



Wiltshire Wildlife **Community Energy**



Wiltshire Wildlife Community Energy
Annual Report 2020-21

Annual Member Report



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Note from the Chair

The year ending 30th March 2021 has been exceptionally busy with the WWCE delivering against the overarching development strategy approved at the last AGM.

Firstly, as your new Chair, I am both pleased and honoured to succeed Lesley Bennett who thankfully remains on our board. I am a Trustee of the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and having successfully run my own business for over 30 years am pleased to be able to serve in the capacity of Chairman. I live in the small village of Compton Bassett where I serve as a Parish Councillor. I also sit on the board of the Care Farm, which is an important part of the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, and I am an amateur beekeeper in my spare time so have a strong affiliation with and commitment to nature.

Our objectives for the past 12 months can be broken into five distinct areas, and they all contribute towards achieving our mission of Less Carbon, More Wildlife in Wiltshire. Finance – improving our loan conditions and long-term profitability. Enhancing our board with new Directors who bring different perspectives and skills. Developing our profile and role in promoting renewable energy in Wiltshire and exploring expansion opportunities where, by enlarging our capacity to generate power, we can contribute more income to the community fund. Finally, we also endeavoured to develop enhanced synergy with our sister organisation, the WWT.

All these top-level objectives have either been delivered or are en route to delivery. For instance, a new refinancing arrangement has been established which lowered our interest payments and allowed to us buy out over 100 members who wanted to relinquish their shares. We appointed two new Directors, Lucy Normington who is professionally employed in the Science and healthcare sector and is now working with the WWCE Community Fund. Also joining us is Russell Abbott, who is a marketing professional teaching Marketing at Anglia Ruskin University. He will help us develop our profile by managing new social media activity, new branding and greater outreach via re-designed newsletters and media engagement.

We will also soon be engaging our first staff member, a post jointly funded by the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. This brings our two organisations closer together, delivering on another of our aims. The role will allow WWCE to be represented at Eco forums, gain access to grants and assist those in the county who want to reduce their energy bills. Finally with our desire to expand we have gained a substantial grant from Government to explore a potential new solar farm prospect near Salisbury, a part of Wiltshire we don't yet service. It is a very exciting future initiative and funding to explore its development potential has not impacted our accounts.

The Community Fund continues to do good work and the pandemic has meant the need for additional funds to help improve carbon reduction or develop wildlife projects is stronger than ever.

Finally, this year has seen money spent on much needed ongoing investment in inverters, CCTV and other equipment to maximise the efficient operation of and energy creation from Braydon, Chelworth and the smaller rooftop arrays. The Operation and Management of our Solar Farms is now substantially more professional than in previous years which means we can create and sell more power, and a new tariff has been negotiated improving revenue.

So, a full and exciting past year with a promise of more to follow in the coming months.

Julian Barlow – Chair WWCE





WWCE Group Financial Performance

The 12 months ending 31 March 2021 was the group's fifth full year of operation. At first glance, the group consolidated accounts look significantly worse than the previous 12 months, posting a loss before tax of £426k (2020: Loss £83k). However, this result is explained by the group's decision to undertake a refinancing of the bank loans during the period at a lower interest rate and thus reduce bank payments going forwards, whilst at the same time releasing some cash in order to pay back those investors most keen to withdraw their shareholding.

Turnover in the year at £732k was comparable to last year (2020: £728k). Cost of sales remained in line with previous years. Administrative expenses at £849k are significantly higher than the £458k shown the previous year. Of this, £334k relates to an adjustment passing through the profit and loss for both break fees incurred when undertaking the refinance, and unwinding previously capitalised legal and set up fees from the original loans.

The operating loss posted of £124k, therefore would have been a profit of £210k (2020: £246k) without these one-off charges. As always, the important thing to remember is that in the early years of operation, the group expects to make a loss due to higher interest charges from bank loans and depreciation charged on the solar farms. The most important performance indicator is therefore the creation of 'free cash' to both fund members interest payments, share buyback and Community Fund donations. Through the refinancing and normal operating activities, the Group was able to successfully repay some £403k of investor capital (reducing member numbers from 602 to 535), donate £20k to the Community Fund (£10k from a government grant), sustain interest rate payment to members of 4% and retain some additional cash reserves in order to fund investment into future initiatives to achieve our 'less carbon, more wildlife in Wiltshire' objective.

Going into the fiscal year to 31 March 2022, the group is in a position to really make the most of its generating assets. With Braydon's finance charges reduced, Chelworth's inverter replacement program complete and the Wiltshire Wildlife Community Solar entity absorbed into the parent company to reduce administrative burden, we believe we are well placed to continue to deliver on our financial KPIs.



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WWCE Land Management

At Braydon we have negotiated a change to the grass-cutting regime at the site with our contractors. This has been developed with the advice of WWT to better support the establishment of native species to support pollinators and other biodiversity and we'll keep the results under close review over the next few years. In the upcoming year Braydon has been selected to be part of a nationwide research study on the use of solar parks for biodiversity by Lancaster University. This will involve plant and wildlife surveys and soil sampling to assess soil carbon and nutrient levels which as well as supporting an academic research project will provide useful information to inform future land management plans.

At the Chelworth site, despite some disruption due to the pandemic, the WWT team have been busy making several enhancements to the wildlife area at the south end of the site. This has included significant works to enlarge and deepen the pond to retain water during the drier months and provide a much-improved habitat to attract great crested newts and other amphibians. The brambles have been cut back to improve wildlife access to the hibernacula (nesting and shelter made from piles of stones or wood), and a new 'bug hotel' and bare earth site for ground-nesting pollinators and other insects. A new flock of Herwick sheep did a good job grazing the site during the summer and some more work has been done to the hedgerow to create more habitat for birds and insects including the rare brown hairstreak butterfly for which the annual survey found evidence of eggs on site. The survey also confirmed that the site continues to enjoy regular use and visits from a wide variety of bird species including raptors (red kite, sparrowhawk), reed warbler, wren, finches, tits, and some rare and endangered species such as redwing, fieldfare and stock dove.



With WWT advice, further enhancements to new land management plan have been agreed to improve grassland management for biodiversity.



Pollinator and soil surveys will be conducted at Braydon this year as part of Lancaster University research project.



Chelworth habitat enhancements – Extended and deepened pond.



New Tree and hedgerow planting at Chelworth continue to establish well.



New flock of Herdwick sheep grazed site during summer.



Chelworth habitat enhancements – New bug hotel.

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Community Fund

WWCE donates a proportion of its annual surplus to the Community Fund for awarding grants to Wiltshire-based applicant community and voluntary groups involved in wildlife conservation, mitigation of climate change, reduction of carbon emissions and alleviation of fuel poverty. The Fund is independently managed by a separate Community Fund Group in which WWCE has representation and is administered by WWT.

In the year WWCE paid £20,000 into the Community Fund comprising WWCE's annual payment plus the Government business support grant for Covid which the Directors elected to pass through directly to the Community Fund.

In April 2020 the Community Fund held funds from prior years of £20.6k for distribution during 2021 to qualifying community groups. During the year, we supported a number of groups involved in various activities aligned with the Fund's aims. However, although grants were awarded, progress on some projects was hampered by Covid restrictions resulting in several projects either being delayed or deferred.

Photos from a Rain Garden water planter workshop.



In the current year, the Fund has received interest from several organisations and is actively promoting applications from eligible groups. Applications are easy and WWT can help with the process. So, if you know of any groups who might be eligible, please put them in touch. Details can be found at:

<https://www.wwce.org/community-fund>

<p>Zero Chippenham</p> <p>£3,500</p> <p>A voluntary group dedicated to reducing the impacts of greenhouse gas (carbon) emissions, waste and pollution on our planet to zero with a first objective to help the community reduce carbon emissions to zero by 2030.</p>	<p>GUL</p> <p>£1,800</p> <p>A charity that runs an outdoor therapy centre based in Shrewton. Gul is passionate about enabling people to get out of their comfort zone, learn more about themselves and enjoy the outdoors.</p>	<p>Action for the River Kennet</p> <p>£4,300</p> <p>ARK is a group of people who care about the Rivers Kennet and Pang and their tributaries. As well as taking action on the ground ARK campaigns to protect the river.</p>	<p>LifeCycle UK</p> <p>£2,500</p> <p>A group that aims to help more people unlock the benefits of cycling, open up their world and enjoy life on two wheels by working with those of all ages and abilities.</p>	<p>St Josephs School Malmesbury</p> <p>£4,500</p> <p>Project to rehabilitate riverside wasteland into a wildlife reserve - on hold due to access issues</p>	<p>Lea and Garsdon Primary School</p> <p>£4,200</p> <p>Support for primary schooling facilities for network of schools in the Malmesbury vicinity;</p>	<p>SPLASH</p> <p>£4,500</p> <p>A community group that provides positive activities and youth worker support for young people facing challenges. SPLASH provides fun opportunities where young people learn from each other, help & support one another and begin to see that they are liked, accepted and valued;</p>	<p>Seeds for Success</p> <p>£4,900</p> <p>A youth work charity based in Mere, which provides opportunities for personal and social development for young people living in South West.</p>	<p>Wiltshire Community Foundation</p> <p>£4,000</p> <p>a youth work charity based in Mere, which provides opportunities for personal and social development for young people living in South West Wiltshire.</p>
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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 Farm

Working with WWT we have identified an opportunity to develop a new solar farm in Wiltshire which could provide power to a local residential development, produce enough green electricity for 560 homes and fund a programme of biodiversity and ecological enhancement at the site. We have received a £40,000 grant from the Rural Community Energy Fund to investigate the commercial, technical and planning feasibility of the potential project, and have employed Communities for Renewables CIC to complete the feasibility study.

Moths to a Flame

Wiltshire Wildlife Community Energy and the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust are working together to develop a twin pronged approach towards creating an arts installation and stakeholder engagement programme: the Moths to a Flame concept. This is a project established by the Art and Energy Collective, using the moth as an allegory for our relationship with energy and consequently the health of our planet. It is a mass participation art installation engaging thousands of people in creative activity and conversation inspired by our energy systems, relationship with nature, and the climate emergency. The project includes participation from 9 counties in the UK with the WWCE and WWT representing Wiltshire.

All of us who care about responding to the climate emergency know that COP26 marks an important moment in global politics. This artwork allows us all to make a mark, have our say, show our willingness for action and bring a bit of beauty to COP26.

The WWT has two care farms which assist children with behavioural challenges to better integrate and learn through nature. We are going to ask students to make moths during their summer break. The moths will then be displayed at Chelworth and Braydon Solar Farms for the purpose of drone filming. Filming of the Children making moths and then the moths being displayed in the context of solar energy will unite the twin aspects of illustrating the importance of insects to children as well as providing an interesting short film.

The second initiative is working with an artist, Linda Reece to make some large Moth sculptures from Willow which can be displayed at WWT reserves in Wiltshire as a long-term visitor viewing opportunity.

WWT has pioneered research in establishing the importance of noting the decline in the insect population in the UK due to climate change and the MTF initiative allows them to get this messaging across at COP26 via the film of the Children, the solar farms and the displays.

Moth-making inspiration!

