

## Kingston Community Energy Project – Progress Report – 25<sup>th</sup> June 2021

We were advised in March 2021 that we were one of five community groups in the South Downs National Park area to receive mentoring from Community Energy South (CES) on the establishment of a community energy project in the village. This is being funded by the SDNPA.

We had a kick-off meeting in March followed by a workshop which enabled us to better understand what our objectives should be and the various activities that we might undertake to achieve that objective. The main one is to seek a reduction in the carbon footprint of the village through community efforts as well as encouraging individual actions.

We have been encouraged by our mentors to establish links initially with similar organisations and to understand what experience there is to build on for developing our own project. So most of the effort over the past three months has been focused on doing that. It may seem to the outsider that our progress has been relatively slow so far, but that is to be expected given the huge learning curve we are on. We have nevertheless been able to, or are about to engage directly with, a number of organisations and individuals including:

- The Ovesco team working with the Barcombe Energy Group (Ovesco are a local community company advising on renewable energy projects),
- The Ouse Valley CARES project,
- The Ovesco technical specialist, Nick Rouse,
- The Sustainable Business Partnership (meeting was with the Managing Director Shelaine Siepel who is a Kingston resident),
- Professor Peter Newell, a climate change specialist at the University of Sussex and also a Kingston resident.

We have also reviewed the activities and the engagement approaches of;

- Sustainable Overton, a Hampshire village engaged in combatting climate change,
- Saffron Walden Community Energy,
- Thame Green Living, working in the village of Thame in Oxfordshire,
- The Climate Action Form for Lewes District (our project is highlighted on this),
- The Lewes Climate Hub,
- The Sustainability Centre,
- The Centre for Alternative Energy,
- Energise Sussex,
- The National Energy Foundation,
- The Local Energy Advice Partnership.

Some important threads have emerged from this work:

- We had hoped that our starting point would be to undertake a village-wide audit of energy consumption. This would include not only household use, but lifestyle issues such as transport and food. We have established that a suitable tool for this is under development by Ovesco but will not be available for use for some months, so this activity has had to be put on hold, although we are investigating other options;
- This is probably the worst time to be looking to promote investment by householders in energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy due to the loss of virtually all government financial support in this field. Although there are no specific policies promised, the

expectation is that new support measures will be introduced. Until that happens we have to be cautious about overstating what we can achieve;

- Although space heating is the largest usage of energy in the home, gas heating is at present the most economical form of heating. Moving away from gas to, for example, heat pumps or to a lesser extent solar, will require substantial financial commitments by individuals which at present cannot be justified simply on financial grounds. So until new support mechanisms are put in place, it is not realistic to expect a wide take-up of these alternative low carbon technologies;
- Investment in low technology improvements in home insulation and energy management is at present the most financially worthwhile things a householder can do;
- An attractive and informative website is a characteristic of most community energy groups and so we need to work hard on learning lessons from those and developing our own. We know there is significant expertise in the village in this type of work which we hope to be able to make use of on a voluntary basis;
- Collaborative working between community groups appears to be an important way of attracting funding for both studies and projects and we are already engaging with others to facilitate this;
- It is important that residents see some benefit to themselves in the project if we are to engage and maintain their interest;
- It is also important to establish a core team bringing a range of technical, commercial and other skills and we are starting to have some success in establishing this.

We have publicised our efforts through regular articles in Kingston News which Rob Watson is now looking after, and this has elicited some response. However, it is clear that a more proactive approach is going to be required to encourage wider interest and participation of villagers. To this end there is a proposal to hold a Community Energy fair later in the year which would include some talks, information from local companies, entertainment for children and adults as well as drinks and food. We have had interest from residents outside of the Action Group, including some relevant experience, in helping to arrange this and other activities. Similar events have been successfully held in Barcombe and elsewhere.

We hope that running such a fair will enable us not only to develop interest in the project, but to allow us to start to provide “educational” material for residents on what they themselves can do to promote carbon reduction through direct action in their home and in their lifestyles.

Our mentors are keen for us to develop one or more renewable energy generation projects which might be funded by the community through a Community Benefit Society. We are looking at what this might entail as well as starting to evaluate two possible technologies. One is based on the tidal flow of the Ouse, possibly in conjunction with the Ouse Valley CARES team, and the other is a “pumped storage” hydro-type project using the natural geography of the Downs.

We have also been advised to consider CIL funding for some of the lower cost aspects of our work and will follow this up further when the needs have been identified.

Finally, but by no means least, we will start working with other Ouse Valley villages, the Ouse Valley CARES project and possibly Compass buses to obtain funding for an electric mini bus for use by residents in the area,

In summary, we are

- starting to understand what may be possible or not possible,
- building contacts with members of the village and elsewhere with useful skills to assist us
- organising an energy fair later in the year, and
- evaluating renewable generation project opportunities.