



What can we do?

What residents think about green issues –
a participatory approach







HydeMartlet residents go green

This report is about a community environmental project undertaken by HydeMartlet in partnership with the School of Applied Social Sciences (SASS) at the University of Brighton and supported by the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS). The project was funded by Brighton and Sussex Community Knowledge Exchange and involved HydeMartlet residents discussing green issues and making small changes to their lives, homes and communities. The report contains quotes from the residents who took part. A full research report of the findings is available separately from SASS.

Housing associations have a key role in helping to reduce carbon emissions in the UK. Housing is one of the main contributors to CO₂ emissions and it is important that housing associations work together with their residents to understand their values, concerns, behaviour, lifestyles and the implications of how they live and inhabit their homes.

Therefore, a key focus of this project has been about what HydeMartlet can do to promote greener living and encourage its residents to live more sustainably. The project sought to understand:

- how housing associations can engage effectively with their residents and local communities on environmental issues
- the perceptions and beliefs residents have towards sustainability and environmental issues
- the barriers to promoting sustainable lifestyles, and the potential solutions to these barriers.

It also sought to promote learning through action in residents' communities, as well as individually in their lifestyles and homes.

The project was supported by a steering group made up of the main partners and various local organisations with community and environmental interests, including Brighton and Hove City Council's Sustainability Team.





What happened in the project?

TPAS and HydeMartlet recruited 24 residents to participate in the project. In consultation with TPAS, researchers from SASS designed six workshops organised around discussion and learning rather than directly providing expert advice on green issues. A TPAS representative facilitated the workshops.

Participants were divided into three groups: two made up of HydeMartlet tenants and a third made up of shared owners. Participants were given shopping vouchers as a 'thank you' for their time spent attending the sessions. At the end of each workshop, residents were encouraged to make small changes to their lifestyle and to the ways in which they live in their homes. Lastly, residents were encouraged to carry out a green activity to benefit their neighbourhood or community. The sessions were lighthearted and fun, and in the final session all of the residents came together and were encouraged to share their experiences and learning.

The workshops ran over a six-month period, lasting for around two hours each and covering the following subjects.

- Common environmental concerns locally, nationally and globally
- Greening lifestyles
- Greening homes
- Greening neighbourhood or community
- Planning community action
- Reflecting on learning and making recommendations for change

What were residents' main concerns and issues?

Residents were concerned about a range of issues connected to sustainability. Some, such as energy use, were seen as a concern globally, nationally and on an individual lifestyle level.

"Supermarkets are trying with the bags, but with the packaging they are not trying at all"



"When they first started to build Brighton, the houses were done in squares and they had a garden in the middle. That's how we should live"



Global concerns

- Climate change – energy, water use, wildlife, flooding and deforestation
- Global growth and inequality
- A sense of powerlessness

National concerns

- Waste – packaging, food and recycling
- Flooding
- Food production
- Transport – flying, driving and safe cycling
- Housing and the effects of immigration
- Inequality and lack of government action
- Energy inefficiency

Local concerns in Brighton and Hove

- Cars – traffic, pollution, parking and overdependence
- Rubbish and recycling – domestic waste, litter, seagulls, dog mess, landfill and incinerator, inadequate recycling facilities
- Green spaces – parks, wildlife, trees and space for growing food
- Population growth, immigration and housing
- Energy inefficiency

Neighbourhood concerns

- Vandalism and noise pollution
- Lack of community and friendliness
- Car use – speeding
- Lack of facilities such as communal and green spaces, cycle facilities and recycling
- Energy inefficiency
- Need to be close to local amenities

Concerns about the home

- Water wastage – baths (no showers in some properties), boilers, over-washing, tap washers
- Recycling
- Heating and insulation – inefficient heating or lack of controls, poor communal energy efficiency
- Lack of information or knowledge on issues including loft or cavity wall insulation, window ventilators and how to work the heating
- Lack of space to dry washing outside, compost, recycle, etc.
- Poor design such as windowless bathrooms, small kitchens, etc.

Concerns about lifestyles

- Shopping – packaging, plastic bags, lack of locally-sourced food
- Food production – ability to grow our own food
- Reducing water waste and conserving water
- Concerns that nobody else will bother
- Travel – flights, over-reliance on the car, cost of public transport
- Energy inefficiency – growth of consumer items such as mobile phones, 'stand by' facilities



"Climate change is bigger than terrorism – it's a worse threat than terrorism ever is."



"It's not a very friendly estate. I used to be involved in it but not anymore."

What were the barriers to going green?

Policy makers and housing associations need to understand the barriers that residents experience in order to help residents overcome them. Residents were asked to reflect on the barriers to living in a more environmentally friendly way. What we learned is summarised here.





Cost

This was the most common barrier and was mentioned throughout the workshop discussions in relation to both local and global issues. Residents pointed out that it was often cheaper to buy supermarket food produced far away than to buy local produce in independent shops. Cost was also identified in purchasing low energy appliances such as fridges, washing machines and greener cars.

It was also recognised that cost was an issue for HydeMartlet when considering changing inefficient heating systems such as solar panels, showers and dual flush toilets.

However, cost was also identified as motivation to live more sustainably. Many residents made changes because of the cost savings from being energy efficient – buying second hand goods, not flying and cooking food from scratch with basic ingredients.

Time

It was often seen as quicker and easier to drive to the supermarket than walk to the local shops or make bread. Many residents felt that they did not have the time to “make do and mend”. Those with more time were aware of the time needed to shop in charity shops, markets and to prepare food.

Health and disability issues

This was another common barrier, particularly around transport.

Poor health also prevented some participants from gardening, growing food and walking to recycling banks.

Lack of facilities

This was a common problem identified by participants, especially concerning recycling and food shopping. There is an inconsistent recycling service across the city and there is no city-wide composting. Residents cannot recycle plastic or cardboard. A lack of access to transport was also identified, as was the lack of food shopping choice, particularly where homes were not close to shops and other amenities. Many had no access to green space to grow food or to dry washing. Others pointed to the lack of allotments and the subsequent long waiting lists for plots.

Cultural barriers such as habits and values

Cultural attitudes towards washing and clothes washing meant that participants found it more difficult to save water. Society’s emphasis on shopping and consumption was also identified as a barrier to going green.

Lack of information, knowledge or skills

Participants revealed a lack of knowledge over issues such as seasonal produce, what levels of insulation their homes contained and what initiatives were already taking place locally. Technical difficulties included a lack of knowledge about plumbing, which made installing a water butt or stopping a dripping tap more difficult. Others expressed difficulties in understanding the truth behind media headlines.

A sense of powerlessness

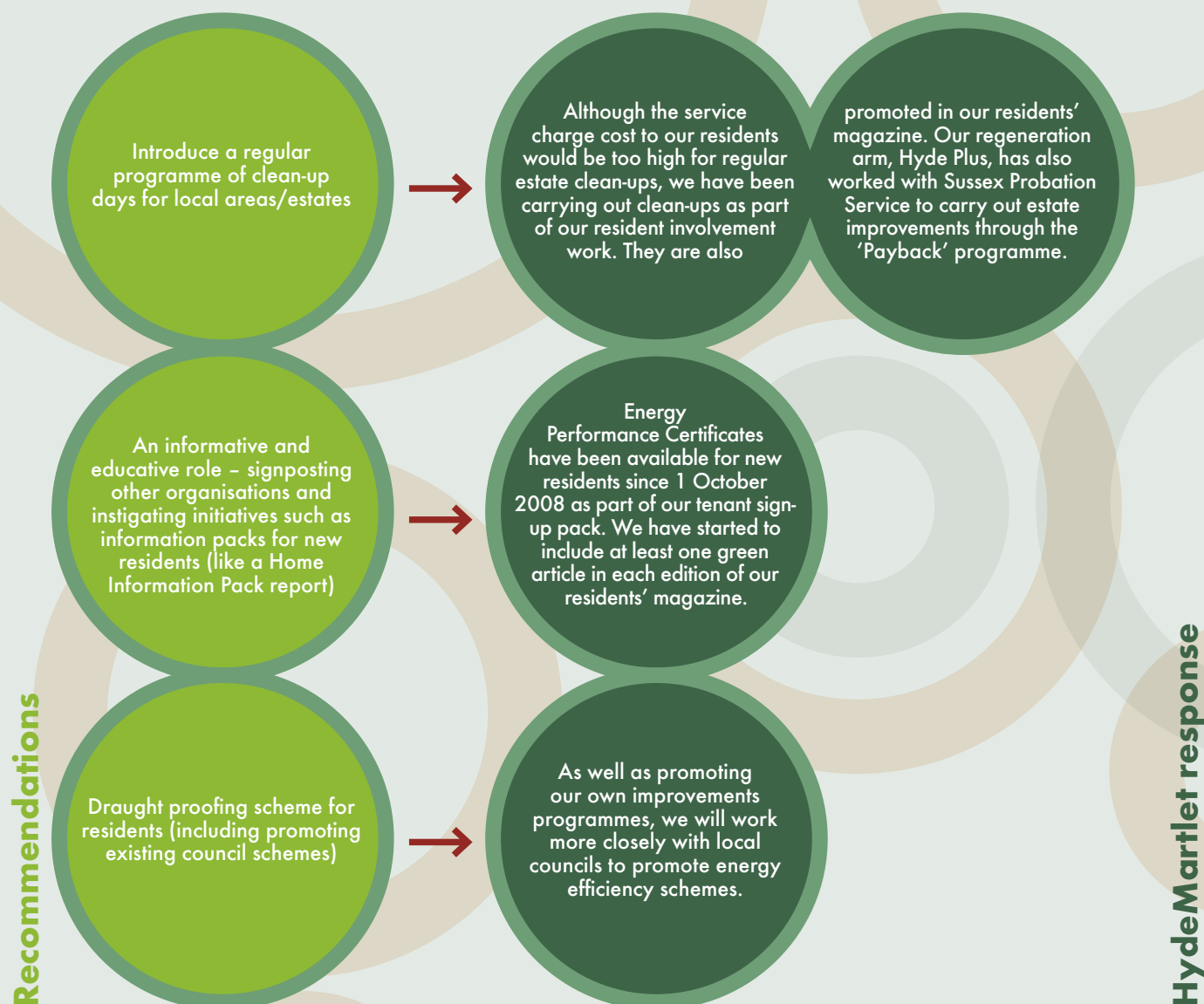
Residents felt at times that although they could change small things through the project, other residents and organisations needed to take responsibility too. For example, one group discussed the fact that although they realised that it was “not right” to flush clean drinking water down the toilet, there did not seem to be anything they could do about it on their own.



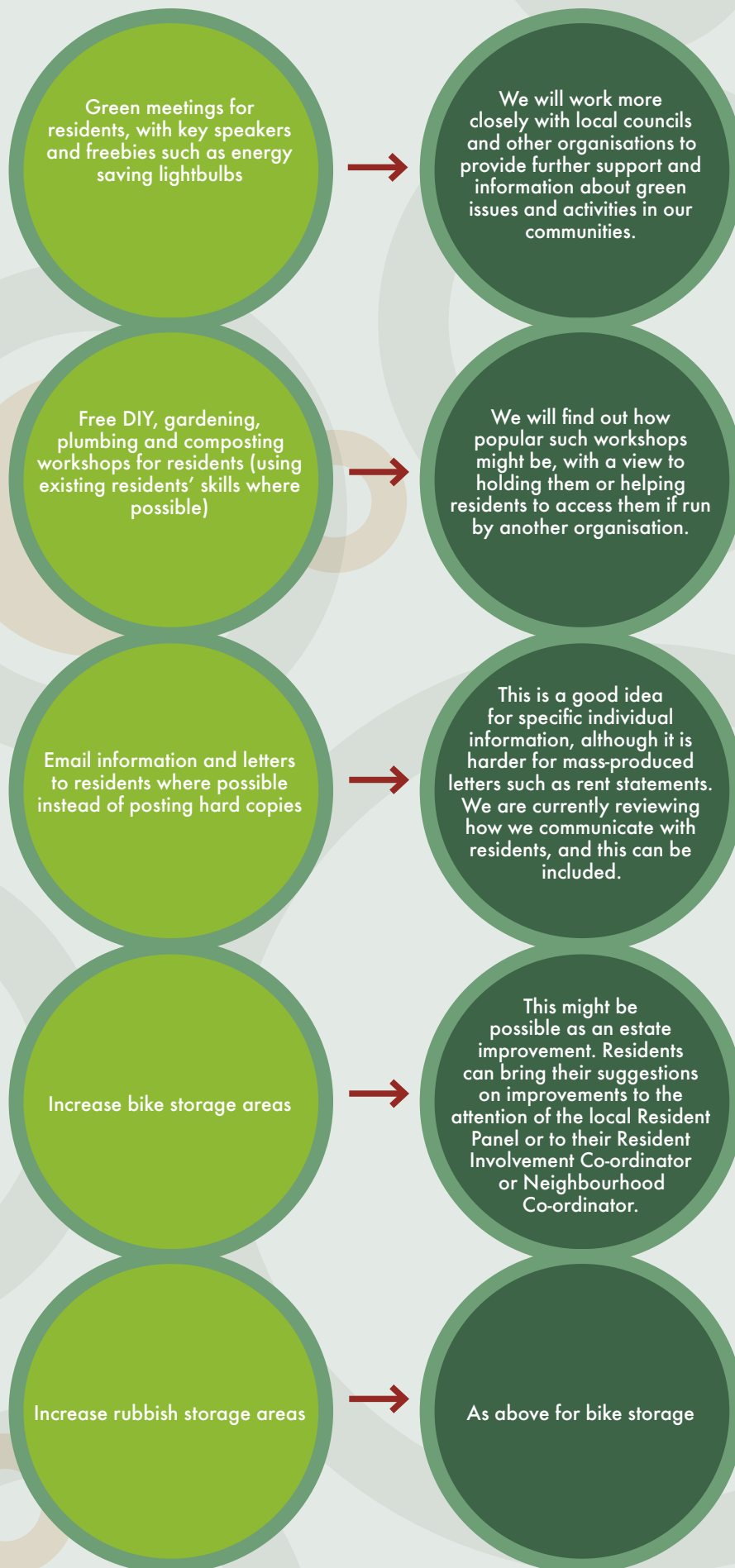
What did the project achieve?

For HydeMartlet and Brighton and Hove City Council

HydeMartlet successfully discussed green issues with a number of residents from Brighton and Hove and will be able to use their ideas and possibly engage with them again in the future. Residents were interested, participative and clearly engaged on the issue. Residents were particularly keen that the city's recycling facilities were more consistently applied and were improved to include plastic and cardboard. They also felt that HydeMartlet and the Council should work more closely together. Residents made a list of priorities that they believed HydeMartlet should concentrate on.



Recommendations



HydeMartlet response

Recommendations

Ensure a green space in each new development, together with encouraging community ownership/management of it

This really depends on the size of the development and how we came to acquire it. Most will have a communal green space if there are no individual gardens, as this is seen as an important factor for a good quality of life.

Supply water butts for residents

We will ask our resident representatives if we should include this as part of our improvement standards.

Rethink ways to be as energy efficient as possible – communal lighting and heating (is heating needed?)

We will consider how we can take this forward, looking at alternative options for existing buildings and how we design new buildings.

Ensure that balconies, communal areas and recycling facilities are accessible to people with disabilities

We will endeavour to ensure that green activities are accessible to all wherever reasonably possible.

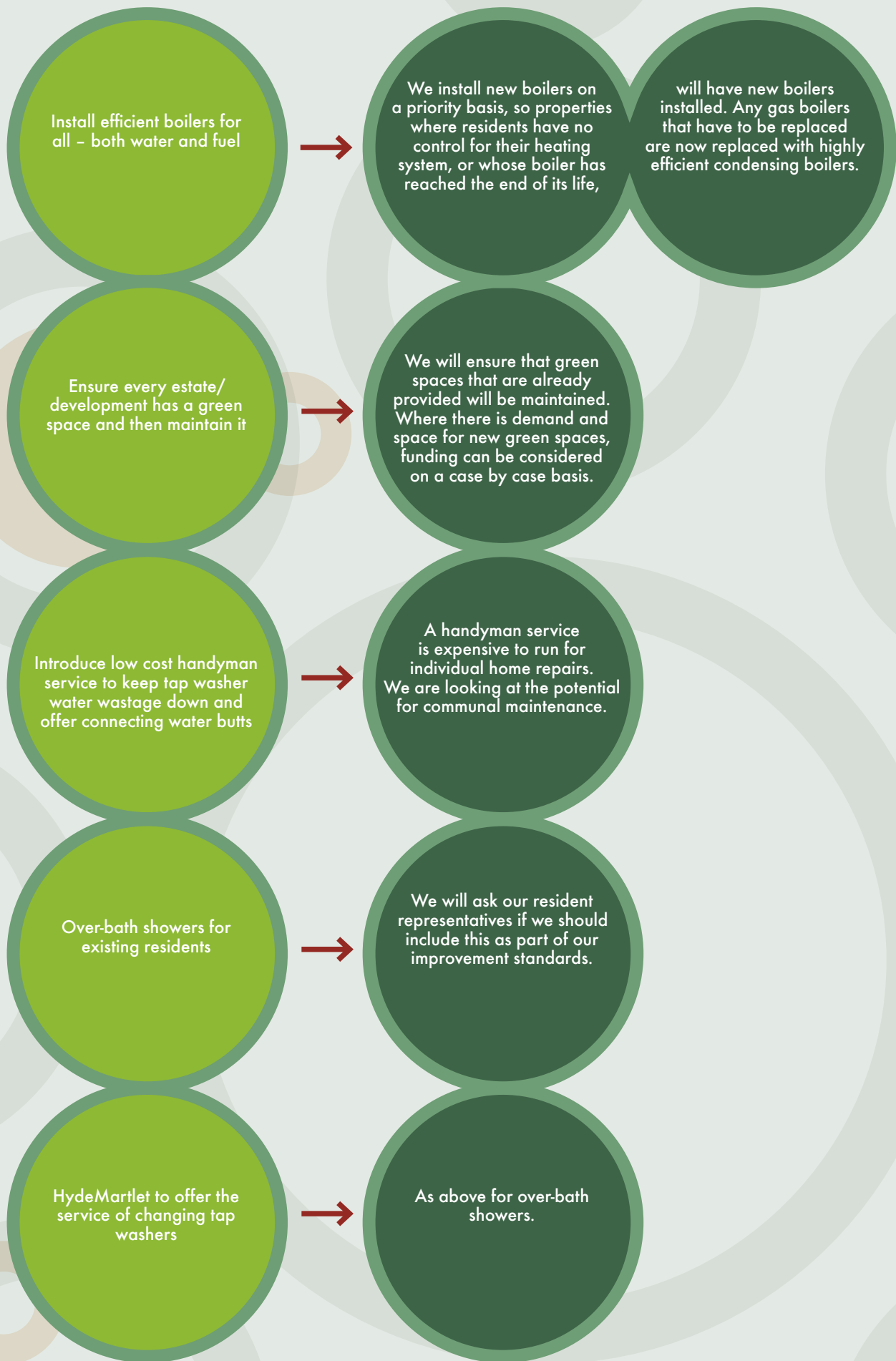
Ensure new developments have solar panels (for water and heating) and explore the possibility of installing solar panels on existing homes

New developments that are funded by the government need to have high environmental standards. Nearly all HydeMartlet new properties will have some form of low carbon or renewable heating

systems. Solar panels on existing properties are just one of the options we would look at for reducing carbon emissions, as they are not suitable for all homes.

HydeMartlet response

Recommendations



Hyde Martlet response



What did the project achieve for the residents?





Knowledge and awareness

Most residents learned more about how to green their lives, but this was done through sharing experiences rather than technical knowledge.

For example, a discussion about composting led to residents sharing information about a scheme for cheap composters. Residents also reported that their awareness increased and this gave them the impetus to research the issue themselves.

Behaviour

Most residents made some changes through the homework activities and through reporting back to their group, although it is difficult to quantify how much was as a result of the project. Many were already undertaking some activities, and two residents felt that the workshops meant they could encourage others to make the changes they had already made.

Here are some of the ways the project made a difference to residents.

- Less reliance on the car - more walking, cycling, lift sharing and using the bus
- Composting
- Food - buying food with less packaging, and buying more local and seasonal produce. Some residents have joined schemes to produce their own food
- Energy - switching off appliances, using low energy lightbulbs, drying washing outside, changing to a green provider, using an energy monitor, buying more energy efficient appliances
- Increased recycling - contributing goods to a local school, recycling mobile phones, shoes and clothes, and using reusable shopping bags
- Water - using a Hippo toiler water saving bag, recycling water for garden use, fitting a water butt, washing less, washing up less
- Joining green organisations and local projects.

Here are the projects that participants undertook

- Lobbying for clean-up days on HydeMartlet estates across the region
- Green space replanting in three different areas
- **Tree planting project**
 - Lobbying local businesses to improve litter
- Campaigning for more recycling in a number of areas
- Providing more information to residents through flyers, notice boards and word of mouth
 - **Online forum for green issues**
 - Signposting green organisations and issues
- Campaign to HydeMartlet to reduce communal energy bills
 - **DIY community recycling**
 - Investigating the cost of solar panels



The workshop sessions also focused on neighbourhoods and what actions people could take.

Meeting other people and establishing networks

Many participants felt that the group had given them contacts and access to likeminded people, whereas others felt that although the groups had worked well, they would not be keeping in touch.

Confidence and empowerment

At the end of the project, some residents felt more confident in their knowledge of green issues, which helped them speak to friends and neighbours. Others felt that coming to the group had given them confidence to join similar initiatives and that their opinions were worthwhile.

Skills

One resident said that her negotiation skills had improved during her community project. Others pointed to communication and social skills. One theme was that many felt that they were not the "type of person" to get involved or start a residents' group "had it not been for the project", and this had given them the skills to do more in the community.

One resident went to a national tenants' conference to run a workshop and presentation on the project - this was her first experience of presenting in public.

What's next?

As a direct result of this project, HydeMartlet will help to encourage more residents to live a more sustainable lifestyle, by:

- providing on a regular basis information about environmental issues, both local and national
- incorporating environmental standards into maintenance and improvements works
- supporting residents who want to carry out environmental projects in their community
- re-creating the project for more residents in other areas.



well"



"It's been quite reassu

Green issues are something we all have a view on. Many of the residents involved in this project were encouraged by sharing their views, experience and knowledge to make changes which reduced their environmental impact. The project inspired both individual and community action. It also led to proposals being put to Brighton and Hove City Council, HydeMartlet and local agencies to help overcome the barriers to going green. By continuing to work together, we hope that further action can be achieved to reduce our environmental footprint.

"It's made me realise that I can go outside these four walls and actually contribute"



This report was co-authored by:

Dr Kepa Artaraz and Dr Martin Kemp
of the University of Brighton

Anna Austin of HydeMartlet

Jane Eyles of TPAS

(Tenant Participation Advisory Service)

Organisation information



Brighton and Sussex Community Knowledge Exchange – supports partnership projects between the University of Brighton, the University of Sussex and local communities.

www.bton.ac.uk/cupp/projects/bsckeprojectlist.htm



HydeMartlet – part of The Hyde Group, managing and maintaining over 11,000 properties in Surrey, Sussex and Hampshire.

www.hydemartlet.co.uk

TPAS

Tenant Participation Advisory Service – a national tenant participation organisation working to promote tenant empowerment.

www.tpas.org.uk



University of Brighton

School of Applied Social Science at the University of Brighton – delivers a range of applied social science courses at undergraduate and post-graduate level. It has a strong tradition of partnership working with local organisations and carries out research on a wide variety of contemporary social issues.

www.brighton.ac.uk/sass





"I wouldn't like to be labelled an activist or a do-gooder or things like that. I'm just a normal person trying to save a bit of energy, a bit of money and have a decent environment for my kids when they're older"



HydeMartlet

63 St Mary Street
St.Mary's
Southampton
SO14 1NU
Tel: 0800 085 4195
Minicom: 023 8083 7821

Martlet House
Southern Gate
Chichester
PO19 8SG
Tel: 0800 085 4195
Fax: 01243 537950

113-119 Davigdor Road
Hove
East Sussex
BN3 1RE
Tel: 0800 085 4195
Minicom: 01273 234702

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