

Report from Greenfields Consulting

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Executive Summary

A mid-term evaluation of Sharenergy was carried out in March 2010 which should be read in conjunction with this report which constitutes the evaluation at the end of the project.

Greenfields has carried out a review of management systems, reporting and interviewed stakeholders to evaluate the delivery and outcomes arising from the Sharenergy project.

Sharenergy has delivered on most of its key targets / deliverables and the final outputs, so critical to the proof of the models it set out to demonstrate, should be delivered within the five year project period. The reasons for not attaining the ultimate targets are mostly, if not totally, because of an over-optimistic view of what was achievable within three years and the added geographic restriction of having to work within the Rural Regeneration Zone.

The feedback received indicates that all individuals consider the work of Sharenergy very positively and there is strong evidence that many community projects would not have happened at all without Sharenergy intervention. The management systems, specifically the online database, are in need of more



regular (formal) attention to enhance performance and ensure business continuity.

Sharenergy forecast that about 55 *per cent* of the revolving investment fund will be recycled

The Sharenergy concept was predicated on Energy4All's success with community owned large wind turbines however, to adapt to the possibilities within the Rural Regeneration Zone, adjustments to this model have had to be developed. The knowledge gained from this research is an extremely useful outcome that must not be overlooked.

Introduction

The Sharenergy project was set up in 2008 to run for three years with the aim of becoming self-sustaining through returns from supported community renewable energy co-operatives and/or alternative funding. The project was funded by Advantage West Midlands, delivered by Energy4All (E4A) and was tasked with screening potential community owned renewable energy projects in the Rural Regeneration Zone and supporting suitable schemes through the development, planning and capital raising phases, prior to their development. Ultimately 'successful' Projects will need to raise the necessary capital through public share issue and repay the development funding provided.

To give Sharenergy some context, in order to reach the ambitious EU and UK targets for renewable energy generation by 2020 it has been recognised that the scale of projects and their distribution will have to change markedly from what conventional commercial interests perceive as financially attractive and the local community co-operative model could certainly have a role to play in delivering the capacity needed. However, the renewable co-operative concept is relatively new and has been based around a single technology, wind, which can split and polarise communities rather than bring them together.

Community groups can take years to become established and are always short of cash and time to realise projects in anything like the short term; the latter because no matter how committed members might be, they will have jobs and other obligations to prioritise.

Renewable energy technologies and projects are complex and, therefore, frequently take several years to proceed from concept to realisation. Furthermore, the in depth knowledge of relevant technology and what is needed for implementation is rarely held by a community group.

It is to overcome the above barriers that Sharenergy was initiated.

To date more than 50 projects have had preliminary consideration, 40 have been formally screened and about 16 have gone on to receive funding for feasibility assessment after screening by Sharenergy and its Management Group from the Rural Regeneration Zone (previously referred to as Stakeholders). Some of the 16 or so projects were amalgamated to achieve



economies of scale and utilise resources more efficiently and ultimately 8 discrete projects are at an advanced stage as shown below.

Name	Size	Initial feasibility	Business planning	Detailed technical feasibility	Planning & Permitting	Finance Raising	Installation and operation
1 Reeves Hill Wind	2MW						
2 Ludlow Hydro	63kW						
3 Tetstill Hydro	10kW						
4 Shrewsbury Hydro	400kW						
5 Pennerley Wind	330kW						
6 Bridgnorth Wind	330kW						
Woolhope Dome							
7 Woodfuel	2MW*						
8 Leominster Solar PV	100kW						

*This is thermal rating rather than electrical

The changes in Government and fiscal policy during 2010 led to a period of uncertainty and a cut of £34,000 was made to the Sharenergy budget in October. The dissolution of AWM by April 2012 has also had management implications; nevertheless it is important that Sharenergy is still evaluated against its original Project Management Plan.

This report updates some of the evaluation carried out in March 2010 but will also examine actions taken to address the recommendations made in the mid-term report.

The mid-term evaluation identified 4 recommendations for Sharenergy to consider, these were to;

1. Define a clear succession plan
2. Describe and refer to the Revolving Investment Fund more thoroughly
3. Raise awareness of the Rural Regeneration Zone
4. Ensure staffing levels are maintained and adequate.

Methodology

Greenfields has had access to the online Energy4All database and received copies of the following documents;

- The last Annual Report to Advantage West Midlands (June 2010)
- Management Group papers
- JH and EF hours spent on projects
- Revolving fund summary as presented to AWM pre-cuts in summer 2010
- Summary of plans for the new Sharenergy Co-op
- A spreadsheet used to analyse financial aspects

The evaluation has been discussed with John Malone, the Sharenergy Project Manager, Sharenergy Project Officer Jon Hallé and Sharenergy Technical Consultant Eithne Flanagan.

Contacts from seven of the most advanced projects and five past and present members of the management group were interviewed over the telephone using separate brief questionnaires.

Delivery against targets

A number of key milestones and targets were identified in the original bid for funding; those relevant to this end evaluation are set out in Table 1 along with brief comments on progress to date.

Table 1: Delivery of Targets and reaching Milestones

Milestone/target	Forecast date to be achieved	Actual date achieved	Comments
RRZ Steering Group meetings	Contrary to mid-term Evaluation there have been very regular meetings, 11 to date.		
Planning Applications for 2 Projects	31/3/10	One project has been undergoing a drawn out planning process since c. June 09. Two other projects are in the initial stages of the planning process and another is on the brink of closure.	
Planning Applications for a further 2 Projects	31/3/11		
1st public share offer complete	31/3/11	Not yet achieved	
Money from 1st share offer into revolving fund	31/3/11	Not yet achieved	
Project evaluation complete	31/3/11	This document	
Contracted Outputs:			
Job created: 0.7	The continuation of Shareenergy as a self-funded entity beyond the funding period will exceed this target.		
Jobs safeguarded: 6.8	These will accrue from the projects at an advanced stage of development		
Businesses created and/or attracted to the region: 1	Output removed by AWM prior to March 2011		
Private sector investment levered: £2.2m	Concomitant with share offer		
Business assisted – Environmental: 4	6 businesses were assisted to improve environmental performance by March 2010 and a further 10 by March 2011		

Telephone interviews of recipients

Following the mid-term interviews in March 2010, contacts from seven of the most advanced projects were interviewed by telephone using a brief questionnaire; a copy of the questionnaire, and the notes made during the interviews, is included in the Appendices.



All interviewees reiterated that Sharenergy had been a great help with the majority stating their project would either not have happened or not progressed without Sharenergy.

None of the projects have secured final planning consent; one is expecting to reach this point within the next 3 months but the rest are a minimum of 6 months from achieving consent.

Most of those interviewed had a grasp of the RIF but there were still two who did not appear to fully understand the concept.

The earliest share offer is still a minimum of three months away and most projects will not launch a share offer for at least another year.

On the past and future funding of Sharenergy nearly all knew the funding had come via AWM, one understood a co-operative was being set up but most either assumed it would operate at a loss or further funding would need to come from elsewhere such as the Local Enterprise Partnership.

All respondents felt Sharenergy had added value to their projects and most were reliant on the support of Sharenergy to make the advances they had made.

There were minor criticisms on communication with critical partners such as landowners and timeliness but overall the recipients were very positive about the way Sharenergy has operated. One pointed out that the approach was much more sensible than the form filling demanded from conventional grant bodies.

Other factors that those interviewed felt should be taken in to account in evaluating Sharenergy were the geographical limits imposed (the RRZ), the need to research and develop knowledge for technologies other than wind and concern over how Sharenergy might continue.

Telephone interviews of management group

Notes from the telephone interviews are included in the Appendices.

Four themes emerged as the greatest challenges for Sharenergy; the short term of the actual project (three years), disruption caused by the closure of AWM (and future funding), identifying the right projects to apply effort to and lack of *real* support from local councils.

Overall there has been good co-operation with other regional projects however, with the LeAD project, there might have been the opportunity to work more closely with LEADER in support of the application.

Most of those interviewed recognised the paradox of trying to 'pick winners', i.e. focus resources on the stronger projects; the paradox being that you can not identify strong projects without expending resources. Other suggested improvements included better administration and spending more time



engaging at a strategic level (above grassroots) and thereby benefit from the resources of other organisations/personnel with a similar remit.

Other factors that should be taken in to account in the evaluation included the need to appreciate the efforts being made to enable continuation and that money spent on stalled projects should definitely not be considered wasted. The project structure was criticised for forcing spending of development funds to a timetable rather than providing timely stepping stones for community groups. A 'lessons learnt' document from Sharenergy staff would be very useful to the embryonic concept of community owned schemes. The project was possibly ahead of its time; the introduction of FITs (and latterly the promise of the RHI) might make the concept more attractive.

Sharenergy management

The mid-term evaluation referred to the comprehensive on-line database package and the need for a very disciplined approach to keep the system updated and truly reflective of constantly changing details. The evaluation also noted that; *"if outputs from this system could be integrated into the reporting mechanism it would be beneficial from a project management perspective and save duplication of effort"*.

Minutes from the Management Group meetings indicate that the production of Gantt charts was requested on more than one occasion and such reports could be relatively easily generated if the system were sustained. Some of the contact details were missing or inaccurate and the Leominster PV project is not listed at all.

The added importance of 'business continuity planning' has been raised with Sharenergy in the context of maintaining the database. The risk has been acknowledged and there is a plan in place to bring the database up to date and increase the frequency of this maintenance.

Interaction of Sharenergy with other regional projects

Subsequent to the previous mid-term evaluation, the demise of AWM and changes in national Government policy, there has been considerable uncertainty for projects that Sharenergy could interact with.

Post the previous evaluation, given the restricted resource available, the priority should have been (and was in the main) given to contacts and projects already engaged.

Addressing previous recommendations

The mid-term evaluation reported on the feedback from both stakeholders and recipients of assistance from Sharenergy and recommended there should be a focus on four aspects of the project:



1. *Define and produce details of what will happen at the end of Sharenergy to give continuity to those receiving support and clarity to the stakeholders involved.*

There are firm proposals in place to continue Sharenergy as a co-operative in its own right and efforts are being made to raise funding to bridge the gap between the end of AWM funding and getting some return from the share issue from the first batch of projects.

We have not seen evidence of a clear and concise document (directly targeted at either recipients or stakeholders) which clearly describes what the plans are.

2. *Clearly describe the Revolving Investment Fund (RIF) concept from the very start of involvement with community groups; what is, and is not, deemed repayable should be made clear from the outset.*

Some respondents still do not understand the RIF concept.

Sharenergy have identified that there are costs associated with the concept that can not be reimbursed by projects that complete; an obvious example is where a feasibility study concludes that a project is not viable. In addition there are the general overheads of running an office which can not be underestimated.

To mitigate some of the unrecoverable screening costs the development of some self-screening tools would be useful and applications for funding these have been made.

3. *The relationship between Sharenergy, AWM and the RRZ should be made more explicit in both publicity materials and in correspondence sent from Sharenergy. This should be designed to ensure the RRZ is more visible such that its services might be accessed by members of the community groups.*

With the demise of AWM and the RRZ this issue became effectively redundant.

4. *With the increase in awareness of renewables generally and the introduction of incentives there is likely to be increased interest in Sharenergy. Steps should be taken to ensure demand does not put undue pressure on the available staff resource.*

The limited resources of Sharenergy were identified early on and the appointment of the Technical Consultant alleviated the issue greatly. However, it appears Sharenergy continued to 'recruit' more community groups and projects when several strong projects were already engaged.



Project achievements

Sharenergy has interacted with hundreds of individuals of many communities within the former RRZ and during these interactions the possibilities and realities of renewable energy options have been disseminated. Given the UK's low knowledge base and aspirations for renewable energy there can be no doubt that this in itself has been useful.

More than £380,000 has been spent on direct public sector support for 17 projects; at an average of more than £22,000 *per* project, this is more than any of these communities could have realistically expected to find in order to crystallise and focus their aspiration for a renewable energy project.

Sharenergy has gathered a vast amount of experience and knowledge in the specialist area of community-owned energy, including the development of unique models based on specific technology and different scales. This research and know-how is being captured in documents such as 'Community-led Wind Power'¹.

Contributions to the economy

There is a commonly held belief that the renewable energy sector is "on the up" but the reality is that, aside from the large scale, power generation sector, the majority of businesses engaged in small and medium scale projects are not yet thriving. There can be no doubt that, by funding research and feasibility, Sharenergy has assisted small specialist renewable energy companies to maintain their presence in the market. That said it would be extremely difficult to quantify this impact.

Case Studies

Case studies of the Tetstill Hydro and Leominster AD projects have been produced in support of this evaluation and should be referred to as they illustrate some of the practical issues raised in this report.

Fund profile and projections

The financial analysis spreadsheet provided details of when and how much was spent in the delivery of the Sharenergy project. The figures that follow have all been rounded to the nearest £1,000.

The headline simplistic budget for Sharenergy was;

£180,000 project costs for Sharenergy (setting up, administration, management, etc ;)

£600,000 available for the RIF

£780,000 Total

From this total £15,000 was spent setting up the project and £34,000 was cut in 2010. Around £18,000 was withdrawn due to under spend against monthly budgets in 2009 and 2010 (£10,000 and £8,000 respectively).

¹ Community-Led Wind Power, 2011, Sharenergy for Local United, funded by NESTA.



This left about **£711,000** remaining.

Over the three years £604,000 has been expended on items assigned to the RIF with the remaining £107,000 being considered project overheads.

The RIF

Of the £604,000 committed to the RIF it is thought that £333,000 will be recoverable from the projects in portfolio with the balance (£271,000) having been invested in projects that have stalled and in research key to multiple projects such as technology, financial models and legal issues.

The under spend

The loss of £18,000 from the budget is a significant sum but underlines the difficulties associated with applying conventional budgeting to an extremely ambitious project relying on 'new' technology markets and new financial structures involving local community groups.

Conclusions

The project concept was to nurture two community groups to complete the development of renewable energy schemes from initial idea through development and to final launch as co-operatives. This in itself would be a monumental task given the starting point of the UK population in terms of familiarity with the technology and co-operative business structures. The additional restrictions of geography and rigid time constraints on budgetary spend have combined with policy changes to make it impossible.

It is widely recognised by all involved in Sharenergy that the scale of the project and its aspirations were under-resourced and time-constrained; it is unlikely that any significant renewable energy project has *ever* progressed from initial concept to full operation within three years. Further to the conventional issues associated with renewable energy, Sharenergy has had the additional difficulties of working with community groups, designing technology/scale-relevant co-operative models and introducing the co-operative concept to the groups.

There needs to be ongoing analysis of the assignation of costs to projects such that a clear delineation between overheads, project start-up costs and project development costs (that will be paid back in to the RIF) can be seen. While the proportions of these costs will understandably change over time, without active ongoing analysis and management of these costs it is difficult to see how a transparent and sustainable business model can be designed.

Some of the feedback received referred to the refreshing approach of Sharenergy when compared to conventional grant schemes while some of the management group made reference to the need for better administration. It is difficult to strike the right balance of appearing non-bureaucratic to, sometimes fragile, community groups whilst having a slick business-like back-office.



Recommendations

1. Further analysis of the RIF expenditure is essential;
 - To learn from experience and understand the risk associated with project types so that an element of constant improvement is brought in to the business model.
 - To separate and review the research element of the spending; are there still significant knowledge gaps? Can a separate project to fill those gaps be justified and funding sought outside of the Sharenergy Co-operative?
2. Consider the time element of money and ensure it is factored in to the business models. Many of the projects will have effectively received an interest free loan of tens of thousands of pounds over three years by the time they try to raise capital.
3. Some 47 *per cent* of the total investment is non-recoverable and Sharenergy needs to put systems in place to not only monitor this figure but also drastically reduce it.



Appendix 1 Responses from Recipients

Sharenergy Evaluation

Telephone Interview Questions – Projects.

The following notes are not a verbatim record of the conversations but summarise the discussion and thrust of what was said. All those contacted were sent a follow up e-mail inviting further comments.

Text in italics is from the developer and not the community group.

Hello, my name is Nick Monether I am calling in relation to the Sharenergy Project and the support it has given XXXXX.

**Is it OK to ask you a few questions?
[General chat].....**

I have 8 questions to ask, there are no right or wrong answers but we would value your honest opinions and views

1. Has Sharenergy helped in the development of XXXXX?

Absolutely fundamental; the basis of our project.

Yes, tremendously, would not have happened.

Yes considerably.

Absolutely crucial.

Yes. Can't say it would not have happened but it would have taken a lot more effort from the active parties without them.

I don't think it would have happened; its driven the project forward. There have been financial issues because it's a small project (10kW) but it is a small community.

Yes, they've provided the wind energy data required for the design

2. Do you know when you might secure planning permission for your project?

YES, NO, ABOUT.....

There's been another re-think on the size, we may need to go for something bigger to make it economic.

The problem has been we've drawn a blank for two sites; the feasibilities were both positive but problems with ownership and adjoining properties. Third site at an early stage – needs feasibility.



As soon as the County Council decides! There have been huge delays due to changes at the council. The council have been indecisive and unhelpful.

Some will require planning and our chipping depot will require it within 12 months or so.

We have scoping information from the planning department, we need an Environmental Impact Assessment, we're sorting out a display for the community and have a forum at the end of June. Hoping for a July application.

Dealing with lease negotiation at the moment. Should go for planning in the next 2 months.

Spoke to the LA this morning, they are concerned over the possibility for a judicial review. Hope to get permission within the next 2 to 3 months.

3. Do you understand the concept of the Shareenergy offer, in particular the Revolving Investment Fund (RIF)?

Not yet – not fully taken on board yet, but suspect Jon has told them.

Yes indeed, without it they can't keep going – quite impressed with an excellent concept.

Yes; we've worked very, very closely and this has been clear from day one.

Yes.

No.

Not the terminology (RIF) but understand the need to reimburse development money; think its about £20 to £25 k.

No, not been explained but we are not the community group.

4. Do you know when you might issue a share offer for XXXXX?

Nowhere near ready yet.

12 months if we're optimistic.

IF the Council acts then could be in a minimum 14 weeks or so.

Hope it will be in late summer. We need a critical number of boiler sites



and allow for RHI impacts.

Depends on Planning permission but we also need a wind mast assessment; so probably 12 months away.

We will launch the co-op once we have planning. Information about the project and co-op has already been circulated to the community.

We are not the community group.

5. Do you know how Sharenergy is/was funded and how it might continue?

Yes; originally AWM and now it will function as a co-op.

Not sure of the latest situation.

By AWM and the RIF, so the RIF will have to continue but, if there's no replacement for AWM, at a loss.

By AWM and Energy 4 All? Not sure other than the RIF.

Understand it was AWM. Not sure how it will continue; presumably others such as LEP.

A grant from AWM. Understand the funding will disappear at the end of March but hasn't heard how Sharenergy will continue. Sharenergy manage RDC (consultants) but we've not been told if this will stop.

No.

6. Do you think Sharenergy has added value to your Project?

Absolutely yes, without doubt!

Yes, very much so.

Yes, a dynamic and helpful partner.

Fundamentally, could not happen without it.

Yes.

Yes, would not have got going; would still be talking. It's been a real education finding out about wind, AD and hydro and the complexities of what on the surface appears simple.

Provision of the mast which we would have found hard to fund



ourselves.

7. Can you think of any ways Sharenergy could do things better?

Not a criticism but, there were long intervals during consultancy studies when the farmer/landowner could have had more contact – even if just to say there's nothing to report. This would have helped, especially for the farmer/landowner.

No.

No, not really. Very helpful, can't think of an improvement.

Not so far, they've surpassed expectations so far but we are at the first end of the project cycle. A much more sensible process than conventional grants and their reams of forms.

When we first spoke it seemed that Sharenergy wanted bigger projects; it took a while before the value of smaller projects was seen. FITS made a difference and put more energy in to project development.

No, things have gone well. Could have got going a bit faster but its complex.

We've not been involved; JH dealt with the mast.

8. Is there anything else you would like to suggest I should take account of in the evaluation of the Sharenergy Project to date?

Jon and Etty have been absolutely excellent and I appreciate all they've done. Very personable and good with people from all sorts of backgrounds, e.g. farmers/landowners who can be difficult!

It would be good to have a think about this. Who can see your evaluation report when it's finished?

The geographical limitation imposed on Sharenergy. There are some very good opportunities in Wales where we'd welcome them as a partner.

Aware of the mailings and website, so communications are good. Concern is for the future – can they continue as they've been operating so far?

Hard to answer because not sure of the full remit of Sharenergy.

Performed reasonably well. We've all been on a learning curve; E4A expertise was in wind so hydro and AD had to be learnt by them as well as us. We view the project as educational and an ethical



investment.

Not really us but this project has provided wind data for this site which might be useful for other projects.

Appendix 2 Responses from Stakeholders

Shareenergy Evaluation

Telephone Interview Questions – Stakeholders:

Hello, my name is Nick Monether I am calling in relation to the Shareenergy Project and the support it has been giving.

Is it OK to ask you a few questions?
[General chat].....

I don't understand the Woolhope Dome project – an ESCo without the capital to fund the hardware?

How zealous will the new organisation be – CLAWBACK MIGHT BE A RISK

1. What have been the most difficult things Shareenergy has had to overcome in the past 12 months?

The closure of AWM has caused disruption. Not sure if it's a viable model and I've not seen a replacement for AWM funding as yet. We need to see the RIF returning to the pot.

Difficulty in identifying projects and community perceptions. The length of time it takes to get things done. Councils are *not* helping, even when they make positive statements. The work needed is intensive.

Lack of certainty over funding. The short-term nature of the project; it was always going to be an enormous challenge to get projects paying back in this time frame.

Throughout the project; identifying projects that have all the right ingredients to succeed is very, very difficult without spending too much money. Working with community groups is very challenging as you are reliant on volunteers and things change, people move on and opinions change – keeping momentum is therefore difficult. Getting to the planning stage with a good quality application and allocating funds fairly is difficult.

Getting projects going. Perhaps it was ahead of its time – with FITS and RHI it would have more success. Some of the smaller councils are not pro-active in supporting things like this. Even after development there is still the need for capital.



2. **Can you give examples where Sharenergy has worked well with, or not worked well with, other relevant regional projects?**

Good work with the HUB network and MEA. Not really seen a big interaction with other AWM funded schemes.

Good synergy with RE:think. The LeAD project applied to LEADER but the application was not focussed enough – maybe the relationship with LEADER could have been built on better.

Its complimented not competed with MEA's work. Its been useful to refer people to.

Integration was good because of a good mix in the Management Group. They've done a fairly good job of identifying similar projects and ensuring no duplication of effort.

3. **Can you think of any ways Sharenergy could do things better?**

Administration! Jon is a great guy but appears to be terribly disorganised.

Earlier engagement with fewer projects and heavily resource these. Engage with higher, strategy level contacts to benefit from other organisation resources that have a similar remit.

No, not really. The problems have been down to the restrictions and conditions of the funding. The RRZ restriction prevented them finding projects that could have paid back more quickly, a good example being the large PV project because there are few sites in the RRZ that could be suitable. They've used local knowledge well.

Resources have been spread too thinly over a lot of projects. Need to be more focussed on front runners but even then there is a big risk such as the lottery of getting planning consent. More realistic expectations on what communities can achieve in this area.

RE:think

Is there anything else you would like to suggest I should take account of in the evaluation of the Sharenergy Project to date?

We've spread a very limited resource too widely. Maybe should have focussed on a limited number of strong projects but its very difficult to spot winners early on. It's been *very* good at raising awareness and giving early support for community RE projects.

When will the RIF start working and the model be proven?



Whoever considers continuation needs to appreciate the efforts made to continue the project. The money spent on projects that have stalled should certainly not be considered wasted – there are many reasons some of them have stopped even where the project is feasible. The preliminary work paid for by Sharenergy will enable them to start again in the future.

The issue of having to spend development money to a timetable rather than when it would be ideal to do so. Small successes can give stepping stones, small steps for community groups to learn, give confidence and build on. It would good to see a 'lessons learnt' document based on JH's Sharenergy experience – his Community-led Wind Power document is very good. The whole concept of Community Schemes is still embryonic and information from Sharenergy is needed to help.

Not sure how much PR there was; a little low-profile. Seemed focussed on south of RRZ.

