

Electricity
Distribution

SIF Matchmaker

This is a summary report. See [here](#) for the full final report.

nationalgrid TPXimpact  REGEN



The challenges

Grid expansion needs greater local support

Delivering Clean Power 2030 will require significant investment in new grid infrastructure. However, public opposition can create delays and barriers to delivery. Building trust and ensuring local communities share in the benefits of the energy transition will therefore be critical to accelerating grid expansion. Community ownership of renewable projects offers one way of achieving this.

Grid limitations are impacting community ownership

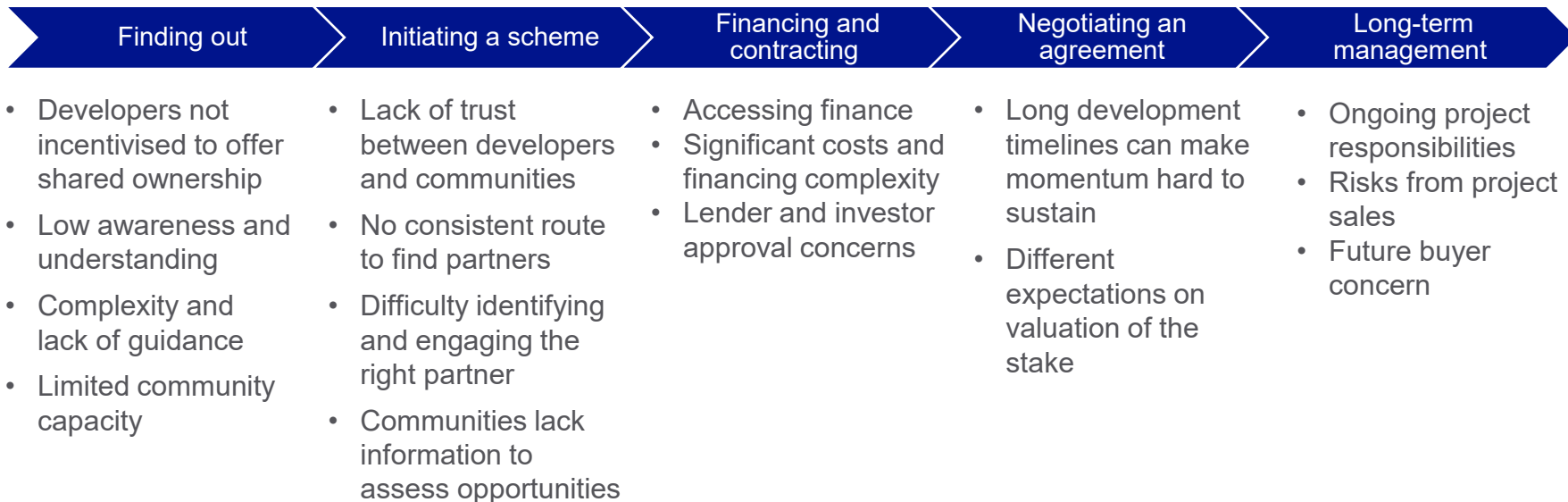
With the Clean Power 2030 pipeline already almost full, it is challenging for standalone community energy projects to connect to the grid. Shared ownership, where communities own a stake in a developer-owned renewable project, offers an alternative route for communities to own part of the energy transition.

Shared ownership is not happening at scale

Despite long-standing efforts by devolved governments and renewed ambition from the UK government, shared ownership remains limited. Developers and communities face persistent barriers to delivering these schemes and there is a need for practical solutions that can help translate that renewed ambition into deliverable projects.

The barriers

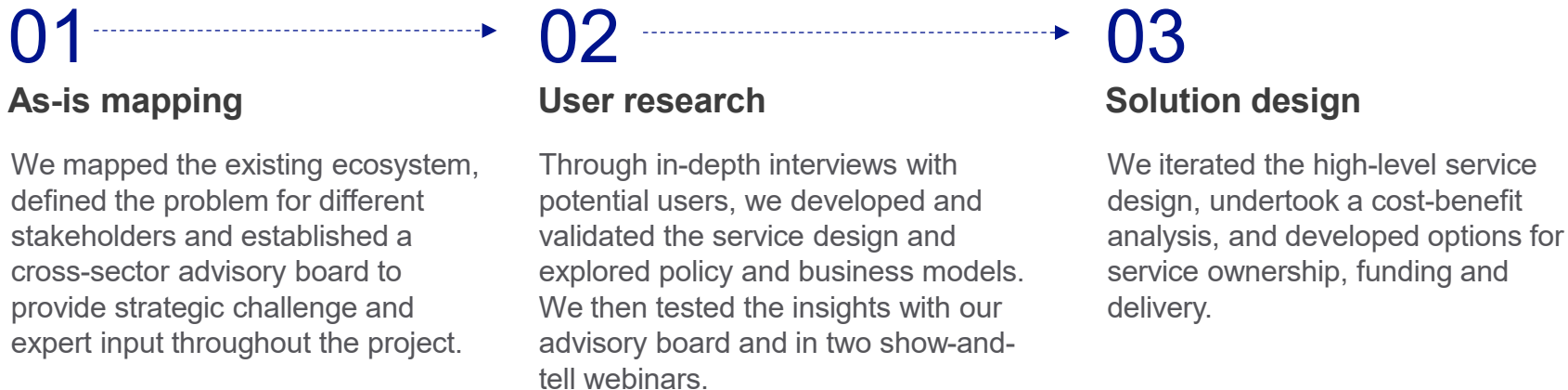
Barriers arise across the shared ownership journey, helping explain why uptake has remained below policy ambitions.



The solution

Matchmaker was developed to test whether a digital service could help deliver more shared ownership schemes. The Discovery phase was funded through the Strategic Innovation Fund, an Ofgem programme managed in partnership with Innovate UK. SIF Challenge 4 aims to accelerate grid expansion by developing solutions that improve public support and reduce opposition to new infrastructure. By enabling more communities to participate in the energy transition, Matchmaker explores whether shared ownership of renewable projects could address this challenge.

The Discovery phase had three linked stages:



The service concept

We tested what an effective digital service would need to do. Through 19 interviews with developers, community energy organisations and community support organisations, we explored three connected service pillars:



User insights

Participants saw all three service pillars as valuable at different stages of their journey.

They highlighted a range of needs for the service to meet:

Informing

- Help manage expectations around what is possible
- Demystify the shared ownership process and create consistency
- Provide detailed information that shows the practical realities of projects.

Matching

- Help users identify opportunities they may not otherwise discover
- Connect willing developers and communities with the right contacts
- Support matching at different stages of project development
- Provide the information needed to assess opportunities, motivations and readiness.

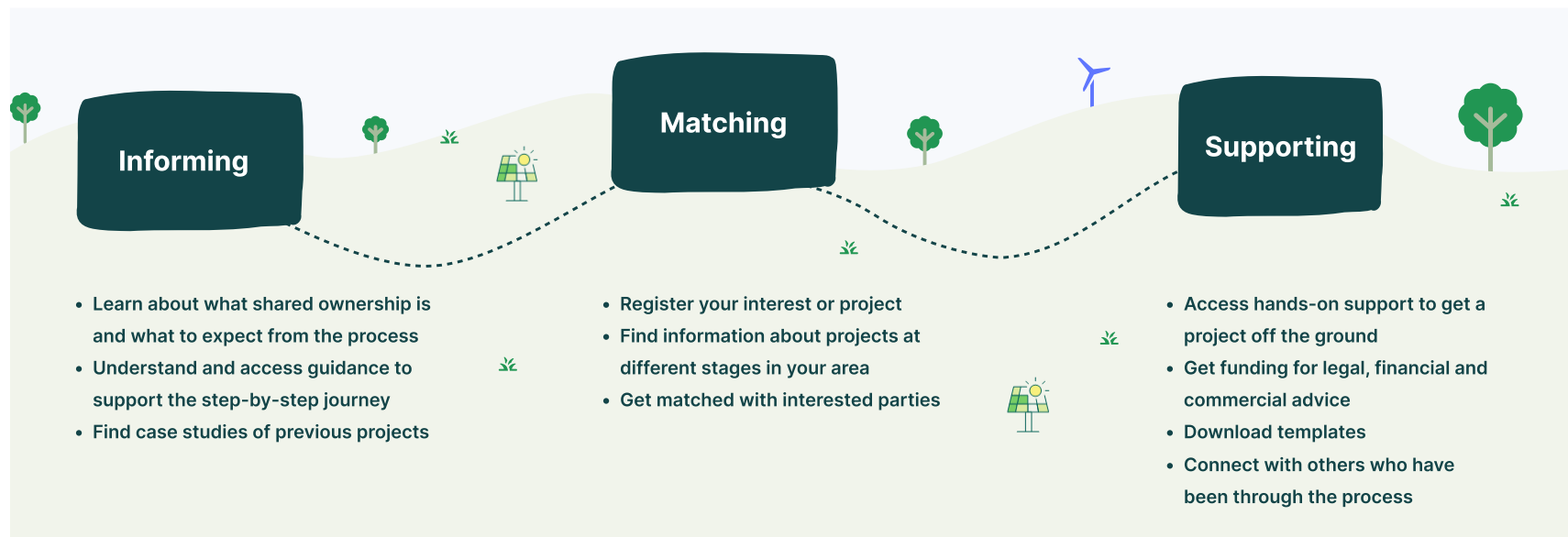
Supporting

- Go beyond signposting to offer more active, hands-on support
- Provide access to templates and standardised resources
- Provide funding and expert support where needed
- Enable peer learning and knowledge sharing.

The iterated service design

We found a strong appetite amongst developers for the more standardised, consistent approach that a digital service can provide. Our research also identified the need for non-digital support, such as bespoke advisory services, transaction management and funding, to help shared ownership schemes progress.

Our iterated service design brings these elements together.



Policy and service scenarios

Reflecting the evolving policy landscape, we developed three scenarios to explore how different levels of policy support could influence the role, target users and impact of the Matchmaker service. The following pages sets out a roadmap for the service, demonstrating how it would change and evolve under the different scenarios.

Scenario 1 VOLUNTARY MARKET/BUSINESS AS USUAL Low-med increase in schemes	Scenario 2 VOLUNTARY BUT INCENTIVISED Med-high increase in schemes	Scenario 3 MANDATED (WITH OR WITHOUT INCENTIVES) High increase in schemes
No mandate and weak or no meaningful incentives. Some advice, development support and finance is available through existing organisations. GB Energy has been formed to support more shared ownership.	Developers have a policy or commercial reason to make a credible shared ownership offer. Incentives could include CfD scoring, planning recognition, reputational benefits, grid queue prioritisation or other policy levers.	Developers are required to offer shared ownership. Incentives may sit alongside the requirement.
 Purpose-driven pioneers	 Pragmatic adopters	 Compliance-led providers

SCENARIO 1 VOLUNTARY MARKET/BUSINESS AS USUAL

Community needs

- Awareness, understanding and clear expectations
- Support to connect with interested developers
- Access to information to assess opportunities
- Capacity and resources to engage
- Trust in developer commitment
- Access to finance
- Legal and commercial advice
- Support managing long term ownership

Developer needs

- Awareness and understanding
- Mechanism to list projects easily
- Support to identify suitable community partners
- Confidence that communities are credible
- Reduced complexity
- Standardised frameworks

Matchmaker role: minimising friction, reducing complexity and providing active, hands-on support.

SCENARIO 2 VOLUNTARY BUT INCENTIVISED

Community needs

- Understanding of incentives and their implications
- Capacity and capability building to engage with a larger number of opportunities
- Support for individuals or groups new to shared ownership

Developer needs

- Understanding of incentives
- Support to identify suitable community partners where no established group exists
- Support to demonstrate credible offers

Matchmaker role: increasing awareness, standardising the process, building community capacity and supporting developers with reporting.

SCENARIO 3 MANDATORY OFFER, WITH OR WITHOUT INCENTIVES

Community needs

- Understanding of requirements and their implications
- Mechanisms to avoid tokenistic engagement by developers

Developer needs

- Understanding of requirements
- Way to demonstrate compliance

Matchmaker role: supporting policy enforcement.



SCENARIO 2



SCENARIO 1

SCENARIO 1

Potential ownership models

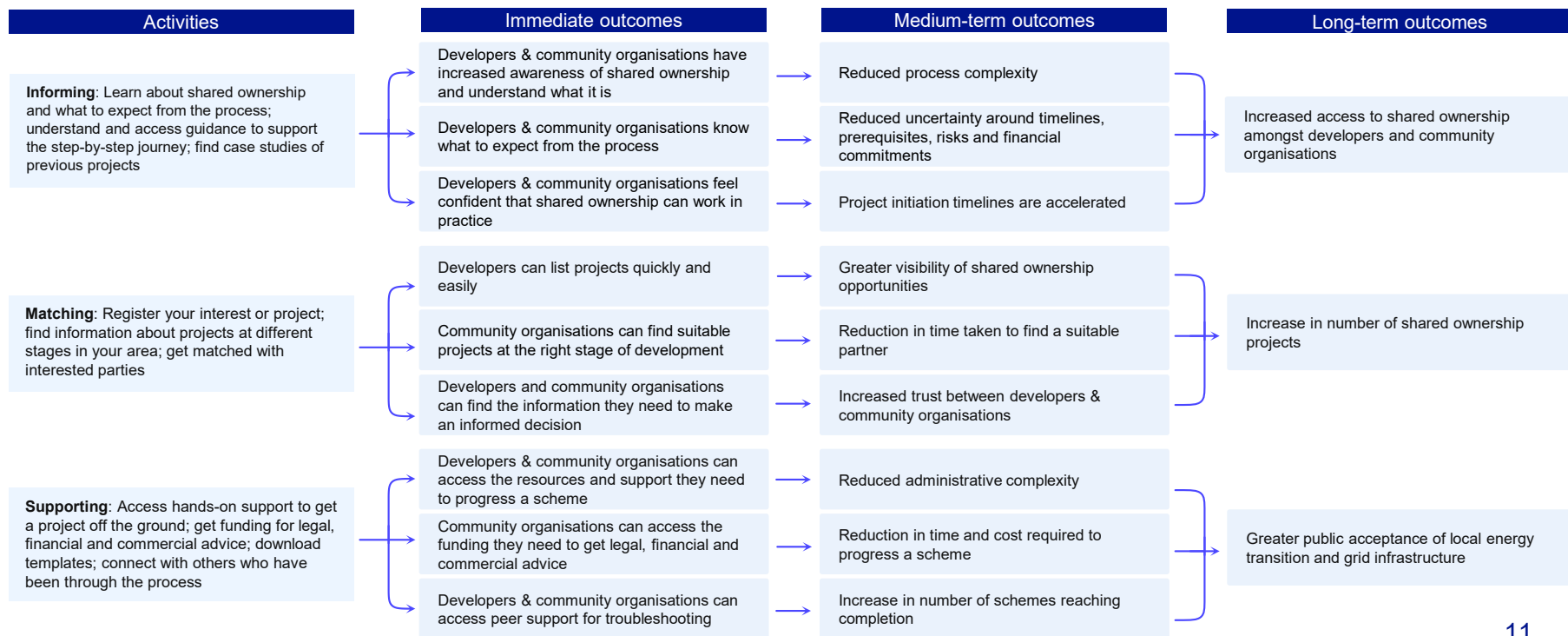
The Discovery suggested that Matchmaker would require national coordination and consistency, combined with trusted regional delivery and support. Four potential ownership models were assessed.

Service owner(s)	Possible funders	Opportunities	Risks
Great British Energy	UK government	• Alignment with GBE services • One-stop shop for shared ownership • National consistency	• GBE support services are new and unknown. Trust not yet established
Distribution Network Operators	Consumer bills or service users	• Alignment with existing community energy and connections support	• Difficult to justify investment without clear consumer/network benefits
Community bodies (Community Energy England/Scotland/Wales)	Government, grant, or service users	• Support from stakeholder interviews • Trusted by communities	• Less efficiency from multiple services • May not be seen to be impartial by commercial developers
Regional and devolved support organisations (e.g. Local Energy Scotland, Welsh Government Energy Service, Net Zero Hubs, local authorities)	Government (devolved and UK)	• Support from stakeholder interviews • Regional support that reflects local context	• Less efficiency from multiple services • Confusing for developers if different approaches are taken across the UK

N.B. All options require partnerships with community support organisations, developer trade bodies and the listed possible service owners.

Theory of change

This high-level theory of change demonstrates how the key service pillars and features identified through discovery connect to immediate, medium-term and long-term outcomes.



Conclusions

1. A gap in the market

There is a gap in the market around a digital 'front door' that can support the end-to-end process at scale. We have validated the need for this amongst developers and community energy organisations.

2. The impact of the service

The service can play a valuable role now, even without wider changes to policy or incentives. As the wider policy landscape changes, the service can evolve to enable a significant scaling of shared ownership within the market.

3. A digital service...

We identified a strong appetite for the more standardised, consistent approach that a digital service can provide to enable greater awareness of shared ownership, increased uptake within the market and more efficiency within the process.

4. ...with non-digital components

Alongside the digital service, we identified the need for bespoke advisory support that could be well served through partnerships with existing organisations.

5. Service ownership

There is a need for impartial national coordination and standardisation. This could be well served through ownership by a national governmental organisation supported by regional organisations with local expertise and established support networks.

6. Does it solve the challenge?

While direct evidence linking shared ownership to grid infrastructure remains limited, the findings suggest that shared ownership could play a role in supporting public acceptance and warrants further testing.

Where next?

Subject to securing SIF Alpha funding, the next phase would focus on designing and prototyping the service, testing key components with users and addressing the questions set out below.

Impact

- Would an increase in the number of shared ownership schemes lead to increased public support to grid infrastructure?
- Would developers and community energy organisations proactively register for the service if shared ownership remains voluntary?

Service design

- How might we widen access to individuals or community organisations who haven't engaged with shared ownership before?
- How might we best facilitate the 'matching' of developers and community energy organisations?

Delivery model

- Which components of the service should be standardised at a national level, and which should be delivered via local support?
- How should this be reflected in service ownership and through partnerships with existing organisations?
- What role should the DNOs play in the service?

Acknowledgements

We thank the developers, community energy organisations, community support organisations and wider sector stakeholders who contributed to the Matchmaker Discovery phase through interviews, focus groups, show-and-tell events and advisory board discussions. Their insights and feedback helped shape the service and this report.

About National Grid Electricity Distribution (Sponsor)

This SIF project has been sponsored by National Grid Electricity Distribution (NGED). NGED is the UK's largest electricity distribution network, serving nearly 8 million customers in the Midlands, South West and Wales, delivering essential power to millions of homes and businesses across its regions.

About Regen

Regen provides independent, evidence-led insight and advice in support of its mission to transform the UK's energy system for a net zero future. It focuses on analysing the systemic challenges of decarbonising power, heat and transport. It applies its expertise to the whole energy system to advocate for a fast and fair transition to net zero.

About TPXimpact

TPXimpact is a digital transformation company supporting public, private and third-sector organisations to build a better future for people, places and the planet.