

## Energy Biographies in Cyswllt Peterston Connect (CPC)

The Energy Biographies research project based at Cardiff University has been working in four communities across the UK to explore everyday energy use in the context of people's previous life experiences, current routines and anticipated futures. You can find out more about the project at [www.energybiographies.org](http://www.energybiographies.org)

As part of the Energy Biographies project, 20 residents of Peterston-Super-Ely took part in an initial interview and 5 were followed up for two further interviews and photograph activities over the course of a year. This document highlights some of the comments from residents about life in Peterston and their views on CPC. We have changed names for anonymity.

Around half those interviewed had some involvement with CPC but most were aware of the group's existence – only one person commented that they had not heard of CPC.

Activities people spoke about in relation to CPC included:

- Solar panel initiative
- Balsam bash
- Allotments
- Hydro/water scheme
- Litter picking/cleaning

### *Village Life*

Many of those we spoke to felt that Peterston had a 'good community spirit' with a variety of regular events which provided opportunities for people to form connections with one another.

There's a big village kind of spirit here, and um, I think everyone's you know, wants the village to be the best that it can ... I was really surprised at how much is sort of you know being done to try and improve the village, and you know help people who live here as well as sort of, you know not becoming sort of a suburb of Cardiff, kind of thing so.  
(Lucy)

For some, this was an important part of the attraction to living in the area. In addition to a general sense of community, several people commented on an environmental consciousness amongst village residents.

I think there's a lot of interest in the village about sustainable living, not everybody goes along gets involved in Peterston Connect but when you look at the recycling and when you talk to people about various things I think as a community there are quite a large number of people who are aware of the environmental issues and involved with thinking. I think partly through their children, if they've got children, or grandchildren, they've been nudged to think about things like that as well. (Mary)

The community spirit and living in a green area was important for many people. The pace of life was also seen as relevant for people having time to engage in environmental activities:

Well I think the fact that you live in a greenish area in terms of the vegetation I think makes a difference and the fact that people have chosen to live in a more rural setting, I think that makes a difference as well but, and I think there's a greater sense of community as well. Playing one's part whereas in cities I think people are very much, they are living their lives and getting on with their jobs and busy, busy, busy, busy. The pace here is significantly slower. There's a big joke here, we have GMT but we have 'Peterston Time' so when you say something is going to start at half-past seven then it's unlikely to start before eight o'clock. (Bryn)

### Energy use in Peterston

In the first interview, everyone was asked what they considered to be essential energy use. Whilst many of the things mentioned by Peterston residents were common across all the case sites (e.g. the washing machine) the bread maker and 4x4 were not mentioned elsewhere.



### Perceptions of CPC

We asked all participants for their views on CPC and the response was overwhelmingly positive. Although half were not regular members, some had been involved with the group's activities.

Here one resident alludes to the positive perceptions of CPC and the village community spirit:

I think they are quite a good bunch round here that they do try and do things to cut costs and help the environment you know because the recycling is big around here; you should see it out there on recycling days, mounds of it! But no I think everybody chips in. (Robert)

Another resident suggests her involvement has come through CPC's work with the primary school, which encourages parents to get involved too.

Really, well what I've seen, what I've been involved in, really good, I mean as I said they did this balsam bash where they had to try and get rid of all these weeds around the riverbank last summer, so many people just went and joined in and participated and then the primary school got involved and they just sent off classes of kids at a time so they all threw themselves into it and they have involved I think because they've involved the school it's really nice because it's really brought the kids in and my kids come and say 'oh

mum this is going on at the weekend, they need help to clear the pond at school' you know so it's by involving the children at the primary school I think it then enforces the parents as well because even if I was thinking 'oh', the kids make me! [Laughs] So from what I've seen of what the Peterston Connect group do it's really good and I did notice there was a sign up and I assume that's them, Big Village Clean, in the next few weeks so I assume that's their incentive as well so they do things like that which we will go along and join in so no its really nice it helps us all doesn't it? (Lisa)

Although some people did not describe themselves as group members, they felt that the group had an important role in encouraging village residents to think about environmental issues.

Well I just, I suppose I think it's a good thing, I don't do a lot about it but as I say I support on the edges, I pay my dues, I go along, I make up the numbers so that you know and if they wanted me to do anything I would do it there's not, but I just think that it is a very useful thing to try to do and it's very hard to try to get over these things about global warming and all the problems and I don't know but I would think one of the better ways might be to do something locally when at least people will go along to a local meeting, will talk to local people and they've had speakers who have done quite major things. And so I think you're spreading the word that way. I think it's a good way of spreading the word because it's quite difficult to get it known really and to recruit support, to motivate people to want to do anything about it. And if you go along to a little meeting and you talk about it and you think oh well perhaps I've got to do a bit as well (Gwen)

### Solar Panels

Whilst participants talked about a range of CPC projects, most people knew about the solar panel initiative and some had panels installed. Most people felt that the benefits of the panels were mainly for the households who installed them, however, some felt they had a wider impact:

I think if people are seeing the solar panels on houses it makes you think twice about, if you haven't got them yourself, it makes you think twice about what you might be doing in terms of the environment I think (Bryn)

In discussing the promotion of the solar panel initiative, group members reflected on how it had been sold as an investment rather than an environmental technology, based on what they felt would be most appealing to village residents. Promoting the scheme as a financial investment may have helped to get people involved who would not have shown the same interest if it had been promoted as an environmental technology

For this village it was a low risk enterprise, yes, it was safe and therefore, you know, very good ... this is their first foray into, what you might call, environmentalism. And it's built on an argument of investment that a lot of them can understand. A lot of them are business people or they've been in, you know, if they're not business people themselves they've provided a service, like they've been engineers or something within a business. (Jonathan)

The nature of the community was also important in the take-up of solar PV as the trusted relationships people had with their friends and neighbours meant they were encouraged to go ahead with the installation based on personal recommendations.

I had been weighing up the possibility for some time of solar panels and looking at costs and looking at different firms and talking to people and then when the sustainable group in the village decided they were going to do all the work and they did all the assessment, the evaluations, got the tenders and did all the due diligence then it just made a lot of sense to say, 'Oh yeah, that sounds like a really good deal and the firm you've selected is very sound, the training and staff development and all the Health & Safety things were there' so it made for a very easy decision to say, 'Well okay, I've been thinking about this, you've done the work, I'll go ahead'. (Mary)

### Promoting CPC

As mentioned earlier, many residents were aware of CPC's work and were supportive of their activities. Some people appreciated the way in which the group worked:

They're a group, they're not an 'in your face' group, they're a group who are working quietly behind the scenes but every so often they bring out the information about what they've been doing etc. But in a way they are almost a much better group than the community council and in a way ... they are doing the things that they should be doing in the village but in a quiet way (Margaret)

However others felt that the group should do more to promote its activities within the village, including a greater online presence. (Although we note that the group has done more work on this front since these interviews were conducted).

I would say they don't really kind of publicise themselves that much. I think if they did a bit more publishing and 'we're here!' maybe they would get more of a response but I think a lot of people know what they are but are quite open to it. (Martin)

I don't want them to be in people's faces but I think they should project themselves more and a little bit more forcibly within the village ... I don't think their information gets out and about enough basically ... a lot of people will say, 'You don't tell me what's happening' but yet don't listen or don't seek the information, so I think if they got a little bit more involved, in a positive fashion, then they would achieve a lot more as well. (Ralph)

### Summary

Peterston Connect is well-regarded in the village and residents are supportive of the group's work. One of the ways in which the group has been important has been in providing opportunities for people to engage with environmental issues (e.g. meetings, presence at village activities, solar panels) which participants felt had helped to raise awareness around the village.

For more information visit [www.energybiographies.org](http://www.energybiographies.org) or contact Dr Fiona Shirani on 02920 876520 / [fionashirani@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:fionashirani@cardiff.ac.uk)