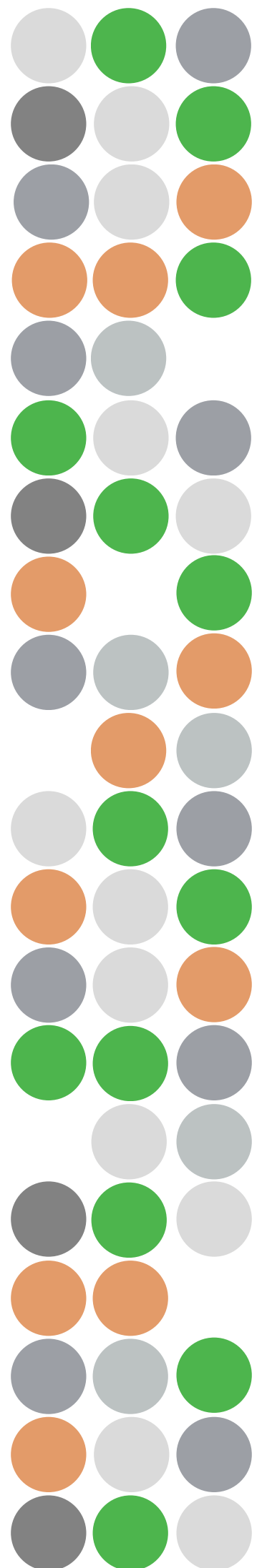


RETROFIT SUCCESS

Communicating
retrofit effectively





About SHAP

Originating in the West Midlands and now with a national reach, the Sustainable Housing Action Partnership (SHAP) is a not-for-profit organisation working to advance the transition to net zero across the housing sector. We work with organisations from the public, private and third sectors to turn ambition into action.

For 20 years, SHAP has worked at the forefront of sustainable housing, driving change through innovative research, thought leadership, and the development and sharing of best practice. Our network and client base spans housing associations, local and combined authorities, charities, community groups, academic institutions and businesses.

Our Vision is one of thriving communities with sustainable, high quality, low carbon homes.

Our Mission is to accelerate the delivery and impact of net zero, by leading and promoting best practice on the environmental, social and economic aspects of sustainable housing.

SHAP's Board is drawn from across the sustainable housing ecosystem and brings together leaders with deep, collective experience of the sector's successes and challenges. Providing strategic oversight, they help steer SHAP's work, ensuring it responds to sector needs and remains relevant, credible and impactful.



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This guide is one of eight thematic guides developed with insights from 70 organisations, drawing on practical retrofit experience in real homes, streets and communities.



Communicating retrofit effectively



Community and resident engagement



Data and digitalisation



Financing and procurement for retrofit



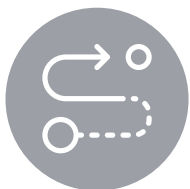
Governing and managing retrofit delivery



Retrofit evaluation and improvement



Skills and workforce development



Strategic planning for area-based retrofit

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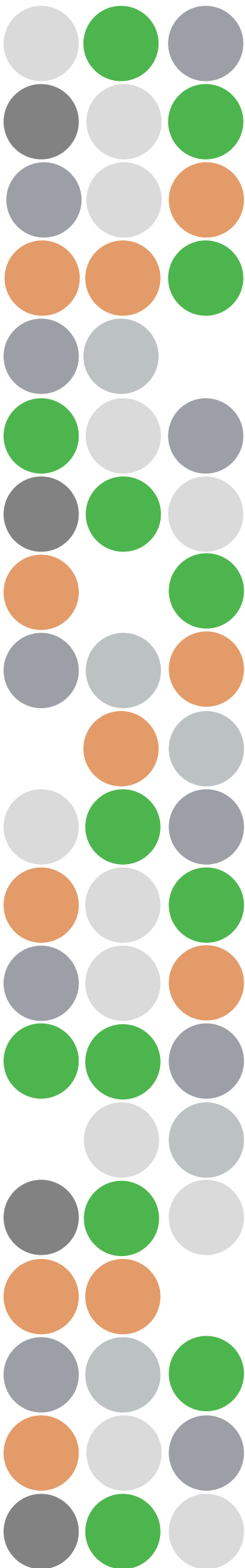


1.0 Introduction

This guide is part of SHAP's Retrofit Success series; practical, experience-led resources to support more effective retrofit delivery. Developed with nearly 100 contributors, the series reflects decades of first-hand insight from those shaping and delivering retrofit on the ground. For fullest value, we recommend reading this guide alongside the Retrofit Success in Summary document, which captures the shared context, core insights, and opportunities for adopting great practice, as well as guidance on how we can be more bold in designing and delivering retrofit.

This particular guide focusses on communicating retrofit effectively. Promoting retrofit isn't just about generating demand — it's about building understanding, trust, and long-term confidence in a process that can feel complex, disruptive, or uncertain. Without clear, timely, and relatable communication, even well-designed schemes risk confusion, low take-up, or public mistrust. Many residents and stakeholders still struggle to understand what retrofit is, why it matters, or how to engage — especially when the benefits can feel distant or hard to visualise.

This guidance sets out how to communicate retrofit more effectively before, during, and after delivery. It focuses on making retrofit visible, relatable and credible — not just to residents, but also to wider audiences including contractors, councillors, local businesses and community partners. Each section includes practical guidance as well as ideas for how we can go further, creating stronger, more inclusive narratives that help normalise retrofit and unlock wider momentum.



The guidance



2.1 Planning for retrofit delivery

Best practice **now**

01

Use early communication to shape expectations and build confidence

Start engagement well before delivery begins, using clear, accessible language to explain what retrofit is, why it matters, and what residents and stakeholders can expect. Early messaging prevents confusion and creates the space for informed consent.

02

Develop a tailored communications strategy for each audience

Different groups — from residents to elected members, community groups to frontline staff — need different messages, formats, and delivery channels. Designing segmented strategies helps ensure relevance and clarity from the outset.

03

Focus on tangible, local benefits rather than abstract goals

Frame messaging around what people will feel and experience — warmer homes, lower bills, improved health — rather than leading with climate targets or technical jargon. Personal relevance is key to building motivation.

04

Co-design messaging with trusted local voices

Partner with community leaders, frontline staff, and residents themselves to shape language and tone. Messages land better when they reflect lived realities and are delivered by people who are known and trusted.

05

Use visual storytelling to make retrofit visible and relatable

Before-and-after imagery, short videos, and real-life case studies can bring retrofit to life. These should reflect the diversity of local housing and households — not just polished ‘success stories’.

06

Establish a clear, consistent brand identity across all materials

A unified look and feel — logos, colours, tone — helps people recognise information as part of the same trusted programme. It also prevents confusion between retrofit messages and unrelated home improvement or utility offers.



07

Pre-empt misinformation and common concerns

Identify recurring worries early — from disruption and damp to rent increases — and address them directly in promotional materials. Being honest about trade-offs builds credibility.

08

Include frontline professionals in the promotion effort

Housing officers, call centre staff, GPs and community workers are often the first to be asked about retrofit. Equipping them with simple, accurate information helps widen the reach and reliability of messages.



How we can be **bolder**

01

Launch place-based retrofit education campaigns

Use local channels — billboards, buses, schools, and community events — to embed retrofit awareness into everyday life. Treat public education as a foundational component of areabased delivery.

02

Establish retrofit ambassador programmes across communities and institutions

Train and support residents, teachers, youth workers, and other local champions to act as go-to sources of retrofit information. Their endorsement helps normalise retrofit and boosts trust.

03

Create immersive experiences that demystify retrofit

Use tools like show homes, mobile demonstration units, or interactive exhibitions to help people see, touch, and understand retrofit measures before they're offered in their own homes.

04

Engage local schools and colleges as catalysts for wider awareness

Retrofit can be a powerful learning opportunity. Involve students in energy workshops or home surveys — and encourage them to bring their learning home.

05

Develop a regional campaign toolkit for partners to customise and deploy

Provide a suite of flexible materials — posters, videos, social media content — that local authorities, housing providers, and contractors can tailor to their audiences while maintaining consistency.

06

Use hyperlocal media and influencers to broaden reach

Engage community radio, local Instagram or TikTok creators, and WhatsApp groups to connect with harder-to-reach audiences in their preferred spaces and languages.



07

Link retrofit messages to cost-of-living support

Position retrofit as part of a wider package of help with energy costs, debt advice, or benefits maximisation. This makes engagement more meaningful and responsive to people's immediate needs.

08

Test messages rigorously — and adapt quickly

Use rapid feedback loops (focus groups, A/B testing, digital analytics) to understand which messages and formats are working. Be willing to iterate.



2.2 During retrofit delivery

Best practice **now**

01

Maintain visible, consistent branding across delivery partners

Use logos, signage, and communications materials that clearly show this is part of a trusted, joined-up programme. Consistency builds recognition and reassures residents it's not a one-off or isolated intervention.

02

Ensure all frontline teams can communicate key messages

Brief contractors, assessors, and on-site staff so they can confidently explain the works, reassure residents, and signpost to further support. A single confusing conversation can undo weeks of good engagement.

03

Use local communication channels to provide updates

During works, keep residents informed via WhatsApp groups, school newsletters, faith groups, or community radio — whichever channels they already use. This reduces confusion and strengthens local credibility.

04

Proactively manage resident expectations around disruption

People expect disruption — but only if it's explained upfront. Clear messaging about timeframes, access needs, and what's being installed can prevent avoidable anxiety and complaints.

05

Offer visual, in-home information on what's happening

Use temporary window posters or door stickers to let neighbours know which homes are being retrofitted, what's being done, and how to learn more — turning private works into public communication moments.

06

Capture stories and testimonials in real time

Don't wait until the end. Interview residents and contractors mid-way through to highlight progress, build local momentum, and normalise retrofit for others.



07

Tailor messaging to different resident groups

Not everyone receives or interprets information the same way. Adapt communications for those with sensory impairments, different first languages, or specific concerns — especially in mixed tenure streets.

08

Provide two-way communication routes throughout delivery

Include QR codes, text lines, or drop-in sessions that let residents ask questions and share concerns at any time. This turns messaging into a dialogue, not just a broadcast.



How we can be **bolder**

01

Use local ambassadors to film and share delivery progress

Equip resident champions or community reporters to document works from their perspective. Their voice is more trusted than top-down comms — and helps demystify the process in real time.

02

Deliver 'open home' or street showcase events during works

Let curious neighbours visit a home mid-install (with consent), speak to installers, or test a demo heat pump. Seeing retrofit up close reduces fear and fosters buy-in.

03

Work with local media to share live stories from site

Invite regional broadcasters, local newspapers or community podcasts to cover the retrofit journey — showcasing benefits and building credibility through independent coverage.

04

Use real-time dashboards to visualise impact

Display visual dashboards in public libraries or community centres showing how many homes have been improved, projected energy savings, or testimonials — making area progress feel tangible.

05

Embed retrofit into local school projects or youth programmes

Use the delivery phase as a live learning opportunity: host classroom talks, site visits or creative projects to engage young people and spark intergenerational conversation at home.

06

Pilot AI or chatbot tools to support on-demand resident queries

Experiment with automated tools that provide instant answers to common questions during delivery — freeing up staff time while improving resident experience.



07

Use branding that reflects local identity

Co-design logos, colour schemes or messaging with local residents to reflect area pride and values — making retrofit feel part of the community, not imposed on it.

08

Translate delivery into compelling public visuals

Use illustrated hoardings, murals or temporary art to tell the story of what's happening in the area — making retrofit visible, imaginative, and emotionally engaging.



2.3 After retrofit delivery

Best practice **now**

01

Gather and share real-world outcomes to build credibility

Collect and communicate the actual results of completed retrofit schemes — including energy savings, resident feedback, and before-and-after visuals. This helps make retrofit more tangible and credible for those still unsure.

02

Use resident stories to show impact and inspire trust

Personal experiences resonate more than statistics. Capture testimonials, short videos, or case studies from residents that highlight both benefits and challenges to build authenticity and relatability.

03

Make performance data digestible and accessible

Where energy use or performance monitoring is in place, ensure summaries are shared with communities and stakeholders in plain language. Use infographics, dashboards, or local noticeboards to visualise what's been achieved.

04

Celebrate early wins locally to build community momentum

Use small successes — a completed phase, a particularly positive resident experience, or a notable carbon saving — as reasons to bring communities together. Celebration events, local press, or school visits can help reinforce value.

05

Ensure materials and messaging remain available beyond delivery

Don't let awareness fade once works end. Keep promotional leaflets, explainer videos, and FAQs accessible on council or housing association websites, community hubs, or through local advice services for residents who come into schemes later.

06

Provide follow-up communications to reinforce trust

Re-engage residents 6–12 months after works complete, checking in on outcomes and offering updates. It helps confirm the value of the scheme and creates a lasting sense of connection and reliability.



How we can be **bolder**

01

Develop a centralised library of retrofit case studies and insights

Capture lessons from each programme and feed them into an open access hub for use by other local authorities, housing providers, and community partners. Standardise formats so insights are transferable and actionable.

02

Create local retrofit champions who continue sharing post-delivery

Train and support residents, contractors, or community leaders to act as long-term ambassadors. They can speak at events, lead home visits, or contribute to wider awareness campaigns — grounded in real experience.

03

Build retrofit visibility into the public realm

Use signage, hoardings, or murals in retrofit areas to explain what's been done and why. Postdelivery, this can act as a legacy — embedding retrofit into the local narrative and encouraging curiosity and replication.

04

Incentivise wider community engagement through recognition schemes

Introduce awards or public acknowledgements for streets, communities or residents who have participated, collaborated or promoted retrofit successfully. Recognition builds pride, visibility and future participation.

05

Use outcomes from past delivery to shape future marketing and messaging

Analyse what messages landed best, what residents misunderstood, and what influenced uptake — and feed that into future communications. This builds a smarter, learning-led approach to promotion over time.

06

Embed public communications into impact reporting

Make it standard practice to include external comms in your post-project evaluation — not just what happened, but how it was shared and what was learned from doing so. This professionalises communication as a key delivery strand.

Thank you to our contributors

