Uk2zero National Policy Forum Submissions 2023
Safe and Secure Communities Commission: Empowered Communities

Communities are experiencing serious, well-founded anxiety – feeling unsafe and insecure. Rising energy bills fan the Cost of Living Crisis - some chose between Food and Fuel. Energy insecurity jeopardizes warmth and power supply reliability. Carbonisation delivers ever more invasive climate changes. This Trilogy: Energy, Cost of Living and Climate Crises, fosters feelings of powerlessness and insecurity which have underpinned so much of the support enjoyed by populist-style right-wing UK governments and politicians.

Acting to combat climate change can empower communities once convinced they faced unassailable 'demons' like fuel bill price hikes, flooding and temperature extremes. Engagement may energise and uplift – inspiring hope and shared community purpose, effecting unity through collective activity.

Democratically elected councils, partnering with other stakeholders and supported by a Labour government, could encourage community involvement and enable green community project development, boosting decarbonisation; guaranteeing affordable, sustainable energy supply. Stress levels should fall and disposable incomes rise, instilling a sense of community safety and security; improving health outcomes and living standards. Community Wealth Building (CWB), in action using local green building blocks.

Development of neglected, indigenous, site-specific renewable energy resources: Geothermal and Tidal Power; Waste, Latent and Geothermal Heat, under council co-ordination as befitting small-medium-scale site-specific resource exploitation, facilitates speedy attainment of energy security, affordable living costs and energy - prerequisites of community safety and security. Waste heat from an underground train circulates through an Islington Heart Network. Sewer tunnels boasting a total annual potential of 20twh although Kingston-upon-Thames Council's 2022 joint project with Thames Water Authority failed to secure government funding. It can be recovered using Combined Heat and Power technology from power stations. Latent river, canal, coastal and estuarial latent heat can be exploited locally as by Bristol council. Riverside towns like Egham (Thames) with under 500mw of annual heat demand can satisfy all their space and water heating requirements entirely by locally-led schemes.

But more green energy can be generated through community solar and wind power schemes, like Community Energy Enterprises, especially if encouraged by legislation to ensure decent returns from the grid for surpluses. On Le Isle de Re, France, a group of houses successfully operate their own solar 'collective'. Each house accommodates elements of the system – even a water tank for storage. Car-sharing, community transport and low energy lighting installation all tackle Energy, Climate and Cost of Living crises, by cutting energy costs and demand.

Energy consumption and wastage can be slashed by community insulation schemes including living, thermal wall and roof 'cladding' - good for biodiversity too. They also double as carbon stores and resilience measures. Constantine, Algeria, lowered ambient city air temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius by planting just 50% of its roofs.

Natural Carbon Capture and Storage, possessing far greater decarbonisation capacity than is generally appreciated, offers numerous opportunities for Council and Community partnership: Wetland restoration, hedge, bamboo and highly selective tree planting. 40% more hedgerows would sequester another 18.5 million carbon tonnes p.a.; 80%, one-tenth of UK annual carbon emissions and at twice the rate of trees.

Recycling – sorting and retailing cloth for new vogue clothes, rags and soft furnishing fabric; wadding for mattress fillings, can finance community activities or create permanent employment, whilst depressing industrial energy demand and emissions, as can repair activities. (The Welsh Senned promotes repair shop developments).

Corporations may be backward in adopting green business models but communities and councils are well-placed to tackle crises 'bottom-up', boosting community safety and security and Community Wealth Building as they go.