

# Report: Evaluating a community-led renewable energy project – Kent, UK

## Context and rationale

In 2014 the Government published the first UK Community Energy Strategy, setting out plans to increase community energy projects in the UK. It emphasised community ownership and leadership, where the community benefits, and highlighted the role public authorities can play to support this.

To support this initiative locally, Kent partners decided to work together to take advantage of the significant opportunities for communities in Kent to develop their own local energy solutions and generate on-going income for their areas.



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## Description of the project

Kent County Council (KCC), working with Swale Borough Council (SBC), decided to concentrate their support in one area where community renewable energy (RE) opportunities have already been identified – the Isle of Sheppey in Kent – and use this approach as a future model for community-led renewables across other areas of the county.

## How we collaborated

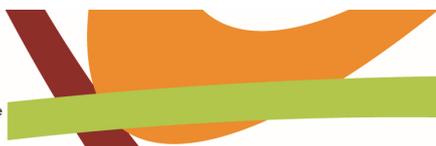
KCC, SBC and individuals across the Isle of Sheppey community, collaborated in a number of ways:

- In 2013 a series of workshops were held on the Isle to gather information from the local community on what types of renewables they would like to see developed on the Island
- A detailed study was undertaken to explore the potential for these technologies (wind, solar and biomass) and the findings were discussed at a final workshop in early 2014

After these initial meetings, interested members of the community, along with KCC and SBC, came together to form the Sheppey Community Energy Trust. The Trust has built a strong foundation from which to investigate how these technologies could be installed across the Island, and to negotiate the community benefits with larger developers.

## Key results of the Collaboration

- Trust established to realise community RE opportunities across the Isle
- 2 community buildings surveyed for solar PV. One building has received free installation of solar PV (worth £6,000)
- Community energy funding guide developed
- Ongoing discussions with the community and local developers to negotiate RE schemes that have an added community benefit.



## Barriers for the project and proposed solutions

- A lack of capital funding to start projects
- Changing government policies have removed incentives for certain RE. For example, a reduction in incentives such as the Feed-In Tariff (FITs) for solar energy has made new solar schemes significantly less viable
- Shared ownership schemes are currently reliant on incentives such as FITs
- It can be difficult to foster community interest in RE schemes – a lot of resource is needed to promote initiatives

Alternative finance is being sought for community RE schemes in order to alleviate funding issues. The nature of the Trust as a body to represent community interest in RE also seeks to ensure that the Isle of Sheppey community is in a strong position to attract funding into the area, and to negotiate with developers to maximise the opportunities of new schemes for the wider community

## Perspectives, continuation of the action

The Trust, as of 2015, has appointed a Chair and Secretary from the Isle of Sheppey community and will continue to investigate new RE projects and funding opportunities across the Isle.

## Transferability: success factors for collaboration

The factors which made this project successful were:

- Building relationships over a number of years and having face-to-face communications between KCC, SBC and the local community
- Creating a Trust. This structure (Chair, secretary, advisors and interested members of the community) provided a recognisable point of contact between developers of RE and the Sheppey Community. Before the Trust, there was no group to negotiate with developers and be a voice for the community.

## Lessons learned and success factors

- It is useful to have a local /regional authority officer who can assist communities to develop RE projects and acquire funding
- Identify multiple sources of funding to ensure the sustainability of projects
- Face to face communication is the best method of collaborating on projects
- Building up a long-term relationship between local /regional authorities and community members (over a number of years) leads to fruitful partnerships and long-term, sustainable RE projects.

## Resources

- 20% of a full-time KCC staff members time
- Dedicated time to go to meetings throughout the year
- Voluntary input from the community at meetings
- Approximately £50,000 over a three year period for consultancy work (surveys, feasibility work for the RE technologies) meeting room hire and refreshments.

## Contact Us

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