



# ... Climate Change

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RCAN Investment Programme – strategic influencing case studies

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## Overview

The Rural Community Action Network (RCAN) comprises the 38 county-based Rural Community Councils, 8 regional RCAN bodies and the national umbrella organisation, Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE). Defra's RCAN Investment Programme provides funding to RCAN members and aims to ensure that the needs of rural communities are addressed effectively in public policy and delivery.

Some local RCAN members have used resources for 2008-11 from Defra to undertake work linking climate change adaptation and mitigation projects with local and regional strategies, such as Sustainable Community Strategies, Local Area Agreements and Community Empowerment Strategies. Whilst that national policy context is now changing, local RCAN members' ability to relate community activity to strategic policy outcomes remains just as important within the climate change arena, not least given the emphasis now on localism and an active civil society.

This climate change work has helped to identify community needs and aspirations, as well as demonstrating the benefit of practical local action. Both these outputs can be valuable to statutory partners in their strategic policy-making and service delivery work. Strategic influence can be achieved by organising and presenting local evidence in a way which fits with those partners' policy and programme objectives. RCAN members are also working with local authorities, academic institutions and voluntary groups to deliver projects with local communities.

Case studies on this theme are available on the strategic influencing work being undertaken by RCAN members in:

- *The South East Region* – where South East Rural Community Councils is using its leadership on a sustainability toolkit to influence strategic decisions at the regional level;
- *Leicestershire and Rutland* – where the Rural Community Council has generated local climate change projects, working with an academic partner, to shape programmes at the county and district councils; and
- *Devon* – where the Community Council of Devon pursued an innovative community development approach to addressing climate change and is now advising the development of county emergency planning strategies.

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A number of common threads can be drawn from these three case studies:

- ***Combining strategic influencing with delivery***: these case study programmes follow a similar path which links the RCAN members' strategic influencing work with their delivery or support work on addressing climate change. The Devon Local Heritage Project and the Communities Cutting Carbon programme in Leicestershire & Rutland were conceived at the strategic level as a partnership between statutory, voluntary and community sectors to deliver community-based climate change work. The learning from the delivery with communities was then fed back up to inform county and district level strategies. This dual – strategic and delivery – role played by RCAN members is valued by local authorities.
- ***Climate change projects as an effective means of engagement***: in two of the three case studies, a significant outcome has been an increased level of community engagement. Strategic partners have recognised this and built upon it. In Devon, elements of the RCAN member's innovative approach have been adopted by the County Council to engage communities in broader climate change adaptation strategies. In the South East, using a community led planning (CLP) approach means the views and concerns of local communities have led to awareness raising and practical actions to address climate change. A web based platform, being developed to extend this work, holds considerable potential for local service providers to listen to communities.
- ***Using the rural evidence base***: more generally, these RCAN members have been influential because of their ability to pull together and present the rural evidence base. Some of this comes directly from communities, as with the CLP-linked approach in the South East, while in Leicestershire and Rutland it comes through a formal academic partnership being tested by the RCC with local communities. Bodies like the Leicestershire Local Strategic Partnership have been convinced by the strength of the findings from this evidence base and use it to inform policy development.
- ***Developing sound working relationships with stakeholders***: the climate change case studies show that RCAN members are proving adept at building new and diverse partnerships. In the South East SERCC have used their climate change toolkit to engage with regional and local academic partners; in Leicestershire and Rutland the collaboration involves urban and rural local authorities plus De Montfort

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University; and in Devon CCD has grown links with community organisations who do not traditionally engage with rural infrastructure bodies. These partnerships help to establish RCAN members as trusted facilitators, as well as underlining their reach into local communities. It often leads directly to RCAN members gaining a seat at the table of other strategic groups.

- ***Future financial uncertainty:*** much of the funding for the work described in these case studies is uncertain beyond March 2011. Typically national and local funding streams are up for renewal and decisions about extending them are expected to be tough. However, local authorities do value the projects and express a desire to see them sustained somehow. In Leicestershire and Rutland this may mean linking the community projects with other areas of local authority controlled funding, such as waste management and recycling.
- ***Adapting to a changing policy landscape:*** all the case study projects were developed during a period when the local performance framework of Sustainable Community Strategies and Local Area Agreements provided the main policy context. Since the 2010 General Election that policy context has altered considerably. The disappearance of statutory regional organisations means that in the South East some of the project stakeholders will disappear. However, climate change adaption and mitigation remain important policy agendas. The Coalition Government's vision for the Big Society, which emphasises citizen involvement and community action, is also seen as an opportunity by many local RCAN members. Local and regional RCAN work which has successfully developed climate change projects with local communities should provide a good fit with such ambitions.

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## Case study 1 – South East Rural Community Council (SERCC)

**The regional RCAN member for the south east, South East Rural Community Councils (SERCC), has been at the forefront of regional action on climate change for some time. Its current initiatives are helping to spread awareness, good practice and practical support with local RCAN members. At the same time SERCC is influencing some strategic decisions about climate change mitigation within regional public bodies.**

### **Context**

RCAN's climate change work in the south east region has been built around a community led planning toolkit used by local RCAN members with community groups. It became clear that many communities were becoming active on local climate change and energy efficiency projects. The toolkit was seized upon as a practical resource by RCAN members to support local efforts with specific advice and help on sustainability, and with climate change mitigation work.

South East Rural Community Councils (SERCC) has developed this resource and associated work on climate change to feed into two RCAN Investment Programme strategic influencing objectives at the regional level:

- Raising awareness of the need for robust rural proofing, if mainstreaming of rural services is to be achieved.
- Building the capacity of local RCAN members to contribute to the regional evidence base.

These activities have grown quickly, driven by a fast moving national policy agenda within which ACRE (the national body for RCAN members) has been a significant player.

### **What happened?**

ACRE's national 21<sup>st</sup> Century Village initiative in 2008 provided the catalyst for a new phase of climate change work for SERCC. Regionally, community led planning (CLP) was becoming stronger and SERCC saw an opportunity to link that approach to raising the profile of local community action on climate change.

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*“We were looking for something that would make community sustainability ‘easy’, so that it wouldn’t frighten people off. Community led planning was the answer, because it is so strong in the region” – Angela Gilmour, Regional Development Manager at SERCC*

SERCC began working in partnership with one of its local RCAN members, Action in Rural Sussex (AirS), to produce a climate change section for the regional CLP toolkit. It takes the form of an A1-sized poster, called A 21st Century Village. One side of the poster highlights important steps which can be taken to become more sustainable. The reverse is a set of resources which communities wishing to cut their carbon footprint can use to help them do so. The poster also signposts other organisations, such as the national government greener living website, transition towns and the Energy Saving Trust.

This is currently entering a new and exciting phase. Plans are well advanced to turn the project into an interactive web based platform, to support local sustainability and community led planning action. The benefits of a web based resource for sustainability are that it would:

- turn the ideas and advice on the poster into an interactive resource, based on a social networking approach that could include case studies, discussion forums, surveys and a link to Google Earth, where areas for action can be pinpointed and shared
- reach beyond the traditional community activists and embrace a deeper and wider audience through people’s living rooms
- make the link between sustainability and community led planning much stronger and so more vital to local authorities and public bodies.

The initiative is starting to capture people’s imagination. Recently, the development team had a very positive reaction from a demonstration they provided for Charles Hendry, Minister for Climate Change. Both East and West Sussex County Councils have expressed interest in having access to the data that the website would generate. They can see that this resource would enable them to understand community actions and priorities more clearly and to talk directly to communities through the facilitators in each area.

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*“The interactive platform can be the catalyst to change the way that facilitators for sustainability action and community led planning reach their audiences. With this we want to involve more people from a wider cross-section, people who wouldn’t normally go to meetings” – Teresa Gittins, Head of Strategy at Action in Rural Sussex (AiRS)*

## **Impacts**

The impacts can be seen strategically, within the region’s decision-making infrastructure, and locally, with direct outcomes for individual communities. SERCC’s linking of sustainability and CLP work has been used to spearhead a range of actions with strategic groups across the region. This includes:

- SERCC membership of the SE Climate Change Partnership, which has led to a Communities Group being established to look at individual and community behavioural change and how good initiatives are shared
- SERCC representing regional voluntary and community sector organisations on the SE Sustainable Futures Group, which drafts and implements the Regional Sustainability Framework
- SERCC and all the local RCAN members signing the Third Sector Declaration on Climate Change.

The climate change/CLP work and other projects are starting to build the evidence base to influence regional and sub-regional partners, and they are building the credibility of the RCAN members. For instance, the harder edged OCSI (Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion) research which is modelling deprivation datasets and public sector interventions, to identify patterns of deprivation in new ways, complements well the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Village initiative. Together they form a powerful suite of tools to talk to public sector organisations about need in rural communities and solutions to help alleviate it.

### **Local impact**

The village of Plumpton used the toolkit to organise events prompted by their village action plan. They recreated aspects of the poster around the village, to raise awareness and spread good practice on climate change. This included practical presentations by residents who, for instance, used solar panels or ran walking buses, for other local residents. As a result the village has established a Plumpton Goes Green team to continue local sustainability work.

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The influence with local authorities also extends to practical environmental delivery. They are now much more likely to work in partnership with local RCAN members on projects, from designing and installing street furniture to co-ordinating energy audits.

The climate change toolkit has proved to be a valuable resource for the 18 local RCAN community development workers in the region. They have used it as a basis to talk to local groups and meetings about community consultations. In many cases this has energised communities and moved them to the next stage of taking action or engaging with the local authority.

**Sustainability as a catalyst for community action**

SERCC and local RCAN members have established community sustainability as a bridgehead for a wide range of actions on which they can help. The toolkit directs communities to core RCAN support, such as community transport schemes, greening community buildings and undertaking a parish plan or market town healthcheck to analyse the town's strengths, weaknesses, future demands and opportunities.

**Resources**

SERCC's role has been one of leadership and co-ordination. Resources have principally come from a proportion of Defra's £15k per year of RCAN Investment Programme funding, which supports the two strategic influencing activities linked to climate change. The Regional Rural Forum provided some further resource to help with printing and distribution costs. £9k also came from Defra's Leader Plus programme.

Much of the developmental and promotional work is carried out by AirS through their own RCAN Investment Programme strategic influencing project, 'To raise the profile of rural community issues'. A proportion of the £38k annual funding for this is used to support strategic elements of the 21st Century Village initiative. The website platform is being funded through the University of Brighton and AirS, who have together put in a total of £14k plus considerably more from the University through contributions in-kind.

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### **What worked well?**

CLP was a logical wagon on which to hitch the community sustainability work. CLP is a proven model in the region, which could break down barriers within communities by making issues that seemed distant, like peak oil and global carbon emissions, seem real by advocating practical, local actions with almost immediate impact. Positive feedback from community development workers across the region, about the way local groups had welcomed the initiative, was widespread.

Engaging local authorities with this work is something SERCC are particularly pleased to see happen. It reinforces the CLP approach, but also moves the relationship with local authorities onto a more professional footing, where SERCC and local RCAN members are seen as team players and organisers.

### **What could improve?**

The disappearance of regional structures is keenly felt by SERCC. The organisation had a particularly productive relationship with Government Office South East. Since the announcement of its demise this has changed and the relationship will shortly end.

There is some tension between collaboration and income generation, evidenced by a growing trend to put a price tag on intellectual property rights and charge for information. SERCC and AirS feel they are on a steep learning curve when it comes to asserting ownership of ideas and innovations to secure a commercial angle, when their instinct is to share information with a wide range of stakeholders.

SERCC has so far managed to dodge the worst aspects of this through partnership arrangements and cooperation, but feel this could come under pressure with the air of austerity and forthcoming spending squeeze.

### **Where next ?**

The emergence of the website platform moves this project onto a potentially long term footing. The team is working on a pilot version of the full website which will be launched with five 'test' communities in the New Year. There has been strong local interest with 22 communities asking to be involved. The University of Brighton will evaluate the trial period and, once the lessons have been absorbed, the project aims to roll out from the middle of 2011.

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The website is envisaged as a franchise model, so it can be applied to any geographic area, rather than being something unique to Sussex.

The development team is considering the longer term commercial prospects and may set themselves up as a Community Interest Company. There has already been interest from local bus companies, who are interested in what communities have to say about their bus services and would like to talk to them about how they could be altered or refined.

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## Case study 2 – Leicestershire and Rutland

**The local RCAN member in Leicestershire and Rutland has used a successful track record of local climate change and environmental work to help pull together a broad partnership which delivers climate mitigation work with a wide range of communities in Leicestershire and Rutland. This work is now feeding into strategic objectives.**

### Context

The Rural Community Council for Leicestershire and Rutland ('the RCC') is running an influential partnership climate change programme, aimed at supporting and encouraging effective local action to combat aspects of climate change in communities across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. This work has become a core component of wider RCAN Investment Programme-funded activities which seek to influence the strategic direction of district councils in Leicestershire.

The Communities Cutting Carbon programme has its roots in earlier work around energy efficiency with local authorities, coupled with a growing emphasis on climate change and local sustainability among a number of the RCC's partners. This emphasis has been evidenced more recently by community led planning initiatives, where communities have increasingly highlighted environmental concerns amongst their local needs.

### What happened?

The RCC developed some practical partnership work with local authorities about three years ago, to help community groups run an energy efficiency competition and, subsequently, a number of awareness-raising events called The Big Switch Off. The success of the community engagement aspects of this work pressed buttons of the local authorities who were looking for effective ways to develop new climate change mitigation work.

Evidence from these successful projects was used by the RCC to unlock resources from the Leicestershire Partnership, the county Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) via the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership. The RCC then brokered further discussions with De Montfort University who, in time, matched the LSP money with a sum from its Knowledge Transfer Partnership programme.

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The aim of this partnership between local authorities, the RCC and the university is to build a sub-regional initiative to support local climate change innovation. The RCC manages the project on behalf of the partnership and employs a full time project co-ordinator, Andrew Reeves, who is responsible for its day-to-day operation and strategic development.

*“The partnership came together well, saw the opportunity and seized it, even if they were galvanized by differing motivations” – Peter Williams, Leicestershire CC*

The programme has three linked outcomes:

- To help local groups become established, who will then set up their own local responses to climate change.
- To support individual projects that help to reduce the carbon footprint of communities or enable communities to adapt to the anticipated impacts of climate change. Funding for this comes through a Climate Friendly Communities Grant worth £50,000.
- To establish how effective climate mitigation support can be provided to community groups through an action research programme led by De Montfort University.

### **Tilton Green**

Tilton Green was formed in the summer of 2008 after a Parish Plan<sup>1</sup> consultation revealed strong feelings about a wide range of environmental issues. Tilton Green won funding through the Communities Cutting Carbon programme, to help them become a Climate Friendly Community. As well as providing advice, Tilton Green has a number of resources to loan to residents to help reduce their energy use and carbon footprint, including electricity monitors and a light bulb library. It has since been selected as one of just six Energy Saving Trust 'Green Communities' in the East Midlands.

### **Impacts**

The findings from the projects are feeding back into the decision making loop of local authorities and the Leicestershire Partnership. Peter Williams at Leicestershire County Council explains that the work contributes towards delivery of two policy priorities and associated LSP targets around the environment for a thriving third sector and levels of regular, formal volunteering. They have also seen social capital increase in some of the project areas, as measured by the former Place Survey.

<sup>1</sup> Community led planning (CLP) is the current terminology for what used to be called parish plans – a term that is still often used locally.

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Winning the funding required to deliver this project has delivered lasting impact. The RCC was able to use its track record of engagement with local communities to demonstrate value to the Leicestershire Partnership. This has led to the RCC's profile being raised in the county and to a stronger relationship with the LSP, as well as other partners.

Andrew Reeves, the Project Coordinator stresses the considerable impact of the cross-sector, cross-discipline partnership which works across both urban and rural areas. The significant academic knowledge base on climate change accumulated by De Montfort University has been matched with the community development and social capital-building expertise of the local RCAN member in a 'knowledge transfer' approach.

*"For us, the ability to emphasise climate change work through a community-led planning approach was an important way of making this happen properly for local communities"* – Diana Cook at the RCC

**Leicester Inter-Faith Youth Hub: the Eco-Faith Riverside Festival**

This event was held in June 2010 and aimed to get young people to explore environmental issues with a faith element using creative arts. This ambition was met through:

- bringing in elements of informal learning, using workshops to explore environmental buzz words and the complexities of climate change
- giving a platform for young people to be the driving force and put their concepts or ideas into action
- running workshops on recycled art, using materials sourced from skips, junk yards and local organisations who had made donations.

**Resources**

The Communities Cutting Carbon project is a collaboration between the RCC, De Montfort University and each of the ten local authorities in the area. The Knowledge Transfer Partnership funding totals £83k and comes from the ESRC, NERC and Defra (though not from the RCAN Investment Programme).

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The East Midlands Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership funding is £40k towards the running costs and £50k towards the Climate Friendly Communities grants.

Part of the Defra RCAN Investment Programme funding allocated to the RCC's activities on influencing district LSPs in Leicestershire has been used to support the strategic aspects of this work including the negotiation and co-working with partners and funders.

### **What worked well?**

These activities have been able to demonstrate clear links between climate change action, community empowerment and academic research. This has been achieved by the RCC working very closely with community groups and adapting the template of community led planning approaches to act as a conduit for the development of projects.

Securing resources that can go directly into communities has been crucial. The RCC says the great thing about the Climate Friendly Communities Grant was that it provided a way in to communities which might otherwise not have been engaged. Without a clear offer of help and support, a few of the communities may not have been interested in working with the programme.

Diversity has been encouraged. A wide range of participating groups has been established in the ten local authority areas, with different levels of organisation, ambition and skills; and an equally varied set of activities in which they were interested.

*"This programme means that we can go to communities and say 'let's come up with ideas for an environmental project to spend funding on in your community', and focus initial meetings around that"* – Andrew Reeves, Project Co-ordinator at the RCC

### **What could improve?**

Stitching a partnership together from the various sectors and with a range of funding pots was a time-consuming and frustrating process. Each component of the delivery plan needed to be clear, so that every partner knew their role. This was not achieved seamlessly and led to some back-tracking on initial decisions. Some of this is seen as inevitable, given that each of the partners also sought their own outcomes from the programme.

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### **Where next ?**

Some aspects of the programme have not yet completed, such as the academic action research which will finish in 2011. Nevertheless, the programme has demonstrated some real progress at both strategic and local delivery levels. There is a demand for this kind of community based climate change work, but its coordination is key. There is a risk the impetus will be lost if that coordination role is not funded beyond the initial three years. It is likely the local groups would continue, but the high level influencing would not.

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## Case study 3 – Devon

**The local RCAN member, Community Council of Devon (CCD), has supported climate change and environmental activities for some while. A growing strategic focus to CCD's activities provided an opportunity to work with some new partners on an innovative approach to local climate change adaption work and, at the same time, to influence some county-wide statutory objectives.**

### Context

Community based climate change activities feature strongly in Community Council of Devon's (CCD's) RCAN strategic influencing activities where the aim is to influence the Devon Partnership and other consortia that have strong rural interests. CCD is helping to achieve this by making new and existing community climate change activities more broadly based and better linked to existing social capital.

CCD has a long and successful history of developing local environmental sustainability and climate change awareness projects. With funding from the Defra RCAN Investment Programme in 2008, the emphasis of CCD's work on strategic influencing with other Devon partnerships and organisations has assumed a much broader and significant remit, including taking on the role of brokering relationships between local and specialist or activist groups and what it terms "the rural establishment".

### What happened?

That brokerage role was important in shaping the Climate Change Heritage Project. The key aspects of the project were: to research, record and celebrate local weather heritage with community groups; and to understand how past events impacted on climate change.

Through these histories the project aimed to raise awareness of climate change and support local adaptation planning.

A successful bid was made to the Heritage Lottery Fund to resource the project in Autumn 2008 and it got underway with a half-time co-ordinator in early 2009. The steering group comprised CCD, the Devon Records Office, Devon History Society, Devon Library & Information Services and the Met Office Hadley Centre.

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The participants were a mix of history societies, youth groups, environmental pressure groups and community associations. The selection represented differing communities, organisational structures, geography and topography.

With support from the project co-ordinator, each group was responsible for agreeing how it would define and manage the project locally. Organisations such as parish councils, schools and colleges, youth groups and community associations contributed to the research. End products included traditional publications and exhibitions, as well as digital audio and visual records.

The mix of skills developed within groups was equally diverse, from research and recording techniques, to writing, publishing and presenting at public events.

*“The mix of groups was important. History societies and museum groups working with schools, parish councils, youth groups and community associations is not an everyday occurrence” – Martin Rich, CCD*

#### **Complementary work in the National Park**

Another aspect of CCD’s climate change activity, which feeds in to strategic influencing and complements this project, centres on parish planning in the Dartmoor National Park. CCD has worked with parish councils and communities to think about how sustainability can be embedded in the forward thinking of communities within the national park boundaries.

#### **Impacts**

Devon County Council has replicated these techniques for engaging with communities about climate change adaptation in other strategic emergency planning work. This helps to reinforce CCD’s relationship with the county and underpins its credibility as a strategic partner.

Some of the findings from the histories have tangible, wider application within the County Council’s plans. For instance, the project found evidence that highly sophisticated and centralised emergency service provision can overlook important local knowledge, which in turn can hamper the distribution of resources.

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Some valuable local impacts which underpin the strategic value are:

- Community projects: Lympstone’s work to promote a local flood defence scheme has resulted in joint work with the Environment Agency; Hartland is pursuing transition town status; Dawlish has established a local pressure group on coastal erosion; and most of the areas have input to parish planning and local sustainability initiatives;
- Social capital and community development: researching local histories has involved a cross section of the local population, helped to forge positive intergenerational bonds and build good will; newcomers have been able to become involved with their new neighbourhood and understand more about it.

*“The benefit of a project like this is that the impacts have knock-on effects in different areas, kick starting activity and giving people more strings to their bows” – Martin Rich, CCD*

### **Engaging tourists**

In Combe Martin the project group wanted to develop a photo record of past floods, storms and blizzards in the area. The collection was scanned and displayed electronically in the local museum with a climate change commentary. It provided a fascinating and informative contrast for the many holidaymakers who came to the area for the benign climate.

### **Resources**

The Heritage Lottery Fund contributed £50k to the project. Contributions in kind helped to fund the time and expertise of the cross-sector steering group, giving a total project cost of £60k. A proportion of the almost £50k of the RCAN Investment Programme funding which CCD allocated to influencing activities with local authorities was funded the strategic influencing aspects of this work.

### **What worked well?**

The innovative approach to community engagement has been widely praised. By aggregating personal histories, stories and experiences at the community level and linking these to current issues and problems, the project reached organisations and individuals which had not previously engaged with climate change adaptation or with public policy development in its broadest sense.

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Specific aspects of the approach that worked well include:

- Raising awareness of the results – this was achieved throughout the county and beyond through local exhibitions, a conference and a project DVD, *Warm Rain*;
- Diversity of participants – involving a range of individuals in the local projects helped to provide valuable and broadly based insights about responses to local weather incidents;
- Good project steering – the membership of the steering group was strong and supportive and it gelled quickly. It was of considerable benefit that many of the partners had worked with each other previously and had good working relationships.

*“Through this project we have managed to restate eloquently that knowledge within communities is important, relevant and valued”* – Martin Rich, CCD

### **What could improve?**

There was a waning of the initial interest of some groups because of the time lag between inviting groups to participate and moving forward with delivery. There was also a lesson about managing people’s expectations: groups who have less familiarity with projects of this nature need to be clear about how and when their role will develop.

A major challenge of working with local and specialist groups who have less contact with ‘the rural establishment’ is to use appropriate and relevant language; CCD quickly learned that trying to engage with history groups by talking about social capital, social exclusion and community engagement benefits was not going to encourage active participation. Instead, discussions began to focus on the core interest of local groups, such as shared experiences, practical action by older generations, recording of incidents and accessing records.

### **Where next ?**

The Climate Change Heritage Project formally finished in May 2010. However, CCD continues to use the findings to inform Devon County Council’s work on climate change and emergency planning, and together with other activities on community climate change, is seeking to influence Devon’s strategic partnerships.

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The project has reinforced the desirability of helping communities record, understand and celebrate their recent history. CCD is using the occasion of 50 years of the Community Council of Devon to develop a proposition to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a similar project, which will focus on community led action over the past fifty years.