

Stepping-Stones to Community Energy in the Derbyshire Dales

Sustainable power, *for* and *from* local communities

**Summary Report
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Foreword

Who are we?

We're a group of Derbyshire Dales residents. We care about our place, our people and our communities. We are keen to take local action on mitigating climate change and promoting social justice.

There are unique opportunities in our area for securing a healthy, flourishing future for all. We recognise community energy as a viable platform for stimulating social and ecological change – we hope to inspire other residents to engage with the idea of community-owned, renewable energy here in the Derbyshire Dales.

*We are a non-partisan collective, bringing diverse skills and knowledge. If you wish to **support the growth and success of renewable, community-owned energy** and act on the ideas presented in this report, in any capacity:*

contact us at: ddenergyd@gmail.com.

Introduction

In this introductory report, we explore the important role of energy in **transitioning to vibrant, exciting, sustainable futures**.

The Derbyshire Dales District Council has declared a climate emergency. Responding to this, we look beyond a straight swap of fossil fuels for renewables and focus on the local benefits and wider advantages to be gained through **energy democracy**.

Average household electricity consumption in the Dales is 4385 kWh/year; above the national average of 3794 kWh/year. A decisive shift to community-owned renewables could **empower and unify urban and rural communities across the district**.

As well as **combating climate change**, this could enable **greater social equality, tackle fuel poverty** and **fund community causes**. The creation of multiple, mutually-supportive energy co-operatives can help achieve these transformations.

This report provides an insight – a first stepping-stone – into **sustainable power for and from local communities**.

Energy democracy

The term “energy democracy” covers a range of different uses and contexts. It prioritises fair, inclusive ways of generating, providing and managing energy.

It advances the renewable energy revolution by including social and ecological benefits which are decentralised – i.e. local regions own and control the benefits, rather than large corporate monopolies. Often the benefits are ‘noncommodifiable’: they are social and ecological, rather than private financial gains.

To create an energy democracy, we must rethink energy. What is it for? *Who* is it for and what does energy justice look like? How should it be distributed? How do energy networks need reconfiguring or creating to support this?

Community-owned renewable energy

Many community energy models exist, embracing the values of energy democracies. These initiatives are directed and controlled by the local citizens. They may exist as companies or co-operatives; may or may not interact with the National Grid; and often interact with other community energy projects – creating a unique energy ecosystem.

Communities’ options for electricity generation include wind turbines, hydro power and solar photovoltaic (PV) panels. Other renewable energy options include anaerobic digestion (biodegrading organic matter to produce methane (biogas) and digestate (fertiliser)), biomass and Combined Heat and Power systems. Whilst they can be useful, these latter examples produce greenhouse gas emissions, and therefore this report will focus on examples of ‘cleaner’ electricity from wind, water and sun.

Renewable energy co-operatives are a great way of **decarbonising, democratising and decentralising** energy, whilst also raising funds for the local community.

Common aims of energy co-ops: to combat climate change; alleviate fuel poverty; improve energy security; enable communities to have ownership of, and contribute to, renewable energy generation; provide local people with income/investment opportunities; create local jobs; fund local environmental or community related causes; educate and inspire people to use low carbon, renewable energy; and to advise others on sustainability and energy efficiency.

Westmill Wind Farm Co-op: saving 2,378 tons of greenhouse gas emissions each year. *“Westmill’s success has demonstrated that ordinary people can co-operate to achieve what politicians talk about.”*



M&S Energy Society: business going green. PV fitted to the roofs of 8 stores – the stores purchase and use this green electricity which provides 5% interest annually to community shareholders

Torrs Hydro: cultural connections, past, present and future. Funding community orchards, festivals and environmental education...



Wey Valley Solar Schools Co-operative: bridging environment and education. Donating over £45,000 to local schools from the revenue!



Four Winds Energy Co-op, near Chesterfield: 2 wind turbines powering approx. 715 homes/year



Bristol Energy Co-op: rising to the challenge of decentralised energy. Their profits fund initiatives which support vulnerable people, refugees and minority communities as well as benefiting the environment

Success factors

Our research into national and international energy democracies and thriving community energy initiatives has allowed us to identify some common themes behind their achievements:

- **Environmentally- and community-minded stakeholders** and supportive land- and site owners.
- **Creative community engagement** strategies and **prioritising locals** in the share offers.
- **Clear aims and targets** and **proactive, positive messaging**.
- **Work *with* the unique local assets** and aim to **maximise ecological and social benefits**
- **Engage appropriate specialists** and ensure the group/directors have **skills in finance, law and marketing**
- **Strong and thorough project planning**
- **Fundraising for development phase**, e.g. to cover feasibility studies and planning fees.
- **Identify people and organisations to collaborate with** and **share resources** across your network
- **Scale-up!** Governmental support for small-scale renewables is not strong at present, so communities and co-ops may need to unite to create financially viable projects.
- **Actively participate in research projects**, which can enable further funding as well as develop the renewable & community energy sector.

Action steps

What next for the Derbyshire Dales' local energy revolution? Here are some ideas for the next steps...

- ➔ Unite with other people/organisations who are interested in developing the idea of community energy within Derbyshire Dales. Actions to consider:
 - ✨ What types of renewable energy are viable in our area? This may lead to feasibility studies, technical and Environmental Impact assessments. Are there any pre-existing initiatives near us?
 - ✨ Gain a solid understanding of what is involved in instigating a community energy project. Seek advice from other co-ops or support organisations. Research the options for finance and networking: how to make it feasible.
 - ✨ Attract people with the relevant skills to develop the project. Are there any skills missing in the group that we need to develop?
 - ✨ Identify potential land or building owners who may be interested.
 - ✨ Gain an understanding of local residents' views, e.g. through open meetings or surveys.
 - ✨ Instigate conversations with town, parish, district and county councils to discover if we can forge a mutually-beneficial partnership.

Further action could then involve:

- ➔ Formalising our project: gaining a legal structure for the group, designing aims and targets, comprehensive planning and fundraising...away we go!
- ➔ Creating an information hub for the district: to facilitate conversations, share knowledge and resources, and connect organisations and communities to further the development of energy co-operatives. This could include online spaces such as websites or social media forums, or (offline) meetings and education workshops.

Inspired?

Click [here](#) for the full report...

To get involved and support this initiative, please contact us on:

ddenergyd@gmail.com