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# **Community Support to Deploying Renewable Energy Projects in the Liverpool City Region**

## **Final report**

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## 1 Introduction

In February 2011, the Merseyside Environmental Advisory Service (MEAS) c/o Sefton Council commissioned the Energy Saving Trust to deliver 'Community Support to Deploying Renewable Energy Projects in the Liverpool City Region' by the end of June 2011 as part of the Climate Change Skills Fund (CCSF) sub-regional programme 'Low Carbon Legacies for the Liverpool City Region' (to be referred to hereon in as the LCR CCSF programme). For the purposes of this report, any reference to LCR should be taken as including the Councils of Liverpool, Wirral, Knowsley, St.Helens, Sefton and Halton.

This final report summarises the revised brief, our approach and deliverables, together with the findings from community engagement regarding (which technologies are being consider, what triggers are incentivising community groups and what are the barriers facing community groups) and finishing with a set of recommendations for LCR stakeholders going forward to continue the legacy of this activity.

## 2 The brief

In January 2011, the original aim of the brief was for the Energy Saving Trust to support the increase in uptake of and number of appropriate renewable energy schemes receiving planning permission in the LCR. This would have been delivered by the Energy Saving Trust providing a mentoring role for community groups and local authority officers to support community and planning department engagement and 'built-to-last' delivery capacity and skills.

In April 2011, following the finalisation of the pan-regional work programme by North West Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (NWIEP), LCR identified that elements of the planned LCR CCSF programme would duplicate elements of the planned pan-regional CCSFS programme. Consequently, with agreement from MEAS, the aim of the brief was revised to increase the level of direct engagement with community groups. The Energy Saving Trust re-focused their activity to provide creative, effective, bespoke support to community groups interested in installing renewable technology across LCR. This form of support was not available under the CCSF pan-regional programme and therefore complimented the entire regional CCSF activity and allowed more focus to be placed on identifying what triggers and barriers exist for community groups interested in renewable energy schemes.

The final deliverables, with apportionment of resource allocation (%) were as follows:

- Enhancing community knowledge and confidence with renewable energy technology and the planning system across the Liverpool city region (LCR) (77%)
- Project management and reporting to MEAS (12%)
- Supporting the dissemination of the wider LCR CCSF work programme (4%)
- Providing funding options for shaping low carbon services in the LCR (4%)
- Supporting the creation of a LCR knowledge hub (3%)

This report focuses on the outputs from 'Enhancing community knowledge and confidence with renewable energy technology and the planning system across the Liverpool city region' deliverable. The outputs from as the other deliverables are captured in separate reports and/or under other LCR CCSF activity. This report forms part of a suite of final reporting for the brief as follows:

1. **Final report**
2. **Project capture** (see accompanying document)
3. **Joining up community support outputs with energy infrastructure project mapping report** (see accompanying document)

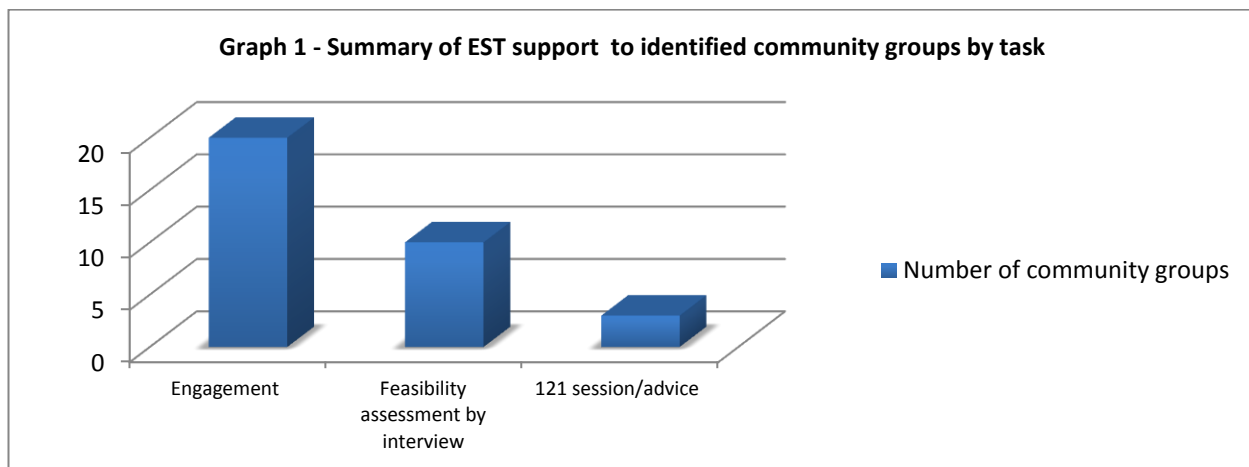
### 3 The approach

In order to successfully deliver enhanced community knowledge and confidence with renewable energy technology and the planning system across the LCR, the Energy Saving Trust broke the activity into the following tasks:

1. **Identification of community groups** active or expressing an interest in LCR by working with Local Authorities, Primary Care Trusts, Housing Associations, Councillors and Primary Care Trusts.
2. **Engagement with identified community groups** to determine status, and gain agreement for involvement in the programme and if appropriate feasibility assessment interview.
3. **Feasibility assessment interview** with engaged community groups to develop a better knowledge of triggers incentivising and barriers preventing take up of renewable projects at community scale.
4. **One to one advice sessions** with community groups that identified 'live' renewable energy projects which required assistance to move the project to the next stage.

### 4 The results

The Energy Saving Trust worked with nearly 60 LCR stakeholders to identify 21 community groups, half of whom agreed to a feasibility assessment interview and 3 went on to receive one to one advice (see Graph 1 for a summary of Energy Saving Trust support split by level of engagement).



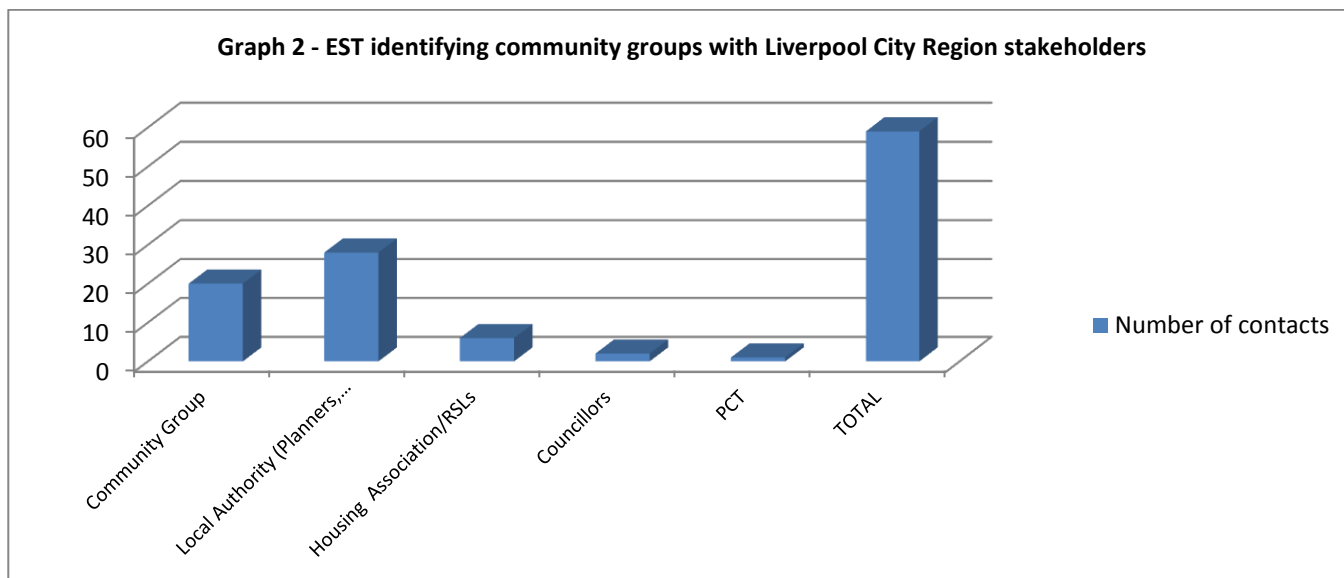
#### Identification of community groups

Contact was made with officers with a climate change, planning, fuel poverty, inward investment and carbon reduction remit to ensure the identification process was extensive as possible.

Following introductions from local authorities', engagement was made with a number of elected members, both within the local authority and also across parish councils. The Councillors confirmed the installation of renewable energy technology in community buildings and their support for future collaborative partnerships. They suggested that they could provide support in the form of signposting to

a source of free impartial advice and encouraging community groups to open up their facilities to other interested groups in order to demonstrate what could be achieved by others.

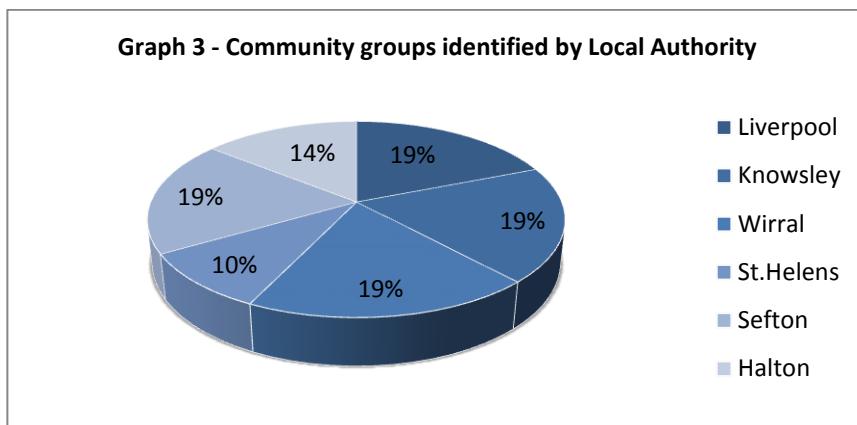
**In total the Energy Saving Trust worked with nearly 60 LCR stakeholders and identified 21 community groups** (see Graph 2 for the breakdown by stakeholder category and table 1 for a list).



<b>Table 1 – List and location of community groups engaged</b>	
<b>Community Group</b>	<b>Local Authority area</b>
1. The Avenue Neighbourhood Network	Liverpool
2. Furniture Resource Centre	
3. Rice Lane Community Association	
4. Lister Drive Allotment Society	
5. The Old Schoolhouse	Knowsley
6. Bowering Green Neighbourhood Group	
7. Stockbridge Allotment Society	
8. Knowsley Allotment Group	
9. Communiversity	Halton
10. Chapelfields Community Centre	
11. LOOSE	
12. St Marys	
13. Transition Southport	Sefton
14. Lydiate Parish Council	
15. Maghull Town Hall	
16. Formby Parish Council	
17. Transition Town West Kirby	Wirral
18. Transition Town Eastham	
19. Liscard Community Facilities	
20. Port Sunlight	
21. Ashtons Green Allotment Group	St.Helens

Engagement with identified community groups

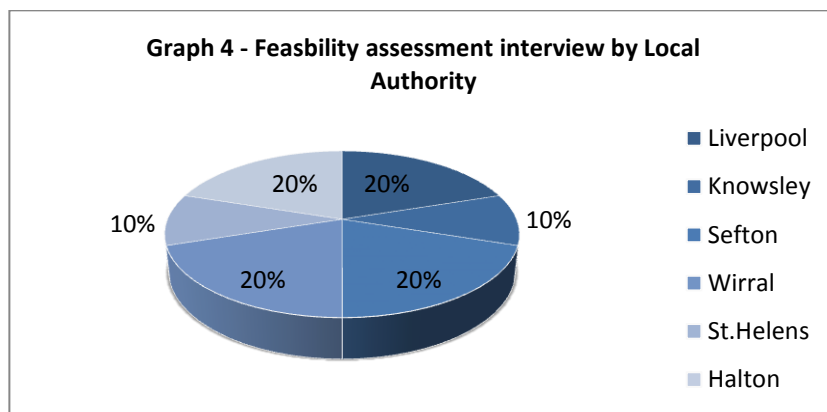
The **21 community groups identified** included Parish Councils, allotment groups, transition towns, local authority lead groups, community centres, faith groups, schools and a dance studio. The spread of the community groups across the 6 local authorities in LCR was roughly even (see Graph 3 for a breakdown by local authority).



All 21 community groups were consulted to gain a greater understanding of their current activity and future ambitions. At this point it became apparent that a number of community groups had undertaken projects independently or with some support from their respective councils. Community groups who had installed a renewable technology already stated that they felt able to continue activity without assistance but were keen to be kept on a distribution list, informed of potential funding sources, offered to be put in contact with other community groups aspiring to install renewable technologies and use of their building as a meeting point. Of the 21 community groups identified 10 agreed to take part in a feasibility assessment interview.

Feasibility assessment interviews

The purpose of the **10 interviews** was to collect knowledge on the community groups’ experiences to identify common triggers and barriers to delivery. Each telephone interview followed a standard pro-forma to ensure consistency, to capture the knowledge and enable themes and trends to be spotted and compared. There was at least one community group interview across the 6 local authorities in LCR (see Graph 4 for a breakdown by local authority). The interviews resulted in 3 community groups requiring one to one advice sessions delivered by the Energy Saving Trust face to face in their local community.



One to one advice sessions

The decision on which **3 community groups** received one to one support was based on a number of factors including the:

- request for further support concerning a ‘real’ renewable energy proposal
- spread of different technologies to ensure maximum lessons learnt across the LCR
- spread of locations to ensure maximum lessons learnt across the LCR
- resource available
- Energy Saving Trust offer to provide one additional session after the closure of the programme at no extra cost to a community group requiring energy efficiency advice.

The advice provided by the Energy Saving Trust focused on understanding and overcoming barriers which the community groups highlighted (such as accessing funding, lack of capacity, lack of knowledge, verifying advice from local authorities and advice for conservation areas). For more detail on the advice provided go to section 7. The following groups received face to face advice:

1. The Avenue Neighbourhood Network (TANN) – located in the Liverpool area
2. Ashtons Green Allotment Society – located in the St Helens area
3. St Marys Community Group – located in the Halton area

The Energy Saving Trust provided additional advice following the one to one session at no extra cost. The follow up advice was the result of the community group seeking specific help on issues such as signposting and providing contact details for successful projects and attended a community steering group meeting. The following group will receive face to face advice on energy efficiency, leading to renewable energy is:

1. Bowering Green Neighbourhood Group – located in the Knowsley area

More information on the engagement and individual projects/groups is available in the project capture document for the attention of Local Authority officers. For a copy email ... [xxx@sefton.gov.uk](mailto:xxx@sefton.gov.uk)

## 5 Triggers incentivising community groups

Through the consultation and interview process the following generic themes emerged as potential triggers incentivising community groups to install renewable technologies.

Trigger	Generic Themes
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Government incentives:</b> the introduction of the Feed in Tariff and Renewable Heat Incentive was cited by all community groups as a significant driver and long term form of guaranteed income.</li> <li>• <b>Increasing operational costs:</b> non-renewable energy operating costs have increased over time and with less resource available at local level overheads and operational costs are having significant impact on services.</li> <li>• <b>Rent your roof schemes:</b> many community groups have become aware of private sector offers to install solar photovoltaics on community and domestic buildings. Many groups are sceptical of the offers and have decided to wait for more guidance to become available (Energy Saving Trust <a href="#">Consumer Guidance on free solar</a> offers provided where appropriate). Many have contacted local authority officers to discuss such schemes but none involved in this project have taken up the offers to date.</li> <li>• <b>Integration of renewable technology in planned maintenance cycles:</b> some groups</li> </ul>

	highlighted potential to install biomass boilers when existing units are due for replacement and potential to include solar photovoltaics in any maintenance work on buildings.
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Environmental concerns:</b> When speaking to groups it was common that they considered it important to 'do their bit' and make a statement to the wider community/neighbourhood. This is particularly relevant in groups where money was not a key driver e.g. Allotment Associations.</li> </ul>
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Interest from local schools:</b> some groups identified that they have worked with schools in their local areas and are interesting in developing these links going forward.</li> </ul>
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Generate income to support other activities:</b> maximising the use of community buildings was identified as important by all groups that own or use a community building. The prospect of making money as well as generating their own energy was considered a bonus but making the building more profitable would enable groups to have more flexible use of facilities and savings can be invested for the benefit of wider community members and local residents.</li> </ul>

## 6 Renewable technologies being considered

Through the consultation and interview process the following common themes regarding which renewable technologies are being considered by community groups is as follows:

- **Solar photovoltaics** – this technology was identified as the most accessible and 'realistic' option for community groups. They also considered it to be the most appealing to wider audience as they can incorporate energy monitors and demonstrate savings to people using the facilities.
- **Wind turbines** – due to some successful installations in LCR some community groups (particularly allotment groups) identified that wind turbines were a viable option and considered to be a good statement of intent which clearly demonstrates commitment to wider community and attracts interest from other groups. Potentially leading to increased use of facilities generating further income.
- **Biomass boilers** – this technology has not been considered by any of the groups engaged in the process. The Energy Saving Trust identified during one to one advice sessions that if a community group was replacing boilers through planned maintenance cycles biomass solutions should be considered. Groups were not aware of the potential supply available from Mersey Forrest and were very interested to hear that this was a viable heating solution for LCR community groups.

## 7 Barriers facing community groups

Throughout the consultation, interviews and one-to-one sessions community groups were asked to identify barriers to delivering community scale renewable energy projects from their personal experiences. Community groups were then provided with advice and recommendations on how to address those barriers. The following themes emerged:

Barrier	Impact on renewable energy projects	Energy Saving Trust recommended action
<p><b>Accessing funding opportunities:</b> A lack of confidence in their ability to complete funding bids and identifying new sources of funding.</p>	<p>Missed opportunity to access funding and reduce costs - Limited knowledge of funding sources available were highlighted as significant barrier, but more importantly groups felt that it was not wise to bid for funds they did not fully understand as they were concerned that this may have a negative impact on future bids.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that all funding sources are identified by groups – recommended that individual within group is identified to keep up to date with funding opportunities and proactively researches opportunities.</li> <li>• Provided advice and identified potential funding sources in order that at least one group member feels confident in producing a concise expression of interest.</li> <li>• Assisted expressions of interest in the British Gas fund <a href="#">Energy Share</a> (entries closed on 31<sup>st</sup> June).</li> <li>• A ‘vision’ template was developed and provided to groups as appropriate. The template encourages groups to identify long term objectives and generate interest from wider group members and try to get quotes from councillors or local leaders. The vision also provides a good basis for any emerging funding bids.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Lack of capacity within community groups</b> identified as significant barrier to delivery.</p>	<p>Groups stated that in many cases there was one champion (generally current or retired engineers) of renewable energy. Given the limited time available meant that progress was often slow.</p> <p>Where community buildings did have full time resource the lead contact expressed interest but lacked the technical knowledge to progress ideas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skills audit of existing members was recommended as an easy first step. Active members identify what experience they have or skills they are willing to develop and take responsibility different steps of process to instillation.</li> <li>• Producing a clear route to delivery will also enable community groups to understand the process and manage expectations about the potential longevity of projects.</li> <li>• Diversify membership of the group to bring people with different skills and experience on board by promoting ideas to wider audience.</li> <li>• Identified the potential role of local University students. Many of them may have skills and capacity to assist and may be willing to provide some support to enhance their CVs on a voluntary basis.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Lack of knowledge and materials available to develop projects passed concept stage.</b></p>	<p>Skills gap - presentation materials and case studies highlighted as a potential gap required to help community leads communicate to wider members and residents.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pan regional materials (insert web link when available) developed by Energy Saving Trust include Factsheets, Case Studies, Presentation materials and checklists which can help a community group understand the process and identify milestones which will help communication and manage expectations.</li> <li>• Department for Energy and Climate Change <a href="#">Plan Local</a> materials include videos which can be viewed by community groups together and help develop an action plan.</li> <li>• <a href="#">Energy Saving Trust Green Community</a> resources were well received, in particular the funding advice and case studies due to the wide variety of technologies and community groups involved in delivering projects.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Lack of understanding of the process required</b></p>	<p>Delays and demotivation for members involved - confusion and misconceptions about the process required to deliver a community scale project</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The wealth of materials now available were referred to as a great starting point for communities and this will enable them to understand the process and therefore manage expectations.</li> <li>• The Toolkit developed at Pan Regional level contains a detailed project ‘checklist’ which will guide group through each step and advice how to make progress at every stage of delivery.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Varying responses/</b></p>	<p>Inconsistent advice across Local Authorities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Materials produced at Pan Regional level have contact details for LCR LAs.</li> </ul>



<p><b>information from LA departments</b> Quality of advice differs across departments and officers at LAs</p>	<p>Communities found this off putting as they expect to be provided with easy to understand advice that is relevant to their locality.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community groups advised to research issues online and approach LAs with concise ideas which lead to practical delivery of a project. This will enable LAs to quickly understand requirements and be able to react accordingly.</li> <li>• Community groups encouraged to familiarise themselves with LA priorities and strategies in order to understand how they can make their projects appealing to LAs who will increasingly have reduced resources and capacity going forward.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Advice in Conservation areas.</b></p>	<p>Doubts on the quality of advice being provided by a local authority – Time wasted challenging information provided to them by the LA and after consideration was deemed to be correct.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide LA with concise information in order to ensure that they are in position to provide accurate advice.</li> <li>• Make contact with conservation officers and let them know project plans. This will enable officers to ‘up skill’ in relevant areas.</li> <li>• Allow conservation officers to consider plans and understand that they may not be able to provide instant advice and may need to consult experts in other departments.</li> </ul>

## 8 Recommendations:

Many community groups welcomed the work commissioned by LCR and provided by the Energy Saving Trust. The community groups very keen that any momentum generated through this process should not be lost even if no physical or financial resources are available at the close of the LCR CCSF programme. Suggestions for shallow assistance or low cost solutions include:

- making connections and signposting to like-minded community groups around LCR to encourage collaborative work and ‘trading’ of skills.
- utilising social media websites (i.e. Facebook) to facilitate discussion at minimal cost (i.e. accessing a computer and internet connection).
- LCR stakeholders promotion and cobranding on web sites would make community group projects more attractive to private sector companies (especially utilities).

The following are recommendations based on the engagement with community groups within the LCR, an understanding of LCR aspirations, Energy Saving Trust national community expertise and involvement in other LCR CCSF and pan-regional CCSF programmes. The recommendations would enable the LCR to continue to provide support community groups installing renewable energy technologies and local authorities in dealing with requests for support post closure of the CCSF programmes.

**1. UTILISE AND SIGN POST TO EXISTING RESOURCES** - Local authorities utilise existing resources which have been developed by [PlanLoCal](#), LCR CCSF and CCSF pan regional programmes and [Energy Saving Trust Green Communities](#). Also make community groups aware of what support is available from local authorities to manage expectations.

**2. CREATING VIRTUAL LCR COMMUNITY ENERGY NETWORK** - Put community groups in contact with each other across LCR and wider – community groups often ask about existing examples and also express a desire to speak to other community groups to build networks and exchange knowledge and experience. The network would facilitate discussion between experienced community groups who have successfully won funding and inexperienced community groups keen to install renewable technologies. Or

signposting to local businesses who have provided free services for any future LCR local authority renewable scheme include condition of grant or assistance is to become part of the network. This could reduce the resource burden on local authorities to provide advice to a number of community groups about the same funding sources.

**3. DELIVER A REGULAR E-NEWSLETTER/BLOG** – for LCR CCSF stakeholders and community groups highlighting emerging funding opportunities and showcasing community energy projects progress. This will enable community groups to understand the 'bigger' picture. Any update should be written in plain English, without jargon, positive in language and provide independent and impartial information. A pool of knowledge should be encouraged with a central 'no frills' hub. This could be in the form of a 'blog' with links to shared documents, useful contacts and technical information. A similar facility is currently being developed by the delivery team of the North West Rural Carbon Challenge Fund (funded by Defra), and once fully developed could be easily replicated.

**4. OWN LIVE LIST OF PARTNERS WILLING TO PROVIDE FREE SERVICES** – various organisations provide free services either for mutually beneficial reasons, via other funding routes and due to corporate social responsibility. Examples include:

- Parish Councils who act as an honest broker to a number of community groups
- Local Business who provide free services ranging from printing to feasibility studies. LCR community groups have established links with local consultancies and received assistance at no cost. LCR should consider identifying a list of potential providers that may consider providing some services free of charge to community groups. A word of caution is some businesses may have a conflict of interest so impartiality should be considered before inclusion.
- Schools who promote education of renewable energy and energy efficiency. LCR allotment groups have integrated this into existing relationship developed through 'grow your own' promotions.
- Transition Towns who already have some links to community groups but could be central point of communication to wider groups.

**5. CENTRAL CO-ORDINATION OF LCR KNOWLEDGE HUB** - Develop consistent LCR response to planning or funding enquiries and update regularly with emerging policy and funding opportunities. Ideally a central point of contact should be identified across LCR to ensure consistency and encourage more projects to come forward.

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