Outcomes and recommendations of Ecojam 'boree
A Sustainability Café for climate change related community groups
(held 4th June 2008)

Ecojam 'boree, a sustainability café, was a follow-up activity to the FoE and Avon Wildlife Trust's survey of Climate Change related community groups. It has built upon the results and recommendations that emerged from the study to explore ways of supporting and facilitating cooperation between community groups in the Bristol/Avon region.

It also provided an opportunity to feed into the development of Ecojam.org – a new website dedicated to raising the profile of local green businesses, organisations and community initiatives and connecting them with each other and the people of the Bristol region. Ecojam was born out of the Sustainability Cafes' organised by the University of Bristol/Bristol Sustainability Network and is kindly supported by the University of Bristol and Bristol City Council.

Aims of the workshop
- To facilitate interaction and the sharing of ideas between groups
- To train participants in the World Café technique
- To raise awareness amongst community groups of how the Ecojam website can support and promote their activities
- To explore how Ecojam can be improved to best support their work.

This report
This report presents the results of the Ecojam 'boree and discusses next steps for how climate change related community groups can be better supported. The methodology for the World Café format is listed on Ecojam (see http://www.ecojam.org/directory/act-bristol/community-groups/workshop-techniques).

Question 1
What are the major constraints and opportunities to community groups in Bristol co-operating and sharing ideas and experiences?

Lack of Time was seen as the most significant factor limiting co-operation between groups. Everyone is very busy, with only a specific amount of time available for this work. This means that time spent on group organisation and communication is seen as time taken away from personal action on issues. Networking therefore needs to directly benefit a group's environmental actions. It can then be given a central role within a group with time allocated to it.

Communication needs to be easy – a one stop shop to find out about groups and what they are doing, advertise events, circulate campaign information, access resources for community groups and find sources for technical information.

The **great diversity of groups** should be celebrated, with good communication being the key to sharing experiences and enabling interested groups to work together for specific projects. There is value, both in terms of support and critical mass, in being part of a larger environmental network.

Closer links should be developed between the environmental community groups and the organisations working in the **community support sector**. This could provide help for the groups themselves and also allow them to develop better links with the wider community within their area.

The tables below summaries the points raised at the workshop.

Constraints	
1. Lack of Time	Everyone is very busy, with only a limited amount of time available for this work. Group organisation and communication with others **versus** personal action on issues. Also seen as time consuming to monitor progress.
2. **Group membership**	Each group has only a small number of people actively involved, so are limited in their capacity to find out what is going on elsewhere. Groups can be inward looking.
3. Many groups	Covering different issues and different geographical areas. Groups don't know all the groups and it is difficult to keep up with what is going on. Different demographics, goals and paths. Transition groups versus non transition. Language usage creates barriers to communication, also different ideas and perspectives.
4. Information overload	Too many emails and information being generated from lots of different sources. Also many sources for factual information and which sources can you trust?
5. No central contact point	There is not a single contact point/ one website where you can go for local information. This makes networking difficult.
6. Lack of co-ordination	May lead to lots of overlap, duplication of effort and risk spending valuable time reinventing the wheel.
7. Resources	Lack of awareness of resources available to help community groups. Example constitution, help with funding sources etc are out there, but groups don't know where to go or have the

	time to look for them.
8. Group structure	Bottom up groups can lack focus, but be inclusive and creative. Top down groups have the structure and focus, but maybe can't respond in the same way to community concerns.
9. City v Rural	The Avon area includes two cities as well as the surrounding smaller towns and rural villages. The issues people are dealing with may be very different between rural and urban communities. In rural areas it can more difficult to meet as people are spread over a wider area. In Bristol there is so much going on that it is very difficult for anyone to keep up with it all.

Opportunities	
1. **Sharing**	Don't reinvent the wheel, share knowledge, creativity and experiences. New groups can learn from established groups and also feed in fresh ideas. There are a lot of skills within the different groups, which could possibly be shared.
2. **Support**	To feel you are part of a larger movement, can get support from others and be energised by the amount of activity taking place.
3. **Resources**	Environmental community groups could tie in much more with community support organisations such as VOSCUR, Black Development Agency and Community Action. They have resources to help community groups organise themselves, find funding and help with training events.
4. **Critical mass**	By joining email groups together we would have a much greater number of people able to push in the same direction for change. A critical mass of people is needed for campaigning and to start to "normalise" activities, rather than them being a fringe concern. There is also an economy of scale.
5. **Publicity**	Publicise events to each other to reach all the interested audience, but also pool resources to enable groups to get information out to a wider audience. Also getting together to organise larger events.
6. **Practical ideas**	Case studies of projects the groups have carried out so others can learn from their work, make use of resources already compiled and contact someone who has already done it.
7. **Green Link**	To create the equivalent of business link for green groups.
8. **Communication**	Give communication a central role in a group with time allocated to it, so it isn't something that falls off the bottom of the do to list.
9. **Take Action**	Encourage more action, which draws new people into the groups.
10. **Social Enterprise**	Potential for social enterprises to bring groups together.
11. **Umbrella group**	An umbrella organisation can answer questions for the groups.

Question 2: How can Ecojam meet your needs?

The community groups present at the Ecojam 'boree were overall positive about the contribution Ecojam.org could make to their activities. It provides a focal point for community groups to find information, share their own experiences and learn from other groups.

Ecojam is expected to provide an excellent support network for start-up groups, who might flounder during the difficult initial months and years. By these groups being able to easily find and contact other community groups, they will not feel isolated and can build upon the knowledge and resources of existing groups. Ecojam can improve the exchange of best practice by displaying a tool-kit and case-studies.

The participants felt Ecojam would be a useful communication tool for engaging people outside of community groups. People are often reluctant and less inclined to visit the Council's website, whereas Ecojam is a more people friendly front to the information.

What role do community groups feel Ecojam should play?
- Group to group communication
- Public communication
- Finding people with common goals e.g. community wind farm
- Filter information to show practical and trusted sources

Usability of Ecojam
The participants emphasised the need for clear signposting on the website and a gentle invitation for new users. It must be easy to print pages of information and navigation should be consistent throughout the site to avoid confusion. In terms of the sections on community groups, there needs to be improved signposting.

Marketing of Ecojam
To attract visitors to Ecojam, there needs to be a wide marketing campaign. Competitions with prizes was one idea for promoting the site. To reach communities that do not have internet access, strong relationships with schools, libraries and communities should be developed to allow greater accessibility to Ecojam. The website should aim to attract younger people who are concerned about environmental issues but do not take action. By Ecojam creating a presence on social networking sites it would increase its exposure to this group. Ecojam's roots in the University of Bristol was seen as advantageous for attracting students.

What would the groups like to see on Ecojam?
Many practical ideas/features emerged from the discussions. Some of them Ecojam already provides, others are in the planning stage, while many were new ideas that could be included in future updates of Ecojam.

Idea	Ecojam features/improvements	Recommendation
Share success stories and case-studies	Groups can record their activities by writing **blogs.** This will enable groups to update each other on their activities and share best practice. Within the **directory** there will be a database of best practices and case-studies from the community groups	Community groups to contact Ecojam in order for a blog to be set-up
Promote groups' events	Ecojam has an event section where the groups can list their upcoming events	All groups to promote their events on Ecojam
Skills share and		"Skills share" section

volunteers offered		added to **Free Stuff** "Volunteers – offered" category added to "Green jobs"
Tip of the day	Although currently not live, Ecojam has teamed up with the Centre for Sustainable Energy to display 100 ideas for sustainable living. These will rotate daily.	
Links	The green directory acts as portal with links to many other websites.	Community groups to include their websites and recommend useful resources Further develop information resources for community groups. Seek advice from VOSCUR.
Host micro-websites for community groups	By groups developing an OAK directory package listing (free for community groups) they are able to write up 1500 characters about themselves, upload photos with captions, give their contact details, show their location on a map, and promote themselves in other parts of the website. Their page can link to a blog facility to write about their news, and have their own discussion group, and display their upcoming events. These provide the majority of functions a website would give them, but for free.	Community groups to create OAK directory listings (see guidance document)
Links from group's websites to Ecojam		Groups are encouraged to make a link from their website to Ecojam
Information displayed adapts according to user's location		This would require a significant update of Ecojam. But is likely in the future.
Green maps		Discuss possibility of displaying green map with GreenBristol.
Newsletters	Although there is currently no newsletter, this is scheduled to be included in the site's first update (end July/beginning Aug).	
Fresh content added regularly	Most of the content on Ecojam is user generated. Content is already being added regularly.	The more people who use Ecojam the more useful it will be. Community groups to add their events, write blogs, keep their directory listing up-to-date.

Challenges
- How to break out of white middle class constituency?
- Not everyone has web access – but free access is available within communities
- Difficulty of getting people to write blogs

Questions and Answers

A number of questions arose at the Ecojam 'boree, which we hope to answer below. Please get in touch if you have more (admin@ecojam.org).

Why is it called Ecojam?
Ecojam emerged after many brainstorming nights (and glasses of wine). The 'jam' is from the word "jamboree"; Ecojam is a website where all the green and ethical activities come together, like different musicians coming together for a 'jam'. Given how difficult it is to find a domain name which hasn't been taken already, we are lucky to have such a catchy short name – it is rare that someone forgets it. The name does not include "Bristol" as we hope, in time, to develop and refine a model website that can be replicated in other cities and regions across the UK.

What are the incentives for groups to go on Ecojam?
Please refer to community group "Why and how to" document

Who is it really aimed at?
Ecojam is a website dedicated to raising the profile of local green businesses, organisations and initiatives and connecting them with each other and the people of the Bristol region. We aim to engage the wider public in making the Bristol region sustainable, help them adopt more sustainable lifestyles, and stimulate green businesses in the region.

Ecojam is therefore aimed at (a) businesses, organisations and groups with an interest in ethical and green issues; and (b) the wider public. The target audience for the latter can be sub-divided into two broad groups:

1. Ethically engaged – people already making significant lifestyle changes in response to climate change and other environmental issues.

2. Concerned but inactive – people who are concerned about climate change and other environmental issues but have only made minor lifestyle changes.

Is there really a need for another green site?
There is currently no website in Bristol which draws together all the green, ethical and local activities. Ecojam is not intended to duplicate other websites; it aims to help people find those other websites.

Will Ecojam move people to action?
Ecojam will move people to action by:
- Making it easy for the public to find alternative products and services that have lower environmental and social impacts
- Encouraging more people to join community groups taking action
- Showcasing all the inspiring, exciting and fun activities happening in Bristol, making them more accessible and encouraging people to get involved
- Promoting the positive aspects of "going green"
- Signposting to information that can help people take action

- Building a membership community that can be rallied to action

What is the geographic range of Bristol's Ecojam?
Bristol's Ecojam is not exclusive to the City of Bristol. Because it is independent, it is not restricted by political demarcations and correctness. Users of Ecojam determine its range – if you feel Bristol's Ecojam can help you do what you do, use it. It realises that communities in the four surrounding counties are integrally linked with Bristol City.

How will Ecojam break-away from preaching to the converted?
Much of Ecojam's design and features are aimed at people who are concerned about climate change but are not making significant behaviour changes. Ecojam was developed based on Values Modes Motivational Mapping. People are more liking to participate in a green activity, if it satisfies other motivations such as saving money, esteem and fashion, in addition to "doing the right thing".

The Green Directory – local, Fairtrade, organic and eco-friendly products and services are desirable. Ecojam received almost 2000 visitors in its first few weeks, the majority arriving from Google searches. Interestingly, many landed on the site by using key words such as local food, or by searching for specific businesses, e.g. Fred Baker's Bikes. This demonstrates that Ecojam has the ability to attract people outside the "green community". Many arriving to a page, have then moved to other pages on Ecojam, such as events.

Green Jobs – many people aspire to having an ethical or environment job. Again, once on the site, they will be drawn to other activities in Bristol.

Free Stuff – most people don't like throwing things away out of principle, they also don't particularly like visiting a dump. Free Stuff is user friendly, and is likely to appeal to the wider public. Users of Free Stuff can then be engaged in other aspects of Ecojam.

Conclusions

The community groups represented at the Ecojam 'boree shared many of the same problems but also recognised the tremendous opportunities for harnessing the collective ingenuity and power of the network of community groups in the Avon region.

Although the groups have many success stories, the few active members of each group are often constrained by time, thus limiting their overall impact. It is often difficult to keep up-to-date on the activities of the different groups covering various issues and geographical areas. Networking between the groups is inhibited by the lack of a single contact point where one can go for local information, leading to overlap and a duplication of effort.

The groups can save time and have a greater impact by sharing knowledge, skills, creativity and experiences. New groups can learn from established groups while also feeding in fresh ideas. By groups pushing in the same direction for change, a critical mass of people can have a lasting impact within the region and beyond. Environmental community groups could also benefit from better communication with community support organisations. Importantly, communication was highlighted as an integral component of a group's activities, but is often neglected.

Is Ecojam the answer? Ecojam.org may enable groups to address many of the constraints and capitalise on the opportunities. It provides a focal point for community groups to find information,

share their own experiences and skills, and learn from each other. It is also a support network for start-up groups, who might otherwise struggle. Ecojam has many practical features that could forge better cooperation between the groups. For example, they can raise awareness of their events, recruit volunteers, find useful information, see what others groups are doing and contact them, and share best practice and case-studies. Ecojam will also be a powerful communication tool for engaging people outside of their networks, including the wider public, local decision makers, academics and businesses.

Actions

1. Community groups to unleash the potential of Ecojam by acting upon the "Why and how to use Ecojam" document.
2. Discussions are taking place with the BCC Sustainability team and other key organisations to look at how we can ensure effective networking to support community sustainability work in Bristol.
3. Ecojam to continue to act upon practical recommendations made by participants including the creation of an e- newsletter for members.
4. Develop a task team to identify community group resources that should be included on Ecojam.
5. The Co-op has kindly offered some additional funding to progress networking and we are putting together proposals to present to them.