



Humshaugh Net Zero PV Project

 Humshaugh, Northumberland, England

Humshaugh Net Zero (HNZ), a community based climate action organisation in Northumberland, have agreement with a local landowner to begin developing a PV project of up to 1 MW, capable of supplying the average electricity needs for more than 150 households.

Work has begun on the detailed design of the project and HNZ are in discussions with Northern Powergrid regarding securing grid connection. Planning permission application was submitted in October 2022 and are awaiting full permission from Northumberland County Council.



Interview Questions and Responses

How did you as a community agree the key objectives that you wanted your project to deliver?

Northumberland County Council declared a climate emergency and to reach net zero 2030. Humshaugh Parish Council then declared a climate emergency. An initial group came together to decide how to tackle the climate emergency and we started with a residential household survey.

This survey identified CO₂ – electricity usage, heating, transport locally, transport long-distance, emissions associated with food and recycling. That gave HNZ a headline figure for total CO₂ for the parish. It localised the climate issue for HNZ and identified what kind of emissions needed to be removed to become net zero by 2030.

How did you decide upon a single project idea that could deliver against those objectives?

HNZ began identifying what could the community do locally in terms of parish based low carbon energy generation.

HNZ obtained a grant from the RCEF (Rural Community Energy Fund) scoping exercise at potential opportunities for low carbon generation and a comprehensive survey of options by a consultant lead. This focused HNZ upon two options – onshore wind and solar PV.

There is a lot of debate around onshore wind in Northumberland, and collectively as a group HNZ pursued the feasible path of solar PV.

Describe the process by which you achieved consensus around objectives and projects. Has that consensus held or does it remain challenged by some in the community? If so, how are you dealing with that?

HNZ developed a clear proposal for the local community for a 1MW farm. HNZ then organised a public in-person meeting, received many questions and responded in person. On the whole, there was no significant challenge.



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Rialtas na hÉireann
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How did you approach planning and project management around your selected idea?

HNZ have a breadth of expertise in their community. David Sill CBE and Bill Grainger have a strong renewables background and are leading on behalf of HNZ.

Although the PV project will be managed by contractors, the HNZ Board will have oversight of this process, led by David and Bill.

How has that stood the test of time through the project? Have you had to revise your plans. How have you managed that process?

HNZ has a strong body of members with experience and expertise to manage any change of plans if this occurs. HNZ decide collectively in regular weekly meetings to adopt plans if required.

HNZ felt it was critical to meet frequently, every week if possible, and share minutes of meetings.

How did you identify a funding need?

Key local organisations have been key in identifying a funding need and directed HNZ to RCEF (Phase 1 and Phase 2).

These include the Rural Design Centre, CAN (Community Action Northumberland), the Climate Action team at Northumberland County Council.

How have you managed the process of bidding for funding?

David Sill CBE led the bidding process to RCEF and formal meetings are used to agree which funding opportunities to bid for.

Did you have a need for specialist expertise for your project? If so how did you handle that and approach experts?

The first area of expertise was procuring support for the planning application and producing multiple documents to meet environmental regulations. Members HNZ had a key industry contact who was approached directly.

Secondly, HMS directly procured services from a legal firm and land agents to ensure an agreement with the site's land owner.

HNZ are now raising funding through an expert firm consultancy who support the raising of finance in renewable projects.

When possible HNZ undertook open procurement for local contractors. However, there is a small pool of contractors in the North East for constructing solar PV projects.

What have been the hardest difficulties to overcome and how did you overcome them?

The key difficulties include:

- Planning permission has suffered delays due to added archaeologist interest in the site as it is within the Hadrian's Wall Buffer Zone, despite Historic England being content with the project.
- Grid access: HNZ are struggling to understand accurate costs of connecting to the local grid and potential affordable solutions.
- Contractor shortage for constructing the project.

Overcoming these issues involves working with key partners and brokering discussions with key organisations.

Has the community managed to stay true to the original project vision? If not, why not? If it has, how has this been achieved?

There is a simple objective of achieving net zero emissions by 2030 for HNZ.

HNZ now know how much carbon the parish is generating and potential views for annual targets. This is around low carbon electricity, removing oil and gas boilers, transition from petrol and diesel to electric vehicles and increased public transport, consuming greener foods and planting more trees.

HNZ are remaining true to their vision of achieving a solar PV project to tackle this overarching objective.

What have been the biggest learnings from the delivery of your project?

- Engage the community from the outset of a project or establishing a community climate action group. A survey is a great way to achieve that, provides raw data and starts to build a consensus.
- Look into community for expertise. There are around 600-700 people in Humshaugh and people have come to the front to form HNZ.
- Following establishing a core group and project, the group need to meet regularly and keep the community onboard through newsletters, a website and public meetings.

What decisions, or elements of organisation have been the most important in the delivery of your project?

From the outset, HNZ wanted to capitalise upon any opportunity for funding and undertaking a feasibility study and options appraisal via RCEF provided unbiased information which is credible to external bodies.

Another key decision was to horizon scan for funding opportunities and work with key local partners such as Northumberland County Council, the Rural Design Centre and Community Action Northumberland (CAN).

What were the most important sources of advice and guidance for your community as you moved through the different phases of the project?

Internal expertise within HNZ was key, especially in developing funding applications. The Climate Action Team at Northumberland County Council has been invaluable in providing technical support and project guidance.

Key contact

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Links

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