

Neighbourhood *Planning*



Community Energy Advice Note

Neighbourhood Plans can support renewable energy generation through a range of policies, including Community Energy. Community owned and led renewable energy projects offer a pathway to more sustainable living, as well as potentially providing an income to fund projects with wider social benefit. This note sets out some of the key questions Neighbourhood Planning Groups should consider in order to get the most out of a Community Energy policy.

What is Community Energy?

A geographic community or group of individuals with a common interest, come together to generate renewable energy collectively. The community owns the scheme, either fully or through a shared ownership arrangement. This may be a standalone renewable energy development, or building mounted. Motives for starting a community energy project are many and varied; understanding these drivers will help you to shape your project effectively and ensure the community receives the maximum benefit from the scheme.

How can Neighbourhood Plans support Community Energy?

Planning Policy covers any renewable energy installation which would require planning permission, thus it is these projects that can be supported through Neighbourhood Planning. Not all schemes will require planning permission, and this will depend on the technology you choose, the location and the scale of the project. [The Planning Portal](#) is a useful resource, but it is always best to check with the Local Planning Authority.

The [Planning Practice Guidance for Renewable and Low Carbon Energy](#) sets out national support for community led renewables. This includes specific reference to the opportunity for communities to plan for community energy initiatives in Neighbourhood Plans. Locally, policy ENV 7 Alternative Energy Supplies of the [Local Plan \(Part One\)](#) sets out the Council's support for renewable and low carbon energy generation. The Local Plan (Part Two) will build on this support and provide a greater level of detail with regard to renewable and low carbon energy supplies.

Policy ENV 7 alongside Planning Practice Guidance provides a solid foundation from which to develop detailed neighbourhood level support, for both standalone and building mounted community renewable installations. This support may come in one of three forms:

1. A supportive policy for developments that include community renewables;
2. Allocation of land for developments that include community renewables or;

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3. Use of Neighbourhood Development Orders and Community Right to Build Orders to grant planning permission for developments that include community renewables.

The following questions will help Neighbourhood Planning Groups start a discussion about the energy needs of their community, and begin to recognise the opportunities for community energy to meet some of those challenges. This is by no means an exhaustive list and each community will need to tailor considerations to their own area. Where statistical data are required, advice on obtaining parish level information can be found in the [Neighbourhood Planning Toolkit](#).

- **What are the key energy challenges in your community and how are these likely to evolve as a result of climate change?** Some examples can be found below, but you will need to fully consider the issues specific to your area:
 - Does the community have off- gas grid properties?
 - Are there a number of large, older properties which are difficult to heat?
 - Does your community suffer from higher than average levels of fuel poverty?
- **Would your community be interested in leading and taking ownership of a renewable energy project?** This does not necessarily require upfront costs.
- **Which renewable heat/electricity generation technologies would be appropriate to the area?** Some possibilities include:

Ground mounted solar?	Hydroelectric?
Micro-wind?	Air source heat pump?
- **How could any revenue from a Community Energy project be reinvested to tackle some of the energy challenges identified above?** Again, these are just a few examples.
 - Is there a local voluntary group working on fuel poverty that would benefit from funding for a specific project?
 - Could the community fund domestic energy efficiency measures?
 - Could the revenue be used to establish a collective fuel purchasing scheme?
- **Could the revenue be spent on other services or facilities of community benefit?**
- **Would the community consider sharing ownership of a renewable energy scheme with a commercial developer?**

For more information, contact the Neighbourhood Planning team
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