# Community ownership unlocks 100 times more value from renewables in Scotland’s Highlands and Islands



A recent report has cast a spotlight on the significant imbalance between the benefits derived from renewable energy projects in Scotland's Highlands and Islands, highlighting a pressing need for a shift towards community and local authority-led initiatives. The findings, authored by Tom Wills and Erin Rizzato of Lerwick-based Equitable Energy Research and commissioned by the social change campaigners at Platform London, underscore a critical insight: community-operated energy projects yield considerably greater value for local populations compared to their wholly commercial counterparts.

Currently, wind power in Scotland generates enough electricity to power 10 million homes; however, alarming statistics reveal that many communities situated near these developments continue to struggle with fuel poverty. This paradox accentuates the urgent demand for a re-envisioning of energy ownership structures, as demonstrated by the report, "Social Value from Renewables in the Highlands and Islands." The analysis reveals that merely 0.5 per cent of wind projects, equivalent to around 85 MW in capacity, are owned by local communities. In stark contrast, community-owned projects can produce up to 100 times more economic benefit for residents than privately owned wind farms.

The report showcases several transformative case studies, one of which is the 4.5 MW Garth wind farm in Yell. Owned by the North Yell Development Council, this facility generates approximately £2 million annually for a community of just 250 residents. Another compelling example includes the Tiree Community Wind Turbine, which, despite being only one per cent the size of the privately-owned Beinn An Tuirc 1-2 Wind Farm, delivers over 100 times more economic value back to its community. Similarly, Orkney Community Wind Farms—wholly owned by Orkney Islands Council—are projected to provide £5.5 million annually to bolster public services across the archipelago.

Flick Monk, a public energy campaigner at Platform, pointed out the pervasive inequality in profit distribution from renewable sources, stating, "It’s imperative that we join the dots and realise community ownership at scale." She emphasised the necessity for local populations to gain a larger share of the profitability derived from energy projects in their vicinity and called for substantial control over vital energy infrastructure.

In a similar vein, Emmie Martin, Community Projects Officer at Tiree Community Development Trust, highlighted the transformative impact of their community-owned wind turbine known as Tilley. She explained, "The wealth she generates goes straight back into the island through our Windfall Fund, which has awarded more than £1.3 million to local projects." This sentiment mirrors broader findings that suggest community ownership not only produces energy but also fosters economic vitality and community resilience.

Miriam Brett, co-director of the Future Economy Scotland think tank, cautioned against merely replicating the inequities of the fossil fuel era within renewable energy frameworks. She called for a collective reimagination of ownership structures that prioritise community stakes and local authority-led initiatives to ensure that wealth generated from renewable resources benefits local populations equitably.

The report brings to light the role of Equitable Energy Research, a consultancy founded last year to provide communities with advice on renewable energy ownership. Their objective is to facilitate fair and just deals that empower communities through proper negotiation and ownership of energy ventures.

Ultimately, as Scotland witnesses a burgeoning growth in renewable energy generation, it becomes increasingly imperative to address the existing disparities and embrace models that deliver tangible benefits directly to local communities, fostering sustainable development and enhancing the quality of life for residents in the Highlands and Islands.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.shetnews.co.uk/2025/05/29/report-highlights-imbalance-benefits-green/), [[2]](https://www.shetnews.co.uk/2025/05/29/report-highlights-imbalance-benefits-green/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.shetnews.co.uk/2025/05/29/report-highlights-imbalance-benefits-green/), [[2]](https://www.shetnews.co.uk/2025/05/29/report-highlights-imbalance-benefits-green/), [[3]](https://www.renewableenergymagazine.com/wind/report-finds-scotland-s-community-owned-wind-20210618)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.shetnews.co.uk/2025/05/29/report-highlights-imbalance-benefits-green/), [[5]](https://www.holyrood.com/inside-politics/view%2Ccommunity-energy-with-a-fair-wind)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.shetnews.co.uk/2025/05/29/report-highlights-imbalance-benefits-green/), [[6]](https://www.cpre.org.uk/discover/why-we-love-community-energy/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.shetnews.co.uk/2025/05/29/report-highlights-imbalance-benefits-green/), [[4]](https://www.renewableuk.com/our-work/planning-environment-and-communities/community-benefits/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[7]](https://www.socialinvestmentscotland.com/insights/scottish-community-group-secures-over-5-million-in-investment/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.shetnews.co.uk/2025/05/29/report-highlights-imbalance-benefits-green/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.shetnews.co.uk/2025/05/29/report-highlights-imbalance-benefits-green/> - A recent report highlights the disparity in benefits from renewable energy projects in Scotland's Highlands and Islands. It reveals that community and local authority-led projects consistently provide more value to local residents than entirely commercial ventures. For instance, the 4.5 MW Garth wind farm in Yell, owned by the North Yell Development Council, generates approximately £2 million annually for a community of around 250 people. In contrast, privately-owned wind farms often fail to deliver similar economic benefits to host communities.
3. <https://www.renewableenergymagazine.com/wind/report-finds-scotland-s-community-owned-wind-20210618> - A report by Aquatera Ltd., commissioned by Point and Sandwick Development Trust, compared nine community-owned and four private wind farms in Scotland. The study found that community-owned wind farms average £170,000 per installed MW per annum, significantly exceeding the standard £5,000 per installed MW per annum from private wind farms. This underscores the substantial economic advantages of community ownership in renewable energy projects.
4. <https://www.renewableuk.com/our-work/planning-environment-and-communities/community-benefits/> - RenewableUK discusses the benefits of shared and local ownership in renewable energy projects. Shared ownership allows communities to invest in local renewable energy projects, fostering greater involvement and support. However, such schemes can be complex and require upfront investment from communities. The cooperative model enables local residents to receive annual returns linked to the project's productivity, with preference given to those living close to the projects to maximise local economic benefits.
5. <https://www.holyrood.com/inside-politics/view%2Ccommunity-energy-with-a-fair-wind> - An article in Holyrood magazine discusses the economic impact of community-owned wind turbines in Scotland. It highlights a project in North Uist, where a community-owned wind turbine generates enough electricity to power all homes in the area. The project has also provided significant income, which has been reinvested into local services and infrastructure, demonstrating the potential of community energy projects to benefit local economies.
6. <https://www.cpre.org.uk/discover/why-we-love-community-energy/> - The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) outlines the advantages of community energy schemes. These include empowering and uniting communities, managing energy consumption, protecting the local landscape, and contributing to environmental protection. For example, the Ynni Ogwen hydro energy scheme in Bethesda involved local residents in its setup, fostering community confidence and providing opportunities for decision-making and contribution to a shared endeavour.
7. <https://www.socialinvestmentscotland.com/insights/scottish-community-group-secures-over-5-million-in-investment/> - A Scottish community group, ATTIX Community Interest Company, secured over £5 million in investment to build the first subsidy-free, 100% community-owned large wind turbine in Scotland. The project, located in North Ayrshire, is expected to be completed by the end of next year. This initiative demonstrates the growing interest and investment in community-owned renewable energy projects in Scotland.