



**DURHAM
COMMUNITY
ACTION**

Community Energy in County Durham: Building a Shared, Sustainable Future

7 July 2026



CAIRN

Climate Action in Rural North East



Welcome and Opening remarks

Kate Burrows
Executive Director DCA



DURHAM
COMMUNITY
ACTION



CAIRN

Climate Action in Rural North East

Introduction to the day



Lindsay Henderson
Community Development Manager DCA

Facebook and LinkedIn @DurhamCommunityAction
#CommunityEnergyFortnight and #UpTheEnergy



Community Energy England presentation



NE & Yorkshire Net Zero Hub Support for Community Energy

Sue Manson – Community Development Officer
North East and Yorkshire Net Zero Hub



There are 5 Local Net Zero Hubs across England – North East & Yorkshire, North West, Midlands, Greater South East, and South West

Net Zero Hubs are funded by the Department of Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) with programme funding from GBE

The Hubs aim to accelerate & support local clean energy/ net zero ambitions & projects, attract investment and share models and information

The Hub have a central team who support different types of Net Zero activity and a local representative for strategic authority area

Community Energy Team



Abbie Raynes
Net Zero Hub Project Manager and
Community Energy Lead



Emma Dowson
Project Officer for Community
Energy



Sue Manson
Community Energy Development
Officer

All enquiries sent to the inbox will be passed on to one of the Community Energy Team who will respond ASAP

Please contact
enquiries@NEYnetzerohub.com

[Join NEY NZ Hub mailing list for updates](#)

[Web page - NEY NZ Hub Community Energy Support](#)



How is the Hub Supporting Community Energy?

- Funding programmes eg CEF, GBECF
- Capacity Building:
 - Carbon Literacy Training
 - Video Case Studies
 - Community Energy Surgeries
 - Community Energy Workshop Recordings
 - Seeing is Believing Programme
- Community Energy Development Officer & Regional Project Managers
- Community Energy Steering Group
- Solar for Business PPA templates – LAs & CE groups
- Solar Canopies assessment toolkit

Sign up to our [mailing list](#) to receive policy & community energy info & updates.



What is Community Energy?

- Community energy is the delivery of community-led or co-led renewable energy projects
- Projects are community owned or developed in partnership with commercial or public sector organisations **and provide community benefits**
- Community energy is about people and communities taking control over their energy future, by understanding, generating, and saving energy in their communities, as well as working together across regions and nationally
- 'Community energy can supply heat and power and advice to any person or company who needs it'



Community Energy can be about
Saving, Managing
or Generating Clean Energy

Benefits of Community Energy - Why is it Important?

- Profits/ benefits for local people / communities
- Builds community resilience – self sufficiency – storms, rising energy costs etc & empowers local communities
- Can help to tackle fuel poverty
- Creates jobs & supports the local & Circular Economy
- Supports the move towards renewable and clean energy generation
- Helps support development of new & innovative technologies
- Reduces reliance on the national grid / adds flexibility
- Helps deliver national & local decarbonisation, Net Zero and other strategic objectives



Types of Community Energy?

- **Saving energy** – reducing amount used, energy efficiency, insulation & ‘retrofit’ – energy saving advice
- **Managing energy** – flexible use of electricity, generating & using it locally, storing it – smart meters, community energy co-operatives, local energy clubs, batteries.
- **Generating clean energy – small & large scale**
eg. roof-top solar panels, air & ground source heat pumps, heat networks, ground mounted solar farms, small & large wind turbines, Anaerobic Digesters, local electric vehicle charging points, hydro schemes, Electric Vehicle car clubs



Community Energy Examples

- **County Durham – DEAL & The Teesside EV Charging project, East Durham Trust – AD, heat network, wind & solar, Spennymoor TC solar project, Weardale Renewables – solar & batteries**
- **Ferryhill Football Renewables** - solar panels and batteries to reduce energy bills and generate income – in partnership with the Town Council
- **Northumberland Community Energy Ltd** – community co-op installing solar & battery powered village halls
- **Settle Energy Local Club local energy club** for generating and selling energy at beneficial rates between local generators and local users, **Power Hull** local energy club & solar PV
- **Circular Malton & Norton CIC** - Yorkshire's 1st Circular Market Town
 - community anaerobic digester, industrial estate and community energy & heat networks
 - Circular hub with Reuse, Repair and Upcycling services - jobs, skills and revenue to reinvest
 - Community & business engagement & partnerships

Support For Community Energy

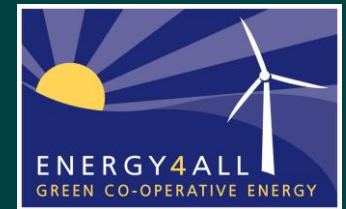
- **NEY NZ Hub Community Energy Team** - funding application support, advice, signposting, resources – templates, workshop & webinar recordings, case studies, capacity building support, PPA template, solar toolkit
- **GBE & the Local Power Plan** – £1bn funding & finance for all project stages. **Details awaited.** Mix of grants, loans & direct finance. **Partnership Fund & GBECF**, Construction & operation loans, Local Investment Fund. Wind, solar, hydro, batteries & flexibility priorities. **Recommend registering your interest at GBE**
- **Community Energy Go** - free, tailored support of £1k-10k for early stage community energy projects or groups undertaking new projects including LAs. Ringfenced support for the NEY area. **EOI to apply.**
- **Community Energy England** – wealth of free resources, templates, How Tos and other helpful info. Funding list, Grant application advice & resources, case studies, Funding applications workshop recording etc
- **Northern Powergrid Community Energy Team** provide hands on support for community projects including bid writing support & funding lists
- **Energy Learning Network** – Ashden – training, webinars, peer mentoring programme Technical Helpline, resources e.g. on planning, financial modelling, partnering for funding, community retrofit, shared ownership, heat networks etc.



More Support For Community Energy

- **Regional CE Organisations & Community Infrastructure Organisations** e.g. NCEL, DEAL, Community Foundations – host funding platforms, manage community grant pots, governance & application checking, host CE networks – **Durham Community Action & Point North**
- **Community Energy Not For Profit organisations**, CICS & Co-ops e.g. Rural Design Centre, Big Solar Co-op, Energy4All - supports 33 renewable-energy co-operatives, Communities for Renewables – development & financing
- **Local Authority Teams** – Climate, Community, Neighbourhoods, Transport & Estates teams
- **Community Share Raising** - Community Shares | Co-operatives UK, Energy4All - Supporting Renewable Energy Co-ops in the UK
- **Social investment platforms** – eg, Ethex, Abundance Investment
- **Net Zero Go** – for Local Authorities. Hosts a wealth of resources, templates, and forums including a Community Energy forum.
- **Younity Community Power Club & Community Connect Volunteering portal**

co₂sense™



CO-OPERATIVES UK



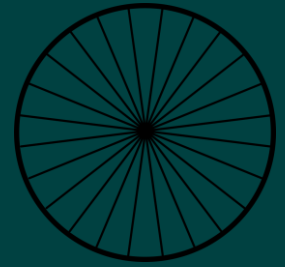
Getting Started - Don't reinvent the wheel!

Research & Talk to others – are groups doing similar projects? Lessons learnt & funding routes, case studies & existing models to replicate. Local & national community energy forums / networks e.g. CEE Loomio.

Work together

- **Partner up** – with like minded groups, existing community energy groups or organisations, your local authority, businesses, energy developers etc. Bulk / collective buying opportunities?
- **Talk to your local council** – climate, communities, education, estates or transport teams may be interested in partnering or supporting you or know of council funding – your project may help them deliver their local & strategic plans or objectives.
- **Funding** – Is there a local umbrella organisation that could help pull together a collaborative project or bid? Eg community energy co-op projects eg NCEL Solar Powered Village Halls, Community Foundations, Faith organisations. Could you apply for funding for a few village halls/community buildings together?

Scope your project & funding needs – feasibility, development, installation, ongoing management/ maintenance costs. Talk to funders.



Funding - Feasibility & Development - Revenue

Not all projects will need funding for their feasibility & development work e.g. Small scale or single buildings - GBE Feasibility template for aspects to cover.

Funding

- **GBE & the Local Power Plan – Details to be announced.** £1bn funding & finance for all project stages. Mix of grants, loans & direct finance. Partnership Fund & GBECF, Construction & operation loans, Local Investment Fund. Wind, solar, hydro, batteries & flexibility priorities. **Recommend registering your interest at GBE.**
- **Energy Industry Voluntary Redress Scheme** - capital or revenue funding to support / benefit vulnerable consumers. Minimum grants - Small Projects Fund £20,000 & Main Fund £50,000. Carbon Emissions Reduction Fund £20k min.
- **Community Energy Go** - free, tailored support of £1k-10k for early stage community energy projects or groups undertaking new projects including LAs. Ringfenced support for the NEY area. **EOI to apply.**
- **National Lottery Awards for All** – up to £20k, environment theme. 16 week turnaround
- **Networks Co-op** – offering 100 free desktop heat network feasibility assessments & 20 detailed studies.
- **Grassroots Grants – Groundwork** < £2k grants
- **Greggs Foundation** – Community Action Fund up to £20k for core costs

Delivery Funding - Installation – Capital Funding #1

- **GBE & the Local Power Plan** – details to be announced. (GBE Capital Toolkit launching Summer 2026)
- **Key Fund Energy Resilience Fund** - 6.5% loans for retrofit energy generating/saving technology on community owned or managed buildings - £10k-£150k
- **Energy Industry Voluntary Redress Scheme** - capital or revenue funding up to 2 years to support / benefit vulnerable consumers. Minimum grants - Small Projects Fund £20,000 & Main Fund £50,000. Administered by Energy Saving Trust.
- **Local trusts and charities** – search free funding portals for your type of project . Local Funding & Grants | One Community Kirklees, North East Community Foundation Funding & Grants, Up for Funding -Up for Yorkshire funding portal
- **National Grid Community Grant Programme** – eg for energy efficiency measures near grid infrastructure projects
- **Veolia Environmental trust** £10k-£75k –for creation of a carbon neutral community space
- **SUEZ Communities Landfill Fund** up to £50k

Delivery Funding – Installation - Capital Funding #2

- National Lottery Awards for All – can fund solar on community but not sports buildings
- Screwfix Foundation – for improved energy efficient lighting & heating <£5k
- Boiler Upgrade Scheme – Up to £7,500 to replace domestic & small/medium non-domestic fossil fuel boilers with air & ground source heat pumps & some biomass boilers, potential for some churches
- Congregational & General Charitable Trust up to £25k for Protestant churches (not solar alone)
- Matthew Good Foundation - Small Charity Funding up to £5,000 for people & planet
- Asda Foundation Local Community Spaces Fund - £10k-£20k, 28 April deadline, roof repairs & window upgrades
- **For larger projects - loans & social, commercial investors** e.g. Younity Community Energy Kickstart, Your Co-op Energy & Younity – short term finance construction/fitting costs of new renewables, grants for groups to develop expertise on community energy
- YORhub – ‘sustainability’ theme - sometimes has capital grants

Resources #1

- [NEY Net Zero Hub](#) – community energy mailing for key funding updates - [North East and Yorkshire Net Zero Hub Newsletter sign up](#)
- [Great British Energy – Local Power Plan & Express your interest | Great British Energy \(NEY NZ Hub Local-Power-Plan-Briefing.pdf\)](#)
- CEE & People Powered Homes [How Communities Can Fund & Sell Their Own Power](#)
- [Net Zero Go](#) – available to Local Authorities. Hosts a wealth of resources, templates and forums.
- [GOV-UK Find a Government Grant](#)
- [ELN Building a business case for community energy generation projects](#)
- [Shared Ownership for a Just Transition - Regen](#)

Resources #2

- [CE Governance Guide](#) – created by the CSE and the GSE Hub.
- [Collaborating on CE: A Guide for Local Authorities](#) – created by CAG Consultants, CSE, and GSE Hub.
- [Community Energy Workshop Recordings](#) - NEY NZ Hub series of beginner and intermediate level workshops designed for CE groups and LAs.
- [Community Energy Video Case Studies](#) - showcasing some previous CE success stories in the North East & Yorkshire NZ Hub area.
- [CEE's National Community Energy Map](#) - shows locations of renewable energy generation and some energy advice and energy efficiency services.
- [Ethex - How To Raise Finance](#) – [Friendly Guide to Community Shares, IFISAs & Ethical Bonds](#)
- [Younity Community Connect Volunteering Portal](#)

Thank you

To get in touch email enquiries@NEYnetzerohub.com

Sign up to our mailing list for future funding, events & info at [North East and Yorkshire Net Zero Hub Newsletter sign up](#)

[Web page - NEY NZ Hub Community Energy Support](#)

Sue Manson – Community Energy Development Officer
North East and Yorkshire Net Zero Hub
susan.manson@teesvalley-ca.gov.uk





Questions and Table discussions



DURHAM
COMMUNITY
ACTION



CAIRN

Climate Action in Rural North East

Break



Come back for 11.30am



DURHAM
COMMUNITY
ACTION



CAIRN

Climate Action in Rural North East

Climate Action in Rural North East



Partnership

Community Action Northumberland (Lead), Durham Community Action, Rural Design Centre & NICRE (evaluation)

Funding

Climate Action Fund (NLCF) 2024 to 2028



DURHAM
COMMUNITY
ACTION



CAIRN

Climate Action in Rural North East

About CAIRN



- Supporting *rural* communities to take climate action
- Helping people reduce energy costs and save energy
- Supporting community energy and renewable projects
- Providing advice, training, and local activities
- Building stronger, more sustainable communities



DURHAM
COMMUNITY
ACTION



CAIRN

Climate Action in Rural North East



Key areas of delivery

Community Energy

Supporting community-led renewable energy and local energy projects.

Carbon Reduction

Helping communities identify ways to reduce carbon emissions and improve sustainability.

Energy Advice

Providing free home energy audits to help households reduce energy use and lower bills.



DURHAM
COMMUNITY
ACTION



CAIRN

Climate Action in Rural North East



Key areas of delivery

Training & Skills

Building local knowledge and skills around climate action and energy efficiency.

Inspiring Young People

Encouraging young people to get involved in climate awareness and local action.

Learning & Evaluation

Capturing learning, sharing good practice, and measuring project impact.



DURHAM
COMMUNITY
ACTION



CAIRN

Climate Action in Rural North East



DURHAM
COMMUNITY
ACTION



Community Carbon Assessments



CAIRN

Climate Action in Rural North East



What we offer

Work with communities to identify main sources of emissions

Identify local people to move things forward

Highlight opportunities to reduce emissions

Support local people to identify priorities

Use evidence gathered to support funding applications and action plans



DURHAM
COMMUNITY
ACTION



CAIRN

Climate Action in Rural North East



DURHAM
COMMUNITY
ACTION



Community Energy



CAIRN

Climate Action in Rural North East

What we offer



Support local communities to understand energy needs and opportunities

Support local community engagement events

Organise networking opportunities to connect people

Working with partners to build a regional support network

Continue to support DEAL and the EV Charging project



**DURHAM
COMMUNITY
ACTION**



CAIRN

Climate Action in Rural North East



DURHAM
COMMUNITY
ACTION



Home Energy Audits



CAIRN

Climate Action in Rural North East



What do we offer?

- Understanding Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs) and home energy efficiency
- Carbon Monoxide awareness (free CO2 alarm if they do not have one)
- Advice on heating controls, smart meters and appliances
- Support with grants, tariffs and insulation options
- Thermal imaging to identify heat loss
- FREE small measure energy-saving items



DURHAM
COMMUNITY
ACTION



CAIRN

Climate Action in Rural North East



Why does it matter?

- Small behaviour changes can make a big difference to bills
- Turning thermostats down by 1°C could save around £80 a year
- Taking a 4-minute shower can save you money.
- Switching to LED bulbs could save around £40 a year
- Supports warmer, healthier and more energy-efficient homes



DURHAM
COMMUNITY
ACTION



CAIRN

Climate Action in Rural North East



How can you help?

Help us reach rural and isolated communities and people

- Promote the free audits
- Share information through your networks
- Invite us to your existing groups to talk through the offer
- Contact us to book a free home energy audit

Contact Durham Community Action for more information:



Interested in saving money on
your energy bills?



Book your **FREE** Home Energy Audit today

Durham Community Action are offering free independent home energy audits to people across rural County Durham.
Our energy team will help you understand your energy use and how to make small changes that could make a big difference to your bills and carbon footprint.

How we can support

-  Help you understand your Energy Performance Certificate and home energy efficiency ✓
-  Share practical advice on maximising the use of energy to save money through heating controls, smart meters and appliances ✓
-  Support with grants and tariffs to make your home more energy efficient ✓
-  Using a thermal imaging camera to show heat loss and talk through your cavity or loft insulation options ✓
-  Give **FREE** home energy efficiency measures such as LED bulbs, radiator panels, carbon monoxide detectors ✓



Scan the QR
code to start
your home
audit



Did you know?

-  The recommended health home temperature is 18°C ✓
-  Turning thermostats down by 1°C saves around £80 a year ✓
-  Switching old light bulbs to LED could save £40 a year ✓
-  By October 2030 all rental properties need an EPC 'C' rating ✓

Small changes can make a big difference!

Our informal Home Energy Audit can help you make these changes and save money.

Interested?

For more information, contact Durham Community Action on 01388 742040, email info@durhamcommunityaction.org.uk or visit our website www.durhamcommunityaction.org.uk





DURHAM
COMMUNITY
ACTION



Inspiring Young People



CAIRN

Climate Action in Rural North East

Our aims



- Inspire the next generation to lead climate action locally
- Build knowledge, confidence, and practical climate skills
- Co-produce resources to encourage behaviour change
- Empower participants to shape ideas, activities, and delivery
- Support and develop a network of Climate and Energy Champions across County Durham's rural communities (and beyond)
- Build opportunities to link with the NE Green job revolution!

Help us reach rural and isolated communities



Contact Durham Community Action for more information:

Info@durhamcommunityaction.org.uk

01388 742040

Sign up and stay informed through our:

[Community Energy Newsletter](#)



DURHAM
COMMUNITY
ACTION



CAIRN

Climate Action in Rural North East



the Rural Design Centre

Purpose-driven, design-led

Durham Community Energy Association (DEAL)
& The Teesdale EV Charging Project



DEAL
Durham Energy
Association Limited

A new community energy model for County Durham

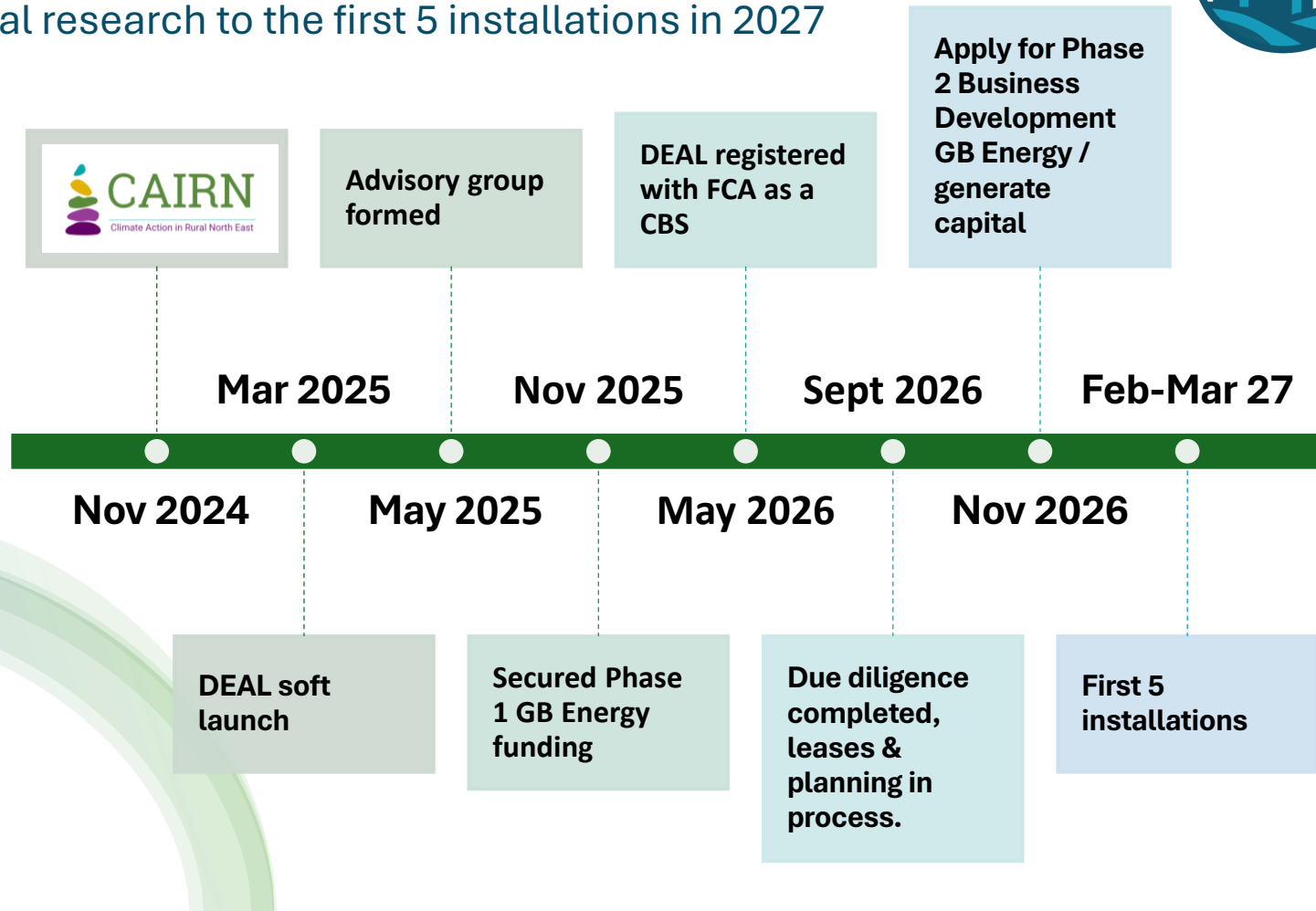
How could DEAL work for your community space?

The DEAL journey:

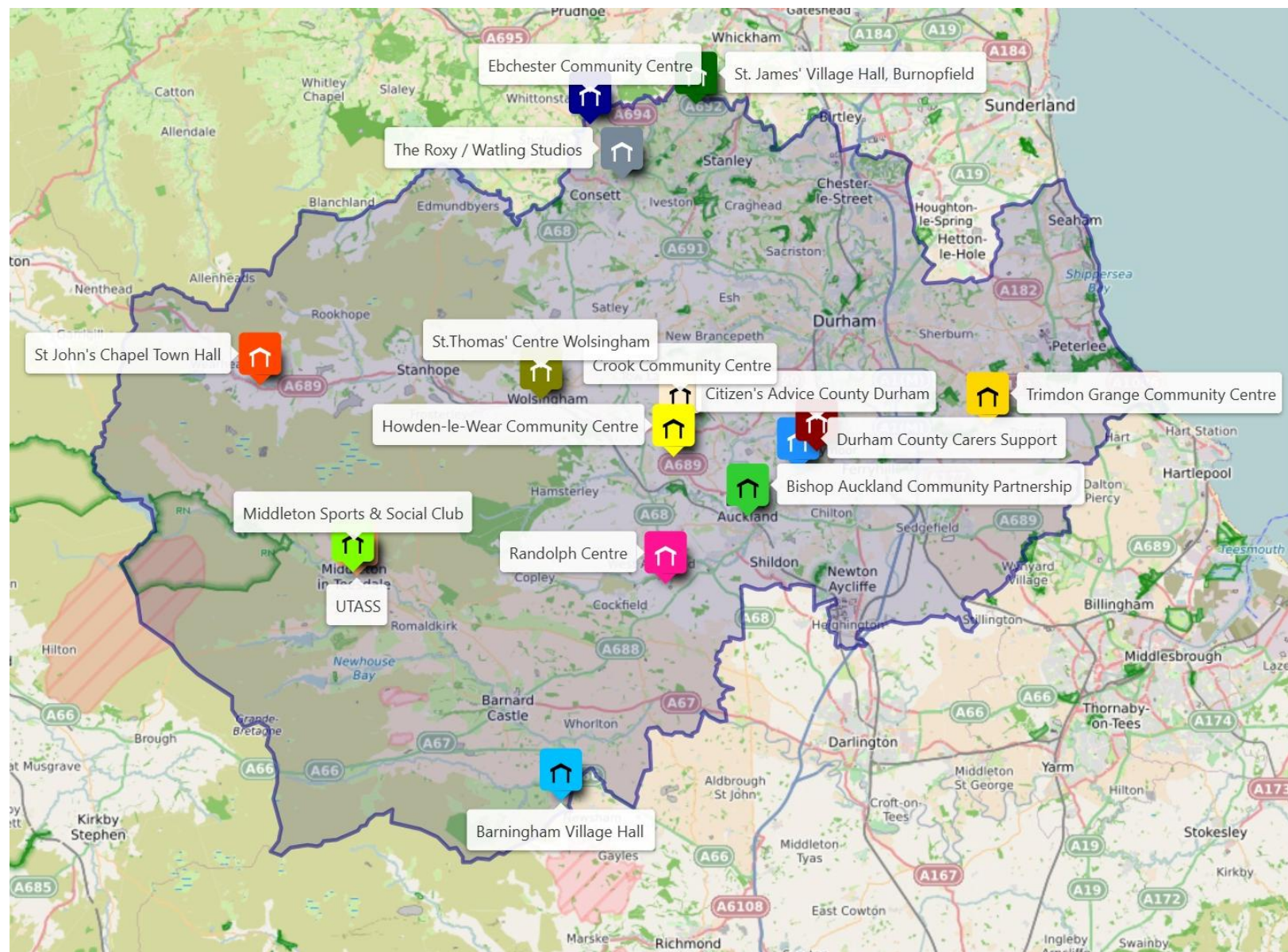
From initial research to the first 5 installations in 2027



DEAL
Durham Energy
Association Limited



Solar Feasibility Studies Completed



1) DEAL apply for planning permission. If approved, your building will lease DEAL roof and battery space for 20 years.

2) DEAL installs solar panels, inverters and/or batteries on your building free of charge, insured and maintained for 20 years.

3) DEAL sells any generated electricity from the panels on your roof to your building at a fixed rate for the next 20 years.

4) Your generated electricity is either used by your building or stored in the battery (if you have one).

5) If the generation is not sufficient, your building can use electricity from the battery or from your existing tariff (supplied by the grid).

6) If the generation is sufficient and battery is full, DEAL can sell the excess electricity back to the grid through a Smart Export Guarantee (SEG). That helps to fund other installations in County Durham.



HOW IT WORKS



DEAL
Durham Energy
Association Limited



DEAL
Durham Energy
Association Limited

DEAL has two membership levels:

**Supporter - voting
power capped at 25%
of a vote**

**Core - holding
75% of the
main vote**

DEAL Planning Process:

**Planning consultant checks
planning permission of your
building**

**Determine whether
you need prior
approval or full
planning**

**Carry out specialist
reports if required –
bat survey, heritage**

**We deal with listed
buildings or faculty
consent for
ecclesiastical
buildings**

1. Planning



Setting objectives

- The first step in any project is to clearly set its objectives.
- This means defining **what** the project will deliver, **who** it is for or **who** will be involved, **when** it will take place, **where** it will happen, and **why** it is needed.
- Establishing these points at the outset provides a clear direction and purpose.

EXAMPLE: a project like DEAL sets out to provide solar PV systems and battery storage to community buildings, working with local groups across County Durham from 2025, in order to reduce energy costs and lower carbon emissions.

Useful questions to ask yourself before you start

QUESTION

What types of spaces will be eligible?
What about the buildings that already have their kit installed?

Who is your target market?

Who will be involved and (how) will they be paid?

Where will your project take place?

FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS

Do you just consider buildings without PV/batteries or will you include those that already have some kit (to take over)?

Are you considering ownership and definition of community building - church, sports, social clubs,...

Who will run the project? Will it be paid staff? Volunteers?

In one area or various locations?
In rural or urban space?

2. Preparation

This phase is about preparing the organisation by forming a steering group, defining structure and governance, and building credibility. It includes securing funding, planning staffing, engaging partners and professionals, and selecting suppliers. The goal is to establish strong foundations, clear processes, and resources needed to deliver a successful community energy project.



TIP: create simple branding (like a logo) and prepare member information packs to clearly explain your purpose and activities to others.

Steering group

Set up a small advisory group made up of interested people or halls. From this group, choose a few individuals to act as committee members, including a company secretary, these roles will need to be formally named when you register your organisation with the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). Next, agree on the basics of how your organisation will operate: decide on a name, how you will communicate your activities (for example, through your own website or by using an existing local organisation's platform to build trust and visibility), and which channels best reach your audience, such as LinkedIn, Facebook, or Instagram.

something to break it up

Legal structure

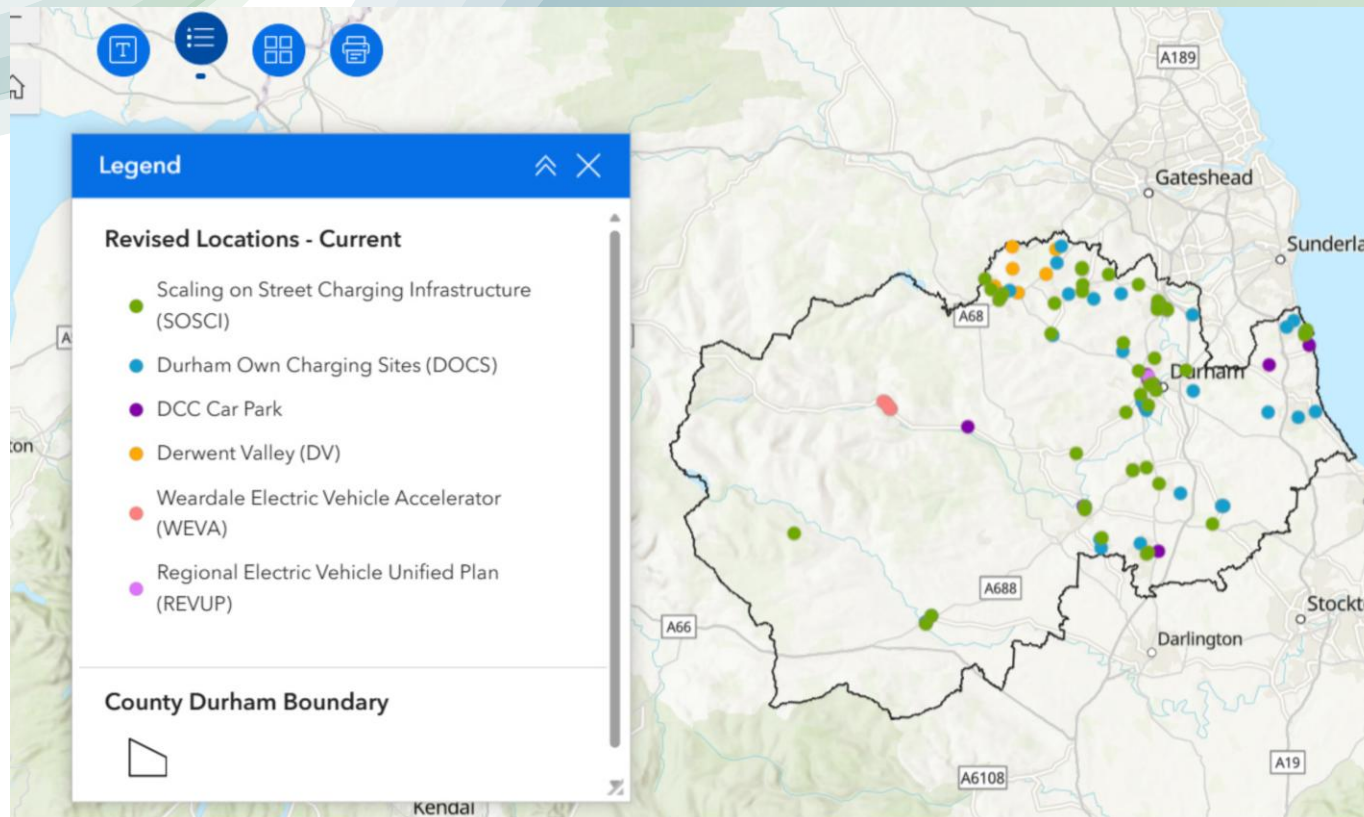
Work with your steering group to agree on the most suitable legal structure for your organisation, such as a Community Benefit Society (CBS) or a co-operative. You will also need to establish your governing rules (often called "terms of reference" or a constitution), which set out how your organisation will operate. Many groups base these on standard templates, such as Co-operative or Somerset rules, as these are widely recognised and help simplify the registration process. It's important to note that making significant changes to these rules in the future can involve additional costs.



DEAL
Durham Energy
Association Limited

Developing models and learning materials to help other communities

Teesdale EV Project: Low EV infrastructure and clear community interest



Durham Insights: Local Data Explorer. ArcGIS Experience Builder, 2025,
<https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/c281abf3379c49748950a2000102227f>.

Responses from our survey:

19% own an EV in Teesdale.

21% considering buying an EV car

52% "strongly support" and **19%** "support" the installation of community chargers in the area.



What happens next: Phase 2 process

5 Site consultations



Cybermoor update: Phase 2 choices

1) Progress all five sites

Move each location into technical survey and commercial modelling rather than filtering out too early.
Use a 7–22kW-first default

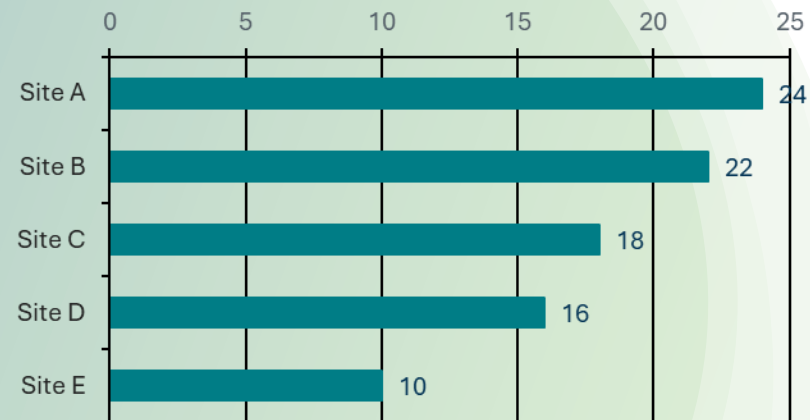
2-3) Prioritise integrated candidates

Most rural community hubs need proportionate grid cost and longer dwell-time charging.
 Use anonymised scoring to identify the strongest solar/EMS, battery and V2X-readiness candidates.

4) Keep V2X as upside for now

Flexibility revenue depends on DNO, metering, compatible vehicles and user consent — do not rely on it in the base case.

Indicative anonymised readiness ranking



Staged route to model at each site



Source: Cybermoor working report — anonymised indicative scores only; update after site consultation, technical survey and partner review.

Any questions?

Interested? Please feel free to pick up a DEAL member's pack if you require further information.

hilary.anderson@ruraldesigncentre.com





Questions and Table discussions



DURHAM
COMMUNITY
ACTION



CAIRN

Climate Action in Rural North East



Lunch and Networking

Come back 1.40pm



DURHAM
COMMUNITY
ACTION



CAIRN

Climate Action in Rural North East

Developing support for Community-led renewable energy projects in the North East

7th July 2026



Copyright © 2025 Edge Innovation Limited - Confidential



Our Funders

Who is helping us deliver this...

Funded by:



Delivered by Edge Innovation on behalf of:



Project Introduction

What it's all about...

- Understanding the real-world barriers and challenges that slow progress or prevent Community Energy projects from moving forward
- Highlighting opportunities and co-design solutions that reduce risk, increase confidence, and unlock momentum. Building on successful models like NCEL and DEAL to create a scalable, regional approach
- Support a more equitable, community-driven clean-energy transition for the North East

Research Overview



- Desk based research on Community Energy projects and previous research
- Discussions with Community Energy projects across the UK
- Discussions with organisations supporting Community Energy projects
- Engaged with 'larger' Community led Renewable Energy projects including workshops with:
 - Acomb
 - Humshaugh
 - Norham
 - Weardale
- Facilitated a validation and co-design session to explore possible support structures
- Collated insights into a project report

Summary of learnings



Our learnings

Summary learnings from stakeholder research sessions validated with representatives from Humshaugh, Norham and Acomb community energy groups.

- **Your motivations**
- **Your experience with key stakeholders:**
 - National Government Departments
 - Local Authorities
 - Community Energy Groups
 - Local Communities
 - Landowners
 - Distribution Network Operators
 - Consultants
 - Support agencies
 - Funders
- **Future Improvements**



Your Motivations

Why you got involved...

- Opportunity to contribute relevant expertise, develop new skills and build connections within your community
- Awareness of other successful projects provided evidence of feasibility
- Desire to create tangible impact through direct local community climate action
- Potential to utilise funds from community energy projects for local public services and future net zero projects
- Educate and inspire local residents about climate action
- Interest in influencing broader governance and support the national community energy movement
- Support from community energy group colleagues and trust in their expertise
- Confidence in community support, evidenced by positive resident feedback, meetings, and local investment

Stakeholder Opportunities and Barriers

National Government

Opportunities:

- Net zero policy has catalysed community energy activity and enabled development of projects
- Planned regulatory changes and the creation of GBE are positive for community energy e.g. PPAs, local procurement

Barriers:

- Slow progress from OFGEM and government on net zero and community energy
- Conflicting remits across government and competing political priorities (including national political shifts)
- Frequent consultations but limited action, with no clear long-term strategy or replicable funding roadmap for community energy

Stakeholder Opportunities and Barriers

Local Authorities including the North East Mayoral Strategic Authority

Opportunities:

- Strong political and strategic backing (climate declarations, Net Zero 2030 leadership, mayoral support)
- Local authority support through advice, mentorship, and planning guidance
- Access to funding and funding advice
- Networks and connections with other groups and support organisations

Barriers:

- Support relies on individual “champions” within local authorities
- Inconsistent political support and changing local authority priorities
- Centralised procurement limiting local community energy purchasing
- Funding challenges, including management issues and lack of viability assessments
- Loss of expertise due to staff turnover and reduced staffing
- Planning policy constraints and inconsistent application across authorities

Stakeholder Opportunities and Barriers

Community Energy Groups

Opportunities:

- Strong commitment to developing community energy (CE) projects – significant time volunteered
- Valuable skills and expertise already within CE groups
- Well-established community contacts and networks
- Shared learning and experience across CE groups
- Ability for CE projects to create replicable models to deliver economic and social returns
- CE funds can be used to develop other Net Zero projects or community services

Barriers:

- Funding pressures cause rushed processes and limits community engagement
- High skill demands, including governance, project management, technical knowledge, community engagement and communications
- High volunteer dependence, with challenges around recruitment, retention, conflict management, and wellbeing
- Difficulties accessing investment, low returns, and community limitations in raising finance
- Planning and technical constraints, grid costs, and location controversies
- Balancing project viability and desirability, where high or uncertain costs intersect with less publicly accepted renewables (wind)

Stakeholder Opportunities and Barriers

Local Communities

Opportunities:

- Diverse engagement methods in use, reaching a wide range of community members
- Strong community interest in CE, with residents supportive and actively engaged
- Community interest supports planning and funding, strengthening project viability
- Links with parish councils and existing net-zero groups build trust, credibility and local support

Barriers:

- Ongoing community engagement required, including early involvement to validate the scheme, repeated opportunities to ensure understanding and avoid exclusions
- Clear communications needed throughout the project, particularly around explaining and managing changes, which requires substantial time and resources.
- Social media challenges - skills and conflict management

Stakeholder Opportunities and Barriers

Landowners

Opportunities:

- Strong landowner engagement, with personal relationships and direct communications help to secure agreements
- Motivated landowners open to CE projects, driven by environmental as well as financial benefits
- Easier to gain agreement when using brownfield or low-yield land

Barriers:

- Difficulties engaging landowners without established relationships, heightened by scepticism, the “foreign” nature of community energy
- Need to clearly communicate financial and environmental benefits to gain credibility and support
- Planning and regulatory requirements add complexity, including biodiversity net gain obligations and deadlines that depend on active landowner participation

Stakeholder Opportunities and Barriers

Distribution Network Operators (DNOs)

Opportunities:

- Northern Power Grid (NPG) initial funding provides early financial support to kick-start community energy projects
- NPG's 5-year strategy offers a longer-term framework and alignment opportunity for future CE development

Barriers:

- Grid connection process not designed for community/non-commercial projects, no obligation on operators to support CE projects, considered a 'dark art'
- Complex negotiations requiring specialist expertise
- High cost and short-lived grid connection offers create financial risk, 90-day expiry
- Fees to maintain offers with potential loss of viability if timelines, processes or costs change

Stakeholder Opportunities and Barriers

Consultants

Opportunities:

- Consultants can fill capacity and capability gaps, providing specialised support across areas such as communication, planning, engagement, and investment

Barriers:

- Inconsistent communication and transparency from consultants, including unclear project requirements, hidden or additional costs, poor responsiveness, and over-reliance on consultant-led negotiations
- Variable consultant expertise, with some lacking local knowledge or giving poor advice that jeopardises projects, plus unclear guidance on planning requirements and added costs for small schemes

Stakeholder Opportunities and Barriers

Support agencies e.g Net Zero Hub, CAN, RDC

Opportunities:

- Support for community engagement, including help with research, volunteer recruitment, attending community meetings, answering questions, and providing third-party validation
- Access to wider support networks and resources, such as workshops, hands-on mentoring for CE groups, and connections with other community energy groups

Barriers:

- Inconsistent and limited support for CE groups, with unclear or changing programmes, varying levels of help across regions, and loss of support when grant schemes shift or end
- Early validation required to ensure viability of projects
- Needs assessment required to identify skills gaps necessary for project success

Stakeholder Opportunities and Barriers

Funders, Net Zero Hub, investors

Opportunities:

- Access to funding, including grant support, flexibility for contract/grant variations, and stronger understanding of available community finance
- Growing investor confidence, with CE projects, especially solar, seen as low-risk, attracting interest from funders and high-net-worth individuals
- Broader support and encouragement for CE groups, strengthening project development and delivery

Barriers:

- Fragmented and siloed funding, with no joined-up strategy across projects
- Uncertain and inconsistent future funding, early-stage projects lack development finance and variations across different programmes
- Grant funding not aligned with commercial viability, with limited understanding of commercial models, reliance on “soft” grants not linked to PPAs
- Challenges developing replicable sustainable CE frameworks
- Timing and commitment requirements restrict project progress, such as planning-related spending commitments or needing permissions before accessing funds

Future improvements

Policy change

National Policy Changes:

- More flexible grid connection agreements for community energy projects
- Clear national roadmap for community energy through the Local Power Plan
- Removal or reduction of VAT on community energy projects

Local Authority Changes:

- Prioritise procurement from local community energy suppliers
- Make Net Zero a core priority in local authority strategies
- Stronger political support for community energy initiatives

Future improvements

Project development support

Funding:

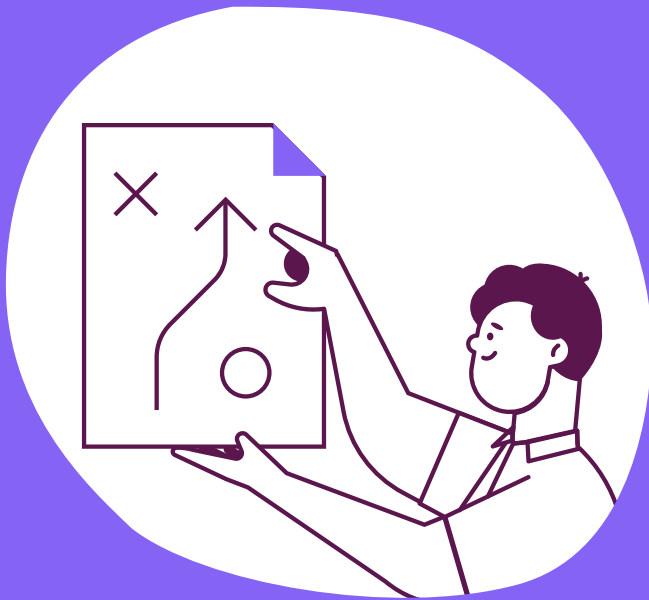
- Longer funding timelines aligned with project development
- Better coordination between grant programmes
- New financial models for community energy projects
- Early-stage feasibility assessment before funding allocation

Expertise and Capacity:

- Independent technical validation of community energy projects
- Local or regional expert support for project development
- Support navigating grid connections and planning processes
- Training and capacity building for community energy groups
- Resources to explain community energy and its benefits
- Clear governance models for community groups

Proposing a support framework as the solution

- The greatest support needs relate to project development capacity and expertise
- There was a desire to see a more joined up approach
- A support structure would help to "level the playing field" for regional community energy projects, allowing future projects to learn lessons from previous work completed





Support Structure Exploration

Support Structure Exploration

Reviewed 3 options

Informal Network

- + Evidence feasibility
- + Access to peer experts
- + Trusted people
- + Buy-in from communities
- ? Limited number of groups regionally
- ? Many groups at similar stage
- ? Bombarding of groups

Publicly Funded Programme

- + Clear Development Pathway
- + Expert advice
- + Consistent Support
- + Project Validation
- ? Dependent on ongoing funding
- ? Potential lack of consistency with funding changes
- ? Communities would need to lead engagement

Community Led Co-operative

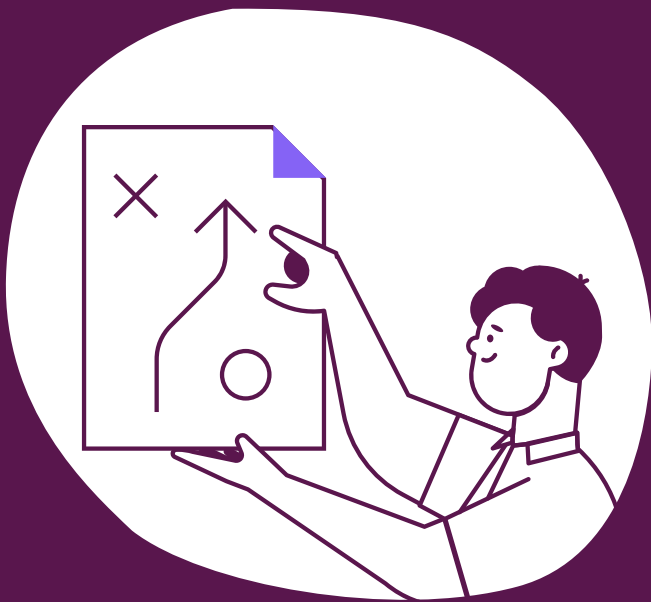
- + Maintenance and operation of projects after build 20-50 yrs
- + De-risks projects for communities
- + Management of project development work
- + Raises finance
- ? Lack of ownership by communities
- ? Parishes may need to conduct feasibility prior to project development

Recommendations

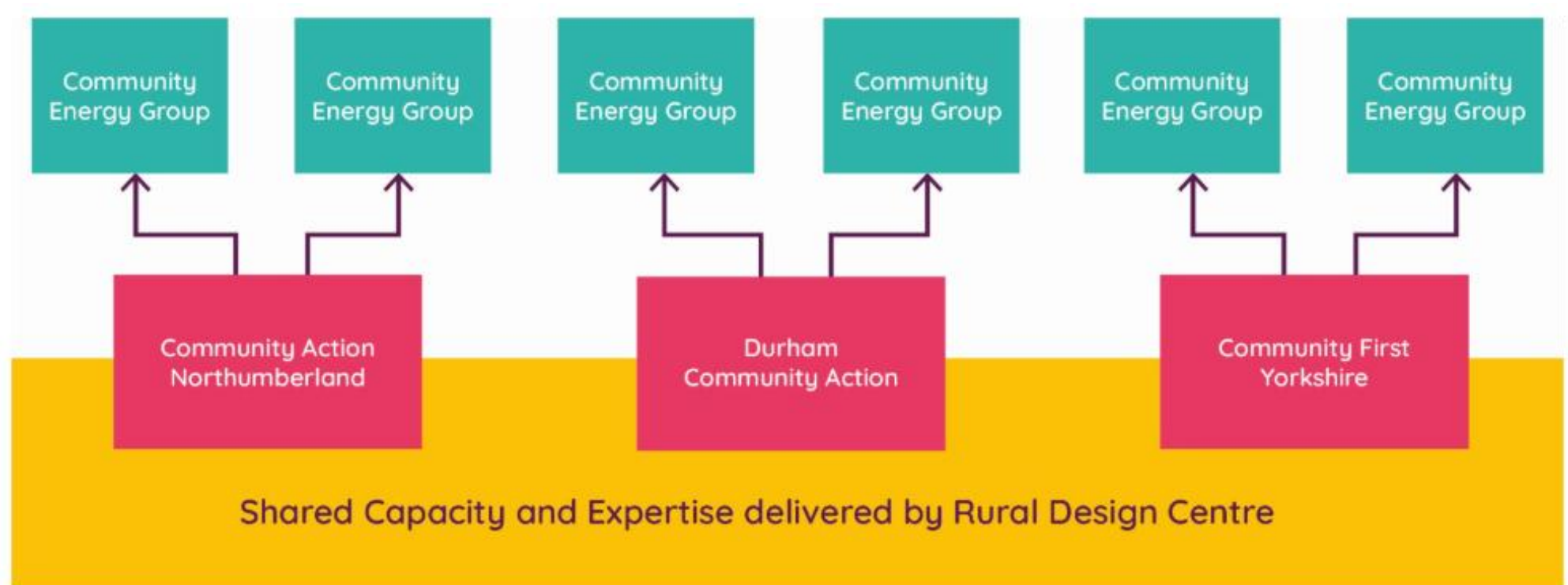


Key Conclusions

- No single model adequately addresses all community energy needs.
- A peer network alone is currently not viable due to the small number of active projects.
- Communities want greater support at the development, finance, construction and operational stages, but without losing local ownership.
- A blended support model combining technical expertise, delivery support and long-term operational assistance is preferred.
- The recommended approach is to build capacity within existing trusted community infrastructure organisations, supported by specialist technical expertise.



Recommended Structure



Next Steps



Next Steps

1. Establish governance and co-ordination arrangements

- Work with Community Infrastructure Organisations and the Rural Design Centre
- Define governance, responsibilities, insurance and financial requirements

2. Develop a business plan

- Refine the support offer
- Produce a detailed resource and delivery plan

3. Secure initial funding

- Fund programme development and setup activities
- Enable mobilisation of the support structure



Thank you!

Susan Ross

Deputy director

Susan.ross@ed-ge.uk



Panel discussion



Kate Burrows Executive Director, DCA (Chair)

- **Aaron Ruddick** Energy Projects Officer, Durham County Council
- **Ali Turner** Horden Heat Steering Group
- **Andrea Baxter** North East Programme Manager NEMSA
- **Michelle Newman** Community Energy Advisor Northern Powergrid



**DURHAM
COMMUNITY
ACTION**



CAIRN

Climate Action in Rural North East



Questions and Table discussions



DURHAM
COMMUNITY
ACTION



CAIRN

Climate Action in Rural North East

Closing remarks



Kate Burrows
Executive Director DCA



DURHAM
COMMUNITY
ACTION



CAIRN

Climate Action in Rural North East