Community DSO Trial RFI

Draughton Parish Council

General Questions

**Extracts from RFI brief and answers to questions raised:**

For all respondents:

Please include in your answer the following information:

1. **Please provide general information about your organisation.**

Draughton Parish Council represents a small rural community in North Yorkshire. Our population is c.200 adults and there are c.80 domestic properties in the main part of the village, excluding outlying barn conversions and some of the farms.

The parish council is facilitating a community-based project to help mitigate the effects of climate change.

The project involves the potential installation of two community-owned renewable energy installation, one wind, one solar. Any generating facility would be managed by a CIC or like vehicle, capable of raising finance by way of both loans and grants. The project is also looking to encourage and facilitate the adoption by individual village householders of new technologies and recommended practices to reduce their own carbon footprint by means of retrofitting their properties and making lifestyle changes.

Our project is currently at the stage of advanced planning, and we are midway through a series of consultation events with the whole of the local community. Although not yet at a stage when we could commit to a timescale for works to begin in time for the first of the trials, we are supported in taking this RfI forward by our principal authority, North Yorkshire Council and by our Local Enterprise Partnership.

At local level, our project is being led by a working group of parish councillors and volunteers drawn from the community. These volunteers include several with direct technical and professional experience relevant to the project.

To date, we have taken the following actions:

* Successful grant application made to National Lottery for funding for initial feasibility study.
* Consultants commissioned to carry out study; report now available, containing encouraging advice, although noting a key constraint as regards local grid capacity for connection of a proposed installation.
* Identification in report of 6 potential sites which might, however, be suitable and financially viable for renewable installations.
* Collation (also in report) of other expert information on minor schemes for householders using solar panels and wind turbines, as well as information and possible recommendations for EV charging points in the village.
* Professional financial analysis assessment of proposals carried out, drawing the conclusion that, in order to be feasible as the current framework stands for power generation and supply, we would need one major village energy user to take the energy from our main installation(s), because such a “customer” would be able to pay a higher rate for the energy than the current Grid feed-in tariff.
* Two local businesses who could act as such “customers” identified, to take 200,000kWh/year and 400,000kWh/year respectively. Discussions with them both are ongoing (one interested in a ground-mounted solar array; the other interested in a wind turbine). We are currently at the point of checking our energy usage estimates, calculations and related assumptions with independent experts.
* Discussions also held with the local Distribution Network Operator to establish local grid constraints. This indicates that our installations could be connected into the grid, as long as they are below 1MW capacity in total. We are therefore looking at 1 x 1MW or, alternatively, 2 x 0.5MW ones.
* Meanwhile, we are organising community engagement exercises in order to consult with villagers on proposals and to encourage them to make their own contributions to climate change mitigation.

Our experience in taking the project this far demonstrates that such initiatives can be set up and implemented by the smallest of local communities with minimal investment of resources.

1. **Please provide details for a lead point of contact within your organisation**.

Jane Markham, Clerk, Draughton Parish Council

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1. **When would you be available to mobilise on a trial?** Note that to participate in the first trial you would need to be available and operational by the end of year 2024. Please provide a brief description of why you can achieve the Trial 1 timescales if relevant, e.g., a community has already been formed, a development is already in construction, etc.

We would be available to participate in any of the trials, from Trial 1 onwards, if, for the purposes of the first trial, our development and consultation work is of interest at this stage.

We would, however, anticipate availability for inclusion in a later Trial commencing from 2025/26, if it is expected that local community involvement should begin only when a project has advanced to the stage of capital works. By early 2026, we might expect that we will be planning and phasing the installation of 1 x 1MW, or possibly 2 x 500KW renewable energy generators in our community. We could probably reach this stage sooner if we are successful in applying for funding support from Northern Powergrid. We will obviously need a funding round open at the right time for us (the current one closes in August, which is too early for us at present). The availability of funding will be an obvious factor which will determine the start dates for our capital programme.

1. **Can you provide any other competencies, not identified within this RFI, that you think might be relevant for the delivery of a trial?**
2. One of our resident volunteers is a Chartered Accountant with relevant experience of assessing the ongoing viability of the capital schemes we envisage. We rely on him considerably.
3. The Chair of our Draughton Action Zero sub-committee is a (semi-retired) Chartered Chemical Engineer with experience in the conceptual design of systems involving dynamically varying energy flows and a PhD for industrial research involving this.
4. The Clerk, a qualified local council and charity administrator, is a qualified Chartered Secretary having practised as a company secretary within the private sector.
5. **Can you provide any case study information about your previous experience of providing this competency?**

In spite of our size, we have previous experience of managing major grant-funded capital projects. We also have engineering and other relevant technical expertise available to our community, by way of professional advisory support and the active involvement of technical specialists as volunteers in developing the project.

1. **Can you tell us why you are interested in participating in Community DSO and the benefits to your organisation?**

To help us take forward our own project, and also to help promote and publicise local energy generation. We believe it is fundamentally important for local communities, regardless of size, to feel able and supported in doing their bit towards the mitigation of climate change on a local basis.

We believe that the role of local communities in this respect needs to be valued and taken seriously. Early on in developing our project, we heard a few voices in the community questioning why we should get involved in a project of some scale and considerable cost, given the relatively small size of our village and of our potential resources. Our consultants initially gave us the answer for this – that, although each local community may be individually small and therefore limited in their own direct contribution to targets for reduction in carbon emissions, taken in aggregate, the contributions of many local communities (each of them potentially able to link up to the Grid for small-scale projects) will add up to an overall nationwide effect of significant value. These immediately available opportunities may have been overlooked by government in the past (because they are too fragmented, perhaps). Co-ordination of our efforts via NALC would further strength the voice of the parish and local council sector, and of the principal councils and other bodies such as enterprise partnerships, in raising their case with Government.

Since working with our consultants on this basis, we have become aware of these many other voices building up in support of community and place-based approaches to climate change projects. It will be hugely important for these arguments to be heard. We see this as the main way in which developments in the Grid for “smart” local grids or “microgrids” will be resourced by Government. Only when these are in place, and when locally-generated energy can be used and shared within local communities, will people in villages like ours be in a position to see the full benefits of local renewable energy projects.

These trials should enable these arguments to be fully explored and advanced and we would like to play our part in this process.

Competency A: Energy communities

**Extracts from RFI brief**

Energy community: Identifying and creating an energy community with the right assets is essential to the trials. Consumers within the community will have to be as engaged as possible.

 If you have communities in mind or are a community for the trials, could you specify:

o Their location.

o An approximate size in terms of the number of houses/businesses.

o Information on low carbon technologies, battery storage or other relevant assets available in the area.

o Information on your previous engagement with this community.

1. If you don’t already have communities in mind, how would you propose to identify them?
2. How would you get customers within the community to engage with the process?
3. How would you propose to involve community members who can’t afford to have their own distributed energy assets, but who are willing to engage?

**Answers to questions raised in the RFI brief**

**Location and size of community**

Draughton is a small rural community in North Yorkshire. Our population is c.200 adults and there are c.80 domestic properties in the main part of the village. There are 2 public buildings – a church and a village hall. Our community also includes a number of major businesses such as large farms, 2 livery businesses and a large care home.

**Use of low carbon technologies**

A number of homes in the core village area have installed domestic solar arrays, some associated with battery storage, and the number of such domestic installations is increasing significantly as time passes. Two of the local farms already have wind turbines and one former farm, now used as a livery business and domestic property, also has a wind turbine in use.

**Community engagement**

The local parish council is actively engaged on a programme of events to build awareness for climate change measures and to publicise the community climate change project. To date, this programme has included two “in-person” consultation events (with talks and displays); a third is being planned to take place in September. The engagement process also involves regular newsletters and emailed updates provided to all villagers.

When we get to the stage of setting up our CIC to manage the local renewable installations, all villagers will be invited to participate by owning shares in the company.

Subject to the development of smart or microgrids, as referred to earlier in our submission, at a later stage in the project, we know that a significant number of local residents will also wish to participate by sharing, as individual households or in groupings, in an arrangement for use of the green energy generated by our installations which may be excess to the requirements of our major customers.

The community project’s engagement exercise is being rolled out alongside that of the local church, which is running a separate, but related, capital project involving insulation and solar panel installation. A third community-based project is being initiated currently by the Village Hall. Like the parish council, both the village hall and the village church have completed decarbonisation studies (grant-supported in each case) and have costed proposals available to take forward.

If Draughton is included within the trial, we would look to continue with our existing programmes for consultation, which already involve all villagers, including farms and other businesses, both those who can afford to participate directly in climate change mitigation measures themselves and those who may not wish to at present.

As well as taking forward ambitious plans for renewable installations for the village, our project also includes providing information to all village residents on energy efficiency measures, retrofitting schemes and funding support for households, as provided from time to time through Government subsidies (if and as available) and from grant funding bodies.

As a small, closely-knit community, it is straightforward for us to ensure that everyone is involved in our project(s), regardless of the degree of personal direct involvement in each case.

Jane Markham

Clerk

Draughton Parish Council

**Copies:**

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Chris Borg, NALC