Working Together to Accelerate Community Energy – 22nd October 2024

Wind workshop 1:

Collated Notes:

These notes cover a workshop and discussion around the process and risks of developing the Ambition Community Energy turbine project and how that has shaped the SIFFFT project.

Key points include:

- The Ambition Community Energy turbine project was financed entirely through debt and a £0.5 million grant, with no equity involved. Extensive due diligence was conducted, but no guarantees were provided—only an assessment of viability using conservative models.
- Developing onshore wind is risky, expensive, and time-consuming. The ACE project took a long time to develop, but Community Power Solutions (the developer) aims to shorten this process to 26 months in future projects (such as is being used in SIFFFT)
- Risk: Planning rejection remains a significant risk and can come after initial spending, highlighting the need for a systematic approach and risk assessment throughout the project.
- SIFFFT is a systematic approach to turbine development used to evaluate risk.
- Ovo: Ovo takes on some project risk by analysing PPA (Power Purchase Agreement) contracts. Their involvement with the ACE project came with a subsidy premium for community projects.
- Market: A PPA currently offers better rates than the Smart Export Guarantee (SEG).
- Financial model: Small turbines are not financially viable for this project. The 4.2MW turbine, similar in height to Glastonbury Tor, required significant upfront development funding of £0.5 million. While costs could potentially be reduced, risks and rising expenses must be accounted for.
- ACE has built-in contingencies for energy price fluctuations.

- Local Jobs: Few local jobs were created, but an Energy Learning Zone is planned to promote local economic benefits.
- Community shares: The team opted against community shares for ACE as they didn't need this form of investment at the time.
- Grid connection: Bristol Energy Cooperative is evaluating the feasibility of a 1MW connection, which is uncertain. Larger turbines are more feasible but time-consuming, while smaller options can be faster. (such South Hams' project have been waiting for a long time for a large turbine - within that time Octopus have put up smaller turbines)
- Community (and LA) engagement: BEN emphasised the importance of engaging communities early to discuss energy use. Large turbines may offer financial benefits for local infrastructure, and local councils could be more receptive than expected.
- Local Authority partnerships are crucial for these types of projects.

Wind workshop 2:

These notes cover a workshop and discussion around the process and risks of developing the Ambition Community Energy turbine project and how that has shaped the SIFFFT project:

- **Community Engagement**: Cara appreciated the emphasis of SIFFFT not just focussing on energy and finance but also on bringing the community together. engagement should reach beyond typical supporters to engage the broader community.
- **Bristol Community Strategy for Energy**: Community energy can address multiple community needs, as seen in examples like Lawrence Weston, which started with small energy projects and workshops. They formed a CIC (Community Interest Company) to ensure local governance and benefits of energy generation remain within the community.
- **Site Selection**: The SIFFFT process was developed to systematically evaluate potential sites before investing, as any site could stop a turbine project. 1MW turbines are not proving financially viable and ties up land for 25 years, especially without subsidies.
- **Energy Local Bridport**: Supports 50 households with smaller turbines and is working well but now without subsidies this would be a harder model.
- **Turbine Size**: Larger turbines (e.g., ACE's 150m, 4.2MW turbine) are more efficient, producing significantly more energy than smaller ones (120m ≈ 2MW).
- **Power Tracing**: This method tailors energy use to community needs, offering potential community benefits. Legal issues, especially with domestic properties, can complicate this process, but once addressed, Power Trace and peer-to-peer trading can be utilised.
- **Skills Gap**: There's a shortage of people upgrading the National Grid, and young people need to be engaged to develop the necessary skills for the energy transition.
- **Governance**: BEN will help SIFFFT communities set up CICs, managing them for the first 1.5 years before handing over governance.

- **Site Issues**: In Somerset, flight paths and soggy ground pose challenges. WECA might explore flood-prone sites that can't be used for housing as potential turbine locations.
- **Local Authority (LA) Relationships**: Collaboration with LAs is essential, but different departments may have conflicting priorities. Farmers and landowners, focused on economic benefits, must also be involved in the conversation as community support is critical for planning.
- **National and Local Issues**: In Wiltshire, LAs are grappling with how to use their assets for climate initiatives, but the national focus on best value over community benefit remains a challenge.

Discussion questions:

- Would you be interested in hosting a wind turbine in your local area?
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- Where are you based, and are you currently working on a wind project?
  - Worked before moratorium identifying sites in Dorset - there are lots of possible sites there.
- How do you feel about engaging your community on the benefits of large wind turbines? What strategies have worked for you?
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- What challenges does your community energy group face in the energy transition and developing onshore wind? Would funding the SIFFFT project in your local authority area help address these and compliment your current activities?

  Lots of groups were keen and some members saying its a no brainer YES.

- How could communicating the benefits of community energy overcome objections to onshore wind?

- How is your local authority supporting community wind projects? Is there local political support for onshore wind at parish council/ward level?

  Mixed experiences

- Would you support a carve out to prioritise for community energy grid connection projects under 10MW by 2030? NB: Current new connection proposals treat all the same with the gate 2 which require 20k per/MW of connection capacity if your do not connect this is forfeit.

We want to raise the reserved capacity for connection from 1MW to 10MW for community energy and remove the 20k per MW proposed bond. This would offer communities a real opportunity to participate in the Energy Transition.

- Would you support a national rollout of the SIFFFT project to identify & develop suitable sites to benefit more communities?

  Lots of groups were keen and some members saying its a no brainer YES.