SP Energy Networks

Community Energy

Checklist for project consideration

SP Energy Networks Project Research

Checklist for project consideration

This guide provides a structured checklist to support communities in planning and developing community energy projects from an early stage.

It is designed to inform you about the Community Energy Journey, Community Energy more broadly and then provide practical guidance on how to plan and structure your approach as you embark on your community energy project.

For more information, please visit:
spenergynetworks.co.uk/pages/ community_energy_journey.aspx

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Guide contents

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1. What is SP Energy Networks Community Energy Journey?

Community energy projects can bring a wide range of benefits to local areas — from generating renewable electricity and reducing carbon emissions to creating income, improving local resilience, and bringing communities together around a shared purpose. However, developing a community energy project can sometimes feel complex, particularly for groups who are at the beginning of their journey.

To help support community groups through this process, SP Energy Networks developed the Community Energy Journey — a step-by-step guide designed to help groups understand the key stages involved in developing a community energy project. The journey has been designed to support communities at different stages of development, from early engagement and idea generation through to feasibility, funding, technical support, and ultimately connecting a project to the electricity network.

The journey combines practical guidance, videos, and supporting resources to help demystify the process and make community energy more accessible. It is not intended to be a rigid pathway, as every project and community is different, but instead provides a flexible framework to help groups understand the questions they may need to consider as their project develops.

These supporting guidance documents have been developed to sit alongside the Community Energy Journey and provide additional detail, examples, and practical advice for each stage of the process.

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2. What is Community Energy?

Community energy refers to locally driven energy initiatives such as renewable electricity generation, renewable heat solutions and energy efficiency programmes that are owned, controlled, or delivered by communities for the benefit of local people.

These projects play an important role in supporting the UK's transition to net zero by enabling low-carbon, decentralised energy solutions while also addressing issues such as fuel poverty and energy security.

By retaining financial benefits within the community and encouraging local participation, community energy schemes help build public engagement, increase acceptance of energy infrastructure, and deliver wider social, environmental, and economic value.

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3. What is Project Research and why is it so important?

Project research in community energy refers to the process of gathering, analysing, and interpreting information to inform the design, feasibility, and delivery of energy initiatives at a local level. It is a critical early-stage activity that helps ensure projects are realistic, well-targeted, and capable of delivering long-term benefits within their specific context.

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The importance of undertaking early-stage research in community energy projects can be defined in the following ways:

Developing Appropriate Solutions:
Community energy projects aim to deliver sustainable, localised energy systems, such as renewable electricity or heat generation. Research helps identify the most suitable technologies and approaches for a given area, ensuring that solutions are aligned with local demand, infrastructure, and environmental conditions.

Understanding Local Context:
Effective project development requires a strong understanding of local factors, including resource availability (e.g. solar, wind, or heat demand), site constraints, planning considerations, and existing energy systems. Research provides the evidence base needed to design viable and context-specific projects.

Assessing Feasibility and Risk:
Early research supports technical, financial, and regulatory feasibility assessments. This includes understanding costs, potential revenue streams, grid connection constraints, and policy frameworks. Identifying risks at an early stage reduces the likelihood of delays, cost overruns, or project failure.

Informing Decision-Making:
Robust research enables project teams to make informed decisions about project scope, scale, delivery model, and partnerships. It also helps prioritise opportunities and allocate resources effectively.

Ensuring Value and Impact:
Research helps to quantify potential benefits, such as carbon reduction, cost savings, and wider social value. This ensures that projects are designed to maximise positive outcomes and deliver meaningful impact for the community.

Supporting Funding and Investment:
Evidence gathered through project research is essential for securing funding and investment. Funders and partners typically require clear justification of need, feasibility, and expected outcomes before committing resources.

4. Early Considerations Checklist

The attached checklist is designed to support early-stage planning for community energy projects. It can be used at the outset to identify potential gaps, risks, or areas that may not yet have been considered.

It is not an exhaustive list, and not every item will be relevant to every project. However, reviewing the considerations early on can help strengthen project foundations and support a smoother development process.

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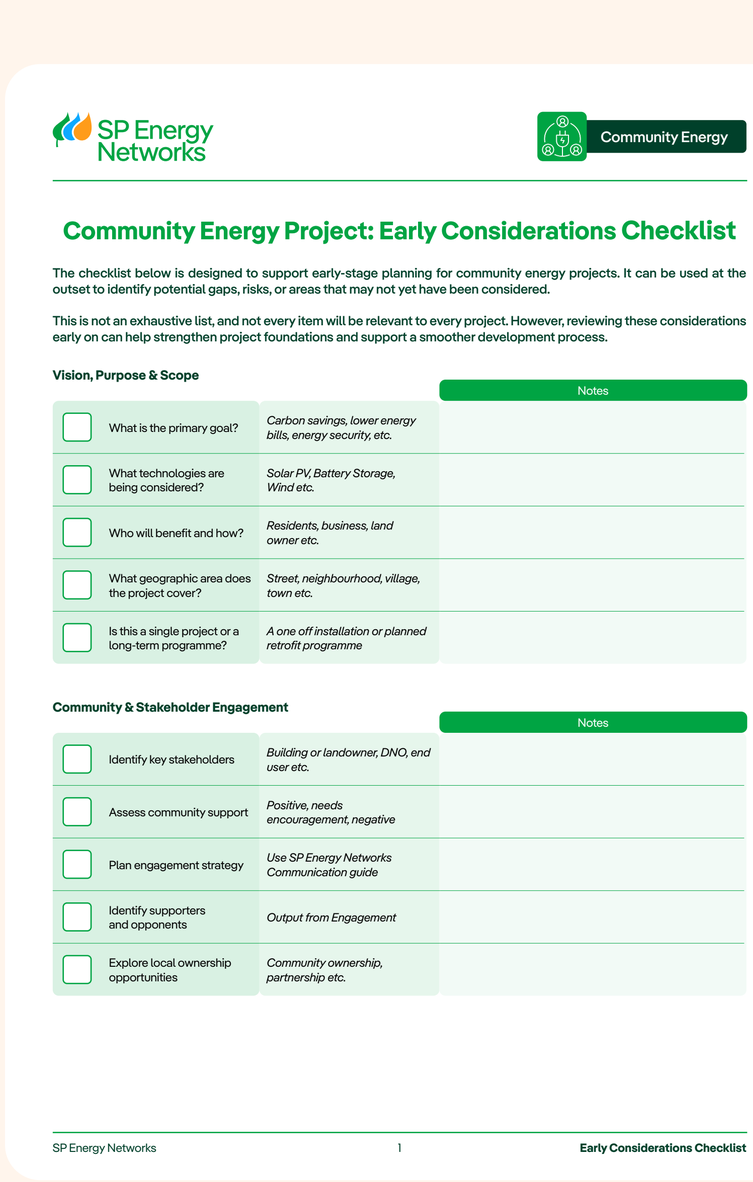

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Community Energy Project: Early Considerations Checklist

The checklist below is designed to support early-stage planning for community energy projects. It can be used at the outset to identify potential gaps, risks, or areas that may not yet have been considered.

This is not an exhaustive list, and not every item will be relevant to every project. However, reviewing these considerations early on can help strengthen project foundations and support a smoother development process.

Vision, Purpose & Scope

		Notes
☐ What is the primary goal?	*Carbon savings, lower energy bills, energy security, etc.*	
☐ What technologies are being considered?	*Solar PV, Battery Storage, Wind etc.*	
☐ Who will benefit and how?	*Residents, business, land owner etc.*	
☐ What geographic area does the project cover?	*Street, neighbourhood, village, town etc.*	
☐ Is this a single project or a long-term programme?	*A one off installation or planned retrofit programme*	

Community & Stakeholder Engagement

		Notes
☐ Identify key stakeholders	*Building or landowner, DNO, end user etc.*	
☐ Assess community support	*Positive, needs encouragement, negative*	
☐ Plan engagement strategy	*Use SP Energy Networks Communication guide*	
☐ Identify supporters and opponents	*Output from Engagement*	
☐ Explore local ownership opportunities	*Community ownership, partnership etc.*	

SP Energy Networks 1 **Early Considerations Checklist**

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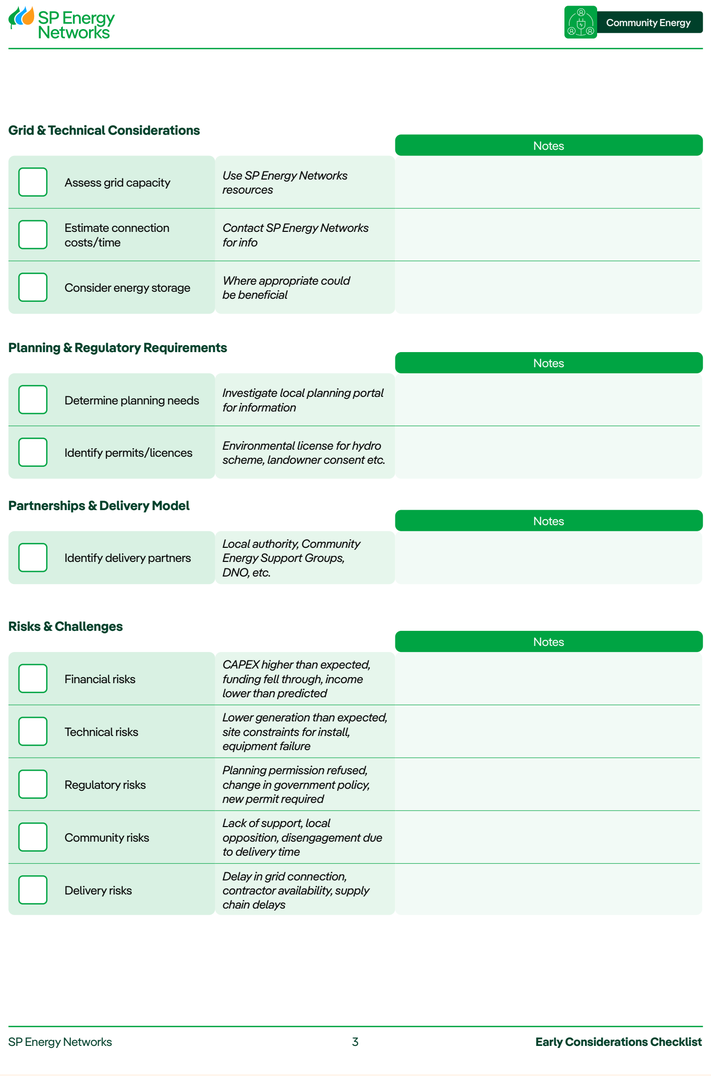

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Grid & Technical Considerations

		Notes
☐ Assess grid capacity	*Use SP Energy Networks resources*	
☐ Estimate connection costs/time	*Contact SP Energy Networks for info*	
☐ Consider energy storage	*Where appropriate could be beneficial*	

Planning & Regulatory Requirements

		Notes
☐ Determine planning needs	*Investigate local planning portal for information*	
☐ Identify permits/licences	*Environmental license for hydro scheme, landowner consent etc.*	

Partnerships & Delivery Model

		Notes
☐ Identify delivery partners	*Local authority, Community Energy Support Groups, DNO, etc.*	

Risks & Challenges

		Notes
☐ Financial risks	*CAPEX higher than expected, funding fell through, income lower than predicted*	
☐ Technical risks	*Lower generation than expected, site constraints for install, equipment failure*	
☐ Regulatory risks	*Planning permission refused, change in government policy, new permit required*	
☐ Community risks	*Lack of support, local opposition, disengagement due to delivery time*	
☐ Delivery risks	*Delay in grid connection, contractor availability, supply chain delays*	

SP Energy Networks 3 **Early Considerations Checklist**

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Additional Resources

SP Energy Networks Connection Guide:
spenergynetworks.co.uk/pages/which_type_of_connection.aspx

SP Energy Networks Hydro Guide
spenergynetworks.co.uk/userfiles/file/Community_Support_Hydro_Guide.pdf

SP Energy Networks Battery Guide:
spenergynetworks.co.uk/userfiles/file/Community_Support_Battery_Storage_Guide.pdf

SP Energy Networks Feasibility Guide:
spenergynetworks.co.uk/userfiles/file/Community_Support_Feasibility_Studies_Guide.pdf

SP Energy Networks Heat Pump Guide:
spenergynetworks.co.uk/userfiles/file/Community_Support_Heat_Pump_Guide.pdf?=v2

SP Energy Networks Solar PV Guide:
spenergynetworks.co.uk/userfiles/file/Guide_to_Solar_Installation_English_V2.pdf

SP Energy Networks Open Data Portal:
spenergynetworks.opendatasoft.com/pages/home/

Community Energy England – Community Energy National Map
communityenergyengland.org/national-map/

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communityenergy@spenergynetworks.co.uk