

Guidance on promoting your events

You need to think about what number of events you will run, over what period, and how you will ensure that people come along to them. So now is the time to think about your motivation and your message, and whether that will attract others.

Choosing your message

Climate Change

If you are a group that is driven entirely by concerns over climate change, now is the time to be honest with yourselves about whether that, as a 'poster headline', is really going to draw the crowds.

To get people on board with developing a renewable energy project, you will have to convince them that there is a need for that development to happen. If your 'need statement' is framed entirely around the need to cut carbon emissions and to tackle climate change, then you may well find that a large minority, or even the majority of your community are not drawn into your process.

Unfortunately, this is because many people don't believe that climate change is happening, don't believe the causes are man-made, or feel overwhelmed by the issue and struggle to see how your small community's contribution will make a difference.

Make sure that you think about also framing your project in the context of differing needs. You don't need to pretend that you aren't concerned about climate change, but you should aim to be able to convince people that your project meets *other* needs. Those most likely to resonate with a wider section of your community are 'energy security' and 'renewable energy as an enabling infrastructure' and potentially also 'The Big Society'.

Energy Security

Many people will be concerned about how we can provide affordable energy in a world where fossil fuel resources are diminishing. This issue can be discussed entirely in separation from climate change, and often engages people who are not convinced of the climate-change argument. Energy security does not refer to a

catastrophic situation where we suddenly run out of oil and gas and the lights go off. Rather it is concerned with increasing energy costs, price volatility and the potential for 'resource wars'. You may wish to look into the considerable body of information on the internet that relates to the phenomenon known as 'Peak Oil', to better familiarise yourself with some of the scenarios put forward around energy security.

So, you can position the need for renewable energy for your community as something that will help address the impacts of a gradual decline in fossil fuel supply.

To some this implies having control over where their energy comes from, and they may be more motivated by concerns over breaking the monopoly of large utility companies or not buying energy from abroad. This is definitely something you want to raise – most people like to do a bit of complaining about large corporates and their shareholders!

But note that others, even if they accept that fossil fuels will become increasingly scarce, may argue that renewable energy is not the answer and that we should be developing more nuclear energy instead. A response to this argument can be found in a section of the document 'Common concerns about wind energy' (which you can find on www.planlocal.org.uk). Familiarise yourself with this document, as the nuclear debate is very tricky and you will want to ensure that you have the facts to hand.

Fuel poverty

Fuel poverty is an increasingly high-profile issue that may be another appropriate way of framing your project.

A household is said to be in fuel poverty if it needs to spend more than 10% of its income on fuel to maintain a reasonable standard of warmth. Various factors contribute to this, including income, health issues, the costs of fuel and the energy performance of the home. Fuel Poverty affects millions of people in this country, particularly elderly and disabled people, families and single people on low-incomes and those living in older housing.

If your community includes a high number of properties of solid-walled construction, and/or no access to the

mains gas network, fuel poverty could be a significant issue. This is because solid walled houses 'leak' far more heat than those with a cavity construction, and lack of access to gas means that householders use considerably more expensive fuels, such as oil, LPG and mains electricity for their heating needs.

You can find more information about fuel poverty from National Energy Action (www.nea.org.uk) and the Centre for Sustainable Energy (www.cse.org.uk/fuelpoverty).

Renewable energy as an 'enabling infrastructure'

Another link that you might want to make explicit is how renewable energy installations can provide local economic resilience, through the creation of local income streams.

The Feed-in tariff and the Renewable Heat Incentive have created a more secure and stable environment for smaller developers to own and manage renewable energy generating infrastructure. But these mechanisms are available to anyone – there's no preference for community-owned schemes. If there's a good site in your community for one or more renewable technologies (especially the larger electricity-generating ones like hydro and wind), then there's every likelihood that a private developer will have their eye on it.

And if they get it, what are the chances of your community benefiting? In some cases, none at all. In other cases, while there may be some payout or arrangement for a community fund, this is likely to be limited.

How much better if renewable energy infrastructure could be developed and owned locally, with the profits re-invested in initiatives, such as youth facilities and local transport, chosen by the local community. The need for your renewable energy project can therefore also be framed in the terms of it being a locally owned 'charitable' business that will ensure investment in things that really do benefit local people.

Such a 'do-it-yourself' approach is sure to be more and more promoted by central government as time goes on, as the Big Society agenda, coupled with significant cuts in public funding, makes a compelling case for community ownership of profit-generating enterprises.

Timing your events

As a rule, you should not plan a public event without at least six week's notice if you want to get a good turnout. Check local and national diaries for clashes – avoid scheduling events that clash with:

- Bank holidays
- Major televised sporting or cultural events
- Religious festivals and observances
- Local meetings that are held regularly, such as those of the parish council and neighbourhood watch, plus parents evenings, the pub quiz, history society etc

It's very likely that you will struggle to find a time that is suitable for all – if you want to get a lot of people involved in the early stages, then be prepared to repeat your initial meeting two or three times.

Your initial event is key to getting people enthusiastic about the basic idea and potential, as later events may concentrate more on detail and could put people off if they didn't get involved at the initial stage. So don't skimp on this stage – set up dates to run the meeting several times (for example, a Monday night, then the following Thursday night and Saturday morning) and make this clear on your flyers and other advertising.

Another good way to get people to come to your initial events is to attend other local meetings and spread the news that way. Absolutely key to this is to get on the meeting agenda for the Parish Council and request that Councillors come along to the main meetings if at all possible – you will need their support at planning application stage, so sound them out early. Other ideas may be meetings of the Women's Institute and Rotary Club, and it can be very helpful to recruit young adults who live locally e.g. via doing a presentation at a local sixth-form or further education college.

Accessibility to your events could be an issue, especially for older people, so think about ways you can perhaps meet with older people before the main meeting, for example through lunchtime clubs, to encourage them to come along to the main meeting.

It's important not to lose momentum once you've got started, so once you have run your series of initial events (i.e. the same event several times to make sure that you have reached a good number of people), you will want to schedule further events that take the project forward. Again, you may have to run these more than once. Since many people are already aware of the project now, you can have a shorter lead-in time, but still don't try to arrange anything less than three weeks in advance.

Advertising your events and their outcome

Using flyers

We have provided a pre-designed flyer that you can save and edit with the details of your project – this can be accessed at www.planlocal.org.uk/downloads. The flyer saves you having to do the design work, and prompts you to include all the necessary information. If you are doing your own, make sure that you include:

- The date
- The time (start and end)
- The venue
- What refreshments will be provided (see box)
- A contact email address as a minimum
- A web address if your group has one
- Registration details if you would like people to register (see box)

Advertising in local outlets

Once you have made up a flyer, you will need to get it out there. Good places to approach to ask if you can display them are:

- Local shops and post offices
- GP surgeries
- Places of worship
- Schools and nurseries
- Community centres
- Town hall
- Cafes and bars
- Allotment notice boards
- Major employers (not always relevant, but significant in some communities)

If there are enough of you in your core group at this stage, a door-to-door leaflet drop is also very useful.

Refreshments

It's vital that you lay on at least some drinks and biscuits for an event up to about two hours in length. For longer events, consider providing a lunch or supper, especially with evening events, as you can easily lose people if there's no food provided.

Evening events can also be difficult to time. An event starting before 7pm will suffer from lots of latecomers as people will want to get home and have some dinner before they arrive. But starting an event at 7.30pm can limit how much you can achieve. It could be more useful to start the event early and make sure that you advertise on the flyers that a light supper will be provided.

Using local press to advertise your event

The local newspaper may be a good place to advertise – though it can be expensive. They may have a free events calendar, though more useful would be an editorial or interview piece in which you could talk about the need for such a project, and why you want lots of people to get involved. In any case, your local paper will be a key relationship to build, particularly for large-scale projects, though you may want to check what sort of track record it has on balanced reporting, especially of climate change and renewable energy issues.

Various local organisations will have newsletters and may be willing to include your event in them. They include the local authority, schools or the PTA, local places of worship, and the parish council. Copy deadlines can be as much as one month before the publication date, so to be sure you don't miss the chance to publicise your event, you need to get hold of the production schedule quickly. Many local authorities also maintain dates of meetings being held by groups in their area, in an online events calendar, so contact your local authority's press office or marketing team to enquire.

Using the event write-up as advertising

Each event will generate comments and feedback from the attendees, and you will have collated all of this on flipcharts on the day (see especially the role of the Recorder in the section on roles). It's important that you

To register or not to register?

It can be immensely helpful to you to know who is coming, but some people are put off by the formality of this process and won't want to register in case they change their minds and don't come.

On balance though, we recommend registration, as long as you accompany it with some sort of casual statement, e.g. "it would be helpful if people could register if they wish to attend, by emailing (address), as it will help us plan refreshments and seating, but we recognise that other commitments may arise that prevent you from attending on the day".

If you do ask people to pre-register, then include their details on a signing-in sheet that has lots of extra lines for people who don't register but turn up on the day. This will help you see who didn't attend, and you can email them details of what happened and stress that they would be very welcome to the next meeting. It's also useful to have a column asking how attendees heard about your event as it can show you which of your sources of advertising are working for you.

write up the outcomes of the events as soon as possible after they have been run, and circulate them to all who attended, and importantly also to those who registered but didn't attend, as you may find that they are interested enough to now attend the next meeting, or at least to follow progress and classify themselves as a passive supporter of what you are trying to do.

These write-ups will form the progress report of the planning you are doing, and will help to show people how you are using a participatory process to decide what renewable energy project(s) to develop and where. The write-ups should be posted on your own website if you have one, and you should also submit summaries of them to the local newsletters that you used to advertise your event, along with your proposals for what you will do next. So, for example, if your local newsletter held a story in January, telling everyone about your series of initial meetings in late February, then you need to ensure that you liaise with the newsletter to get your summary write up and further advertising for the subsequent events in the next issue. Because of the timing of getting copy submitted, that may mean that you can't run your next event until April, so that people will have had time to read the March edition of the local newsletter.

Be realistic about which advertising sources are most useful to you – it could mean extending the period over which you run your events in order to make sure you get the best possible turnout.

Try to take email addresses from everyone who attends each event, as you can use this to provide the write-up to encourage them to attend the next meeting and to suggest that they recruit friends and neighbours if possible. Some people may never come to more than the initial event, but will be passively supportive and feel part of the group, as they will be getting the emails. Others may miss one event but want to slot back in so make sure they have all the information they need to get back into the swing of it quickly. Always make sure you give the option of unsubscribing to the email list whenever you send out information.

Finally, don't give up on getting more people involved as time goes on, and target your advertising wisely in the later stages – if you have managed to get a significant number of people to engage in a planning process and have gotten to the point of identifying actual sites for potential installations, then make sure that you take a step back at that point and ensure that the people who live closest to the site have been included – if not, make every attempt to get them on board while you are still in this planning stage