



## Chocolate brownies and community energy in a changing energy system – 01.06.2017

Entering through a huge sky-blue door on a noisy industrial estate, we arrived at the tranquil Fazeley Studios in Birmingham, a stark contrast from the outside world. Over thirty people joined us here today to chat about the role of community energy in a changing energy system. Fuelled by lunch and chocolate brownies we got down to business. First up was a quick introduction to an incredible array of community groups, people from universities, wales government, and distribution network operators (DNO). This first rule of a great event is to get the right people in a room - tick!

The community groups proved their metal by talking about the projects they've installed, lots of solar, and the innovative projects they are planning and delivering including lots of storage, power sharing, energy efficiency and biomass (using miscanthus).



### 1. The government

First up, I gave the group a quick run through of what's going on with policy. This included a political manifestos league table of climate change and community energy content. Now is a great time to influence and engage MP's and candidates; you can have a lot of impact with relatively little effort and you can use the Regen [toolkit and templates](#) to do this. Community Energy England (CEE) and 10:10 will be launching a pack to help engage MP's after the election with a useful wish list of what we should be asking our politicians for. This includes:

- supportive financial mechanisms
- giving community ownership material weight in planning policy
- full and fair access to the energy market for local supply





CEE will be launching their State of the Sector survey at the conference on the 24 June and using this to influence policy. The conference is the start of [Community energy fortnight](#) (24 June – 9 July) and the Climate Coalition’s week of action (1-9 July). These are great opportunities for community energy groups to run events and engage MP’s.

Can we rely on politicians to sort out our energy market? I won’t be holding my breath, but we’ve seen the impact policy can have on our projects, and so it’s essential we keep highlighting the great work community energy groups are doing alongside our politicians. The consensus in the room was that community energy groups can act as trusted intermediaries, effecting behaviour change and helping with education. However, our real strength comes from getting on with making great projects happen, regardless of what happens in Westminster.

## 2. The electricity network

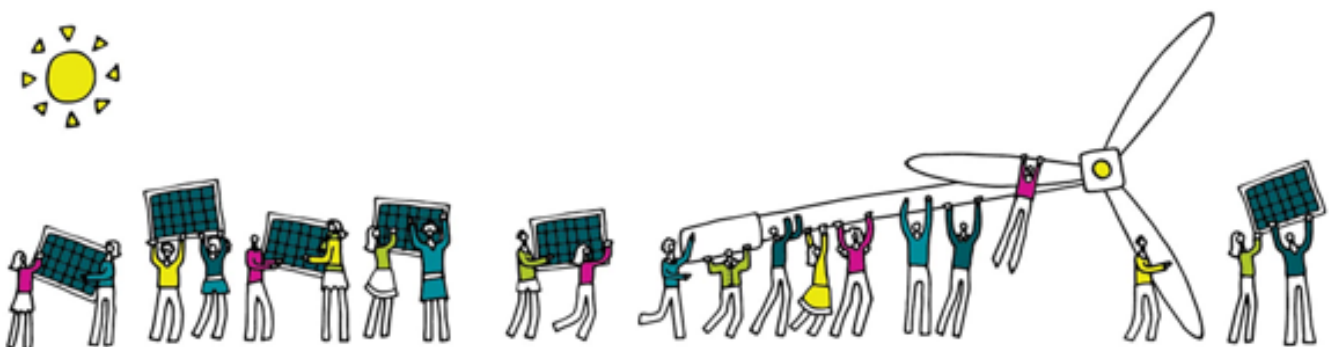
Next up we heard from Alison Sleightholm at Western Power Distribution (WPD) who rides a motorbike and wears killer heels. Aside from that, in her day job she helps keep the lights on for 7.8 million customers in WPD’s licence area. Alison expertly guided us through the transformation from Distribution Network Operator (DNO) to Distribution Systems Operator (DSO), the innovation projects they are delivering, and opportunities for community groups. The impact of distributed generation and storage means WPD are having to manage the network in a much more proactive way.

In the future WPD will be managing energy rather than power, demand response contracts, local balancing & settlement, alternative connections, and will have more commercial interaction with customers. They will be rolling out active network management (ANM) to their entire licence area by 2021, demonstrating their ambition to continue leading the pack of network operators. WPD have also been busy making information for communities more readily available on their [website](#) with films, guides and tools to help groups get connected and find innovative solutions for their projects. Alison’s sage advice to communities included to “be fearless, the rules don’t exist yet” and “conversations are free” so chat to your DNO early.

## 3. The models

Olly from Regen gave us to low down on the latest new storage and local supply models for community energy. Olly took part in the world gig pilot championships a few years ago and came 56<sup>th</sup> in the world.

The landscape is changing really quickly in the local supply and energy storage worlds. It’s tough for the community energy sector and everyone else to keep up. Regen is working on new projects with three community energy groups to understand how these new business models could work - with support from Friends Provident Foundation. We will be sharing the knowledge with our network in the Autumn.





We've also been doing some work for Cornwall Council, and have identified two leading models of local supply, the energy local club and licence exempt private network (microgrid). The [Energy Local](#) example is showing particular promise, with five additional projects following on from their successful trial in Bethesda, Wales.

- [Local supply animation](#)
- [Local supply: Options for selling your energy locally](#)



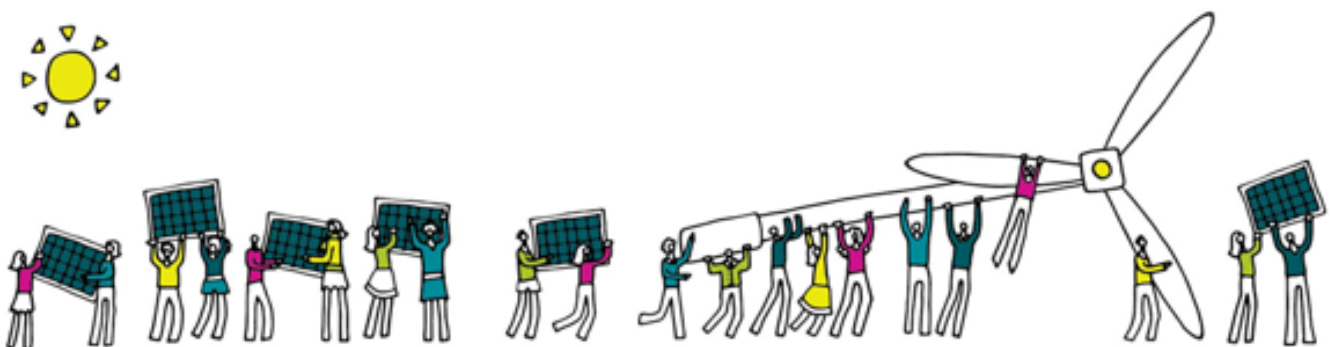
Energy storage is getting huge levels of attention, but it's a very different proposition from the traditional solar PV community model. The income streams are much more uncertain and often need to be 'stacked' to make a business model work. Regulation is lagging behind the market and the warranties/lifetime of products can be a minefield. This all makes energy storage much riskier than PV, and communities need to treat it with cautious optimism. Because battery costs keep falling, and time of use tariffs and aggregation platforms are becoming more accessible, the situation changes rapidly and it's one to keep an eye on.

[Energy storage – key points communities](#)

[Energy Storage - Towards a Commercial Model 2<sup>nd</sup> edition](#)

[Electricity storage guide for communities and independent developers](#)

[WPD energy storage consultation](#)







#### 4. The front line

Our final speaker, Anthony Walters from South Staffordshire Community Energy (SSCE) and Chase Community Solar talked about the incredible work his group is doing. It was a masterclass in demonstrating impact to draw in further funding and partners, creating “matches made in heaven”. Anthony talked about how SSCE have installed solar panels on 8 of their local hospital buildings and they wanted the community fund to have substantial impact, rather than giving away a few LED light bulbs. They are working with the hospital and a charity called Beat the Cold to tackle the 167 excess annual winter deaths in Stoke and keep the “frequent fliers” out of A&E. These are people who repeatedly return to A&E with cold related respiratory diseases due to poor housing and poverty. There are 1187 frequent fliers who cost the NHS £4.5 million a year in this trust alone. A home visit from Beat the Cold costs £120. Tracing a person through the healthcare system has enabled SSCE to demonstrate the impact of the solar community fund, and how much money that have saved the taxpayer. This has encouraged the big six vulnerable customer teams and the council to get on board and support them.

Anthony’s ambition now is to help his local authority create a truly equitable Stoke energy market “Potteries Power”. His drive and determination to continue moving the community energy revolution forward is evident, but to do this we must be more strategic and collaborative. He offered up some golden nuggets of advice and left us all feeling truly inspired and motivated to have more fun! Anthony once took 40 tonnes of chocolate down the Amazon.



We topped it all off in a sunny courtyard garden with some great wine fuelled networking and yet more chocolate brownies.

If you’d like to join us for more fun events like this one, keep an eye on the Regen events page on our [website](#).

