

2023

Conference Report

**The role of communities in delivering
fair and inclusive decarbonisation**

Conference Partners

We would like to mention special thanks to our members who helped us deliver this event.

And also to the partner organisations who came along to listen and share their own knowledge and expertise.



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Introduction

Late September in Edinburgh and the first Community Energy Scotland conference for four years! How satisfying it was to be together in person to engage with each other, share experiences and listen to experts.



It was excellent to see so many new faces and such enthusiasm from everyone to create a dynamic event taking place in some of the most challenging times of our generation.

This report serves not only as an update to those who couldn't attend on the day, but also to share the content of workshops and discussion groups which ran parallel during the afternoon. The report doesn't offer a panacea for delivering a fair and inclusive decarbonisation, however it provides insights and provokes further discussion, to drive us along the path to solutions.

After the welcome and introduction from one of our board, Dr Ameena Camps, we kicked off the day listening to a series of further inspiring talks and presentations. The afternoon brought with it some discerning discussions and exchanges, interjected with a presentation on a working example of local community energy supply.

The body of this report summarises the talks, presentations and discussions with further details available in the links provided.

The Role of Communities in Delivering a Fair and Inclusive Decarbonisation

Never has there been a more critical time to garner the knowledge and expertise of communities, share knowledge, and voice decarbonisation challenges and benefits, in order to drive an equitable transition focusing on the well-being of all.

The contrast of the extreme difficulties now faced by so many against the gains being made by the few who influence the energy system is only too clear. By coming together, whether in person or virtually, community trusts and energy groups can build on the strong bonds that already exist between us and put these to work by voicing our experiences for others to hear. These 'others' include those who support us now and those who would do so in the future, and also the apparently distant policy makers who can be brought closer by our collective vocal efforts.

The Community Energy Scotland Conference 2023 aimed to bring Scottish community organisations together to discuss and share learnings on an inclusive transition to decarbonisation that values well-being for all, and highlight the critical role of members and CES in shaping strategic Scottish and UK policy and decision-making. Your feedback would suggest these aims were achieved – inevitably more for some than others.



In this report we aspire to capture the events of the day and provide inspiration and information to move forward in the challenge for an equitable future in community decarbonisation.

Cath Curd
Membership Officer



Welcome & Setting the Scene

Dr Ameena Camps, Just Transition commissioner, Uist Wind manager and member of the CES board, was introduced by Zoe Holliday, and warmly welcomed the conference delegates to the event.

As the day's aims included a transition for wellbeing, and shaping policy, Ameena strongly stated there was no better time than now to focus on these areas. She highlighted the following points:

Our unjust world: Fossil fuel companies making more than £50 billion profit and their taxation is a drop in the ocean. There is a living crisis, poverty is increasing, homelessness is increasing, the wealth gap is increasing. The wealthiest are now 200 times as wealthy as the poorest. The richest 10% have £1.7M on average and the poorest 10% have £7,600. Communities have shown they can do better than this, highlighting the positive examples present at the conference. These are opportunities for the Just Transition - by many community-led cases creating new relationships of power.

Draft Energy Strategy & Just Transition Plan: Only seven responses to the consultation came from community groups; however as someone working in the sector, Ameena fully recognises that it is stretched and there are many consultations to find time for. Importantly, Ameena reminded the audience that communities can have a strong voice to influence policy.

Sharing learnings: Communities should take the opportunities to share learnings and build upon them, such as the Carbon Neutral Islands project for island and mainland communities.

Ameena would welcome members to get in touch with her as a Just Transition Commissioner apcamps@hotmail.co.uk



Community Learning Exchange

Jill Keegan, Partnership Manager of Scottish Communities Alliance (SCA), a coalition of networks with a diverse community sector and shared commitment to community empowerment. The Community Learning Exchange supports mutual support between groups and increases synergies across networks.

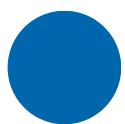


The Community Learning Exchange is a rolling grant fund of £1,000 per exchange including host fee and travel & subsistence.

As so many of us have discovered already, visiting other groups - seeing and hearing first hand their experiences, both good and bad - is one of the best ways to increase our knowledge and take that invaluable benefit home.

Together with providing on-the-ground learning opportunities, the exchanges have also helped trusts develop confidence to overcome challenges, as well as expand their networks of experienced peers.

CES community members are eligible to apply - find out more information by clicking on the image above.



The Sandy Macaulay Lecture

Although taken early, cherished memories of Sandy Macaulay remain, and he is a very special person amongst CES, the wider community sector, and particularly on Unst. After a well travelled early life, mainly working overseas supporting communities in developing countries, he ended up in Unst with a young family, about 25 years ago.



At the same time, the community was being hit by a huge social challenge when losing the main employer in the community, with the loss of the local airport and other associated local resources. Whilst continuing to work overseas, Sandy led locally on setting up the Unst Partnership, an early and pioneering community group looking to find a good long term future for their community, and, in a few short years ended up achieving more than many of us do in our lifetimes. They got the community to plan for their own future: set up the first local green hydrogen demonstration, created and ran their own hydrogen car, identified the opportunity and set the groundwork for the current Saxaford Space port, focused on training and upskilling local folk, ran events, and generally worked on ways to keep people living and thriving within the local community. It was also during this period he that he became contracted to the Highland and Islands Community Energy Company (now CES) and started to support others also wanting to use community energy to make their own communities resilient along similar lines. We were privileged this year to have Sandy's son, Bobby give the Sandy Macaulay Lecture. Bobby provided his unique and intimate perspective on the man, his dad; what he believed in, achieved, and the times that they lived. Not forgetting his dad's constant love of music, good company, his electric guitar and tendency to sit up late with others enjoying all of these.



Presentations

Community-Led Action in the Just Transition to Decarbonisation

Pauline Smith, Chief Executive of Development Trust Association Scotland (DTAS), and **Morvern Lyon**, Program Manager for Community Shares Scotland (CSS) presented on the work of DTAS highlighting how communities across Scotland are already leading the way on climate action and how DTAS and CSS are involved in their support towards a just transition and decarbonisation.

[Link to notes](#)

The Potential for Community Energy Organisations to Influence Scottish and UK Policy

Kristopher Leask & **Dr Josh Doble**, policy managers at CES and Community Land Scotland respectively, considered the ways to support communities to contribute to policy discussions, what lobbying looks like, and policy opportunities for energy. They looked at how policy managers can support communities to feed their challenges and opportunities into national policies.

[Link to notes](#)

Taking Local Action on Decarbonisation: Experiences from the Carbon Neutral Islands (CNI) Project

Tom Lusink and **Scott Watson**, CNI Community Development Officers for the isles of Raasay and Cumbrae respectively, focused on some of the key findings and actions from the current CNI project. Tom took us through some of the practicalities of achieving the support of their communities who then immersed themselves into creating their community climate action plans. Scott honed in on the importance of using local knowledge and local data as a key component of communities' carbon audit processes.

[Link to notes](#)

When will communities be able to use the power they produce?

Felix Wight, formally CES Head of Development and current Technical Director with Repowering London, presented community solar projects with the power to create, control and benefit from renewable energy, enabling them to play an active part in the transition to a low-carbon society.



Summary

- The biggest challenge is that communities can't sell electricity to their neighbours
- Local control to supply would provide opportunities with huge economic benefits
- Local supply would give certainty in the longer term as you would have a contract with local buyers
- Local supply empowers local communities to set own priorities, including tariffs and addressing fuel poverty
- Local renewable electricity delivers greatest benefit for least carbon & financial cost
- Various possible solutions for set-up, including proven virtual microgrids
- Public support essential for the transformational policies needed for change
- Vital for MSPs and MPS to understand importance of local supply

[Link to notes](#)

[Link to slides for all presentations](#)

Climate Change Action Plan Workshops: Sharing Opportunities & Challenges

Community Development Officers and CES staff from the CNI project led four workshops at the start of the afternoon, exploring the opportunities and challenges in three overarching areas, Energy; Transport; Land & Sea; Waste.



Energy

Rosie Macinnes (Raasay) and **Neil Gow** (Islay) introduced the topic and discussion, and outlined the three questions:

1. What energy projects do you currently have?
2. What energy projects are you planning or contemplating?
3. What challenges have you faced or overcome?

[Link to notes](#)



Transport

Scott Watson (Cumbrae) and **Cameron Duff** (CES) led the discussion around transport, focusing on three key areas

- Identifying key features of local transport system
- What are the challenges and issues?
- What are the opportunities to improve these?

[Link to notes](#)



Land & Sea

Aisling Philips (Hoy & Walls) and **Shona MacLeod** (Barra & Vatersay) led the group to identify and discuss

1. Actions already completed
2. Actions you would like to do
3. Challenges
4. Solutions

[Link to notes](#)



Waste

Tom Lusink (Raasay) and **Darragh Keenaghan** (CES) considered the activity that had been taking place in the six CNI island locations (and beyond) as part of their Community Climate Action Plans, noting key points and challenges.

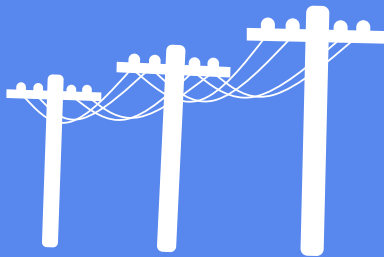
[Link to notes](#)

CES Discussion Groups

Delegates continued to focus in afternoon discussion groups, covering critical topics, including those suggested by our members, and designed to share knowledge and develop ideas between peers.



The Energy Infrastructure System and its Challenges and Opportunities

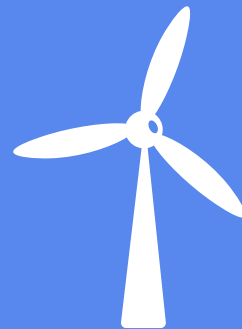


Facilitated by **Steve Atkins**, Senior Manager, Stakeholder Relations, Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks, and **Eibhlin Lee**, Trading Manager at CES.

The discussion focused on the challenges and opportunities in energy infrastructure for a transition to decarbonization. Grid constraints, ownership, and access issues were identified as challenges, while opportunities included local employment and financial benefits for communities. Actions to improve accessibility and ensure community benefits were discussed.

[Link to notes](#)

Repowering



Facilitated by **Morag Watson**, Director of Policy at Scottish Renewables and **Mark Hull**, Chief Technical Officer at CES.

Points raised during this discussion include ownership & repowering options, technical information, social costs, energy pricing and finances and local energy supply.

[Link to notes](#)

CES Discussion Groups



Community Energy and Land Ownership as an Alternative to Carbon Trading



Hosted by **Mike Danson** (Visiting Professor in the Centre for Energy Policy, Strathclyde and Chair of Strathnairn Development Company) and **Kristopher Leask**, CES Policy Manager. Key areas considered by the group were land ownership and the new challenges, carbon offsetting and associated ethics, and how communities are involved or affected.

[Link to notes](#)

Sustainable Transport in our Communities



Facilitated by **Mike Steele**, Nith Valley Leaf Trust, **Gordon Gilfillan** CES Development Manager and **Rosie Brown**, CES Project Officer N76 Energy in Motion.

This discussion kickstarted with a quick poll of the room to determine key points early on which included lived experiences of lack of transport connections, ferries, and rural and island challenges.

[Link to notes](#)

CES Discussion Groups



Linking Community Renewables with Addressing Fuel Poverty



Facilitated by **Michael Hildrew**, Energy Advice Team Leader at Greener Kirkaldy and **Leanne Fischler**, Community Energy Data and Digital Officer at CES.

This discussion was centred around three key questions:

1. What is fuel poverty?
2. What are the perceived barriers to fuel poor households adopting climate friendly energy systems?
3. What action is being taken?

Unsurprisingly the conversation very quickly shifted to the cost of living crisis and rising fuel costs. Housing tenure and other areas inhibiting building improvements is considered at length and some related activities by some organisations are also identified.

[Link to notes](#)

Re-Energising Stakeholder Collaboration: Learning from the RIPEET Project in the Outer Hebrides



Facilitated by **Sarah Marshall**, Senior Manager – RIPEET, Highlands & Islands Enterprise and **Matthew Logan**, ICNZ Outer Hebrides Manager at CES.

An overview of the project was presented to the discussion group and overall it was notes that the project sought additional input to that of the stakeholders. The process ensured the project's co-creation by stakeholders.

[Link to notes](#)

Panel Discussions



Community Leadership in Action

Chair:

- Zoe Holliday (CEO, CES)

Panellists:

- Dr Bobby Macaulay (Research Fellow, Centre for Mountain Studies at University of the Highlands and Islands)
- Dr Aameena Camps (CES Director & Just Transition Commissioner)
- Kristopher Leask (Policy Manager, CES)
- Dr Josh Doble (Policy Manager, Community Land Scotland)
- Morven Lyon (Programme Manager, Development Trusts Association Scotland)



- Recognising community-level work, implementing legislative changes, and promoting diversity and ambition in policy will help overcome future challenges.
- Democratising and restructuring energy relationships, changing the economic system, improving communication, and encouraging innovation and collaboration with the private sector are crucial for equitable benefits of a circular economy.
- Political ambition, community wealth, agency, decentralized energy, and community engagement and power are necessary for fair and inclusive decarbonisation.

[Link to notes](#)

Panel Discussions



Looking forward: Opportunities and Barriers to Achieving Decarbonisation in Our Communities

Chair:

- Gordon Gilfillan, Development Manager, CES

Panellists:

- Mike Danson (Visiting Professor in the Centre for Energy Policy, Strathclyde and Chair of Strathnairn Development Company),
- Steve Atkins (Senior Manager, Stakeholder Relations, Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks),
- Morag Watson (Director of Policy, Scottish Renewables),
- Mark Hull (Chief Technical Officer, CES),
- Michael Hildrew (Energy Advice Team Leader, Greener Kirkcaldy)



- The discussion centred around how local authorities can partner with communities to support community aspirations and promote whole system thinking.
- Although some local authorities are already engaged, a disconnect still exists.
- While bureaucracy and process can be challenging, there is an appetite for change and motivation to work with communities further.
- Funding is available for communities to engage with Democracy Matters 2.
- Scottish Renewables and developers are committed to supporting communities and exploring shared ownership models. SSEN is also working to support planning among developers and communities.

[Link to notes](#)

What's Next?

Where do we go from here? The conference and this report are not just about looking back, but also looking forward.

Connections made and discussions that took place at the event have provided the catalyst to develop the CES Member-led forums, designed to feed directly into policy. By communicating to us in this way, members create an information process that supports other evidence used to influence policy makers. Evidence and information directly from members can be a deal breaker and it's impossible to overemphasise their importance.

The conference provided a valuable knowledge-sharing opportunity and we continue to commit to this critical activity by creating further ways to enable our members to access the experience and expertise of their peers.

We are committed to boosting our engagement with and support for our members. Collaboration is key to achieving what is needed in our sector.



1. Members' Policy Forums

We will host space for our members to lead their own forums, raising topics for external decision-makers. For more information on existing forums or to suggest discussion topics, contact

kristopher.leask@communityenergyscotland.org.uk



2. Linking our Members

We continue our work to promote peer-learning between our members, so that the valuable knowledge and expertise in our communities can be shared as part of our drive to a just decarbonisation.



3. Supporting our Members

We continue to develop meaningful engagement with our members to ensure inclusion, and the promotion and development of community energy and other decarbonisation activities, which provide robust foundations for a fair and inclusive society.

Acknowledgements

- Everyone who attended the conference: [Link to delegate list](#)
- The members, organisations and colleagues who presented, hosted discussion groups and took part in the Q&A sessions
- The staff of the Augustine United Church and the caterers, Edinburgh Food Social
- The CES conference planning team
- Colleagues who provided support on the day and in the development of this report

**We thank you for your continued
collaboration with us in the drive to a
better and more just decarbonised future**

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