



ADUR & WORTHING
COUNCILS

Leaders
13 April 2021

Decision to be taken on or after
21 April 2021

Key Decision: Yes

Ward(s) Affected: All

Solar Together Sussex - 2nd Auction

Report by the Director for Digital, Sustainability & Resources

Executive Summary

1. Purpose

- 1.1. This report provides an update on the success of the Sussex Solar Together Programme and seeks approval to remain involved with the scheme for a second Auction.
- 1.2. The Solar Together Sussex scheme sent 110,000 direct mails to Sussex residents; resulting in 6,127 registrations, and is forecast to install 2.8MW of Solar photovoltaics, delivering nearly 700 tonnes carbon reduction in year one, across a forecast 760 solar PV installations.
- 1.3. Solar Together Sussex is a Sussex wide, not for profit, solar photovoltaic (PV) group buying scheme run by iChoosr, that enables all local residents to buy high quality, quality assured, discount rate solar PV for their homes. Schemes have been successfully delivered in other parts of England.
- 1.4. Solar Together Sussex is being run in collaboration with West Sussex County Council, and other Sussex local authorities including Adur District and Worthing Borough Council. It was launched in Sussex in August 2021.
- 1.5. The scheme has achieved great success. Over 1000 residents in Sussex have accepted their recommended offers for home solar PV, and over 100

of these were in Adur & Worthing. So far around 10% of these have been installed (installs were delayed during lockdowns).

- 1.6. The scheme enables the Councils to support residents to decarbonise their own homes. This aligns with commitments made by both Councils to work towards becoming Net Zero by 2045 across both areas. Carbon emissions from homes are the single largest source of carbon emissions in Adur and Worthing, representing 38% of the combined annual carbon emissions of Adur and Worthing.

2. Recommendations

2.1. That Members:

- 2.1.1. Note the success of the first Solar Together Sussex auction in autumn 2020;
- 2.1.2. Give approval for the Councils to enter into collaboration agreement with West Sussex Council and iChoosr on the second Solar Together Sussex Programme in autumn 2021;
- 2.1.3. Approval to send a direct mail to residents on the Solar Together programme (text from the first direct mail letter is shown at **Appendix 1**);
- 2.1.4. Approval for the Leaders of Worthing Borough and Adur District Council to send direct mail letters in their names; and
- 2.1.5. Approval to use the Council logo in the direct mail letters.

3. Context

- 3.1. In August 2020 Members gave approval to:
 - 3.1.1. collaborate with West Sussex Council and iChoosr on the Solar Together Sussex Programme
 - 3.1.2. enter a Collaboration Agreement with West Sussex County Council (WSCC) and
 - 3.1.3. to send out direct mails to residents from the Leaders of Worthing Borough Council and Adur District Council.
- 3.2. In Autumn 2020 the Sussex Solar Together Scheme was launched by iChoosr and WSCC with the group of 15 participating District and Borough councils in East and West Sussex, as well as Brighton & Hove City Council.

- 3.3. Direct mails were sent out to residents in owner occupied homes in Adur and Worthing carrying the respective council logo and signed by the respective Leader. A combined total of 15,000 letters were sent out. The text of the letters can be seen at **Appendix 1**.
- 3.4. The [Solar Together programme](#) is a unique offer, managed by [iChoosr](#) which, with local council backing, helps residents to access a quality assured investment in solar PV and/or battery storage at a discounted rate enabled through a bulk buying contract. The scheme is delivered on a not for profit basis.
- 3.5. The delivery of this programme aligns with the following commitments:
 - 3.5.1. *Platforms for our Places Going Further: 2020-2022* commitment 3.3: *Transitioning to clean, secure and affordable energy* and under
 - 3.5.2. *SustainableAW: To provide discount PV offers to residents through Solar Together programme with WSCC, and iChoosr;*
 - 3.5.3. To become carbon neutral across the area under the UK100 Cities Net Zero Pledge.
- 3.6. The first Solar Together auction in Sussex achieved great success, and it is now proposed that Adur District and Worthing Borough Council remain involved for a 2nd auction in Autumn 2021.

4. About Sussex Solar Together Programme

- 4.1. A description of how the Solar Together scheme works is set out in a factsheet produced by iChoosr, and is attached at **Appendix 3**. The contract with iChoosr was managed by WSCC on behalf of the local authorities.
- 4.2. The Scheme was set up and managed by iChoosr through an online platform, allowing 3rd party suppliers to bid for a contract for the installation and provision of solar PV and battery storage equipment ordered by Residents. The successful Solar PV installer was EC- Solar. They subcontract one layer down, working with local scaffolding providers.

Success of Solar Together Sussex

- 4.3. The scheme has been a huge success, achieving above the national average over several target outcomes. The targets for the Solar Together Sussex programme were to:

	Target for 1st auction	Achieved by the 1st Auction
Send a minimum of number of direct mails to residents in Sussex	100,000 direct mails	110,000
Receive a minimum number of registrations in response to the mailout and promotion by participating councils	4,000 registrations	6,127

4.4. Headline figures are as follows for the Sussex-wide scheme:

- 15 councils participated
- Forecast to install 760 Solar PV installations
- Forecast to install 2.8MW solar capacity
- Forecast to deliver 686 tonnes Carbon emissions offset in year 1

4.5. The Sussex registration rate (total registrations compared to total DMs sent) was strong at 5.57%. This exceeds the national average of 4.94% across all autumn 2020 schemes across England. The highest rate achieved in the autumn 2020 schemes was 6%. The breakdown of registration rates by Local Authority is shown at **Appendix 2**.

4.6. Acceptance rate was also high:19.5% versus an average in all autumn schemes of 19.6%. 1,050 offers have been accepted in all. The acceptance rate reflects the number of acceptances of the offer compared to all registrations of interest. A drop off rate is always expected for this stage. The highest acceptance rate achieved in the autumn 2020 schemes was 24%.

4.7. Acceptance rate for retrofit battery storage was 14.8% versus an average across all UK schemes of 18.2%. This average includes regions where we are running repeat schemes and reaching out to previously installed solar customers with the offer of retrofit battery storage.

4.8. Surveys and installations have been delayed by COVID. The government guidance permitted construction sector activity to continue, where installers follow the government guidance for construction and working in people's homes. Whilst surveys and installations could go ahead, some customers chose to delay their booking until after the lockdown. IChoosr is working closely with the installer to provide maximum flexibility for customers on this which may have an impact on the final scheme delivery deadline.

5. Issues for consideration

- 5.1. The Sussex scheme has seen massive success, achieving above the UK average rates for registration and acceptance for Solar compared to other Solar Together schemes. The registration rates for battery storage were lower than UK average but this rate is expected to increase with the second auction if approved. In other schemes, many of the battery installations are delivered in homes that installed solar PV in a previous auction.
- 5.2. Solar Together Sussex has helped raise awareness amongst residents of the councils' work on Climate Emergency.
- 5.3. The Direct Mail letters were incredibly successful. Around 80% of all who registered stated they had learnt about the scheme through direct mail.
- 5.4. The Solar Together Programme is a unique offer. There is no equivalent solar group buying offering working with local authorities. Adur District and Worthing Borough Councils would not be able to deliver their own version of the programme because of the scale of installations.

6. Engagement and Communication

- 6.1. If the Solar Together programme goes ahead, Direct Mails will be sent out to prospective residents based on regional demographic data accessed through the 'Mosaic' database. Text from the Direct mail letter set by ADC and WBC is attached at **Appendix 1**. This would be slightly amended to refer to the first auction. Anecdotal evidence from elsewhere shows that many residents take up the 2nd offer having not been involved in the first auction in an area, after seeing how successfully it was delivered. In auctions elsewhere, some residents that invested in solar PV installations in the 1st auction, will go on to invest in battery storage in the 2nd auction.
- 6.2. The offer will be promoted to all residents via the Councils' communication channels including social media, in order that any private home owning residents can benefit from the programme.
- 6.3. The scheme is also available for community buildings and the scheme will also be promoted in these settings.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1. In August 2020, a total of 15,319 direct mails were sent to residents of Adur and Worthing, at a total cost of £4,417 (45p per letter including printing). This was paid for under existing budgets.
- 7.2. For every installation completed each participating council will receive £75 commission until the costs of the direct mail have been recouped. After this threshold, the commission for every local authority will be paid into the Sussex Fuel Poverty Fund operated by Citizens Advice Bureau to benefit vulnerable householders struggling to pay their energy bills by distributing vouchers.
- 7.3. If Members approve Adur DC and Worthing BC being involved in the 2nd auction, the commission payments which will be held by WSCC, will be used to send Direct Mails a 2nd time. If not it will be returned to each Council. Involvement in the programme is cost neutral to the Council.

8. Legal Implications

- 8.1 Under Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council has the power to do anything that is calculated to facilitate, or which is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of any of their functions.
- 8.2 s1 of the Localism Act 2011 empowers the Council to do anything an individual can do apart from that which is specifically prohibited by pre-existing legislation
- 8.3 Section 3(1) of the Local Government Act 1999 (LGA 1999) contains a general duty on a best value authority to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- 8.4 s1 Local Government (Contracts) Act 1997 confers power on the Council to enter into a contract for the provision of making available assets or services for the purposes of, or in connection with, the discharge of the function by the Council.

Background Papers

- [Solar Together Sussex Project Executive Member Report 10 August 2020](#)
- [Platforms for our Places Going Further: 2020-2022](#)
- [SustainableAW 2020-2023](#)

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Sustainability & Risk Assessment

1. Economic

- This scheme offers a quality assured discount rate to householders to install solar panels and battery storage under a not for profit scheme. It therefore offers an affordable route to decarbonize domestic emissions.

2. Social

2.1 Social Value

- There are opportunities for local installers to bid into the installation contract (managed by iChoosr under contract to West Sussex County Council). Surplus commission will be paid to the YES Fuel Poverty Fund to support local residents struggling to pay energy bills.

2.2 Equality Issues

- The impacts of climate change are predicted to impact on all communities, but the greatest impact is predicted to impact the most vulnerable communities. This scheme aims to mitigate the impacts of climate change.
- Not all communities will be able to afford to participate in Solar Together Sussex. However fuel poor households may be able to benefit from the increased funds to the YES Fuel Poverty Fund as a result of this scheme.

2.3 Community Safety Issues (Section 17)

- Matter considered and no issues identified

2.4 Human Rights Issues

- The impacts of climate change are predicted to impact on all communities, but the greatest impact is predicted to impact the most vulnerable communities. This scheme aims to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

3. Environmental

- The scheme has potential to reduce carbon emissions associated with domestic energy use and thereby mitigate the impacts of climate change.

4. Governance

- Delivering the scheme meets commitments in Platforms for Our Places and SustainableAW and helps to achieve carbon targets made under the Climate Emergency Declaration and UK100 Cities NetZero pledge.

Appendix 1

Direct Mail text sent August 2020, Auction 1

The text will be revised slightly for Auction 2, by referring to the 1st Auction.

Dear Resident,

Do you want to save on your energy bill and generate your own clean electricity?

Having your own solar panels means you can save on your energy bill as well as reduce your carbon emissions.

Adur District Council/Worthing Borough Council is working in partnership with West Sussex County Council on an innovative new scheme offering high-quality solar photovoltaic (PV) panels to help deliver our shared vision of *Adur/Worthing* becoming carbon neutral. Solar Together Sussex is a group-buying scheme, which brings households together to get high-quality solar panels at a competitive price.

SOLAR TOGETHER SUSSEX - BUYING SOLAR PANELS MADE EASY!

Solar panels are not complex but buying a solar system can be daunting. Solar Together Sussex is a group-buying scheme that helps you through the process, keeping you informed at every stage.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

1. Registration: you can register before **X date** for free and without obligation at www.solartogether.co.uk/sussex. To register you simply provide details about your roof, such as its size and orientation.

2. Auction: a supplier 'auction' will be held on **X date**, when our approved solar suppliers will bid for the work. The more people that register, the better the deal should be for each household.

3. Personal recommendation: from **X date** you will be emailed with a personal recommendation, based on your roof details. This includes your costs and specification of your solar panel installation.

4. You decide: the decision is then yours as to whether you want to accept our recommendation. There is no obligation to continue. You will have until **X date** to decide and will be invited to visit an information session.

5. Installation: if you accept, the winning supplier will contact you to survey your roof and set an installation date. All installations are planned to be completed by the end of 2020.

For detailed information about likely costs, the amount of energy you can expect to generate, and lots more go to www.solartogether.co.uk/sussex

We trust this initiative will be of interest to you. The more people that participate, the better the price we can secure and the more renewable energy will be generated by Sussex residents.

Kind regards,

Cllr ...

Leader of *Adur District Council/Worthing Borough Council*

in partnership with Solar Together Sussex

Appendix 2 Registration Rates at end March 2021

Solar Photovoltaic

	# Accepted	# Installations to date	% Installed	# Post-survey drop-out	# Panels installed	Total KW installed to date (kW)	Installed carbon reduction to date (kgCO2)	Total investment (£)
Brighton & Hove City Council	197	42	21%	53	453	147	36,834	213,004
West-Sussex Council*	164	26	16%	15	285	93	24,133	145,290
Wealden District Council	138	18	13%	19	204	66	18,146	103,668
Chichester District Council	131	1	1%	21	16	5	1,017	8,377
Rother District Council	79	1	1%	4	10	3	1,101	3,854
Horsham District Council	77	4	5%	7	43	14	3,090	23,911
Crawley Borough Council	59	2	3%	8	24	8	1,777	14,001
Worthing Borough Council	54	24	44%	9	227	74	17,434	111,418
Adur District Council	51	10	20%	15	94	31	7,486	41,843
Arun District Council	42	17	40%	7	191	62	14,675	89,588
Hastings Borough Council	41			6			0	
Mid-Sussex Council	6	1	17%	0	10	3	845	6,458
Lewes District Council	4			1			0	
East-Sussex Council*	4	3	75%	0	42	14	3,414	16,050
Eastbourne Borough Council	3	1	33%	0	10	3	845	6,087
Grand Total	1,050	150	14%	165	1,609	523	130,796	783,550

*The accepted offers that were registered following promotion by East or West Sussex will be apportioned to their relevant district or borough council at the programme end.

Battery storage

	# Accepted	# Installations to date	% Installed to date	# Post-survey drop-out	Total investment to date	Total kWh installed battery to date
Brighton and Hove City Council	16			3		0
Wealden District Council	13			0		0
Chichester District Council	13			0		0
Horsham District Council	9			1		0
Rother District Council	6			0		0
Worthing Borough Council	5			2		0
West-Sussex Council	5	1	20%	0	4,043	6
Arun District Council	4			1		0
Adur District Council	4	1	25%	0	2,993	3
Crawley Borough Council	3			0		0
Mid-Sussex Council	1			1		0
Eastbourne Borough Council	1			0		0
Grand Total	80	2	3%	8	7,036	9