

Rt Hon Ed Miliband MP
Secretary of State for Energy Security and Climate Change

Department for Energy Security and Net Zero
Level 3, 55 Whitehall, London, SW1A 2HP

cc Chris Stark, Head of Mission Control for Clean Power 2030

28 February 2025

Dear Secretary of State

Getting the Local Power Plan right

We are writing to highlight some key principles we feel need to underpin the design of the Local Power Plan to secure its success.

Introduction to who we are

The Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE) is a national charity that supports people and organisations across the UK to tackle the climate emergency and end the suffering caused by cold homes. For over 45 years we have been working with householders, communities and local authorities and delivering practical solutions to address fuel poverty and cut carbon emissions. Our latest [Impact Report](#) provides more detail of our work.

We have a long track-record of collaboration and initiative for the community energy sector. As far back as 2010 CSE co-founded the Community Energy Practitioners Forum (as a precursor to Community Energy England), we previously designed and managed the Urban Community Energy Fund for government and more recently ran the Next Generation Community Energy programme for Power to Change.

Today we're proud to be working with Community Energy England, Scotland and Wales, Ashden, and for Renewables in Northern Ireland to lead the UK-wide flagship Community Energy Learning Network¹ funded by the National Lottery's Climate Action Fund. And more locally we are delivering Bristol City Leap's £1.5 million locally focused Community Energy Fund, supporting Bristol communities to deliver a range of local energy initiatives.

As such we feel we have some insights we would like to share at this critical juncture as your team develops the detail of how the Local Power Plan will be delivered.

¹ <https://www.cse.org.uk/my-community/community-projects/energy-learning-network/>

1. The need for continuity of support.

First and foremost, the Community Energy Fund needs to be extended until the Local Power Plan is in place. A hiatus in support risks a drop in ambition from existing community actors which will constrict any potential pipeline for future projects. Then there needs to be a clear and long-term commitment to support the development of local authority led and community energy projects. Community Energy projects take time and often considerable voluntary commitment and the absence of long-term certainty of support is a significant barrier to retaining the interest and commitment in new communities we are working with.

2. The Local Power Plan needs to invest in capacity building and social infrastructure as well as MWs to ensure fairness and accessibility.

Local authorities and community organisations need skills, knowledge and support to bring forward new community generation schemes. At present submitting a decent Community Energy Fund funding application is a pretty high bar for novice organisations. We believe a fundamental element of the Local Power Plan needs to be the provision of a dedicated support service for community organisations, that helps them to develop and bring forward new community energy initiatives. This is particularly important for areas which do not have existing established community energy groups or experience of developing projects – which are also more likely to be disadvantaged communities. There are proven ways that local energy projects can be nurtured in more disadvantaged areas as our research has revealed². The key is working through community anchor organisations (including local authorities and housing associations), building community interest and capacity and sharing models and ideas.

If the Local Power Plan centres only on grant and loans that established groups are more able to access, we will be exacerbating inequality between communities and at risk of missing out on the dynamism and creativity that communities new to local energy projects could bring.

3. Local ‘Power’ needs to encompass the power of local and community energy schemes as well as generation.

We applaud and support the government’s commitment to delivery of Clean Power 2030 and see local authorities and communities as vital actors in helping to achieve that ambition. But the Local Power Plan is an opportunity to also look further and begin to build a pipeline reflecting the full range of community energy potential, beyond power generation projects alone.

Our recent research report, the role of non-profit organisations in the provision of retrofit services in England³, has highlighted this nascent sector in need of support – with a few well-established organisations delivering community retrofit and many others just beginning their journey. It outlines significant opportunities for the careful application of public funds to fill market gaps and support capacity building, as well as the need for

² [Bringing local energy benefits to deprived communities](#), research for Barrow Cadbury Trust

³ <https://access-socialinvestment.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/role-of-non-profit-organisations-in-provision-of-retrofit-services-in-england-2024.pdf>

greater levels of collaboration and knowledge sharing – both within the not-for-profit and with appropriate partners in the private sector.

We also know that whilst a small minority of existing community energy projects are currently focused on locally led heat networks, heat pump developments and heat storage, interest in developing local and community heat schemes is growing. If these are excluded from accessing support, we risk the heat decarbonisation projects only being brought forward with commercial models and communities losing trust and railing against them. To deliver an 81% cut in greenhouse gas emissions by 2035 we need investment in heat as well as power now. Community energy groups also have the potential to create street or community-scale flexibility projects and help mitigate some of the inequalities created by market driven flexibility offers.

4. Recognises the full value of local authority and community energy projects in rapidly evolving energy system reforms.

The establishment of the National Energy System Operator with for the first time a responsibility to support and drive decarbonisation of our energy system is an enormous leap forward and the drive towards reforming and accelerating connections and developing national and regional strategic energy system plans is commendable.

Whilst we welcome these reforms, we are concerned that in the race towards achieving Clean Power by 2030, the focus on decarbonisation and renewable energy agnostic of delivery model is resulting in the local and community benefits afforded from community energy projects and local authority led schemes (e.g. social value in the form of public support, jobs, retained local income) not being sufficiently recognised.

There is a strong case for requiring NESO and Distribution Network Operators to find solutions that prioritise support for local authority led and community energy scheme connections. Similarly Regional Energy Strategic Plan methodologies need to give added weight to local authority led and community energy schemes and aligned with the Local Power Plan.

5. GB Energy must demonstrate and build best practice in community engagement to order to deliver genuine local benefits.

Whilst local and community energy schemes are desirable, the way in which the majority of the public will come in contact with large-scale energy infrastructure developments is inevitably through commercial development. It is paramount therefore that engagement processes are reviewed and improved as people's acceptance, understanding, and use of clean technologies will ultimately determine the speed of change. As identified, in research and guidelines⁴ that we developed for the Department in 2021, community engagement is not only about meeting the consultation requirements associated with a planning application process. It's also about being a good neighbour throughout the lifetime of a project. It requires effective communication and engagement, from liaison

⁴ Community Engagement and Benefits from Onshore Wind Developments Good Practice Guidance for England <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-benefits-and-engagement-guidance-for-onshore-wind>

about construction plans or operational issues to ensuring the community benefits of the project are effectively realised.

Since developing the guidelines, we have been pioneering a new approach to community engagement for large-scale renewables infrastructure development – Future Energy Landscapes (FEL)⁵. FEL is a well-established, non-confrontational process that enables communities to consider, at an early stage, how and where renewable energy projects might be developed locally. This process allows communities to assess the types and scales of renewable energy projects that may be acceptable, the potential landscape impacts, and the benefits they might receive. Communities are using it to initiate and build support for new community energy projects. In the 13 communities where FEL has been implemented:

- 85% of participating communities have supported renewable energy projects capable of meeting or exceeding their annual electricity needs.
- 62% have expressed majority support for local onshore wind development.

We are now delivering the FEL process across five further local authority areas with community and local authority partners and are supporting community energy groups to use FEL to initiate and build support for new generation projects. It could be highly applicable as an early engagement tool in the context of the Local Power Plan.

We appreciate your time in considering these issues and would welcome the opportunity to discuss them further.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Janine Michael'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'J'.

Janine Michael
Chief Executive

⁵ <https://www.cse.org.uk/my-community/future-energy-landscapes/>