

Valley Renewables Group Strategy 2019-22



Craigengelt Wind Farm

Valley renewables group



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Introduction

Valley Renewables Group (VRG) has consistently taken a strategic approach to managing and delivering community windfarm benefit by producing and working to the 2010 -2014 and 2015-18 Strategic Plans. Continuing with this approach, the VRG Board has now met to consider and re-assess the current priorities and the future strategic direction for VRG, ensuring that the organisation continues to address the challenges and opportunities faced by the local community.

As a result of our research and discussions, we have developed a Strategic Plan for 2019-22. This lays out the community challenges and opportunities that we aim to address, together with the outcomes we hope to achieve, and the strategic approach we will take to do so. It clearly articulates the Aims, Objectives and expected Outcomes for VRG activity over the next *three years*, allowing our community to understand and influence how the community benefit funds will be invested in the short and medium term. The Strategy aims to give clarity and structure to VRG's activities, providing a deliverable action plan to focus our resources upon. It provides a *ten-year* vision we are working towards, supported by a strategic model that will enable us to make informed decisions about the use of windfarm community benefit funds.

This Strategy recognises that VRG has been delivering positive outcomes for the community it serves for more than 10 years. However, as with all volunteer led organisations, there is a limit to the capacity and time volunteers are able to contribute. VRG must therefore decide its priorities and identify the best ways in which it can deliver benefit to the local community within the current resources and capacity.

Challenges and Opportunities for our community

The challenges and opportunities within the local community we aim to address are:

- A small and ageing population, thinly spread throughout the area, with two main clusters of houses at Carron Valley / Buckieburn and Sauchieburn / Auchenbowie
- Few local facilities and no central meeting point for community groups to gather and socialise
- No reliable means of communication across everyone within the community
- The community is seeking to realise its opportunities through:
 - Increasing sustainability and self-sufficiency
 - Improving access to social and training opportunities
 - Improving home energy efficiency
 - Improving communication across the community and beyond.

These challenges and opportunities have been identified through previous community consultations, statistical evidence, local research and feedback from current projects and grant schemes.

VRG Ten-Year Vision

‘For everyone in our community to experience an improving quality of rural living. For this to be delivered through community-wide and individual projects, supported by community benefit income, and distributed through a fair and transparent process’.

VRG Objectives

We have set four **Strategic Objectives** directly related to the identified challenges and opportunities for our community. VRG activities will all adhere to these four Objectives. We will:

- **Distribute VRG funds** throughout the whole community with the aim of helping to support rural living, by using community benefit income to assist community-wide and individual projects
- **Engage and communicate** across the whole community, bringing people together by delivering more events and activities, potentially supported by paid organisers
- **Deliver good governance** to provide a long-term financial legacy for future generations in our community
- **Support viable and sustainable larger projects** that address the identified community challenges and opportunities, through a documented and informed decision-making process, and as funds allow.



Expected / Desired Outcomes

The Strategic Objectives will lead to the Expected Outcomes set out below. Ways in which these will be measured are provided in Appendix 1.

- **The community benefitting** directly from community grants which enable them to deliver their own projects and events to meet the needs and aspirations of people in the community
- **Local people benefitting** directly from individual grants which help to support rural living, improve their well-being and enable them to live more sustainably
- **Communication with the whole community** achieved through the delivery of a communications strategy, including use of newsletters, website, social media, community woodland project and annual events
- **VRG Board members to be well informed** and to deliver their roles and responsibilities effectively. VRG governance is maintained to a high standard and sound financial management provides a sustainable income for the long term
- **Larger scale projects** that address identified community challenges are supported by VRG. These projects demonstrate positive outcomes for the community and long-term sustainability through effective project planning and management.

To deliver these Outcomes effectively within the available resources, we need to refocus the way we work. We need to provide equitable and transparent decision making, and to allocate grants to support suitable projects that are led by community groups or sub-groups of VRG. The Strategic Model given below explains how VRG intends to do this over the coming years.

VRG's Strategic Model

VRG is the Development Trust for the Carron Valley and District Community. As with all Development Trusts, it acts as a catalyst and facilitator for activities and projects. VRG is currently delivering projects through a Board-led model, which is proving difficult to resource and lacks wider community engagement. We are therefore adjusting this to a more transparent process which enables projects that are initiated and developed by the community to be funded by VRG through the grant schemes. The same process will also be available for sub-groups of VRG to bring proposed projects forward for funding, so making the model equitable.

This shift in organisational structure from Board-led to Community or VRG Subgroup-led working is essential and for three reasons:

- Our scope and effectiveness to date has been limited by the energies and capabilities of the eight or nine Board members
- We need to engage with, and directly involve, the wider community in all aspects of our work
- There is a perception that the Board is inward looking in its response to wider community concerns.

In order for the Subgroup-led model to work effectively, the application and decision-making processes need to be clearly articulated and well publicised across the community. The criteria for funding also need to be made readily available and linked directly to the VRG objectives, and the community challenges and opportunities we aim to address. It is intended that through this model projects will emerge from community groups that are not necessarily connected with VRG, as well as being brought forward by VRG sub-groups composed of one or more VRG Board members, together with members from the wider community.



VRG Core Functions

VRG currently delivers a number of **core functions** for the community which can be summarised as:

- Organisational **Governance**
- **Communication** across the community
- **Financial** management
- Planning and administration of the **Grant Scheme**.

These functions will continue to be delivered by the VRG Board, which will maintain overall responsibility for the delivery of good governance and financial management. The existing sub groups will maintain a focus on delivery in each area, with new subgroups formed as necessary. The sub groups will actively recruit new members from outside of the current VRG Board, adding capacity, strengthening knowledge and increasing wider community engagement in VRG delivery.

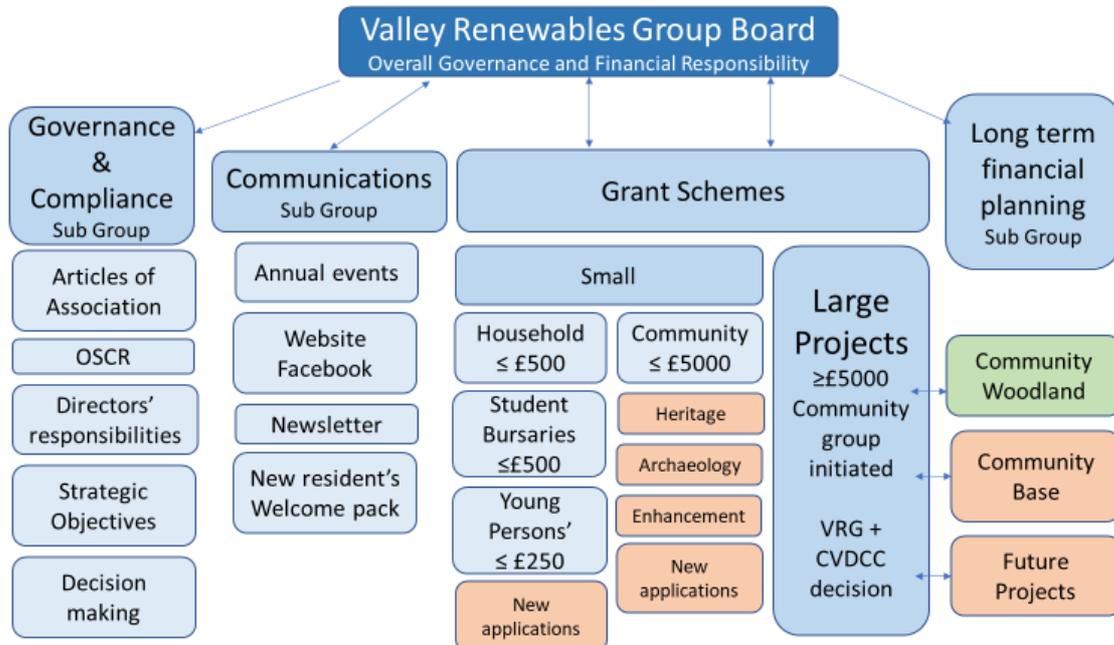
The Grant Scheme will broaden its criteria to deliver *'an improved quality of rural living for our community'* and be extended to include grants to groups and organisations, with a simple, well publicised grant application process.

Larger projects requesting VRG financial or Board support, whether led by a VRG Sub-group or another community organisation, will be assessed on a case by case basis through a transparent process. This process will also be clearly documented and publicised.

In summary, we are re-orientating the focus of project delivery away from the VRG Board as a whole, and towards VRG sub groups and wider community led projects and activities. We will administer grant support to these projects through Grant Schemes and Larger Project funding, through a documented grant application and approval process.



A diagram to illustrate the VRG Strategic model, and how current projects and activities fit within it, is given below (more detail can be found in appendix 2).



Key



Examples of current projects within the model:

- **Annual Community Open Day** – delivered as a core activity by VRG, with the sub-group recruiting new members and taking responsibility for delivery.
- **Archaeology** projects (investigative and interpretative archaeology for two important sites in the Carron Valley - Sir John de Graham's Castle and the Kirk o' Muir graveyard). Apply as a community group via the Small Grants Scheme.
- **History and heritage** - existing material needs archiving and an accessible home. Apply as a community group via the Grant scheme.
- **The Community Woodland Project** is led by a sub-group composed predominantly of VRG Board members (with wider recruitment planned). It has produced a business plan that illustrates a clear, costed route forward with planned activities and outcomes. VRG has made an informed decision to support this project financially.
- **The Community Base** is led by a sub-group composed predominantly of VRG Board members (with wider recruitment planned). It has an early stage business plan which highlights areas requiring further work (community engagement, income streams and long-term sustainability) and can apply to VRG for further development support through a Larger Grant process.
- **Howietoun Fishery** - A community led group maintains an interest in contributing to the conservation and use of the site. If appropriate in the future, the group could apply to VRG for financial support for relevant feasibility and viability assessments through the large project process.

Financial Background

Our community currently has an index linked annual income from Wind —farm Community benefit of £93,000. This is comprised of £51,000 in 'unrestricted' funds and £42,000 in 'restricted' funds. The restricted funds can only be applied to community-wide projects and expenditure, and with the consent of the Community Council. Assuming energy price inflation of 3% per annum, our annual income in 2022 will be £104,060; £57,500 in 'unrestricted' funds and £46,600 in 'restricted' funds. The wind farm income is guaranteed only for the 25-year life span of the wind farms.

Our current annual expenditure, excluding the Community Woodland, is about £26,000 per year and is paid from unrestricted funds. This amount fluctuates depending on the number and size of successful grant applications. Our only community-wide project to be funded from accrued 'restricted' funds is the Community Woodland, which the Community Council recently approved a capital budget of £131,000 over the next three years to 2022.

The unexpended funds at the end of each year have been saved into fixed-term, interest-bearing deposit accounts with a number of High Street banks. Current savings are £279,000. The Board has started work on developing a financial strategy which will investigate the basis for a legacy fund invested for future generations of our community.

Our financial position for a small community is strong and should allow us to continue to deliver individual and large project grants. As a community, we need to discuss and agree which large projects we wish to pursue, e.g. further investment in the community woodland, a permanent site for our Open Day, or a community base building, etc. This expenditure needs to be balanced against saving and investment for future generations in our community. We shall be coming back to the community to review the draft financial strategy before agreeing it as the basis for our financial planning.

Income, Expenditure and Savings Projections

	Actual	Actual	Actual	Projected	Projected	Projected	Projected	
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	
INCOME/YEAR								Index linked 3% per annum
Unrestricted funds	47754	42020	51068	52600	54178	55800	57477	
Restricted funds	0	130367	0	67774	43900	45217	46573	
YEAR TOTAL	47754	172387	51068	120374	98078	101017	104050	
EXPENDITURE								Inflation allowance 3% per annum
Unrestricted funds	23077	40616	26355	27125	27938	28776	29641	
Restricted funds								
Community woodland - capital	0	0	0	56154	29147	27731	10600	
Community woodland - revenue	0	0	0	15500	15965	16444	16937	
YEAR TOTAL	0	0	0	71654	45112	44175	26537	
SAVINGS								Compound Interest 1% per annum
Unrestricted funds	125000	126630	127896	129174	130466	131771	133089	
Restricted funds	0	150313	151816	153334	154867	201632	250221	
ANNUAL CUMULATIVE TOTAL	125000	276943	279712	282508	285333	333403	383310	

Making it Happen - VRG Action Plan

We shall now be working towards the delivery of this Strategy by focussing on the following actions in the short to medium term.

- Clarifying the criteria for the grant scheme to deliver grants to individuals and groups that will help to support rural living and enhance sustainability
- Writing the criteria and processing applications for small and larger grants and publicise these widely
- VRG Board Members to be clearly briefed on their roles and responsibilities, with identified sub groups delivering group objectives while meeting VRG governance requirements
- Supporting the sub groups to deliver the Annual events and the Community Woodland Project.
- Preparing and delivering a long-term investment strategy and legacy fund for future generations in the community
- Considering the employment of a development person

There is plenty to do and VRG is looking for new people to join in to help make it all happen.

As the Strategy shows, VRG has windfarm money that needs to be invested well for the benefit of the whole community through grants for individuals and community projects. We should like to see your ideas and projects coming forward to help us tackle the challenges and opportunities in our community and achieving an improving quality of rural living for us all!

Thank you for reading the Valley Renewables Group 2019-22 Strategy!

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VRG Strategy produced by kjg initiatives ltd in conjunction with VRG, Nov 2018 - www.kjginitiatives.co.uk

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VRG Strategy Appendices

Appendix 1 - Measurement of Expected Outcomes

These outcomes will inform an action / implementation plan for VRG, and the measurement will need to be carried out centrally, potentially requiring additional paid staff support.

Expected Outcome	Methods of Measurement
<p>Local people benefitting directly from individual and community grants which help to support rural living through physical and social improvements and interventions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of grants given annually to individuals and to community groups • Total amount of grant distributed • Feedback from recipients re outcomes achieved through grant
<p>Communication with the whole community through newsletters, website, social media, community woodland project and annual events</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of people receiving newsletter • Number of people attending annual events • Positive feedback received from people re VRG social and communication activities
<p>VRG Board members are well informed and deliver their roles and responsibilities effectively. VRG governance is maintained to a high standard and financial management provides a sustainable income long term.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of Board Members receiving written guidance as part of the VRG Board induction • Regular financial management reports provided to the VRG Board by Treasurer and sub groups • Sub groups set up • Successful Board and sub group recruitment
<p>Larger scale projects that demonstrate positive outcomes for the community and long-term sustainability through effective business planning are supported by VRG</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of larger projects approaching VRG • Number of non-VRG Board members involved in projects • Larger projects supported can demonstrate viability, sustainability and that they • address the identified needs of the community.

Appendix 2 –VRG Strategic Model detail

The VRG Board meets regularly to discuss and make decisions around Strategic direction, Governance and Financial Planning, supported by the relevant sub-groups. Each sub-group includes at least one member of the VRG Board who will report back to the VRG Board meetings.

The Sub group for Communications will lead on delivering current communication activities including the annual events, website, newsletter and welcome pack.

The Grants sub-group will be responsible for writing and publicising the grant giving process and meeting regularly to make decisions regarding grant applications. The grant scheme will be widely available to both individuals and groups, with a broad aim of *'improving quality of rural living for members of the community'*, whilst still adhering to the VRG Objectives laid out in the Articles of Association. Many of the smaller projects currently being led by VRG will fit within this grant scheme, so providing the opportunity for others to apply for funds and lead the projects themselves, or through a sub-group.

The whole VRG Board is responsible for decisions regarding larger project grants in conjunction with the Community Council. The sub group will write and publicise the process for application and will need to receive a feasibility study / business plan or equivalent information from each project to illustrate viability.

Examples of current projects within the model:

Annual Community Open Day – delivered as a core activity by VRG, with the sub-group recruiting new members and taking responsibility for delivery.

Archaeology projects (investigative and interpretative archaeology for two important sites in the Carron Valley - Sir John de Graham's Castle and the Kirk O'Muir graveyard). Apply as a community group via the Small Grants Scheme.

History and Heritage - existing material needs archiving and an accessible home. Apply as a community group via the Small grants scheme.

The Community Woodland Project is led by a sub-group composed predominantly of VRG Board members (with wider recruitment planned). It has produced a business plan that illustrates a clear, costed route forward with planned activities and outcomes. VRG has made an informed decision to support this project financially.

The Community Base is led by a sub-group composed predominantly of VRG Board members (with wider recruitment planned). It has an early stage business plan which highlights areas requiring further work (community engagement, income streams and long-term sustainability) and can apply to VRG for further development support through the larger grant application process.

Howietoun Fishery - A community led group maintains an interest in contributing to the conservation and use of the site. If appropriate in the future, the group could apply to VRG for financial support for relevant feasibility and viability assessments through the large project process.

Appendix 3 – Communications Strategy

VRG requires a strategy for communications with Members, the wider population and within the VRG Board. VRG aims to communicate well across the whole community, reaching out to everyone in some way. This will be achieved through the use of newsletters, website and social media together with community woodland project activities and annual events.

Stakeholders	Communication methods and content
Wider community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular Newsletter currently sent to every household and made available on the VRG website • Regular Facebook updates re activities and timings • Short Facebook updates and photos about new projects and grants • Continue to maintain high quality accessible website, with dates and times of activities updated regularly • Annual Open Day – at the Community Woodland in August each year • Additional community social event at the Community Woodland (Spring) • Community Woodland events open to all and promoted through the communications above • Grant scheme promotion to be included in all the above communications • Information about current sub-groups and opportunities to engage to be included in all the above communications
Volunteers	<p>As for wider community above plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer opportunities and achievements bulletin on website / Facebook • Annual Volunteer celebration or gathering (specifically for Community Woodland volunteers currently, but could engage with wider volunteer base across sub groups and Board in future) • Information about current sub-groups and opportunities to engage
Members	<p>As for wider community above plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlighted opportunities for engagement and volunteering across projects and sub groups • AGM notifications with reminder of voting rights • Information about current sub-groups and opportunities to engage
Sub group Members	<p>As for wider community plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular sub-group meetings to discuss and make decisions across the area of sub group focus • Representative from each sub group to sit on or attend the VRG Board to report back on a quarterly basis
VRG Board	<p>As for wider community plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quarterly meetings to receive reports from sub-groups and take an overview of governance, finance, communications and small and large grants schemes activity.
Wider partners and funders	<p>As for wider community plus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case by case feedback as requested • Regular contact to ensure all relevant information is being received.