

The background of the slide is a photograph of a woman with long brown hair, smiling and sitting at a table. She is wearing a floral patterned top. In front of her is a laptop. To her left, the back of another person's head is visible. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent teal color.

explain

# Northern Powergrid

BEET first wave stakeholder in-depth interviews

**Report:** December 2024



# Introduction

An overview of the project background, objectives and methodology.

# Objectives

The stakeholder in-depth interviews form the third and final part of a multi-method approach to understanding how communities in the Boston Spa Energy Efficiency Trial (BEET) feel and think about the trial. Other methods were the residents' survey (both online and in-person) and the residents' focus group (in-person). Insights will help to feed into future planning of communications and engagement for BEET and other innovation projects.

## **Specifically, the in-depth interviews explored:**

- Stakeholder awareness and perceptions of BEET
- How those in the trial area have heard about BEET and what they understand the key messages to be
- Opinions and any concerns of those in the trial area
- Experiences of the pilot, the benefits, and how future projects can be effectively rolled out.

It is important to note that these interviews are wave 1; results will help us to benchmark awareness, perceptions, and understanding. Wave 2 will take place at the end of the trial period.



# Methodology

Four stakeholders took part in an in-depth interview to establish their awareness and perceptions of BEET. Each interview lasted up to 30 minutes and happened by telephone or online (Teams).

To recruit the stakeholders, Explain worked with Northern Powergrid to map and specify which stakeholder groups should be invited to participate in this part of the research. It was decided that Explain should approach:

- Local and regional green groups
- Political stakeholders
- Local business owners
- LCT manufacturers and installers.

Stakeholders within these groups were identified and contacted by email and/or telephone. In addition, one of Northern Powergrid's key local advocates for BEET approached key stakeholders in-person. It is important to note that recruitment of participants for this part of the research was challenging; many stakeholders were happy to hear about the project but did not have time to take part in an interview.



# Methodology

Interviews focused on the following areas:

- **Discussion part 1:** Initial perceptions and awareness of Northern Powergrid and BEET
  - Initial awareness of and feelings towards Northern Powergrid
  - Current level of understanding of BEET and method of receiving information
- **Discussion part 2:** Experience and involvement in BEET
  - Experience of the project so far, including any concerns, what Northern Powergrid could do differently, and any opportunities they could utilise to ensure the project is a success
  - Any opportunities for stakeholders' organisations to work with Northern Powergrid during the trial period
  - Any networks or groups where Northern Powergrid should be represented
- **Discussion part 3:** Keeping informed about BEET
  - Whether stakeholder would like to be kept informed about BEET
  - What stakeholders want to be kept informed about and how
  - Whether and how Northern Powergrid should engage with stakeholders at the end of the 20 months trial period.



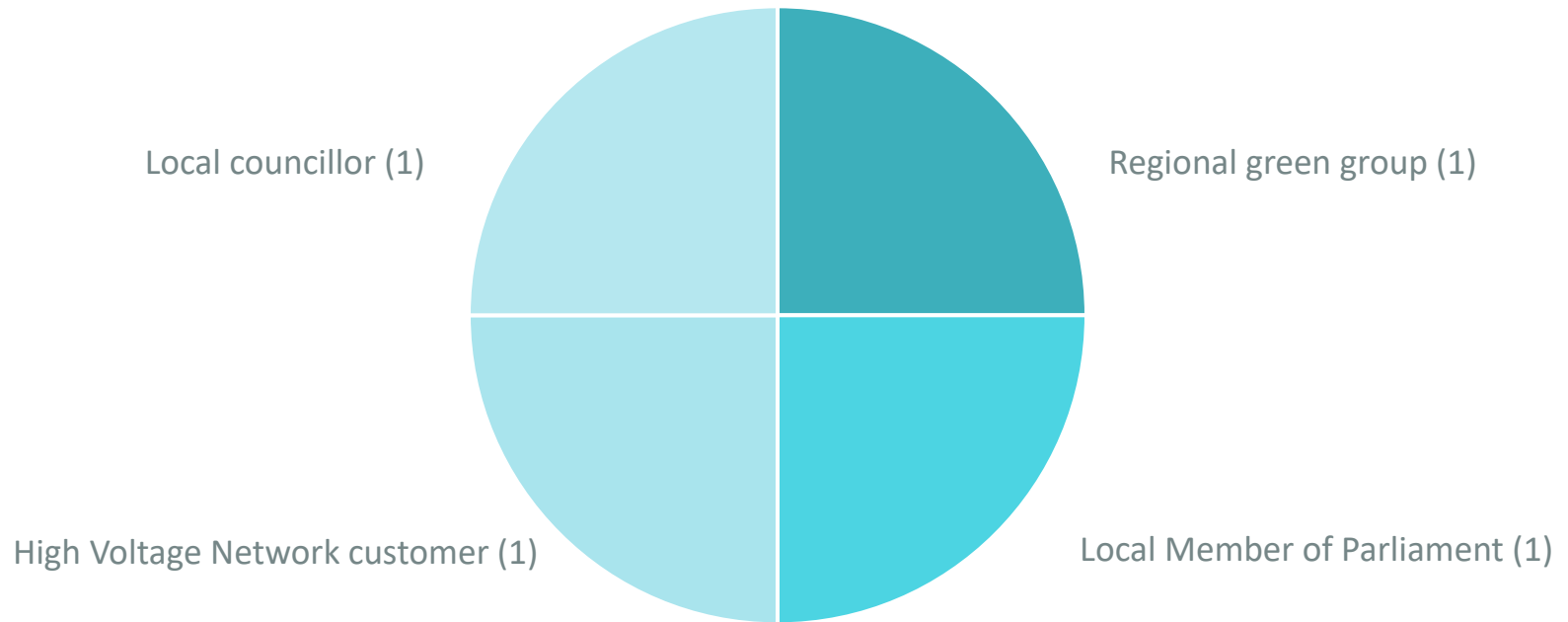


## Respondent profile

A breakdown of stakeholder participants

# Respondent profile

Stakeholder breakdown (4)





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## Results

An overview of our research insights

# Key findings

1

Stakeholders agreed that BEET is a positive utilisation of innovative technology to indirectly lower domestic and business energy usage and reduce energy bills

2

There were some minor concerns in relation to the implementation of new technology, such as the general public's resistance to change

3

Stakeholders wanted to know the outcomes of BEET (e.g. energy and cost saving opportunities for customers), shared in a short and straightforward digital format

4

If BEET is successful, stakeholders wanted to see the project being rolled out nationally



# 1

## Using innovative technology to indirectly reduce energy use is a good idea

Initial awareness of BEET was mixed, with two stakeholders being unaware of BEET prior to this research, while two were aware of the potential environmental and financial benefits through close connection to Northern Powergrid. After receiving an outline of BEET, stakeholders responded positively about the implementation of the project in terms of optimising voltage to lower energy usage and reduce customer bills. One stakeholder described the trial as a ‘**no brainer**’, whereby, if the technology provides successful outcomes, it makes sense for Northern Powergrid to implement it. Others highlighted BEET as a method of tackling climate change that is **indirect to customers**, working alongside individual lifestyle changes.

“I know there's ways of managing flexibility that do involve customers, like consumers being asked to use their washing machine at a certain time or turn off their heating. But this sounds like kind of like a way of doing it in the background, which is always helpful” (Regional green group)

“If the technology does its job, it's kind of a no brainer, isn't it?” (Local Councillor)



# 2

## Stakeholder concerns with new technology need addressing

While one stakeholder was clear in their opinion that BEET was a ‘non-event’ that did not concern local residents, other stakeholders shared some minor concerns about the **general public’s resistance to new technology** and the possibility of **misinformation** spreading about the project. Indeed, one stakeholder showed a misunderstanding of how BEET would work and thought there would be greater potential impacts on their business.

Altogether, this highlights the importance of public engagement about innovation, including the clear and direct communication about what is involved. A list of frequently asked questions (FAQ) would help to assure customers about what is happening and how the project might affect them.



*“Sometimes people can be a bit resistant to a new technology or an unusual technology ” (Regional green group)*



# 3

## Stakeholders want to know about the outcomes of BEET

All stakeholders expressed interest in receiving feedback from Northern Powergrid about the outcomes of BEET, specifically information about whether voltage optimisation produces positive outcomes in terms of **energy use**, and whether individual customers and businesses have experienced **financial benefits** as a result. In addition to this, some were interested in the promise of BEET as a **national solution helping to address climate change**, wanting to understand Northern Powergrid's plans following the trial. One stakeholder also wanted feedback about the trial itself, such as any **challenges** experienced and any further engagement conducted.

“Information on the scale of it, the effectiveness of it, how Northern Powergrid see it as a solution going forward, if there are any challenges that came up around it...what sort of engagement they did around it” (Regional green group)

“For individual consumers, do they actually get to see some of the benefit, especially people who are fuel poor and might be struggling with energy needs” (Local councillor)

“If there's any benefit from it in terms of the what [we'll] pay” (High Voltage Network customer)



In terms of the format of communications stakeholders wanted from Northern Powergrid around the outcomes of BEET, two stakeholders expressed the need for **quick and straightforward** language or **‘headline’ information** to disseminate project findings to customers in a way that is easy to understand. Key **facts and figures** about reductions in electricity and cost were suggested as the most effective messages to ‘pique their interest’. Both stakeholders had a **preference for email communication** shortly after the completion of the trial, however one indicated the importance of not being overloaded with too many updates. One stakeholder similarly indicated that the information leaflet would reassure customers concerned about Northern Powergrid’s innovation work. It was noted that most customers would not benefit from a lot of engagement about BEET, due to its backgrounded nature (as a ‘non-event’).

The interviews also emphasised the importance of engaging with businesses as they can provide **routes to further engagement in the community**. For example, one business expressed their willingness to promote the outcomes of BEET through a case study after receiving data from Northern Powergrid.



*“Just an update email update would be good after this” (Regional green group)*



*“The headline is the first bit that hooks people in to then understand how it works. [Like...] a typical house can expect... and a typical business could expect... that's really what people want to hear...99% of people, what will pique their interest is you could save, there's new technology that could save you X amount, or X percentage of your energy usage (Local councillor)*



*“We could do a case study about it. If there's like data that comes out of it that's quite interesting. [...] And we could integrate that into different conversations that we're having about energy system transformation” (Regional green group)*



*“It’s irrelevant to people’s lives – they only want to know that the lights will come on” (Local Member of Parliament)*



# 4

## Stakeholders are positive about opportunities for expansion after the trial

Two stakeholders felt that if early outcomes show a positive impact of voltage optimisation on the environment and energy bills, it makes sense that the project should be **'scaled up'** to expand its benefits beyond Boston Spa. Stakeholders wanted to know what Northern Powergrid's plans were for this.



*"There's a big opportunity, because probably businesses and things like bigger users, which, if it scales up in the same way that can equal more savings, kind of less emissions" (Local councillor)*



*"Whether it's something that could be scaled up, and whether they see it as part of overall flexibility measures" (Regional green group)*



*"If there's an early bit of data that says, it's saying people saved X% off their electric bills, then, right? Well, we should do more of it then" (Local Councillor)*



*"It would be interesting to know what impact it would have on the overall grid, if it was like, whether you could scale it up and have BEET boxes everywhere, at different substations" (Regional green group)*





# Conclusions and recommendations

An overview of findings from the event and next steps

# Conclusions

Awareness of BEET amongst stakeholders was mixed, however **all felt positively towards the project** once learning more, viewing it as a positive way of helping to manage consumer energy use which will result in both economic and environmental benefits for individual customers and businesses.

**Some minor concerns were raised** from stakeholders around the general public's resistance to new technology, which needs to be addressed upfront.

All stakeholders expressed **interest in engaging** with Northern Powergrid about the outcomes of BEET on energy use and bills, any challenges faced, and findings of community engagement, as well as Northern Powergrid's plans following the trial.

Stakeholders expressed the desire for communications from Northern Powergrid to use '**headline' information** such as key facts and figures about reductions in electricity and cost to 'pique interest'. **Email was the preferred method** of communication, though the frequency of updates was an important consideration. The interviews also emphasised the importance of engaging with businesses to provide routes to further engagement in the community.

Stakeholders felt that **expansion of the trial** across a broader area would make sense to deliver benefits beyond Boston Spa.



# Actions and recommendations

## Recommendations for BEET:

- Consider upfront messaging and wider engagement with the public to ease general resistance to technology and innovation due to lack of information
- Consider the publication of outcomes from the trial to highlight the success of the project, including economic and environmental benefits to customers, specifically sharing key facts and figures
- Consider providing quarterly updates to stakeholders via email
- Consider utilising stakeholders as communication channels to further promote the objectives and outcomes of BEET
- Celebrate the success of BEET with the local community and keep them informed of future plans to roll out BEET.





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