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# Community benefits from onshore renewable energy developments

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Guidance on good practice principles for communities, businesses, local authorities and others.

Supporting documents

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## Overview and key principles of community benefits

This section sets out:

- High level overview of community benefits
- Key principles
- Community benefits packages
- Help to Identify the 'area of benefit'
- Explains the right to express views on the development
- Roles and responsibilities

### Overview

Community benefits are a renewable industry led **voluntary initiative** to support communities and offer an opportunity for communities to work with renewable energy businesses for the long term benefit of the community.

The Scottish Government commends the role of the renewables industry over the last decade in making community benefits an integral part of renewable energy projects, and for their willingness to continue to offer this for new developments.

As previously indicated, we accept that the renewables industry is in a period of transition following changes to the UK renewable support schemes, and that investment decisions are being taken in a more challenging context than has been the case in the past. It is in everyone's interest to work towards ensuring renewable energy continues to play an important role in Scotland's transition to a low carbon future.

The onshore wind sector has been at the forefront in terms of offering community benefits, but the Scottish Government would encourage all renewable generation developments, irrespective of technology and scale to adopt the guidance.

**The ultimate aim is to achieve a lasting legacy for communities regardless of the set-up of the community benefits package.**

A key component of this guidance is the planning for and provision of information regarding community benefits, allowing time for communities to build capacity, and the development of ideas that can support the establishment of effective local arrangements that are in line with communities aspirations.

Alongside agreeing a community benefits package, we encourage communities to develop an action plan at the earliest opportunity. However, ultimately, that is a decision for a community to take.

Community action plans are discussed in more detail in Section 4. However, it is worth highlighting, that the development of a community action plan is not a linear process; some communities may already have one in place, others may decide to wait until later in the process, or refresh an existing plan that is not necessarily directly linked to the specific site but linked to a local development plan. What's important is the community has ownership of a "plan", that it identifies key priorities to maximise impact and has a process in place to update on a regular basis. A plan should be viewed as a "live" document that can be adapted to meet the current and future priorities of the community.

Community benefits packages can take many forms, and decisions on the details are best led locally based on consensus between the renewable energy business and the community/communities concerned. The provision of community benefits (including flexible packages of benefits) is **not a material consideration, and has no bearing in the planning process.**

## Key Principles

Community benefits offer an opportunity for communities to benefit from their local renewable energy resource by engaging them in discussions to build a lasting relationship with the renewables industry that supports Scotland's transition to a low carbon future.

## Principles of Community Benefits



**As mentioned previously, community benefits are voluntary initiatives; they are not a material consideration in the planning process. Planning permission will be assessed against the provisions in Scottish Planning policy, the local authority's development plan, and any other material considerations**

Conditions on planning permission and legal obligations with the planning authority are not thought necessary to secure voluntary community benefits, as these do not effect the decision on whether to approve or refuse the application for consent.

A renewable energy business may also wish to offer a community the opportunity to invest in the renewable energy project, or a community itself may wish to make the initial contact to a renewable energy business about investing in a project. Further information on this can be found in the [Scottish Government Good Practice Principles for Shared Ownership of Onshore Renewable Energy Developments](#).

### **Community benefits packages**

The package of benefits that a renewable energy business offers may vary in line with the priorities of community/communities involved, and the size and scope of the renewable energy project. However, community benefits should relate to the specific needs and aspirations of local people, evidenced by some form of ballot or other mechanism to capture views, for example, in a community action plan.

The importance of having a community action plan is critical to being able to engage with the renewable energy business irrespective of the community benefits package being offered. As

part of that process, communities may also wish to consider advice on any available match funding opportunities to complement any package of benefits on offer.

While we will continue at a national level to promote a community benefits value of equivalent to £5,000 per installed MW per year, we do understand that some renewable energy businesses will seek to offer a more flexible package of benefits in keeping with their ambition to offer the lowest cost energy for consumers.

### **Area of benefit**

Once determined through consultation with local communities, the geographical area that any community benefits packages is targeted towards is commonly known as the 'area of benefit'.

Community benefits packages may benefit one community or a group of communities within the area of benefit identified. Further details around consulting on details of the area of benefit (and community benefits package) are available at Section 3.3.

The Scottish Government is keen to encourage renewable energy businesses and communities to give consideration to widening the area of benefit where appropriate, but at a scale commensurate with the community benefits package that has been agreed.

### **Right to express views on the development**

Contributing to community benefits discussions does not affect an individual's, community or organisation's right to express a view on the development proposals, and objectives to an

organisations right to express a view on the development proposals, and objecting to or supporting the development does not affect their right to discuss the community benefits proposals. There should be no implication that support for the development is contingent on the existence or size of a community benefits package.

Renewable energy businesses are encouraged to make this clear to all community members at the outset of the project, underlining the separation between community benefits discussions and the planning process. This discussion between the renewable energy business and the community should be logged or noted, and reaffirmed when appropriate.

Some people may be opposed to the development, but may still wish to have input on the community benefits discussions. This is one reason why a separate forum for consultations on the community benefits package is recommended.

### **Roles and responsibilities**

The roles and responsibilities of communities and renewable energy businesses, based on lessons learnt, are summarised below:

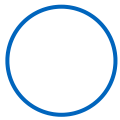
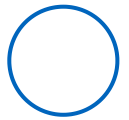
#### **Community**

- Register interest with the renewable energy business.
- Engage constructively with renewable energy businesses.
- Recognise the complexity of energy projects.
- Appoint a lead organisation, could be a community council or other appointed representative group.
- Keep local people apprised.
- Regular contact with renewable energy business.
- Utilise the support provided through Local Energy Scotland.
- Engage professional advice, as required.
- Development of a community action plan.
- If applicable, devise a strategy to effectively administer and manage a fund.
- Submit community benefits details to Scottish Register of Community Benefits from Renewables, or contact Local Energy Scotland to assist.

#### **Renewable energy businesses and/or their agents**

- Establish geographical boundary for proposed benefit.
- Recognise local level capacity.
- Engage in early discussion openly.
- Engage in effective local consultation on any proposed community benefits.
- Appoint a single, key point of contact.

- Continue discussions post-consultation with community, as required.
- If applicable, utilise the support provided through Local Energy Scotland.
- Submit community benefits details to Scottish Register of Community Benefits from Renewables or contact Local Energy Scotland to assist.

**PREVIOUS**[Executive Summary](#)**NEXT**[Community – Consultation and Identification](#)

## Contact

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