

# CARES CASE STUDY



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## SOLAR CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

### BACKGROUND

The Feed-in Tariff closed in March 2019 but Ofgem offered community organisations a 12-month extension through a simple pre-registration process. Local Energy Scotland supported 35 community groups and organisations to apply for pre-registration.

**Project:** Solar Connected Communities

**Technology:** Solar PV

**Location:** across Scotland

**CARES funding:** Enablement grants and external grant support

**Date installed/operational:** March 2020



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The Feed-in Tariff (FIT) scheme closed to new applications in March 2019. Ofgem offered community organisations a 12-month extension through a simple pre-registration process.

Communities interested in small solar PV projects (50kW or less) could pre-register buildings with Ofgem and then have 12 months to get their project up and running but still receive FIT payments at the January 2019 rate. These payments are then guaranteed for 20 years.

Local Energy Scotland was keen to support communities to make the most of this opportunity as the financial return is likely to be significantly more than developing projects without this support.

## PROJECT AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Local Energy Scotland supported 35 community groups and organisations across Scotland to apply for pre-registration for 78 buildings. 2.1MW capacity was applied for under community solar pre-registration. Local Energy Scotland also funded 32 new Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs) under Community and Renewable Energy Scheme (CARES) funding as an EPC was required to secure pre-registration.

Local Energy Scotland has continued to support the community groups who successfully pre-registered their solar projects. At the time of writing (February 2020), 20 community groups are currently developing their solar projects ahead of the March 2020 FIT deadline. Together



these community solar installations make up a combined capacity of 541.83kW across 29 buildings. Project buildings include schools, leisure centres and sports clubs, community halls and centres, community trust buildings and heritage centres, Men's Sheds and a resilience centre. All the organisations being supported are constituted community groups and are either a Community Interest Company (CIC), a Community Benefit Society or a Registered Charity, as required by Ofgem.

First year carbon savings of 108 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub> are expected, in addition to significant energy cost savings. The lifetime of the projects is expected to be between 20 and 25 years.

As well as helping to reduce carbon emissions and encouraging learning by example, profit from the FIT and the sale of electricity over the next 20 years will support groups' future charitable activities.

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The vision is that these projects will have a lasting environmental, economic and social benefit on their communities. Many of these communities have not previously been involved in any renewable energy projects and may not have progressed their solar projects if it were not for this opportunity. The projects will also support community involvement and partnership working in local energy systems which may encourage new installations of locally owned renewable energy in the future.

The projects will contribute towards the Scottish Government's ambition to have 1GW of locally owned energy by 2020 and 2GW by 2030, as outlined in the Scottish Energy Strategy, its vision for the future of the energy system in Scotland.

## OUTCOMES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Local Energy Scotland's experience of building projects is that there is often an increase in the use and occupancy rates in buildings that have installed an energy system and associated energy efficiency measures. General improvements made to the building and enhancement of facilities tend to help organisations to deliver their services more effectively and/or generate more revenue from room hire.

Any savings and surpluses that community groups make can be reinvested into their work which contributes to a wider positive impact across the areas they serve. Where host buildings are owned



by others such as councils and local businesses, they will benefit from low-carbon credentials and affordable electricity, freeing up funds for services and enhancing competitiveness.

Communities will increase their energy awareness through the delivery and management of their projects. These communities can mentor and act as demonstrators for others as market conditions improve through price reductions and as the Smart Export Guarantee is established.

The Solar Connected Communities project as a whole has also increased activity for solar PV installers across Scotland during a period when the market is in transition.

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## LESSONS LEARNED

The community groups involved in the project have developed their skills and knowledge around local renewable energy systems; this will build their capacity to deliver future projects.

CARES is also piloting a new mentoring programme and there is scope to include mentoring support from community organisations in the future.

Gill Warnock, project lead of Glenkens Community Arts Trust (GCAT), said:

“Although we had an interest in the subject, we didn’t really know very much about solar PV at the start, so the whole project has been very educational! We now have a better appreciation of the benefits that a solar PV project can bring to a community group.

“We’ve learned about infrastructure constraints, funding issues and some of the technicalities of installing solar PV. As a result of the project we were invited to take part in the Community Energy Futures programme which has meant we’ve been able to learn about a far wider range of potential community energy projects.”

When asked if there was anything particularly challenging, Gill said: “The technical specifications and the paperwork were particularly opaque to the non-professional. Without Local Energy Scotland’s help we couldn’t have considered or completed the project.

“Funding was also a challenge as we were not in a position to take on loans. Luckily, we had the chance to apply for a grant from a local community benefit fund which made the project possible.

Local Energy Scotland also helped us to secure Green Economy Fund match-funding for the solar PV, and CARES funding to pay for the EPC.

“We were also hampered by the infrastructure capacity: we had to reduce our system’s capacity and upgrade our inverter to avoid unaffordable infrastructure upgrade costs which likely wouldn’t have happened before the FIT deadline.

“It was difficult to find the necessary resource to manage the project. Without significant time and effort from a volunteer, it would not have been possible to do it.”

Gill said she would highlight a few key issues to communities in similar situations. She adds: “We ran into some issues with our specification to the supplier. Though we had everything in writing, there were still misunderstandings. I’d advise talking through all the requirements in detail, as well as having them written down, just to ensure there is no room for misinterpretation.

“Finally, take all the advice that you can get from independent bodies like Local Energy Scotland, Community Energy Scotland and Resource Efficient Scotland. They don’t expect you to be an expert and they are all happy to help. Don’t be put off by potential challenges. It’s great to be able to do a project that brings both immediate and long-term benefits to your community. If a group like ours, that had little prior knowledge, can complete such a project then anyone can do it!”

To find out more about funding from the Community and Renewable Energy Scheme, visit [localenergy.scot/funding](https://localenergy.scot/funding)

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