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The Guide to Community Solar on Council Assets

Overcoming barriers to local authority
and community energy partnerships

Written by Dr. Rachel Coxcoon of Climate Guide
In partnership with Community Energy Pathways,
UK100 and Community Energy England
Funded by the Greater South East Net Zero Hub



Funder: The Greater South East Net Zero Hub

The Greater South East Net Zero Hub is a regional, government-funded initiative that works with local authorities, other public sector organisations, and their stakeholders to support the development and financing of local energy projects.



Project Lead: Community Energy Pathways

An award-winning social enterprise that exclusively works to accelerate growth in the community energy sector through building local skills and capacity, unlocking investment, leading innovation and strengthening collaboration between communities, government, local authorities, and industry partners.



Author: Dr Rachel Coxcoon, Climate Guide

A public sector consultancy led by Dr Rachel Coxcoon offering quantitative and qualitative research, strategic climate change support, and training. Rachel specialises in the political and social dimensions of climate policy, with over 20 years of senior leadership experience in local government and the climate sector.



Project Partner: UK100

A network of ambitious councils led by all political parties working together to tackle climate change, helping local leaders overcome challenges and turn innovation into solutions that work everywhere. From cities to villages, they help communities across the UK create thriving places powered by clean energy — with fresh air to breathe, warm homes to live in, and a healthy natural environment.



Project Partner: Community Energy England

The national voice of the community energy sector, representing organisations from across the community, public, and private sectors all working to put people at the heart of energy system transformation. We work with our members to help create a fair and zero-carbon energy system through the growth of community energy.



Focus – Solar PV on Council Assets

Rationale:

- 'Gateway drug' for community/local authority partnerships
- Prevents 'perfect being the enemy of good'
- Most successful groups built from a similar base
- Offered scope to clarify the procurement approach with current regulations

Who should use this toolkit?

The toolkit is designed to be used by Officers and elected Members of local authorities in England.

If you are a representative of a Community Energy Group, you may also find it useful as a way of familiarising yourself with how local authorities work; indeed, one section of it has been written specifically to help you do that. You may also want to bring this Guide to the attention of any Council Officers and elected Members with whom you are already engaging.

What does the toolkit contain?

The toolkit is split into two parts.

Part 1

Part one contains a set of Decision-Making Templates as outlined to the right. These are written in the register that local authority internal documents use, and have been completed as far as possible to minimise the amount of Officer time needed to create any of these documents from scratch.

Part 2

Part two contains other resources that will help break down the most obvious barriers that you will encounter on the way to getting the Community Solar on Council Assets Strategy adopted at your Council.

• Part 1 - Decision-Making Templates

- Case for Action Briefing Note
- Decision Paper template
- Full Council Motion template
- Community Solar on Council Assets Strategy template

• Part 2 - Barrier-Busting Resources

- Frequently Raised Barriers – detailed guidance addressing the most common questions and concerns about council/community energy collaborations.
- Community Energy and Local Authority Partnership Assessment Framework
- Case Studies of existing community energy/local authority partnerships, highlighting successful outcomes and replication potential under current regulations.
- **How Your Council Works: A Guide for Community Energy Groups.**

Each of these documents is described briefly on the following pages, and the download link can be found at the bottom of each section.

NOTE: target audience is the Local Authority, not the CEG

Focus – Solar PV on Council Assets

Three key barriers:

- **No embedded corporate or senior level commitment to supporting community solar development.** Support, where it can be found, is often limited to staff in non-statutory service areas such as climate teams, sometimes also limited to relatively junior staff in the wider decision-making hierarchy.
- *This resource addresses this point of failure by providing a collection of templates that lead to a Decision Paper, discussed at Cabinet or Full Council, to secure a corporate commitment to supporting the development of Community Solar on Council Assets.*

Focus – Solar PV on Council Assets



Three key barriers:

- **Confusing overlap of responsibilities within the council.** Community energy projects do not fit neatly into the responsibilities of one directorate in a council, and community energy projects stall as they are repeatedly passed between departments.

This resource addresses this point of failure by providing a template Community Solar on Council Assets Strategy, linked to the Decision Paper, which provides a route for assigning responsibilities, milestones and deliverables to move projects along.

Focus – Solar PV on Council Assets



Three key barriers:

- **Uncertainty about appropriate legal & procurement routes.** The fact that most of the more successful projects were established pre-Brexit, and before both the Concession Contracts Regulations of 2016 and the Procurement Act of 2023, means that they do not provide entirely replicable blueprints for the establishment of similar projects today.

This resource addresses this point of failure through outlining a procurement hierarchy that aligns with current regulatory requirements, contrasting this with the successful elements of previous projects.

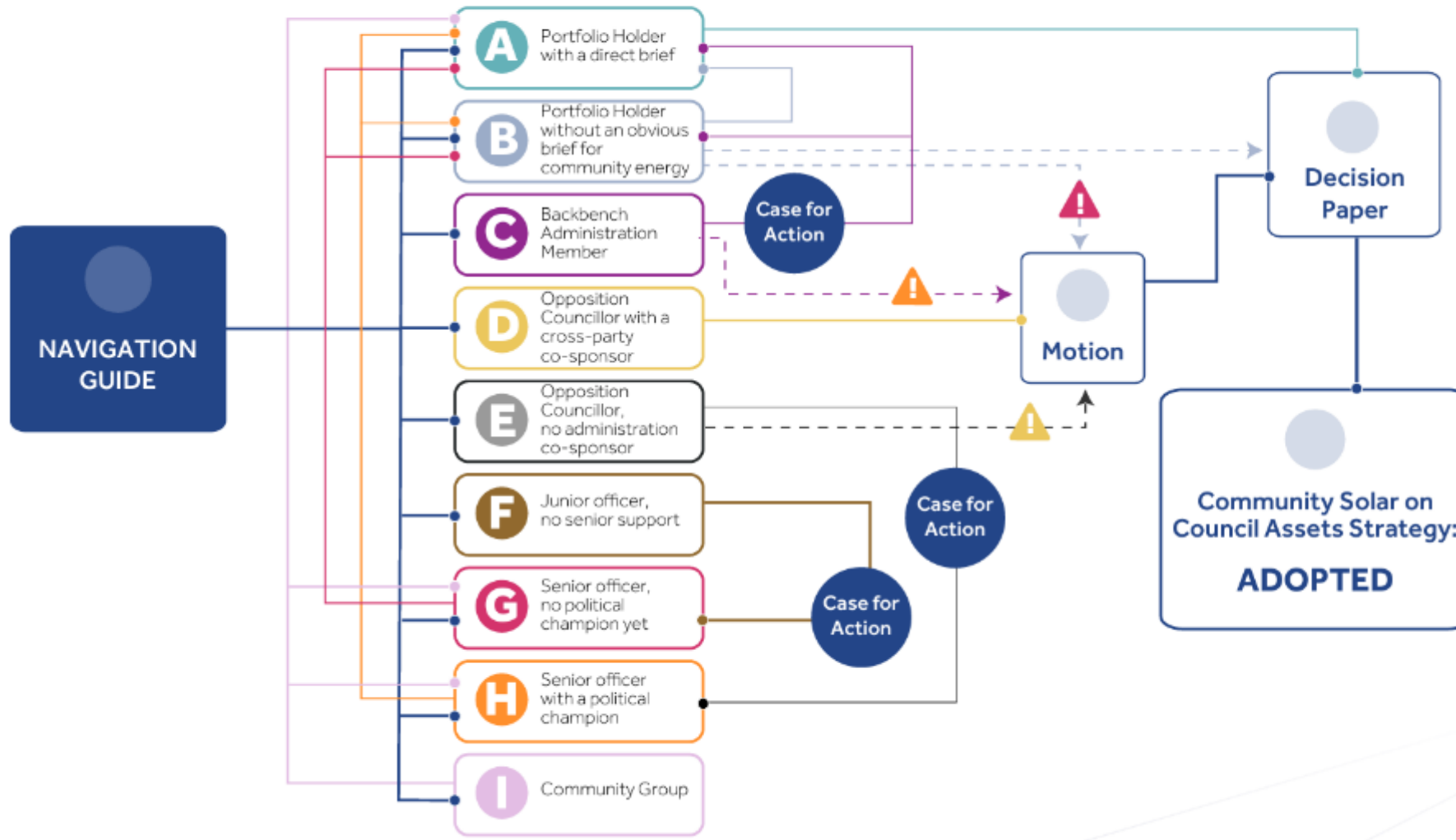
PART 1 – Decision Making

- **Part 1 – Decision-Making Templates**

- Case for Action Briefing Note
- Decision Paper template
- Full Council Motion template
- Community Solar on Council Assets Strategy template

Pathways for different users

Decision-Making Toolkit



Guide assumes local authority users will be officers (both junior and senior) or councillors (both administration and opposition).

Pathways for different users

A **PATHWAY A:**
Portfolio Holder with a direct brief

B
PATHWAY B:
Portfolio Holder
without an obvious brief
for community energy

C
PATHWAY C:
Backbench
Administration Member

D **PATHWAY D:**
Opposition Councillor with a cross-party co-sponsor

E **PATHWAY E:**
Opposition Councillor, no cross-party support



F
PATHWAY F:
Junior Officer, no senior support

G
PATHWAY G:
Senior officer
no political champion yet

H **PATHWAY H:**
Senior officer
with a political champion

I **PATHWAY I:**
Community Energy Group



Example – Decision Paper

Uses Treasury Five-Case business model to create a Strategic Outline Case to be presented at Cabinet/Full Council, to get a Community Solar on Council Assets Strategy adopted.

Pre-populated (approx. 80% of text and argument already made, local details to be added)

Covers Strategic Case, Economic Case, Commercial Case, Financial Case, Management Case

DECISION PAPER

Community Solar Asset Programme: Proposal to adopt the 'Community Solar on Council Assets Strategy', making Council buildings and land available for community-owned solar energy generation

Report to:	Full Council/Cabinet / Portfolio Holder for Climate / Assets / Finance
Date:	TBC
Report author:	Name, Title, Directorate
Classification:	Unrestricted
Key Decision	Yes/No [If Yes, Confirm with Monitoring Officer whether this constitutes a Key Decision and if so, confirm it appeared on the Forward Plan 28 days in advance of meeting.]
Wards affected:	All
Linked documents:	Suggested Appendices to include: Appendix A – Community Solar on Council Assets Strategy Appendix B – Preliminary Asset Assessment Appendix C – Case studies of existing Local Authority-Community Energy partnerships [OTHER APPENDICES AS APPROPRIATE]

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper recommends that **[COUNCIL NAME]** adopts the Community Solar on Council Assets Strategy (**attached as Appendix A if using**) and establishes a programme of work to identify and make available suitable council buildings and land for community energy groups to install solar photovoltaic (PV) arrays.

The Decision Paper is structured as a Strategic Outline Case (SOC) to align with the approach set out in HM Treasury's 'Five-Cases' guide to developing a project business case^{1,2}.

The community route, through which a community energy group raises capital from local investors, installs and maintains the panels, and sells electricity to the council under a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA), delivers four primary benefits:

- No capital expenditure required from the council: all installation and maintenance costs are borne by the community energy group.

Example – Decision Paper

Uses Treasury Five-Case business model to create a Strategic Outline Case to be presented at Cabinet/Full Council, to get a Community Solar on Council Assets Strategy adopted.

Pre-populated (approx. 80% of text and argument already made, local details to be added)

Covers Strategic Case, Economic Case, Commercial Case, Financial Case, Management Case

2.2. Policy and statutory alignment

2.2.1. National policy environment and funding for community energy

Great British Energy (GBE) was established by the Great British Energy Act 2025. Its Local Power Plan (published February 2026) commits up to £1 billion to support over 1,000 local and community energy projects by 2030. The Local Power Plan explicitly identifies local authorities as delivery partners and Councils and community groups will be able to access wrap-around support and funding through their proposed 'Partnership Fund', which is specifically designed to support joint working between Local Authorities and Community Energy Groups (CEGs). Details of the application process and eligibility criteria are planned to be published by GBE in the second half of 2026. **[Check with your local [Net Zero Hub](#) and update these details at the time of drafting].**

Councils that have adopted a proactive strategy, completed an asset assessment, and identified a community energy partner will be best positioned to access the GBE funding when it launches. By contrast, councils without an adopted strategy are likely to be at a material disadvantage.

2.2.2. Statutory powers of the Council to enter into relationships with Community Energy Groups

The council has the power to enter into the arrangements proposed in this Decision Paper under the following provisions:

- **Section 2, Local Government Act 2000 (Well-being Power)**⁷: Provides a broad power to do anything the council considers likely to promote or improve the economic, social or environmental well-being of its area. Granting a lease to a community energy group and entering into a PPA falls within this power.
- **Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011, (General Power of Competence)**⁸: Gives the Council the power to do anything an individual can do, subject to any statutory constraints on the Council's powers. The recommendations in this report are in keeping with the General Power.
- **Section 123, Local Government Act 1972**⁹: Governs disposal of land. While a peppercorn lease to a community energy group may constitute disposal below best consideration, the additional provisions of the **General Disposal Consent (2003)**¹⁰ permits this where the

Example – Decision Paper

Uses Treasury Five-Case business model to create a Strategic Outline Case to be presented at Cabinet/Full Council, to get a Community Solar on Council Assets Strategy adopted.

Pre-populated (approx. 80% of text and argument already made, local details to be added)

Covers Strategic Case, Economic Case, Commercial Case, Financial Case, Management Case

3.1. Options appraisal

3.1.1. Options considered

The following four options have been considered for bringing solar generation onto the Council's estate.

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Option	Description
Option 0 – Do nothing (BAU)	The council takes no action. It continues to pay full retail electricity prices for all council buildings that currently do not have PV. No solar generation is installed. No GBE funding is accessed. Rooftop and land assets remain unproductive for energy.
Option 1 – Council self-installs	The council borrows or draws on reserves to fund the installation of solar PV on its own buildings. It owns the panels, retains all electricity savings and any export revenue, and is responsible for operation and maintenance.
Option 2 – Commercial lease and PPA	The council grants a lease of its rooftops or land to a commercial solar developer. The developer funds, installs and operates the panels and sells electricity to the council under a PPA at a discount to retail tariff. The developer retains ownership of the installation and extracts profit from the arrangement for the company and/or its shareholders.
Option 3 – Community lease and PPA	The council grants a lease of its rooftops or land to a community energy group with an 'asset-locked' legal structure and constitution (see Box 1) ¹⁵ . The community energy group raises the capital from local investors via a community share or bond offer, installs and maintains the panels, and sells electricity to the council at a rate below the current retail tariff. At the end of the lease term the panels transfer to the council at no cost. Financial returns flow to local investors and a Community Benefit Fund, maximising impact on the local economy and wellbeing.

Example – Decision Paper

Uses Treasury Five-Case business model to create a Strategic Outline Case to be presented at Cabinet/Full Council, to get a Community Solar on Council Assets Strategy adopted.

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The Community Solar on Council Assets Strategy (Appendix A) sets out a phased delivery programme. This Decision Paper seeks authority to proceed with all three phases.

The Programme Owner will be **[NAMED LEAD OFFICER]** within the **[NAMED TEAM OR DIRECTORATE]**. The Programme Owner is tasked with coordinating the work of the named teams in the table below to ensure that the phases are delivered in a timely fashion. **[INSERT MILESTONE DATES IN TABLE BELOW AND ENSURE THEY ARE REPLICATED IN THE STRATEGY DOCUMENT]**

Phase	Milestone	Lead Team	Target date
Phase 1: Enabling	GBE Expression of Interest submitted	Lead officer	Recommend not more than 6 weeks from adoption of strategy
Phase 1: Enabling	Asset assessment to identify suitable buildings and land	Estates	[FIXED DATE or X months from adoption of strategy]
Phase 1: Enabling	Community energy partner identified and due diligence completed	Sustainability / Procurement	[FIXED DATE or X months from adoption of strategy]

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Phase 1: Enabling	Legal and Procurement team review of proposed lease and PPA terms	Legal/Procurement	[FIXED DATE or X months from adoption of strategy]
Phase 1: Enabling	Strategy embedded in Corporate Plan and Forward Plan	Chief Executive's office	[FIXED DATE or X months from adoption of strategy]
Phase 2: Pilot	Pilot site selected from suitability assessment	Estates	[FIXED DATE or X months from completion of asset assessment]
Phase 2: Pilot	First lease heads of terms agreed	Legal/Estates	[FIXED DATE or X months from completion of asset assessment]
Phase 2: Pilot	First PPA agreed and	Legal/Estates	[FIXED DATE or X months

Why so detailed?

Community Energy projects are a win-win-win – councils who have supported them have recouped their investments many times over. So why aren't they replicated more?

- Structural/political barriers within different authorities, particularly in relation to risk?
- Limited officer capacity (especially in smaller authorities), and especially with LGR
- Changes to regulatory regimes lead to 'going round in circles' when trying to replicate – *"can't get there from here anymore"*.
- 'Category error' objections lead to the idea dying within the council – conflating project-specific barriers with strategic level support (see FRB document...)

The exceptions that don't make a rule



Early successful groups have relied on arrangements that may seem risky to a council starting now, which may explain why other councils investigate, but won't replicate:

Co-operation Agreement – **BWCE/B&NES** – offers an excellent way to publicly state a commitment, but did not need to align with the new reality of 'Concession Contracts' or post-Brexit Subsidy Controls

Plymouth – PEC established as a spin out of the council, staff seconded via an SLA. Highly embedded route remains quite unusual.

North Lincs – amazing example of one-off proof of market failure, and a clever and strategic use of Towns Fund grant to make finances stack up. But not easily replicable elsewhere.

PART 2 – Barrier Busting

PART 2: Barrier-Busting Resources

“It is such an impressive and helpful suite of documents, and so welcome to have this come from and rooted in the LA perspective. It is literally a plug and play! I also really like the way you've managed to convey benefits in a neutral way emphasising the efficient use of resources - I think that's a helpful discipline in any Council, but obviously particularly important at the moment.” - A Council Leader at a District Council

• Frequently Raised Barriers

As part of the development of these resources, attendees at a range of conferences, workshops and webinars were asked to provide information on the barriers that have prevented them from making progress on community energy projects in their area. Participants included community energy representatives, local authority officers, and local authority councillors. Their comments were synthesised into strategic and project level barriers, covering a range of issues from limited staff resource, poor understanding of community energy, legal, procurement, LGR, planning and building related issues. These are grouped and addressed in this Frequently Raised Barriers section to help you respond to these as comprehensively as possible.

[DOWNLOAD HERE](#)

• Community Energy and Local Authority Partnership Assessment Framework

This checklist will help you determine whether the community energy groups you are engaging with have the right structure, skills and incorporated form to help you achieve the proposals in the Community Solar on Council Assets Strategy.

It will also help to inform any Pre-Qualification Questionnaire or Market Engagement process you prepare as part of procuring community energy delivery partners.

[DOWNLOAD HERE](#)

• Case Studies of existing community energy schemes

Council partnership in the early stages has been a key contributing factor to the longer-term success of some of the UK's most well-known Community Energy Organisations. The Case Studies section illustrate both the successes that come from such foundational support, but also how their founding principles differ from the path a Council might need to take now.

[DOWNLOAD HERE](#)

• How Your Council Works: A Guide for Community Energy Groups

This is a separate document you can give to Community Energy Groups who are keen to engage with your Council but who you feel need information on the realities of how a local authority functions. It also contains an appendix describing school types, since schools are often a target site for community solar projects, and the ownership and sub-lease complexities created by the mix of maintained schools, academy schools, faith schools etc. are not immediately apparent to community groups looking to work with schools through the Council.

[DOWNLOAD HERE](#)

Frequently Raised Barriers



Community Solar on Council Assets:

FREQUENTLY RAISED BARRIERS



Issues and concerns that are frequently raised when the concept of a community solar installation on Council land or buildings is proposed.

How do we know what the barriers are?

The project team undertook a series of conferences, workshops and webinars to challenge, test and develop their understanding of the barriers being experienced by the community energy sector when working with local authorities. Participants were asked to brainstorm the types of barriers that have been raised with them, and which have prevented them from making progress on community energy projects in their area. Participants included community energy representatives, local authority Officers, and local authority Councillors.

Frequently Raised Barriers

Contents



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 - 2.2. Council self-installation of solar PV as an alternative to the community model
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 - 2.4. Concerns about liabilities for assets
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3. Legal and Procurement barriers
 - 3.1. Legal and procurement elements of community solar projects on Council assets
 - 3.2. Concerns about leases
 - 3.3. Concerns about Power Purchase Agreements
 - 3.4. Concerns about appropriate procurement approaches
 - 3.4.1. Route 1: Below-threshold Direct Award via Contract Standing Order waiver
 - 3.4.2. Route 2: Below-threshold Invited Tender with prior market engagement
 - 3.4.3. Route 3: Above-threshold competitive tender with detailed outcome requirements and contract performance conditions
 - 3.5. Splitting lots to stay below Procurement Act 2023 thresholds
4. Project-level barriers
 - 4.1. Barriers relating to individual building characteristics
 - 4.2. Barriers relating to buildings that the council owns but does not occupy directly
5. Are you asking the right question?

Frequently Raised Barriers

2. Strategic-level barriers

2.1. Lack of resource as a 'meta-barrier'

2.2. Council self-installation of solar PV as an alternative to the community model

2.3. Poor understanding of the concept of Community Energy

2.4. Concerns about liabilities for assets

2.5. Concerns about what Councils can commit to during LGR

Frequently Raised Barriers

3. Legal and Procurement barriers

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3.5. Splitting lots to stay below Procurement Act 2023 thresholds

One size fits all for procurement?



Barrier busting element includes guidance on Procurement routes that hopefully work for *all* councils.

Takes the position that most CE arrangements where council purchases the energy are now very likely to be a **Concession Contract** under the **Procurement Act 2023**, (because the community group has the right to exploit the council's land/building, but carries the operating and financial risk).

- below-threshold, direct-award procurements,
- below threshold, invited tender following market engagement
- above-threshold full procurement using pre-qualification questionnaires and contract terms that require specific provisions on asset transfers and community benefit purposes.

Note an individual site 'bare lease' may allow for non-procured arrangements. Unlikely to be suitable for anything strategic. Council intent will be an important part of judgement. Legal advice vital!!!

4.2. Barriers relating to buildings that the council owns but does not occupy directly

However, where a community group building of interest, it is sometimes model will fund the cost of the survey establish whether the roof can bear installation and to inform the mould that in some circumstances, the work in any case.

It is also relevant that the planning policy context has shifted in recent years. The 2023 update of the National Planning Policy Framework provided, for the first time, a meaningful rebalancing of where weight should be applied when determining energy efficiency and renewable energy projects on heritage buildings. This paragraph (renumbered to Para 167 in the 2024 NPPF) now requires planning authorities to give significant weight to the need to support renewable and low carbon energy, and this consideration must be balanced against heritage protection rather than automatically subordinated to it.

mon constraint for some roof types, especially flat roofs. Sealed membranes that must not be punctured may indeed permanently exclude a penetrating system. However, in other cases there are penetrating systems (where penetration is not a problem) that are more than by penetrating systems. "This building has a lot of them" warranties.

Commercial energy supply contracts can legally contain minimum offtake clauses, where the contract for supply will have been established on the assumption that a minimum kWh per annum will be required, with the unit price set accordingly. This may therefore affect the prioritisation of some buildings, but it is not a technical barrier to installing solar PV in the long run on an otherwise suitable building. A building currently in the early years of a contract with minimum offtake provisions and no imminent break clauses may have to be deprioritised for installation as part of a community solar scheme, but it may well be eligible for renewal at which point it would be possible to install solar PV.

For buildings where the Council funds the occupier's running costs (and schools being the most obvious example) the saving flows to the Council indirectly and clearly allows for school budgets to be managed more efficiently. For commercially tenanted buildings where the Council has no direct interest in the building, the occupier's energy costs, there is a direct financial benefit to the occupier. These include asset depreciation and the longer-term

are domestic
s to exercise their
strict Council case
ts simply allow
ing arrangement
right, or to have the
a substantive issue

How does it relate to Partnership Grant?



Details on the ongoing design of the Partnership Fund were not made available to the Hubs while this guidance was being developed.

BUT....

Now that the fund has launched, Stage 1 funding seems to be suitable for many of the tasks outlined in the Decision Paper/Strategy.



5.1.3. Officer time and resource costs

The principal commitment of the Council is for Officer time to ensure the Strategy can be delivered. This will need to be resourced from a range of different teams, as detailed below.

Task	Estimated day allocation	Lead officer
Officer time for Local Partnership Grant application submission	[X days]	[TBC]
Building and land suitability assessment	[X days]	[TBC]
Legal assessment and opinion	[X days]	[TBC]
Procurement assessment and selection of preferred procurement route	[X days]	[TBC]
Community energy group due diligence and selection	[X days]	[TBC]
Confirmation of procurement route based on selected community energy partners	[X days]	[TBC]
Lease and PPA negotiation and execution	[X days]	[TBC]
Ongoing programme management (per year, once operational)	[X days/yr]	[TBC]

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6.1. Programme Milestones

Phase	Mile-stone	Description	Lead Team	Target date
Phase 1: Enabling	1	GBE Expression of Interest submitted	Programme Lead Officer	Recommend not more than 6 weeks from adoption of strategy
Phase 1: Enabling	2	Asset assessment to identify suitable buildings and land, to include engagement with DfE on their <u>schools</u> solar pilot, and template PPA and lease approach ¹	Estates	[FIXED DATE or X months from adoption of strategy]
Phase 1: Enabling	3	Community energy partner identified and due diligence completed	Sustainability / Procurement	[FIXED DATE or X months from adoption of strategy]
Phase 1: Enabling	4	Legal and Procurement team review of proposed lease and PPA terms	Legal/Procurement	[FIXED DATE or X months from adoption of strategy]
Phase 1: Enabling	5	Strategy embedded in Corporate Plan and Forward Plan	Chief Executive's office	[FIXED DATE or X months from adoption of strategy]
Phase 2: Pilot	6	Pilot site selected from suitability assessment	Estates	[FIXED DATE or X months from completion of asset assessment]
Phase 2: Pilot	7	First lease heads of terms agreed	Legal/Estates	[FIXED DATE or X months from completion of asset

How does it relate to Partnership Grant?



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5. Council commitments under this Strategy	11
5.1. Phase 1: Enabling	11
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5.1.3. Community Energy partner identification	12
5.1.4. Legal and Procurement framework established.....	12
5.1.5. Adoption into the Council's Corporate Strategy and Forward Plan.....	12

Local Authorities must apply either with an existing community partner or use funding to identify and establish a suitable community partner during Stage 1. The Local Authority

Where a community organisation partner has not yet been identified, applicants must provide:

- a clear and time bound process for identifying and selecting an eligible community organisation;
- the proposed roles of the lead applicant and community partner;
- the proposed governance and decision-making arrangements; and
- a project milestone requiring a written partnership agreement, Memorandum of Understanding, Heads of Terms or equivalent document to be completed by the end of Stage 1.

How does it relate to Partnership Grant?



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BUT....

Now that the fund has launched, Stage 1 funding seems to be suitable for many of the tasks outlined in the Decision Paper/Strategy.

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For both Stage 1 and Stage 2 applications, a Local Authority must identify a local energy project opportunity or project concept and explain how the proposed activities will assess its technical, commercial, governance or delivery feasibility. Applications must demonstrate that the opportunity is credible and capable of meaningful assessment through the activities proposed.

Partnership Assessment Framework

Designed to help keen officers/councillors show their less enthusiastic colleagues in procurement/estates/finance that there are community energy groups in their area that meet (or can meet) all the characteristics needed for a low risk partnership.

Works both ways!

Contents

1. Introduction
2. **Community Energy Organisation Assessment**
 - 2.1. Legal status and asset lock
 - 2.2. Governance and insurance.....
 - 2.3. Financial management.....
 - 2.4. Organisational capacity and track record
 - 2.5. Long-term organisational stability.....
3. **Local Authority Assessment**
 - 3.1. Executive-level Mandate
 - 3.2. Officer Responsibilities

Where to get the resources?

- Officially, Net Zero Go, but needs a local authority login:
<https://netzerogo.org.uk/resources/guide-to-community-solar-on-council-assets/>
- Or here, if you don't have one! <https://tinyurl.com/Climate-Guide-download>

Thank you!

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Q&A