

6 July 2026 at M Shed, Bristol



Photos: Bristol Harbour | Conference suite, M Shed

About Energising Britain

Energising Britain (South West) was hosted by South West Net Zero Hub in partnership with the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) to celebrate community action on climate change and nature recovery.

The conference was one of five events across England as part of the rollout of the first UK-wide climate and nature Public Participation Strategy published earlier this year: Energising Britain: Your voice in our Clean Energy Superpower Mission.

This strategy complements the UK's Clean Power 2030 Action Plan to decarbonise the UK's electricity system by 2030.

Presentation slides and videos from the event can all be accessed here.

This report aims to provide detailed notes and links to aid attendees (and those who couldn't attend) in recalling and finding out more about the topics discussed. Content is not intended to express the Hub's opinion, nor the opinion of DESNZ.

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Keynote Speaker

Sonia Krylova, Deputy Director, Net Zero Strategy, Department for Energy Security & Net Zero (DESNZ)

Context: Sonia provides advice to the Energy Secretary Ed Miliband, responsible for leading the Clean Energy Mission. [N.B. Since this event, Ed has moved roles.]



Photo: Sonia presenting

Key points:

- The fundamental commitment to clean energy is consistent and growing, despite political changes.
- Climate, nature and fairness must be addressed in tandem or people will resist.
- Today's events are to celebrate and platform good work. While we are engaging the 'already engaged' today, attendees will still learn, broaden horizons and gain motivation. Tell others if their work inspires you.
- DESNZ's [Youth Climate and Nature Panel](#) is seeking appointees; please encourage people aged 16-25 to apply.
- Energy security is pressing; war has caused energy shocks and the energy price cap is rising by 13%. We must double down on electrifying the economy, expanding renewable energy and supporting nature.
- Civil society and local organisations are the voices most trusted by the public, not central Government.

Video: Ed Miliband, Energy Secretary

- The climate crisis is already happening and action *now* is the right thing to do. The Ukraine and Iran wars have emphasised the need for energy security, and we need better public health and cleaner air.
- We can only change in coalition across government, society and the economy. The Net Zero Hubs are helping to organise these coalitions.
- We *can* make a difference. The best antidote to despair is action. We must be wary not only of deny and delay tactics, but also fatalism. We must prove them wrong and show we can do something.
- Hope is our biggest commodity. Since the 2008 financial collapse, things have been difficult. This transition must be the light at the end of the tunnel: warmer homes, lower bills, good jobs, protected nature and a safer future.



Photo: Ed Miliband in the pre-recorded video

Session 1 – Panel 1: Energising the South West

This expert panel discussed the opportunities and challenges around a fair transition to clean energy, bringing together national and regional insights.

Chair: [Justin Olosunde](#), Head of Strategic Investment & Planning, [West of England Mayoral Combined Authority](#)

Panel: [Sonia Krylova](#), Deputy Director, Net Zero Strategy, [DESNZ](#) | [Emma Howard-Boyd CBE](#), Chair, [National Heat Risk Commission](#) | [Kerry McCarthy MP](#) | [Hannah Spungin](#), Director, [Bristol City Leap](#) | [Luke Moss](#), Skills and Employer Project Manager, [Exeter College](#)



Photo (L-R): Sonia, Emma, Kerry, Justin, Hannah and Luke

What are the opportunities from the transition to clean energy?

- Transitioning to a low carbon economy will improve our resilience.
- The energy system (under [NESO](#)) has a resilience duty (to heat, attack, etc.) and systems will break down if unready.
- Those with least resources are most affected; we need [Heat Ready London](#) equivalent plans across the country.
- Clean energy brings tangible benefits to homes and businesses, and exposure to risk is lowered with electrification.
- Electric cars are cheaper to power than petrol/diesel cars, and new cars are now similarly priced, while domestic solar can typically save £500/yr.
- The low carbon economy is growing faster than the rest of the economy; we need to help young people benefit.
- Many young people want employment in the green economy.

- [Construction technical excellence colleges \(CTECs\)](#) provide a mechanism and the [Green Skills Advisory Panel \(GSAP\)](#) a community; the role of feeder schools/colleges needs developing.
- [Exeter & North Devon Colleges Group](#) is working on Celtic Sea marine renewables, and [Level 2 Understanding Domestic Retrofit](#) is being delivered alongside a wide range of other trades courses to mainstream knowledge.

How do we make the clean energy transition fair?

- Political consensus on net zero has been under attack in recent years.
- Net zero must be discussed in the context of growth, skills, jobs, security and bringing bills down.
- Place-based approaches are important (e.g. ‘re-industrialising’ Cornwall appeals to locals tired of tourism focus and limited seasonal opportunity).



Photo (L-R): Emma, Kerry, Justin and Hannah

- We need to *show* how it makes lives better; Bristol leadership includes the well-known [Lawrence Weston turbine](#); the [£13.5m Temple Quarter district heating scheme](#) is less well-known.
- [Bristol City Leap](#) (a 20-year partnership between [Bristol City Council](#) and [Ameresco](#)) has a broad place-based decarbonising remit: domestic retrofit requires understanding of communities and can be most impactful; district heating is poorly understood by the public, but we're winning if people want it regardless of the climate benefits.

How do we give equal priority to climate adaptation and resilience alongside clean energy?

- Recent weather has highlighted heat risks – we must deliver at pace.
- The [Seventh Carbon Budget](#), setting an 87% emissions reduction target, was passed in June 2026 – but we're not yet integrating resilience (e.g. renewables that can withstand extreme weather).
- Mayors and councils are better placed to bring action to community level.
- Retrofit must integrate warmer homes and cooler homes at the same time.
- Climate impacts are happening quickly and must be understood across *all* Government departments to respond strategically, not just reactively.

How can we protect the most vulnerable?

- Emma's work for the [London Climate Resilience Review](#) revealed some very worrying statistics.
- Flooding is frequently discussed, but heat vulnerabilities less so.
- Governments are bound by spending review cycles, which are short term.
- Anything being commissioned now must take future temperatures into account, e.g. shutters, less glass (far too many glass buildings in London).

How can we build popular support for climate action?

- The Government's [five principles of public engagement](#) on transition are designed to support this:
communicate action being taken, **listen** to people, **enable** households to benefit, **grow** access to sustainable choices and **collaborate** on action.
- Previous schemes made economic sense but failed to consider how people actually make decisions; this is changing (e.g. [Boiler Upgrade Scheme](#) used social research in its design).
- [DESNZ Public Attitudes Tracker](#) is being used to advise ministers; the general population is very supportive of action on climate and clean energy, but Westminster politicians have a more negative perception of public opinion than is really the case.



Photo (L-R): Sonia and Emma

What one practical action should we prioritise next year (very briefly)?

- Insulation.
- Community response to events such as heatwaves.
- Solar on schools and public buildings.
- Knowledge exchange, including with other parts of the country.
- Construction industry changes: shorter courses for experienced tradespeople to upgrade qualifications (e.g. recent work via the [Warm Homes Skills Programme](#)); developing pipelines to match college students with skills gaps (e.g. Section 106 Employment and Skills Plan requirements to work with Exeter College on upskilling).

Session 2 – ‘It Makes Life Better!’

A series of case studies of community climate and nature action, hosted by [Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership](#). [Download presentation slides](#)

Chair: [Lizzi Testani](#), CEO, [Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership](#)

Presenters: [Amy Harrison](#), Head of Community Partnerships, [Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership](#) | [Kirsty Tait](#), Community Development Manager, [Heart of BS13](#) | [Melissa Blackburn](#), CEO, [Lockleaze Neighbourhood Trust](#) | [Emma Geen](#), Disability Climate Justice Consultant, [Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership](#) | [Euella Jackson](#), Co-director, [Rising Arts Agency](#)



Photo (L-R): Euella, Emma, Melissa, Kirsty and Amy



Photo: Lizzi

Introducing Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership

Presenter: [Lizzi Testani](#), CEO, [Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership](#)

- Bristol is a climate leader, reducing its carbon footprint by 65% since 2005 (10% more than the national average) and the first city to declare a climate emergency.
- Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership grew from the [Green Capital Partnership](#) and is now a CIC (independent from Bristol City Council) with 13 staff, and

the largest place-based movement for climate and nature worldwide: 1,400 member organisations spanning public, business and community sectors.

- Work includes the [Climate Action Programme](#) and [Climate Leaders Group](#), and a key role in [Bristol Climate Action Investment](#) (raising £2m) and the West of England [Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#).
- The partnership's work is people-centred and messy; work is still needed on better inclusion of underrepresented groups.
- Space is needed for (constructive, not toxic!) contestation – challenges to approaches can make things better (e.g. [‘Repair College Green after the Youth Strike’ crowdfunder](#)).
- Every place needs good governance structures to support action; community organisations are essential, trusted and underestimated on every issue, helping with societal shifts, learning by doing, and making changes to make life better.

Delivering community action through Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership

Presenter: [Amy Harrison](#), Head of Community Partnerships, [Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership](#)

- Community responses to Covid and [heatwaves](#) show that communities are change agents providing vital social and civic infrastructure.
- Instead of technology, start with people, places and community: health, housing, transport, jobs, belonging.
- Net zero transition is a big opportunity for a fairer, healthier society and to address systemic inequalities – but done badly will leave some even more behind than they already are.
- Bristol is a testbed for a just transition; see [2026 impact report](#): 17 action plans, 18,300 people engaged (half new to climate action), £4.3m invested.
- Don't always start with climate: instead consider employment, eating, heating, living costs, better work; locally, climate isn't separate from wider issues.
- Representation matters, to ensure work is fit for purpose and legitimate.
- Joy is essential to sustain people's resilience to carry out climate work: hope and discomfort must co-exist.
- Creativity provides an accessible entry point for a more diverse range of people.
- We are [working with UWE](#) to explore potential for scale and replication, and to influence national policy.

- Communities are innovative, trusted civic mycelium and must be at the heart of a fair transition.



Photo: Kirsty and Amy

Hartcliffe and Withywood: Heart of BS13

Presenter: [Kirsty Tait](#), Community Development Manager, [Heart of BS13](#)

- Life expectancy for men in BS13 is 13 years lower than Bristol's Harbourside, and <8% of residents went to university.
- Communities who contributed the least to climate change are hit hardest.
- We started with people, not carbon, and *listened*: waste was a big concern (e.g. food), leading to work such as [closed loop composting](#); the tangible can then be related to the intangible to help understanding (e.g. energy use).
- Green skills and jobs are a community priority; people need to see others in their community in those roles.
- We must tackle inequality, build resilience and invest in new leaders – bringing lived experience and community voices to decision-making.
- More funding is needed to create capacity for a just transition – what are

we investing in to get underrepresented people in the room?

Really Wild Lockleaze

Presenter: [Melissa Blackburn](#), CEO, [Lockleaze Neighbourhood Trust](#)

- Lockleaze is a very diverse Bristol ward with health, housing and hardship issues; it also has the most greenspace.
- Life expectancy is seven years less than in Clifton ward (only a few miles away).
- Communities can be engines of social change and already have expertise.
- [Really Wild Lockleaze](#) is a demonstrator project for bringing nature to housing greens (in 1950s/60s housing estates), alongside private gardens and verges.
- Improving shared spaces helps diverse neighbours come together, and more people have contact with the Trust.
- Developing '[green permits](#)' will make it easier for residents to improve streets.
- Talk about green spaces and mental health; don't lead the conversation with climate, and don't talk about net zero.
- The future must involve a just transition for working class communities.

Disability in community action

Presenter: [Emma Geen](#), Disability Climate Justice Consultant, [Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership](#)

- Disabled people are very underrepresented in climate action, despite being 24% of the population.

- One of the most climate-vulnerable groups: 2-4 x more likely to die in 'fast' climate disasters ([Harvard, 2023](#)), and in 'slow' ones (such as heatwaves).
- Disabled people are experts at adapting in a world that doesn't meet needs.
- Transition to a sustainable future is an opportunity to close the disability gap.
- Improvements for disabled people often make life better for all, e.g. drop kerbs (as a non-energy example).
- Active travel and public transport often don't support disability; Bristol has created an [inclusive transport vision](#).
- Bristol's [Just Transition Declaration](#) outlines 10 core principles; see also [The Future Must be Green and Accessible: Bristol Disability Equality Forum Community Climate Action Plan](#).



Photo: Emma

Young people and creative responses

Presenter: [Euella Jackson](#), Co-director, [Rising Arts Agency](#)

- Rising Arts is a Bristol-based creative agency led by people aged 18-30.
- Young adults face myriad challenges (living costs, pandemic fallout, precarious living/job situations) but are underrepresented in decision-making and often lack agency (e.g. few assets, renting with bad landlords).
- Rising Arts' community is nomadic across the city (e.g. temporary living in house shares, digital communities).
- Their strength as leaders and problem-solvers lies in doing things differently.
- The colonial legacy of climate crisis means many young people from the global majority care deeply about what is happening outside the UK and don't see this as a separate issue.
- Joy is an important part of resilience – people must feel well enough to cope.
- We need radical imagination and the ability to freely express anxieties.
- The [Capsule](#) short film [see Lunchtime session] was created with communities to explore a just transition, considering climate alongside other social issues.



Photo: Emma, Melissa, Kirsty, Amy and Lizzi, with Euella presenting the making of 'Capsule'

Session 3 – Creative Clean Power Pilot

An innovative project to decarbonise live events by replacing diesel generators with renewable mobile solutions through a [Creative Clean Power Pilot](#). [Download presentation slides](#)

Chair: [Nona Hunter](#), Creative Economy Lead, [West of England Mayoral Combined Authority](#)

Panel: [Katherine Nash](#), Head of Studios, [The Bottle Yard Studios](#) | [Ian Peniston](#), Director of Operations, [Power Logistics](#) | [Chloe Brazier-Sant](#), Project Manager, [South West Net Zero Hub](#)



Photo (L-R): Ian, Katherine, Chloe and Nona

Cross-panel contributions

- The pilot is part of efforts to decarbonise creative industries, catalysed by Massive Attack's [climate accelerator event](#) on Bristol Downs in 2024 as part of [Act 1.5](#), supported by the Tyndall Centre's [Roadmap to Super Low Carbon Live Music](#).
- The project is supported by the [West of England Creative Places Growth Fund](#) and involves a wider range of partners spanning councils, arts and energy organisations.
- Work includes developing a [shared battery fleet](#) (reducing hire costs) and supporting and gathering evidence around decarbonising live events, TV and film.
- [The Bottle Yard Studios](#) (owned/managed by Bristol City Council) is acting as a clean battery storage and charging hub for the pilot, providing 'plug and play' power supplies for unit bases (the operational hubs during filming) that normally rely on diesel generators.
- The Bottle Yard Studios is the highest scoring studio globally under BAFTA Albert's [Studio Sustainability Standard](#); it can now offer clients a sustainability package handling everything needed for off-grid power, and influences them in their wider work elsewhere.
- The pilot's success has created a strong business case for continuity.
- Education alongside incentivising and derisking battery use has supported studio clients to take up technologies, including a project fund to top up the cost of battery hire and help cash flow; currently, batteries are still more expensive than generators.



Photo: Nona

- [Power Logistics](#) is a temporary power provider working with events and battery providers (including those who lack confidence and relevant knowledge) to support cleaner alternatives and better specification of energy needs (e.g. for toilet blocks), supporting events such as Bristol festival [Love Saves the Day](#).
- [South West Net Zero Hub](#) is providing project management support, helping the project to progress at pace and leaning on existing relationships (e.g. advancing trenching and meter dates with the local DNO).
- Small details shouldn't be underestimated – Avon Fire & Rescue provided advice on battery transport and storage safety specifications (e.g. millimetres of grass required around battery units).
- The pilot brought together several battery providers who would normally be in competition and looked at best options for different contexts.
- Sharing learning across TV, film and events has been insightful and educational for everyone (e.g. understanding technologies), and lack

of in-house knowledge shouldn't be a barrier for production teams to engage.

- Onsite roles are shifting, e.g. from generator engineer to battery storage technician.
- A [Clean Power Pilot Battery Demonstration Open Day](#) is being held on 16 July 2026.
- The project is changing culture among producers, demystifying it and making it easier; everyone is interested, if barriers can be removed.
- The [Tyndall Centre](#) will be releasing a new big piece of research on the work in November 2026.

Question from the floor: Can you help creative organisations further afield, such as Chippenham Folk Festival [in Wiltshire]?

Answers: The next phase of the project (from Jan 2027) will extend reach beyond the West of England, and South West Net Zero Hub's support extends across the South West. Eventually the project aims for a national reach, and is working with national government to develop supportive policy for this work.



Photo: Katherine

Lunchtime Boat Tours and Films



Photo: Vegetarian and vegan lunch served at M Shed

Boat tours

During lunchtime, two fully booked boat tours took place on [Redshank](#), a newly converted electric narrowboat.

The first boat trip was led by [David Towns](#), Harbour Projects Manager at [Bristol City Council](#) to visit Capricorn Quay to see newly installed [floating ecosystems](#) in Bristol Harbour.

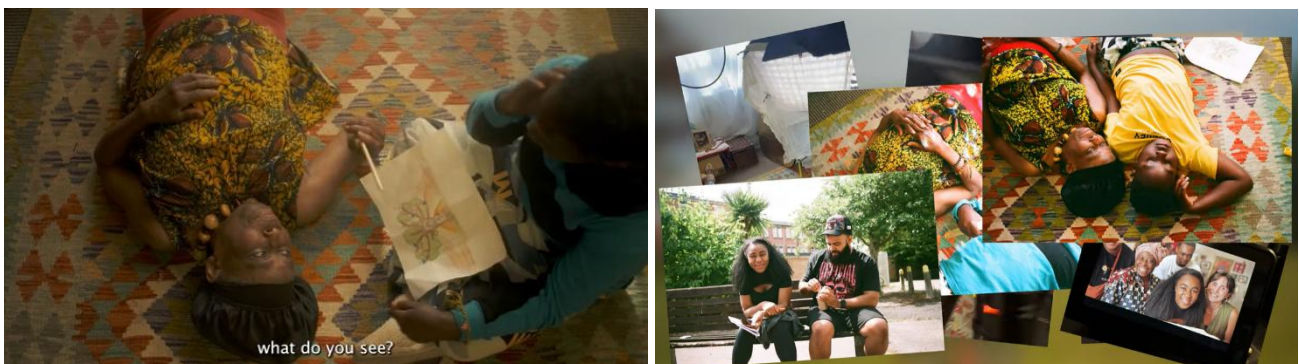
The second trip, led by [Jon Sankey](#), Business Development Manager at [Bristol City Leap](#), was to visit the [Bristol Heat Network](#), and in particular the [Castle Park Energy Centre](#), which uses a 3MW water source heat pump to generate heat for homes and businesses across Bristol.



Photos (L-R): Redshank | Onboard | Attendees | Floating ecosystem installations in the harbour

Short films

For those staying at M Shed over lunch, there was a showing of [Rising Arts Agency](#)'s short film [Capsule](#) (directed by [Euella Jackson](#) who spoke in the earlier session). This was accompanied by a second short film [The making of Capsule: what does a just transition mean to Bristol?](#)



Photos (L-R): Still from 'Capsule' | Still from 'The making of Capsule'

Session 4 – Lightning Session: Community Energy in Action

Quickfire presentations on community energy projects from across the region.

Hybrid Air Source Heat Pump (ASHP) and Gas at St Helen's Alveston

↓ [Download presentation slides](#)



Presenter: [Rev David Moss](#), Vicar, [North Severnside Benefice](#)

- The Diocese of Bristol adopted a [net zero target for 2030](#) in 2019, aiming to phase out gas entirely.
- In practice, this has been really difficult: halo heaters and ASHPs were problematic for grid connection, one ASHP being considered was withdrawn from the market for technical reasons, and air-to-air heaters were disallowed for heritage reasons (St Helen's Church is Grade II Listed).
- Project was under time pressure to spend a £40k grant and £35k of publicly raised funds (and not let donors down).
- Eventually secured a hybrid system for £20k over original budget (with help from a generous legacy from a local person), reducing annual gas usage from 90,000 kWh to 11,451 kWh – while not net zero, this is still a big reduction.

Bigbury Community Wind Turbine

↓ [Download presentation slides](#)



Presenter: [Als Parker](#), Director, [Devon Energy Collective](#)

- Devon Energy Collective is a CIC set up in 2020 to support renewables.
- The [Power Allotments](#) project (with Regen) asked every Devon parish and town council to find 5+ acres for solar or wind – 73 came back with sites!
- [Bigbury](#) is one of those sites – potential wind turbine spot in the National Landscape (AONB) at 1MW, 90m tall.
- Grid connections for 1MW wind are available, and cost around £60k.
- The site is on a windy hillside, away from homes and heritage assets, on land with low biodiversity value; the landowner runs an organic dairy farm.
- Challenges: demonstrating the turbine will help protect the landscape; access (to get turbine blades down rural lanes), finance and (some) public opposition.
- Community feuding has emerged, with those opposing the turbine being challenged by those supporting it.

Question from the floor: How are you coping with the conflict?

Answer: We're still working on this. It's important to keep dialogue going and not allow a vacuum to develop. It's time-consuming, but communication must stay joyous and positive. Previous work on [Southill Solar](#) got lots of people involved, e.g. local Women's Institute knit-bombed the area with suns; people took and shared photos of themselves by a banner to show support.

Question from the floor: Local influence on pylon décor has been explored ... could this apply to turbines, to help acceptance?

Answer: The single stick turbine is iconic, though art has been incorporated in Portugal [see [WindArt](#)]!



Photo: Lisa, Als, Lloyd and David

Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure

[Download presentation slides](#)

Presenter: [Lloyd Allen](#), Development Lead, [Bristol City Leap](#)

- We need to reduce car journeys and increase electrification of car miles.
- 40% of Bristolians don't have off-street parking to charge at home.
- Big shift for users is to think about what you do while waiting for car to charge (e.g. sleeping, working).
- [Revive](#) is the West of England's electric vehicle charging network, established in 2019 to create a step-change in public charge point availability.
- [150 street lighting column charge points](#) were installed for launch earlier this year (new to Bristol, but not UK), with innovations in size and height to improve accessibility; so far, 23,000 kWh charged (29,000 miles), eight tonnes of carbon saved.
- Big rollout (1,000s more charge points) planned over the next few years – there will be consultation on locations.

Question from the floor: Are [charging gullies](#) being explored?

Answer: These are being trialled now by Bristol City Council, with Bristol City Leap support.

Power Together – a community-owned Social Virtual Power Plant for a fair transition

↓ [Download presentation slides](#)



Presenter: [Lisa Beaney](#), Director, [Green Isle of Wight CIC](#)

- Solutions on the Isle of Wight must work for its population: 30% are aged 65+ and income is 18% lower than the national average.
- Many homes are old and deteriorating, affected by wind-driven rain; there are limited grid links and all of the island's primary substations have upstream constraints.
- Green Isle of Wight received funding from [GBECF](#) and [Energy Redress](#) for [Power Together](#), a pioneering project (still being tested) using 100+ batteries in homes and businesses to function alongside an enhanced [Fairer Warmth](#) app to store energy when it's cheap and release it when demand is high.
- A short [project video](#) was shown.
- The system is community-owned via shares, and low income households can access it for free or at reduced cost.

- A fair transition cannot depend on who can afford new technology – we need subsidised access, accessible onboarding, and advice and support.
- People are more willing to try new technology in places they know, with people they trust, with benefits they can see – infrastructure, ownership and trust are key.

Question from the floor: Is there a role for plug-in batteries for renters?

Answer: Yes, these will play a big part – alongside balcony solar. We are seeking outside spaces for conventional batteries for flats (as larger batteries bring more benefits), but plug-in batteries have a role.

Session 5 – Panel 2: Transformational Power of Community Energy

Presentations and panel exploring community-owned energy models as powerful mechanisms to share economic benefits, build trust and anchor climate action in communities.

Chair: [Katherine Piper](#), Business Development and Partnerships Lead, [Bristol City Leap](#)

Panel: [Ellie Philips](#), Community Engagement Coordinator, [Centre for Sustainable Energy](#) | [Neil Best](#), Senior Planner for Net Zero, [Centre for Sustainable Energy](#) | [Rebecca Windemer](#), Planning Lead, [Regen](#) | [Matt Golding](#), Director, [Antidote](#) | [Pete Capener](#), Managing Director, [Bath & West Community Energy](#)



Photo (L-R): Ellie, Neil, Rebecca, Matt and Pete

Chair's opening comments



Photo: Katherine (chair)

- Bristol City Leap is managing a £1.5m [Community Energy Fund](#) for Bristol groups (see online for details and videos of recipient projects); the fund also offers 0% interest capital loans.

Part 1: Presentations

Future Energy Landscapes (FEL)

Presenters: Ellie Philips and Neil Best, CSE

- The clean energy transition is often framed as a technological challenge, but it's also a social challenge in how to involve people.
- In community energy, ordinary people are active participants, not passive consumers.



- FEL's engagement programme focused on tricky questions of how clean energy affects people where they live, with three key findings:
 - 1) People care when energy becomes local and tangible: *this place, this landscape*.
 - 2) People *can* handle complexity, but need trusted information, time and space to consider trade-offs.
 - 3) Community energy builds legitimacy and trust, but won't necessarily eliminate conflict.
- Community energy creates conditions for building consent through trust and fairness.
- Example: In Corsham (Wiltshire), FEL helped the community to explore multiple sites at parish level (rather than focusing on a specific planning application) and involved multiple partners (e.g. Empowered, Bath & North East Somerset Council, Bath & West Community Energy, local climate groups); wind generation has emerged as being of local interest.
- Local partnerships are needed to reach people, and the hyper local context must be understood.
- There is far more support for solar and wind if it uses a community energy model – this is based on hard data, not hunches.

Antidote: Storytelling and Climate



Presenter: Matt Golding, Antidote

- Antidote has a podcast '[Screw this ... let's try something else](#)' and hosts a [postcode search tool](#) to find projects in your area.
- The project is playing with being playful, but also exploring serious ideas about finding collective action stories that resonate and are communicated well.
- Belief in the ability to achieve things is key, and community *empowerment* is the most effective story to tell; meeting essential monthly needs is the hook, with content including food, farms, community energy, etc.
- Working with the University of Bristol, Antidote is researching the storytelling required to engage communities, and help people reclaim power over systems over which they feel powerless – from 'bleak' to 'restored agency'.
- Results indicate that 6-12 core people is typical to enable projects, and that storytelling works well following a model of 'inspire' → 'explain' → 'show how to get started'.

Fairy Hill Community Solar



Presenter: Pete Capener, Bath & West Community Energy (BWCE)

- BWCE was established in 2010 and has developed 16.6 MW of community energy – enough to power 5,800 homes – raising over £25m to enable this and putting £470k back into the community. There is potential to x4 this achievement over the next few years.
- Flexibility and local supply innovation has been important, alongside collaboration with Bath & North East Somerset Council and [Retrofit West](#).
- [Fairy Hill Community Solar](#) is a new 4.5 acre site with a 2MW installation, biodiversity improvements and community access.
- An [Energy Local](#) approach at Fairy Hill is just starting: the community project sells energy at a higher rate than it would get from the grid, while households buy it at a lower rate than they would get from the grid.
- Local support for the project was originally 80%, dropping to 70% when the idea was launched; around 50% of planning portal comments were

positive, showing a drop in support at each stage.

- Community energy is not a silver bullet, but it helps people who are supportive to be more involved, and opposition has faded away as the project progressed.
- At this stage, discussions are happening about community benefits, including to local social housing, and looking at links to battery storage and home energy.
- Community energy is unique in its ability to involve the community.
- When shared ownership plans – through the [Local Power Plan](#) and [Great British Energy](#) – get established, corporates will be adopting the rhetoric of community energy, but their offer won't be the same.
- Projects are not just about climate, but also the cost of living; it's important to lead with the message that makes a difference to people.

Clean Power: A Just Transition

Presenter: Rebecca Windemer, Regen

- A just transition is a key part of the clean energy transition, across three key themes: timing, scale and involvement.
- Timing – significant change is happening and coming up, including implementation of the [Local Power Plan](#), [Clean Power 2030 Action Plan](#) targets and the development of [Strategic Spatial Energy Plans](#)

(indicating where new energy infrastructure should be located).

- Scale – small wind and solar, battery storage and retrofit all require upscaling, while the need to maximise community benefit from shared ownership will be explored.
- Involvement – time, skills and education are needed to get involved, but not everyone has these; it's

important to consider what time and funding are needed to give more people the opportunity, and to consider how projects can benefit the wider community.



Photo: The day's speakers attracted an attentive audience

Part 2: Panel discussion

How can community energy help public support for the clean power transition, and how is it uniquely positioned for this?

- Community energy ownership structures promote accountable governance and they are legally required to generate community benefit – this fosters trust.
- The scale that community energy works at is more challenging than commercial projects, because it's harder to get the economics to stack up – but the wider benefits are significant.
- Great British Energy and the Local Power Plan need to support community energy at scale.
- Community energy can directly help with cheaper bills, and also gives more opportunity to link with other concerns such as biodiversity (most people find nature interesting, but carbon and energy less so).

Public support for renewables in general is high, but lowers for specific projects. Can community approaches help, or are there deeper issues of trust?

- Net zero is often something being done to people – but community energy gives a direct opportunity to choose to support it.
- Climate is a secondary benefit to projects promoted by Antidote, not central.
- Misinformation is a big issue locally.

- Community energy supports meaningful involvement – it helps get true information out into the community, people learn from their neighbours and see their input has meaning.

Can community energy depoliticise net zero?

- Community energy democratises power, so it may play a role.
- Ownership is part of the answer.
- Opposition to renewables is often about process, whether public input is listened to, and who will benefit – community energy helps overcome all of these issues.

How can opportunities for community energy be made fair, given the different challenges for rural, coastal and underresourced communities?

- If we can make smaller projects stack up, they can be closer to sources of demand and provide cheaper energy tariffs (e.g. [Energy Local](#) model).
- Community energy's funding model depends on raising capital, so there's a balance between targeting an area large enough to raise this, but small enough for meaningful local benefit.

What is the role of government and local authorities in a just transition?

- Leadership and good decision-making.

- Help with local capacity-building, funding and finance (including guaranteed loans at scale) and technical support.
- Community energy needs funding support to bring new people in, and to sustain established organisations (many run by volunteers who have been grafting for decades).

Question from the floor: Can community energy meet the pace and scale of transition needed? Will it be used to avoid large-scale solutions?

Answers: The Government wants 8MW of community energy (~100 projects) by 2030 – it's part of what's needed. If shared ownership becomes mandatory, there will be big opportunities (and challenges). Future Energy Landscapes (or similar) could help support communities going into shared ownership of bigger schemes. Community energy can't do it all, and larger scale renewables are needed. Not all MW are created equal – MW with strong community links can bring new people into the conversation, triggering other actions in people's lives (e.g. reported by 2 in 3 people participating in BWCE).

Question from the floor: What are your biggest storytelling tips for climate action?

Answers: 'Climate' has been toxified, but 'creating a future that works for ordinary people' still has resonance. Show, don't tell – allow featured people to explain their activities in their own words, and find examples that break stereotypes (i.e. not white middle-class).

Question from the floor: How can community energy membership be mainstreamed without becoming onerous or expensive?

Answers: We need more organisations to give more opportunities. Ownership should be more than simply investing in the capital costs, e.g. lower bills. We can't give up on climate as an agenda item, but can lean into cost-of-living arguments. Communications around community energy is needed, as people often don't understand it or how it differs to corporate projects. [Community Energy England's Up the Energy](#) campaign and crowdfunder aims to boost awareness and uptake.

Session 5 – Workshop: Our Vision for the Future

[Climate Outreach](#) and the [Centre for Climate Change and Social Transformations \(CAST\)](#) led this interactive session to build a ten-year vision for the South West.

Workshop introduction



Presenter: [Hayden Banks](#), Advocacy Manager, [Climate Outreach](#)

- We must consider how to bring the unengaged with us on the clean power transition.
- Over the next ten years, crucial policy includes the [Clean Power 2030 Action Plan](#), plans to deliver the [2050 net zero target](#) and the [Seventh Carbon Budget](#) (which has set a 87% emissions reduction target from 1990 levels by 2038-42).
- The Energise Britain strategy is based on [five principles of public engagement](#) on transition: **communicate** action being taken, **listen** to people, **enable** households to benefit, **grow** access to sustainable choices and **collaborate** on action.
- The Government aims to fully decarbonise electricity by 2030.

Questions explored

Question 1: **Imagine the clean energy transition has gone really well over the next 10 years. What does your region look like and how are people engaged in the transition?**

Question 2: **What are one or two really key things that need to happen to reach this vision? How can your organisation contribute and what do you need from Government?**

Outputs

Climate Outreach is analysing results from this workshop across all five regional events. Results will be collated and shared with the Government via the Net Zero Council and Local Authority Delivery Group, with the Local Net Zero Hubs invited to join discussions. This exercise will be revisited each year at the annual Energising Britain events.

Session support was provided by [Bella Zanin](#), Knowledge Exchange Associate, [Centre for Climate Change and Social Transformations \(CAST\)](#).



Close and Stalls

Closing remarks

Presenters: [Sonia Krylova](#), Deputy Director, Net Zero Strategy, [Department for Energy Security & Net Zero](#) | [Ben Mosley](#), Director of Operations and Delivery, [West of England Mayoral Combined Authority](#)

Sonia: The clean power transition is like a doughnut – delicious but messy, and better with friends. There is still some way to go with representation in this work, and we must keep momentum.

Ben: It's inspiring and useful to understand the challenges shared during the day. We can achieve much if we start with

community and work up. The West of England has a pioneering history on climate energy, including the [Lawrence Weston turbine](#) and [Bristol Harbour heat pump](#) – we need more! Clean energy and green jobs are central to economic plans for the region.



Photo: Sonia and Ben

Stalls



Photo: Local Net Zero Hub stall | Retrofit West stall

The event hosted four stalls providing information and resources throughout the day.

[Local Net Zero Hubs](#) | [Retrofit West](#) | [Skills Connect](#) | [West of England Growth Hub](#)

Post-event Gathering

[People, Planet, Pint](#) provided an informal post-event gathering at [The Junction](#), hosted by [Alexander Jefferson](#).

Further Information and Contacts

South West Net Zero Hub

[Email the Hub](#)

[Visit our LinkedIn page](#)

[Meet the team](#)

[Subscribe to our newsletter](#)

www.swnetzerohub.org.uk

The event was compered by [Katherine Rooney](#), Community Energy Manager, [South West Net Zero Hub](#).



Photo: Katherine

Speakers

Please refer to the relevant section of the report for LinkedIn and organisation website links (where applicable). If you need assistance contacting someone, please ask the Hub.

Conference reporting

This report was produced by [Ruth Gerrard](mailto:ruth@ruthgerrard.uk) (ruth@ruthgerrard.uk | www.ruthgerrard.uk).

Conference attendees

Ameresco • Amplify EV • Antidote • Arup • Ashden • Bath & North East Somerset Council • Bath & West Community Energy • Brightwild Ventures • Bristol City Council • Bristol City Leap • Bristol Climate & Nature Partnership • Bristol Diocese • Bristol Energy Cooperative • Bristol Energy Network • Centre for Energy Equality • Centre for Sustainable Energy • Cheltenham Borough Council • Climate Friendly Bradford on Avon • Climate Leadership Gloucestershire • Climate Outreach • Community Energy England • Defra • DESNZ • Devon County Council • Dorset Community Energy • East Devon District Council • Empowered • Energy Local Totnes • Engain • Exeter & North Devon Colleges Group • Forest of Dean Climate Action Partnership • Forest of Dean District Council • Free Rangers • Frome Renewable Energy Community • Future Leap • Gloucestershire County Council • Great Green Bedwyn • Green Isle of Wight • Green Longbow • Green Schools Project • Greener Energy Futures • GW4 • Harvest Green Developments • Heart of BS13 • Heatiliti • Hillfields Community Garden • Hubbub • Landmark Information Group • Let's Go Zero • Local Partnerships LLP • Locality • Lockleaze Neighbourhood Trust • Low Carbon Gordano • National Energy System Operator • National Grid DSO • National Lottery Community Fund • North Devon & Torridge District Councils • North Somerset Council • People Planet Pint • REGEN • Resilience Network • Retrofit West • Ridgewater Energy • Riding Sunbeams • Rubber Republic • She's Electric • Simtricity • Somerset Council • Somerset Wildlife Trust • South Gloucestershire Race Equality Network • South West Net Zero Hub • Spacehive • Spencer West LLP • St Werburgh's Community Association • Swindon Borough Council • The Bottle Yard Studios • The CHEESE Project • The Impact Factory • The Young Foundation • Totnes Renewable Energy Society • Turley • Turner and Townsend • University of Bath • University of Exeter • University of the West of England • Urban Smart Power • Vattenfall • We The Curious • West of England Mayoral Combined Authority • Wiltshire Wildlife Trust & Wiltshire Wildlife Community Energy • Windmill Hill City Farm • Zero Chippenham • Zero North Wiltshire Community Energy • Zoe Banks Gross Consulting



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