

PUBLIC OWNERSHIP OF ENERGY GENERATION IN NORTH EAST SCOTLAND

THE BENEFITS OF ESTABLISHING PUBLICLY-OWNED RENEWABLES



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SUMMARY

This briefing explores the potential for public ownership of clean power in North East Scotland – particularly the local authorities of Highland, Moray, Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen.

Municipal and regional public energy play a central role across Europe, operating at village, city or regional level. Public energy companies have played a big role in community wealth building, providing revenue for public services, developing new technologies like offshore wind and rolling out proven technologies, supporting tens of thousands of quality jobs, and helping limit the increases to household energy bills during the gas price crisis of 2021–2023.

Public energy companies like Aspiravi and SOCOFE in Belgium, Stadtwerke Munchen and Entega in Germany, or EWB in Bern and EKZ in Zurich, Switzerland, demonstrate the potential for public energy companies at a scale comparable to North East Scotland.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

There is very little public ownership of renewables generation in Scotland today – with a small number of council-owned projects from Orkney to North Ayrshire. Local authority ownership of solar farms is on the rise in England and Wales, with 500 MW of generation either completed, under construction or planned. Yet it remains the exception rather than the norm.

This is despite the significant opportunity for public ownership of clean power to support significant numbers of local jobs, to boost community wealth building, strengthen local public services and bring down bills.

Transitioning away from a fossil-based and profitextracting energy system provides the opportunity to build renewable power that strengthens and empowers local communities. This is a practical future for North East Scotland – if local authorities take the right action.

1 Has public ownership of energy generation at a local authority or regional level improved local livelihoods and built community wealth elsewhere in Europe?

2 Is there any publicly-owned energy generation in North East Scotland, and Scotland more broadly? Or in England and Wales?

3 What difference could public ownership of energy generation make to North East Scotland?

4 Is it possible to create publiclyowned energy generation at this geographic scale?

INTRODUCTION

- 1 https://www.gmb.org.uk/ news/uk-windfarm-contractgoing-overseas-sickening
- 2 https://www.theguardian. com/uk-news/2018/oct/21/ migrants-building-beatricewindfarm-paid-fractionof-minimum-wage
- 3 https://www. heraldscotland.com/news/ homenews/23456574. ministers-halt-scandalscots-wind-farmforeign-labour

As electricity and gas prices soared from 2021 onwards, households – including the most vulnerable and low-income – paid thousands of pounds each to multinational corporations and state–owned companies from other countries. This is wealth extracted from households and communities in North East Scotland, then transformed into dividend payments to global shareholders or to public benefit outside the UK. Privatisation and the lack of UK publicly–owned generation companies – common elsewhere in Europe – made it much harder to protect households from the price shock.

At the same time, the wind and sun in Scotland – a common resource – is being privatised with little debate. Profits flow to predominantly private and foreign public entities that own the solar and wind farms. Manufacturing has been offshored and Scottish communities – already facing dwindling industrial activity – have missed out on industrial capability. Local supply chains have not been developed and there is a lack of job creation and sufficient community benefit. Orders worth billions continue to be awarded overseas.¹

Wind power has been long heralded as bringing the potential to create many new jobs in Scotland. Yet job creation has not met expectations and promises. This is especially true of local jobs, where communities near wind farms have sometimes seen limited benefit. Decades of underinvestment have left Scotland's engineering and maritime support infrastructure (e.g sites like BiFab fabrication yards in Fife) with limited capacity and unable to scale up quickly. And where jobs are created, there are concerns – e.g. that workers were paid below existing collective agreements. There have been reports of minimum wage laws being flouted by the Scottish offshore renewables sector including on Beatrice in the Moray Firth,² and UK-resident workers being paid £18–20 per hour being replaced with cheaper non-resident workers on £9.50 an hour.³

But crucially, the renewable power boat hasn't sailed. The UK's offshore wind pipeline alone is 8 times the scale of operational farms – and the Energy System Catapult has modelled a further doubling in capacity to 150GW as realistic. This means that the future is yet to be written.

FINDINGS



1. OPPORTUNITIES: PUBLIC SERVICES, JOBS AND SUPPLY CHAINS

Public ownership is ownership of resources, production or services by a public body. It can exist at various scales - local, regional, national or international. It can involve one single public body (e.g. a council), or a consortium of public bodies. Public ownership should involve accountability to residents and users. In other sectors of UK society, we recognise (or take for granted) the positive benefit that comes from our roads, our health services, our schools, and our water being run as public services for the good of the population.

INCOME FOR FRONTLINE SERVICES

Publicly-owned renewables can return profits to fund frontline services delivered by local authorities. Profits from the Gwynt y Môr off the coast of Wales fund Munich's municipal services like public swimming pools, green spaces and children's services.

Depending on the scale of local public renewables, initial estimates by Transition Economics indicate that local authorities in North East Scotland could benefit anywhere from £1 million - £150 million per year in additional income. Future Transition Economics modelling will explore the potential income from publicly owned renewables projects of a specific scale.

Councillors from local authorities that have commissioned or invested into public renewables point to the benefits of "[taking] capital, which can't be used to simply prop up the costs of our day to day services as eventually it would run dry, and it has created a decent level of annual income - income which we know will rise significantly over the years."4

Orkney's Community Wind Farm Project aims to generate £ £5.5 million per year for local services, as well as £432,000 paid to communities for local benefit schemes.⁵ Orkney has a population of 22,000 - barely 3% of North East Scotland.

- 4 https://www.solarpowerportal.co.uk/news/council_proud_of_investment_after_solar_farm_delivers_higher_than_expected
- https://www.orkney.gov.uk/News?postid=5975
- Forest Heath District Council was abolished, and absorbed into West Suffolk Council https://www.solarpowerportal. co.uk/news/council_proud_of_investment_after_solar_farm_delivers_higher_than_expected
- 7 https://groups.friendsoftheearth.uk/climate-action/how-cambridgeshire-council-raising-revenue-solar-farms
- 8 https://groups.friendsoftheearth.uk/climate-action/how-cambridgeshire-council-raising-revenue-solar-farms

West Suffolk Council is receiving a net return of around 5% after running costs and capital investment repayment on its solar farm, which gave councillors "of all political persuasion" the confidence to support public ownership of the project.⁶

Cambridgeshire County Council used revenues from its Triangle Solar Farm, its first venture into publiclyowned renewables, to part-fund adult social care services, including buying equipment and technology to support elderly people living independently. It also channelled revenues into services for those living with a physical disability or sensory impairment, as well as protection for adults vulnerable to abuse or neglect.⁷ The 12 MW solar farm generates electricity equivalent to 3,000 homes, and currently returns £350,000 a year to the council - due to increase to £1 million once the loan used to finance the farm is paid off.⁸

By expanding into renewable power, councils in North East Scotland could generate far larger revenues to support local residents, learning from their peers in Belgium and Germany.

CREATING QUALITY JOBS

Building the clean power that we need to hit our climate targets could create a wealth of well-paid, stable, unionised jobs - or it could create a far smaller number of jobs, on more precarious contracts with worse pay.

Initial Transition Economics draft estimates for job creation in North East Scotland from renewable power indicate that this could be as low as 3,000 jobs or as high as 27,000 jobs. The high variance on whether jobs are created will depend on a range of factors, including on the levels of onshoring vs offshoring, on the pipeline of renewables projects and where they are based, on supply chains and local manufacturing developed within the region (see next section).

Whether new jobs created are quality jobs or not will depend on the approach taken by employers, whether they engage with trade unions and collective bargaining, and the levels of sub-contracting involved.

Additionally, government and state agencies (including local authorities, the Scottish Government and the UK Government) have a range of levers that can be pulled to ensure that jobs are created during the climate transition and that these are quality jobs - as laid out in the final report of the UK Government's Green Jobs Taskforce,⁹ and repeated publications from the Scottish Government's Just Transition Commission.¹⁰

Local public ownership of local generation can play a very large role in ensuring significant numbers of jobs are actually created, and that North East Scotland benefits from more like 27,000 new clean jobs rather than 3,000. Additionally, public ownership is also a key lever to ensure that jobs created are safe, pay well and are unionised.

COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING AND STRENGTHENING LOCAL AND SCOTTISH SUPPLY CHAINS

Local and regional public ownership of renewable power can boost community wealth building, increase local investment levels and strengthen domestic supply chains. In other European countries, public ownership has been a key lever (alongside active industrial strategies) to boosting local economic activity. This is partly because they can implement active procurement strategies that build long term relationships with local suppliers.

Transition Economics analysis shows that there are local supply chain companies with the potential to grow their workforce in North East Scotland in coming years with the expansion of renewable generating capacity - see Table 1 opposite.¹¹ Whether or not these projects are actually delivered will depend on a range of social, economic and financial factors - including to what extent the owners of Scottish renewable generation are truly committed to sourcing from nearby supply chains, and making long term commitments.

A publicly-owned renewable power company especially one participating in offshore wind - will be able to use its procurement powers to boost local supply chain activity. By sourcing locally, and crucially by making longer-term commitments and partnerships - regional public ownership can encourage owners of private companies like those listed here to invest into upgrading their operations, boosting their competitiveness to win more contracts and access wider markets. Effectively - public ownership can create a virtuous spiral of green investment into local economy activity and job creation.

Table 1. Renewables supply chain sites and companies in North East Scotland prepared to grow workforce

COMPANY	DESCRIPTION	PLA
Ardersier Port Authority	Floating wind manufacturing hub, rig decommissioning, green steel plant, concrete production	Arders
Forth Ports	Ports / offshore wind supply chain	Grang Leith, I Rosyth Kirkca
Global Energy Group	Port of Nigg – offshore wind supply chain	Nigg
Harland & Wolff	Fabrication yard	Methil,
Kishorn Port Ltd	Port of Kishorn – offshore wind supply chain / decommissioning	Kishor
Motive Offshore	Cable lay, transpooling, equipment supply	Banff (
Nigg Offshore Wind	Offshore wind tower factory	Nigg
North Star Renewables	Purpose built fleet of service operation vessels for offshore wind, diversifying from oil & gas	Aberd

- 10 https://www.gov.scot/groups/just-transition-commission
- 11 Current workforce and forecast job growth are based on industry sources. This is a subset of analysis conducted by Transition Economics for the STUC, and draws on Transition Economics' knowledge of Scottish companies engaged in the climate transition, as well as industry publications, government analysis and investments made by the the Scottish National Investment Bank (SNIB).
- 12 This is a subset of analysis conducted by Transition Economics for the STUC, and draws on Transition Economics' knowledge of Scottish companies engaged in the climate transition, as well as industry publications, government analysis and investments made by the SNIB.

PUBLIC

sier 3,900
gemouth, 1,100 (UK-wide – 7 Dundee, are in Scotland, h, Burntisland, but English port aldy and Methil Tilbury is large)
141 (includes 93 permanent and 48 from Seagreen)
l, Arnish
rn
(Boyndie) 200 (global but largest in Scotland)
leen 350 (in Scotland)

7

2. INSPIRATION: BUILDING COMMUNITY WEALTH AND IMPROVING LIVELIHOODS ACROSS EUROPE

Public ownership of electricity generation is commonplace across Europe, and plays a key role in ensuring the public benefit from more and better local jobs, increased revenue for public services, lower bills, greater community wealth, more democratic accountability, and a fairer climate transition. In Europe, big and small public energy companies – ranging from municipal companies in villages to national energy companies like Orsted in Denmark – have built thousands and thousands of MWs of solar farms, onshore wind and offshore wind. These public companies have often played a big role in developing new renewable technologies and rolling out proven technologies, supporting hundreds of thousands of quality jobs, and helped limit the increases to household energy bills during the gas price crisis of 2021–2023.

In some European countries, power generation is predominantly owned by large-scale national energy champions like EDF, while in other countries regional or municipal-owned companies played a significant role (e.g. Aspiravi and SOCOFE¹³ in Belgium, EWB,¹⁴ EKZ¹⁵ and Axpo in Switzerland, EnBW in Baden Württemberg in Germany). The various models have different advantages – public ownership at a national level is able to deliver greater economies of scale and national coordination of industrial strategy, while at a local level there is more democratic accountability, community-wealth building and direct benefit to local communities and residents.

- 13 https://www.socofe.be/la-socofe/qui-sommes-nous
- 14 https://www.ewb.ch/ueber-uns
- 15 https://www.ekz.ch/de/ueber-ekz.html

IMPACTS OF PUBLICLY-OWNED POWER GENERATION IN OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

- Able to insulate the public from soaring and volatile energy prices by controlling prices and keeping bills down
- Reinvest profits into communities or return them to the public
- Make long term commitments, growing domestic manufacturing, local supply chains and economies
- Long term commitment to creating and maintaining quality jobs, collective bargaining
- Planning for skills building up a skilled workforce in anticipation of need and preempting skills shortages and gaps
- Planning for and investing into the climate transition
- Public bodies able to deliver both an industrial strategy and new energy infrastructure at pace
- Ability to invent and develop new technology
- Self-sufficient and able to negotiate a fair deal when in partnership
- Able to export goods, skills and intellectual property
- Ensure public benefits from climate transition



Privatisation of electricity generation, networks and supply during the 1990s led to a wave of remunicipalisation from the 2000s onwards across Europe. Communities and politicians across the spectrum recognised that lower bills, better jobs and more community wealth building could be attained by local authorities operating grids, generating and providing electricity. Between 2011 and 2016 almost 350 municipalities in Germany covering about 8.5 million inhabitants decided to re-municipalise their electricity grids.¹⁶

The geography of North East Scotland that this briefing is exploring includes local authorities with a population of over 800,000: Highland, Moray, Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen. Populations in individual council areas range from 95,000 to 260,000. We have included case studies here of publicly-owned energy companies from other countries operating at a similar scale.

ASPIRAVI

Aspiravi is a clean power company owned collectively by 94 Belgian municipalities.¹⁷ Many of these are small rural communities with a population of 5,000 – 10,000.

The company is involved in clean power projects with installed capacity of over 1,600 MW, including over 400 onshore and offshore wind turbines.¹ Aspiravi owns stakes in over 50 onshore wind farms in Belgium,¹⁹ as well as the Rentel, SeaMade and NorthWind offshore wind farms in Belgian waters,²⁰ alongside private and public shareholders like the SRIW Regional Investment Fund of Wallonia. In Scotland, through Aspiravi, the 94 Belgian municipalities also own 15% of two 1 GW offshore wind leases auctioned during the ScotWind lease round. The proposed Bowdun and Ayre wind farms would lie off the coast of Stonehaven and to the east of Orkney.²¹

STADTWERKE MÜNCHEN

Munich's publicly-run city utility provides electricity and water to 1.5 million people, as well as running public transport and swimming pools.

Stadtwerke München owns stakes in over 20 onshore and offshore wind farms totalling over 3 GW. This includes 30% of the 576 MW £2 billion Gwynt y Môr offshore wind farm, operating off the north coast of Wales since 2015,²³ and a 30% stake in the proposed 1,100 MW Awel y Môr farm also off the north coast of Wales, proposed to be built by 2030.

Munich has plans to be powered by 100% renewable electricity by 2025, and already generates as much as its domestic residents consume. Recognising the limits of generation within the city, Stadtwerke München invests in and operates renewable energy generation across Europe. Unlike many German municipal utilities, Munich's was never handed over to private companies, so didn't need to be remunicipalised - giving it a strong starting position in the climate transition. The public company pays an annual dividend of €100 million to the city.

- 16 https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2018-10/dg_ecfin_am_final_draft_pillar_4_re-muni.pdf
- 17 http://storage.condros.eu/Uploads/aspiravi/files/19290_jaarverslag_aandeelhouders_ENG_Aspiravi(1).pdf
- 18 https://aspiravi.be/en/about-aspiravi/aspiravi-in-figures
- 19 https://www.aspiravi.be/en/our-projects/wind-onshore/belgium
- 20 https://aspiravi.be/en/our-projects/wind-offshore
- 21 https://w3.windfair.net/wind-energy/pr/43541-thistle-wind-partners-scotland-offshore-windfarm-name-deme-concessions-gair-aspiravi-scotwind-auction-bowdun-ayre

- 23 https://www.power-technology.com/news/newsrwe-stadtwerke-mnchen-and-siemenscommission-576mw-offshore-wind-farm-in-uk-4604203
- 24 https://exhibition.awelymor.cymru/faqs
- 25 https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/166542/1/cesifo-forum-v14-y2013-i3-p03-05.pdf
- 26 https://www.swm.de/presse/pressemitteilungen/2022/04-2022/swm-jahresabschluss-2021
- 27 https://www.entega.ag/geschaeftsfelder/erzeugung/windenergie
- 28 https://www.power-technology.com/data-insights/power-plant-profile-global-tech-1-germany

PUBLIC OWNERSHIP OF ENERGY

ENTEGA

Entega is the municipal energy provider owned by Darmstadt, a German city with a population of 160,000 - comparable to Dundee.

Entega employs 2,000 workers, and develops its own solar and wind projects including 4 solar farms and 11 onshore wind projects.²⁷ The public company also invests into larger collaborative projects, owning 24.9% of Global Tech I offshore wind farm, alongside other municipal energy companies Stadtwerke München and the Swiss municipal energy company Axpo.

3.WHEREWE ARE NOW: PUBLIC ENERGY IN THE UK

Today, ownership of electricity generation by Scottish (and UK) public bodies is very limited. However, there are several examples that demonstrate the huge potential across the UK.

ONSHORE RENEWABLES

North Ayrshire Council is currently investing £12.8 million to commission two council-owned solar PV farms on the Council's former landfill sites at Nethermains and Shewalton.²⁹ The council also announced plans for a further 5 MW solar farm and 12 MW of local wind power in Irvine.³⁰ Highlands and Aberdeenshire Councils have developed around 226 and 110 MW respectively, including solar and wind generation, and heat pump installations.³¹

Orkney's Community Wind Farm Project consists of three six-turbine wind projects - all council owned. These aim to generate £5.5 million per year for local services, as well as £432,000 paid to communities for local benefit schemes.³² Council Leader James Stockan made clear that "For decades now, private companies and development trusts have developed wind farms here.[...] The time has come for the Council to step forward now and to take on a developer role, to ensure that all the financial benefit stays here in Orkney."³³

Local authority ownership of solar farms is expanding faster in England and Wales - with 300 MW of

- 29 https://www.solarpowerportal.co.uk/news/council owned solar project reaches major milestone
- 30 https://www.thisisnorthayrshire.co.uk/council-reveal-latest-green-drive
- 31 https://stuc.org.uk/media-centre/news/1725/new-public-power-leaguereveals-local-authorities-leading-the-charge-on-energy
- 32 https://www.orkney.gov.uk/News?postid=5975
- 33 https://www.orkney.gov.uk/News?postid=5975
- 34 https://www.solarpowerportal.co.uk/blogs/uk_government_departments_and_local_authorities_investing_heavily_in_new_so
- 35 https://www.sharpepritchard.co.uk/green-steves/articles/generation-of-renewable-energy-by-local-authorities
- 36 https://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/environment/climate-change/toggam-solar-farm.cfm
- 37 https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/council_and_democracy/council_information/media_hub/ media_releases/work-to-start-on-large-scale-solar-farm-in-the-borough.aspx
- 38 https://news.wokingham.gov.uk/news/barkham-solar-farm-approved-by-planning-committee
- 39 https://www.coventry.gov.uk/news/article/4677/council-submits-planning-application-for-coventry-solar-farm
- 40 https://www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/telford-wrekin-council-publicly-owned-solar-farm
- 41 https://www.solarpowerportal.co.uk/news/bristol_city_council_celebrates_record_generation_at_its_solar_farm
- 42 https://ylab.wales/case-study-wrexham-solar-farm-wales-first-local-authority-owned-solar-farm

publicly-owned solar PV built or due to be completed in 2023, and a further 200 MW planned.³⁴ This includes renewables plants that were designed and commissioned by local councils - like Cambridgeshire County Council's North Angle Solar Farm, the largest completed council-financed/owned solar farm in the UK. Sometimes, local authorities purchase an existing operational solar farm - such as Forest Heath District Council in Suffolk that purchased the 12.4MW Toggam Farm in Lakenheath in 2016 for £14.5m.³⁵ The Toggan Farm (now owned by West Suffolk Council after Forest Heath District Council was abolished) had already generated £1.8 million for frontline services, after covering capital repayment costs.³⁶

Other English and Welsh local authorities with solar or onshore wind farms under development or operational include Cheshire East Council,³⁷ Wokingham Borough Council,³⁸ Coventry City Council,³⁹ Telford & Wrekin Council,⁴⁰ Bristol City Council⁴¹ and Wrexham County Borough Council.⁴² Most of these local authority-led projects are relatively small.

INDINGS

OFFSHORE WIND

The vast majority of new renewable power built in the UK in recent years has been offshore wind.

And much of Scotland (and the UK's) offshore wind is publicly-owned - but by public entities from Norway, Germany and elsewhere. In North East Scotland, the Norwegian Equinor built the Hywind Scotland floating wind farm off of Peterhead,⁴³ and German EnBW shares the Morven licence for a 2.9GW site off Montrose.⁴⁴ See the ScotWind box for an overview of this licence round.

A single UK offshore wind turbine – the 7 MW Levenmouth Demonstration Turbine on the Fife coastline – is owned by the Offshore Renewable Energy Catapult. The turbine is an open access testing facility used for R&D.⁴⁵ The Offshore Renewable Energy Catapult – headquartered in Glasgow – is one of the UK government's innovation and research Catapult centres.

Aberdeen City Council did own a significant stake in offshore wind. Through its wholly-owned Aberdeen

Renewable Energy Group (AREG), the council in 2003 initiated plans for a wind farm off the coast of Aberdeen, submitting planning applications and sourcing a €40 million EU grant in 2009. After bringing (Swedish-government owned) Vattenfall on board, the council still held 25% of the project.⁴⁶ In 2016, Vattenfall bought out AREG's 25% stake. The 92 MW Aberdeen Bay Wind Farm, known officially as the European Offshore Wind Deployment Centre, was completed in 2018 – using 11 of the most powerful turbines in the world when built.⁴⁷

Proposals for a 1.2 GW Collette offshore wind farm off the coast of Cumbria include a community ownership component, and possibly public ownership through councils taking equity stakes. The Green Investment Plan Cumbria – developed by the Green Finance Community Hub – argues that councils can borrow at low interest levels, and invest into an offshore wind farm to use returns "to fund core services such as adult social care and children's services."⁴⁸

SCOTWIND 2022 LEASING ROUND

The Scotwind leasing round in 2022 *** marked a large-scale privatisation of Scotland's offshore wind. Transition Economics analysis of the ownership structures and countries of origin for the 26 parent companies involved in the 17 ScotWind leases revealed that the vast majority of the leases are owned by companies ultimately based outside Scotland: over 23GW, representing 95% of the total. Only 1.3GW are owned by companies based in Scotland.

Only 10% of the total are controlled by publicly-owned entities, from Sweden, Denmark, Belgium and Germany. The remaining 90% is owned by private companies. None of the proposed new wind farms have ownership participation from public Scottish (or UK) entities.

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43 https://www.equinor.com/energy/hywind-scotland
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- 44 https://www.enbw.com/company/press/enbw-and-bp-scot-auction-site-allocation-for-offshore-wind-farm.html
- 45 https://ore.catapult.org.uk/what-we-do/testing-validation/levenmouth
- 46 https://www.insider.co.uk/news/vattenfall-begin-work-300m-aberdeen-9869070
- 47 https://group.vattenfall.com/uk/what-we-do/our-projects/european-offshore-wind-deployment-centre
- 48 https://greeninvestmentplancumbria.files.wordpress.com/2021/12/cumbria-report-final-2.pdf

Table 2. Company ownership in ScotWind leasing round

CAPACITY (GW, %) BY OWNERSHIP STRUCTURE & LOCATION

	Public	Private
Scotland	0.00 (00.00%)	1.34 (5.41%)
non-Scotland	2.49 (10.02%)	20.99 (84.56%)

49 https://www.crownestatescotland.com/news/scotwind-offshore-wind-leasing-delivers-major-boost-to-scotlands-net-zero-aspirations

4.WHAT'S NEXT?

Is it possible to create publicly-owned energy generation at this geographic scale?

Yes. Although seemingly novel, the existing examples of publicly-owned clean power in Scotland, England and Wales demonstrate that public ownership is not only feasible, but relatively straightforward, with solid financial returns and generating concrete benefits for local residents.

ADDITIONAL LESSONS CAN BE DRAWN FROM:

- ▶ The past experience of the Aberdeen Councilowned Aberdeen Renewable Energy Group, which initiated the 92 MW EOWDC offshore wind farm off the coast of Aberdeen, submitting planning applications and bringing (Swedish-government owned) Vattenfall on board.⁵¹ Although Aberdeen Council sold its remaining 25% stake two years before the wind farm was completed, the experience shows the power of local authorities in initiating and driving forward renewables projects.
- ▶ Telford & Wrekin's experience as the second UK local authority to build a publicly owned solar farm. Key lessons included pro-active engagement to build community support and mitigate opposition with communities to build support and head off opposition, developing a detailed risk register to cover unforeseen circumstances and shifts in the energy market and securing full legal and tax advice, possibly requiring external specialists.⁵²

- 50 https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Mission-Climate.pdf
- 51 https://www.insider.co.uk/news/vattenfall-begin-work-300m-aberdeen-9869070
- 52 https://www.local.gov.uk/case-studies/telford-wrekin-council-publicly-owned-solar-farm
- 53 https://groups.friendsoftheearth.uk/climate-action/how-cambridgeshire-council-raising-revenue-solar-farms

The ability of local authorities to grow local renewable power could be boosted significantly after the next election, depending on which party wins. Some recently-announced policies, like Labour's Local Power Plan, would see central government providing £600 million per year in grant finance to local authorities to invest into local renewable power.⁵⁰

Cambridgeshire's experience, which highlights how local authorities need to upskill existing staff and bring in new expertise. This includes building the in-house ability to develop business models, establish supply chains, and assess the risks and issues associated with implementing large energy projects. Cambridgeshire Council now has an expert renewables team with ten staff members, with skills including financial modelling, accounting, project finance and the ins-and-outs of the energy market. Before setting up its Energy Investment Unit, there was no organising structure within the local authority to deliver its various energy projects.⁵³



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