


Why grassroots energy partnerships are essential for a net zero future

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The public sector must collaborate with the private sector to achieve net zero goals. It's crucial for the public sector to confidently embrace working with players like SSE Energy Solutions, Neil Kirkby, Managing Director of Enterprise, writes

In the race towards a sustainable future, the energy sector stands at a critical juncture. As local and combined authorities across the UK work tirelessly towards common decarbonisation goals, the complexity of the journey ahead becomes increasingly apparent.

The urgency of climate action has catalysed a change in thinking in how we approach energy infrastructure and services. Local and combined authorities, often with challenging net zero targets, may find themselves at the intersection of policy ambition and practical implementation. It is here that the value of strategic energy partnerships becomes evident, offering a bridge between public sector vision and private sector expertise.

The public sector must collaborate long-term with the private sector to achieve net zero goals, whether it's investors like SSE, community projects, or SMEs.

Joining forces for a common cause: Net Zero

Plenty of examples point to such successful collaborations where solutions are tailored to local objectives. In Newcastle, a Memorandum of Understanding with the City Council aims to accelerate the delivery of the city's Net Zero Action Plan. This partnership not only focuses on decarbonisation but also on fostering a green skills workforce.

Similarly, an agreement with the West Yorkshire Combined Authority positions SSE as one of four major private sector firms tasked with delivering net zero at pace and scale, advising on targeted investments in green skills and the decarbonisation of the region. Finally, SSE has also made significant inroads in the education sector, as highlighted by our partnership with the University of Warwick to find geothermal reserves on campus.

These are just a few examples of a collaborative approach being the most logical path forward, bringing different stakeholders together as key facilitators in the public sector's pursuit of sustainability.

Energy partnerships: More than a piece of paper

These partnerships extend far beyond agreements on paper. They represent a commitment to shared goals and mutual benefits. For instance, SSE's collaboration with Northumberland Estates in the North of England focuses on developing large-scale solar farms, battery energy storage systems, and district heat networks. This joint development agreement advances the region's net zero ambitions and aligns with the carbon neutrality goals of Northumberland, Newcastle, and North Tyneside Councils.

Recognising that true partnership value lies in delivery rather than mere agreements, SSE Energy Solutions is demonstrating its genuine commitment by opening regional hubs to support its regional ambitions. This not only reinforces SSE's investment in these areas but also ensures that partnerships translate into tangible, on-the-ground progress.

Social values are the bedrock of meaningful energy partnerships

What further sets these partnerships apart is their whole systems thinking approach to sustainability. They go beyond the technical aspects of energy infrastructure to address the broader implications of the energy transition. SSE's Social Value strategy focuses on creating sustainable cities and communities by fostering strong regional relationships, challenging inequality through inclusive recruitment, and inspiring low-carbon career education.

The impact of these partnerships is tangible and far-reaching. In the West Midlands, SSE's collaboration with the Combined Authority is set to deliver a range of green energy projects, including one of the UK's first HGV electric vehicle charging hubs. These projects support a fair and just transition, positively contributing to the region's net zero targets while also driving economic growth.

SSE are committed to one of the largest investment programmes the UK has ever seen; more than £20bn to be invested right here in the UK this decade. But unlocking this investment will need the right partnership between industry and local and regional government. By aligning public sector goals with private sector capabilities, resources and investment, these partnerships are accelerating the deployment of innovative technologies and sustainable solutions.

A new energy era: How do we get there?

The journey towards a sustainable future has its challenges. Decarbonisation's complexity requires a delicate balance of stakeholder interests, innovative technologies, and policy frameworks. Strategic energy partnerships must navigate these complexities while remaining adaptable to evolving needs and opportunities.

Looking ahead, the role of partnerships in shaping the future of energy is growing in significance. As the urgency for climate action intensifies, the need for collaborative approaches that can deliver rapid, scalable solutions becomes more pressing. Partnerships, like those championed by SSE Energy Solutions, offer a blueprint for how the public and private sectors can work together to deliver meaningful long-term change.

As we stand on the precipice of a new energy era, the power of partnerships cannot be overstated.

For local and combined authorities looking to accelerate their journey to net zero, embracing partnerships with the private sector is a crucial first step. As we and our partners have demonstrated, when public vision aligns with private innovation, the path to a sustainable future becomes a tangible reality.

Reference

1. <https://www.sse.com/news-and-views/2023/05/sse-announces-plans-to-invest-up-to-40bn-in-low-carbon-energy-infrastructure/>

Find out more about [Distributed Energy infrastructure](#) and [SSE Energy Solution's approach](#) to strategic energy partnerships.

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