

SUSTAINABLE DESIGNS ON YOU

EVALUATION REPORT



SUST.
THE LIGHTHOUSE ON SUSTAINABILITY

Evaluation report

1. The pilot Sustainable Designs on You (SDoY) for Housing Associations was held in January and February 2004. There were two concurrent courses - one for committee members over 4 evenings, and one for staff over two days, with a final evening for both groups, preceded by a day's study tour. The courses were commissioned through Sust., a Lighthouse project funded by the Scottish Executive, as a pilot learning programme for housing association committee members and staff to implement a more sustainable approach to new housing design and refurbishment.

2. The courses were designed to run at different times because experience of housing association courses (esp. run by SHARE) indicated that staff are not keen on evening courses, while committee members normally cannot attend day courses. The programme content was fundamentally the same for both courses although tailored to meet the needs of the specific audiences. One exception was two additional sessions for staff - one on using tools and one on waste management. The marketing encouraged associations to send two committee members to the evening course and one member of staff to the day course - so that there could be some sharing of knowledge at both a strategic and an operational level within each association - thus the study day and the final evening session. The programme for each course, including those giving presentations, is set out in appendix 1.

3. Marketing the courses began later than planned. The target numbers were: 15 Committee; 30 staff. Despite marketing through SFHA and direct by SHARE, there were very few delegates registered by the beginning of January - particularly committee members. A phone round staff who were signed up for the staff course, revealed a number of reasons:

- Evening meetings not suitable for everyone
- Location in Glasgow - needed to be nearer the association base
- Committee member training not yet started

A fuller set of comments is in appendix 4.

4. However, by the first night (January 12) 21 committee members had registered from 9 Associations/LHOs. (The delegates list is in Appendix 2). Three associations/LHOs sent 1 delegate, four sent two, and two sent 5! All of the associations were from the West of Scotland - 5 from Glasgow. One association (Hillhead 2000) had not acquired any stock when the course was held.

5. Seventeen staff took part from 10 associations. There were

two directors, four with a maintenance responsibility, and eleven from development. Misia Jack from the SFHA was an observer.

6. Only two associations had both staff and committee members.

7. Each delegate was given a folder to store handouts, and a copy of the Sustainable Housing Design Guide provided by Communities Scotland. In addition, the presenters were requested to produce literature that would form reference material for course attendees.

8. As part of the preparation for the pilot, there were two other elements that were attempted - neither of which were particularly successful:

- We attempted to create a directory of HA sustainable developments through an SFHA electronic questionnaire. 25 HAs responded to the development questionnaire - of which 21 completed the questionnaire. Typically, associations have reported new build developments on brown field land, with priority being given to energy efficiency measures, and some incorporating alternative sources of energy - e.g. biomass. There does not seem to be any strong pattern to materials selection and specification; although some are specifying materials on health grounds and lower embodied energy. A number are seeking to specify non toxic materials - including paint.

4 HAs responded to the maintenance questionnaire and 3 completed it.

Further analysis of the questionnaires is ongoing.

However the level of response was disappointing, particularly on maintenance. The length of the form may have put people off.

- We also attempted to update the case studies in the Sustainable Housing Design Guide. Not all of the case studies were to be updated, and of those that were we are still waiting for Partick HA's contribution. The updates were submitted late with the result that they were only available on the last night.

Committee and staff feedback

9. Feedback, via a written form, was sought from the delegates to help assess whether the pilot had been useful, and whether it should be repeated. In general, the courses were well received by the delegates, although not without some criticism and suggestions for future courses. Of the two groups, the committee members appear to be more satisfied – an average of 1.33 (where 1 is very useful to 5 of no use) compared to 2.61 for staff. Full details of the feedback analysis, including comments, are in appendix 3.

10. The most consistent message is that the courses had too great an emphasis on new build – there is a need to do more or to run a separate course on rehabilitation and maintenance. Of the sessions, the main comments are:

- The materials lecture produced the biggest surprises for committee members – less so for staff. Was the difference in the level of presentation or what? Difficult to know, except that Howard spent more time on the staff course on eco-minimalism. Could it be that the staff were threatened by his lecture?
- There were two presenters that were not either HA staff or architects who worked for HAs – from SEPA and Ecodyne. They were not well received by staff, perhaps because their presentations were at the end of both days. It was also suggested that it may be because neither had any real knowledge or experience of housing.
- We tried to cram in too much information on the energy sessions – all of the presenters talked too long on the staff course and had to be reigned in for the committee course.
- Susan Napier's session on maintenance concentrated on Slateford Green and the implications on maintenance of sustainable design. There is a need to look at maintenance from different angles – that of bringing sustainability into a reactive and a planned maintenance programme.

Conclusions & Recommendations

11. I have drawn a number of conclusions both from the feedback and from my own experience of running the pilot:

- The pilot was a basic introduction and more suited to committee members and staff who had little knowledge or experience of sustainable development.

Recommendation: There should be different levels of courses for different audiences.

I believe that the SDoY committee members course should be repeated with revisions to the programme:

- i. The existing course should be regarded as an 'Introduction to Sustainable Design' and be available to committee members and staff as a basic course.
- ii. This should be a 5 week course – we really only had 4 weeks because of the plenary session in the Lighthouse.
- iii. The first session should combine the introduction with two short case studies (They were too long – would have been better as site visits)
- iv. The energy session did not work well – too many case studies and not enough pulling together (would have been better if one person had done an overview).
- v. We needed a whole night on materials – that was what surprised them. It should be backed up with a handout that had guidance to committee members on what to do. The Green Directory will be a useful resource for staff to procure green materials.

- We could do with more of a 'masterclass' approach for development and maintenance staff – higher level of technical input and possibly involving more of an academic approach – less case studies and more analysis. These should not just be for housing association staff, but for people who are responsible for procuring buildings and maintenance programmes, e.g. in the NHS, and LAs. Perhaps the architecture & engineering departments at key Universities should be asked to run local technical courses for clients, with credits towards some kind of accreditation? This would concentrate on several key issues:
 - i. site selection and built form in new build
 - ii. energy
 - iii. water and waste
 - iv. materials specification
 - v. maintenance
 - vi. use of tools
- Any further course must do more on rehabilitation and maintenance, and with less emphasis on new build 'one offs'

- There should be fewer case studies, and more overview perhaps with case studies as reference material. This would reduce the number of presenters, and while it might reduce the room for debate, it would reduce costs and make it more flexible – and could be held around the country.
- A couple of good videos (e.g. of Fairfield, any others? Eg Shettleston, Slateford Green?) would be useful. Could the BBC help out – there is a good story here?
- Every case study should have costs (sq m as well as unit costs?) and funding sources attached.
- Any case studies about energy should have running costs included (actual if possible)
- Conclusion: The updates of the Sustainable Housing Design Guide do not tell much. This exercise probably needed more time than could be allowed. . There was no hard evidence on energy consumption, etc
- Recommendation: this could be developed as a research project that would include a visit to each site and some interviews with tenants
- Recommendation: The study day needs to take place on a warmer day!
- Conclusion: I do not really think the final night worked – too many presentations (even if they were all given within the time limits). Since there was only one HA with both staff and committee together, we missed the point of bringing the two groups together
- Recommendation: a reduced number of presenters covering distinct themes, with more time for questions and interaction between presenters and delegates.
- My biggest surprise? SEPA not having thought of the importance of the social housing sector in the national waste plan!
- My biggest disappointment? The response by Ian Williamson of Communities Scotland to the question that was put to all the panel members on the last night ‘what we can do to help housing associations become more sustainable?’ While giving support to the concept of sustainable design, he indicated that there would be no additional financial support nor any change to the assessment process to encourage associations. Numbers, not quality would be critical targets. Most of the course participants were very disappointed with

this. It does lead to a curious situation – and one which reflects the current difficulties of promoting sustainable development – the question of how far the commitment of the Executive to sustainable development extends across all of the Departments. On one hand the Scottish Executive wants to encourage sustainable design (otherwise why should it have funded SUST?), but on the other hand its primary housing agency (despite having funded SDHG - the best guide in the UK!) does not seem to be giving further encouragement to HAs. There is a fundamental problem here, and unless it is resolved at the Executive level, there must be a question about the point of developing SDoY any further.

Recommendations

12. Finally, I am very grateful for the administrative support from both The Lighthouse (esp. Amani) and SHARE (esp. Lynn). And of course to Catherine Docherty for support, encouragement and attending the entire committee course. Is there a housing association committee she could now join?

Raymond Young
Coordinator
10 March 2004

Sust.: The Lighthouse on Sustainability aims to raise awareness of sustainable design in architecture. It was devised by The Lighthouse: Scotland's Centre for Architecture, Design and the City on behalf of the Scottish Executive and in support of the aims of the Policy on Architecture. It is funded by the Sustainable Action Fund.

www.sust.org