LOCAL ENERGY ACTION FORCE PROJECT

THEORY OF CHANGE

AUTUMN 2020 VERSION

30.11.2020

Cynnwys / Contents

1. Introduction 3
2. What is a Theory of Change? 3
3. How we developed the Theory of Change 4
4. Our final goal 4
5. Higher level outcomes 5
6. Work streams 5
7. 'Pre-project' phase 6
8. Simplified Theory of Change 7
9. Enablers 9
10. Assumptions, evidence and evaluation 9
11. Conclusions, recommendations, detailed Theory of Change diagram 11

1. Introduction

The Local Energy Action Force project was funded by Arwain Sir Benfro LEADER Pembrokeshire (which is part of the European Union's Agriculture Fund for Rural Development) and delivered by Community Energy Pembrokeshire.

The project aimed to establish Local Energy Action Groups (LEAGs) in five communities in Pembrokeshire, and ran from September 2018 to September 2020. The Monitoring and Evaluation contract for the project included working with the team to develop a Theory of Change.

This report records the Theory of Change work for the LEAF Project. A separate evaluation report assesses the effectiveness of the project in achieving the Theory of Change outcomes as well as other project outputs.

2. What is a Theory of Change?

A Theory of Change is a tool for describing a project or enterprise. It sets out how **activities** lead to **outcomes,** and how outcomes lead to a **final goal**. It also identifies **internal or external enablers** that are critical for success.

It is a way to communicate how we believe we are making a difference, how we think change will happen, and how we will focus on achieving our long-term goals. It also helps identify what we need to measure in order to demonstrate success. Developing a Theory of Change is an opportunity for reflection and to take a step back from our day to day tasks, and a chance to gently challenge ourselves.

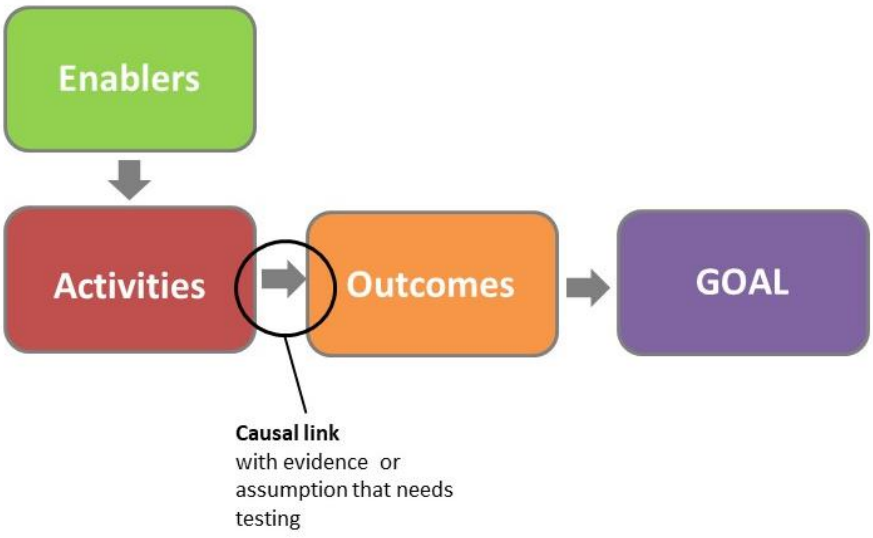


Figure 1: Elements of a Theory of Change

3. How we developed the Theory of Change

Two workshops were held with the project team in July and October 2019, and a further review session was held in August 2020. The initial workshops were kindly hosted by PLANED. The review session was held online.

The Theory of Change is based on discussions and reflections by the team at the workshops. Outline notes and diagrams were produced during workshops, which were then further reflected on and developed by the facilitator, before being shared with the team for comment. Ideally the development of a Theory of Change should be iterative and ongoing, with each set of updates brought back to the project team for further discussion and agreement.

4. Our final goal

The final goal for the LEAF project, as agreed at the first workshop and reconfirmed at each future session, is:

Bringing power back into communities:
building capacity within communities for a sustainable, long term future for people, health and environment.

The final goal is designed to address the combined needs of

- Climate change emergency
- Lack of engagement / connection to energy
- Lack of appropriate community structures

The word 'power' in the final goal has dual meaning – firstly power in terms of energy generation (power over time = energy), but also power in terms of people and community power to make things happen.

Developing a **community energy project** is also a goal, but a complementary one. The project team all agreed that if community energy project was developed without also building capacity in the community, the project would be deemed unsuccessful.

A community energy project without people development, capacity building and community engagement is just one project that can only make a small overall contribution to tackling the climate emergency. By extending the final goal to more than just a physical project, LEAF type projects have a far greater potential to address need by building capacity to deliver multiple projects.

5. Higher level outcomes

Five 'higher level outcomes' that will help to achieve the final goal were identified, along with a need for external validation or support to make community energy projects happen (see Figure 2 below)

Figure 2: LEAF Theory of Change 'higher level outcomes'

Community energy projects, as well as leading directly to increased community energy generation / capacity, also contribute to the five higher level outcomes in a hopefully virtuous circle of ongoing achievement. They obviously also lead directly to energy generation power / equipment in communities.

In the LEAF project, the **external validation and support** which helps to achieve the final goal is support from the Welsh Government Energy Service (WGES) support. This is triggered by being / becoming a constituted group and having Heads of Terms for a lease for any land required for the project.

6. Work streams

The Theory of Change developed after the first two sessions in 2019 was complex, with lots of outcomes and activities, as you would expect from a community development project. Community development is, by its nature, a complex task, which can be hard to explain on paper and requires a whole systems approach. However, when the Theory of Change was reviewed in August 2020 it became clear that many activities and outcomes can be grouped into three themes of work, allowing a simplified Theory of Change to be produced.

These were:

- Developing a group
- Developing your people
- Developing a project

7. 'Pre-project' phase

At the final workshop we also discussed how a large part of the work needed to make a LEAF type project successful was required up front and may or may not lead to a full investment of resources in that community.

The LEAF project was more successful in some communities than others. The differences in levels of success may be partly attributable to previous work done by Community Energy Pembrokeshire and/or the Welsh Government Energy Service in those communities.

The 'pre-project phase' should be a period of community engagement and consultation. It could involve an assessment of where a community stands in its ability to deliver. Some communities may need a preparatory phase of enabling activity to motivate people to take part in a LEAF type project

In the final Theory of Change workshop for the project we identified the following objectives for the pre-project phase:

- Asking people what they want – both potential or existing members of a group and the wider community
- More general market / community research and development e.g. what are people in the community actually interested in and what type of events and activities would interest them?
- Confirmation of community selection – is this really the right community or are our efforts perhaps better targeted elsewhere / does this community need a different type of project (possibly as a preparatory phase)?
- Finding 'new blood' i.e. people that don't already have lots of other voluntary commitments for whom this will be their main 'project'

8. Simplified Theory of Change

The Theory of Change outlined in the Figure 3 below was produced after the discussions at the final workshop

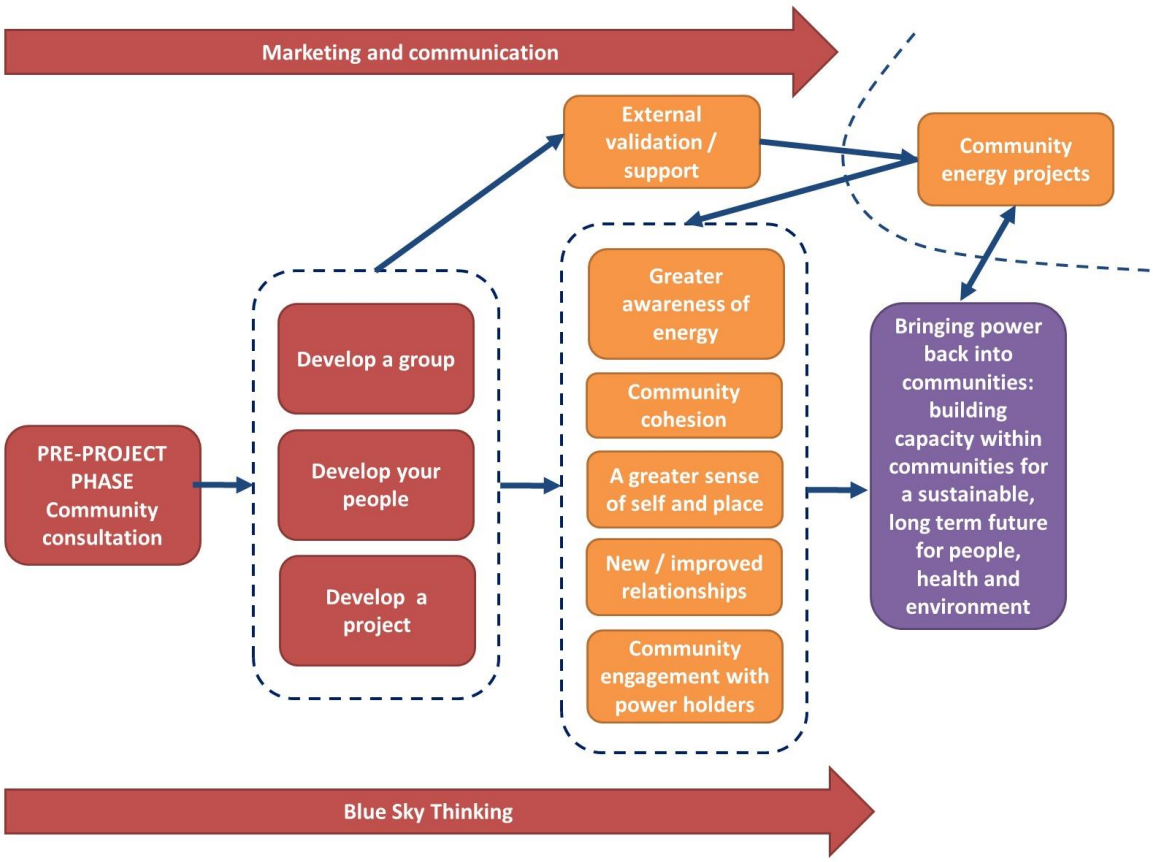


Figure 3: Simplified LEAF Theory of Change

Developing your group, developing your people and developing your project

The realisation that the Theory of Change could be split into three streams came fairly late on in the process, so how exactly the activities and outcomes we had defined to date fit into each stream has not been discussed in detail. However some rough outlines are suggested in the diagrams on the next page

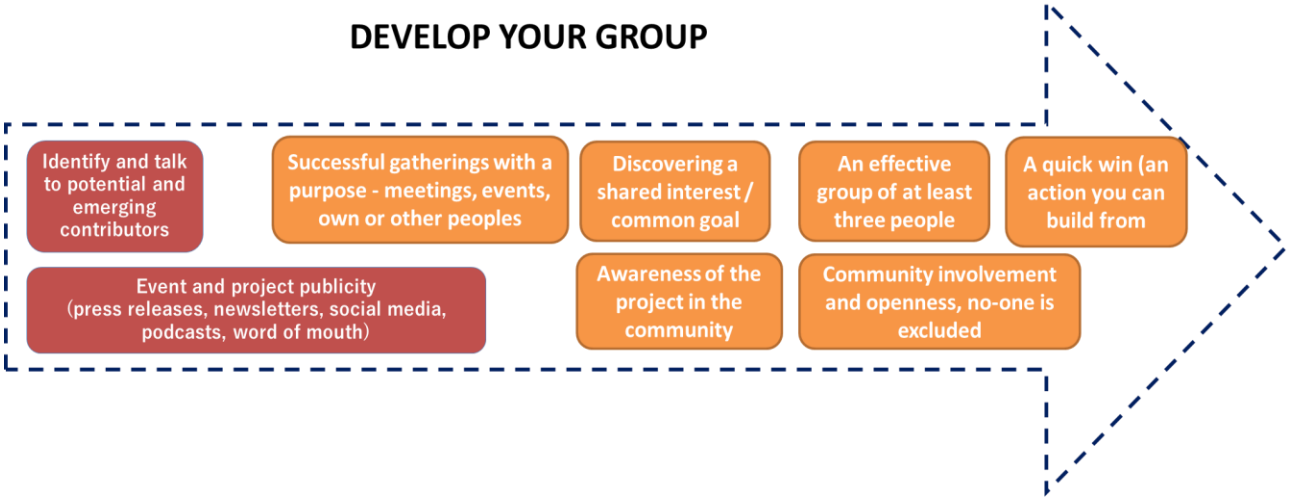


Figure 4: LEAF 'develop your group' workstream activities (red) and outcomes (orange)

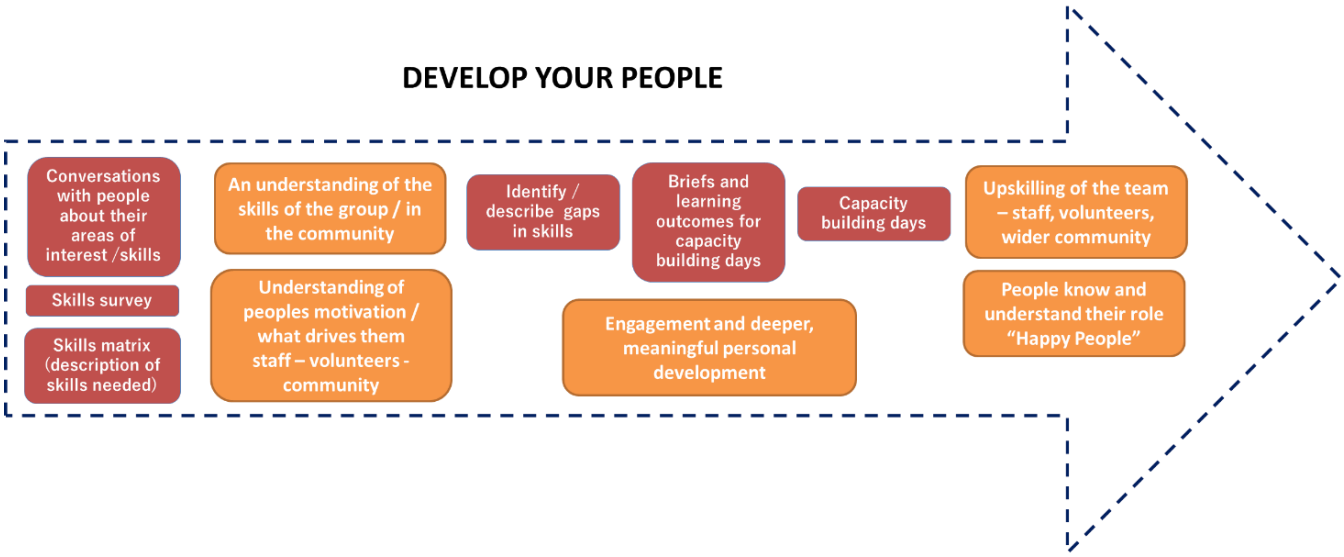


Figure 5: LEAF 'develop your people workstream activities (red) and outcomes (orange)

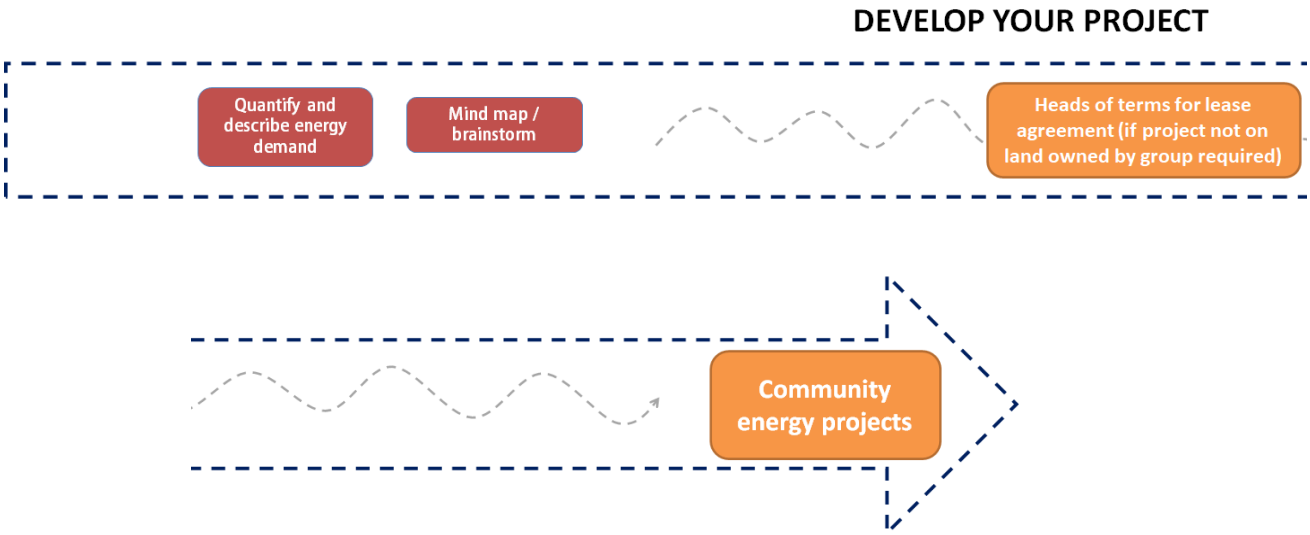


Figure 6: LEAF 'develop your project' workstream activities (red) and outcomes (orange)

Further work should be undertaken to develop the Theory of Change for each work stream.

Each time the Theory of Change is reviewed further tweaks / updates to the entire model are likely to be suggested.

9. Enablers

Enablers for the LEAF project can broadly be grouped into three categories.

The first set of enablers are important at the project outset.

- Draft terms of reference
- Project team
- Activities, events and engagement tools budget
- Partners (delivery partnership)
- Understanding of different methods of community engagement
- Supportive outside agencies (e.g. Wales Coop Centre)
- Case studies – evidence

The second group relate to the development of the group

- Be aware of group dynamics / community 'politics'
- Recognise negative influences / deal with negativity
- Understand structures / options for working
- Understanding of group dynamics, succession and legacy

The final group are related to skills and capacity building

- Communicate that just because you are involved doesn't mean you have to be responsible for everything
- Fun exercises to identify people's skills
- Example skills assessment (St Davids)

A further enabler is the external support or validation (provided for the LEAF project by the Welsh Government Energy Service).

10. Assumptions, evidence and evaluation

The Theory of Change for the Local Energy Action Force project is complex and involves a large number of outcomes and causal links.

Some of the outcomes are relatively easy to measure and can be quantified, others are more difficult to measure and require qualitative assessment.

Table 1 below sets out the outcomes and evaluation methods employed as part of the monitoring and evaluation contract, as well as potential additional valuable evaluation / information collection that has been recommended to Community Energy Pembrokeshire.

Table 1: LEAF Theory of Change outcomes and evaluation methods

Theory of Change outcomes		**Evaluation method(s)**
'Higher level' outcomes	• A greater awareness of energy • Community cohesion • A greater sense of self and place • New / improved relationships • Community engagement with power holders	• Project officer assessment • LEAG member survey / interviews
Developing a group	Successful gatherings with a purpose – meetings, events, own or other people	• Event feedback boards / forms • Project officer discussions / interviews
	Discovering a shared interest / common goal	• Project officer discussions / interviews
	Awareness of the project in the community	• Number of people reached face to face and on social media
	An effective group of 3 or more people	• Project officer assessment • LEAG member survey / interviews
	Community involvement and openness, no-one is excluded	• LEAG member survey / interviews
	A quick win / an action you can build on	• Project officer discussions / interviews
Developing people	Understanding of people's motivation / what drives them – staff, volunteers, community	• Project officer discussions / interviews
	An understanding of the skills in the group / in the community	• Project officer discussions / interviews
	Engagement and deeper, meaningful personal development	• LEAG member survey responses to open questions
	Upskilling of the team – staff, volunteers, wider community	• Capacity building day evaluation forms • Project officer assessment • LEAG member survey / interviews
	People know and understand their role 'happy people'	• Project officer assessment LEAG member survey / interviews

Some outcomes are either difficult to evaluate within the scope / budget of the monitoring evaluation contract or their successful achievement can only really be demonstrated over time.

It has been recommended that CEP consider the following additional evaluation

- Community survey / engagement to assess reach and awareness
- Re-evaluation in 2022 and 2025 (this could be an informal conversation with the local group based on the outcomes outlined above). It is anticipated that CEP will be in more regular contact with the groups than this and may be able to informally update progress towards the Theory of Change outcomes on a more regular basis.

11. Conclusions, recommendations, detailed Theory of Change diagram

The process of creating a Theory of Change was well received by the project team. They found it a valuable tool for personal, team and project development and reflection. Their only criticism was that it was not used often enough – only 3 sessions were held in July and October 2019, and August 2020. The team felt the tool could have been even more valuable to the project if it was revisited more regularly (and sessions could have focussed in on specifics rather than spending a lot of time at the August 2020 session re-familiarising the group with the work completed so far).

The team suggested the following in a conversation about what had been good about the Theory of Change work and what could have worked better:

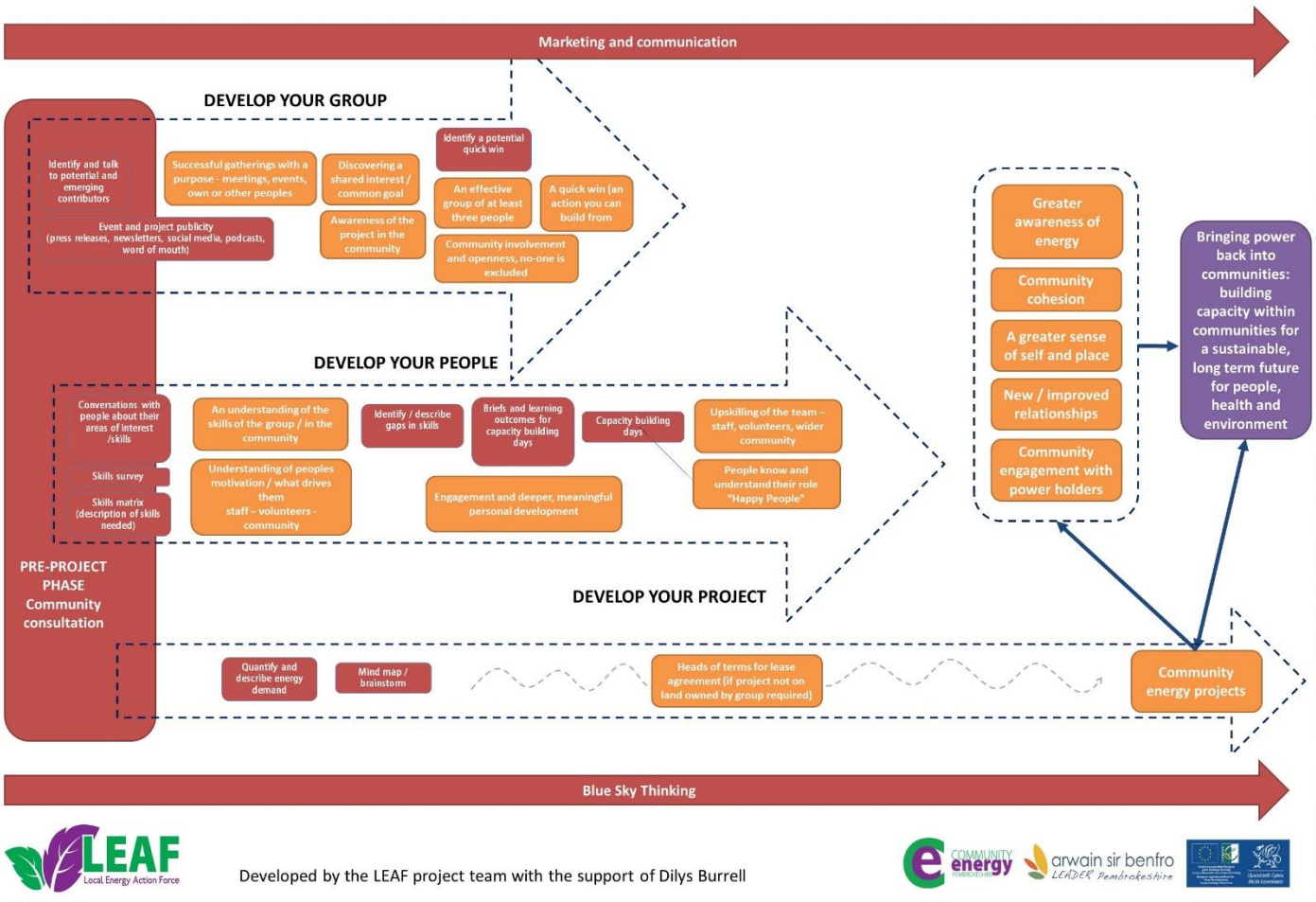
- A shared working space with the Theory of Change displayed could allow a team to use it to plan their work regularly. A shared space could have also helped the team to connect and share resources and experience more.

- The Theory of Change sessions are a bit like 'project therapy' and should be run by someone external to the project. Comments could be added to a Theory of Change on a board on an ongoing basis / as part of team meetings, then a regular external review session could reflect on these. External partners could be invited to be part of some sessions. It is difficult to be prescriptive about how the Theory of Change process should work as it will change throughout a project.

- We also discussed the fact that it would have been useful to use the Theory of Change process with the individual LEAGS

Dilys Burrell
dilysburrell@gmail.com 07736 120580

Local Energy Action Force
Theori Newidd / Theory of Change Oct 2020



ENABLERS

External validation / support

Enablers – project outset / initial stages
- Draft terms of reference
- Project team / support
- Activities, events and engagement tools budget
- Partners (delivery partnership)
- Understanding of different methods of community engagement
- Supportive outside agencies (e.g. Wales Coop Centre)
- Cas stuides - evidence

Enablers – group development
- Be aware of group dynamics / community 'politics'
- Recognise negative includences / deal with negativity
- Understand structures / options for working
- Understanding of group dynamics, succession and legacy

Enablers – skills and capacity building
- Communicate that just because you are involved doesn't mean you have to be responsible for everything
- Fun exercises to identify people's skills
- Example skills assessment (EcoDewi example)

LEAF Local Energy Action Force

Developed by the LEAF project team with the support of Dilys Burrell