

Thermal Imaging Project 2014

Feedback from Bathford Energy Group

Background

Bathford Energy Group is a subgroup of BEFA+ (Bathford Enterprise for All), a community run members co-operative with over 200 members from the local community that runs the local shop. It is a small group of (currently) four to five people, with an aim to try and help Bathford and surrounding residents to save energy and live in warmer homes. We have an email list of 30+ people who have expressed an interest in the energy related information and events, and who have a particular interest in thermal imaging following recent professional surveys of 10 local houses facilitated through LEAF funding in the past few years.

Thermal Imaging Project 2014

Following the invitation from Transition Bath, one of our members trained in the use of the thermal imaging camera. Where possible, two members of the group attended each survey, one to take photos and one (with more expertise) to talk about how issues may have arisen and discuss possible solutions. Our initial aims were to focus on particular areas of the village with similar housing types (i.e., more modern estates) where houses may have similar problems, and to encourage neighbours to discuss solutions among themselves.

In total, 15 surveys were conducted, although the first three happened to take place on an abnormally warm and sunny afternoon, so were less useful. All subsequent surveys were conducted in the evening. All householders were provided with a written report following the survey, providing feedback on the main features of their home and where appropriate some suggested approaches to dealing with these (see examples in the Appendix). It was of interest that three of the 15 homes were very well insulated and draught proofed – in these cases, householders were interested in the survey to confirm what they had done had worked, rather than as they felt they had unresolved issues.

A general report of common issues has also been prepared (see Appendix), and we are planning to circulate this in the autumn to prompt people towards taking action when they may be more likely to be thinking about preparing for the winter. The report will be circulated to the email group plus all those who received a survey, and we may also advertise it in the parish newsletter.

Overall we felt the project was very positive; it was great to be able to provide a concrete 'service' to local people at low cost. We are very grateful to Transition Bath in providing the training, the camera, and support to deliver this to people in our area. While we did not charge householders at the point of survey, we did explain the voluntary nature of the surveys and role of Transition Bath in facilitating the project, so suggested that people donate to Transition Bath towards the upkeep of the camera if they found the survey useful. Details of how to do this were provided when they received their survey report.

It will be interesting to see what sort of actions, if any, people take as a result of the survey. We aim to follow up with the householders involved later in 2014 to investigate this.

Feedback on the process

Recruitment

- We delivered leaflets to approximately 50 homes in one area of the village
- We emailed our mailing list
- We spread news of the survey through word of mouth (i.e., to our neighbours and contacts locally)

Only the latter two approaches resulted in any uptake – no responses were obtained from the leaflets alone.

- We were able to provide surveys to all those who expressed an interest, so would expect to have fewer takers in subsequent years.

Time Commitment

- The surveys took 45-60 mins to conduct, and were generally fun to do for all concerned. However, it took and several more hours to produce reports which was not so much fun (!) and with our limited number of local volunteers it may not be feasible on this scale in subsequent years.
- Time spent preparing the reports seemed to stem from the software being relatively inflexible, and reports difficult to annotate. If this improves in future the process will be quicker and easier.

Approach

- We ultimately conducted all surveys individually, as some householders were reluctant to let people they did not know into their home, and it was difficult to get near neighbours available at the same time or to commit to several hours at a time.
- It was useful to carry out the surveys alongside the householders, to talk through characteristics of the house and potential reasons for cold/hot spots, rather than conduct the survey independently as some had expected. We did not take many external shots, as the sky temperature so dramatically altered the scale. We have gathered since that it is possible to manipulate the scale to make this more informative so may be something to add in future years.
- Our reports were fairly non-prescriptive, but we got a feeling that people would value advice in how to tackle some of the issues identified if follow up was possible.

Householder feedback

- We did not seek formal feedback at the point of the survey, but all householders indicated that they had found the process interesting and useful, and had confirmed or identified new problem areas (i.e. in many cases thermal imaging was confirming issues, rather than revealing unknowns).
- Householders appeared to particularly value the opportunity to talk to someone about the source of identified problems and the options available to resolving these; this relied on our

volunteers' knowledge level, so our ability to provide this was limited when those with more expertise not present.

- Householders were very interested to find out what we thought they should do about the issues raised. We have provided draught proofing workshops in the past but uptake for this was low. Nonetheless, there is a desire for more information on what to do following surveys if there is any way to provide or signpost people to this.

What would be useful if repeated

- We were not able to answer all householders' queries. If there were a forum for raising queries with other groups or surveyors (e.g., via the website) to pool expertise this may be helpful.
- If we had been more organised (!), it would have been useful to take examples of draught proofing equipment, and perhaps handouts such as the information made available at the Transition workshop event at the Museum of the Building of Bath, with us.
- Providing follow ups to surveys could add considerably to the workload. An event in which people come to collect their survey report at a central point, talk through options, and have draught proofing/insulating materials available to buy may be one way around this. This, or some other follow up activity would no doubt be useful to provide additional support for people to make the changes they are thinking about, and increase the impact of the thermal imaging project.

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