



Green Open Homes: Faversham 2024

Project Report

June 2024

Kent County Council



With Special Thanks to:

A. Marsh

B. Hudson

Cllr. R Yates

Dr. H. Scott

Faversham Town
Councillors and the
Hopper Bus Driver

J. De Souza

J. Muñoz

K. Traylen

L. Bareham

L. Taylor

Lib and all involved from
Swale Friends of the
Earth/ Plastic Free
Faversham

M. Collins

R. Gibbs

S. Deakin

The 2 local homeowners

All who attended,
inspired, and supported
the event

This pilot event could not have happened without you!

Authors: V.Frost and B. Hudson

Climate.change@kent.gov.uk

Contents

Executive Summary.....4

Project Planning.....6

 Timeline.....6

 Onboarding homeowners.....7

 Event format8

 Insurance9

Event promotion9

Event preparation 11

 Materials produced 12

On the day 12

Following the event 15

Executive Summary

Green Open Homes: Faversham was hosted by Kent County Council (KCC), Swale Borough Council (SBC), Faversham Town Council (FTC), and Swale Friends of the Earth (FoE) on 11th May 2024.

Green Open Homes Faversham utilised a "[Central Hub](#) model". Attendees met at a central location, the Faversham Guildhall, for presentations and discussion about heat pumps and energy efficiency before visiting the two homes.

Expected attendees: 39¹

Attendees: 24²

Attendees with heat pumps: 4³

The following report outlines learnings from the project, to inform future Open Homes events that may be held in Kent or more widely. Additional guidance can be found on the Green Open Homes national website, run by the Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE): <https://www.greenopenhomes.net/>

Presentations **contextualized the need for heat pump installations** in the UK, and what this means for households regarding bills, warmth, and emissions. Heat pump owners shared their experience of heat pumps and other local carbon technology, and allowed attendees to ask questions about cost and comfort.

Visits to the two Open Homes allowed attendees to get ‘up close and personal’ with heat pumps and ask more questions to heat pump owners.

Benefits included:

- Seeing heat pumps in person to understand their size, structure, and (basic) workings.
- Hearing heat pumps in operation to assess the noise.
- Understanding how heat pumps work alongside other local carbon technologies (i.e. solar thermal, solar PV).
- Understanding finance: including grants and electricity tariffs that can support heat pump installations.

¹ 24 registrants plus 15 others who had communicated intention to attend, with the organisers

² Including 6 KCC stewards

³ 2 Open Homes, 2 speakers who were not local

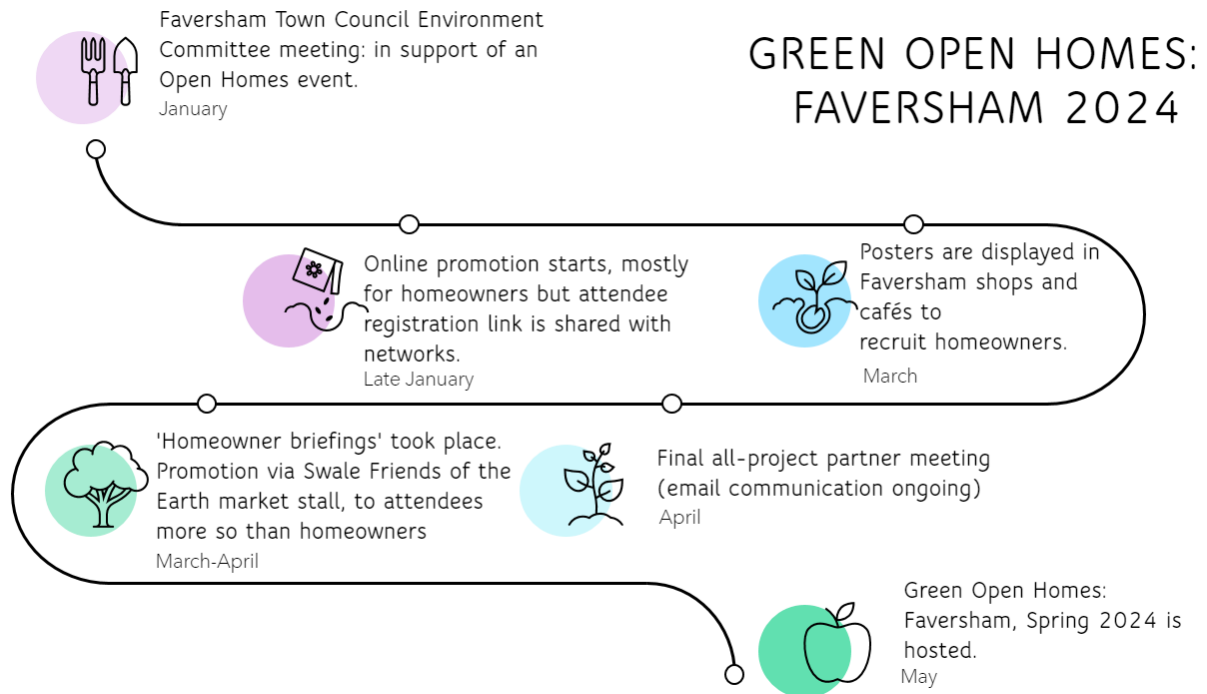
- Understanding considerations of where to place heat pumps in regards to neighbouring properties (noise), and bedroom windows (vibrations).

Key learning for running future Open Homes events:

- **Homeowner participation is central** to all other planning. There are several approaches for running Open Homes events. It is recommended that event organisers **review the [‘Choosing a Green Open Homes Approach’ guidance](#)**.
- **Ensure flexibility is integrated into plans.** For instance, the event format may change based on attendance, the number of homeowners involved and their preferences, or the weather on the day.
- **Consider the mobility and vulnerability of participants.** This will influence the maximum distance between homes, whether a central venue is arranged, and modes of transport between venues. We were fortunate enough to offer a community bus service between sites.
- **Professional and personal networks were most useful for reaching attendees.** However, there is likely to be a self-selecting bias whereby those who hear of this event may already be engaged with sustainability topics. Posters, social media posts and local newsletters were also utilised, but **in-person events** such as meeting the Town Council and speaking to residents at a market stall were **most effective**.
- **Public liability insurance is not essential but may be desired.** Check what the Council’s and partners’ insurance policies cover, and what the homeowner’s are comfortable with. The Green Open Homes site provides further [insurance and risk management guidance](#).
- **Make use of existing materials for promotion and evaluation.** The Green Open Homes website provides advice and templates on [evaluation](#) and [promotion](#).
- **Open Homes events are a great opportunity to promote complementary schemes** such as Solar Together Kent.

Project Planning

Timeline



From stakeholder engagement and resource allocation to event realization took around five months. In December 2023, the idea of an Open Homes event was circulated among the Energy and Climate Change Teams, and this was taken to the [Faversham Town Council Environment Committee in early January 2024](#). ‘It was proposed by Cllr Perkin, seconded by Cllr Crayford, and on being put to the meeting it was resolved that the Town Council would support KCC’s Green Open Homes events.’

Initially, 6th April and 11th May were the proposed event dates. It became apparent that, due to scheduling and other commitments, the April date was going to be challenging to meet and was subsequently cancelled. This was met with some disappointment from one resident and one homeowner that had registered to participate in the April event but, with sufficient notice, the impact of this was mitigated.

Towards the end of January, our Media and Resident Experience colleagues produced posters for the Open Homes event. From there, campaigning began, to find homeowners to participate, and attendees to learn about low-carbon technology (LCT.)

Faversham Town Councillors, Climate Change Officers from Swale Borough Council, and KCC staff working on the project in any capacity were kept updated throughout the planning process. This allows for:

- **Transparency:** people want to know what they will be a part of, and what kind of event they are endorsing. If additional coordination is needed on the day, the more people who have detail on what the event schedule is, the better.
- **Accountability:** all were reminded of their actions (if any), and roles ahead of and during the event
- **Collaboration:** from poster design to event timings and public communications, having as many opinions as possible is valuable, especially if they have experience with similar events or campaigns. Conversely, views from a general public/attendee perspective are also helpful.

Onboarding homeowners

Separate promotional materials, event information, and mailing lists were produced for homeowners and attendees. These materials (registration forms, posters, and newsletter features) are available on request, to use as templates. Please contact the Author to enquire.

Homeowners registered between February and March to participate in the event. 'Homeowner briefings' took place between mid-March and mid-April, to explain the intention of the event, align expectations, and to address any queries or concerns. Homeowners were asked:

- what information and technology they would be comfortable presenting to visitors
- the maximum group size they would welcome into their home
- to sign a digital agreement to participate, and under what terms, to clarify the responsibilities and expectations of homeowners and event organisers.

The agreement confirmed whether homeowners were comfortable with letting visitors into their house and if so, into which areas. This is because most of the technology was often on the ground floor.

No pets or children were present at the Faversham event, but it would have been useful to also ask homeowners if there were pets or small children to be aware of when visiting.

Homeowners were also informed of:

- prompts and FAQs to expect from visitors. These were also given to stewards to help conversation flow

- what visitors would be told on the day. For example, not to expect refreshments at the homes, or to be able to use facilities in the homes.

Event format

The event format, dates and times are largely based on homeowner preferences and availability so try to engage in open and honest conversation with them as you plan the event.

To reduce costs, ask project partners if they are willing to provide a venue for free, if you plan on having a central meeting point. This can help break the day up with an informative presentation, help to reassure homeowners that the event organisers have checked that only registered attendees are visiting their home, and gives organisers the opportunity to introduce themselves to help everyone feel more comfortable asking questions and sharing information.

Ahead of communications for homeowners and attendees, sound out some options with project partners to prepare for different scenarios. Considerations include:

- What is the minimum number of homeowners you would like to participate, for the event to go ahead?
- Will you have a central venue and if so, how far away should homes be? How will visitors travel between homes?
- Will you host one event, or spread options across a couple of weekends? Will you try to avoid or coincide with other local events?
- What are the cut-off dates for registrations, and do you project partners have the flexibility to adapt plans according to registration numbers and locations?
- Will the event be exclusively showcasing retrofit heat pumps, or functionality in new-builds as well?

When deciding upon an event structure for the Faversham pilot, the below options were considered:

- A. **Drop-in (casual or timed)**. The following questions would need to be answered, among others:
 - How long would homeowners need to stay at home for?
 - How can you ensure that visitors are respectful, and/or monitored in some way?
 - Would you have an event steward with the homeowners?
 - Are homeowners comfortable with their full address being posted online?
- B. Event participants to meet at a **central venue** or location, and to **travel to the Open Homes in groups** depending on location and accessibility

- This format relies upon homes being an appropriate distance from one another and from the venue. Attendees may be split into groups; a variety of transport options such as walking and carpooling or bus may be offered; a sufficient number of stewards must be available, and groups should be allocated according to preference and mobility.

With project partners, option B was considered the optimal format considering homeowner safety and capacity of the team to make the necessary arrangements.

As outlined on the Green Open Homes website (particularly in their '[Choosing a Green Open Homes Approach guidance](#)',) there are several event formats to choose from. When choosing an event format, confirm the following details:

- **Homeowner and attendee accessibility requirements:** mobility and vulnerability of participants will determine the maximum distance between homes, whether you have a central venue, and modes of transport between venues.
- **What homeowners are willing to offer**
- **Staff/ steward availability**
- **Safety precautions:** for example, are routes between homes pedestrian-friendly? Can active travel or public transport be used?

Insurance

Public liability insurance is not essential but may be desired. Check what the Council's and partners' insurance policies cover, and the Green Open Homes insurance and risk management guidance [here](#).

Ahead of the Faversham event, Kent County Council's insurance policy was reviewed, and public liability was found to be a challenging and complex area. To mitigate risk, homeowners' addresses, and information was not communicated further than necessary. Homeowner information was not featured on posters or in emails to attendees.

All attendees were required to have a valid email address and homeowners were asked if they were comfortable inviting visitors to their property based on their home insurance policy.

Allow sufficient time to publish a Privacy Notice and clarify insurance policies.

Event promotion

Existing networks are most useful in gaining momentum for events such as these – especially if colleagues, friends, or neighbours have a heat pump.

To promote the event to homeowners and attendees, the following channels were utilised:

- Professional and personal networks
- Posters with QR codes in local shops and cafés
- CCN channels
- The Environmental Champions Group
- Local groups such as Plastic Free Faversham and Swale Friends of the Earth
- Swale Borough Council (*Green Grid*), Faversham Town Council, and Swale Friends of the Earth newsletters
- Social media – Facebook and Instagram:
 - *Kent Green Action (now Greener Kent)*
 - Faversham Town Council Facebook page
 - Swale Friends of the Earth Facebook page

Allow the event format to influence the tone of communications and adapt to the audience. Is this an event for local installers to showcase their services? Will attendees be at the beginning of their retrofit journey, or further ahead? Is this all about emissions reduction or are there other benefits of retrofit you would like to highlight?

We avoided promoting the event via numerous Borough-wide channels as we wanted to keep things 'local' for the pilot. It is sensible to expect that around 75% of registrants will attend. In our case, around 62% showed on the day.

A member of the Energy Team attended a Swale Friends of the Earth meeting (after seeking an agenda item via email) on 14th March. This meant that KCC could support the Swale Friends of the Earth market stall on 13th April and bring printed posters and a sign-up sheet to promote the Open Homes event.

We approached event preparation and presentation development with an open mind, keeping information as neutral and inclusive as possible. For example:

- Not suggesting everyone is able to afford a heat pump, or is at that later stage on their retrofit journey
- Not suggesting that all accountability is on residents, by briefly mentioning retrofit work carried out by Local Authorities
- Defining terms such as 'retrofit' and outlining current regulations related to EPCs (Energy Performance Certificates) to help attendees understand the context of the event.

Communications materials (used in newsletters, social media and emails) contained event aims, link (QR code) to sign up and a contact email. However, it would have been helpful to create a website so that information about the event was in one place for ease of reference. Please contact the Author to view templates of communications.

Event preparation

If choosing option B or a similar format, in which attendees are split into groups, it is sensible to ensure that:

1. All Stewards have each other's contact details, and any drivers
2. A contingency plan allows for 'no-shows' – this was not done effectively ahead of the Faversham event so, at short notice, transport arrangements and times at which homeowners expected visitors were modified. Determine a threshold, under which a certain number of groups (comprised of 12 or fewer visitors, for example) are formed, and plan accordingly.

If attendees sent their apologies, they were asked if they would like to:

- Receive resources after the event (presentation slides, weblinks, further information)
- Be notified of future similar events.

This helped to keep communication open and abide by UK GDPR (storage of email addresses).

Ahead of the event, several emails were sent to the homeowners and speakers to update them on communications with registrants, and to check that they felt comfortable with the event arrangements. Registrants were emailed from a shared mailbox:

- On 19th April, to thank them for their interest and provide information regarding the itinerary, accessibility (transport and toilets), and nearby parking.
- On 7th May with further detail of the itinerary, including how long bus and walking routes would take for each group
- On 14th May to thank attendees for their participation; to offer to keep communication open for all registrants; to provide resources related to topics discussed; and provide the opportunity for further feedback from attendees.

None of the emails included homeowner addresses or maps showing their location, for privacy and security. The shared mailbox was monitored almost daily to track and reply to responses.

Materials produced

The following documents were prepared and printed ahead of the event;

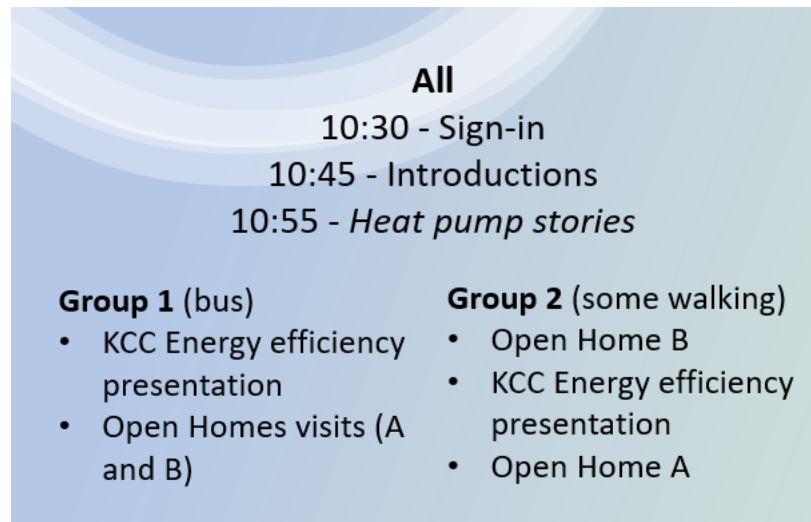
- **A risk assessment**, for the Guildhall, homes and routes between. Fire exits were shown at the beginning of the event, with a reminder to attendees to let a steward know if they feel unwell.
- **Steward Guides** featuring safety information, timings, conversation topics, relevant contact details, answers to common questions about low-carbon technologies.
 - A guide was developed for each steward in each group, but all guides included a full itinerary of all the groups, so we had an idea of when one group must leave a home as the other approaches, for example.
- **A sign-in sheet**
- **Evaluation forms** for attendees to provide feedback before leaving the event
- **A double-sided A5 leaflet** providing information about domestic energy efficiency; low-carbon technologies; grants and discounts; quick wins and other related advice. Paper copies were available at the event, and a digital copy was circulated afterwards.

Copies of the above documents can be made available upon request, for use as templates for further events.

On the day

Faversham Town Council kindly provided a central venue, the Guildhall, and refreshments. Stewards and supporting staff arrived 45-60 minutes before the event was due to begin, to connect the audio-visual (AV) equipment to a laptop for the presentations; to arrange resources, refreshments, and arrange seating; and to ensure all staff were comfortable with their roles for the day.

The agenda for the event was outlined as below:



All	
10:30 - Sign-in	
10:45 - Introductions	
10:55 - <i>Heat pump stories</i>	
Group 1 (bus)	Group 2 (some walking)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• KCC Energy efficiency presentation• Open Homes visits (A and B)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Open Home B• KCC Energy efficiency presentation• Open Home A

Attendees signed in upon arrival. The following clause was included at the top of the sign-in sheet:

Please note that, by attending this event, you agree to respect the event organisers and homeowners, their properties, and belongings. Homeowners may have hazards like fragile possessions or allergens like pets or food in their homes. Kent County Council do not accept liability for any unintended consequences arising from contact with these hazards.

Photographs will be taken at this event for promotional purposes. If you do not wish to be featured in these photos, please let us know.

We recommend adding this, or something similar, to a sign-in sheet and to the introduction. This allows some photos to be taken at the central venue, to have some record of event participation.

A brief introductory presentation featured thanks to event supporters, speakers, and attendees, safety information and a reminder to respect the homeowners and their properties. Two heat pump owners were invited to speak about their experiences, leading to an informal discussion. Photos of the low-carbon technology owned by the homeowners was showed on-screen in the background. Topics discussed included:

- Prior or subsequent home improvements such as insulation, larger radiators, or Solar PV
- Noise
- Cost
- Size (generating capacity and area needed inside and outside the home)

- Location (garden, wall-mounted)
- Water temperature

The group split into two to visit homes as detailed in the above agenda.

Headcounts, ongoing communication between stewards, homeowners and the community bus driver via WhatsApp helped to coordinate the groups between venues. Stewards helped to keep conversation flowing with prompts and questions and kept an eye on the time spent at each property.

Note: Being open to audience interaction was beneficial, as it encouraged some attendees to ask questions, and others to offer their experience and knowledge.

However, keeping an eye on the time and limiting to a certain number of questions/interruptions is wise. Keeping communication channels open after the event, via a shared or personal inbox, can help avoid the event overrunning while reassuring attendees that their query will be addressed.

Attendees asked informed questions about the operational costs and maintenance of heat pumps, and neighbours' reception to the technology. Both homeowners:

- emphasized that heat pumps are much quieter than people may think
- pointed to the benefit of self-generating and storing electricity via a Solar PV system to power the heat pump
- echoed the first two speakers by encouraging others to leave the heat pump 'running' to maintain a comfortable temperature, rather than expecting the system to heat a home in a similar fashion, and at a similar speed to a gas central heating system.

While some attendees left the event while travelling between venues, or otherwise prematurely, those that gathered at the Guildhall after visiting the Open Homes were offered A5 evaluation forms. These forms asked the following questions:

1. How did you hear about this event?
2. What motivated you to attend today?
3. What was your experience of the event?
Was it useful, inspiring, motivating? What did you learn? Did it meet your expectations?
4. How could this event be improved?
5. What will you do as a result of attending the event? (please tick)
[table inserted below listed a range of energy efficiency measures and the option to tick whether they would be installed within 1, 3, or 5 years, or n/a.]

A summary of responses can be found in the following section of this document (p.15).

Following the event

Feedback

One of the homeowners gave the following feedback, which was valuable:

- Attendees were engaged and wanted to hear a heat pump in operation to assess the noise.
- People seemed interested in the idea of choosing the right tariff for the equipment installed
- Add to the guidance for participants that they should ask permission before taking photos at the homes. That is quite different from taking them in the Guildhall [central venue].
- Perhaps it could be advertised in the [local] Visitor Information Centre [...] next time? The numbers were a little low.

6 out of 24 attendees completed a feedback form. Encouraging attendees to complete a feedback form before leaving the event may have been more effective than relying on a mixture of in-person and email feedback.

Most respondents found the event to be informative and interesting. One attendee suggested inviting installers to help explain how the heat pump installation process works.

Some attendees said that more homeowners and expanded advertisement efforts would have been beneficial. Attendee registrations were capped to help make the event more

easily manageable, as it was a pilot, and to ensure homeowners had appropriate-sized groups visiting them.

A concise list of installers and grants was also requested after the event. Grants available towards the installation of energy efficiency measures and low-carbon technologies were included in the energy efficiency presentation and in the follow-up email to registrants. The follow-up email also directed registrants towards KCC Trading Standards Checked, and consumer codes and other certifications to look out for when choosing an installer. This helped to avoid recommending particular businesses that individuals or the Council may not have had direct contact with, but instead reassuring residents of the legitimacy of businesses and consumer protection.

Moving forward

The KCC Energy Team look forward to supporting further Open Homes events across Kent. Templates for the following materials are available on request:

- Homeowner and attendee registration forms
- Homeowner information
- Homeowner digital agreement
- Stakeholder engagement presentation outline
- Energy efficiency presentation outline
- Draft emails, social media posts and newsletter features for promotion and registrant communications