

Peter Capener: 29th September 2014

Statement to the Call In Meeting to consider the B&NES Council loan for the Wilmington Farm Solar Array

Thank you for the opportunity to speak at this meeting.

My name is Peter Capener and I'm the chair of Bath & West Community Energy. I'm also chair of Community Energy England, a representative body for community energy enterprises like us around the country and a member of the ministerial advisory group that supported Greg Barker MP in recently producing the UK's first ever community energy strategy. What we are doing in Bath is fully supported by UK Government Policy.

Bath & West Community Energy is an award winning, financially sound, local Community Benefit Society. We are not a private company as many have said. We offer local people the opportunity to become members, invest and so own and control the community business. For the last three years we have paid members 7% interest on their investment.

Community ownership also offers a massive dividend to the local community. The Wilmington Farm Solar Array will enable us to re-invest £700,000 over the project's 25 year life back into communities directly around the Wilmington Farm Solar Array.

This is nearly 30 times more than typically generated by commercial projects.

We have already set up an independent charity that will manage the community benefit funds and we have started paying surplus into the fund from our existing projects.

A Council loan will help to ensure that the Wilmington Farm Solar Array will be built as a community owned energy project, generating significant returns to local people and the community, whilst safeguarding jobs within a rapidly growing local community enterprise.

As a result we will be retaining the vast majority of all project income within the local area. This is in stark contrast to the commercial development model whereby nearly all income is whisked out of the area and into the accounts of national and often international commercial developers, energy companies and banks.

In addition this project will deliver a significant step towards existing local renewable energy targets for B&NES. This project alone will increase by a third existing renewable capacity in the area.

The Council loan will fill the gap left by banks who are only prepared to offer much larger project finance loans. The Council loan will be secured against what is a good project earning a commercial return that will benefit B&NES residents, with planning approved and signed off by the secretary of state. As such the council will have full step in rights to take control of the project if anything were to go wrong. Bath & West Community Energy is a financially sound organization with a recent Experien credit assessment referring to us as having a 'Very Low Risk of Failure.

We have already raised nearly £800,000 from members and from our recently launched share offer. That together with the loan, if approved, will leave a further £1.3 million to be raised over the coming months. We recently secured £2.2 million for a similar project

near Avonmouth for another community enterprise, Low Carbon Gordano and so are confident we will meet the target.

This is a different way of doing business that puts the community first and as a result, we believe, fully warrants local authority involvement.

We fully support the due diligence and decision-making process the Council has entered into and believe it's in the Council's interests to now approve this loan. Please don't threaten the huge benefits of a project that offers such a clear win-win-win – for the Council that gets a secure commercial return and its initial investment back to then re-use elsewhere – for the local community that secures significant community benefit – and last but not least, for our environment.

Thank you.