

# Derbyshire Community Energy Partnership Hub

**One year review**

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1	Contents	
2	Summary.....	3
3	Overview.....	4
4	Connecting with Community Energy Groups.....	5
5	Support Delivered to Groups in Derbyshire .....	7
5.1	Belper Clusters.....	7
5.2	Belper Community Energy.....	7
5.3	Birch Vale CIC Ltd.....	8
5.4	Bonsall Community Energy.....	8
5.5	Brassington Community Heat CIC.....	9
5.6	Calver Hydro project.....	9
5.7	Cromford Mill (Arkwright Society) and Cromford Waterpower CIC .....	10
5.8	Darley Abbey Community Energy .....	10
5.9	Derbyshire Dales Community Energy .....	11
5.10	Hope Valley Renewables .....	11
5.11	Hope Valley Climate Action .....	12
5.12	Horsley Woodhouse Parish Council.....	12
5.13	Slaley Community Energy.....	12
5.14	Sustainable Hayfield.....	13
5.15	Tideswell & District Environment Group.....	13
5.16	Transition Buxton .....	13
6	Summary of how the Community Hub Officer has helped the following groups .....	15
7	Common Issues for Community Groups.....	16
8	Future Work.....	18
8.1	Networking Meetings.....	18
8.2	Seek Additional Grant Aid.....	18
8.3	Develop a Suite of Online Resources .....	18
8.4	Marketing.....	19

## 2 Summary

This document is a review of the first year of work carried out by the Derbyshire Community Energy Partnership Hub project.

This project was set up by Derbyshire Dales Community Energy Ltd using a grant from Derbyshire County Council, as part of their Large Grants 2022-23 scheme.

A coordinator was appointed in October 2022 working 2 days per week, increasing to 3 days per week in March 2023. This report covers the period October 2022 to September 2023.

### 3 Overview

Derbyshire Dales Community Energy Ltd (DDCE) is a Community Benefit Society regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. As a result of a successful bid for Rural Community Energy Fund (RCEF) grant back in 2022 it is progressing the installation of several renewable energy generation sites within Matlock. It also wishes to use its expertise to develop other community energy sites across Derbyshire. The Derbyshire County Council grant was awarded towards the end of 2022 to enable us to set up a project to support the growing network of community energy groups in the Derbyshire area.

Community energy is about people coming together to reduce energy use, purchase, manage and generate low carbon heat and power. Community energy projects are often delivered collectively by a group or organisation with a focus on engagement, local leadership, and strong positive outcomes for the local community. Community groups often have distinct, specific localised goals with an overarching benefit of tackling climate change, energy security and making energy affordable.

This project is designed to encourage the growth of community led projects in low carbon ventures such as renewable energy generation, energy efficiency, low carbon transport and fuel poverty reduction.

This project is coordinated with Derbyshire County Council's Net Zero Policies. Specifically promoting renewable generation, supporting local social clubs, medical practices, world heritage sites and schools to become more sustainable, working with local Derbyshire businesses to reduce carbon emissions, supporting low carbon businesses, and promoting energy efficiency in rural villages.

## 4 Connecting with Community Energy Groups

At the start of this project, we were aware of four other community energy projects in Derbyshire that had been supported by Rural Community Energy (RCEF) funding.

Developing an understanding of groups either actively involved in, or planning projects was an important initial phase of this project. By establishing contacts through the four initial RCEF groups and by presenting at local events themed around climate change, energy efficiency and renewable energy, this network grew larger. This allowed us to talk with various stakeholders and start to quantify the number of projects at various stages of inception. Importantly we started to gain a comprehensive understanding of what types of technology and application groups were focussing on, what is driving this local ambition, and what the objectives of groups and their members within these communities were.

One of the first activities arranged by the new community energy support project was to arrange an “in-person” networking event at Cromford Mill on 24 November 2022. The event gave everyone involved an opportunity to learn more about the scope and scale of interesting projects within the Derbyshire region and we started to learn more about the types of support and interventions each group may want. This first event was attended by 19 delegates representing 10 local energy groups.

For groups that either didn't have the time or resources to attend the group meetings and preferred one to one contact, introduction meetings were arranged. These meetings were face to face, either at monthly members meetings or at sites that had been identified as having potential to deploy renewable energy assets.

In addition, our Hub Coordinator has been in regular contact with these, and other groups via email telephone and occasionally Zoom/Teams meetings. This has been critical to gain an in depth understanding of each group; the barriers that these groups are facing and potential interventions to provide tailored support to help them.

A second in person networking event took place at Cromford Mill in March 2023 and received extremely positive feedback. This second event had a focus on deployment of Solar PV working with Big Solar Coop, an innovative organisation supporting the deployment of rooftop solar PV across the UK. This meeting attended by 24 delegates with representation from 6 local energy groups.

During the first year of this project, we have successfully engaged with 17 groups listed below:

Name of Group or Project	Date Contact Made	Location
Belper Clusters	Previously known	Belper
Belper Community Energy	Previously known	Belper
Birch Vale CIC Ltd	Oct - 2022	Birch Vale
Bonsall Community Energy	Oct-22	Bonsall
Brassington Community Energy	Previously known	Brassington
Calver Hydro project	Jan-23	Calver
Cromford Mill (Arkwright Society)	Previously known	Cromford
Cromford Water Power CIC	July 23	Cromford
Darley Abbey Community Energy	Oct - 22	Darley Abbey

Name of Group or Project	Date Contact Made	Location
Derbyshire Dales Community Energy (DDCE)	Previously known	Derbyshire Dales
Hope Valley Renewables	May-22	Hope Valley
Hope Valley Climate Action (HVCA)	Jan-22	Hope Valley
Horsley Woodhouse Parish Council	Jun-23	Horsely Woodhouse
Slaley Community Energy	Apr-23	Slaley
Sustainable Hayfield	Feb-23	Hayfield
Tideswell & District Environment Group	Oct - 22	Tideswell
Transition Buxton	Nov-22	Buxton

These groups have the potential to generate a significant amount of renewable energy in Derbyshire if their proposed schemes are implemented, as shown in the table below:

Community Group	Type of Renewable	Power kWp	Annual production kWh	CO <sub>2</sub> saved (tonnes)
Belper Community Energy Total	roof mounted solar	559	504,058	102
Birch Vale CIC Total	roof mounted solar	100	85,000	25
Bonsall Community Energy Total	Wind and ground mounted solar	350	532,000	27
Brassington Community Energy Total	ASHP, wind	2,827	2,000,000	58
Cromford Mill (Arkwright Society) Total	Hydro	40	115,900	6
Darley Abbey Community Energy Total	Hydro	50	330,000	44
Derbyshire Dales Community Energy (DDCE) Total	roof mounted solar	1,510	1,268,232	349
Horsley Woodhouse Parish Council Total	roof mounted solar	40	33,600	20
Slaley Community Energy Total	ground mounted solar	250	212,500	30
<b>Grand Total</b>		<b>5,726</b>	<b>5,081,290</b>	<b>661</b>

There are a range of motivating factors that are driving these projects forward that include:

- Reducing fuel poverty and mitigating impacts of increasing utility costs.
- Improving the efficiency of local energy systems through the carbon emissions reduction associated with renewable energy use and adding resilience to increase security of supply.
- Strengthening communities and working to solve collective concerns related to climate change and social justice.

## 5 Support Delivered to Groups in Derbyshire

### 5.1 Belper Clusters

The Belper Clusters is a community of former mill workers' cottages, constructed at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution during the 18th and 19th centuries, and the streets and cottages survive to this day with many of their original features intact. The Belper Clusters Heritage Group is an inclusive, resident-led initiative that brings together strands of creative and restorative activity for a project with both local and wider impact with the goal to celebrate a historic environment of cultural importance and allow its unique character to be preserved and enjoyed by future generations.

The group is working towards developing a long-term, coordinated management plan to support the renovation and upkeep of the roads servicing the Clusters. In 2020 a successful bid into the Rural Community Energy Fund sought to investigate and understand the degree to which sustainably powered EV charging can be implemented in The Clusters.

Due to the World Heritage Site status of The Clusters, additional constraints were identified that would require great sensitivity. The group received support from The Derbyshire Community Energy Partnership Hub to raise the profile of the project with local policymakers at County level reporting into the team of the Executive Director of the authority's Place Department, to the group of climate change and sustainability officers working at district level and directly liaising with the planning department to follow up on queries regarding an ongoing planning application.

The Belper group were also introduced to stakeholders including the UK National Commission for UNESCO during initial meetings to discuss a potential bid for funding to support work linking Community Energy Groups to the Derwent Valley Mills world heritage sites. This proposal seeks to promote the idea of Heritage Sites in the Derwent Valley becoming leaders and models of innovation and sustainability and contribute to more effective mitigation of climate change.

### 5.2 Belper Community Energy

In August 2022, several local Belper area residents came together with the desire to reduce carbon emissions in Belper, raise awareness of energy issues and support the community in the transition to a greener energy system where no one is left behind. The group aims to promote the development of low-carbon renewable energy generation opportunities to support multiple applications to community groups, businesses, and other organisations in Belper and surrounding areas.

The Derbyshire Community Energy Partnership Hub were involved with the group at the very early stages of their journey. The group is very well organised, holding regular, well attended and focussed meetings. These meetings were an opportunity for the hub coordinator to meet with members and provide advice on issues including raising the profile of the new organisation through community engagement and different business

models and potential pathways for the organisation to take to help meet their objectives. In 2023 the group decided to partner with The Big Solar Coop and started to investigate several sites in Belper that could support rooftop solar PV. Additional support was provided at this stage to help familiarise the group's site team with the Big Solar Coops systems and processes and help build up their pipeline of sites for installation.

The Belper group have also supported a Nottingham University MSc Leadership in Sustainability student project on Climate Change and its impacts on World Heritage Sites in the Derwent Valley. This work has also supported DCC's work on its Derwent Valley Mills WHS Management plan.

### 5.3 Birch Vale CIC Ltd

Birch Vale CIC Ltd is a not for profit, volunteer led organisation that started a project in 2020 to develop a support mechanism to introduce a range of measures to help encourage a strong, resilient local energy system. The organisation received funding from the Rural Community Energy Fund in 2021 to explore the feasibility of the deployment of a mix of technologies to help meet the demand for heat and power in the village of Birch Vale with the aim of providing low cost, clean power, and heat across the community. The group is currently preparing a detailed planning application to be submitted to High Peak Planning and are investigating finance/funding options to support the deployment of assets should the application be successful.

Support provided to Birch Vale CIC included some analysis on potential grid connection with an initial heat mapping analysis to establish potential constraints and followed up with a high-level budget proposal (provided by Electricity Northwest) to support the group's financial modelling.

### 5.4 Bonsall Community Energy

The Bonsall Energy Group is a group of people from Bonsall, Derbyshire dedicated to exploring how people in the village might benefit from community-driven, alternative local energy sources. Their goal is to find a feasible, local means to generate energy that will help people in Bonsall save money, be more self-sufficient and reduce the village's carbon footprint.

An interesting feasibility study produced by CPRE (Derbyshire) was presented to the community at Bonsall village hall and the Hub Coordinator spoke at the event about the opportunities to build on the information contained within the report and explain the processes involved and the resources needed to take the project through to development. The group holds regular monthly meetings to discuss progress that the hub coordinator occasionally attended, taking the opportunity to answer questions raised by members of the group and wider community. Additional support delivered through this project included some detailed, site-specific work to explore feasibility of both wind and solar PV in the village. This included pre application advice through National Grid, wind speed analysis for two sites in the village and some initial enquiries to establish the supply chain for medium sized wind turbines in the UK. Following requests from the group an introduction was also made to the developer of a community led wind turbine project and



a meeting set up to share knowledge and learn more about the process.

### 5.5 Brassington Community Heat CIC

Brassington is a village in Derbyshire, near Carsington Water, SW of Matlock. It has 233 houses, a primary school, two pubs and a village hall. The village is not on the mains gas grid, most homes are heated by oil or LPG. Brassington Community Heat(BHC) CIC is a not-for-profit company set up to explore the possibility of supplying renewable heat to residents in the village. A Rural Community Energy Fund project was finalised in August 2022. The report was generally positive but highlighted the need for additional funding to strengthen the business case for the project by reducing the CAPEX.

Brassington Community Heat (BCH) is a small group and therefore unlike many renewable heat projects in the UK, that are often led by local authorities and include a consortium of organisations. Working closely with the Director of BCH the Hub Coordinator worked with the regional Net Zero Hub to strengthen links to the local authority as it had been identified that a bid for funding, for example through Heat Network Delivery Unit (HNDU) or equivalent, may need the local authority to lead. Opportunities to raise the profile of the project with the local authority were capitalised on and two meetings, with various stakeholders have been successfully held to help develop the organisation's plan to raise further funds.

The Hub Coordinator also identified a resource gap and sought to address this by considering the introduction of an intern or post graduate student. The hub coordinator asked other local groups that have had experience finding additional resources to share their experiences and relevant meetings were set-up. Brassington will be eligible for further funding from a new community energy fund for up to £130K to take their programme forward to a stage 2 application.

### 5.6 Calver Hydro project

Both Calver Mill and Calver Weir are of significant historical interest and might be considered an upstream extension of the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site in Derbyshire. A group of residents came together to address the demise of the weir at Calver and successfully applied for Lottery funding to establish a restoration project that would secure the future of the weir and the adjacent wetlands.

A member of the group reached out to the hub coordinator to find out more about the support offered. The group had no experience or prior knowledge of renewable energy assets, and the hub coordinator delivered an overview of the sector and information regarding the technical aspects of hydro and the opportunities of support. A site visit confirmed the potential for the project however it was unclear if all the members of the group would be in favour of a project due to the groups focus on the restoration of these important heritage assets, the natural habitat and biodiversity.

### 5.7 Cromford Mill (Arkwright Society) and Cromford Waterpower CIC

The team at Cromford Mill have undertaken several efficiency measures internally to reduce consumption and are now progressing their Hydro and heat pump project. The group has been extremely successful in raising funds including RCEF phase 1 funding to support a feasibility study, working with Derwent Hydro the report established that the world heritage status wouldn't necessarily restrict a new turbine. RCEF2 funding then supported the development of a comprehensive development plan and with additional support through some capital funding the group are now at the construction phase of this exciting multi technology project that will meet heat and power demand on site.

The group will be reinstating the water wheel (2kW) and have received delivery of an additional 15 kW turbine. Collectively this will meet a considerable portion of the electricity consumption on site and support the great range of businesses that operate on site by protecting them from the volatility in energy prices we have experienced in the UK. Cromford Mill are also working with Vaillant that is supplying a heat pump that will provide heating to one of the large mill buildings. A second organisation was established as a CIC in 2022 called Cromford Waterpower CIC that may look at delivering power to sites outside the boundary of Cromford Mill in the future.

The Arkwright Society's waterpower project aims to reduce its carbon footprint by putting waterpower back into the heart of Cromford Mills. The industrial revolution started here using renewable waterpower, and so this project will return the site to its original renewable energy source, as it was originally, 250 years ago. The project will also start to address the substantial rises in energy prices. The recent spike in their electricity bills, which escalated from £45,000 to £170,000 per annum from July 2022 to April 2023, has made it increasingly difficult to afford power and has significantly impacted their resilience as a charity, compounded by rising inflation and the cost-of-living impacts.

The project will see the installation of a new 5m diameter water wheel and a 17kWh hydro turbine and water source heating system; the new system will use the same water course that originally powered Arkwright's mills. They anticipate generating around 20-25% of on-site electricity, taking a significant step forward towards embracing renewable technology and achieving our sustainability goals. The Arkwright Society have very recently set up a Crowd Funding bid for £60K to fund the final stages of the installation; details can be found here: <https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/cromford-water-power-project>.

Cromford Mill has provided a venue to hold community energy networking events and have taken the opportunity to raise the profile of their project at these events. The hub coordinator also spent time investigating the potential for a funding bid to Derbyshire County Council to support a project that would benefit Cromford Mill, and other projects in the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site.

### 5.8 Darley Abbey Community Energy

Darley Abbey Community Energy attended the networking events held by DDCC. We learnt that the organisation is exploring a hydro project and have undertaken some

community engagement work. The group secured funds, through donations, to support the commissioning of a pre-feasibility report. The group is also very interested in developing a solution to meet a growing demand in the area to make improvements to the energy performance of domestic buildings. A thermal imaging camera is being used to demonstrate where homes are losing heat and the group has discussed various issues with People Powered Retrofit to see if this business model could be replicated in Darley Abbey.

As well as sharing Darley Abbey's case study to a wider audience in order to raise the profile of its energy efficiency programme the Hub coordinator spent some time developing a financial model to help the group assess the business case for the deployment of hydro at the mill using a community benefit business model.

### 5.9 Derbyshire Dales Community Energy

This group established a Community Benefit Society in January 2022 to enable them to bid for RCEF phase 2 funding. The Phase 2 funding from the Rural Community Energy Fund came to an end in March 2023.

DDCE are now partnering with the Big Solar Co-op: who will raise finance, install solar panels on buildings and manage them for the lifetime of the solar panels.

The Big Solar Co-op are a cooperative like DDCE. They are a not-for-profit, carbon-first and volunteer-led organisation. They already have a community share offer in progress and our local community members will be able to invest in their share offer.

DDCE have prioritised three local sites where Big Solar Co-op have issued a proposal: these sites represent 746kWp of installed capacity. Their first site at William Twigg Ltd in Matlock should be installed before Christmas. Commercial offers have now been made to 5 significant local business sites and a further 3 are in a progress pipeline -making a total of 8 sites in the Derbyshire Dales with an installed capacity of 1,500kWp.

### 5.10 Hope Valley Renewables

Hope Valley Renewables is a member driven Community Benefit Society with a goal to develop sustainable renewable energy projects that reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions within the Hope Valley. The business of the society aims to reduce the carbon footprint of homes and businesses in the Hope Valley and explore sustainable ways to generate renewable energy locally.

The group were working independently on a large solar PV project at a site in Hope Valley and didn't require any support at the time with this project however the hub coordinator introduced Hope Valley Renewables to a new opportunity for rooftop solar PV on a commercial unit in High Peak. This was essentially a turnkey solution and support focussed on the development of a financial model that could support the assessment of the business case of a 350 kWp clean energy system. The hub coordinator arranged several online sessions designed to go through the financial model in more detail. These

sessions helped the group understand the different scenarios, evaluate the level of risk associated with this opportunity and develop a long-term business plan before discussing the project in more detail with the developer. Unfortunately, this project did not proceed however, the group, with access to, and knowledge of the model will be able to assess additional opportunities and evaluate risk of future projects.

### 5.11 Hope Valley Climate Action

They have produced a fantastic report detailing research around potential future electricity demand under several scenarios. This project involved a large amount of community engagement work that has been shared with other groups in the Derbyshire network. The report concluded that only a third of people considered their homes to be adequately insulated and that over 60% of residents felt large-scale renewable generation acceptable and suitable to improve the local energy system.

The group is currently working on a project in the village of Abney, where 23 of 24 households have signed up for an energy assessment. This assessment will lead to the development of proposals and pathways designed for homeowners to make efficiency improvements. Phase 2 of the project will see a proposal being put forward for 3 or 4 wind turbines, the best technology to meet the daily and seasonal demand profiles at a local level. This is however within the Peak Park and therefore planning constraints do exist.

The hub coordinator made an introduction to a consultant seconded to Derbyshire County Council who was very interested to learn more about the interventions being proposed for hard-to-treat buildings in Abney. Further work involved investigating potential funding opportunities through 'HUGS2' and discussing the project with the local climate change officer.

### 5.12 Horsley Woodhouse Parish Council

Horsley Woodhouse is a village and civil parish in the Amber Valley district of Derbyshire. The parish council were invited to support network as they wished to install renewable energy in the housing stock to meet objectives of improving the local energy system.

The hub coordinator gave a presentation to the group detailing community energy and demonstrating how it may be relevant to a project in the village of Horsley Woodhouse. Due to the scale of the project being quite small and the organisation's intention to roll out the project gradually, it was recommended that following a study to quantify the village's energy needs, funding opportunities should be explored to assist with capital requirements that could support smaller upgrades at a building scale.

### 5.13 Slaley Community Energy

Slaley Community Energy was made aware of the project by Bonsall Community Energy and were looking at the opportunity of a solar PV project in Derbyshire Dales. Some initial feasibility and design work had been undertaken. This established that a 200 KW ground mounted system was technically feasible and connections to the grid were potentially available.

The hub coordinator attended a site visit to the proposed site to assess the technical potential of the project and discuss in much more detail the potential output of the proposed system could align with assumed demand profiles of local consumers. Additional information including the emergence of new market models were discussed and how these could provide an opportunity for the group to supply energy to the local community.

#### 5.14 Sustainable Hayfield

The Sustainable Hayfield community group was formed around a shared determination to ensure that Hayfield will be a beautiful place to live for future generations. The organisation's aims are to increase awareness of climate change issues and how individuals and communities can mitigate them; to share knowledge of positive lifestyle choices to protect the environment, to equip the younger generation with the skills and confidence to meet the challenge of change ahead and lead community projects that provide positive and sustainable solutions.

The group had received RCEF funding to investigate the feasibility of a large-scale ground mounted solar PV system in the village but unfortunately due to constraints with the local distribution network and the potential high costs associated with connection the project didn't go ahead. In 2022/23 the group focussed on the promotion and delivery of a Home Energy MOT scheme, developed with Marches Energy Agency. Through this project over 100 Hayfield households benefited from low level insulation and advice offered through the scheme.

The hub coordinator met the group (mid 2023) to learn more about the group's previous renewable energy project and the ongoing energy efficiency and agreed to support the group by sharing potential funding opportunities that were being developed at a local level to support energy efficiency projects and raise awareness of the project across the community energy network.

#### 5.15 Tideswell & District Environment Group

Tideswell & District Environment Group aim to develop and support projects that improve local or global environmental issues such as climate change; the loss of biodiversity and habitat; waste and recycling; energy efficiency; water pollution; food production; transport; ethical consumerism and other environmental issues.

The group is very active, with strong local support, and is currently running six project groups focusing on litter; recycling; wildlife; ethical consumerism; cycling; and climate action. The hub coordinator presented at an event that was focussed on climate change providing information and examples about how individuals and groups could get involved in clean energy and energy efficiency projects.

#### 5.16 Transition Buxton

Transition Buxton is exploring the opportunity of setting up a spin out operation with a

focus on energy. There had been funding previously to support a feasibility study for a large solar PV project just outside the town that did not proceed at the time due to market conditions. The group were looking for support to explore various opportunities that could harness a renewed interest within the group to explore renewable energy projects in the area. The group attended the networking events that they found useful and received support to help the energy team learn how to get involved with the Big Solar Coop. The hub coordinator also gave a presentation to the group that focussed on renewable energy technologies, new and emerging market opportunities and how to overcome localised constraints.

## 6 Summary of how the Community Hub Officer has helped the following groups

### Collaboration:

**Knowledge and expertise sharing:** Belper Community Energy, Bonsall Community Energy, Birch Vale CIC, Transition Buxton, Hope Valley Renewables, Horsley Woodhouse Parish Council, Derbyshire Dales Community Energy.

**Creating and sharing of resources:** Belper Community Energy, Bonsall Community Energy, Darley Abbey Community Energy, Derbyshire Dales Community Energy, Hope Valley Renewables.

**Mentoring and support across groups:** Belper Community Energy, Bonsall Community Energy, Hope Valley Renewables, Derbyshire Dales Community Energy, Transition Buxton

### Business and financial support:

**Share business plans of successful ventures:** Bonsall Community Energy, Hope Valley Renewables, Slaley Community Energy, Darley Abbey Community Energy, Transition Buxton.

**Create blueprints for future projects:** Hayfield Community Energy, Hope Valley Climate Action, Darley Abbey Community Energy.

**Support and advice on funding applications:** Bonsall Community Energy, Brassington Community Heat, Derbyshire Dales Community Energy.

**Advise on business, project planning and feasibility studies:** Belper Community Energy, Slaley Community Energy, Horsley Woodhouse Parish Council,

### Extend reach and scope of community projects:

**Promotion of each group within the area and further afield:** Belper Clusters, Belper Community Energy, Birch Vale CIC, Brassington Community Heat CIC, Cromford Mill CIC, Darley Abbey Community Energy,

**Build upon current projects allowing them to scale up:** Belper Community Energy, Hope Valley Renewables, Derbyshire Dales Community Energy, Bonsall Community Energy.

**Encourage further or new developments in the area and beyond:** Belper Community Energy, Bonsall Community Energy Group, Derbyshire Dales Community Energy, Hope Valley Renewables, Slaley Community Energy.

**Promote Community share offers to a broader audience:** Belper Community Energy, Derbyshire Dales Community Energy, Transition Buxton.



## 7 Common Issues for Community Groups

The incipient community energy sector is currently experiencing enormous changes. A reduction in subsidies, inflated energy prices and changes in policy has meant that community groups must address many complex issues and hence need to be flexible and adaptable. The scope of projects identified in Derbyshire is extremely wide ranging, with access to several potential renewable energy sources, a range of volunteer skills and knowledge, a diverse built and natural environment and varied demographic. Therefore, the support and advice needed by groups has necessitated a careful analysis of the complexity of their unique local contexts and varied objectives and aspirations of different community groups and the communities they were operating within.

Several issues common to several community groups in the Derbyshire region were identified by the hub coordinator.

1. Projects at the conceptual and pre-feasibility phase were helped to establish a formal not for profit organisation and how to adopt effective methods and tools needed to reach out to the broader community to gain insights and develop community support. The hub coordinator discussed their experience with community engagement and shared case studies and feasibility reports that highlighted examples of good practice.
2. For groups working on projects at the development stage, members new to the network were particularly interested in how to assess the business case for their respective projects; to learn about new, innovative, and appropriate business models and to access funding opportunities. In a post subsidy environment previous examples that showed business plans and financial models were less relevant but the hub coordinator found that signposting to organisations such as Community Energy England, Co-operatives UK and Community Energy South and making direct introductions to experienced community groups around the UK was appropriate and provided the opportunity for community groups and their members to access suitable resources, read up to date case studies and talk to those experienced in the sector. The hub coordinator also found that community groups were generally more than happy to offer time and act as mentors, sharing their experiences and provide useful insights.
3. There were also significant constraints that we were made aware of and had been raised by several groups.
  - a. The first related to planning policy and the requirements of planning departments for plans and supporting documents. Groups were keen to understand the steps organisations should take to gain the necessary approval required for these projects to proceed. The hub coordinator started to gather information from the nine district councils, making introductions wherever possible to contacts in the relevant departments. Through Belper Community Energy we were informed about the impact of Local Plans and the effect these may have on developing planning proposals. Some interest in hydro projects in the region also provided the opportunity to discuss historical project team's experiences with liaising with and making applications to the Environment Agency.
  - b. A common barrier raised by several groups relates to grid connections. Problems related to limited access to data and long lead-times to gain the



necessary information about the capacity of local distribution networks to accept new generation, the potential costs associated with connecting assets and lead times associated with applications and the connection process. This caused uncertainty and inefficiencies at the early phase of projects.

High level support included introducing groups to open-source heat mapping data running through these data to establish if there were any constraints with capacity. In cases where headroom capacity was sufficient follow-on work involved and then liaising directly with engineers at the DNO to discuss in more detail each case gaining a broad idea of connection costs and identifying the available process to make a pre-application.

- c. The third common barrier was linked to funding as the removal of subsidies and closure of two well utilised funds had left a gap that groups were unsure how to fill. The hub coordinator referred groups to the Community Energy England database of funds, a resource that was updated on a regular basis and via email informed groups when details of new opportunities, such as Energy Redress and National Lottery Climate Action Fund when announced.
4. A further issue is the recruitment of volunteers in many of the community energy groups in Derbyshire. One of the most challenging issues is the increasing technical complexity of the renewable energy sector and hence for many potential volunteers they see this as a major barrier to make a tangible contribution. Along with Big Solar Coop we have facilitated several training programmes to overcome some of these challenges. Another issue is the difficulty recruiting younger volunteers partly because many have family and career demands that compromise their ability to offer any volunteer time.
5. We have attempted to develop a limited number of more pro-active and constructive meetings with key officers at County and District Council level but so far with limited volunteer capacity and the work pressures on officers we have not yet achieved a satisfactory level of collaboration which might fully support their net zero carbon targets.

## 8 Future Work

### 8.1 Networking Meetings

The networking meetings received good feedback from all groups that were able to attend. These events are a good opportunity for groups to network with each other, learn about new opportunities and good practice. The events are also seen as an opportunity to deliver information regarding the constraints that are common to multiple groups. The introduction of speaking slots for organisations allowed groups to share useful information and raise awareness of opportunities to overcome issues relating to planning, grid connections and funding.

A further networking meeting is planned for October 2023 with Ruth Mulvany (Midlands Net Zero Hub) speaking on the recently announced Community Energy Fund. With the sustainability charity Change Agents UK, we will be exploring hosting some Climate Literacy programmes across the County. We are also exploring hosting a major conference in February/March 2024 with the objective of seeking to secure further support for the installation of the generation capacity set out in this review.

### 8.2 Seek Additional Grant Aid

The hub coordinator has worked with various stakeholders to develop funding proposals that facilitated the continuation of net zero decarbonisation initiatives delivered by community energy organisations in the region. Feedback from climate change officers based in Derbyshire and Nottingham has encouraged the idea of extending the project in terms of spatial scale to cover the D2N2 region. A National Lottery Climate Action Fund bid for £500K is in the process of being developed. The bid is due to be submitted in December 2023.

### 8.3 Develop a Suite of Online Resources

The hub coordinator has explored opportunities to develop a suite of online resources for the network of Community Energy groups. Initially it was thought Google could be a suitable platform. However, some groups and their members had problems accessing the content. It was also a difficult system to administer with limited time and resources to develop and maintain a solution was suitable for more than 100 members and was compliant with existing regulations. To date a collection of appropriate reports and resources has been posted on the Derbyshire Dales Community Energy Website: (<https://derbyshiredalesenergy.org.uk/>)

Building on the aspirations to create an effective mechanism to share resources the hub coordinator researched potential opportunities and met with the founder of “The Great Collaboration” a programme designed to support positive climate action at a local level. Much climate policy is driven by a top-down, national approach. It doesn’t consider regional differences around the country. By using The Great Collaboration Toolkit (<https://greatcollaboration.uk/>) it is possible to be part of a bottom-up, local initiative that provides detailed, local information to allow local policy to be directed at the specific needs of local communities. In other words, you’re helping get the right actions to happen in the place that you live.

We believe the tool kit offers a useful and intuitive online portal that could be replicated to support community energy groups in Derbyshire. The system has useful functions which support the development and administration of this project and provides data and useful metrics on activities. Continuing to develop relevant documents regarding common themes, that may not be available through other organisations, will also be useful and a platform to provide access to these documents and other useful resources would be a positive step forward and might be a useful process for council teams to adopt.

#### 8.4 Marketing

Raising the profile of groups and their projects has been extremely useful in sharing and coordinating progress. However, more could be achieved by developing a marketing and communications strategy( and plan ) linked to those currently offered at parish, district, and county level. This would provide a much-needed opportunity to share information to a wider audience through social media channels and could also include a monthly newsletter to communicate key issues, events, and volunteer opportunities. But this would need additional volunteer capacity or a paid part time post to make it effective.