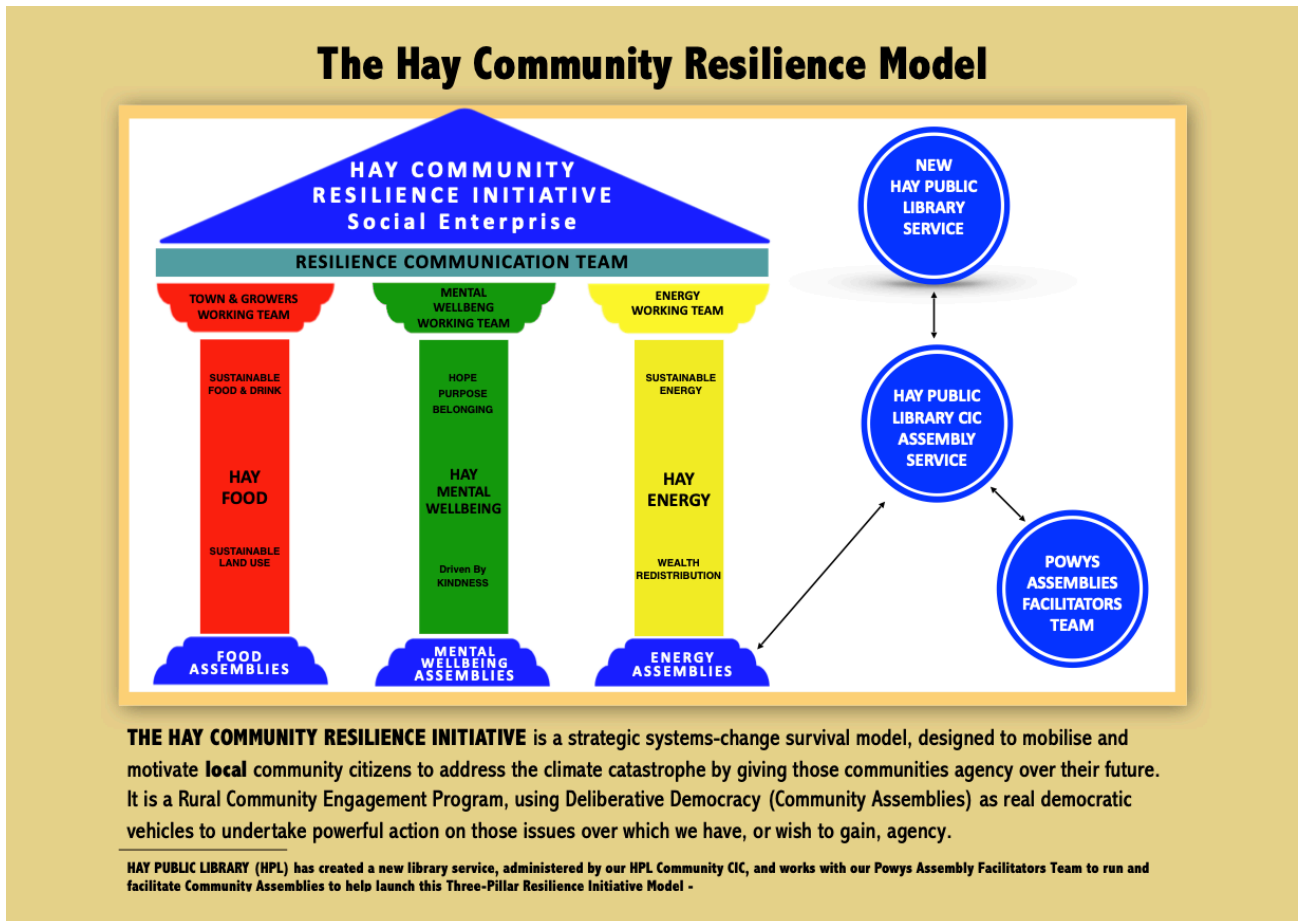


# How to Activate Your Community - And Give Power Back to the People. It's Easy!

The Hay Community Resilience Initiative is a strategic, systems-change survival model. It is designed to mobilise and motivate local citizens to address the climate catastrophe by giving



communities genuine agency over their future.

At its core, it is a Rural Community Engagement Programme that uses Deliberative Democracy (Community Assemblies) as real democratic vehicles to create impactful action on issues where we already have — or want to gain — agency. The model is both replicable and adaptable.

We believe that bringing deliberative democracy into communities at the grassroots level can transform our failing democratic system in the UK. Our country is no longer administered by the people for the people. Local Community Assemblies can be the first step toward a future where Citizens' Assemblies sit above politicians and make policy decisions. In Hay-on-Wye, we view ourselves as part of a broader movement for UK system change. We are acting now, with the resources we have, where we are.

To bring about systems change, you must first change your ‘story’. In Hay, we have done just that. We no longer see ourselves as subjects of the ‘Crown’, or as mere ‘consumers’ or ‘consumer statistics’ in a neoliberal capitalist system that plunders both people and planet. Instead, we see ourselves as ‘citizens’ of our community, part of nature, and empowered to shape our own future.<sup>1</sup>

Our model is also grounded in the concept of [Doughnut Economics](#). Kate Raworth, who pioneered this framework, has created a compass that communities, cities, and even nations can use to address the climate emergency and reimagine their economies. Her book is a page-turner, and cities around the globe are adopting her approach. When she heard about our work in Hay, she wrote this message in our copy of her book:

***“For the Citizens of Hay – Here’s to a thriving local future. Can you live in the doughnut?”***

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Our answer to Kate: Yes, we can — and we will. There is no other choice.

## How to Begin

### 1. Find Support

Begin by identifying two or three individuals in your community who are committed to working alongside you. Sharing the workload is essential.

### 2. See What We Did

Watch our presentation to the [Great Collaboration Group](#)<sup>2</sup>, which outlines everything we accomplished between August 2022 and August 2024. Because of what we achieved, much of the groundwork does not need to be repeated. Governments, agencies, local authorities, and funders are now taking resilience initiatives seriously. The talk also reveals what was required to launch the initiative. It’s well worth your time.

The Great Collaboration described the initiative as:

***“A masterpiece of joined-up thinking on how to build a fresh way of looking at and living in your community, and then how to build resilience on the three pillars of food resilience, energy resilience, and wellbeing.”***

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***“This is one of those videos that should be the template of best practice in this arena.”***

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<sup>1</sup> “Why does this matter? Because, unlike the ‘citizen’, the ‘consumer’s means of expression is limited: while the ‘citizen’ can address every aspect of cultural, social and economic life... the ‘consumer’ finds expression only in the marketplace.” Justin Lewis - media and cultural analyst.

<sup>2</sup> The Great Collaboration invited us back for an update on 1st October ‘25, which can be found here: [Banter Session 89 in their knowledge base](#). See the Banter Session panel, including a table of all sessions, on the left-hand side of the page (link above), and you can find our first session in August ‘24 here - [Banter Session 34](#).

### 3. Define Your Community and Its Priorities

Define the boundaries of your community and identify the projects that resonate with them. (You may find that different groups in your community are drawn to differing priorities.)

In Hay, once people began to get involved, we defined our community as ‘Hay-on-Wye, population 2,500, and its surrounding villages’, which added a further 2,500 people. Together, we chose three core pillars: Food, Energy, and Mental Wellbeing. And how did we discover that? By talking to our citizens, in our case, to over 150 of them. Without exception, everyone was concerned about the climate issue, but none of them knew what to do about it. With further questioning, everyone agreed that the most important issues we needed to address as a community to ensure our future survival were Food, Energy and Mental Wellbeing. We had identified the most critical issues our citizens wanted to take control of.

Next, identify the individuals and organisations already working in those areas. Engage with them to understand their expertise, systems, and the challenges they face.

For example, I joined over 50 organisations in Wales, spent hours on Zoom calls, and built a clearer picture of how the system worked — and who we needed for support.

### 4. Design Your Strategic Model

Shape a strategy that fits both your community’s character and the groups already working locally. It must include a profit-making element to make the model self-sustainable, unless you are already fortunate enough to have a wealthy and benevolent patron.

### 5. Choose the Right Media

Find the most effective way to reach your community. Please don’t assume it’s social media. In Hay, we found leaflets inserted into our local news and advertising magazine had a far greater impact. Over 10% of our community (population 2,500) actively supported our Assemblies and the initiative. Expanding to a 7-mile radius (population 5,000) still yielded over 5% engagement — a remarkable reach.

### 6. Learn the Language

Understand the difference between [intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation](#) and [open vs. closed sentences](#). The way you frame your message matters.

People often ask how we attracted so many citizens to our Assemblies. The key was simple: We drove them to our Assemblies with intrinsic motivational sentences and intrinsic, open-ended sentences in our copy, and we gave them what they had asked for.

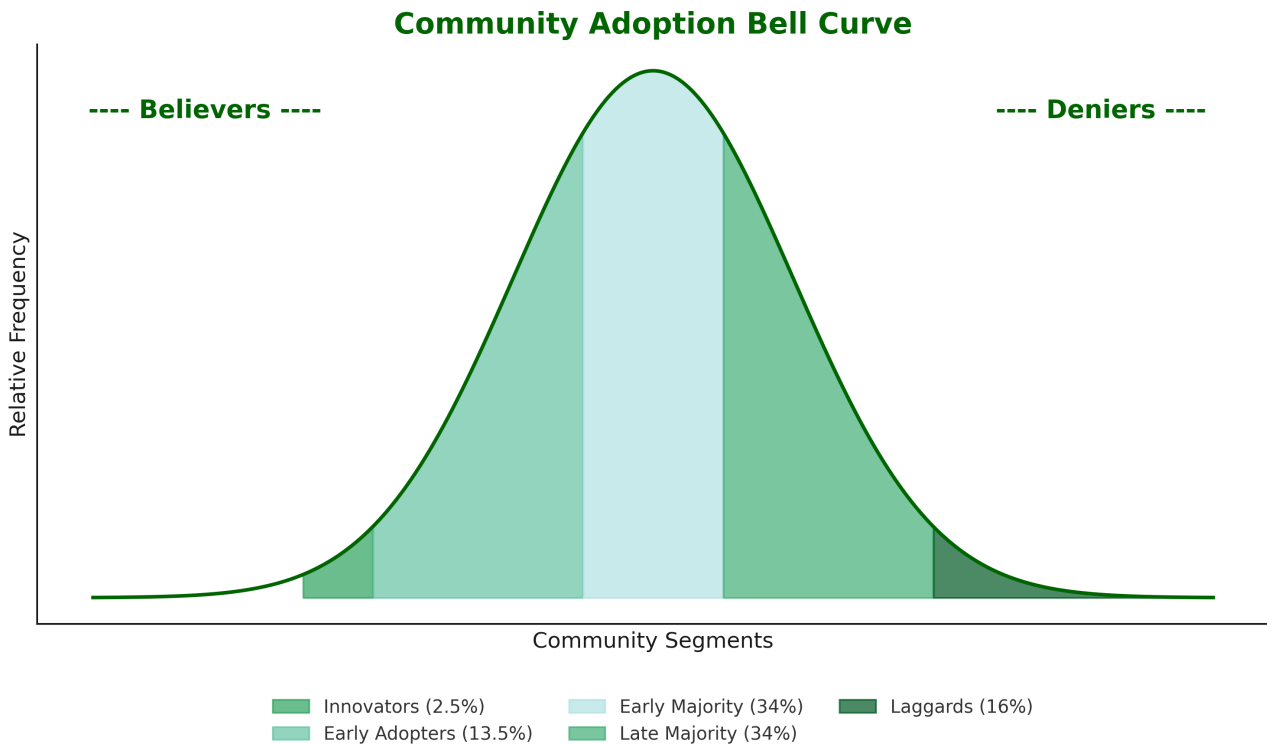
### 7. Craft Your Assembly Invitation<sup>3</sup>

We were deliberate about our marketing. We did not waste time trying to attract climate deniers or flat-earth believers.

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<sup>3</sup> The definitive book on understanding how all this works is [Simon Sinek’s ‘Start with Why - How great leaders inspire everyone to take action.’](#) If you genuinely want to understand, read this book repeatedly. It’s our bible for systems change and for our survival. [Or, at least, take a look at his TED Talk.](#)

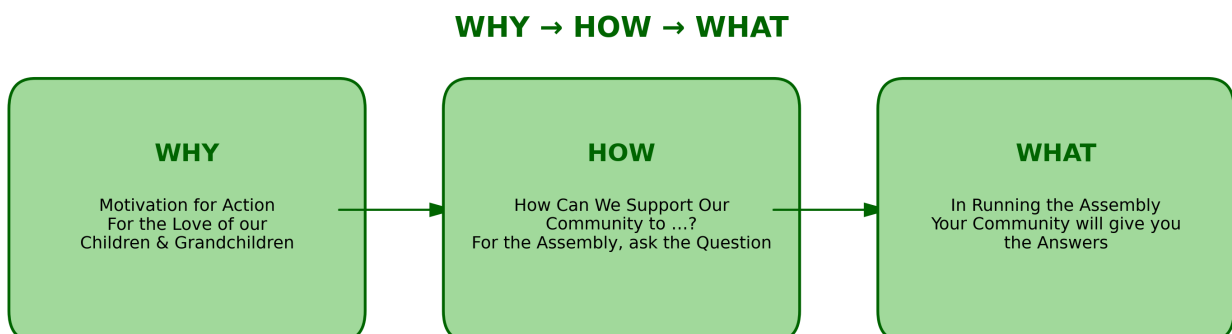
Think of your community as a bell curve. On the left are the believers, on the right the deniers. We focused only on the believers. Our role is not to persuade everyone, but to mobilise those already motivated. Once momentum builds, the late majority will follow.



Our strategy targeted Innovators (2.5%), Early Adopters (13.5%), and the Early Majority (34%). That’s 50% of any community. In Hay, our clear and compelling messaging engaged 20% of the believers – approximately 10% of our community overall.

We didn’t ask, “**What** should we do?” or “**What** do you want?” We had already learned **Why** people cared about resilience and survival: because they understood that the climate crisis was much worse than was being openly discussed. They wanted change - **Why?** Because of their love for their children and grandchildren, they wanted to ensure their survival.

So, we moved from the **Why** to the **How**. And the How, for us, was to launch each pillar of our initiative with a Community Assembly. We asked: “**How** can we support Hay-on-Wye to become self-sufficient in agroecologically grown food by 2030?”



The Assemblies then answered the question of 'What we should do' with concrete action proposals and their order of priority.

### 8. Secure Trained Facilitators & Note Takers

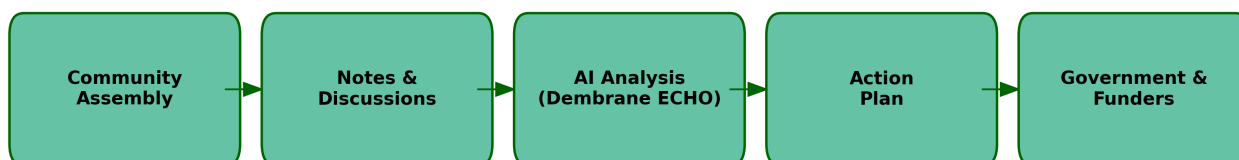
Assemblies need trained facilitators and note-takers. In Wales, we are working to build a national pool of professionals for this role. In the meantime, groups such as [Trust the People](#), [The Humanity Project](#), and [Time to Assemble](#) provide training and support.

Without trained facilitators, deliberative democracy cannot function.

### 9. Run Your Assemblies — and Capture the Results<sup>4</sup>

Use software such as [Dembrane ECHO](#) (or similar AI note-taking tools) to analyse Assembly outcomes. These reports provide the evidence you need to show a mandate for action — and to engage government agencies and funders.

#### From Assembly to Action & Impact



We tested AI analysis against human data analysts. We found it to be both accurate and faster, with the added benefit of anonymity and the ability to quote and cross-reference action points by table. [Here is a short video I made explaining how to use it.](#) It is more affordable than you might think and is indispensable.

### 10. Build a Self-Sustaining and Economically Viable Model

Your project should eventually become financially self-sustaining. Use grants for the launch phase and to establish structures, but plan for long-term funding through community shares, foundations, or bank loans, and eventually from profits. The money raised can then be used to match-fund projects or secure additional loans or grants. **Most importantly, profits can be used by each community to redistribute wealth**, subsidise food and energy, support those less well-off whose lives are a nightmare of financial struggle and injustice, who have fallen short of life's basics, and who live in the hole in the centre of the Doughnut.<sup>5</sup> This is the secret to moving from unsupportable growth to thriving.

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<sup>4</sup> As with all Assemblies, we used facilitators and note-takers. However, we used 3"x3" post-it notes, forcing concise thinking, and collected Opinions separately from Action points.

<sup>5</sup> See page 51 of Kate Raworth's book *Doughnut Economics* and the [Doughnut Action Lab](#)

## 11. Use Trusted Institutions

We used our new Hay Public Library Assembly Service to run our Assemblies.

Back in 2015, our Conservative County Council, under pressure from Westminster to cut services, planned to close all rural public libraries in Powys. Many failed to recognise the critical role libraries play in literacy, knowledge, and community empowerment<sup>6</sup>.

In Hay, more than 400 citizens formed Hay-on-Wye Library Supporters (HOWLS) to resist closure. By 2018, when closure seemed inevitable, HOWLS created a CIC — HayPublicLibrary.org (HPL) — to represent the town. HPL built relationships with Powys Councillors and negotiated a *renewable* five-year contract to keep the library open.

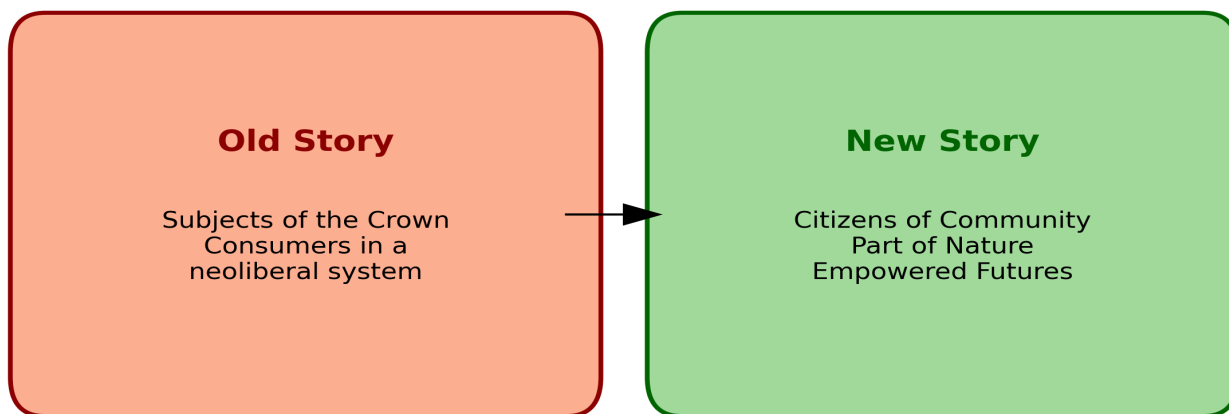
Part of HPL's vision was to develop the capacity to run Community Assemblies as a Public Library Service. In 2021, this became a reality.

Why does this matter? By running Assemblies through HayPublicLibrary.org, our CIC — with the support of the Powys Library Service and Powys Council — became an overt part of the establishment. And when you're inside the system, you have a much better chance to change it, peacefully, and from within.

## 12. Take Agency — Take Back Control

At its heart, the Hay Model is about agency: giving people back control over the issues that affect their lives.

### Changing the Story



The model was created to bring about systems change. That means:

- Changing our story.
  - Introducing deliberative democracy through Community Assemblies.
  - Giving communities the ability to take agency over survival issues.

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<sup>6</sup> "Libraries Give Us Power" - Manic Street Preachers. In June 2009, the Manic Street Preachers were asked to open Cardiff's new £15 m Library. Inscribed on the opening plaque to the new building is [the first line from the 'Design For Life track'](#). Hay Public Library's CIC logo is emblazoned with their words: "Libraries Give us Power".

- Embedding Assemblies in public institutions like libraries.
- Providing a template rural resilience model that others can adapt and replicate.

## So, What Is the Hay Community Resilience Initiative?



As citizens of our local community we can achieve self-sufficiency in Renewable Energy and Locally Grown Real Food by 2035, while changing the culture around Mental Wellbeing such that we are prepared to care for each other with new resilient institutions, and a new 'story'. It is designed from the grassroots up and driven by kindness.

**VISIT: <https://HayResilience.org>**

**[Mike.Eccles@HayPublicLibrary.org](mailto:Mike.Eccles@HayPublicLibrary.org)**

It is a grassroots mechanism introducing deliberative democracy, enabling citizens to achieve:

- Self-sufficiency in renewable energy by 2035 and in locally grown, real food by 2030.
- A culture of mental wellbeing that supports caring for one another through resilient institutions and a new collective story.

It is designed from the ground up and driven by kindness.

Without emphasising it, this model directly addresses our community's carbon footprint. In choosing Food and Energy as two of our three pillars, we can achieve:

- A 22% cut in emissions arising from food consumption <sup>7</sup>
- A 51% cut in emissions arising from energy usage
- And a 31% cut in non-CO2 emissions arising from land use as a result of habitat restoration, land use change and sustainable farming practices.

<sup>7</sup> Figures from the Bannau Brycheiniog National Park [Management Plan 2023-2028](#) (p.131)

But it is also a model for radical systems change — returning the UK to true democracy: government for the people, by the people. A democracy where we live sustainably within our planetary boundaries, and where:

- No human in any community falls below the social foundation.
- No human, corporation, or nation rises above the planetary ecological ceiling.

Where we create and live harmoniously within a regenerative, distributive economy: the Doughnut —A safe and just space for humanity and nature to thrive.

### From Community Assemblies to Systems Change



- That is why Kate Raworth asked of our community:

***“Can you live in the doughnut?”***

- Our question to you is the same:

**Can you? And can you also bring your community with you?**

Warmly,

Mike Eccles

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