

Lindsey
Community
Energy
Survey



**Lindsey Community Energy Study: Attitudes of the local population towards a community
green energy initiative**

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In partnership with
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3rd of October 2024

Abstract

The United Kingdom has pledged to reach Net Zero by 2050 and many communities can benefit from the need to invest in renewable energy sources. Volunteer groups and local councils across the UK are working to implement renewable infrastructures in their communities. Most rural communities in the UK are off the gas grid and isolated from energy sources, creating opportunities to invest in small-scale community-owned renewable initiatives. The rural village of Lindsey in Suffolk has been identified as having the opportunity for a renewable energy source. Lindsey Parish Council has partnered with the volunteer group Heating Bildeston to progress the opportunity for sustainable energy generation in the village. This study will examine the attitudes of the local Lindsey residents towards renewable energy sources through a quantitative survey. The findings of the study highlight that Lindsey residents are supportive of a local renewable energy initiative, although a clear preference for the type of infrastructure isn't conclusive. Their support was driven by their concern about the impact of climate change and by the benefits locals expect to receive from a proposed renewable energy initiative. The study concludes with four recommendations to ensure the successful adoption of locals to a proposed renewable energy initiative, based on the realisation of benefits, community ownership, addressing concerns transparently and leveraging climate awareness for buy-in.

Introduction

At the time of this study, the government of the United Kingdom has outlined their commitment to reducing carbon emissions by 41% by 2025, and 78% by 2035, and to achieve net zero by 2050, without, most would argue, a credible plan. Organisations such as Community Energy South (CES) enable communities and local councils to scale up the renewable community-owned energy sector across the UK. With the support of the CES 'Pathways' mentoring programme, rural volunteer groups such as Heating Bildeston CIC can bridge the gap towards a sustainable future and positive outcomes for their respective communities. Lindsey Parish Council has partnered with the volunteer group Heating Bildeston to progress sustainable energy generation and energy efficiency measures for this off-gas grid rural community. For this particular study, Heating Bildeston is sharing its expertise and knowledge with the smaller community of Lindsey. Furthermore, Heating Bildeston has provided the initial funding for this study, in the hope that it will provide insights which are valuable and applicable to other rural communities in the UK as they are likely to all face similar challenges on the road to decarbonisation.

The Suffolk village of Lindsey has the typical energy challenges of a rural UK community. The village is off of the gas grid and the majority of the properties are older and some listed, with limited to no insulation. Although most rural villages in the UK are similar in these aspects, different constellations of green energy solutions need to be based on local specifics and factors. Lindsey has the potential for a community-owned green energy initiative, because of the following advantages. Firstly, Lindsey has a village champion, who is prepared to work towards the realisation of a green energy initiative by facilitating meaningful community engagement. Secondly, the village has available and suitable land to install a green energy initiative, and there is potential headroom at the local electricity substation to support the additional energy infrastructure. Thirdly, the village meets the requirements for the optimal placement of a wind turbine (Richardson, 2019), as opposed to other neighbouring villages in Suffolk. The main reason is due to the numerous military and civilian airfields in Suffolk and their respective flight restriction zones which limits what is permitted to build and fly in these areas. Lindsey falls outside of these restricted zones and is awaiting official approval from the MOD, which if granted would allow the construction of an on-shore wind turbine for the rural community. In order to receive planning permission to construct any renewable energy source, the community needs to be on board. However,

the opinions and attitudes of the local population of Lindsey towards a proposed green energy initiative have yet to be established, which is the aim of this study.

The study will examine the attitudes of the local Lindsey residents through a quantitative survey. The survey aims to assess the following hypotheses:

The majority of Lindsey locals:

- are worried about rising energy costs.
- are very concerned about the impact of climate change on themselves and their descendants.
- are well-informed about green energy technology advancements.
- are in favour of local green energy solutions and which ones (ie wind turbine, solar, etc).
- expect a reduction in their electricity bills from local green energy solutions.
- expect to be part of the decision-making process for local green energy solutions.
- interested in investing in the construction of local green energy solutions.
- interested in reinvesting revenues generated from green energy solutions into the community.
- have changed to make more sustainable and climate-conscious behaviours in the last 5 years.
- are engaged and involved in community activities.

Previous Studies

Despite the UK government's commitment to net zero by 2050, the rollout of green energy initiatives has been sparse over the last decade. This is attributed to the changes in laws and the manifesto of the ruling party at the time. Since 2015 on-shore wind turbines have been nearly impossible to build due to onerous planning conditions, in which a single objection could effectively block the project (*"Wind of Change": Labour Government Lifts de Facto Ban on Onshore Wind in the UK*, 2024). However, with the change in government to one pledged to a more sustainable future, these conditions may change. So far the current government has increased the budget for securing new renewable energy projects by 50%, to make up for the failure to contract renewable projects last year (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, 2024). The latest auction contracted for 131 new green energy initiatives, which "will power the equivalent of 11 million British homes" (Department for Energy Security and

Net Zero, 2024). These actions are incentivising the rollout of green energy initiatives, amongst businesses and the population, which will benefit many communities across the UK. The British Department of Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) Public Attitudes Tracker for Renewable Energy conducted in the spring of 2024, showed that overall support for renewable energy has increased from 82% in 2023 to 84% in 2024 (2024, p 1). There are a variety of different green and renewable energy sources, including solar panels, on-shore and off-shore wind turbines, ground-source and air-source heat pumps, biomass, and hydropower in the form of wave and tidal or dams, each with their benefits and drawbacks. Because of these differences, each new green infrastructure project will have different levels of support in different communities.

People's views on renewable energy are significantly influenced by their beliefs about the negative impacts and effects it will have on the environment and their health and well-being (Bartczak, Budzinski, & Gołębiowska, 2021, p 2-3). Wind turbines are faced with notable opposition in particular in this regard, despite the growing rollout across many developed nations. There are many advantages of wind turbines such as a focus on 1) local energy production reducing the dependence on foreign sources, 2) more sustainable energy production, 3) a sign of commitment to solving the climate crisis, 4) reduction in air pollution and 5) the potential to increase tourism in local communities (Smith & Klick, 2007, p 8). Despite this, there is reasonable cause to suspect that some locals will object to the construction of a wind turbine in their village, as wind turbines (1) may produce noise which may disturb inhabitants, (2) they have potential to harm wildlife, (3) concerns over which land is used, (4) some people may find that the wind turbine spoils local scenery, (5) concerns over the impact on local property prices, and lastly (6) it may not produce a reduction in local electricity bills (Smith & Klick, 2007, p 8). The DESNZ Public Attitudes Tracker confirmed that the British population living in rural areas are more likely to oppose, especially wind farms, compared to their urban compatriots (2024, p 6). Rural communities are more concerned about wind turbines disturbing "local plant and animal life (66% compared with 52% in urban areas), house prices (47% compared with 34%), not benefiting the local community (45% compared with 26%) and not benefiting the local economy (33% compared with 19%)" (2024, p 6). However, people living in rural areas also showed more concern in regards to solar farms on account of the "perceived lack of benefit to the local community (45% compared with 29% in urban areas) and to the local economy (40%

compared with 29%), as well as concern about the loss of fertile and agricultural land (20% compared with 10%)” (*DESNZ Public Attitudes Tracker, 2024, p 8*). In light of these previous findings, it is vital for the success of any proposed green energy initiative, whether in the form of a wind turbine or other infrastructure, that the local inhabitants’ opinions and attitudes are studied and considered.

Thomson and Kempton’s study on the perceptions and attitudes of US residents living near wind turbines versus a coal plant showed that 43% of residents living near a wind turbine felt it had a ‘positive effect’ on their life, compared to the 46% of residents living near a coal plant felt that the plant had a ‘negative effect’ on their life (2017, p 305). Despite the tendency to prefer the existing power plants in the community, residents from both communities “perceived greater visual and noise impacts from coal than from wind” (Thomson & Kempton, p 310). Their study also concluded that there was no geographic correlation between the positive and negative responses of the visual and auditory impact of wind turbines (Thomson & Kempton, 2017, p 305). Based on this, people’s opinions of wind turbines seem to be independent of people’s exposure to the technology. Biases towards a preferred energy source are therefore not as closely linked to familiarity, local employment and political preferences in the community (Thomson & Kempton, p 310). A key factor in determining the attitudes people have towards local renewable energy sources is their concern for the environment rather than the role of different energy-providing infrastructures (Scovell et al, 2023, p 10). In their study, Scovell et al. investigated how the “energy transition narrative influences local acceptance of solar farms” in Australia (2023, p 10) and found that people who perceived the earth as ‘fragile’ and in need of protection, in the form of large scale changes in human behaviour, are more likely to support local green initiatives (2023, p 8). This perception is associated with the belief that their country should be speeding up the green energy transition and that this will reduce greenhouse gas emissions (Scovell et al, 2023, p 8).

In the UK, 87% of the rural population is concerned about the impacts of climate change, in particular, climate-related issues such as sustaining the natural environment, deforestation, and plastic and air pollution. Possibly due to these factors, rural citizens are more likely to reduce household energy consumption and switch to a renewable energy provider, compared to urban citizens (*Equipping Rural Councillors to Engage Effectively on*

Climate UK100, 2021). The 2023 Climate-Ready Index study by YouGov showed that UK residents over 65 are more likely to take more energy-saving measures (eg turning down heating, shorter/ lower temperature cycles on washing machines, etc) than those aged 18-24 (*Over-65s top poll of climate-conscious behaviours*, 2023). The economic climate in the UK is a key factor driving how people engage with environmental climate matters. According to the 2017 EON Energy study, 55% of the British participants wanted to see sustainable improvements in their community by making their homes more sustainable and cheaper to run (*Britons Demanding Progress towards Cleaner Communities*, 2017). As energy costs continued to rise over the last seven years, many British citizens may have been forced to prioritise sustaining their basic needs over making long-term climate-conscious impacts. Acknowledging the immediate needs of citizens, and addressing these with renewable energy initiatives, can bring meaningful rural development if the energy transition genuinely benefits the rural community. In Scotland, community ownership models are used to roll out renewable energy transitions, showing higher social and economic benefits at the local level (Clausen & Rudolph, 2020, p 6). Local community involvement plays a major factor in the realisation of the potential for renewable energy infrastructure. The benefits of renewable energy should be retained locally to ensure support, as rural areas are critical for the renewable energy transition. Only 8% of East of England residents feel proud of investments in green initiatives done by their local communities because they do not feel that they are a part of the decision-making process and across the UK, 60% of adults would like more direct input in how taxpayers' money is invested in green initiatives (*Britons Demanding Progress towards Cleaner Communities*, 2017). Furthermore, because of the centralised model of governance in the UK, 85% of rural citizens stated that they do not feel part of the decision-making process (*Equipping Rural Councillors to Engage Effectively on Climate UK100*, 2021). This indicates a need for community-driven projects driven by a partnership between rural councils, local volunteer groups such as Heating Bildeston and village champions pushing for a Net Zero future.

Research Design

Design

This study aims to uncover the attitudes towards local green energy initiatives of the residents of Lindsey, a rural village in England. To achieve this, this study follows a deductive approach, basing the survey questions on previous studies' insights and the quantitative findings of the survey will inform the proposed recommendations for the successful implementation of a green energy initiative.

Sample

This study will focus on the residents of Lindsey Suffolk, a rural village in the United Kingdom with around 90 households. A total of 28 responses were collected (response rate 31%) and 71.4% have lived in Lindsey for more than 11 years. The age range of respondents was between 30 and 89, with slightly more than 2/3rds over the age of 60. (35.7% of respondents were in their 60s, 25% were in their 70s and 7.1% were in their 80s). The study acknowledges that despite best efforts there may have been a selection bias due to the digital distribution limiting accessibility for some potential respondents (i.e. those with no access to a computer or smartphone etc), as well as the topic of sustainability and climate crisis deterring certain participants from taking part due to their views of the world.

Procedure

The survey, made using the freely available Google Forms software, was advertised with printed flyers hung: in the local pub, on the post boxes and on the parish council notice board. The majority of the surveys were sent out electronically via email. The remaining households received a printed flyer with a QR code and a link to the online survey, delivered directly to their letterbox. The survey remained active for three weeks to ensure ample time for response. To incentivise participation in the survey, each respondent was entered into a raffle to win a £60 voucher to spend at the Lindsey Rose (local Gastropub). The participants' consent was obtained by accepting the terms and conditions of how the data is used at the end of the survey, after which they are thanked for participating. The survey collected anonymised data and this is the only data that will be recorded for this portion of the research project.

Results

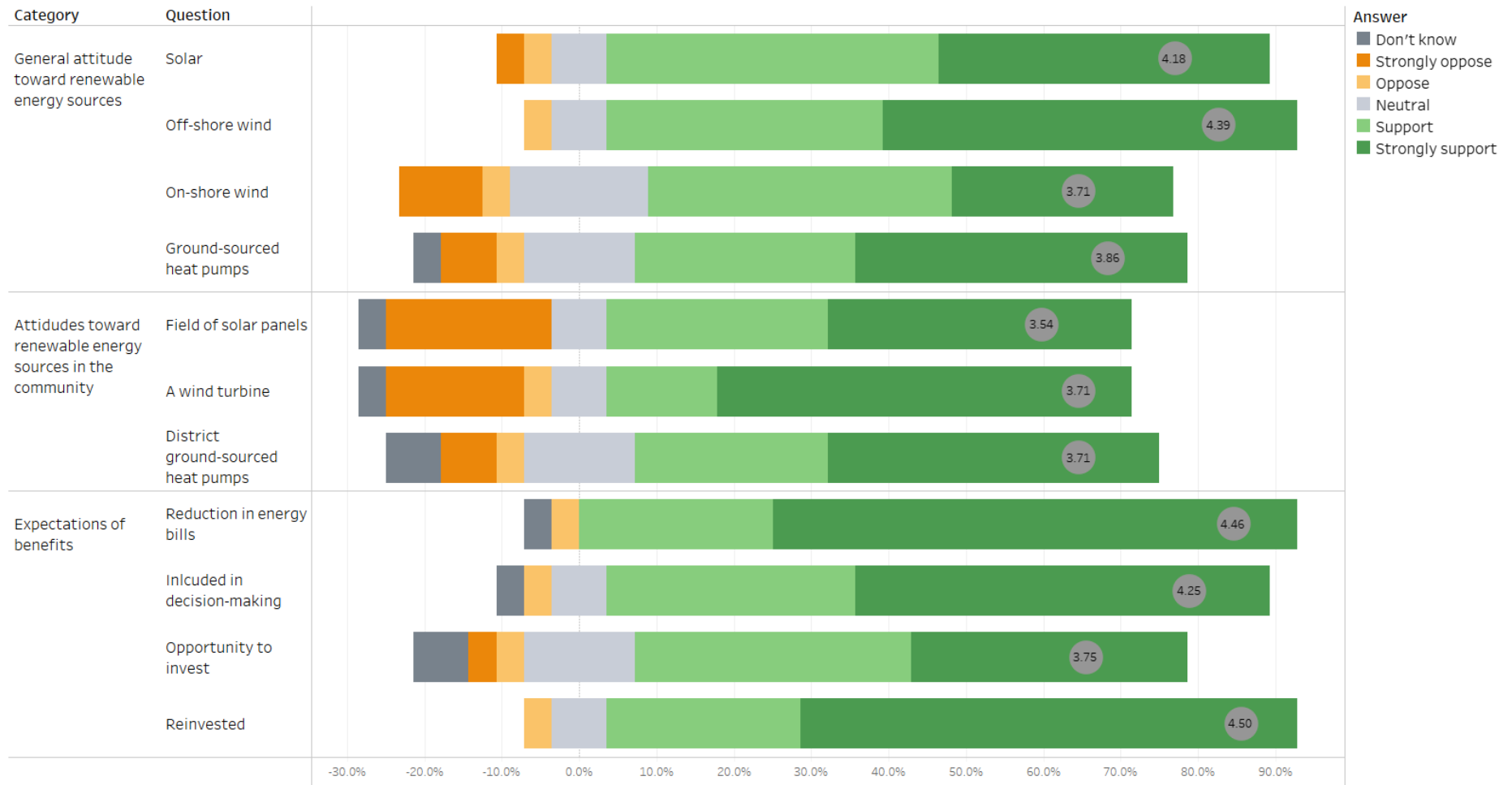
The results of the quantitative study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Attitudes towards	Number	Per cent
Rising energy costs (concern)	22	78.6
Impact of climate change (concern)	22	78.6
Local renewable energy solutions (in favour)	26	92.9
Renewable energy sources (in favour):		
- Solar	24	85.7
- Off-shore wind	25	89.3
- On-shore wind	19	67.9
- Ground-source heat pump	20	71.4
Renewable energy sources in the community (in favour):		
- Field of solar panels	19	67.9
- A wind turbine	19	67.9
- District ground-source heat pump network	19	67.9
Expectations of benefits (in favour):		
- Reduction in their electricity bills	26	92.9
- Active in the decision-making process	24	85.7
- Investing in the construction	20	71.4
- reinvesting revenues into the community	25	89.3
Climate-driven decisions:		
- Recycling and reducing waste	26	92.9
- Reducing domestic energy use	22	78.6
- Driving an electric car	10	35.7
- Insulating their home	19	67.9
- Installing domestic renewable energy source	13	46.4
Community engagement and involvement	12	42.9

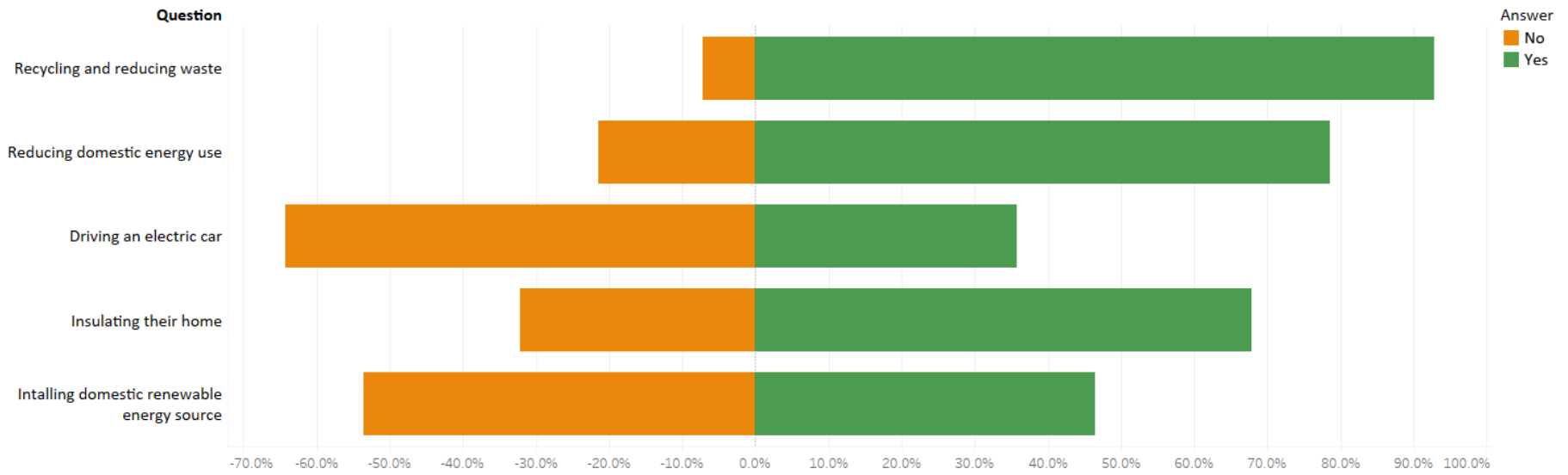
The results highlight that 92.9% of Lindsey residents are in favour of local green energy solutions and showed overall support for all renewable energy sources (i.e. solar, off-shore wind, on-shore wind, and ground-source heat pump) as represented in Figure 1 below. On-shore wind generation had the least support with more participants choosing to 'strongly oppose', compared to any other renewable energy source. This is contrasted by off-shore wind, for which participants showed the most support, suggesting that geographical

Figure 1



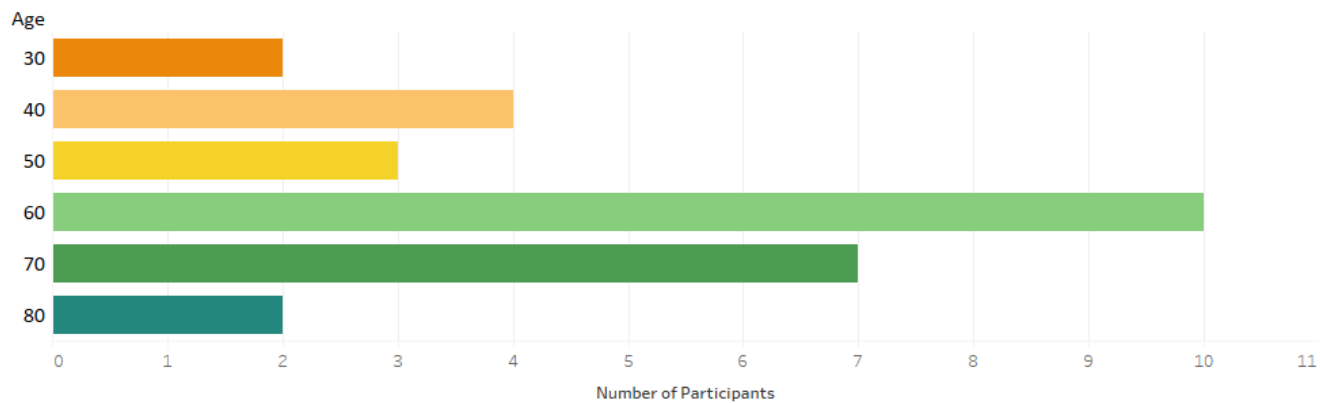
Note. The results indicate an overall supportive attitude (in green) towards renewable energy sources with only a few participants opposing (in orange).

Figure 2



Note. Over the last five years, respondents have made climate-conscious decisions.

Figure 3



proximity is a key factor for objection. Despite this initial dislike towards on-shore wind infrastructure in general, participants showed support for a proposed wind turbine in the village, with 53.6% 'strongly supporting' the initiative. This finding is contrasted by solar energy generation which was highly supported in general however, participants showed far more disdain towards a proposed field of solar panels in the village, with marginally more opposition to a proposed wind turbine (21.4% compared to 17.9%). This direct contradiction in attitudes towards wind turbines highlights how divisive the scale and the way in which the proposed initiative is communicated have on the success of local renewable infrastructures. Out of the suggested renewable energy sources, ground-sourced heat pumps had the highest number of 'Don't know' answers, suggesting a gap in participants' understanding of the infrastructure. However, when asked how informed participants are regarding renewable energy advancements, 21.4% are 'very informed' and 46.4% are 'quite informed' with only 10.7% 'knowing nothing about it'. The majority of Lindsey residents have made climate-conscious decisions in the past five years (see Figure 2), with just under half (46.4%) of the participants installing domestic renewable energy sources in their homes. 78.6% of participants decided to reduce their domestic energy use and just over two-thirds (67.9%) insulated their homes over the past five years, which is in accord with participants' concern for rising energy costs. Those who made large investments such as installing domestic renewable energy sources or driving an electric vehicle were in the minority. In terms of how engaged and involved Lindsey residents are with the community, the responses showed a near equal split with about half of the participants stating they are not that engaged and involved, whereas only 21.4% said they are very engaged and involved.

Conclusion

This study explored the attitudes of the Lindsey residents towards a local community-driven green energy initiative. A quantitative survey was created based on previous studies and the quarterly DESNZ Public Attitudes Tracker of the UK government. The findings of the study indicate that the residents of Lindsey are receptive to a local renewable energy source, although a clear preference for the type of infrastructure isn't conclusive. However, the results highlight the importance of the benefits locals expect to receive from renewable energy sources. Overall the findings suggest that Lindsey locals are climate-conscious, having taken climate-driven decisions in the past five years and 78.6% are concerned about the

impact of climate change. Based on these findings, residents of Lindsey would be supportive of a local renewable energy initiative, although a clear preference for the type of infrastructure isn't conclusive. The research suggests four recommendations to ensure Lindsey's successful adoption and implementation of renewable energy sources.

1. Lead with the local benefits of the renewable energy initiative

- Aim to ensure that local residents receive tangible benefits, in the form of community funds, compensatory payments to residents (for example energy bill discounts) or shared ownership (Rankl, 2024). The results of this study indicate a clear expectation for a reduction in energy bills, which has become a more significant request, because of the current economic volatility people are experiencing. Additionally, emphasising cost savings will appeal to locals who may not have a compelling intention to build a sustainable future.
- Emphasise how the project will reinvest in the local community, such as infrastructure improvements. Community benefit payments are another option to demonstrate how the renewable energy initiative will benefit the common good (Clausen & Rudolph, 2020, p 5).

2. Promote community ownership and involvement

- Utilise Lindsey community champion to establish a community ownership model to ensure that locals' opinions are considered in the decision-making processes throughout the life span of the renewable energy source. This will ensure that social and economic benefits are retained locally, enhancing acceptance and pride in renewable initiatives. As stated in a previous study in Scotland, community ownership models empower communities to benefit directly from initiatives and ensure higher local support and satisfaction (Clausen & Rudolph, 2020, p 6).
- Empower respected local figures to act as advocates for the renewable energy initiative to increase support. These champions are more likely to be supported and trusted by locals of the Lindsey community and should also facilitate discussions to aid in addressing concerns and opinions directly.

3. Address environmental and aesthetic concerns transparently

- Acknowledge and address common concerns by establishing clear measures to mitigate these, such as protecting valuable farmland, establishing safeguards to protect wildlife, minimising disturbance to affected homes, etc. Effectively communicating and guaranteeing these counterbalances will help mitigate resistance from locals.
- Engaging with the community to generate creative solutions to make renewable infrastructure more aesthetically pleasing, such as painting a wind turbine, or arranging solar panels into a shape (ie a sunflower). Reimagining these infrastructures as murals may mitigate concerns and increase support.

4. Build on existing environmental concerns and climate awareness

- The study established that locals are climate aware with 78.6% of participants are concerned about the impacts of climate change and most have modified their behaviour in the last five years to be more 'climate conscious'. Prioritising the initiative as a meaningful local step towards combating climate change should receive community support. However, as there are a few individuals who do not share the same concerns for the climate, positioning the benefits specifically to Lindsey may ensure more buy-in and less opposition.

Limitations

This study acknowledges that the observations discussed are generalisations based on a small subset of the residents of Lindsey. Eligible participants may not have taken part due to the digital distribution of the survey acting as a barrier. Furthermore, despite best efforts to ensure neutrality, the survey's subject matter is biased towards a 'green' agenda, which may have deterred some participants. As this study aimed to identify a general understanding of the attitudes towards renewable energy generation in Lindsey specifically, further research would be necessary to uncover why participants have these opinions.

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Appendix 1 - Survey Questions

Section 1: Main Questions

- 1) How concerned, if at all, are you about rising energy costs?
 - a) 'Very concerned' to 'Not at all concerned' (linear scale)
- 2) How concerned, if at all, are you about the impact of climate change (i.e. global warming) on yourself and your descendants?
 - a) 'Very concerned' to 'Not at all concerned' (linear scale)
- 3) Do you support or oppose the use of renewable energy for providing our electricity, fuel and heat, locally?
 - a) 'Strongly support' to 'Strongly oppose' (linear scale)
- 4) How well informed would you say you are about technological advancements in green energy?
 - a) 'Very informed', 'Quite informed', 'Know a little', 'Know nothing about it'
- 5) Generally speaking, do you support or oppose the use of the following renewable energy developments:
 - a) Solar
 - b) Off-shore wind
 - c) On-shore wind
 - d) Ground-sourced heat pump
 - i) 'Strongly support' to 'Strongly oppose' + 'Don't know' (grid)
- 6) Do you agree or disagree that green energy initiatives should provide direct benefits to the communities in which they are located?
 - a) 'Strongly agree' to 'Strongly disagree' (linear scale)
- 7) If a local community-owned green energy initiative were to be implemented would you expect to
 - a) Receive a direct reduction in your energy bills
 - b) Be a part of the decision-making process
 - c) Have the opportunity to invest in the initiative
 - d) Have revenues generated to be reinvested into the community
 - i) 'Strongly support' to 'Strongly oppose' + 'Don't know' (grid)
- 8) Now imagine that there are plans for a green initiative to be constructed in Lindsey at a scale appropriate to village needs. How happy or unhappy would you be by the following:
 - a) Field of solar panels
 - b) A wind turbine
 - c) Ground-sourced heat pump
 - i) 'Very happy' to 'Very unhappy' + 'Don't know' (grid)

- 9) In the last 5 years, have you made any climate-conscious or climate-driven decisions, such as
- a) Recycling and reducing waste
 - b) Reducing domestic energy use
 - c) Driving an electric car
 - d) Insulating your home
 - e) Installing solar panels, heat pumps or other more sustainable energy sources
- i) 'Yes' / 'No' (single choice)

Section 2: Demographic Questions

- 10) Which of the following age bands are you in?
- a) '18-29', '30-39', '40-49', '50-59', '60-69', '70-79', '80-89', '90+' (single choice)
- 11) How many adults (18+) are in your household?
- a) 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 or more (single choice)
- 12) How long have you lived in Lindsey? (single choice)
- a) Less than a year
 - b) 1-2 years
 - c) 3-5 years
 - d) 5-10 years
 - e) 11 years or more
- 13) How engaged and involved in the community would you say you are?
- a) 'Very involved' to 'Not involved at all' (linear scale)
- 14) Would you like to participate in a face-to-face interview to share more of your thoughts on local renewable energy solutions?
- a) 'Yes' / 'No' (single choice)
- If you answered yes to the previous question, please send an email to lindsey@heatingbildeston.uk indicating your interest and availability from the 16th to the 27th of September.
- 15) Please indicate your consent to your anonymised answers being used for this study and for a chance to win a £60 voucher for the Lindsey Rose.
- a) 'I agree' / 'I disagree' (single choice)