

# Community vs Public EV Charging: What's the Difference?

**Did you know that not all electric vehicle (EV) chargepoints are the same, and that who owns and runs them can make a real difference to local communities?**

This question came up repeatedly during recent feasibility studies that we carried out together across five community sites in Teesdale and wider rural County Durham. Working in partnership, Durham Community Action and Rural Design Centre explored how community-led EV charging could work in places where infrastructure is often hardest to deliver but arguably most needed. With funding linked to a Great British Energy bid, the work allowed us to combine local insight, technical expertise and community engagement to test practical, place-based solutions.

The work began as a problem-solving innovation activity, following conversations with the Teesdale AAP Coordinator team, who shared a clear concern with us: people in Teesdale risk being left behind as transport decarbonises because there are not enough local EV chargepoints. Together, we identified that this challenge is made even more acute by the high proportion of homes without off-street parking, leaving many residents with no practical way to charge an EV at home. Without accessible local charging, the transition to electric vehicles can feel out of reach, particularly in rural villages and small towns.

Working alongside Durham Community Action, whose trusted role in community engagement helped shape local conversations, we spoke with residents and community groups about their needs and concerns. These discussions highlighted that EV charging is sometimes perceived as something "done to" communities, or as part of wider political debates. In reality, how charging is delivered on the ground can look very different – and much more inclusive.

Public EV charging is most often installed by commercial operators or local authorities, typically in high-footfall locations such as supermarkets, roadside hubs or town centres. These chargepoints are designed for anyone to use, but pricing and profits are set by the operator, and any surplus usually leaves the area. Public networks also tend to prioritise rapid and ultra-rapid chargers to support quick turnaround use, particularly for longer journeys.

Community EV charging, on the other hand, is rooted in local benefit. Chargepoints are installed at places people already use and trust – such as village halls, community centres or locally owned businesses – and are developed in partnership with local organisations. This approach is especially important in areas where on-street or at-home charging simply isn't an option.

There's a common myth that community chargepoints are always slow, overnight chargers. In reality, the same range of technologies can be used, from slow and fast chargers through to rapid

charging, depending on local grid connections and site constraints. Crucially, any income generated can be reinvested back into the community, helping to support local facilities, build resilience and enable future projects.

Our initial feasibility work also benefited from the support of Durham County Council, who recognised community-led charging as a complementary activity to their wider transport and climate ambitions. That support reinforced an important message: community and public charging are not in competition – they work best when they work together.

Building on this early work, the **Teesdale V2X project**, led by the Rural Design Centre and supported by Durham Community Action, Charge My Street CIC and Cybermoor, is now testing how a community-led charging model could work across five rural community hubs in County Durham: Barnard Castle, Evenwood, Bowes, Toft Hill and Middleton-in-Teesdale.

Charge My Street CIC already has a strong track record, having delivered successful rural EV charging projects across the UK, including community installations at sites such as Victory Hall in Broughton-in-Furness. These projects show that, with the right support, rural communities can get real benefit from their local charging infrastructure. Working in collaboration with Cybermoor, who are developing the back-office software, the partnership is now developing a business-ready proposal and working to secure capital funding to purchase and install the equipment.

Ultimately, the Teesdale V2X project is about more than just installing chargepoints. It's about choice – ensuring that people without driveways or private parking aren't excluded from the shift to cleaner transport. It's about supporting local commuters as well as visitors and helping sustain small towns and rural economies. Above all, it's about ensuring that rural communities can take an active role in the transition to low-carbon travel, and that the social and economic benefits of that transition stay local.

*If you'd like more information about this project, or would like to explore EV charging for your own community space, please contact [hilary.anderson@ruraldesigncentre.com](mailto:hilary.anderson@ruraldesigncentre.com).*