

## Strategic Innovation Fund - Alpha

Rosendale Borough Council Community Engagement  
and Dissemination Report: March 2024



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## Glossary

Term	Definition
CEE	Centre for Energy Equality
GSHP	Ground Source Heat Pumps
LEAD	Local Energy Advice Demonstrator
NZT	Net Zero Terrace
PPA	Power Purchase Agreement
RBC	Rossendale Borough Council
RVE	Rossendale Valley Energy
SIF	Strategic Innovation Fund

# 1. Introduction

There is a widely acknowledged need to reduce energy use and carbon emissions in order to mitigate climate change. Cities constitute three quarters of global energy consumption and the built environment is responsible for significant use of energy (62%) and greenhouse gas emissions (55%)<sup>1</sup>.

In many parts of the UK, heating houses produces high carbon emissions. In Rossendale, according to the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), carbon emissions from heating houses is the second largest emitter of CO<sub>2</sub> in the Borough<sup>2</sup>. Decarbonising domestic heating has been challenging in the Borough as most houses are reliant on gas, were built in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and have low energy efficiency. Around 37% of the properties were built before 1900 compared to 15% nationally<sup>3</sup>. Over 60% of homes in the Borough have an energy efficiency rating of D or E. The Council's emissions constitute just 0.6% of emissions in the district, therefore we need to work together with residents, businesses and community groups in the Borough to significantly reduce emissions across the Borough.

Rossendale Borough Council (RBC) have partnered with Rossendale Valley Energy (RVE) on the Net Zero Terrace (NZZ) project which aims to create a replicable, scalable model to decarbonise heat, enable deployment of a standardised package of fabric retrofit and ensure that low carbon heat is an affordable option for all. The Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF) Discovery phase investigated the possibility for Net Zero suitable terraced streets, areas which make up the majority of homes in the Borough and are often older and less energy efficient. The NZZ solution identified is a Smart Local Energy System (SLES), which will comprise ambient loop ground source heat pumps (GSHPs), community EV car clubs, community-provided storage, and solar PV and local peer-to-peer Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) controlled by optimisation software. The benefits case of the system can simply be summarised that it would reduce bills and increase peak network capacity by up to 80% compared to the counterfactual of direct electric heating in individual homes. Other benefits include mitigating against electricity grid constraints and developing local energy economies that enable the fair distribution of energy into areas where it is needed.

This system, however, relies on novel arrangements between a variety of stakeholders, including the local authority, community energy organisations, residents' groups, supply chain, energy suppliers, aggregators and the local distribution network operator. Phase 2 of the project, Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF) Alpha, further

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<sup>1</sup> Preston, S., Mazhar, M. U., & Bull, R. (2020). Citizen engagement for co-creating low carbon smart cities: Practical Lessons from Nottingham City Council in the UK. *Energies*, 13(24), 6615.

<sup>2</sup> Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS). (2022). UK local authority and regional greenhouse gas emissions national statistics, 2005 to 2020.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-local-authority-and-regional-greenhouse-gas-emissions-national-statistics-2005-to-2020>

<sup>3</sup> ONS (2022), Age of the property is the biggest single factor in energy efficiency of homes.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/articles/ageofthepropertyisthebiggestsinglefactorinenergyefficiencyofhomes/2021-11-01>

explored the outputs required to deliver the NZT solution. As the key to scaling this model is effective community and stakeholder engagement, without buy in from individuals, the community scale model will not be economic and therefore cannot be achieved.

This report outlines the outcome of community engagement activities conducted by RBC and RVE as part of SIF Alpha which trialled RVE’s community engagement methodology in line with RBC’s engagement strategy for increasing household insulation funding.

## 2. Engagement approach and methodology

RBC’s engagement strategy for increasing household insulation funding clearly defines the Council’s role, process for engagement and how the Council will work in partnership with RVE to engage the community on the NZT project<sup>4</sup>. As highlighted in the strategy, the Council aligned with RVE’s approach and adopted RVE’s community engagement model for NZT: REACH-ENGAGE-RETAIN (as shown in Figure 1).

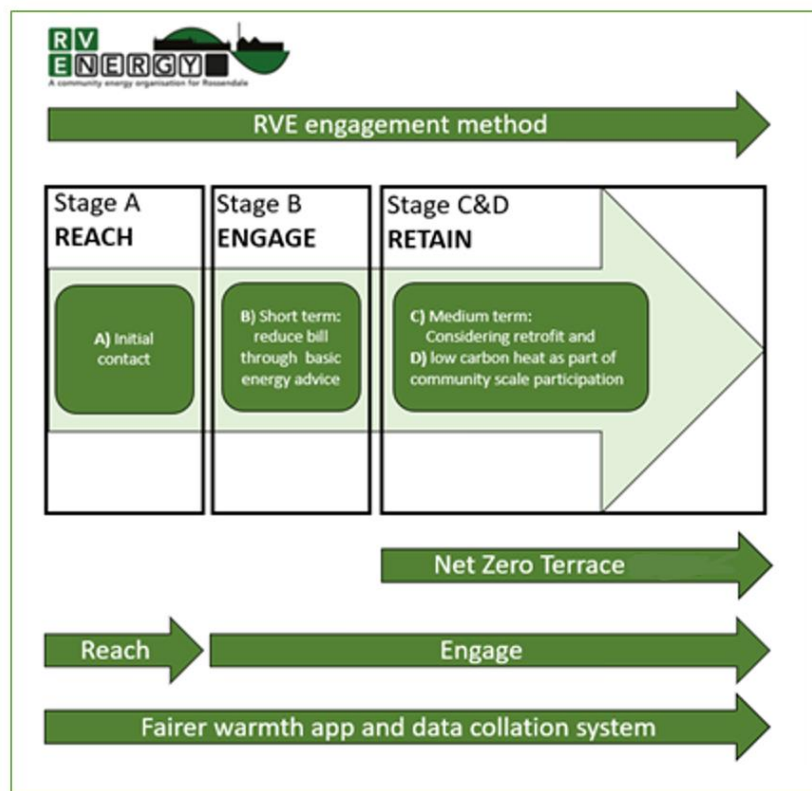


Figure 1: RVE engagement model

<sup>4</sup> Rossendale Borough Council. (2022). Engagement Strategy for increasing household insulation funding.

The idea behind the model is that local Energy Champions/Advisers REACH out to households in the local area, offering energy advice and home energy assessments. Interested households are invited to ENGAGE with the 'Fairer Warmth App', developed by the Centre for Energy Equality (CEE), which provides energy efficiency advice and signposting to relevant Government support, and easy energy savings activities, while also collecting monitoring data. The Fairer Warmth App aims to provide an ongoing energy advice service and community-building activities that will RETAIN some of these households going forward, allowing for the process of identifying potential NZT customers in target streets. The concept is that NZT services will eventually be offered to App users living in streets suitable for NZT, where a critical mass of interested households have been recruited.

RBC supported RVE with the initial outreach and engagement activities around energy efficiency, linked to the Fairer Warmth App in Rossendale under SIF Alpha and also the Local Energy Advice Demonstrator (LEAD) project. Community engagement, as part of the SIF Alpha, mainly focused on REACH and ENGAGE, as only soft market testing can be done until there is a funded or investable pathway for the community to attain the NZT output.

### **3. Engagement activities**

RVE aimed to engage all residents within the project area as all residents are facing high energy bills and mainly use fossil fuels to heat their homes. It is important that residents were engaged in a way they would like to be engaged and provided with the appropriate information for the type of house they live in, tenure of the property and in a way that is accessible to them.

#### **3.1. Stakeholder and community mapping**

As set out in SIF Discovery, stakeholder and community mapping was undertaken around organisations and entities that the Council could engage and work with. RVE used available Council platforms, including parity projects, to map areas where residents are likely to qualify for current and future funding.



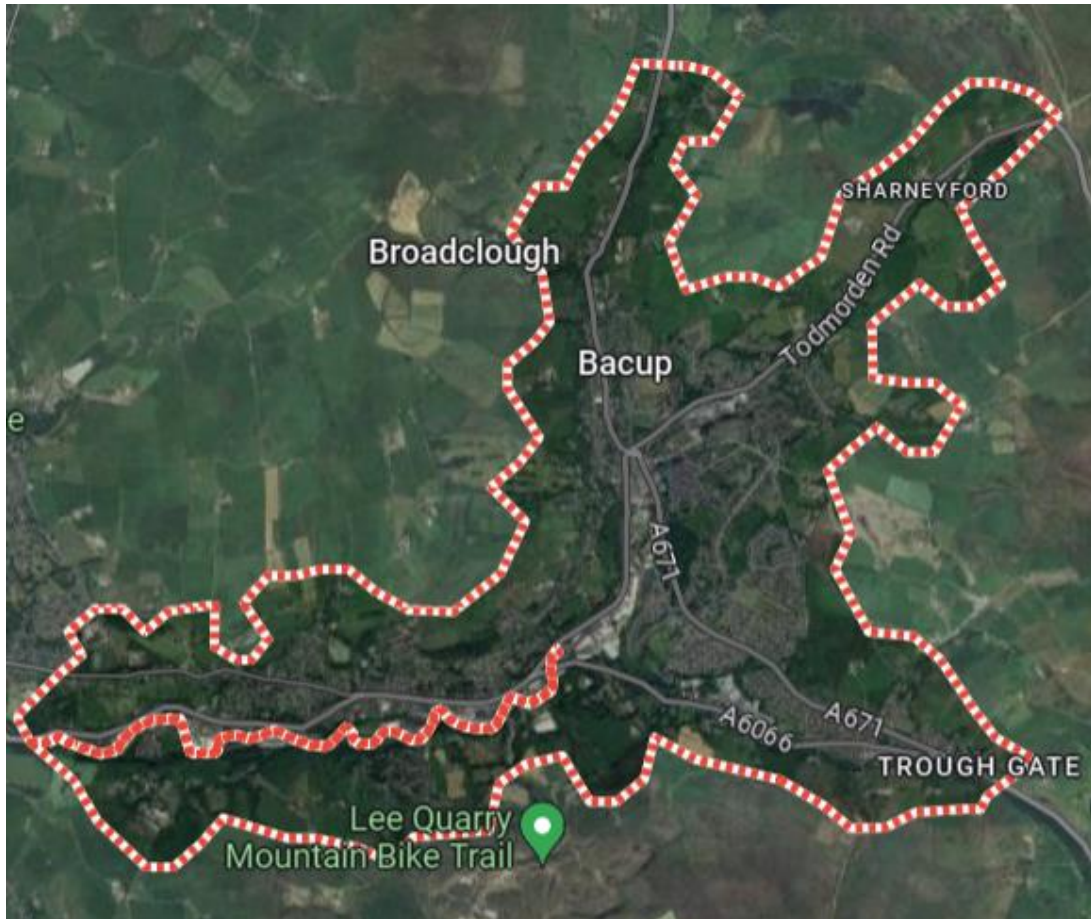


Figure 2: Google Earth depicting Bacup

The target area for NZT is Bacup (Figure 2), within Rossendale, which is a post-industrial area with aged, terraced housing and is within the 1st and 2nd decile on the Indices of multiple deprivation.

### 3.2. Community engagement campaigns

Eight campaigns for REACH were set up and, within each campaign, activities and media or communications channels to enable REACH were considered. These were:

- a. Community groups – contacting leaders and arranging drop-ins and events
- b. Health – working with the local medical centres
- c. Food banks
- d. Faith groups
- e. Retail locations
- f. Events
- g. Doorstep
- h. Schools – Energy Heroes

The RVE team worked with community leaders and RBC in arranging drop ins and events including five advice info hubs across three libraries, carers link info hub and Bacup Family Centre held weekly (Figure 3). Two advice sessions are organised for RBC employees and elected councillors at the Council office in Bacup (Futures Park) every two weeks. The RVE team also worked with local medical centres, engaging with health professionals to explain the NZT project and the benefits of energy efficiency advice. RVE staff worked with the charity Energy Heroes to deliver the Energy Heroes schools programme in Water Primary School and completed two pop ups at Tesco as part of the retail campaign.



*Figure 3: RVE team at a Council community group meeting*

Doorstep campaigns, working with faith groups and food banks are not fully operational. However, RVE plan to start these campaigns as soon as weather conditions improve and all the necessary permissions are provided.



Figure 4: Leaflet distributed during engagement campaigns

Figure 4 shows RVE leaflets distributed at events and sessions. 2500 leaflets were ordered and approximately 2000 have now been distributed with plans to distribute the remaining leaflets at events and sessions in March.

### 3.3. Council community engagement support

As highlighted in Table 1, RVE were able use Council platforms to share information and engage with residents through Council community mailing lists, social media platforms and community group meetings.



Table 1: Community engagement activities using Council platform

Platform	Activity
Council Community Partnership meetings	RVE attended community partnership meetings at Whitworth (23/01/24), Rawtenstall (01/02/24), Bacup (21/02/24) and Haslingden (6/03/24) to talk to the partnerships about the work of RVE. Community Partnerships are face to face meetings that aim to promote the interests of each neighborhood and assist the area's residents, businesses, community groups and local Councilors in meeting the needs and aspirations for the neighborhood.
Rossendale Connected	Rossendale Connected is a network of 170 groups and organisations that are working together to deliver the Rossendale health and wellbeing plan 'Our Place, Our Wellbeing, Our Plan'. RVE attended a network meeting on 1 <sup>st</sup> February 2024 to promote the work of RVE and the Fairer Warmth app. This information was distributed to all partners.
Rossendale Community Bulletin	This e-bulletin is distributed to over 300 groups and residents. The January 2024 bulletin included information about the RVE LEAD programme and how to get involved (Figure 5).
Rossendale Climate Network	Information has been distributed through the Rossendale Climate Network Facebook page.
Council Bin Bulletin	The Council bin bulletin is distributed to all households in the Borough. The 2024 bulletin (distributed in December 2023) included information about RVE (under the climate change section) and their projects, including NZT.

**RV ENERGY**  
A community energy organisation for Rossendale

**CEE** Centre for Energy Equality

Community Energy AWARDS  
2023 WINNER

**Who Are We?**

Rossendale Valley Energy is a not for profit community benefit organisation based in Rossendale.

Our aim is to create a thriving community support network to put power into the hands of local people to help them reduce their carbon emissions, move to greener, more affordable energy to help Rossendale Valley transition to net zero AND help them to save money in the process.

**What Do We Do?**

We have been awarded funding from the Northwest Net Zero hub to deliver a Local Energy Advice Demonstrator project to offer energy advice to the people of Rossendale. We have energy advisors and energy champions who will be able to advise you on how to reduce energy bills, what grants may be available and what steps you can put in place to make your home warmer and healthier

We are working in partnership with the Centre for Energy Equality who have developed an app "Fairer Warmth", which will help people find what support, grants and funding are available for things like insulation and other energy saving measures. If you're not able to use the app don't worry - our energy advisors and champions will also be available to help with this if needed.

We are very much a community based project and welcome input from members of the public as to what will work best for them on the journey to net zero. Over the coming months we will be holding workshops, visiting local community groups and retail outlets where you can access our energy advisors and champions and also tell us what you would like to see happening for Rossendale.

In the meantime, if you would like to get in touch with us, please

Email: [info@rvenergy.org.uk](mailto:info@rvenergy.org.uk)

Text: 88802 and enter the code RVE

Figure 5: Council bulletin page showing information about the Fairer Warmth App

RBC took part in the RVE Fast Followers event 'Preparing for Net Zero Terrace' for local authorities and community groups on 25 January 2024. The two-hour event included presentations and a Q&A. 36 people attended the session which was recorded and shared with those who could not attend.

### 3.4. Monitoring sign ups using the Fairer Warmth platform

The Fairer Warmth platform is being co-developed by CEE and the RVE team to ensure that the platform has the functionality that RVE (and others) require to collate information, keep people informed and eventually allow them to be part of the NZT deployment and local energy club. The Fairer Warmth platform comprises an App with a customer-facing interface and an administrator interface used by our energy advisors and energy champions. This allows energy champions to sign people up using the App if they are digitally excluded or do not want to input data directly.

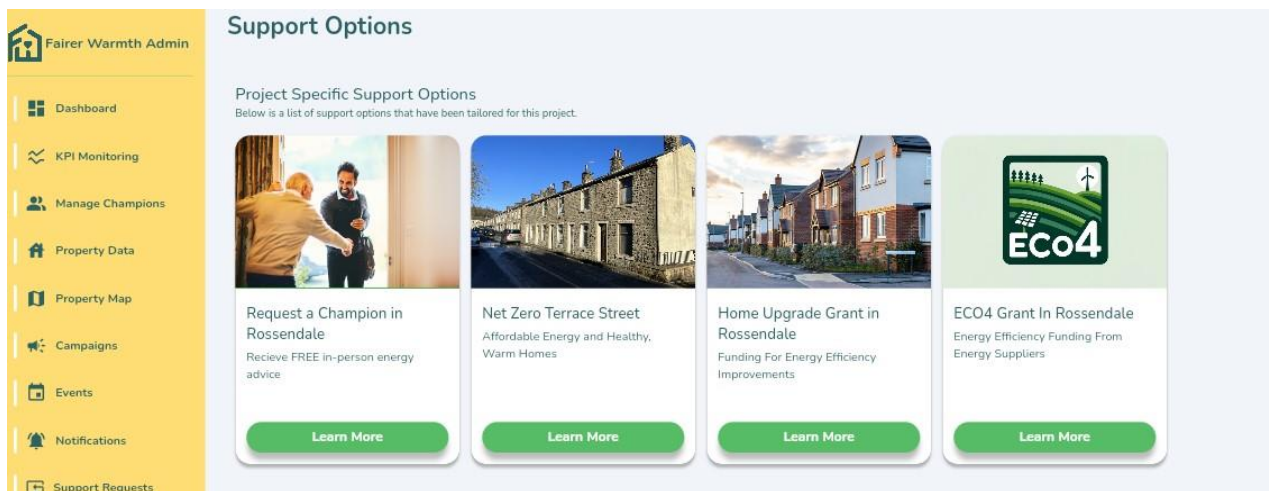


Figure 6: The Fairer Warmth App platform

Within the SIF Alpha, the Fairer Warmth platform enables RVE to monitor sign ups and see activity within the platform. It has also allowed RVE to monitor which campaign has effectively reached someone and led to them signing up. The App has been incredibly useful in enabling RVE to understand where to focus resources to increase sign up. The feature will also allow RVE to see if other communities have different preferences for engagement or if different types of campaign and media channels differ across other geographies or demographics.

## 4. Outcome of engagement activities

As highlighted in Figure 7, RVE have reached the specified target for SIF Alpha of engaging 300 households. The use of different QR codes and input into the Fairer Warmth App enabled RVE team to log where people are interacting with the programme. Analysis of the information on the Fairer Warmth App dashboard show that different engagement campaigns are having different impacts.



Figure 7: The Fairer Warmth App dashboard

The health campaign has been the most successful campaign to date. RVE has built this relationship which has resulted in health centres sending out an information text to highlight the benefits of getting in touch with RVE to organise energy efficiency advice. This led to a large spike in community members viewing and downloading the app and then requesting energy advice or 1-2-1s with the energy champions. On the other hand, the results indicate that distribution of leaflets is having little impact.

## 5. Lessons Learnt and the way forward

Community engagement as part of SIF Alpha has successfully tested the REACH and ENGAGE methodology through RVE engagement campaigns. The data to date clearly shows that the health campaign has been successful. RVE Energy Advisors report that text messages from GP clinics/health centres have produced the highest level of



engagement. Local events and community group meetings attended by Energy Advisors helped to build up face-to-face trust which resulted in successful engagement.

The results indicate that distribution of leaflets is having little impact. This could be down to several factors, particularly that people don't use QR codes. This may be because people are not familiar with digital tools, could be due to digital exclusion, a preference for written or face to face contact and may be different with other demographics/geographies.

Other reasons for muted interest could be energy efficiency scams, adverse media coverage of energy efficiency schemes and anti-net zero sentiment in social media or mainstream media. There is a reportedly high level of mistrust of energy efficiency schemes, especially across Lancashire, with a considerable amount of news attention given to a failed energy efficiency scheme in the region, the subsequent fall out for households trying to seek remedial measures and ending up with large bills after a legal firm went into administration: [Lancashire homeowners demand action over huge legal bills - BBC News](#). This may have affected wider levels of trust in council or government-led schemes.

Additionally, many people are currently receiving cold calls from 'Energy Advisors' creating a mistrust and instant aversion to anyone offering 'free' advice. Such advice and potential scams are also common on social media platforms such as Facebook.

The results provide an understanding of campaigns that are likely to succeed and the campaigns to direct resources for significant impact. It is important that community engagement continues in future phases so that campaigns including doorstep, food banks and faith groups could be further examined. Getting RVE known as a trusted brand and delivering energy advice and testing effectiveness of engagement methods has been core to SIF Alpha activities.

Testing RVE's ability to RETAIN interest requires a longer time period and can be tested across future phases. The key is to have funding, then investment in place so the deployment solution can be offered, providing a clear pathway for householders towards the outcome of NZT.

## 6. Conclusion

RVE in partnership with RBC have successfully tested the REACH and ENGAGE methodology through community engagement campaigns under SIP Alpha. Outcomes of community engagement activities show that different campaigns are achieving different impacts. Findings indicate that health campaigns supported by GP clinics and health centres are very successful, while distribution of leaflets has not been successful. The results also indicate that campaigns involving face-to-face meet up/interactions were more productive.

RETAIN was not tested during SIF Alpha as testing RVE's ability to retain interest requires a longer time period. Until there is funding in place to allow the NZT service to 'go live' we will remain in the 'pump priming' phase of engagement.

In moving forward, it is important to continue testing the community engagement methodology in the area and widen testing to include the delivery of NZT solution and actual uptake. It is also crucial to test the engagement methodology undertaken in Rossendale and Lancashire in different areas with different 'use cases'.

RBC is committed to our partnership with RVE and we hope the partnership can continue. This commitment is demonstrated through the Council's involvement in Pathfinders 2 (a concurrent project) which includes work around organisational and operational governance.