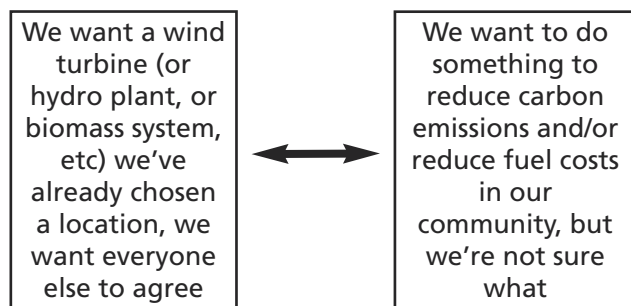


Why run a series of public events to establish a community renewable energy project?

By now, you should have watched the sections on community consultation, along with the film 'A cautionary tale'. If not, do so now. What you need to be careful about is how you pitch what you want to get out of running these events. You're probably somewhere on this scale:



If you are on the left hand side of this diagram, be careful how you pitch your events. If you have a clear plan for a certain technology in a particular place, then you could choose to run a series of events explaining why you have chosen this, and aim to win everyone over to your idea. This is a process commonly called 'Decide-Announce-Defend'. You can try it, but you may end up in a situation where some distinct 'pro' and 'anti' groups develop, which could leave you with a legacy of difficult and obstructive relationships or even scupper your project completely. We don't recommend this approach, and the rest of this guidance assumes you won't do it.

If you're genuinely on the right-hand end of this scale, then the approach outlined in this resource will work well for you, since it is designed to help a community work through the issues and come to a collective decision.

Admittedly, it's quite difficult to think about a problem (climate change, energy security, or supporting the local economy) *without* thinking about possible solutions. The trick with a truly inclusive consultation is to present the problem and ask everybody to work through the issues to come up with a solution, rather than to present the whole 'problem-which-leads-to-your-chosen-solution' package and ask them to endorse it. You don't need to pretend that you haven't already thought of some solutions, just make sure that you stress that you want the whole community to assess all the options – if they come to the same conclusions as you, then so much the better.

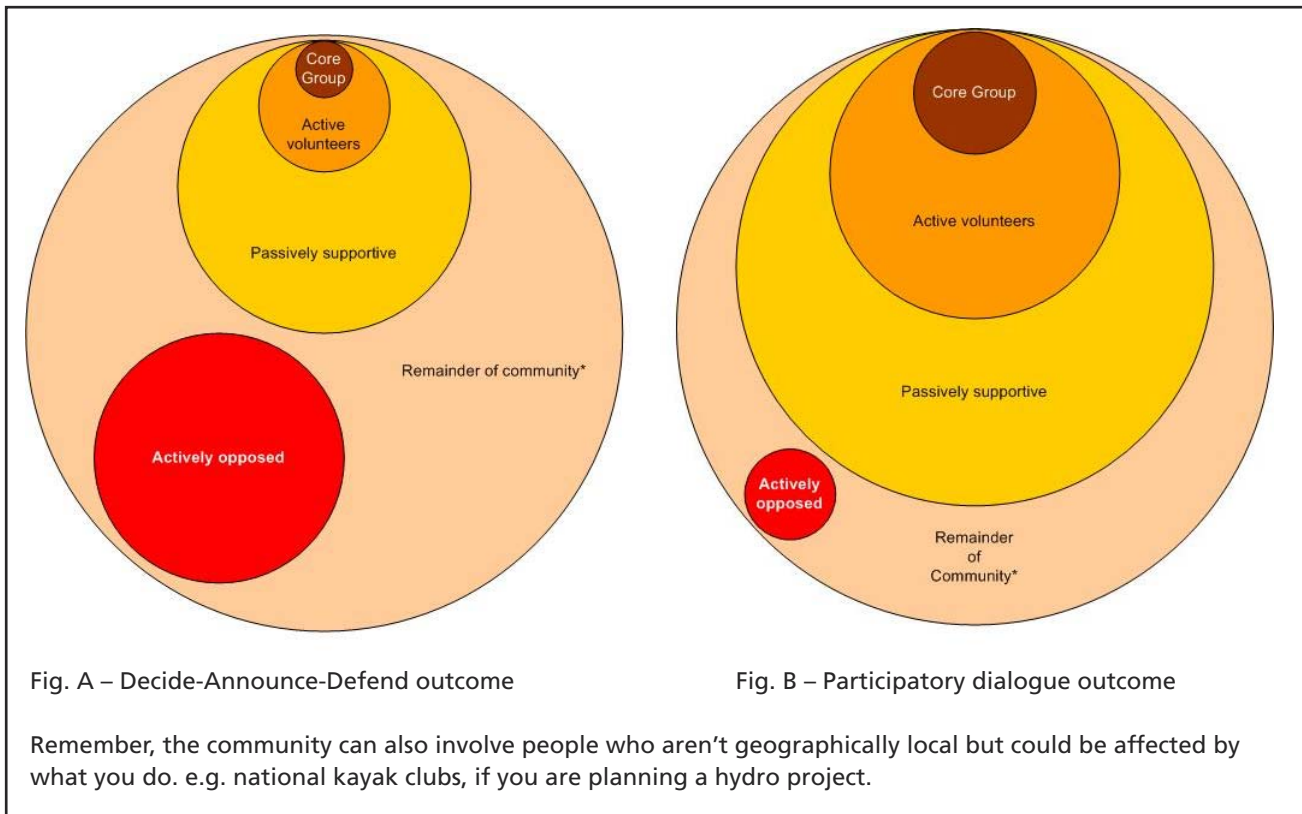
Through an open consultation process, the more people you can bring on board to contribute, rather than presenting them with a fait accompli, the more likely you are to avoid serious and entrenched objection. Even where you do go through an open process as outlined in this resource, you may still end up with strong objection, but the difference will be that you will be able to show that you went through an open and inclusive process that has (hopefully) secured you a community that looks more like the diagram on the right (following page) than the one on the left.

If you enter into a truly participatory process, where you make every attempt to engage people in the process, then the objectors will be easier to deal with.

In figure A, the core group is smaller, because the process was not necessarily designed to get more people on board with delivering the project. This means that each member of the core group will ultimately have more to do. The number of people actively volunteering for the project is also smaller, as it will only appeal to those who agree with the 'pre-prepared solution' that the core group has put forward.

Similarly, the number of people passively supporting the project is also quite small – they may be the friends and neighbours of the small number of core-group and active volunteers. This leaves a large proportion of the community who are effectively undecided. They are fair game for either the pro or the anti group to convert to their way of thinking. The anti group is quite large – it has drawn in people who not only object to the idea of what the core group are suggesting, but also the methods that the core group have chosen – it will include people who think that something is being forced on them, who may not have been actively against the project if consultation had been handled in another way.

In figure B, because a series of events has been held, one or more ideas will emerge that have a wider sense of community ownership. Many people will attend events but won't be interested or passionate enough to become actively involved, but they will appreciate what you have tried to do, and will be far more likely to tell friends and neighbours about what they have learned and what the plans are (you should encourage this sort of spreading-



the-word at every event).

The core group is larger, because more people have come on board who are willing to devote significant time to getting the project off the ground, and similarly there are a larger group of people actively spreading the word. There will nearly always be some people who remain steadfastly against the project, whatever level of inclusivity you have achieved, and especially in the case of more contentious technologies such as large scale wind. But they will be considerably more isolated, have a smaller pool of people to influence, and you will have the potential to draw on a large number of people who are willing to make small actions – such as emailing the council to support your planning application – at the moments when it counts.