Powering Communities to Net Zero Fund – Community-led Physical and Environmental Resilience

ABOUT THE FUND

We're Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks (SSEN) Distribution - the electricity Distribution Network Operator (DNO) responsible for delivering power to millions of homes and businesses in central southern England and the north of Scotland.

We've established this fund to help communities in our two distribution network areas improve their resilience and to support their own decarbonisation journeys.

The fund has a total value of £3m and runs annually, concluding in Spring 2028. The fund is open to applications from not-for-profit groups located within SSEN's network areas.

Who can apply?

Your organisation must be in an SSEN Distribution area (off-grid communities are not eligible).

You don't need to be a registered charity to apply, but your organisation must have a constitution (governing document or set of rules) and be set up on a not-for-profit basis.

If you're unsure who your distribution network operator is, you can check here.

> **Advice and support**
> Colin McMillan, (Community Investment Manager), can provide further information on the fund. He can be contacted at colin.mcmillan@sse.com or 07423 314294

Application timetable

The key dates for this year's fund are as follows:

- **Fund opens**   **23 March**
- **Deadline**   **21 May at 12 noon**
- **Awards made**   **Late August 2026**

Applications received after the deadline will not be eligible.

How much can I apply for?

The fund will be managed as one across the north of Scotland and central southern England. In most cases, you can apply for funding from £1,000 up to a maximum of £20,000. You can only make one application per year to this fund. The panel will consider value-for-money and may award less than requested. In exceptional circumstances, multi-community area funding to a maximum of £40,000 may be considered.

What the fund can support

The fund will provide support for projects which create a stronger, coordinated resilience framework for local communities. For example, projects that enhance community facilities, services and communication specifically to mitigate the impact of, or support the local response to, a significant emergency such as extended power loss, severe weather events or climate change.

When assessing applications, priority will be given to:

- Projects which support communities who are particularly remote or isolated and have experienced emergencies due to poor weather in the past.
- Projects in areas affected by recent severe weather, including storms and flooding, which resulted in extended power loss.
- Projects which demonstrate innovative approaches to improving the resilience of vulnerable community members.
- Projects that support communities where it may be difficult for emergency services to respond in a safe and timely manner.
- Projects from communities which have been identified as having low resilience.
- Projects where communities work together towards local resilience planning.
- Projects that support communities make progress towards decarbonisation.

Project guidance and additional considerations

The panel will review each application based on its relevance to the priority themes identified above. In addition to these, you may also need to consider the details below and integrate them into your own application.

- **Purchasing equipment**: consider how it will be stored and maintained.
- **Quotations**: please provide at least one quotation for all items over £250. For larger capital items of more than £2,500 in value, we expect you to have sought at least two quotes. And for items of more than £10,000 in value, we expect you to have sought at least three quotations. If this is not possible or appropriate, please tell us why.
- **Staff costs**: ensure any staffing cost is provided at, or above, the Living Wage.
- **Low-carbon alternatives** should be researched in line with ambitions for decarbonisation.

Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks

- **Community plans and stakeholders**: communities seeking funding of this nature would often already have community emergency plans in place, having communicated with the local authority and / or emergency services. The application should demonstrate how these will be complemented.
- **Power sources**: if applying for a power source, you must provide full details of the technology that you wish to purchase in the 'Project Description' part of the application. This should include detail confirming that the backup power is essential, fit-for-purpose, and that installation, security, storage and maintenance have all been fully appraised.
- **Power generators**: if your project requires backup power and a battery storage system is not appropriate, please explain why in your application. If you're seeking funds for a power generator, we ask that you seek one that is Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) compliant, as many modern generators are. Please also provide details of your generator and of the electrical load requirement of the building that you seek the generator to support.

What the fund cannot support

The community fund will not support the following activities or costs:

- The advancement of religion or politics
- Activities that are the statutory responsibility of statutory authorities
- Projects which do not benefit people living within the SSEN Distribution area
- Activities contrary to the interests of SSE or its subsidiaries
- Activities likely to bring SSE or its subsidiaries into disrepute
- Defibrillators
- Individuals
- Repayment of loans or payment of debts
- Retrospective funding (i.e. paying for costs incurred before a decision on an application to the fund for support can be made)
- Recoverable costs (i.e. VAT costs that can be recovered)

When must grants be spent by?

All awardees must be able to meet grant conditions and draw down funds before 31 March 2027. **Grants should then be spent within 12 months of being paid**.

Scottish & Southern
Electricity Networks

APPLYING TO THE COMMUNITY FUND

- SSE operates an online Community Investment Portal which ensures all applicant data is held securely, and makes it easier for groups to apply for and manage grants.
- SSE recommends you prepare your answers to the questions offline and then copy them into the online application. Colin McMillan (colin.mcmillan@sse.com) can provide a word template of the questions if this would help you.
- There are six stages in the application.
- You can view videos on navigating the SSE Community Investment Portal here.
- You can read Frequently Asked Questions about the SSE Community Investment Portal here.
- If you have any problems in accessing or using the SSE Community Investment Portal, please contact CommunityFundSupport@sse.com.

> **Accessing the Community Investment Portal -** You can access the PCNZ Community-led Physical and Environmental Resilience fund application here

The process map overleaf visually outlines the application process for groups to become registered on the Community Investment Portal. The process is then outlined in more detail later in this document.

You'll be asked to upload the following documents during the application process:

- A copy of the group's constitution or equivalent governance documents.
- A recent bank statement in the name of the group applying for the grant, dated within the last three months.
- The group's most recent approved annual accounts.
- The budget for the project - or you can use the budget template provided in the application form.
- Quotes for works or goods included in your project budget where these are over the values set out in the fund guidance notes.
- A copy of the community resilience plan (if available).
- If the project is for development work on a building, please provide evidence that your organisation owns the building or confirmation from the owner that they agree to works being undertaken.
- A copy of a recent energy audit that supports your projects proposed LCT measures for community building projects (if applicable).
- A copy of your net zero plan (if available).
- Along with the project schedule, please include a time schedule - the project must be able to demonstrate deliverability within twelve months of the grant award date.
- The group's child protection / vulnerable adult policy (if applicable).
- Any other documents which you think are required in support of your application e.g. architect's drawings, relevant permissions such as planning, building warrant, and/or listed building consent, letters of support.

Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks

Community Investment Portal process map

1 **FUND WEBPAGE**	• Click on **"Begin New Application"**. • This will take you to the **SSE Community Investment Portal**.
2 **CHECK ELIGIBILITY**	• Answer **yes or no** questions to confirm whether your project is eligible.
3 **SET UP USER ACCOUNT**	*(For **new users only** – returning applicants can skip to Step 5)* • Click on **"Not Registered?"** • Enter your name and email address. • Check your email and click on the confirmation link. • Create your password. • Your **username** will be your email address with **.sse** added at the end — Example: joe.bloggs@outlook.com.sse
4 **COMMUNITY INVESTMENT HOMEPAGE**	• Repeat Step 1: go to the **fund webpage** and click **"Begin New Application"**. • Answer the eligibility questions again. • Log in to begin the application.
5 **SET UP GROUP ACCOUNT**	• Answer questions relating to your group. • **Important:** You must have your **group's constitution / governance document** ready to upload to complete this step.
6 **APPLICATION FORM**	• Answer the application questions. • Upload supporting documentation relating to the project applied for. • Guidance notes and example questions are provided at the end of this section. • Applications can be saved at key points. • To continue an existing application, click **"Continue Existing Applications"** on the fund webpage.

Scottish & Southern
Electricity Networks

GUIDANCE ON THE COMMUNITY INVESTMENT PORTAL

Stage 1 – Fund webpage

- To access the correct application, you need to visit the fund webpage. If you're creating a new application, click 'Begin New Application' and then follow the steps below.
- If you've already created a draft application, please click 'Continue Existing Application' on the fund webpage, log in to your account, click 'My Applications' on the home screen, and then 'launch' next to your draft application.

Stage 2 – Eligibility

- When you access the PCNZ Community-led Physical and Environmental Resilience application for the first time you'll be asked to answer some Yes and No questions to ensure your project is eligible for the fund.
- If your project is eligible, you'll be directed to log on to the Community Investment Portal to access or create your user account
- If your project isn't eligible you'll be directed to where you can find information about other SSE community funds.

Stage 3 – Setting up a user account

If you've previously used the Community Investment Portal, please log in using your username and password, and progress to Stage 5.

If you've never used the Community Investment Portal before, you'll need to create an account.

To create an account, click 'not registered?' and enter your name and email address. You'll then receive an email to confirm that the account has been registered, containing your username. Please click on the link in the email to create a password.

> **IMPORTANT**
>
> Please note that your username will be your email address with .sse at the end (e.g. joe.blogs@outlook.com.sse).

Scottish & Southern
Electricity Networks

Stage 4 – Community Investment homepage

Once you've created a password, you'll automatically be redirected to the Community Investment Portal homepage.

To continue with your application, please repeat Stage One (go to the relevant fund page, click 'Begin New Application' and complete the eligibility questions). You'll then be able to log in and continue with the below steps.

Stage 5 – Creating a group account

When starting a new application, you'll be asked to select the group which you wish to apply on behalf of. If you've already completed an application on behalf of a group previously, you can select the group from the drop-down menu.

If this is your group's first time applying on the SSE Community Investment Portal, you'll need to register a group account. This information will be stored and used for all future applications by the group on SSE's Community Investment Portal.

> **IMPORTANT**
>
> You need to complete Stage Five in one attempt to create an account on the system.
>
> You also need to upload a copy of the group's constitution at this stage – please
>
> make sure you have this available before starting.

To create an account, you'll be asked the following questions:

Question	Guidance to answer question
Name of group	This should be the name that appears on your group's governing document and bank account statement.
Type of group	You'll be able to select from a list: unincorporated voluntary or community organisation; SCIO; registered charity (other); company limited by guarantee; community interest company; community benefit society; Community Council or 'other'. If your group has one, you'll be asked to provide its registered charity and/or company number so please have this to hand.
Phone number	Please enter a phone number on which we can contact the group to discuss the application or grant.
Website	
Number of people	o On your group's board or management committee – in total, not just office bearers. o Employed by the group.

Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks

	o Who volunteer for the group.
Date established	Please provide the date that your group's governing document was adopted, or if it is a registered company or charity, the date it was registered with the regulator.
What are the group's aims and objectives?	
What are the group's main activities?	Provide a summary of the main activities or services the group delivers and/or has delivered to-date.
Communities supported	State which communities or beneficiary groups your group supports. For example, all residents in the community your group is set up to benefit, or young people, or people who are not in education, employment or training.
Constitution upload	Upload the latest version of your group's governing document adopted by the members.
Correspondence address	
Registered address	This is the address at which your group or organisation is formally registered, which may differ from the correspondence address.

Stage 6 – Completing the application form

You may prefer to prepare your answers to the project questions offline and then copy them into your application. The community investment manager can provide a word template of the questions if this would help you.

IMPORTANT

You need to upload a copy of the following documents at Stage 2 of the application:

• A copy of one of the group's bank statements from the last three months

• A copy of the group's most recent approved annual accounts

• A copy of your project budget (or you can use the budget template provided in the application form)

• Copies of quotes for works or goods included in the project budget (if applicable)

• A copy of the organisation's Child Protection / Vulnerable Adult Policy (if applicable)

• Letters of support for your project (if applicable)

• Any other documents which you think are required in support of your application. For example, a business plan, and/or copies of any relevant permissions, such as planning permission.

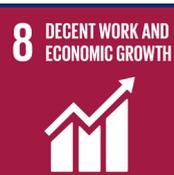PLEASE NOTE - due to GDPR we ask you not to include any photos which include people.

Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks

About the project

Question	Guidance to answer question
Please give a summary of the project or activity you are requesting a grant towards.	The description should be no more than 25 words.
Please provide a postcode that best represents the project's delivery location.	The geographic area the project will be delivered in.
Please provide a description of the project (maximum 3000 characters).	We suggest you cover: • What you want to do. • How you will do this – e.g. the activities you will deliver, where / when / how often you will deliver them, how you will reach those you are seeking to benefit, any equipment needed and how it will be used. • How the community has been and / or will be involved in developing and delivering the project. • Who will lead the project – their role(s), skills and experience. • How you will monitor and evaluate the success of the project. • The proposed start and end dates for the project.
How will you maintain / sustain your project after the period of our grant funding is finished? (maximum 3,000 characters).	• If the project will continue beyond the period for which you are seeking grant funding, please let us know how you intend to continue it, including how you will secure any funding, volunteers, or other resources needed to do so. • Please also include relevant details if the project will help to make your organisation more self-sustaining.
How have you identified a need for this project within the local area? (maximum 2,000 characters).	• Your project should address a current need and gap in local provision. • Where possible please provide relevant local data that demonstrates this e.g. from a local community plan, survey of your intended beneficiaries, labour market statistics, and / or neighbourhood statistics.
How many people will benefit from the project? (maximum 1,200 characters).	Only include those who will benefit directly from the project. This may include any volunteers involved in delivering it. Please ensure the number you give is realistic. Please tell us how you arrived at this figure.
Will any jobs be supported by the project?	If yes, we will ask how many.
Will any community assets (e.g. community hall, footpath) be built	If yes, we will ask how many.

Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks

and / or improved as part of the project?	
Will this project help improve energy efficiency or climate change?	If yes, please provide details of the energy generation or carbon-reduction potential of the project, where you know this.

UN Sustainable Development Goals

SSE's community programme supports the UN Sustainable Development Goals. We'll ask you to identify the primary UN Sustainable Development Goal that your project contributes to and will allow you to also identify secondary goals. You can find out more about the UN SDG's at: Sustainable Development Goals | United Nations Development Programme (undp.org)

UN Sustainable Development Goal	Example
3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING	Your project will improve people's well-being, physical health or emotional health, e.g. community care services, sports classes, befriending services.
4 QUALITY EDUCATION	Your project will support people to enter work, will help schools to deliver new activity or will help community members learn new skills.
7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY	Your project helps communities to have affordable and modern energy, e.g. insulation measures, new heating systems.
8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH	Your project will enhance the local economy, e.g. projects which employ people in the local area, the development of social enterprise activity, projects to increase tourism to the area.
11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES	Your project will help enhance the local community, e.g. improving a community hall, building a new community sports centre, running a community event.
13 CLIMATE ACTION	Your project will help to combat climate change, e.g. community renewables.

PCNZ COMMUNITY-LED RESILIENCE GUIDANCE

Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks

15 LIFE ON LAND	Your projects which help the local environment, e.g. community owned forests, community gardens, community nature paths.

Project aims and measuring its success

Question	Guidance to answer question
Please explain how your project achieves the fund aims and priorities outlined in this guidance document. (maximum 4000 characters)	

Project bank details and group finances

Question	Guidance to answer question
Bank account holder's name	This is the name that your group's bank account is held in, as it appears on bank statements - it should be the name of your group.
Sort code Account number	Please ensure the details you provide here are correct as this information will be used to make grant payments if you are successful in securing a grant.
Upload a copy of a recent bank statement	This should be from the last three months **This is a mandatory field on the form** so please make sure you have the statement available before starting the application.
Upload a copy of the group's latest accounts	This should be the version approved by the group's board or management committee. **This is a mandatory field on the form** so please make sure you have the statement available before starting the application.
Name, email address and position of an additional authorised bank signatory	You need to provide the details of a second person who is authorised to use your group's bank account. **Please ensure you enter these details correctly as this person will be emailed any grant offer letter for their countersignature.**
What are the main sources of income for the group? (maximum 1200 characters)	Provide brief details of how the group normally raises most of its income e.g. from local fundraising, grants, charges for services, etc.

Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks

Total income and surplus / deficit from the uploaded financial accounts	The figures you provide should match those in the group's approved annual accounts that you uploaded earlier as part of your application.
Current unrestricted reserves and why they cannot be used for this project (maximum 2000 characters)	Unrestricted reserves are monies which are not restricted (usually by a donor or lender) for any particular use. If your group's unrestricted reserves cannot be used towards the project you are seeking a grant from SSE for, we will ask you to explain why.

Project budget

Question	Guidance to answer question
Please provide an accurate list of all costs involved in the work, services, or items required for the project. This should include any project costs that you are not requesting a grant towards.	You will be able to select one of two options to add your project cost detail. Please **do not do both**. • Insert the information into a list/ table in the form • If you enter costs in the list / table option, these will automatically be totalled. **OR** • Upload your own budget template. • If you choose to upload a budget file, enter the total project cost (as stated in the file) into the box provided.
Please explain how you have costed the project. (maximum 1500 characters)	• For larger capital items (e.g. building work, vehicles, equipment) of more than £2,500 in value we expect you to have sought at least two quotations, for such items of more than £10,000 in value we expect you to have sought at least three quotations. Please upload any quotations you have received towards such costs. • If you are seeking a grant to cover salary costs, please tell us what hourly rate will be paid. SSE is a Living Wage Friendly Funder; therefore, we require any roles paid for through our funding to meet or exceed the Living Wage.
Tell us how much you are applying to the PCNZ Community-led Resilience Community Fund for.	Only non-recoverable VAT costs should be included in any grant amount you are requesting from SSE.
Who are the project funders?	If your total project cost requires other funding (including where your organisation is contributing its own funds), you will be asked to list all of the other funding sources, including the amounts being applied for and whether this funding is confirmed.

Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks

Checklist

We'll ask you to tick 'yes', 'no' or 'not applicable' in the following checklist:

- The group has the appropriate procedures in place to carry out your project safely
- The group has at least three unrelated people serving on its management committee / board.
- The project doesn't require retrospective funding
- If requested, you can provide the details of an independent referee.
- Any salaries are paid at, or greater than, the Living Wage.
- Does the project require your group to secure permissions, such as planning permission, a building warrant and/or listed buildings consent, prior to starting work? If it does, tell us whether these have been applied for / granted. If they haven't been applied for or granted yet, tell us when you expect this to happen.

Uploads

Please remember to upload:

- Any relevant community emergency action plans, resilience plans, or net zero plans.
- Documentation confirming the building owner agrees to the project work being undertaken (if applicable).
- A copy of the organisation's child protection/vulnerable adult policy (if applicable).
- Letters of support for your project (if applicable).
- Any other documents which you think are required in support of your application (e.g. Architect drawings, relevant permissions such as planning, building warrant, and/or listed building consent).
- A copy of a recent energy audit that supports your projects proposed Low Carbon Technology measures (for community building projects – if applicable).

Submitting the form

Your draft application will save at key points, so you can log out of the portal and resume drafting at a later date.

To continue drafting, click the 'Continue Existing Application' link on the fund homepage, click the 'My Applications' button on the home screen, and then 'Launch' next to your draft application.

If you have any problems in accessing or completing the application form, please contact us on the details on page 1. You can also read our dedicated SSE Community Investment Portal FAQ section.

Once you've completed your application form, press the submit button. A copy of your application form will be saved in your 'My Applications' section of the portal.

Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks