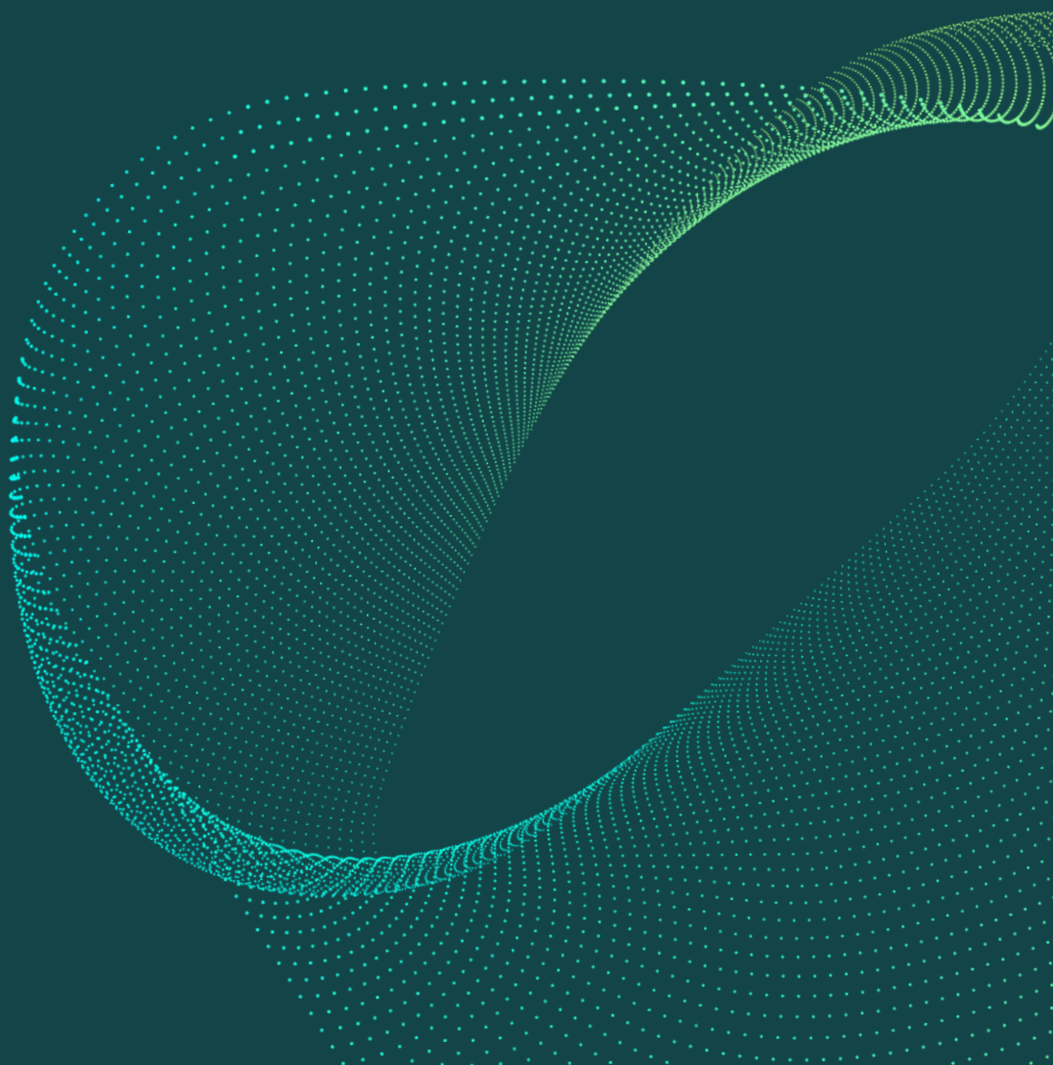
REGEN

WPA1 D2: Briefing note on Knowledge Sharing Events

Accelerating Rural Decarbonisation: Updates on the REACH innovation project

MAY 2025



About Regen

Regen provides independent, evidence-led insight and advice in support of our mission to transform the UK's energy system for a net zero future. We focus on analysing the systemic challenges of decarbonising power, heat and transport. We know that a transformation of this scale will require engaging the whole of society in a just transition.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the project partners for their presentations and participation in the Q&A.

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1 Background

Throughout the REACH project, Regen has played a key role in engaging a wider set of community energy stakeholders.

Engaging this wider set of stakeholders has been essential for disseminating findings from the REACH innovation project to the very communities that could be affected by the issue that the project is trying to address.

This briefing note summarises the event '*Accelerating Rural Decarbonisation: Updates on the REACH innovation project',* which was held online on Tuesday 13 May, 13:00 – 14:30.

Figure 1. A screenshot of the chair's introduction during the webinar

2 Event overview

Event details

- Title: Accelerating Rural Decarbonisation: Updates on the REACH innovation project
- Location: Online
- Date and time: Tuesday 13 May, 13:00 – 14:30

Target audience

- National rural community energy stakeholders
- Wider community energy stakeholders interested in heat, transport, grid and innovation.

Event aims

- Provide an update on the activity, progress and key lessons from the ‘Alpha’ phase of this innovation project.
- Educate community energy stakeholders about demand constraints, how they could impact rural community energy projects, and potential solutions.
- Gather feedback from a broad set of community energy stakeholders.

Figure 2. The webinar agenda

Agenda

13:00 Welcome and introduction

George Middlemiss, Regen

13:10 The role of our community partners

Jess Hogan, Regen

13:15 The project and our progress

Laurence Hunter, National Grid

James Whale, VEPOD

Mathew Osbourne, Passiv

Gary Swandells, Smart Grid Consultancy

14:00 Feedback

A series of survey questions using interactive polling software, Menti

14:10 Q&A

Panel session with questions from attendees

14:30 Close

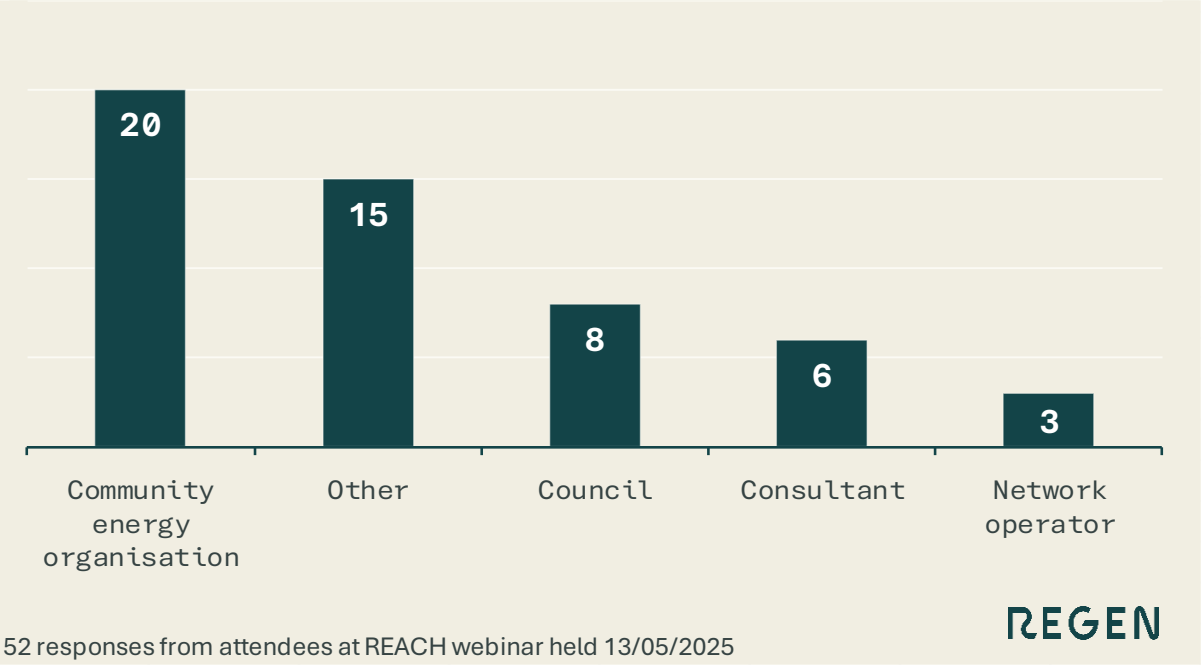
3 On the day details

Attendees

Seventy community energy stakeholders were present during the session; a full list of the organisations that registered can be found in the Appendix.

The participants represented various organisations, including active community energy groups, local authorities, network operators, consultants and other stakeholders.

Figure 3. Organisations present on the webinar



52 responses from attendees at REACH webinar held 13/05/2025

Content

The content covered by the speakers included:

- An introduction to rural decarbonisation and demand-related grid constraints
- An explanation of the role of the community partners in REACH
- Updates from each key project partner on their activities and key learnings from the Alpha phase.

Figure 4. A screenshot of one of the presentations during the event

Engagement

Engagement was facilitated in two ways during the session:

- A series of survey questions using Menti
- Zoom chat function
- Panel session with questions from attendees.

Survey results

The Community User Insights report fully outlines the results of the survey.

Zoom chat function

Participants used the chat to share their views during the session. Several participants raised concerns in the chat about the sustainability of the HVO fuel in the energy centre.

Panel session

The session featured a range of insightful and technically detailed questions from participants. A complete list of the questions asked can be seen in Appendix B.

Key themes included grid flexibility and future planning, collaboration opportunities, DNO-neutrality, grid access challenges and the long-term role of temporary energy solutions. There

was also interest in data transparency, resilience and how communities can take greater ownership.

Most of the questions were answered during the session. Responses to the unanswered questions are being gathered and will be sent to event participants.

4 Appendix A: Attendees

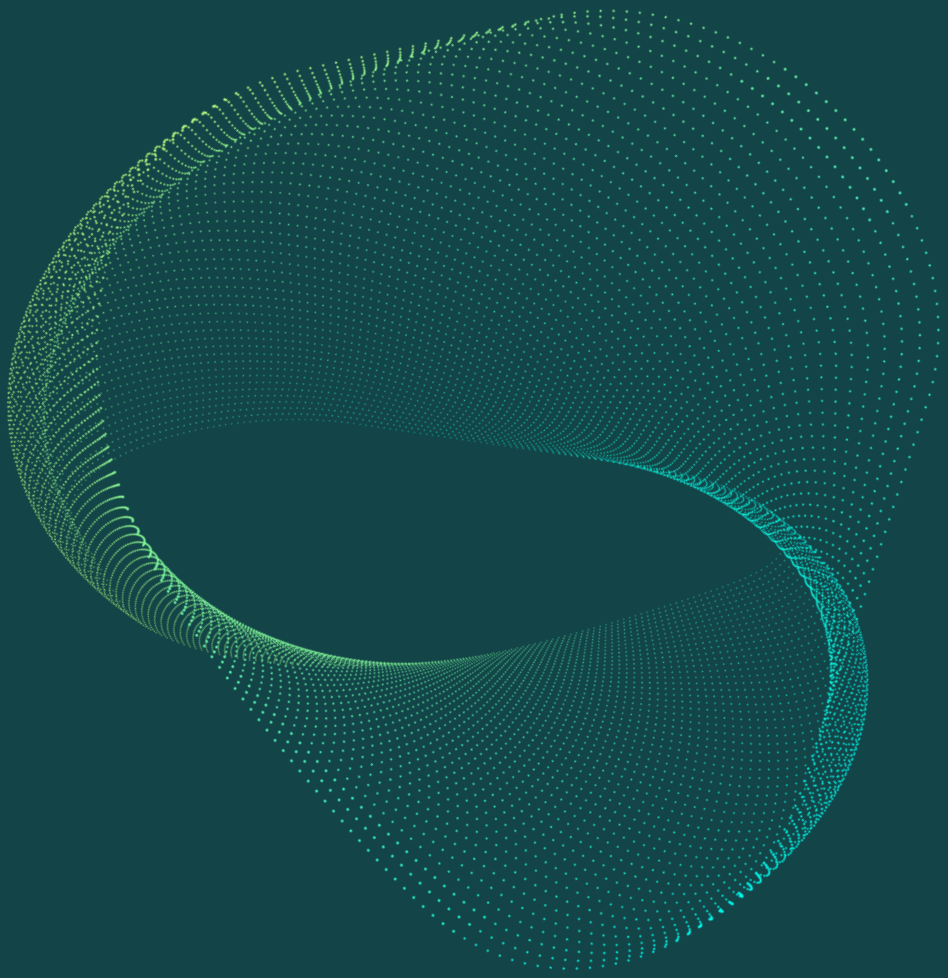
Organisation		
361 Community Renewables	Derbyshire County Council	GSENZH
Awel Aman Tawe	Diocese of Ely	Harborough District Council
Bath and West Community Energy	Eco Matters Renewable Assets Ltd	Harbury Future Energy
BEC	ECOE	Heart of Devon Community Energy Ltd
Bratton Fleming Parish Council	EMEC	Heat Clanfield
Bright Photon	Energise South Downs	HVCA Energy Group
Brighton Energy Coop	Energise Sussex Coast	Indigen
BWCE	Energy Saving Trust	Kakariki Energia SL
Cambridge Retrofit Hub	ENGIE UK	Llangattock Green Valleys CIC
Cambridgeshire Climate Emergency	Envol Labs	Local Energy Systems
Carbon Trust	Essex County Council	Low Carbon Hub
Carmarthenshire County Council	Forest of Dean District Council	MVHPFA
CAT / RAMBOLL	Freeths	National Grid
Centre for Sustainable Energy	FTI	NESO
CEP	Futureproof Cumbria	NEY Net Zero Hub
Challoch Energy	GCAT	North East and Yorkshire Net Zero Hub
Church of England	Glendevon Energy	Northumberland County Council
Coleg Sir Gar	Gloucestershire County Council	Nottinghamshire County Council
Communities for Renewables	GopherZero	NZA
Community Energy Pathways	Grand Union Community Energy	Opergy Net Zero
Community Energy Scotland	Grantchester Climate Change Action Committee	Oxfordshire County Council
Crosier Kilgour	Grantchester Parish Council	Paperclip CN
DCAN	Growing Mid Wales	Pembrokeshire County Council

Organisation		
Portland Town Council	SmartRural	University of Glasgow
Power Circle Projects	Somerset Council	Wales and West Utilities
Powys County Council	Somerset NHS Foundation Trust	West of England Rural Network
Quantum Strategy & Technology Ltd	South West Net Zero Hub	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
RCTCBC	Stroud District Council	WeWantWind
Renewable Exchange	Sustainable Borders (Selkirk Regeneration)	Wiltshire Council
SCE Ltd.	Swanbarton	Wolverton Parish Council
Scene Connect	Triple Point	Ynni Cymru
Severn Wye Energy Agency	Trivallis	Ynni Teg
Sharenergy	UCL	Younity
Shropshire Climate Action	University of Birmingham	Zero North Wiltshire
Social Investment Business (SIB)	University of Cambridge	

5 Appendix B: Questions asked

Questions for the panel at the REACH webinar
Is there a way to collaborate with the REACH project?
Is this solution DNO-neutral, or will it need to be different from DNO to DNO?
How can community energy groups and councils work together to deliver more renewable energy and storage installations to meet the CP30 ambition if grid restrictions and long connection queues are preventing project planning and delivery?
How does the DNO know what the future demand will look like without off-grid gas use and vehicle use patterns?
With increasing faults happening, would householders also benefit from isolating their solar and battery installations from the grid to ensure energy continuity during grid outages?
How large a community does the energy centre support? Across the NGED network, where you have identified Intact/Abnormal scenarios and how do you plan to initiate projects with the communities there?
Is this linked to Local Area Energy Plans?
The Passiv methodology for coordinating heat-pump turn-down isn't compatible with the DSR approach being implemented by DESNZ. It may well be functionally superior, but DESNZ could overrule that. Has this been considered?
You have modelled typical and cold years, any modelling on extreme heat scenarios and the increasing need for cooling?
Would 5 MW solar farms with 2 MW batteries be helpful in smart grids?
Does any of this help communities who want to promote renewable generation but are prevented by the unaffordable cost of grid connections?

How useful are / what's the further potential for battery storage energy systems (e.g. on local authority land) in helping balance the grid/ overcome the issues being discussed? Is NGED pursuing this as a key part of the (interim) solution? What's the downside?
What happens if the outcome of the Options Tool is that there is no solution suitable for that community? Does the temporary solution to maintain capacity get removed anyway?
Given that a key component of the REACH container is backup generation, are you working with hydrogen-related projects such as the SIF 'REACT' project?
Does the Community Engagement Tool actually exist in the public domain? Is there a link?
Could you put the link to the research on rural/urban usage that Laurence referenced?
I am struggling to see the long-term benefits for communities now that you have explained that these are temporary installs. Rather than remove the Energy Centre, can you transfer the ownership to the community?
Could the entire design (eventually) be made open source so communities can build it themselves?



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