

Introduction

The Sustainable Energy Communities Roundtable was organised by The Village, Tipperary Institute, SERVE and Transition Town Cloughjordan with support from Sustainable Energy Ireland. Its purpose was to initiate discussions on how synergies can be created between community led/bottom up approaches to sustainable energy and national programmes and initiatives. The roundtable attendees represented a wide cross section of key stakeholders including project developers, community activists, Sustainable Energy Ireland, academic institutes and local energy agencies.

The Discussions

The programme included presentations on two key projects in Ireland which are aiming to create sustainable energy zones in two parts of the country. The SERVE project is focused on a rural community in North Tipperary while the HOLISTIC/Dundalk 2020 project focuses on Dundalk in Co. Louth. These were followed by short overviews of examples of initiatives and experiences from activities which are community led or focused on community action.

A discussion on key issues and aspects was then facilitated by Gavin Harte which sought to identify and examine key issues which need to be addressed to move towards a more coordinated approach to addressing the challenges of creating sustainable energy communities. Some of the key issues identified included

- Placing an economic value on the spin off benefits of a community led project: an example was given of a bioenergy project where if a focus was put on the project finance only the economic return was limited e.g. €50,000 annual return for a €1m investment. However, if the additional community benefits were included the annual returns were significantly higher e.g. €250,000 per annum due to job creation, reduced imports, cost avoidance etc. How can these additionalities be integrated to allow community projects to be financed initially
- High start up costs for community led projects: an comparison given of the high initial costs which projects have to face (many which are regulation based) in Ireland compared to other EU countries. These high costs often stop a project from being initiated or progressing beyond the first phase.
- Planning issues: while there are a range of policies at a National and Local level in relation to sustainable energy there seems to be a knowledge gap in the planning system in relation to sustainable energy projects. This gap can have a detrimental affect on projects clearing the planning hurdle.
- Addressing the economic crisis and financial models: there is an urgent need to create new models of financing investment in sustainable energy projects. These include Pay as You Save schemes where the savings achieved from energy efficiency actions are used to pay off the capital costs through to Green Bonds and Green Banks.
- Community Structures: Currently in Ireland there is a deficit in the models which community led projects can use to move their projects forward. There is currently no legal base for Limited Liability Partnerships in Ireland at present. This model, which is available in the UK and other EU countries allows legal partnerships to be created which can facilitate investment costs and profits to be shared appropriately within the partnership.

Harvesting the Results

Mr Brendan Halligan, Chair of Sustainable Energy Ireland provided a short summary of the day and identified a number of actions arising out of the discussions

- a) The issue of financial models is something that SEI have been looking at and SEI will seek to engage further with members of the workshop on this issue
- b) Barriers to renewable energy clearly need to be addressed, in particular the up front costs. Further discussions and research on these issues is needed to allow these barriers to be overcome.
- c) Community involvement and community development are what sustainable energy communities are about and further discussions need to be held on how the range of community development issues can be addressed via sustainable energy led activities
- d) Planning is a clear issue and there is potential for engagement with the planning profession into the future to address the knowledge gap in this area.

SEI is willing to engage with relevant parties in relation to the above.

Workshop Programme

Time	Description
12.15pm	Ecovillage Tour for Delegates– Assemble at The Village Offices
1.40pm	Powerdown Show – ‘Rethinking Energy’, Davie Philips, Cultivate
2.00pm	Opening and Introductions
2.10pm	Presentations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SERVE Project:, Seamus Hoyne, Tipperary Institute • HOLISTIC/Dundalk 2020, Declan Meally, SEI
2.40pm	A Sample of Initiatives
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Power of One Community Owen Lewis, SEI (TBC) • The Village, Gregg Allen, SPIL • Enterprise, Energy and Community, Ben Whelan, Cultivate • Energy Smart Communities, Joe Hayden, CODEMA • Community Wind, John Fogarthy, Templederry Wind Project • Energy Neighbourhoods, Vincent Carragher, TEA • Examples of National Programmes/Initiatives, TBC
3.30pm	Discussions around <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future Options, Challenges, Linkages
4.45pm	Harvest findings
5.00pm	Close

Participants

- Community Groups/Representatives
- LEADER Companies
- Local Authorities
- Local Representatives
- Sustainable Energy Ireland
- Transition Town Representatives