

INTRODUCTION

The Community Renewable Energy Event and Exhibition aimed to provide advice and ideas to community groups who would like to generate renewable energy for community income or take action against climate change within their communities - but don't know where to start. The workshop provided plenty of information and also opportunities for networking, interactive sessions and feedback.

Presentations covered:

- Feed in Tariff and Securing Funding
- Renewable Technologies – wind, hydro, PV, biomass, solar thermal, AD
- Planning and Permits – what you will need to do
- Support Available – advice, funding, technical support
- Case Studies – communities who are already active and lessons learned

The event also included Workshops/Interactive/Q&A - sessions to get feedback on the community schemes happening in Wales and the barriers to them.

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SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The event started with a range of presentations putting community renewable energy into context within European (ENNEREG), UK, Welsh Assembly Government and Local Government policies. The drivers, funding and support for community scale RE in Wales were presented. This was followed by an interactive workshop where delegates had the opportunity to share information about the schemes they were interested in developing, the barriers they have found to their progress and the beneficial support and advice they have received. The main conclusion from this was that the advice, funding and technical support existed and was good but that it was too disjointed - a one-stop-shop for this service is needed. In the afternoon delegates chose between attending more detailed talks on specific RE technologies, having a one-to-one advice session with an RE expert or visiting the exhibitions.

Overall people felt that the event was good to excellent. The vast majority felt that the pace and content were about right and everyone who replied felt that they had learned something that they will be able to apply to some or a great extent. At future events the organisers will attempt to allow for more group discussion and a wider questions and answers session.

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SUMMARY OF QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

(from 39 Completed and returned forms)

YOUR COMMUNITY GROUP HAS A GENERAL INTEREST IN:	Current Interest	Future Interest	Total Interest	Residential	Large Scale	Micro <50kW
1. Hydro	18	13	31	2	5	5
2. Wind	15	16	31	2	7	2
3. Anaerobic Digestion	5	14	19	1	3	2
4. Biomass	7	10	17		1	
5. Community Building/s – Electric (PV)	11	10	21	6	1	4
6. Community Building/s – Heating (Air source pumps, Ground source heat pumps, Biomass)	12	15	27	4		2

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

(from both the completed forms and Post-It notes)

Negatives - Problems or barriers encountered

- Too many sources of advice – lack of a one-stop shop
- Need for impartial independent advice
- Lack of Grants, Clean money and funding advice
- Confusion over state aid – FITs and Grants – also level of *de minimus* too low
- Time – to process all the information, apply for various permits etc.
- Biomass – fuel supply issues and quality control
- Planning - should be more exemptions, better understanding, lack of expertise
- MCS accreditation – lack of guidance on suppliers, confusion with hydro schemes
- Permits - lack of coordination between consenting bodies and statutory consultees
- Conflicts on conservation areas and other environmental land designations
- Community engagement difficult and poor reactions to proposed schemes – lack of education
- Landowner Agreements and Public Liability

Positives – Anything that is useful/helpful e.g. support, funding or advice received

- Advice and Support from non-government bodies – Energy Agencies, Planed, GLASU, Wales Co-op, Eco-Centres, CAT etc.
- Technical Support and funding through Ynni'r Fro
- Good advice from accredited installers and consultants is available – lots of expertise out there
- Higher education options and courses on renewable energy
- Local Authority Support and initiatives e.g. Wrexham, Powys and Monmouthshire
- Wider Political Leadership – WAG policies and drivers, FITs, RHI , WAG planning policy and building regs
- Plenty of passionate and enthusiastic people, lots of good advice, good workshops

Suggestions for support needed, advice, funding ideas etc...

- Standard documentation available to download such as head of Terms agreements, landowner agreements – easy access and affordable legal assistance
- Checklists for each technology on what community groups will have to do to get each installed
- More local officers to support community projects and provide technical support
- Greater funding for feasibility studies
- Better communication – maybe a one-stop-shop for advice – could be a network or online resource
- Independent help with choosing consultants, installers, equipment
- Assistance to coordinate and link projects – also between LAs and community groups
- Low cost finance for projects compatible with FITS – soft loans, clean money fund
- Remove or reduce planning constraints for Renewables
- Improved systems for Environmental Assessment and Permitting – too expensive and slow
- Central support to projects to provide funding and financial advice

POSSIBLE WAYS FORWARD

It is clear that there is interest and enthusiasm from community groups to deliver large scale projects and not just using the simpler options of PV but also installing more ambitious technologies such as wind and hydro which have a lot more hurdles and take more time. This needs to be driven forward and supported. Many of the barriers revolve around communication of complex processes such as planning and also funding issues but also the need for independent advice for all aspects coming from one-source.

From the positive comments there are clearly already a lot of agencies and public bodies undertaking good work in this field, providing technical support, advice, encouragement and some funding but appears that this is too disjointed. There is a need to unite these bodies, to provide a comprehensive and independent service. This could be hosted by one main agency, or could be a Freephone number that is routed (geographically) to a small number of members of a tight resources network. This will need to include technical advice on legal issues, planning, permissions, technologies, processes, financing and community engagement. In addition there is a need for increased support for schemes at feasibility and preparatory stages and a fund which does not come under state aid rules – clean money or a loan fund. In addition to this central support there was a call for increased numbers of local support officers who can work directly with community groups.

