



A new toolkit has been developed to support rural communities with the development of renewable energy projects. Photo: Adobe Stock

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Renewables toolkit aims to help smooth the road to net zero

Economists and environmental scientists from Northumbria University have joined forces with regional leaders across the North East to co-design a renewable energy toolkit.

Working with local authorities, the [National Farmers' Union](#) (NFU), the [National Trust](#) and industry experts, academics from the University have developed a renewable energy toolkit which provides clear and accessible

guidance to those interested in developing local scale renewable energy projects in North East England.

Advice is tailored for use at a local level, prioritising individual farms or smallholdings, and takes into account the region's diverse energy needs, considering not only electricity generation, but also heat, energy efficiency, and energy storage.

It covers frequently asked questions on the logistics, finance and planning considerations relating to solar panels, onshore wind turbines, heat pumps, hydropower, and anaerobic digestion, among other projects. Building this kind of diversity in energy supply will be critical to the UK [achieving net zero by 2050](#).

Economist and Assistant Professor at the University's [Newcastle Business School](#), [Dr Dongna Zhang](#), co-authored the guidance with [Dr Andy Suggitt](#), an Assistant Professor in the Department of [Geography and Environmental Sciences](#), and Research Assistant, Natasha Johnson.

Dr Zhang explained: "There are lots of people looking to develop local-scale renewable energy solutions, but it isn't always obvious where to get the information from.

"We co-designed this toolkit with local experts with the ultimate aim of bridging that gap, helping individuals and communities to begin their renewable energy journey. This is an important piece of work which we hope will be of use in local efforts to achieve net zero."

The toolkit is the product of a series of online and in-person workshops at Northumbria University.

Natasha said: "We should remember that renewable energy projects can also be beneficial for local wildlife, and thereby qualify for incentives that target the biodiversity and climate crises simultaneously."

Heidi Mottram CBE is Co-chair of [Net Zero North East England](#), a new collaboration between local government, business, education, the public sector and civil society to drive a comprehensive regional approach to tackling the climate emergency. She said: "The challenge of developing local

scale renewable energy solutions can be daunting, however this toolkit is a welcome source of support and guidance.

“By making information accessible, the toolkit eases the path for all, fostering a collective effort towards a sustainable and energy efficient future.”

For further information, you can to access the toolkit [here](#).

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