



Wiltshire Wildlife
Community Energy

LESS CARBON, MORE WILDLIFE



**Wiltshire Wildlife Community Energy
Annual Report 2021-22**



Annual Member Report

Note from the Chair

These are extraordinary times for those of us working in the energy sector. As people up and down the country are confronted by unprecedented price rises and concerns grow over the UK's energy security, there has been a widespread realisation that renewables provide a sustainable and affordable solution to the worsening energy and climate crisis we are facing. In turn, the role of community benefit societies such as our own has been brought into sharp focus.

Wiltshire Wildlife Community Energy works not only to deliver a greater return to those who have stuck by us during less profitable times, but also to deliver tangible results on our aims to reduce carbon and encourage more wildlife to flourish in Wiltshire. My fellow director, Rob Gillies, outlines our progress later in this report.

Furthermore, we seek to support other charitable groups who share our vision of conserving nature, tackling climate change, and combating fuel poverty. To that end, our Community Fund has distributed grants to a number of great projects this year, enabling them to deliver a host of fantastic initiatives to people throughout Wiltshire as explained by the Fund's new Chair, Jon Bateman.

You will by now be aware that we have also welcomed a carbon reduction ambassador to our ranks. Fuel poverty and energy efficiency expert Jessica Thimbleby works with us and the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust (WWT), providing advice and guidance around how we might work to assist other local agencies to support people to streamline energy usage, insulate homes, and apply for additional financial help. We look forward to doing more to help those most in need during the colder winter months via our own fuel poverty programme which is currently in development.

In terms of finances, I'm delighted to report that WWCE has for the first time made a profit this year! This has been achieved significantly ahead of forecast and we have recently taken advantage of the volatility of the energy market to renegotiate rates paid for our exported power which promises to bring considerable benefits from July next year.

We continue to endeavour to develop new sites and received a grant of £100,000 from the Rural Community Energy Fund (RCEF) to progress a solar array at Petersfinger Farm near Salisbury. Meanwhile, our work with Silverwood School (Devizes) represents an opportunity to help a Wiltshire educational facility to access cheaper greener power, as well as enabling it to develop its own community fund which will help students to better understand and appreciate nature. We hope to be launching a community fund raise for both projects next year.

I want to sign off by looking forward to next year, when we plan to evaluate exactly how much we reduce Wiltshire's carbon footprint as well as recording the multitude of ways that we enhance the biodiversity of our beautiful county. We want to offer a reasonable return for our stakeholders, but we also will work closely with our sister organisation the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust in improving bio-diversity in the county and assisting them in reducing their own carbon footprint. Lastly my fellow Directors and myself all work on behalf of WWCE on an unpaid, voluntary basis. I particularly want to thank them for all their help and hard work during the past year.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julian Barlow', is placed over a light grey circular background.

Julian Barlow – Chair WWCE



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WWCE Group Financial Performance

This has been the group's sixth full year of renewable generation and the very first year we have been able to report a net profit overall. Much of the group's focus this year has been on the ever-changing economic situation around us, and how WWCE can remain committed to its mission of 'less carbon, more wildlife,' whilst continuing to strive to maximise interest payments to members and community fund contributions.

The combined group revenue of £808k (2021: £732k) is a 10% increase on last year. Cost of sales remain in line with previous years. Administrative expenses are not directly comparable as last year included some £334k of exceptional costs associated with the refinance. Without this, admin costs are exactly the same as last year at £515k.

The operating profit of £289k is in excess of last year's £210k (taking out the exceptional charges for comparison purposes). Interest charges at £281k are an 8% decrease on last year as we continue to pay off both member share capital and Triodos loan capital, thus reducing 'debt'. The profit before tax for the group is therefore £8k (2021: £426k loss). However, last year did include some £334k of exceptional costs relating to the refinancing of the Triodos Loans. As always, in these early years (given the project projections are run over 25 years as a minimum) a loss is generally expected after interest and depreciation charges.

Notwithstanding the weather, we are expecting the year to March 2023 to also be profitable from the standard operational activities as power prices continue to increase. The important thing is that the group continues to be cash generative, not only to achieve our long-term goal of less carbon and more wildlife through driving new initiatives, but to support our long-term goal of maintaining a steady interest rate payment to members and meeting our targets for donations to the Community Fund.



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WWCE Land Management

After a busy last few years for wildlife and biodiversity enhancements, particularly at our Chelworth site, the 2021-2022 has been a bit quieter in terms of new work. Chelworth continues to provide a haven for wildlife and biodiversity, extending the wildlife habitat from the adjacent WWT Blakehill Farm Nature Reserve. The Herdwick sheep flock introduced last year are settling in nicely with the Wildlife Trust supplementing with additional sheep for the main summer grazing period.

There was good news from this year's survey for the endangered brown hairstreak butterfly with our third highest egg count since we started surveying in 2014. This suggests that our careful management of suitable hedgerows is maximising the development of suitable blackthorn habitat on the site. The survey also recorded sightings of a variety of wildlife including kestrels and wrens, butterflies and moths. Plans for the new year include some additional works to the hedgerows and trees and topping up of the wood piles around the pond area to support wildlife habitats including for great crested newts.

At the larger Braydon site, this year's ecology survey - the first since a new grassland management regime was introduced - found a wide range of native grassland flora species within the site. A good variety of invertebrates were also recorded including many butterfly and moth species, suggesting the current management regime of the site and previous wildflower seeding is providing biodiversity benefits.

As mentioned in our summer newsletter, Braydon was included within the field research for a recently published scientific paper from Lancaster University looking at how solar park management and design can boost pollinator populations. This work has informed new guidance from Solar Energy UK on how to increase biodiversity at all stages of a solar farm's lifecycle. Everyone at WWCE is proud to have been able to support this important research and guidance on how to deliver solar farms with an emphasis on natural capital and biodiversity.



Good variety of invertebrates recorded including this Marbled White butterfly.



Grassland and surrounding vegetation established following extension and deepening of pond at Chelworth



Beehives at Chelworth



Well established grassland observed at Braydon as result of new management plan.



Variety of wildlife observed at Braydon during the annual grassland survey.



Well established grassland at Chelworth thanks to the Herdwick sheep flock introduced last year.

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Community Fund

WWCE donates a proportion of its annual operating surplus to the Community Fund for allocating grants to projects brought forward by local communities and voluntary organisations involved in wildlife conservation, climate change mitigation, carbon reduction (including local food, transport, waste projects) and reducing fuel poverty.

The Fund is independently managed by a Panel and administered by Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. In 2021/22 WWCE paid £10,000 into the Community Fund and combined with funds held from previous years, in April 2021 £19,861 was available to award. Following the grants awarded during 2021/22, the Fund's balance at 31 March 2022 was £5,046.

During the year Peter Newell, who chaired the Panel since its inception stepped down and we were pleased to welcome Jon Bateman as his successor. Peter has chaired the Fund with vision and pragmatism and his knowledge and experience of the Wiltshire voluntary sector has been invaluable in these formative years. We would like to say a huge thank you to Peter for his leadership.

Jon joined the Panel in 2019 having been a member of the WWCE Board since 2018. As a retired civil engineer and utility regulation specialist he has an in-depth knowledge of Community Energy and is well placed to take up the role.

Throughout 2020-21, notwithstanding the Covid 19 constraints, the Panel maintained its support to community projects across Wiltshire some of which are highlighted in the map to the right. Looking forward, the Panel continues to welcome new applications for funding and if you know of any initiatives by eligible groups or local communities seeking funding between £500 to £5,000 please encourage them to get in touch - details can be found at: www.wwce.org.



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Carbon Reduction Champion



In 2021, WWCE decided to create a new role and appoint a Carbon Reduction Champion, shared jointly with Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. The purpose of this exciting new position is to increase capacity for both organisations to achieve their mutual aims of reducing carbon and promoting nature-based solutions to the climate crisis.

Jessica Thimbleby began in post in late March 2022 having previously worked at WWT as Sustainability Officer and engaging communities on the Waste Education Team. For the past year and a half Jessica was working as an energy advisor at the Centre for Sustainable Energy and Citizen's Advice, where she supported people experiencing fuel poverty.

For WWCE this role is an opportunity to develop initiatives in new areas of work, primarily energy efficiency and fuel poverty. Supporting Wiltshire households to reduce carbon emissions and save money by adopting energy efficiency measures is more crucial than ever during the current energy and climate crisis. This coming winter, working with community organisations in Wiltshire, Jessica will deliver a series of 'Keeping Warm This Winter' workshops and pop-up events to help people use less energy at home and reduce their bills. Residents will be referred on for further support where needed and grants are available to install longer-term measures such as loft and cavity wall insulation.

Jessica has also been helping to promote WWCE and the Community Fund within Wiltshire, attending local events and forums to raise awareness of the organisation and generate interest and opportunities.





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Future opportunities

During the year WWCE has identified and progressed a number of opportunities to deliver on our objective of reducing carbon and improving wildlife in Wiltshire whilst raising the profile of our organisation so we are able to use our combined voice to effect wider change.

Petersfinger

Last year we reported that WWCE had received a £40,000 grant from the Rural Community Energy Fund (RCEF), to investigate the feasibility of a new 1.5 MW community owned solar array at Petersfinger Farm on the outskirts of Salisbury. Communities for Renewables (CfR) completed this study in early 2022, which established that the project could be technically and financially viable. In Spring of this year, WWCE secured a further grant of £100,000 to progress the project to construction readiness. Work is underway on land agreements, grid connection and the environmental studies needed to support the planning application. Assuming the outcome of the environmental studies are positive and the statutory consultees are supportive, we hope to be submitting a planning application by the end of this year. We will be in touch to invite WWCE members to register their support. If planning is successful, and we can procure construction contractors at a viable cost, we will be launching a community fund raise next year.

Silverwood School

Formed in 2020, Silverwood School is a co-educational special school for children and young people aged 4-19 years with Campuses in Rowde (near Devizes), Trowbridge and Chippenham. A planning application was submitted in mid-2021 to extend the existing Rowde Campus to provide high quality support for special education needs to an extra 350 students. The school gained planning permission approval in late 2021 for a new classroom block, specialist teaching spaces and play areas. Work has now begun with completion due by September 2023. WWCE is partnering with the school to fund the construction of a 500kW rooftop solar array on the new buildings and to sell the generated green power to the school. Installation and a community fund raise for the solar array are planned for next year.

