



This is one of a series of case studies produced as part of the 'Learning from the Big Society Project'. It aims to draw lessons from the Eden Valley Big Society Vanguard, covering the parish groupings in Upper Eden, Heart of Eden and Lyvennet Valley, each of whom had worked together to produce a Community Led Plan for their area.

Many of the projects covered in the case studies are currently in development but we can still learn from the experiences of the communities and agencies involved.

The Challenge

The communities of the Eden Valley exist within an attractive, rural environment characterised by outstanding landscapes in a countryside rich with natural resources.

Most of these communities live in relatively remote places and therefore do not have access to the natural gas network. The restricted fuel choice, together with the relatively harsh Cumbrian climate, can mean more expensive energy bills.

For households on low incomes and those with older, difficult to insulate, properties it is not uncommon for residents to experience fuel poverty.

It is also common for village halls, schools and other community buildings to be ageing, poorly insulated and expensive to run, presenting a challenge for the whole community to maintain its facilities and infrastructure.

Locally tailored solutions

The local decision-making and activity being demonstrated by the communities in the Eden Valley includes an expansion of the number of renewable energy schemes run by the community for the benefit of the community.

By re-investing revenue generated by the schemes for wider community benefits, these new schemes will be vital to sustaining community self-help well into the future.

As communities have become increasingly aware of the need to tackle climate change, they have also learned how their collective actions to reduce their carbon footprint can bring financial rewards. For example, raising the capital needed to equip the village hall with a renewable energy system leads not only to reduced carbon emissions but also to reduced running costs. Where there is similar investment to improve the insulation, a warmer, more welcoming venue should also increase usage and generate further revenue for the hall.

The level of interest in community energy schemes has been heightened by the Government's introduction of Feed in Tariff incentive payments for heat and power generated from renewable energy sources, and the recent addition of new guidance to support communities developing local energy schemes.

One example is 'Community Energy Online' at the Department for Energy and Climate Change <http://ceo.decc.gov.uk>

Case Study: Lyvennet Renewable Energy Ltd.

Case Study: Bolton Memorial Hall Photo Voltaic Panels

Lyvennet Renewable Energy Limited

Background

The Lyvennet Community Plan was published in 2009 and covered the Parish of Crosby Ravensworth and King's Meaburn village. The consultation had indicated that there was an interest in sustainability issues related to climate change and the generation of renewable energy.

The Project

There being no support for wind turbines in the community and hydro not being appropriate for the Lyvennet Beck, the Sustainability Working Group decided to focus on anaerobic digestion (AD).

The underpinning philosophy from the start was that the community as a whole should benefit from any developments. The farming community would benefit by providing manure, slurry and grass silage (feedstock) to the AD Plant. Community investments in the AD business would ensure that the Parish as a whole would gain financially from the dividends.

The AD process produces methane from the digestion of the feedstock. This biogas drives a generator producing electricity to sell to the National Grid. The end product, the digestate, returns to the farmer to be spread on the land, thus saving on the cost of artificial fertiliser. Excess heat can be transferred to local buildings or businesses.

The community dimension of the project is unusual and probably unique in the UK.

What have the challenges been?

The Group's first challenge was making contact with a company who was supportive of the community-led approach. Seeking funding to invest on behalf of the community has proved testing and continues to be time consuming. A grant of £2,500 from Big Society Grant Fund has enabled us to draw up a database of possible funding sources.

When progress is slow, keeping the community on board is difficult: there is little to be gained by calling a meeting if there isn't much to report.

The group have farmers interested in joining the project but establishing a fair price for their feedstock has proved to be difficult too. Alongside this, and yet to be addressed, are tenancy agreements which allow tenant farmers to remove feedstock from the land. Support from Department of Communities and Local Government staff through the Vanguard enabled the group to seek advice from the Country Landowners Association about this issue. Gaining a land lease agreement for the site of the 1MW AD plant is a further challenge.

What has been achieved?

The working group has established a company limited by guarantee, Lyvennet Renewable Energy Ltd, to develop the project. They are in partnership with Anaerobic Energy Ltd, a subsidiary of the Centre for Process Innovation, which has expertise in moving innovative projects onto a commercial footing.

The group has developed an extensive network of supportive contacts. They have also raised the profile of AD and renewable energy in the community and have taken a community group to visit an AD plant in Northumberland.

The Learning

Small start-up grants, which are easy to access, are important to get projects like this going and grants of £1,000 from CCC Neighbourhood Forum and Eden Strategic Partnership have been helpful for the group.

A grant from RDPE enabled them to buy in advice about business planning; a larger grant paid for the setting up of the company and a pre-planning study of possible sites for the AD plant.

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Bolton Photo Voltaic Panels

Background

The Heart of Eden Community Plan covers twelve parishes around Appleby and was published in 2009. The Heart of Eden Development Trust has been formed to deliver projects across the area.

One of the actions identified, following consultation with local people, was to research the feasibility of renewable energy projects.

The Project

Photo voltaic (PV) panels have been installed on the roof of Bolton Memorial Hall to generate electricity from sunlight and income through the Feed in Tariff. Bolton is one of the villages in the Heart of Eden area and this is intended to be a pilot project with a view to installing PV panels on other community buildings in the area.

A proportion of the income will go to the Memorial Hall with the remainder going to the Heart of Eden Development Trust to develop area-wide initiatives.

What have the challenges been?

The project was developed very rapidly after funding was made available through the Big Society Grant Fund. There was a project completion date of 31st March 2011 but the funding wasn't approved until early February 2011.

There was also some uncertainty as to whether the grant fund could meet the full project costs which meant that the Memorial Hall committee had to identify other funders at short notice. The total project cost £14,110.60.

The Memorial Hall committee knew that planning permission was not required for the installation of PV panels on domestic property however it was not discovered until January 2011 that permission and listed building consent would be required for the installation on the Memorial Hall.

With the tight timescale for the project completion this proved to be a challenge and planning consent was only received mid-March 2011.



Installation of Photo Voltaic Panels on Bolton Memorial Hall

The Memorial Hall management committee and Heart of Eden Development Trust needed to agree the ownership and maintenance of the panels and the split of income from the Feed in Tariff.

It was agreed that the Memorial Hall trustees would own and have responsibility for maintaining and insuring the panels and would keep 64 per cent of the income, with the Development Trust receiving 36 per cent.

What has been achieved?

Installing PV panels on a community building is not an unusual project but the concept of rolling the project out to a wider group of communities, all working in partnership, is.

If a number of community buildings participate the income generated from the Feed in Tariff would provide Heart of Eden Development Trust with sustainable, long term funding to develop a wide-range of local projects. It would also provide the village halls with income for their own buildings.

One of the Heart of Eden Development Trust directors is preparing a "Step by Step" guide to steer other community building volunteers through the process.

Within Bolton the project has raised awareness of the opportunities the Feed in Tariff presents and eight private householders have installed PV panels on their own homes in less than six months with others considering it.

The Learning

There is a lack of clarity among many Planning Departments as to whether planning or building control permission is required for PV installation. Early discussion with the local planning authority is recommended.

It would help similar projects if District Councils and other planning authorities introduced agreed policies for determining whether roof structures are suitable and for granting approval.

The availability of funding will be crucial to the project being extended to other villages in the Heart of Eden and the Development Trust is researching this.

Contact Details

See the **Heart of Eden Development Trust** website for a report on the PV project www.heartofeden.co.uk

Get Generating: A Renewable Energy Guide for Rural Communities produced by Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) www.acre.org.uk/Resources/ACRE/Documents/Renewable_Energy_Guide.pdf

Plan LoCaL - Planning for Low Carbon Living www.planlocal.org.uk

For more information about this and other case studies in this series, please contact ACT on Tel: 01228 817224 or Email: info@cumbriaaction.org.uk

Topics covered in this series:

- Community Housing
- Community Broadband
- Community Owned Enterprise
- Community Renewable Energy
- Neighbourhood Planning
- Community Transport



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