



Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland

National Energy Research,
Development & Demonstration
Funding Programme

FINAL REPORT RDD569

SECTION 1: PROJECT DETAILS – FOR PUBLICATION

Project Title	Initiating Title: Building a Social Licence to Operate: co-designing a near-neighbour - developer engagement process, and refining it on three projects to equip wind farm developers and near-neighbours to create win-win projects. Final Title: Earning local support for wind energy projects in Ireland.
Lead Grantee (Organisation)	AstonECO Management Ltd (“Astoneco”)
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Report Submission Date	28 th February 2021

	Name	Organisation
Project Partner(s)		
Collaborators		

Project Summary (max 500 words)

This project undertook in-depth community- and developer-based research, development and demonstration to enable deep insights into the challenges facing the acceptance of wind energy projects by the communities of Ireland. It has created guidance to greatly improve the chances of acceptance. It was co-developed with community members and developers, with input from multiple researchers.

The programme developed a process that enables community – developer agreement making for energy projects to be built on a foundation of local support, thereby successfully achieving the “Just Energy Transition”.

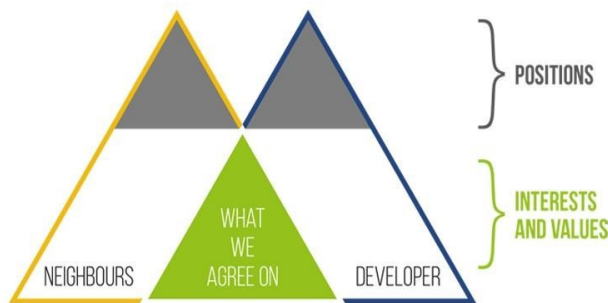
The resulting Guide presents a new approach to hearing, acknowledging and addressing concerns around energy infrastructure projects in Ireland.



The programme delivered 7 sections as follows:

1. Programme Overview

An overview of key components of the framework that enables the renewable energy (r)evolution to earn local support through its projects being co-designed in a way that supports the success of all involved.



2. Situation Analysis

A deep dive into the underlying challenges which are required to be addressed in order to earn local support for wind energy projects in Ireland.

3. Literature Review

Scholars have been studying some of the building blocks required to earn local support for large infrastructure projects with community impacts such as wind farms for some time – this is a look at what they found.



Adapted from Wüstenhagen et al.



4. Guide to earning local support for energy projects in Ireland

People like projects they can be proud of - great projects. This Guide enables the creation of an engagement process through which neighbours, developers & the authorities can create locally supported sustainable energy projects. These projects fit inside the local sustainable development project.

5. Local Support Checklist

There is a lot happening as developers deal with financial, technical, environmental and community issues all at the same time. This check list provides a quick guide for what is required of them to earn local support.



6. Case Studies

Some of the key aspects covered in the guide to earning local support have been illustrated in these case studies. Some of these case studies also demonstrate how partnerships with others working for rural development strengthen the capacity to earn local support.

7. Next steps

A lot has been accomplished in this programme. It has outlined a practical and effective path to earn local support for wind energy projects in Ireland. This section also identifies the additional work and research required to help strengthen the ability of the energy (r)evolution to earn local support going forward.



The above is presented for the public at <https://www.astoneco.com/earning-local-support-energy-projects-ireland#>. A Project Summary is presented in graphic design format in Section 1 sections there also.

Keywords (min 3 and max 10)

Local Support
Renewable Energy
Smart Engagement
Just Transition
Communities
Developers
Win-Win

NB – Both Section 1 and Section 2 of this Final Report will be made publicly available in a Final Technical Report uploaded online to the National Energy Research Database.

In the following Section, please provide a clear overview of your project, including details of the key findings, outcomes and recommendations. The section headings below are provided as a guide, please update or add to these as best suits your project.

By submitting this project report to SEAI, you confirm you are happy for Section 1 and Section 2 of this report to be made publicly available. If you wish to request edits to this section in advance of publication, please contact SEAI at EnergyResearch@seai.ie.

SECTION 2: FINAL TECHNICAL REPORT – FOR PUBLICATION

(max 10 pages)

2.1 Executive Summary

There are many community relations, stakeholder engagement and public participation guides and standards that present a route - on paper - that could achieve the desired level of engagement between projects and their host communities. But such guides, when faced with the reality on the ground, often become un-workable - for at least one party to the process. This RDD programme has partnered with best practice guidance and standards, extensive project and community development experience and worked through an extensive network of communities and developers to document guidance to enable energy projects in Ireland to be built on a foundation of local support. The resulting Guide helps to successfully achieve the “Just Energy Transition”.

The Guide is a live document outlining an engagement process that delivers an acceptable road-map for neighbours, communities, developers and policy makers alike, and can be tailored to their ambitions. Aspects of the approach in this Guide have been demonstrated in the case studies, and these are still ‘live’, and so continue to deliver useful insight.

The Guide supports wind energy design teams to co-design developments suitable for all actors’ needs, including the investors, community, developers and the government. Its goal is to enable the development of sustainable, socially supported projects. It mobilises the power of constructive critical dialogue and win-win partnerships between neighbours and developers.

The needs of design teams, community members, planners, local authorities, corporate teams and investors have been carefully considered throughout this document.

An overview is presented in graphic designed format in Section 1 of <https://www.astoneco.com/earning-local-support-energy-projects-ireland#>.

2.2 Introduction to Project

The Situation Analysis of this project highlights that many neighbours to wind turbines in communities in rural Ireland feel that the developer and the authorities / government undertake generally tokenistic engagement with regards to how wind energy projects are sited, designed and integrated (or not) into the local sustainable development fabric. Many feel strongly that mistakes and unfairnesses are being made, and that local sustainable development is being undermined rather than supported. Addressing this so that the industry can earn the local support to have a stronger local social license to operate (SLO) is essential.

As the government works to finalise and test out the RESS to ensure that communities and citizens are designed into the fabric renewable energy policy, the findings of this research in developing and testing a SLO building approach in an Irish context is a timely support for industry, communities and government policy measures.

2.3 Project Objectives

The project objectives included:

- Co-designing with key stakeholders a route to Social Licence to Operate (SLO)¹ for wind energy projects (WEPs) resulting in projects wanted by developers and near-neighbours and so reduce barriers to the deployment of these technologies.
- Bringing into the public domain an engagement process and assistance scheme co-designed by near-neighbours and developers, that helps remove the barrier of local opposition.
- Developing a guide to building a WEP’s SLO. It will support national policy makers to ensure the community guidance around the Renewable Energy Support Scheme (RESS) process is

¹ A **Social Licence to Operate** (SLO) refers to the level of acceptance or approval by local communities and stakeholders of an organisation and its projects <http://learningforsustainability.net/social-license/>.

state-of-the-art and continuously improved to help it achieve its objective of providing renewable energy at least cost.

- Identifying challenges for research agencies to innovatively tackle some of the most pressing SLO issues of our day, and so help Ireland meet our energy needs through the nation's own clean energy resources.

2.4 Summary of Key Findings/Outcomes

Describe how your project has furthered the current state-of-the-art, current knowledge or current practice. Clearly highlight the degree of novelty and innovation demonstrated by your project.

Address each innovation in a bullet point below. Add as many bullet points as you need:

- Innovation 1: Clearly identified and summarised the root causes driving local opposition to wind energy projects in Ireland through the eyes of people impacted.
 - Identified in their own words what the challenges, fears and aspirations are where confronted by a wind energy project.
 - This is presented online in the Situation Analysis where the challenges perceived on the ground are presented – see document in Section 2 of <https://www.astoneco.com/earning-local-support-energy-projects-ireland#>.
- Innovation 2: Clarifying the concerns of the neighbours and other stakeholders through a literature review in the innovative area of Social License to Operate.
 - This is presented online in the Literature review where the challenges perceived on the ground are presented – see the document in Section 3 of <https://www.astoneco.com/earning-local-support-energy-projects-ireland#>.
- Innovation 3: Creating a Guide to earn local support through addressing the requests of both the near neighbours and developers on a wind energy project.
 - This is presented online in the Guide – see the document in Section 4 of <https://www.astoneco.com/earning-local-support-energy-projects-ireland#>.
- Innovation 4: Creating a checklist that presents the order of tasks when seen from the perspective of a management board that includes both Near Neighbours and Developers.
 - This is presented online in the Check List – see the document in Section 5 of <https://www.astoneco.com/earning-local-support-energy-projects-ireland#>.
- Innovation 5: Compiled both named and un-named case studies to demonstrate both the origins of the Situation Analysis and the application of the Guide. The named case studies were conducted throughout 2020 (and continue) to enable the continual improvement of the content of this programme through on the ground feedback from people directly being impacted.
 - These case studies are presented online at <https://www.astoneco.com/earning-local-support-energy-projects-ireland#> and are being added to as the need arises and the case studies mature further on the ground.

2.5 Project Impact

- The research, based on frontline engagement, resulted in practical outputs to support new policy developments around the RESS - which repeatedly addresses the need for citizen and community engagement - and related policy.
- Addressing the needs of citizens and communities, who can sometimes act as enablers or disablers for wind energy projects, is very relevant as wind energy is a key technology for Ireland to achieve the designated emissions targets under the Paris Agreement, as well as national targets.

- This RD&D project helps clarify what is needed to strengthen the "energy citizen" in Ireland's strategy for energy transition to a carbon-free economy.
- This project is a solution-based approach to current issues identified by the applicant in the context of the Irish sustainable energy sector supported by the above policies and targets.
- This option of developing a co-designed SLO in direct engagement with near-neighbours offers a new opportunity for some locals as well as developers to work on a positive outcome for all stakeholders.
- The results of this project are freely available on its own custom-built internet platform, thereby facilitating its dissemination far and wide.
- The results of this RD&D project provide solid and timely support not just to policy makers, but also to developers who wish to qualify as ESG² and CSR² compliant investments.

2.6 Conclusions, Recommendations

A lot has been accomplished through this RD&D programme to provide insights and guidance to enable the systematic and structured earning of local support for wind energy projects in Ireland.

Yet further work is required to help make this approach become more main-stream so that the industry, host communities and society can all benefit from it.

In this short and final document of the 7-section series, the next steps in re-purposing how the wind industry designs projects to significantly improve the earning of local support through harnessing the strengths inherent in the many genuine current community concerns are presented, together with the conclusions and recommendations on which they are based.

The conclusions and recommendations are presented below under the following 7 headings:

1. Communities are asking for a holistic sustainable development focus,
2. National strategic planning to have a stronger local link,
3. The decision-making process needs to include communities,
4. Energy citizens come from empowered citizens,
5. The Project Design Mindset,
6. Build an internal-external team with a joint vision,
7. New paradigm needs capacity building and support.

1. Communities are asking for a holistic sustainable development focus

Conclusions	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As with many countries, Ireland has a number of sustainable development challenges in many communities. Rolling out industrial-scale renewable energy generation technology without meaningful local partnerships and agreements has proven to exacerbate rather than ameliorate these challenges (see the Situation Analysis in https://www.astoneco.com/earning-local-support-energy-projects-ireland). It is creating new problems that communities are being faced with, including the erosion of social cohesion due to some people benefiting from projects while others only receive negative impacts. Due to this, the overly technological-focused roll-out is creating its own breaks, through cultivating opposition. This is being exacerbated by senior people in industry and in government departments downplaying the legitimacy and level of 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Enable all senior people in the wind industry and related government departments to experience and understand the genuine local concern on how industrial-scale renewable energy generation technologies are being rolled out in Ireland and how this is undermining rather than supporting local sustainable development. Reading section 2 – the Situation Analysis – is an enabling step. b) Facilitate all parties to agree a meaningful local partnership

² ESC: Environmental, Social, and Governance, CSR: Corporate Social Responsibility

<p>genuine local concern on how wind turbines are being rolled out. This is delaying the acknowledgement of the problems and their rectification. Without rectification, experience shows that opposition will grow.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The capacity to roll-out the energy (r)evolution on a foundation of agreement-making would help to reverse the build-up of opposition. To enable this to happen will need much more institutional, strategic and systematic support for local communities (and developers) than is currently available. The Guide for Earning Local Support for Wind Energy Project's in Ireland demonstrates the process that near-neighbours and ambitious developers are asking be followed (see the Guide at the same link as the Situation Analysis referred to above). 	<p>and agreement making process for project scoping and design. The Guide for Earning Local Support for Wind Energy Project's in Ireland (Section 4 of this programme) provides a starting / reference point).</p> <p>c) Capacity build all actors to roll-out the energy (r)evolution on a foundation of near-neighbour and host community-based agreement making.</p>
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2. National strategic planning to have a stronger local link

Conclusions	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The government has increased its initial target of 55% of electricity to be generated by renewable energy by 2030 (as outlined in the draft 2021-2030 national energy and climate plan), to a more ambitious 70% target outlined in the Programme for Government 2020. This has become known as the '70 by 30' target. This target is based on recommendations in 2018/19 by the Irish wind industry body, Wind Energy Ireland – based on what they believe their members – and non-members - can deliver onshore and offshore. It relies on finding suitable sites for all these turbines, and on having the required transmission grid and permissions in place. There is widespread concern in many communities about this target being realised through the current approach, despite effort by government to make it more palatable through community benefit funds. The above commitment is based on a largely technological model, and includes the assumption that communities, landscape and biodiversity in Ireland can host such a roll-out without damage. More and more local community members are asking for a transparent tracking of just how many turbines does the government plan to have erected; and when enough is considered enough. They also ask to understand the overall national energy strategy to reduce CO₂ emissions, and gain energy independence from fossil fuels, by reduction or optimisation of electricity demand – it is not clear. A particular focus is on such entities as data centres, with confusion widespread as to how their construction supports the sustainable development of Ireland and its carbon goals. Communities are asking that more effort be made at project scoping stage to identify if turbines are appropriate within the local sustainable development context before projects are proposed. This so that community energy is not diverted on inappropriate projects instead of focusing on other pressing local development needs. Many inappropriate projects are ultimately turned down by the planning process – for a number of reasons - but only after much stress has been felt by communities. Some inappropriate projects get through resulting in ill-affected communities. When projects fail, this adds costs to developers who in turn need extra profits from the projects they do get permitted to cover the loss for the projects they don't. Having a more robust scoping process before project's enter the design stage will, therefore, save money, energy and time across the board. A more robust initial assessment, potentially along the lines of an exploration license 	<p>a) Strengthen the planning process to scope if turbines should be considered in a given site before the expense of designing projects and pushing them through courts are undertaken (the cost of which is borne by the citizens of Ireland through the price of electricity).</p> <p>b) To this end, consider a more robust initial assessment with an exploration license idea used for mining projects and used in some wind projects on the continent.</p> <p>c) Build trust and credibility by creating a transparent tracking of just how many turbines the government plans to have erected; and when enough is considered enough. Strengthen this by also transparently showing the electricity demand strategy from such entities as data centres; and justifying (or not) this demand within the country's sustainable development plan. This is required to enable more genuine partnerships with</p>

<p>idea (see Chapter 4 of the Guide), would remove a lot of the hassle currently being placed on communities on one hand and developers on the other.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On sites where hosting turbines are deemed appropriate, there is a request that the renewable energy project be designed within a community's local sustainable development project so that all synergies are harnessed and no undue damage is done. Realistically, this will mean more effort up front, as many communities have not yet defined their local sustainable development project. This may need to be addressed by government rather than simply relying on developers. The result will be to meet the nations sustainable development goals while also addressing the climate goals, hence ensuring a better return on investment for the government. The result will also mean much higher local support for the renewable energy infrastructure roll-out and hence less money wasted by developers throughout the life of each project. • To enable the above, a significant number of community members are open to be proactively involved in identifying what is the most appropriate way for an area to contribute to the energy revolution, while ensuring that projects which are developed are done so in harmony with all the other sustainable development initiatives communities require to thrive. 	<p>citizens who are fighting for a better Ireland.</p> <p>d) Enable communities to be proactively involved in identifying what is the most appropriate way for an area to contribute to the energy (r)evolution, while also ensuring that projects which are developed are done so in harmony with all the other sustainable development challenges communities are faced with.</p>
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3. The decision-making process needs to include communities


Conclusions	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once the appropriate sites and technology are identified, community members want to ensure the local sustainable development (SD) synergies and resources are optimised within any proposed project. This reflects the basic human need to have agency for decisions that impact each one of us. • History has shown that an invading force is rarely welcomed. Developers and the wind turbine roll-out will benefit mightily from understanding this. A mentality that seeks win-win and rejects win-lose is an essential starting point to enable success. Agreeing and respecting a shared decision-making for all aspects of a project that impact the host community – not just the externalities and community benefit funds - together with a partnership mentality at leadership level, are key to developing local support. This is lacking in the current way wind energy projects are rolled out in Ireland. The resulting steam-roll approach is powering opposition. • It is acknowledged that communities need support and empowerment to participate in the decision-making that impacts them, as much of this has been delegated to (or taken by) central government over the years. As a result, communities feel disenfranchised as they try to address local challenges. It is also acknowledged that developers need a lot of support to be able to take decisions that 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Build on work already done by the government within the RESS to develop a wind industry sustainable development (SD) win-win mentality, vision and approach that results in design briefs to engineers that ensure the energy project is part of the 'whole' local SD project, with the 'whole' being so much more than just energy: energy projects will benefit enormously through being designed as part of local SD projects co-designed in partnership with all aspects, insights and experiences with the local community. b) Ensure that a process is in place to make sure insights are shared and decisions are taken by those they impact, to a minimum standard of AA1000SES(2015) or similar. This may require agreeing the appropriate standards to be transposed from other industries through a government sponsored initiative. c) Once the appropriate sites and technology are identified, ensure synergies and resources are optimally partnered with the larger local SD project (e.g. biodiversity, tourism, culture, entrepreneurship, life-long learning). d) Acknowledge and address externalities before any talk of community benefit funds. e) Provide communities with support and empowerment to participate in the decision-making that impacts them, as much of this has been delegated to (or taken by) central government over the years.

<p>impact the host communities inclusively in partnership with these host communities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a governance supply and demand issue at stake here. The demand from communities is that developments address the ‘whole’ as captured in the above points. There is currently a void around WHO will ‘supply’ the expertise and focus to make this happen. 	<p>f) Provide developers with support to be able to take decisions linked to their projects that impact the host communities inclusively in partnership with these host communities – the Guide in section 4 of this programme provides a framework for this.</p>
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4. Energy citizens come from empowered citizens

Conclusions	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regarding communities hosting renewable energy projects, the Danish example is often quoted in Ireland as what we can do. Yet Denmark has had a ‘renewable energy culture’ for arguably 150 years. People produced their own energy there – it was part of life. They are the example renewable energy world leader. In Ireland energy was also understood through peat being widely turned into fuel. This is now considered the old way. Renewable energy was rarely, if ever, part of what the average citizen did. • To create energy citizens, the country requires an extensive network of empowered citizens. When community members were asked where they are open to invest their ‘voluntary time and concentration’, culture, music, art, heritage, education, life-long-learning, sustainable local livelihoods, biodiversity, local innovation in food production, leisure, tourism, housing, transport, sport, health and wellbeing, among others, all score as high or higher than addressing energy efficiency and generation. Yet the latter two are also recognised as very important. There is, therefore, a governance issue to be addressed. People would like to see energy decisions addressed more holistically in the context of all the other challenges communities are faced with. Not many people want to become just ‘energy citizens.’ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) To create energy citizens, put much more effort into building an extensive network of empowered citizens enabled to build their own and their community’s sustainable development – the Loop Head case studies in Section 6 of this programme demonstrates this in action. b) Facilitate energy citizens to emerge as a result of an umbrella community’s sustainable development strategy. c) Ensure that energy project decisions are made within the local holistic context of all the other challenges communities are faced with.

5. The Project Design Mindset

Conclusions	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The roll-out of the wind energy technology can learn from the extractive industries, and other sectors that significantly impact host communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Assemble design teams that can design Smart Projects – projects that are locally supported, financially successful, technical feasibility and environmental compatibility. b) Incorporate deliberative learning into community engagement, in a way that all local concerns are heard and acknowledged, and agreements are made to address them BEFORE projects are advanced (bar the back of the envelop work needed to know if a project in an area would make sense to a developer) – the next point facilitates this. c) Facilitate the mentality change this will require from the developers, and perhaps senior management in government. This process, although

<p>They have been dealing with community interaction for a long time. A key learning is a project's local support needs to be built in the same systematic and structured way as is its financial viability, technical feasibility and environmental compatibility. 'Smart Projects' address all four components from the initiating stage. Engineers get a Smart Design Brief – signed off by the host community and the developers addressing local concerns, respecting local plans and partnering for local opportunities. Building affinity goes a long way. Wind energy projects need to be designed as Smart Projects from the get go.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing externalities must become part of the cost column for every project's financial model; and the decision to advance with a project only taken if the project still stacks up financially. Externalities are not to be addressed using the Community Benefit Fund mechanism – the latter should be only in recognition that a resource in a community is being harnessed, and that it will be done so in partnership with the community. Benefit funds should be for value-added only. They should be mobilised only after externalities are removed or compensated as per the requirements of the Government's 2016 code of Practice (to be updated and strengthened in 2021). • This combined effort is a sustainable development-supporting solution to remove obstacles that distract energy and resources away from reaching the national decarbonisation and sustainable development targets. Ignoring the preceding points builds obstacles, delays and failures into the de-carbonisation roll-out. 	<p>very worthwhile, takes time. A conversation is needed in how this fits in with the urgency of target meeting. Once viewed holistically, allocating time for empowering a community's voice in time, acknowledging and addressing concerns, implementing appropriate due process adds time initially but saves time and money over the development cycle of a project. It also makes for better projects. This will most likely need government direction.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> d) Benefit funds to be used for value-addition only, and not as a hidden compensation for negative impacts on near-neighbours. The benefit funds should be mobilised only after externalities are removed or compensated as per the requirements of the Government's 2016 code of Practice (to be updated and strengthened in 2021). e) Do not use community benefit funds to elicit support from communities before addressing all externalities placed on near neighbours and a community's sustainable development future first. f) Ensure that the project design internalises all externalities as part of the cost column for every project's financial model: advance with projects that only then still stack up financially.
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6. Build an internal-external team with a joint vision

Conclusions	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To design renewable energy projects in a way that is optimal for the host community and the developer requires awareness, fairness, respect, motivation and cohesive thinking between the project's internal (developer) and external (neighbours) teams – between those doing the impacting and those being impacted. • The gold standard is that both the external and internal teams help design renewable energy projects that are part of a host 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Those driving the energy revolution need to fully comprehend that the complex realities of the 2020's need 'Smart Projects', which in turn need internal and external teams that can co-design and deliver them. Build these teams in a transparent, inclusive and representative way. The Guide in section 4 provides an overview of how to do this. b) Everyone concerned needs to ask themselves why local community members would be cooperative with the wind industry through the goodness of their heart if communities don't trust that they will be listened to when it comes to decisions that impact them. A mentality change is needed by those who site and design projects for the energy transition to be successful. c) Examine together the host community's sustainable development project that the energy project needs to add value to and become part of. d) From a procedural point of view for the newly required 'Community Report', a consensus needs to be agreed on what is the minimum level of information communities want

community's sustainable development project.	in the Community Report, and by who and how it is to be signed off. This consensus will need government facilitation.
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7. New paradigm needs capacity building and support

Conclusions	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communities recognise that energy is part of the 'whole' of the sustainable development challenge faced by society, yet communities need considerable capacity building to understand how the potential of the energy revolution can come to life in their neighbourhood. • Developers tend to be technically and financially competent, but need a lot of support to learn how to take decisions that impact the host communities of their projects in partnership with those communities. The Guide in Section 4 of this programme is design to provide a foundation for this. • Community members feel that developers understand energy, but have a very superficial understanding of the 'whole' which is the sustainable development, and its complexities, within the communities that their projects impact. • When done 'right' and sited appropriately, energy has great potential to contribute to other government policy pillars besides that of decarbonising our economy: namely to meet our sustainable development goals. Some projects in Ireland have done steps in this direction but not one has been identified as having thought this through to where it needs to be. • The Government needs to ensure the required support to enable communities and developers find partnering solutions to help meet decarbonisation targets. • The reality is that the vast majority of renewable energy generation in Ireland is being conducted through developer-led projects. Empowering more and more developers to partner with Irish communities to design their projects in such a way as to deliver on the local sustainable development targets, will in turn enable the government to meet the decarbonisation targets. The developer capacity building – at leadership, process and skills levels – and joint-learning by doing - is a vital part of the solution. Money through community benefit funds, or other channels, cannot replace joined up thinking. • To clarify the challenge here, the developer-community partnership building needs stronger governance at different levels, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Enabling community members to have access to unbiased, factual and complete³ information, and to have their concerns addressed; b) Enable those who wish to engage and contribute to the design to ensure the negative community impacts are removed or mitigated and to support this through providing local knowledge from within the community; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Government to work through all the sustainable development supporting departments, agencies and organisations to ensure energy projects are developed as part of the 'whole' of the sustainable development challenge faced by communities. b) Capacity build communities to enable the roll-out of the energy (r)evolution to be done in a way that enables communities to meet their sustainable development needs. c) Meet the decarbonisation targets through meeting the wider sustainable development targets. d) Support developers to take decisions that impact the host communities of their projects in partnership with those communities, and their sustainable development. e) Empower developers to partner with Irish communities to design their projects in such a way as to deliver on the local sustainable development targets, will in turn enable the government to meet the decarbonisation targets. Capacity build at leadership, process and skills levels. Understand

³ In the sense that all material issues are put on the table. Not in the sense of 'a completed design': there is an understanding that the nature of wind farm development means projects evolve, (turbine siting changes, road alignment changes, etc) during planning stages due to constraints. People want to know what the current facts are and some want to be able to be at the table to make sure the best decisions for all concerned are taken.

<p>c) Enable those who wish to be fully engaged to build community sustainability through how renewables energy-harnessing projects are designed.</p> <p>Not everyone wants to do b) or c), and the capacity building required for each of these three areas is very different – both at community level and at developer level.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The case studies demonstrated that the required community capacity building is possible, and did not take a disproportionate amount of time and resources to make happen, even with the massively added workload required to mobilise effective community engagement during the Covid restrictions. • If Ireland wants to meet ambitious targets like 70 by 30 then we need to have equally ambitious targets to capacity build both communities and developers to enable this to happen. One near-neighbour imagined 70 by 30 as a ‘space ship’ designed for a ‘world with few communities’, or ‘communities that could be asked to turn blind eyes due to money’. Yet, in the real world, the space ship needs somewhere to land. To enable its ‘landing’, we need to enable designs driven by both local communities and developers, as opposed to just developers. Backed by communities, problems can be avoided, and the full potential of the energy (r)evolution to unlock sustainable community development can be felt across Ireland. Done in a more holistic way, community groups will work for the decarbonisation targets, rather than against the imposition of the industrial turbines. 	<p>that money does not buy local acceptance.</p> <p>f) Enable community members to have access to unbiased, accurate and complete² information, and to have their concerns addressed.</p> <p>g) Enable those who wish to engage and contribute to the design to ensure the negative community impacts are removed or mitigated and to support this through providing local knowledge from within the community.</p> <p>h) Enable those who wish to be fully engaged to build community sustainability through how renewables energy-harnessing projects are designed.</p>
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2.7 Next Steps

Use the Guide to Earning Local Support for Wind Energy Projects in Ireland, built through consensus with 150+ near neighbours and 7 ambitious developers, as a basis to support leading decision makers to strengthen the enabling environment to deliver on the national climate and energy targets. The next steps involve engaging on the above conclusions and recommendations, and using the Guide and its supporting components to help:

1. Share the learnings from all levels of the Earning Local Support programme,
2. Inform and strengthen policy and the regulatory framework,
3. Build on the existing case studies to create further diverse examples of the engagement processes to co-design results that enable developers and their host-communities to work together in partnership,
4. Communities to be prepared to partner with developers in a way that supports their local sustainable development, and so garner broad community support,
5. Developers to co-design projects in a way that they partner with the goals of their host communities, and so garner local support.

A. Build upon the grass-root- and-best-practice-created Guide through strengthening the bridges with policy and regulation makers, the renewable energy industries and pilot communities.

Immediate next steps to achieve 1 and 2 above is to engage on the Guide with all interested parties in communities, government and industry, and on the inherent challenges faced by relevant organisations. This to include examining the results and case studies of the Earning Local Support programme with the organisations below, among others, and to identify synergies with what each of these bodies are aspiring to so that they can be incorporated into a second edition of the Guide:

- The Planning Authorities,
- The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage,
- The Department of Environment, Climate and Communications,
- The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland,
- Other organisations that are researching in this area, e.g. ESRI, and NESC.
- The management of network of the Local Development Companies,
- The wind, solar and heat energy industries and associations,
- EU counterparts should the above deem this useful. Ireland is well position to demonstrate leadership through success stories on the ground, in a way that we don't just meet our climate targets, but do so in a way that we meet our rural development targets,
- Community groups,
- Near-neighbours,
- The wind energy industry,
- Others as is deemed necessary.

B. Create a Centre of Excellence to support the implementation of the Guide.

Immediate next step to achieve 3, 4 & 5 above would be to create an empowering Centre of Excellence in Earning Local Support – in partnership with those who would want to from the above organisations - that empowers community members and developers to design, facilitate and resource engagement processes that respond to the needs identified in the Guide and supporting documents. This would also help identify the most efficient ways to scale-up and replicate the successful levels of community engagement demonstrated in the case studies, and to grow the energy culture proven essential in other countries to enable the Just Energy transition. It would be up to the SEAI to decide if they wanted to see a prototype created first or if the Centre of Excellence were to be conducted in partnership under the auspices of the above organisations.

1. Post Covid, the Centre of Excellence – created online - is to have a mobile branch that goes to communities to help co-design projects resulting in agreements co-created and signed-off by community, developer and authorities.
2. Develop and demonstrate how the centre of excellence will respond to the different levels of capacity building required to meet the demand for a more holistic governance for wind energy projects. To include:
 - i) being consulted, having unbiased information, having issues addressed;
 - ii) being more engaged and contributing to design to reduce community impact and contributing local knowledge from within the community
 - iii) being fully engaged to build sustainability using renewables.
3. Create partnerships with other sustainable development supporting organisations, programmes and authorities to build synergies in how the capacity building is delivered.
4. Demonstrate a number of community-based partnerships that deliver on the above.
5. Demonstrate how becoming aware of where our energy comes from, what its impacts are, and what opportunities 'doing it differently' can bring can help move a community from inaction to action.
6. Demonstrate the value-added to a developer of having representative and empowered host-community members at the project decision-making table.
7. Demonstrate how the results can be monitored and evaluated so it can become clear when the demands from the communities are being met.

These next steps form part of the RD&D proposal submitted by AstonECO in March 2021 for the next round of SEAI supported RD&D projects.