



COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP OF RENEWABLE ENERGY

Saturday 26 June 2010

CONFERENCE REPORT

Sustainable
Action
Stratford



Renewable
Energy Club
Warwickshire



Transition
Stratford

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BACKGROUND

Under the EU Renewable Energy Directive, the UK has a target of meeting 15% of energy requirements from renewables by 2020 - a seven-fold increase on 2008 levels. The West Midlands is considered to have few natural resources compared with other regions: accordingly, regional targets adopted in 2004 require 5% of energy consumption to be met from renewables by 2010 and 10% by 2020.

The 2010 target would require the West Midlands to have a total installed renewables capacity of over 400 MW by the end of this year. According to a report published by RenewableUK¹, however, less than half of this capacity (183 MW) had been commissioned by mid-2009. The report concluded that the region will miss its 2010 target by a wide margin and will then find it extremely difficult to meet the more challenging 2020 target.

Despite this slow progress, there is no lack of interest in south Warwickshire in promoting increased use of renewables. Groups such as the Renewable Energy Club exist for the purpose of encouraging on-site renewables, particularly in Warwick District, communities such as Harbury are investigating the local potential for larger-scale renewables and many individuals are pursuing ideas for specific projects.

In response to this situation, Transition Stratford, Transition Town Leamington, Sustainable Action Stratford, the Renewable Energy Club and Action 21 organised a conference on community ownership of renewable energy projects on 26 June 2010. The aims of the conference were to:

- provide expert briefing for participants on the main renewable energy technologies, the local availability of low-carbon and renewable resources and the commercial criteria for successful investment in renewable energy
- explore possible organisational models for collective investment in local renewable energy projects for the benefit of the community and the environment.

This report sets out the main points from the speakers' presentations and summarises discussion in workshops and plenary sessions.

SESSION I: TECHNOLOGIES, RESOURCES AND COMMERCIAL CRITERIA

Speakers' presentations

Renewable energy technologies and their technical requirements

Bernard Perkins, Encraft Ltd

Bernard began his presentation by looking at the extent to which renewables could reasonably be expected to contribute to required reductions in carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions in Coventry and Warwickshire. He explained that in 2007 total energy use in the area was 284 terawatt hours (TWh) and was responsible for 7.9 kilotonnes (kt) of CO₂ emissions. By 2050, CO₂ emissions will need to be reduced by 80%, to just 2.8 kt of CO₂.

For this reduction to be achieved solely through the use of renewable energy sources would require an annual output of 20 TWh - but there is a limit to the renewable resource potentially available. Recent estimates have suggested that, by 2021, the maximum potential output from renewable sources in Coventry and Warwickshire will be around 1.9 TWh

¹ England's Regional Renewable Energy Targets: Progress Report (BWEA, July 2009)
<http://www.bwea.com/pdf/publications/RRETProgressReport.pdf>

(about 18% of total power requirements and 8% of total heating requirements). It is clear that the CO₂ reduction target cannot be met by renewables alone. More realistically, overall demand for energy will need to fall by 50%, accompanied by a 20% improvement in energy efficiency and a contribution of 10%, or 1.3 TWh, from renewable sources.

Turning to the different technologies which could potentially be used in the Coventry and Warwickshire area, Bernard highlighted the following main issues:

Wind

Location and size are of critical importance: a twofold increase in turbine diameter increases energy output by a factor of four, while a doubling of wind speed increases energy output by a factor of 8. These effects are cumulative, so that twice the diameter and twice the windspeed will increase energy output 32 times. Investment should therefore be focused on the largest turbines in the windiest locations.

Key issues for developing a wind power project are:

- *technical*, including the requirement for windspeed in the range 4 – 7 metres/second; location; size and technical characteristics of the turbine; availability of connection to the transition and distribution network; ground conditions for structural works, such as foundations
- *environmental impact*, including noise, impact on wildlife, visual amenity and social factors
- *funding*
- *planning considerations*
- *health and safety*

Solar

There are major geographical, seasonal and diurnal variations in solar energy resources. Annual solar irradiation in the West Midlands is in the range 1000 - 1100 kilowatt hours (kWh) per square metre, compared with the annual energy demand of a typical home of 4,000 kWh of electricity and 20,000 kWh for heating.

Key issues for solar power projects are therefore:

- *technical*, including locational factors such as orientation and shading; the size of the project and the energy requirement to be met; the ease of connection to services within the building; wind loading, weight and other structural issues; security
- *environmental impact*, primarily visual
- *cost*
- *planning considerations*
- *health and safety*

Biomass

a) Wood fuel

Wood fuel is a local resource which is best used on-site or within 25 miles of the point of production. Availability can vary throughout the year depending on the season of harvest (usually winter) and the time taken to dry the material and process it into logs, chips or pellets. This can have implications for security of supply.

Key issues for developing a wood fuel project are:

- *technical*, including the size and type of installation and the energy requirement it is intended to meet; fuel supply, transport and storage; the location and topography of the site
- *people*, including operating skills and the existence of people willing to champion the project
- *environmental impact*, including visual impact, air quality and traffic
- *funding*
- *planning considerations*

b) Biogas from anaerobic digestion

The production of biogas from the anaerobic digestion (AD) of animal manures or other wastes can be economically and environmentally effective in the right context. AD can be used to produce heat only or electricity only, but the highest conversion factors are achieved where plants are linked to Combined Heat and Power (CHP) networks which can use both the electrical and the thermal output. Larger AD installations can also inject biomethane direct to the mains gas network and the proposed Renewable Heat Incentive is expected to pay 4p/kWh for biomethane.

Key issues for AD projects are:

- *technical*, including the scale and type of installation; the suitability and reliability of the waste stream; the existence of on-site uses for the energy and heat outputs; ease of connection to the electricity and gas grids
- *commercial*, particularly the avoided costs of waste disposal
- *environmental impact*
- *funding*
- *planning considerations*

Hydro

Hydro schemes are critically dependent on head and flow rates, which are low on Warwickshire rivers. However, there is a potentially viable 50 kW scheme involving two sites on the Leam (Jephson Gardens/Emscote Road): this would cost £300,000, produce 160,000 kWh of electricity and achieve payback within 10 years.

Key issues for hydro projects are:

- *technical*, including resource availability (including head and flow rate); civil infrastructure implications, eg for flood defences; type and size of installation; grid connection and synchronisation
- *environmental impact*, including fish; water abstraction; proximity to Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs); implications for leisure use; noise
- *finance*
- *planning considerations*

Key messages

- it is nearly always possible to achieve more through passive design and energy conservation measures than through renewables
- accordingly, low-carbon technologies need to be properly integrated, not regarded as “add-ons” to business as usual

- appropriate use of renewable energy technology is a function of location, resource availability, cost and policy
- in general, larger renewable energy projects have better financial paybacks - but higher environmental impacts

Warwickshire's climate change strategy and the Camco resource assessment

Dr Jacky Lawrence, Strategic Energy Manager, Warwickshire County Council

Jacky explained that, as part of the Warwickshire Climate Change Strategy, Warwickshire County Council and six district councils (North Warwickshire, Nuneaton & Bedworth, Rugby, Solihull, Stratford and Warwick) had commissioned from Camco Global an assessment of:

- current and projected energy consumption and carbon emissions in Warwickshire
- existing LZC energy generation capacity within the county
- low-carbon policies and targets at national, regional and local levels and market mechanisms intended to support LZC technologies;
- the potential for local renewable energy and decentralised generation

Camco were asked to propose targets for LZC technologies and to recommend ways in which councils can support their achievement, for example through the application of planning standards.

Camco estimate that existing LZC generating capacity in the area is around 28 MW, equating to less than 2% of energy demand (excluding transport). Planned LZC capacity is estimated at around 57 MW. A high proportion of existing and planned capacity uses landfill gas - which will decline rapidly in future as landfill sites close and biodegradable wastes are diverted away from landfill.

To assess the potential for future LZC generation, Camco estimated the naturally-available resource of each type within the area, then applied a series of tests which had the effect of reducing the potential for each technology. These were:

- the extent to which a potential resource is technically accessible
- environmental constraints
- the impact of planning and regulatory constraints
- the extent to which the resource is potentially economically viable
- limitations on the deployment of the resource arising from the supply chain
- the extent to which deployment of the resource is encouraged by local targets

Wind

There is significant naturally-available wind resource, particularly in Rugby and Stratford Districts, but its potential use is limited by factors such as proximity to housing and landscape considerations. Camco therefore concluded that the potential uptake of wind energy in each district by 2020, by number of turbines and percentage of total energy consumption, could be:

- *Stratford-on-Avon*: 76 - 142 turbines (64% - 120% of energy consumption)
- *Warwick*: 14 - 26 turbines (9.5% - 18% of energy consumption)
- *Rugby*: 17 - 32 turbines (11.5% - 22% of energy consumption)
- *North Warwickshire*: 6 - 12 turbines (6% - 12% of energy consumption)
- *Nuneaton & Bedworth*: 2 - 5 turbines (2.1% - 5% of energy consumption)

- *Solihull*: 0 - 1 turbine (0% - <1% of energy consumption)

Biomass

Camco estimate that the potential update of biomass in each district as a percentage of total energy consumption could be:

- *Stratford-on-Avon*: >11.5% of energy consumption
- *Warwick*: 3.3% of energy consumption
- *Rugby*: 1.9% of energy consumption
- *North Warwickshire*: 4.5% of energy consumption
- *Nuneaton & Bedworth*: 1.7% of energy consumption
- *Solihull*: 1.2% of energy consumption

Hydro

Camco have identified the potential for 12 small hydro schemes in the study area by 2020, with a maximum feasible generating capacity of 730 kW. These are likely to be concentrated in three districts:

- *Stratford-on-Avon*: four possible sites with a maximum total capacity of 224 kW
- *Warwick*: six possible sites with a potential maximum total capacity of 472 kW
- *Rugby*: two possible sites with a potential maximum total capacity of 34 kW

Overall potential

The Camco study has concluded that the district with the greatest potential for the development of renewable energy is Stratford-on-Avon, where renewables - particularly wind and biomass - could provide between 32% and 48% of energy consumption by 2020, significantly exceeding the district's "share" of localised national renewables targets. Although the potential in Warwick District is lower, renewables could still meet 9% - 13% of energy consumption by 2020, close to localised national renewables targets.

Next policy steps

Jacky concluded her presentation with an outline of the policy steps proposed in Warwickshire in response to the Camco report. These include:

- the establishment of an expert low-carbon technical assessment service for planners
- further development of the evidence base in the Camco report as the basis for a progress monitoring mechanism
- viability assessments and site energy studies for each new development
- the establishment of a local carbon investment fund
- heat mapping and analysis of the potential for fuel switching in locations off the gas grid
- specific planning protocols and policy to support the uptake of LZC technologies
- local delivery leadership to promote demand for LZC solutions, in particular by linking planning and non-planning measures

Community-owned renewable energy - the sums

Jon Hallé, Energy4All

Jon explained that Energy4All is the UK's main incubator for community-owned renewable energy co-operatives. Formed in 2003, it has been involved in the formation of seven wind

co-operatives, including Westmill in Oxfordshire. Based on this experience, Energy4All considers that the community ownership model can make a real contribution to reducing CO₂, while supporting the local economy, creating ethical investment opportunities and improving the acceptability of renewable energy projects by engaging local people.

It is expected that the viability of community-owned renewables will be helped by the introduction of the Feed-in Tariff (FiT) from April 2010 and the Renewable Heat Incentive due in April 2011. FiT payments will be in the range 4.5p/kWh to 41.3p/kWh according to technology and scale, compared to the standard export tariff of 3p/kWh. Existing projects may not receive the FiT, but it is likely to be of significant benefit to future projects.

Turning to the question of project finance, Jon explained that it is much more difficult to raise the money for the development phase of a project than for implementation. Although development costs are small relative to construction costs, they may still be substantial and are wholly at risk, in that they will be lost entirely if the project does not go ahead.

For this reason, it is easier to raise finance for the less risky construction phase than for development costs. Typical sources of project finance include:

- *grants* - but grants for community projects are likely to be adversely affected by recession, while grants intended specifically for renewables will be progressively replaced by the FiT
- *loans* from banks (which will require security) or other lenders (who may be less willing/able to lend because of recession)
- *private investment* in the form of venture capital (providers of which will typically look for 10 - 20% returns) or funds raised through co-operative share offers

Co-operative share offers are a proven model for raising finance for community renewables. Individual investors typically invest between £250 and £20,000 and generally receive a reasonable return on their investment.

Raising finance for the development phase is more difficult. Grants towards revenue costs may be available, but communities may be required to raise matching funds from their own resources. However, banks and other commercial lenders will be reluctant to lend, while private investment is unlikely at the development stage because of the high risks involved. In these circumstances, community groups may decide to work in partnership with commercial developers, or alternatively development funding might be available from Energy4All through projects such as Sharenergy. This is currently only funded to cover the West Midlands Rural Regeneration Zone (large parts of Shropshire and Herefordshire and part of Worcestershire) but plans to extend and improve its support for community groups over a wider area.

Jon explained that the Sharenergy project receives funding from Advantage West Midlands of £0.75 million over three years which is used to fund the development of community renewables projects up to and through the planning stage. Finance is provided in the form of "soft" loans rather than grants: if a project fails, no repayment is expected, but if it succeeds repayment is made to a ringfenced Revolving Investment Fund from which other community projects can benefit. Sharenergy is currently funding 14 projects using a range of technologies including wind, hydro, biomass and AD.

Question-and-answers on technologies, resources and commercial criteria

Q. Is there likely to be any net benefit from injecting biomethane from AD plants to the gas grid once the costs of meeting British Gas's pressure and quality standards have been met?

JH: Depending on scale and location, direct injection is likely to be financially attractive once the Renewable Heat Incentive is introduced - the main obstacles are regulatory rather than technical. For smaller plants or those which are remote from the gas grid, however, communities may need to think about how biomethane can be used locally on a decentralised basis.

Q. Is there likely to be local political support for community-owned renewables projects in Warwickshire?

JL: Community renewables are not currently high on the local political agenda, but this should change for the better as the Camco recommendations go through the community reporting process.

JH: Communities can do a lot to raise the political profile of renewables by coming up with ideas for projects and challenging the politicians to respond. But it's essential that community groups think like commercial developers, rather than waiting for local authority initiatives.

Q. Are there any tax breaks available to incentivise investment in wind and other renewables?

JH: Yes - the Enterprise Investment Scheme (EIS) provides a range of tax reliefs for investors who buy shares in certain types of technology company and can be an important incentive for investment in renewables.

Q. How much detail does Sharenergy need about a project in order to assess its viability for development funding purposes?

JH: Difficult to give a definitive answer in isolation. However, Sharenergy does not have the resources itself to carry out detailed investment appraisals, so relies on the ability of community groups to call on a wide range of local voluntary resources. Groups are encouraged to work through the Energy4All STEPS (see <http://www.energysteps.coop/>). But you can get a long way with common sense and a good map!

Q. How is the need for demand management being addressed locally?

JL: A lot of work is being done by organisations, particularly in the public sector, but much more needs to be done to reduce domestic energy use.

BP: It's essential to address demand reduction as an integral part of the move to a low-carbon economy and community groups in various parts of the country are beginning to do so. We need a separate conference on the subject!

Q. What's the carbon payback on farm-sized wind turbines?

JH: About a year, depending on location and capacity factor.

Q. Is noise associated with hydro schemes a serious issue?

BP: Potentially yes: certainly it is a concern for the Leam proposal because of the proximity of houses.

Q. How safe are the Feed-in Tariff and Renewable Heat Incentive following the change of government?

JH: Both had cross-party support before the General Election, so it is expected that they will go ahead.

SESSION 2: LOCAL MAPPING EXERCISE

Introduction

Participants were invited to divide into area-based groups, each group being provided with a 1: 25 000 scale Ordnance Survey map of its area. Groups were invited to apply the information provided in the presentations on technologies, resources and commercial criteria, in combination with their local knowledge, in order to assess the prospects for and likely acceptability of renewable energy projects, taking into account:

- the naturally-available resource (eg windspeed, river head and flow rates)
- the proximity of housing, roads, watercourses etc
- designated landscape areas such as AONBs, National Parks, SSSIs
- access to roads and the electricity and gas grids
- aesthetics, eg noise, wildlife, ecology
- ownership of land
- local support/opposition

Feedback from groups

Stratford West & Alcester

Biomass:

- good prospects, good acceptability
- Ragley Estate already has biomass boiler and produces biomass surplus which could be basis of an energy co-op
- also farmland for energy cropping, with some existing short-rotation coppice

Solar (PV & thermal):

- good prospects, good acceptability
- lots of industrial estates around Alcester with high electricity and thermal demand
- solar PV and thermal installations on non-residential buildings eg industrial estates, leisure centres, schools, hospitals etc
- PV banks could be located on farmland - possible community projects
- also lots of scope for energy reduction, particularly for businesses

Hydro:

- medium prospects, good acceptability
- Alne and Arrow historically supported mills
- but heads and flows too small to support viable hydro projects?
- locks and weirs on Avon might offer greater potential

Anaerobic digestion:

- medium prospects, good acceptability
- a possibility at sewage works?
- limited potential for farm use because mainly arable with little livestock

Wind:

- good technical prospects but publicly very contentious
- viable windspeeds on Ridgeway, around Snitterfield and near Temple Grafton

Heat source:

- high acceptability and good technical prospects
- potential applications for social housing, farms and large private houses
- still largely untapped resource

Kenilworth, Leamington & Warwick

Few real options because of urbanised character

Hydro:

- potentially viable scheme on Leam (Jephson Gardens/Emscote Road)
- but very small and already thoroughly investigated

Solar PV:

- could use rented roof space on eg social and private housing, businesses, public buildings
- would need CIC/co-op to contract with owners/occupiers
- most promising technology for urban applications

Shipston & Stour Valley

Solar PV:

- potential for use of roof space on eg school, sports centre and health centre

Wind:

- areas of high wind speeds, eg Brailes, Rollrights
- historically have been windmills
- but would be difficult to achieve public/CPRE acceptance because of AONBs

Hydro:

- several weirs and former water mills on Stour
- possible opportunity at Talton Mill, where farmer is already sympathetic to environmental concerns

Biomass:

- lots of woodland on Cotswolds fringe
- some already managed for biomass and there is potential for more
- WCC owns farmland - could encourage tenants to grow energy crops?

Stratford East & Wellesbourne

Group focused on Harbury village:

- lots of apparent scope for wind, but in practice is limited by proximity to dwellings and woodland
- might be potential for one or two turbines, but not very viable

- concluded that local priority should be demand reduction

Conclusions and emerging themes from mapping exercise

1. The most promising renewable technology for community development appears to be solar PV on large rented roofspace, with a role for domestic-scale PV to raise awareness of the technology.
2. Participants agreed that the advice to consider the prospects for and likely acceptability of different projects was helpful, but felt that this left out issues such as the relative CO₂ and economic effectiveness of different projects and the wide range of capacity factors achieved by different technologies. A common measurement - such as £/tonne of CO₂ avoided - was needed as a basis of comparison between technologies.
3. Much more detailed information was needed to enable the true potential for community wind projects to be assessed. It was noted in this context that Advantage West Midlands had issued a wind resource study for the region in May 2009² which could provide a useful starting point.
4. There was some surprise that more groups had not considered the potential for AD. Severn Trent Water Are understood to be looking at the potential for mixed sewage/waste food digestion at Coleshill and Stratford sewage works, and it was also possible that some Government support might be forthcoming for AD projects. It was noted, however, that although there are compelling arguments for AD for food waste, projects are extremely complex because of the need to secure reliable supplies of feedstock over the life of the project. As a consequence, AD projects typically involve high levels of commercial risk compared to other renewables projects, particularly wind.

SESSION 3: CORPORATE AND FINANCIAL STRUCTURES

The organisational structures most commonly used for community-owned renewables projects are Co-operative Societies (previously known as the "bona fide co-op" form of Industrial & Provident Society) and Community Benefit Societies (previously known as the "ben com" form of Industrial & Provident Society). Jon Hallé had focused in his presentation on the use of Co-operative Societies. Sean Wheeldon now described in more detail the pros and cons of Community Benefit Societies.

Presentation

Community Benefit Societies

Sean Wheeldon, Project and Research Worker, Wessex Community Assets Ltd

Community benefit societies (CBSs) are an incorporated form of Industrial & Provident Society and are established for the purpose of carrying out business activities for the benefit of their community. They are able to raise funds by offering shares for sale to the public, and for this reason are regulated by the Financial Services Authority to which they are required to submit their accounts (which in the case of a large CBS must be audited). Unlike a registered charity, employees of a CBS are permitted to serve on the board and directors can be paid.

² See

http://www.advantagewm.co.uk/Images/Wind%20resource%20study%20for%20the%20West%20Midlands%20region_tcm9-17945.pdf

Before it can offer shares for sale to the public, a CBS must issue an offer document ("prospectus"). The directors are personally liable for any misleading statement made in the offer document and must therefore carry out full due diligence in order to ensure that the document is accurate.

Shares in a CBS are not traded on any stock exchange and thus have no second-hand value or market-determined share price. Investors are entitled to withdraw their capital on demand by returning their shares to the CBS. Shares will generally be redeemed at their face value, but if the CBS is in difficulty it may not be able to repay the full amount: for this reason, the investment is at risk. The withdrawability of shares on demand has implications for the CBS's cost of capital, in that it is obliged to make provision against a certain level of withdrawals (usually 10% a year).

Shareholders in a CBS are entitled to a return on their investment, but this takes the form of interest rather than a dividend. The amount of interest payable on shares must be no more than necessary to obtain and retain sufficient capital to run the business. For this reason, CBS investors are generally motivated by social or philanthropic concerns rather than by financial gain. Although the return on shares is in the form of interest, shareholders' funds are treated on the balance sheet as assets rather than debt and the CBS can therefore borrow against them.

As in the case of a Community Interest Company (CIC) or registered charity, the assets of a CBS are subject to an asset lock, which means that the assets cannot be shared amongst the shareholders in the event that the CBS is dissolved, but must instead be transferred to another asset-locked organisation with similar objectives to the CBS. Unlike a CIC, however, both CBSs and Co-operative Societies guarantee democracy on a one-member-one-vote basis, which prevents wealthy investors from having more say in the running of the business than community investors who may have less to invest. This can be administratively expensive and burdensome, particularly because of the need to hold an AGM, but can be very helpful in terms of winning and keeping community support.

CICs also incur high costs in issuing shares, which small community groups can often avoid by setting up CBSs or Co-operative Societies (although large share issues which require FSA approval will still be expensive). Individual shareholdings in a CBS are limited to £20,000, although there is no limit on the size of shareholding that may be held by another CBS.

Sean then gave two contrasting examples of community-owned renewables projects to illustrate how the balance between community benefit and investor returns affects the choice of legal structure:

Torrs Hydro:

- the project has received grant funding of around £150,000 and a further £100,000 has been raised through a share issue
- investments in Torrs Hydro qualify for tax relief under the Enterprise Investment Scheme
- investors are expected to receive returns equivalent to 6% APR after EIS tax relief

West Oxford Community Renewables:

- the project's aims are environmental/social rather than commercial, so not expected to provide a return
- a share issue has raised around £1 million which will be invested in a portfolio of renewables projects including wind, hydro and solar PV
- investments do not qualify for EIS tax relief

- because of charitable character, 50% of the money invested has come from 10% of (high net worth) investors
- WOCR has investors in Truro and Inverness, reducing the "local" ownership of the project

In conclusion, Sean emphasised that the first priority should be to determine local aims and objectives, taking into account likely financing requirements, risk, the need for engagement with local communities and the required balance between community benefit and returns to investors. These issues need to be thought through before any decision is made on legal structure: form should follow function.

Discussion on corporate and financial structures

In discussion, there was a general consensus that:

- local people, including those present, should be prepared to take the initiative by promoting community renewables projects, rather than simply waiting for commercial developer to promote projects
- the balance between community benefit and return to investors would need to be determined on a case-by-case basis depending on such factors as the nature and size of the project, the level of risk involved and the sources of project finance
- community ownership through a CBS or similar structure could be helpful in securing local acceptability of projects which might otherwise be unable to proceed

SESSION 4: CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The conference concluded that:

- a CBS or similar co-operative structure should be established in south Warwickshire for the purpose of promoting investment in community-owned renewable energy projects;
- as a first step, a follow-up meeting should be held to look in more detail at commercial, contractual, organisational and financing issues, using a specific potential project for this purpose; and
- recognising that increased investment in renewables cannot by itself achieve a decisive shift to a low-carbon economy, a second conference should be organised to look specifically at demand reduction and energy efficiency issues.