

GREEN GB WEEK ...in BRISTOL

The Energy Transition: Top Down v. Grassroots

19th October 2018 12.30-5pm, Level 1 Galleries, The Arnolfini, Bristol

Conference Report and Review



On the 19th October over 170 people gathered for the conference ‘The Energy Transition: Top Down versus grassroots’ co-hosted by Bristol Energy Network (BEN) and Bristol City Council Energy Service. The event was held on the final day of *Green Great Britain Week* (15-19th October 2018), a week of national events to celebrate 10 years since the introduction of the Climate Change Act (2008). The final day was designated ‘People’s Day’ and aimed to celebrate what communities around the country have been doing to tackle climate change through community energy projects. Since 2008, Community Energy projects have gone from strength to strength. They are developing into a real force for change, changing how our power is generated and moved around the country as well as making a real difference to individuals, by educating and empowering people to tackle climate change in their daily lives.

So why Bristol and why BEN? Bristol, with its typically activist, alternative approach to bucking the system, has grown some amazing community energy projects. These projects include:

- **Re:Work** which trains up local people to assess and deliver energy efficiency measures to houses in South Bristol;
- **the Owen Square Cooperative** who have installed a ground-source heat pump in a park and are using it to help power the Community Centre and neighbouring homes;
- **the CHEESE project** which carries out thermal imaging surveys to identify where heat and suggest remedies to make homes warmer;
- and **so much more**.

All these groups have been, and continue to be, nurtured and supported by Bristol Energy Network (BEN). BEN is important to the success of community energy in Bristol, working to build partnerships between community groups, the Council and local energy organisations. BEN also identifies funding for projects and advises and supports their development; and gathers data and helps influence policy both in Bristol and nationally.

This conference celebrated the collaboration between BEN and Bristol City Council's Energy Service by bringing community groups together with funders, policy makers and energy businesses. The conference explored grassroots activities and how they can be supported from the Top Down. The following pages provides a summary of the discussion. Videos of the day can be accessed [here](#).

On the Day

Over 170 people gathered from as far afield as Bangor, Plymouth, London and Sheffield for an afternoon of insightful speakers ([YouTube clips](#) and [photos](#)) and some useful debates about the changes needed within the industry and to policies that affect the industry so that we can achieve so much more, oh and fracking...

Welcome and Introduction

[Cllr Kye Dudd](#), Cabinet Member for Energy, Waste and Regulatory Services for Bristol City Council, welcomed everyone to Bristol and the conference. He talked about the innovative [City Leap Prospectus](#), which engages long-term partners to enable Bristol to meet its goal of becoming carbon-neutral by 2030, a highly ambitious (but necessary!) pledge which gained [unanimous cross party support](#) at a Council meeting shortly after this conference.

[Caroline Bird](#), Chair of [Bristol Energy Network](#) introduced the conference giving an overview of community energy nationally and setting the scene in Bristol.

Session 1: How grassroots energy projects can tackle climate change and empower communities to support the energy transition

The first session concentrated on grassroots approaches and community initiatives from around the country, what has been working well, what has been difficult and what the future challenges and opportunities are.

[David Tudgey](#), the Project Development Officer from [BEN](#) talked about his work in Bristol to bring together communities, develop technologies and demonstrate the significance of energy for all including, and maybe particularly, for hard to reach groups. He also talked about the [Bristol Community Strategy for Energy](#), launched 5 years ago in 2013, which has driven this process, bringing clarity and stakeholder engagement.

[Alister Macpherson](#), CEO of [Plymouth Energy Community](#), an "angry man from Plymouth" gave an impassioned talk about the huge achievements of Community Energy to date, both in Plymouth and around the country, largely without the support of politicians and therefore funding. He finished with a call to action: for groups across the country to tackle energy issues in their communities: and for policy makers to wake up and lend their support to these initiatives that have shown to make a difference.



Peter Capener, Managing Director of [Bath and West Community Energy Coop](#), showed the conference how BWCE had raised funding through community finance and debt to develop renewable energy systems that have resulted in at least 6% interest paid to members annually with £175K paid into a community fund. Their plans for the future include projects like the Solar Streets Pilot, that will act locally, engaging communities and public sector partners. His final take-home message was that the industry needs to professionalise community energy, by increasing skills and knowledge, to encourage people that they can and should manage their daily energy use.

Jodie Giles, senior Project Manager at [REGEN](#), spoke about how the growing community energy market is shaping our future energy system. She talked about the work REGEN have been doing to ensure the energy market is flexible enough to become decentralised and receive energy from a variety of different sources. Jodie also talked about the need to engage people with energy; about how they can change their energy use, make their homes more energy efficient; generate their own energy; and even lobby their MP to make a difference.

Paul Hassan, South West Development Manager for [Locality](#), talked about the link between fuel poverty and community energy and how taking control of assets, like the skills and knowledge of the community as well as wind and solar availability can deliver social and economic benefits as well as environmental rewards. He discussed the work they are doing with BEN to take this message to new audiences in Bristol, and how they are working to influence funders and policy makers to improve the operating environment for the sector.

The first panel, hosted by [Zakiya McKenzie](#) from [Ujima radio](#), answered a variety of questions, generated during the talks through SLI.DO (an app that allows the audience to ask questions directly to the organisers during the talks) and taken directly from the floor. The panel debated professionalism in response to one comment "A phrase from the Credit Unions, "Voluntary but not amateur!" and others asking what professionalism means and "How do we maintain grass roots connections and simultaneously achieve scale efficiency?". People were also interested in how to develop community energy projects where there currently aren't any and how to change local and national policy to enable them to happen. For example, how to "get Local Authorities to use "social value" of our projects to offset "best market value" charging community groups for assets (incl land) & rents?" and "What local activity does the panel think will best help provide the political space which national politicians seem to need to put in place stronger policies?" and to transfer decision making to "Citizens Assemblies to make key decisions needed as politicians are not delivering".

Address from the Minister

MP Claire Perry, Minister of State for Energy and Clean Growth talked about how her department, the department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), is supporting community energy and renewable projects. On taking questions, this opened up a passionate debate that covered fracking, off-shore wind and the future direction of energy policy in the UK. (...by the way REGEN have published a very user friendly article on the government's policy on fracking [here...](#))



Session 2: How local authorities, energy companies, funders and government policy can enable grassroots community energy initiatives

The second session asked “Top Down” representatives from local authorities, funders, organisations with national influence and national government to respond to the challenges set down in the first session by the grassroots organisations.



Lorna Edwards Community Energy Project Manager from [Bristol City Council's Energy Service](#) and [Hayley Ash REPLICATE](#) Programme Manager from the Council's Innovation team talked about what the Local Authority are doing to support community energy. Hayley looked at how council policy, including the Corporate Strategy and the One City Plan provide a framework for supporting community projects and gave more detail about the [REPLICATE project](#) which explores how technology can help local

people tackle issues of fuel poverty and contribute to the clean energy system of the future. Lorna gave examples of how the Council-administered Bristol Community Energy Fund had supported community energy initiatives across the city and the great opportunities offered by the City Leap Prospectus. Both officers emphasized that public engagement and partnership working is key to shaping and delivering these strategies and the work of the local authority.

Polly Billington, Director of [UK100](#) delivered an engaging talk about how UK100 support decision-makers across the UK to devise and implement plans for the transition to clean energy that take the public and business with them through Clean Energy Action Partnerships. She also showed how the learning from innovations in different cities was being shared through UK100. To echo other speakers, she emphasized how difficult it is to make changes in politics, finishing with the message that the desire for politicians to leave behind a positive legacy can be used as a lever for policy change.

Simon Proctor, the Renewables and Origination manager from [Bristol Energy Ltd](#) which is 100% owned by Bristol City Council and sources 31% of renewable energy and 100% of green gas from the Bristol area. Simon also talked about how the profits are reinvested back into the local community and some of the projects that have benefited and its commitment to community energy projects in future.

Rachel Coxcoon, Head of Local and Community Empowerment for the [Centre for Sustainable Energy \(CSE\)](#) delivered an energetic plea for community groups to use the planning system when developing energy initiatives. Her team have developed a system called Future Energy Landscapes which helps community energy projects engage local people. This prevents the consultation gap that results in Planning Permission for renewable projects being denied because of the “social gap” of high levels of support for renewables nationally but strong resistance locally. Trials of this system have been very successful and have resulted in ambitious local energy plans, for example in Cornwall. Rachel finished by pointing out that nearly all local authorities in the country have local elections coming up on 2nd May 2019, a chance for all of us to make a political difference!

Patrick Allcorn, Head of Local Energy from the [Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy \(BEIS\)](#), talked about the changes in funding from BEIS – he confirmed that the Rural Community Energy Fund has closed but the remaining £9 million will be transferred to BEIS budget and will open again early next year. Patrick said that BEIS is creating 5 Local Energy Hubs, each hub will have an £8 million budget and a dedicated community energy representative. John Rattenbury, the Programme Manager for the SW Energy Hub tells us more about Energy Hubs in the January edition of the [BEN newsletter](#).

[Will Walker](#), Programme & Investment Manager for Community Energy from [Power to Change](#) wrapped up the event by launching the [Next Generation Community Energy Fund](#) which will fund around 10 existing community energy business in England up to £100k.

The second panel, which was hosted by [Roger Griffith](#), Executive Chair and Broadcaster at [Ujima Radio](#), discussed questions including “What is your current activity involving young people (under 18) in the fight for renewable energy, or how do you plan to develop this?”. One contributor mentioned [Catalyse Change](#) which is a programme mentoring girls and young women who want to work or volunteer in the sustainability industry and [Bright Green Future](#) which is a CSE programme to inspire the next generation of environmental decision makers. There was also a strong discussion around the dismay felt by the conference around the disparity between the governments’ support for fracking and withdrawal of support for onshore wind and the end of the Feed in Tariff. In response, one contributor mentioned the [Extinction Rebellion](#) campaign.



Questions from the floor

We used the interactive app [Sli.do](#) to gather questions and feedback from the audience and to collate the most popular to pose to the panels. Thought provoking questions from the floor included:

- What local activity does the panel think will best help provide the political space national politicians seem to need to put in place stronger policies?
- In the last session, you touched an interesting point on the professionalisation of the sector. Can the panel further explore how to achieve that and what does it mean?
- How do we maintain grassroots connections and simultaneously achieve scale efficiency?
- How do we persuade Local Authorities to use the "social value" of our projects to offset the "best market value" charges that community groups pay for assets (incl land) & rents?
- Community Energy projects have patchy coverage (and elsewhere). What is (or should be) in place to support communities where nothing is happening (yet)?
- Given we have 12yrs to prevent catastrophic climate change how do we establish Citizens Assemblies to make key decisions needed as politicians not delivering?
- What is your current activity involving young people (under 18) in the fight for renewable energy, or how do you plan to develop this?
- What are local energy hubs?

Feedback, evaluation, outcomes...

Media

in the run up:

25 Tweets (BEN did 15) with 59 ReTweets and 91 Likes

Facebook Posts 13 with a reach of 1,564 and 279 engagements (click, reaction, comment, or share)

On the day:

There were 117 Tweets on the day and 8 afterwards.

Posts 2 with a reach of 104, engagement 14

21 responses to the survey were completed at the conference or filled in on Survey Monkey afterwards, this represents 12% of the attendees.

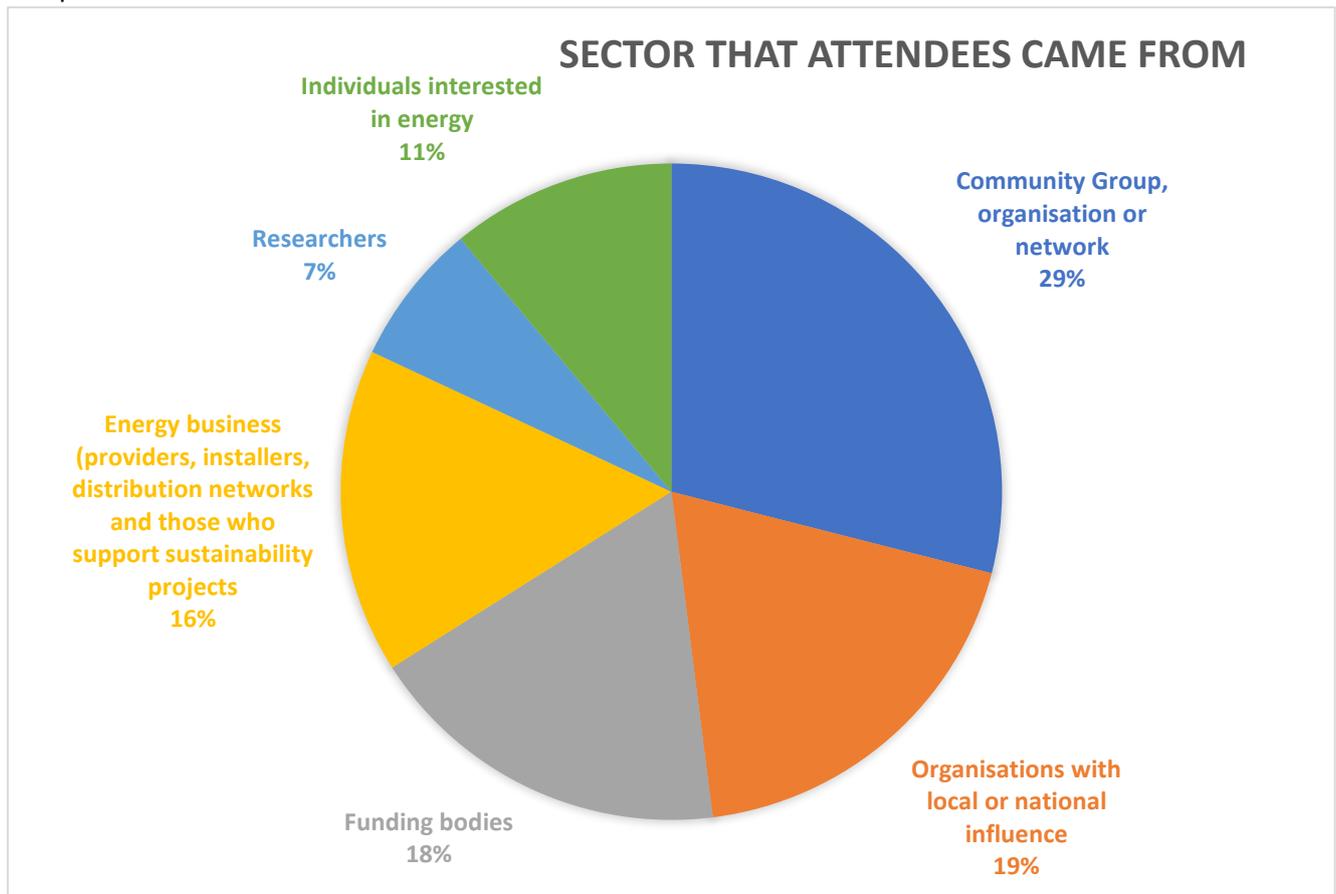


Participants

90.5% respondents had been to an event organised by the partners before, mostly those run by Bristol Energy Network and Bristol City Council. 9.5% of respondents had never been to any events run by any of the partners.

Nearly a third of attendees came from outside the South West region, with some describing themselves as "National".

The pie chart below shows which sector the attendees came from:



85% of respondents said that they had made new connections at the conference and many had reinforced connections that they had already forged.

86% of respondents said that the conference had improved their understanding of how community energy projects can tackle the 5 themes of the [Bristol Community Strategy for Energy](#). Most people felt that their understanding was enhanced in terms of Local Economic Development (65%) and Community Resilience and Fuel Poverty (35%).

People also commented on the feeling of the conference, that policy was stifling community energy and renewable energy projects in the UK, and that stakeholders need to work together to influence policy and overcome this.

Outcomes

The conference was well publicised within the industry, in newsletters and on social media (see Appendix 2 for comments). Paul Hassan (Locality) provided a particular draw for people not associated with community energy and who hadn't attended an event run by one of the partners before. The event successfully appealed to our target audience of community (29%), energy industry (16%) and local and national policy makers (18%) and brought them together with funders (18%), see pie chart above. It also engaged a good proportion of researchers (7%) and individuals interested in energy (11%). The event was Bristol/ South West centric but had successfully attracted people from around the country from as far away as Bangor, London, Plymouth and Sheffield, this would be due, in part, to the link with the Community Energy England Awards.

The speakers were wide-ranging and engaging, with good subject knowledge and (mostly!) useful visual aids, though unfortunately the acoustics of the venue were quite poor. It was a great reflection on the industry and

the conference that the Minister, who was due to speak for only 10 minutes, was happy to stay for nearly an hour and answer questions – some of which were very challenging!

There was not enough time for the panels to explore any of the subjects in great details. However, they were a good opportunity for the audience to challenge the speakers, find out more and raise the issue of diversity in the community energy industry. Using Sli-do enabled us to see what questions were being asked even if we couldn't raise all of them with the speakers on the day.

The feedback following the event was very positive but limited to a small number of individuals, perhaps due to the rather hurried ending because of the amount of time the Minister stayed for. A follow-up email yielded a few more responses (see Appendix 1 for pledges)



It is clear that the community energy industry is vibrant and innovative and welcomes the challenges posed by climate change. It is a sector that has achieved a lot on its own but would now like (and needs!) some recognition and support from policy makers and funders to professionalise and bring these changes into the mainstream. The sector also needs to work together and ensure that champions, from across the country support one another. The industry also recognises that it needs to diversify to engage hard-to-reach communities and encourage young people to get involved.

The recent decision by Bristol City Council, where unanimous cross -party support was given to the motion to make Bristol carbon-neutral by 2030, is a great local example of how politicians can work together to set the standards for the city to follow. The challenge now is to see how they engage and work with community groups to support its delivery.

A particular theme throughout the afternoon was that community energy needs to get more 'political' and engage more with policy and politicians.

WHAT NEXT?



The conference provoked many questions and paths to explore in the future. Key takeaway messages and next steps included:

- Ensure that community energy records and celebrates what it is doing, with local and national politicians as well as in their local communities. The best place to record this is on the Community Energy England Hub (<https://hub.communityenergyengland.org/projects/>) because national government uses it to understand what is going on.
- Make sure community members understand how to lobby for political change. This includes developing ways to work together to lobby government
- Continue to engage with less traditional communities through debate, dialogue and projects
- Use the questions, pledges and talks from the event to start a debate on social media, at meetings or in other fora where it will reach a diverse audience.
- Follow up on the pledges – look at progress made locally or revisit at the next Green GB People’s Day event

And finally, a comment from the survey:

“there is a need for all stakeholders to link up and communicate between projects, funders, local & central Government, industry, etc. This strongly endorsed the value of the event. Full marks to Bristol for being the catalyst!”

Appendix 1: Pledges

The idea of the pledge was to give the event, and Great Green Britain week, a legacy of people committing to take action to tackle climate change.

- 91% of people made a pledge to take action to tackle climate change and/or support community energy initiatives.
- 24% pledged to continue what they were doing
- 67% wanted to step up their activities.

The majority of the pledges were about taking action to influence policy, to understand more about the energy sector and to engage other people in these issues. Below are the personal pledges made following the conference:

Personal

- This is a significant focus of my life already. I plan to help Bristol reach zero emissions by 2030 latest.
- Keep on keeping on (x2)
- Think about how I can get involved as an individual outside of work in local initiatives

Political

- On a personal level, I pledge to increase my awareness of how policy impacts the clean energy transition and to increase my level of engagement. As an employee, I will drive forward raising awareness of the political impacts on our work with our members and ensuring that we are fully engaging our MPs.
- To take whatever peaceful action is necessary to force those in power to deliver on the environment and societal issues that we face.
- Take more direct action
- Get more vocal politically about the issues our sector faces
- Try to be more effective in my lobbying / political action
- strengthen engagement with policy and policy-makers
- To promote/share individual actions we can take to combat carbon emissions, to be more political and to fight for on shore wind. To promote energy saving more effectively in my community and to understand the energy market so I can lobby my local and national politicians and decision-makers.

Community

- Continue to follow the progress of the energy transition and engage other individuals locally.
- Continue my involvement in community-led energy projects (x2)
- I will continue to be a community champion as part of the REPLICATE project. Talk to Simon about how the community can actively be part of using renewable energy. Talk with Power to Change to see how we can develop a project for our service users.
- An activist who wants to get more renewable energy in Worcestershire
- We pledge to actively support the development of new models for community energy in a post-subsidy world



Appendix 2: Other feedback from the Twittersphere

@chrisjchurch2 [#EnergyTransition18](#) conference. So many positive examples of community-led change

@peoplesbiz [@KyeDudd](#) 'There's no jobs and no industry on a dead planet

@iwill_campaign In order to protect and preserve the [#environment](#), the entire community needs to play a part, and be invited to have a role. Hopefully covering the role that youth [#socialaction](#) can play too

@peoplesbiz Alistair from [@plyenergycom](#) to policy makers: 'We need recognition of the benefits from allowing communities to take over their own infrastructure. We need to end the short term, competitive environment that sets communities against each other.



@emmabridge_1 "We need to make [#climatechange](#) and [#communityenergy](#) a normal part of every day conversations. We need to stop polarising opinions, to build trust and for top down and grassroots approaches to work together" Pete Capner

@Comm1nrg Jodie's quick poll demonstrated we have a room full of people motivated by [#climatechange](#) & social responsibility, not £. [@RegenCommunit1y](#)'s research into the flexible nrg system of tomorrow shows collaboration, trust & is key to determining how we get there [#EnergyTransition18](#)

@Comm1nrg Paul from [@localitynews](#), "think global, act local" & don't make people feel hopeless in the face of the next 12 years. Communities need to be involved & not preached to by the green sector.

@RegenDom [@ZakiyaMedia](#) of [@UJIMAgreenblack](#) chairing the q&a at [#EnergyTransition18](#) conference. How do we involve people and build trust in community energy projects? KEY QUESTION!

@Greenhouse_PR Claire Perry, Minister of State for Energy and Clean Growth, booked to speak for 10mins but talked for an hour on decarbonisation, fracking and the huge challenge ahead - tense & interesting

@mvpgomes We need to better understand the tension between professionalising the [#CommunityEnergy](#) sector while strengthening its connections with the [#Grassroots](#)

@peoplesbiz [@LornaAPEdwards](#) is up now talking about the Bristol Community Energy Fund. £300k grants, £160 loans since 2016. Aim is to deliver £1bn low carbon smart infrastructure in next 10 years reduce fuel poverty, and maximise local benefits. [#GreenGB](#) [#EnergyTransition18](#)

@PollyBillington Been a truly inspiring day at [#energytransition18](#). Don't mourn: organise!

@Comm1nrg A great presentation from [@RachelCoxcoon](#), ending by posing a challenge to the [#CommunityEnergy](#) sector: you should stand in local elections. [#EnergyTransition18](#)

@CarbonCoop Patrick Allcorn from [@beisgovuk](#) BEIS urging CE groups to record activities on CEE hub, so govt knows about it. [#EnergyTransition18](#)