

## Looking closer to home

An interview with chief executive, Philip Sellwood

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Philip Sellwood has been chief executive of the Energy Saving Trust for four years. Before this, he worked in private equity, ran a wine-retailing business and served as a ministerial adviser to the Home Office. He is currently non-executive director at the Improvement and Development Agency.

As a member of the National Trust who is passionate about the natural beauty of the landscape, Philip, 52, became increasingly aware of how fragile the environment is. He says he first got the 'green bug' when he moved to Pevensey Bay on the Sussex coast 12 years ago. "When you live 10 feet from the sea it makes you acutely aware that a relatively minor change in climate could be catastrophic," he says.

Philip's stated aim is to widen the debate about global warming and how a more efficient use of energy can help to stop it happening. He holds the fundamental belief that saving the planet begins at home, and that every one of us can and should make a difference. He has recently been raising awareness of the environmental damage caused by patio heaters.

An enthusiastic blogger (see [www.carbonchallenge.typepad.com](http://www.carbonchallenge.typepad.com)), Philip welcomes any opportunity to discuss climate change issues and how we as a community of individuals can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. He has three children – aged 25, xx and 18 months – and still lives in Pevensey Bay.

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### **Do you feel that energy efficiency is starting to be seen as a local, community issue?**

People don't look at how much the aggregate of all individual action adds up to – whether it's action taken by households, businesses, communities or local authorities. You would be amazed to discover what impact energy efficiency has had on reducing, or at least capping, any rise in carbon emissions. If we hadn't have carried out the energy efficiency measures we have since 1970, we would have seen annual growth in usage of about 2 per cent. Because of energy efficiency we've just about neutralised that. When you look at that picture over a period of 30 years, the figures are absolutely massive.

We have to get individuals and local authorities to say yes to energy efficiency and make them aware of how significant it is in the fight against climate change. Half of carbon emissions come from personal and domestic transport,

for instance. But we're not seeing 50 per cent of the solution being directed in that area, by central or local government.

### **What aspects of Government policy on climate change have most impressed you?**

The UK Government has taken a leadership position on the development of European trading standards, helping firms such as car companies improve products [to make them greener]. It has put an obligation on all energy suppliers to provide their customers with energy efficiency, which from 2008 will involve an investment of between £800 million and £1 billion.

But, there are areas where we believe improvements can be made – for instance, our stop-start commitment to domestic renewables such as wind or solar energy. The Government has supported this intermittently through grants, but we'd welcome a longer-term commitment like we see in countries such as Germany, Japan and the US. We think that this, combined with decentralised energy, could see up to 40 per cent of electricity generated by domestic renewables.

### **What is decentralised energy?**

Decentralised energy is produced and generated in the home. Along with what we call 'smart-metering', this enables consumers to see at a glance what they are producing and using. Evidence from other countries, such as those in Scandinavia, shows that this will enable consumers to cut their energy use while exporting it back to the overall grid when they don't need the energy but still have it coming in. If energy companies paid you and I the same amount we currently pay them, that would be a huge incentive for people to reduce their energy use and produce their own.

### **So it's a reversal of the traditional energy supply process?**

Yes, and we believe that is fundamental to producing low-carbon citizens. At the moment, people aren't aware of their consumption and the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions that produces. But, if you have that technology available in your own home and can measure what you're using or producing, it will fundamentally change people's behaviour.

### **How close is this technology to being developed?**

All of these technologies exist. We shouldn't be seduced by the idea that we've got to wait for 20 years. This is not like hydrogen fuels or nuclear fusion. All of these technologies are here today. It just requires a commitment from Government and business, and a demand from consumers.

### **Looking at the response of local communities to the recent floods, is there anything that can serve as an example to the rest of us?**

One of the major lessons from the flooding is that it wasn't central Government that stepped in to sort the problem out. It was a combination of local government, local services and local citizens who rose to the challenge to help their communities survive and recover. I think there's a good message here. The national Government can set the policy framework, but it will be delivered locally – not from Westminster.

### **Is there any other way you'd like to see energy efficiency taken up at a local level?**

We already have very good examples. Local authorities like Southampton, Plymouth, Oxford and Woking are doing tremendously good things, like building housing to high levels of EE, ensuring leisure centres and schools have good insulation and microgeneration, and greening fleets from refuse trucks to meals on wheels. We also want to see a more systematic use of public funds at local level to upgrade the 6 or 7 million homes in the UK that don't have cavity insulation.

Local authorities employ 2.5 million people and buy £50 billion worth of kit per year. There are massive opportunities through procurement and local leadership to show the rest of the community what is possible. One of the EST's ambitions is to engage not just local authorities, but to get citizens to pressurise their communities to come up with solutions. Rather than turning to Gordon Brown or George Bush, we must look closer to home.

### **What role are Sustainable Energy Networks playing?**

We've had a network of advice centres for the last 10 years that people can contact by phone, face to face or increasingly through the web. What we've seen over the past three years is that consumers want a one-stop shop that gives advice on all energy-related areas: renewables, clean fuel transport and energy efficiency. So, over the last 18 months we've trialed three areas to offer this to consumers. We've increased the reach of the number of people, decreased carbon emissions, and we've done it more cost effectively. We currently have three networks in Northern Ireland, North East England and Anglia. Our aim is to roll out two more areas this year: London and Wales.

### **Were those three areas chosen for any particular reason?**

They were chosen to give us a representative example of the UK: rural and urban, large cities and small towns. We're in talks with the Government and regions to have full UK coverage within two years. While we want national consistency in terms of the advice we give, it's important for the local element to be emphasised in terms of how it is delivered.

### **What about other stakeholders, like power companies? How is their involvement growing?**

Commercial and non-commercial organisations are now very clear that it is part of their responsibilities to work with their customers to push forward the carbon reduction agenda. We're working with organisations as diverse as Marks & Spencer, the Church of England, Sky TV, the Women's Institute and small businesses. We also have Community For Energy, a programme involving 3,500 members of faith and community groups. It's really heartening to see these groups and large corporate organisations coming together, and we believe this is absolutely fundamental. All these groups – be they corporate or community – have huge national reach. As a result of these partnerships and the development of the Sustainable Energy Networks, we have a credible aspiration to reach 10 million consumers by 2010.

**What more do you think could be done to get organisations involved?**

The issue is to get them involved in a cost-effective, community-based way. We want this to be action-based; that's why we work with organisations with a large national reach. For every organisation doing this, there are others that have yet to show commitment. What we're saying is, let's take the best and work with the rest.

**So are you hoping for some sort of snowball/domino effect?**

Yes. We're seeing individual householders starting to demand that their employers or membership organisations aren't left behind on this issue. One of the areas where Government could show more leadership is by giving people the right incentives to take action. One of our members, British Gas, is working with about 35 local authorities on a scheme to reduce council tax breaks for householders who introduce energy efficiency measures. This is having excellent results and we think it's something the Treasury should fund. Over 60 per cent of homes contacted under this scheme are taking action – a fantastic conversion rate and for a relatively small amount of investment.

The energy performance certificates [part of the HIPs scheme] are a potentially excellent way of engaging investors. They should add to the asset value of a property, as no one will want to live in a place that costs several hundred pounds a year to run because it's energy inefficient.

**Summing up, what have been the EST's major achievements since you took over, and what are your key aims for the future?**

The biggest achievement is that we're now seen as a leading independent adviser in the field, dealing with millions of people annually. Our aspiration to 2010 is twofold: first, to ensure that every means possible is put in place to develop low-carbon citizens; and, second, to ensure that the next generation of low-carbon technology is brought into the marketplace – whether that's in lighting, heating, consumer electronics or personal transport. All these things

require continual investment. Our biggest goal is to be working with most of the UK's 26 million households so that energy efficiency becomes not just a marginal area of interest in people's lives, but an everyday way of living.

Pullquote suggestions

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