

Improving energy efficiency in community buildings – online event held on 11th July 2023

Summary of Q&A

What funding can we apply for to make improvements to our building?

There are two ways the district councils may be able to financially support improvements to your community buildings:

1. **S106/Community Infrastructure Levy funding** – this comes from money that developers have to pay to the district council when they build new houses to improve local facilities which will be used by the new residents. There are limitations to what this funding can be used for and usually it must be spent on facilities within the same town or parish as the new houses. Please visit our websites for further information for [South Oxfordshire](#) and the [Vale of White Horse](#).
2. **District council grant schemes** – the councils award grants which can be used for energy efficiency projects:
 - **[Vale of White Horse Climate Action Fund](#)** – please note that this scheme focuses on raising awareness of climate change so an application for an energy infrastructure project would need to have a strong element of community engagement incorporated into it.
 - **[South Oxfordshire Councillor Community Grant](#)**
 - **[South Oxfordshire Capital Grant Scheme](#)**

Other funding opportunities include:

- **[Low Carbon Hub](#)** – low carbon community groups with a focus on energy can become a member of the Low Carbon Hub which then offers small and large annual grants. You can contact the Low Carbon Hub [helpdesk](#) if you have any questions.
- **[Westmill Solar Community Grants Scheme](#)**
- **[National Lottery Community Fund](#)** (previously called the Big Lottery Fund)
- **[People's Postcode Lottery](#)**
- **[Rural Community Building Loan Fund](#)**

It is likely you will need to get funding from a variety of sources. Once you have started securing some funding, it is often easier to successfully apply for the rest.

How should we decide what improvements to make?

A building energy assessment is the best way to get information about how to improve the energy efficiency of your community building. The Low Carbon Hub offers **[free energy assessments for community buildings](#)**, carried out by Oxford Brookes' Environmental Information Exchange. You can **[visit the Low Carbon Hub website](#)** to express your interest.

Thermal imaging cameras can be used to visually show where heat is leaking out of buildings and therefore where it would be best to focus efforts to improve insulation.

- The council has two thermal imaging cameras available to borrow between March and October on a first come first served basis. Please email **climateaction@southandvale.gov.uk** to arrange to borrow this equipment (free of charge).



- Low Carbon Hub have two thermal imaging cameras available to borrow, though you'll need to travel to Oxford to pick one up. To arrange please **complete this booking form**.

Can hosting at EV charging point raise money for a village hall?

Yes, an EV charging point can provide income for a village hall as well as providing a service for the residents in your local area. As an example, **Sustainable Kirtlington** has installed solar PV, a battery and 2 EV charging points at their village hall.

If you are a town or parish council, there may be elements of your constitution that do not allow 'trade' which could have an impact on whether you are able to take the income from an EV charger. In most cases this is not an issue, as the money can be ringfenced and if the hall is managed by an association or charity this point would not apply.

Do we need to apply for planning permission to make energy efficiency improvements to our community building?

This will depend on your proposed installation and the location of your building but often energy efficiency improvements will be classed as 'permitted development' which means, if your scheme meets the criteria, you do not need planning permission. If your building is in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or Conservation Area the criteria that you must meet are stricter. If your building is listed you will always need to apply for planning permission.

The **Planning Portal website** sets out all the information about permitted development rights or if you really want to double check then you can **look directly at the legislation**.

Which roof direction is the most advantageous for hosting solar panels?

A south facing roof will be best for solar panels as that direction gets the most intense sun for the longest period of time each day. However, east or west facing roofs can also be suitable for solar panels. A north facing roof is unsuitable for solar panels.

You can **listen to a presentation from Wallingford Sports Trust** about the solar panels they are installing on the roof of their building - interestingly they are installing panels on the roofs facing south, east and west which should maximise the energy generated throughout the year.

Is it true that the electricity grid can't cope with more generated energy being fed into the grid in some places?

Yes, it's true that for larger energy generation installations there are issues with long delays and lead-in-times for getting connections agreements. However this is unlikely to be an issue for the scale of project that most community buildings will be pursuing. Research ran through one of the **Project Leo Smart & Fair Neighbourhood trials** showed that more solar panels and electric vehicle charging can actually be beneficial for balancing the grid at the local level.

What is the Smart Export Guarantee?

The Smart Export Guarantee is a scheme where you are paid for electricity that you generate but don't use. Usually the payment per kWh is less than you will pay to your supplier if you need to purchase any electricity to supplement the energy you generate onsite. The Energy Saving Trust has some more useful information **on their website**.

