



# Chester Community Energy – Member survey results 2021

PREPARED FOR POWER TO CHANGE

INFORMING POSITIVE CHANGE

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# 1 Introduction

In 2019 CAG Consultants, in partnership with Fiveways<sup>1</sup>, were commissioned to conduct a three-year evaluation of the Power to Change Next Generation programme. One of the outputs from the first year's work was a draft survey for the members, supporters, staff and volunteers of Community Energy companies aimed at understanding the impact of being involved in a Community Energy group – i.e., to determine what secondary impacts or changes flow from people's involvement.

In the spring of 2021, at the request of Chester Community Energy, we carried out a survey amongst their members, supporters and volunteers. This report highlights the results of that survey (which is included as an appendix).

## 1.1 Method

- The survey was conducted online. Chester Community Energy circulated the customised survey link (prepared by CAG/Fiveways) to 90 contacts via email. A reminder email was also sent to boost response.
- The survey routed respondents according to their relationship with Chester CE. Typically, each respondent answered around 20 questions which, on average took 15 minutes to complete (median = 10 minutes, mode = 8 minutes).
- The survey did not collect any personal data.
- No incentive was offered for completing the survey – members were told that Chester CE would report back the results.

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<sup>1</sup> CAG Consultants is an employee-owned co-operative with more than 30 years' experience of high-quality research and evaluation on economic, social and environmental issues, with particular expertise on evaluation and sustainable energy. Fiveways have broad expertise in advising and evaluating the community and voluntary sector, including governance and diversity issues.

## 2 Respondent profile

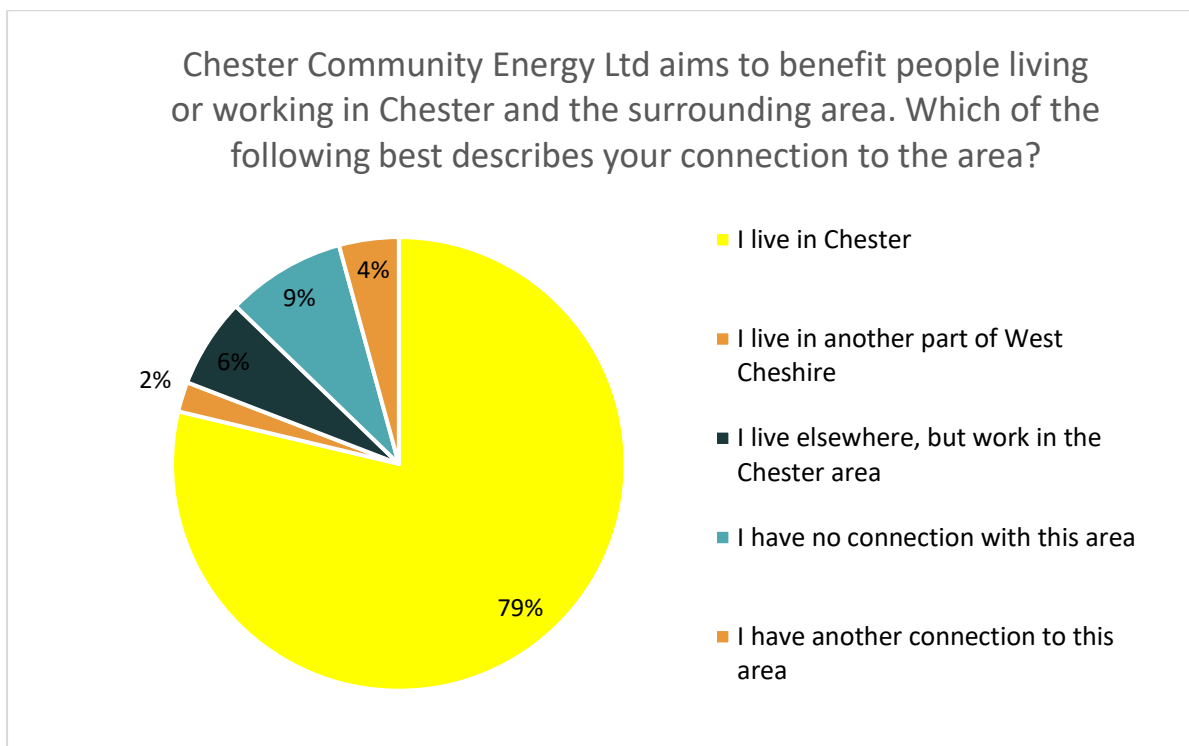
- 47 people responded to the survey between 13<sup>th</sup> April and 12<sup>th</sup> May 2021. This represented a 52% response rate for the 90 members sent the survey.

### 2.1 Involvement in CCEL

- 38 (84%) described themselves as “an investor member”
- 6 (13%) were either board members or volunteer/supporters

### 2.2 Link with Chester

- 79% of respondents (47)<sup>2</sup> live in Chester, only 4% indicated that they had no connection with the area.
- The survey asked if anyone lived in Flintshire or the Neston/Ellesmere Port area but none of the respondents did.



### 2.3 Involvement in other Community Energy Groups

- For 85% of respondents (47) Chester CE was the first community energy group they have been involved in.

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<sup>2</sup> Not every respondent answers every question. Numbers in brackets represent the number of respondents that answered the question.

- The 15% of respondents who had been involved in other groups mentioned their connections to a variety of groups (i.e. Snitterfield Actioning Climate Change, Greater Manchester Community Renewables, Halton Lune Hydro Scheme, More renewables in Morecambe, Edinburgh Energy Coop, Raasay Community Energy, River Bain Hydro and Egni Mynydd Hydro).

## **2.4 Gender**

- 57% of respondents (44)<sup>3</sup> were male, 43% female.

## **2.5 Age**

- 34% of respondents (44) were over 70, 89% were over 50.

## **2.6 Ethnicity**

- 100% of respondents who gave their ethnicity (43) were White/White British.

## **2.7 Personal income level**

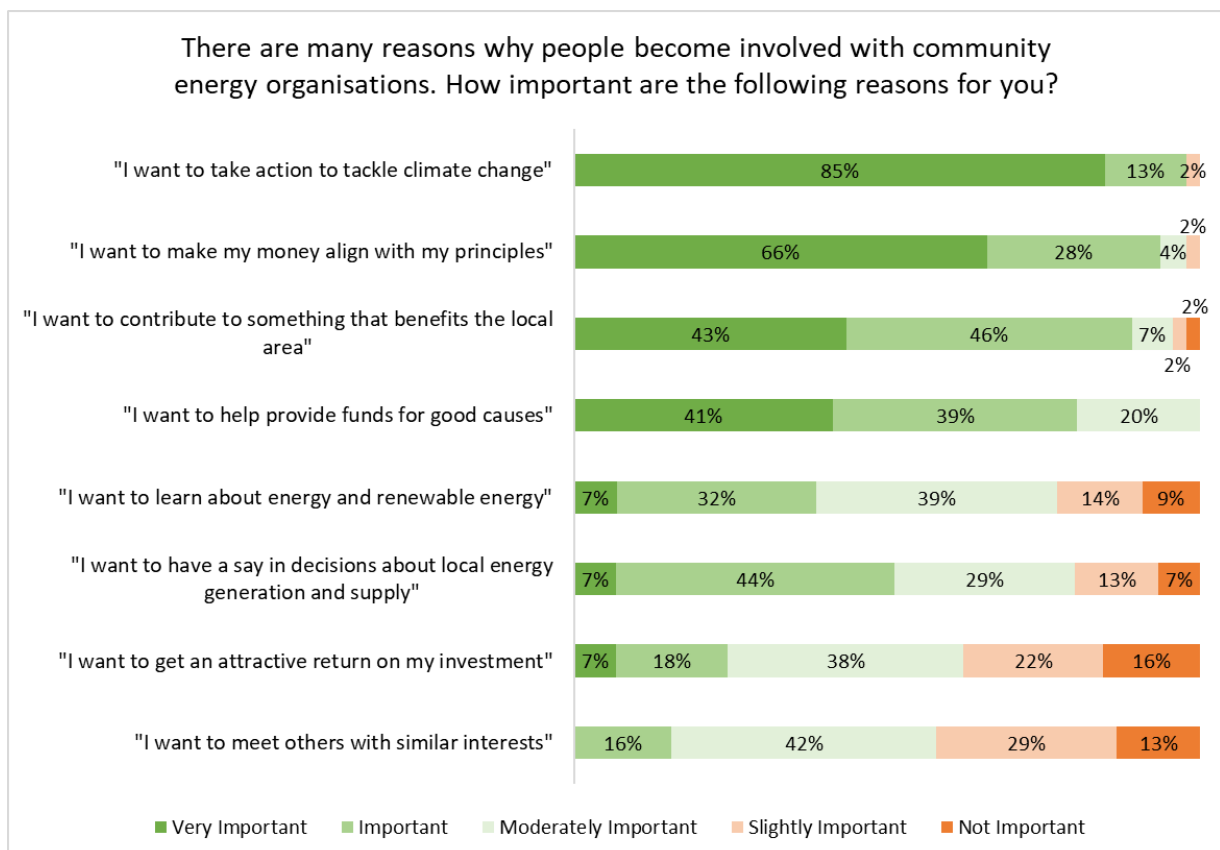
- Of the 38 respondents who indicated a personal income level, 50% had an annual personal income level of £25,000 or less, 11% had an income of £50,000 or more.

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<sup>3</sup> Numbers in brackets represent the number of respondents that answered the question.

### 3 Motivations for involvement in CCEL

- The two most important reasons for getting involved in CCEL are:
  - “to tackle climate change” - 98% of respondents (46) thought this was “very important” or “important” – and
  - “to make my money align with my principles” - 94% of respondents (47) thought this was “very important” or “important”
- Two further reasons for getting involved in CCEL are:
  - “to contribute to something that benefits the local area” – 89% of respondents (46) thought this was “very important” or “important” – and
  - “to help provide funds for good causes” – 80% of respondents (46) thought this was “very important” or “important”
- Getting a return on investment was considered “important” or “very important” by 25% of respondents (45)
- Meeting others with similar interests was the least important of the options given – considered “important” or “very important” by 16% of respondents (45)



## 4 Changes made because of involvement in CCEL

- See chart on p9. The most common changes reported by respondents are feeling able to influence decisions of CCEL (67% agree, 7% disagree) and increased knowledge about renewable energy (66% agree, 4% disagree)<sup>4</sup>
- 38% of respondents agree they have made changes to reduce their personal carbon footprint (13% disagree).
- The least common changes are getting involved in other sustainable energy initiatives (26% agree but 39% disagree) and having influenced decisions that have directly saved carbon (28% agree and 39% disagree) – this is despite feeling able to influence CCEL decisions (see above).

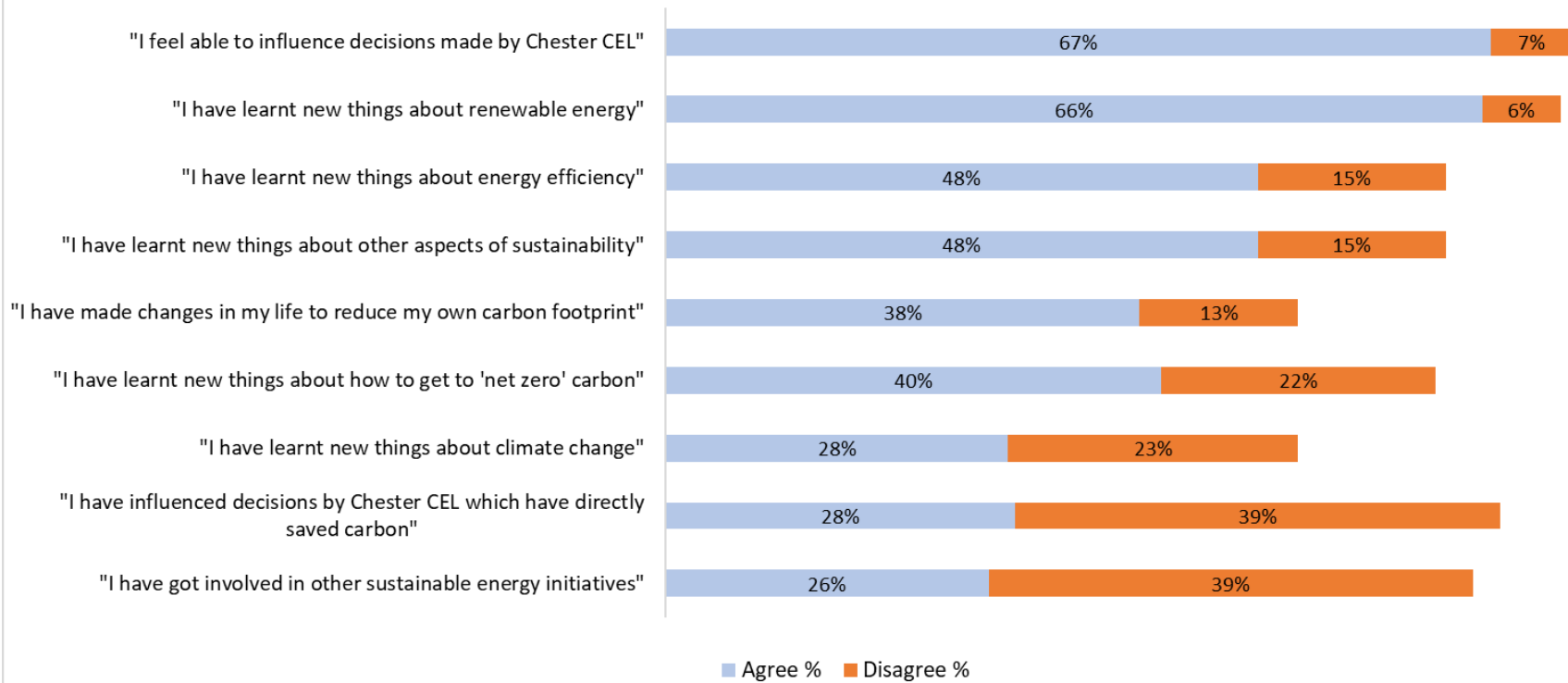
### 4.1 Energy efficiency actions

- Respondents were asked about a range of actions individuals could take with regards to energy efficiency.
- 23 respondents had not changed all their lighting to LED bulbs and fittings *before* their involvement with CCEL – 57% of these had done so *since* their involvement with CCEL, and a further 17% were considering it since their involvement
- 43 respondents had not installed an EV charging point before their involvement with CCEL – 5% of these had done so since their involvement with CCEL and 19% were considering it since their involvement
- Involvement with CCEL had not (as yet) prompted action amongst those who had not installed solar PV panels (34), solar thermal panels (38) or a heat pump (45). However since their involvement 20% of respondents who had not previously done so, were considering installing a heat pump, 9% solar PV panels and 3% solar thermal panels.
- Other actions taken included reducing usage, and installing heating controls
- Three respondents cited living in a flat as the reason for not taking more action.

	Number who had not already taken this step	% taken action since being involved with CCEL	% considering since being involved with CCEL
Installed solar pv panels	34	0%	9%
Installed solar thermal panels	38	0%	3%
Installed wall or floor insulation	23	0%	0%
Installed a heat pump	45	0%	20%
Installed an EV charging point	42	5%	19%
Changed all your lighting to LED bulbs/fittings	23	57%	17%

<sup>4</sup> These proportions may not add up to 100% as answer options also included “neither agree nor disagree” and “I don’t know”.

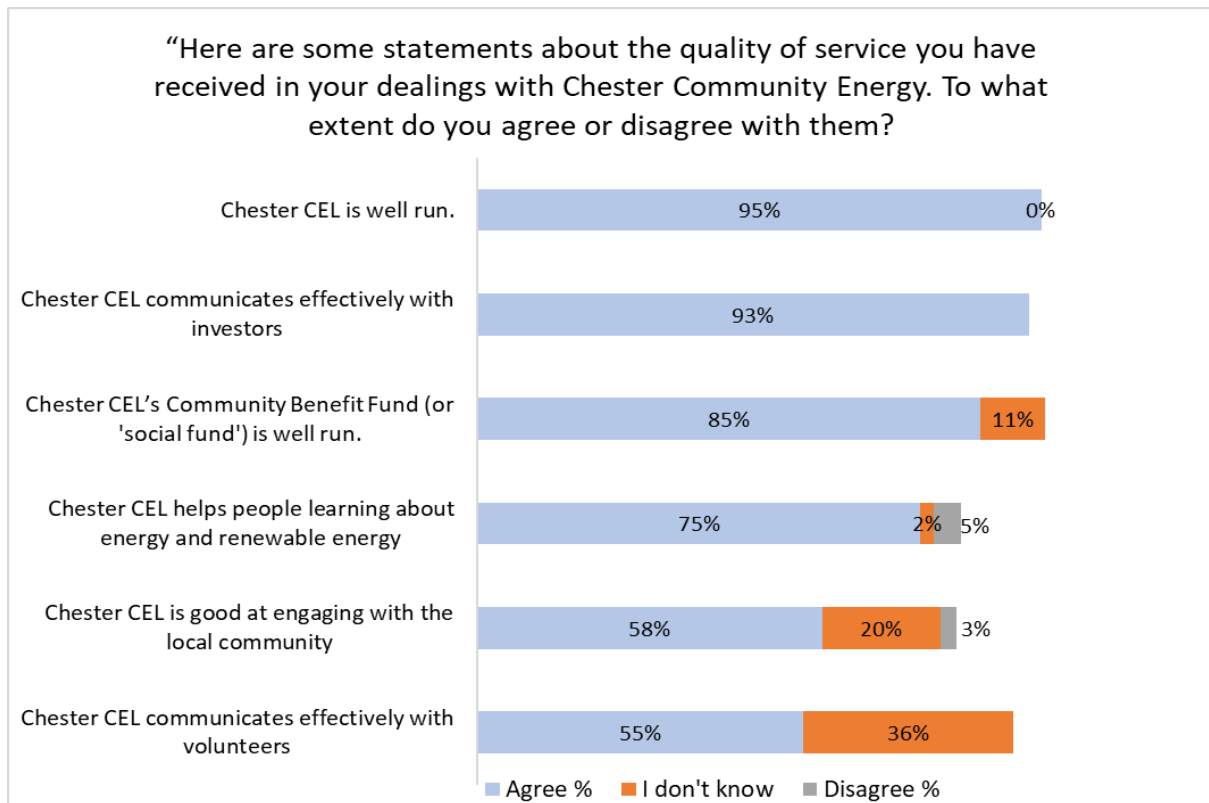
“As a result of my involvement with Chester Community Energy...





## 5 Quality of service

- Overall members are very satisfied with the service they receive from CCEL. 95% (44) agree it is well run (with no disagreement)
- 93% (45) agree they are communicated with effectively (with no disagreement)
- There is very little disagreement with any of these statements – so where agreement is lower it is mainly to do with more respondents answering “I don't know”.



- In free text responses (8) some respondents gave some suggestions for improving CCEL's service. No clear themes arise, but the following suggestions were mentioned more: increased promotion (especially through social media), spreading the load more so key members are not overburdened and sharing information in advance of meetings.

## 6 Priorities for future work

- Respondents (45) were asked to rank six actions that CCEL could take in the future in terms of which they would like to see CCEL focusing on going forward.
- The actions prioritised by most were “Joint ventures with other community energy organisations” and “more solar PV projects”.

	<b>Average rank</b>	<b>Overall Rank</b>
Joint ventures with other community energy organisations.	1.4	1
More solar PV projects.	1.6	2
Collective purchasing schemes e.g. for energy or energy saving measures.	2.0	3
Installation of heat pumps to replace gas heating.	2.4	4
Bio-diversity projects e.g. planting trees.	3.6	5
More talks on sustainability issues for members	4.0	6

- When asked about other priorities no clear picture emerges with the following activities mentioned: EV infrastructure, working with schools, working with local industry, supporting householders with energy efficiency measures (especially insulation), more micro generation projects (household solar PV, hydro, wind)

## 7 Investment intentions

- 91% of respondents (44) answered “yes” to “Assuming the bank base rate remains very low, would you be prepared to purchase shares in CEL in the future?” (the remainder answered “I don’t know”).
- Of those who would be prepared to purchase shares when the bank base rate is low (40), over half would be prepared to purchase shares at a return of 2% or less. *“The rate of return is a subsidiary issue. The project is more important to me.”*

<b>Suggested rate of return</b>	<b>Percent agreeing</b>
1%	23%
2%	28%
3%	25%
4%	18%
Not answered	8%

- Of the 39 respondents who answered – 21% would be prepared to waive the annual interest on their investment and donate it to the community benefit fund, 21% would not, and 59% answered “possibly”.
- Those answering “possibly” would need more information on the project and its impact (and, in particular, local impact) to reach a decision.
- Those answering “no” said that they used the income they make on their investment.

## 8 Engaging members

- As we have seen earlier, there is an appetite for more investment in CCEL activity. 45% of respondents (44) had already invested in another carbon reduction project, and a further 45% would be interested in doing so.
- There is also a strong interest in helping at promotional events – with 55% of respondents (42) interested in getting involved in this way (of which 17% had done this already and would do so again, and 38% would be interested in getting involved in this way in future).
- There was also considerable interest in assisting a director with a specific project or assisting with a specific skill or area of expertise on an “as required” basis.



## 9 Volunteering for CCEL

Additional questions were asked of volunteers – board members and other members who had volunteered their time (5 respondents)

### 9.1 Length of volunteering engagement/hours spent

- 4/5 (80%) had been volunteering for over two years.
- 4/5 (80%) had spent 3 or more days a month volunteering their time.

### 9.2 Benefits of involvement

- 3 volunteers gave free text responses commenting on the knowledge and skills they had gained from volunteering with CCEL. The knowledge gained included knowledge about solar PV and LED installations, and about how community energy businesses operate. The skills gained included project and financial management.
- Other benefits of involvement include “putting something back” that will have a long-term and local benefit.
- No respondent (5) agreed that volunteering their time for CCEL helped them to gain employment or to progress, or change, their career.

## Appendix – Survey questions

Thank you for opening our survey

At Chester Community Energy we are keen to understand the impact of our work. We would be very grateful if you could complete this survey.

There are around 20 questions. Many of these are quick "multiple choice" ones, so the survey can be completed in 10-15 minutes.

We are not collecting any identifying information so your answers will be anonymous.

If you have any questions or would like any more information, please contact Graham Booth on 07445 989736.

Thank you for your support.

Graham Booth

**1. Was Chester CEL the first Community Energy Company you have been involved with?**

- Yes
- No

**If no, please tell us which other Community Energy Companies you have been involved with? [free text]**

**2. Chester Community Energy Ltd aims to benefit people living or working in Chester and the surrounding area. Which of the following best describes your connection to the area?**

- I live in Chester
- I live in the Neston/Ellesmere Port area
- I live in Flintshire
- I live in another part of West Cheshire
- I live elsewhere, but work in the Chester area
- I have no connection with this area
- I have another connection to this area (please tell us)

**3. There are many reasons why people become involved with community energy organisations. How important are the following reasons for you?**

- I want to learn about energy and renewable energy
- I want to take action to tackle climate change
- I want to help provide funds for good causes
- I want to have a say in decisions about local energy generation and supply
- I want to contribute to something that benefits the local area
- I want to get an attractive return on my investment
- I want to make my money align with my principles
- I want to meet others with similar interests

*Answer options*

Very Important

Important

Moderately Important

Slightly Important

Not Important

**4. If you had any other reasons for becoming involved in community energy, please add them here: [free text]**

**5. Thinking back since you got involved with Chester Community Energy to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements.**

"As I result of my involvement with Chester Community Energy...

- I have learnt new things about renewable energy
- I have learnt new things about energy efficiency
- I have learnt new things about climate change
- I have learnt new things about how to get to 'net zero' carbon
- I have learnt new things about other aspects of sustainability

I have made changes in my life to reduce my own carbon footprint

I have got involved in other sustainable energy initiatives

I feel able to influence decisions made by Chester CEL

I have influenced decisions by Chester CEL which have directly saved carbon

*Answer options*

Definitely agree

Tend to agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Tend to disagree

Definitely disagree

I don't know

**6. Here are some energy efficiency measures people can take in their homes. Which statement best reflects where you are in relation to these measures?**

Installed solar pv panels  
Installed solar thermal panels  
Installed wall or floor insulation  
Installed a heat pump  
Installed an EV charging point  
Changed all your lighting to LED bulbs/fittings

*Answer options*

I had done this before my involvement with Chester CEL  
I have done this since I got involved with Chester CEL  
I was considering this before my involvement with Chester CEL  
I am considering this since I got involved with Chester CEL  
I am not considering this

**7. If there are any other steps you have taken to be more energy efficient since your involvement with Chester Community Energy Ltd please tell us here [free text]**

**8. Here are some statements about the quality of service you have received in your dealings with Chester Community Energy. To what extent do you agree or disagree with them?**

- Chester CEL helps people learning about energy and renewable energy
- Chester CEL communicates effectively with investors
- Chester CEL communicates effectively with volunteers
- Chester CEL is good at engaging with the local community
- Chester CEL is well run.
- Chester CEL's Community Benefit Fund (or 'social fund') is well run.

*Answer options*

Definitely agree  
Tend to agree  
Neither agree nor disagree  
Tend to disagree  
Definitely disagree  
I don't know

Do you have any suggestions about how Chester CE could improve its performance in these or other areas? [free text]



**9. Here are some actions Chester CEL could take in the future. Thinking of what you would like to see CCEL focus on going forward, how would you rank them?**

With 1 being the activity you would most like to see CCEL focus on and 6 being the activity you would least like to see CCEL focus on. When you select a number from the drop down list the options will automatically order themselves.

- Collective purchasing schemes e.g. for energy or energy saving measures.
- Joint ventures with other community energy organisations.
- More solar pv projects.
- Installation of heat pumps to replace gas heating.
- More talks on sustainability issues for members
- Bio-diversity projects e.g. planting trees.

**10. If there is any other activity you would like to see Chester CE focusing on in the future, please let us know here [free text]**

**11. Here are some ways members can get involved in CCEL, which option best describes your view of them?**

Helping at a promotional event.

Assisting with a specific skill or area of expertise on an “as required” basis

Assisting a director on a specific project.

Investing in another carbon reduction project.

Answer options

I have done this already and would do so again

I have done this already and wouldn't do so again

I would be interested in getting involved in this way in the future

I wouldn't be interested in getting involved in this way in the future

**12. Assuming the bank base rate remains very low, would you be prepared to purchase shares in CEL in the future?**

Yes (to 13)

No (to 15)

I don't know (to 16)

**13. Assuming the bank base rate remains very low, at what interest rate would you be prepared to purchase shares in CCEL in the future?**

1%

2%

3%

4%

Other, please state

**14. Would you be prepared to waiver the annual interest on your investment and donate it to the community benefit fund?**

Yes

No

Possibly

I don't know

**If possibly – what factors would need to be place for you donate your interest to the community benefit fund?**

**If no – please let us know the reason for your answer.**

**15. Please let us know the reason for your answer**

**16. Which of the following best describes your involvement with Chester Community Energy Ltd (CCEL)?**

a board member

an investor member

a paid member of staff

a volunteer or supporter

a subscriber to the newsletter

a recipient of help or information from Chester Community Energy

I am not involved

Other (please tell us)

## **Questions for board/volunteers only**

**17. How long have you been volunteering for Chester CEL?**

- For less than three months
- For less than six months
- For less than a year
- For less than two years
- For two years or more

**18. Thinking back over the past year, on average how many days per month did you volunteer on behalf of the Chester CEL?**

- Less than a day
- 1 or 2 days
- 3 or 4 days
- 5 days or more

**19. What knowledge have you gained whilst volunteering for Chester CEL? [free text]**

**20. What skills have you gained whilst volunteering for Chester CEL? [free text]**

**21. Has volunteering for Chester CEL helped you to gain employment or to progress or change your career?**

- Yes (to 22)
- No (to 23)
- I don't know (to 23)

**22. (if yes to 21) Please explain what difference volunteering for Chester CEL made to help you to gain employment or to progress or change your career? [free text]**

**23. Please tell us about any other benefits volunteering for Chester CEL has brought you. [free text]**

**24. Are there any areas where you would welcome more support, training or other input from Chester CEL, or any areas where you think Chester CEL itself needs more support from other bodies? [free text]**

## **About you (questions for all)**

Thank you for your feedback. We would be very grateful if you could tell us more about yourself. These questions are optional, we ask them in order to measure how well we are reaching a diverse audience. Please be assured that all your responses to this survey will be anonymous, we are not collecting any identifiable information.

### **25. Which of the following best describes your gender?**

- Male
- Female
- Prefer to self-describe (please tell us)
- Prefer not to say

### **26. How old are you?**

- under 18
- 18-29
- 30-49
- 50-69
- 70+
- Prefer not to say

### **27. Which of the following best describes your ethnicity?**

- Asian/Asian British
- Black/African/Caribbean/Black British
- Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups
- White/ White British
- Other ethnic group (please tell us)
- Prefer not to say

### **28. Which of the following best describes your personal income last year?**

£1 to £9, 999

£10, 000 to £24, 999

£25, 000 to £49, 999

£50, 000 to £74, 999

£75, 000 to £99, 999

£100, 000 or more

Prefer not to say

Thank you for your time and input. Your feedback will help Chester CEL understand their impact and improve their service for members.



## CAG CONSULTANTS

Founded in 1983, CAG Consultants is an independent, employee-owned co-operative. We provide support, research and analysis, policy advice and training in a wide range of fields relating to sustainable development and climate change. We have practitioners in stakeholder & community involvement, regeneration, evaluation, economics and regulatory affairs. We deliver high quality, innovative and thoughtful work for our clients, who include government departments, local authorities, public agencies, the NHS and regeneration and community planning partnerships across the UK. We pride ourselves on our strong ethical approach and our commitment to social justice and improving and protecting the environment.

CAG Consultants' Quality Management System is approved to the Quality Guild standard.

For more information, see [www.cagconsultants.co.uk](http://www.cagconsultants.co.uk)