

Why Work with Community Energy Organisations?

As organisations look to cut carbon emissions and reduce energy costs, many face a critical decision: go it alone, work with a commercial provider, or partner with a community energy organisation. While DIY and commercial models may sometimes offer lower price or convenience, partnering with a community energy organisation brings deeper value - through long-term support, local impact, and social return.

What Is Community Energy?

Community energy is about people and places - local groups coming together to generate, manage, and reduce energy use through low-carbon projects. These organisations are mission-driven, not profit-led. Their goal is to tackle climate change, enhance energy security, make energy affordable, and ensure long-term community benefit. They build up experience over many projects, rather than the building owner having to learn all about developing and managing renewables.

They often lead on:

- Project scoping and funding
- Installations and maintenance
- Ongoing monitoring and upgrades (for up to 25 years)
- Education and community engagement

Key Benefits of Working with Community Energy

1. Long-Term Commitment and Higher Standards

Community energy groups are deeply invested in project outcomes. Unlike some commercial installers who may cut corners or disappear after installation, community groups maintain strong aftercare and performance monitoring. They've even uncovered abandoned commercial solar panels — installed poorly and forgotten by the host organisation.

2. Greater Value for Money

While matching commercial levels of professionalism, community energy organisations typically operate with lower overheads and no profit extraction. Surplus revenue is reinvested into local projects, often through community funds tackling fuel poverty or supporting education. Volunteer expertise can also lower project development costs.

3. Local and Social Impact

Community projects generate up to **13 times more local benefit** than commercial equivalents. They:

- Create local jobs and support local contractors
- Mobilise local investors for project funding
- Build resilience and skills within the community
- Raise the profile of schools and organisations through visible climate leadership

4. Support Beyond Installation

Projects often lead to wider energy savings and sustainability initiatives:

- Energy and carbon audits
- Behaviour change and curriculum integration
- Opportunities for storage, insulation, and efficiency upgrades
- Links to wider local climate action and funding sources

5. Tailored, Ethical Partnerships

Community energy groups value cooperation, transparency, and long-term relationships. Host organisations benefit from a **local, accountable contact** rather than a remote commercial entity. Community backing also increases engagement and commitment to energy use reduction.

Risks of Going It Alone or with a Commercial Operator

Choosing DIY or purely commercial routes can come with hidden costs:

- Host organisation must fund and manage the project (including maintenance)
 - Less motivation for long-term care or educational integration
 - Higher risk of poor installation and minimal aftercare
 - Fewer local economic benefits; profit often leaves the area
 - No community involvement, missing out on behavioural and social change
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Real-World Impact: Case Studies

South East London Community Energy (SELCE)

- 11 solar arrays installed since 2015 - 7 on schools
- Generate 487,000 kWh/year
- Over 20 years:
 - £300,000+ in energy savings
 - £180,000+ for fuel poverty work
- Tailored designs - e.g. Deansfield Primary's east/west/south-facing array, unlikely from a commercial provider

Oldham Community Power

- Developed educational tools, tablets, and software to teach pupils about energy
- Live data displays connect students with their school's real-time energy use
- Developed with local engineers and tested by students - rooted in place and participation

Totnes Renewable Energy Society (TRESoc)

- Runs 2-3 day renewable energy modules in primary schools
 - Includes hands-on workshops and field trips
 - Community festivals and events grow awareness and involvement
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Summary: The Community Energy Advantage

Community Energy	Commercial/DIY
Long-term support and maintenance	Limited aftercare
Local investment and economic benefits	Profit extracted
Community engagement and education	No engagement
Lower total costs and long-term value	Higher risk of hidden costs
Ethical and transparent partnerships	Transactional relationships

In conclusion, community energy organisations offer far more than just energy installations. They bring **expertise, funding, education, and local value** - creating projects that are built to last, grounded in trust, and aligned with climate and community goals.