



# monmouthshire community climate champions

eco  
open  
doors

## Monmouthshire Eco Open Doors 2013 report

### Event overview

In 2013 27 properties opened during the weekend of 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> April to show their energy saving and energy generating features. For comparison, in 2012 28 properties opened on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> March. In 2013 314 visits were made by 149 individuals to the opening properties, while in 2012 202 visits were made.

The most popular property was 1 Cwm Madoc Barns, which was open for the whole weekend and welcomed 80 visitors. This house is part of a small community with a wide range of interesting eco-features. Other well visited properties were One The Orchard near Abergavenny, a new-build eco-house which was visited by 26 people, Middle Ninfa Farm an older property with a range of eco-features and productive gardens which received 22 visitors, Dixon Isaf and Ty Gwyn, both new build homes, close together in Monmouth which welcomed 33 and 20 visitors respectively. The new County Hall building near Usk had 17 visitors over the weekend, and the community investment solar farm near Newcastle welcomed 11 visitors when it opened on the second day of the event.



A wide range of properties were open including houses, a school, community buildings, a community solar PV installation, and a new municipal office. Only one property had no visitors at all, but they were advertised only on the Eco Open Doors website, and not on the promotional brochure due to their late inclusion in the

event. As in 2012, there were less visitors to properties in the Chepstow area, but it is very difficult to identify a reason for this as the properties are equally as interesting as in other parts of Monmouthshire, leaflets were well distributed and members of Transition Chepstow worked hard at promoting the event via social media.

Publicity was improved in 2013, with a new Facebook page and Twitter account, local newspaper advertising and features, as well as the existing and updated website and promotional leaflet.

In 2012 'Meet the Installer' events were held in each town as part of the Eco Open Doors weekend, but these were very poorly attended. In 2013 property owners were asked if they would like to invite their installers to be present at their homes during their opening times to provide more in-depth and technical information to visitors. This was well received, and would certainly be worth repeating.

Many visitors appear to have come from within the local area, although some were from further afield including Gloucestershire, Cardiff, Herefordshire, Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen.

Most people visited a single property that was of interest to them, but a substantial number visited two or three, and a small number visited five properties over the weekend.

Feedback from visitors was collected in a 'Visitor Book' provided to each property, and feedback was also encouraged from each participating property via a short questionnaire. Most of these were returned, and provide the basis for this short report.

#### Feedback from visitors

Visitors were very complimentary about the features that they viewed, and pleased to have the opportunity to talk to property owners about how the various technologies and installations work, and what they are like to live with. Visitors were universally enthusiastic and inspired by their visits and found the visits to properties hugely informative.



Some visitors were looking for information on specific technologies including wind, passive solar construction, hydro, biomass, heat pumps and insulation, and were investigating installing them in their own properties or for future projects. Others were just looking for ideas and inspiration for future projects.

Some visitors were looking to

install certain technologies in their own home, and their visits were important in assessing whether or not they would be suitable. They included air source heat pump (3), solar water heating (2), hydro (1), new build ideas (8), insulation and energy efficiency (2), wind turbine (2), PV (2), wood fuel/biomass (17), community renewable scheme (1).

Properties receiving more than 10 visitors tended to have a wider range of technologies or features to see, are examples of sustainable living generally, or are new-build, individually designed green buildings. It is clear from visitor feedback that visitors were particularly interested in seeing projects that they could learn from for their own future new-build eco-house projects, as well as using wood or biomass as an



alternative fuel for heating their homes. The much delayed domestic Renewable Heat Incentive may provide additional interest for visitors in solar thermal, biomass and heat pumps if the event is arranged again in 2014. The RHI is expected to be introduced in spring 2014.

#### Feedback from Property Owners

Feedback from property owners was more positive in 2013, with most properties feeling that they had received adequate numbers of visitors. Some reported that visitors did not all visit during the advertised opening time, and so some visitors were turned away. Some property owners made useful suggestions which can be easily adopted for future events:

- Ask visitors via feedback form how they found out about the event
- Identify ways to engage with harder to reach people who have not thought about energy saving features yet
- Invite one or more of the properties to host information/'signs handover' events for other property owners, which will also provide an opportunity for those who are opening to visit another interesting property
- Increase text on directional signs which was felt to be too small
- Article on benefits of air source heat pumps when the RHI is introduced
- Promote school openings to all other Monmouthshire schools to increase visitors
- Use local radio to promote the event
- Improve leaflet to include more comprehensive information about the features at properties and their histories/development to eco homes
- Include directions on the leaflet as most visitors arrived armed with the leaflet

In 2012 the costs of the event were met primarily through a single grant from DECC. In 2013 they were met partly through sponsorship from local renewable energy installation companies who have worked with MCC and

other partners on similar events. Feedback informally from sponsors has been positive, with a number of useful leads and contacts made as a result of their involvement with the Eco Open Doors weekend. Small grants were also obtained for the 2013 event from New Grove Trust and the Sustainable Development Fund for the Brecon Beacons National Park.