



Citizens' Jury Report and Recommendations



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Introduction

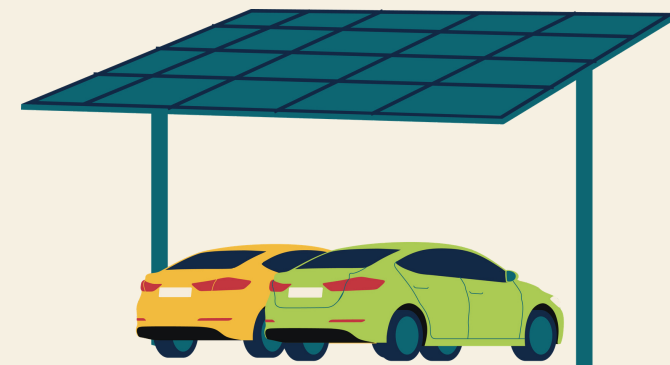
This report presents the findings and recommendations of the **Powering Up Castle Vale (PUCV) Citizens' Jury**. The Citizens' Jury was established to ensure that residents had a meaningful role in examining the emerging proposals, understanding the choices and trade-offs involved, challenging assumptions and considering what a fair transition to a Net Zero Neighbourhood should mean for the people of Castle Vale.

The Jury process was deliberately designed to go beyond conventional consultation. Jurors were not asked simply to comment on or endorse a predetermined proposal. Instead, they were introduced to the wider context within which the Net Zero Neighbourhood was being developed, provided with evidence and information, given opportunities to question and discuss emerging options, and asked to deliberate on the practical implications for residents and the wider community.

The Jury also considered the proposals within the wider context of Castle Vale. This was important. Residents did not see energy as an issue that could be separated from housing, employment, skills, transport, health, household finances or the strength of the community itself.

The first session introduced jurors to the process, the wider context and the systems within which the proposals were being developed. The second and third sessions moved progressively into the detail, enabling residents to examine the proposed Castle Vale Community Energy Company and consider questions relating to its operation, ownership, governance, membership and distribution of benefits. The fourth served as an affirmation process seeking approval to the findings and recommendations set out in this report.

The findings and recommendations in this report represent the **voice and deliberations of the Citizens' Jury**. Where technical proposals and options were presented to jurors, these are distinguished from the conclusions and recommendations subsequently reached by the Jury. The overall position of the Jury was **positive but conditional**. Jurors supported the principle of developing a Community Energy Company and recognised the opportunities that a Net Zero Neighbourhood could create. However, this should not be interpreted as unconditional support for a particular technical or commercial model. Instead, residents established a clear set of tests that the next stage of the project will need to meet. At the centre of these is **fairness**.



Residents want to know who will benefit, how much they will benefit, when those benefits will be realised, what residents might be expected to contribute, what risks they will carry and how they will be able to influence the decisions that are made.

The strongest overall message from the Jury is that Castle Vale should be treated as a **connected, place-based system rather than as a series of separate problems**. Energy investment could create local employment; skills programmes could enable residents to access those jobs; better transport could widen employment opportunities; warmer and more energy-efficient homes could improve health and reduce household costs; and better housing management and community support could strengthen community stability. The Jury's overarching message can therefore be expressed simply as give Castle Vale residents greater choice, access and control, rather than deciding externally what kind of energy system, economy, housing or community Castle Vale ought to have.



What Matters to Residents

The Jury's deliberations demonstrated that residents' ambitions for a Net Zero Neighbourhood extend considerably beyond the installation of renewable energy technology. Lower household energy costs are important, but residents also want the investment associated with the transition to create better jobs, apprenticeships and opportunities for young people. They want better connections between Castle Vale and employment and services elsewhere. They want housing that is affordable, secure and appropriate to residents' needs. They want greater social support and they want the benefits of investment to remain visible within the community.

These priorities are interconnected. A programme of solar and retrofit investment could, for example, simultaneously reduce household costs and create jobs and apprenticeships. Developing local skills could help residents secure those jobs. Better transport could increase access to employment beyond Castle Vale, while creating more employment locally could reduce dependence on travelling elsewhere. Improvements to housing could contribute to better health as well as lower energy costs.



The overarching recommendations of the PUCV Jury are that the next phases of the Net Zero Neighbourhood programme should:

1. Develop an equitable community-energy model without prohibitive upfront costs for residents.
2. Link solar and retrofit investment directly to local jobs, apprenticeships and skills.
3. Improve transport connections while also increasing opportunities for employment within Castle Vale.
4. Establish accessible local employment, digital-skills and careers support.
5. Improve the evidence available to understand the causes of health-related economic inactivity.
6. Recognise and address hidden fuel poverty and under-heating.
7. Investigate concerns relating to HMOs, overcrowding and landlord acquisition.
8. Increase appropriate housing choice while protecting residents' security and ability to choose.
9. Embed genuine resident co-design into future decisions about energy, development and green space.

These priorities provide the wider context within which the Jury considered the proposed Castle Vale Community Energy Company.



The Castle Vale Community Energy Company

Community Ownership and Governance

There was broad support **amongst jurors for the principle of a Community Energy Company**. As discussions developed residents moved quickly from support for the general concept to the practical questions that will ultimately determine whether the company is regarded as genuinely community owned. Jurors wanted to understand who would be able to participate, who would own and benefit from solar generation, how financial savings would be distributed, whether profits would be reinvested in Castle Vale, and how the interests of tenants, homeowners, landlords and different household types would be balanced. The Jury therefore resolved that **support would be conditional upon the company being demonstrably fair and genuinely rooted in Castle Vale**.

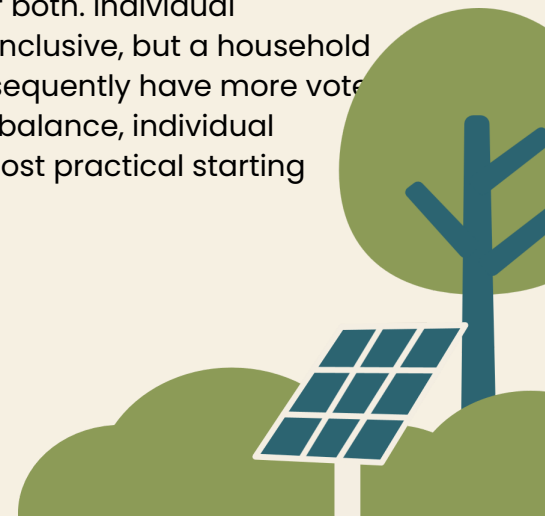
Membership and community control

The Jury supported the principle that all Castle Vale residents should be eligible to become members of the Community Energy Company. There was also strong support for **one member, one vote**, ensuring that influence is not determined by the amount somebody is able to invest. Jurors were more cautious about businesses and organisations becoming members. Their participation was not rejected, but residents felt that eligibility should depend upon demonstrating a genuine connection and contribution to Castle Vale for example, by employing local people or providing services to the community.

It was understood that Pioneer would have a clear role and stake in any venture but again the Jury was clear that it should not hold a controlling interest. Jurors could also see circumstances in which people from outside Castle Vale might invest through for example community shares, particularly if external investment helped finance the scheme. However, external investment should not result in external control.

Citizens' Jury recommendation: Castle Vale residents should have clear primacy within the membership and governance of the Community Energy Company. The principle of one member, one vote should be maintained regardless of the level of investment. Businesses, organisations and external investors could participate under clearly defined conditions, but governance arrangements must ensure that control remains rooted within Castle Vale.

Individual or household membership: The Jury considered whether membership should attach to individual residents or households. There are arguments for both. Individual membership is straightforward and inclusive, but a household containing several adults could consequently have more votes than a single-person household. On balance, individual membership was regarded as the most practical starting point.



Citizens' Jury recommendation: membership should initially be based on individual residents, supported by clear eligibility rules covering residency, what happens when members leave Castle Vale, and safeguards against particular households or interests gaining disproportionate influence.

Joining the company; The Jury also considered whether every Castle Vale resident should automatically become a member or whether membership should require people to opt in. Jurors favoured **formal registration**. An opt-in arrangement would provide the organisation with a clearly identifiable membership while helping to prevent people joining solely to influence a particular contentious decision. At the same time, residents were clear that meaningful membership should not depend upon being able to attend meetings regularly.

Citizens' Jury recommendation: introduce a simple and accessible opt-in membership process. Participation should be possible both digitally and offline, and regular meeting attendance should not be a condition of membership.

What Should the Financial Benefits Be For?

One of the most important discussions concerned how the financial value created by the Community Energy Company should be used. Two broad objectives emerged. The first was to reduce residents' household energy bills as much, and as quickly, as possible. The second was to create a **community dividend**, through which some of the financial value generated could support wider priorities in Castle Vale, including education and skills, youth provision, green spaces, advice services and community buildings.

Jurors did not regard these objectives as mutually exclusive. Instead, their emerging preference particularly in relation to rooftop solar was effectively **"bills first, wider community benefit as the scheme grows."**

Jurors recognised that reducing household energy costs should be the priority during the early stages of the scheme. As the Community Energy Company develops, expands its generating capacity and becomes financially sustainable, however, residents want a proportion of the value it creates to be retained for the wider benefit of Castle Vale.

Citizens' Jury recommendation: Prioritise meaningful household energy savings during the early stages of the scheme, while establishing from the outset a commitment that, once the Community Energy Company is financially sustainable, an agreed proportion of surplus will fund a visible **Castle Vale Community Dividend**.

Jurors also recognised the significant potential for clean energy generation across the estate. This discussion produced a clear principle: **sunlight is a shared natural resource, and the benefits of harnessing it should be shared across the community**. This was particularly important because not every household or building will have the same opportunity to benefit directly from rooftop solar.

The Jury's discussions took place during periods of extreme heat, making the effects of a changing climate particularly tangible. Jurors felt that residents should be able to see practical and positive local outcomes from the transition to cleaner energy, helping the community both adapt to

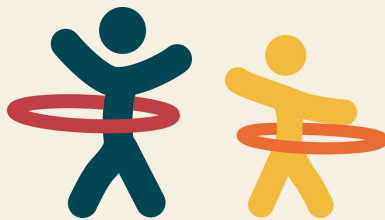


changing circumstances and share in the value created through that transition.

This principle strengthened interest in ground-mounted solar and other forms of collective generation. Such schemes could complement rooftop solar by creating an asset whose benefits are explicitly shared across Castle Vale, including with residents who cannot benefit directly from panels installed on their own homes.

Citizens' Jury recommendation: Include the potential for ground-mounted and other forms of collectively owned solar generation within the future programme, with the financial value generated used to support a Castle Vale Community Dividend. This should be developed on the principle that shared renewable resources should create shared community benefit.

Further work should also explore the **redistributive potential of a comprehensive photovoltaic programme** across Castle Vale: how benefits could be shared between households with different housing types and circumstances, and how generation associated with new developments, major businesses and other large sites could contribute to the wider community energy model.



The Central Question of Fairness

Individual Benefit or Shared Community Benefit?

The most significant issue considered by the Jury concerned **how the benefits of electricity generated from solar panels should be distributed**. Two broad approaches were presented.

Under a **household-focused model**, homes receiving solar panels would use the electricity generated from their own roofs first. This could provide those households with substantial and immediate savings, with surplus electricity then entering the wider system.

Under a more **collective model**, solar panels would form part of a community asset, with the electricity generated pooled so that the benefits could be shared more widely amongst participating residents.

This revealed a fundamental tension between **speed of individual benefit and equity across the community**. If households receiving panels first gain very significant reductions in their bills, residents waiting several years for installations could receive little or no equivalent benefit. A pooled system could distribute benefits more fairly but could also mean that the individual household providing the roof receives a smaller immediate saving. Jurors understood this trade-off clearly.

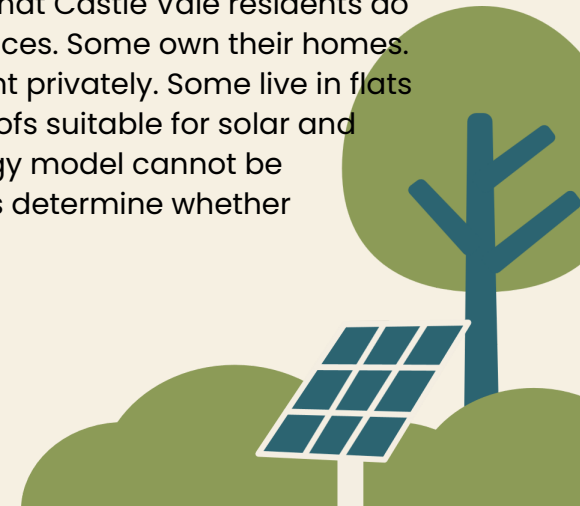


There was support for the principle of collective benefit because it avoids a situation in which some households receive substantial publicly or community-supported benefits while others receive very little. At the same time, residents acknowledged the reality that households will understandably judge the proposition partly according to what it means for their own finances. This tension cannot simply be designed away. It needs to be explicitly recognised within the eventual model.

Citizens' Jury recommendation: establish a clear fairness principle before determining the final technical model. The scheme should avoid dramatic differences in benefit arising simply because one household receives community-funded solar earlier than another. **A pooled or hybrid model should therefore be developed and tested further.**

Different Homes, Different Circumstances

Fairness also means recognising that Castle Vale residents do not all live in the same circumstances. Some own their homes. Some are social tenants. Some rent privately. Some live in flats or HMOs. Some properties have roofs suitable for solar and others do not. A community-energy model cannot be considered fair if these differences determine whether somebody is able to benefit.



Protecting tenants: Jurors raised particular concerns about private landlords and HMOs. A landlord could potentially benefit financially from solar installed through a community-supported scheme without passing the resulting savings to tenants. This would mean an intervention intended to reduce energy costs inadvertently increasing returns to property investors while doing little to improve affordability for the people living in the property.

Citizens' Jury recommendation: establish specific protections for private renters and HMO residents. Landlord participation should be conditional upon demonstrating that some of the benefit is passed to tenants. Community supported investment should not subsidise landlord returns without corresponding benefits for residents.

Homeowners and property sales: Owner-occupiers raised different concerns. Residents wanted clarity about what would happen if community-owned solar panels were installed on a privately owned roof and the homeowner subsequently wanted to sell. Jurors were aware of previous solar arrangements in which complicated leases or ownership structures had caused difficulties during house sales. Possible solutions include allowing homeowners to buy out the panels when selling or enabling a new owner to enter into a replacement agreement.

Citizens' Jury recommendation: obtain clear legal advice and establish a simple standard arrangement before homeowners are asked to participate. Information about panel ownership, mortgages, maintenance responsibilities, property sales and any buy-out mechanism must be understandable and transparent.

Recognising households that provide their roofs: A further question arises if electricity is pooled for community benefit. If a household allows its roof to be used as an asset for community generation but receives little additional direct benefit, what incentive does it have to participate? Jurors discussed the possibility of a roof rental payment, incentive or enhanced benefit.

Citizens' Jury recommendation: develop a transparent host-household incentive as part of any pooled model. It should provide sufficient recognition to encourage participation without becoming so large that it undermines equitable community benefit.



Turning the Proposition into Something Residents Can Judge

Residents Need Concrete Choices

A recurring message from the Jury was that residents cannot meaningfully judge abstract technical or commercial models. They need to know what those models mean in practice. The project should therefore move away from asking residents whether they prefer "Option One" or "Option Two" and instead show what each approach means for different types of Castle Vale household. For example:

- What would a social housing tenant save?
- What would an owner-occupier save?
- What happens to someone living in a flat?
- What happens if a property cannot accommodate solar?
- What happens if a household receives panels in year one compared with year five?
- What benefit does a household receive if its roof is used for community generation?
- What happens if someone moves home?
- What happens if energy prices change?

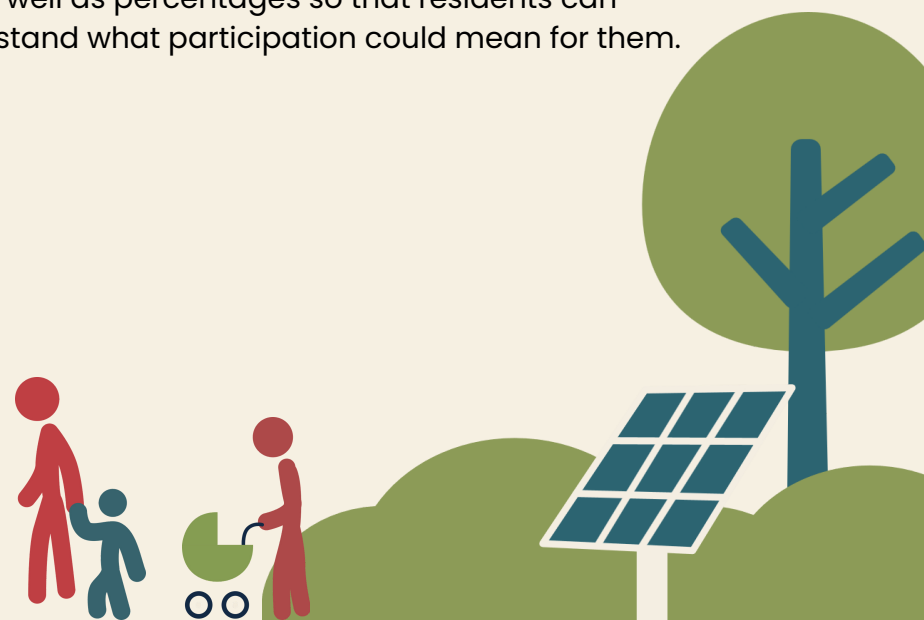
Citizens' Jury recommendation: provide worked examples showing what the alternative models mean for different households over five and ten years. These should include tenants, homeowners, flats, HMOs, households with and without suitable roofs, and households receiving installations at different stages of the programme.



Residents Need a Worthwhile Financial Benefit

Jurors considered how large the financial saving would need to be for residents to regard participation as worthwhile. The discussion explored whether very small reductions would be sufficient or whether savings would need to reach more significant levels. The Jury did not necessarily expect the maximum possible saving immediately. Residents were prepared to consider modest initial savings if there was a credible and transparent pathway showing how those benefits would increase as more local generation came online. What mattered was confidence that the benefit would become meaningful.

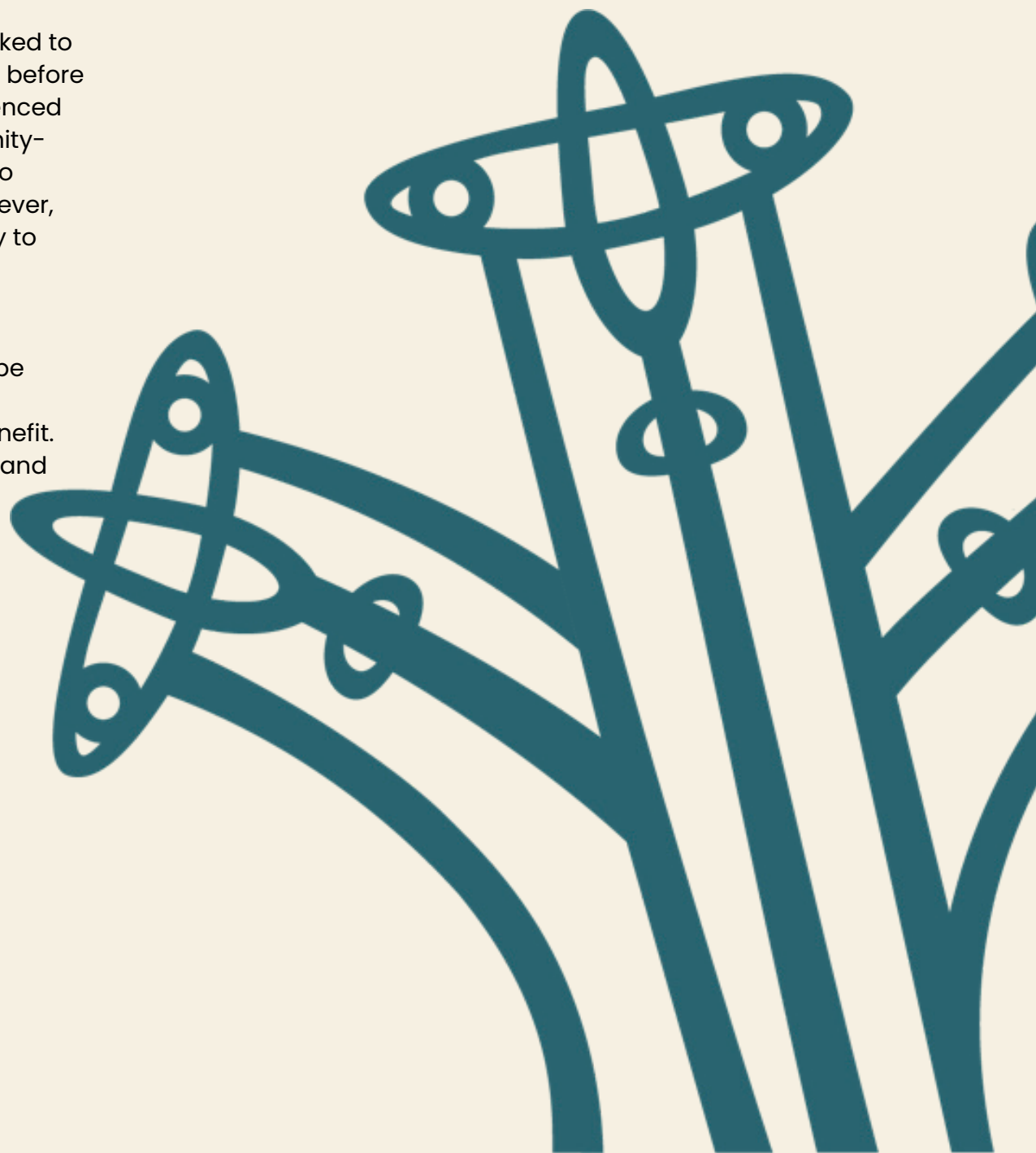
Citizens' Jury recommendation: publish a simple financial trajectory showing expected savings in years one, three, five and beyond. Savings should be expressed in pounds per household as well as percentages so that residents can readily understand what participation could mean for them.



Benefit Before Contribution

Jurors were concerned about the possibility of being asked to make financial contributions to a scheme several years before their own property received solar panels or they experienced another tangible benefit. A separate voluntary community-share offer could provide opportunities for residents who actively wanted to invest. Jurors distinguished this, however, from requiring households to make contributions simply to secure future participation. The Jury's principle is straightforward: **Benefit before contribution.**

Citizens' Jury recommendation: no household should be required to make compulsory payments years before receiving cheaper energy or another clearly defined benefit. Any earlier investment opportunity should be voluntary and clearly presented as a social or community investment.



Delivery and Risk

The Speed of Rollout Matters

Residents recognised that solar installation across Castle Vale cannot happen simultaneously. There will inevitably be a sequence, and some properties will receive investment before others. A rollout of around five years was generally regarded as understandable, particularly given the constraints associated with funding and the availability of skilled workers. A programme stretching over ten or fifteen years was regarded much less positively. Residents indicated that waiting would be more acceptable where people could see that implementation was happening, understood when their area or property was likely to benefit, and received other benefits in the meantime. Importantly, this broadened the Jury's definition of benefit. Someone waiting for panels might still benefit from a job, apprenticeship or training opportunity generated by the programme.

Citizens' Jury recommendation: aim for a five-year rollout where feasible, subject to funding and workforce capacity. Publish the proposed phases and provide regular information about progress. Benefits should begin from the outset and should not be limited to households receiving the first solar installations.

Jobs, Skills and Apprenticeships

Jurors saw the scale of the proposed investment as an important opportunity for Castle Vale. A significant solar

and retrofit programme will purchase substantial amounts of work from contractors. The Community Energy Company could use this purchasing power not only to secure installations but also to create employment and skills opportunities for local people. Prospective contractors could be asked to demonstrate how they will advertise jobs locally, provide apprenticeships and training, and contribute to developing the workforce needed to deliver the programme. This would provide an immediate community benefit while also helping to address potential shortages of appropriately skilled workers.

Citizens' Jury recommendation: make local workforce development integral to procurement. Contractors should be expected, wherever legally and practically possible, to provide measurable recruitment, training and apprenticeship opportunities for Castle Vale residents.

Financial Risk Must Be Managed and Transparent

The Jury recognised that no energy company can guarantee that it will always provide the cheapest electricity available. Energy markets change, sometimes rapidly, and there could be circumstances in which another supplier offered a cheaper tariff. Jurors did not expect the project to pretend that this risk does not exist. They did, however, expect it to be kept as low as possible and explained openly. There was strong opposition to important risks being hidden in contractual small print or becoming apparent only after residents had committed to the



scheme. The Jury also discussed whether a public body or funding organisation could provide some form of underwriting or safety net, particularly for households least able to absorb financial shocks.

Citizens' Jury recommendation: establish a formal consumer-protection principle aimed at ensuring participating households are no worse off than they otherwise would have been. Explore whether public funding partners can underwrite exceptional risks, particularly for low-income and vulnerable households.

Switching Supplier Could Be a Major Barrier

One of the most significant practical concerns was whether residents would have to leave their existing energy supplier to become customers of Castle Vale Community Energy.

Residents may already have favourable tariffs, fixed-price arrangements or other benefits associated with their existing supplier. Requiring them to abandon those arrangements could make participation feel unnecessarily risky. Jurors regarded a top-up model, through which residents could remain with their existing supplier while purchasing some locally generated electricity, as considerably easier to accept. This issue also made the direct household solar model more attractive to some jurors because electricity generated from their own roof could potentially provide an immediate benefit without requiring the same commitment to a new supplier.

Citizens' Jury recommendation: investigate regulatory and partnership arrangements that could allow Castle Vale

generated energy to operate alongside residents' existing suppliers. If full switching is unavoidable, strong price protections, clear exit arrangements and consumer safeguards will be essential.

Battery Storage

The Jury also considered the role of battery storage. Individual household batteries could enable homes with solar panels to use more of the electricity generated outside daylight hours. However, batteries require space and will not be suitable for every property. Communal storage may fit more naturally with a shared community-energy model by allowing surplus generation to become a collective resource. The Jury did not see storage as a decision that should be made independently of the wider energy model.

Citizens' Jury recommendation: align battery storage with the eventual community energy model. Communal storage should be fully assessed as part of a pooled model, while household batteries may be appropriate where direct household generation is adopted and individual properties are suitable.



Making Community Benefit Real

Community Benefit Must Be Measurable

One of the clearest messages from jurors was that the phrase "community benefit" is not enough. Deeds not words was how success would be measured by the community.

When referencing community benefits Residents want to know what those benefits actually are. A promise of community benefit should therefore be translated into commitments that can be measured and subsequently tested.

This could include:

- household bill savings;
- numbers of local jobs created;
- apprenticeships offered;
- residents completing training;
- investment in community services and facilities; and
- the value of any community dividend retained within Castle Vale.

Citizens' Jury recommendation: establish and publish a Community Benefits Framework containing measurable commitments covering household savings, jobs, apprenticeships, training and wider community investment, with regular reporting against those commitments.

Governance Must Represent Castle Vale

Jurors strongly supported the principle that residents should

have an equal voice within the Community Energy Company. However, one member, one vote does not by itself guarantee that the governance of the organisation will reflect the diversity of Castle Vale. The Jury therefore considered whether some board positions should be reserved to ensure that important groups including social housing tenants and owner-occupiers are represented. Residents recognised that housing organisations and other interests might also require representation, but the company should not become dominated by institutional stakeholders.

Citizens' Jury recommendation: establish minimum representation requirements rather than rigidly allocating every board position. Governance arrangements should guarantee meaningful representation for important resident groups while retaining opportunities for members to elect representatives.

The Wider Castle Vale Community Must Be Involved

Jurors were clear that responsibility for decisions about Castle Vale's future should not rest with the Citizens' Jury alone. The Jury provides an important resident voice, but it consists of a relatively small number of people. The wider Castle Vale community must therefore become increasingly involved as proposals develop. Communication needs to strike a careful balance. Residents should hear about proposals early enough to influence them, but unresolved ideas should not be



communicated as though final decisions have already been made.

Jurors identified local WhatsApp groups as particularly important communication networks. Social media, community organisations and printed information also have a role, particularly in ensuring that older residents and people who are less digitally connected are not excluded.

Citizens' Jury recommendation: undertake wider Castle Vale engagement while making clear that proposals remain in development. Use a combination of WhatsApp, community social media, local organisations and printed information, and involve Citizens' Jury members in reviewing communications before they are published.



The Citizens' Jury's Tests for the Next Stage

What the Jury Needs to See Next

The Citizens' Jury is positive about the potential of the Community Energy Company, but it is not giving unconditional support to a particular model. The next stage needs to turn the concept into a proposition that residents can properly assess. The Jury wants to see:

1. **A clear fairness principle** defining what an equitable outcome means for tenants, homeowners, flats, HMOs, different household sizes, households without suitable roofs and residents receiving installations at different stages.
2. **Castle Vale residents at the centre of governance**, with one member, one vote and a straightforward membership process.
3. **Worked household examples**, showing in pounds and pence what different residents could save under alternative models and how those savings would change over time.
4. **Further development of pooled and hybrid approaches**, particularly to address inequalities between households receiving panels early and those waiting for installation.
5. **Strong protections for tenants and HMO residents**, ensuring community-supported solar cannot simply increase landlord returns.
6. **Resolution of homeowner legal issues before launch**, including ownership, maintenance, mortgages, property sales and any buy-out arrangements
7. **A fair incentive for households providing roofs or other assets** for community generation.
8. **A phased community dividend**, prioritising household energy savings initially while subsequently directing an agreed share of surplus towards Castle Vale priorities.
9. **Development of ground-mounted and other collective solar generation** so that the benefits of renewable energy can be shared fairly across Castle Vale
10. **A delivery ambition of around five years**, where feasible, rather than allowing implementation to extend over ten or fifteen years.
11. **Benefits from the beginning of the programme**, including jobs, apprenticeships and training for residents who may still be waiting for energy interventions.
12. **Procurement that builds the local workforce**, using the programme's purchasing power to create opportunities for Castle Vale residents.
13. **No compulsory financial contribution before a household receives a benefit.**
14. **Realistic and transparent projections of household savings**, expressed in pounds as well as percentages.
15. **Low and clearly explained financial risk**, including investigation of possible underwriting or safety-net arrangements.
16. **Protection of consumer choice**, particularly where switching supplier could mean losing favourable existing tariffs or discounts.
17. **Storage solutions aligned with the chosen energy model**, including consideration of communal batteries within a collective approach.



18. **Representative governance**, ensuring tenants, homeowners and other parts of the Castle Vale community have meaningful influence.
19. **A measurable Community Benefits Framework**, covering bills, jobs, apprenticeships, skills and community investment.
20. **Wider engagement with Castle Vale**, ensuring that the Citizens' Jury informs rather than substitutes for broader community participation.

Overall Conclusion of the Citizens' Jury

The Citizens' Jury is supportive of the ambition to establish a Castle Vale Community Energy Company and can see the potential for a Net Zero Neighbourhood to deliver significant benefits. But that support comes with clear conditions. The central test identified through the Jury's deliberations is does the scheme reduce energy costs while sharing the benefits fairly across Castle Vale, regardless of whether somebody owns their home, rents, lives in a flat, has a suitable roof, or happens to receive solar panels earlier than somebody else?

A purely household-by-household approach risks undermining the community principle if households receiving installations first secure substantial benefits while others wait. At the same time, a completely pooled approach may struggle to secure participation if households providing their roofs and other assets receive very little direct benefit themselves. The strongest direction emerging from the Jury is therefore a **carefully designed community or hybrid model**: one that delivers meaningful household savings, recognises those contributing assets, protects tenants and other residents

from unintended disadvantage, retains local control and creates an increasing community dividend as the scheme develops.

The Jury's deliberations also demonstrate something important about public consent. Residents are **not resistant to change or to the principle of community energy**. What they are resistant to is being asked to accept poorly defined risks in return for poorly defined benefits. Support becomes much more likely when the proposition can be explained concretely:

- This is what you could save.
- This is when you will benefit.
- This is the financial risk and how you will be protected.
- This is what happens if you want to leave.
- These are the jobs, apprenticeships and training opportunities the investment will create.
- This is how the wider community will benefit.
- And this is how Castle Vale residents will retain a meaningful voice in controlling the organisation.

The Citizens' Jury has therefore not provided the project with a simple endorsement of a technical solution. It has provided something more valuable: a set of principles against which the emerging proposition can be designed and tested. Those principles should now guide the next stage of Powering Up Castle Vale.

The resident test is clear: Make it fair. Make the benefits tangible. Manage the financial risk. Create opportunities for local people. Keep control rooted in Castle Vale. And be completely transparent about what residents are being asked to sign up to.







POWERING UP CASTLE VALE

Citizens' Jury August 2026

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