

Hello,

Following your latest email, wondered if you can provide some signposting please?

On the allotment site we are having a visitor centre/site management building . This is funded by heritage lottery. Unfortunately they won't provide any running costs. We would like to install solar /pv panels (again which HL won't fund). The building has air to heat pumps which will require electricity costs.

██████ will use the building and manage it. They are a charity as well as co. Ltd by guarantee.

Any help much appreciated.

Regards, ██████

Hi ██████

Your new building sounds exciting! Below are some ideas for keeping your running costs, in relation to energy usage, low, and funding a solar PV system.

Running Costs

I'm assuming that the building is already designed, but isn't built yet – that's the way I've read your email.

There is a lot you can do to keep energy usage – and, thus, energy bills - down once it's built. As the building is new it will meet current building regs: re insulation, draught proofing etc which is a good start, but you can do more:

- **Measure how much energy you're using** by taking regular meter readings. In domestic settings people who know how much energy they use tend to use less than those who don't and the same is often true of non-domestic buildings. MEA has a free tool to help community organisations to do this: www.wesave.org.uk. You can simply input meter readings on a regular basis (once a month is good) and build up a pattern of your usage. The site includes a downloadable guide which was written specifically for community and third sector organisations. One feature of this website is the ability to print out charts of usage – you could put these on a notice board in the building to show people what you are using and how much it is costing. This could encourage them to turn the lights off/heating down etc.
- One you start getting energy bills **make sure they aren't estimated** – utility companies usually estimate in their favour not yours! It usually just takes a two minute phone call to give them the correct reading and then they send you a revised bill.
- It's worth talking to energy companies about **community tariffs** – they sometimes have them.

Once you've started monitoring your usage there are some simple ways to keep it low:

- Is the heating set to be on at times when the building is actually being used, or is it coming on at other times? It's worth periodically checking this as you may find that the times at which the building is being used change slightly over time.
- Does someone change the heating settings in autumn and spring to reflect the changing seasons? This is the kind of thing we all do at home, but it can get forgotten about in a community building used by lots of people.
- Make sure you start with low energy lightbulbs. A wide range is now available – including LEDs to replace Halogens – especially online.

More tips on saving energy:

- www.est.org.uk
- www.mea.org.uk/resources/fact-sheets

Funding a Solar PV Panel

Feed-in-Tariffs

You may have heard of these. In a nutshell, someone installs a solar panel and then they receive payments from their energy company for every unit of energy they generate for a guaranteed amount of time (currently 25 years). They also receive a further payment for half of the units they generate (in the assumption that they send half of what they generate back to the grid), and they also have lower energy bills because they are using half of what they generate. FITS have been set up in such a way as to guarantee a good return on your initial investment – they could generate a long term income for your project.

There has been a lot in the news recently about FIT tariffs changing suddenly. However, it's mostly settled down in the last couple of months, and it can still be a good investment as the cost of installing the panels has fallen dramatically. More information here:

www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/Generate-your-own-energy/Financial-incentives/Feed-In-Tariffs-scheme-FITs - a thorough explanation of the scheme.

<http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/Generate-your-own-energy/Solar-panels-PV/Solar-Energy-Calculator> - this tool allows you to ascertain if your building faces the right directions for PV (might be difficult if it's not built yet and doesn't have a postcode!) and also what your likely return on your investment will be.

www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/Publications2/Generate-your-own-energy/FAQ-on-UK-Government-Feed-in-Tariffs - Pages 12-13 of this document set out what the government is currently doing to make FITs work for community organisations.

For most community orgs the main problem with FITS is that you need to come up with the upfront investment to buy them in the first place. There are a number of ways of finding funding.

(a) Community Shares: A number of community orgs around the country have set up community-owned renewables on community buildings. Local people buy shares in the project, these are used to purchase a solar panel or air source heat pump etc. The building gets the free electricity/heat and those who bought shares get a return on their investment as the renewable earns FIT payments. Here are some local(ish) examples:

- Torrs Hydro Project (Derbyshire-based): <http://torrs-hydro-new-mills.blogspot.com/>

- SHOCK (Nottinghamshire based): www.sustainablehockerton.org
- Green Fox (Leicestershire based): <http://greenfoxcommunityenergy.coop/>
- Tutbury EcoPower (Staffordshire based): www.tutburyecopower.co.uk

A short video guide to funding a project through a Share Issue:

www.planlocal.org.uk/videos/videopages/funding-your-project-through-a-share-issue.html

Energy4All has worked on a number of community-owned projects (mostly wind turbines): www.energy4all.co.uk.

(b) Low Cost Loans that are designed for community orgs wanting to install renewables. You make the repayments with your FIT payments, and once it's paid off you start making money.

Here is an example of a church which got a low cost loan for PV: www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-shropshire-14189887

I've recently come across this org: www.puretrust.org.uk. Don't know much about them but might be worth looking at. They have just teamed up with Energy Share to offer loans: www.energyshare.com/make-energy/pure-and-energyshare-loan.

(c) Grants

EDF Green Energy Fund: This fund is open until 31st August: www.edfenergy.com/products-services/for-your-home/our-services/green-energy-fund.shtml#

Last year DECC ran something called the **Local Energy Assessment Fund (LEAF)** (<http://greencommunitiescc.org.uk/>). This funded a range of projects, some of them involving community buildings. Grants ranged from £2K to £130k.

There are rumours of a second round of LEAF later this f/y. There are no guarantees at the moment that it will happen, and the criteria may be slightly different to last time, but it's definitely worth groups keeping an eye out. Last time orgs like MEA were able to help groups write their applications – they were able to include up to £1K for our time in their bid's budget and if they were successful we then claimed this. If they weren't successful we didn't claim it, so the risk lay with MEA rather than the groups. We would be happy to do this again if there is another round and if DECC allows this again.

These guys got a **lottery grant** for their village hall solar panels: www.northkilworth.com.

One word of warning re: accepting a grant for the installation of renewables – if the grant comes from public funds it can make an installation ineligible for FIT/RHI payments (but it doesn't always. You would need to check with OFGEM (who oversee FITS) before going ahead with an installation.

Useful Resources:

- These short videos explore different ways of funding renewables on community buildings: www.planlocal.org.uk/videos/submenus/submenu-funding.html.

- www.planlocal.org.uk – this is an excellent resource from a charity called Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE) which guides groups through the process of setting up a community owned renewable. There are short videos on all sorts of topics (including some really inspiring case studies) and lots of factsheets and activities to help groups work out issues such as deciding what renewables to have, finding funding, getting the community on board etc. All the website resources exist in hard copy in the form of a level archer file full of factsheets and two DVDs with the videos on. This can be ordered from the website by community groups. CSE are running an event in Milton Keynes in September which might be of interest: more information attached.
- www.acre.org.uk/news/2011-news/news-2011-get-generating-guide - an easy read with lots of case studies. Written with village halls in rural communities in mind, but you may still find lots of what's in it useful.