

Bootle is a Lakeland parish in Copeland, West Cumbria, with around 740 residents. The village of Bootle is situated equidistant between Whitehaven (25 miles north) and Barrow (25 miles south) with the A595 road running through it's centre.

Background

Bootle completed a Community Led Plan in 2010. The initial motivation behind the plan was when the village school, Captain Shaw's, was threatened with closure. The realisation that the community was in decline, both in terms of population and services, motivated community leaders. They recognised that they needed to build new houses, increase the population, create employment and breathe new life into Bootle for future generations.

Census data confirms that the off-gas community of 742 residents is blighted by Fuel Poverty. Village homes are reliant on electric heating or coal whilst the more rural properties depend on oil or bottled gas – costly options, both economically and environmentally.

Situated between the Western Lake District fells and the Cumbrian coastline, Bootle has a wealth of natural resources. These have become the focus for the renewed vision, 'Bootle2020'.

The Project

The top priority in the plan is Wellbank, developing a derelict 12.5 acre former Ministry of Defence site on the outskirts of Bootle, and transforming it into houses, a hotel and innovation hub.

Following a substantial amount of volunteer input, the Wellbank Project and renewable energy generation outlined in Bootle2020 has now attracted private investors and is recognised as a key priority by Britain's Energy Coast.

Bootle2020 aims to create a rural sustainable community and export more than 20% of the total energy demand by renewable, local sources.



Wellbank proposed site plan

What has been achieved?

Residents have created a Community Interest Company, with assistance from Cumbria Rural Housing Trust (CRHT), and have secured private funding from investors. Grant funding has been received from Britain's Energy Coast, and the Rural Community Energy Fund, supported by Rural Cumbria Connects.

The Bootle2020 team now employs **two full-time staff**, Trudy Harrison (originally a volunteer on the project) and Sophie Entwisle, working in partnership with the community.

Outline planning permission has been granted for a 12.5 acre mixed-use eco development. **Wellbank** will bring 46 homes, a hotel with spa and conference facilities and a business area to the previously derelict ex-MoD base.

The near completion of **Victory Gardens**, a local, affordable housing development in the village, which has embraced solar panels and Mechanical Ventilation and Heat Recovery.

Feasibility studies examining the potential for **anaerobic digestion and biomass district heating** have concluded with excellent potential for both. Further reports on the **hydro** potential are being developed.



Energy Lunch at Millstones for local farmers, Oct 2014



Locals view the site at 'Bootle2020' launch event, July 2014

On 21 June 2014, exactly 2020 days until the year 2020, **Millstones** conservation and renewable energy centre opened, making great use of a previously empty barn development next to the Byre Tearooms.

Bizcat, a Swedish district energy consultancy is the latest business to take up residency at Millstones, joining Barden Energy, Innovus, Eco-environments, the World Owl Trust and the West Lakes Squirrel Initiative.

A recent **Energy Lunch** to discuss renewable energy options attracted 38 local farmers and included information about anaerobic digestion, biomass, solar, and short rotation coppice.

Bootle2020 has also been recognised by Manchester University which is basing a new post graduate planning module on the project.

The Learning

Patience, vision and a positive attitude are the attributes which programme manager Trudy Harrison recommends. Trudy also highlights the importance of working closely with residents whilst enabling the private sector to realise commercial viability.

The village seems to have struck the balance between public, private and community involvement, with projects aligned to local and national strategies. The Wellbank project team worked closely with Bootle Parish Council and all local authorities to ensure the development met community needs and strategic priorities.

ACT champions community and rural issues

ACTion with Communities in Cumbria, Offices O-Q Skirsgill Business Park, Penrith, Cumbria CA11 0FA
T: 01228 817224 | www.cumbriaaction.org.uk | info@cumbriaaction.org.uk | Follow us @ACTCumbria
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With any project of this scale, be prepared for challenging questions and differing viewpoints. Its important to be positive and provide clear information at all stages to help minimise any confusion or lack of understanding. Identify your stakeholders and ensure there is clear ongoing communication both with those close to the project and the wider community.

The project is well timed, benefitting from opportunities created by Government's drive to empower local people, Britain's Energy Coast blueprint, and the Department of Energy and Climate Change's focus on community energy.

Advice and encouragement from organisations such as CRHT and ACT has also given the community the confidence to peruse a dream of becoming more sustainable and ensuring Bootle is a well serviced, vibrant village for future generations.

Contact Details

For more information about Bootle2020 and the Wellbank project please contact:
Trudy Harrison on Tel: 01229 718333,
Email: trudy@bootle2020.co.uk,
or visit: www.bootle2020.co.uk

For more information and support for community energy projects visit the Centre for Sustainable Energy website:
www.cse.org.uk/pages/information/community-groups