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the power of community

Bretherton Parish Council

Community Engagement Survey
Report

February 2023



Background and Introduction

Locality were commissioned by Bretherton Parish Council to deliver community engagement work to gather the thoughts of the residents of Bretherton on the proposed development of Asland Energy Park, a wind turbine and solar field by GA Pet Foods, and on the accompanying Bretherton Energy Partnership, a community energy model being developed by Energy Local which would potentially provide the village with savings and benefits from the surplus generated by the Energy Park.

Bretherton Energy Partnership Proposal

Asland Walk Energy Park

GA Pet Foods proposal is for the development of a 150m wind turbine and 70 acre solar field on land between the River Douglas and the Leeds to Liverpool Canal to be known as the Asland Walks Energy Park. The location of the park comprises of 100 acres of arable land that includes several well used public rights of way. The new Energy Park would maintain accessibility allowing the community to continue to enjoy the area. In addition, GA Pet Foods proposed future improvements including ecological enhancements and tree planting, and a visitor centre providing information about the Energy Park, how the scheme works and displaying 'live' data on how much electricity the park is generating.

GA are proposing that 5% of the wind and solar electricity generated would be supplied free of cost to the community via a cable which runs directly to a community battery and then to the electricity sub-stations which provides power to Bretherton. The electricity would be supplied on the existing electrical network to local households. The estimated amount of energy from the 5% renewable generation represents over twice the electrical energy consumed by Bretherton homes each year, which leaves scope for usage to increase as over time as households shift to electricity for heating and transport.

A community-owned battery (or batteries) would be required to help balance variable wind and solar generation and the parish's consumption, and for regulatory and grid compliance purposes. Any surplus power would be sold to GA or the National Grid to generate income that could then be invested in local community projects.

The other 95% of the electricity generated would be used directly by GA's factory. It would help to reduce and stabilise GA's energy bill, help GA achieve its commitment to net-zero and make the business more resilient.

Bretherton Energy Partnership

In order for the community to benefit from the proposed scheme Bretherton residents would need to set up a not-for-profit community enterprise to finance, build and own the community battery and run the Bretherton Energy Local Club. To benefit from the discounted electricity residents would need to join the Bretherton Energy Local Club and install a smart meter, which shows when and how much energy they are using. They would also need to be supplied by the same sub-station to which the community battery is connected.

As the proposal is still at a relatively early stage of development some key details which could affect the commercial and technical viability of the Bretherton Energy Local Club are yet to be established. The club is dependent on being able to install the community battery. If the battery cannot be connected to the local electricity grid, or is not commercially viable, the Club will not be able to operate and supply reduced cost electricity to Bretherton residents.

In this case, the 5% of the electricity produced by the Asland Walks wind turbine and solar field array will be sold and the money would be received by the Bretherton community enterprise. The Bretherton community enterprise could use that income to help residents make their homes more energy efficient and to support those struggling to pay their energy bills.

Community Consultation

Bretherton Parish Council are aware that the GA Pet Foods proposal for the development of Asland Walk Energy Park is one that will have a number of potential impacts on the residents of Bretherton. An Energy working group was established to act as a point of contact between GA Pet Foods, the wider Parish Council and local residents.

While aware that there were still a number of aspects of the proposal to be researched further, the PC Energy groups felt it was important to engage with the local community at an early stage with the aim of –

- Making local residents aware of the proposed Asland Energy Park including the latest information regarding the scale of the wind turbine and solar field, and the effect on the current land
- Gathering the community's thoughts, comments and concerns on the energy park proposal.
- Sharing information regarding the potential Bretherton Energy Partnership including how this could work in terms of governance, community involvement and actions local residents would need to take to become part of the partnership.
- Discovering the level of interest within the community the being involved in the potential Bretherton Energy Partnership.
- Understanding how the community would like any surplus money earned through the generation of energy at Asland Walk Energy Park to be spent.

Engagement Methods

Bretherton Energy Partnership Website

Prior to the community consultation taking place the Parish Council were keen to ensure that local residents were able to access as much up to date information as possible regarding the proposed scheme. With the agreement of GA Pet Foods the existing site at [Bretherton Energy – Powering your future](http://brethertonenergy.co.uk) (brethertonenergy.co.uk) was updated with revised content that the Parish Council felt gave the community the best available information at the time. Where further research is needed this was also reflected on the website so residents were aware the information provided was subject to change at a later date.

A two page printed summary of key website content and details about the proposed scheme was also created to ensure all residents were able to access information regardless of their level of online access. These summaries were also distributed to all residents with the printed surveys in December 2022.

Community Survey

The community survey was developed by Locality in conjunction with the Parish Council's Energy Working Group. It was designed to capture the community's thoughts about the early stages of the Asland Energy Park proposal and to provide them with the opportunity to highlight where they may need more information in order to fully express their opinions on different aspects of the proposal.

The survey was constructed around the following sections –

- About the respondent – specifically their connection to Bretherton
- Understanding of the different elements of the proposed scheme
- To what extent they support the different elements of the proposed scheme
- How the Parish Council should support the proposed scheme through the planning process
- Whether or not the Parish Council should engage with the Bretherton Community Energy partnership
- How keen respondents would be to be a part of the Bretherton Community Energy partnership
- How respondents thought surplus money should be invested in the local community.

While the survey was designed for both online and printed versions to be distributed, the Parish Council took the decision to only share the printed version to make the process accessible to all residents. Copies of the survey and the two page printed information summary were distributed to all households in Bretherton in December 2022.

Survey Results

Level of Response

A total of 292 questionnaires were delivered to households in the village with 101 completed forms being returned, a 35% response rate which the Parish Council felt was reasonable given the timescales for returning completed surveys – 2 weeks – and the Christmas and New Year Holiday.

As the survey was only distributed to households in the village unsurprisingly all respondents said they were residents of Bretherton. Some also stated they worked in the village (4 responses) and had friends and family there (3 responses).

Community Understanding of the Proposal

Respondents were asked if they fully understood the different aspects of the Asland Walk Energy Park and Bretherton Community Energy proposal, or if they needed more information on any part(s) of it. Residents appeared to understand the wind turbine, solar field and energy park aspects of the proposal well, with the community energy scheme appearing to be less clear. Responses were as follows –

	I understand	I need more information
Wind Turbine	94	7
Solar Field	96	5
Asland Walk Park	83	17
Energy Local & Community Battery	65	29
Community Fund & Enterprise	66	30

Where people said they needed more information they were invited to provide details of what they would have liked to have seen in the proposal. Comments focused on a number of key themes that residents thought were not fully explained.

<p>The scale and visual impact of the scheme on the area, and a better representation of this in the information provided</p> <p>"I need to understand the visual impact of the wind turbine on the area. I had no idea the turbine was 150m high."</p> <p>"Seeing what the proposed solar structures would look like on a map/location of the 80 acres would be helpful."</p> <p>"But what about the people who live near the wind turbine? The noise and how ugly will it be?"</p> <p>"The info provided is scant and whilst the solar seems ok 150m turbine is huge. CGI, drawings, plans, elevation?"</p> <p>"We are in support of the scheme in principle but for solar power not on shore wind which will be a blight on our community and eyeline. Wind power is a great solution but should be for off shore farms and areas of low human and bird population."</p>
<p>Clarity on whether or not the scheme will benefit all residents in Bretherton and exactly what these benefits would be.</p> <p>"The benefit to the parish and the certainty of said benefit is not explained simply and clearly."</p> <p>"Energy Local proposal all seems a bit vague. How will the community energy partnership work? Which homes will be excluded?"</p> <p>"There are many aspects of the model that is unclear. How do parts of the village benefits if different parts of the village are connected to different substations?"</p> <p>"How would you supply everyone in the village? There are more than one electricity power source. Will it include homes on the outskirts?"</p> <p>"People on the outskirts of village are usually ignored"</p>
<p>The cost of the scheme, in particular the battery, and how this would be financed.</p>

"What is the cost to install this and how long will it take to pay off the capital? What are the running costs and who is responsible for maintenance and operation?"

"How much will residents need to pay to finance the battery storage? What about those who can't afford to? What would the costs be? Would it be available to all?"

"How would those who can't take part be compensated? Community Enterprise - What are the costs? what is the long term security of the enterprise?"

It needs a definitive proposal with approx costs. How will the cost be funded and what would be the timescale for installation? What are the projections for return of energy after all these overheads are taken into account?"

Concerns about the environmental impact of the scheme

"Solar field - would it be fenced off? How would it affect wildlife? How might it affect surface water drainage?"

"I support the proposal if I had a further understanding of the environmental impact and these studies are still ongoing. TGA are responsible for 24% of the commercial emissions for Chorley Borough. This is a staggering figure and it is good that it being addressed but it needs to be in sympathy with the environs."

"Looks a great scheme for the climate, Bretherton and GA as it seems to benefit all. I support the scheme for all benefits proposed however if it was to reduce carbon in the atmosphere and generate green electricity I would still support it. This looks like the proposal has considered the ecology and the environment."

Community Support for the Proposal

Respondents were asked to what extent they supported the 3 elements of the proposed Asland Walk Energy Park – the wind turbine, the solar field and the park. They were given the choice of 3 responses – fully supportive, supportive if it could provide reduced cost energy and community fund income to the Parish, or not supportive for the wind turbine and solar park with a straightforward yes or no option for the park.

Respondents were also able to leave comments on why they did or did not support the different elements, with comments predominantly being left by those who did not support the proposal.

	Fully Supportive	Support with community benefit	Do not support
Wind Turbine	26	51	20
<p>"The wind turbine is too tall, unsightly and if it needs repair who pays?"</p> <p>"The scale of the turbine is out of proportion with its' rural location and proximity to Bretherton".</p> <p>"We would support smaller turbines that do not impact as much on neighbours in Sollom. We would prefer to have more information before giving our support. It's difficult to support when we are happy about the solar but not keen on the large turbine"</p> <p>"This is a large scale turbine not suited to a residential area. Two smaller would be better."</p> <p>"The scale of the turbine will be detrimental to the area. Impact on wildlife is unknown. Scheme probably not viable without the turbine."</p> <p>"Not sure why the turbine has to be so big especially if supported by solar panels"</p>			
Solar Field	35	42	21
<p>"Need more info on solar field and its impact on landscape and wildlife."</p> <p>"I would like to know why GA can't have solar panels on all their new buildings rather than using a green field area?"</p>			
Asland Walk Park	76	N/A	19
<p>"Need more realistic info on landscape impact of Asland Park"</p> <p>"As it stands the question about Aslands Walks is irrelevant until more information is provided. Not supportive of the location, it should be located adjacent to GA."</p> <p>"Asland Walk should reflect the high level of interest among residents in preserving wildlife and leisure facilities"</p>			

"It would be good to have an understanding of the actual extent of public access (Asland Walk)"
 "I doubt the park would be an attractive place to visit."
 "Would support any proposal to increase community access and improve wildlife habitats"

Bretherton Parish Council Support For The Proposal

There were a number of questions aimed at helping the Parish Council understand if they should support the proposal through the planning process and whether or not they should support the development of a Bretherton Community Energy Partnership.

In terms of planning, respondents were asked whether or not they thought the Parish Council should support the proposal through the planning process. Where people answered yes, they were also offered a number of options around the level of support they thought the Parish Council should give to the proposal.

Yes should support	73
No should not support	25

If yes the parish council should -	
Support the proposal as a statutory consultee to the planning application when submitted	41
Designate the Asland Walks Energy Park in the Bretherton Neighbourhood Plan	43
Support the designation of the Asland Walks Energy Park in the Central Lancashire Local Plan	20

Respondents were also asked their view on whether or not the Parish Council should give it's support to the Bretherton Energy Partnership. The survey gave respondents the opportunity to say the Parish Council should support the Partnership if certain conditions were in place and to leave comments on what those conditions should be, as well as offering straightforward yes and no options.

Yes, should support	55
Yes but with conditions in place	23
No should not support	11

"The PC should support BEP subject to a viable business case and evidence of a funding model otherwise we are agreeing to a radical set of changes to the area without a means to realise the upside/ It is not clear that the energy local model will be viable."
 "It would not reduce energy costs as these are set nationally irrespective of costs. It would lock us into a single energy supplier who would dictate energy prices. This is a scheme thought up by Octopus Energy to generate income for themselves and to lock customers into their company with no choice to go anywhere else."
 "How the energy partnership will work, how the capex will be funded and who will be competent enough to manage it needs some serious consideration. Good idea but I'm not on board yet."
 "Uncertain of costs and benefits of BEP. Would it include high long term loans? Uncertain if everyone can/would want to take part. Not sure if there is enough info to allow the PC to make a decision on engaging yet."
 "Much more info on the costings, likely payback and its feasibility needed."
 "Has to be a majority of support after proper proposals have been circulated. Current information is nebulous and lacking in detail. It is inadequate to formulate an opinion."
 "BEP needs to be commercially viable for the village. We need more information when it becomes available to determine involvement."

Respondents Views on The Bretherton Energy Partnership and Community Fund

The final section of the survey asked respondents for their thoughts on the Bretherton Energy Partnership, including any changes they would be prepared to make to their own energy supply, the level of involvement they would potentially like to have in the governance and management of the partnership and how they would like any surplus money to be spent to benefit the community.

One of the key elements of the Bretherton Energy Partnership model involves the installation of a smart meter at all households who are members of the partnership therefore respondents were asked if this is something they would be willing to do, if the partnership business model provided to be viable.

Yes	56
Maybe	46
No	11

The Bretherton Energy Partnership model is also likely to be reliant on residents buying into a "One Member One Vote" community share offer which would help to fund the enterprise and the installation of the community battery. Respondents were asked if this was something they would be interested in potentially participating in.

Possibly	47
Definitely Not	23
Would Need More Information	23

To understand how much interest there would be within the community to be involved in the governance and management of the Bretherton Energy Partnership respondents were offered a number of options relating to how they could get involved and asked to indicate which were of interest to them.

Stand as a volunteer director of the enterprise	30
Become a 1 member 1 vote share holder	33
Support with good ideas and projects	22
Volunteer in other ways	6

Finally respondents were asked how they thought any surplus generated by the Asland Energy Park scheme should be used to bring benefit to the local community in Bretherton. They were offered a number of options to chose from and were also given the option to add their own suggestions.

Provide grants and/or low interest loans to local households to help make their homes warmer, healthier and more energy efficient	64
Help those who are struggling to pay their energy bills	51
Improve our local low carbon transport facilities	45
Help make our school and community buildings warmer and more energy efficient	51
Parish Council Initiatives	18
Other Suggestions "30% should be allocated to good causes, 70% should be divided between residents as compensation for the development in our community" "Continue to invest money in the future. Don't just spend it on one off benefits." "Funding for possible car park facilities to ease/eradicate parking adjacent to primary school on South Road." "Look into options for a bypass reducing traffic through our neighbourhood. We need more things for our children in the village (teenagers). The youth club is brilliant." "Greater investment in wellbeing (green areas, wildlife, walkways). I support all decisions that the Parish Council make to spend this money to support the parish. I really like the above proposals regarding making Bretherton a sustainable place to live and they accord with the ethos in how this money was generated.	

However I would like a good proportion of the money to be continually invested into a fund or other investments that grow the wealth of the parish further for many years to come”
“Donate to local charities including food banks”
“Invest in local churches”

Any Other Comments

At the end of the survey respondents were given the option to leave general comments and thoughts about the proposed scheme. Some of these have been included in earlier comments sections where they were relevant, however others were general feedback both in support of and against the proposal. For the most part comments were left by those expressing opposition to the proposal but some supportive comments were also provided.

Comments In Support

“I find the proposal exciting and thought provoking and as such should not be viewed as a cash cow as councils reduce other grants”
“This is a positive idea and will benefit the community”
“We can’t stand in the way of progress. We need to generate more green energy and become less reliant on energy bought from abroad.”
“I see this as a great scheme. The community can receive income and gradually invest in producing the batteries and infrastructure to support the actual use of electricity. The parish does not have to take any risk. This seems like a progressive roll out of the infrastructure as the solar and wind generation are added. These does not seem to be any downside to residents or GA. We should support the scheme.”

Comments Opposed

“Cannot support due to the detrimental effect on the rural landscape of turbine and 80 acres of panels”
“There are too many unknowns and most of the information is based on speculation”
“I do not feel the system has any advantage to Bretherton. Wind turbine is too tall. Bretherton could pay a fortune for future repairs and could existing appliances in houses use the power supplied or would we all need new heating systems?”
“We do not want or need at 150m wind turbine anywhere near our village - it would be an eyesore! Plus they do make a significant noise. These very tall turbines are best put on the Pennines rather than near towns and villages, not appropriate at all. 80 acres of good land which could be better used for farming, seems like a lot of wasted land when just covered with solar panels. These proposals are mainly for the benefit of GA Pet Foods with the village very much a secondary consideration. If GA Pet Foods wanted to expand would they take up the spare electricity that us generated by the turbine and solar panels leaving nothing for the village?”
“It would not reduce energy costs as these are set nationally irrespective of costs. It would lock us into a single energy supplier who would dictate energy prices. This is a scheme thought up by Octopus Energy to generate income for themselves and to lock customers into their company with no choice to go anywhere else.”
“PC should oppose planning due to the wind turbine. Survey is difficult to complete if you oppose one part of the proposal and not others.”
“The proposals are an eyesore in an attractive area with much wildlife”
“Why does the wind turbine have to be located there? What is wrong with the Golden Acres site? Does it have to be so tall? I can really only see one winner in this development. I know that there is a possibility of Bretherton residents benefitting but it will depend on how the income is used. Some residents will not benefit at all. I don't want to be a "NIBMYer" but if there nowhere else to locate the solar panels? If the development goes ahead it will impact on traffic in the village in particular Eyes Lane. How about house prices?”
“This is a sugar-coated proposal from GA. All the promises have conditions. No concrete benefits to the local community. The turbine will be as high as Blackpool Tower, generating awful levels of noise and vibration.”

Recommended Next Steps

Sharing of More Detailed Information Regarding Asland Energy Park

As can be seen from the responses above there are a significant number of residents who do not feel they have enough information about the proposed scheme to give fully considered feedback at the moment. While most respondents understood the concept of the wind turbine (93%), solar field (95%) and Asland Walk Park (82%) a number of comments were made in relation to the scope of the scheme, in particular the height of the wind turbine, the size of the solar field and the potential environmental impact of the whole scheme.

A number of respondents felt that provision of drawings and illustrations would have helped them to understand the visual impact of the proposal and to make a more informed decision on whether or not they could support the proposal. The addition of this information to the Bretherton Energy website and to any future community engagement activities will help to garner a more informed response from the community.

Development of a Clear Business Model for the Bretherton Energy Partnership

While for the most part respondents understood the Asland Energy Park element of the proposal this number dropped when asked about the Bretherton Energy Partnership (64%) and the Community Fund (65%). Comments from respondents highlighted the feasibility of the Bretherton Energy Partnership Business model, costs related to the community battery and to what extent this would impact on the financial return for the community.

At the time the survey was conducted information relating to the business model and costs were still being developed and therefore were unavailable to respondents. Once these details have been finalised they should be shared with the community via the website and through other Parish Council communication channels so that local residents are able to develop more informed views on the Energy Partnership proposal.

Development of a Governance Structure for Bretherton Energy Partnership

As with the business model and costs, at the time the survey was conducted a governance structure for the Energy Partnership had not been fully developed. Respondents were asked if involvement in the Partnership is something they would potentially be interested in. While 45% of respondents answered positively, with 29% also stating they would be interested in standing as volunteer directors, these answers cannot be seen as definite commitments to the Partnership until further details are provided to the community to allow them to make fully informed decisions about their involvement in the Partnership.

Ongoing and In Depth Community Engagement

While this survey has been able to provide a snapshot of the community's initial views on Asland Energy Park and the Bretherton Energy Partnership, it is clear from a of the responses that a significant number of people in the community do not feel informed enough about the proposal to provide definitive responses to the questions asked.

The key areas where further information needs to be shared are detailed above and once this information has been made available to the community further community engagement and consultation should be carried out to capture any changes to the community's views and provide a much more robust response to the proposal. In particular in-person consultations would be useful to allow a dialogue between the Parish Council and local residents to take place to better inform the Parish Council's level of support for the proposal.

