

**Byers Gill Solar
EN010139****8.10 Community Benefit Fund**

Planning Act 2008

APFP Regulation 5(2)(q)

Infrastructure Planning (Applications: Prescribed Forms
and Procedure) Regulations 2009

Volume 8

Deadline 2 - August 2024

Revision 1



Table of Contents

Page

- 1. Introduction** **1**
- 1.1. Purpose of this Document 1
- 2. The Community Benefit Fund** **2**
- 2.1. Introduction 2
- 2.2. Community consultation 2
- 2.3. Management of the Community Benefit Fund 3

1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose of this Document

- 1.1.1. The Applicant has prepared this document – Community Benefit Fund (Document Reference 8.10) in response to Issue Specific Hearing (ISH1) Action Point 10 [EV3-005], published by the Examining Authority (ExA) following the first ISH on 23 July 2024.
- 1.1.2. The purpose of this document is to provide further information about the proposed Community Benefit Fund including the Applicant’s approach to community consultation on proposals for the administration of the fund.
- 1.1.3. It is important to note that Action Point 10 [EV3-005] also refers to the Applicant providing a response to the matters raised by Bishopton Villages Action Group (BVAG) [REP1-048] during the same ISH, once these had been received in writing by Deadline 1 (13 August 2024). Upon receipt of this written summary, it is clear that BVAG were referring to the benefits of the Proposed Development and not specifically the Community Benefit Fund.
- 1.1.4. The Applicant wishes to reiterate that the benefits of the Proposed Development and the Community Benefit Fund are two separate matters, and therefore this document focuses solely on the Community Benefit Fund. The matters raised by BVAG [REP1-048], provided at Deadline 1, will be responded to a future Deadline.
- 1.1.5. It is recognised, as set out in the Planning Statement [APP-163], that the Community Benefit Fund cannot be taken into account as part of the overall planning balance to be considered by the decision-maker.

2. The Community Benefit Fund

2.1. Introduction

- 2.1.1. As identified in the Planning Statement [APP-163], the Design Approach Document [AS-004] and the materials presented during pre-application consultation, the Applicant has proposed to provide a Community Benefit Fund as part of the Proposed Development.
- 2.1.2. How the Community Benefit Fund will be allocated is subject to agreement, as set out below, but previous projects delivered by the Applicant have ensured that the funds are spent on things such as electric vehicle charging points, further recreational access improvements in the wider area, fuel poverty measures, picnic benches, rooftop solar for community buildings and funding for other local sustainable initiatives.
- 2.1.3. The following sections of this document provide an account of the ways in which the Applicant has sought to engage the local community regarding the Community Benefit Fund, and how it will be administrated should the Proposed Development receive development consent.

2.2. Community consultation

- 2.2.1. At the point that the Proposed Development first undertook informal consultation, it had been assumed that the amount of the Community Benefit Fund would be £600,000. This amount was based on the Applicant's previous policy and was the amount taken forwards into statutory consultation.
- 2.2.2. At the time of statutory consultation, the Applicant provided information on the proposed Community Benefit Fund and sought feedback on what projects the local community considered the Fund could contribute towards.
- 2.2.3. The Applicant requested feedback, via question 8 of the feedback questionnaire, on what additional benefits the Applicant could and should consider as part of the Proposed Development. Additionally, via question 11 of the feedback questionnaire, the Applicant provided the opportunity for those with an interest in the Proposed Development to provide any further comments they had on the proposals which they felt had not been covered by other questions.
- 2.2.4. As identified in the Consultation Report [APP-017] and the Consultation Report Appendices Part 4 of 4 [APP-021], responses which were in relation to the proposed Community Benefit Fund considered:
- that the amount proposed at that time was not sufficient to offset the perceived impacts of the Proposed Development;
 - that the amount proposed at that time would not offset the loss of agricultural land in the local area;

- that the Applicant should provide free solar panels to all residents and businesses in the local area;
- the energy generated should be provided directly to the local area; and
- the Applicant should instead reduce the energy bills for local residents and community facilities in the local area.

2.2.5. Following the statutory consultation, the Applicant's policy regarding Community Benefit Fund contributions changed. The Community Benefit Fund for Byers Gill Solar is now £1.512m based on contributing £210/MW per year to the fund over the lifetime of the Proposed Development.

2.2.6. The yearly contribution is index linked, therefore it will increase from the stated figure dependant on inflation. The per MW contribution is based on other projects in the Applicants portfolio, however the Applicant would be open to discussing the level of contribution with stakeholders.

2.2.7. Following the statutory consultation, and in advance of the submission of the Application, the Applicant sought to engage once again with local parish councils and interested parties on the changes made to the Proposed Development following statutory consultation. Reported in detail in the Consultation Report [APP-017], part of this engagement covered the change to the amount of the Community Benefit Fund.

2.2.8. At that time, the local parish councils and interested parties did not want to engage on the Fund, considering it to be inappropriate and a mechanism that should not be discussed pending the planning process. The Applicant wishes to highlight that Community Benefit Funds – or similar schemes – are standard practice as part of projects of national significance, that are discussed throughout the development process.

2.3. Management of the Community Benefit Fund

2.3.1. The Applicant's preferred administrator for our solar community funds is a registered charity called GrantScape. As well as being highly experienced in setting up and supporting panels of local decision makers, GrantScape has a proven track record in making the application process simple, straightforward and efficient for those applying.

2.3.2. Organisations that can apply for funding include:

- Voluntary and community groups
- Parish Councils
- Schools and educational establishments (for projects which are not the responsibility of the Local Education Authority)
- Social enterprises and Community Interest Companies operating on a non-profit-distributing basis.
- In certain cases, individuals may be eligible to apply for funding

- 2.3.3. These are defined by Social Enterprise UK as ‘businesses that trade to tackle social problems, improve communities, people’s life chances, or the environment. They make money from selling goods and services in the open market, but they reinvest their profits back into the business or the local community’. Such organisations must have a minimum of three unrelated Directors.
- 2.3.4. Applicants are required to have a written constitution, a set of rules, or a governing document and a bank or building society account, held in the name of the organisation, in place before applying for a grant.
- 2.3.5. As a general rule, funds will tend to support the communities closest to the solar farm and will work with the local community to explore what the area of benefit for the community fund should be.
- 2.3.6. The Applicant’s significant experience distributing community benefit funds from our wind farms for over 25 years results in us currently considering the following combination of factors:
- Proximity to the solar farm
 - Size of population relative to the size of the fund
 - How people live, work and use community facilities in the area
- 2.3.7. When drawing up the final area of benefit for each part of the fund, the Applicant and GrantScape will consider best practise guidelines, where they exist. The Applicant is not currently aware of these guidelines in the local area.
- 2.3.8. The Applicant welcomes the opportunity to discuss the administration of the Community Benefit Fund with local parish councils and other interested parties.