



CARES CASE STUDY

EDINBURGH COMMUNITY SOLAR CO-OPERATIVE



- Project owner: Edinburgh Community Solar Co-operative
- Location: Schools and leisure centres all over Edinburgh
- Technology: 1.38 MW of solar PV panels on 24 City of Edinburgh Council buildings
- CARES funding: CARES Development Loan of £44k awarded June 2015
- Date complete: April 2016

BACKGROUND

Edinburgh Community Solar Co-operative (ECSC) wanted to install PV panels on council buildings for the benefit of the community. They worked closely with City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) to agree the process and identify a business case that would allow the panels to be installed on schools and leisure centres managed by Edinburgh Leisure on behalf of CEC. ECSC had been trying to get a renewable energy project off the ground for several years and achieved this by working with the council and other shareholders.

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PROJECT AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The primary purpose of ECSC is to own solar PV panels on 24 public buildings in the city of Edinburgh and sell electricity to the buildings on which they are installed. ECSC also generates revenue from the Feed in Tariff (FiT) and from exporting surplus electricity back to the national grid.

ECSC was established to be involved in and support the supply of renewable, low carbon energy. This helps to reduce carbon emissions, improve energy security and support sustainable development in and around the City of Edinburgh. ECSC does this by working with like-minded organisations and supporting projects and educational work.



OUTCOMES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

ECSC's primary achievement was to install solar PV panels on 24 buildings in Edinburgh, with a total installed capacity of 1.38 MW. The total generation potential of the project is an impressive 1,107,250 kWh per year!

This unique project represents an unrivalled level of partnership working between a community group and local authority. The group caught the imagination of the council leadership which helped the project to succeed even in times of doubt.

Another reason this project is distinctive is that the majority of the £1.4 million share offer was raised locally. Over 70% of the shares were purchased by people in Edinburgh, whereas most projects funded by share offer get the majority of their funding from outside the project area.

The project generated £12,000 surplus in the first six months of operation and £23,000 in the first full year. All but £3,000 of this has been put to good use through the community benefit fund, with funds being awarded to projects linked to the schools which have solar PV installed. Once the fund has been up and running for 3 years, other local community groups will be able to benefit. The project shareholders benefit from an interest rate return of 5% a year and the council benefits by reducing their carbon emissions.

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LESSONS LEARNED

This project shows that community groups can work successfully with councils to set up a renewable energy project with benefits for everyone involved. ECSC has installed 15 displays in schools and leisure centres to show how much electricity is being generated on a real time basis, helping school pupils and community members to see the benefits of renewables.

ECSC had great success with the community share offer, but Project Officer Jim Lee believes securing funding from the Community and Renewable Energy Scheme (CARES) was essential to get the project started. Jim said, "CARES funding is absolutely crucial for any community energy project. Community groups have great difficulty acquiring financial support for early stage development. The funding from CARES to support feasibility studies allows projects to develop beyond the concept stage to a point where partners such as City of Edinburgh Council can treat the project seriously."

"Funding for the final stages of community energy projects is relatively easy to obtain either through share offers or through loan finance. But such capital does not like to take on significant degrees of risk and the role of CARES in providing grants and loans in the early stages allows community groups to make a robust case for further development."

Website: www.edinburghsolar.coop

To find out more about funding from the Community and Renewable Energy Scheme, visit www.localenergy.scot/funding

The technical level of the project was most challenging for ECSC. The group held a review session and shared some lessons learned:

- Have a Project Champion in the council, or a stakeholder at a high level. Produce a clear proposal document for stakeholders showing the benefits of the project and consider working with more stakeholders over a wider area.
- Take a pragmatic approach to surveys. Survey a wide list of buildings and check the building load and grid connection first. Structural surveys need to happen early in the project and building metering provision should be considered at the survey stage. At the end of the survey stage, full specification should be provided, including designs, structure and electrical plans. A Schedule of Rates could be established here too.
- Outline a clear spec at the beginning. Make sure you know what the council needs in terms of health and safety as this will help you sort out snagging quickly. Make sure you include displays in each building in your spec.
- Choose your buildings carefully. If repeating the project, ECSC would include more buildings with a higher load all year round, like leisure centres and libraries. Check in with the District Network Operator (DNO) at an early stage as you may need to think about export limitation or storage on site.

The ECSC elected board are hoping to use these lessons to continue their success, beginning a second phase of the project to install solar PV panels on another 11 council buildings. There are also early stage plans for more installations in partnership with various public, private and third sector organisations.

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