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MORE RESPONSES NEEDED IF **“POWER TO THE PEOPLE” TRUST** **IS TO BECOME A REALITY**

RESIDENTS from across Cumbria have come out strongly in support of a Trust to help establish community-owned renewable energy projects – but more responses are needed if it is to become a reality.

As the ‘Cumbria Community Energy Trust’ consultation enters its final month, almost 200 residents have completed the online questionnaire. Of these, 89 per cent said they would support the creation of the Trust – which would help communities invest in projects spanning wind, hydro, biomass, solar and geothermal technologies; 84 per cent said they would consider investing between £500 and £2,500 in community-owned projects; and 74 per cent would be willing to invest if annual dividends were between 2.5 per cent and 5 per cent.

However, organisations leading the first phase of this consultation have said more responses are needed if the Trust is to take off. Cumbria Vision, Cumbria County Council and the Lake District National Park Authority have all stressed the creation of the Trust and how it might function will be influenced by the response to the questionnaire.

Residents have until Wednesday, March 31 to complete the questionnaire, which is available to download under the *Renewable Energy* section at www.cumbriavision.co.uk.

The rationale for creating a ‘Cumbria Community Energy Trust’ is to ensure Cumbrians benefit more directly from renewable energy developments, either individually through small-scale investment or as a whole community. By investing in these projects residents would not only control their own source of “clean” energy but also benefit by selling any surplus back to the National Grid. The model under consideration includes a proposal to divert a share of the profits into local community projects and helping other communities develop their own renewable energy schemes.

A detailed plan of how the Trust would operate will be developed if there is enough support from the public. However, the questionnaire includes a comments section for respondents to expand on their answers and to suggest how they think the Trust should operate.

Simon Sjenitzer, Strategy Director at economic development agency Cumbria Vision, said: “This initiative seeks to give power to the people, therefore it is vitally important residents take this opportunity to help shape something which could benefit

them and thousands of other Cumbrians. So far the responses have been hugely encouraging but we need many more to justify its creation. Therefore we would urge as many people as possible to complete the questionnaire and put forward their ideas and thoughts so we can build a Trust around the needs of communities.”

Phil Davies, Climate Change Officer at Cumbria County Council, said: “There are various examples of community-owned renewable energy projects being developed across Cumbria. While it is encouraging to see like-minded people coming together to create their own schemes, we are aware many more are interested in doing so but are somewhat daunted by the amount of time and effort it entails or how much capital is needed up front. Others simply want to invest their savings in projects that are locally-owned and benefit Cumbrians. The Trust aims to make it easier for communities to become involved in renewable energy projects by offering assistance and by directing small investors to financially viable community renewable energy projects. This way the benefits are kept in Cumbria and hopefully we can all gain.”

Bob Cartwright, Director of the Lake District National Park Authority, added: “This way the advantages are kept in Cumbria and hopefully we can all benefit. I urge everyone to say what they think by completing the questionnaire so we can build a Trust around the needs of communities.”

It is anticipated that the initial level of investment in projects supported by the Trust would be restricted to a minimum of £500 and a maximum of £2,500 per resident – a successful model already proved by Energy4All’s 1996 Baywind project in Ulverston. Investors will be made aware of the differing returns from renewable sources, which range from one per cent to 15 per cent per annum. To keep administrative and legal costs to a minimum and to harness skills and experience in the renewable energy field, discussions are underway to see if an existing Cumbrian social enterprise, charity or local authority is willing to “host” the Trust.

Ends

NOTES TO EDITORS

1: For further information contact Cumbria Vision PR and Communications Manager Luke Diccico on 07799035390 or email luke.diccico@cumbriavision.co.uk.

2: Cumbria Vision is the organisation charged with leading the economic regeneration of Cumbria and is responsible for identifying clear priorities for investment; bringing together skills and higher paid jobs; promoting private sector investment and growth. www.cumbriavision.co.uk

3: Cumbria Vision is supported by the Northwest Regional Development Agency (NWDA), which leads the economic development and regeneration of England's Northwest and is responsible for: Supporting business growth and encouraging investment; Matching skills provision to employer needs; Creating the conditions for economic growth; Connecting the region through effective transport and communication infrastructure; Promoting the region’s outstanding quality of life. www.nwda.co.uk

4: Cumbria County Council is a founding partner of and the accountable body for Cumbria Vision. www.cumbria.gov.uk

5. Cumbria Strategic Partnership’s Climate Change Action Plan is available from the climate change pages of www.cumbriastrategicpartnership.org.uk