

Integrating Community Employment into Retrofit Delivery

How resident voices shaped local training and jobs at Lancaster West, building trust, improving services and delivering retrofit success.

Carbon Co-op's "Understanding Experience" research highlights trust-building as key to people-centred retrofit. The Lancaster West Neighbourhood Team (LWNT) has developed resident employment opportunities in the green sector as one way of rebuilding trust with the community. We interviewed a programme manager and a resident-employee at LWNT to find out more.



Refurbishment engagement event with Lancaster West residents Credit: LWNT

The impetus for change

LWNT was set up after the Grenfell Tragedy to deliver improved services and outcomes for residents, and restore trust, through a resident-led approach to housing management and estate refurbishment. The organisation has ten core principles, including: a commitment to no demolitions, transparent decision-making and prioritising local employment. Its model champions co-design, treating resident input and feedback as central to its policy and retrofit programmes, aiming to set a standard for social housing in the 21st century.

The case study is part of the Toolkit: Recruiting Residents, and is accompanied by a guide for senior managers.

LWNT works on the principle that resident experience is central to all decisions, with all staff, project teams and even external partners and the wider supply chain being brought into this process. They work with residents to provide thorough information and technical details through co-design processes, resident-led programming, and involvement in key decision-making, such as through procurement and recruitment panels.

Central to LWNT's mission is sustainability, the manager told us:

“All of us are moving towards this more sustainable model – to enable residents to thrive in their homes and lives, we mean sustainable in every single sense: the infrastructure locally of the neighbourhood...the quality of the homes... [and] sustainability in their finances...and local employment.**”**

One strand of this vision that LWNT deliver, in partnership with Lancaster West Residents' Association and local partners, is their employment and career opportunities. Since 2019, LWNT has developed a robust offer, with three key initiatives:

- LancWest Works (a recruitment service)
- The Employment and Training Hub
- The Green Skills Academy.



What it looks like

LWNT employment and training services have evolved into an interconnected offer that feels like a seamless journey for residents. As one senior manager described:

“The Green Skills Academy, LancWest Works, the Employment and Training Hub - as well as our volunteering scheme LancWest Connects - are all integrated: that's the beauty and the mess. You want to think holistically about a person and, in the same way, you have to think holistically about services.**”**

This approach allows LWNT to meet residents where they are: "We don't think of it as necessarily a service, but as a journey" with a focus on removing barriers to employment and creating opportunities, said the manager.

The whole offer organically developed from what the residents wanted and needed around sustainability and retrofit, specifically as part of the “three mandates set out by residents when developing our first Neighbourhood Strategy:

- To listen and act
- To repair, refurbish and decarbonise the estate
- To create opportunities.”



Residents, represented by Lancaster West Residents' Association alongside other local partners, had called for a dedicated space to address employment barriers: “We want something here that will serve us in a more dedicated way, and we want that to be a centre of excellence” and that became the **Employment and Training Hub**.

LancWest Works was one of the first initiatives set up by the Community Development and Co-design team in 2019 as LWNT began to expand its services, and focused on building a local, representative team as the Neighbourhood Team grew, as well as providing three-month paid placements to create a springboard for career pathways, especially in green skills for retrofit.



Employment and Training Fair at Kensington Leisure Centre. Credit: LWNT



Meet the Contractor Event at Bramley House. Credit: LWNT

LancWest Works gets residents into local employment, ensuring “a multitude of benefits and outcomes” for the community. The manager explained: “It was a bit of a no-brainer: where are the local skills, and who’s looking for work?” What began as a placement program organically developed into a full-fledged recruitment service, which is now even being used by external contractors and local employers, who have started proactively approaching LancWest with their own opportunities. It also serves as a pipeline for LWNT’s own staffing needs, particularly in areas like housing repairs and maintenance. She explained:

“**If you want a responsive team, you want to use the local skills.**”

The long-term vision extends beyond immediate needs, and asks “how do we secure, and invest in, a future workforce?”

The Green Skills Academy (GSA) was established to expand green skills in North Kensington and the wider borough. The aim is to develop the very skills the area needs to hit net zero targets, to create new possibilities, to ensure economic opportunities for residents, and to upskill in-house staff. So far, the GSA has provided training for 43 residents, 105 council staff, 12 contractors/ supply chain and 18 local SMEs. Additional benefits include bringing visibility and awareness to green skills, delivering a community-centred approach to net-zero targets, and increasing opportunities for residents and local employability.



Green Skills Academy at a Sustainability Market in December 2022. Credit: LWNT

Impact

Better services

By hiring locally and investing in the skills of their community, LWNT has benefited, with many local residents becoming staff members. They have seen **much-improved community engagement, more responsive services, and more enthusiastic buy-in to their sustainability initiatives**. A key example is using residents as liaison officers and engagement assistants, which has engaged traditionally less-heard-from residents:

“There are local people who have the knowledge and connections...who can speak to people who usually would be kind of behind closed doors.”

They now have a team that can speak many languages and understand different cultural backgrounds, to better inform their engagement strategies and bridge possible communication gaps. Having resident-employees on your team also means you get real-time insights and local opinions ‘built in’. These resident liaison roles have been pivotal in gaining buy-in for retrofit programs.



Residents attending the 2024 Residents' Summit. Credit: LWNT



Residents attending the first Futures Fair in 2024. Credit: LWNT

Having a large team of operatives who “live on the estate or within North Kensington enables us [LWNT] to have responsive services.” Having hyper-local workers means that LWNT has been able to more easily mitigate risks, solve problems quicker, and generally be able to reduce repair times by almost half. Data in June 2025 indicates that repairs are being carried out within 4.46 days on LWE, with the wider borough being 9.76 days.

Increased trust

Having residents in LWNT's workforce has strengthened trust because it embodies a commitment to transparency, accountability, and shared investment in outcomes. Employees who are also residents can see, first-hand, the team's dedication, and be part of creating a better estate:

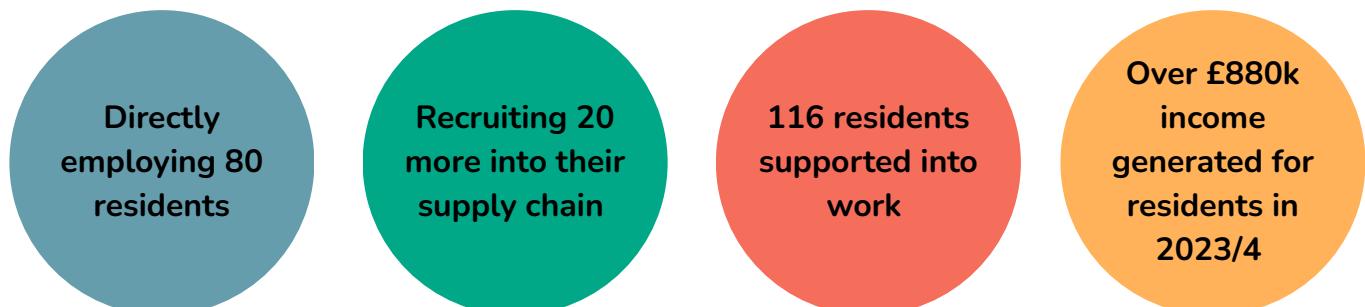
I know how passionate [the project manager] is... making sure that it [the construction work] is to the letter what residents want, and we're not cutting corners.

This dual role of resident-employees also creates natural oversight, said the senior manager: "Being able to hear and see and know people who are impacted by the decisions...holds you to account." This is mutually beneficial as "For a lot of them [our community], it's knowing...what is going into improving our service."

However, there are still some challenges the organisation faces: while LWNT has fostered trust with many through its community-based projects, some residents, even nearby, remain unaware of its efforts. Broader distrust of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) and other political institutions persists, compounded by national controversies during Brexit and the pandemic, making trust-building in institutions an ongoing challenge. The future integration of the LWNT model initiatives into RBKC will test whether this hard-earned trust can be sustained.

Impact on residents and the local economy

LWNT's employment and training programs have delivered measurable benefits for residents, with many securing long-term roles both within LancWest and with partner organisations - including those that started as placements. Outcomes include:



The programmes open doors to emerging industries while boosting the local economy:

“Opportunities in construction, in green skills... equip people appropriately to work with us.”

Resident involvement has also created a sense of collective ownership of their estate: “It’s reflective of a local community. It’s the pride. It’s the realness of it.” LWNT makes sure that successes are celebrated together, with residents put front and centre of any recognition for place-based success, such as at the place-making Pineapple Awards, where together Lancaster West Residents’ Association and LWNT have won four awards since 2022.



LWNT’s approach also demonstrates how **green technology and skills development go hand-in-hand with reducing inequalities**. The resident-employee we spoke to was surprised and proud to see LWNT bring high-quality retrofit, green technologies (as well as wide-ranging sustainability programmes like repair cafes, technology recycling, food waste recycling and furniture redistribution) to working-class areas:

“I thought initially that level of green thinking was only available to places that were privately owned, places like White City or Canary Wharf... So to think we’re bringing it here to North Kensington, which has been historically social housing, historically working class...it’s cool.”

This case study has been researched and written by Sabina Dewfield, Shortwork for Carbon Co-op. Many thanks to LWNT for their participation in the research, and Helen Grimshaw, Aneaka Kellay and Natalie Merrick at Carbon Co-op for editing and design. For more on this project, visit the [project page](#).



Carbon Co-op **shortwork**

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