

County Durham Community Energy Network Meeting 23/06/26

Attendees: Stephen McDonal (DCC), Craig Richardson & Rox Nicholls (East Durham Trust), Fiona Dyer (Climate Action Durham), Hilary Anderson (RDC), John Taylor (Community Energy England), Susan Manson (NEY Net Zero Hub), Susan Ross (ED Energy), Isla Ballard (DCA), Allison Lishman (DCA)

Apologies: Lindsay Henderson (DCA), Ellie Mackay (ED Energy)

Agenda Item	Key Points	Actions/Links
Welcome and Introductions	Isla welcomed all to the meeting noting Lindsay was unexpectedly unavailable. Those in attendance gave a brief introduction of themselves	
Policy changes and funding opportunities	Susan Manson noted there are x2 main local power plans with significant Government funding (£1 billion) to enable every community to have their own community energy project by 2030. Delivery to be established, expressions of interest to be received. The local authority will only be allowed to solely bid but can in joint with a community organisation. At a local level, the North East Energy Accelerator has £3 million coming for low carbon projects (hopefully to support x44 projects) and is looking to involve the wider public and volunteer sectors. Great British Energy programme, details are still awaited on support for community energy and a capital toolkit will be undertaken very soon. John Taylor noted he feels this will be in the same format at previously, early stages feasibility for grass-roots projects. Community Energy Go is still accepting expressions of interest. UK RI Flexibility competition (£25 million) – information received on a collaborative project to fund innovative solutions for industrial/commercial organisations to support energy flexibility.	Community Energy GO Susan Manson to forward email

	North East Feasibility have a pilot offer and are looking for community groups in the North East to test their digital app. Hilary Anderson noted there is a small pot of funding from Northern Powergrid Foundation for EV charging projects. John Taylor noted there is a pot of money in the Energy Redress Scheme although the application window is closing very soon. Isla Ballard noted that National Lottery Awards for All Environment strand had an underspend – an update to be circulated in due course.	Energy Redress Scheme
Member updates	<u>Susan Manson</u> Great British Energy funding has been allocated for projects happening until end March 2027, detailed information on the next round of funding is awaited. Andrea Baxter (North East Regional Manager for the Combined Authority) is delivering accelerator funding. NEY Net Zero Hub have funded work with Susan Edge along with RDC and CAN which is a good achievement. South Tyneside are keen to work with Durham Diocese supporting wider community energy projects. Have been in conversation with Community Power Solutions (only community owned wind turbine facility) who have some pro bono offers for feasibility studies for community wind farms. Susan has been in contact with Circular Malton regarding feasibility of a community heat energy hub, a local business has an anaerobic digester ready to go. Susan will share details <u>Craig Richardson & Rox Nicholls</u> Events have been held in Shotton around solar power around Energy Democracy and how it works in practice. The events have allowed the community to air concerns and have these addressed. The community is now more positive.	Circular Malton details to be shared – Susan Manson

	Durham Project – Energy Debt Advice support – this is going further to also advise on ways to save money/look for behaviour change. Horden Mine Water – this is going well and at the end of feasibility studies. The community is engaged and conversations are ongoing with local authority and local councillors. East Durham Trust are working with the Anthropology department of Durham University on participatory research with a view to provide sills to question/analyse data. Craig noted there have been technical studies to look at a viable scheme although there is a struggle for funding. Looking at key elements on having local power (wind/solar) to progress the project which is looking to attract business to the local industrial estate. Discussion took place following a query from Fiona on if the output from the mine water would benefit local community or a new housing development. The output will benefit the local community by attracting businesses to the industrial estate. <u>Stephen McDonald</u> Seaham Garden Village geo thermal project is proceeding with pipes now in the ground. <u>Fiona Dyer</u> Climate Action Durham raises money through a shareholder scheme for Big Solar and held a Clear Air event at Durham Town Hall – look at moving away from fossil fuels and interested in what is happening in local villages. <u>Susan Ross</u> Undertook a project alongside DCA, RDC and CAN around a net zero hub looking at what are the barriers and how to overcome. There is a pipeline of x4 further projects along with workshops on: Opportunities & Barriers; Validate Feedback & Solutions; Resources & Studies. It is felt a regional structure is needed by using existing expertise, peer support, etc. Susan will be attending DCA’s Community Energy in County Durham in-person event on 7th July and will produce a more detailed report. There are still places available and a booking can be made using the link opposite. <u>John Taylor</u>	Community Energy in County Durham Event
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	Held National Conference in Birmingham along with their partner (Younity) and launched Community Power Clubs – can offer localised community tariffs to those organisations exporting power to grid. In conversation with Coalfields Regeneration Trust around working community wide, in particular, South Wales on how community energy benefits local communities. In partnership with Music Venues Trust who work with grass-root music venues struggling to meet energy costs, they help obtain funding for renewables, solar, etc. Following a survey it was found Newcastle upon Tyne was in the top percentage – looking to undertake a pilot. John had a recent meeting with Compassionate Energy around privately funded battery model – John to circulate further details. <u>Hilary Anderson</u> DEAL (Durham Energy Association Ltd) has recently become registered as CBS. DEAL focuses on installing solar panels/battery storage in community spaces using the NCEL model. In process of obtaining funding for equipment, solar surveys have been done and structural surveys are underway, feasibility studies are underway for x5 big generators. DEAL is still very new but have recently appointed committee members. Linking with Stephen on Great British Energy for council buildings, attended the recent community energy conference on NCELS dealing with retrospectively fitting of equipment and the issues of PPA agreement and aggregated energy whereby only 5 kwh can be stored back to the grid and also around getting money for energy sent to the grid. Further discussion with power companies is needed. There are challenges where some buildings in rural areas are not able to have electric smart meters. It is hoped more lobbying of Government will provide more support for the model. There is also an ongoing issue with segregated route were brokers will help for a cost but are not engaging. The PPA rate is classed as a small producer – a look to be taken to see if it could be done as smaller batches of 5 to try to overcome the aggregated building challenge. Phase 2 is being looked at and funding to be found for structural surveys and planning.	<u>Community Power Clubs</u> Circulate information on Compassionate Energy - John
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	EV Project is looking at x5 rural areas in Teesdale to instal chargers, the project is working with Cybermoor and Charge My Street who are carrying out studies. It is noted Great British Energy refused to participate as the project is not an energy generator. <u>Stephen McDonald</u> DCC is talking with rural communities on how to distribute the network (based on Swaffham Prior model). The role is to support community groups to take forward community energy projects, not necessarily low carbon but focussed on communities who want to take forward their own projects. BEPP project is still ongoing providing support to SME and can now support the community/voluntary sector with audits up to April 2027. Bidding is ongoing for a bigger project with NEMSA to deliver a North East wide scheme. <u>Isla Ballard</u> DCA's CAIRN project is ongoing in partnership with RDC and CAN. From the home audits currently being completed it has been found to be a good way for DCA to be in place for community carbon assessments/community energy information. The home audits are being completed in Middleton in Teesdale, Weardale and Tow Law. Support is being given to Weardale Renewables around community engagement – see details in events. Community Spaces project is around energy efficiency for community buildings and has led to discussions on how community buildings can stay open for local people in times of emergency.	
Events and Comms	<u>DCA</u> A Community Energy Conference to be held 07/07/2026 at Shildon (in-person event) to build knowledge on community energy in County Durham, there will be speakers from DCA, RDC and also Susan Manson and Susan Ross. There are still spaces available and a place can be booked using the link opposite. A Community Energy newsletter is being circulated quarterly, if members have information they would like in the newsletter, they can forward to Lindsay or Isla.	Community Energy Conference

	Weardale Renewables are hosting x4 events with support from DCA in rural areas of Weardale. Roy Williams will be discussing plans for a solar farm with local residents. <u>CAN/RDC</u> Hillary noted funding is being applied for a regional rural community energy event in September through the CAIRN partnership. <u>Community Energy England</u> John Taylor noted the first 2 weeks in July are the Community Energy Fortnight, he feels it would be good to promote DCA's events on their website. A Fossil Free Farming Summit is to be held, John will update in due course. The theme is around regenerative farming, Isla noted DCA has the Food and Growing Network. <u>Climate Action Durham</u> Work is ongoing on a formal action plan for the group. <u>Durham County Council</u> A new environment study incorporating broader elements and thematic areas is about to go to Cabinet for sign off. This will be a council document not a partnership document and will be internally focussed. There is to be a Food and Rural Farming event on 21/07/2026 at Hardwick Park, Sedgefield to promote County Durham producers especially around the hospitality sector. <u>NEY Net Zero Hub</u> Susan noted Hull City Council ran a community energy conference and are keen to support community energy and are setting up a partnership with groups working with those with limited resources and provide clear signposting for groups. Northern Gasworks are piloting an anaerobic programme to provide heat, will forward contact person's details in due course.	Community Energy Fortnight Food & Rural Farming Eventbrite
AOB	None	

Date of Next Meeting	To be confirmed	
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