

Notes on setting up Community Energy Projects

Dorset Climate Action Network

V2 16th June 2026

Community energy refers to local, renewable energy projects that are owned, controlled, or directly benefiting local residents. These initiatives focus on putting people at the heart of the clean power transition by generating renewable electricity, promoting energy efficiency, and reinvesting any profits back into the local area. [CEE].

1. Introduction

There is some excellent information available on the internet for groups wanting to find out more about renewable energy and who want to start their own community energy group. In fact, there is so much information that it is easy to get overwhelmed. This is just a small personal selection of some of the best advice around. In practice, it is probably more important that you start “doing something” than trying to do all the research up front. This way you will learn as you go and find yourself talking to some brilliant people inside and outside your community who can help you with all aspects of your project. It is amazing what knowledge and experience is already available in every local community.

2. General Advice

- To get started: get a group of 2-3 like-minded people in your community around you and form a local group (or organisation, enterprise or co-op. Whatever you want to be called).
- Decide the level of your ambition: e.g. everything from providing energy advice to residents to encouraging solar panels on roofs of local buildings to building your own renewable energy windfarm or solar array for the benefit of the community.
- Look at what other groups in are doing. In Dorset, there is some great work being done by: the Purbeck Energy Group: <https://sustainableswanage.uk/energy/energy-group/>, DCAN of course: <https://www.dorsetcan.org/teams/energy> and Dorset Community Energy: <https://www.dorsetcommunityenergy.org.uk>
- Talk to your parish council and determine the extent to which they can support you (probably verbal rather than monetary) but they can help a lot with communication and public engagement if they are supportive.
- Make contact with external groups that can provide you with practical support and possibly finance. There are lists in the next section.

3. General Organisations providing Help

- The Centre of Sustainable Energy has just launched a scheme called Community Energy GO specifically aimed at new groups at the early stages: <https://communityenergygo.org.uk/>
- The Southwest Net Zero Hub administer loans from the Great British Energy Community Energy Fund: <https://www.swnetzerohub.org.uk/what-we-do/community-energy/>
- Regen (based in Exeter) have a lot of useful seminars and publications: <https://www.regen.co.uk/communities>
- Community Energy England <https://communityenergyengland.org> is an excellent organisation with a wide range of support information. This includes:

- o Guide to getting started with Community Energy: <https://communityenergyengland.org/guidance/how-to-guides/getting-started-with-community-energy/>
- o Sources for funding: <https://communityenergyengland.org/funding-opportunities/>
- o “How to” guides: https://communityenergyengland.org/guidance/how-to-guides/?how_to_guide_type%5B%5D=getting-started-with-community-energy
- o It is also worth considering joining Community Energy England to give access to their member forums (where you can ask for help from 100s of people who've been doing this stuff for decades): <https://communityenergyengland.org/membership/join/>
- Energy Saving Trust: https://energysavingtrust.org.uk/advice/helping-your-community/?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=17121799809&gbraid=0AAAAADjP0ps2eyThVPIIE-RqWQg3jQ1nK&gclid=Cj0KCQjwILDQBhDjARIsAPIIefE-r5Q4vm9RESk1ALjLYPM-bMD1VRGha7_Flsj7-rKQMN1_WfHbRnkaAnxGEALw_wcB
- Dorset Community Energy (DCE): <https://www.dorsetcommunityenergy.org.uk>. DCE has facilitated twenty-eight solar installations in Dorset providing a maximum power of 1582kW. This has cost over £1 million and is funded by over two hundred members through share offers.

Specific advice on Onshore Wind

- Advice on onshore wind: <https://content.votewind.org/guide/>
<https://votewind.org/> is a great tool for finding potentially viable sites for onshore wind
- CEE have a Wind Working Group that meets monthly too <https://communityenergyengland.org/policy-campaigns/working-groups/>)

Specific advice on PV Solar

Rooftop Solar: <https://solarwizard.org.uk/> is a handy tool for solar calculations on specific buildings. See also the solar calculator <https://solar-calculator.ennovus.co.uk/>

List of Community Energy software tools: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1cz9XITDcxATrADJ2YDemiE5hs1fcTTuuJE_9d4HbScI/edit?gid=0#gid=0

What DCAN can offer

DCAN can provide you with some local support in helping you to get set up and finding your way through the minefield of different options. More specifically, DCAN can offer:

- Basic banking facilities so you don't have to set up your own bank account initially
- Advice on the organisational structure: volunteer group, Community organisation etc.
- You can adopt our policies and risk assessments to allow you to apply for funding (for example from Dorset Council or Southwest Net Zero hub (SWNZH)).
- Local experience of working in Dorset and provide contacts and support. By keeping in touch, we may be able to provide you with some useful contact people and support if you get stuck - for example, with Dorset Council and several of the town and parish councils.