

*TITLE:*

## **New education centre is sustainability exemplar**



*DATE:*

**January 2009**

*INSTITUTION PROFILE*

34,000 employees (county council)  
200 FTEs in Adult Community Education Service  
28 dedicated adult community education centres county-wide plus 200 other centres used

*SUMMARY*

An innovative project in Derbyshire will create a building which is an exemplar of sustainability in its construction and which will be the home for Derbyshire's sustainable adult education provision.

*EAUC COMMENT*

This is an excellent example of how a group of partners can come together to create an innovative sustainable building to deliver a sustainable curriculum.

## **PROJECT PARTNERS**

Derbyshire Adult Community Education Service  
College of the Peak  
The National Stone Centre  
Learning and Skills Council

## **THE PROBLEM**

The national push to adopt a sustainable approach to the adult education curriculum prompted Derbyshire Adult Community Education Service (DACE) to review its facilities and curriculum offer. DACE wanted to set an example in the way it adapted to climate change and saw an opportunity to develop a curriculum to complement this.

DACE knew that its existing facilities would be unsuitable so decided to develop a new Eco-centre for teaching courses and as an exemplar for sustainability.

The Eco-centre would help the service deliver its Sustainable Action Plan and would provide a strategy for integrating the work of the College of the Peak - a project set up to promote heritage building skills and rural crafts which was already part of DACE - into the service's mainstream activity.

## **THE APPROACH**

The centre was conceived as a hub which would link the existing work of 27 other adult education centres across Derbyshire. Staff here will help the other centres develop their sustainable curriculum offer and students from these centres can travel to the Eco-centre for specific courses or modules. DACE chose the site at the National Stone Centre because of its existing infrastructure, links to other education providers at the site such as the National Centre for Stonework, links to local employers, its central location and good transport links.

Funding was obtained from the Learning and Skills Council's Adult Safeguarded Learning Challenge fund, Derbyshire County Council, local firms and from the National Stone Centre. The LSC provided 70 per cent of the funding needed – about £900,000. This money will pay for the construction of the centre, which is due to start in 2009.

As DACE intended the centre to be an exemplar of sustainability in its own right, the design of the centre was crucial. Derbyshire County Council's architect team already had experience of designing sustainable buildings, so they designed the centre after consultation with stakeholders, staff and learner representatives.

The curriculum the centre will offer is currently being developed and will complement the existing skills taught at the National Stone

Centre. It will include courses focusing on Education for Sustainable Development, including heritage and sustainable building skills, rural crafts, arts and the environment, sustainable technologies and healthy living. The Adult Community Education Service has worked closely with the College of the Peak in developing the curriculum as it has commissioned a number of independent reports on developing heritage building skills. Other council departments and partners have also been keen to be involved in curriculum development.

## OUR GOALS

- The centre will be an exemplar of sustainability, both in its design and construction, and in the courses it offers. Through its design and operation it will lead by example on a range of issues relating to climate change and sustainable development
- The new building will be a catalyst for the development of an innovative curriculum by combining;
  - The expertise of the College of the Peak in the design of courses around heritage building skills, rural crafts and sustainability
  - The Adult Community Education Service's expertise in adult community learning, family learning and creative arts
  - The National Stone Centre expertise in new subject areas using the actual site as a learning tool, long term partnerships with local business, industry and pathways into further and higher education
- To use the experience of putting together this Education For Sustainable Development project to help other services within the council
- To also use this experience to help build capacity in the Adult Community Learning sector to integrate Education for Sustainable Development within the curriculum
- The centre will provide a hub and strong network within Derbyshire which will help adults and families to understand and meet the challenges of climate change

## OBSTACLES AND SOLUTIONS

### Obstacle

- Building a sustainable centre is more expensive than a traditional one – which gave the team problems meeting the LSC's specification price per metre for the funding
- Access to the building and limited transport links, which could discourage groups from using it
- The curriculum to be offered by the centre is largely new to the service, so new expertise was needed in its development and will be needed in its delivery

### Solution

- Source as much material as possible locally, which cuts down transport costs and footprint
- Forge partnerships with local companies offering to showcase their products in the final centre in return for supplying materials at cost
- Activity times will be co-ordinated to fit with the local bus times
- Sustainable modes of transport to the centre will be encouraged – the site is well served with a network of footpaths and cycle trails and is close to a railway station
- The team is working with the council's transport department to investigate a pilot of mini buses powered by electricity which could be used to transport groups from the other centres
- Learn from other centres which have launched unique curriculums – the service has worked with the College of the Peak which offers heritage building skills and whose curriculum will be integrated into the new centre's
- Access knowledge and expertise from across the council and from voluntary organisations such as the National Stone Centre, Groundwork Trust, South Yorkshire Energy Centre and local environmental interest groups, to enhance your knowledge

## PERFORMANCE AND RESULTS

- The Eco-Centre is expected to be completed in January 2010 but has already created a great deal of interest throughout the county.
- Learners and staff have been involved in the design of the building with County Architects and are now busy designing the landscape around the building which will be used to develop courses and activities.
- The Eco-Centre will play an important role in helping to promote the county council's Climate Change policy. Other Derbyshire County Council departments have supported the project and are keen to be involved in the centre and use its facilities.
- The development of the Eco-Centre has enabled the service to work closely with the voluntary sector, particularly with the National Stone Centre.
- The aim is to achieve BREEAM excellence grade for the Eco-Centre, which would be a first for the county council. Initial meetings with the BREEAM assessor suggest that the project is on target.

## LESSONS LEARNT

- Developing strong partnerships both with other county council departments and the voluntary sector has helped to develop a wider aspect to the project.
- Don't underestimate the problems of developing a brownfield site. The Eco-centre is to be built over a disused lead mine, which gave the team some problems and needed extensive site investigations.
- Get partners on board at an early stage and use existing networks. The team developing the eco-centre had the benefit of already running an externally funded project which meant they already had a good network of stakeholders and supporters.
- Use the knowledge and experience of other local authority departments and services. Derbyshire County Council's Environmental Services and the Policy Unit have contributed to the curriculum development to ensure it supports the council's policy on climate change.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

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[www.derbyshire.gov.uk/adulteducation](http://www.derbyshire.gov.uk/adulteducation)

Information about BREEAM sustainable building standards <http://www.breeam.org/>



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