

Northumberland Community Energy Limited (NCEL)

The Solar-Powered Building Project is working to enable community buildings reduce their energy bills, reduce their carbon footprint and boost their long-term resilience to the impacts of climate change and fluctuating energy markets. NCEL project manages the installation, maintenance and all risks of the system over the 20-year partnership.



The main steps along the way:

Following a hall/centre/church's interest to join the project, an initial **feasibility study** is carried out by a recognised contractor on behalf of NCEL.

Once funds are in place to proceed the next stage is securing **planning permission** for the siting of panels and batteries.

A Lease is agreed between NCEL and the community building with respect to siting of NCEL panels and batteries and includes a power purchase agreement where the community building purchases the solar electricity at a fixed price of £0.15 per kWh for the term of the lease. The lease will be drawn up by solicitors, independently acting for both parties, engaged and funded by NCEL. A solar PV contractor will be procured and once the lease is in place we can agree an **installation** date. This process can take up to 2 months.

All capital and revenue costs associated with installing panels and batteries are covered by NCEL.

There is an accompanying **How it Works** summary sheet and information on the Community Action Northumberland website [Solar-Powered Community Buildings](#)



NCEL was formed in 2023 as a not-for-profit Community Benefit Society. It is supported by representatives from community buildings and the founding partnerships of Community Action Northumberland (CAN), Rural Design Centre (RDC) and National Innovation Centre for Rural Enterprise (NICRE). NCEL is regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority and works for the best interest of the community.

Progress of Community Buildings

To date we have installed solar PV and battery systems at 9 buildings with 2 due in April.

- **Corsenside** – installed **28th August**
- **Longhoughton** – installed **6th September**
- **Beadnell** – installed **19th October 2024**
- **Barrasford** – installed **23rd October 2024**
- **Whitley Chapel** – installed **12th November 2024**
- **Creighton Memorial Hall** – installed **4th December 2024**
- **Humshaugh Village HALL** – installed **20th December 2025**
- **Thropton Village Hall** - installed **14th January 2025**
- **Newton & Bywell** – installed **28th February 2025**

- **Crookham Village Hall** – Will be installed before **April 18th 2025**
- **Felton Village Hall** – will be installed before **18th April 2025**

Once funding secured, below are the first buildings we hope to install in 2025

- Lesbury Village Hall
- St Pauls Church, North Sunderland
- Cheviot Centre, Wooler
- Stannington Village Hall,
- Seahouses Hostel
- Elsdon

In the last few months **6** community buildings have expressed an interest to join the project

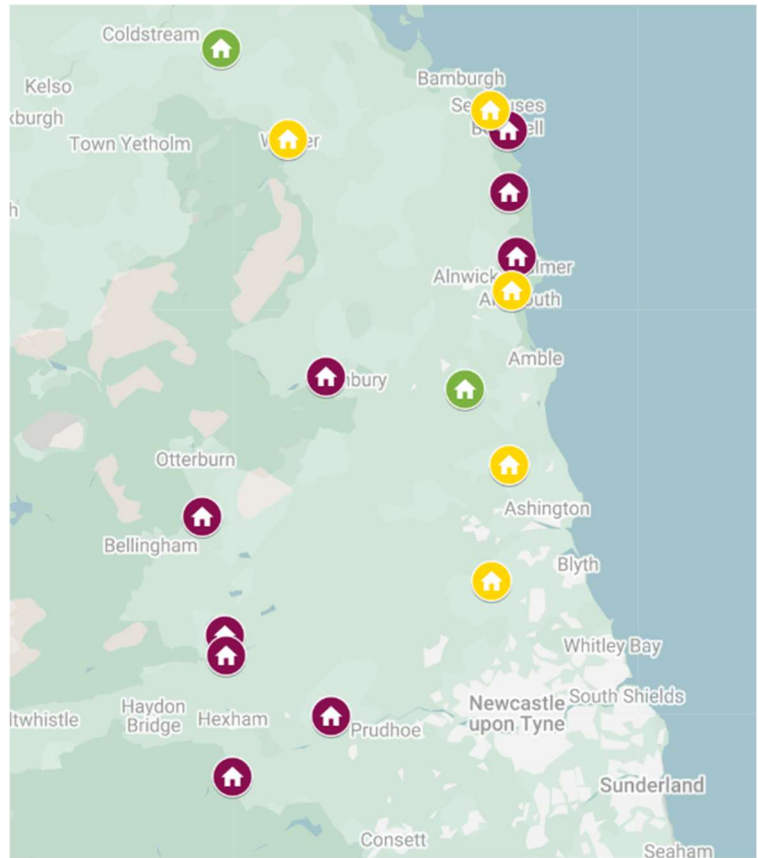
Currently we have **63** buildings who have a completed solar installation feasibility study or awaiting their visit and report.

There are **15** buildings with a feasibility study and planning approval awaiting the next steps.

In total we are working with **95** buildings who are various stages in the project.

- ✔ **Installed community buildings**
 - 🏠 Corsenside Parish Hall
 - 🏠 Longhoughton Community & Sports Centre
 - 🏠 Barrasford Village Hall
 - 🏠 Whitley Chapel Parish Hall
 - 🏠 Humshaugh Village Hall
 - 🏠 Creighton Memorial Hall
 - 🏠 Thropton
 - 🏠 Newton & Bywell Community Hall
 - 🏠 Beadnell Women's Institute

- ✔ **Proposed Solar PV installed by April 2025**
 - 🏠 Crookham Village Hall
 - 🏠 Felton Village Hall



Proposed installations in 2025

- 🏠 Cheviot Centre, Wooler
- 🏠 Seahouses Hostel
- 🏠 Lesbury Village Hall
- 🏠 Stannington Village Hall
- 🏠 Ulgham

Communication and Sharing

NCEL held their first **Sharing Event** at Longhoughton Community & Sports Centre on **Monday 18th November**. We are planning for a second in the south of Northumberland in **May 2025**. Dates and information will be sent out to everyone.



This project is part funded by the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the North East Combined Authority Investment Fund with the North East Combined Authority as the lead authority

NCEL's first AGM is on **Tuesday 18th March** 1pm – 4pm at Creighton Memorial Hall, Embleton. There will be a summary report in the next NCEL Solar-Powered Building update.

The Solar Powered buildings Project was part of the series of 3 roadshows delivered by the **Northumberland County Council Community Resilience Forums**.

Information on the Solar Powered Buildings Project is available to take away at **CAN's Village Hall Week** event on Wednesday 19th March at Stannington Village Hall. [Northumberland Village Halls Week 2025 Tickets, Wed 19 Mar 2025 at 09:30 | Eventbrite](#)

Through the Northumberland County Council **Rural Asset Multiplier** Project (RAMP) funding the installations at Humshaugh and Barrasford will hopefully feature as part of their collective project film.

Keep your eyes out for articles in **CAN newsletter** [News | Community Action Northumberland](#) and **CAN Facebook** [\(6\) Facebook](#)



Kaleidoscope filming at Humshaugh and Barrasford

Storm Eowyn tested the NCEL solar panel installations on community buildings. From Whitley Chapel to Beadnell high winds of up to 80 miles per hour blew through Northumberland on Friday 25th and Saturday 26th January. Building's trustees reported no issues and we are delighted to report all installations were unaffected. Whitley Chapel and Barrasford village hall intermittently lost power over the weekend but the emergency backup box kicked in and the halls were able to maintain an emergency electricity supply. All in all we are delighted that the installations have performed so well.

Funding

During 2023-April 2025 NCEL received funding from

North East & Yorkshire Net Zero Hub,

National Lottery Community Fund

UK Shared Prosperity Funding

Northern Power Grid Foundation

The funding facilitated approximately **45** feasibility studies. **35** planning applications, **7** roof surveys, **4** bat surveys and **11** installations.

Energy Savings Trust - Energy Redress fund

NCEL and CAN successfully applied to the Energy Savings Trust - Energy Redress fund.

We have funding from March 2025 – March 2027 for:

21 planning applications

31 legal agreements

13 roof surveys

Rural Design Centre have funding for a graduate innovation associate who will support some of the work of NCEL.

Wind Farm Community Funding

A number of community buildings engaged with the Solar-Powered building project lie within the catchment area of several wind farms that offer funding for local projects. In 2025 NCEL will explore how this funding could support solar PV panels and battery installation. Use the link below to check your eligibility for funding.

[Wingates Wind Farm Community Grants Scheme | Empowering Organisations | Community Action Northumberland](#)

NCEL billing

The first invoices were sent out to the halls that have installations for electricity consumed up to 31st December 2024. Some halls had only been commissioned for a short period. The initial income was £540.90 from 5 halls.

Northern Power Grid Foundation

The Northern Power Grid Foundation offers grants to communities strengthen community resilience and promote greener energy. NCEL are working with communities who have received NPGF funding and wish to join NCEL to install solar power and battery systems at their community building and benefit from the ongoing monitoring, maintenance, repair and renewal offered by NCEL through the Solar-Powered Buildings project. Consider applying to NPGF for funding to support your buildings resilience and move to greener energy.

[Homepage | Northern Powergrid Foundation](#)

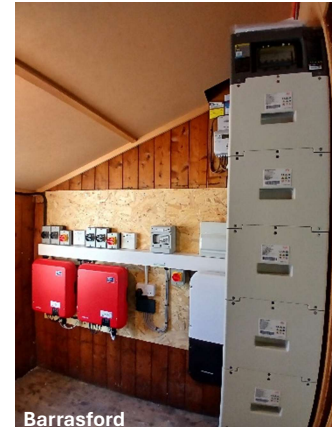
Operational

Battery Safety

NCEL is aware of the risks posed by Li-Ion batteries stored in community buildings. We are currently working with Newcastle University and Tyne & Wear Fire Service to develop guidance for community buildings.

Battery Optimisation.

Now we have the first installations up and running we are evaluating the performance of the systems to identify any buildings which need more, or less, battery capacity. We have already identified two buildings benefit from additional battery capacity. We have been able to utilise some underspend from the existing RAMP grant to buy additional battery modules and these will be installed soon. NCEL is working with a local company, Smart Origin, to develop a battery optimisation model to further improve this process.



Smart Export Guarantee (SEG)

At all installations we are working to optimise the battery storage so the building can consume as much solar electricity generated as possible. For any solar electricity that is exported NCEL is responsible for securing the SEG with the mains electricity supplier for that building. For each building, NCEL enters into a G98 or G99 agreement depending on the anticipated degree of export with Northern Power Grid or Scottish Power. We also need the building to have a smart meter in place or retro fitted so the amount exported can be agreed with the mains supplier. We are currently recording where smart meters are in place and operational. We are at the start of registering the sites for Renewable Energy Guarantees of Origin (REGO) certification with Ofgem and at the same time exploring working with Yunity (parent companies Octopus Energy and Co-Operative) [Growing Community Energy Through PPAs, Funding & Volunteer](#) who will manage the billing across the various sites for NCEL.

CAN Support - Community Buildings Energy Audits

CAN are now able to offer free energy audits for community buildings. Please contact **Jake Delacey**, Community Buildings Energy Advisor, jakedelacey@ca-north.org.uk 07450866874 for an informal chat.