

Promoting community
renewable energy in a corporate
energy world: new policy
developments in the UK

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Context and questions

- Rapid growth in wind power in the UK since 2000, mostly by major corporations
- Rhetorical support for community renewables now seems to be shifting to serious attention
- But, can community renewable energy be promoted in a corporate energy world?
- Data comes from ESRC-funded research project Delivering Renewable Energy Under Devolution

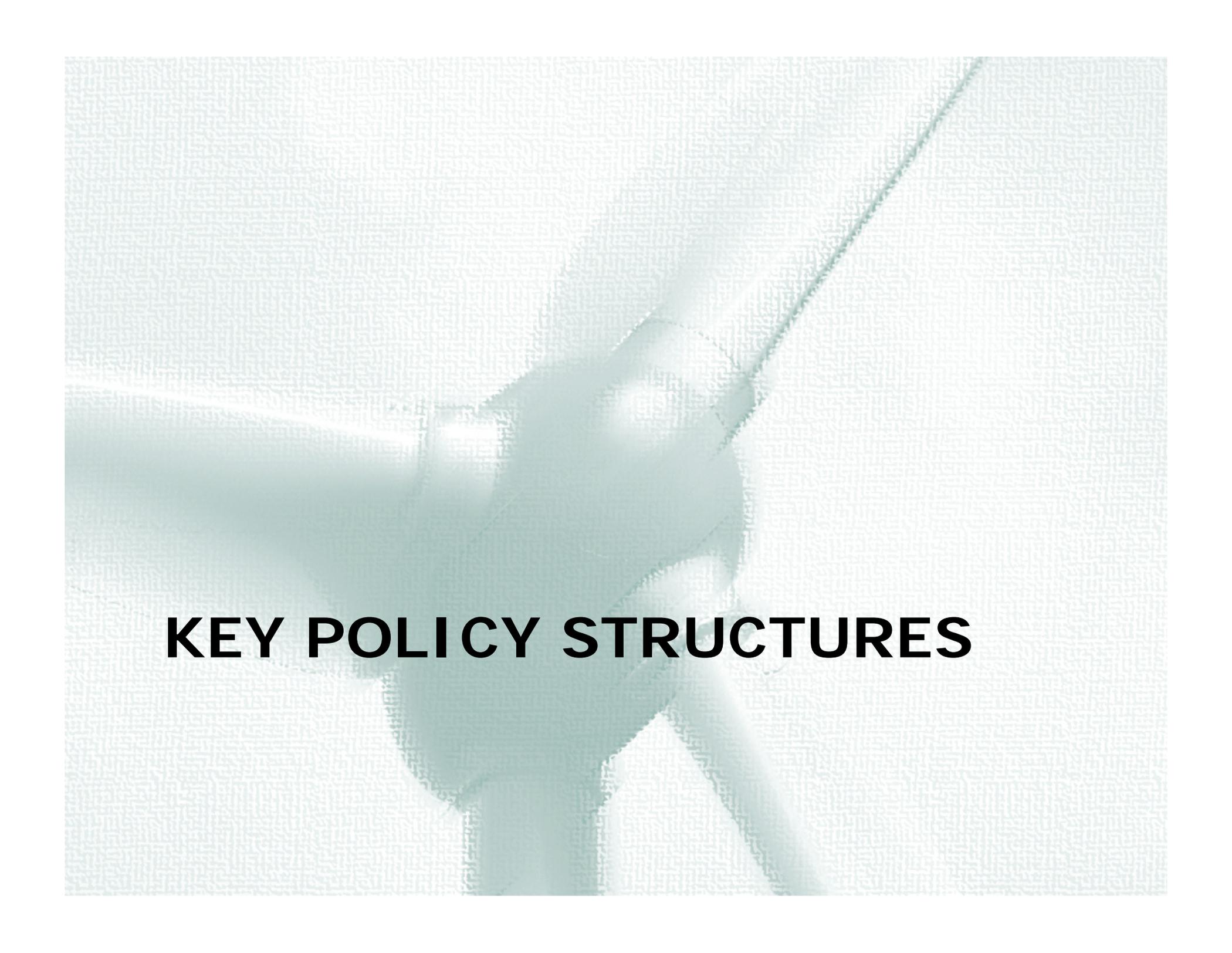
Hard' and 'soft' energy paths

- What do we mean by these terms?
- Are they distinct alternatives?
- Do community renewables have merits that the hard, corporate energy model tends to lack, in terms of
 - i. social acceptance
 - ii. fairer distribution of costs and benefits
 - iii. social and economic regeneration

But what about the issue of transition – *getting to* a world with more community renewables in it?

Shifting UK policy

- In Scotland, a target of 500MW of community- and locally-owned renewable energy by 2020
- Across the UK, new schemes offering grants and loans to community renewables (£4 million in Scotland)
- Chiming with political agendas of 'localism' (but also public sector austerity?)
- But clearly supplementary to, not supplanting, a dominant agenda of big, corporately owned renewable energy facilities

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a pen, poised to sign a document. A large, dark checkmark is visible on the paper, indicating a completed or approved action. The scene is brightly lit, with strong highlights and shadows, creating a sense of focus and importance.

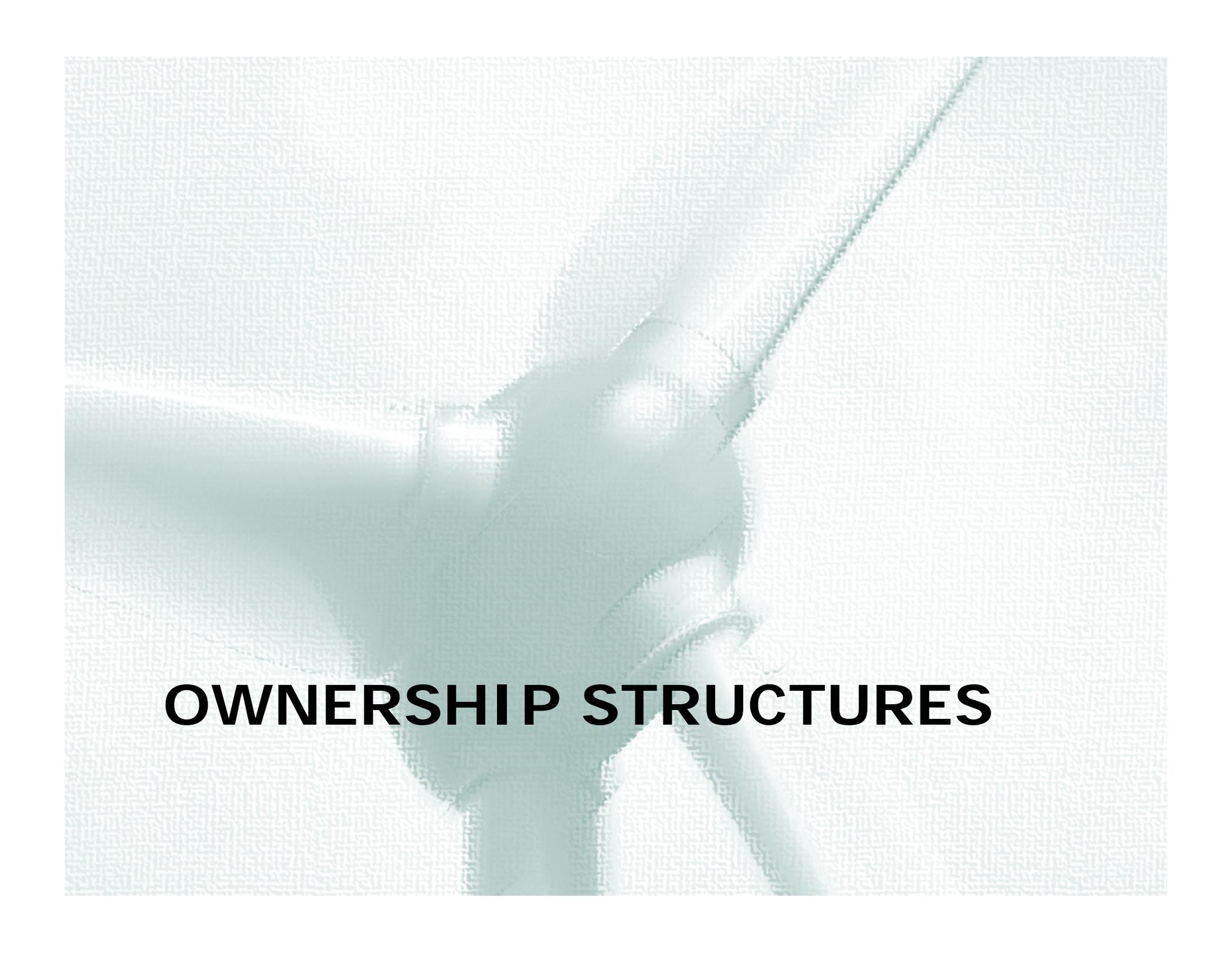
KEY POLICY STRUCTURES

The planning system

- Community-developed projects do not get much special treatment in British planning
- Financial benefits to communities should not be 'material' planning decisions
- Developing any wind farm in rural Britain is difficult
- However, large-scale energy projects including wind farms *do* get special treatment: special, centralised, 'fast track' decisions; in Wales a supportive zoning policy

Financial support systems

- Non-fossil fuel obligation and Renewables Obligation Certificates tended to benefit major corporations that could deal with the risks and complexities
- Energy Market Reform and 'contracts for differences' may have the same effects
- Additional grant aid schemes only partly address the shortage of capital and expertise in communities, and are small in scale
- Will the Green Deal and Feed-in-Tariffs transform the scene for community renewables?

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a pen, with the text "OWNERSHIP STRUCTURES" overlaid in bold black letters. The background is a light, textured surface, possibly a piece of paper or fabric, with a diagonal crease or fold visible. The lighting is soft, highlighting the contours of the hand and the pen.

OWNERSHIP STRUCTURES

1. **Small-scale for individual profit**

- Slow to develop in the UK but becoming more popular because of the FIT
- Grant schemes have not resolved problems of limited availability of capital
- Grid connection can be a problem
- Planning problems can remain, not least dilemmas of 'cumulative impact'

2. Joint ownership ventures

- These look like they benefit both sides, but actually very rare in the UK
- Not popular with most commercial developers
- Communities have limited control?
- Positive example of Fintry Development Trust, Stirlingshire

3. Community benefits from corporate projects

- It has become the norm for developers of on-shore wind farms to provide community benefits at £1000 up to £6000/MW of install capacity per annum
- Overall flow of funds now equals/exceeds government grant schemes
- No legal obligation to provide, and encounters problems in planning process

Conclusions

- New momentum behind community renewables in the UK but still under-exploited
- Partly because momentum behind 'hard energy path' is undiminished
- Potential scope to tap joint ventures and community benefits, but these leave community renewables as by-product
- Governments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are doing innovative things, but perhaps big problem is failure seriously to challenge the structures of the 'hard energy path'

Further information

‘Delivering renewable energy under devolution’ is a two year research project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (RES-062-23-2526). The aim of the proposed study is to assess the impacts of devolution in the UK on the provision of renewable energy.

The research is conducted as a four-way partnership, involving the School of City and Regional Planning, Cardiff University (Dr Richard Cowell, Dr Fionnguala Sherry-Brennan), Queens University Belfast (Dr Geraint Ellis), Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen (Professor Peter A Strachan) and the University of Birmingham (Dr David Toke).

For more information see
<http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/cplan/research/renewableenergy/>