

Transition Town Totnes - legal structure case study

[Transition Town Totnes](#) (TTT) was the original Transition Town which sought to find local solutions towards making the transition from the existing dependence on fossil fuels to a future that also meets the challenge of climate change and builds in resilience to external shocks. TTT was formed in September 2006 as a company limited by guarantee and became a registered charity in 2010 with around £100,000 of annual turnover in recent years.

TTT supports a wide range of community based activity including local food production, energy, transport, housing, education and the arts to name a few. TTT has an office in the centre of Totnes, shared with the Transition Network which supports the wider Transition movement, and a limited number of paid staff with volunteers usually leading individual projects. Funding comes from a variety of sources including donations by major institutions such as the Ashden and Esmee Fairbairn Trusts as well through referral fees for particular contracts and also traditional fund raising and donations.



The Transition Town Totnes organisational diagram in 2009

In the specific area of renewable energy, TTT won a £625,000 grant from DECC under their Low Carbon Communities Challenge (LCCC) in late 2009 for the Transition Streets project. Through 2010 – 2011 this supported a number of street level groups of residents to run through an energy awareness/saving programme. Subject to survey and availability of the appropriate funding, each participating household was then eligible for a grant of £2,500 towards a PV installation (£3,500 for low income households who were also able to get Wessex Home Improvement low interest loans via

South Hams District Council). A total of 141 households had PV arrays, the cost also having already been reduced by TTT negotiating a bulk buy rate with the local installer. The Feed in Tariff (FiT) payments go direct to the householder. LCCC also funded the main part of a 14 kW PV installation on the Civic centre owned by Totnes Town Council, under an agreement that 40% of FiT revenue would go to TTT for energy efficiency projects. The remaining recycled Transition Streets LCCC funds are earmarked towards the costs of a suitable long term renewable project. It is recognised that the current TTT structure may only take this through the initial stages of a Rural Community Energy Fund application and a subordinate IPS BenCom might be appropriate if and when this venture gets to the stage of running a share issue.

More recently TTT loaned some of the recycled funds from LCCC to South Devon Rural Housing Association to facilitate PV installation to some of their homes using a very simple loan agreement. The Housing Association owns the systems and receives the FiT, while their tenants get the benefit of the free electricity and TTT gets a good rate of return on its investment.

Another example of how TTT can operate is through the DECC arrangements under the Renewable Heat Premium Payment Communities scheme to encourage uptake of Renewable Heat installations in areas of fuel poverty or Hard to Heat. This involved negotiating bulk buy discounts from local firms while facilitating access to enhanced grants for the individual households and also earning TTT a referral fee. Finally, TTT held a competitive tender across a number of local PV installers and now refers any householder enquiries to the winning firm, Totnes Solar, who install at a discounted rate, offer a small cashback to the householder and pay a referral fee to TTT.



Totnes Civic Hall with TTT funded PV array

Other TTT originated ventures have taken different legal structures. Totnes Renewable Energy Society (TRESOC) which aims to operate at much higher scales of renewable generation, established itself as a completely independent IPS BenCom early in its history.

The TTT/Totnes Development Trust Atmos project formed the Totnes Community Development Society as an IPS BenCom in 2013 after 5 years of involvement to secure the former Dairy Crest site for development as a community owned business centre.

Transition Homes Community Land Trust started life as a TTT housing project and is now incorporated as a company limited by guarantee with charitable aims.



Surveying a Transition Streets property for shading before installing solar PV