Your Local Net Zero Hub

Case studies

Kent County Council

About the local authority

Kent county council are users of Your Local Net Zero Hub and are currently using the platform to support with the development of projects for generation from solar PVs. We spoke with Kent County council to find out more.

Using the tool

What have you been using the energy planning tool for?

We use Your Local Net Zero Hub several times per week. We dip in and out for various reasons, but it's essentially to build a foundation for Local Area Energy Planning (LAEP). As a County Council we're keen to have a strategic overview of opportunities and this is a useful platform for us to see that. Having geospatially mapped data helps to target our efforts and know where we might want to go next. The platform is quite easy to navigate, it visualises data clearly, and it allows us to save projects according to different areas or themes.

How would you describe the Your Local Net Zero Hub energy planning tool in one sentence?

The platform is useful to communicate energy opportunities to internal colleagues, and to visualise our decarbonisation projects to inform how the electricity network will need to adapt to facilitate these changes.

What will you likely be using the Your Local Net Zero Hub energy planning tool for in future?

In the future, rather than mainly looking for energy opportunities, we'll be using the tool for stage zero feasibility to look for areas for realistic deployment, using the cost tool to consider larger areas of the county, and generally making more use of the tool's features on a larger scale. Hopefully we'll be able to use the tool to then communicate that information to other people that would be working on the projects and with their stakeholders.

What challenges or opportunities do you see Your Local Net Zero Hub helping you solve?

We're at the early stages of looking at different energy projects. The problems we anticipate are around stakeholder engagement. For something like retrofit or energy efficiency of homes, which is just one part of an energy transition, we'll need to engage stakeholders from all different angles, including housing developers, housing associations, local councils, investors and so on. Using the stakeholder engagement features of the platform will not necessarily solve the sheer number of stakeholders, but it will help us to communicate with them effectively and show that retrofit is not just an expense, it's an opportunity from social, financial, environmental perspectives.

⚙️ Top features

What do you consider to be Your Local Net Zero Hub's top features?

The data is our top feature for sure, we can't call ourselves a data-led team and not value the data the most! We've found the data especially useful, because sometimes you don't know what you don't know. If we think about our known and unknowns matrix, we've been able to use the data, for example, to look through distinctions between domestic and non-domestic energy demand for heat and electricity.

The metadata available in the tool shows when it was last updated, so it helps us decipher what to search for in other open-source databases, so that's really helpful. Secondly, the Projects element has been especially helpful in that we can save a project and come back to it when we've got new information or new inputs from stakeholders. We've used Projects to produce reports for a few parish councils who are looking into deploying PV locally and looking into community finance models. It has been really useful for looking at the potential for renewable technology.

Finally, the chat function has got to be one of our top three. To have that ongoing support available has been really valuable for instances where we wanted direct guidance, such as with uploading our own data.

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How are you finding the visuals/user interface of the Your Local Net Zero Hub energy planning tool?

The user interface and visuals are really helpful - the shading for the different thresholds of various measurements is really clear and accessible. The ability to also change the colour of the gradients is useful whether you're trying to just understand it yourself or communicate these things with colleagues.

What data have you found particularly valuable?

The energy demand and renewables potentials datasets have been most valuable for us to date. As an organisation we are starting to look more at transport and mobility data related to EV charge points, so the data around EV charge points, cable connections, substation capacity will increase in significance for us over the next few months.

We've increasingly been looking at the datasets to see the split between residential and non-residential buildings. In the government's fixed climate budget, they refer to the greater overall efficiency of heating buildings using heat networks rather than individual heat pumps where applicable. So, we're looking for higher heat demand annually to ensure that a heat network would be cost effective. This is where the distinction between non-residential and residential buildings has been really useful for us to start thinking about where we could place potential heat networks.

Also, the gas demand and electricity demand data for domestic properties has allowed us to help local or community organisations look at the scale of the challenge in their area only. When parish councils have come to us and expressed a desire to decarbonise housing in their area, that data has been really useful to quantify the scale of the challenge, but also the opportunity for these technologies.

✓ Value and impact

What value does Your Local Net Zero Hub bring to your decarbonisation planning?

The value in the tool comes from using the features and reviewing them alongside our own market research. For example, using the distinction between domestic and non-domestic again in the context of rooftop solar PV, operation and installation costs may be very different for commercial versus domestic buildings. Although some of the renewable potential datasets focus on domestic properties, commercial or non-domestic properties are visible and represented in other datasets, so it's helpful to look at the cost estimates within the tool alongside the development of our own local knowledge.

The second thing is the option to upload your own data and view it alongside the other datasets on the platform - sometimes there are very specific local datasets that our team has greater capacity to consistently keep up to date, so it's easier for us to do it ourselves and upload it onto the tool.

Finally, the building selection tool within the Projects feature has been really useful in enabling us to focus our efforts specifically when working on local projects, because it gives us that parish or local community perspective.

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> "Your Local Net Zero Hub has been very useful for us and the more people use it, the better it will get."

What impact has Your Local Net Zero Hub had on your planning works?

Our main achievement for now is being able to report and process the data and having these early conversations with other people, more so than getting to the delivery stage just yet. The tool will continue to be available as we progress through our local area energy planning journey.

Our short-term goals were generally to develop knowledge and more confidence in approaching energy planning among our team. Learning if there are any major differences in potential for different energy assets between different districts in the county is something that we want to explore and this platform has made that quite easy. The platform also helps us more confidently communicate local energy potential to others. So, it's helped us achieve our short-term goals and develop our long-term goals because, sometimes, you don't know what you don't know. The data in the tool allows us to think about where there may be more potential for different renewables than we thought.

Experience

Would you recommend Your Local Net Zero Hub to other Local Authorities?

Your Local Net Zero Hub has been very useful for us and the more people use it, the better it will get. If all our local partners are using the same platform, then it helps us to centralise information, which will ensure that we're singing from the same hymn sheet, so to speak, as well as supporting the development of the platform.

What do you think about our training? How have you benefited from it?

The regular training workshops are especially helpful for further explanations because if the tool were any simpler, you'd risk missing out on the detail that is crucial for this kind of planning. The frequency, the structure and the interactive nature of the training sessions has been really useful – holding them fortnightly gives us enough time to have a look and gather any questions. Plus, structuring the sessions by feature in the platform makes the focus really clear.

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