

Forest Gate Solar Farm Community Fund Options

1. Background

The Forest Gate Solar Farm, a 49.9 MW renewable energy project, received planning permission in March 2023. The grid connection route was granted planning consent in March 2025. Construction is currently expected to commence in Spring 2026, with the plant becoming operational in 2026/27.

The application included a commitment to establish a Community Benefit Fund worth approximately £17,500 per annum, index linked for the expected 40-year life of the project.

The Council has been approached by the Developer, Eden Renewables, for our views on how the Community Benefit Fund would best be established and administered. The Finance Committee is asked to consider options with a view to making a recommendation to the Council.

2. Examples of Similar Funds

2.1 Bradenstoke Solar Park Community Benefit Fund

Location	Lyneham
Link	https://www.bradenstokesolarfund.org/
Value	£50,000 pa index linked
Remit	Community groups within the parishes of Bradenstoke & Lyneham, Hilmarton, Christian Malford and Bremhill may apply.
Funding Criteria	Grant criteria around alleviating fuel poverty, community energy schemes, carbon reduction, biodiversity & natural environment, sustainability or “other purpose in the interest of the community”.
Administration	Local Grant Committee chaired by Wiltshire Councillor, with representatives from the parish councils and the MoD Lyneham. Fund is administered by Community First, a charitable organisation, who charge for administrative costs.
Structure	Unincorporated Association

2.2 Slimbridge Solar Fund

Location	Slimbridge, Gloucestershire
Link	https://slimbridge-pc.gov.uk/solar-farm-community-fund/
Value	Not known
Remit	Organisations within the parish of Slimbridge, including the Parish Council, voluntary & community groups, schools & educational establishments. Exclusions such as commercial organisations, individuals, funding core running costs, etc.

Funding Criteria	Not defined.
Administration	Administered by Parish Council. Advised by a Community Advisory Panel, comprising 2 parish councillors and 3 members serving 3-year terms chosen by lot from applicants. The Advisory Panel recommends grants to the Parish Council, which can veto, but otherwise not make its own grant decisions.
Structure	Parish Council supported by Community Advisory Panel

2.3 Rockwood Solar Farm, Broad Town

Location	Broad Town, Wiltshire
Link	https://www.broadtownparishcouncil.org.uk/good-energy-community-fund/about-the-fund/
Value	£5,000 pa
Remit	Registered charities, voluntary groups, community groups, school/pre-school parent associations. Individuals may apply, but only in relation to a specific project with a community focus. Projects must benefit the target area of the parish of Broad Town to be eligible.
Funding Criteria	Examples of funding projects are provided. List provided of projects that are not eligible, such as those that will materially increase carbon emissions.
Administration	Administered by Parish Council. Advised by a Community Advisory Group,
Structure	Parish Council supported by Community Advisory Group comprising two parish councillors and three local residents. The Advisory Group consider applications and recommend grant awards to the Parish Council.

2.4 Gib Lane Community Fund

Location	Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire
Link	https://grantscape.org.uk/fund/gib-lane-community-fund/
Value	Approx £14,800 pa, index-linked.
Remit	Grants are available for: energy efficiency or renewable energy projects; projects for school age children, or older people; any other community projects for the benefit of residents of the local area. Fund is for the benefit of the parishes of Bierton (38%), Hulcott (14%), Aston Clinton (29%) and Buckland (19%).
Funding Criteria	Lists of eligible organisation and exclusions provided. Judging criteria also defined.
Administration	Administered by Grantscape. Applications are presented to the respective parish council for their views on suitability, but the Grantscape Board of Trustees make the final decision.

Structure	GrantScape is a charity which specialises in community benefit fund grant administration and management.
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3. Options

Options for administering the Forest Gate Solar Farm Community Fund include:

Option 1 – Parish Council

The Community Fund would be administered directly by Derry Hill and Studley Parish Council, as a ring-fenced fund available for grant-funding community organisations and projects.

Option 2 – Parish Council supported by Advisory Panel

The Community Fund would be administered directly by Derry Hill and Studley Parish Council, as a ring-fenced fund available for grant-funding community organisations and projects. Grant Decisions would be made by a Community Advisory Panel made up of both parish councillors and community members, with the Parish Council retaining a right of veto. This would be similar to the Slimbridge and Broad Town examples outlined in 2.2 and 2.3 above.

Option 3 – existing Grant Management Charity

The Community Fund would be administered by an existing charity specialising in grant administration and management. This would be similar to the Gib Lane model outlined in 2.4 above.

Option 4 – Unincorporated Association, with administration by an existing charity

The Community Fund would be administered by an existing charity specialising in grant administration and management, but with grant decisions being made by a Local Grant Committee comprised of local representatives. This would be similar to the Bradenstoke model outlined in 2.1 above.

Option 5 – Community Trust Fund (i.e. Charitable Trust)

A Charitable Trust would be established to administer the fund with a defined charitable purpose. This would be governed by Trustees drawn from the local community and would be regulated by the Charity Commission.

Option 6 – Community Interest Company

A Community Interest Company is a special type of limited company designed specifically for social enterprises that want to use their profits and assets for the public good. They are governed by Directors, and are regulated by Companies House and the CIC Regulator.

4. Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths and weaknesses of these options are summarised below:

Option	Strengths	Weaknesses
Option 1 – Parish Council	High level of transparency and accountability. Low administration costs.	Lack of distinction between Solar Farm Community Fund and other Parish Council grant funding. Perceived conflict of interest could prevent Parish Council from awarding funding to Council projects. Eden Renewables would prefer there to be community involvement in addition to parish councillors.
Option 2 – Parish Council supported by Advisory Panel	High level of transparency and accountability. Low administration costs. Good community involvement. Maintains the distinctiveness of the fund.	Would need to establish a “fair” process for recruiting community members on the Advisory Panel.
Option 3 – existing Grant Management Charity	Draws on professional expertise in assessing applications.	High administration costs. Lack of local accountability.
Option 4 – Unincorporated Association, with administration by an existing charity	Potential for community involvement	High administration costs. Level of accountability and community involvement would depend on the membership of the Unincorporated Association.
Option 5 – Community Trust Fund	Regulated by Charity Commission	High administration cost. Low accountability.
Option 6 – Community Interest Company	Lighter operational structure than a charity.	Low accountability. Low transparency. Administrative costs.

5. Recommendation

The Committee is asked to consider the options outlined above and to recommend a preferred option to the Council to guide discussions with Eden Renewables.

Cllr John Barnes