Connecting Community Energy Factsheet

Community energy projects will have an important role to play in helping the UK achieve its net zero targets while also delivering significant social benefits.

We are committed to supporting the growth of community energy projects in our region and have produced a factsheet for community energy groups and stakeholders who may be seeking a connection to our network.

What is a Distribution Network Operator?

Northern Powergrid owns and operates the electricity distribution network that delivers power to more than 8 million people across the North East, Yorkshire and northern Lincolnshire.

We are one of six Distribution Network Operators (DNOs) in the UK, responsible for delivering a safe and secure supply of electricity to homes and businesses.

As a DNO, connecting people safely to the electricity network is one of the most important jobs we do. New connections enable new homes to be built, new businesses to start trading and new sources of renewable energy to start generating power.

For information on community energy visit our website:
northernpowergrid.com/community-energy

Where can I find information on connections?

For information on applying for a new connection, making changes to an existing connection or if you just want to find out more about the services we provide, you can visit:

northernpowergrid.com/get-connected

You will also find a useful guide prices section, detailing the typical costs and timescales for different types of connections which will help you plan and budget for your project.

For any additional questions, e-mail communityenergy@northernpowergrid.com

How do I go about connecting to the network?

If you are involved in a community energy project and are considering applying for a connection to our network, we would encourage you to speak to us straight away. We can help you understand where there is capacity to connect to our network and identify the most viable and cost-effective solutions. One of the best ways to do this is by booking an appointment at one of our monthly connections surgeries, for more information visit:

northernpowergrid.com/customer-events-and-surgeries

You need to apply to us for a new connection. You can complete the application yourself with help from Northern Powergrid or employ a specialist installer or consultant with knowledge of the network and our connections process.

For advice on completing a new application, you can contact our connections enquiry team on:

0800 011 3433

Mon - Fri: 8am - 8pm
Sat: 9am - 5pm

What information will I need when making a connections application?

You will need all of the following to make an application:

- Your contact details and site address
- A site layout plan showing where the connection is required
- The maximum capacity of the connection
- The type of connection you require (e.g. demand or generation)
- Any special equipment characteristics

Is there any help I can get before making an application?

If you are thinking about a new connection, our monthly surgeries are a great opportunity to talk to our experts about your project. Whether you want to explore your options before making an application or need upfront support or advice, we will put you in touch with the right person.

Our connections surgeries are held once a month and are currently being delivered digitally or via the telephone.

To book an appointment visit:

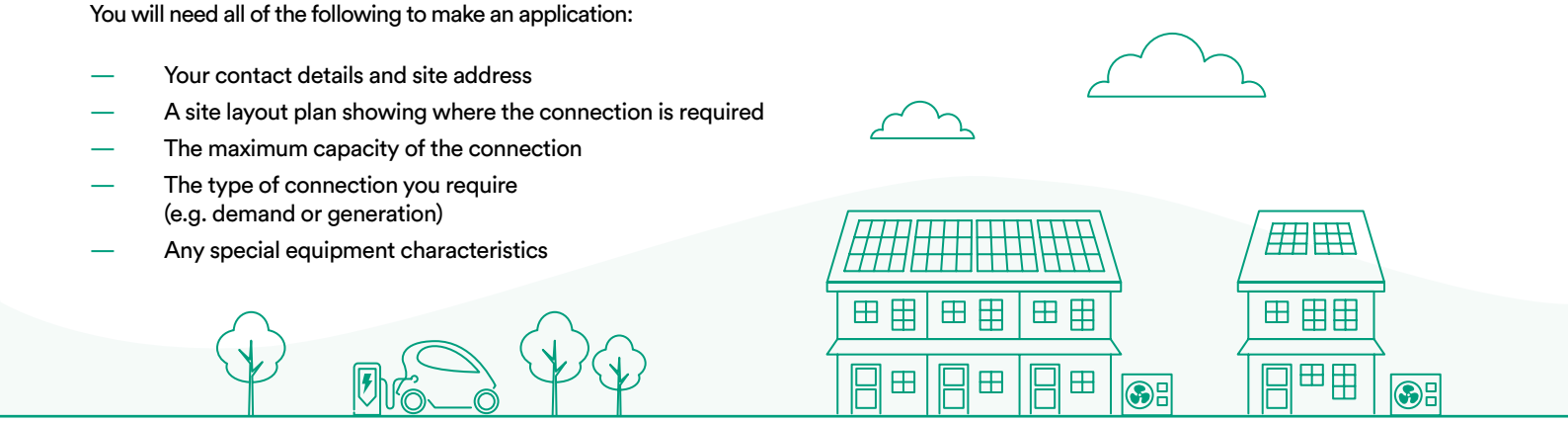
northernpowergrid.com/customer-events-and-surgeries

What's the process for getting a new connection?

- Apply for your connection
- Your DNO will provide a quotation
- You accept the quotation and arrange payment
- Your DNO or Independent Connections Provider (ICP) will notify you and complete the works
- A new Meter Point Administration Number (MPAN) is provided which is used by your energy supplier to fit a meter

You can apply for a new connection on our website:

northernpowergrid.com/connection-service



How will I know if there is capacity to connect in my area?

Our network availability heat maps can help you make more informed decisions about where to connect to our Extra High Voltage (EHV) and High Voltage (HV) network.

Our generation heat map shows where there is capacity to connect large-scale generation like solar or wind farms using a green, amber, red (yes, maybe, no) indicator. The demand heat map uses the same simple "traffic light" system to show where there is a capacity for large-scale developments.

Our heat maps are accompanied by downloadable datasheets that provide a wealth of additional network data for users who want to perform their own upfront assessments and feasibility studies.

To view our heat maps visit:

northernpowergrid.com/generation-availability-map

northernpowergrid.com/demand-availability-map

For new connections to our Low Voltage (LV) network, you can use AutoDesign. This online tool uses the same "traffic light" indicator system to help you identify the most cost-effective and viable connections solutions and get a free of charge budget estimate for the work. To find out more visit:

northernpowergrid.com/auto-design

The area I want to connect to is showing as red on your heat map, what are my options?

If the area in which you wish to make a connection is showing as red on our heat maps, this does not necessarily mean there is no capacity. Red indicators mean that connections in these areas will likely need additional reinforcement to make a connection possible.

If your area is showing as red, we recommend you talk to our design and commercial engineers when considering locations for new connections. The best way to do that is signing up for one of our monthly connections surgeries.

How long will the work take?

The guide prices section of our website provides an overview of the likely costs and timescales involved in delivering different types of connections projects and can give you an indication of how long the project will take.

You can also ask our experts for their advice about timescales before making an application at one of our monthly connections surgeries.

Once you accept a connection offer from us, you will be issued with a single point of contact for LV and EHV connections to guide you through the process from quotation to delivery and they will advise you on the expected timescales.

If your connection is at HV, you will have two single points of contact – one who will look after your quotation and one to handle the delivery of your project.

If I decide to go ahead with the connection, who carries out the work?

Northern Powergrid is not the only company that can provide a new connection to our network. You can compare our prices and levels of service with Independent Connections Providers (ICPs) who can deliver some, or all of the work.

There are elements of the work referred to as 'non-contestable' which must be carried out by the DNO but there are other elements of the work that can be carried out by either a DNO or an ICP known as 'contestable works'.

Your connection quotation will clearly set out the work that is contestable and non-contestable.

You have a choice as to whether you accept the quote for the contestable elements of the work from us or look elsewhere. In some cases, an ICP might be able to deliver the work more quickly or cheaply.

How do I find an ICP?

We have a register of ICPs who are accredited to carry out contestable works on our website at:

northernpowergrid.com/alternative-providers

How much does a connection cost?

Our website has a useful guide prices section which can help you understand the typical costs and timescales required to deliver different types of connections and help you plan and budget for your project. To view our guide prices visit:

northernpowergrid.com/guide-prices-and-timescales

What is the difference between a budget estimate and a firm quotation?

A budget estimate will provide you with an 'estimated' cost for your connection and is calculated by making assumptions based on similar work we have done in the past.

For a budget estimate you will only need to provide us with some general information on your proposed project.

Budget estimates are prospective and therefore cannot be accepted. If you're in a position to progress with your connection, you should apply for a firm quotation.

You can use our free online tool, AutoDesign, to get an indicative cost for your LV connection and generate a free of charge budget estimate. However, if you ask us to prepare an estimate, you will likely be charged a fee.

When you apply for a firm quotation, we will charge you a fee for the detailed design and assessment work required to provide you with a connections offer.

What happens if I accept the connection offer?

If you accept the quotation we provide then you are agreeing to proceed with the work and will need to pay for the cost of the connection.

How long is my quotation valid for?

Your quotation will be valid for 90 days from the date it is issued. If your quotation expires you may need to apply again, however we advise discussing this with your single point of contact which will be assigned to you once you have accepted your quotation.

Why do I have to pay a fee for my application?

In 2018, the UK Government introduced legislation to allow all DNOs to charge Connection Offer Expenses, also known as Assessment and Design or A&D fees. DNOs were allowed to charge these fees to help drive efficiencies in the overall connections process and ensure fairer allocation of costs.

At Northern Powergrid, we charge Connection Offer Expenses for all new budget estimates, feasibility studies and quotations we produce. We only recover the costs which were reasonably incurred when conducting the detailed design assessments required to complete the work.

We are happy to discuss your project before you making an application at one of our connections surgeries where we will be able to help you identify the most viable and cost-effective connections solutions. For a LV connection, you could also use our AutoDesign tool to generate a budget estimate free of charge.

To use AutoDesign visit:

northernpowergrid.com/auto-design

For more information on our Connection Offer Expenses and how they are applied visit:

northernpowergrid.com/connection-offer-expenses

Why do community energy projects have to pay for a connection?

Connecting people and businesses to the electricity network safely is one of the most important jobs we do as a DNO. In order to do this, there are costs involved.

We are not allowed to discriminate between different customer classes or different connected assets, therefore prioritising certain types of connections' customers or projects – including community energy projects – over others would constitute a breach of our licence conditions.

The electricity network development is funded through two sources of pass-through costs:

- Connection charges; and
- Customers' bills (also known as socialisation of costs). These costs are charged indirectly, via your energy supplier, and currently c. £85 of your average annual household energy bill goes towards maintaining and operating the electricity network.

The charges ensure connections are sufficient but not over-specified and reflect the cost of connecting in a specific area, which can vary depending on the local infrastructure. These costs are reviewed and approved by BEIS and Ofgem.

Is there funding available for Community organisations?

Community organisations across our region can apply for grants through our Community Partnering Fund.

The Community Partnering Fund is run by Northern Powergrid in partnership with the local gas distribution network operator, Northern Gas Networks.

Grants range from £1,000 to £10,000. Eligible projects need to be not-for-profit and demonstrate significant societal benefit. If your application is successful, your grant could be used to help kick-start and deliver community energy projects.

Over the past few years, the Community Partnering Fund has supported a diverse range of projects and organisations, from community radio stations to foodbanks and renewable energy projects.

More local funding opportunities are offered through other organisations, including the Rural Community Energy Fund. For more information email:

communityenergy@northernpowergrid.com

What if the cost of the connection is prohibitive?

Firstly, we would advise that you talk to your DNO, who may be able to help you identify a more cost-effective solution.

You could also ask whether they can offer you a flexible arrangement which could reduce the cost of your connection.

You could explore whether funding is available and talk to your local support network (Community Energy England/Scotland/Wales, your BEIS Local Energy Hub) to find out if they are aware of any funding or trial opportunities.

What other support is available for Community Energy projects?

We hold regular engagement and networking sessions for community energy stakeholders. For information on upcoming events, please visit:

northernpowergrid.com/community-energy

We have established a Community Energy Panel to ensure the views of these stakeholders are heard and they can inform and challenge our future plans and priorities.

For upfront technical advice and support, you can book an appointment with one of our engineers at our monthly connections surgeries.

We also provide a range of online tools and resources that can help you understand the viability of a project. These include guide prices, budget calculators, and AutoDesign, a new tool, which can help you to identify the most viable and cost-effective locations to connect to our network.

Heat pumps and electric vehicle charging is going to create unpredictable new demand, how is Northern Powergrid planning for this?

Over the last ten years, we have seen a reduction of the electricity demand from our network. In the future, we expect it increase significantly, as electricity is used to power transport and heating. We are putting a variety of measures in place to help prepare for this – such as load monitoring equipment on our substations and improving our approach to network planning.

To manage the uncertainty around how energy demands could change in the future, we use a scenario-based approach. This includes modelling heat pump and EV uptake trends, among others.

Our Distribution Future Energy Scenarios (DFES) explore a set of possible future pathways and scenarios. While presenting a local view, our DFES use a common language (including pathway names and core assumptions) with the other DNOs and the National Grid ESO, who produces future scenarios for the whole of the UK.

We publish this information as open datasets, a spatial visualisation tool, graphs, and an overview document. We are committed to developing and improving this approach, and refreshing our DFES every year.

More information can be found at:

odileeds.org/projects/northernpowergrid/dfes