



Report

BEN member survey 2020

Authored: Bristol Energy Network 2021

Bristol Energy Network (BEN) surveyed its members during 2020 in order to find out what members have been doing, their successes and challenges, and how BEN has or has not supported this work.

As an umbrella organisation, BEN is committed to the following:

- sharing news and information throughout the network,
- acting as a conduit between members and other organisations,
- helping members share resources and ideas through regular meetings,
- building capacity through training, advice and support,
- and taking part in Community outreach to engage a wider range of people and groups in the network.

It is important that BEN listens to its members and reflects on whether it has achieved this and where it needs to improve.

This report is based on the feedback given in the survey and will inform how BEN refines and develops its offer to members in the future.

Contents

1. About our members p.3
 - a. Skills and resources
 - b. Successes and impact
 - c. Political contacts and networks
 - d. Community connections

 2. Members' future planning p.6
 - a. Development potential and next steps
 - b. Barriers and gaps

 3. What BEN does for its members p.7
 - a. What BEN already does
 - b. (enabling) mutual support

 4. What BEN could do for its members p.9
 - a. Areas for improvement
 - b. Mapping member needs to BEN projects
 - c. Additional Training

 5. Challenges and solutions p.12
 - a. External challenges
 - b. BEN development and growth
- 

1. About our members

What skills and resources do BEN members have?

The varied membership of BEN is represented in the diversity of skills and resources that spread across the network. Members have experience and proficiency that spans a large skillset including:

- **Management:** financial and project
- **Communications:** including publicity, writing press releases, public talks and lectures, website design and using online platforms such as YouTube.
- **Renewable energy:** including off-shore wind, and roof and field solar arrays.
- **Community:** engagement, community owned renewable energy generation, representing communities of interest.
- **Campaigning and Policy:** Engaging candidates before elections. Responding to local and national policy. Engaging with local planning.
- **Other:** Tree planting, New building developments, engaging in consultations, and Youth employment activity.

Successes and impact achieved

Members of BEN have had a number of successful projects over the past couple of years across different areas.

Education: Prior to lockdown, there were community projects engaging with local schools and universities on energy issues, embedding energy in education and maintaining a connection with the next generation.

Community: Involvement in community development plans allowed for the identification of the need to strengthen sustainability and equality within the plans, furthering the goal of not just a sustainable future but a fair one for their community members. Another local community group has launched a Climate

Action group, working and campaigning on issues directly impacting their community.

The African Voices Forum has been developing relationships at a local, national and international level during the International Decade for People of African Descent with plans for a summit, hosted in Bristol, in 2021.

Business: Clifton Climate Action worked hard to engage local SMEs on their energy use, training up student volunteers to do energy audits for businesses. Though this project proved a difficult one due to waning engagement from businesses, it helped to identify where more work needs to be done on behavioural change in order to encourage SMEs to prioritise energy efficiency in business.

Communication: On the communications front, some groups, such as Bishopston, Cotham and Redland, and Clifton Climate Action have continued their talks and lectures throughout lockdown by moving to online platforms and by recording talks then uploading them to YouTube to help make them accessible for those with access to the internet.

Grants have been secured by members across the network to allow for the continuation of their work and reach.

Renewables: Other projects to recognise have been the success of local solar schemes such as Low Carbon Gordano's rooftop solar projects and solar arrays at Moorhouse and Ham Lane and Bristol Energy Cooperative's two solar farms and 13 rooftop solar projects across the city. Beyond the immediate benefits of clean energy, these schemes have had an additional impact on communities. In 2020, the Community Megawatt fund, created from the profits of the solar, awarded almost £50,000 to local community projects.

Political contacts and networks held by member groups

Many of the BEN member groups have contact with their councillors and/or MPs. Some are in regular contact, and many local political figures are supportive. In particular, there are positive relationships between BEN member groups and: town councillors in Thornbury, South Gloucestershire councillors, Bristol City Council councillors Martin Fodor, Paula O'Rourke, Jerome Thomas, councillors in Southmead, B&NES councillor Alistair

Singleton, and MPs Darren Jones and Thangham Debonnaire in Bristol, and Sarah Warren in B&NES.

There is also contact with officers in Bristol City Council, including in the sustainability and energy teams and cabinet officers. Members named Steve Pearce - pension fund rep for Bristol, Kye Dudd - cabinet member for energy and transport, David White (energy team BCC), Alex Minshull - Sustainability team BCC, and support from the B&NES Area forums and Sustainability team.

There was a suggestion from one member that BEN could promote what we are doing within Bristol City Council at a 'Hot Coffee Hot Topic' session.



Community connections already held/made by members

Bristol Energy Network believes that to build an energy system that works for everyone, everyone must be involved in building it. BEN aims to act as a conduit between members and other organisations to enable the sharing of skills and knowledge across the network and beyond. It was important to hear about the connections that member groups already have in their communities and across Bristol as this is an integral to the goal of creating an energy system that works for all.

Member groups currently have connections in the following categories:

- Community Energy Groups
 - Community Interest Companies (CIC) and Community Benefit Societies (Bencoms)
 - Charities e.g. Neighbourhood Trusts, Advice centres
 - Community interest groups e.g. historical societies, cultural groups, political groups
 - Schools
 - Religious groups
 - Transition groups
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2. Future plans

Development potential for members - next steps

When asked about potential projects, BEN members shared plans that fall roughly under the following categories: Energy Efficiency, Engagement, Buildings and Renewable Generation, Fundraising and Other. Many of these categories overlap and feed each other, as do the barriers the members see in realising the projects.

Examples of potential projects include:

Energy Efficiency projects within general households, vulnerable households visited by volunteers and local SMEs. These could include garnering the appetite for interest in energy efficiency, approaching the above with advice, asking those with maintenance experience to consider volunteering to make improvements to energy efficiency.

There are plans for more **Engagement** in schools and an exploration into the long term outcomes of school projects. Farmers are another group members plan to engage with, specifically around the topic of renewable energy generation. Others would like to create and train energy champions to engage people with their own households and work on behavioural change. Community groups run workshops in retrofit are also in member plans, with the structure of 'afford to pay' citizens subsidising grants for others.

Other members want to improve the energy efficiency and site management of their **Buildings**. **Renewable** generation has been mentioned in plans for groups to generate their own energy on their buildings using rooftop solar, and others would like to expand existing generation projects on the roofs of both social and private housing, while land has been identified by a member group for building a wind turbine.

Fundraising, specifically securing long term funding, along with **Other** plans including developing strong PR campaigns, and the trial of an electric bike scheme are all included in the future plans of member groups.

Barriers and gaps

There are common themes arising in the barriers to these plans. Many have identified a **lack of funding** opportunities and the problem of staffing resources and capacity that stems from this lack of funding. Many groups rely on volunteers and would like some of these to become paid roles to increase the security of the projects and the ability to take on larger scale plans.

Another barrier highlighted is around **perception** of 'green' projects. It was mentioned that some of the public may still have reservations around wind generation, while some groups, such as farmers, may feel confronted or excluded by the plans to cut carbon. Other groups are finding there are only small numbers of people or SMEs who **take-up** suggested energy efficiency modifications and a lack of **motivation** from the general public. One reason behind this, that a group suggested, is that there is currently no clear pathway to retrofit for householders and thus few examples of it happening around communities.

Finally, there is a gap in the **skills and training** required for some members to be able to plan, create, and execute the projects that they wish to. Skills and training will be discussed in the next section.



3. What BEN does for its members

What BEN already does that is of value to members

BEN's **meetings and conferences** have been identified as being a real strength, bringing together members to discuss and present ideas around all things energy.

The themes of our last open meetings have been:

Build Back Better, The Green Homes Grant, Re-Energising Community Buildings, City Leap and BEN hosted the Bristol Community Energy Conferences in 2018 and 2019.

As part of that communication, another positive asset highlighted is that BEN opens up **dialogue around projects**, such as City Leap, and the promotion of **partnerships** both within the network and with other parties in Bristol and the greater area. The informative **newsletters** were mentioned as a good way to share news across the network as well as things that are going on at a regional and national level.

BEN was commended for their **innovative and interesting ideas**, particularly around projects working with under-represented communities. Behind many of these projects is our Project Development Manager David Tudgey, who was mentioned for his considerable enthusiasm, knowledge, and good advice.

Lastly, BEN was praised for the way it **engages with political issues** in an informed way. Much of that is based on the Community Strategy for Energy which was developed with BEN members in 2013. It is an important foundation for the work BEN does.



(enabling) mutual support between members

BEN's main purpose is to connect members and facilitate the sharing of knowledge, skills, resources, and connections. This can be done by mapping the strengths and assets of member groups against the needs of other member groups and with such a diverse membership, with equally diverse skill sets, a lot could be achieved through the process. However, a more comprehensive response to the member survey will be needed to complete this process.

An example of some the needs and offers of member groups:

Group	What they need	Who offered	Who else in BEN that could	outstanding skills offers	who?
sustainable Thornbury	help to set up CE group		CCA, BCR CE group	financial& project managemen	sustainable Thornbury
Low Carbon Gordano	Fundraising	Zero Carbon Bristol	CHEESE, Ambition Lawrence Weston, Eastside Community	offshore wind generation	sustainable Thornbury
Bishopston Cotham Redland	admin, funding	Zero Carbon Bristol	maybe fits the financial&Project management offer from S	roof and ground soalr arrays	Low Carbon Gordano
Souhtmead development tru:	understanding energy audit		CCA, BCR, CHEESE, MakeYourhome Eco	tree planting	BCR
Clifton Cliamte Action	Fundraising	Zero Carbon Bristol		community engagement	Southmead
Coal Action Network	design, multimedia			engaging with developers	Southmead
Groundwork South	energy advice for building		BEN, CHEESE, CSE, MakeYourHomeEco	online events	CCA
Afican Voices Forum	community buildings support		Easton Energy Group, BEN, CHEESE, Eastside Community T	talks	CCA
Make Your Home Eco	venue for workshops		ECT, ...	website design	CCA
Keynsham	tripartate agreements	Zero Carbon Bristol	BEC, ALW,	publicising events	CCA
	wind turbine		Ambition Lawrence Weston, BEC, Sust Thornbury (see out	local campaigning	Coal Action Network
	rooftop solar	Low Carbon Gordano	BEC	energy work for youth	Groundwork South
Zero Carbon Bristol	public engagement	Southmead	Eastside Community Trust, Re:work,	newsletter reach	African Voices Forum
	retrofit	Make Your Home Eco	Re:Work, CHEESE, CSE	DIY workshops	Make Your Home Eco
	building energy audit		CHEESE, CSE, (commercial auditors - not members)	project management	Zero Carbon Bristol
				community engagement	Zero Carbon Bristol
				fundraising	Zero Carbon Bristol

A working spreadsheet of needs and offers can be found [here](#). Please add your groups' needs and skills you can offer and check whether you match with any other groups.

4. What BEN could do for its members

Areas for improvement

Though celebrated in the feedback, it was also pointed out that the existing **Community Strategy for Energy needs updating** to come in line with what has happened around community energy since 2013 and what plans there are for the future for Bristol and greater Bristol area groups.

One of the main areas that BEN needs to work on is the **clarity of its offer** to its members. BEN needs a clear and comprehensive proposal of how it functions, what its plans are, and importantly, what are the benefits of groups in becoming members. It was suggested that the community energy sector can feel a bit crowded, and it is important for BEN to identify its unique qualities in order to stake its place in the sector.

One of the pieces of work needed to support this, is the fleshing out of the network's **asset mapping** in terms of member needs and offers as exemplified above. This could become a very useful resource across the network. Another suggestion for improvement, which would also support this work, is to make more of the successes of BEN members and to promote them accordingly.

Some members would like BEN to focus more on the **networking** side of its work rather than the projects while others would like a focus on supporting individual groups to attain long term funding. Bristol Energy Network is currently funded on a project basis so it needs to deliver on its project workstreams. Some project funding covers network support, meetings etc. but more core funding needs to be secured in order to support this work. The unique side to BEN is that it is often able to share project outcomes with

others in the network as a way to disseminate useful knowledge from work it has already undertaken. BEN will be applying for funding to support its core work in the future.

Mapping member needs to BEN projects

Along with the above suggestions for improvements BEN could make, the survey responses identified some practical training and support needs.

The following maps member needs and requests onto current projects and activities that BEN are involved in. There is potential for strengthening the link, and exchange of knowledge, between current BEN projects and member groups.

Matchmaking: specifically connecting members with groups who are skilled in fundraising and legal advice. Connecting community building managers to share information on energy efficiency processes.

BEN are part of the Bristol City Lab of the European 'SOcial iNNovation in Energy Transitions' ([SONNET](#)) project. BEN's role is to undertake engagement activities with community building managers and Bristol citizens, to explore energy efficiency improvements and renewable generation in community buildings and the possibility of using investment-based crowdfunding to fund these works. This is a great opportunity for community buildings to lead the way on energy efficiency in their communities, an approach which has been at the heart of BEN's city-wide thinking for a long time. Many of the community buildings in Bristol are owned by Bristol City Council and leased to community organisations but are often left out of City Council energy upgrades. This project aims to understand how to unlock these.

BEN plans to share outcomes of the SONNET project with any member groups and community buildings looking for a way forward in building energy needs.

Practical Workshops: on DIY retrofit, designing retrofit assessments and energy audits, asset mapping, Energy Champion training, renewable energy project formation.

A current project that BEN is undertaking with Re:Work, C.H.E.E.S.E and Bristol City Council is the "Enabling Retrofit" pilot 'Bright Green Homes' that will fully retrofit a sample 25 homes. Properties will be surveyed using C.H.E.E.S.E thermal imaging protocol both before and after retrofitting to verify efficacy of all retrofit measures undertaken. Surveys will also be carried out on the attitudes and actions of householder participants before and after all surveys and subsequent retrofit actions. The project plans to engage householders who are earning <£30,000 who feel unable to engage with retrofit measures to engage with self-help DIY style interventions as the first rewarding step towards deeper, more costly retrofit, and to be introduced to Bristol City Council's Local Authority Delivery Scheme for deeper retrofit measures.

Policy and Advocacy: negotiating agreements with the council and other parties, clear messaging from the network, and opening routes to policy makers in, for example, the council, BEIS, and active campaign groups. Helping voices to be heard on how funding should be delivered e.g. to make homes warmer or reduce tariffs for those in fuel poverty.

As an example of clear messaging by and from the network, BEN recently consulted its members on the UK Government's 10 point plan and Energy White paper and created an extensive response in the form of '10 asks for a Smart Local Energy Revolution-Community Views and Plans for Bristol' (full document [here](#)). This document was digested and 10 questions were created to ask the Bristol Mayoral, WECA Mayoral and local councillor candidates at the upcoming elections.

Other: Administration, promotion of events, developing educational tools to share with the community, design work, research e.g. heat networks vs hydrogen provision.

Resources

BEN has a number of resources available to members for booking for outreach activities. These include:

- A bike stand generator (which can facilitate most bikes)

- A light box array, showing the different types of lightbulbs (this can be powered by the generator)
- The house of the future; a (large) model, interactive house showing retrofit measures that can be done.
- Paper resources for kids - energy themed word searches etc
- Bristol Energy Network gazebo and event displays

The physical equipment is currently being serviced as it has been in storage throughout lockdown.

Additional Training

There are several areas where specialist professional development and training would help members get to the next level of skill development. Areas that have come up multiple times include fundraising and energy auditing of buildings.

Once BEN has gathered information from both the SONNET and 'Enabling Retrofit' projects they will be able to share their experiences on energy audits, and how to create plans from those audits, with the network.

Fundraising is fundamental to all groups and would benefit from specialist input to help develop skills across the network. BEN will look into engaging a professional group such as VOSCUR to run a workshop specifically on fundraising and split the costs with those participating.

5. Challenges and solutions

External Challenges

Community energy faces multiple external challenges. The biggest challenge is the lukewarm governmental support and indeed the putting up of barriers by

government through the withdrawal of tax relief, reliable feed-in and export tariffs, making it difficult to secure investment for CE projects.

At a central government level, full cross-party commitment to community energy is needed. Ambitious targets, dedicated working groups, community participation in policy making, and community energy information hubs to share best practice and knowledge are required. All of these need to be supported financially through incentives, tax relief, and grants and community energy must be recognised as an excellent example of added social value and co-benefits.

All these challenges are highly relevant to our members and have been mentioned in various survey responses. BEN intends to put pressure on local government through its existing relationships and by holding to account the newly elected local officials. In order to engage on a national level BEN has been working on its responses to policy, such as the Energy White Paper, and by engaging and responding to organisations such as Community Energy England and their State of the Sector report.

BEN development and growth

Members have offered suggestions for the improvement and development of BEN. One of the most prominent is the need for BEN to clarify its offer to its members; *what exactly can BEN provide for a member and at what cost?* This is important information for groups to build-in when considering their fundraising and it is necessary for BEN in order to sustain itself and to deliver exactly what it is that its memberships require.

In response to this, BEN is currently developing **a new member offer**. The plan will look at BEN's past, current, and future projects and set itself on three courses of action:

- Meet - Create space to discuss & develop concepts projects, new opportunities
- Learn - Learning from each other
- Do - Actualising BEN member activity, shaping local & national policy, project delivery, coordinating activity across the city

BEN will also create a **business plan** that will contain a situation analysis and SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) to thoroughly interrogate BEN's progress and suggest strategic shifts towards the goal of combating climate change and fuel poverty.

The outcomes of this necessary reflective and strategic work, alongside lessons from this member survey, will be shared with the network culminating in a new, coherent member offer.

The future of the Bristol Energy Network is dependent on its members, and BEN's staff and board of directors are there to provide the necessary support to complete projects and provide opportunities for members to 'Meet, Learn, and Do'. In order for Bristol to attain a clean and fair energy system for all, community energy will have to be central to the system and the Bristol Energy Network intends to provide information, make connections, and share knowledge about energy in order to achieve this and help Bristol towards new zero carbon emissions.



<http://bristolenergynetwork.org>

Future Leap, 1-3 Gloucester Rd, Bristol BS7 8AA
info@bristolenergynetwork.org