



# Community Energy Fortnight lobbying pack 2017

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This year Community Energy Fortnight (<http://www.ukcec.org/about-CEF>) is linking up with the Speak Up! Week of Action (<https://www.theclimatecoalition.org/woa/>) to showcase community energy initiatives across the country and to demonstrate how community energy is helping to create a clean and secure future for your local area. To make the most of this opportunity, Community Energy England and 10:10 have produced this lobbying guide to support community energy organisations in engaging with their local politicians.

With a newly elected parliament, we have an exciting opportunity to demonstrate the impact that community energy can have and also what the sector needs to grow and reach its full potential. We are asking community energy groups to invite your MP to events during the Fortnight or to visit your MP's surgery. MPs hold regular meetings in their local area called surgeries, so you can meet them without organising an event. To find out when and where these are held, visit your MP's website. Find out who your MP is [here](https://www.theyworkforyou.com/) (<https://www.theyworkforyou.com/>).

## What are we calling for?

People up and down the country are eager to be part of the clean energy transformation, but our energy system is skewed in favour of large energy companies, rather than supporting communities generating their own energy. Planning rules often stop communities and social enterprises from developing green, local energy, and pricing rules mean that communities don't get a fair price for the clean energy they produce. We want fair taxes and fair planning and market rules to allow everyone to play their part and share in the benefits of a clean energy future.

We want MPs to reflect their constituents' concerns about climate change by asking the prime minister to ensure that government departments work together **unlock local and community energy**. To do this the government should:

## **1. Re-introduce fair taxation and financial mechanisms for community-owned energy.**

Community energy schemes have been hit by many changes over the last couple of years, resulting in some schemes stalling and others having to reduce their resulting community benefit.

Two of the most detrimental changes have been the removal of tax reliefs and changes to feed-in tariffs, including the removal of pre-registration for sub-50kW schemes. Tax relief would help ordinary people afford to invest in community clean energy enterprises whilst rewarding social impact and encouraging innovation. Pre-registration enabled community energy enterprises and schools to fix their feed-in tariff rate at a set rate for 12 months to allow time for them to raise money from the community and to develop the project. The re-introduction of both of these measures would give communities the confidence they need to generate local investment.

A further, unexpected impact on the financial viability of community energy schemes has come through changes to the implementation of business rates, which have seen some projects hit with big tax bills that were never factored into financial models. We ask that, due to the additional social outcomes of community-owned energy schemes, they are treated in the same way as charities and automatically awarded discretionary relief.

## **2. Review planning rules so that community wind, solar and hydro projects are given fair treatment within the planning system.**

The planning system exists to treat all proposed developments fairly and make sure that people who will be affected have their views taken into account - there shouldn't be special favours for one technology and extra hurdles for another built into this process. Yet planning experts say the barriers to onshore wind energy are now much higher than those faced by other developments.

In 2015 the government changed national planning policy guidance to introduce strict new conditions on planning consent for onshore wind energy. This was billed as “giving local people the final say over wind farms”, and ministers made clear “that where local communities want more onshore wind, that should be supported.” But in practice the new rules went much further, effectively amounting to a ban on any new wind energy in England and Wales - whether or not the local community wants it.

The draft Housing bill currently going through parliament recognises the need to clarify guidance on wind so that councils can make robust planning decisions. This is a great opportunity to amend the rules so that local communities really can decide whether to host wind energy or not. We are calling for community-owned and community scale wind projects - those under 1.5MW (typically a single wind turbine) - to be treated the same as any other planning application, and exempted from the new conditions placed on large

scale wind developers. This won't guarantee approval. It just means that communities and local businesses who want to play their part in a greener future will have a fair chance to try. And they won't be caught up in rules that were intended to give communities more say, not less.

More broadly, the national planning framework allows for community ownership of renewable energy projects to be a 'material consideration' in local planning policies. But in practice officials have not taken this into account in planning decisions. We need to reform the national planning policy framework and guidance to councils so that community energy projects are given effective recognition in both, and communities who want to actively contribute to meeting our national targets for renewable energy generation are supported to do so by the planning system.

### **3. Give communities full and fair access to the energy markets, particularly where scale and capacity prevent communities from selling or using their energy locally.**

The UK's energy market rules were designed by the "Big Six" energy companies for a centralised system that generated electricity in giant fossil power plants, often a long way from where their energy was used. As a result, when community energy groups set up their own wind turbine or solar panels, they don't receive all of the financial benefit of this local power. This is because the community group has to sell the power they generate to one of the power companies at 4 or 5p per unit. Then the local people who actually use this electricity have to buy it back from a supplier at three times the price. Community energy groups have been stuck with this situation because they don't have the scale or capacity to compete with big, incumbent utilities.

New 'smart' technology is now making it possible to share the financial value of matching local electricity demand with local clean energy, but outdated regulations around energy supply need to change too so that communities can access these benefits. We are calling for market rules to be updated for the 21st century so that communities who host renewables are rewarded through lower bills, whilst local generators get a fairer price for the power they supply to local customers.

The changes we need to make this happen are complex and won't happen overnight. So the first thing the government should do is to set up a dedicated local energy innovation fund for England and Wales, accessible to community groups and social entrepreneurs.

## **More information**

For more ways of involving your MP, such as example invitations and press releases, go to the Climate Coalition's [event organiser's guide \(http://bit.ly/2sGKwqG\)](http://bit.ly/2sGKwqG).

## About Community Energy England

Community Energy England (CEE) was established in 2014 as a not for profit organisation to provide a voice for the community energy sector and to help to create the conditions within which community energy can flourish. We do this by coordinating the grassroots of the sector and by advocating for supportive policies at national and local levels.

Membership is open to any organisation which shares CEE's objectives for the development of the community energy sector.

## About 10:10 Climate Action

We're 10:10, a charity that helps people tackle climate change. We do this through working with communities and groups to help them benefit from local renewable energy, promoting low-carbon solutions in everyday life, and using positive stories to inspire the public to take action on climate change.

## Community Energy Fortnight

Community Energy Fortnight takes place from 24th June – 9th July and is supported by [Coop Energy \(https://www.cooperativeenergy.coop/\)](https://www.cooperativeenergy.coop/). This year, for the first time Community Energy Fortnight has linked up with [The Climate Coalition \(https://www.theclimatecoalition.org/\)](https://www.theclimatecoalition.org/) to combine forces during their [Week Action \(https://www.theclimatecoalition.org/\)](https://www.theclimatecoalition.org/) from 1st - 9th July.

We are looking for event organisers to help us make 2017 an even more diverse and distinctly louder celebration of all things community energy. For inspiration of what happened last year visit the 2016 event page or look through our event [resources \(http://www.ukcec.org/event-resources\)](http://www.ukcec.org/event-resources). If you're interested in getting involved in running an event for [#CEF17 \(https://twitter.com/search?q=%23CEF17&src=tyah&lang=en-gb\)](https://twitter.com/search?q=%23CEF17&src=tyah&lang=en-gb), or would like to know more information, please [contact us at communityenergyfortnight@gmail.com](mailto:communityenergyfortnight@gmail.com).

To keep updated about Community Energy Fortnight 2017, please [sign up \(http://www.ukcec.org/contact\)](http://www.ukcec.org/contact) to our newsletter. You can also follow us on Twitter [@CEFfortnight](https://twitter.com/CEFfortnight).

The Community Energy Fortnight is run by [Forum for the Future \(https://www.forumforthefuture.org/\)](https://www.forumforthefuture.org/) and [Community Energy England \(http://communityenergyengland.org/\)](http://communityenergyengland.org/) on behalf of the [Community Energy Coalition \(http://www.ukcec.org/about-us\)](http://www.ukcec.org/about-us).