

CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Developing Local Partnerships for Onshore Wind in England: Regen's response

For the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero: Open consultation on developing local partnerships for onshore wind in England.



July 2023

About Regen



Regen is an independent centre of energy expertise with a mission to accelerate the transition to a zero-carbon energy system. We have nearly 20 years' experience in transforming the energy system for net zero and delivering expert advice and market insight on the systemic challenges of decarbonising power, heat, and transport.

Regen is also a membership organisation and manages the Electricity Storage Network (ESN), the voice of the UK storage industry. We have over 150 members who share our mission, including clean energy developers, businesses, local authorities, community energy groups, academic institutions, and research organisations across the energy sector.

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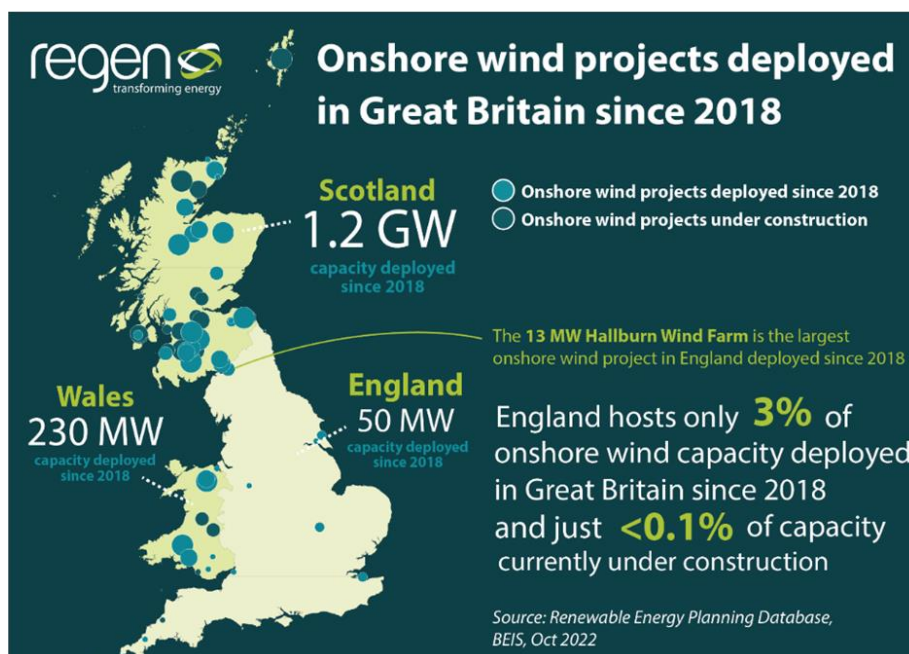
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Overall recommendations

While we are supportive of a greater consideration of community engagement and benefits for onshore wind, these proposals **MUST** be accompanied by a change in planning policy (removal of footnote 54 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)). There will not be any new community benefit funds without new onshore wind projects.

As depicted in the image below, the current planning policy has significantly impacted the ability of onshore wind to be delivered in England. As we set out in [our response](#) to the 2023 open consultation on reforms to national planning policy relating to onshore wind, led by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the changes set out in the consultation did not go far enough in terms of creating a policy that will enable new onshore wind farms to be developed in England.

The proposed changes kept an unreasonable requirement of community support and of site allocation and thus continued to create a significantly high bar for new onshore wind farms, over other forms of energy development. Onshore wind should be treated equally to other forms of energy infrastructure. Thus, while we have provided detailed comments on the current consultation, we want to reiterate our call that footnote 54 is removed from the NPPF as soon as possible. This will give local authorities, communities, developers, and investors the confidence to pursue new onshore wind development in England. Such a change will enable improved community engagement and benefit to come forward on new as well as repowered projects.



The focus of this consultation is 'developing local partnerships for onshore wind'. The consultation states that 'through the development of a wind farm, developers and communities can be said to enter into a partnership'. It then describes this partnership as having two elements 'scoping, development and planning', i.e., community engagement and 'how the community is enabled to benefit from agreeing to host an onshore wind project', i.e., community benefits. However, we would argue that this is often not a partnership. Rather, it is a process of negotiation through which communities have had varying experiences.

Our view is that local ownership, community benefits and engagement are vital to the success of onshore wind development to ensure that communities are not only engaged in the decision-making process, but can also directly benefit from wind farms in their local area. While the consultation largely focuses on discounted energy bills as an innovative form of community benefit, there should be a wider discussion on how communities can engage and benefit through a range of routes and the support they may need to achieve this.

As well as the urgent need to change the planning policy, there are a number of aspects not covered within this consultation that must be considered and implemented:

- **There needs to be inclusion of support for shared ownership.** Shared ownership provides the opportunity for a true 'local partnership' between developers and communities. The evidence and suggestion of how this can work in practice have already been undertaken by the [2014 shared ownership taskforce](#). We are thus asking for shared ownership to be available as an option for communities on all new and repowered wind farms. We suggest this is included in the updates to the Community Benefits Protocol.
- **Support needs to be provided for communities in using/administering community benefit funding.** Without greater support, there are likely to be communities that face challenges in accessing and using community benefit funding. Challenges in accessing funding have been seen to contribute towards negative perceptions of wind farms over time and could impact acceptance of future projects. We suggest that the Government introduces a support scheme to help communities in deciding what form of benefits they would like to receive and how to administer the funds. The CARES scheme in Scotland provides an excellent example of this type of support.
- **Support must be provided for fully community-owned onshore wind projects.** While it is important to consider how communities can benefit from developer-led onshore wind schemes, the greatest benefit that communities can achieve from onshore wind is

through developing and owning their own projects. We are therefore calling for the Government to reintroduce funding and support for the development of community energy projects. In particular, now that the Rural Energy Community Fund is no longer available, there is a need for seed funding for both rural and urban communities.

We also suggest that there is a need to consider how guidance and support on community engagement and benefits aligns with that in Scotland and Wales. Additionally, we are pleased to see this consultation recognising the need for a longer-term approach to engagement and benefits. Communities should not just be considered around the time of planning applications but need to be engaged throughout the lifetime of a project. As many of our onshore wind farms are reaching the end of their time-limited 25-year planning consents, repowering provides an important opportunity to alter existing community benefit packages to reflect the needs and preferences of the community.

Responses to consultation questions

Engaging the community

Q 1. Do you agree with the proposal to embed the principles of best practice engagement into planning guidance?

Yes, we support the proposal to embed the principles of best practice engagement into Planning Practice Guidance. The best practice guide on community engagement with wind farms is a comprehensive document. However, there is currently no requirement for compliance with the recommendations. Setting the guide as Planning Practice Guidance should establish a minimum standard that has to be achieved.

We want to emphasise that embedding the principles of best practice engagement into Planning Practice Guidance should be undertaken **instead of requiring a measure of community support in planning policy** as is currently required in the NPPF and in the Government's proposed changes to the NPPF. International peer-reviewed evidence consistently shows that high-quality public engagement can increase local support for renewable energy projects¹. Meanwhile, community support itself cannot easily be measured. Therefore, we reiterate our call for footnote 54 of the current NPPF to be removed so that onshore wind is treated in the same way as other infrastructure in the planning system.

One additional consideration is how statements of community involvement are assessed. Wind farm developers are required to submit statements of community involvement as part of a planning application; however, there is currently no scrutiny method to ensure that the best-practice guidelines are being followed and that high-quality engagement is being undertaken. In making this guidance a statutory requirement, there may also need to be an assessment of compliance. A suitable method of achieving this could be using independent consultants to scrutinise the statements and their implementation. Depending on the scale of the wind farm development, future responsibility for scrutiny may include Local Authorities or the Planning Inspectorate. Such scrutiny could involve measurement against agreed criteria or indicators.

¹ See for example: Firestone, J. et al. 2018. Reconsidering barriers to wind power projects: community engagement, developer transparency and place. *Journal of environmental policy & planning* 20(3), pp. 370–386 and Hindmarsh, R. and Matthews, C., 2008. Deliberative speak at the turbine face: community engagement, wind farms, and renewable energy transitions, in Australia. *Journal of environmental policy & planning*, 10(3), pp.217-232.

Linked to this, there may also be a need to provide additional resourcing to local authorities once the onshore wind planning policy changes.

Additionally, it will be important to regularly review the principles of best practice engagement to reflect the latest evidence or examples of best practice.

Q2. What other ways are there to improve community engagement when onshore wind developers consult with the local community?

When considering community engagement, it is firstly important to acknowledge that there is no one size-fits-all approach as all communities are different; however, there are certain principles that help to ensure that communities are properly engaged. We agree with the principles of best practice engagement set out in the 2021 best practice document. We are particularly pleased to see consideration of engagement across the lifetime of the site as this is vital for ensuring that communities have a positive experience of onshore wind over the long term.

Successful community engagement should capture knowledge from all sections of the community to help inform decision making. However, public consultations are often most likely to capture the opinions of the most active and vocal members of a community, representing a vocal minority of the population. Developers could improve community engagement through a greater focus on trying to involve the harder-to-reach groups. This could include reaching out to a diverse range of community groups and organisations. Part of this process should involve making the planning process more accessible through avoiding the use of technical language and providing simplified information. Developers should be available to answer questions throughout the process. While digital methods can be incorporated, there should be a recognition that not all members of the public are able to access digital platforms.

It is important that engagement is undertaken as early as possible in the process and enables communities to play a role in shaping a scheme, e.g. in the design and detail. For example, this could involve workshops where potential site locations / layouts are presented to communities. Such approaches can build trust between the parties, leading to greater cooperation and reduced opposition. This can be seen to have occurred in the case of repowering schemes where developers used community experiences and insights to change the design of a scheme².

² Windemer, R., 2019. Managing (im) permanence: end-of-life challenges for the wind and solar energy sectors (Doctoral dissertation, Cardiff University).

It should be recognised that local people may have attachments to certain places or landscapes that go beyond national level landscape designations, understanding these subjective constraints can help shape the design of the scheme in a way that achieves community support. Project information should also be provided to communities as early as possible in a format that is accessible to non-experts, e.g. avoiding the use of technical language. There is a need to ensure that public engagement is an ongoing process and not a one way passing of information to the community. High quality engagement should fundamentally involve two-way knowledge sharing and collaboration between the developer and the local community³.

It is also important for the Government to recognise that community-owned projects are likely to generate higher levels of engagement due to the nature of the organisations being embedded within the local community and due to the community fully owning and thus being the sole beneficiary of the development. As such, we would emphasise the need to provide additional financial support for community energy projects alongside the changes to community engagement and benefits for commercially owned onshore wind projects.

Q3. Are there other methods of engagement between developers and local communities that should be considered best practice?

There is a need to ensure that developers focus on forming genuine local partnerships with communities. This should involve trying to fully involve communities in the development of a proposal. There is a potential for developers to partner with local organisations such as community energy organisations to ensure that they are forming a real partnership with the local community. As we set out later in this consultation response, this could include developers partnering with communities through shared ownership schemes (please see our response to question 7).

Alongside the best-practice identified in our response to Q2 of this consultation, we would highlight that there have been some methods of engagement that have tried to reach a wider audience such as attending wider community events e.g. local community fetes - such approaches are beneficial. Another useful approach is taking communities to visit another local wind farm so they can see the scale of a site and learn about the infrastructure.

³ Devine - Wright, P., 2011. Public engagement with large - scale renewable energy technologies: breaking the cycle of NIMBYism. Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change, 2(1), pp.19-26.

Q4. What are the main barriers to effective engagement between local communities and developers?

There are a number of factors that have been seen internationally to impact effective engagement between local communities and developers. These are as follows:

- Timing of engagement.** If developers do not engage communities at the very start of the process, then communities may be unlikely to feel that they are able to have a real influence on the design of the project or may feel that the project has been imposed upon them. It is thus important that developers engage with communities as early as possible.

- Including the harder-to-reach groups.** Effective engagement needs to involve as many members of the community as possible. For example, this needs to include reaching those who may have little time to engage, may have challenges understanding energy projects, or who may feel intimidated by the process. In order to overcome this challenge, a wide variety of engagement methods should be used, and developers should reach out to local community organisations.

- Building trust between the developer and the community.** Effective engagement needs to involve establishing trust with the community. This can be established through early engagement and clear provision of information as well as establishing a clear line of communication. This clear provision of information may need to include very high-level information such as why wind farms are needed. It should also involve treating communities with fairness and respect during the decision-making process. Trust also arises through explaining to communities why certain decisions have been made.

- Listening to what the community want.** High-quality engagement involves listening to what the community wants, for example, in terms of community benefits and trying to respond to those requests. This should include demonstrating how community feedback is being captured and used. It should also involve responding to feedback even when the change being asked for can't be made and explaining why that is the case.

- Long-term engagement.** Sometimes community engagement is only considered during the planning process. Ongoing engagement over the lifetime of the project is very important to ensure that communities continue to benefit from the project. Communities need to have an accessible single point of contact that they can go to if they need any concerns to be addressed. Where this doesn't happen, then concerns and even misinformation can escalate.

Q5. How can effective community engagement help to gain community support for onshore wind?

Effective and meaningful community engagement that addresses the barriers set out in response to question four above has regularly been seen to lead to greater support for onshore wind⁴. In particular, effective community engagement that involves communities in the design of a project can lead to greater levels of support. If communities have had the opportunity to properly shape the design of the project, then concerns over aspects that they would previously have opposed are likely to have been reduced. Effective community engagement should also give communities a say in the form of community benefits that they want to receive. The provision of meaningful community benefits that respond to the needs and desires of the local community can lead to greater levels of support. (We provide more information on this in response to the second set of consultation questions below).

Ongoing engagement with a community can also help to ensure that support remains over the lifetime of a wind project. Research published in 2023⁵ has highlighted the need for ongoing engagement with communities over the lifetime of a wind project in order to establish continued trust in the developer, ensure any concerns or misinformation are addressed and ensure that communities are aware of and using the community benefit fund. The research identified that these aspects of continued engagement over the operational lifetime of a wind farm can also influence community responses to applications to repower or life-extend the wind farm. Likewise, from a longer-term perspective, if a community feels that a wind farm was imposed upon them and they were not properly involved / engaged in the original planning application, they may be more likely to oppose any future application (such as repowering) on that site.

Q6. Are there ways community support for onshore wind can be defined?

Community support cannot accurately be measured or defined in a way that is suitable to be placed in policy. Onshore wind should thus be treated in the same way as any other infrastructure in the planning system, with the standard planning consultation process providing the opportunity to record community responses. The experience with the current NPPF policy

⁴ See for example, Firestone, J. et al. 2018. Reconsidering barriers to wind power projects: community engagement, developer transparency and place. *Journal of environmental policy & planning* 20(3), pp. 370–386

⁵ Windemer, R., 2023. Acceptance should not be assumed. How the dynamics of social acceptance changes over time, impacting onshore wind repowering. *Energy Policy*, 173, p.113363.

has shown that community support is very difficult to measure or evidence. Planning appeal decisions⁶ show a lack of consensus on how to interpret the current community backing requirement. A referendum approach has been suggested, by some, as a way of measuring community support; however, there are significant challenges to this approach which do not make it suitable for enabling new onshore wind farms to come forward. Implementing a local referendum can be very challenging, time-consuming and expensive. It is also not straightforward to identify the host community impacted by a particular energy infrastructure proposal⁷. Wind farm proposals often occur in sites at the border of more than one planning authority, resulting in contrasting community definitions.

Tests of community support have been considered by the UK Government in relation to underground storage of radioactive waste, with three mechanisms considered (local referendum, statistically representative polling and formal consultation⁸). However, these have not yet been successfully applied. The timing of a method such as a referendum also creates potential challenges. People's opinions about the merits of wind energy developments have been seen to change over time⁹, particularly becoming significantly more favourable once a project is built, compared to during the planning application process. Referenda can also be divisive, whereas high-quality community engagement helps to build agreement and acceptance.

Our position is that **focusing on high-quality engagement and meaningful community benefits is more suitable than trying to define community support**. This can be evidenced through detailed statements of community engagement and through implementing a transparent process for deciding upon the details of a community benefit scheme. It can also be evidenced by recording the details of community benefits. The idea of a community benefit register was proposed in 2014, but did not materialise. We suggest that this is now implemented.

⁶ Planning appeal reference: APP/Y2003/W/15/31347995 and APP/D0840/W/15/3097706

⁷ Devine-Wright, P. and Sherry-Brennan, F., 2019. Where do you draw the line? Legitimacy and fairness in constructing community benefit fund boundaries for energy infrastructure projects. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 54, pp.166-175.

⁸ BEIS (2018) Working with Communities implementing geological disposal Available online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/working-with-communitiesimplementing-geological-disposal>

⁹ Wolsink, M., 2000. Wind power and the NIMBY-myth: institutional capacity and the limited significance of public support. *Renewable energy*, 21(1), pp.49-64. And Devine-Wright, P., 2005. Beyond NIMBYism: towards an integrated framework for understanding public perceptions of wind energy. *Wind Energy: An International Journal for Progress and Applications in Wind Power Conversion Technology*, 8(2), pp.125-139.

Community Benefits:

Q7. Do you agree with the proposal to update the existing Community Benefits Protocol for community benefits from onshore wind to reflect innovative and emerging schemes, like energy bill discounts? If so, in what ways should the Protocol be updated?

Yes, we support the proposal to update the Community Benefits Protocol for community benefits from onshore wind to reflect innovative and emerging schemes; however, this should provide other options in addition to electricity bill discounts and **must include the option of shared ownership. The community sector should also be involved in the updated of the community benefits protocol.** It is also important to highlight here that this process will not have an impact unless footnote 54 of the NPPF is removed, allowing onshore wind to be developed in England.

As we set out in more detail in response to Q 10, below, electricity bill discounts could be one of the options offered to communities, but should not be the only innovative option. Alternative innovative approaches could include (but not be limited to) community retrofit programmes or providing direct support to existing community energy organisations.

An option that is clearly missing from the Community Benefits Protocol and this consultation, is shared ownership. Shared ownership refers to a financial structure whereby a community group is a financial partner of the wind farm project over the life of the project. Shared ownership can lead to strong economic benefits for the local community. These economic benefits can be used to ensure support to the wider community; for example, through helping those in fuel poverty. Examples of these wider benefits have been seen in shared ownership projects in Scotland¹⁰. The UK Government previously undertook significant research into this by setting up a shared ownership taskforce comprising representatives from the community energy sector and renewables industry. In 2014, this taskforce developed a report setting out a clear framework to facilitate a voluntary approach to increasing shared ownership of commercial onshore renewables developments. In the 2015 government response to the shared ownership taskforce, it was identified that shared ownership 'can represent new ways for communities and industry to work collaboratively and constructively together on the ground to the benefit of both'.

¹⁰ Schiffer, A., 2017. Shared Ownership in Scotland: opening up citizen participation in renewable energy. Available online at: <https://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/id/eprint/4900/1/SharedOwnershipReportWeb.pdf>

However, since that 2015 report, no progress has been made on shared ownership. This is despite many calls for it to be progressed, and despite the [Government webpage](#) stating that ‘we now expect all relevant renewable energy developers to be engaging with this guide and discussing shared ownership opportunities with local communities.’ This consultation provides an optimal moment to bring forward the recommendations of the taskforce and enable communities to have the option of shared ownership of new onshore wind farms. Such an approach would facilitate real partnerships between industry and communities and significantly benefit communities. **The option of shared ownership should be offered as one of the community benefit options for all onshore wind projects, including repowered as well as new projects.**

Updates to the protocol should also encourage developers to undertake early engagement with communities about community benefits. Such engagement and discussions on community benefits should be separate from the wider community engagement on the scope of the project. This should follow the recommendations on best practice community engagement, particularly in terms of reaching a wider audience. It should also be made clear to communities that contributing to community benefits discussions does not affect a community member’s ability to oppose or support a development.

Q8. How is the current system for community benefits from onshore wind working? Can it be improved and, if so, how?

There are numerous cases in the UK where community benefit funds can be seen to have made a positive contribution to communities. Research¹¹ has identified that in some cases, community benefits also appear to positively influence perceptions of wind farms over a longer period and can positively influence responses to repowering applications. This positive response can be seen to have occurred when communities have been able to recognise the benefits that the wind farm has provided over its life, for example, in being able to identify and value the projects that the community fund has supported. However, not all experiences of community benefit funds have been positive and there are improvements to be made in order to ensure that all communities maximise the potential long lasting positive impact of community benefits.

Community benefits have not always worked successfully in the UK. There have been cases where communities have reported having a negative experience of community benefits because they have not been aware of the funding or the types of projects that they can spend

¹¹ Windemer, R., 2023. Acceptance should not be assumed. How the dynamics of social acceptance changes over time, impacting onshore wind repowering. *Energy Policy*, 173, p.113363.

money on ¹². Concerns have also been raised around the potential challenges associated with the distribution of community benefit payments in terms of who is accessing the funds ¹³. An important consideration here is if the community benefit funds have led to widely recognisable changes that have clearly benefited the local community, or if they have been considered as a bribe. Research identified that people considering a benefit fund to be a bribe raised questions regarding how the money had been advertised and spent¹⁴. There have also been difficulties in cases where there is a small community receiving community benefits from a number of projects. For example, there have been examples where a small community has run out of projects to spend community benefit funding on due to the nature of community benefit funds having to be used for a community project¹⁵.

The current system of community benefits can be improved through increasing flexibility and through providing additional support to communities. The majority of community benefit funds in England involve the traditional grant funding approach, but this is not necessarily what all communities want or what will provide the greatest benefit. In our response to question 10 we provide a detailed discussion of the type of support that communities could receive and suggest that increasing the flexibility of community benefit funds means that they will be able to more accurately respond to community needs. As we also set out in our response to question 10, communities should be provided with support to work out what form of benefit would be useful.

The process of deciding upon a suitable community benefits package should involve an open process of dialogue between the developer and community; the process should help to identify what form of community benefit could lead to a long-term tangible benefit in the local area. Part of this needs to involve the provision of clear information to the community so they are aware of the different potential options. This must also be a transparent process that facilitates trust between the community and the developer. Engagement and discussions on community benefits should be separate from the wider communications on the scope of the project. It

¹² Windemer, R., 2023. Acceptance should not be assumed. How the dynamics of social acceptance changes over time, impacting onshore wind repowering. *Energy Policy*, 173, p.113363.

¹³ See: Aitken, M., 2010. Wind power and community benefits: Challenges and opportunities. *Energy policy*, 38(10), pp.6066-6075 and Cowell, R., Bristow, G. and Munday, M., 2011. Acceptance, acceptability and environmental justice: the role of community benefits in wind energy development. *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, 54(4), pp.539-557.

¹⁴ Windemer, R., 2023. Acceptance should not be assumed. How the dynamics of social acceptance changes over time, impacting onshore wind repowering. *Energy Policy*, 173, p.113363.

¹⁵ Windemer, R., 2019. Managing (im) permanence: end-of-life challenges for the wind and solar energy sectors (Doctoral dissertation, Cardiff University).

should also be made clear to communities that contributing to community benefits discussions does not affect a community member's decision to oppose or support a development.

Additionally, we strongly recommend that community benefits should remain immaterial to planning decisions. We note there have been discussions regarding the potential for community benefits to become a material consideration in planning terms, but feel that this would create significant legal challenges, challenges for planning decision makers and would not be in the best interests of local communities. It could also set a concerning precedent for other forms of development.

Q9. What community benefits packages are currently being offered by onshore wind developers and are the packages being offered sufficient? Are there other ways the host community should benefit?

The most common form of benefit package offered in England is the community benefit fund. As outlined in our response to question 8, in some cases such a fund approach has not been successful as it has not responded to the needs of the local community. As we set out in response to questions 7 and 10, we suggest that there needs to be additional flexibility to enable new forms of community benefits that respond to local needs. One such approach could be community shared ownership, allowing communities to get a greater level of direct benefit from an onshore wind farm. We also suggest that a community benefits register is developed in order to provide details and examples of community benefit schemes. Such a register could both help to ensure that community benefits are being used as well as providing examples of different forms of benefits.

Regarding other ways that communities could benefit, developers could look for additional ways that they could support local community organisations. This could include helping a community energy organisation with feasibility work for their project, staff donating their time to help support a community energy project etc.

Aside from communities benefiting from commercial projects, there is also a need to enable communities to develop and own their own onshore wind turbines. Community ownership of projects provides a significantly larger benefit for communities as the profits are focused on benefitting the local area. To achieve this, we suggest that there needs to be a change in government policy to provide financial and policy support for community energy.

Q10. Are there new or innovative types of community benefits that could be offered from onshore wind developers, such as local electricity bill discounts? Are there alternative approaches to facilitating the provision of innovative community benefits from onshore wind that should be considered?

We agree that new and innovative community benefits could be offered to communities. This can help to ensure that the benefits that communities receive can create a long-lasting impact. However, alongside the introduction of innovative benefits there must be support provided to communities in terms of helping them to work out what form of benefit would be of value to their area. Without this support then those communities who have less experience of community benefits, potentially this might include a higher proportion of lower income communities, will miss out, going against the principles of a just transition.

Electricity bill discounts could be one of the options offered to communities but should not be the only form of innovative community benefit. In some cases, electricity bill discounts could be a popular option to help communities with the increased cost of energy bills. However, it is important to note that bill discounts provide a short-term benefit as opposed to the longer-term development benefits that can be achieved through other forms of community benefit, such as project funding or shared ownership. Additionally, an energy bill discount scheme would need to be done in a way that does not also tie the community to a particular energy provider. We suggest that existing models and experiences of this approach should be investigated in order to understand the perspective and experiences of the communities involved. Electricity bill discounts would also need to be accompanied by clear provision of information and support to communities to ensure that all members of a community understand how to access it. This would need to include consideration of those without internet access. Additionally, the potential negative consequence of this approach in terms of increased household energy consumption should be considered, as research has identified that subsidising the cost of energy can lead to increased energy usage¹⁶.

As we set out in more detail in response to question seven, shared ownership should be an option for enabling communities to achieve a more substantial benefit from hosting onshore wind infrastructure. As well as providing an option for shared ownership, commercial developers could also look for additional ways to support local community energy organisations. This could include helping a community energy organisation with feasibility work for their project or staff donating their time to help support the community energy project etc.

¹⁶ Albatayneh, A., Juaidi, A., Abdallah, R., Pena-Fernandez, A. and Manzano-Agugliaro, F., 2022. Effect of the subsidised electrical energy tariff on the residential energy consumption in Jordan. *Energy Reports*, 8, pp.893-903.

Regarding innovative facilitation methods, as community benefits packages become more diverse, there may be an increased need for external organisations to administer them. While in some cases this role has been undertaken successfully by local organisations, not all communities will have an organisation with the necessary skills and capacity. This may also become increasingly challenging for organisations as the size of funds increase or as communities become recipients of more than one fund. However, the fund is administered, local decision making should be the key element. There is also a need for additional support for those communities who wish to pursue shared ownership. Such support could include impartial advice on the process, risks and requirements, as well as more detailed support on the legal and financial aspects.

Communities, particularly those unfamiliar with community benefits may also need support in terms of understanding the different forms of community benefits and what may work for their community. There needs to be accessible information for communities that enable them to understand the different options available. Alongside updating the Community Benefits Protocol, we suggest that the Government commit to providing additional support to communities to help them both administer and make informed decisions on community benefits. Support is particularly important for those communities who have no previous experience using community benefit schemes and for lower-income communities. There needs to be accessible information for communities that enables them to understand the different options available. One option could be to provide funding for an organisation to work with communities to help them decide on their priorities for their local area. An approach such as the Community and Renewable Energy Scheme (CARES), delivered by Local Energy Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Government, could be implemented. Part of the CARES scheme involves helping communities to develop a community action plan. Such a plan is used to set out the long-term vision for the community, including what they would like to achieve, investment aspirations and potential projects that could help them to achieve their aspirations. Such a plan can also be adapted as the needs and priorities of a community change. Through developing such a plan, communities can ensure that community benefits respond to the longer-term needs and ambitions of the community.

Developers also have an important role to play in improving the facilitation of community benefits. Community benefits must respond to the needs of the community and reflect the types of benefits that they want. The process of deciding upon a suitable community benefits package should involve an open process of dialogue between the developer and community; the process should help to identify what form of community benefit could lead to a long-term tangible benefit. Part of this needs to involve the provision of clear information to the community so they are aware of the different potential options. This must also be a transparent process that facilitates trust between the community and the developer. Engagement and

discussions on community benefits should be separate from the wider community engagement on the scope of the project. It should also be made clear that contributing to community benefits discussions does not affect a community member's decision to oppose or support a development.

Q11. What challenges do communities and onshore wind developers face when designing and implementing community benefits?

There are a number of challenges that need to be addressed to ensure the successful implementation of community benefits:

- **Ensuring effective engagement:** ensuring that the wider community is involved in the design of the community benefit scheme, rather than a vocal minority. Effective engagement is important for ensuring that the community benefits scheme reflects the needs of the wider community, not just those of the most vocal and active members of the community. Responding to this challenge involves communicating the opportunity amongst a wide range of groups. This process can take time in terms of identifying and speaking to relevant community organisations and groups.
- **Ensuring equity in the distribution of benefits.** Linked to effective engagement is the need to monitor and ensure that benefits are being distributed in an equitable way. There is a need to ensure that community benefits are not only being accessed by a minority of groups and that they are benefiting the wider community. A register of community benefits could be a way to help ensure this.
- **Developing a detailed understanding of how community could benefit.** As we set out earlier in this document, some communities may require additional support in terms of understanding how to use a community benefit fund and to decide on their priorities. While some communities may have existing networks or groups to assist with these opportunities, other locations may not. Managing a community benefit fund can also create challenges. In some cases, management within the community has worked well. However, in other cases, there is a clear need for an intermediary organisation that can administer funds.

Communities who are recipients of numerous community benefit funds. An increasingly prominent challenge in certain locations occurs when a community is the beneficiary of a number of community benefit funds. There have already been examples where a small community has run out of projects to spend community benefit funding on due to

restrictions having been placed on how community benefit funds can be spent. In these cases, there is a need for developers to work with the community to consider how these communities can best benefit. This may involve different developers communicating and working together in terms of creating a more flexible fund. It could also involve innovative methods, such as using community benefit payments to help communities with a shared ownership investment opportunity.

- **Longer-term considerations.** The area surrounding a wind farm is likely to change over its operational life, as is the local community. Repowering provides an opportunity to re-consider the form of community benefits and to recognise that the community may want a different form of benefit.



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