



## **Devon Hosts European Project Partners for First Post-Covid Interregional Event – Showcasing Community Energy**

European partners joined together at the Devon Interregional Event to hear about the impressive effort to increase local community energy projects within the county. Through the successful showcase of such projects the partners learnt of the relevant financing and policy instruments needed to ensure all parties involved receive economic, social, and environmental benefits. Community energy is proving to be critical in tackling the climate emergency, as it engages the community in the debate whilst providing effective projects.

These actions inspired the partners to implement similar structures within their plans to move to a sustainable low-carbon agricultural system, using Devon initiatives as a model to build upon. The partnership consists of groups from seven European countries that are disrupting the current production model within agriculture with an effort to embrace renewable energy through the sharing of research and innovations.

### *Overview*

On the 11th and 12th of May, Devon County Council hosted almost 30 AgroRES participants to exchange knowledge, experiences and passions surrounding renewable energy production and its uses within the agricultural sector. Attendees came from diverse backgrounds including farming, energy production, regional and national authorities, and educational institutions. The event focused on demonstrating Devon's existing community energy projects, using resources to generate a safe and secure form of renewable energy. Devon's rural landscapes provide the perfect setting for hydro, wind, and solar power, as well as the use of biomass for energy production. Community energy projects allow local economic gains to improve local well-being. Through increasing energy security and energy efficiency, environmental benefits are enjoyed as well as reducing fuel poverty.

### *Devon Renewable Energy Projects*

Ky Hoare, project manager of Regen – an independent centre of energy expertise and market insights within the UK – provided insight into key policies, programmes and initiatives that have shaped the sector. Regen's mission is to transform the energy sector, accelerating the move to a zero-carbon energy system through advocating for policies and funding that provide long-term support for energy projects. The sector is resilient and adaptable. Important lessons include:

- Policies must focus on urban and rural energy funds that focus on building capacity
- Local communities and public bodies must be involved in community-based energy, with local and shared ownership and commitments to buying community-owned energy
- Local authorities can support community energy through
  - Grants
  - Training
  - Supporting meetings and networking



**Totnes Renewable Energy Society (TRESOC)** managing director Ian Bright provided a specific example of a local renewable society, tracing actions that have helped and hindered the movement to successfully incorporate community energy within society. Most recently, TRESOC was awarded a £25,000 grant from Team Devon's Covid 19 Economic Recovery & Business Prospectus Fund to develop a Totnes Energy Local Club which would allow the consumer to pay less whilst the generator receives more. These projects support local communities in building resilience within the transition to net-zero and creating a just transition.

Andy Bradford, farmer of a 700 acre farm that has heavily diversified, discussed how one of these strategies is founding the Dartmoor Wood-fuel Co-operative, formed in 2009 through a grant awarded by the Bio Energy Infrastructure Scheme. In 2014, Rural Development Programme England funding secured storage of biomass chips, with funding in 2019 increasing capacity to 3000m<sup>3</sup>. Funding was key to the success of the co-operative which now supplies their membership's 35 wood chip boilers. Members facilitate the growth of locally sustainable fuel sources and benefit from well-priced quality goods. The production of this biomass form also encourages environmental improvement through better forest management.

Finally, AGRORES & FINERPOL partners had the opportunity to engage with each other in groups. They discussed effective monitoring tools for, and potential barriers to, action plans; and the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats posed by COVID-19 and the recovery period. A number of common themes emerged from the report back session – supply chain challenges; lack of qualified labour; the implications of home/remote working; the instability of political change; the need for updated or new legislation and regulatory frameworks and thorough education about the financial and health benefits of energy efficiency; and increased demand for renewables and energy self-sufficiency due to increasing gas prices.

A visit to a local county owned farm was made that highlighted the technical opportunities within gas capture. The farm uses a biomethane slurry lagoon which captures fugitive methane from slurry and converts it into compressed gas to use as fuel. This provides the farm with a useful form of energy that can be used within internal processes. Additionally, the fuel can also be sold providing extra income whilst minimizing the environmental impact of slurry as well as processes that usually rely on fossil fuel use.

*[AgroRES project](#), funded through the INTERREG EUROPE programme, aims to develop measures which encourage the production and use of renewable energy in the agricultural and rural sectors.*