Area

WILEY | AREA Royal Geographical Society with IBG

ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

The Spatial Constitution of Domestic Energy Advice: Opportunities and Challenges for Place-Based Net Zero

Neil Simcock | Sophie Laidlaw | Michael Landry

School of Biological and Environmental Sciences, Faculty of Health, Innovation, Technology and Science, Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool, UK

Correspondence: Neil Simcock (n.d.simcock@ljmu.ac.uk)

Received: 21 August 2025 | **Revised:** 22 May 2026 | **Accepted:** 29 May 2026

Keywords: energy advice | net zero | place | place-based | retrofit

ABSTRACT

This paper critically assesses the opportunities and challenges arising from localised forms of domestic energy advice (DEA) provision, within the context of emerging 'place-based' approaches to net zero governance. DEA will play a key role in achieving net zero by facilitating the installation and usage of low-carbon measures in homes, but there is little research that examines how the spatial configuration of advice programmes may influence their efficacy. This paper addresses this research gap, drawing empirical data from an in-depth workshop with 19 DEA professionals in northwest England and an analysis of evaluation reports from seven DEA organisations. The findings suggest that place should be considered a fundamental and active part of the DEA process, not merely a backdrop in which advice provision happens. Localised, place-based approaches can be advantageous for ensuring DEA is relevant to the circumstances of communities and individuals, and for helping to establish relations of trust between advisors and citizens. However, local DEA operates within a multi-scalar governance landscape, and existing national policies relating to the financing of home energy retrofits and the funding of energy advice organisations often hinder the capacity of local actors to translate advice into action. We conclude by arguing for a form of 'progressive relational localism', involving the establishment of a national energy advice network that would empower local actors and support equitable place-based decarbonisation.

1 | Introduction

There is a growing interest within academia and policy in 'place-based' approaches to climate change mitigation and net zero governance (EDRC 2025), understood here as approaches to low-carbon transitions that focus on local-scale design, control and implementation (Bedford et al. 2023).[1] Advocates of place-based approaches argue that the unique social, material, political and economic characteristics of particular neighbourhoods, cities and regions will play a crucial role in determining the impact of climate mitigation policies (Marsden et al. 2025; Middlemiss et al. 2024). Adopting a more localised approach, which considers the socio-material conditions of different places, is therefore argued to generate more 'place appropriate' and ultimately effective climate policies (Baranova 2023; McCann 2023). Place-based and localist forms of governance are not without critiques, however. A key concern is that they do not address the wider-scale policies and governance systems that have a major impact on the material conditions of everyday life (Bouzarovski and Simcock 2017), and may ignore differences in local capacities for action and thereby exacerbate inequalities within and between places (Bedford et al. 2023; Featherstone et al. 2012).

Intervening in these debates, in this exploratory paper we critically consider opportunities and challenges that might arise from a 'place-based' approach to domestic energy advice (DEA). We define DEA as 'an institutionalized form of domestic assistance aimed at improving domestic energy efficiency,

conserving energy use, increasing social inclusion, and reducing carbon emissions' (Bouzarovski et al. 2025, 2). DEA can cover a spectrum of issues; many providers include a focus on immediate energy bill reduction (e.g., through assisting households with energy market engagement and 'energy literacy') (Ramsden 2020), although it increasingly also involve guidance on home energy 'retrofitting', grant funding and the installation of low-carbon technologies (Sugar et al. 2025). Decarbonising homes is essential for achieving net zero goals (Climate Change Committee 2019), and the complexity of home energy retrofit means that DEA has a crucial role to play in this endeavour (Brown et al. 2025).

There is a strong body of existing research into the factors shaping the efficacy and inclusivity of DEA. This research has focused predominantly on social and relational contingencies, such as the perceived trustworthiness of the advice providers (Davis et al. 2025; Ramsden 2020; Reeves 2016) or the manner through which advice is communicated (Baker et al. 2019; Boardman and Darby 2000; Simcock et al. 2014). Missing from the literature, however, is an empirical investigation into how the spatial configuration of DEA—such as *where* advice is delivered and the spatial identities of advice providers—might influence its value and effectiveness. This lacuna exists despite wider sociological and geographical literature suggesting that spatial contingencies, such as the location of social interaction, can influence the development of trust and the efficacy of knowledge exchange (Devine-Wright 2012; Small and Adler 2019; Storper and Venables 2004). In the United Kingdom and elsewhere, DEA is currently provided by organisations operating at various scales—from local charities to national-scale institutions—and through multiple communication channels including telephone, internet and 'in-person' advice in various locations (Bouzarovski et al. 2025). In a policy briefing, Sugar et al. (2025) critique the increasing reliance in the United Kingdom on DEA delivered via telephone and argue that this cannot replace face-to-face advice provision, but empirical evidence to corroborate this assertion is needed. Furthermore, under a place-based net zero agenda, the spatial configuration of DEA provision would potentially become more localised. It is therefore important to consider the implications of such a change.

It is here that this paper makes a contribution, by critically assessing the opportunities and challenges that may arise from localised, place-based approaches to the design and delivery of DEA. We draw on empirical data from a day-long workshop with 19 DEA professionals based in northwest (NW) England, alongside detailed evaluation reports written by 7 DEA organisations.

2 | Methods

This paper is based on an analysis of qualitative data acquired through two methods. Firstly, a day-long, in-person workshop was held in March 2025 in a public building in a city in northwest England with 19 professionals involved with DEA. All participants were based in northwest England, but there was diversity in terms of participants' type of engagement with DEA (14 were involved in frontline delivery, 5 in local/regional policy) and the geographical context in which they operated (9 worked in urban areas, 3 in rural communities and 7 a mixture). All frontline advisors were experienced in a variety of DEA topics (ranging from energy bill understanding to the suitability of low-carbon technologies and energy efficiency measures) and modes of communication (including telephone, digital and in-person). Given the range of participant experiences and working contexts, common themes evident across this diversity might reasonably have wider applicability outside of NW England.

The aim of the workshop was to investigate participants' experiences and perceptions of recent DEA schemes, and to consider whether and how the design and delivery of future initiatives might be improved. The spatial concepts discussed in this paper, and debates around 'place-based' net zero, were not an explicit focus of the workshops and did not inform the design of activities; rather, these concepts emerged during workshop discussions and were identified as a key overarching theme during analysis (see below for more detail on the analytical approach). The Supporting Information provides details of the workshop structure and activities undertaken (Section S1), and photographs of written material from the workshop activities (Sections S2–S9). Following each activity, a plenary discussion was held, facilitated by the authors. These were loosely structured around key points or reflections from the workshop activities, but typically also developed organically as participants responded to or built upon one another's points. The facilitators managed the discussion to ensure that a diversity of voices and perspectives were captured. One researcher took detailed written notes of the plenary discussions on a laptop. During lunch and after the workshop, the researchers debriefed. In the days following the workshop, notes were shared within team and reviewed, with any aspects of uncertainty clarified through discussion. Notes were also shared with workshop participants for validation.

This workshop data is supplemented by an analysis of seven evaluation reports, each written in June 2025 by various DEA organisations operating in NW England. In these reports, the organisations reflected on DEA projects they had delivered in the previous 2 years, assessing lessons learnt, barriers encountered and overall impact. The seven organisations who wrote the reports were also attendees at the aforementioned workshop, with the sample comprising organisations from varying geographical contexts (3 urban, 2 rural and 2 covering both). Although a relatively small sample, the reports were between 3000 and 7000 words in length and therefore add substantial depth and richness that supplements and validates the workshop findings.

Workshop notes and written materials developed by participants were then collated and analysed using thematic analysis. An inductive approach to coding was utilised in which themes were identified through closely reading and categorising the workshop notes, rather than applying a pre-defined coding schema. This was a multistage process involving all three authors, in which themes and categories were modified and refined. The lead author undertook the initial coding, which was then checked, refined and validated by the co-authors over multiple cycles. As the process evolved, links, commonalities and differences with existing academic literature were identified. The spatial concepts discussed in this paper were identified inductively through this analysis, with the three subheadings of 'Tailoring energy advice to place', 'The spatiality of trust', and 'Scale and the capacity for action' representing the final overarching 'themes' of the analysis. These final

three themes were then applied deductively to code and organise material from the written reports. Notably, the issues raised in the evaluation reports closely mirrored the workshop discussions, thus corroborating the initial analysis.

The study methodology does have limitations. The sample size is relatively small and all participants are based within NW England. As such, the sample is unlikely to reflect the full range of contexts within which DEA takes place and the diversity of its design and delivery. Nonetheless, NW England is demographically and materially diverse, and the participants were drawn from a range of spatial settings and contexts. Further research could seek to investigate the wider applicability of our findings and enrich them with additional contextual nuance. Ideally, the workshop would have been audio recorded to allow a more precise analysis of participant discourse, but this was not practically feasible given the size of the room.

3 | Assessing the Implications of 'Place-Based' Energy Advice

Based on the thematic analysis, three themes relating to the implications of place-based approaches to DEA were identified: *tailoring energy advice to place*; *the spatiality of trust*; and *scale and the capacity for action*. The subsections below summarise key insights relating to these themes. A selection of indicative extracts from the written workshop activities and the evaluation reports are provided in Table 1.

3.1 | Tailoring Energy Advice to Place

A theme expressed strongly and consistently in the workshops and evaluation reports was the crucial importance of ensuring DEA—in terms of the information conveyed, how it is delivered, where and when it is provided, and by whom—does not follow a generic and 'one-size-fits-all' approach but instead is deeply tailored to the specific conditions of particular places and individual households.

In part, this related to the varied materiality of places. The United Kingdom has a wide diversity of housing in terms of building age and structure. Participants emphasised that not all low-carbon heating or insulation measures were appropriate for all housing types, and that recommendations made by energy advisors needed to be adjusted to account for the diverse material characteristics of communities and households. For example, in one evaluation report (Organisation 5), cavity wall

TABLE 1 | Example extracts from workshop activities and evaluation reports that demonstrate analytical themes.

Theme	Indicative quotes
Tailoring energy advice to place	'Working with community leads/community groups to tailor energy advice to their needs' (Workshop Activity 1) 'Tailored advice delivery around initial intentions of residents engaging with services led to more installations of retrofit measures'. (Workshop Activity 1) 'Householders are citizens with a diverse set of needs, backgrounds and circumstances therefore a one-size-fits-all approach to energy advice is not suitable'. (Evaluation report, Organisation 2) 'Advice had to be tailored to what could realistically be undertaken given the physical property constraints' (Evaluation report, Organisation 7)
The spatiality of trust	'Local "community" researchers hold conversations within the community (in various locations). The peer-to-peer nature of this seemed to help residents to be more open than they might otherwise'. (Workshop Activity 1) 'In-person home visit interaction – builds trust & rapport' (Workshop Activity 1) 'Not just digital. People need to see, hear, feel actions and measures'. (Workshop Activity 1) 'A key element of our engaging with hard-to-reach clients was recognising that local service providers and front-line and community organisations embedded and known in their area were far better placed to reach their vulnerable and hard-to-reach residents than our charity. By building on the trust they had already built within their area of operation we were able to start our support on the front-foot'. (Evaluation report, Organisation 3) 'We have found that initial engagement on energy efficiency and awareness raising has been most successful at community venues such as libraries, community hubs, church halls etc. This is because you are working alongside known and trusted community members and other VCSE organisations so this helps to build trust and a sense that you are "genuine"' (Evaluation report, Organisation 5)
Scale and the capacity for action	'We didn't refer ppl into grants. Requires a lot of hand holding. Grant process is very fraught' (Workshop Activity 2) 'Frustrations with the grant process created an additional barrier to installations. While our advice successfully encouraged people to begin their retrofit journey, external factors beyond our control, such as delays and complexities in grant funding, have the potential to hinder or prevent successful installations' (Evaluation report, Organisation 1) 'Lack of support for residents who need prior repairs before retrofit' (Workshop Activity 2) '[There should be a] National contact to feed locally → local advice, local delivery' (Workshop Activity 3)

insulation was noted as unsuitable for many houses within a particular town due to the frequent 'westerly driving rain' the area experienced. Alongside materiality, participants emphasised the importance of adapting DEA to the heterogeneous sociocultural and economic circumstances found within local areas, taking into account financial circumstances, householder motivations, age profiles and languages spoken.

Several participants argued that delivering DEA via 'locally embedded' organisations that stem from, and have a rich understanding of, the areas in which they operate is crucial for the effective tailoring of advice. Rather than treating 'local' places as singular and uniform, participant accounts suggested the importance of using advisors that understood the diversity and 'intricacies' found within localities and could adapt advice accordingly. As stated by one organisation in their evaluation report:

> Local delivery partners also know their areas and communities inside out, understanding the intricacies of local situations and the housing stock. They are able to provide a high level of support appropriate to the residents within their communities and are trusted within their local areas to be able to do so.
>
> (Evaluation Report, Organisation 4)

Some participants described the need for DEA to be 'hyper-local' and tailored to the circumstances of neighbourhoods or streets. Many others, at the workshop and in reports, emphasised the importance of tailoring DEA at the scale of *individual* households. The consensus was that this could best be achieved via in-person home visits that enabled advisors to understand household circumstances and modify their guidance accordingly:

> For consumers who successfully installed retrofit measures, the main factor was the support provided through in-person visits. These allowed for a clearer understanding of the specific challenges related to hard-to-treat buildings, which could be difficult to address through digital or telephone advice.
>
> (Evaluation Report, Organisation 1)

Other suggestions from workshop participants for enabling the local tailoring of DEA included conducting background research to gain an initial understanding of community circumstances, building relationships with local authority planning teams and community groups, and being flexible and open to experimentation regarding 'what works well' within particular settings.

A pertinent example of place-based DEA came from a non-profit organisation in northwest England, who engaged with communities where a relatively high-proportion of residents were on a low-income, from an ethnic minority background, and did not speak English as their first language. The organisation worked closely with existing neighbourhood groups and networks to develop a deep understanding of, and relationship with, the local community. They then sought to adapt their engagement and advice strategy to meet local needs; for example, by advertising in multiple languages, avoiding jargon and running 'hands-on' practical workshops designed to be engaging and relevant. Advice was also framed around and focused upon providing solutions to existing community concerns, such as tackling indoor mould and damp. Workshop participants involved with this approach felt it had been highly effective in terms of increasing local people's engagement with DEA.

3.2 | The Spatiality of Trust

Participants at the workshop agreed unanimously that, for DEA to be listened to and acted upon, trust between advice providers and recipients was essential. Confirming existing literature (Simcock et al. 2014; Davis et al. 2025), common suggestions for building trust were to deliver advice through non-profit organisations, and to utilise dialogical and sustained (rather than one-off) forms of engagement. However, an additional and novel finding was the important role that geography plays in creating and mediating trust in DEA. Here, we use the term the *spatiality of trust* (Nilsson and Mattes 2015) to capture the various ways the spatial configuration of DEA, including where it is provided and the spatial identities of the actors involved, impact upon the development of trust.

As noted in Section 3.1, participants described the benefits of providing DEA via locally embedded organisations in terms of tailoring advice to place-based conditions. An additional stated benefit to such an approach was that local organisations were more likely to be trusted by advice recipients compared to advisors who were 'parachuted in' to a community. Working alongside other locally embedded actors and institutions (such as GPs, food banks, voluntary community groups and neighbourhood 'energy champions') was also argued to be useful in building trust. As one participant wrote in the workshop:

> The [energy advice] funding enabled and empowered organisations to deliver, but the fact that they were already embedded in their communities was key to success. Fund existing trusted bodies, don't parachute people in.

Although the exact reason for a perceived greater trust in local advisors and organisations was not fully elucidated during the workshop, a sense of shared 'place identity' can assist in developing initial trust between previously unfamiliar parties (Fresque-Baxter and Armitage 2012). The evaluation reports also allude to the importance of familiarity and a positive reputation. That said, some national brands, particularly charities, were also noted as potentially valuable and trusted partners—this suggests that the ability to cultivate trust in DEA is not *exclusive* to 'local' actors.

Secondly, the general feeling among workshop participants, and echoed in the evaluation reports, was that relations of trust could be most effectively fostered through in-person interactions that enabled energy advisors to 'get to know' [i.e., begin to build a relationship with (Davis et al. 2025)] advice recipients. In contrast, it was felt to be more challenging to build trust through remote engagement due to a lack of 'personal touch' and the inability to 'read' the body language or reactions of advice recipients. For example:

> Advice over the phone is always more challenging as you are unable to identify opportunities or see potential barriers compared to being in someone's home. It is also more difficult to build a rapport and trust with someone compared with face-to-face.
>
> (Evaluation Report, Organisation 5)

> In-person engagement played a big part in building trust.
>
> (Evaluation Report, Organisation 4)

These accounts echo research which suggests that, whilst reputation and a sense of common identity are important for building *initial* trust, deeper and more resilient trust is primarily cultivated through face-to-face social interaction (Nilsson and Mattes 2015; Storper and Venables 2004). This form of in-person contact has a clear spatial dimension, in that it necessitates physical proximity, co-presence and shared spaces where interaction can take place (Small and Adler 2019).

Nonetheless, all the DEA organisations represented at the workshop and in the evaluation reports utilised multiple forms of 'remote' advice provision (e.g., telephone calls, written reports, apps and online decision-tools, and video calls) alongside in-person methods. Indeed, the value and utility of such approaches, as part of a multi-pronged DEA strategy, was recognised by participants. Yet the general consensus was that in-person interaction remains the most important part of 'trusted' DEA, and that programmes focusing *only* on online or remote communication were unlikely to achieve the same levels of success. Recognising the diversity of household circumstances, some evaluation reports also noted that in-person interaction was especially vital when engaging with households with complex needs or with limited digital access or literacy.

Thirdly, the characteristics and meanings ascribed to the place in which DEA is offered were felt by participants to influence how advice is perceived by publics. Places are not simply empty settings in which events happen, but are actively ascribed meaning and can carry deep cultural associations (Relph 2001). Places perceived in some way negatively have been shown to hinder the formation of social ties (Small and Adler 2019). Yet previous research on energy advice has largely been silent on the potential significance of *where* advice provision takes place. Workshop discussions emphasised the importance of offering and promoting energy advice in 'trusted' settings, arguing that the positive perception of a location assists in building trust in energy advisors and their services. Being non-commercial, informal and playing an active role in community life were all suggested as important characteristics of trusted locations, with community centres and libraries offered as examples in this regard. As one workshop participant wrote:

> Embedding advisors in the heart of the community (libraries, community hubs etc.) builds trust, creates visibility + opens doors for those not engaging through wider comms campaigns.
>
> (Activity 1)

Another participant shared an unsuccessful example of offering DEA in a supermarket and getting very little response, which they attributed to the location's status as a commercial establishment creating a perception that the advisors also had commercial motives. However, and connecting back to the need for 'place-based' energy advice discussed in Section 3.1, participants also noted that there is no simple or universal rule regarding which spatial settings are 'trusted' sites for energy advice, as factors such as social class, ethnicity, age and gender can all influence how locations are ascribed meaning. Several participants noted that experimentation, adaptability, listening to community views and utilising advisors with local knowledge were often necessary to find places that 'worked'.

3.3 | Scale and the Capacity for Action

Whilst participants felt there were clear benefits to a localised DEA governance and delivery model, they also noted constraints and challenges. A common issue was that policies, regulations and actions originating from outside the boundaries of a place could, depending on their specific details, hinder the effectiveness of locally delivered DEA. Multiple workshop participants suggested that the ability of DEA to lead to the installation of home energy retrofit measures was often difficult in practice, principally due to limitations with national funding programmes intended to assist householders in purchasing and installing such measures.

Participants described such schemes as 'fraught', 'long', 'unclear' and 'very difficult for people to navigate' (see Table 1). Whilst specific policies and funding schemes were not always mentioned, the Home Upgrade Grant and its successor, the Warm Homes: Local Plan, were sometimes referred to as examples. Negative householder experiences with national funding schemes were argued to be potentially harmful to the reputation of local DEA organisations and thereby make people less likely to access advice services in the future. Several participants gave examples of people who were initially keen on installing insulation or other low-carbon measures but ultimately withdrew from the process due to 'impenetrable' funding programmes.

> the [energy efficiency grant] system needs to be clearer and more transparent. It is too confusing for customers to navigate in the present form.
>
> (Evaluation Report, Organisation 7)

Narrow, complex eligibility criteria for funding support were also critiqued in the workshop and evaluation reports, with suggestions that many low-income people are excluded from support even when they are evidently unable to self-finance home energy retrofits. A further barrier noted was that some homes require physical defects to be remedied prior to the installation of low-carbon measures, but major funding programmes do not cover repair work and there is a lack of alternative financing options (see also Charles 2025).

Two organisations who wrote evaluation reports also noted that some households required multiple advice sessions, due to, for example, the aforementioned complexity of funding schemes or having additional support needs. However, DEA organisations

are themselves typically reliant on external (often government or energy company) funding, and the limited and short-term nature of this (Ramsden 2020; Reeves 2016; Sugar et al. 2025) often means that multiple advice sessions are not deliverable.

Governance scales beyond the local were also mentioned when considering how DEA services might be improved in the future (Activity 3 of the workshop—see Section S1). Although aspects of a place-based approach to DEA were clearly perceived as beneficial (see Sections 3.1 and 3.2), several workshop participants argued that maximising the efficacy of DEA required coordination between local, regional and national governance levels. In this regard, participants agreed unanimously on the need for a national-scale DEA 'brand' that could work with local delivery organisations. One group of participants termed this the 'Citizen's Advice model', in which an overseeing central organisation coordinates local offices that have significant autonomy and flexibility to meet place-based needs. Stated benefits of such an approach included the ability to ensure geographical coverage of energy advice services in current underserved communities, provide consistency of quality standards and advisor training, and enable the sharing of resources, information and expertise between advice partners in different locations. Some participants also suggested that a national coordinating body could provide a 'central hub' of very specialised energy assessors, which local energy advice services could draw on in very complex retrofit cases (such as 'hard-to-treat' or uncommon property types).

4 | Concluding Discussion

This paper has examined the opportunities and challenges associated with localised and place-based approaches to the design and delivery of DEA. The findings show that the 'spatial identity' of energy advisors and the settings where advice is provided matter for the utility and perceived trustworthiness of DEA. Providing advice via 'place embedded' actors with a rich understanding of local material and social contexts appears to be highly valuable for enabling advice to be relevant to the circumstances of communities and individuals, and for helping to establish trust in advisors and their recommendations. Likewise, corroborating research on the role of spatial factors in cultivating social ties (Small and Adler 2019; Storper and Venables 2004), the results suggest that spatial propinquity and face-to-face interaction are often advantageous, and arguably sometimes necessary, for ensuring DEA is useful and perceived positively by recipients. The efficacy and value of DEA is therefore determined not only by social and relational contingencies (the predominant focus of existing research) but, crucially, is also *spatially constituted*. In short, space and place should be considered a fundamental and active part of the DEA process, not merely a backdrop in which advice provision happens.

These findings reinforce calls for 'place' to be a central consideration in debates over how decarbonisation policies should be governed and delivered. If DEA were to become consistently more localised as part of wider place-based net zero policies, then this could be advantageous in terms of enhancing citizen trust and ensuring home energy retrofits are suited to local contexts. However, this paper also highlights challenges associated with a place-based approach to DEA. Notably, the findings show that there are constraints on the capacity of DEA organisations to deliver advice, and for this advice to be translated into meaningful action on the part of citizens, due to policies and processes operating at geographical scales beyond the boundaries of advice locations (see also Forster et al. 2019; Simcock and Bouzarovski 2025). The complexity and narrow eligibility criteria of retrofit financing programmes (which are designed at the national level), systemic housing disrepair and insecurity of funding for DEA organisations were all noted as limiting what DEA could achieve. Such constraints are arguably greatest in areas with a relative lack of financial and social resources, whilst better resourced places are more easily able to establish and benefit from localised forms of DEA provision (e.g., communities with more affluent citizens may be able to self-finance insulation or low-carbon heating and so be less hindered by national funding availability).

Addressing these challenges requires thinking of places relationally—as dynamic rather than static, and as always entwined with, influenced by and influencing other places and scales (Darling 2009; Marsden et al. 2025). Expanding on Featherstone et al. (2012) and Bedford et al. (2023), we argue that a 'progressive relational localism' is required, in which relations between local, regional and national scales of governance are coordinated, collaborative and organised so as to enhance local capacities for action. Notably, greater and more accessible national funding for home energy efficiency measures will increase the ability of local DEA organisations to engender transformative changes. Participants' call for a nationally coordinated energy advice network (echoing Bouzarovski et al. 2023), with a central organisation connecting autonomous local DEA offices who adapt to place-based needs, also recognises the potentially *enabling* rather than constraining role of national–local relations when configured supportively. The UK government's recent proposal for a national Warm Homes Agency (Deparment for Energy Security and Net Zero 2026) is a promising step, but details are currently underdeveloped and there remains an emphasis on online and digital advice.[2] Our findings show that for the WHA (and similar programmes elsewhere) to be successful, it must enable and support in-person advice delivery and be proactive in addressing the existing 'fragmentation' and inconsistency in face-to-face DEA provision in England—including by providing additional resource for the establishment or expansion of local advice services where they are needed. Structured in this way, there is potential for place-based approaches to DEA to contribute to an inclusive and effective net zero transition.

Acknowledgements

A huge thanks to all the organisations (Bolton at Home, Carbon Coop, Cumbria Action for Sustainability, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Energy Projects Plus, Groundwork, Homebaked CLT, Northwest Net Zero Hub, Plus Dane, Pure Leapfrog, Rossendale Valley Energy, Wigan Council) and individual participants who took part in the workshop and contributed with such energy and insight. Many thanks to Tony Seasman and colleagues for their support throughout and their work in organising the logistics of the workshop. Finally, thanks to two anonymous reviewers and the journal editor for their helpful and constructive feedback.

Funding

This research was supported by the School of Biological and Environmental Sciences Research Capability Fund at Liverpool John Moores University, and by Liverpool City Region Combined Authority.

Data Availability Statement

Some of the data that supports the findings of this study are available in the Supporting Information of this article. Other data (evaluation reports) supporting the findings cannot be shared publicly to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

Endnotes

[1] In geographical theory, 'place' does not only or necessarily apply to the local scale (e.g., Massey 1994). However, in policy and academic discourse, 'place-based net zero' is predominantly understood as meaning a more localised approach to decarbonisation, and so this is the meaning that is followed in this paper.

[2] We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for prompting us to consider the implications of our analysis for the proposed Warm Homes Agency.

References

Baker, K. J., R. Mould, F. Stewart, S. Restrick, H. Melone, and B. Atterson. 2019. "Never Try and Face the Journey Alone: Exploring the Face-To-Face Advocacy Needs of Fuel Poor Householders in the United Kingdom." *Energy Research & Social Science* 51: 210–219. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2019.01.009.

Baranova, P. 2023. "Place-Based Business Support Towards Net Zero: Enabling Through the Place-Policy-Practice Nexus." *Journal of the British Academy* 11, no. 4: 57–95. https://doi.org/10.5871/jba/011s4.057.

Bedford, T., P. Catney, and Z. Robinson. 2023. "Going Down the Local: The Challenges of Place-Based Net Zero Governance." *Journal of the British Academy* 11, no. 4: 125–156. https://doi.org/10.5871/jba/011s4.125.

Boardman, B., and S. J. Darby. 2000. *Effective Advice: Energy Efficiency and the Disadvantaged*. Environmental Change Institute, University of Oxford.

Bouzarovski, S., A. Crowther, and N. Simcock. 2023. "The UK Needs a National Energy Advice Service." The Conversation. http://theconversation.com/the-uk-needs-a-national-energy-advice-service-197176.

Bouzarovski, S., L. Karpinska, K. Sugar, and S. Śmiech. 2025. "Networked, Fragmented, Unequal: The Emergent Landscape of Home Energy Advice Provision in England." *Applied Geography* 181: 103682. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apgeog.2025.103682.

Bouzarovski, S., and N. Simcock. 2017. "Spatializing Energy Justice." *Energy Policy* 107: 640–648. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2017.03.064.

Brown, D., L. Middlemiss, M. Davis, et al. 2025. "Rethinking Retrofit: Relational Insights for the Design of Residential Energy Efficiency Policy." *Energy Research & Social Science* 120: 103863. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2024.103863.

Charles, H. 2025. *Social Housing Challenges in the Low-Carbon Transformation Towards Net Zero [PhD Thesis]*. University of Manchester.

Climate Change Committee. 2019. "UK Housing: Fit for the Future?" https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/uk-housing-fit-for-the-future/.

Darling, J. 2009. "Thinking Beyond Place: The Responsibilities of a Relational Spatial Politics." *Geography Compass* 3, no. 5: 1938–1954. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8198.2009.00262.x.

Davis, M., L. Middlemiss, S. Hall, et al. 2025. "Towards a Relational Sociology of Retrofit." *Sociology* 59, no. 3: 466–484. https://doi.org/10.1177/00380385241298177.

Deparment for Energy Security & Net Zero. 2026. "Warm Homes Plan." HM Government. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/warm-homes-plan/warm-homes-plan-html.

Devine-Wright, P. 2012. "Fostering Public Engagement in Wind Energy Development: The Role of Intermediaries and Community Benefits." In *Learning From Wind Power: Governance, Societal and Policy Perspectives on Sustainable Energy*, edited by J. Szarka, R. Cowell, G. Ellis, P. A. Strachan, and C. Warren, 194–214. Palgrave MacMillan.

EDRC. 2025. *Place*. Energy Demand Research Centre. https://www.edrc.ac.uk/research/place/.

Featherstone, D., A. Ince, D. Mackinnon, K. Strauss, and A. Cumbers. 2012. "Progressive Localism and the Construction of Political Alternatives." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 37, no. 2: 177–182. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-5661.2011.00493.x.

Forster, N., P. Hodgson, and C. Bailey. 2019. "Energy Advice for Traveller Communities in the Context of Ethnic and Spatial Premiums: 'Paying the Price' for Other People's Choices." *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice* 27, no. 1: 61–78. https://doi.org/10.1332/175982718X15451316707778.

Fresque-Baxter, J. A., and D. Armitage. 2012. "Place Identity and Climate Change Adaptation: A Synthesis and Framework for Understanding." *WIREs Climate Change* 3, no. 3: 251–266. https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.164.

Marsden, G., S. Bouzarovski, K. Balani, et al. 2025. "(Re-)locating 'Place' in Energy Demand: Implications for Research and Policy." *Geoforum* 165: 104375. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2025.104375.

Massey, D. 1994. *Space, Place and Gender*. University of Minnesota Press.

McCann, P. 2023. "OECD Regional Development Papers." In *Place-Based Policies for the Future: How Have Place-Based Policies Evolved to Date and What Are They for Now?* vol. 78. OECD Publishing. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/place-based-policies-for-the-future_9b0b0107-en.html.

Middlemiss, L., C. Snell, S. Theminimulle, et al. 2024. "Place-Based and People-Centred: Principles for a Socially Inclusive Net Zero Transition." *Geo: Geography and Environment* 11, no. 2: e00157. https://doi.org/10.1002/geo2.157.

Nilsson, M., and J. Mattes. 2015. "The Spatiality of Trust: Factors Influencing the Creation of Trust and the Role of Face-To-Face Contacts." *European Management Journal* 33, no. 4: 230–244. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2015.01.002.

Ramsden, S. 2020. "Tackling Fuel Poverty Through Household Advice and Support: Exploring the Impacts of a Charity-Led Project in a Disadvantaged City in the United Kingdom." *Energy Research & Social Science* 70: 101786. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2020.101786.

Reeves, A. 2016. "Exploring Local and Community Capacity to Reduce Fuel Poverty: The Case of Home Energy Advice Visits in the UK." *Energies* 9, no. 4: 276. https://doi.org/10.3390/en9040276.

Relph, E. 2001. "Place in Geography." In *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, edited by N. J. Smelser and P. B. Baltes, 11448–11451. Pergamon. https://doi.org/10.1016/B0-08-043076-7/02474-8.

Simcock, N., and S. Bouzarovski. 2025. "A Cure-All for Energy Poverty? Thinking Critically About Energy Advice." *Critical Social Policy* 45, no. 1: 49–71. https://doi.org/10.1177/02610183231219185.

Simcock, N., S. MacGregor, P. Catney, et al. 2014. "Factors Influencing Perceptions of Domestic Energy Information: Content, Source and Process." *Energy Policy* 65: 455–464. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2013.10.038.

Small, M. L., and L. Adler. 2019. "The Role of Space in the Formation of Social Ties." *Annual Review of Sociology* 45: 111–132. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-073018-022707.

Storper, M., and A. J. Venables. 2004. "Buzz: Face-To-Face Contact and the Urban Economy." *Journal of Economic Geography* 4, no. 4: 351–370. https://doi.org/10.1093/jnlecg/lbh027.

Sugar, K., V. Kasprowicz, M. Pauker, et al. 2025. *Re-Imagining Home Energy Advice in the UK*. Energy Demand Research Centre.

Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section. **Supporting Information: S1:** Table outlining the workshop structure and activities. **Supporting Information: S2:** Photograph of written material produced in Activity 1 'What worked well in recent energy advice initiatives, and why?' **Supporting Information: S3:** Photograph of written material produced in Activity 2 'What didn't work well in recent energy advice initiatives, and why?' **Supporting Information: S4:** Photographs of written material produced by group 1 for Activity 3 'The ideal future energy advice system' **Supporting Information: S5:** Photographs of written material produced by group 2 for Activity 3 'The ideal future energy advice system' **Supporting Information: S6:** Photographs of written material produced by group 3 for Activity 3 'The ideal future energy advice system' **Supporting Information: S7:** Photograph of written material produced by group 1 for Activity 4 'How can the ideal future energy advice system become a reality' **Supporting Information: S8:** Photograph of written material produced by group 2 for Activity 4 'How can the ideal future energy advice system become a reality' SI9: Photograph of written material produced by group 3 for Activity 4 'How can the ideal future energy advice system become a reality'