

Community Spaces Decarbonisation Programme

*Investment, Impact & Future Opportunity
Scottish Borders 2024-2026*

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Borders Community Action (BCA), working alongside the Four Federations of Village Halls and in partnership with Scottish Borders Council, has delivered a significant programme of decarbonisation and retrofit investment supporting village halls and community spaces across the Scottish Borders.

The programme has focused on improving energy efficiency, reducing revenue energy costs and strengthening the long-term sustainability of volunteer-led community buildings that play a vital role within rural communities.

Through a combination of energy audits, practical support and targeted capital investment, community organisations have been able to progress projects including insulation upgrades, solar PV systems, battery storage, heating improvements, ventilation, lighting upgrades and fabric improvements.

The programme has demonstrated that relatively modest investment can deliver substantial environmental, financial and social benefit. Alongside reducing carbon emissions and energy use, projects have improved comfort, increased community use of halls, strengthened volunteer confidence and helped future-proof essential rural infrastructure.

Importantly, the work has also established strong momentum for future decarbonisation activity across the Scottish Borders and created a growing pipeline of community organisations seeking further support and investment.

This programme is a follow up of the successful pilot project delivered in 2024-25 where a total of £242,590 supported 14 village halls retrofit projects and 35 energy audits were developed which saw the beginning of the pipeline creation.

PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

- 58 funded Energy Audits completed
- 60 Community Spaces benefited
- Monies distributed from UK Government £188,685 and Scottish Borders Council £53,856 for retrofit in 2024/25
- Money distributed from Scottish Borders Council £497,137 for decarbonisation in 2025/26
- 375 Improvement measures recommended by energy audits and 73 delivered
- £193,974.57 matching fund unlocked as a result of this programme
- Investment delivered across village halls and community spaces across the geography of the Scottish Borders
- Retrofit measures included insulation, solar PV, heat pumps, LED lighting, doors, windows and heating controls
- Strong evidence of reduced heat loss, improved comfort, increased sustainability and lower energy bills
- Further demand identified across the region's village halls and community spaces

- Pipeline of projects for future retrofit items following energy audits already positioned to progress immediately when investment arrives
- The remaining budget for 2025/26 is now allocated to Live Borders Community Centres
- The village halls 'Retrofit Roadmap' was co-designed and produced jointly by BCA and village hall committees following technical

advice and input from the Net Zero Team at SOSE.

- The 'Community Hall Retrofit Playbook' has now been co-developed with SOSE bringing together everything learned and shared across the South of Scotland region, a resource halls can use when planning future projects. Community hall retrofit playbook launched to support low carbon community spaces | Borders Community Action

SUMMARY OF CHALLENGES FACING COMMUNITY SPACES:

- Rising energy and operational costs
- Ageing buildings requiring significant investment
- Increasing governance and compliance demands
- Volunteer recruitment and succession challenges
- Limited technical knowledge around retrofit and decarbonisation
- Restricted access to flexible funding opportunities

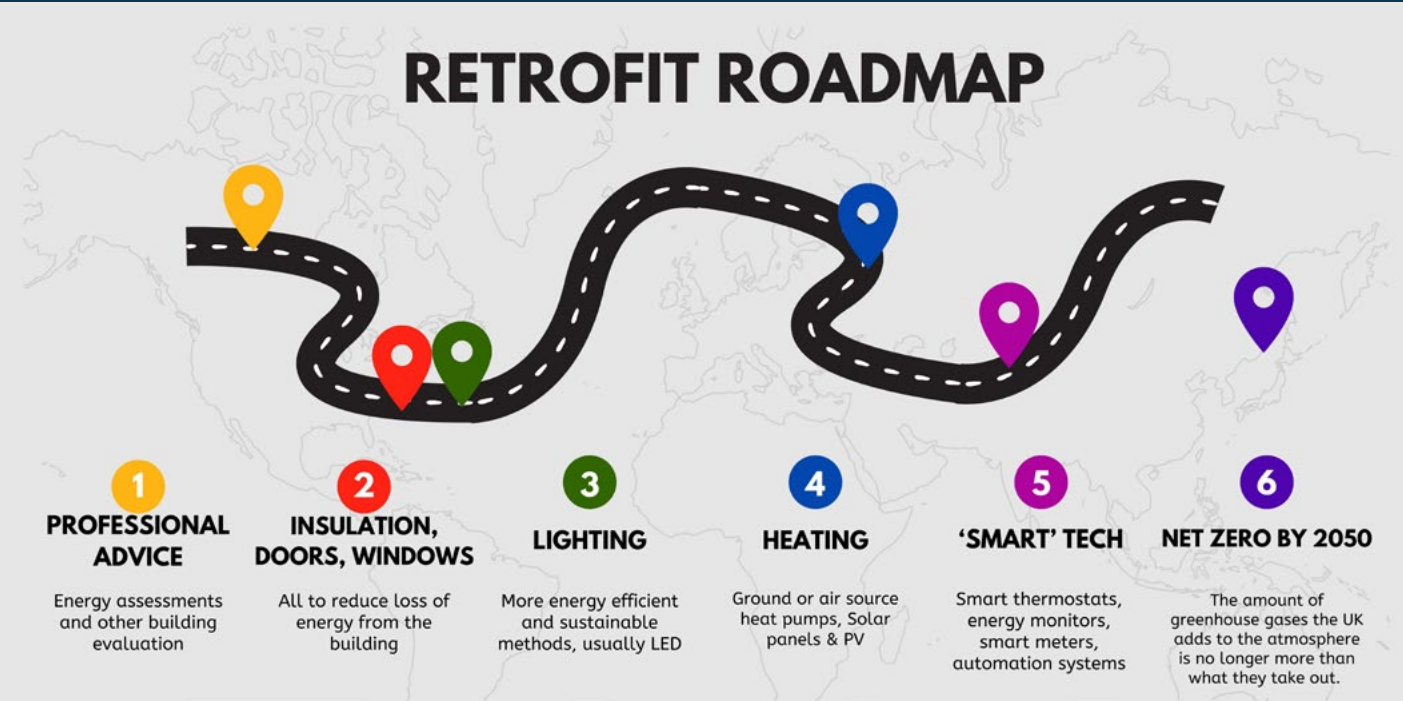


PROGRAMME DELIVERY & RETROFIT ACTIVITY

The 2025–26 decarbonisation programme adopted a phased and practical delivery model designed to support volunteer-led organisations through each stage of the improvement journey.

building performance, identify priority interventions and develop practical long-term improvement plans. This approach helped organisations make informed decisions and build confidence before progressing capital works.

The programme began with funded energy audits, enabling halls to better understand



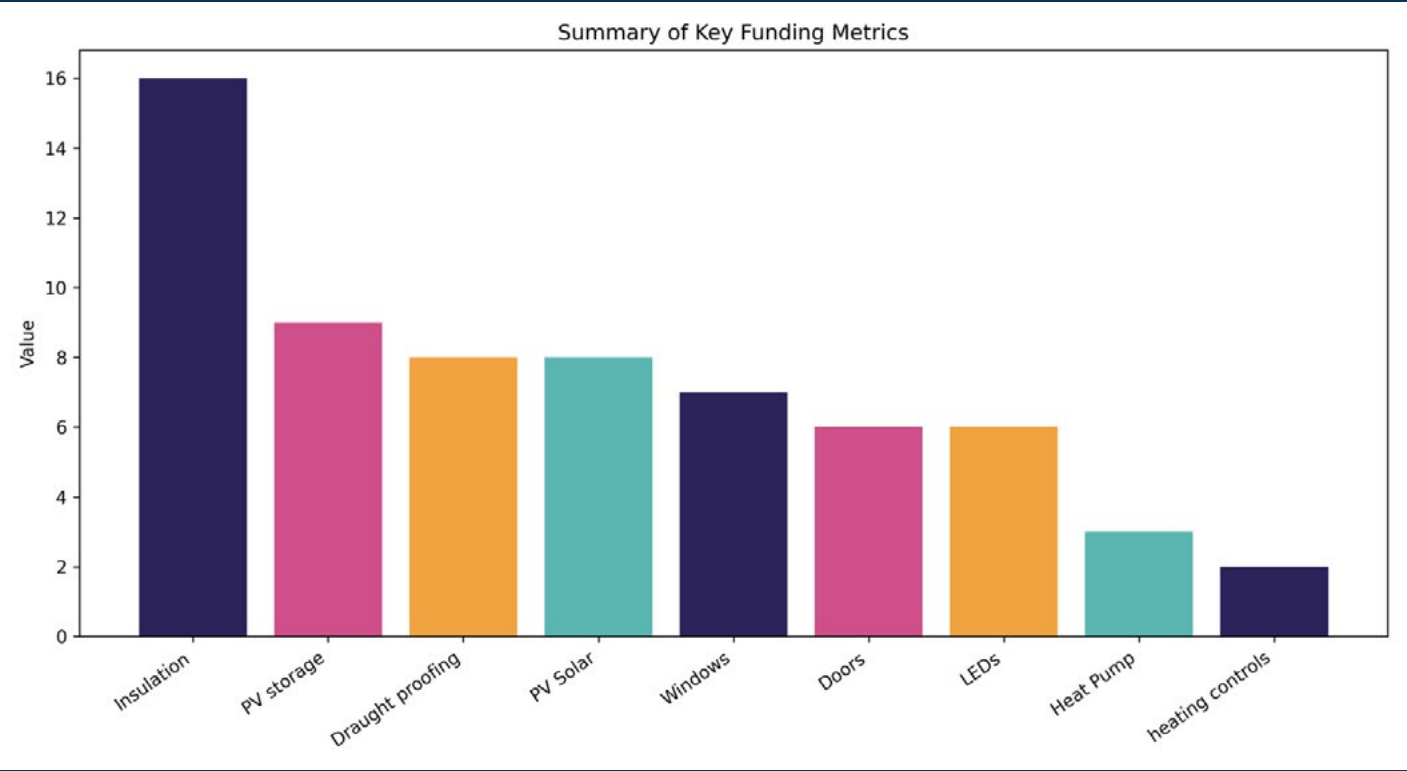
The 'Retrofit Roadmap' was developed by BCA using local knowledge, technical know how from SOSE and working alongside village hall committees. The idea was to break-down the process into bite-sized achievable projects so it didn't feel like an enormous unachievable endeavour. Furthermore, a priority for the investment was the spreading of funding across as many halls as possible to start the journey and to think about it as progressive steps. BCA worked with SOSE to ensure the order of delivery made technical sense (e.g. invest in insulating the building first and then consider improvements to

the heating system; evidence behind the sequencing).

As a development of the Retrofit Roadmap, SOSE and BCA have now published the 'Community Halls Retrofit Playbook' – a complete guide to the retrofit journey.

Retrofit activity delivered through the programme included:

- Loft, wall and floor insulation
- LED lighting improvements
- Solar PV and battery storage
- Ventilation improvements
- Heating upgrades and heating controls
- Doors, windows and fabric improvements



A number of halls are also continuing their decarbonisation journey following completion of energy audits. This demonstrates ongoing delivery of energy audits alongside the strong

COMMUNITY IMPACT & SUCCESS STORIES

While the programme has delivered measurable environmental outcomes, its most immediate and visible impact has been felt within communities themselves. Across the Scottish Borders, village halls are now warmer, more welcoming, better off and more sustainable spaces that are better equipped to continue serving local residents into the future. Improved thermal efficiency and upgraded heating systems have enabled halls to remain active during winter months,

future pipeline of projects across the region, showing there is strong demand for further investment.

increased community participation, reduced financial pressure on volunteer-led committees and strengthened confidence around long-term sustainability planning.

Blainslie Hall reported that insulation improvements transformed the comfort of the building during colder months. Previously, the hall struggled to retain heat due to poor insulation and high ceilings, making winter use difficult and expensive. Following the retrofit work, the hall now retains heat

far more effectively and has become a more welcoming and usable space for local residents. Community activities such as yoga classes can now continue throughout winter, helping maintain social connection and improving the long-term sustainability of the hall through increased bookings and usage.



Darnick Village Hall described the insulation project as a key milestone within a wider decarbonisation journey. Ceiling and floor insulation works significantly reduced heat loss and improved comfort for users while also creating the foundation for future low-carbon heating improvements. The committee highlighted how the programme enabled them to move strategically through phases of retrofit work rather than attempting piecemeal improvements. The project also praised BCA's support and pragmatic approach to recognising ongoing limitations of commissioning specialist work in rural areas.



Foulden Village Hall used funding support to progress a substantial solar PV and battery storage project following recommendations identified through an energy audit. The committee estimated that the project could reduce electricity costs by approximately £1,000 per year,



helping stabilise hall finances and maintain affordable hire charges for community users. The project has also generated visible community interest, with local residents becoming more aware of renewable technologies and several households now considering solar installations themselves. This demonstrates how community buildings can act as visible and pioneering local examples of practical climate action.

At **Gavinton Fogo & Polwarth Village Hall**, the programme supported the installation of energy efficient heating systems, remote heating controls, solar and battery storage, and automatic lighting improvements. Volunteers are now able to manage heating remotely, reducing unnecessary energy consumption while ensuring the hall remains comfortable for users. The committee described the programme as both practical and motivating, helping strengthen collaboration within the organisation and encouraging wider planning around future solar and battery storage projects. The improvements have also reduced pressure on volunteers who previously needed to physically attend the building to manage heating systems late in the evening.



Lindean Village Hall completed external cladding and insulation improvements which significantly improved heat retention within the building. The hall had previously lost large amounts of heat through uninsulated external walls, creating higher running costs and reduced comfort for users, noting that it will make it more attractive for the local community to use. The completed project has now created a noticeably warmer and more



comfortable environment for hall users while reducing long-term energy costs. The committee highlighted that the work formed the final phase of a broader programme of environmental improvements including solar panels, battery storage, radiant heating and loft insulation.

Newstead Village Hall used the funding from BCA's retrofit and decarbonisation programmes to install roof insulation and replace ageing external doors with secure modern double-glazed units. Hall users have commented positively on the noticeable improvement in warmth and comfort, particularly during colder weather. The improvements have also contributed to increased hall bookings and strengthened the role of the hall as an active community hub hosting coffee afternoons, Pilates, dance classes, film clubs, tutoring sessions, community events and temporary accommodation for a local toddler group while another hall underwent renovation work.



Across all projects, a number of common themes have consistently emerged:

- Improved comfort and warmth for community users
- Increased use of halls during winter months
- Reduced operational and energy costs
- Greater confidence among volunteer-led committees
- Increased awareness of energy efficiency and sustainability
- Improved long-term financial resilience

- Stronger collaboration between community organisations
- Creation of future-ready community assets

The success stories demonstrate that investment in village halls and community spaces creates practical, measurable outcomes that directly improve the quality, sustainability and resilience of rural community life. These projects provide strong evidence that community-led decarbonisation investment delivers substantial value both environmentally and socially while helping ensure that local facilities remain viable and active for future generations.

WIDER STRATEGIC IMPACT

The programme has generated wider strategic benefits beyond the physical improvements delivered within individual buildings.

The work has strengthened local confidence around decarbonisation activity and increased awareness of energy efficiency measures within communities. In several cases, village hall projects have encouraged wider community interest in renewable technologies and sustainability measures and their application to private homes and businesses.

Volunteer-led committees have also gained practical experience in funding applications, procurement, project delivery and long-term planning. The reduced burden on volunteers to operate heating systems that can now be done remotely means a stronger ability to attract volunteers for succession planning. This increased organisational confidence is helping strengthen the resilience and sustainability of community organisations across the region.

SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIP WORKING

A key strength of the programme has been the collaborative approach taken by Borders Community Action, bringing together community organisations, local government,

funders and local contractors to maximise investment and deliver practical outcomes for community spaces across the Scottish Borders.

THE FOUR FEDERATIONS OF VILLAGE HALLS

Worked in partnership with BCA to identify local priorities, engage village halls and support a dedicated development post. The Federations acted as a trusted link between local volunteer management committees and the programme, ensuring support was shaped by the needs of community organisations.

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL

Provided the capital investment into the Scottish Borders Community Spaces Decarbonisation Fund, funded through the Community Regeneration Partnership (CRP), a UK Government regeneration programme delivered through Scottish Borders Council. The Council allocated £650,000 from the programme to support decarbonisation of community spaces helping improve the energy efficiency, sustainability and long-term viability of community buildings across the region.

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT'S COMMUNITY AND RENEWABLE ENERGY SCHEME (CARES), DELIVERED BY LOCAL ENERGY SCOTLAND

Worked alongside BCA to maximise investment by combining CARES funding with the additional funding sources. BCA was able to provide support for eligible measures that complemented CARES funding, including insulation and building fabric improvements identified through energy audits following the Retrofit Roadmap, creating more comprehensive and appropriately staged decarbonisation projects.

LIVE BORDERS

Worked with BCA to encourage and support community centres to engage with the energy audit programme, helping extend the reach of the project beyond village halls and ensuring a wider range of community facilities benefited.

SOUTH OF SCOTLAND ENTERPRISE

Worked collaboratively with BCA to provide specialist technical expertise, supporting the design of the Retrofit Roadmap and associated Community Hall Retrofit Playbook. This ensured community organisations received practical, evidence-based guidance to inform future investment decisions.

LOCAL CONTRACTORS

Local trades contractors brought valuable knowledge of rural communities and the practical realities of delivering retrofit projects across a large geographical area. BCA coordinated contractor engagement, needed because there is a lack of available contractors here in the Scottish Borders making the need for up to 3 or more quotes in some cases impossible. BCA also helped managed delivery pipelines and co-ordinated match available capacity with project demand, ensuring works could be completed within challenging funding timescales.

UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND (UKSPF)

Working with Scottish Borders Council, UKSPF investment enabled significant additional work that complemented the wider programme, demonstrating how coordinated partnership working can attract and maximise external investment for rural community assets.

This collaborative approach ensured that no single organisation was responsible for delivering the programme in isolation. By combining community knowledge, public sector investment, technical expertise and

local delivery capacity, the programme achieved outcomes that would not have been possible through individual organisations working alone.



PROGRAMME PIPELINE & CURRENT FUTURE RETROFIT DEMAND

Alongside completed projects, the programme has also established a substantial pipeline of future retrofit and decarbonisation activity across the Scottish Borders.

Analysis of projects progressing through the programme demonstrates that many community organisations are now actively planning additional improvements following completion of energy audits and initial retrofit phases. This reflects growing confidence among volunteer-led committees and increasing awareness of the long-term environmental and financial benefits associated with energy efficiency investment.

The current project pipeline highlights significant future demand for further capital investment and technical support across the region. Planned projects waiting for further investment include a wide range of decarbonisation measures designed to improve thermal performance, reduce operational costs and strengthen long-term sustainability.

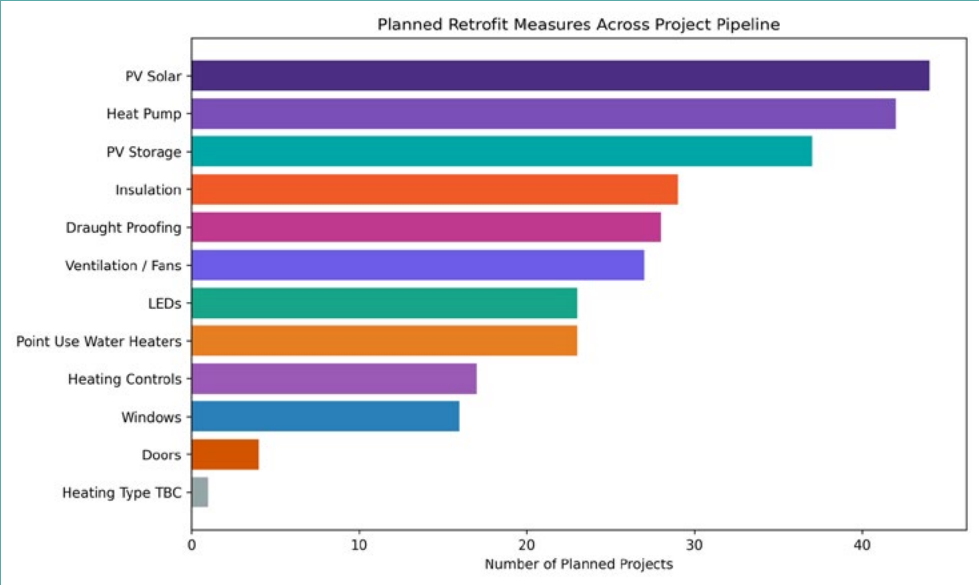
The pipeline demonstrates that community organisations are no longer approaching retrofit work as isolated individual projects. Instead, many halls are now progressing phased decarbonisation strategies focused on fabric-first improvements, renewable technologies and long-term operational resilience.

Key measures identified within projects progressing toward delivery include:

- Solar PV systems and battery storage
- Loft, wall and floor insulation
- Sustainable heating systems
- Heating controls and energy management systems
- LED lighting upgrades
- Ventilation improvements
- Doors, glazing and fabric upgrades
- Renewable energy integration



Current details
are as follows:



Analysis of the programme data identified solar PV as the most frequently planned retrofit measure within projects still progressing through development. This demonstrates increasing confidence among community organisations around renewable energy technologies and longer-term approaches to reducing electricity costs.

The programme pipeline also highlights the importance of continued strategic investment support and funding coordination. Many volunteer-led organisations require ongoing assistance to navigate procurement, technical specifications, planning requirements, funding applications and phased project delivery. BCA has been praised for its competence in supporting the programme.

The growing number of projects progressing toward delivery provides strong evidence that the programme has successfully stimulated long-term behavioural and organisational change across the community sector rather than simply supporting one-off improvements.

In addition to village halls, there is also increasing demand emerging from larger town-based community spaces,

development trusts and volunteer-managed community centres throughout the Scottish Borders. These organisations are increasingly seeking support around energy efficiency, sustainability planning and decarbonisation activity in response to rising operational costs and ageing infrastructure.

This growing pipeline of future activity demonstrates both the scale of opportunity and the importance of maintaining dedicated support capacity to help communities progress practical climate action and long-term sustainability planning.

Indicative Future Demand Areas

- Increasing demand for solar PV and battery storage projects
- Growing interest in low-carbon and electric heating systems
- Additional insulation and fabric improvement requirements
- Increasing need for technical advice and procurement support
- Demand for phased retrofit planning and energy management

- Ongoing requirement for volunteer support and organisational development
- Expansion of demand beyond rural village halls into wider community spaces and town-based facilities

THE CASE FOR CONTINUED INVESTMENT

Borders Community Action is seeking investment to establish a dedicated Village Halls and Community Spaces Officer role to build on the success and momentum created through the current programme.

The proposed role would support approximately 96 village halls alongside a wider network of community spaces across towns throughout the Scottish Borders. The post would provide practical guidance, project development support and strategic coordination to help organisations progress sustainability and decarbonisation activity.

The role would support:

- Decarbonisation planning and retrofit development

- Access to funding opportunities
- Governance and organisational development
- Networking and peer learning
- Volunteer support and capacity building
- Access to technical advice and specialist support
- Long-term resilience planning

The proposed investment recognises that volunteer-led organisations often require sustained practical support to progress complex projects and maintain long-term momentum. Rather than delivering services directly, the programme would strengthen local leadership, build organisational confidence and support communities to sustain and develop essential infrastructure for the future.



CONCLUSION

The Village Halls and Community Spaces Decarbonisation Programme has demonstrated the significant value of targeted investment in rural community infrastructure.

The programme has delivered measurable environmental benefits while also strengthening community resilience, supporting volunteers, improving comfort and helping sustain essential local facilities. Importantly, the work has created momentum for further action. Energy audits, completed retrofit projects and increased community engagement have established a strong pipeline of future improvement activities across the Scottish Borders.

Relatively modest investment has generated substantial benefit for communities, demonstrating that village halls and community spaces are not simply buildings, but vital social infrastructure supporting community wellbeing, resilience and sustainability.

The journey to net zero for community buildings cannot realistically be achieved within a single 12-month funding cycle. Decarbonisation is a long-term process that requires organisations to move through a series of stages, including building awareness, undertaking energy audits, developing improvement plans, securing technical advice, identifying funding opportunities, procuring contractors and ultimately delivering capital improvements. For volunteer-led community organisations,

each of these stages can take considerable time and often depends on the availability and capacity of local volunteers. Short-term funding can support individual projects, but it rarely provides the continuity needed to develop a pipeline of investment-ready projects or to support organisations through the full process from planning to delivery.

Sustainable, long-term investment enables trusted relationships to be built with community organisations, allows learning and expertise to be retained locally, and provides the stability required to coordinate capital investment and local trades contractors over time. Furthermore, the local economy benefits from more sustained demand for green skills jobs. This approach not only delivers better value for money but also increases the likelihood that community buildings will achieve meaningful and lasting reductions in energy costs and carbon emissions while remaining viable community assets for future generations.

We call for long term investment of both capital funds for decarbonisation works, strategic support through a resource to support the sector, as well as revenue investment for community capacity building which will help ensure that village halls and community spaces across the Scottish Borders remain sustainable, future-ready assets serving communities for generations to come.



With thanks to our funders:



**Funded by
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Borders Third Sector Interface Ltd, trading as Borders Community Action.

Company No. SC758752. Scottish Charity No. SC052612

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