



2015 Project Snapshot

LEAD APPLICANT

NCE Insulation

PROJECT CO-ORDINATOR

Brian McSwiney, Sustainable Clonakilty

PROJECT

Installation of a rural community bicycle scheme, retrofit of three private sector buildings and the rugby clubhouse in Clonakilty, Co Cork

FINAL PROJECT COST

€318,623

BEC GRANT

€79,234

ENERGY SAVINGS

996,376 kWh

Background

The driving force behind this project was Sustainable Clonakilty, a group of community activists that first came together in December 2006 with a mission to support the transition of the west Cork town of Clonakilty to a low-carbon future and deliver a sustainable living and working environment for the existing community and generations to come. Sustainable Clonakilty is made up of a number of volunteer-led working groups including the 'Events and Promotions' group which organises bi-monthly meetings on diverse subjects around sustainability, organises promotions such as St. Patrick's Day float, and a Green Energy Fair. In November 2008, the group became a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity in order to facilitate funding requirements and establish a professional identity.

Their journey to the 2015 BEC project involved establishing [Clonenergy 2020](#) – a strategy-focused initiative which aims to “enable the transition of Clonakilty and the surrounding areas to energy neutrality through renewable energy, in order to support a sustainable economy and equality of life for the community by 2020.” With financial support from the Clonakilty Chamber of Commerce (using a Fáilte Ireland prize fund) and Cork County Council Local Agenda 21 funds they were able to carry out an energy audit of the town and produce an up-to-date energy map to inform the project. In 2010, they received approximately €27,000 support from the West Cork Development Partnership under the Rural Development Plan 2007-2013 to develop their work with a renewable energy study: 'A Roadmap to Energy Neutrality in the Clonakilty District by 2020'. This

involved employing a specialist to carry out an assessment of the feasibility of using local renewable resources to supply energy within the local area. It confirmed the overall feasibility of the project and outlined the steps to achieve their energy neutral objectives. In 2015, Sustainable Clonakilty recognised the opportunity provided by SEAI's BEC scheme to leverage local investment in energy efficiency and renewable energy to contribute towards its mission. Early in the year they began to gather details of potential energy efficiency projects, contacting potential collaborators by email and ultimately joining forces with other key stakeholders in the town to build a community-wide project. Sustainable Clonakilty volunteers also began attending networking events organised by local interest group Energy Cork - a cluster of organisations in the private and public sector in Cork city and county - whose members have been very supportive of the project by facilitating the participation of energy suppliers and providing advice and technical support. Through this organisation, the group met John O'Leary of NCE Insulation, who undertook the role of Lead Applicant for the BEC grant application. Based in North Cork, NCE Insulations is a social enterprise and one of the largest community based installers of energy efficiency measures in the region and were therefore an ideal partner for Sustainable Clonakilty to facilitate delivery of the project.

Using existing networks, such as Tidy Towns and the GAA, as well as local and social media, Sustainable Clonakilty began to build interest in the project and specifically focused on local energy-intensive businesses

and community organisations in the area. Out of this, six individual projects were identified through feasibility studies for the BEC application. Energy audits were carried out on these buildings by NCE and investment packages were agreed with the beneficiaries.

Project Overview

The upgrade works carried out by NCE Insulations included a mix of energy efficiency and renewable energy measures to a variety of public and private buildings including Clonakilty Rugby Club, Richy's Cafe & Bistro, Fernhill House Hotel & Gardens, Kildorrery Nursing Home as well as the first rural community bicycle scheme in Ireland. Two projects dropped out during the period between application and approval as over that time, factors changed that made it no longer possible to be a part of the BEC – in some cases the quotations had changed while in others, there had been budget cut-backs. Within the buildings that did proceed, energy efficiency measures ranged from replacing old and inefficient oil boilers with heat pumps or hybrid high efficiency systems, LED lighting upgrades, window replacements, to recommissioning and controls optimisation for an existing solar thermal system and installation of a wood burning stove. Bord Gais acted as the Participating Energy Supplier, providing an important financial contribution to the project and NCE were keen to develop a working relationship with them with a view to partnering on future schemes.

As this was his first experience of a BEC project, Brian McSweeney of Sustainable Clonakilty felt it was important to work with NCE Insulation because they had

extensive experience of similar projects, an established relationship with SEAI, and the capital required to bridge the funding gap before the BEC grant payments would be paid. NCE Insulation also provided approximately half a day per week assistance on administrative and technical support. As Project Co-ordinator, Brian was responsible for the day to day operations and delivery of the project on behalf of Sustainable Clonakilty however this had to be managed between his normal work commitments which did create pressures, especially for someone who was deeply embedded in the community.

Innovation A Community Bicycle Scheme

Clonakilty was the first rural town in Ireland to demonstrate a community bicycle scheme modelled on similar initiatives in major cities across Europe, which has significant environmental and health benefits for the residents. This scheme – and its business plan – is now being shared by Clonakilty with other towns and cities in Ireland and abroad. The project was also very community driven, coordinated by a local community group (Sustainable Clonakilty) with strong ties in the area and led by a social enterprise (NCE Insulation), and has resulted in tangible local socio-economic benefits among businesses and community-based local services. It also has the support of local interest groups such as Energy Cork and the Clonakilty Chamber of Commerce. The partnership approach promoted by Sustainable Clonakilty enabled it to leverage the goodwill and support of local stakeholders and interest groups to get the project off the ground.



Fernhill House Hotel



Richy's Restaurant



Clonakilty Rugby Club

Spotlight on... the Community Bicycle Scheme

The most unique aspect of this project was the establishment of the first community bicycle scheme in a rural environment in Ireland, awarded “Overall Best Community Project” at the 2016 SEAI Awards. The driver for this scheme emerged from a key learning from their 2020 Roadmap that one third of energy demand in the Clonakilty area was attributable to transport. It is promoted by a consortium consisting of Sustainable Clonakilty together with hotels and schools in the town and surrounding area. A total of 70 high quality white bikes are dispersed at 10 locations in Clonakilty, Inchydoney, Dunmore, Rosscarbery and Courtmacsherry and at the Model Village. The scheme is designed to replace short commuting car journeys, and to target school children in the town. Following its launch in June 2015 at the Clonakilty Bike Festival, more than 500 people joined the scheme within the first five months for a €20 annual fee which entitles them to use the bikes free for one hour as often as they like. There is also a short term rental option for visitors which helps to promote Clonakilty as a ‘green tourism’ destination along the Wild Atlantic Way. Key to the success of the scheme is an awareness raising programme led by Sustainable Clonakilty and supported by the local schools as part of their green flag initiatives, which aims to emphasis the benefits of having more diversity within your transportation network. Other cities and towns are now trying to emulate the scheme, and Clonakilty is sharing their

business plan which has a payback time of a year to 18 months. One learning from the project was that even though the bike scheme had applied to be VAT registered at the time of application for BEC funding¹, ultimately they were advised against this by Revenue which reduced the net grant amount payable to them.



¹ Currently if the main beneficiary can reclaim VAT costs, the sub-projects cannot claim VAT inclusive grants

Where to Next?

Sustainable Clonakilty plans to continue its work on its own through a variety of projects. One idea is to scale up the bike scheme and potentially introduce electric bikes as part of widening the catchment area. Another project under consideration, potentially in partnership with a private company and university researchers, is to offer community transportation via an electric taxi in the area with a charge point which could be solar powered. The group are also interested in a carbon offsetting project which would involve tree planting in the area, specifically on council land and they have started a community forest. This is being done in partnership with the Branch Out community group that organise planting of native Irish trees. As for NCE, they are working with four other community energy groups and comment in relation to the work in Clonakilty that, **“we would like to see that it could be replicated elsewhere and if there was an opportunity again we would certainly do it.”**

Insider's Tips... Below are some tips and advice from the Sustainable Clonakilty project leaders for preparing and carrying out a BEC project:

1. Be prepared for the delay between application and grant approval:

In the case of this community, the application was submitted in late March and the notification that the application was successful was received in early June. This start was later than expected but the project still had to be finished by the October deadline. Therefore, it is important to be prepared to start right away and keep in contact with partners throughout the application review process – in order to mitigate the risk of partners dropping out or contractors changing the prices of the services in the interim.

2. Ensure transparency and clarity around the BEC funding and grant payments process with all partners:

The BEC grant process means that you receive the funding in instalments, and grants can only be drawn down after costs have been incurred. Ensure that your beneficiaries, partners, contractors, and community members are aware of this and able to front their costs or develop a way to front the costs for those that can't.

3. Project management is crucial and often involves more than is expected:

A dedicated Project Manager is necessary to oversee the many aspects of multiple simultaneous projects. The fee allowed for project management in the BEC grant is limited and it may be necessary to find further funding for project management and other costs such as accounting and legal advice to make this viable.

4. When starting off, it might be preferable to obtain one core commercial beneficiary:

One option is to build your scheme around a larger scale installation that will achieve high energy savings. This helps to lessen the administrative burden and avoids spreading your resources across too many projects.