



CARES CASE STUDY

STROUPSTER COMMUNITY FUND

BACKGROUND

Located in the far north east of Scotland, Dunnet & Canisbay is a rural area with a population of 1,623. The population density is much lower than the national average, with the population split between six main villages and five smaller hamlets.

A number of challenges exist in the area like geographical isolation, an ageing population, higher than average numbers of holiday lets and vacant property, and a high level of unpaid care provision.

However, the area also has a number of positives - John O'Groats is one of the most iconic tourist destinations in the Highlands and tourists are also drawn by the ferry services to Orkney and the section of the North Coast 500 which runs through the area. Dunnet & Canisbay also benefits from a much appreciated natural environment and cultural heritage, with Pictish and Viking sites.



- Fund Name: Stroupster Community Fund
- Fund Donor: Greencoat UK Wind
- Related Renewable Energy Scheme: Stroupster Onshore Wind Farm
- Technology: Onshore wind
- Annual Fund Value: £5,000 a year per MW installed, totalling £149,500 a year (index linked) for the wind farm's operational lifetime
- Year of Fund commencement: 2011
- Fund Area of Benefit: Dunnet & Canisbay
- Fund Administrator: Foundation Scotland

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Greencoat's Stroupster Community Fund was the first onshore wind community fund that the Dunnet & Canisbay area had access to. Before the fund launched in 2015 a community action plan was developed using funding from the Scottish Government's Community and Renewable Energy Scheme (CARES), to help make sure that the design of the fund would meet the needs of the local area. The plan highlighted seven specific opportunities for the community to improve its future:

1. Improving or giving better access to communications and transport
2. Improving community assets and facilities for local people and visitors
3. Providing opportunities for young people
4. Providing support and opportunities for older people
5. Promoting enterprise and tourism
6. Improving the natural environment and access to it
7. Improving or giving better access to culture and heritage.

The projects proposed were at various stages of development, but the ideas showed a desire for progress and a community keen to take forward projects to improve its future.



FUND ARRANGEMENTS

Stroupster Community Fund supports community activity and development by funding the charitable activities of constituted, not-for-profit groups working to benefit the community. The Fund benefits communities primarily within the Dunnet & Canisbay Community Council area but up to 20% of the Fund is available for projects or services located outside that area if they benefit residents within Dunnet & Canisbay.

This arrangement came about as the original owner of Stroupster Wind Farm, RWE Innogy, had been involved in a county wide consultation as part of another wind farm development. The 'Caithness Conversation' facilitated discussions between community members, businesses and stakeholders about how community benefit funds might benefit communities across the whole of Caithness. Local people felt that the majority of wind farm funds should be spent on communities nearest the wind farm, but supported the idea of setting aside a smaller pot of funds for county-wide initiatives.

Stroupster Community Fund is held and administered by Foundation Scotland. The Foundation receives and processes applications, then decisions on awards are made by the Stroupster Community Fund Panel, comprising of nine local people.

The first Panel helped to shape and design the Fund framework, which includes the themes identified in the community planning exercise. All applications must demonstrate how their project contributes to one or more of the themes, and the Panel makes sure there is a fair spread of projects funded across the area. The Panel also works very closely with the Community Council on local issues and initiatives, which is very useful in identifying projects to be taken forward.

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KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Stroupster Community Fund supported 53 projects in its first year. These have covered a range of activities, such as:

- Chainsaw training courses for volunteers at Dunnet Forest so forest paths can quickly and effectively be cleared from storm blown trees.
- The purchase of a pressure washer which operates off sea water to clear algae from the slipway at Brough, allowing Brough Bay Association to stop using traditional chemical treatments.
- The creation of a safe all-weather cycle path for Scallywags Nursery, Dunnet.
- The provision of outdoor play equipment for local children.
- Improvements to village halls such as new car parks, windows, doors and other essential maintenance.

The Fund has also supported various projects outwith the Dunnet & Cansibay area, such as:

- Resurfacing and modernising tennis courts in Thurso
- Supporting a Viking festival
- Installing floodlights at a bowls club in Wick, so that matches can be scheduled in the evenings.



Significantly, the community action planning work and the establishment of the Fund has encouraged the creation of the John O'Groats Development Trust. The Trust aims to promote the John O'Groats area, to improve amenities and opportunities to benefit businesses, residents and visitors.

The Trust received support in its set-up phase from other successful Development Trusts, Development Trusts Association Scotland, Highland and Islands Enterprise and Foundation Scotland. It began with some quick win projects like repairing failing pathways for local crofters.

Its first flagship project was the creation of the John O'Groats Book Festival, bringing national award winning authors to John O'Groats and providing workshops and talks for over 250 local people. It is estimated that the festival brought £10,000 to the area through increased trade with local businesses.

The event allowed local writers to share a stage with established successful authors and attendees were able to learn about writing and were introduced to new authors. The Book Festival is now set to be an annual event.

The Trust has recently recruited a Development Officer, supported through Stroupster Community Fund, and it is hoped this will allow further development of projects that meet local needs and aspirations.

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LESSONS LEARNED

Stroupster Community Fund shows that community benefit funds can be structured to mainly benefit communities close to the wind farm, but to also recognise that no-one lives their lives according to administrative boundaries and that it's possible to widen the benefit from these funds.

The Panel looks to get feedback from local groups, as well as providing them with information on the Fund. From 2019 onwards, the grant-making programme will be tweaked to have three applications rounds per year, rather than two, to reduce the gap between rounds.

A member of the Stoupster Community Fund Panel commented:

"The most satisfying aspect is helping to ensure an enhancement in the socio-economic future for north east Caithness and helping (voluntary) bodies in the wider Caithness area that make life easier - less challenging - for local inhabitants. There are clear signs of facilities improvements and the Greencoat Stroupster Fund has stimulated 'let us help ourselves' thinking."

Websites:

Greencoat Stroupster Community Fund

www.foundationscotland.org.uk/programmes/stroupster

John O'Groats Development Trust

www.johnogroatsdt.org

To find out more about community benefits from renewable energy projects, visit www.localenergy.scot/community-benefits

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