



Event Feedback: Energy, Sustainability and Community Buildings

On 19th March 2025 delegates gathered at Jubilee Fields Community Centre in Shildon to celebrate the impact that community buildings make to the places that we live and work.

The Energy, Sustainability and Community Buildings event also brought people together to look at enhancing energy efficiency in community buildings and hear about a new County Durham energy company being developed to support them.

The event attracted more than 50 people during Village Halls Week; collectively the volunteers and trustees who attended help to support 37 community buildings across many different communities and geographies in County Durham.

Trustees from Jubilee Fields Community Association told delegates about how their centre has developed over the years and explained how their new solar panels system is helping them with future plans.

Durham Community Action (DCA) and the Rural Design Centre (RDC) presented information about how they have been supporting community buildings with energy efficiency plans and how they have been working together with communities in County Durham to look at the development of new community energy initiatives.

DCA launched a new resource Community Buildings – a Guide to Property Ownership and Leases, authored by Sintons Law, to assist trustees in navigating legal issues related to property. To request your copy of the guide email info@durhamcommunityaction.org.uk

The main part of the day looked at a new, not for profit, community energy initiative for County Durham, part of the **CAIRN** project (Climate Action in Rural Northeast): RDC summarised 18 months of work consulting with people who run community buildings about their energy needs, and presented proposals for the new community benefit society for County Durham which could help people interested in installing solar panels on their community buildings. Further information about the community energy initiative and the full presentations are available **here**.

Presentations about the proposed model generated a range of thought-provoking questions which will help to shape the community benefit society further.

Feedback Highlights / Key Findings:

Overall, people were positive about the proposal for the not-for-profit community energy initiative, and the audience voted on a name for the community benefit society; Durham Energy Association Ltd (DEAL)

Most organisations saw significant benefits in having an independent, not-for-profit organisation guiding them through the process and purchasing and maintaining equipment. They liked the idea of the Community Benefit Society because:

- they felt they lacked the technical knowledge needed to feel confident about getting solar panels installed
- they didn't have the time needed to manage the process of selecting installers and managing a solar panels project

Several organisations which had already had solar panels installed commented that they had found the process very time consuming and difficult to navigate.

People wanted clearer information about which organisations could be considered/ prioritised for the scheme– e.g. rural v urban locations

Cost structure was generally considered acceptable: but some felt it was more financially beneficial to develop independent plans - RDC explained that the cost structure will become increasingly beneficial to the members as the scheme develops.

Some centres didn't see the benefit of the scheme – one or two centres with more staff/volunteers and with technical knowledge, preferred to develop plans independently, as they didn't feel they needed support offered through the scheme and wanted to maximise their own generation

Community spaces with existing solar panels wanted to know if there could be advantages to them joining– some felt they could benefit from getting technical support and potential inclusion in a bulk buying arrangement for low cost energy. They also asked if other forms of renewable energy measures could be considered within the scheme.

Next Steps

Review detailed feedback and address points raised

Create information sheet/pack for interested parties

Recruit trustees from community halls from to the DEAL steering group

Secure funding for first grants for feasibility studies and installations.

