



Community Engagement and Benefits for Onshore Wind in England

Qualitative research on good practice

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this qualitative research is to provide real case studies and best practice to inform updated guidance for community engagement and community benefit packages for onshore wind developments in England – as well as to inform future onshore wind policy-making.

The report includes three 360° case studies and two shorter case studies of good practice community engagement and community benefits. These are:

- 360° case study 1: Early community engagement – ACE Severn Road Wind Turbine, England.
- 360° case study 2: Identifying and responding to community priorities – Berry Burn Extension, Scotland.
- 360° case study 3a: Negotiating and distributing community benefits – Kype Muir Wind Farm, Scotland.
- 360° case study 3b: Maintaining ongoing relationships – Kype Muir Wind Extension, Scotland.
- Good practice in brief: Awel Co-op, Wales.
- Good practice in brief: Tirgwynt Wind Farm, Wales.

Key Findings

What constitutes a ‘local community’ in relation to onshore wind developments and how should this community be identified?

- No two communities are the same; they are fluid and there is not a one size fits all approach. It is best to treat communities on a case-by-case basis.
- Whilst existing organisational districts, such as parish councils, can be useful as a starting point to reach further contacts, it is important to note that the local affected community is unlikely to map neatly against administrative boundaries. A variety of methods can be used to gather knowledge about the local community - from desk research, accessing local media, data gathering, and geographical considerations of environmental impacts.
- Representative bodies and other local groups have local knowledge about the community and engaging with them can be useful in helping to identify the characteristics of the local area.

What examples of best practice are there when it comes to engaging with a local community in the early stages of an onshore wind development?

- The community-led developer of the ACE Severn Road wind farm trained and paid interns from the local area to help lead engagement by undertaking door-knocking as well as host information and advice stalls at neighbourhood events and presentations. The developer also worked in collaboration with neighbourhood groups, strengthening understanding of community priorities, including the need for local economic regeneration. Communicating the links between climate action and local economic regeneration helped to achieve broad community support for onshore wind in the area.
- The commercial developer of the Berry Burn Wind Farm asked community representatives and local groups for their advice on who to involve and on practical arrangements about the proposed extension to the existing site. This helped achieve broad engagement with the community.
- Other instances of good practice highlighted preparatory desk research and work on the ground by the developer to understand local concerns and build rapport with the community.

What are the main challenges to initial engagement and how should these be overcome?

- The research found that attitudes towards onshore wind can be divisive. This can be a hindrance to open and honest conversation within the community and can discourage some from participating in engagement.
- One of the main challenges raised by respondents was the risk of inaccurate information and rumours circulating within close-knit communities. Methods suggested by respondents to mitigate this risk include: maintaining dialogue through regular widely-distributed updates which avoid relying on a single person to disseminate message, maintaining an informative, up-to-date website, and establishing a community liaison group.
- Consultation fatigue was another challenge identified. Tested ways of overcoming this challenge include adjustments to the timings of events, communicating via a range of channels, making information available in short videos, and offering opportunities to respond online or via short inputs at events.

How did engagement ensure that a multitude of views were considered and reflected?

- The main message from interviews was that using a variety of communication channels and engagement activities was considered key to ensuring that a multitude of views were reflected and delivering an outcome that was representative of the local community's views.
- Techniques that were identified included:
 - Identifying local community representatives and working through them, and with them. Examples included employing local people to gather community views.

- Using traditional methods of engagement, such as surveys, telephone polls, door knocking, and in-person events;
- Using digital methods, such as maintaining a project website, using 3d visualisations and multimedia, hosting webinars, and accessing social media;
- Community outreach techniques - engaging the community where it is already located; by accessing local newspapers, magazines and radio, identifying existing events and groups, and involving key nodes in the community such as sports teams;
- Tailoring engagement (see below);
- Anonymous voting arrangements at key meetings; and
- Providing safe spaces for individuals to discuss issues on a one-to-one basis.

What were the challenges in reaching hard to find groups and how were these overcome?

- One challenge identified was a tendency for the views of a small vocal group to crowd out the views of others. Interviews suggested that this can be intimidating, meaning that other groups do not state their views. Approaches to overcome this challenge included a choice of engagement methods tailored to different groups; and providing regular feedback about the views heard so far.
- Restrictions on face-to-face events due to COVID-19 led to experimentation with online forms of engagement, which, it was found, led to different sections of communities engaging, including younger age groups. This has encouraged developers to give greater emphasis to offering online engagement opportunities as well as in-person in future.
- Community outreach techniques can be used to reach groups which do not typically engage in the development process. The research suggested that these groups tended to be families with children, low income or unemployed people and minority communities (such as people from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic background or disabled people).

What is important to a local community when an onshore wind farm is proposed in their area?

- Local communities interviewed said they want developers to:
 - Engage as early as possible and maintain availability throughout the project
 - Be personable, a single point of contact was raised by interviewees as important to them
 - Be transparent and genuine, communicating regularly about project updates
- Local communities interviewed said they are primarily concerned about:
 - Local economic benefits
 - Impacts on house prices

- Impacts of the turbines themselves in relation to visual amenity, noise and shadow flicker, and from traffic during the construction phase
- Environment and biodiversity
- The objectives of the developer. Many felt that profits were being put before people.
- Climate change. Most community representatives valued the contribution that onshore wind developments make towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

What is the best way of identifying the needs and any concerns of a local community in this respect?

- The research found that 'making it real' was a useful way of drawing out what communities felt about the development and how it would apply to them. This included using modern digital methods such as visual representations, facilitating site visits, and using independent experts to discuss specific concerns, such as environmental consultants.

How have local communities helped to shape onshore wind developments through engagement?

- The research found that communities have shaped sites by engaging developers on their concerns. Site visits, high quality visualisations at exhibitions and the opportunity to discuss the design with environmental specialists have helped community members and developers to find compromises regarding the size and location of wind turbines.
- Communities have also shaped and improved wind farm sites through providing local knowledge to the developer. Developers told us that they often glean useful information about the local geography, biodiversity and topography from local people, which can result in environmental enhancements or changes to site design and layout to reduce visual impacts and maintain public rights of way, for instance.
- Developers told us that local concerns which result in a reduction of the scale of the proposed scheme may mean an associated reduction in the financial value of community benefits available. Developers and communities said that this was an important consideration for communities to be made aware of when any changes to a site are negotiated.

What is best practice for maintaining good relationships between the developer and the community across the lifetime of the site?

- Participants said that developers need to commit to being a 'good neighbour'. Techniques included having a single point of contact who can resolve problems quickly, fulfil promises made by the developer to the community, and ensure the community remain informed of any planned changes.
- Consistent messaging in newsletters and other channels, keeping the project webpage updated, and holding regular community liaison meetings was suggested as a good way to help to maintain good relationships.

What are the main challenges for longer-term engagement and how should these be overcome?

- A challenge raised in interviews was that, in areas where there are several wind farm developments, communities have experienced prior bad experience of wind farm developers not fulfilling their promises. Communities told us in the research that new owners – where the site is sold on – should invest time in building and renewing relationships. Communities we spoke to said that commitments made by the project developers should be passed on to and adopted by the new owners in a legal agreement.
- Developers and communities told us that conducting refreshed engagement was important and should apply the same good practice principles as for a new proposed project, when decommissioning, repowering or undertaking extensions.

What should local communities and developers consider when drawing up community benefit packages?

- The interviews suggested that a good community benefit package can only be drawn up if the local community is well represented, and has the skills, capacity and resource to devote to the process. Both developers and communities identified this as a vital consideration.
- Developers and community representatives told us that it was important that all affected communities are represented. However, neighbouring villages or administrative districts may differ in their priorities. A good overall community package will respond with appropriately tailored benefits for each village or district.
- Community representatives and some developers identified a community plan (typically produced by the community and setting out ways of working and priority actions to improve the quality of life and address the problems experienced locally) as a valuable basis for drawing up a community benefit package.
- According to those interviewed, a community benefit package should reflect the situation, needs and priorities of the particular affected community or communities, so that the money is used in a way that responds to their specific circumstances. This may be as an upfront lump sum, regular payments into an endowment fund or a negotiated benefit in kind to deliver a community-identified infrastructure improvement.
- Interview respondents also suggested that the institutional arrangements for overseeing and administering the package should be tailored to the local situation, whether building on existing arrangements, creating a new body, or establishing new partnerships between existing bodies.

Are there any types of community benefit that local communities and developers have found are most appropriate in the context of onshore wind developments?

- Community benefit packages can take a variety of forms and participants told us that, rather than a single approach being preferable, the type of package should be tailored to local circumstances rather than adopting a one size fits all approach.

- For direct financial packages, participants agreed that the value of the fund or package should continue to directly relate to the size of the project. Some interviewees, including developers, referenced the industry protocol of £5,000 per installed MW per year as an accepted standard.¹
- Participants told us that shared ownership was often looked upon favourably as it generally constituted a more generous financial outcome for communities, but also offered a way for communities to have a direct stake in a commercial wind farm project. A Memorandum of Understanding was identified as a way to allow community members to delay a decision on taking up this option until fuller financial information is available. However, some developers expressed concerns that shared ownership arrangements can be more complex to arrange.

What are the main challenges when designing community benefits packages and how should these be overcome?

- Research suggested that community benefits packages are immaterial to planning, and the principle of a clear separation between developer-led engagement with the community around community benefits and planning-related public consultation remains crucial. On balance, the research suggested that there are merits in early conversations with communities about the potential community benefits package, but detailed negotiations should only proceed once the project is consented.
- A good community benefit package can only be drawn up if the local community is well represented, and has the skills, capacity and resource to devote to the process. The research showed there is a need for communities to be able to access support from third parties, including legal advice. Keeping a good record of agreed eligibility criteria, third party support and creativity in deciding an appropriate structure are identified as good ways to address some of these challenges.

Practical recommendations

The research identified several ways in which engagement between developers and communities, including the process for designing and maintaining community benefits, could be improved. Based on this, we recommend that the following actions are considered in order to drive up good practice. These recommendations reflect the views of the team from the Centre for Sustainable Energy and are not the views of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

Recommendations for developers, engagement specialists and industry bodies

- We recommend that developers aim to clearly communicate to communities how the number and size of turbines and layout of a wind farm is the primary contributing factor to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and supplying the grid with cheap, clean

¹ Renewable UK (2013) Onshore Wind: Our Community Commitment. Accessed at https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.renewableuk.com/resource/resmgr/Docs/community_benefits_report.pdf

electricity. This can help build a sense of shared community pride in the contribution to a low carbon future and recognition of the opportunities for local capture of economic benefits.

- We recommend that developers give consideration to adjusting the scale and layout of the project based on feedback. In discussing the scale of the project, developers need to be clear in communications with community members that the number, size and location of turbines will directly influence the value of community benefits.
- Where appropriate, we recommend that developers consider offering pro bono staff time to nascent community bodies trying to develop a community partnership or a community plan as the basis for negotiating their community benefit.
- Developers should maintain and refresh connections and understanding of the community, their concerns, and priorities over the lifetime of the project.

Further recommendations to developers on good practice in community engagement and benefits are set out in Chapter 7.

Recommendations for community bodies involved

- Existing community representative bodies who are approached by the developer should act as a responsible gatekeeper to enable the wider community to hear about and have their say in what is proposed.
- Consideration should be given as to whether existing community organisations are appropriate to represent the local community in conversations with the developer or if a new community liaison group may be preferred.
- We recommend that communities develop a community action plan, which can be a valuable starting point for identifying a suitably ambitious and tailored community benefit package.
- Where multiple communities will be affected by a project, we recommend that representatives from all communities are involved in negotiating community benefits and deciding on how funds are spent.
- We recommend that communities seek out legal advice and other expert input from a third-party intermediary to help understand the terms of a community benefits agreement.

Recommendations for local authorities

- Consideration should be given to setting up low-cost loans to community bodies to participate in shared ownership as part of a community plan.
- In updating local plans, we recommend that local authorities identify opportunity areas for onshore wind to enable local economic regeneration and contribute to net zero goals.
- Where responsible for administering community funds, we recommend that local authorities identify where other sources of funding (such as the Big Lottery Fund or

Sport England) can be used to match community benefit fund to maximise the social impact of onshore wind projects.

- As partners in a community benefit partnership, we recommend that local authorities direct a share of the community benefit to wider scale economic investment so that benefits extend beyond the communities in the immediate vicinity of the wind farm.

Further recommendations to local authorities on their role in community engagement and benefits are set out in Chapter 7.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

This research aims to provide new evidence to underpin updated guidance for community engagement and benefits for onshore wind in England, in recognition of the considerable changes to the context for onshore wind since the previous guidance was published in 2014.² In 2015, changes were made to planning guidance for onshore wind developments:

When determining planning applications for wind energy development involving one or more wind turbines, local planning authorities should only grant planning permission if:

the development site is in an area identified as suitable for wind energy development in a local or neighbourhood plan; and

following consultation, it can be demonstrated that the planning impacts identified by affected local communities have been fully addressed and therefore the proposal has their backing.

In applying these new considerations, suitable areas for wind energy development will need to have been allocated clearly in a local or neighbourhood plan. Maps showing the wind resource as favourable to wind turbines, or similar, will not be sufficient. Whether a proposal has the backing of the affected local community is a planning judgment for the local planning authority.

Where a valid planning application for a wind energy development has already been submitted to a local planning authority and the development plan does not identify suitable sites, the following transitional provision applies. In such instances, local planning authorities can find the proposal acceptable if, following consultation, they are satisfied it has addressed the planning impacts identified by affected local communities and therefore has their backing.³

Since these tests were introduced, at the time of writing, only eight applications for new onshore wind sites in England have been approved.⁴

Between 2015 and 2020 (where data are comparable) public support for onshore wind increased from 65% to 77%, with opposition to onshore wind also falling from 12% to 6%,

² Community benefits from onshore wind developments: Best practice guidance for England (2014) Accessed at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/363405/FINAL_-_Community_Benefits_Guidance.pdf

³ Written Ministerial Statement (2015). Accessed at <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmhansrd/cm150618/wmstext/150618m0001.htm#1506188200002>

⁴ Renewable Energy Planning Database (Q1 March 2021). Accessed at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/renewable-energy-planning-database-monthly-extract>

whilst levels of public concern about climate change (either very or fairly concerned) increased from 66% to 76%.⁵ Over the same time period, the cost of onshore wind has reduced and it is now the second cheapest electricity generating technology today on a levelised cost basis, behind solar PV.⁶

In 2019, the UK became the first major economy to commit to new legally binding target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. In 2021 the Government announced that it was going to accept the Climate Change Committee's recommended levels for setting Carbon Budget 6 – requiring a 78% reduction in emissions from 1990 levels by 2035. In the Committee's modelling, onshore wind capacity is almost doubled to 25-30GW in all scenarios by 2050.⁷ The Climate Change Committee identifies that the wider context for delivering net zero includes the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for climate investment to support economic recovery and jobs. In recognition of this, the Government has committed to a policy of “sustained growth” of onshore wind to 2030.⁸

The Government has also announced that onshore wind projects will be able to compete in the next Contracts for Difference Allocation Round, opening in late 2021. The increased deployment of onshore wind with the support of local communities can contribute towards meeting England's 2050 net zero greenhouse gas emissions target as well as delivering economic and social co-benefits.

Terms used in this report

In this report we use a number of terms to refer to the types of participants interviewed.

- Developers – this refers to representatives of the lead organisation for the development and delivery of one or more onshore wind farm projects. The interviewees in this study included representatives of:
 - Commercial developers (such as Vattenfall) who deliver wind farms for profit;
 - Community-led developers - community organisations (such as Awel Aman Tawe), who deliver wind farms and where the project is usually wholly or partly community owned; and
 - Local authority-led developer, where a local authority (such as Cornwall Council) plays a leading role for a wind farm, usually on publicly-owned land, though a commercial developer may construct and operate the wind farm on behalf of the local authority.

⁵ BEIS Public Attitudes Tracker (March 2020, Wave 33, UK). Accessed at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/public-attitudes-tracking-survey>.

⁶ BEIS Electricity Generation Costs, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/beis-electricity-generation-costs-2020>

⁷ Climate Change Committee (2021) The Sixth Carbon Budget: Electricity Generation. Accessed at [Sector-summary-Electricity-generation.pdf \(theccc.org.uk\)](https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/sector-summary-electricity-generation/)

⁸ Energy white paper: Powering our net zero future. [Energy white paper: Powering our net zero future - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/white-papers/energy-white-paper)

- **Community representatives:** This includes individuals living near an onshore wind farm and who have been directly involved in community engagement and/or in community benefits. Some of whom have a role in a community group (such as a community liaison group) or representative body (such as a parish council). It also includes individual members of staff, volunteers or members of wider-scale organisations that represent community views and interests (such as Community Energy Wales and Campaign for the Protection of Rural England).
- **Devolved administration bodies:** This refers to the Scottish Government, Welsh Assembly or bodies that manage services on their behalf (such as Local Energy Scotland), which manages the Scottish Government's Community and Renewable Energy Scheme (CARES).
- **Local authority:** This refers to planning officers or officers with a strategic responsibility for onshore wind farms as part of the economic development of the area.
- **Community engagement specialists:** This refers to specialist consultants who design and deliver communications, consultation and engagement services for commercial developers.
- **Investment-based crowdfunding platforms:** These are website platforms where consumers invest directly or indirectly in businesses by buying investments such as shares or debentures, which act like bonds. The crowdfunding platform operator also attends to the associated legal arrangements. Crowdfunding is a regulated activity under the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000.⁹
- The terms 'interviewees', 'respondents' and 'participants' are used interchangeably throughout this report to refer to the individuals who took part in full interviews or scoping interviews for this study. A glossary of technical terms is provided at the front of the report.

Aims and objectives

This research sought to generate new evidence to underpin updated guidance for community engagement and community benefit packages for onshore wind developments in England, as well as to inform future onshore wind policy-making. Recognising that every community is unique and no single approach fits all, the research sought to draw on a range of examples to generate evidence of good practice in a variety of contexts, mainly examining projects approved from 2015 onwards in England, Scotland, and Wales.

Research questions

1. What constitutes a 'local community' in relation to onshore wind developments and how should this community be identified?

⁹ See <https://www.fca.org.uk/consumers/crowdfunding>. Accessed 25/10/2021.

2. What examples of best practice are there when it comes to engaging with a local community in the early stages of an onshore wind development? What are the main challenges and how should these be overcome?
3. How did engagement ensure that a multitude of views were taken into account and reflected? What were the challenges in reaching hard to find groups and how were these overcome?
4. What is important to a local community when an onshore wind farm is proposed in their area? What is the best way of identifying the needs and any concerns of a local community in this respect?
5. How have local communities helped to shape onshore wind developments through engagement?
6. What is best practice for maintaining good relationships between the developer and the community across the lifetime of the site? What are the main challenges and how should these be overcome?
7. What should local communities and developers consider when drawing up community benefits packages? Are there any types of community benefit that local communities and developers have found are most appropriate in the context of onshore wind developments? What are the main challenges and how should these be overcome?
8. What case studies are there that demonstrate good community engagement, and successful or innovative approaches to community benefits packages? What lessons can we learn from previous onshore wind projects?

Methodology

This qualitative research involved in-depth, semi-structured interviews with onshore wind developers and industry experts, community groups, local authorities, and devolved administrations. Interviews explored these groups' experiences and views about what works and what doesn't work in relation to community engagement and benefits, with reference to onshore wind projects in England, Scotland, and Wales approved since 2015. The research also sought to produce a set of 360° case studies of good practice in community engagement, and community benefits. The aim was to learn what happened and lessons for future practice from the perspective of the developer, the local authority, and the community for each of three onshore wind development cases.

Literature review and desk research

A high-level literature review examined existing guidance on community engagement and community benefit practice and academic literature reviews of good practice. The desk research identified web-based materials, including case studies and project-specific webpages for onshore wind projects since 2015. The desk research considered materials published by government bodies, developers, and community energy organisations.

Sampling strategy

The sampling strategy was informed by analysis of the Renewable Energy Planning Database (REPD), a review of devolved body, trade body, and developer websites, and discussion with the BEIS project team and industry experts. The selected sample aimed to achieve a balance of perspectives across the different groups of people and types of organisations involved in community engagement and community benefits, as well as the variety in scale of project and range of project examples from England, Scotland, and Wales, prioritising schemes approved from 2015 onwards.

Scoping to identify interviewees and case studies

To gather rich new evidence about good practice community engagement and community benefits, we decided to produce at least three 360° case studies. A shortlist of potential case study projects was selected. They were selected on the basis of information from industry experts, scoping interviews and the literature review and desk research. Six informal scoping conversations of up to 30 minutes long were conducted with three investment-based crowdfunding platforms, one trade body, and one community representative. These scoping interviews helped inform the selection of case studies and collected views from people with experience across a range of projects. With the permission of the individuals we spoke to, we kept detailed notes for reference during the analysis stage. However, these individuals were not invited to take part in full interviews as we judged that the nature of their involvement with wind farm developments was indirect or partial and so their participation in a full interview would not substantively add further insights towards answering the research questions beyond what they had said in the scoping call. Case study recruitment started with the developer, who in turn helped to identify suitable contacts for community representative and local authority representative interviews. The project team selected which projects to write up as 360° case studies based on the completed interviews: the chosen case studies were judged to provide rich examples of good practice in early engagement, negotiation of community benefits and good practice in ongoing community engagement. The three 360° case studies include a community-led small scale project in England, a site extension in Scotland and a large new development in Scotland. Shorter case studies for a pre-2015 large development in Wales and for a community-led project in Wales were also produced.

Preparation of interview materials and interview set-up

For each type of participant identified in the sampling strategy, a semi-structured topic guide was prepared to ensure that the interview would address the research questions. Within the topic guides, prompt questions and areas to explore further were identified. Participants received an information sheet and completed an online consent form prior to interview. Participation in the interviews was voluntary and no financial incentive was offered to those invited to take part. The technical annex includes copies of interview materials used with the different types of participants.

A combination of emails and phone calls were used to make and confirm interview appointments with potential interviewees. All interviews, but one, were conducted prior to the

pre-election period ahead of local and regional election in May 2021. The last one was conducted after the date of the elections.

Interviews

27 full interviews of 60-75 minutes in length were conducted either by telephone or video call. The interviews conducted and the geographic spread of wind developments discussed are summarised in Table 1 and Table 2. Most full interviews were conducted with individuals. Four interviews involved two or more people from the same organisation, where they were involved at different times and/or had different roles or levels of involvement in onshore wind developments. All interviews were audio recorded with the consent of participants and were transcribed. Two transcripts from early interviews were anonymised and provided to BEIS for quality assurance purposes.

Table 1. Full interviews conducted

Interview group	Type	Count	Percentage of completed interviews % (n=27)
Developer*	Commercial	8	30
	Community-led	2	7
	Local authority-led	1	4
Community engagement specialist		2	7
Community representative group		8	30
Local authority		4	15
Devolved administrations		2	7

Table 2. Country of wind development discussed

Country ¹⁰	Count	Percentage of completed interviews % (n=27)
England	8	30
Scotland	13	48

¹⁰ Country indicates the country of the onshore wind development discussed in the interview, for instance an international commercial developer describing a Scottish onshore wind project is counted against Scotland. One organisation was a UK-wide trade body.

Wales	5	19
UK-wide	1	4

Data analysis

A case classification categorised each transcript by respondent type, wind farm development discussed, and country location of wind farm. Interview notes and transcriptions were uploaded to NVivo qualitative analysis software. A coding structure was developed to correspond to the overarching research questions and the topic guide structure. Coding was conducted by two researchers who compared coding on a sample of transcripts to ensure consistency in approach to data analysis. The case classification was used to identify areas of consent across different types of respondents and points of difference. Thematic summaries identified the main messages emerging from how different types of interviewees had responded to questions. Researchers drew on the thematic summaries and returned to the coding and full transcripts to prepare findings, with further analysis conducted following an interim workshop and after comments on the first draft of the report. The interim workshop was attended by an advisory group of BEIS staff and invited experts in the onshore wind sector, namely an independent community engagement specialist and an engineering consultant. This workshop enabled discussion of key messages and contextualisation of some of the evidence gathered to avoid misleading findings.

Reporting of findings

The findings were reported in line with the structure of the thematic analysis, which itself corresponded to the agreed research questions. For each theme discussed, first we discuss the main areas of consent amongst different types of interviewees, before reporting any distinct points mentioned by individual interviewees or specific types of interviewees (e.g. community representatives). We then report any points of disagreement or differing views held by different types of interviewees. We draw on other evidence identified in the review to provide balancing factual information and to highlight where findings in this research fit with or contrast with existing evidence. The conclusion summarises what has been found about each research question. Recommendations are identified for different actors in the onshore wind sector in England.

Limitations

The research findings should be interpreted in the context of the following limitations.

Sampling limitations

In arranging interviews with community representatives, we asked devolved bodies, community organisations, local authority representatives as well as developers to suggest and make introductions. Approaches via developers proved most successful in making contact with individuals willing to take part in the research. Other types of respondents were unwilling to make introductions, didn't hold up-to-date contact details or the individuals declined to be

involved when approached. It is likely that many of the developers interviewed continue to have an ongoing relationship with community representatives involved in community liaison or in managing community benefits. This approach may introduce selection bias towards community representatives interviewed and may not be representative of the wider population of community representatives. We sought to balance this possible bias by recruiting two community representatives who self-identified as anti-wind, suggested by a national-level community organisation with an interest in onshore wind developments. Trade bodies who declined to participate in the research gave the reason that they had previously responded to a 2020 Government consultation about Contracts for Difference for Low Carbon Electricity Generation. For one of the 360° case studies, we were unable to secure an interview with a local authority representative. These limitations mean that the respondents are not fully representative of the groups whose voices we sought to include. In turn, this means the findings cannot be over-generalised as a true and full reflection of recent experience of community engagement and benefits for onshore wind. However, the approach has sought to reflect a wide range of views and experiences.

The prioritisation of more recent examples (since 2015) of good practice means that evidence mainly draws on examples from Scotland and Wales, since only eight projects in England at the time of writing have achieved planning approval since changes to English planning rules in 2015.¹¹

Accuracy and completeness of information

The research sought to achieve balanced representation of practice across different countries and across different scales of project as well as to achieve balanced representation across developers, community members, local authority officers, and other parties involved in community engagement and benefits relating to onshore wind. Interviewers sought to cover a range of topics of interest in hour-long interviews with individual interviewees. This research provides valuable new findings but does not provide exhaustive coverage. Numerous other potential examples of good practice were suggested. The diversity of views and experiences amongst communities living near wind farms is likely to be much more varied than is captured in this report.

One potential source of bias in this report is recall bias. This is where participants do not remember past events accurately or completely. The activities and discussion relating to community engagement and community benefits can spread over several years, making it harder to recall details in full. People's own attitudes towards onshore wind or the other parties involved can also influence what they recall, including to try and present a more positive image of themselves or to present a less favourable image of other parties involved.

Standard interview topic guides were agreed for use with each type of participant to minimise recall bias. The process of interviewee selection aimed to ensure we spoke with people best able to talk about the developments of interest. The selection of more recent examples also helped to reduce recall bias. The use of 360° case studies, interviewing up to three informants

¹¹ Renewable Energy Planning Database (Q1 March 2021). Accessed at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/renewable-energy-planning-database-monthly-extract>

of different types about the same wind farm development can help to minimise the effects of recall bias to achieve a more balanced overall account of what happened.

Chapter 2: Defining and identifying local communities

This chapter draws on interviews with stakeholders involved in onshore wind farms to address questions concerning what constitutes a ‘local community’ in relation to onshore wind developments and how this community should be identified.

Defining the local community: What constitutes a ‘local community’ in relation to onshore wind developments and how should this community be identified?

Participants were asked both about their experience of who gets involved and their views on who developers should engage with when an onshore wind farm is proposed in the local area. These conversations yielded a variety of responses about what should be considered. There was consensus across all types of interviewees about the importance of adapting the approach to each case:

“What a local community is will vary site by site. It depends on the nature of the area that the development’s taken place in and on the nature and scale of the proposal as well. There isn’t a one size fits all approach. It’s not a case of drawing a buffer around a site and saying, right that’s the affected local community. It needs a little bit of work to try to understand.” (Local authority representative 1)

“Every project is unique and different. Take the lead from the community would be my advice when starting that engagement.” (Community engagement specialist 2)

Commercial developers described a typical approach to how they define the local community but said that they adapt this on a case-by-case basis. Two main considerations stood out as important from the point of view of developers - the geography of the site and administrative boundaries such as local authority and parish council areas. Community representatives also told us that these two considerations were important in defining the affected community.

Developers reported that they initially focused on two geographical considerations: the distance of properties from turbines (which could vary from 3-10 kilometres) and visual impact (typically assessed through a “Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV)” mapping exercise¹²).

¹² A Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) is a computer-generated tool to identify the likely extent of visibility of a development. The elevation (or a set of elevations) of the development is tested against a 3D terrain model. Accessed at: <https://www.2bconsultancy.co.uk/ztv.htm>

“We take a 10-kilometre radius, we’re overlaying the political boundaries, and we’re using the ZTV which is showing us where the visual impact of a project is.”
(Commercial developer 4)

Developers interviewed stated that geographical ‘buffer zones’ and visual impact are used flexibly, depending on the nature and topography of the land of the proposed development¹³. Land might be largely unoccupied or close to dwellings. Visual impact can vary hugely, for example in a flat landscape wind turbines may be visible for miles, whereas in an undulating terrain carefully sited turbines might not be visible to a local village at all. All types of participants agreed that it would not be feasible to define residents a long way from a proposed development in a flat landscape as the ‘local community’ but agreed that extending the area visually affected in that instance would be anticipated:

“I think the visual intrusion maps that are in the environmental statements are a good starting point, because they show the area that’s going to be impacted.”
(Community representative 4)

Developers and community representatives said that they found visual impact maps a useful aid to understanding how an area will be affected. However, one community representative noted that visual maps sometimes didn’t account for the exact detail of local topography like buildings or hedges, suggesting that developers need to be more ready to discuss the specific details of the likely visual effects in their conversations with local community members.

Developers told us that another early step in defining the local community is to consider administrative boundaries at different tiers (local authority, parliamentary constituency, town, and parish or community council). Developers and community engagement specialists told us that developers prioritise engaging with parish councils and the ward or division representatives from the local authority, reporting that after undertaking research to identify stakeholders and residents they normally ask councillors or other representatives who else to speak to in the community.

However, different types of participants recognised that an over-reliance on parish or community councils to represent the interests of an affected community can be problematic due to a variety of limitations. These limitations include: the make-up of parish councils can sometimes comprise mainly of time-rich and often retired people and therefore may not be representative of the wider community; limited trust amongst local residents in their parish council to represent their interests; and the fact that a parish council’s area of responsibility may not fully correspond to the affected area.

“There are generally other often more representative and accountable organisations in communities that historically might have been overlooked. I’m thinking of anchor organisations like community associations or community trusts.”

¹³ A buffer zone is a separation distance between an onshore wind turbine and domestic dwelling. There is no standard buffer zone distance in England. (RegenSW (2012) Residential buffer zones for wind turbines. The evidence. Accessed at http://regensw.s3.amazonaws.com/residential_buffer_zones_for_wind_turbines_c7cb0ed0aa138678.pdf)

However the population they [anchor organisation] serve might be different to the population that a parish council serves so you immediately rub up against the issue of boundaries and areas of benefit. But I think actually a parish council that's doing its job really well should be a good conduit through which to operate the conversation.” (Community representative 2)

“As well as the parish council you've got so many different local groups and organisations. You've got the town partnership, the business association, the Rotary Club, the Roundtable, community trusts, so you're literally straight away talking about seven or eight local groups.” (Community engagement specialist 2)

Community representatives and community engagement specialists remarked that these limitations are important because parish councils are always a statutory consultee. There was agreement that developers need to pay careful attention to the limitations of relying solely on parish council boundaries and parish or community council representatives in identifying a community and their concerns.

As well as those who live in the vicinity of the turbines once built, community and local authority representatives highlighted the importance of considering those who will be impacted by construction traffic routes and grid connections. Developers gave examples of measures taken to reduce the impact, including care in the timing of when turbine parts are transported to the site. A community representative and developer both raised community sensitivity about the pylons needed to connect the wind farm to the electricity grid, noting that this does not form part of the planning application for an onshore wind project.

Who should be engaged?

The different types of participants involved in the research identified a variety of different community organisations and residents that they felt should be identified as part of the local community. These include:

- Landowners
- Communities of interest (such as conservation groups)
- Businesses via the Chamber of Commerce, business associations, and farmers groups
- Community trusts, development trusts, social enterprises, and community action organisations
- Professional bodies like the RSPB or Natural England (some of which may be statutory consultees)
- Non-professional bodies such as the Women's Institute, Round Table, Rotary Club, and other community groups including religious, sports, and leisure organisations
- Local service providers like schools
- Climate change action groups

A community representative with experience of working with different developers in Scotland noted that it is important that the developer does sufficient research to understand the geography and history of the community, including existing community initiatives and aspirations. Those interviewed mentioned utilising different methods such as phone calls with elected representatives, conversations with local people encountered during time spent in the locality, asking early contacts in the community about who else to talk to, and using social media and online searches to identify and contact locally active groups.

Whilst there was broad agreement across different participant types of the importance of engaging with a variety of different groups, developers and community engagement specialists noted the challenges they face in trying to understand how well the voices heard represent the views of the local affected community:

“What we always find [challenging] is, who is representing the local people? We might end up with three or four groups all arguing that they are the local people. You have a group of objecting people and then you find out that they are actually representing only 10 or 15 people out of a couple of hundred. So, I think quite often something we struggle with is to identify who are really the local people”.
(Commercial developer 3)

Participants of different types raised the risk that a small vocal minority may exert a disproportionate influence during community engagement whilst the opinions of the silent majority remain unheard. One interviewee from a specialist community support organisation identified that community representative bodies can act in a way that make it difficult for developers and engagement specialists to reach a wider range of people directly. In the interview, they said that they try to overcome this by building the relationship with the representative body ahead of further efforts to engage more widely, going on to say that they believe developers appear to be improving practices to engage more widely:

“We’re very much trying to reach beyond the community council. In one community it’s hard because the community council’s a real gatekeeper not wanting us to reach further than them initially. So what we’re doing is trying to build a really good rapport with that community council so that they can see we’re not suddenly going to try and stage some coup in their community or whatever...I think developers have got better at reaching beyond the community councils where they know the community council is maybe not going to give them a representative view.” (Community representative 2)

Developers and community engagement specialists similarly identified challenges of how to hear a range of local views and get a sense of the relative balance of views towards a project. A different community representative shared an example which demonstrated the risk of being overly reliant on individual elected representatives to reach the community. The participant described an occasion where information given to one member of a parish council was not passed onto other council members or the wider community, giving rise to confusion and rumours about the project. Noting the importance of using a range of ways to reach the community:

“The developer should have been sending newsletters direct to the houses as well. Yes, you have to engage with the community’s representatives but what else are you doing to engage with the public directly?” (Community representative 10)

Amongst those interviewed, developers and community representatives alike identified the value of a fluid definition of an affected community, recognising that a community is not a fixed entity and that it changes over time. This was recognised by participants as important to maintain a good understanding of the community and to build and maintain a strong relationship over the lifecycle of a wind farm project.

A local authority representative with a planning policy role based their understanding of affected community on proximity to the site and likelihood of experiencing direct environmental effects rather than a broader understanding of community:

“We’ve been trying to think what constitutes the affected local community, the community that’s more in the vicinity of the site - basically the people who are more likely to be directly affected by some of the effects of the wind farm proposal, rather than people who are more geographically distanced from it.” (Local authority representative 1)

One community representative similarly recalled an instance where the criteria for who could give their views or vote at a parish council meeting about a proposed wind farm development was limited to those residents listed on the electoral roll within a specific postcode area.

Chapter 3: Community engagement

This chapter draws on interviews with onshore wind developers, community engagement specialists, community representatives, and local authority and devolved administrations to report on good practice in engagement at different stages of the lifecycle of an onshore wind farm, from early engagement at the feasibility stage to the operational stage and through to decommissioning.

Engaging with a local community in the early stages of an onshore wind development

Early engagement includes the feasibility and pre planning application stages of an onshore wind scheme (see the Appendices on community engagement and community benefits practice in England, Scotland, and Wales for more details). A Statement of Community Consultation must be submitted with a planning application which describes the community consultation conducted and its findings.¹⁴

Trust and transparency

Developers, engagement specialists, and some community representatives recognised that past poor practice has damaged the reputation of developers amongst communities in areas with existing wind farms.

“I always ask if there’s been other wind developments in the area, either operational or where another developer brought a project that didn’t go through planning. Then it’s a question of what they did well and what they did badly? We can learn lessons from that. If a developer wasn’t getting in touch, did the community want monthly updates? We ask that at the start.” (Community engagement specialist 2)

All participant types emphasised there should be clarity between communities and developers about what aspects of the development could be influenced as part of the engagement. Developers interviewed stated that a key principle for engaging with a community in the early stages is transparency about the community engagement process.

Timing of community engagement

There was consensus amongst all participant types that good practice community engagement begins as early as possible when there is scope for local communities to have a meaningful influence on the shape of a proposal.

¹⁴ Department for Communities and Local Government (2015) Planning Act 2008: Guidance on the pre-application process. Page 9

*“We would start engaging with local communities at the time that we were putting up met masts, so that tends to be right at the beginning of the process.”
(Commercial developer 1)¹⁵*

Developers typically described a three-phase process for early engagement:

1. Information sharing and fact finding.
2. ‘Design’ phase, sharing initial proposal plans with the local community for feedback and to ascertain levels of public support.
3. Presentation of a revised proposal, informed by community views and project constraints. A second assessment of public support is made prior to potential submission of a planning application.

“On [one wind farm]... we did three exhibition series: one right at the start, one about 18 months later once we’d identified all the constraints and were about to start a design process for the site, and then one after the design process had concluded and we were able to tell people, ‘Right, we’ve taken all this information, we’ve put it in the mixing-jug and here’s the result.’” (Commercial developer 2)

Learning about community concerns

All types of participants interviewed recognised good practice as taking steps to build understanding about the distinctive issues that matter to a community, such as employment, electronic infrastructure such as broadband connectivity or electric vehicle charging, or other local priorities. Relying solely on a demographic analysis and a potted history of the local communities was considered insufficient to get a rich picture about an individual community. Most developers reported that they research current and historical wind development applications in the area to gauge local sentiment about onshore wind. One developer said they read local newspapers to get a feel for local concerns.

“I think developers are quite adept at not being particularly discerning about communities. We sometimes hear ‘You’ve seen one community you’ve seen them all’. No. I think that’s fool-hardy. It’s about really doing your homework, understanding the geography of that community. It’s important that they [the developer] find a way to build rapport based on having a genuine interest rather than it just being a place they’ve got to get consent.” (Community representative 2)

“What we try and do is just talk very plainly and gauge views on what challenges communities face and what they would like to see as part of any development and the community benefit arrangements.” (Commercial developer 5)

¹⁵ A met mast (meteorological mast) carries equipment that measures wind speed. They are erected to determine the actual wind speed of a site in the pre-project stage of a development.

All types of participants interviewed agreed on the value of developers taking time to listen to and understand the priorities of the community to build trust and inform future discussion about community benefits. A community representative commented that where a developer demonstrates that they are genuine in their efforts to engage with the community, this can counter a potential sense of imposition or suspicions that the developer is profiting at the community's expense.

Identifying who to engage with

Developers and community engagement specialists considered it important to approach existing local bodies at an early stage to find out who to engage with, to get a feel for the existing organisational capacity, scale of ambition, and understanding of the planning process. This could identify any additional support local people and organisations might need in order to fully participate in community consultation activities and to benefit from the wind farm over its lifetime. Developers also said that early engagement gave them a sense of the community's likely willingness to engage and forewarned them about potential risks of 'consultation fatigue':

"Sharing our plans for consulting before we do it, we've found that's really valuable. I think they've [parish council] appreciated it and so it's a win-win. It's seeking their feedback on how we can do a good job... It's 'How do we make sure that we're reaching all of the community?', and finding new ideas for how we can get as much feedback as possible through the design process." (Commercial developer 4)

"Trying to understand the capacity and the ambition of a community is quite important. It might have very limited capacity but have huge ambition and that's really great because you can find ways to build that capacity." (Community representative 2)

An issue raised across all participant types was the differing capacities of communities to engage with developers. Evidence from interviews suggested that independent capacity-building support is needed by some communities for ongoing community engagement and discussion about community benefits. The capacity of local organisations, often run by volunteers, can be built with funding for community action plans, training, or staff time. Most developers and community engagement specialists mentioned the need to support the development of community liaison groups or of community partnerships between parish councils.

A community engagement specialist stated that it was important to have the right people involved in discussions at the start (for instance the developer's project manager and a community engagement specialist) and to have continuity during the project.

"It's important to have the same people rather than the community having to deal with different people constantly. At that initial engagement it's important that you have the right people there to be able to answer the questions and to introduce the project and also to keep that continuity. Then we build up a relationship with them." (Community engagement specialist 1)

Providing information to the community

A local authority representative emphasised the importance of making sure the local community is provided with sufficient information and time to respond to a proposal. Developers told us that in the early engagement phases of information sharing and project design they typically share information by direct mail to residents close to the proposed site, as well as via local press, community organisations' websites, neighbourhood and business networks, and social media. Some developers create a dedicated project webpage where local residents can find relevant documentation and contact details of named staff or request a call with the developers. They described holding public exhibitions in community venues in the daytime and early evening to allow a wide range of people to attend, with information boards and experts on hand to discuss specific issues. A community representative said that the relaxed 'drop-in' nature of public exhibitions was an improvement on formal sit-down meetings when they felt more 'on their guard'. The developers described such events as useful opportunities to collect feedback on community views about proposed developments. Some developers said they increasingly make an online version of exhibition materials so that people who are unable to attend in person can still find out what is proposed.

Conversations supported by the use of visual models

There was consensus across different interviewees that the 2D images (photomontages) or 3D computer-generated models which show the visual impact of a project, required as part of the planning process and associated consultation, are particularly useful to aid discussions between members of the public and developers about a wind farm. These images helped, for example, in discussions of available options and constraints on changes to the number, position, and size of turbines. Participants told us that this made it easier for communities to get a sense of the scheme proposed and for the developer to learn more about the site from knowledgeable local residents:

*"It was really beneficial for both sides: you've people walking the hills who know the site really well and we've got our site surveyors who can share knowledge."
(Commercial developer 4)*

However, one community representative was critical of the quality of landscape visualisations and of the documentation submitted with the planning application. They thought it needed to be more realistic, comprehensive, and complete so that people could better understand a development.

"I think if [the developer] provided really comprehensive information with their application, people would understand it a bit better. ... That is a big criticism, that when a planning application is submitted it doesn't provide everything it should and it's not good quality." (Community representative 9)

360° case study 1: Early Community Engagement – ACE Severn Road wind turbine, England.

Early community engagement – ACE Severn Road wind turbine, England.

This case study shows how early engagement by a community-led developer contributed to establishing broad community support for a single turbine project in England.

Lawrence Weston is on the outskirts of Bristol, near Avonmouth port. There are already nine operational large wind turbines at the port and a nearby industrial estate. Ambition Lawrence Weston (ALW) is a resident-led community organisation dedicated to making Lawrence Weston an even better place to live and work.

In 2012, ALW conducted community engagement in Lawrence Weston to find out peoples' views about the neighbourhood and the changes they would like to see. This resulted in production of a residents' development plan focused on delivering local economic regeneration. Renewable energy and climate change were not on the agenda. However, ALW needed finance to deliver the development plan.

Thus began a productive journey of collaboration between ALW and a network of local community energy groups to address fuel poverty in the area. A next step was to develop a joint venture solar farm with half the profits going to ALW. ALW then secured Urban Community Energy Fund (UCEF)¹⁶ funding towards the early costs involved in developing a community-led wind turbine. In 2019, ALW set up Ambition Community Energy (ACE), a community interest company (CIC), to support the delivery of a 4.5MW single onshore wind turbine. They planned to use income from the electricity generated to pay for local economic regeneration activities.

Community engagement

In 2016-17, trained volunteers and interns undertook community engagement about the proposed wind turbine. They administered a survey asking about residents' experiences of fuel poverty, their views on renewable energy and their interest in getting involved in a community-led wind farm project. They approached people in person at community events, neighbourhood forums and business breakfasts. They ran stalls where they also offered advice about energy efficiency and saving money on energy bills. At these events, community members could ask questions, discuss their concerns and express their views about the project. ALW also distributed the questionnaire via a door knocking campaign and as an insert to a local magazine delivered to 3,500 households.

“It's about harnessing the assets of the community... We need to [work from the] bottom up... so we have something that is reflecting the communities that they [wind turbines] are in.” (Project development manager, ACE)

¹⁶ Urban Community Energy Fund (UCEF) was a financial support scheme aimed at urban communities across England wanting to set up renewable energy generation projects in their area. It closed to new applicants in 2016.

The format of the consultation was shaped to satisfy its use to support a planning application. A first question asked if the resident supported renewable energy in general, including onshore wind. A second question asked whether the resident would support a community onshore wind project in the area. This two-question consultation format was carefully designed to counteract objections, clearly showing community support for both renewable energy in general and an onshore wind development in the area.

In total, they engaged with 815 people. Out of 183 survey responses collected at face to face events, 96% expressed support for renewable energy and for wind turbines in their area. Out of 530 survey responses from the door knocking campaign, 68% of residents expressed support and 26% said they weren't sure. Not everyone answered the door so there was less opportunity to answer questions about what was proposed.

In 2017 ALW supported a planning application by local business Accolade Wines for an on-site 1.5MW wind turbine. At the time Bristol had no designated sites for onshore wind in its local plan. ALW conducted extensive community engagement about the proposed development. The consultation findings showed wide community support for onshore wind in the area. This contributed to satisfying the planning test that the application had the backing of affected local communities. This was an important factor taken into account in the final consenting decision to approve the application. This in turn gave ACE confidence to press ahead with its own onshore wind project.

ACE worked with the local authority Planning and Energy Services Departments to identify a suitable site for a wind turbine. A full EIA and planning application was submitted. The sole objection was overruled and planning permission granted in August 2020. It is the only community-led onshore wind project to receive planning permission approval in England since 2016. ACE is now exploring financing options to construct and operate the turbine.

Once constructed and operational, the turbine should generate an income stream that can be reinvested in the community to fund training and work experience opportunities for local residents, create a community-based learning zone, and offer educational opportunities for local schools.

Reflections and learning

Effective early community engagement by AWL resulted in a community-owned plan for economic regeneration in the area. Working in collaboration with neighbourhood groups strengthened understanding of community priorities.

Communicating the links between climate action and economic regeneration, a priority for the local community, helped convince people of the potential benefits of onshore wind.

A diverse range of engagement activities, including door-knocking, information and advice stalls at neighbourhood events, and presentations helped to achieve broad community support, which in turn supported planning approval.

“We concentrate on their [community] priorities and then bring that added value around climate – I think it’s a win-win for everyone.” (Development Manager, ALW)

Trust from the start

A trusting relationship built from the earliest stages of engagement, maintained in the process of negotiating community benefits and over the longer term was widely considered as crucial to contribute to the success of a proposed wind farm development. From the earliest engagement onwards, the importance of transparency was emphasised:

“We would say, ‘This is what people in your area have told us.’ That’s real transparency; we’re not hiding that. That builds trust because that’s perhaps not what we want to share, but it’s really important we do. Some of what people are commenting on is the conversation on the street; so by acknowledging that we can then start to answer and address that conversation.” (Commercial developer 4)

Doing engagement that considers and reflects different views

In interviews, participants were asked about their experiences of engagement and what should be done to make sure that a range of views are heard. Developers and community engagement specialists with repeated experiences of community engagement with multiple communities were mostly able to describe approaches and actions taken to try to reach a broad section of residents and to respond to them. Other types of participants found it harder to respond to this question, although some community representatives with experience relating to several wind farm developments in their area were able to report on their experience.

There was an emphasis, particularly amongst developers, about the importance of planning how to achieve inclusive engagement, especially the need to tailor the method of engagement according to what would motivate different people to get involved:

“You want to try and design a process so that you engage with old people, young people, people who have got this viewpoint, people who are not so engaged in it. That is a combination of traditional methods, face-to-face consultation events, working together with parish councils, with key people from the local authorities.” (Commercial developer 2)

Developers and community engagement specialists that were interviewed described using traditional communication channels of direct mail, local press, and online communication channels such as websites and social media. These methods were used in combination with newer virtual engagement methods such as videoconferencing meetings, online exhibitions, and webinars to engage the public. The importance of websites was also noted as offering additional functions to make it easier for people to learn about the project or engage, enabling people to request a call back and watch videos and webinars in their own time. One developer

suggested that feedback forms, which are typically handed out at a physical event, could instead be sent out online after a webinar.

Developers said they had mainly relied on online engagement during the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and were unanimous in saying that they felt this had helped them to engage more widely. Online involvement enabled community members who could not participate in person to become engaged. One developer explained that this enabled a public exhibition to be spread over three to four weeks rather than over a few days, achieving a similar level of engagement which was more iterative and sustained. One developer described how creating opportunities for people to respond to a consultation via their computer had enabled a welcome shift in who they reached compared to their previous experience of hosting in-person consultation events:

“We reached a completely other audience with our online consultation than with our live consultation. Those people who maybe won’t have time to go to [a meeting in] the local village, but they do have 15 minutes in the evening to be behind the computer or on the telephone and reach out to us.” (Commercial developer 3)

One developer said that in future they plan to use marketing intelligence to develop online content for specific target groups, giving an example of developing videos, half-hour long consultation events, and quick response surveys (click only, no typing) for 16-35 year olds. Other considerations included adjusting the timing of events and conducting analysis of response rates to different forms of advertising so that they can more effectively engage with hard-to-reach groups.

Developers and community representatives noted that polls (either at a meeting or circulated via mobile phone) had proven a successful way to involve a wider range of people. A commercial developer reported a five-fold increase in response rate from use of mobile phone polls, with a marked increase in engagement from a younger age group than those they’d normally expect to engage. A community representative stated that a parish poll where people voted anonymously at a meeting had achieved a 70-80% local turnout.

The same developer also noted that they had successfully used social media to reach young people. Examples of techniques that interviewees recalled being used to engage different groups included: the developer attending community events organised by a variety of active local groups in the community; timing the exhibition to coincide with when people will be attending community activities at the venue; sharing information via local social media channels; promoting the opportunity to talk to specialists about key community concerns; and taking advantage of a recent trend for community meetings to be held online, making it easier for the developer to attend:

“We’re having more interactions now with our parish councils post lockdown, I think mainly because it’s not such a big deal to meet; we can all virtually do that. We’ll pop into the community council meeting now but we wouldn’t have just popped in before.” (Commercial developer 4)

A local authority representative identified that proposals to erect a wind turbine attracted the interest of a local radio DJ which helped broaden awareness of the project.

Cornwall County Council – Ventonteague, England

Cornwall County Council led a single turbine development with existing planning permission which became operational in 2020. Ventonteague is smart-grid connected and part of Cornwall Local Energy Market (LEM), a project which aims to help increase the amount of renewable energy that can be deployed by managing the electricity network more efficiently. A local councillor recalled how a radio presenter was initially opposed to the turbine. The councillor defended the project on air, putting forward a differing view of the turbine as ‘harnessing nature’ and having the potential to achieve ‘home grown profits...kept in Cornwall’ as part of a ‘circular economy’. The DJ continued to give regular updates on their radio show about the turbine construction, inviting other guests to talk about it. This raised significant community awareness and interest in the project.

“I think we got quite lucky as when the turbine was going up, it was quite visual. It’s on the main trunk road through Cornwall. We could have been in a position where there was quite a lot of negative publicity. But the radio presenter was really excited about it and talked about it every day on the radio and was disappointed when it wasn’t progressing as quickly as he’d hoped. He had the project manager on the radio.” (Local councillor)

Challenges in reaching hard to reach groups

One of the main challenges identified by developers and a devolved administration concerned the situation where different members of a community hold strong differing views, making some unwilling, or even intimidated, to share their views in a group setting:

“They [other community members at the meeting] were really silenced by the opponents who were really aggressive. It’s really full on so I think that is a real problem.” (Commercial developer 3)

In this instance, the discussion was meant to consider interest in a local energy discount scheme as part of a community benefits package. The developer’s version of events was that community members interested in the possibility found it hard to speak up in the meeting. Developers and a devolved administration representative felt that people who are opposed to wind farms tend to speak out more loudly than those in favour:

“Often there’s a silent majority of people who are agnostic or reasonably in favour of these developments, but there’s a noisy minority who are quite prepared to put time, effort and money into objecting. (Devolved administration)

A local authority representative expressed a similar concern that opposition built on a general dislike of change can harm the wider interests of the community:

“I think it’s very easy for somebody to oppose something and then that stops it because nobody likes change, so you can just take up a position of not liking something just to stop something. If we did that for everything we wouldn’t be able to deliver a lot of the things that society and the country needs.” (Local authority representative 1)

Developers and community representatives supportive of onshore wind said it was important to listen to those opposed to onshore wind but also to provide factual information to challenge misinformation. One solution used to try to give others the opportunity to give their own views was to offer a safe space to meet and voice their views and concerns on a one-to-one basis. Another approach tried by a developer involved using anonymous online surveys to overcome the reluctance of people to speak up in-person about their concerns.

Another challenge identified as affecting communities in areas well-suited to onshore wind is ‘consultation fatigue’.

“People can get involved by attending the public exhibitions, making their representations known to myself, or to the planning authority, or to the wind farm company. The lines are open. The problem is people don’t bother...the average attendance at a public exhibition is about ten. We’ve had so many, and people say ‘Oh not another wind farm’. That tends to be the reaction.” (Community representative 3)

Good practice in brief: Awel Co-op, Wales

Awel Co-op, Wales – Testing different methods of engagement

Awel Co-op is a community-led developer operating two wind turbines near Swansea, Wales. In the early stages of feasibility scoping, Awel Co-op worked with Swansea University to test how effective different methods of engagement were at building community awareness about onshore wind.

The co-op organised trips for community members to visit other local wind farms. These were attended by a mix of people from the community, some of whom had previously expressed little interest in the onshore wind project. This included about fifty elderly residents from several community organisations. They found the trip interesting and informative.

When letters published in the local press expressed concerns about claims that wind farms kill birds, several of those who had been on the trip to visit nearby wind farms wrote letters in response: in their letters they described their own experience of visiting the wind farms and said they hadn’t seen any evidence of dead birds at the site. The developer felt this illustrated how their efforts to engage the local community had prompted a healthy dialogue on the merits of the development and helped counter negative myths about onshore wind. The developer observed that older residents appeared to be influential

members of the community who shaped support for the wind farms through their strong family connections within the community.

Awel Co-op's final community engagement activity that year was to commission the Electoral Reform Services to hold a referendum, with anyone over the age of 16 eligible to vote. The result was a 15% majority in favour of the proposed onshore wind development.

One developer commented on which voices tend not to be heard in engagement, highlighting unemployed people, time-poor working age families, and black and ethnic minority communities:

"I think people who are out of work, men, anybody who is working age with a family are quite hard to reach, because they don't have time. There has been a tendency in the UK to engage people who are over 55 and retired, probably middle-class, probably white... and I think BAME and ethnic minority communities probably haven't been reached that well." (Commercial developer 5)

The ACE Severn Road case study (see page 30) illustrates how a community-led developer sought to engage people in a low-income community by developing an approach that directly addressed concerns about fuel poverty and employment skills. They recruited and trained local people in consultation techniques, then engaged them as paid interns to design and conduct engagement activities in the entire electoral ward. Consultation was hosted at community venues and was tied-in with switching and energy efficiency advice provision for low-income households. The developer said that employing local people had proven successful at achieving broader engagement with residents.

Identifying the needs and concerns of the local community

All participant types that were interviewed identified that communities tend to be most concerned about the potential visual and noise impacts of a wind farm and its effects on biodiversity and landscape. Other concerns mentioned include disruption during the construction period, pylons, shadow flicker, impact on heritage, impact on property prices, likelihood of future extensions, and profiteering by developers.

Some developers reported that they try to address concerns about visual impact by making the wind farm as unobtrusive as possible in the physical landscape and giving people the opportunity to see what the completed project might look. They said that in recent projects, 3D fly-throughs or virtual reality headsets had proved helpful at enabling community members to view the proposed wind farm. One developer gave an example of taking groups of people with concerns about noise to visit a wind farm to hear what the noise was like for themselves. Developers shared how the environmental impact assessment process and mitigation plan is used to address a variety of potential impacts, including construction and radar.

Developers and a devolved administration told us that public awareness of climate change has increased and people are broadly in favour of renewable energy, a view also supported by BEIS public attitude research. Three participants of differing types stated that creating a community sense of pride and collective sense of purpose on net zero could help to address community concerns, supported also by positive narratives on renewables:

“Wind ideally is temporary and is reversible but climate change is not reversible. There is a need to educate the public about what is required to tackle climate change.” (Commercial developer 7)¹⁷

360° case study 2: Identifying and responding to community priorities – Berry Burn Wind Farm Extension, Scotland.

Identifying and responding to community priorities – Berry Burn Wind Farm Extension, Scotland.

This case study shows how a developer adapted a community engagement process during the Covid-19 pandemic to identify and respond to community concerns following a recent wildfire near the site of a proposed wind farm extension.

In 2018, Statkraft began to engage with the local community on proposals for an extension to Berry Burn Wind Farm in north-east Scotland. There are already 29 turbines with a capacity of 67 MW operational at the wind farm which began operating in 2014. Statkraft proposed a 9 turbine extension which would generate a further 37.8 MW per year. In April 2019 a wildfire destroyed over 20 square miles of land near the site. Statkraft listened to the community’s concerns about biodiversity during planned community engagement about the extension. The developer is now awaiting a decision by the Scottish Government on its planning application for the Berry Burn Extension, submitted in 2020.

Community engagement

The developer used a ‘three stage’ engagement process¹⁸ so that the community could influence plans and proposals at an early stage, in line with Scottish Government Planning Advice. The process was adapted in response to Covid-19 pandemic restrictions. They identified the consultation area within two zones of up to 10km and 15km from the centre of the extension site, based on the Zone of Theoretical Visibility of the site and the likely construction traffic route. For the first stage, the public exhibitions were advertised on local notice boards, in direct mail-outs, in the local press, via geo-targeted digital adverts, and by notifying elected representatives. A project website provided a way for residents to get in touch with the project team, view or download documents, subscribe for updates, and take part in online surveys.

¹⁷ The interviewee’s mention of ‘wind’ here refers to a wind farm development and ‘temporary’ as the operational lifetime of 30 years.

¹⁸ The three-stage process included (1) initial communication and exhibitions; (2) follow up events and workshops; and (3) virtual/online engagement

The developer sought suggestions from local representatives, including the local MP, MSPs, local councillors, community councils, and community groups about who they should try to reach as part of the consultation process:

“We’d go to the community councils and ask them, ‘What’s the community?’ We present a picture of what we think this community is, in the context of who we would talk to and want to engage with and seek their input. We spend time looking for community groups and social media interest groups as well... and that community database grows, obviously, over time. You come to know more and more about the community and different people that pop up along the way, so it’s never fixed.” (Communications Manager)

Public exhibitions held in 2018 provided information about the operational wind farm, the community benefit fund, the proposed extension, prospective local benefits and anticipated next steps. Attendees were asked to complete feedback forms to share their views on the proposal.

A community liaison group set up in 2019 provides a consistent point of contact for local people to share their views about the proposed extension with the developer. A report was published on the project website summarising community feedback to date. It responded to statements and questions from the community, such as: *‘We have got enough wind turbines in Moray’* and, *‘Who will really benefit from this project?’*

The developer presented a revised proposal for the site at follow up workshops and other events in November 2019. The location, timings and contents of these events was decided in response to community feedback on previous events. The revised proposal set out how they planned to improve the quality of habitat within the site to repair damage caused by the previous wildfire and protect against future risks to nature from fires. At three drop-in workshops, local residents interested in specific topics could meet industry specialists. The three topics covered: ecology (living things and their habitats), broadband connectivity; and shared ownership in the wind farm. A survey conducted after these engagement activities reported a marked increase in community support for the extension – from 61% to 72%.

In 2020 the developer was able to continue to engage with the community despite the restrictions of the pandemic by posting newsletters, videos and other information about the extension on the project website, hosting virtual meetings with community groups and attending parish council meetings held online. Newsletters presented information about developer-led initiatives in the local area, including a partnership with the Chamber of Commerce to keep more of the economic benefits local, the donation of a defibrillator to a visitor centre, plans for a first-of-its-kind Greener Grid Park to improve grid stability in the area, and a feasibility study about bringing superfast broadband to the area.

At this third stage, the developer confirmed that, conditional on the approval of the site lifetime extension, recommended environmental protection activities, including to rewet

damaged peatland habitats, would begin. These actions should mitigate the risk of future wildfires and enhance local biodiversity.

Reflection and learning

The developer asked community representatives and local groups for advice on who to involve and practical arrangements to reach a broad range of local people.

A community liaison group was set up as a consistent way for the developer and the community to maintain contact and feedback.

The developer prepared a well-structured engagement plan. Further adaptations to the engagement process and to proposals for the site were made in response to changing circumstances and community feedback.

By sharing back consultation findings with community representatives, the developer demonstrated transparency and was able to maintain the trust of the community.

The developer made it easy for community members to learn about the project via a range of channels, including virtual meetings and a content-rich project website.

Local communities' role in shaping onshore wind developments

A view expressed across all participant types was that communities commonly influence the number, size, and location of wind turbines in a proposal in the early stages of engagement. Developers said that sometimes there may be a business reason why they can't adopt a suggestion made by community members. Both a developer and a community representative recalled examples where the community shaped the location and the number of turbines:

"It became pretty clear that [the wind farm development] coming down into the valley could be the difference between getting their [community] support and not getting it. So, they did influence it, but there were other things and you weigh it up in the round. We'd rather have a supportive community." (Commercial developer 2)

"I actually said at one meeting, far too many for that site, halve it, and they did, in fairness to them. They did listen. And I remember one of the old members wasn't happy with one of the turbines. He felt it was in the wrong place as you drive up the road. It could kind of distract you and he said it should be moved over and they did that." (Community representative 10)

One community representative described how the community's attitude towards a wind farm changed over time - after initially submitting objections to an initial planning application, which resulted in fewer turbines being installed, the community supported a revised proposal. At a later date, the community supported a subsequent extension to the site:

“Well, in terms of numbers there are only 13 or 15 turbines up there instead of the original plan which would have been 40 or 50 so the scale is significantly reduced. The siting of the individual turbines has been quite carefully worked out to minimise the visual impact on this side of the water.” (Community representative 6)

In a similar way, a developer recalled that local walkers who know the hills well were able to share knowledge about the proposed site in discussion with site surveyors, contributing to refining the project design. One community engagement specialist recounted a case where a proposed development was initially refused planning permission. However, support from the local community encouraged the developer to resubmit the application, which was then successful. The Berry Burn case study illustrates how, after listening to and responding to community concerns about recent wildfires, the developer commissioned work to develop a habitat management plan to restore the heathland.

Chapter 4: Community benefit

This chapter explores what good practice examples exist that demonstrate successful or innovative approaches to community benefits and the process involved. It also outlines what local communities and developers should consider when drawing up community benefits.

It is increasingly common for renewable energy projects to incorporate financial packages that make payments directly, or in kind, to local communities. These packages are separate and additional to any other direct economic benefits from construction and development, such as employment or associated upgrades to local infrastructure (such as faster broadband). Community benefits schemes are a well-established part of onshore wind energy development. The onshore wind industry maintains a community benefits protocol which commits to ensuring that these benefits schemes are realised within local communities that host wind farms. An industry standard of community benefits to the value of £5,000/MW per year for the lifetime of the project was established in a protocol of 2013, at a time when renewable energy projects benefited from generous and supportive subsidy.¹⁹ Community benefit can take a number of forms. These can include a one-off lump sum or regular payments to a community benefit fund that in turn makes payments directly to local communities; and benefits in kind, where a developer provides for a community facility or, less commonly, shared ownership for the affected communities. Community benefit schemes may include a combination of these different forms of benefit. These benefit schemes are separate and additional to incidental 'in-kind' direct benefits from construction and development, such as employment or associated upgrades to local infrastructure. The scale and complexity of community benefit schemes can vary according to the scale of the project and associated value of the scheme.

Findings reported in Chapter 2 about good practice in engagement also apply to engagement with communities about community benefits.

Considerations in drawing up community benefit packages

Identifying priorities

Developers and community representatives indicated that an important first step in developing a community benefit scheme is to ask the local communities what they want and provide a structured way for communities to reflect on, discuss, and present their priorities. This can help build trust in the process, demonstrate that the intention is to offer benefits that align with the community's priorities and avoid the impression that an offer is being made to override local objections to the proposed wind farm. Community representatives and developers agreed

¹⁹ The protocol is supported by the Government and a range of Governmental and community stakeholders. Under the Protocol, developers in England with qualifying projects commit to provide community benefits of £5,000 per MW of installed capacity, or equivalent benefits-in-kind, directly to host communities. Onshore Wind: Our Community Commitment. A commitment by the onshore wind industry to local communities (2013) Accessed at https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.renewableuk.com/resource/resmgr/Docs/community_benefits_report.pdf

there should be flexibility for the community to decide what kind of community benefits they want.

“I think we should be asking, ‘What do you want?’ They might come back to you and say, ‘What we really need is an in-car charging network.’” (Commercial developer 5)

Types of benefits

Developers reported tailoring their engagement based on community interests and needs, highlighting that whilst in-work households may prioritise leisure opportunities and free events, unemployed or low-paid households may prioritise training opportunities to access employment, whilst others may ask for investment to be directed towards improving local health or school facilities. One developer, drawing from their experience, typified urban communities as more interested in outdoor leisure and education facilities, visitors’ centres, and EV charging points, in contrast to rural communities tending to be more concerned about securing improved broadband connectivity, training, and local job opportunities.

Getting the community involved

There was consensus amongst different types of participants that it is important for developers to get to know the community, build a relationship of trust with the community and conduct an effective engagement process to arrive at an appropriate and widely accepted community benefit package. Both developers and a devolved administration representative drew attention to the value of Scottish guidance and support arrangements, including a register of community benefits, in driving good practice for community benefits²⁰.

“We have the register of community benefits which asks questions around [the voting arrangements] for your fund and how you engaged the community.”
(Devolved administration, Scotland)

Community representatives emphasised how important it is that as many people as possible in communities near a proposed onshore wind farm get involved. This view was shared by some developers who voiced frustration that, from their experience, community members seemed unwilling to come forward as willing representatives to negotiate a suitable community benefits scheme.

“Get involved in the planning process before the wind turbine’s up to try and strike an agreement about what benefits will come to your local area... let [the developer] know you’re there and that they need to work with you.” (Community representative 7)

²⁰ Scottish Government (2019) Scottish Government Good Practice Principles for Community Benefits from Onshore Renewable Energy Developments. Available at [Community benefits from onshore renewable energy developments - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/consultations-policies/energy/consultations/2019/06/20190620-scottish-government-good-practice-principles-for-community-benefits-from-onshore-renewable-energy-developments)

Support for communities

There was consensus amongst all participant types that communities often require additional resources and support (such as skills, time and professional expertise) to engage in community benefit negotiations. Having the appropriate resources was seen as an important enabling requirement for communities to negotiate with the developer.

Both community representatives and devolved administration representatives made suggestions for ways that good practice can support communities to understand the available options. These included providing clear written information or giving examples of what other communities have achieved. A community representative said that training in negotiation skills would be particularly pertinent for community representatives with little or no experience in commercial negotiations. They also said that this would help a greater diversity of community members to get involved. One developer observed that the fact that community members are generally involved as unpaid volunteers can make it harder for people with limited time and financial resources to take part.

Community representatives also said that they needed to be able to draw on professional support to help them negotiate community benefit schemes. They suggested an index of professional impartial support or appointing a third-party intermediary provider who can help local communities understand the terms of an agreement and consider how well that fits with their community priorities. A developer similarly raised the scenario where, without appropriate access to legal advice, a community may not be able to spot unfavourable loopholes in the terms of an agreement set out by developers. Where a community trust or body is able to pay lawyers to draft the legal contracts this can provide reassurance to the community that the developer will be held accountable and comply with commitments. A developer commented that local authorities and other public bodies may also benefit from support on how to work with developers around partnership arrangements.

Achieving impact

The different types of participants valued community partnerships as a means for the community to deliver community action plans and achieve more ambitious outcomes. One local authority representative said that without community collaboration, strategic opportunities and larger-scale developments could be missed. There was consensus amongst those interviewed that capacity and skills limitations of small groups can hamper the scaling up of benefits for an area. Respondents drew on their experience to identify different models for enabling effective decision-making and service delivery. These included setting up a development trust with paid staff or a community partnership which makes decisions delivered through an agreement with a council team.

Arrangements for managing a community benefit package

There was wide agreement amongst the different types of participants about how important it is to make sure the community has suitable arrangements in place for managing and administering a community benefit fund. In some cases, it was identified that an existing organisation (for example a parish council) may be able to take on this role. But a variety of

participants highlighted that it often proves necessary to create a new body (such as a charitable trust) or to appoint a third party (such as a local authority) to undertake this role, with the size of the fund a key consideration on what arrangements are appropriate. Different types of interviewees noted that communities frequently don't have a suitable existing body to administer funds, whether from a fund or shared ownership. This can mean a community needs to establish a new body and may require support to do so:

“You have to be aware that some communities don't have a body that can handle the money because community councils are not allowed to handle vast sums of money. We're not allowed to own assets. That's just the way we're set up. So developers need to be aware that if they are going to pay community benefit, they may have to help get that set up as well.” (Community representative 10)

Deciding how benefits are shared between communities

There was consensus amongst interviewees that it is important for a diversity of people from affected communities, including across neighbouring settlements, to get involved in the process of defining community benefits so that the agreed package addresses a range of needs within and across communities. One community representative described their experience where people from several neighbouring settlements came together to identify shared goals and discuss how benefits should be distributed between the four communities:

“Once it was consented, we led a process with the four communities to secure some funding for each of them to undergo a community action plan process and then we did an exercise to... look across those plans as to what the unifying themes and issues were, out of which we developed with the communities a fund strategy fine-tuned to the needs and ambitions of those four communities.” (Community representative 2)

For large developments where a community benefit fund is likely to amount to hundreds of thousands of pounds a year, community action plans or stakeholder mapping exercises can help communities develop their own ideas further, outlining the community's long-term priorities:

“At an early stage of talking to a community, if they didn't have one (action plan) in place and we were coming in to talk to them about a wind farm, we would say it's a really good document to have to show people coming in and wanting to invest in the area where your priorities are as a community.” (Commercial developer 4)

Timing and flexibility

Flexibility and longevity of funding is a further consideration in deciding community benefit funds. There was general consensus among different types of participants about the value of making provision for funding to be used flexibly in response to changing conditions or emergencies, with a particular example being the Covid-19 pandemic. The duration over which funding or other benefits last also needs consideration. Some communities may prioritise

making the funding last for a long-time, as a form of endowment fund, whereas others may want to make it available for a variety of immediate priorities or investments. One community representative highlighted the need for there to be more strategic approaches for how to use funds, such as for apprenticeships or business start-ups, rather than a ‘scatter gun’ approach.

An associated consideration is how to maximise the value and longevity of positive impact for the community by seeking match funding for priorities. Local authority representatives reported supporting community organisations to access match funding from other sources to help them achieve their priorities. Sources of funding mentioned included the UK Community Renewal Fund, the UK Levelling Up Fund, Arts Council, Sport Wales, Landfill Communities Fund and the Coalfields Regeneration Trust. The local authority representative also administered onshore wind funds on behalf of several communities. Some community representatives welcomed local authorities’ practical support whilst others expressed concerns about a share of community benefits being spent in other parts of the local authority area.

Good practice in brief: Tirgwynt Wind farm, Wales

Tirgwynt Wind Farm – Flexing how benefits are provided according to community needs

This case study from Wales illustrates how community benefits were used in different ways to suit the different priorities of nearby communities.

Tirgwynt Wind Farm in Central Wales has 12 turbines with a 24 MW capacity and commenced operation in 2016. It was jointly funded by the developer and the landowners, who continue to farm the land around the development. Following extensive community engagement, the developer agreed to front load the Carno Community Benefits fund to enable the community to fund a new school building and save the primary school from closure, in line with its wishes. The grant from the community fund was match funded by Powys County Council and the Welsh Government’s 21st Century Schools and Colleges Programme. The developer said that it was essential to be flexible with community benefit funds.

Other benefits from the wind farm include the provision of broadband for the other host community Dwyriw, annual visits to the wind farm and renewables workshops for the children at Carno Primary School, plus restoration and enhancement of uplands habitats over the lifetime of the development.

Appropriate types of community benefit for onshore wind developments

The importance of the financial value of the community benefit was emphasised, with ‘money’ one of the most frequently used words in interviews. Interviewees, including community representatives, developers and others described a wide variety of wider local benefits to the

community across several themes. These included construction phase infrastructure upgrades (e.g. cycle paths, broadband); recreation, culture and health (both investment in facilities and expenditure on activities); environmental benefits like habitat restoration or climate-related action (e.g. woodland creation, low carbon homes, EV charge points); capacity building, education and skills for local people; resilience and emergency response (including for the running costs of local clubs during the pandemic); ensuring local economic benefits (e.g. employment, supply chain, local council rates) and fuel bills (e.g. direct wire, energy voucher scheme).

There was some appetite amongst different types of participants that the community benefit schemes associated with larger commercial projects should not be solely about financial contributions to a benefits fund but give more consideration to support for community upskilling, cohesion, building capacity and local investment as well as employment, and climate related action, such as woodland restoration and home energy efficiency improvements.

There was agreement amongst different types of participants that flexibility is an important guiding principle for both community benefit schemes and shared ownership arrangements so that they are relevant to the local circumstances rather than following a one-size-fits-all approach. One developer criticised what they saw as a tendency amongst some commercial developers to take an overly standardised approach to community benefit funds and shared ownership:

“I don’t think that any two of those funds are exactly the same as each other.... Community benefits [have evolved] very, very rapidly over the past 20 years.” (Commercial developer 1)

“I think that there’s lots of different models for community investment that need to be adapted, it needs to be very flexible in order to be suitable for each situation that is offered in and for it to be something that’s possible for communities to take on.” (Commercial developer 1)

While some participants emphasised the need for benefit arrangements to be flexible and responsive to each community’s individual needs, there were concerns over the lack of replicability of existing shared ownership examples.

“There is almost no replicable model of shared ownership in Scotland, Wales or England” (Commercial developer 5)

One commercial developer pointed to Wales as having in place policies which support flexibility around shared ownership arrangements, noting that a developer could partner with different types of public bodies but with an emphasis on achieving local economic capture of benefits.²¹

²¹ Welsh Government (2020) Policy Statement. Local ownership of energy generation in Wales – benefitting Wales today and for future generations [Local ownership of energy generation in Wales: policy statement |](#)

100% Community ownership

There are few 100% community-owned projects, and these are typically small scale. One community-led developer in Wales, which has 100% community ownership of a small wind farm in receipt of a feed-in tariff, explained that they had used surplus revenue from the wind farm to donate shares in the co-op to local groups which then receive a regular income stream:

“In the first couple of years with any surplus revenue that we had [we bought] local groups shares in the co-op in the wind farm. So, community organisations like the rugby clubs, the football clubs, the local art centre, old age groups, Welsh language groups and community development organisations: we bought them about £100,000 of the shares so they get an annual revenue from the wind farm and they’re full members of the co-op. It’s direct ownership of the wind turbines for a fairly broad membership within the community.” (Community-led developer 2)

The co-op also used surplus revenues to set up another co-op to install roof-top solar on community buildings and to create a low carbon community centre in a former school building. A similar example in Scotland, Dingwall Wind Co-op, was cited by an investment-based crowdfunding platform as demonstrating how a renewable energy co-op can be the start for other community-led activity. The Co-op raised investment from members in a small town to finance a single wind turbine, which subsequently led them to undertake other enterprises, including setting up a successful community-owned whisky distillery. However, this example, which was the first 100% cooperatively owned wind project, benefitted from a feed-in tariff.

Shared ownership

Shared ownership offers a way for local people to have a financial stake in a commercial wind farm. Developers expressed concerns that they have found it hard to identify a replicable model of shared ownership that works in a post-subsidy era and fast-changing market, where onshore wind is high risk and low return. Investment-based crowdfunding platform representatives and some developers considered existing guidance on shared ownership to be out-of-date and unsuited to a post-subsidy era. A cross-section of interviewees with experience of projects in Wales identified Welsh policy on local ownership as an improvement on Scotland’s ‘one-size-fits-all’ model, where a community group has to form a body and then invest in a project. Interviewees said the Welsh approach provides a welcome degree of flexibility, with an emphasis on maximising the financial value kept in the community rather than legal ownership. However, one developer felt that there was still room for England to develop a better policy approach to support shared ownership. Interviewees supportive of shared ownership identified it as likely to encourage increased community engagement and support for the wind farm.

“For communities to really support onshore wind, they need to have a stake in it. They need to feel it’s in their own lives, and it needs to be their energy, their wind farm.” (Commercial developer 5)

A local-authority led developer told us that their council is currently consulting on adopting a requirement for any project over five megawatts to have a community ownership of 5% per project. Interviewees recognised that shared ownership brings associated financial risks for communities and may not be affordable for some. Several interviewees of different types felt that this was a reason why developers should offer a community benefit fund as an alternative or in addition to shared ownership. One developer mentioned a project where there had been no uptake of the shared ownership options offered in addition to the community benefit fund. Another developer identified a more top-down culture in the UK compared with the Netherlands as a possible explanation for why shared ownership is less common in the UK:

“I think it’s very easy as a concept but not so easy to put in practice ... For people to raise that amount ...you have to organise yourself... get a committee, etc.... We find in the Netherlands, that local ownership really works. I think that may be part of the problem in the UK. It’s much more top down. People are not used to that whole idea of having a co-operative.” (Commercial developer 3)

Some community representatives felt that developers do not provide sufficient information to communities to inform decisions about shared ownership, with one community representative recalling a case where a project chose not to proceed with a shared ownership arrangement for this reason:

“There was some talk of shared ownership... but it was felt that it wasn’t viable because you would have on-going running costs. The developer wasn’t very keen on talking about how much it cost to run a turbine because of this commercial sensitivity excuse that keeps being used. But in the end they [the Community Trust] said well if you can’t give us upfront numbers, we just want a straight package and that’s what they got.” (Community representative 10)

Participants in the research identified as good practice offering a Memorandum of Understanding shared ownership option so that community members can decide whether to invest in the project once there is greater certainty about costs or to instead select a community benefit fund. An investment-based crowdfunding platform representative explained that it is normal practice for developers to delay releasing full financial information for investors, including community investors, until an appropriate moment, because costs and projected financial returns can change very quickly in the sector. However, the views of community representatives interviewed indicate this is not always clearly communicated to communities.

There was consensus amongst participants that choosing shared ownership necessarily exposes communities to the financial risks associated with investment. Developers and investment-based crowdfunding platforms identified available and potential options to reduce the risk to communities: for projects in Scotland, the Scottish Investment Bank can lend money to communities in Scotland to invest in a wind farm; and a commercial developer suggested

that local authorities or public bodies should use their ability to borrow money at low interest rates to offer low interest loans for communities to participate in shared ownership:

“They [community] can borrow at a nice low rate, get a decent return, pay off their debt quickly and feel the impact. Then they can fund their green transport scheme, their new village hall.” (Commercial developer 5)

Community benefit packages and funds

Some community representatives and developers identified community benefit funds as offering a relatively risk free and straightforward way for the community to benefit from local onshore wind. They were also considered to offer communities more say over how money is spent in their area when compared to ‘in kind’ benefits promised by a developer. Community representatives and investment-based crowdfunding platforms as well as some developers supported arrangements where the community has control over how the money is spent to suit the needs and priorities of the community:

“We find that it is very important for us as a developer not to be involved in the decision-making process where the money is spent.” (Commercial developer 3)

Different types of participants also noted that community benefit funds offer a more straightforward arrangement for developers and less effort for the community to manage:

“I think there’s a few pockets of communities that are very interested in investment and I think a lot of other communities just kind of think well, if you’re going to give us £5,000 a megawatt, we’ll just take that with no risk and do what we’re doing at the moment.” (Commercial developer 1)

This benefit was tempered by recognition that there is inevitably a level of associated bureaucracy and some doubts voiced by developers about whether, in practice, benefit funds are managed effectively by community bodies to achieve the long-term impacts sought, notably including local employment creation:

“Community benefit is great, thank you very much, we’ll take it, but actually jobs is the thing that’s very high up the list... to allow local people to upscale or to create employability or improve local services or tourism attractions or whatever [is needed] to improve their local area as a destination, community benefit can enable them to do things like that.” (Commercial developer 1)

Another developer similarly noted that community fund managers ought to be more ambitious and if necessary, seek support, so that funds are invested and used to deliver meaningful impact for the local community:

“Our chairman and our company want to see this money used; we want to see local benefit as a result of this; we want to see a legacy. As the guardians, [the community fund manager] can’t just be sitting on lots of cash, if [they] are sitting on lots of cash, is there a better way to use it? [Does the group] need more support?” (Commercial developer 2)

An investment-based crowdfunding platform suggested that developers could enable members of staff to work pro-bono to support communities to make best use of the community benefit payment to benefit everyone in the community.

In-kind benefits

In talking about in-kind benefits, developers referred to infrastructure and utilities, as well as supply chain and employment opportunities. One commercial developer indicated that how the development is done can influence the extent to which in-kind benefits are achieved and their significance:

“I think community benefit [fund] is just one financial benefit that wind farms bring, and actually you should be showing all the ways in which your development can impact that community and create value in that community, because not only do you bring community benefit, which is a financial benefit, but you bring jobs, employment, education, supply chain opportunities for local business. If you’re doing things the right way, you should be bringing local jobs; you should be bringing rates for local councils. Some wind farms bring utilities; they do bring broadband and things like that, to speed up the rollout.” (Commercial developer 5)

Community representatives expressed concerns that the community has limited say over the type of benefit they receive via in-kind contributions and that a developer may use the promise of in-kind benefits to justify a reduction in the value of the community benefit fund, whereas good practice would demand that a project include both types of benefit:

“As long as the fund isn’t lost then a package is fine but there was a concern at one point that the [community benefit] package was being used as a way to reduce the incentive to have a fund at all because the community benefit arrangement from [the wind farm development] could just be the bike track and the apprenticeship scheme.” (Community representative 2)

360° case study 3a: Negotiating and distributing community benefits – Kype Muir Wind Farm, Scotland.

Negotiating and distributing community benefits – Kype Muir Wind Farm, Scotland.

This case study describes the process of negotiating a community benefits package and establishment of a community partnership to decide how to distribute benefits in a transparent and accountable way. Similar models have been used in subsequent onshore wind projects by the same developer.

Kype Muir is an 88 MW wind farm with 26 turbines near Strathaven, in a rural ex-mining area affected by high relative levels of multiple deprivation. The area now has multiple wind farms due to the ‘wind rich’ location. Planning permission was granted in 2014 and the wind farm became operational in 2019. A 15-turbine extension (75 MW) approved in 2016 is under construction.

Negotiating community benefits

In 2011, the developer worked with four community councils for two years to formulate an appropriate community benefits package and to create a community partnership to deliver it. A community representative said that the process was never smooth, and that there were always different points of view from the various councils.

Draft guidelines for the formation of Kype Muir Community Partnership (KMCP) and the operation of the Kype Muir partnership fund (KMPF) were agreed in January 2014. Councillors from the unitary authority were initially involved but were then excluded on the grounds that they were not contributing usefully to the process.

“I have to say, it wasn't easy going. It was never smooth; there were always different points of view from the Community Councils... [We] formed a partnership where we met fairly frequently every couple of months. We spent a fair amount of time bargaining with them. But we ended up with a really good deal. Then to provide sustainable employment for five years we put 50% of our monies into a scheme called Connect2Renewables along with South Lanarkshire Council... to try and sustain employment.” (Community representative, KMCP)

Through persistent negotiation KMCP obtained a sizeable community benefits package. The developer committed to contribute 1.5% of the gross annual revenue from the wind farm to the community fund. A guaranteed minimum payment of £442,000 a year, based on the Scottish guidelines recommended £5,000 per MW per year, is split 50:50 between KMCF and South Lanarkshire Council's Renewable Energy Fund (REF). The KMCF receives a further top up payment in addition to the guaranteed minimum payment, so that the total annual contribution to the fund equates to 1.5% of gross annual revenue. This is expected to be around £213,000 a year. The fund is anticipated to receive in total £16.3 million (£655,000 annually over 25 years). Following the scheme extension, the community revenue share for KMCF will increase to 2.5% from 1.5%, which is estimated to treble the community benefit fund to £32m over 25 years.

The South Lanarkshire REF fund receives additional income from other wind farms in the area. It distributes £2million a year primarily for capital projects in rural areas.

KMCF is managed by KMCP and administered by a community foundation. The four community councils each developed a community action plan, using a one-off grant of £10,000 from the developer. These plans form the basis for how the fund is distributed. The fund is shared equally between the four councils but there is flexibility for any underspend to be re-allocated to another council year on year or to be paid into an endowment fund. This flexibility enables financing of more costly projects.

Community Action Plans are regularly reviewed and updated. Online surveys shared via social media have proved successful as a way to get community feedback, with a 35% household completion rate. This wider public participation in reviewing the plans helps to ensure that the fund is used to meet local priorities.

Innovative funding for local economic benefits

KMCP decided to use some of the community benefit fund to meet its strategic focus on improving local employment and skills, including in tourism and rural diversification. This has been achieved via a partnership between KMCP and South Lanarkshire Council. Both of the guaranteed payment funds made to the local authority Renewable Energy Fund and KMCF are specifically for projects within 10 kilometres of the wind farm in the four community council areas. Secondly, for the first 5 years, KMCP and South Lanarkshire Council each allocate 50% of the two funds (about £125,000 a year each) to Connect2Renewables, an employability scheme run and administered by the local authority to address rural training and economic development needs.²²

Connect2Renewables also provides a mechanism for Banks Renewables to maximise the use of local businesses and employment of local people through the wind farm lifecycle to maximise local capture of economic benefits.

The employability scheme covers the salary of an officer in the local authority's employability team whose role is to support training, local business support and networking of people and businesses in the 4 community council areas. The community-based officer is able to get to know local residents and businesses, so can connect up employment opportunities with individuals who are seeking work. The officer is able to arrange bursaries or support for transport or training to help individuals into work.

“She works with the community and talks to them about what needs they’ve got. But she also connects up with local businesses to match [an individual job-seeker] with [businesses’ needs].

Then where there’s barriers of, ‘I’d love to go and work on that farm but I don’t have the access’... So, bursaries or support for transport or training costs is a big thing.” (Local authority representative)

The share of funding that goes to the local authority run fund achieves benefits to the wider surrounding area. The extension is estimated to bring £74.8million of investment to South Lanarkshire over the life of the project, funding to upgrade the local grid and a new turbine-friendly radar at Glasgow Airport.

Reflection and learning

The partnership approach between the developer, community councils and local authority demands significant joint working likely to be more appropriate for larger projects.

The multi-party partnership was designed to ensure the community benefit fund delivers economic growth and employment in local communities. The share of funding that goes to the local authority-run renewable energy fund enables regeneration benefits to be achieved across the wider surrounding area.

²² <https://www.banksgroup.co.uk/renewables/connect2renewables/>

The initial work to set up the partnership and negotiate funding arrangements imposed significant demands on community members' skills and unpaid time. In retrospect, support to build the capacity of the community volunteers involved or funding to employ paid staff would have been valuable.

Challenges in agreeing community benefit funds

Timing for negotiating community benefits

One of the key challenges raised by developers and community representatives is related to the timing of when to discuss community benefits with the affected communities. Some developers, engagement specialists and community representatives felt it was preferable to begin talking about potential community benefits early on to allow sufficient time to develop plans through in-depth engagement with the community. Others, across these different groups, thought that the benefits should only be discussed in detail after consent has been reached, in order to keep a clear separation between wind farm planning and community benefits.

“Generally, we would be cautious about getting too involved in communities about community benefit pre-consent. However, I would qualify that by saying that it’s not as simple as that because if a developer and/or a community is serious about a community ownership opportunity you need to be in those conversations as soon as possible. It’s likely that the community benefit element of a potential project will be wrapped up in that conversation...An option could be negotiated with the community if they’re comfortable talking about community benefit, knowing the project might not get consented...They need to realise it’s not material [to the planning decision] but in the event of getting consent this could be transformative for the community.” (Community representative 2)

One community representative mentioned that some communities do not want to hear about the plans for the wind farm without discussing the benefits available, because they really care about the associated benefits. Whilst the benefit schemes do not form a material consideration in the planning process, a local authority representative indicated that communities can be suspicious that the benefit scheme could influence the consent even if they are not supposed to.

“Sometimes there can be a degree of scepticism from the local community about what exactly it is and whether it’s just a bribe to smooth over things.” (Local authority representative 1)

Some developers said that they wait until consent is achieved before discussing benefits but other developers and participants reported that in their experience negotiations usually begin earlier because the community will want to know what is on offer:

“We are currently involved in a process of designing a community benefit fund with four communities, two years ahead of the fund going live. It’s really positive

of the developer to invest in this and recognise the importance of building any fund on firm foundations...as early as possible but without compromising people's ability to engage effectively on the project itself and the consenting process of the project." (Community representative 2)

Turnover of people due to long timeframes

The long timeframes involved in the planning stages was identified as adding to the difficulties of negotiating community benefit arrangements. Some developers and community representatives identified that this can lead to a turnover of the people involved in the process, both on the side of the community and the developer. From a developer perspective, this can mean that they need to recommence negotiations with a group of people that can change over time. An accelerated time frame for planning and consent, it was suggested, would help resolve this problem.

Defining who should benefit

Another challenge relates to defining who should benefit and how widely those benefits are shared across communities. The research indicated that there were often disagreements about how the distribution of benefits should differ between communities, depending on the proportion to which they are affected by the scheme (for example, because they are geographically further away).

"I think what is most difficult is to determine where the community benefit is applicable. Is it applicable to only village A and not to village B? How wide do you go?" (Commercial developer 3)

One interviewee recommended sharing benefits more widely across communities to avoid conflict between communities. This could mean, for example, including in the benefits those communities on the turbine delivery route. Some interviewees emphasised the need for establishing clear eligibility criteria to avoid conflict relating to benefits.

"You need a robust set of guiding principles which are your bible that you refer to when you get into trouble, you need a consistent list of eligibilities, ineligibilities; you need to get it nailed down so that there's nothing left to chance, nothing left to interpretation." (Local authority representative 4)

Achieving adequate community representation

There was consensus from different types of interviewees that it can be difficult to achieve adequate representation of the community to negotiate benefits:

"You might have an organisation within the community that's doing it [developing the community benefit offer] but you know that's one group within the community and they might not be representative of the community at large." (Local authority representative 1)

Interviewees told us that, consequently, not all needs in the community may be adequately represented. For example, people who have fewer financial pressures may have more time to engage in the development of community benefits but do not represent the whole community.

“So, for example, we tried a local energy scheme where people could get discounted electricity. The people against, they couldn’t care less. They knew what their energy bill was so the people that really benefit from that maybe in fuel poverty... we were not able to really reach them” (Commercial developer 3)

Interviewees of different types mentioned that it can be difficult to get agreement on the scale of ambition and of how benefits should be shared to cover a variety of needs within a community and across multiple communities.

“The problem is that it covers a huge area and nine different village communities. So, it’s extremely difficult to find a project which would benefit [the whole area].” (Community representative 3)

“sometimes people have ideas about making sure there’s nice plants in the high-street, but other people have much grander ideas and want a legacy project... so it’s making sure that all the views are represented and that there’s a broad agreement of where the money’s going.” (Community engagement specialist 1)

Lack of community resources

Interviewees of all types raised the challenges associated with community volunteers having limited time, money and experience or skills for engaging in the development of community benefits.

“Often communities are talking to lots of different developers about different wind farms in their area and therefore we have to be realistic about how much they’re able to... emotionally and mentally invest in having those conversations with all those different people, especially if those wind farms may not be consented... it could be a decent number of years by the time we get through construction and grid connection.” (Commercial developer 1)

The differing abilities to invest within a community were identified as a challenge for setting up shared ownership models that reflect the financial statuses of different households.

Honouring commitments

One community representative recalled from a number of cases in their experience where developers had failed to deliver promised benefits, especially in cases where a project was subsequently sold on to another wind farm developer.

“I do think that this business that I mentioned about communities that are promised X and then it doesn’t happen, that’s something that really has to be addressed.” (Community representative 9)

Opposition to wind farms

Interviews about community benefits with community representatives who oppose onshore wind revealed that they could not envisage any community benefits that would outweigh their concerns about a wind farm being developed in their locality:

“It’s just that they [the community benefits] do not outweigh on the balancing scales the damage to be done and I can’t envisage of any benefit that would allay those fears.” (Community representative 4)

Community representatives opposed to commercial-led onshore wind indicated a greater willingness to support community-led onshore wind projects.

Recommendations for addressing the challenges

Interviewees came up with a variety of suggestions for how to overcome challenges relating to community benefits. Several interviewees highlighted the important role of third parties in supporting communities, recognising that the job of negotiating community benefits is a big responsibility for the community to take on and manage:

“The problem is communities of course are not sufficiently well organised to get that community benefit sorted. That’s the top and bottom of it... my experience is that communities for the most part were quite happy to leave it to somebody else to do the sorting.” (Community representative 3)

Support from third parties can include capacity building and/or ‘handholding’ through the process of negotiating community benefits and supporting them to access appropriate professional and legal advice.

A related suggestion was access to financial or in-kind support at the point of negotiating the community benefit arrangement with the developer, notably around the costs for legal advice.

“You’re very much an organisation or a community with very little resources behind you and you’re trying to form a partnership with an organisation that generally has a lot of resources behind them and expertise, so you do need support. The Welsh Government Energy Service provides support in terms of just legal costs and things like that. Making sure you have good legal advice when you’re getting into these agreements is really, really important.” (Community representative 8)

Managing the community benefit fund

Interviewees referenced a variety of different arrangements for administering and managing the community benefit fund and differences in how widely the benefits are shared, as illustrated by a devolved administration body that provides support to community groups:

“It could be that the developer holds the funds and there is a representative community body that helps to decide the priorities, or it could be that the community body holds the funds and then reports back to the developer or it could be that a third party manages the funds and a local representative body helps to decide priorities.” (Devolved administration Scotland)

A community engagement specialist described an example, which they viewed to be successful, where multiple community councils had established a single body to manage a shared community benefit fund:

“So, nine community councils group, and they’ve come together just purely on wind farm community benefit packages. They all now work together on wind farm community benefit packages. They all share that and rather than it being in percentages, even if a wind farm is in one of those community council areas, any of those nine can bid into that fund. So there’s different ways of doing it.” (Community engagement specialist 2)

Developers, engagement specialists, and local authorities broadly supported benefits being shared widely, for example, via a regional fund, on the basis that this can enable a broader impact and minimise conflict between communities. However, community representatives prioritised community control over how funding is used, with a preference for more localised distribution. Community representatives were concerned that decisions are not influenced by the developer or by local politicians. Community representatives also felt that community control can encourage community members to take a more active interest in decisions about community benefits.

One developer expressed concern from experience that community or parish councils may not have a sufficiently clear remit to manage a benefit fund or scheme effectively:

“By its very nature there are challenges to overcome, and most of those are around the differences in how community councils are led on an individual-by-individual basis; people’s interpretation of what a community council is there to do or a parish council is there to do, and what they can and can’t do.” (Commercial developer 2)

The interviewees referred to a variety of different organisational arrangements and financial structures used by communities to manage a community fund. These include a community trust, a company limited by guarantee, or a co-operative, as well as the option of setting up a separate committee for decisions about investments. The Kype Muir project in Scotland was described as an example where several communities are represented on a decision-making body but employ an administrator to manage the funds:

“The Kype Muir Community Partnership employ an administrator, through us [the developer]. It’s called the County Durham Foundation. The applications go to the County Durham Foundation, who do due diligence, write a report and make a recommendation to the Kype Muir Community Partnership who debate [the recommendation] and decide.” (Commercial developer 2)

Developers and community bodies noted that a community may need guidance and advice in setting up a trust, company, or co-operative to manage the funds. There was also acknowledgement of the potential for ill-feeling about how benefits are distributed across different communities. Suggested solutions emphasised representation of different communities in discussions about how to distribute benefits fairly:

“Where there has been some sort of animosity towards how community benefits are going to be distributed... the way that we went about it [resolving the animosity] is by setting up a public liaison group with a member of the parish council from each of the parishes sitting on that group.” (Local-authority led developer)

A local authority representative in Scotland noted that local authorities can play a co-ordination role to join up finance from an onshore wind community fund with funding from other sources to deliver larger scale projects as part of a rural strategic investment plan.

Impacts of community benefit funds

Money was frequently mentioned by all types of participants during discussion of community benefits, including around the significance of the value of funds for affected communities, as well as the associated responsibility and the choices available to the community.

“We are paying out massively. I think this wind farm is paying £300,000-400,000 a year in a very small community.” (Commercial developer 3)

“Some of our older funds are really significant sums of money that can help communities address local needs, maybe tens of thousands of pounds, I think our largest fund now annually pays just over £1.2 million a year, so it’s a huge, huge sum and a huge responsibility for local people to take that on and administer.” (Commercial developer 1)

“We’re only investing £20,000-£30,000 a year at the moment so it’s not earth-shatteringly big sums of money involved in what we’re doing. As the life of the project progresses, the amount of money that we should earn from it will increase and we’ll be able to do more ambitious things.” (Community representative 6)

One community representative recalled lengthy negotiations first with the developer to maximise how much money went to the community partnership, followed by negotiations amongst the partnership about how the money would be used, including a decision to direct half the money towards employment creation, with the local authority providing matched funding to further maximise the impact.

“We met fairly regularly with the developer to establish how much money we could get from the wind farm, what that would look like. We kept defining how much money we could maximise from them, how much money they were prepared to give us. We spent a fair amount of time bargaining and ended up with

a really good deal. We then put 50% of our monies into a scheme to provide sustainable employment for five years. We ended up with a fairly good constitution on what we can spend the money on and what we shouldn't spend the money on, how we agree, how we would spend the money..." (Community representative 5)

Interviewees reported community benefit funds being used for a variety of purposes, including local infrastructure improvements (from footpath repairs and upgrades to community buildings to fibre broadband in rural areas), sports and leisure facilities and activities, investment in skills training and job creation in the local economy, community group projects, and towards local low carbon strategies. Tourism, heritage, and culture were widely mentioned as potentially valuable uses of benefit funds, though limited examples were given.

Several interviewees reported how the criteria of community benefit funds had been adjusted so that money could be used to pay for urgent local needs during the COVID-19 pandemic:

"We realised that some of our grants or the criteria were no good for this COVID-19 pandemic... So we altered the criteria to develop an emergency fund. We diluted the criteria so that [local clubs and groups]... struggling to make ends meet during this lockdown and this pandemic could apply to us for a small grant of up to £1,000 to pay for utilities, insurances, affiliations which were essential to keep these clubs afloat." (Local authority representative 4)

Community engagement specialists, developers and community representatives gave examples of efforts to tackle fuel poverty, including via local energy discount schemes. One developer expressed frustration at low take-up of an offer which they claimed would save £100 a year on energy bills.

Investment-based crowd-funding platforms as well as community-led and some commercial developers expressed enthusiasm for the benefits of shared ownership as a way for local people and community organisations to have a direct stake in the wind farm and share in the profits. However, commercial developers also raised concerns about whether there is sufficient guidance on shared ownership arrangements, suggesting that the model is not yet sufficiently developed. A developer, an engagement specialist and an investment-based crowdfunding platform all referred to a Memorandum of Understanding as a useful way to keep options open for communities to decide their preferred way to benefit from a development once it has consent.

Different types of participants expressed concerns that community benefits schemes are not realising their potential strategic impact in their area, with a tendency to focus on quick wins or small-scale projects. Amongst developers, local authorities, and other industry professionals there was a shared view that community benefits could be more strategic towards addressing local felt priorities or investment in measures, such as electric vehicle charging points or retrofitting homes to achieve net zero carbon targets. Local authorities, as well as developers, framed the need for more strategic impact in terms of the income from onshore wind farms offering a sizeable and flexible form of funding available to rural areas and lower income areas.

A local authority reported exploring how to join up UK funding (UK Renewal Fund and UK Levelling Up Fund) with wind farm money to deliver regeneration in former mining towns.

Local authority representatives who administer renewable energy community benefit funds illustrated two ways in which they claim they can maximise impact by comparison to funds run by community trusts:

“The model that most people think of is local community trusts and local community councils as administering their local budget that can work but has the problem that you miss strategic opportunities and big-scale developments. Plus issues around capacity and skills or independence of small groups.” (Local authority representative 3)

One local authority achieved this by raising on average £1 million match funding a year from other sources (such as Landfill Communities Fund, National Lottery) to increase the value of small grants to local community groups. The other outlined an approach in concept phase: a funded capacity building programme for communities in post-industrial towns to develop a vision (such as to become net zero or around tourism) for their area so they can deliver larger projects that will achieve a longer-term legacy. The local authority representative said that development trusts are already taking forward this type of approach. There were mixed views amongst community representatives interviewed about the involvement of local authorities in how community benefits are distributed, with some strong opposition to their involvement, considering that decisions are best made at community level.

Developers suggested that introducing a measure of the impacts achieved by community benefit schemes could lead to greater consideration of lasting impacts, whilst a community representative was concerned that it can be hard to measure the cumulative value of ‘little acts of kindness’ associated with small-scale community-level activity. A community-led developer gave an example of beneficial unforeseen impacts achieved by a project:

“Where we’ve set up a co-op with surpluses from the wind farm or it’s helped underwrite it, that’s installed a further 4.2 megawatts of rooftop solar on lots of community buildings. We didn’t know about that at the point of applying for planning for the wind farm.” (Community-led developer 2)

Chapter 5: Ongoing relationships and local legacy

This chapter reports on good practice for maintaining good relationships between the developer and the community across the lifetime of the site.

Early chapters reported how interviewees noted the importance of building trusting relationships from the start and maintaining them. The importance of doing what you've said you're going to do continues to be important to local people over the lifetime of the site. Interviewees broadly shared the view that this should motivate developers to invest time upfront to build relationships and trust with the local community. However, all types of interviewees recognised that in practice, developers' level of engagement with the community tends to fall once consent is given and once the project is operational. Developers acknowledged that this can give rise to problems with the community. This was seen as best resolved through simply committing to, and funding, ongoing engagement. Similar principles of good community engagement apply as those mentioned for earlier engagement, such as putting in the time and effort to engage and respond to concerns, based on a recognition that extensions, repowering or selling on of sites are significant changes which should trigger renewed community engagement.

Different types of participants noted the need for developers to continue to engage with communities, albeit with less frequency, on a regular basis once the wind farm has been built, with a recognition that ongoing relationships will continue for decades. An engagement specialist highlighted that it is in developers' own interests to maintain good relationships with communities to maintain their reputation when they are seeking community support for future projects in the area.

A variety of practical pointers were identified by different types of participants as ways of maintaining good relationships. These include: holding regular local liaison committee meetings; nominating an individual to provide a consistent point of contact over several years to respond to and resolve any issues; arranging community and educational visits to the site, and allowing public access to the site; making sure that a consistent source of information, such as a project website, is kept up-to-date; and circulating newsletters to properties within the vicinity of the site to reach people who do not participate in liaison meetings. The importance of consistent messaging conveyed through a project website or leaflets was identified as important for the developer as well as for the community, to ensure local residents receive accurate timely information and minimise the risk of inaccurate information spreading via word-of-mouth.

The need to communicate on a regular basis about how community benefit funds are spent was identified as an effective way to maintain regular contact between the developer and the community, including where the fund administrators are required to report to the developer on how the funds have been spent. However, one devolved administration body highlighted that

developers need to give communities space regarding the use and administration of benefit funds.

Community representatives felt particularly strongly that in the two-way relationship, the developer has the primary responsibility for building good relationships and maintaining good lines of communication. Inevitable turnover in who represents the developer and the local community was identified as a reason for ongoing renewal of relationships. A developer gave a case in Scotland as an example of good practice where an established set of rules, terms of reference and code of behaviour provides the framework for the developer-community relationship to be regularly renewed.

Community representatives were notably critical of a tendency amongst developers to neglect consultation of affected communities when they are considering planned changes to the existing site, including decommissioning, repowering, a change in ownership, installation of other associated technologies such as battery storage, extensions to the site or other changes to land management at the site.

Developers and community engagement specialists pointed out that any repowering or extension would require a new consenting process. As part of this, developers are required to undertake a new phase of community consultation. In line with good engagement practice discussed earlier, this requires the consultation to invest time in refreshing their understanding of the community, meet local people face to face and engage with people's concerns about the new proposals.

Some community representatives interviewed were especially concerned about existing sites being sold on, particularly with regards to whether the subsequent owners would honour the arrangements made previously.

“It’s happened locally - the developer will come, they’ll have the public meeting, they’ll promise a community benefit or whatever and then they sell the planning permission and what was sold doesn’t include that obligation. I think that needs to be absolutely remedied so that if a community is promised whatever, it happens. But so many times that hasn’t happened and I think that’s really bad.”
(Community representative 9)

Similarly, where a site is sold on, the new owner needs to invest time in relationship building:

“If they sell it on, then there’s a change of project team: it’s all about building up the trust again – because there will be a lot of mistrust and that can only be done through face time. It’s going back to basics, meeting with people, listening to what their concerns are and then slowly trying to address it.” (Community engagement specialist 1)

360° case study 3b: Maintaining ongoing relationships – Kype Muir Wind Farm Extension, Scotland.

Maintaining ongoing relationships – Kype Muir Wind Farm Extension

This case study demonstrates how the developer has maintained a strong ongoing relationship with the community via regular meetings and contact with community representatives. This has brought benefits for both sides.

The partnership approach devised by a commercial developer during the Kype Muir Wind Farm project and now adopted as standard practice on the developer's other projects, helps ensure it maintains positive lasting contact with communities. The developer maintains that their emphasis on listening and responding flexibly to community needs helps build a good relationship with communities.

The developer has an ongoing relationship with the five community councils for Kype Muir Wind Farm as part of the community partnership initiated to deliver community benefit funds. A representative of the developer attends meetings once every 2 months in person or via Zoom, as well as having frequent informal phone and email contact with community representatives.

"I've known these people now for ten years... the partnership approach and encouraging that way of working in collaboration with us, we sit on that [community partnership] group – we're non-voting members; we're purely there to offer advice and put our threepence-worth in, that's it – but that will continue every two months for the next 30 years." (Project Manager)

The positive track record with local communities enabled the developer to approach the community partnership about a possible extension to the wind farm. The developer sought to use 15 larger turbines to maximise use of the area's wind resources. The local communities supported extension after careful siting of the turbines. The extension is expected to treble the initial community benefit fund for the community.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

This chapter summarises what the research found in answer to each of the main research questions.

What constitutes a ‘local community’ in relation to onshore wind developments and how should this community be identified?

There was broad consensus that ‘local community’ needs to be defined on a case-by-case basis in the early stages of project identification. Each community is unique and will have its own concerns which means that a one size fits all approach is unlikely to work. Developers identified the physical and local administrative geography as important for identifying the local affected area. But various examples illustrated that the local affected community doesn’t always map neatly against administrative boundaries and that people may self-identify as part of a local community in relation to where they work or in other ways.

The research revealed use of a variety of methods to gather knowledge about the local community as a first stage in a comprehensive engagement plan - from desk research, accessing local media, data gathering, and geographical considerations of environmental impacts. Representative bodies and other local groups have local knowledge about the community, and engaging with them can be useful in helping to identify the characteristics of the local area.

What examples of best practice are there when it comes to engaging with a local community in the early stages of an onshore wind development?

The ACE Severn Road Wind Turbine community-led developer trained and paid interns to undertake door-knocking, host information and advice stalls at neighbourhood events and deliver presentations. The developer worked in collaboration with neighbourhood groups, strengthening understanding of community priorities, including the need for local economic regeneration. Communicating the links between climate action and local economic regeneration helped to achieve broad community support for onshore wind in the area.

The Berry Burn Wind Farm Extension provides a further example of good practice. The developer asked community representatives and local groups for their advice on who to involve and practical arrangements for further engagement with a broad range of local people. This also helped to establish constructive relationships at the outset and achieve broad engagement. Other instances of good practice highlighted preparatory desk research and work on the ground by the developer to understand local concerns and build rapport with the

community. Further examples involved local people viewing and discussing visual models with environmental specialists, yielding useful local knowledge for the developer, and enabling local people to influence details of the layout and scale of the project.

What are the main challenges and how should these be overcome?

Onshore wind can be divisive. The research included examples where this had proven a hindrance to open and honest conversation within and between communities. This can prove intimidating for some people, discouraging them from engaging in discussions about the proposed wind farm.

Another challenge concerns the risk of inaccurate information and rumours circulating within close-knit communities. Suggested methods to mitigate this risk included: maintaining dialogue through regular widely-distributed updates which avoid relying on a single person to disseminate message, maintaining an informative, up-to-date website, and establishing a community liaison group as a communication channel between the developer and community members. Anonymous online surveys were also recommended as a way to get a better understanding about the reasons for objections to a project.

Consultation fatigue in areas with multiple wind farm developments was highlighted in interviews as a further challenge. Attention to the timings of events, the choice of communication channels, presenting information in short videos and offering opportunities to respond via short events or online are techniques that have been used or proposed to address this challenge.

How did engagement ensure that a multitude of views were considered and reflected?

To consider and reflect a multitude of views, developers and engagement specialists highlighted their use of a variety of different communication channels and engagement activities to make consultation meaningful and inclusive. Further examples of techniques used to hear a wider range of different voices included:

- attending events in the locality organised by others;
- using traditional methods of engagement, such as surveys, door knocking, in-person events, and conducting telephone polls;
- using digital methods, such as maintaining a project website, using 3d visualisations and multimedia, hosting webinars and videoconference meetings, and accessing social media;
- providing a safe space for honest feedback, by offering anonymous voting arrangements at meetings and the opportunity for individuals to speak about their own concerns on a one-to-one basis at in person or digital events;
- Using community outreach techniques to engage the community where it already gathers - via local radio, magazines, newspapers and social media channels; and

- Tailoring engagement to reach different groups (see below).

What were the challenges in reaching hard to find groups and how were these overcome?

One challenge identified was a tendency for the views of a small vocal group with a particular stance to crowd out or silence the views of others. Evidence from interviews suggest that some people can feel intimidated to present their own views openly. Approaches to overcoming this challenge include an overall commitment to using a broad variety of tailored engagement methods, providing regular feedback about views heard so far, and through provision of safe spaces for one-to-one conversations.

Restrictions on the ability to hold in-person events during the pandemic led developers to experiment with online forms of engagement. They found that this led to widened engagement, including amongst younger age groups. This has led developers to consider how they can combine physical and online engagement methods to broaden their reach in the future.

Community outreach techniques can be used to reach groups which do not typically engage in the development process. The research suggested that these groups tended to be families with children, low income or unemployed people and minority communities (such as people from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic background or disabled people). There was recognition that this is an area where further efforts are needed to learn what works.

What is important to a local community when an onshore wind farm is proposed in their area?

Local communities interviewed said they want developers to demonstrate a genuine interest in communicating with them and ensuring that the community will achieve a fair share of the benefits of having a wind farm in their area. The research showed that local communities want developers to engage early and continue to inform, listen to and respond to the community throughout the project. Having a single point of contact was valued by interviewees as important to feeling confident that their concerns will be acted on. There was also emphasis on the importance of transparency, which can be achieved through regular updates.

Local community concerns will differ, even between neighbouring villages. But some of the main concerns include local capture of economic benefits, worries about effects on house prices, impacts of the turbines themselves, including possible visual amenity, noise and shadow flicker, as well as traffic effects during the construction phase. Local communities are also concerned about effects on the natural environment, including biodiversity and heritage impacts. Community concerns may also relate to feelings that wind farm developers are imposing the scheme on the local community and putting their own profits ahead of the interests of the local community. The research also showed that communities are concerned about climate change and recognise the contribution that onshore wind developments make towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

What is the best way of identifying the needs and any concerns of a local community in this respect?

The use of a variety of engagement methods and communication channels, as discussed above, is important as means of enabling local communities to talk openly about their needs and concerns.

Developers highlighted how 'making it real' through the use of organised visits, use of independent experts to discuss specific concerns and use of visual representations, such as 3D fly-throughs or virtual reality headsets can help people understand how the development will apply to them and voice their concerns. These methods can also help allay or clarify concerns that people may have about possible negative impacts.

How have local communities helped to shape onshore wind developments through engagement?

The research showed how communities can shape sites by engaging with developers about their concerns. Site visits, high quality visualisations at exhibitions, and the opportunity to discuss the design with environmental specialists can help community members and developers to find compromises regarding the size and location of wind turbines.

Communities can also shape and improve wind farm sites through providing local knowledge to the developer. Developers told us that they often glean useful knowledge about the local geography, biodiversity and topography from local people, which can result in environmental enhancements or changes to site design and layout to reduce visual impacts and maintain public rights of way, for instance. Where developers make changes in responses, this can lead to increased trust amongst community members and bring associated reputational benefits for the developer.

Some developers pointed out that where local concerns result in a reduction of the scale of the proposed scheme, this may mean a reduction in the financial value of community benefits available. Developers and communities said that this was an important consideration for communities to be made aware of when any changes to a site are negotiated.

What is best practice for maintaining good relationships between the developer and the community across the lifetime of the site?

Participants agreed that developers need to demonstrate through their actions a commitment to being a good neighbour. Techniques included having a single point of contact who can resolve problems quickly, follow through on promises made to the community and keep the community informed of any planned changes.

Consistent messaging in newsletters and via other channels, keeping the project webpage updated, and holding regular community liaison meetings help maintain good relationships.

What are the main challenges and how should these be overcome?

A challenge raised in interviews was that, in areas with a history of wind farm developments, communities' past experience of wind farm developers not fulfilling their promises can mean they are less ready to trust the promises made by the developers of new projects. As stated above, communities will look to the developer to demonstrate through their actions a commitment to being a good neighbour. Major changes to the site, such as decommissioning, repowering or extensions require their own consultation process as part of the planning process. A refreshed engagement adhering to good practice principles as for a new proposed project can overcome problems. New owners – where the site is sold on – can avoid problems by investing time in building and renewing relationships. Commitments made by the project developers should be passed on to and adopted by the new owners in a legal agreement.

What should local communities and developers consider when drawing up community benefit packages?

The research showed that a good community benefit package arises when the local community is well represented and has the skills, confidence, capacity and resources to devote to the process.

Developers and community representatives told us that it was important that all affected communities are represented. However, neighbouring villages or administrative districts may differ in their priorities. A good overall community package will respond with appropriately tailored benefits for each village or district. The process demands care around negotiating the different views and interests of the various communities involved, including where some benefits are for the immediately affected community and some are to be shared more widely (e.g. across a local authority area).

Where communities have an existing community plan that sets out their ways of working and priority actions, this can prove a valuable starting point for drawing up a community benefit package. The development of such a plan by the community may require external support. A community benefit package should reflect the situation, needs and priorities of the particular affected community/ies, so that the money is used in a way that responds to their specific circumstances. This may be as an upfront lump sum, regular payments into an endowment fund or a negotiated benefit in kind to deliver a community-identified infrastructure improvement.

The institutional arrangements for overseeing and administering the package should also be tailored to the local situation, whether building on existing arrangements or creating a new body or establishing new partnerships between existing bodies. Interviewees encouraged creativity in deciding an appropriate structure.

Training provision, support from a third-party intermediary, and funding to pay for legal advice emerged as important ways that communities can be supported to negotiate appropriate community benefit packages. Interviewees with experience of developments in Scotland and Wales referred to services offered through the Scottish Government's Community and Renewable Energy Scheme (CARES) and the Welsh Government's Energy service respectively as potentially helpful models for a new service in England.

Are there any types of community benefit that local communities and developers have found are most appropriate in the context of onshore wind developments?

Community benefit packages can take a variety of forms and participants told us that, rather than a single approach being preferable, the type of package should be tailored to local circumstances rather than adopting a one size fits all approach.

Examples of fully community owned onshore wind projects since 2015 are scarce. Despite this, community representatives championed community-led projects as a way for communities to retain control over how income from onshore wind is reinvested in the locality.

Participants told us that shared ownership was often looked upon favourably as it generally constituted a more generous financial outcome for communities, and also offered a way for communities to have a direct stake in a commercial wind farm project. A Memorandum of Understanding was identified as a way to allow community members to delay a decision on taking up this option until fuller financial information is available. However, some developers expressed concerns that shared ownership arrangements can be more complex to arrange.

For direct financial packages, participants agreed that the value of the fund or package should continue to directly relate to the size of the project. Some interviewees, including developers, referenced the industry protocol of £5,000 per installed MW per year as an accepted standard.²³ However, a variety of voices expressed concerns that this needs reviewing.

The research showed that community benefit funds may either be directly managed by a community organisation or administered on their behalf by a third party: a new body may need to be set up to administer funds. There was a preference, both amongst community representatives and some developers, for developers not to be involved in deciding how money is spent. The research found that clear rules on how money is spent are important, but some flexibility can also enable funds to respond to emergencies, such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Communities could also consider how to utilise the funds to best achieve impactful and lasting benefits.

Developers may also provide direct benefits in addition to the community package. However, interviewees made it clear that developer-decided voluntary benefits should not be seen as an alternative to a community benefits package.

²³ Renewable UK (2013) Onshore Wind: Our Community Commitment. Accessed at https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.renewableuk.com/resource/resmgr/Docs/community_benefits_report.pdf

What are the main challenges when designing community benefits packages and how should these be overcome?

The principle of a clear separation between developer-led engagement with the community and planning-related public consultation by the local authority remains crucial. On balance, there are merits in early conversations with communities about the potential community benefits package. Detailed negotiations should only proceed once the project is consented.

The research showed there is a need for communities to be able to access support from third parties, including legal advice. Keeping a good record of agreed eligibility criteria, third party support and creativity in deciding an appropriate structure are identified as good ways to address some of these challenges.

What are the main challenges and how should these be overcome?

Challenges to negotiating and managing community benefits packages include achieving wide representation, timing discussions of community benefits, disputes around eligibility, and the time and skills constraints faced by members of the community.

Bringing people from different communities together can be useful to agree on shared goals. The support of specialist community bodies can help with facilitating this process. Existing community plans or a stakeholder mapping exercise can be useful starting points for identifying what types of benefits are included. Keeping a good record of agreed eligibility criteria, third party support and creativity in deciding an appropriate structure are identified as good ways to address some of these challenges.

What case studies are there that demonstrate good community engagement, and successful or innovative approaches to community benefits packages? What lessons can we learn from previous onshore wind projects?

This report includes three case studies which provide good practice examples of community engagement and community benefits. Lessons from each are:

360° case study 1: Early community engagement by community-led developer – ACE Severn Road Wind Turbine, England.

- A diverse range of engagement activities, including door-knocking, information and advice stalls at neighbourhood events and presentations helped to achieve broad community support, which in turn supported planning approval.
- Working in collaboration with neighbourhood groups strengthened understanding of community priorities.

- Communicating the links between climate action and economic regeneration, a priority for the local community, helped persuade people to support onshore wind.

360° case study 2: Identifying and responding to community priorities– Berry Burn Extension, Scotland.

- The commercial developer asked community representatives and local groups for their advice on who to involve and practical arrangements. This made it easier for the developer to engage with a broad range of local people.
- The developer planned and delivered a well-structured engagement plan, adapting the process in response to changing circumstances and feedback to respond to community areas of interest.
- The developer shared back consultation findings with community representatives. This demonstrated transparency and helped maintain the trust of the community.
- A community liaison group was set up as a consistent way for the developer and the community to maintain contact and feedback.
- The developer shared information via a range of channels, making it easier for community members to learn about the project. These included virtual meetings, a content-rich project website of videos, a document library, newsletters, and surveys.
- The developer was ready to adapt proposals in response to community concerns about recent local wildfires. This resulted in a plan to restore habitats and benefit biodiversity.

360° case study 3: Negotiating and distributing community benefits – Kype Muir Wind Farm, Scotland.

- The community partnership approach between the developer, community and its community councils and local authority required a significant level of joint working. This is likely to be more appropriate for larger projects.
- The multi-party partnership was designed to ensure the community benefit fund is used to deliver economic growth and employment in local communities. The share of funding that goes to the local authority run renewable energy fund enables regeneration benefits to be achieved across the wider surrounding area.
- The initial work to set up the partnership and negotiate funding arrangements imposed significant demands on community members' skills and unpaid time. In retrospect, support to build the capacity of the community volunteers involved or funding to employ paid staff would have been valuable.

Chapter 7 provides practical recommendations for developers, communities, local authorities as well as policy makers and other bodies involved in the onshore wind sector.

Chapter 7: Practical recommendations for the onshore wind sector in England

This chapter sets out recommendations for developers, communities, local authorities as well as policy makers and other bodies involved in the onshore wind sector. These recommendations reflect the views of the team from the Centre for Sustainable Energy and are not the views of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

Updated good practice guidance for community engagement and benefits from onshore wind developments in England will be published alongside this report. The guidelines draw on good practice principles identified in this research. The recommendations below identify key lessons as well as wider implications for good practice.

Recommendations for developers, engagement specialists and industry bodies

Communicate the environmental benefits of onshore wind

- Developers should aim to clearly communicate to communities how the number and size of turbines and layout of a wind farm is the primary contributing factor to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and supplying the grid with cheap, clean electricity. It is also the main consideration influencing the value of community benefits. This can help build a sense of shared community pride in the contribution to a low carbon future and recognition of the opportunities for local capture of economic benefits.

Defining the community

- The research suggests that whilst administrative boundaries or electoral rolls can be important starting points for defining the community, developers should avoid an over-reliance on these sources of information.
- Similarly, visual impact maps and other maps defining areas of impact are an important resource for identifying who may be affected by impacts.
- Good practice for defining the community and identifying who to engage with involves a systematic and interactive process; a combination of desk-based, social media and on-the-ground research. This should be used to build a rich picture of the community organisations, diversity amongst affected communities and priority concerns.
- Meetings, conversations and site visits provide opportunities to identify the different ways in which people self-identify with the area – developers should be ready to flex their definition of affected community in response to self-definitions, such as where people living outside the area have a connection with the area (for example, related to their employment).

- The research indicated that treating each community as unique in its needs and desires is an important principle of good practice. It is also important to maintain and refresh connections and understanding of the community, their concerns, and priorities over the lifetime of the project.

Early engagement

The research highlighted that good practice involves:

- Starting engagement at the feasibility stage of project development.
- Efforts to build trust with gatekeeper individuals/organisations but also to use a variety of communication mechanisms to reach others in the community, such as newsletters and adverts in local press, radio, and tailored messages via social media.
- Use of visual impact maps and 3D visualisations as aids to support community members to understand proposals. Site visits and conversations with experts can provide valuable information for the developer and help developers understand and respond to local people's concerns or questions.
- Being ready to provide information about associated changes that do not form part of the planning application, notably about pylons to connect the wind farm to the electricity network.
- Tailored use of communication channels to reach 'the silent majority' and more disengaged groups to help prevent one narrowly held view gaining dominance.
- Listening to what communities identify as their most pressing priorities and engaging in discussions. This can help develop a tailored community benefit package which sets out clear plans to address economic regeneration and other community-identified priorities.

Achieving a wide reach during engagement

The research highlighted the following as principles of good practice:

- Communicating and working with accountable organisations like parish councils and development trusts to build rapport, establish entry points to engaging more widely and strengthen understanding of community priorities.
- Asking for feedback on engagement plans from parish councils and local groups to demonstrate transparency and generate useful further suggestions on practical arrangements. Taking care to avoid becoming over-reliant on single individuals to pass on information.
- Cultivating a good neighbour relationship rather than an overly instrumental use of community engagement to gain planning consent. This may help minimise cynicism amongst affected communities about the developer's intentions.
- In planning engagement, incorporating a range of online and in person engagement activities, to reach a mix of people. Asking to attend events hosted by others as well as being ready to offer separate events for certain groups if you think others are making it hard for their voices to be heard.

- Developing tailored communication strategies to fit the communication styles and the distinctive needs of different groups within communities, including low-income households, ethnic minority households, and families with young children. Use of multiple traditional and online communication channels to widen outreach, including by using social media, project webpages, meetings and one-to-one conversations.
- In low-income areas, considering opportunities to create paid internships for local people to receive training and support the delivery of engagement activities with more marginalised groups.

Ongoing engagement

The research highlighted the following as principles of good practice:

- Building trust amongst the community by sharing feedback on what you've been told.
- Where possible, maintaining continuity in the single point of contact for communities throughout the project's development and operation.
- Setting up a community liaison group may be an appropriate way to maintain ongoing contact and feedback.
- Making sure the local community has sufficient information and time to respond to plans and proposals. Providing information about the proposed site in a variety of ways, including visually. Making specialists available to explain and discuss proposals, including options and constraints on changes to the number, position, and size of turbines.
- Being ready to adapt engagement processes as you get to know the community. Respond flexibly to community needs and suggestions.

Understanding community concerns

The research highlighted the following as principles of good practice:

- Finding ways to communicate information, such as from specialist environmental studies, to communities in visual forms. For example, a 3D fly-through of what the completed project might look like to help people understand the likely visual impact.
- It is important that developers are ready to listen to community views and adjust the scale and layout of the project based on feedback. In discussing the scale of the project, developers need to be clear in communications with community members that the number, size and location of turbines will directly influence the value of community benefits.

Community benefits

The research highlighted the following as opportunities for enabling and delivering good practice:

- Policy makers, industry bodies and community representative bodies working together to shape a government-funded support programme to drive new good practice in community benefits in England. An example may be the CARE programme in Scotland.
- Industry bodies, developers and community benefit administrators working together to develop a best practice framework for measuring and reporting the net zero, economic and social value achieved by community benefit and shared ownership arrangements.
- Developers and their representatives first listening and learning about what communities want rather than presenting a suggested offer. Developers recognising that communities will vary in how much time and support they may need before they feel ready to present or consider more ambitious or novel plans.
- Where appropriate, offering pro bono staff time to nascent community bodies trying to develop a community partnership or a community plan as the basis for negotiating their community benefit.

Recommendations for community bodies involved

Community engagement

The research highlighted the following as principles of good practice:

- Communities or individuals contacting specialist community energy bodies (such as Community Energy England) to access a wide variety of resources available via their websites and to request specific additional support.²⁴
- Existing community representative bodies who are approached by the developer should act as a responsible gatekeeper to enable the wider community to hear about and have their say in what is proposed.
- Consider whether existing community organisations are appropriate to represent the local community in conversations with the developer or if a new community liaison group may be preferred.
- Give active consideration to whether other unheard voices in the community need to be invited and supported to get involved in plans, negotiations or management of community benefits.
- Community representatives encourage other members of their community to learn about local proposals by pointing them towards the developer's project specific website, sharing information with others via local networks. Representatives can also encourage others to ask questions and speak to developers and independent experts about any concerns they may have.

²⁴ Guidance documents include 'Scottish Government: Good Practice Principles for Community Benefits from Onshore Renewable Energy Developments' (2019) and 'Planning Advice Note 3/2010: community engagement' (2010). See also references on [Research and Other Good Practice](#). There are websites for Community Energy [England](#), [Northern Ireland](#), [Scotland](#) and [Wales](#).

Community benefits

The research highlighted the following as opportunities for enabling and delivering good practice:

- Asking the developer to clearly explain the scale of the project and the potential value of community benefit money from the developer. This research has shown that it is useful to involve someone with good negotiating skills and seek expert legal and financial advice to inform your negotiations. Community representatives may need to be prepared for this process to take some time.
- For larger projects, seek support to build community capacity to engage in proposal discussions and community benefit fund negotiations and for community action plans. This could be from a specialist community energy organisation (such as Community Energy England) or an investment-based crowd-funding platform (such as Abundance) in the case of shared ownership.²⁵ The developer may be willing to provide support, but take care that their involvement does not influence negotiations unfavourably.
- Seek funding and support to develop a community or neighbourhood action plan, such as from Neighbourhood Planning grant funds. Consult widely in the community to develop a plan that reflects the concerns of different groups. Conduct regular reviews of this plan to respond to emergencies or changing priorities.
- Where multiple communities will be affected by a project, representatives from all communities should be involved in negotiating community benefits and deciding on how funds are spent. A community partnership may be a good way to overcome difference and identify shared outcomes.
- Discuss community benefits with the developer as early as possible, separately from and without compromising community shaping of project plans and proposals. Preliminary discussions may be light touch until planning consent is obtained.
- Consider the range of in-kind community benefits that the developer may be able to help deliver (e.g. broadband, enhanced biodiversity).
- Consider what different model of community benefit may work best. Also consider whether a partnership, such as with a local authority or health provider, may assist with financing shared ownership and to reduce risk.
- Set out clear community benefit funding eligibility criteria to avoid misinterpretation. Consideration of how to use community benefit funds strategically, for example front-loading funding for a large capital project.
- Seek out legal advice and other expert input from a third-party intermediary to help understand the terms of a community benefits agreement.

²⁵ Government-funded bodies include the [Community and Renewable Energy Scheme](#) in Scotland, and the [Welsh Government Energy Service](#) in Wales. Investment-based crowd-funding platforms include [Abundance](#) or [Thrive Renewables](#) ; [Energy4All](#) and [Sharenergy](#) specialise in support to set up cooperatives.

Recommendations for local authorities

The role of the local authority can vary. For those involved in considering a planning application, it is important not to get involved in the discussion of community benefits. These recommendations are aimed at local authority officers or councillors with a strategic role where wind farms can help achieve economic, net-zero or other goals, or in administering community benefits. The research highlighted the following as opportunities for enabling and delivering good practice:

Strategic opportunities

- Consider setting up low cost loans to community bodies to participate in shared ownership as part of a community plan.
- In updating local plans, identify opportunity areas for onshore wind to enable local economic regeneration and contribute to net zero goals.
- Identify policies which help ensure that a share of income from onshore wind provides benefit to the local economy.
- Consider support for smaller-scale, community-led onshore wind farms, as exemplified by the ACE Severn Road case study.

Administering community funds

- Where responsible for administering community funds, local authorities should identify where other sources of funding (such as the Big Lottery Fund or Sport England) can be used to match community benefit fund to maximise the social impact of onshore wind projects.
- As partners in a community benefit partnership, direct a share of the community benefit to wider scale economic investment so that benefits extend beyond the communities in the immediate vicinity of the wind farm.
- Offer advice and skills support to community benefit groups in areas with commercial onshore wind opportunities.

Glossary of terms

Capacity building	Identifying barriers to development and enhancing the skills and abilities of both individuals and groups to achieve positive results.
CARES	Community and Renewable Energy Scheme, funded by Scottish Government and delivered by Local Energy Scotland.
Community action plan	Document outlining the community's priorities. It identifies what the community wants to accomplish, what activities and resources are required during a specified timeline.
Community development trust	A community organisation that aims to achieve the sustainable regeneration of a community or address a range of economic, social, environmental and cultural issues within a community. They aim to reduce dependency on grant support by generating income through enterprise and the ownership of assets.
Community Energy England	An organisation dedicated to representing and supporting the community energy sector in England. They advocate for policy that will support community energy and provide opportunities for community energy practitioners to connect.
Community Energy Wales	An organisation that has been set up to provide assistance and a voice to community groups working on energy projects in Wales.
Community investment	A community gets a financial stake in renewable energy through investment of money into a renewable energy project.
Community trust	A community organisation set up to administer funds for the benefit of the community.
Consultation	The act of discussing a topic or development to understand people's views and opinions on it.
Contracts for Difference	The main government scheme for supporting large scale low carbon electricity projects in Great Britain.

Devolved administration	These are distinct legislatures and Governments which operate and have powers over a range of policy areas separate to the central UK Government - Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
In-kind benefits	Non-cash benefits.
Lifetime extension	Upgrading some of the components of an existing wind turbine. New technology is installed, or components are replaced with newer more efficient components. The overall external layout of the wind farm remains unchanged (e.g. turbine height, siting, size).
Local Energy Scotland	An organisation that offers impartial advice service to help develop community and locally owned renewable energy projects in Scotland. They manage the delivery of CARES - the Scottish Government's Community and Renewable Energy Scheme.
Memorandum of Understanding	A statement of serious intent – agreed voluntarily by equal partners – of the commitment, resources, and other considerations that each of the parties will bring. It does not create legal obligations.
MW	Megawatt: unit of power equal to one million watts, the generating capacity in which renewable energy installations are measured.
MWh	Megawatt-hour (MWh): a unit of measure of electric energy. It is the amount of electricity generated by a one megawatt (MW) electric generator operating or producing electricity for one hour.
Net zero	Achieving a balance between the amount of greenhouse gas emissions produced and the amount removed from the atmosphere. ²⁶
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework - sets out Government planning policies in England and how these are expected to be applied.
Parish council/Community council	A voluntary organisation set up by statute by the Local Authority and run by local residents to act on behalf of its area. The most local tier of statutory representation in Scotland.

²⁶ [The Climate Change Act 2008 \(2050 Target Amendment\) Order 2019 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#) amends Section 1 of the Act so that the target is for net zero greenhouse gas emissions (following any adjustment for trading in carbon units).

REPD	Renewable Energy Planning Database - tracks the progress of renewable energy projects from planning application, through to consent, construction and operation.
Repowering	Replacing older turbines with new more efficient larger turbines.
Shadow flicker	The flickering effect that may be caused when rotating wind turbine blades periodically cast shadows over neighbouring properties as they turn.
Shared ownership	Any structure which involves a community group as a financial partner over the lifetime of a renewable energy project.
Statement of community involvement (Community Involvement Scheme in Wales)	A document which sets out how local planning authorities will involve the local community, stakeholders, organisations and statutory bodies in the planning process.

