

# CONFERENCE REPORT 2024

**THE COMMUNITY ENERGY RIPPLE EFFECT:  
MAXIMISING POSITIVE IMPACT**



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Prepared by

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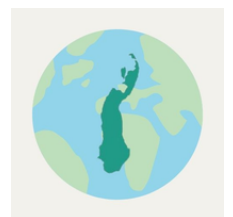
# CONFERENCE PARTNERS



We would like to thank our sponsors, members and supporters who helped us deliver this event.

We were grateful to receive support for this event from our headline sponsor SP Energy Networks and our supporting sponsor Younity.

Alongside CES members of staff, representatives from our community member organisations helped deliver a range of presentations, sessions and workshops. Thanks also to the event venue, the Technology and Innovation Centre, Glasgow.





# THE COMMUNITY ENERGY RIPPLE EFFECT: MAXIMISING POSITIVE IMPACT



At Community Energy Scotland, we understand that low-carbon initiatives do more than reduce our environmental impact. From improving health and well-being through active travel to helping vulnerable people stay warm with energy efficiency measures, community energy is valuable in strengthening local economies and improving our communities.

The CES Conference in September 2024 celebrated the progress we've made, the positive impacts our communities are driving, and what we need to do to push even further.

This year's conference once again placed a strong emphasis on learning from one another, with attendees particularly valuing the networking opportunities and the focus on diversity and inclusion within the sector.

As we reach a pivotal time for community energy in Scotland and the UK with [Labour's Local Power Plan](#), it's more important than ever that community organisations are leading the local, just transition to net zero.

This report summarises key sessions from the day and highlights some of what can be achieved when communities work together for a resilient and sustainable future. Full notes on each of the sessions can be found [here](#).

Hannah Sharp  
Communications Officer







# SP ENERGY NETWORKS

SP Energy Networks, the headline sponsor of the Community Energy Scotland Annual Conference 2024, opened the event with a presentation by Liam Cantwell, Community Energy Manager. SP Energy Networks provides electricity to millions of customers across Scotland and parts of England and Wales, and has committed to supporting community energy projects through its new business plan (ED2).

Liam Cantwell outlined the company's initiatives to strengthen community energy groups. These include offering direct access to community energy advisers, guidance on project development, support for innovation and funding applications, as well as educational outreach and capacity building. The company will also produce an annual Community Energy Strategy, provide workshops and resources, and monitor progress through regular evaluations.

Through these efforts, SP Energy Networks aims to create a lasting legacy by empowering community-led energy projects, promoting financial benefits for groups, and helping to build long-term resilience in the energy sector.



# WHAT'S BEEN ACHIEVED SO FAR?



Employees working in the community energy sector in Scotland in 2023

**207**



Total organisational turnover for the community energy sector in 2023

**£9.6M**



Number of community energy organisations that were active in the sector last year

**122**



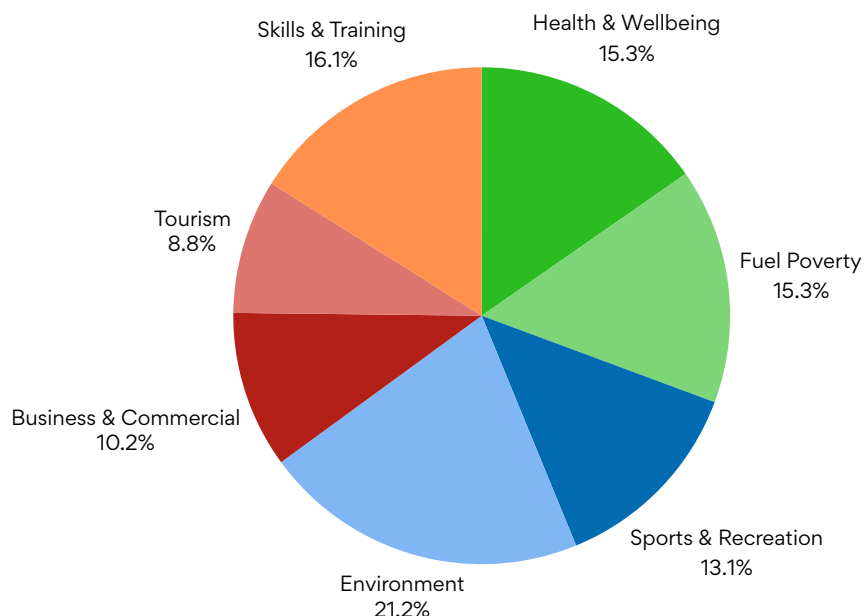
Approximate tonnes of carbon that were saved by community energy projects in Scotland in 2023

**530,000t**

## WHAT IS THE RIPPLE EFFECT?

We asked members of community energy organisations at the conference to indicate the types of projects that their organisations fund.

A wide range of themes across environmental, economic and social benefits were identified.



# STRATHCLYDE INSTITUTE FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES



## BRIDGING GAPS IN COMMUNITY-LED ENERGY

Professor Matt Hannon from the Strathclyde Institute for Sustainable Communities (SISC) spoke at the Community Energy Scotland Annual Conference, addressing the challenges and opportunities in the community energy sector. SISC aims to close research gaps through evidence-based approaches, working towards net zero by connecting various sectors and empowering communities to lead in decision-making.

Matt stressed the need to shift away from a top-down energy system, shifting to a system where community energy projects and local organisations are key decision-makers. He highlighted SISC's research, the expanding role of community benefit funds, and the importance of ensuring the sector is prepared to maximise future funding opportunities. He also invited attendees to share inspirational stories for SISC's Local Zero podcast, which has a global reach.





# PANEL: DIVERISTY, INCLUSION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The first panel, chaired by Zoe Holliday (CEO, CES), featured experts from various sectors, including Michaela Cryar (Younity), Rosanna Rabaeijs (Infrasisters), Thomas Fisher (CoDeL), Alyson Mackay (2050 Climate Group), and Aekus Kamboj (CEMVO).

Discussions focused on how to make community energy (CE) more inclusive, with panellists addressing the need for cultural sensitivity, anti-racism training, and eliminating assumptions about participant engagement. They stressed that inclusion should not be an afterthought but built into events and processes from the outset. Thomas Fisher argued that inclusion is about recognising individuals as part of the community, not reducing them to labels. Aekus Kamboj emphasised the need for organisations to embed inclusivity at all levels and form cross-sector partnerships to better share knowledge.

The panel also discussed the challenges of involving rural, underrepresented, and disadvantaged communities. They noted the importance of maintaining dignity when engaging with those experiencing poverty and cautioned against making assumptions based on appearances.

The panel ended with a call to action to engage in their upcoming events and platforms, including Younity's [Community Energy Connect](#) and [2050 Climate Group's leadership programmes](#).



## Key takeaways:

- Inclusion must be integral from the start, not a reactive consideration.
- Engaging people as full community members, not based on characteristics or labels.
- Stronger cross-sector collaboration and knowledge-sharing are needed to improve engagement.
- We must address capacity, not just capability, when engaging communities.



# THE SANDY MACAULAY LECTURE



Nicholas Gubbins delivered a compelling lecture focusing on the importance of innovation and commitment to supporting disadvantaged communities. His messages revolved around the key lessons learned from past experiences and the importance of strategic approaches to maximise impact.

## **Identifying Opportunities:**

Participants were challenged to consider: What are your windows of opportunity, and how can you drive them forward?

## KEY REFLECTIONS

### **\* Scale Matters - Connect communities to create larger projects**

While small, localised projects are valuable, Nicholas argued that scaling up is essential to maximise impact. By fostering collaboration between different communities, there is greater potential to implement larger projects that can have more substantial environmental and social effects.

### **\* Human stories are key - real impact lies in lived experiences**

Although there is often pressure to quantify impact through data and numbers, Nicholas highlighted the power of human stories in demonstrating the real-world effects of community energy projects. These narratives, particularly when reaching policymakers, can be far more influential than statistics alone.

### **\* Foresight is better than hindsight - build up reserves and diversify**

Drawing from past experiences, Nicholas emphasised the need for foresight in managing community energy projects. Having a financial reserve and a diversified portfolio of activities can provide a cushion for communities, enabling them to innovate and adapt to challenges.



# WORKSHOPS



## WORKSHOP 1: ACTIVE TRAVEL

This workshop explored the ripple effect of modest, community-driven actions in promoting active travel. Focusing on the ongoing development of a pedestrian path connecting Penpont and Thornhill in Dumfries and Galloway, the session highlighted the social, environmental, and economic benefits of such projects. Challenges faced included land ownership, funding, and coordination across multiple stakeholders. Participants discussed replication of the project in other areas, particularly in rural and island communities, and the importance of inclusivity, shared spaces, and community-driven planning.

## WORKSHOP 2: ENERGY EFFICIENCY

This session highlighted the Raasay Retrofit Project aimed at improving energy efficiency in homes, through residents collective action driven by Raasay Development Trust. The project is halfway through at the time of the conference, and the community's priority is tackling damp and mould while upgrading heating systems. Challenges such as contractor availability and funding coordination were discussed. The session emphasised collective action, with a focus on learning from pilot projects, creating replicable models, and addressing both practical and regulatory barriers to successful retrofitting in rural areas.

## WORKSHOP 3: COMMUNITY BENEFITS FROM COMMERCIAL WIND FARMS

With a focus on community ownership of renewable energy, this workshop outlined key asks for the Scottish Government, including setting a community energy target of 1GW by 2030. Examples from Stratherrick & Foyers Community Trust illustrated how community benefits from renewable projects can fund local initiatives like affordable housing. However, the process is complex, requiring robust consultation, planning, and management of community benefit funds. The need for clearer guidelines, mandatory reporting, and a shift toward community-owned energy was highlighted.

## WORKSHOP 4: HOW TO COMMUNICATE AND EVALUATE YOUR IMPACT

This workshop explored effective strategies for measuring and communicating project impacts. Participants shared tools and techniques for tracking social and economic outcomes, highlighting the importance of real stories, feedback, and continuous engagement with the community. The session stressed the need for inclusive communication strategies, leveraging networks, and using multiple formats like videos and social media to convey impact. Simple, clear, and honest messaging is key to making the benefits of projects accessible to a wider audience.

\*Full notes on each workshop are available [here](#)





# PANEL: SOLAR PV



The second panel, chaired by Beatriz Maroto (CES), featured insights from Scott Watson (Cumbrae Carbon Neutral Island Initiative), Drew Murphy (Edinburgh Solar Coop), and Mark Stewart (SPEN).

Discussions focused on community approaches to solar energy deployment, with Scott Watson highlighting a 280% increase in installations in Cumbrae (domestic and business) after installing 34 kW of PV systems on community buildings. He noted that residents were more engaged with energy initiatives than broader environmental issues.

Drew Murphy expressed concerns over conservation restrictions limiting solar installations to community facilities rather than homes. His cooperative has installed 1.4 MW on council-owned buildings and is pursuing an additional 2.6 MW.

The panel identified barriers such as high grid connection costs and stringent regulations. Mark Stewart emphasised the need for better understanding of capacity, while Scott Watson highlighted the importance of having dedicated Community Development Officers to drive engagement.

A key theme throughout the discussion was the “ripple effect,” which resonates with the overall theme of the conference. Successful projects not only foster community interest but also encourage further participation and engagement.

## Key Takeaways

- Community-led solar initiatives can significantly contribute to local decarbonisation efforts.
- Inclusion of solar energy solutions must be integral from the beginning, not an afterthought.
- Addressing barriers such as grid connection costs and regulatory constraints is crucial for expanding solar energy access.
- Engaging communities in a meaningful way creates a “ripple effect” that encourages further participation.



# HOW CAN COMMUNITY ENERGY REACH FURTHER?

## OUR MEMBERS' VIEWS

Community Energy Scotland, as part of the Scottish Community Coalition on Energy (SCCE), is pleased to share a series of papers calling on the Scottish and UK Government to create a Fair Energy Deal for Communities.

We asked our conference attendees if they support this, what their priorities are and what else we need.

Highlights are shown below. Full results are available in the notes.



# 94%

Support the Fair Energy Deal call for action

## A tenfold increase in 100% community-owned renewables in Scotland to 1GW by 2030

The priority call to create a fair energy deal for all in Scotland

We should also be calling for

## Funding

What communities most need now to take forward community energy projects

## Capacity





# WHAT'S NEXT?



## THANK YOU!

As we wrap up this year's conference, we want to thank everyone for their contributions and engagement. We hope you found these valuable for your own communities and the plans you want to drive forward.

## JOIN OUR MEMBERSHIP

If you are not already a member, we invite you to become a member of our network. Membership offers access to resources, expertise, and opportunities to collaborate with like-minded individuals and organisations committed to community energy. Enquire about membership [here](#).

## STAY IN TOUCH

Visit our [website](#) to find useful resources, news and more in the community energy sector in Scotland.

Follow us on [social media](#) for the latest updates.





# MESSAGE FROM OUR SPONSORS

## SP ENERGY NETWORKS

*"We would like to extend our gratitude to everyone who made this year's Community Energy Scotland Annual Members' Conference a success. The conference was a fantastic opportunity to engage with so many passionate members and meet the people influencing Scotland's community energy landscape. SP Energy Networks is deeply committed to supporting the community energy sector: providing the necessary resources, technical guidance, and support to help community energy projects thrive. Our ongoing collaboration with CES and its members is crucial in driving forward innovative solutions and achieving our shared vision of a sustainable and inclusive energy future. We look forward to continuing our work together and advancing the community energy movement."*

- Liam Cantwell, SP Energy Networks



## YOUNITY



*"The Community Energy Scotland conference 2024 was a fabulous gathering of community energy minds and Younity was honoured to be a sponsor. Now is a pivotal time for the community energy sector, with Labour's Local Power Plan central to their energy policy. Younity is actively addressing barriers to growth like core funding, public awareness, and inclusivity. With 300 active Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs), Younity supports 33% of the sector, powering the equivalent of 63,000 homes with green energy. Younity's initiatives, such as Powering Communities Fund, has distributed £65K in grants. We've launched Community Energy Connect to link professionals with energy groups, and our Kickstart Loan offering has enabled projects like Bristol Energy Co-op's largest rooftop installation. In 2025, we aim to address regional disparities by supporting urban energy projects. With Labour's commitment of £1bn annually for community energy, we are excited about the sector's growth and the journey ahead."*

- Michaela Cryar, Younity



# USEFUL LINKS

**FULL NOTES OF SESSIONS**

**SLIDES**

**DELEGATE LIST**

**PHOTO GALLERY**





# CONTACT US



[linktr.ee/communityenergyscot](https://linktr.ee/communityenergyscot)

