

Energy for All: Broadening the benefits of community energy projects for local communities in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland

About the Project

Community energy initiatives bring together people in the places where they live and work to actively engage with how energy generation and usage affect their lives by delivering projects for the benefit of local community members. The activities delivered can be anything involving energy, including neighbourhood groups supporting vulnerable local households to achieve energy bill savings, co-developing renewable energy installations such as rooftop solar photovoltaics, or sharing access to electric vehicles in a remote village. The two key dimensions that are needed to make community energy initiatives successful are active participation of local community members in energy-related initiatives, and members of the local community members seeing tangible benefits from their participation (which could be financial savings, improved health, etc.).

With the recent launch of 'GB Energy' by the current UK government, which has pledged to directly support and finance community energy projects as a major part of its energy strategy, the coming years offer a significant opportunity to develop such projects across the UK. In Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland (LLR), there is strong local momentum in support of community energy, building on the 2024-25 Leicestershire Collaborate to Accelerate Net Zero (LCAN) project, which has brought together local government, universities, and specialist community energy support organisations to empower local groups to establish new or scale-up existing activities.

This community-led PhD proposal has been devised by LCAN's local voluntary sector partners to go beyond business-as-usual approaches to identify how LLR community energy projects can broaden the possible benefits for local communities and to diversify local participation. LLR has distinctive challenges and opportunities related to community energy development which include:

About the Project

- Addressing fuel poverty in low-income Leicester city households, off-gas villages and former-industrial towns.
- Starting conversations amongst local people on energy and climate issues where cost-of-living pressures and language/cultural barriers may hinder engagement.
- Securing support and local community benefit for large-scale projects such as solar farms.

This action-research project will address these issues by delivering and evaluating community engagement activities on energy issues in 10 LLR communities, supported by rigorous analysis of benefits arising from community energy projects across the region. Following a community development approach, initial dialogue on local challenges and energy-related issues will be used to co-create community energy initiatives.

This project has been co-created and is supported by researchers from De Montfort University, Loughborough University, and partners at Green Fox Community Energy. The successful candidate for this project will be enrolled at De Montfort University.

Project Aims

The overall aims of this project are :

1. Assess and enhance the local benefit arising from community energy initiatives in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, with a focus on equitable distribution of benefits
2. Deliver and evaluate local community engagement activities on energy issues, harnessing outputs from Local Area Energy Plans (LAEPs) for the region

Supervisory Team

1. Lead Academic Supervisor: [Dr Andrew Reeves \(De Montfort University\)](#)
2. Academic Co-Supervisor(s): [Dr Taimaz Larimian \(Loughborough University\)](#)
3. Academic Co-Supervisor(s): [Dr John Rowlatt \(De Montfort University\)](#)
4. Community Supervisor(s): [Ben Dodd \(Green Fox Community Energy\)](#)
5. Community Supervisor(s): [Duncan Bell \(Leicester City Council\)](#)

Key Details

Host University:	De Montfort University
School / department:	School of Engineering and Sustainable Development
Start date:	Monday 28 September 2025
Financial offer:	Tuition fees covered in full (worth approx. £15-17k across full PhD programme). Monthly stipend based on £19,237 per annum, pro rata, tax free.
Working hours	Full-time (minimum 37.5 hrs per week)
Working Style:	Primarily in-person at host university. Flexible working supported. Working pattern to be agreed between successful candidate and lead supervisor.

Competencies

Collaboratory Core Competencies		
Category	Competency	Assessed: Application (A), Interview (I)
Comprehension and evaluation	Strong understanding of the project and its subject matter.	A / I
	Analytical, researcher mindset with keen attention to detail.	A / I
	Communicate complex concepts with clarity and precision.	A / I
	Able to identify connections, patterns, gaps, and irregularities in information/data.	I
	Able to interpret data/information confidently with logic and empathy to derive meaning.	I
Social and emotional	Demonstrable experience of responding effectively changing contexts, information and demands.	A
	Ability to persevere in the face of challenges/failures and to remain constructive in developing solutions.	A
	Demonstrable passion for learning with clear drive and curiosity to undertake this specific research project.	A / I
	Willingness to immerse oneself in the research subject matter and make a contribute to new knowledge through a PhD.	A / I
	Strong desire to make a positive community impact through the research.	A / I
	Willingness to think deeply about complex concepts and engage with academic ideas and theory.	A / I
Preparedness and potential for success	Experience of working, collaborating and communicating effectively with different stakeholders.	A
	High level of self-motivation and ability to work with minimal guidance.	A / I
	Strong organisational and time-management skills with the ability to balance and prioritise multiple tasks.	A / I
	Ability to identify potential challenges and complexities and thoughtfully consider possible solutions.	A / I
	Able to identify the technical, personal, or professional skills required for a task and take action to develop these.	A / I

Competencies

Collaboratory Core Competencies			
Category		Competency	Assessed: Application (A), Interview (I)
Community Context		Genuine desire to undertake community-engaged research over more traditional approaches to research.	A
		Understand the impact of and need for the inclusion of diverse experiences and points of view in research.	A / I
		Appreciation/understanding of the importance of community insight and experience in the generation of new knowledge.	A / I
		Awareness/understanding of the broader societal context related to the subject matter of the project.	A / I

Project Specific Competencies			
Essential	Assessed: Application (A), Interview (I)	Desirable	Assessed: Application (A), Interview (I)
Commitment to the advancement of environmental sustainability and social justice	A / I	Understanding of energy-related issues faced by communities, including links between energy/transport, health and carbon emissions, and associated actions that can bring community benefit.	A / I
Experience of collaborative working with or within community groups or voluntary sector organisations.	A / I	Inclusive group facilitation skills, enabling expression of a range of perspectives and constructively managing differences of opinion	A / I
Experience of working constructively with people who have a wide range of values, worldviews and life experiences, including people from minoritised or relatively deprived communities.	A / I	Experience of writing funding bids or project proposals in any professional or community setting.	A / I
High degree of computer literacy with the ability to learn and use new software and tools.	A / I	Fluency in one or more South Asian languages	A/I
Ability to work at flexible hours and locations (specifically to attend meetings outside of office hours in communities across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland).	A / I		

References for Further Reading

- Benner, M., Tripl, M. and Hassink, R., 2024. Sustainable and inclusive development in left-behind places. *Review of Regional Research*, 44(3), pp.237-249. Available from: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10037-024-00216-w>
- Community Energy England (2024) *Community Energy: State of the Sector 2024*. Available from: https://communityenergyengland.org/files/document/960/1720710752_CommunityEnergyStateoftheSector2024UKOverview.pdf
- Great British Energy (2025) *What will we do?* Available from: <https://www.gbe.gov.uk/what-we-will-do>
- Hall, S., Owen, A., Middlemiss, L., Davis, M. & Bookbinder, R. (2025), 'Mission Led government or Radical Incrementalism for electricity and Net Zero?', *Journal of the British Academy*, 13(1):a10 Available from: <https://doi.org/10.5871/jba/013.a10>
- Leicester City Council (2025) *Climate Ready Leicester website*. Available from: <https://www.leicester.gov.uk/your-council/policies-plans-and-strategies/environment-and-sustainability/climate-ready-leicester/>
- Leicestershire County Council (2025) *Net Zero Leicestershire Strategy, Action Plan and Reports*. Available from: <https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/net-zero/net-zero-leicestershire-strategy-action-plan-and-reports>
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- Reeves, A., Lemon, M. and Cook, D. (2014) *Jump-starting transition? Catalysing grassroots action on climate change*. *Energy Efficiency*, 7 (1), pp. 115-132. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Andrew-Reeves-12/publication/257768346_Jump-starting_transition_Catalysing_grassroots_action_on_climate_change
- Reeves, A. (2016) *Exploring Local and Community Capacity to Reduce Fuel Poverty: The Case of Home Energy Advice Visits in the UK*. *Energies*, 9 (4), pp 276
- Rutland County Council (2025) *Our Corporate Strategy*. Available from: <https://www.rutland.gov.uk/council-councillors/our-corporate-strategy>