HACT

Supported by JPMorganChase

# Growing Green Skills

## A collaboration to support social housing communities connect with training and employment opportunities

### Learning Journal 2: Residents' perspectives



# Introduction

The Green Skills programme is focused on developing skills, training and employment opportunities for social housing residents within the green economy. Led by HACT in partnership with Sovereign Network Group (SNG) and supported by JPMorganChase, the programme is based on collaboration between housing associations, the local council, local training providers and businesses. Supporting net zero goals, it aims to tackle stigma around green industries, create green job opportunities and boost financial resilience in local communities as part of our wider approach towards a just transition.

The project has two components: the first nurtures learning and collaboration at a national level through the Green Skills Network. Good practice examples and learning are shared by a range of organisations from different sectors, providing a space to identify effective ways to develop pathways for communities into the growing green job market and the spectrum of these job roles. Through connecting people and organisations, we aim to accelerate progress through shared knowledge and accessible expertise.

The second core aspect of the project is the localised place-based pilot led by SNG in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP). This started in September 2024 and has engaged over 135 local residents, supported 69 to complete training and resulted in more than 70 achieving green skills qualifications and employment opportunities. By aligning local supply and demand, the Green Employment Pathway (developed by SNG) supports people to access advice, guidance, vocational training and roles with organisations better related to green skills.

A central part of our programme is to share learnings. We know the housing sector has net zero targets to decarbonise homes by 2030. We know that unemployment and lack of access to good jobs is negatively impacting the financial resilience of many of our communities. This presents us with both a challenge and an opportunity. By pooling our collective learning and ideas we can co-create the solutions.

This learning journal reflects on our insights after a year of project delivery, focusing on residents' perspectives and exploring what helps to unlock green opportunities and the challenges they face in accessing them. Listening to residents' perspectives is essential when delivering programmes that work for communities and is a vital part of our collective effort to achieve retrofitting and net zero goals across the UK.

We would like to thank the residents in BCP who contributed their time and for sharing their insights to form the content of this Journal. These insights should inform how we realise the opportunities of a just transition.



LEARNING

# 01 Limited awareness and visibility of green careers

Over the last year of delivery in BCP, a clear theme is that many residents do not know what green work looks like in practice. There is limited awareness of the type of roles available, the skills required and how to begin their journey into this sector. This information gap makes green careers appear inaccessible, or not known at all, to many residents.

As the opportunities in the green sector grow, it is important that access to news and information about the routes into these roles become available. Communities need to understand where these starting points are and how the available courses, volunteering and knowledge building can result in tangible employment. When residents can see how training leads to employment this can encourage people to pursue these roles with more confidence.

> *I was aware of some opportunities available, but not aware of the qualifications and skills employers look for regarding these roles.*

> *I did not know anything [about Green Skills] until my work coach informed me.*

LEARNING

# 02 Support, confidence and skill building

Confidence and foundational skills can help lay the foundations for residents to meaningfully engage with formal training and employment routes. Throughout this project we have seen participants onboarding with low confidence, limited work experience and mental health challenges. By adapting our approach to meet each individual's needs and by investing in strengthening core skills, we are able to provide the conditions for them to have greater opportunities for success. This also increases the likelihood that residents fully engage with and benefit from the training opportunities available to them.

Feedback from residents highlighted the importance of building confidence, encouragement and feeling supported throughout the process. One said that this type of support "made me feel like I wasn't an inconvenience or just a name on a list". By focusing on early-stage support centred around individual need the project has attempted to ensure residents are better prepared and more able to take their next steps and progress into green work.

> *Finding a place to start re-training is very difficult if you lack experience of working in this sector. Having someone with insight in the various roles available has been great.*

> *It made me feel like I wasn't an inconvenience or just a name on a list.*

> *It kept me feeling positive.*

LEARNING

# 03 Practical barriers

Residents continue to face significant practical barriers that affect their ability to engage in green skills and training, including financial pressures, challenges related to disability or anxiety and difficulties getting to training venues. For many residents, these barriers are as limiting as skills gaps.

These practical barriers highlight the need to provide training pathways that are practical, flexible and accessible. Support with transport, adaptable hours and access to childcare can make a huge difference to those who want to engage. Offering evening and weekend sessions, allowing remote sessions or creating more flexible pathways allows individuals with different lifestyles or caring responsibilities to access training. By addressing these practical barriers, residents can begin their journey into training and move into green employment.

> *I've been wanting to work on getting a better job for ages.More suitable work for my disabilities is what I need.*



LEARNING

# 04 Guaranteed pathways into real employment

A consistent message from residents is the need for tangible routes into stable employment. Despite the demand within the sector, there is a continued lack of available apprenticeships and entry level roles. Residents emphasised the value of work experience, for clarity on what next steps are after training and guaranteed progression into paid work.

It's critical that residents are able see visible pathways from training into employment. This should include apprenticeships, entry-level jobs, guaranteed interviews and the chance for job progression opportunities once in employment. Allowing residents to clearly understand how their training will turn into employment will encourage residents, whilst making the sector more accessible, inclusive and appealing.

> *I hope to be in a job I love.*

> *I hope to work for the company in a role where I can use my personality and skills.*



# Insights into action: How we can utilise this learning to inform our actions

## Funders

Funding should cover core costs of staff time, including relationship building with residents and engagement with employers. Without this support, organisations cannot focus on long-term solutions to support residents to move into green work. Core funding provides the stability needed for engagement and more effective pathways into the sector.

Multi-year funding enables organisations to plan, build relationships with residents and offer support over a longer period. Short-term funding makes it difficult to deliver meaningful support or develop the green skills needed within communities.

## Policy makers

Policy makers should explore how to unlock larger, more flexible funds that allow grants to cover core costs for employment pathways and provide greater market certainty, encouraging employers to invest in expanding their work or entering the green economy. This is essential if we want to create stable and consistent pathways that support residents into green jobs. Without providing this investment, communities find it difficult to see and trust that their efforts to retrain will convert into meaningful future employment opportunities.



There is also a need to encourage local economic models, rather than relying on short-term contract approaches with a handful of suppliers that can result in small pools of contractors who move around the UK for retrofit work. Supporting longer-term, place-based delivery will help to create local job opportunities, build green skills within communities and make the sector more accessible for social housing residents.

## Service providers

It is essential teams have the time, resources and skills to engage with social housing residents authentically so they can build relationships, offer tailored support and understand and the resident's needs.

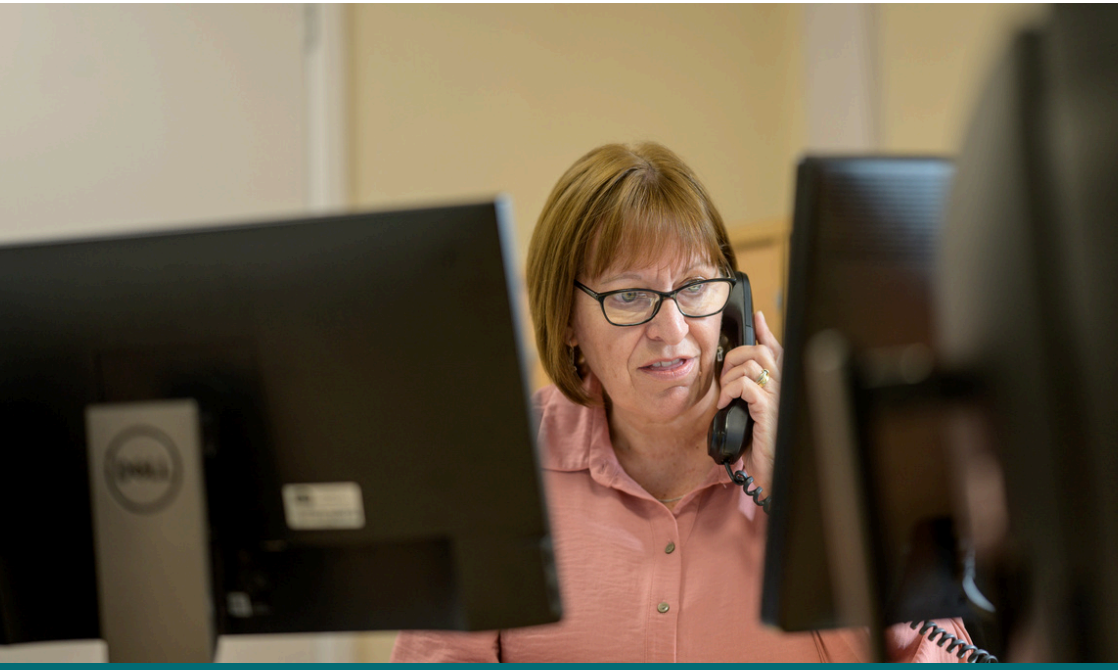
Service providers also need to work closely with employers to ensure residents have clear pathways into green jobs. By understanding the skills required by local employers, providers can ensure they are offering the right support and training to help residents meet these requirements. Collaboration helps to unlock opportunities that meet the needs of the sector while connecting social housing residents to real employment pathways. The social housing sector is very well placed to forge these joined up pathways connected communities and employers.



## Employers

Employers should consider how they can create accessible, clear entry points that enable social housing residents to move into green jobs, including apprenticeships and entry level jobs. Employers should work with housing providers and community organisations to actively promote these opportunities to residents who may be unaware of them. Community-based organisations can provide vital early support to those entering the workplace or returning to work, supporting the successful early phases of peoples' careers into green industries.

In the longer term, employers should consider structuring progression routes so that residents can build sustainable careers. They should explore how to encourage this by working in place-based collaborations with housing providers, colleges and other local businesses. The opportunity for progression is key to making the green sector appealing to residents and ensuring long-term sustainability of a green workforce that can meet the demands and scale of the UK's retrofit and sustainability agendas.



HACT

HACT is a long-established organisation with over 65 years of experience supporting the UK social housing sector. Through consultancy, innovation and collaboration, HACT works closely with housing associations to deliver meaningful social impact.

HACT brings national insights to local contexts with a strong track record in mapping community needs, engaging residents and analysing large-scale resident data. HACT's strength lies in its extensively experienced team and its ability to drive evidence-based, community-focused solutions.



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