



Woolpit Parish Council benefits its community with a local energy project

Client's objectives

Woolpit Parish Council in Suffolk received Government funding of £18,350 to develop local energy projects with the Rural Community Energy Fund (RCEF). The £15 million programme, jointly funded by Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) and Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DBEIS), offers rural communities in England an opportunity to develop renewable energy projects, which provide economic and social benefits to the community. Woolpit Parish Council was found eligible to apply and was looking to assess the feasibility of local, renewable energy projects in the area, in conjunction with the development of its Neighbourhood Plan.

Woolpit Parish Council selected carbon Smart to conduct a feasibility study. After consultation with the Parish Council and Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group, the key technologies to be appraised were a renewable energy heat system and solar PV.

The project

The feasibility study was designed to help Woolpit Parish Council make an informed decision at the end of the process on which renewable energy system they could install. Our work comprised five key areas:

1. **Public engagement** – we produced an awareness poster, held key interviews with individuals within the community, produced a public survey and attended committee meetings throughout the process to ensure that the community was kept up to date with developments
2. **Location** – having identified three key sites in the development phase, we investigated the benefits and disadvantages of each site on its own and in conjunction with others. The priority sites are Woolpit Primary School, Woolpit Health Centre and the Old Stowmarket Road housing development
3. **Technology** – using our in-house tools, we modelled a variety of technologies across the different site combinations proposed. These technologies included: biomass, biomass CHP, solar PV, air source and ground source heat pumps. We also assessed the impact of different fuel sources for a biomass heating system, looking at local waste materials that could be readily available to Woolpit Parish Council
4. **Finance** – we conducted a full investigation into the finance options available, including the range of live grants available to the project, as well as share schemes, crowdfunding options and third-party project finance
5. **Governance** – we identified the key legal structures that would enable Woolpit Parish Council to gain the most from their envisaged renewable energy community heat system. Different options included running the scheme using a co-operative, Community Benefit Society (BenCom), community interest company (CIC) or energy service company (ESCO).

Project impact

Our recommendation was that a biomass CHP system would be viable at the Health Centre, owned and operated by a CIC with funding sources from grants (e.g. M&S Community Energy Fund, or Power to Change) and potential crowdfunding. Alternatively, the Health Centre partners may take the scheme on themselves. **This scheme would achieve 22% IRR over the lifetime of the system, saving 69 tCO₂e/yr.** A solar array at the same site achieves 9% IRR over 20 years, saving 21 tCO₂e/yr.

We also presented next steps for the Council for each technology option, including potential procurement routes, access to funding, planning and permissions requirements, and ongoing community engagement activities.

The Parish Council is now reviewing the recommendations and will decide how to proceed for this site, as well as whether to incorporate requirements for onsite renewables for the allocated sites in their Neighbourhood Plan.

Testimonial

“Carbon Smart provided excellent support and advice during Woolpit Parish Council's application for funding to produce community energy feasibility study. Their report has recently been delivered ahead of programme and has been approved by WRAP. The Parish Council has enjoyed working with Carbon Smart to explore the possibilities for a renewable energy project in Woolpit. With an emerging Neighbourhood Plan for the village, this is a particularly opportune time to identify a local environmentally friendly scheme to benefit the community.”

John Guyler, Chair of Woolpit Parish Council



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