

Community benefits and engagement: Onshore wind factsheet



What are community benefits?

The onshore wind sector has a long history of engaging with and supporting local communities who host onshore wind through a wide variety of community benefit schemes over a project's lifetime.

These initiatives, which involve the onshore wind industry sharing the rewards of renewable energy development with local communities, are typically called 'community benefits'.



What are the different forms of community benefit?

There are three main forms of community benefit:

- Community Benefit Funds (CBFs)
- Local Electricity Discount Schemes (LEDS)
- Local and shared ownership

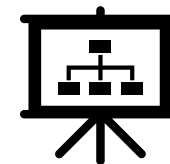
The type of community benefit received varies on the project and the needs of the communities.



Community Benefit Funds (CBFs): CBFs are voluntary financial arrangements between the developer and the community. CBFs allow local communities to make use of long-term, reliable, and flexible funding to directly improve their local area, environment, society, and economy.



Local Electricity Discount Schemes (LEDS): This is an initiative where residents and local businesses who are located near an onshore wind farm can benefit from discounted electricity bills on an annual basis.



Shared ownership: Shared ownership can work in several ways and involves a community forming a group to become a financial partner in a renewable energy project. There are three main models: joint ventures, shared revenue and split ownership.

What do Community Benefit Funds seek to deliver

Community Benefit Funds support communities in many ways. It is important to recognise that there is no one-size fits-all approach as no two communities are the same. Community benefit packages usually take a bespoke approach to each project and its unique make-up.

There are also indirect benefits to communities from hosting onshore wind farms, such as significant tax contributions through business rates to local authorities, apprenticeships, local employment opportunities, and nature enhancements.

Some of the benefits community benefits aim to deliver include:



environmental
benefits



a lasting
legacy



community led
initiatives



social benefits



flexible funding



supporting local
initiatives

What are the benefits to communities?

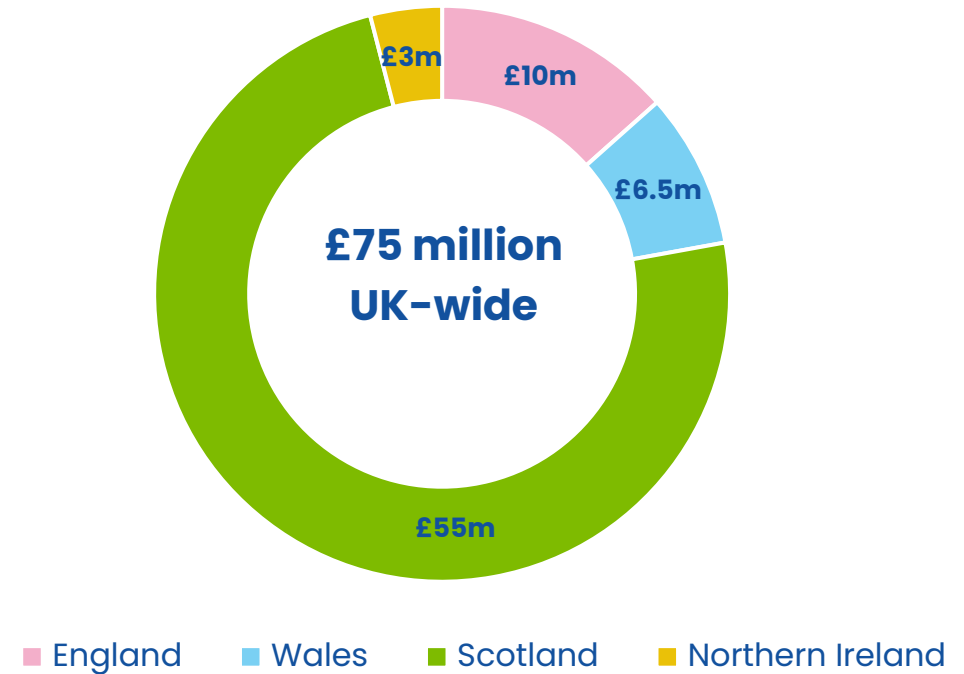
- Community Benefit Funds are popular models that have a proven track record of providing financial benefits to communities.
- Community Benefit Funds offer significant flexibility to communities and can be used to support a wide range of projects. They also provide flexibility on how the funds are delivered so communities can fund what they need when they need it.
- Local Electricity Discount Schemes are one of the most direct forms of community benefit and can provide a clear connection between a local energy project and financial savings for residents.
- Shared ownership can allow a community to feel more involved, which can build support and a legacy for a project.

What are the levels of investment in Community Benefit Funds?

For onshore wind developments alone, **total Community Benefit Fund investment for communities closest to wind farms across the UK is estimated to be around £75 million a year.** This includes over £55 million in Scotland, more than £10 million in England, over £6.5 million a year in Wales, and more than £3 million in Northern Ireland.

Scotland currently has more operational projects resulting in higher levels of community benefits. If the UK reaches its 2030 targets the levels of community benefit available for communities annually will significantly increase across the UK.

Estimated annual Level of Community Benefit from Community Benefit Funds (millions)¹



¹ [RenewableUK Cymru \(2024\) Onshore Wind in Wales: How our sector works with communities](#)

Community engagement

The delivery of community benefits requires effective communication and interaction between developers and the communities that will host an onshore wind project.

At the heart of building meaningful relationships with communities is ensuring that developers are approachable and respectful of their neighbours throughout the lifetime of a project.

Community engagement

Community benefit packages should take a bespoke approach to each project and its unique community.

The ultimate package offered will be based on several factors, informed by consultation and engagement with as broad a range of local stakeholders as possible.



Key elements of community engagement

Consultation

Early engagement between developers and communities is key and is usually initiated after desk-based research and site selection

Engagement activities adopted by the developer should be:

open-ended; time effective; cost-effective where possible and reach the widest possible pool of people in the community.

Good governance

Good governance is a fundamental part of delivering community benefits.

Good governance typically includes:

Providing training for the people managing the fund

Completing due diligence on a project's fund

reporting on how the funding is spent

evaluating projects and reviewing priorities at regular points during the lifetime of the fund

Lasting legacy

Ensuring a lasting legacy from community benefits is at the heart of what makes this approach so unique.

To support legacy building, community benefits typically seek to: support locally run initiatives, encourage community capacity building and

enable community involvement in the decision on how the community will receive the benefits offered in their area.

Community benefit stories

Case study: Community Benefit Fund

ScottishPower Renewables, Lynemouth Wind Farm

Lynemouth Wind Farm is a 13-turbine project capable of generating up to 26 megawatts of electricity. The project is situated approximately two kilometres north of Ashington in the Northeast of England and officially opened in May 2012.

The Lynemouth Wind Farm community benefit fund was utilised to create a community garden on previously derelict land and is an important resource for local school children and other community members to visit, enjoy and learn about Lynemouth. The ScottishPower Renewables community team liaised with Lynemouth Parish Council during the development of the information boards in the garden that tell the story of the birth of this traditional mining village and its evolution towards hosting green energy generation and all the benefits it brings. This has helped create a legacy for Lynemouth as a mining town whilst embracing its new future as being a host to an onshore wind farm and producing green electricity that benefits everyone.



Community benefit stories

Case study: Community Benefit Fund

SSE Renewables Scholarship Programme, Northern Ireland

Providing training and education is crucial for preparing the next generation for skilled jobs. The SSE Renewables Community Benefit Fund Scholarship programme has, over the past decade been instrumental in helping local students pursue their further education goals.

The Scholarship Fund is delivered in partnership with Ulster University, south west College and north west Regional College. The fund provides up to 50% of third-level fees up to a maximum of three years to students living in Co. Derry/Londonderry, Co. Tyrone, Co. Fermanagh, and Co. Donegal.

Over the past decade over 500 scholars have been supported by the fund in courses as diverse as science, engineering and medicine. Once they have graduated the scholars have been the doctors, nurses, and engineers at the heart of Northern Ireland's communities, who are vital to our economy.



Community benefit stories

Case study: Local Electricity Discount Scheme (LEDS)

Tallentire Wind Farm (12MW), England. Owned by The Renewables Infrastructure Group (TRIG). Developed, constructed and operated by RES

Tallentire Wind Farm is a 12MW project in Cumbria, England, which became operational in June 2013.

The project, which is owned by TRIG and operated by RES, delivers direct community benefits to the local community via RES' unique Local Electricity Discount Scheme (LEDS) for properties within 2km of the turbines.

The annual discount is index-linked annually. In 2024, eligible properties benefitted from a discount of £145. The project also provides a community benefit fund of £24,000 per year, totalling a community benefit package worth around £60,000 per year.

LEDS provided its first payments directly to households in 2014, once the wind farm was fully operational. Any surplus LEDS funds are used to increase the annual community fund contribution.



Community benefit stories

🔍 Case study: shared ownership

Nadara's local cooperative/BenComs

Over the last 20 years Nadara has provided local communities with the opportunity to invest in some of their UK plants through local cooperative schemes.

Under a cooperative scheme, local people are offered the opportunity to buy a stake in a new plant through a cooperative. Cooperative members then receive an annual return with interest rates linked to the productivity of the plant. Preference for joining the scheme is given to people living close to the projects to maximise the economic benefits to the local community.

This model is being replaced by BenComs, where returns cannot simply go to individuals but have to be reinvested in the local community. Two of Nadara's operating plants already have BenComs instead of Co-ops.

Since 2005 when the model was first applied at the Boyndie Wind Farm, Nadara has created seven cooperatives/BenComs covering eight of their wind farms in Scotland, with approximately 3,600 participating members.

The scheme allows the direct participation of communities in the development and production of local plants, creating greater awareness and confidence in the potential of renewable energy and enabling people to actively participate in the energy transition.



Community benefit stories

🔍 Case study: community engagement

Brechfa Forest Wind Farm, RWE

Brechfa Forest Wind Farm is a 57.4MW project in Carmarthenshire and was commissioned in 2018. The RWE Brechfa Forest Wind Farm Fund was launched in 2018 by RWE and is worth £11 million over the lifetime of the wind farm.

The fund aims to support the communities that neighbour the wind site. With a flexible approach, local knowledge and community support, the Brechfa Fund is transforming lives and proving that community-led initiatives can have a lasting impact.

During the consenting process, RWE engaged with an independent community development consultant to work with the local community to carry out a community profiling exercise. The aim was to raise awareness about the long-term funding opportunity, understand more about the community priorities and aspirations, as well as encouraging the community to build capacity and plan for the arrival of funds. Further consultation by the developer in 2017 provided the opportunity for everyone in the community to have their say and helped shape the structure of the fund.

The CBF is entirely community led with every decision made by a panel of local people who live, work, or donate their time within the wind farm's 6km benefit zone. Their local knowledge is invaluable in making informed choices about what's important for the area.

Applicants are supported and handheld by a locally based fund manager who works for the fund administrator, Antur Cymru an independent, local social enterprise, who was appointed as fund administrator following an open tender process. The fund supports capital projects and revenue funding with several salaried roles benefitting from multi year awards.



Community benefit: useful links

If you are looking to find out more about community benefits in the UK from onshore wind, the links below may be of interest:

Guidance on community benefits:

England

- [Community engagement and benefits from onshore wind developments: good practice guidance for England](#)– this provides best practice principles for developers engaging with communities in England for onshore wind.

Scotland

- [Scottish Government Good Practice Principles for Community Benefits from Onshore Renewable Energy Developments](#)– this provides best practice principles for developers engaging with communities in Scotland for onshore wind.

Community energy:

- [Community Energy England](#)– this site has information about community energy projects. in England
- [Community Energy Scotland](#)– this site has information about community energy projects. in Scotland
- [Local and shared ownership of energy projects: guidance](#)– this guidance is provided by Welsh Government for developers, local communities and decision makers.



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