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Authors

John Aston, Andreea Savu,
Nuala Carr (AstonECO),
Thomas Van Rensburg
(University of Galway).

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Contact details

john.aston@astoneco.com
[linkedin.com/in/johnaston](https://www.linkedin.com/in/johnaston)

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Earning Local Support for Energy Projects in Ireland

Abstract

Policy context: Ireland's clean-energy build-out is constrained less by technology than by social process: mistrust between community and developers, sub-par engagement, and weak project fit with local development.

Issue addressed: RDD569 established an evidence base and a practical pathway to *earn* local support systematically so projects are built faster, fairer, and more consistently. It did this via a situation analysis, a literature review, a practical guide, a checklist, and demonstration case studies.

Policy ask: Mainstream early co-design with host communities backed by evidence-based processes, independent facilitation, and auditable outcomes, so planning progresses with fewer appeals and higher confidence.

Scalability: RDD569 established the evidence base and pathway to local support. (RDD874 evolves this into a scalable, auditable system).

Research Outcomes

□ **Communities and developers needs:**
⇒ Communities want projects embedded in **local sustainable development** priorities.

⇒ Developers want predictability and fewer permitting surprises.

□ **Process design and procedural fairness – not pre-existing views (such as NIMBYism) – drive the route to opposition or support.** The evidence points to procedural justice: timing, transparency, and power-sharing matter more than one-way communication or late-stage financial offers.

□ **A practical pathway.** The resulting **Guide** set out a route to a Community-Based Project Development Partnership, with ground rules, a co-design process, an issues-and-decisions log, a co-authored Community Report, and a Community-Based Impact Assessment aligned with the existing EIAR process. The **Checklist** operationalises “what good engagement looks like.”

□ **Case studies** illustrate how earlier partnerships are developed to lead to better options and less contention; **but** capability needs to achieve this persist on *both* sides.

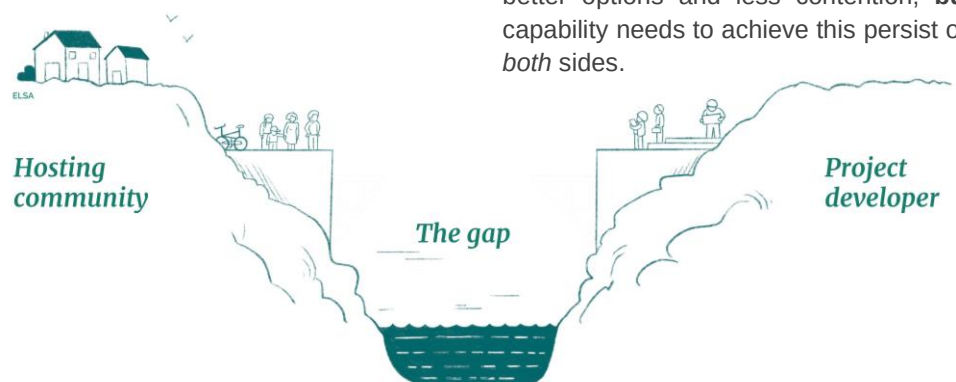


Figure 1. RDD569 laid the foundations to understanding the **Gap** between developers and their host community. It also lays the grounds for a community- and developer-welcomed solution. This is being elaborated upon in RDD874.

Recommendations

- **Mandate a Pre-Application Co-Design Plan & Report** in guidance/planning: ground rules, agreed processes, shared records (maps, minutes, option appraisals), public issues-and-decision logs.
- **Trusted Intermediary (TI) Programme.** Establish a national roster, training, and funding so both sides can access independent facilitation; link engagement to a AA1000SES (or equivalent) minimum standard.
- **Standard Templates.** Publish Community-Based Impact Assessment, Community Report, and partnership governance templates to reduce uncertainty and raise practice quality.
- **Incentivise verified co-design** in RESS/ORESS/planning scoring – reward verifiable co-design evidence (with documented community input), not one-sided narrative.
- **Centre of Excellence.** Strengthen standards, coach, evaluate, and scale the meaningful engagement approach with communities, developers, and authorities.
- **Capacity & learning.** Support local deliberation forums and capability building for community-partnered project assessment and integration; curate learnings and case stories for continuous improvement

These recommendations date from 2021. The RDD for the recommended Centre of Excellence is underway during 2023-25 through RDD874, and is being made available to those who need it through the Earning Local Support Academy (ELSA).



Figure 2. The pathway and steps to meaningful engagement have an inherent system and, **when sequence is not respected, trust is the casualty.**



Figure 3. The reason **co-design and partnership is required** stems from the simple fact that there is a physical part of the community where the interests and impacts of a given project overlap with those of a local community's sustainable development.



Figure 4. **Assessing and resolving the overlap issues** require trustful dialogue between the developer, the host community, and the authorities. The current status quo form of engagement between these parties (DAD: Decide – Announce – Defend) rarely enables this. RDD874, which follows RDD569, has taken up the challenge to create a systematic yet simple pathway to enable this required dialogue in a way that gives confidence to community, developer, and investor. This pathway bridges the gap between project developer and host community.