

Community Benefits from Net Zero Energy Developments

11 April 2025

Built Environment Forum Scotland (BEFS) is an umbrella body for organisations working in the built environment in Scotland. Drawing on extensive expertise in a membership-led forum, BEFS informs, debates and advocates on the strategic issues, opportunities and challenges facing Scotland's existing built environment. BEFS is a supporting member of the [Climate Heritage Network](#).

Other relevant consultation responses from BEFS can be seen below, as many issues overlap and demand associative consideration:

- [Protecting Built Heritage](#)
- [Building Community Wealth in Scotland](#)
- [Effective Community Engagement in Local Development Planning Guidance](#)

BEFS will be responding only to relevant questions of the consultation, as below:

Section 1: Offshore Renewable Energy Developments

1. In the context of offshore wind development, what or who or where do you consider the relevant communities to be?

As the consultation paper notes, there are particular complexities at play concerning the geographical and economic links a given offshore wind development will have with one, or multiple, Scottish communities.

These links may be hyper-local in the form of communities directly connected to the development, whether through links via transport or energy infrastructure, employment and training provision, maintenance and administrative services, supply chain dependencies, or another type of connection.

These links may also extend into a wider set of communities, perhaps over a coastline section, island chain or an administrative region – or several of these in combination.

As such, the Good Practice Principles could offer flexibility and encouragement to offshore wind developments, to investigate all of the communities their operation comes into contact with, and to consider the approach they take to engaging with communities across that sphere of influence.

Offshore wind developments tend to operate at a large distance from mainland and island communities, and typically have a large operational footprint. The fact that regional approaches can spread benefits into a wider set of communities is also a reality. This all points to the logic and value of a broader regional consideration compared to, for example, limiting community benefits only to the nearest coastal or island settlement.

7: The development of offshore wind is often geographically dispersed with multiple communities who could potentially benefit. To what extent do you agree or disagree that a regional and/or national approach to delivering community benefits would be an appropriate way to address geographical dispersal of development and multiple communities? Please explain your answer.

BEFS would consider that there are strong arguments in favour of a regional approach. Offshore wind developments are located at some distance to communities, and a regional approach enables positive community activity across a wider range of places.

This would retain an important geographic link between offshore wind providers and the local region, and enables relationship-building between investor and investee, both of which could be lost were a more distant, national approach to be taken instead.

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9: In your view, what would just and proportionate community benefits from offshore wind developments look like in practice?

BEFS Members are particularly interested in the application of community benefit resources that protect and enhance the local built and historic environment. Local consultations from across the country, as evidenced by [the Scottish Government's review of Community Charrettes and Making Places Funds](#), demonstrate that physical improvement is a key priority for many communities.

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Undertaking town centre improvements, installing energy efficiency measures in homes and community centres, reusing vacant and derelict buildings, repairing and refurbishing heritage assets, and enhancing green spaces, waterfronts and designed landscapes, regularly appear at the top of community wish-lists.

The provision of funding from offshore wind developments into these types of projects, in response to local community demand, presents a strong example of practical application and the delivery of tangible benefits for people and places.

Heritage tourism and community led archaeology have also been identified in the BEFS network as valuable community benefit project areas that could particularly benefit from offshore wind opportunities.

In addition, the use of renewable energy resources to support delivery of place-based improvement projects that demonstrate effective community engagement and partnership working, deliver further added value in implementing the [Scottish Government's Place Principle](#), and in progressing priority aspirations articulated in Local Development Plans and Local Place Plans.

Section 2: Onshore Net Zero Energy Developments

3.3.1. a) Which of the following onshore technologies should be in scope for the Good Practice Principles? Select all that apply.

- Wind
- Solar
- Hydro power (including pumped hydro storage)
- Hydrogen
- Battery storage
- Heat networks
- Bioenergy
- Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage
- Negative Emissions Technologies
- Electricity transmission

3.3.1. b) Please explain your reasons for the technologies you have selected or not selected and provide evidence where available.

In the [2023 update of its 'The Economic Impact of Scotland's Renewable Energy Sector' report](#), the Fraser of Allander Institute states that more than £10bn of economic output is generated by the renewable energy industry in Scotland. The calculations behind this estimate include direct turnover, employment and economic activity linked to supply chains.

This is a massive and growing industry comprising wind, renewable heat, hydropower and other energy types and technologies, as highlighted above. Renewable energy has already contributed considerably to

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Scotland's communities in economic, social and environmental benefits. [Local Energy Scotland reports that £31.1m was invested in community benefits](#) by renewable energy providers over the past year.

There is rich potential in further expanding these investments, in scale and geographic spread, to help even more people and places. The application of Good Practice Principles for the provision of community benefits across all of the listed technologies would help capitalise on this potential.

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In doing so, this would make additional, lasting contributions to a diverse range of key national policy priorities. These include progressing a just transition to net zero, improving places and quality of life, protecting and celebrating heritage, enhancing health and wellbeing, and sustainably growing local economies.

BEFS has previously – and repeatedly – lobbied in favour of the overarching, cross-policy and cross-portfolio benefits of investing in Scotland's existing and historic built environment. The substantial cultural, economic, environmental and societal wins that additional action and investment in this area can deliver are not to be understated: more warm homes, increased opportunities for sustainable, skilled employment, better-designed places that enhance health and wellbeing, and more resilient, future-proof buildings are just some of the positive outcomes.

As the consultation paper notes, some areas of renewable energy, such as bioenergy and electricity transmission, are not covered by Good Practice Principles at present. Extending coverage will capitalise on the opportunities for more renewable energy providers to participate in the mutually beneficial tradition of regularly investing in social and economic benefits.

BEFS is cognisant of the reality that some renewable technologies are at an early development stage and may not yet be generating the income levels at which significant community benefit investments would be reasonable or viable. In these circumstances, modest initial contributions to local community activity in the form of micro-grants, and/or setting out commitments to invest in future, would present helpful alternative approaches.

3.3.1 (b) (continued) Should the same Good Practice Principles apply in a standard way across all the technologies selected, or should the Good Practice Principles be different for different technologies? Please explain the reasons for your answer and provide evidence where available.

A standard approach to Good Practice Principles has the advantage of clarity, accessibility and consistency. Where the opportunity exists to deliver community benefits from resources generated by renewable energy provision, this opportunity should be realised, regardless of the specific technology.

3.3.2 Do improvements need to be made to how eligible communities are identified? For example, changes to how communities are defined at a local level, and whether communities at a regional and/or national level could be eligible. Please explain your answer and provide supporting evidence if available.

Many of the community led bodies, heritage trusts, social enterprises and charities in the BEFS network are already accessing renewable energy grants to protect and enhance the built and historic environment in villages, towns and cities across Scotland.

There are, however, major 'postcode lottery' dynamics at play, that depend on whether a settlement happens to have a nearby renewable energy development that they can apply to for funding, or otherwise develop a mutually useful relationship with.

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A related challenge is the dilution of community benefit investments across local population size and density. One wind farm, for example, may have a single small village in its local catchment area; another may have multiple medium-sized towns in close proximity.

This points to a need for further consideration of how community groups interact with the geographic spheres of influence of renewable energy developers. BEFS argues for a balanced, regional approach, which retains links between onshore renewable energy providers and their local communities that might otherwise be lost in a national distribution model, while building more consistency and equity of access compared to hyper-local operations.

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3.3.2 (continued) Should more direction be provided on how and when to engage communities in community benefit opportunities, and when arrangements should take effect? Please explain your answer and provide evidence/examples of good practice where available.

Yes. The provision of further clarity is helpful in setting out expectations on communications and processes for community groups and renewable energy providers.

This would form a baseline to support widespread adoption of good practice in the renewables sector, and enable any community groups that feel the engagement processes they are involved with are lacking, to invoke the Good Practice Principles to seek remediation.

5. How could the Good Practice Principles better ensure that community benefits are used in ways that meet the needs and wishes of the community? For example, more direction on how community benefits should or should not be used, including supporting local, regional or national priorities and development plans. Please explain your answer and provide evidence/examples of good practice where available.

Robust, inclusive and accessible community consultation activity forms a strong basis for evidencing local community demand.

The [National Standards for Community Engagement](#) provide a set of good practice principles that all organisations undertaking consultation activity should utilise, and the [Place Standards Tool](#) can help to structure conversations about place-based improvements.

The Good Practice Principles can do more to ensure historic and significant buildings that play a significant role in the lives of local people, but which have become vacant, can be effectively repaired and productively reused.

The transfer of these assets to local communities is not a solution in itself, as a more fundamental problem often concerns the securing of adequate funding for maintenance and refurbishment. Making full use of renewable energy community benefit schemes can go some way to alleviating a shortfall in resources to meet locally identified needs.

With regard to community demands for further action in caring for and improving Scotland's built and historic environment, [BEFS has a library of case studies](#) that can be used to usefully inform new activity.

A final linked point, as BEFS has highlighted in previous consultation responses including those highlighted above, concerns the spatial planning process. Community groups that lack understanding of the planning process, and how and when to get involved, often find this to be a major barrier to participation. Additional

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support activity here, including through services provided by BEFS Member Planning Aid Scotland, can lead to the delivery of more effective community benefit projects that align well with local and regional priorities.

BEFS responses to a number of Consultations in relation to the Built Environment can be found at:

<https://www.befs.org.uk/resources/consultations/>

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The Scottish Government would like your permission to publish your consultation response. Please indicate your publishing preference: **Publish response with name**

We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise? **YES**

I confirm that I have read the privacy policy and consent to the data I provide being used as set out in the policy. **I CONSENT**