

ARUN DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO AND DECISION OF ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE ON 10th MARCH 2022

SUBJECT: Solar Together Sussex Scheme

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DATE: 4th January 2022
EXTN: 01903 737743
AREA: Place/Technical Services

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Authority is sought to support a collective solar scheme with other District and Boroughs in Sussex. This is run by West Sussex County Council and called 'Solar Together Sussex'. The aim is to help residents access this renewable technology and drive down the cost through collective purchasing.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Committee:

1. Approve Arun District Council's participation in the third Solar Together Sussex scheme auction and;
2. Approve the contribution that the Council was due to receive for its initial investment to the Solar Together scheme of £2,521 continue to be waived, to further support the Solar Together Sussex scheme for the mailout costs for the upcoming third auction.
3. Delegate authority to the Group Head of Technical Services to approve Arun District Council's participation in future auctions, and to approve reinvestment of fees from the third and any future Solar Together auctions.

1. BACKGROUND:

1.1 Climate change is considered the biggest modern threat to humanity. The Government declared a Climate Emergency in 2019. The Council declared a Climate Emergency on 15 January 2020. By pledging to become carbon neutral the Council has committed to achieving net zero carbon dioxide emissions by 2030. This will be achieved by reducing our emissions of carbon dioxide and seeking alternative

solutions, such as offsetting, for any emissions which cannot be removed.

1.2 The Council has produced a Carbon Neutral Strategy 2022-2030 detailing the work Arun intends to undertake to support the national commitment to become carbon neutral by 2050, in accordance with the UK Climate Change Act 2008. Arun District Council adopted an Energy Efficiency and Fuel Poverty Strategy on 09 March 2020. Amongst the strategic aims is "To encourage and support the uptake of domestic renewable energy systems". Promotion of renewables is vital to help to tackle climate change.

1.3 The Council took part in Solar Together Sussex auctions in 2020 and 2021, which were successful. Previous auctions were for Solar Photovoltaic (PV) installations. The next auction will still offer Solar PV but have more of a focus on Battery Storage and Electric Vehicle charge points. This is because the most suitable properties have already been approached in previous auctions so the take up might not be so high.

iChoosr Solar Scheme

1.4 iChoosr is an independent organiser of group buying schemes established in 2008. They offer better prices, higher quality, and less inconvenience. The collective nature of their work offers residents the security and confidence in purchasing their products. There is no obligation and registration is free.

Solar Scheme Overview

1.5 iChoosr only work with large authorities so they can target over 100,000 properties. They work with West Sussex County Council (WSCC), to run the scheme called 'Solar Together Sussex' and WSCC in turn ask for support from the District and Borough Councils.

1.6 WSCC have a Concession Agreement with iChoosr. The District and Boroughs, including Arun District Council, have signed an inter authority agreement with WSCC. This is valid for 5 years from 2019.

1.7 WSCC will work with iChoosr to identify 100,000 or more households across Sussex in the target group.

1.8 Each participating District and Borough will pay WSCC for the direct mailout costs in their area (re-use monies from last round held by WSCC). WSCC will then arrange payment of the direct mailout. The cost is calculated on a 30p per household basis.

1.9 In return for WSCC providing a coordinating role, the Council agrees that any surplus revenue from the commission payments is paid into the Your Energy Sussex (YES) Fuel Poverty Fund to help vulnerable Householders in Sussex struggling to pay their fuel bills. The Fuel Poverty Fund has so far contributed £4800 to Age UK West Sussex to provide 20 residents with a weeks' worth of cooked dinners. It has also contributed £4500 to West Sussex Family Support work. This was to further support the fuel voucher schemes.

1.10 This scheme is expected to be cost neutral to Arun District Council as the direct mail

should be reimbursed. There is a risk that the Council mailout payment may not be reimbursed if there is low take up in the district.

1.11 How the Scheme Works

- Residents are sent letters from iChoosr with WSCC and Arun District Council logos
- If interested, residents sign up for free and with no obligation
- iChoosr organises an auction among selected approved installers
- Residents receives a personal offer from the winning installer. This is typically 20% lower than the average cost.
- The resident decides whether to accept the offer and proceed. If they do, iChoosr is on hand to help throughout the process. iChoosr inspect 20% of installations.

1.12 Auction in 2020

This Solar Together Sussex scheme ran in 2020, Arun District Council limited its contribution to £2,521 and the outcomes:

- One of the most successful Solar Together schemes with Sussex having a 5.6% registration rate (against a 4.9% average for autumn auction) and 19.5% acceptance rate for Photo Voltaic (19.4% average for autumn auction) - despite Sussex being more complex than other schemes due to large geographical area and number of partners.
- Targeted direct mail was the centrepiece of the marketing campaign (secured 70% of registrants).
- Overall, the project installed 760 systems of which 52 are in the Arun District.
- Total income in fees to WSCC £57,600
- Arun District Council fees £3,900; £2,521 covered the mail out costs and the remaining went to the WSCC fuel poverty pot.
- West Sussex Fuel poverty pot around £18,000
- 12,985 kg of CO² reduction in Arun

1.12 Auction in 2021

Limited data available however 7,241 households registered for the auction an increase of 1000 compared to the 2020 auction so 18% increase. It is highly likely the mailout costs will be covered so available for re-investment in this next auction.

1.13 Cost and benefits to Arun District Council and the residents

For Residents	For Councils
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• By coming together, residents get a better deal• Council backing gives reassurance• Simple process• Working with experts who have vetted suppliers and researched the market helps navigate uncertainty• Service desk for queries and support throughout all stages of the process	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Significant measurable carbon reduction driven by resident investment in green energy• Group buying is an extremely cost-effective option• Small investment of council officer time to drive significant private investment• Supplier vetting and engagement handled by iChoosr• Customer support handled by iChoosr• Potential to generate income for a West Sussex wide fuel poverty fund

1.13 Timescales

The auction is expected to take place in Autumn 2022 and WSCC require commitment from those District and Boroughs wishing to take part in April 2022. The proposed timetable is:

- July 2022 – Mail out to residents
- September 2022 – Auction ends
- December 2022 – Installs to begin
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2. PROPOSAL(S):

Members are requested to approve:

1. Arun District Council's participation in the second Solar Together Sussex scheme auction and;
2. The reinvestment of the £2,521 fees initially invested by the Council in the first Solar Together Sussex scheme auction in 2020 and subsequently 2021, to support mailout costs for the third auction.
3. Delegate authority to the Group Head of Technical Services to approve Arun District Council's participation in future auctions, and to approve reinvestment of fees from the third and any future Solar Together auctions.

3. OPTIONS:

To not reinvest the £2,521 and not take part in a further Solar Together Sussex Scheme auction. This would mean that residents would be unable to access the EV charge points and battery storage as part of a group buying scheme and therefore would not be able to benefit from the reduced costs this can offer.

4. CONSULTATION:		
Has consultation been undertaken with:	YES	NO
Relevant Town/Parish Council		X
Relevant District Ward Councillors		X
Other groups/persons (please specify)		X
5. ARE THERE ANY IMPLICATIONS IN RELATION TO THE FOLLOWING COUNCIL POLICIES: (Explain in more detail at 6 below)	YES	NO
Financial	X	
Legal	X	
Human Rights/Equality Impact Assessment	X	
Community Safety including Section 17 of Crime & Disorder Act		X
Sustainability	X	
Asset Management/Property/Land		X
Technology		X
Other (please explain)		X
6 IMPLICATIONS:		
<p>6.1 Financial- The original invested £2,521 from the 2020 auction and then reused in the 2021 auction would be reinvested in the scheme's third auction and used for the direct mail. This money will not come back into the Council. It will be held by WSCC.</p> <p>6.2 Expected rates of take-up would result in reimbursement of the Council's investment, making it cost neutral to the council. There is a risk that this may not be fully re-paid if there is very low take up. We will look to spread the risk by only doing a capped amount for the auction.</p> <p>6.3 In the event the 2021 auction installs are lower than expected, and therefore the £2,521 is not available to reinvest the shortfall will be funded from within existing 2022/2023 budgets.</p> <p>6.4 Legal- iChoosr are the only group buying organisation in the market therefore WSCC have determined that there is no need to undertake a procurement process.</p> <p>6.5 Sustainability - The scheme will support renewables and reduce carbon emissions in the district. Helping meet the Government target of 'Net Zero' emissions by 2050.</p>		
7. REASON FOR THE DECISION:		
To contribute to Arun District Council's Energy Efficiency and Fuel Poverty Strategy strategic aim of encouraging and supporting the uptake of domestic renewable energy systems. To contribute to carbon emissions reduction.		

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Energy Efficiency and Fuel Poverty Strategy 2020-2025:

[Energy Efficiency and FP Strategy 2020-2025 \(arun.gov.uk\)](https://www.arun.gov.uk/energy-efficiency-and-fuel-poverty-strategy-2020-2025)

Carbon Neutral Strategy 2022-2030:

<https://www.arun.gov.uk/download.cfm?doc=docm93jjim4n18057.pdf&ver=18990>

Equality Impact Assessment