



Putting community owned solar panels into schools

Installing solar panels at a school can cut electricity purchased from the grid by up to one third, can save the school money and represents significant educational opportunities for students.

The Schools' Energy Co-operative installs community funded solar panel systems on schools free of charge, provides energy efficiency support to its member schools, pays all its profits to its member schools and works with schools and local community groups to maximise the environmental, educational and community impact of the solar installations.

The Schools' Energy Co-op is a social enterprise dedicated to supporting its school members and provides an alternative to the prevailing commercial rent a roof or leasing model. It gives schools access to renewable energy sources and helps them cut their energy costs with no up-front cost by installing solar panels. It is supported in its work by Energy4All.



The aim is to assist schools in their sustainability and educational work and to engage the local community. Central to this is our aspiration to retain as much as possible of the benefits for the school, its students and the surrounding community.

What are we proposing?

We want to:

- Find schools that are interested in benefiting from solar panels and have suitable roofs;
- Manage the installation (in partnership with the school);
- Provide the finance and all the relevant legal documents; and,
- Ensure that the schools gain the maximum environmental, community and financial benefit.

Financial highlights of our approach:

1. Up-front financial cost to the School is £ nil. The School allows the Co-op to install solar panels on its roofs. There is no cost to the School, no borrowing or leasing of panels by the School and no risk to the School. The Co-op pays for everything including the surveys. The panels are owned by the Co-op. There is very little work to be done by the School, which will be fully supported throughout.
2. Electricity generated by the solar panels and consumed by the School will be charged to the School at a rate that is lower than they currently pay. The Co-op will invoice the School quarterly for its consumption. This price will increase by inflation (RPI) each year during the duration of the arrangement (i.e. for 25 years). Electricity prices are anticipated to increase at a rate which is faster than general inflation each year so the benefit to the School should increase each year.
3. Maintenance and replacement of broken parts will be paid for by the Co-op.
4. The only additional costs for the school are insurance of the panels - estimates obtained for an example school indicate that the increase in insurance premium is nominal (£20 or £30 per annum) if there is any increase at all. If schools have half hourly meters, we will arrange for them to be reprogrammed to deal with the export of electricity not used by the School to the grid if feasible and cost effective to do so.
5. The income from the sale of electricity, both to the School and exported via the grid, will be retained by the Co-op to recoup the cost of the solar panels and to pay interest to its members.

6. Members of the public who invest in the Co-op are paid interest of about 4.5% and their investment is repaid over 20-25 years. All the Co-op's profits after paying interest are shared between the Co-op's participating schools.
7. The School (or funds associated with it) is welcome to invest in the Co-op and receive interest and repayment of its investment on the same basis as the public. We hope the School will do so and will consider undertaking a fundraising activity to enable it to invest as part of maximising student and school engagement - but this is not mandatory. Schools that have participated this way have benefited – they have a stimulating project for interested students, particularly if the school has an eco-committee; they have a live business example for use in business study classes; and the current generation of students undertakes a project to benefit a future generation.

After 25 years, the panels will be given to the School - they should have at least 15 years of life left in them at that stage.

Educational, sustainability and community highlights of our approach:

Community

For schools (and any corporate supporters) this scheme takes community engagement to the next level and delivers tangible benefits that will have a ripple effect as children take their experiences home with them.

Simplicity

The purpose of The Schools Energy Co-op and its supporting organisations is to make more projects happen and we will make the whole process simple, transparent and fair.

Security

We do things properly including undertaking a structural and electrical survey prior to installation.

Ease of terminating the arrangements

Schools can buy themselves out of the arrangements at any time if they need or want to at a fair price.

Experienced team

The Schools' Energy Co-op has now installed solar panel arrays at 80 schools (as at April 2019), including some highly complex installations. All installations are working well, and the schools will provide references. The Co-op is supported by Energy4All on fundraising, project management, management and monitoring of the solar panels, organising any repairs needed, and on-going administration.

Ethos

Our primary goal is to support schools and their community. Investors are provided with a fair interest return but no one profits at the School's expense. The Co-op exists to enable its member schools successfully to install renewable energy and to support them in their environmental, educational and community work. It is not purely a financial arrangement.

Education

If practicable and financially viable we will seek to ensure that at least part of the array is highly visible to students. We provide full access to generation data and if you wish we will link that data to the school's intranet.

Sustainability

Schools can make a material reduction in their carbon footprint and demonstrate leadership in their community.

Mr Hughes (Head of Science at Broadwater School) said. *“The solar PV system will benefit both school and students. Students are fully aware of the problems with conventional fossil fuel power production; global warming, carbon footprints, acid rain and problems of energy reserves from their science lessons, so having this system installed at Broadwater will allow them to see first-hand the positive impact of clean renewable energy.*

“They will be able to monitor the output and see the savings made both financially and environmentally. It is a fantastic opportunity to see renewable energy live instead of just hearing about it or watching video clips, and to be involved.”

Next Steps

If your School is interested the Co-op will undertake a free feasibility study and will then make you a proposal based on the cost of installation and electricity generation anticipated. There is a straightforward agreement between the School and the Co-op (under which the School consents to the Co-op placing its panels on the School roofs and which sets out the other terms described above) which will be sent to the School for its consideration.

The project delivers environmental, educational, community and financial benefits - there really is no catch!

References

References are available from schools who are members of The Schools' Energy Co-op.

Our supporter and manager: Energy4All - a quick introduction



Energy4All is a non-profit distributing social enterprise that delivers and manages community owned energy projects, organising the community fundraising and then managing the ongoing co-operative. To date it has delivered 26 successful community energy projects and has raised over £70 million in community fundraising.

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