

Vattenfall, the Hexham-based energy company, is currently undertaking the construction of the 16 Turbine Wind Farm at the Ray Estate near Kirkwhelpington and has pledged an index linked annual investment of over £250,000 to set up a local Community Fund for the lifetime of the wind farm. If the wind farm generates green power for the next 25 years the community will see a total community investment of over £6 million. It is anticipated that the Wind Farm will become operational by the beginning of 2017 and the first payment to the community will be made 6 months after the operation starts.

Community Action Northumberland has been commissioned by Vattenfall to support local people with creating a vision for the area of benefit and identifying priorities for the use of the funds. The aim of this consultation is to ensure that the fund will be used in a way that will be of maximum benefit to the local community and will genuinely respond to local issues and priorities. A range of activities are already underway to gather views from local people including consultation events and distribution of a survey to households and businesses within a 10km radius of the wind farm.

We are now looking to recruit local people to join a steering group which will have a vital role in the time leading up to the opening of the fund. The steering group will work alongside Vattenfall to set a vision for the community fund and establish appropriate governance arrangements for the management of the fund. Full Terms of Reference for the group will be agreed at its first meeting, but key purposes are likely to include:

- Reviewing the findings of the consultation work that has already been carried out
- Developing clear and effective criteria for grant making from the fund in order to achieve maximum benefit for the local community.
- Working with Vattenfall to agree appropriate governance arrangements for the administration of the fund.
- Appointing an appropriate administrative body to manage the fund on behalf of the local community.
- Liaising with the local community, to ensure that local people are aware of progress throughout the year and continue to have the opportunity to contribute to the process as appropriate.
- Make decisions on expenditure of the fund in the longer term

It is envisaged that Bavington, Birtley, Corsenside, Elsdon and Kirkwhelpington Parish Councils will each nominate one representative to the steering group. In addition five more lay representatives will be recruited through an interview process, ideally one from each of these parishes, chosen to achieve a broad range of experience and views from across the area.