

PRESENT:

North Ward:

Councillor J Herron

East Ward:

Councillor J Craigie (Chairman)

Councillor Mrs R Craigie

Councillor Mrs L Hellyer

South Ward:

Councillor R Wootton

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr R Coombes (Deputy Town Clerk)

Mr D Lewis, South West Energy Hub

Mr B Garman

1 x Member of the Public

69. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor J McKenzie (East Ward – TDC Meeting).

70. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST ON ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

There were no Declarations of Interest.

71. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PERIOD

There was no member participation.

72. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 October 2020 were approved and signed as a correct record.

(Vote – For: 5, Against: 0)

73. RURAL COMMUNITY ENERGY FUND (RCEF) FEASIBILITY STUDY GRANT PROCESS

a. Presentation by David Lewis, South West Energy Hub.

The Chairman reminded Members that the former Chairman, and Councillor, Joe Day had obtained grant funding from the RCEF, on behalf of the Council, to provide for Community involvement / benefit from solar arrays. Although the project to provide panels, raise funds for Community benefit and provide cheaper electricity did not come to fruition it did create interest and many firms did purchase panels, thereby reducing their carbon emissions.

He welcomed Mr Lewis to the Meeting, who provided a presentation on his background, the Government funding body, the Rural Community Energy Fund (RCEF), application process, criteria and the support offered to help develop and submit an application through the South West Energy Hub.

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) Energy Hub programme is a country wide initiative to support the identification, development and implementation of energy projects across five regional hubs. The initiative has four core objectives aimed at stimulating local investment in energy projects.

1. Increase the number, quality and scale of local energy projects being delivered.
2. Raise local awareness of the opportunity for and benefits of local energy investment.
3. Enable local areas to attract private and/or public finance for energy projects.
4. Identify a working model to be financially self-sustaining after the first two years.

He described how the South West Energy Hub provides free expert advice and support to get energy projects started, helping with options appraisals, feasibility studies, business cases, planning applications, and financing.

The Hub work with public sector and not-for-profit organisations across the South West region including Portsmouth, the Solent and Isle of Wight.

He explained that the team have various specialisations, his was heat, others solar generation, Community Energy development, consultancy etc.

Mr Lewis spoke about the £1.8 million budget, that has a March 2021 deadline; half the money has been spent with involvement on thirty projects.

He explained how the Rural Community Energy Fund (RCEF) provides grants to cover feasibility studies and development costs for community renewable energy projects in rural areas.

Grants of up to £40,000 are available at the feasibility stage. Further development funding of £100,000 is on offer for projects with a high chance of success.

Stage 1 – Feasibility grant:

- For communities at an early stage of exploring the possibility of a renewable energy project.
- Grants of up to a maximum of £40,000.
- Can be used for consultancy and professional costs for the development of a feasibility report in a standard format for a specific project.
- Must be early stage activities without which the installations would not be able to go ahead.

Stage 2 – Full business development and planning grant:

- For projects that demonstrate a good chance of securing planning permission and being implemented.
- Grants of up to £100,000.
- Intended for more detailed investigation into the key areas of technology selection.
- Can be used for securing a site (e.g. legal fees), environmental impact assessments, submitting planning applications, permitting applications and developing a full investment business plan.
- Cannot be used for capital investment.

He advised that the grant is dependent on a number of criteria but it is important to note that the project must be community-led and that some initial work will need to have been carried out before an application can be submitted.

The Hub will be able to help develop any proposal and assist with completing the application. They will be able to assist with objectives (he alluded to conversations with the Chairman), outcomes and risks.

Eligibility requirements that must be met at the outset in order to be eligible for RCEF support include:

1. Projects must be based in a rural community (Bideford qualifies, so do some areas of Plymouth and Bristol).
2. Applicants must be a qualifying community organisation.

Mr Lewis indicated that to receive funds, a local community group must have formed a legal entity which provides a benefit to the community. He indicated that this could be stand-alone from the Council (although have Council representation.)

- Community Interest Companies (CICs)
- Community Benefit Societies (Bencoms)
- Co-operatives
- Pre-commencement societies
- Registered Social Landlords
- Charitable Incorporated Organisations (CIOs)
- Registered Charities
- Development Trusts
- Amateur sports associations
- Town or Parish Councils

He indicated the projects must be community-led; funding will only be provided for projects that are at least 50% owned by the community. He added that the project must be driven by the community group.

Mr Lewis listed the eligible technologies given their ability to reduce carbon emissions.

- Anaerobic digestion (AD)
- AD (biogas) fuelled heat network
- Bio liquids/gas/fuels
- Biomass heat network
- Heat pumps
- Hydropower
- Solar (photo voltaic)
- Solar (thermal)

- Wind turbines
- Multi-technology approaches

Projects must be of sufficient size or complexity:

- Require planning permission and significant pre-planning development.
- Generate energy for multiple buildings (or export the equivalent to the grid).
- Applications for installations on multiple individual community buildings as part of one project will be accepted and reviewed on a case by case basis.
- Single community buildings are eligible for RCEF if they are exporting the equivalent back to the grid, though the funds generated from this must be used for wider community benefit.
- Single buildings that generate their own energy and export excess to other buildings e.g. in the case of heat networks.

He emphasised that any project must have a clear community benefit; the wider community should benefit from having the project based within it. It is expected that the income that is forecast from the final project – whether from energy generation or savings from reduced energy costs – should be passed to the wider community itself.

Projects where only a section of the community will benefit (e.g. where the project would provide energy savings or income to a small number of households) are only allowable when any profit generated by the scheme will be placed in support of the local community.

Before RCEF grant application submission can be made there must be a demonstration that some initial community engagement has been carried out and that there is no obvious objection for the project.

Support can be critical for obtaining planning permission and in raising funds and attracting a customer base.

Mr Lewis explained the need for a record of contractor procurement.

The Stage 1 Feasibility Report Structure document needs to be provided to contractors, with the project brief, when going out to tender.

The project brief sent out to consultants along with the quotes received in return will need to be submitted with the application.

A minimum of three quotations is expected for all services with a value of over £5,000.

The chosen contractor should represent the best value for money.

The Hub can decline an application if it is considered that the service provider does not have the appropriate skills and experience to undertake the work, or if their proposal does not adequately cover all aspects of the Feasibility Report Structure

The selection of contractors must be undertaken through a transparent procurement process. Potential contractors must not be involved in the development of tender documents or the collation, evaluation and selection of proposals or have access to proposals from other bidders.

Members raised points and questions that included:

- Proposed (private) local solar farm.
- Tidal Energy complexities.
- Potential to form CiC, work with established partners.
- Seek advice from other communities.
- Community engagement. Do they want what is proposed? Educate, show direct benefit.

The Chairman thanked Mr Lewis for his presentation to the Committee.

- Review the application for grant funding hydro/tidal and
- Recommend actions for further Community Engagement.

Members discussed a five-month (bid) timetable, engagement with the Community, local authorities and individual / organisations with relevant experience.

The Chairman agreed to meet with Councillor Herron to begin the process.

It was felt that TDC should be engaged from a planning authority and land ownership perspective.

74. TREE STRATEGY UPDATE

- Receive update on work to date and
- Review quotes for work components of developing strategy and
- Recommend further action to be taken.

The Chairman explained that he had one quotation from Treconomics that provided various breakdown costs:

- Mapping / canopy cover: £500.00
- Number of trees that already exist: £6,000.00.
- Age and types of trees in the Parish: £15 – £20,000.00.

Often volunteers can do the footwork. He indicated that a basic tree strategy could be obtained at a cost of £1,500.00.

It could provide for a planting scheme, identifying where there is least density and analyse where planting would provide for the most effective opportunity at reducing air pollution.

Concern was raised that there is no tree officer at TDC, the number of trees being felled by developers, request to TDC to preserve trees / hedgerows at Cleave Woods (it was suggested that any planning approval should include planting of new trees), the lack of Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) / policy, Ash die back, implications over the next ten years (1.8 million ash dying) – impacting whole of Devon and the workload of the DCC incumbent (tree officer).

The Chairman indicated that if the Council develop a Tree Strategy, the District Council could adopt it. He would return to the item in the future with more information.

Councillor Mrs Hellyer indicated a wish to see a planting strategy. She noted the token trees at the East-the-Water play areas, no trees at Clifton Street and Barton Torr Estates and token trees on new estates.

Councillor Mrs Craigie spoke about a statement of intent from SWW to annually plant trees. She believed there was an opportunity to encourage them to grow Willows on the piece of land on the right-hand side as one drives up Manteo Way.

The Chairman stated that he would invite Treeconomics to give a future presentation; he confirmed that he would write to TDC in an effort to preserve the Cleave Woods trees and hedgerows from development.

Discussion followed on planting in Pollyfield on TDC land (Councillor Hodgson, TDC investigating), front garden orchards in Ropewalk, Dimpsey Woods inertia, future funding opportunities (including collaborative bid with TDC), and provision for Chairman to be authorised to investigate and pursue funding opportunities for Council Projects.

The Chairman thanked the Members for their attendance and support. He concluded the Meeting at 7.55 pm.