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Aligning Community Wealth Building with Just Transitions

Research, policy and practice insights from international workshops in the UK and Canada

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Executive summary

Drawing on British Academy funded international research and multi-stakeholder workshops held across 2025 in the UK and Canada, this report demonstrates that aligning Community Wealth Building (CWB) with just transitions offers a practical, place-based pathway for net zero. Our collaborative report shows that integrating economic development and climate policy is essential to achieving decarbonisation that centres communities, particularly at a time when net zero transitions are increasingly politically divisive. In this report, we introduce our international research project and explore the key ideas underpinning both CWB and just transitions, as well as their many connections in research, policy and practice. We then introduce our 2025 workshops in Sussex and Birmingham (UK) and Edmonton and Ottawa (Canada), featuring over 120+ stakeholders in the CWB and Net Zero sectors. We explore their findings and analyse examples of good practice, before offering concluding thoughts for moving policy and practice forward in an uncertain time for both the global economy and the consensus on climate policy. We note the importance of bringing CWB and just transitions together to enhance resilience and energy sovereignty, in the face of increasing economic, social and political challenges to decarbonisation efforts. Our report is intended for CWB, net zero, community and social enterprise stakeholders and practitioners.

Policy and practice recommendations

- **Reframe energy transitions and net zero around local economic development:** Policymakers should formally align climate strategies and net zero targets with CWB principles, so decarbonisation delivers tangible social and economic benefits locally.
- **Empower anchor institutions as key engines for place-based transitions:** Local authorities, hospitals and universities should be mandated and resourced to use procurement, assets, workforce strategies and investment to drive local green economies, retain wealth in local economies and support inclusive job creation.
- **Break departmental silos and align governance to integrate CWB into just transitions:** Effective transitions require integrated governance across economic development, climate, procurement and social policy sectors. Lacking national support, local & regional governments can facilitate cross-departmental coordination and policy networks.
- **Harness place-based financial innovation to scale local net zero solutions:** Shift from short-term, competitive funding to stable, long-term devolved models (e.g. municipal bonds and community finance) that enable and support strategic planning, social innovation and community ownership of local energy and retrofit programmes.
- **Create monitoring and evaluation metrics for impact outcomes:** Develop methods for measuring the impact of CWB outcomes that also contribute to just transitions, for example through coupling emissions reduction with wealth retained in local community organisations. This is also vital for supporting further research into CWB and net zero.

Section 1 – Introduction

This collaborative report presents the findings of a major two-year international research partnership funded by the British Academy, examining how Community Wealth Building (CWB) can be harnessed to deliver just transitions in the UK and Canada. Led by the University of Sussex (UK) and NorQuest College (Canada), supported through a key partnership with the Centre for Local Economies (CLES) in the UK and in collaboration with Carleton University (Canada), the project brings together academic insight, practitioner expertise and policy leadership at a moment when climate action urgently needs new ideas, new alliances and new forms of legitimacy to counter a rising political opposition globally.

Our research provides the first in-depth comparative analysis of how CWB can support just transitions across two countries facing shared structural challenges: spiralling inequality, deepening social crises and escalating political division around net-zero commitments. Across both contexts, we find communities, local government and 'anchor institutions'[1] experimenting with new models of democratic ownership, localised investment and participatory governance, opening up new pathways for just transitions. Importantly, these initiatives do not just decarbonise local economies; they show how economic power can be redirected towards local communities and counter the corporate capture of energy transitions. Such a transition pathway is vital to our shared understanding of a just transition in both our research project and this report.

This work is essential in a period of overlapping crises. As the climate emergency accelerates, energy systems must shift rapidly towards renewables, decarbonise transport and industry, increase housing and building energy efficiency and upgrade energy grids to handle increased low-carbon generation and integrate new storage capacities. At the same time, as wealth gaps widen and inequality deepens, societal demands grow for democratic, locally controlled alternatives to economic models that prioritise external investment and the interests of multinational corporations. These two trends are deeply intertwined: energy transitions that forge the economies of the future inevitably grapple with the social realities of increasingly divided societies.

The concepts of just transition and CWB sit at the heart of these debates. Yet, too often they are separated by government and departmental silos. CWB is largely confined to economic development teams and just transition work contained within energy and sustainability departments. Many governments are not yet treating the climate emergency as requiring integrated responses that unite social, economic and environmental issues.

Our research demonstrates that this separation is no longer viable amid an intensifying backlash against net zero, particularly during an acute cost-of-living crisis in both of the countries featured in our research. A critical window of opportunity is emerging to bring CWB and just transitions together, in policy and practice.

CWB's five core principles — democratic enterprise, locally rooted finance, fair work, progressive procurement and the just use of land and property — align directly with the aims of transformative just transitions, offering a blueprint for democratic, locally controlled, place-based pathways to net zero.

[1] As noted in Section 3, an anchor institution is an organisation that is locally rooted in place, with a long-term presence and social and economic power. Examples include local government, universities and hospitals.

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Our report builds on wider findings from our international research project [‘Building ‘common’ wealth through just transitions’] (2024–2026), which features in-depth interviews, leading case studies, international conference sessions, academic articles and policy pieces.

Dr Max Lacey-Barnacle talking about the links between CWB and just transitions at the SASE conference in Montreal, Canada. July 2025.

This report largely centres on the insights from our international collaborative workshops. Across 2025, we convened four workshops in the UK and Canada that brought together more than 120 stakeholders, in Sussex and Birmingham (UK) and Edmonton and Ottawa (Canada). Each workshop featured roughly 30 participants, including community leaders, practitioners, policymakers, academics and anchor institution representatives from both the CWB and net zero sectors. The insights, themes and activities from these sessions form the foundation of this report and the accompanying workshop and facilitation guides.

We hope that a diverse range of different stakeholders find our report and workshop guides practically useful. This report is intended for researchers, CWB policymakers, community organisations, social enterprises and net zero companies and stakeholders that are seeking a more local, community oriented approach to the energy transition that embeds new forms of ownership and participation in the green economies of the future. We firmly believe that aligning CWB with just transitions to a net zero future is an effective place to start.

Section 2 – Just Transitions and CWB overlaps

Our project recognises the global energy transition and decarbonisation as the backdrop for calls for a more *just* transition to net zero economies and sustainable energy systems. This is not without contestation. When climate policies widen inequality or leave communities behind, they fuel distrust, strengthen populist backlash and can undermine support for net zero. A just transition can be the foundation that makes deep, lasting change possible, provided it offers pathways that are democratic, inclusive and locally rooted. In research and policy, a just transition is often understood through three interlinked forms of justice: distributional justice (how benefits and burdens are shared); procedural justice (whether people can genuinely shape decisions); and restorative justice (addressing past harms and structural inequalities). A more policy-oriented definition describes it as 'socially inclusive decarbonisation', while a practice-oriented approach argues the climate crisis is fundamentally a failure of our economic model, so practitioners must reshape local and regional economies to deliver both sustainability and better community outcomes. These ideas align very closely with CWB.

Our country contexts are critical sites for advancing both net zero and just transitions. The UK has played a leading role in global climate action: the Climate Change Act (2008) created the world's first legally binding long-term emissions target, strengthened in 2019 with a commitment to net zero by 2050, and further accelerated in 2021 toward a fully decarbonised power system and a 78% emissions reduction by 2035. Yet, without targeted policy support, millions of low-income household's risk falling into "transition poverty" , as the costs of net zero, levied on energy bills, push families further into deprivation. In Preston, pioneering CWB policies have halved unemployment, increased social mobility, improved wellbeing, placed 4,000 people on the living wage and seen anchor institutions retain £448m in procurement spend locally (Hadfield 2019; Manley & Whyman 2021; Rose et al. 2023). Unlike Canada, where a national Just Transition Taskforce was established in 2018 and issued its final report in 2019, informing the phase-out of conventional coal-fired electricity by 2030, the UK still lacks a comprehensive just transition policy or framework. Canada's Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act (2021) and Sustainable Jobs Act (2023) embed greater fairness in policy and set clear milestones, including a 40–45% emissions reduction by 2030.

In contrast, the UK's climate legislation is more technically driven and focused on carbon reduction than societal impact. As the UK deepens its net zero commitments, there are clear lessons from Canada here; though Canada too faces growing social-acceptance challenges and is not on track to meet its 2030 decarbonisation targets. Crucially, the UK leads globally on CWB legislation and strategy, whilst Canada lacks the equivalent momentum. Comparing these overlapping Westminster-style systems highlights how shared foundations adapt to CWB and net zero in different ways. It is here that powerful synergies emerge: just transitions define the moral and social imperatives of energy transitions, while CWB delivers the mechanisms that anchor that transition in local economies and communities. Here, a just transition is not only about cutting emissions, but about ensuring the shift to a net zero future strengthens communities, rebuilds economic security and delivers shared prosperity.

Section 3 - Exploring Community Wealth Building in the UK and Canada

CWB is a people-centred, strategic approach to local economic development. Its purpose is to increase the flow, circulation and ownership of wealth within a place, through jobs, support for local business and community action, effective public services and diversified land ownership. It can help support local resilience in the face of an uncertain economic future.

The history and development of CWB in the UK

CWB emerged in the UK following the 2008 financial crash, with CLES working alongside local authorities, including Preston[2], to explore alternatives to conventional local economic development, including mapping the economic power of public procurement. Inspired by the Democracy Collaborative in Cleveland, Ohio, this work led to the five-pillar model and the roll-out of CWB across the UK[3].

Like many alternatives to neoclassical economics, CWB responds to the limitations of conventional approaches to economic policy; particularly its emphasis on market-led interventions and inward investment in pursuit of aggregate growth. In contrast, CWB sees the delivery and funding of public services such as health and education as the foundations of a just and effective local economy. While operating within a market economy, it recognises the vital role the public sector plays in supporting high standards in employment, recruitment and advancing social innovation.

CWB is fundamentally about delivering more democratic economies, where success is measured by how well a place generates good lives rather than simply 'growth' as measured by 'Gross Value Added' (GVA) metrics. It ensures that both the means of production and the benefits of a place's wealth creation directly benefit the people who live there, rather than distant shareholders, tax havens and absentee landlords.

Community Wealth Building: the five-principle model

CWB is guided by five interlinked principles, all aimed at increasing the flow, circulation and ownership of wealth within local economies:

- **Plural ownership of the economy** — promoting employee-owned businesses, co-operatives and social enterprises.
- **Fair work and local labour markets** — raising standards of pay and conditions to support quality of life and productivity, prioritising fair wages, secure employment and strong local labour markets.
- **Finance** — aligning investment and financial institutions to better serve local needs by directing capital toward local businesses, social enterprises and community projects.

[2] CLES — How we built community wealth in Preston: achievements and lessons. cles.org.uk
[3] CLES — Community wealth building: a history. cles.org.uk

- **Land and property** — increasing the benefits communities receive from land and property through planning policy, community asset transfer, high-street regeneration and affordable housing.
- **Procurement and spending** — emphasising the local benefits of sourcing goods and services locally, designing services with economic and social intent and strengthening local supply chains.

These principles are embedded within the concept of an 'anchor institution', understood as an organisation that is locally rooted, with a significant and stable presence and social and economic power[4]. Typically these are councils, hospitals, health boards, universities, colleges and housing associations. Individually they can flex their economic muscle on procurement, jobs and finance; working together, they can co-ordinate action on shared challenges such as the just transition. In the South of Scotland, for example, CLES worked with housing associations to use their collective housing ownership to build skills and supply chains for retrofit[5].

Community wealth building and UK policy

Contrasting strongly with Canada, there has been significant progress embedding community wealth objectives across the UK's governance. Most notably, the Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill passed and became and Act in March 2026 — the first of its kind in the world — requiring ministers to set out plans to reduce inequality and support inclusive growth, and mandating that public bodies produce CWB action plans across the five pillars[6].

Northern Ireland convened an independent commission focussed on CWB in 2023[7], and in England CWB has been implemented regionally and locally — influencing the Greater Manchester Inequality Commission, adopted by councils including Islington, Newham, Lewes, Stroud, Newcastle, Salford, Leeds, Cumberland and Westmorland in Furness, and embedded widely across the NHS through the 'anchor institutions' principle. CWB has also informed the UK Government's Procurement Act 2023[8] and the National Procurement Policy Statement 2025[9], and is recognised within the Pride in Place programme, a UK government initiative that empowers local communities with up to £20 million in funding over 10 years to establish resident-led boards and directly improve their high streets, green spaces, and local infrastructure.

Community Wealth Building, just transition and the Canadian policy context

CWB in Canada has emerged in a fragmented, largely uncoordinated manner rather than through a unified national or provincial framework, reflecting the country's decentralised federal governance and strong civil-society traditions. Rooted in community economic development and co-operative movements, CWB's presence in Canada draws on a long history of localised practice within credit unions, co-operatives, rural and community development organisations, universities and Indigenous-led initiatives. Unlike the UK, Canada's

[4] CLES (2024) How to Build an Anchor Network. publication.cles.org.uk/building-anchor-networks
[5] Jennings, A., Murphy, C. and Bentley, R. (2022) A roadmap to decarbonisation. cles.org.uk
[6] Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill, Scottish Parliament.
[7] Independent report to advance community wealth building in Northern Ireland, communities-ni.gov.uk
[8] Transforming Public Procurement, gov.uk.
[9] National Procurement Policy Statement, gov.uk.

experience has been more dispersed and bottom-up, led by non-profits, policy networks and social-finance intermediaries that advance the social enterprise economy.

This diverse ecosystem includes organisations such as the Canadian Community Economic Development Network, Buy Social Canada and the Ontario Nonprofit Network; financing innovators such as Tapestry Community Capital; and anchor networks such as AnchorTO in Toronto. Labour–community coalitions, community land trusts and co-operative federations extend CWB's reach across Canada, while Indigenous organisations add a distinct dimension, embedding sovereignty, stewardship and community ownership that broaden understandings of different facets of Canadian economic democracy.

Despite this growth, links between CWB and Canada's net zero ambitions remain underdeveloped. The broader benefits of decarbonisation still accrue largely to corporate and state actors; community ownership of renewables is limited; and energy poverty persists, particularly in Atlantic Canada, the Territories and the Prairies. CWB offers a potential bridge to embedding net zero in local places in Canada, through community benefit agreements, public–private partnerships and community finance solutions, but the absence of formal federal or provincial recognition limits its scalability. Realising this potential requires deliberate alignment between CWB and net zero strategies, supported by stronger coordination, clearer frameworks and sustained investment, notwithstanding a much stronger role for government.

Implementing just transitions through Community Wealth Building

CWB has been used to develop and deliver a range of initiatives across the UK and Canada, including just-transition initiatives. Table 1 below aligns the five principles with examples of implementation and case studies, showing where these have been taken forward with some success:

Table 1: A summary of CWB principles, just transition implementation and case studies

CWB principles	Examples of implementation for just transition	UK case studies	Canada case studies
Plural ownership of the economy	Community energy projects; Municipally owned energy companies; renewable installations on public and community-owned buildings and land; worker-owned co-operatives supplying and managing energy locally.	Community-owned energy in Scotland; the Point and Sandwick Trust (Outer Hebrides) is the UK's largest community-owned wind farm at 9MW, delivering £9m to the community over 10 years.	Sun Certified Builders Co-operative (Manitoba) is a worker-owned co-op building net-zero housing since 2012; SolarShare community solar. SES Solar co-op has developed 10 solar installations generating 500kw, Saskatoon.
Fair work and local labour markets	Upskilling public-sector and housing-association staff in green construction; maintaining high pay and conditions; targeting recruitment to disadvantaged	Lancaster Council's Green Skills Group works with manufacturers, contractors, the local college and businesses to	City of Victoria, a certified Living Wage Employer with progressive procurement and a target to cut emissions 80% from 2007 levels by 2030.

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CWB principles	Examples of implementation for just transition	UK case studies	Canada case studies
	communities and supporting routes into green sectors.	grow the area's green skills base.	
Procurement and spending	Anchor institutions designing commissioned services and procurement to deliver just-transition outcomes; supporting local businesses and VCSEs; social-value asks (green skills, greener supplier operations); costing CO_2 externalities into procurement.	Westminster Council's procurement policy commits to net zero by 2040, including reducing contractor air pollution and increasing contractor contributions to urban greening and biodiversity.	University of Toronto Scarborough's Harmony Commons (Canada's largest passive house, union-built). Toronto's MURA programme has awarded $165m to 34 non-profit, co-op, land-trust and Indigenous housing projects since 2021.
Land and property	Retrofit of public-sector buildings using local employment; licensing of private rented housing to raise minimum energy-efficiency standards; community-led affordable and near-net-zero housing.	Nottingham City Council's workplace parking levy has raised millions to fund local public transport, cut congestion and reduce emissions.	University of Winnipeg's Community Renewal Corporation 2.0 (near/at net-zero downtown housing). BC's Community Land Trust has developed thousands of co-op homes; in 2026 it secured federal funding to retrofit 269 units.
Finance	Community Municipal Investments / municipal bonds for local green projects; local-government pension investment in local energy and renewables; regional banking and credit unions backing green initiatives.	Oldham Green New Deal (public and private finance for net zero with local benefit). Greater Manchester works with Manchester Credit Union to provide low-cost retrofit finance at 5.5% across six authorities.	Vancity Credit Union — a democratic credit union (500k+ members, $40bn assets), a living-wage employer with a net-zero-by-2040 lending target and a Community Investment Bank focused on social-purpose real estate and climate finance.

Source: CLES / authors

Section 4 – Introducing the international workshops

In 2025, more than 120 participants - split roughly evenly between the UK workshops in Birmingham and Sussex and the Canadian workshops in Edmonton and Ottawa - took part in a series of international workshops focused on aligning Community Wealth Building (CWB) with net-zero transitions. These collaborative sessions were designed to break down silos between economic development, climate action and community-based organisations, with the aim of envisioning ways to shape a fairer, place-based transition in both countries.

UK workshops: Breaking the Silos (Birmingham & Sussex)

The UK sessions were framed around a central challenge: how to align CWB with net zero in practice, particularly within the resource-strained, highly siloed landscape of UK local government. Drawing on the theme of "Breaking the Silos", the workshops invited participants to explore new forms of cross-departmental working, joint governance and multi-actor collaboration. While UK institutions have strong decarbonisation ambitions, responsibilities remain divided between energy, climate, economic development, procurement and social value teams, making integrated strategies difficult. Presentations from Birmingham City Council, the West Midlands Combined Authority, Lewes District Council and Barnet Council illustrated how anchor institutions can redirect procurement, deploy land and assets and shape local supply chains to retain wealth and accelerate climate action. However, attendees emphasised ongoing constraints in short-term and competitive funding cycles, risk-averse cultures, a lack of long-term policy certainty and insufficient time for strategic planning. The UK workshops identified the need for more effective governance, coordinated leadership, aligned incentives and better evidence to support combined CWB–net zero initiatives.

Workshop organisers, from left to right, Conrad Parke, Dr Max Lacey-Barnacle, Dr Sarah Longlands, Siobhan Stack-Maddox and Dr Martin Boucher. Birmingham, June 2025.

Canada workshops: Creating Connection (Edmonton & Ottawa)

The Canadian workshops, under the banner "Creating Connection: Net Zero and Local Economic Development", brought together community organisations, energy-transition practitioners, co-operatives and economic development professionals. Hosted at NorQuest College's Community Energy Innovation Centre (Edmonton) and the Centre for Community Innovation at Carleton University (Ottawa), the sessions focused on how anchor institutions, civil society networks and local net zero actors can build partnerships that advance both decarbonisation and inclusive economic development, reflecting the very different provincial environments of Alberta and Ontario. Social enterprises featured more heavily than in the UK, particularly in the form of renewable energy co-operatives. Participants highlighted that while CWB is not yet widely formalised in Canadian policy, many municipalities and community organisations already practise its core principles through social procurement, co-operative development and community energy projects. Edmonton's Community Energy Transition Strategy and sustainable procurement reforms were discussed as strong examples of implicit CWB practice. Canada's workshops also displayed a far stronger embrace of just-transition language than the UK, reflecting the potential influence of national legislation such as the Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act and Sustainable Jobs Act.

Workshop organisers, from left to right, Dr Martin Boucher, Sara Boulos, Dr Max Lacey-Barnacle and Colin Bruce Anthes. Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada. October 2025.

Section 5 – Findings from the UK workshops

The UK workshops, held in Birmingham and Sussex in 2025, revealed both the significant potential and the structural challenges involved in bringing together CWB and net-zero transitions. Participants emphasised that the UK is at a pivotal moment: while climate action has advanced, the social and institutional foundations needed to make the transition fair, democratic and community-centred remain underdeveloped. A central theme was the persistence of siloed working cultures within local authorities, with economic development, sustainability, procurement and climate teams often operating independently, limiting shared planning. Meaningful integration requires more time, better resourcing and forums for cross-departmental collaboration.

Anchor institutions were widely recognised as essential actors for place-based decarbonisation, yet they face resource pressures, risk aversion and capacity gaps. While anchors can redirect procurement, unlock land and assets and expand fair-work commitments, they often lack the long-term strategies needed to invest in transformative programmes. Participants called for national government to set clearer CWB mandates, align incentives and devolve stable funding so anchors can act strategically. Funding emerged as a major obstacle: short-term, competitive, project-based grants prevent long-range planning. Participants called for alternative models — long-term devolved budgets, community municipal investments, climate bonds and proactive use of the Community Infrastructure Levy.

Several cross-cutting themes emerged. First, the importance of community involvement, co-production and trust-building as the foundation for just transitions. The workshops found that locally led net-zero initiatives are far more likely to succeed when people see tangible local benefits. Second, recognition that decarbonisation intersects with housing, food and economic resilience, requiring multi-sector solutions. Third, the need for financial innovation through anchor-led procurement, local finance models and community-benefit partnerships. Fourth, the importance of evaluation and monitoring, including metrics that capture long-term social value, fairness, equity and inclusion. These are areas often missing from both net-zero reporting and the CWB movement.

Overall, the UK workshops underscored that aligning CWB and net zero is not only desirable, but essential for a socially legitimate, place-based transition. To succeed, the UK must invest in local capacity, devolve resources, break down departmental silos and create long-term policy structures that empower communities and anchor institutions to shape a more democratic path to net zero where with multi-sector solutions are localised and communities play an active role in feeding into local economic development plans.

Dr Martin Boucher presenting Canadian policy insights to UK workshop participants in Birmingham. June 2025

Dr Max Lacey-Barnacle presenting research insights to UK workshop participants in Sussex. June 2025.

Section 6 – Findings from the Canada workshops

The Canadian workshops, held in Edmonton and Ottawa in 2025, revealed a landscape rich with local innovation, community leadership and implicit CWB practice, yet lacking formal policy frameworks that explicitly draw these strands together. Participants highlighted that Canada has embraced the language of just transition more strongly than the UK, supported by federal instruments such as the Sustainable Jobs Act and the Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act. However, CWB remains largely under-recognised in formal strategies, surfacing instead through local initiatives, co-operative movements and emerging community energy ecosystems.

A central insight from Edmonton was the extent to which municipal sustainability work already aligns with the five principles of CWB, even without being labelled as such: decarbonisation, procurement reform, local job creation and community engagement are embedded in municipal strategies, illustrated by Edmonton's Community Energy Transition Strategy. Yet participants noted the absence of any formal local strategy that explicitly names or connects CWB to these initiatives, exhibiting both a broader Canadian pattern and a fascinating counterpoint to UK policy momentum that demonstrates CWB's adaptability and resonance across contexts.

The workshops also underscored Canada's unique governance landscape. Multi-level coordination between federal, provincial and municipal governments is complex, and municipalities carry far greater fiscal responsibility than in the UK. While this often means downloaded responsibilities and pressures, it also creates opportunities for bold local action through social finance, procurement innovation and community-benefit agreements. Municipalities remain legally "creatures of the provinces", however, with limited revenue tools and constrained autonomy. Aligning CWB with net zero could help them build resilience, retain value locally and reduce vulnerability to provincial political shifts.

Canadian sessions suggested decentralised, diverse and bottom-up leadership. Interviews highlighted the critical role of Indigenous leadership, rights and governance in shaping energy and economic transitions. Both sessions featured renewable-energy co-operatives connected to "second-tier" co-operatives supporting regional collaboration. In Edmonton, participants emphasised the importance of community leagues as local civic anchors[10]; in Ottawa, the Quebec experience was cited as a touchstone for social-economy and CWB-oriented practice. Many foundational elements are already present, such as emerging networks, technical know-how and various local examples, but participants stressed the need for clearer case studies and roadmaps, more accessible communication, diversified funding and stronger collaborative infrastructure.

The Canadian workshops underscored that while many of the building blocks for democratising net zero transitions already exist, the next step is to explicitly integrate CWB into Canada's just-transition planning to ensure deep, lasting community benefit.

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[10]Community leagues are neighbourhood-based, volunteer-run non-profits unique to Edmonton, coordinated through the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues (EFCL), acting as hyper-local civic anchors for sustainability initiatives including EFCL's Green Leagues programme.

Dr Max Lacey-Barnacle presenting UK policy insights to Canadian workshop participants in Ottawa, October 2025

Dr Martin Boucher engaging workshop participants in Edmonton, October 2025.

Section 7 – Conclusion

This report demonstrates that bringing CWB and just transitions together is not only a matter of policy innovation implemented by local leaders; it is a strategic imperative for economic resilience, energy security and democratic renewal in both the UK and Canada. In an increasingly volatile global economy, marked by supply-chain disruption, geopolitical instability and energy price shocks, both countries face shared challenges. Namely, how to decarbonise in ways that strengthen, rather than expose, their domestic economies and communities, while localising the benefits of net zero to build public engagement and trust.

The findings from our UK–Canada research project and 2025 workshops make clear that aligning CWB with net zero provides a powerful route to achieving this. By embedding the five principles of CWB - plural ownership, fair work, progressive procurement, locally embedded finance and the socially productive use of land and assets - within just transition strategies, governments can ensure that investment in decarbonisation circulates within national, regional and local economies. Examples such as Lewes' alignment of housing, procurement and green growth, alongside Edmonton's integration of social value into energy and procurement systems, illustrate how localised models can simultaneously drive decarbonisation whilst building local resilience and strengthening local economies.

Crucially, this approach also strengthens energy sovereignty. Community-owned renewable projects such as Scotland's Point and Sandwick Trust wind farm or Ottawa's co-operative solar initiatives, show how energy systems can shift from dependence on external, corporate-dominated supply chains towards locally controlled, democratically governed infrastructure. This can enhance national energy security by rooting generation, ownership and multiplier effects within domestic, regional and local territories. Research by CLES on the dominance of extractive economies in Scotlands wind power sector strengthens this point (Boys et al 2026).

Our workshop insights reinforce the idea that institutional and policy conditions to achieve this exist but remain fragmented. In the UK, strong CWB policy momentum contrasts with a lack of national just transition coordination. In Canada, more developed federal just transition frameworks coexist with an underdeveloped CWB landscape. Across both, siloed governance, short-term funding cycles and limited integration between economic and climate policy continue to constrain progress in aligning CWB with just transitions. However, as participants consistently emphasised, the examples already emerging, ranging from community finance models, local energy efficiency and community energy schemes to anchor-led procurement, anchor institution networks and local government action in uniting the green economy with CWB outcomes, show these barriers can be overcome with coordinated policy action and strong networks.

For policymakers, researchers and practitioners, we identify four routes forward. First, energy transitions and net zero must be reframed as a core component of local economic development strategies, not a separate domain or top-down burden. Second, CWB offers a tested, adaptable framework for ensuring net zero transitions actively build domestic capacity and local resilience. Third, future research must focus on integrated evaluation frameworks for CWB and just transitions, scaling financing mechanisms and strengthening governance models that connect local action to national and international goals. Fourth, anchor institutions and policy networks supportive of bringing together CWB and just transitions can pool resources to support the creation of a network co-ordinator position. Anchor Institution network co-ordinators exist in the UK, for example, in the Birmingham Anchor Network. They can create can facilitative roles and fill any capacity gaps needed to co-ordinate a large amount of organisations and stakeholders around shared goals.

Finally, a broader reflection from the research project as a whole noted three different pathways for aligning CWB and just transitions, adapted from Foxon's (2013) seminal work on transition pathways. These can be separated into:

- **Market:** Strengthening local economies and harnessing procurement and financial innovation to support existing net zero businesses and supply chains, where existing funds can be redirected.
- **State:** Advancing public and community ownership of the net zero economy, through greater municipal projects and partnerships between community organisations and government
- **Civil Society:** Prioritising co-operatives, community-led and social enterprise organisations and civil society innovations and networks for net zero, particularly focusing on community ownership models

We found from both our workshops and our project research that all three approaches were utilised to support alignments between CWB and just transitions. Sometimes a combination of pathways was used by networks of different actors seeking to align CWB with just transitions. Importantly, the pathways or combination of pathways used was dependent on varying local contexts, organisational capacities, community needs, place-based histories and political and social cultures. They can act as theoretical guides that may underpin a governance rationale, or an overall objective to strive towards for local economies.

Introducing the workshop guide

Building on the learning from the international workshops, a workshop guide has been developed to follow this report. Its aim is to help just transition and Community Wealth Building practitioners and policymakers work together to deliver mutually compatible aims, creating a multiplier effect within existing resources that achieves both net zero targets and increased local flows of wealth. To achieve this, the workshop guide will:

- Create a shared understanding of the two approaches for both policy and practice audiences.
- Explain how the goals of both are mutually compatible.
- Make a persuasive strategic argument for a joint approach — including an honest assessment of the barriers to overcome.
- Identify practical opportunities for joint action that turn strategy into effective delivery.
- Provide support for designing shared outcomes, which can include looking at: Wealth retained locally; jobs created (and who gets them); energy cost reductions; community ownership levels

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