

CASE STUDY

COMMUNITY LANDOWNERS AND THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY

Reducing Emissions from Domestic Buildings

Lister Housing Co-operative

COMMUNITY*
LAND SCOTLAND



Introduction

Scotland has declared a climate emergency and committed to becoming carbon-neutral by 2045. The community landowning sector is contributing towards this goal.

Community Land Scotland has commissioned research to document action that the sector is taking to address climate change. Alongside a report which looks at climate initiatives across the sector, six case studies have been produced.

Each of the case studies looks in depth at one asset-owning community organisation and how it is contributing to a particular climate action theme. The themes are: renewable energy generation; managing 'carbon sinks' like woodlands and peatlands; helping people to adapt to the effects of climate change, and; reducing emissions related to food, transport and domestic energy use.

Each case study also looks at the wider work of the community owner in relation to the climate emergency, and the diverse benefits that they are providing.

This case study features Lister Housing Co-operative, a social landlord in Edinburgh's Old Town.

The co-operative has been at the forefront of reducing domestic emissions from historic building stock. It is generating renewable energy and improving the energy efficiency of its tenement flats, all within a strictly-regulated Conservation Area.

KEY MESSAGES

Community landowners:

- ✓ reduce domestic emissions while providing affordable high-quality housing which improves the welfare of residents. Lister Housing Co-operative is doing this with its blocks of tenements in Edinburgh.
- ✓ act in the interests of their members and are accountable to them.
- ✓ collaborate with partners on innovative climate actions which benefit residents and serve the wider public interest.
- ✓ involve local people in decisions, integrate climate action with local needs and priorities, and help to deliver a Just Transition to net zero.



Lister Housing Co-operative owns two blocks of tenements with 185 flats in and around Lauriston Place in Edinburgh. It is a fully-mutual co-operative organisation. It retains the flats exclusively for use in the social-rented sector. Management of the buildings is overseen by a Tenant-only Management Committee.

<https://lister.coop>



Photo: Lister Housing Co-operative.

Reducing emissions in community-owned housing

Lister was the first housing co-operative in Scotland. It was founded in 1976 following a grassroots campaign to save the flats from demolition.

The main aim of the co-operative is to provide affordable housing within the increasingly exclusive Central Edinburgh Conservation Area and World Heritage Site. Lister regularly imposes one of the lowest annual rent rises in the country; this year saw no inflation increase at all.

While charging affordable rents, the organisation generates enough income to provide other services and improve the buildings, without passing the costs on to tenants.

This includes improving the energy efficiency of the flats, with residents enjoying more comfortable homes and reduced household bills.

Lister's concern for the welfare of residents means that more invasive energy-efficiency renovations have to wait until a property

becomes empty.

They also have to work within the constraints that come from being located within a conservation area. This is especially the case with any works which affect the external appearance of the buildings, such as double glazing, external cladding or solar panels on public-facing roofs.

These constraints have encouraged Lister to be innovative. They have collaborated with a range of partners to find ways to conserve the external appearance of the tenements while also improving their efficiency and the lives of residents.

Lister is reducing domestic emissions in two main ways: by improving the energy efficiency of their properties and by supplementing heating through the use of renewable energy.

In terms of energy efficiency, one solution has been to reduce the amount of heat lost through windows.



Installing the solar-thermal panels. Photo: Lister Housing Co-operative.

Until recently, conservation requirements relating to the preservation of the original 'sash and case' windows prevented the installation of double glazing. Lister worked with its partners and with manufacturers to trial the use of 'slim' double-glazing which was retrofitted into sash and case window frames.

An international comparative trial of cutting-edge glazing technologies, involving two Scottish universities, considered the efficiency of the windows as well as the emissions produced during their manufacture and transport.

Following approval from planners, Lister set the precedent for the installation of slim double-glazing in Listed Buildings of this type in Edinburgh.

Magnetic Secondary Glazing is also being installed. This involves fixing additional panels onto the original window to reduce heat loss. While effective, this approach is expensive and it is being implemented gradually to keep down the upfront costs.

Performance monitoring is ongoing. Lister takes a long-term approach, planning for

a 60-year lifecycle on renovations in order to ensure quality, value for money and minimal upheaval for residents.

In terms of renewable energy, the co-operative has installed a solar-thermal heating system.

Following lengthy negotiations with the relevant conservation bodies, Lister gained approval for 70 solar-thermal panels on areas of roof that are hidden from public view. This is thought to be the first time this had been achieved for a B-listed tenement building.

The system warms fluid which 'pre-heats' domestic hot water systems. This reduces the amount of externally-sourced energy needed to heat the water in each property. It reduces emissions and keeps energy bills down.

While solar-PV (generating electricity as opposed to heat) is currently more widespread than solar-thermal, the reduction in Feed-in Tariff (FIT) payments for renewably-generated electricity has led to increased interest in solar-thermal as a means of reducing domestic costs.

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“We've had great cooperation, particularly from people like Changeworks, from various academic institutions, universities; Historic Scotland have been excellent. The Council, by and large, have been very good. If you can bring other people along in the changes, that makes a huge difference. Because they're learning as much as we're learning. And it's real life, you know, a lot of people in universities are saying 'this is really good', but they don't have anyone to try it out on.”

Alistair Cant, Director, Lister Housing Co-operative

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“People out there who are responsible for housing, they don't really understand these issues and neither do the manufacturers of products, or architects even. Some do, but I guess a lot don't. So there definitely needs to be more connections. Lister is a good example of where you've got good connections between them and other organisations who can really give them good guidance.”

Dr Paul Baker, Building Physics Consultant

Lister has also investigated other potential initiatives.

Discussions are ongoing about the future replacement of gas systems, with renewable hydrogen being considered as an option.

Installing energy-efficient light bulbs has been identified as a simple and non-intrusive way to reduce energy use without significant disruption to the lives of tenants.

Throughout all of this, Lister has been at the forefront of research and development into how to improve the energy efficiency of historic housing stock.

There are relatively few Housing Associations with large numbers of tenement properties, and there is therefore limited industry knowledge of the most effective ways to reduce domestic emissions from this housing type.

Through working with planners, conservation specialists, universities, environmental consultants and building industry bodies, Lister has taken a holistic approach to energy-efficient renovation.

Lister's approach has been to make small-scale interventions to begin with – to evaluate the costs and benefits – before implementing them across their properties.

Collaboration has facilitated the co-production of knowledge, allowing Lister to lead on the practical application of new technologies and serve as a test-bed to assess their performance.

Lister Housing Co-operative's example has encouraged other housing associations and developers to adopt new practices.

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“There's a lot of environmentalists and conservationists that are very enthusiastic but never get properties to play with. And we have that, we're the perfect medium and essentially have real properties, real tenants, real issues.”

Alistair Cant, Director, Lister Housing Co-operative

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“Significant amounts of money are being spent by housing associations but it could be questioned whether what they're doing is the right way of dealing with what might be called 'hard to treat' properties. As far as I'm aware, none of the housing associations who do this kind of upgrade have ever got any measurements done they're going for fairly convenient options for insulating externally and ... it looks good, but the question is, is it performing?”

Dr Paul Baker, Building Physics Consultant



Solar-thermal panels, tucked out of view to take account of the area's conservation status. Photo: Lister Housing Co-operative.

Because the residents of the tenements own their buildings collectively, through the Lister Housing Co-operative, they have been able to innovate and be ambitious.

Collective control over decision-making and funding has allowed them to be autonomous and independent in their approach to the management and development of the buildings.

The ability to control an entire building – Lister owns two complete blocks of tenements – is felt to be important when it comes to pursuing large-scale projects successfully.

Sometimes having a patchwork of different owners and property managers can make it difficult to agree and take action.

While ostensibly similar to other housing associations, what sets Lister apart is that control of the organisation

is vested in the tenants. Lister is a community owner.

Since its inception, the organisation has been driven by, and for, tenants on the basis of equality and non-discrimination.

Each resident is a member of the co-operative, with elected members serving a term on the Tenant-only Management Committee which oversees the organisation's governance.

The organisation's sole purpose is improving the lives of its tenants by reinvesting all profits toward the improvement of their homes. It also cares about and contributes to the improvement of the wider neighbourhood.

The community governance of the organisation helps to ensure that residents' needs and opinions are

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“The land and the buildings and the people are fundamentals. Absolutely. If you own that then you can do lots it's not owned by faceless so-and-sos or by multinationals or by the local authority who, with the best will in the world, have got huge pressures on them.”

Alistair Cant, Director, Lister Housing Co-operative

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“We have kept our autonomy and our committee has always been committed to both the tenants and the properties and the community Until the last of my breath I will fight for our uniqueness, our heritage and also for our tenants.”

Jean-Luc Addams, Resident and Member of the Management Committee, Lister Housing Co-operative

recognised and taken into account; it also helps to build trust and buy-in.

Community ownership has helped to build understanding of and support for climate-related initiatives, such as **installing insulation** and **new energy systems**.

It has helped to drive behaviour change amongst the residents, around **recycling** and the installation of **energy-efficient light bulbs** for example.

The size of the organisation is also thought to be important in maintaining this type of engagement.

Lister had the opportunity to grow by developing an additional building, but it declined. This decision was taken for a range of reasons. There was a desire not to split the tenant committee or to create a more geographically dispersed resident community. There was also a desire to remain small enough to keep a feeling of community and not distance management too far from the tenants.

This final point - keeping management close to the tenants - is considered important for retaining the feeling of the co-operative as a service accountable to tenants, as opposed to a profit-maximising business.

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“The co-op does allow us to think more and more of not just the housing and the various targets we have to do, but the community and the neighbourhood, the environment.”

Alistair Cant, Director, Lister Housing Co-operative

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“Small things can make big differences. But ... everyone has to make a small change And I think the larger organisations are merely concerned with putting the money in the bank, or money in somebody else's pocket. We are concerned about the environment and we're concerned about the community.”

Jean-Luc Addams, Resident and Member of the Management Committee, Lister Housing Co-operative

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