



Community energy engagement strategy 2020-2023



This strategy was produced for Northern Powergrid in partnership with Regen in December 2019.
All rights reserved. No part of this document may be reproduced or published in any way (including online)
without the prior permission of Regen. www.regen.co.uk

Front cover photo: Whitby Esk Energy community hydro scheme



Photo: Energise Barnsley community rooftop solar. (For more information see case study link on pg 10).

Contents

Foreword	2
Executive summary	4
Contact us	5
Welcome	6
Vision	7
Purpose	8
Approach	8
Stakeholders	9
1. What is community energy?	9
2. What motivates community energy organisations and what have they delivered?	10
3. What support do community energy organisations want?	10
Engagement plan	11
Resources	16
Acknowledgments	17

Foreword

The urgent need to transition to a low-carbon economy has come into sharp focus over the last year. Local governments have responded with climate emergency declarations and focused planning to reduce carbon emissions; nationally, the government has set a net zero carbon target by 2050 for the whole country.

Across society, we all need to take radical action to decarbonise the economy. Electricity networks are essential for many sectors to function correctly, and we need to adapt to facilitate and enable all of the necessary changes.

Our vision set out in our Distribution System Operator (DSO) plan and updated last year, is for a smart, flexible, and clean energy system, where a mix of sustainable sources provides electricity. One that enables local communities to explore different solutions – where a neighbour’s solar panels power electric vehicles on the street, or neighbourhoods are offered discounts on bills for providing power back to the grid by using their aggregated generation, and where batteries kick in automatically to keep homes and businesses running at times of low generation.

In this world, the system works to utilise every unit of low-carbon energy in the best way and enables communities and individuals to provide power back to the grid, or take it from locally generated, sustainable sources. We are determined to help make this a reality and recognise that as a Distribution Network Operator (DNO) we already play a central role in enabling a low-carbon energy system, connecting people to locally generated wind and solar power across our region.

As a DSO, we will take responsibility for the integrity of the regional system and the operation of energy markets, including new markets for local flexibility

and community energy provision. We aim to enable customers to become active participants in the energy system, maximising the financial value of their energy resources and eliminating the need for new infrastructure, which would otherwise be needed to ensure a reliable network, cutting costs, and helping the environment.

We are already driving innovation to make this vision a reality. Our Customer-Led Distribution System programme is exploring the potential for our network to operate a more flexible energy system and our Smart Grid Enablers programme is preparing our network for the rapid growth of electric vehicles.

Working with Community Energy England and other contributors, we are developing a clear strategy to foster the growth of Community Energy across Yorkshire, the North East, and northern Lincolnshire.

We are looking forward to continuing to work with the communities we serve as we continue to deliver and refine our plans. We would welcome further engagement on these issues as we prepare our Business Plan for 2023-2028, known as the RIIO-ED2 price control period.

Thank you for your continued interest, engagement, and feedback.

Patrick Erwin, Policy and Markets Director





Photo: Moor House Wind Farm

Executive summary

The path to net zero requires everyone to act. We share that responsibility and recognise we have a position to support the low carbon transition, collaborate and build the capacity of others.

We want our work to be fair and open, not just benefitting the most engaged stakeholders. Supporting the growth of community energy in our region will help us reach the most vulnerable in our society, as many community energy organisations are trusted

intermediaries focussed on the environmental, social, and local economic impacts of our energy system. By working together, we can deliver better outcomes for all our customers.

We've developed this strategy based on feedback from community energy representatives in our region.

We would like to thank them for giving their time and insight to ensure this strategy delivers mutual benefits to communities and our business, through long term engagement centred around listening, informing, empowering, and advocating.

From the engagement we have already done with community energy stakeholders we know that they face some unique barriers. They are time and resource constrained and often need additional support to engage. The end of the Feed-in Tariff means there is a lack of viable business models for community energy, and nationally community energy organisations are focussing on scaling up to achieve financial viability, collaborations, and projects behind the meter. Community energy organisations have told us they need support and financial help to get new grid connections, funding to address fuel poverty, deliver energy efficiency projects, and support to carry out climate change education in their communities. They also talked about the need for technical support to upskill and help them develop new business models at scale. All those interviewed wanted a named Northern Powergrid contact they can pick up the phone to, who can offer support with technical aspects of projects, network connections, and discuss innovation. They want to have face-to-face and phone conversations to find solutions, before filling in forms and spending money on quotes to get connected.

In this strategy, we make 26 commitments to community and local energy organisations with detailed and achievable plans, timeframes, and measures of success.

Key among these actions are our commitments to:

- **Listen and be transparent** about why we want to make more of an effort to engage community and local energy organisation.
- **Be clear about our position on climate change**, as an anchor organisation facilitating the clean energy transition.
- Keep communities informed via a **targeted quarterly newsletter** and an up to date website.
- Better publicising our **community energy point of contact**.
- More **face to face engagement** including a programme of two events per year designed with and for community energy organisations, and continuing to engage in regional and national events that community energy groups take part in.
- **Facilitate greater collaboration to help communities build partnerships** to deliver viable large-scale projects.
- Explore how we can offer more **technical support**, training and resources to community energy organisations to develop their skills, build capacity, and support new community energy business models at scale.
- **Financial support:** Northern Powergrid were the first DNO to have a communities' fund and we will continue to deliver this through the **Community Partnering Fund**¹. We will review the process to ensure it is specifically encouraging more community energy, energy efficiency, fuel poverty and climate change education activities.

¹ <https://leedscf.org.uk/community-partnering-fund-r4>



Photo: Energise Barnsley Community. (For more information see case study link on pg 10).

- **More innovation projects with communities**, especially on voltage reduction and smart grids, helping communities find new business models at scale.
- Consider integrating weighting on social and environmental value in our **flexibility services procurement**.
- **Review our connections process** to explore offering greater technical and financial support for community energy organisations.
- Review our priority service register process in response to specific requests from community referral organisations who **support people in fuel poverty**.
- Support communities to **advocate and have a voice**, using our industry position to feed back to the government and Ofgem what community energy organisations say they need to thrive.

We want this to be the start of the conversation. Our role is about more than keeping the lights on - we can support decarbonisation, partnerships, and work collectively to achieve our low carbon future. We believe in doing the right thing, being a proper corporate citizen with quality and integrity.

Many thanks again to all the community energy organisations who gave their valuable time to inform this strategy and ensure it is stakeholder-led. We hope you enjoy reading it and we look forward to continuing the conversation.

Contact us

Anda Baumerte, Sustainability Manager and Community Energy Contact, Northern Powergrid



Email: Anda.Baumerte@Northernpowergrid.com

www.northernpowergrid.com

www.northernpowergrid.com/contact-our-connections-engineers

Welcome

The Northern Powergrid community energy engagement strategy sets out our vision, purpose, and approach to engaging community energy organisations from 2020 to 2023.

This strategy has been developed in collaboration with community energy expert Regen and informed by feedback from 17 community energy representatives in our region. This expertise and stakeholder feedback led to a detailed plan of specific, measurable actions that will help us continue to:

- listen,
- inform,
- engage,
- empower; and
- advocate for community energy organisations across our region.

We are not starting from scratch but building on the work that's already been done to develop long term relationships and respond to the needs and priorities of community energy organisations.

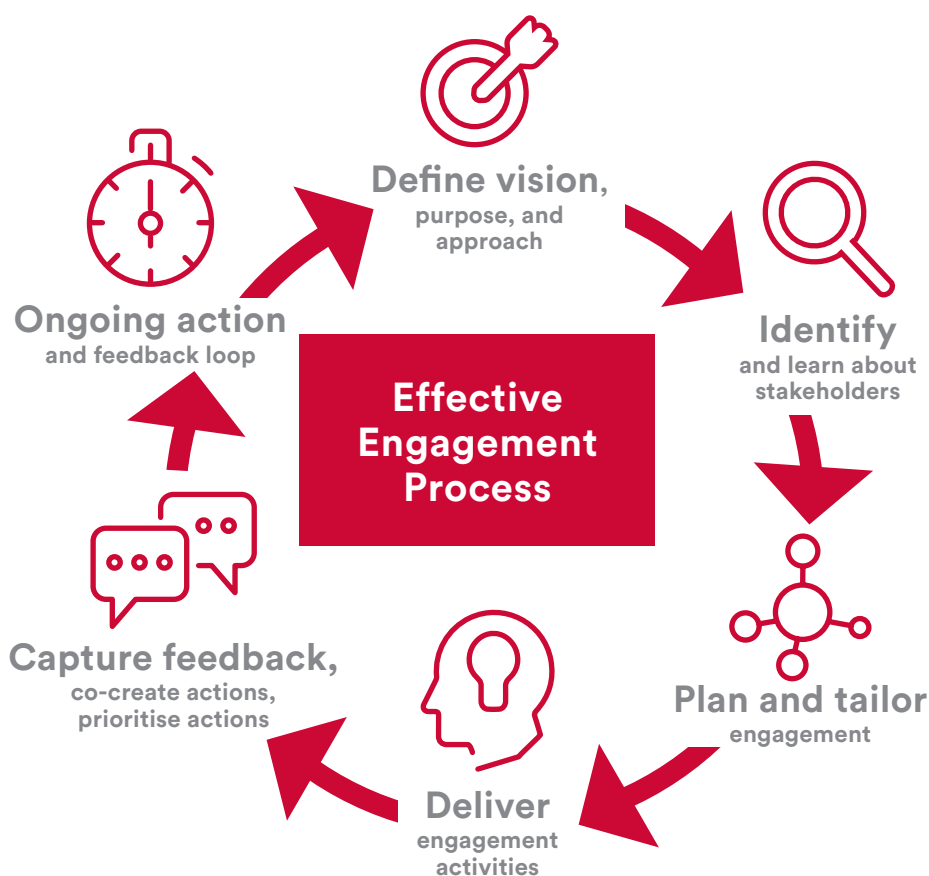


Figure 1: Effective engagement process.

Vision

We want to be a proactive, trusted partner, providing expert support and capacity building, whilst being a responsible, ethical business. We want to build positive relationships with community and local energy organisations that can benefit us all.

In the energy transition, our response to the climate emergency and building a thriving energy region is crucial. Our goal is to support communities and community energy organisations in our region to:

- Develop and connect more low carbon generation technologies that improve reliability.
- Supply energy locally using our network.
- Reduce energy bills through energy efficiency and education.
- Alleviate fuel poverty through our Priority Services Register (PSR) and support.
- Get involved in innovation projects to bring a grass roots perspective, fresh ideas, and a social and environmental conscience to a complex energy system.
- Amplify their voice with the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and Ofgem.

As a natural monopoly, we recognise that we are in a privileged position and that our strategy must be fair and efficient. As a regulated business, it also must be deliverable. We want our work to support the growth of community and local energy in our region by helping new and emerging groups, as well as existing and more established organisations, who are working to decarbonise our energy system. Our role is about more than keeping the lights on, we can support partnerships and work together to achieve our low carbon future.

“We believe in fairness, there has to be a transition in our energy system. The most engaged will benefit most, but I want the process to be fair and open, and for the most vulnerable in our society not to lose out. We need to be trusted and valued by our customers. We believe in doing the right thing, being a proper corporate citizen with quality and integrity.”

Patrick Erwin - Policy and Markets Director at Northern Powergrid

“I’d like to see a situation where communities are trading energy locally using our network.”

Iain Miller - Head of Innovation at Northern Powergrid

“Dramatically decarbonising the electricity system, while electrifying everything from cars to heating is part of the solution to achieve substantial progress towards net zero emissions by 2050. Our vision is a smart, flexible and clean energy system, where your electric vehicle is powered by a neighbour’s solar panels and you get a discount on your bill for providing power back to the grid. We envision a world where your office heating intelligently manages its energy consumption to get the best price and help to balance power supply and demand; where batteries kick in automatically to keep critical infrastructure and your home running in a power cut.”

Northern Powergrid DSO v1.1 Distribution System Operator Development plan, October 2019

Purpose

This community energy engagement strategy is a record of what we've done so far and will guide our work in the future, helping us to evaluate our work with community and local energy organisations working to tackle our climate emergency. More proactively engaging community and local energy stakeholders will help us deliver better outcomes for customers, particularly the most vulnerable.

By delivering this strategy we will continue exploring the potential of local energy, including partnering with communities on innovation projects and helping develop new community energy business models.

"Community energy gives me inspiration for what the future might look like. Community energy is a clear example of what the future possibilities could be."

Anne-Claire Leydier, DSO Transition Manager, Northern Powergrid

Approach

Engaging early and creating lasting relationships with our stakeholders and communities is important to us. Our engagement approach centers on listening to the needs of our customers and stakeholders, making sure they're informed, engaging with them, empowering them to achieve their goals, and then using our position within the energy system to advocate and give them a voice.

Supporting the growth of community energy and local organisations focussing on addressing climate change and tackling fuel poverty in our region, will help us reach the most vulnerable in our society.

We recognise these organisations as trusted intermediaries, with local connections who are delivering outreach and engagement activities of their own, focussed on the environmental, social and local economic impacts of our energy system. By supporting and collaborating with these local organisations more, we believe we can achieve more impact and fairness in our energy system.



Figure 2: Northern Powergrid's approach to engagement.

"Continuous improvement is at the core of our business, as we strive to achieve our aim to be the best energy company in serving our customers and delivering sustainable energy solutions."³

Northern Powergrid Incentive on Connections Engagement (ICE) submission 2018/19

³ www.northernpowergrid.com/ice-work-plan

Stakeholders

1. What is community energy?

This strategy is for engaging with community and local energy organisations working to achieve net zero emissions in our licence areas.

When we talk about community energy, we mean: communities taking collective action to address climate change through delivery of community-led renewable energy, energy demand reduction, and energy supply projects that have a significant proportion of local ownership and/or control, and that deliver social, environmental, and economic benefit locally, such as fuel poverty alleviation.

We recognise that community projects come in many different forms and are often delivered in partnership with commercial or public sector partners. We know that community energy does not exist in isolation and, in the future, will need greater collaboration and scale to help achieve the net zero emissions target. We can help this collaboration by bringing together other organisations who can support and partner with the wide range of community and local energy organisations across the regions we serve.

The community energy organisations we spoke to for this strategy identified key partner organisations which can support them, such as:

- Local authorities
 - Local enterprise partnerships (LEPs)
 - Regional energy hubs
 - Universities
 - Housing associations
 - SMEs
 - Suppliers
 - Aggregators
 - Insurers
 - Law firms
 - Funders
 - Financiers
- that are supportive of community energy

We identified 21 community energy organisations in our licence areas, and we want to see that number grow. We are keen to be inclusive and engage community organisations who are starting to think about climate change, and might one day deliver energy projects, including community land trusts, parish and town councils, climate action groups and others.

We interviewed 17 community and local energy organisations to ensure that this strategy is community-led and results in delivery that is what our stakeholders want. Feedback showed that we already have positive relationships with some community energy organisations and recognised support, including our communities fund, but we want to do more and continuously improve how we engage with them.

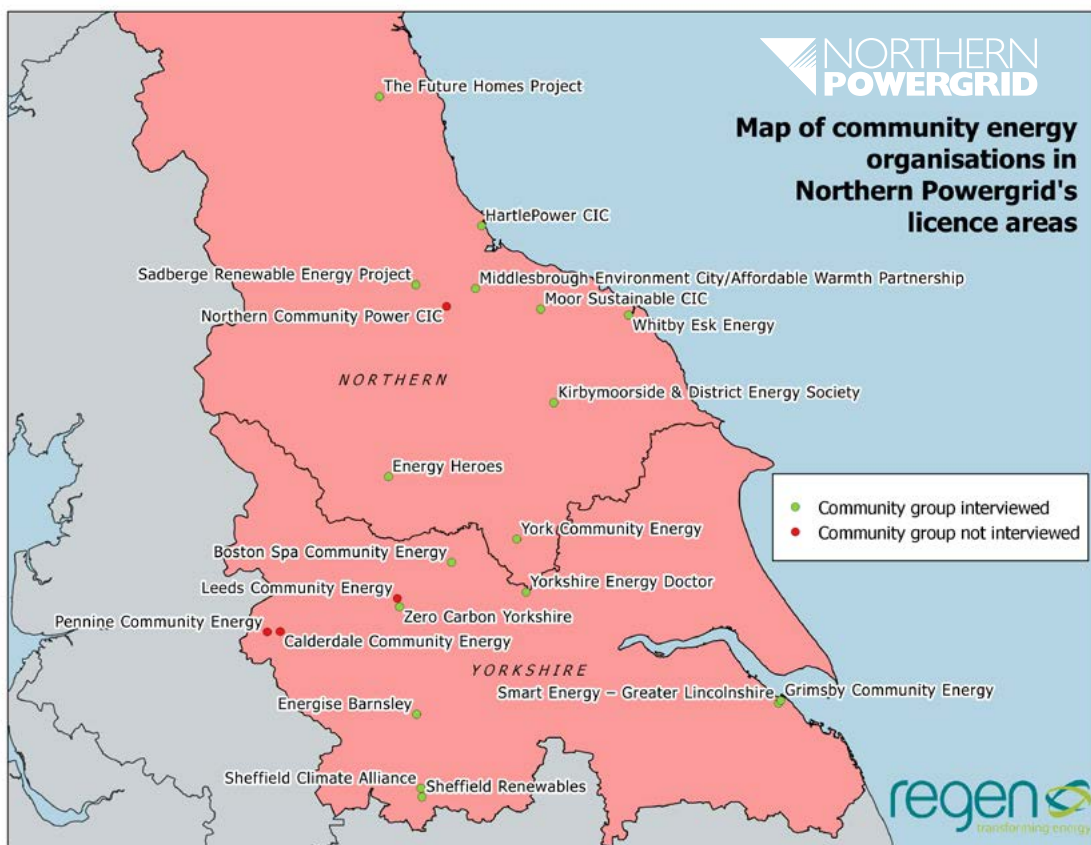


Figure 3: Map of the communities we spoke to, who helped shape this strategy, and groups we couldn't get hold of.

2. What motivates community energy organisations and what have they delivered?

Feedback we received indicates that community and local energy organisations are motivated by climate change, social justice, and creating a local circular economy. Most of the communities we spoke to have delivered small scale solar photovoltaic (PV) projects funded by community share offers. Some have ambitions to do innovation projects, while others have given up due to the end of the Feed-in Tariff. Many are working on energy efficiency, fuel poverty, and climate change education.

3. What support do community energy organisations want?

From the engagement we have already done with community energy organisations we know they are time and resource constrained and need additional support to meaningfully engage with us. In our engagement plan below, we have summarised what 'you said' in 17 independently facilitated conversations with community energy organisations and focussed on making clear commitments around what we will do in response.

"We've learnt we need to go to them and reach out. We understand that these stakeholders need additional support to engage and create a more level playing field, because they have limited time and resources to upskill and participate. We've learned one-to-one outreach works best for them and we need to be targeted with our engagement."

Anne-Claire Leydier - DSO Transition Manager, Northern Powergrid



Photo: Energise Barnsley⁴ community rooftop solar.

⁴ Case study available from: www.northernpowergrid.com/innovation/news/home-battery-trial-aims-to-increase-electricity-network-capacity-to-enable-more-solar-homes-and-save-millions-for-customers

Engagement plan

Northern Powergrid community energy engagement plan 2020-2023.

LISTEN We will continue to listen to communities through the ongoing engagement as outlined in this plan				
You said	Action/commitment	Method	Target date	Measure of success/impact/KPI
Listen to us	Interview community energy organisations in our licence areas	Independent research by Regen, telephone interviews with 17 community energy organisations	December 2019	Strategy published and circulated internally and externally, track how many people view the document online, gather qualitative feedback from stakeholders
	Further work to engage new and existing community energy organisations that we aren't aware of	Refocus communities fund, widely publicise events through third party organisations	2020-2023	Increasing mailing list from baseline of 17

INFORM We will keep communities up to date and informed about our activities which we hope will become more collaborative over time				
You said	Action/commitment	Method	Target date	Measure of success/impact/KPI
Tell us what Northern Powergrid want and how communities can help	Make a public statement about why we want to work with communities and how they can help	Statement and vision for good engagement with communities in this strategy	April 2020	Statement included in Community energy engagement strategy (this document)
		Speak about this at four internal and four external events regionally or nationally	December 2020	Speak at 8 events
Keep us up to date via email	We will send out quarterly email updates tailored to community and local energy stakeholders	A quarterly newsletter for communities to keep them up to date on funding, events and relevant Northern Powergrid activities via email	Quarterly starting in April 2020	Monitor open and click through rates
	We will create a new community energy page on our website	New community energy page with up to date information on events, guides and signposting	June 2020	Monitor visits to pages

ENGAGE We will engage early - we recognise that good engagement takes time and so will continue our engagement to help build up and facilitate a strong network of community and local energy organisations in our region

You said	Action/commitment	Method	Target date	Measure of success/impact/KPI
We want a named person or point of contact for communities	Anda Baumerte, Sustainability Manager at Northern Powergrid is the appointed community energy contact	Publish the information more widely on our website, in newsletters and in this strategy to ensure communities know this	April 2020	Information published on Northern Powergrid website
We want to have conversations to find viable solutions, before filling in a form and spending money	We will have conversations with communities to find solutions and facilitate constructive conversations with our network engineers	Have conversations on the phone or in person at events and via relevant webinars. We hold monthly Customer Surgeries ⁵ and our engineers' details are publicly available on our website ⁶	2020-2023	Number of conversations had
We want more face to face engagement	We will continue to participate in the wider energy system transformation debate	Continue participating in national community energy events and Community Energy Fortnight	2020-2023	2 events a year
	We will continue partnering and participating in regional energy and climate change events	Use and develop existing relationships with the BEIS Regional Energy Hub, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and local authorities to develop more of a presence	2020-2023	4 events a year (provided four or more are organised)
We want events specifically designed for us	Our community energy events will be participatory and include plenty of networking time and time for communities to talk to us about their specific projects and ideas. These events will focus on subjects that matter to communities and we will invite feedback face to face	Develop a planned programme of two events per year aimed at communities and local authorities, focussing on carbon reduction and new business models for community energy. We will develop this event series in partnership with local organisations working to facilitate better networking in community energy	2020-2023	2 events a year and feedback collected at events
Everyone we sign up to the PSR should receive a welcome pack, and you should know we made the referral	We will make sure every new person signed up to the PSR receives a link to the online welcome pack, and look into new systems that could identify referral organisations	Everyone registered will receive a link to the interactive pdf welcome pack. Where we don't hold a digital contact we will post the customer a hard copy. Customers will be re-issued a welcome every two years in line with our revised data cleanse process. We will explore new systems that could identify referral organisations	March 2020	Every new referral receiving an online welcome pack. Results of a bi-monthly PSR survey with 1400 customers

⁵ www.northernpowergrid.com/customer-events-and-surgeries

⁶ www.northernpowergrid.com/contact-our-connections-engineers

EMPOWER We want to empower and build the capacity of community energy organisations to participate in and contribute to our changing energy system, to make sure it is democratic and benefits those less able to engage

You said	Action/commitment	Method	Target date	Measure of success/impact/KPI
We need financial support for community energy and energy efficiency activities	We were the first DNO to have a Community Partnering Fund and we will continue to deliver this	Review criteria for our Community Partnering Fund to make sure it is encouraging more community energy, and energy efficiency activities	January 2020	Increased number of community energy projects funded, pounds spent, tonnes of carbon saved, number of people engaged
We need financial support for fuel poverty outreach	We will consider paying a referral fee to community and local energy organisations who make referrals to the PSR and report our decision to communities via the newsletter	Review idea at senior level in Northern Powergrid, and if agreed, set aside budget, implement a process for referral fee, payment similar to other DNOs	June 2020	Internal review completed
We need resources for fuel poverty outreach	We will continue improving information and offering resources such as fridge magnets to help people know what to do in a power cut and how to save energy	Review resources and information offered online and at events, continue developing relationship with referral organisations to collaborate and ensure they have the resources they need	2020-2023	Resource and information review completed
We need technical support	We are committed to explaining technical information to communities in plain English. We will explore how we can offer more technical support and resources to community energy organisations	Explore using corporate social responsibility time to provide technical and professional resource to community energy organisations	September 2020	A programme of technical support considered, relevant resources provided on the website, hours invested
We would like training on how the network and our energy system works	We will endeavour to upskill and build the capacity of community energy organisations	Use the events series to offer appropriate training, and provide relevant resources on the website	December 2020	Feedback from events, number of people trained
Support us with energy efficiency activities to reduce demand	We will explore this theme with communities at our events during 2020 and collectively decide appropriate action	Workshop at events, continue Green Doctor and Green Dragon activities and ensure these are sufficiently publicised to communities	December 2020	Feedback from events
We need financial support to get new network connections	We will communicate the evidence we have received from communities as part of this research to Ofgem and BEIS	Provide feedback to Ofgem, local LEPs and BEIS, collaborate with other DNOs and organisations to facilitate decision-making	December 2020	Ofgem informed

EMPOWER We want to empower and build the capacity of community energy organisations to participate in and contribute to our changing energy system, to make sure it is democratic and benefits those less able to engage				
You said	Action/commitment	Method	Target date	Measure of success/impact/KPI
We need technical support to get new network connections	We will have conversations with communities to find solutions and facilitate constructive conversations with our network engineers	Have solutions focussed conversations to help communities find the best sites from a connections perspective on the phone or in person at events, e.g. Customer Surgeries	2020-2023	Number of conversations had
	We have developed a visual map of our network in a desktop app which includes a design tool, useful for EV installation and as a low voltage design tool. Designed for connections, it can help in the pre planning and project design stage	A training session incorporated into the community events	December 2020	Number of participants trained
We'd like more community energy innovation projects that help us develop new business models at scale	We will continue to offer support to communities with innovative project ideas ⁷ that haven't been done before	We will ensure time is made available to communities with innovative ideas on the phone or in person at our events	2020-2023	Number of innovation projects taking place involving communities
Support us long term to address climate change	We have funded Energy Heroes climate change education programme for many years and will continue to, we will also engage more with this programme offering professional development support and volunteer resource via corporate social responsibility resources	Continue to fund this programme and step up our engagement, time and support for this, publicise the great work being done, and gather feedback from the Energy Heroes team	2020-2023	Number of children involved, energy savings, carbon reduction achieved
	We will consider integrating a social and environmental weighting when procuring flexibility services	Review flexibility procurement process and consider integrating higher scoring for social and environmental value	December 2020	Social and environmental value scoring for flexibility procurement reviewed

⁷ These innovation ideas must fit Network Innovation Allowance (NIA) and Network Innovation Competition (NIC) criteria and communities thinking about innovative projects should read www.regen.co.uk/publications/electricity-network-innovation-guide-for-communities-2018

ADVOCATE We recognise communities don't have the capacity and time to lobby, we want to amplify their voice

You said	Action/commitment	Method	Target date	Measure of success/impact/KPI
Help us have a voice with government and Ofgem	We will use our industry position to feedback to BEIS and Ofgem what community energy organisations say they need to thrive	Gather evidence from communities through ongoing engagement, and include this in the relevant consultation responses (if there are any), and discussions with Ofgem to change our licence to help us decarbonise the energy system in collaboration with Community Energy England	2020-2023	Number of relevant consultation responses Northern Powergrid submit with community evidence included
Include communities in your business planning	We will inform communities of how they can engage in our RIIO ED-2 business planning process	Via our community energy newsletters. We will also consider setting up a community energy stakeholder panel to inform our business planning process	2020 - 2021	Number of community energy organisations engaged

Resources

Community Energy England

Catalysing People-powered Energy in Yorkshire and the Humber 2019

CommunityEnergyEngland.org

hub.CommunityEnergyEngland.org

North East, Yorkshire and Humber Local Energy Hub Rural Community Energy Fund

Josh Sawyer (North East and Tees Valley): josh.sawyer@nelep.co.uk

Allan Millar (Yorkshire and Humber): alan.millar@teesvalley-ca.gov.uk

General RCEF enquiries to: rcef@teesvalley-ca.gov.uk

www.teesvalley-ca.gov.uk/business/key-sectors/energy-and-renewable/rural-community-energy-fund

Northern Powergrid

Community Partnering Fund

ENA

Connecting Community Energy, A guide to getting a network connection

Electricity Network Innovation Guide for Communities 2018

Rough Guide to Engaging Communities in Energy Network Innovation

Acknowledgments

Thanks to everyone who took part and gave their time to be interviewed as part of the research that informs this strategy, including:

Alastair Mackenzie
Sadberge Renewable Energy Project

Paul Hewitson
HartlePower CIC

Nelly Trevelyan
Kirbymoorside & District Energy Society

Vicky Dunn
Smart Energy Greater Lincolnshire

Andy Heald
Energise Barnsley

Keith Jackson
Boston Spa Community Energy

Lee-Ann Williams
Zero Carbon Yorkshire

Kate Gilmartin
My Green Investment CIC/Energy Heroes

Mike Ford
Whitby Esk Energy

Amanda Megson
Middlesbrough Environment City/Affordable Warmth Partnership

Kate Urwin
Yorkshire Energy Doctor CIC

Matthew Tulley
Solid Carbon Storage Ltd/Zero Carbon Yorkshire

Richard Lane
York Community Energy

Rose Gilroy
The Future Homes Project

Luke Wilson
Sheffield Renewables

Chris Broome
Sheffield Climate Alliance

Richard Bellamy
Grimsby Community Energy

Will Eadson
Sheffield Hallam University

Emma Bridge
Community Energy England

Jim Cardwell
Head of Policy Development, Northern Powergrid

Patrick Erwin
Policy and Markets Director, Northern Powergrid

Iain Miller
Head of Innovation, Northern Powergrid

Helen Priestley
Stakeholder Manager, Northern Powergrid

Gavin Sangiovanni
Stakeholder Advisor, Northern Powergrid

Anda Baumerte
Sustainability Manager, Northern Powergrid

Anne-Claire Leydier
DSO Transition Manager, Northern Powergrid



Online at:
www.northernpowergrid.com

General enquiries

By telephone
0800 011 3332

