



BMCE Community Dialogue Project

Report on activity in 2025



The mission of the Black Mountains Community Energy Scheme is to maximise the use of locally generated, renewable electricity in the Crickhowell area through a community organization that ensures profits return to the local community using medium-scale installations managed by a Smart Local Energy System. Community engagement is crucial, with ongoing advice from our community oversight group.

The scheme covers the region supplied with electricity from the primary substation in Crickhowell and maps approximately onto that of the Five Community Councils in and around Crickhowell.

Summary

This is a report on six drop-in community engagement events, supported by Sustainable Steps Wales on progress of the Black Mountains Community Energy (BCME) scheme and other activities of Llangattock Green Valleys (LGV). The overall response to the BMCE scheme was “get on and do it”. The biodiversity display for our solar PV sites was welcomed, and the Home Energy Service now has a waiting list for its services. The drop-in format is popular and will be used for future BMCE and LGV community events.

1. The funding application.

The engagement events were funded by the Sustainable Steps Wales programme (SSW) of the National Lottery with the stated purpose to inform the community directly of the site selected for the first BMCE PV solar array following the feasibility study of two potential sites by Ynni Teg. The intention was to answer people’s questions and seek their views on the site to guide LGV in developing its plans. The application specified two outcomes: to document views of the community on the proposals, to be summarised in a report, and to increase the number of volunteers wishing to help develop the scheme.

2. Context.

The feasibility study indicated that both sites selected for investigation were financially viable provided all generation could be exported, however the export restriction imposed by National Grid Electricity Distribution (NGED) for the foreseeable future prevents either site operating profitably. Consequently, a site could not be identified without further work to comply with NGED’s conditions. Rather than cancel the events it was decided to use them to give an interim report on progress since the events last year, and to widen the scope to include other LGV

activities, namely biodiversity particularly in relation to solar PV arrays, local transport, and home energy saving.

The drop-in format was similar to that used last year with displays describing the new scheme now being considered, which comprises a medium scale solar PV array, a community scale battery and a Smart Local Energy System (SLES). The broad aims were unchanged: to inform, to discuss and to listen, with the intention to widen public awareness of the activities and services provided by LGV, guide the development of these activities, and to encourage people to volunteer to help us.

This project was funded as an EGIN mentored grant, and the mentor attended two preparatory meetings and a feedback discussion leading to this report.

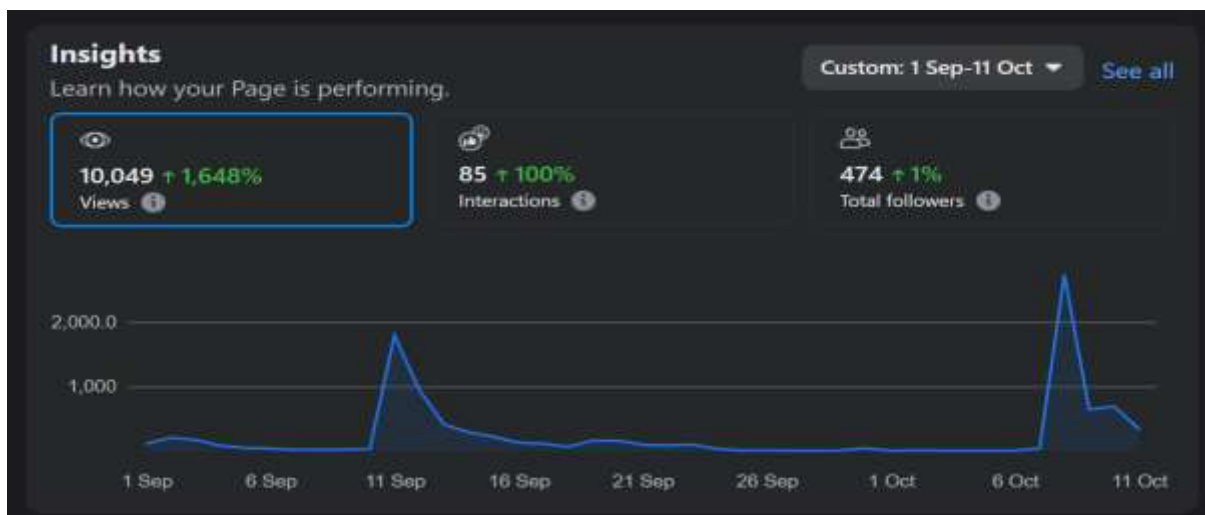
3. The Events.

In addition to Crickhowell, the region embraces six or seven small communities and outlying houses and farms. Publicity included house-to-house distribution of post cards in the population centres, posters on notice boards, social media, and LGV and BMCE email lists. A half-page advertisement was placed in South Powys Focus which is delivered to houses in villages in the region but not outlying properties. Advance publicity was handed out on the LGV stand at the Llangynidr Village Show at the end of August

Social media was used to reach people beyond the reach of the paper publicity, and a general promotional video was prepared which was widely shared, with 10049 views from when the video was published to the date of the last event.

<https://www.facebook.com/LlangattockGreenValleys> .

See also <https://www.llangattockgreenvalleys.org/>



Display posters were prepared for each activity and an operating thermal camera and home energy saving kit were on display.

Six events were held at Llanbedr, Cwmdru, Llangynidr, Llangattock, Langenny and Crickhowell. Tea, coffee and cake were provided for visitors, and attendance was recorded with sign-out sheets with tick boxes for requests for further information. Visitors were invited to record their comments on Post-it notes. Eighteen expressed interest in the BMCE Community Oversight Group and have been invited to an introductory meeting; 37 were interested in the home energy saving kit of which 30 also expressed interest in a thermal camera visit, all will be approached to make bookings.

The total number of sign-outs was 80, a lower number than for similar events last year and possibly reflecting the lack of concern and controversy at this stage.

A total of 24 LGV volunteers and helpers were involved in hand distribution of publicity material, staffing display tables and handing out the refreshments. One volunteer chatted to people as they left encouraging them to complete the sign-out sheet.



4. Evaluation.

4.1. Post-it notes.

Not everyone left written feedback. This summary covers all comments from some of the visitors. Further feedback has been captured from LGV “staff” at the wrap up meeting see below.

Community energy schemes

Solar arrays: football pitch size “OK if appropriately located.”

PV array “great” if it reduces my bill.

Happy to allow a smart energy system to operate home appliances? “Yes, provided it could be over-ridden”....”ditto”.

Local community energy networks “good idea”, “like the idea of being decentralised and having control locally”.

“Brilliant, positive work, leading the way for communities in the National Park”.

“Great progress, defining “local” will be critical in selling this to people through planning and beyond”.

“I’m interested in buying shares in the battery purchase.”

Would like information about domestic PV “roof top viability across the area”

Concerns:

perceived concerns over “viability of PV generation” {PB: make data on chosen site publicly available]

“What happens if the battery runs out?”,

“What about those not digitally comfortable?”

“Truly accessible to all: costs as well as benefits.”

Home energy

It would be “Useful to have a list of recommended suppliers and installers for home energy improvements”.

The events

Like format?...”yes” X 3

Had you been to events last year “yes”, some “no”, and read the report “yes, very comprehensive” and “no”.

How did you hear of the event? “Through the door”. “Posters vital”. In conversation: posters at key local public sites (council boards, shop, pub) important for reaching those in outlying houses not covered by house-to house publicity.

4.2. Feedback meeting.

The mentor joined a discussion on feedback from those who staffed the events.

BMCE

The consensus was that all attendees, except for one “neutral” person, were very positive about LGV and the BMCE scheme. There were unsolicited offers to invest in future developments.

Citing Energy Local Crickhowell, which is known to many, as an example of a Smart Local Energy System SLES was helpful in conveying what SLES involves and the benefits which can accrue from it.

Most frequent comments were: When is it going to be built? Where is it going?

Biodiversity and meadows

There were comments about what sort of 'specifics' could be included in a meadow setting: bench, information board, but not necessarily a pond due to safety concerns. It was suggested that schools could be involved (somehow), and that there were some very good apps for use in identifying plants for any biodiversity surveys that might be done.

A baseline survey of the selected site and future monitoring could be done as a citizen science project, though once the site is active access will be for specific periods and supervised.

In relation to the solar meadow, it was also suggested that field edges could be used to provide foraging for bees, and that indeed the gap between the rows of panels could provide many 'field edges'. We were told of someone who rented space in a field of solar panels for his hives, paying the rent in honey.

Home energy saving

The events involved hours of volunteer time for only a relatively few face-to-face contacts. We need to find ways to increase footfall. Nevertheless, valuable conversations were had with individuals.

The Home Energy Saving Kit and the thermal camera were enthusiastically received, and we have lengthy waiting lists for each.

The overall concept of the Home Energy Saving Service was not properly understood, and the marketing message will need improving for participation in future events.

Volunteers

All of the 18 persons expressing interest in the BMCE scheme have been invited to a gathering to tell them more about the project and encourage them to become active volunteers. Two new volunteers were recruited to help with the thermal camera visits and will take part in training during November.

Future events

The EGIN mentor said she appreciated the very positive and professional approach of BMCE volunteers and the Community Engagement events. Other community events that would help engagement could be Schools, U3A and Rotary etc.

She suggested BMCE could also consider digital engagement tools such as Mentimeter (www.mentimeter.com) which could link with social media.

There is funding within the current SSW grant for further events, and it was agreed that once a site is confirmed this would be used for a Crickhowell public engagement event, and a separate meeting with nominated Community Councillors, to outline options for detailed proposals for the site. A further event within the Community affected should also be held which could take the form of a “field trip/walk” around the site if practical.

Visitors commented positively on displays for LGV activities in addition to the BMCE scheme and, while key stages in the BMCE project may merit dedicated events in the future (eg submission of a planning application), an annual (?) LGV Community update would help maintain engagement between LGV and the community it serves.

5. Conclusions

5.1. The activities

Regarding the BMCE scheme the feedback from those attending was “get on and do it”. And there was interest in investing in the scheme.

Biodiversity attracted interest both in relation to solar meadows and meadows in general. This is a valuable associated activity for the BMCE scheme, showing that LGV is aware of the need to protect the biodiversity of its chosen PV sites.

Presence at the events was productive in promoting the Home Energy Service, and further thought will be given to the marketing message.

5.2. The events

Publicity and engagement.

LGV could develop contacts and visits with organisations beyond its immediate orbit to reach a wider spectrum of people. Examples: schools (some contacts already), U3A, Rotary Specific possible actions include

- appointing a BMCE volunteer dedicated to public engagement and raising awareness [PB].
- Considering digital engagement tools such as Mentimeter.

Volunteers covered many miles (literally) in distribution publicity but with many houses outside concentrations of populations in future LGV could

- Pay more attention to posters at key locations which are visited by those living outside the main communities, eg the village shop, village halls, council notice boards, pubs.

Format

The drop-in format was appreciated by visitors.

Black Mountains Community Energy, a Llangattock Green Valleys project.

National Lottery Community Fund: Sustainable Steps Wales.

Inclusion of other LGV activities in addition to BMCE was worthwhile, particularly as there was no information available to be given about a solar PV site.

- LGV should consider an annual drop-in event showcasing all its activities to report progress and publicise coming activity.
- The full scope of the event should be clear in the publicity.

Within the SSW grant, LGV has funding available for event(s) next year to be used for

- A drop-in event dedicated to the BMCE site held in Crickhowell and publicised across the region, inviting all Five councils' counsellors, and a local event within the community affected which could be held in the vicinity of the site if practical.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the all the LGV volunteers involved in all aspects of the events, making the whole operation a success. Thanks to our mentor Becky Lythgoe for her contribution to the discussions before and after the events. The feasibility study was done by Ynni Teg with funds provided by the Sustainable Development Fund of Bannau Brycheiniog.

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PB 12 November 2025