

Reducing Energy Costs for Lighting Through Smart Technology Bradford-on-Avon

Background

As the Board knows, Wiltshire Council agreed to provide £5,000 to each area board to allow town councils and parishes to install smart technology in streetlights to enable them to be automatically switched off between approximately 12:00 midnight and 5:30 am. The principal aims being to reduce energy consumption and so save costs, cut CO² emissions and lessen light pollution of the night sky.

In this innovative project, Wiltshire Council has sought both backing for the scheme and specific recommendations as to the most appropriate lights from the local communities. It has not dictated which lights will form part of the scheme. This has given communities the opportunity to take positive action i.e. nominate the lights to be included themselves rather than merely comment upon Wiltshire Council plans.

Implementation

In Bradford-on-Avon, in the first instance, support was sought from Town Council. They unanimously backed the scheme and the involvement of a community volunteer.

Further innovations were possible - the approach was not dictated by Wiltshire Council, rather plans followed were those suggested locally. Bradford-on-Avon residents and local businesses were asked to nominate streetlights which could be turned off overnight. The period for nomination stretched from early October to 22nd of that month. Posters were displayed in pubs and shops - indicating a general level of support in the business community - as well as in traditional Council sites. Further, organisations in the town (Climate Friendly Bradford-on-Avon, the Preservation Trust and the Chamber of Commerce) kindly notified their members of the proposals by email. Residents' associations and other local groups were also emailed and the police were asked to forward details to neighbourhood watch contacts. In the region of 750 emails were issued. The Town Council website provided details of the scheme as did the community website. Finally, in the initial nomination phase, over 500 households in the Town received leaflets requesting light nominations.

The setting up of a specific email address meant that residents could easily feed in to the nomination process and likewise the team could respond directly helping to keep residents in the information loop. Postal and telephone responses were also supported to ensure no section of the community was excluded.

In the end, over 100 light nominations were received and, based on them, an overall plan was drawn up for consultation. Details of the consultation process were printed in the Gudgeon and those residents and businesses close to selected lights received more detailed information, including maps showing the location of the lights. Those who wish to comment on the suitability of the selected lights have a variety of means for doing so.

The Town as a whole has had the opportunity to review and comment on plans at an open meeting on 17th November at St Margaret's Hall. The closing date for comments is 26th November 2010 – the consultation started early November.

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Using the consultation feedback, a plan will be put forward to the Bradford on Avon Town Council for their backing in December 2010, ready for final approval by the Area Board in January 2011. Elly Townsend as area board manager has been keeping the technical team apprised of the plans and so it is hoped they will be able to complete their work by the end of the tax year to ensure the scheme can be funded.

Initial feedback

The responses received from the community are being assessed not only in terms of the lights nominated etc but also general themes emerging. A number of key points are evident including:

- (i) a genuine concern that energy is being wasted - a view in no way restricted to Climate Friendly Bradford-on-Avon members,
- (ii) a real sense that local residents see that it is important to take action to address this wastage,
- (iii) some residents feel it is the Council's responsibility to protect individual's personal possessions at all times, rather than provide lighting to allow safe passage on roads and pavements at sociable hours and
- (iv) the success of the project and any ability to extend it will be dependent upon providing feedback on both implementation and a review of the scheme after a reasonable timeframe.

Level of support

Significant support for this project has been demonstrated by

the number of responses from the community,
specific assistance from Climate Friendly Bradford-on-Avon,
the hard work of the Area board manager, Elly Townsend,
help from the staff at the Town Council and
support from 2 Bradford-on-Avon Town Councillors, in particular.

However, the success of the project is being hampered by:

- (i) the unnecessarily tight timeframe - implementation required within the tax year, made more difficult by delays in receiving basic information on the scheme, and
- (ii) a lack of resources limiting the scope of the nomination / consultation phases.

It would also have been helpful if all authorities that could have contributed to the process had been willing to engage with the project team.

Despite these issues, those involved in the project are working hard to make it a success.

Conclusion

At the next Area Board it is planned to provide a list of lights to be included in the scheme, supported by the community and the Town Council. It is hoped that at that stage the Area Board

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will approve the list. The production of that list will have been the result of much work and commitment both by specific individuals and the community as a whole.

Having proposed this scheme, so asking for community backing, it is important that the Council supports those who have embraced the positive approach the scheme has adopted – i.e. those who have taken action and nominated a light - not just take into consideration the views of those who have objected.

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