

Low Carbon Hub – Submission for Open Hearing on 14 May 2025.

- Apologies from our CEO [REDACTED]. She would be happy to respond to any questions following this hearing though.
- Low Carbon Hub is a community benefit society, with nearly 2,000 investor members and 50 community group members. We manage 56 renewable energy projects that generate an ongoing income.
- All of our profits go towards community benefit – funding a range of projects from energy efficiency for homes, schools and businesses, energy innovation projects and more.
- We continue to remain neutral on Botley West as a project. Our role has been to work with our network of community groups to help them gain access to answers and information so they can make their submissions to the consultations. As in our written submission, our focus is on the community benefit proposals.
- I won't repeat all of our submission here. Here, we wanted to highlight that we are not normally a campaigning organization.
- But just this once we felt it was too important an issue to not act.
- And so, since the submission, we have launched a petition about the level of community benefit currently being proposed.
- Addressed to Blenheim Estate as the key landowner, we are asking them to use their influence to push for a greater community benefit funding should the project be approved. We have reached nearly 1,000 signatures since launching at the start of April.
- We feel that getting the community benefit funding right here is crucial not only for the long-term relationship between the developer and community, but it could also set the precedent for other large-scale projects being planned across the country.

So, what do we think is fair community benefit?

- Our petition asks for **2% of project revenue** to be allocated to communities. A conservative estimate tells us that 2% would create approximately £840k in community benefit, more than the £200,000 currently on offer.
- We believe funds should be tied to the performance of the project not a one-off payment so that if the project does well, the communities also benefit.
- We propose that a separate fund be set up and managed by an independent board made up of key stakeholders, from the developer, landowner, local authorities, and communities.

- This funding could be game-changing in supporting people to decarbonize their homes, businesses and schools by enabling the difficult task of reducing energy demand, a key factor in tackling climate change.
- A properly funded, long-term community benefit fund set up like this could make a real difference, creating significant social benefits and helping people out of fuel poverty.
- A community benefit model here could also set the national standard for what's to come as there are more large-scale projects such as this in planning.
- Getting the community benefit right means people could really benefit from the transition to the zero-carbon energy system we need. And crucially it will help ensure that no one is left behind in that transition.

Response to questions from the hearing:

With the understanding that generation performance of solar panels will go down over time, do you still think tying community benefit funds to performance of the project is the best thing given the level of benefit will go down?

Even with slight degradation in the efficiency of the solar panels, the proposed solar park is likely to generate significant amounts of clean energy and profits for the developers. Therefore we still think 2% of revenue is the fairest way to ensure communities receive an appropriate level of community benefit.

We understand you're working as a coalition of groups (with the petition). Do you have a plan on how you'd work together to administer the funds?

We'd recommend an independent board to manage the funds. Whilst we don't have any plans to administer this, we have significant experience in managing community benefit funding from our own portfolio of renewable energy projects, and would be happy to support the set up and running of such a fund, if requested. We would advocate for the funds to be spent on energy efficiency services for homes and businesses, with a particular focus on reducing fuel poverty in nearby communities.