



Constituency voices: realising the potential of community energy

by Hannah Kyrke-Smith
with Paul Blomfield MP, Mike Crockart MP and Tessa Munt MP

Introduction

Community energy isn't a new concept, but it is certainly growing. There are established schemes, like the Baywind project in south Cumbria, Westmill wind and solar farms in Oxfordshire, and the Ovesco solar scheme in Sussex; and with a recent groundswell of public support there are now around 50 community renewable energy co-operatives and 2,000 community installations receiving feed-in tariffs across the UK.¹

As well as generating their own energy, community groups are also investigating the potential for energy efficiency projects, collective purchasing or switching. Beyond immediate economic and environmental benefits, these projects also offer opportunities to finance other local projects, create local jobs, inspire others to start schemes and improve local understanding of energy and climate issues.

The potential capacity of UK community owned renewables is estimated to be around 3.5GW.² But, can the existing policy framework enable community energy projects to take advantage of this potential, and make a real contribution to the UK's climate change targets? Until now, it has been difficult to develop a project. Policies, such as the Green Deal and feed-in tariffs, have not been designed with community level projects in mind. There has been no obvious home for community energy in government, which has been focused on energy markets for large commercial players.

With growing concerns about energy security, rising energy prices, an emphasis on local rights and responsibilities, and the need to meet climate change targets, the government is now showing more interest in community energy. Recognising that its approach has been piecemeal so far, it is now investigating the benefits and opportunities on offer, as well as how to realise them. The government's community energy strategy will be published later this year.³

Here, we bring together the findings from three constituency workshops, held in June and July 2013, and make recommendations to the government as it finalises its

strategy. The workshops were held in constituencies in three very different regions of the UK:

Sheffield Central, with Paul Blomfield MP;
Wells, with Tessa Munt MP; and
Edinburgh West, with Mike Crockart MP.

Each workshop was attended by representatives from existing local community energy schemes, other community and environment groups, businesses and local authorities, as well as the Department of Energy and Climate Change's strategy team.

The challenges identified were similar in all three constituencies. They included: time and resources; accessing start up and project finance; knowing where to find support and advice; navigating planning and regulation requirements; and getting community buy-in. Participants were well versed in the issues but were determined to make projects happen. They saw many opportunities, and recommended policy and practical changes to overcome the challenges.

Our research shows there is great potential for the growth of community energy projects and the following government actions would enable it to be realised:

1. Strengthen national policy for community projects.
2. Establish a nationwide information resource for community groups.
3. Reduce administrative, planning and regulatory burdens.
4. Improve start up and project finance options.
5. Ensure local energy projects feature a level of community ownership.
6. Encourage community led energy efficiency programmes.

The local picture: views from three constituencies

Sheffield Central

Paul Blomfield's constituency is one of five in the South Yorkshire city of Sheffield. As one of the eight largest regional English cities, the area is predominantly urban, but is surrounded by hills and is home to the confluence of five rivers.

Demographics are varied and, as the area has two universities, there is a large student population. A number of people live in social housing, with 17.6 per cent of all households in fuel poverty.⁴ The universities also provide a local low carbon research base, including a solar energy group at Sheffield Hallam University and a solar farm at the University of Sheffield.

City leaders already recognise the local potential of the low carbon agenda, with the Sheffield City Region's city deal featuring plans to generate more low carbon jobs, 'go early' on the Green Deal, expand Sheffield's district heating network, develop a carbon capture and storage plant and improve public transport infrastructure.⁵

Community led low carbon projects are also emerging in the city and surrounding area, including Sheffield Renewables, the Roseland Community Energy Trust and others.

Local issues and opportunities

Sheffield's geography and demographics offers the potential for communities to go much further than this: the rivers give scope for more hydro projects; much of the city's housing stock is inefficient, either without basic insulation or hard to treat, creating an opportunity for a residential energy efficiency programme; and the existing district heating network could be expanded, providing more homes with energy from renewable sources. However, local community groups have so far come up against a number of barriers to developing projects, and have found that potential partners, developers and others don't always take them seriously.

“Getting anyone to take you seriously is quite difficult”

Workshop participant

Despite the excellent natural resource, developing hydro power in Sheffield has been problematic. The development process is complex and risky. There have been difficulties obtaining lease agreements, abstraction licences, fish passes and planning permission; tender prices for construction contracts have been high as a result; and it has been hard to secure power purchase agreements at a fair rate. These requirements can change over the course of a project, affecting its economic viability. Sheffield Renewables, established with the ambition of developing hydro power, negotiated a lengthy permitting process and held discussions with the Environment Agency from the start, but eventually failed to find a cost effective solution for fish passes. As a result they had to stop the scheme after four years of planning and considerable expense, and are now looking at the potential for a solar PV project instead.

A real barrier is limited knowledge about where to obtain advice. Existing forums are fragmented, and awareness of what help is available can be low, especially in the early stages of a project. In some cases community groups may not have the skills, finance or control to deliver large, ambitious projects and, therefore, they need a simple and accessible resource to help them establish partnerships.

Policy uncertainty was seen to be a big problem. There were concerns about how planning policy might evolve, and scepticism about the effectiveness of the Green Deal. Whilst those who came to our workshop acknowledged that communities could have a role in promoting the Green Deal, there was a worry that residents would not be interested, given the high interest rates. It may also prove difficult in Sheffield as there are many old homes, as well as rented properties inhabited by poorer residents who have little control over their buildings and heating systems. Added to this, with efficiency projects benefiting individual homes, it can be difficult to share these benefits and showcase the results to others; previous ‘demonstration home’ days have been poorly attended.

“A big challenge is that the market is currently skewed to favour major schemes”

Workshop participant

Using public buildings for community energy projects was seen as an opportunity, for example installing solar PV on roof spaces. But EU procurement requirements for local authorities mean they have to go to tender rather than simply allowing a local community group to use these spaces, so commercial developers are more likely to be the successful bidders. Restricted local authority resources and budgets may also limit their ability to support and work with community groups.

Participants recognised that community energy schemes can have multiple added benefits, such as encouraging people to think about their energy use, or using the income generated to fund efficiency programmes. There is no reliable revenue stream for energy efficiency measures, apart from lower energy bills, which can be hard to predict and tap. Therefore, many felt that the majority of community energy projects would focus on generation, despite the government’s strategy covering supply and demand. There were questions around whether one naturally follows the other, ie a community scheme might invest in generation first and then use the proceeds to invest in efficiency. There was clearly an interest in looking at both, with the need to reduce energy use seen as a priority. But questions remained about how this could work at the community level, given the large amount of funding needed, which has historically come from supplier obligations and council budgets.

Solutions for the Sheffield Central constituency:

Share information and advice across the region: for groups to learn how to run a successful project, better information needs to be disseminated, for example in a local resource handbook. A local forum would enable groups to talk to each other, share knowledge, expertise and resources, and provide links to other organisations. There may be a role for the local authority in formalising or supporting this as it could be difficult to achieve at community level.

Drive community led energy efficiency in housing: as trusted messengers, community groups could engage others in energy demand reduction, including those in fuel poverty, from smaller awareness raising or educational initiatives to bigger schemes such as the Green Deal. Community champions would need local authority support, both financial and capacity building, to make the most of these opportunities. They would also need easier access to the Energy Company Obligation (ECO) and Green Deal finance, for example with tailored incentives for community schemes. Communities could bulk buy energy efficiency measures (eg insulation products and LED lighting) to bring the costs down.

Seek bespoke solutions for local areas: there are many types of community energy projects, and different approaches will help meet different communities' needs. Central to this is keeping the benefits local, for example working with local contractors and developers. Sheffield City Council could recognise the significant potential of hydro by developing a hydro strategy to help realise this. District heating is another local opportunity, with the existing network currently powered by energy from waste. Community groups could help to expand this, perhaps by learning from successful schemes elsewhere.

Improve the national policy environment: transparent, consistent government policy is needed to encourage communities to commit to schemes. Planning and regulation requirements (eg Environment Agency requirements for permitting hydro projects) need to be more consistent and transparent, making it easier for schemes to go ahead.

Encourage partnerships: community groups could partner with large energy suppliers to address their skills gaps to develop larger generation schemes. This should reduce local opposition and ensure benefits are partially captured in the local area, not just by company shareholders. The government should consider making it a requirement for energy companies to involve community groups in local energy projects to ensure local communities benefit directly.

Facilitate access to finance: this would incentivise and enable more community energy projects to get going and break down one of the major barriers. Options include kick-start grants, soft loans that do not have to be paid back if a project is not successful, priming funds, crowd sourcing and higher rates for community feed-in tariffs (FiTs). The government could provide an initial start up fund, with additional project funding coming from banks, local companies or local authorities.

“We use energy so we need to be the ones to take control of it”

Workshop participant

Wells

Tessa Munt's Somerset constituency covers the city of Wells and a large rural surrounding area with small towns and villages. Many properties lack a mains gas connection and, whilst some local residents are fairly well off, many live in fuel poverty. Somerset County Council and the network of district and parish councillors have considerable influence over local decision making. Whilst the county council has some low carbon ambitions, including a renewable energy strategy and public support for the Transition Town movement, it is looking to review them in the near future.

The rural nature of the local area means there is great potential for renewables. There are a number of passionate and motivated community groups in the constituency and the surrounding area, with some existing energy schemes. Wedmore Community Power Co-operative has a share offer open for its non-profit solar paddock scheme, with a planned September 2013 installation date and, in the neighbouring constituency of Somerton and Frome, a community group in Lydford is planning a hydro project on the local weir.

Local issues and opportunities

Given the wealth of local energy resources and the need to address fuel poverty, there is potential for many more community energy schemes in Wells and the surrounding area. Workshop participants certainly recognised this, but many were quick to highlight the barriers they come up against.

There seems to be a lack of energy literacy locally, both amongst the public and local councillors, in terms of understanding where energy comes from, how it is generated and how to use it efficiently. This has meant it is not seen as a local responsibility, and project plans have suffered from local opposition as a result. Groups were concerned about the difficulty of gaining wider community buy-in, if share offers are deemed to be too expensive, or if there is a perception that community energy is the preserve of middle class, rural communities.

The reliance on local investors for many of these projects is high, due to the lack of availability of mainstream finance. It was felt that the big banks currently see community energy schemes as a bit of a mystery and too risky to lend to.

Planning and regulation were central issues, with time and money needed to address this proving to be a key barrier. One group said that Environment Agency requirements had changed over the course of planning for their hydro project, requiring more work and specialist input at additional cost. Specialist advice or other support is often needed, but groups felt they did not always know where to look for it and, without a central information hub, it is harder to find.

“Government needs to make planning less risky for these schemes”

Workshop participant

In the wider national policy context, a lack of policy stability from the government is putting people off committing to community schemes. There was a perception that changes to FiTs have made solar PV less attractive, and that the Green Deal is not seen as an attractive way to fund energy efficiency measures partly due to the lack of effective national communications around it. Participants felt that communities would only succeed if there was stronger political leadership and an attractive, consistent funding environment.

Whilst the need to reduce energy use was recognised, most of the discussions focused on generation, suggesting there might be scope for more opportunities beyond those discussed. Workshop participants were keen for community energy to be a central part of the transition to a local low carbon economy, not just a ‘nice to have’. With the right support, community ‘green’ champions could be fostered. And, with sufficient community buy-in, they saw potential to transform local communities beyond the way energy is used and generated. But, at the same time there was a recognition that this will most likely be through small steps in the right direction, with communities learning from each other to work towards practical and locally relevant projects that maximise locally available resources.

Solutions for the Wells constituency:

Make the most of existing tools, such as neighbourhood planning: low carbon issues could be a central part of neighbourhood plans, for example through local energy plans. Neighbourhood development orders could be used to grant automatic planning permission for community energy projects, with sufficient government support and advice to help communities maximise the opportunity.

Reduce planning fees for community schemes: this would make planning less risky for community groups, making it easier for them to succeed.

Establish a local advice forum: all the local information that community groups need should be in one place, making it easier to find specialist support or people who could help run a particular project, and learn from the experiences of others.

Sell the benefits to the local community: a successful project needs to offer a good return on investment but, beyond this, the benefits and reasons for a particular project need to be communicated to the local community. Existing local schemes could be publicised in local media, raising wider awareness and encouraging others to get involved. Central government could set up a publicly available database of all existing schemes, managed by an independent agency, to make it easier to collate figures locally.

Increase energy literacy among district and parish councillors: educating local decision makers would help them to understand the benefits of community energy and make more robust decisions, reducing the likelihood of them resisting schemes due to lobbying from opposition. Both the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) and the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) should put pressure on councillors to justify their opposition.

“We just haven’t got the right sort of thinking yet... people are still wasting energy”

Workshop participant

Set the tone nationally: the government must provide policy stability and political leadership on community energy, so communities feel it is worth taking risks and committing time and resources. A framework is needed to make mainstream finance more readily available, with government working with a variety of financial organisations to help them understand the benefits of community energy. The Green Investment Bank (GIB) could also be opened up for community projects: the Wedmore solar project found that when it approached the GIB there was not only no support available, but also a general lack of knowledge about community level schemes.

Edinburgh West

Mike Crockart's constituency is one of five in the city of Edinburgh. It is mostly suburban, in the commuter belt, but also includes some rural areas to the west of the city centre. Across Edinburgh, thousands of residents are in fuel poverty, and with energy prices continuing to rise there is a growing interest in how to bring these costs down.

The Scottish Government sees huge potential for renewable energy, setting the ambitious target of 100 per cent of electricity and 11 per cent of heat demand from renewable sources by 2020.⁶ The government has also set a target of 500MW of community and locally owned renewable energy by 2020; 35MW has already been installed, with 200MW under development.⁷ To support this, it established the Community and Renewable Energy Scheme (CARES) in 2002, providing loans for the pre-planning stages of projects. Until recently, this was managed by Community Energy Scotland, an independent charity which provides practical help for communities on renewable energy development and energy conservation.

“There is a culture of centralised control of energy policy – people are happy to be energy tenants not energy owners”

Workshop participant

Scotland has a culture of community participation, with a network of around 1,200 community councils representing community views to local authorities and other public bodies, a number of transition towns and many smaller community groups. Existing or planned community energy projects in the Edinburgh area include Harlaw Hydro, whose share offer recently closed having passed its target, Edinburgh Community Energy Co-operative, which is looking at options for solar PV, and PEDAL (Portobello transition town) and Greener Leith, which together propose to develop a commercial scale wind turbine.

Local issues and opportunities

There is potential for a considerable expansion in community energy across Scotland, not least given the Scottish Government's ambitions and the advice, funding and support available. There are substantial renewable resources, and many willing communities. However, these may not always be in the same place, meaning co-ordination is needed to get the best out of both urban and rural areas. In urban and suburban areas there is a continual pressure on land for housing, as well as a highly transient community, with many tenants, who may not feel motivated to invest in their local area.

The participants at our workshop felt that realising the potential may need a shift in attitudes. The existing culture of centrally controlled energy policy, based around big suppliers, does not work for community energy. Many people feel disconnected from their energy use, and prioritise short term benefits rather than recognising the long term benefits that other models, such as community energy, could provide.

Community groups often face capacity issues, as projects require determination and considerable time and resources. Participants said it is not always clear who could provide help, or how to access advice. In addition, communities do not have obvious legal status, which can be problematic. Wider community buy-in was also seen to be a challenge, and it was recognised that appropriate framing or messaging is needed to help people understand their local responsibilities.

With the grid already at full capacity, heat and electricity demand measures were seen as priorities as well as generation, but these were considered difficult for community groups to monetise, as there is no revenue stream. Participants saw the Green Deal as a missed opportunity, as there are problems with trust and a lack of clear messages from central government. It was also thought that energy efficiency requirements for new build housing are not strict enough, with a missed an opportunity to encourage renewable energy generation as standard.

Where energy is generated locally, current market structures do not make it easy to store and distribute it to local people, or retain benefits such as jobs and skills. Participants suggested that there was potential for community involvement in heat provision, for example the development of district heating and combined heat and power (CHP). This is likely to need local government investment but, as it is already struggling to meet expectations set by national policy, its ability to provide this support is restricted.

Participants valued the Scottish Government's funding for community projects (CARES and the Climate Challenge Fund), but said it is unable to fund larger projects. FiTs for solar PV were also raised an issue, both in terms of the perception and portrayal of changing rates, and because public grant recipients are not eligible for them. Without sufficient certainty over finance, groups find it harder to build their case for a project.

“Barriers are financial – with the reduction in FiTs it’s harder to build a case”

Workshop participant

Current planning processes are also difficult, especially for wind and hydro, and decisions do not take into account the added social and economic benefits of community energy. There may be opportunities to make planning easier, by transferring learning and expertise from existing projects, but co-ordination is needed to make the connections and information more readily available.

Participants saw great potential for more community energy projects in the Edinburgh area, but also recognised that communities vary in size and capacity, with some very small. Some thought it would be best to start with small steps and work upwards from there, rather than being overly ambitious with project ideas from the start. The existing support available in Scotland, both in terms of finance and advice, was highly valued. However, it was thought that more could be done, especially through stronger working relationships, with businesses and local authorities, and even across multiple communities.

Solutions for the Edinburgh West constituency:

Develop better, simpler finance options for projects: for example, the Green Investment Bank could lend to community energy projects. Other options include: better lending terms; educating mainstream banks or developing local banks; changes to FiTs to directly benefit community level projects; increasing income tax relief; encouraging the use of community benefit schemes from private projects to fund community energy projects; loans supported by the Treasury; and energy ‘mortgages’.

Simplify planning and other processes: through the Scottish planning policy review, preferences for community energy could be built into planning and community projects could be prioritised for grid connection at a lower price. There should be simple legal agreements or protocols that could be adapted for different projects, with a legal definition of community regions. The due diligence process needs to be simplified and standardised.

Encourage community led energy efficiency projects: community councils and other groups have the potential to promote the Green Deal locally but interest needs to be generated among them first, with better national communications on what it covers and the benefits it offers. Beyond the Green Deal, there could be street by street competitions on energy use, using smart metering to raise awareness. Community groups could also help local residents to make links between generation and demand, for example encouraging people to use less energy when a project is not generating.

“We need a national energy policy which recognises community energy as the core not a sideshow”

Workshop participant

Create an enabling national policy environment: community energy should be at the core of energy policy, with stable policies and incentives to encourage involvement. To make it easier for groups to access information and advice and to establish smoother processes, the government should create a single resource that brings together information about professional advisers, including lawyers, planners and others who can help.

Encourage new partnerships: partnerships between community groups and developers, suppliers or local authorities would help to facilitate projects and in some cases result in co-investment (the City of Edinburgh Council’s sustainable development partnership energy sub group is one example of joint working). Two areas (eg urban and rural) could form a partnership, matching up locally available resources and funds. In some cases, the government may need to work with local authorities, to help them understand why low carbon should be a priority and make clear what their role in supporting community energy should be.

National recommendations for enabling community energy

Whilst the issues and solutions discussed in our workshops applied to three distinct local areas, a number are also clearly broadly relevant to other areas and can be used to inform the government's thinking as it finalises its community energy strategy.

We have distilled the conclusions into six high level recommendations for government to encourage and enable the expansion of successful community energy schemes across the UK. Under each are more specific indications of what is needed and how to take them forward.

Strengthen national policy for community projects

Set a clear, ambitious vision for community energy in the UK. Community groups need certainty that policies will remain in place, with changes to support only made with sufficient advance warning. As has already been seen, policies suffering from a lack of transparency, subject to unreasonable or unpredictable changes, act as a disincentive or barrier to schemes.

Consider communities explicitly in the design of energy policies and schemes such as FiTs, the Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) and the Green Deal. These should be accessible to local community groups whether co-operatives, local charities, Community Interest Companies (CICs) or other bodies.

Review how the RHI could support communities and offer a clear package to community groups, in co-ordination with the development of the domestic RHI. Communities could pursue renewable heat opportunities using the RHI but this was barely raised in our workshops, suggesting current low awareness of the scheme.

Establish a nationwide information resource for community groups

Set up an information and advice forum run by a not for profit agency. It should feature an up to date database of existing community energy schemes, tips for setting up a new project, information on the ownership structures and funding options available, and provide links to people or organisations who offer tailored advice and support for particular types of scheme.

Run a national communications campaign selling the benefits of schemes such as FiTs, the RHI and the Green Deal, making clear what is on offer to local communities. At the local level, this should then make it easier for community groups to engage the wider community and secure buy-in to schemes.

Reduce administrative, planning and regulatory burdens

Give community projects priority access to the grid, with lower initial access costs and connection charges. This would simplify the process for community groups, reduce the likelihood of commercial players getting there first (especially where grid capacity for generation is limited, such as in rural Somerset), and at the same time bring down costs.

DECC and CLG should work together to support communities in drawing up neighbourhood development orders, or in using the 'community right to build', for community energy projects. Planning could play a positive role for community energy, but existing processes need to be simplified and neighbourhood planning should be used more effectively. This support should include legal advice, technical guidance and simplified information that can be used to support local consultation.

The government should work with relevant bodies, such as the Environment Agency, Ofgem and network companies, to agree standardised processes and, where possible, standard models for documentation, to reduce the high administrative burden on community groups. This should be easily accessible, clearly setting out expectations for different types of projects, the steps that need to be followed and the information required.

Improve start up and project finance options

Provide start up funding to help community groups get projects off the ground, as is already available in Scotland.⁸ This could be in the way of one off grants, or long term loans provided at low or zero interest rates, to fund feasibility studies and other early stages of project development. Extending the rural community energy fund to apply to both rural and urban areas could be one way to deliver this, making it easier for communities to pursue local opportunities regardless of where they live.

Use the Green Investment Bank to provide accessible finance for community energy schemes. This could be through a dedicated fund managed by a third party or in partnership with commercial lenders.

DECC could convene the banks to establish how more banks could provide community project finance, as the main lenders for community schemes do not have the capacity to support all projects. This could help to determine the support needed from industry bodies and from the government to enable this.

State aid rules and government FiT policy should be amended so that community projects are still eligible for FiT payments, even when they have benefited from public grant funding, which is often vital for volunteers to get projects off the ground. Better financial support is also needed for communities who partner with businesses or local authorities to pursue more ambitious schemes, for example those of 10-50MW which fall between the eligibility criteria for FiTs and contracts for difference. Although government plans that projects up to 10MW should be eligible for FiTs are positive, currently FiT payments are not as accessible or attractive as they could be for community groups.

Ensure local energy projects feature a level of community ownership

A level of community ownership should be a pre-condition of development, to ensure local benefit, encourage wider public support and reduce local opposition, where commercial players are establishing renewable energy projects. As per the coalition's commitment, community energy should be about ownership, not just benefit.⁹

Ofgem should be tasked with considering how local energy projects can offer a supply option to local people, possibly through the development of 'Licence Lite', a junior electricity supply licencing system for smaller electricity generators, to make it accessible to communities.

Local authorities should be encouraged to form partnerships with communities, for example through joint ventures. This would help them to access lower borrowing rates and identify suitable sites for projects. Partnerships with local authorities should also make it easier for communities to deliver energy efficiency programmes (see below).

Encourage community led energy efficiency programmes

Provide incentives for communities to promote and deliver energy efficiency initiatives, with support from local authorities to inform them of the benefits and help identify the appropriate measures and communities to work with. Examples of incentives include giving communities easier access to Green Deal loans, eg at lower interest rates or by linking to council tax reductions, or stipulating the proportion of ECO available for community groups.

Conclusion

There is huge potential for community energy to play a major role in the UK's future energy system, and to contribute to energy security, carbon reduction and energy efficiency. Existing schemes in the UK are already starting to show what's possible. But we are still a long way from reaching the achievements of countries like Germany, where around 50 per cent of renewable energy capacity is locally owned.¹⁰

The government's community energy strategy offers a real opportunity to make sure there are many more success stories, in communities of all shapes and sizes across the country. DECC ministers have given a sense of the ambition, with Secretary of State Ed Davey calling for "a community energy revolution in the UK", and Greg Barker saying he wants to see the "Big 6,000, or go even further and see far more companies and individuals and communities generating their own heat and electricity."¹¹

But, without taking on board the views of the communities who are trying to get schemes off the ground, like those we spoke to in Sheffield, Somerset and Edinburgh, and without addressing the barriers they face, the strategy may never live up to the ministers' expectations.

It is clear that people across the country are committed to community energy as an idea, and that they see the potential benefits it could bring, not just to their local areas but to the UK as a whole. The people we met identified plenty of local options and opportunities, including rivers for hydro projects, exposed land where wind turbines could be installed, flat roofs for solar PV, fuel poor residents looking for ways to bring bills down, off grid properties in need of cheaper heating solutions, and homes needing energy efficiency improvements.

There are already many inspiring community champions determined to set up and deliver schemes to help their community generate its own renewable energy, bring down energy use or buy energy collectively. But they can't do it alone. Many are struggling to succeed, despite significant and sustained efforts, due to difficulties with finance, accessing support and advice, regulation and planning requirements, local opposition and other barriers.

The community energy revolution that Ed Davey wants to see certainly won't happen overnight, and countries like Germany have set the bar high. But if the government gets this strategy right, and demonstrates strong leadership, ambition and support for community energy, it will take the UK significantly closer to achieving that goal.

Workshop participants

Sheffield Central

Paul Blomfield, MP for Sheffield Central; Andy Tickle, CPRE South Yorkshire; Chris Dale, Danfoss Heat Pumps; Oliver Coppard, Dearne Valley Eco-Vision; Rob Samuelson, Energy Jump; Simon Firth, Environment Agency; Hellen Smith, Friends of Millhouse Park; Wendy Bussey, Groundwork Sheffield; Kevin Frea, Halton Lune Hydro; Lorcan Anglin, Green Energy Centre; Paul Davies, Roseland Community Energy Trust; Maxwell Ayamba, Sheffield Black and Ethnic Minority Environmental Network; Max Ghani, Sheffield Black and Ethnic Minority Environmental Network; Bernd Hoermann, Sheffield City Council; Cllr Alf Meade, Sheffield City Council; Cllr Nikki Bond, Sheffield City Council; Cllr Jack Scott, Sheffield City Council; David Kemp, Sheffield Civic Trust; Andrew Garrard, Sheffield Hallam University; Prof Dharme Dharmadesa, Sheffield Hallam University; Dr Richard Collins, Sheffield Renewables; Jean Tinsley, Sheffield Renewables; David Garlovsky, Solar Active; Malcolm Denman, South Yorkshire Environment and Energy Management Group; John Johnson, Speak Easy; Susannah Diamond, Transition Sheffield; Ro Berkshire, Transition Sheffield; Dr Alastair Buckley, University of Sheffield.

Wells

Tessa Munt, MP for Wells; Earl Bramley-Howard, Avalon Community Energy; Chris Briton, Avalon Community Energy; Gareth Hoskins, Brendon Energy; Alistair Gordon, Burnham Without Parish Council; Rachel Coxcoon, Centre for Sustainable Energy; Marlene Pickford, Chilcompton Parish Council; Frances Good, CPRE Somerset; Ian King, DECC; John Malone, Energy4All; Cllr Jon Cousins, Glastonbury Town Council; John Barlow, Visible Energy Solutions; Michael Baugh, Visible Energy Solutions; Ted Alexander, Lydford Weir Company; Dodger Long, Lydford Weir Company; Mike Pauley, Lydford Weir Company; Jodie Giles, Regen SW; David Parkin, Sustainable Axbridge Network; Geoff Dunlop, Sustainable Axbridge Network; Steve Pratt, Tincknell Green Energy; Cllr Gerald Lunn, Weare Parish Council; Robin Mewes, Wedmore Community Power Co-operative; Steve Mewes, Wedmore Community Power Co-operative, Wedmore Green Group and office of Tessa Munt MP.

Edinburgh West

Mike Crockart, MP for Edinburgh West; Claire Addison, AES Wind; Martin Whiteford, Anderson Strathern; Emma Baker, City of Edinburgh Council; Felix Wight, Community Energy Scotland; David Salton, Corstorphine Community Council; Dave Halbert, Craighleith/Blackhall Community Council; Melissa Smith, DECC; Paul Phare, Edinburgh Community Energy Co-operative and Energy4All; Andrew Tait, Edinburgh Community Energy Co-operative and North Edinburgh Development Trust; Anne Schiffer, Friends of the Earth Scotland; Ross McEwan, Granton Improvement Society; Alison Reid, Greenpeace Edinburgh local group; Martin Petty, Harlaw Hydro; Roy Douglas, Muirhouse/Salvesen Community Council; Chris Cook, Nordic Enterprise Trust; Katie Newlands, PNE Wind; John Maslen, Realise Renewables; Vijay Bhopal, Sustainable Community Energy Network; Matthew Parsons, Sustainable Community Energy Network; Bob Muirson, Transition Edinburgh Pentlands; David Bewsey, Transition Edinburgh Pentlands and Colinton Amenity Association; Gordon Davidson, Validus Energy; Christopher Trigg, Validus Energy; Bruce Doney.

Endnotes

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This programme, founded in 2009, has worked with over 50 MPs to develop knowledge and skills to lead a proactive agenda on climate change.

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Green Alliance

Green Alliance is a charity and independent think tank, focused on ambitious leadership for the environment. With a track record of over 30 years, Green Alliance has worked with the most influential leaders from the NGO and business communities. Green Alliance's work generates new thinking and dialogue, and has increased political action and support for environmental solutions in the UK.

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