

Launch of the second Solar Together scheme in Wiltshire and Swindon

Briefing Note No. 23 - 17

Service : Climate Team

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Wiltshire Council and Swindon Borough Council are working with iChoosr, independent experts in group-buying, to launch a second Solar Together scheme, following the success of the first in 2022. The Solar Together scheme offers a cost-effective way for residents and businesses to purchase solar panel and battery storage installation.

What is the Solar Together scheme?

Solar Together operates on a group-buying approach, with the core principle that coming together as a group provides enhanced buying power and allows the approved providers to offer a better price than individual homeowners might get from entering the market alone.

The scheme gives households and businesses the opportunity to save on energy bills and generate their own electricity by purchasing high-quality solar panels and battery storage at a competitive price.

The prospect of choosing an installer and making the change to renewable energy can be quite daunting, but Solar Together makes the switch to clean energy as hassle-free as possible. The scheme supports people every step of the way, providing clear and objective information that people can trust, so that they can make a well-informed decision and receive expert guidance throughout the process.

The initiative offers solar panels (also known as solar PV) with optional battery storage and electric vehicle (EV) charge points. It also offers battery storage installation for residents who have already invested in solar panels and are looking to maximise how much of their self-generated energy they can use at home and become less dependent on electricity suppliers.

The cost-of-living crisis continues to be particularly challenging, and this scheme is one of the ways in which households can make long-term savings by generating their own renewable energy, whilst also helping our ambition to reach net zero carbon emissions across the county.

Relevance to the council's business plan

By reducing carbon emissions and stimulating the green economy, this scheme will support the following business plan missions and guiding themes:

- **Sustainable environment:** We are on the path to carbon neutral (net zero). We lead the way in how councils and counties mitigate the climate challenges ahead and assist the county to have a smaller carbon footprint.
- **Thriving economy:** Our local economy thrives and is supported by a skilled workforce.

Who is eligible and when can they register?

To register for the scheme, residents must either own their own house or have permission from the landlord to install solar panels. Small and medium-sized enterprises (non-domestic) and Commonhold Associations meeting this requirement can also participate.

The scheme is now open for registrations in Wiltshire and Swindon, people have until 11 August 2023 to register. People who are interested can register for free, and, following a competitive bidding process managed by Solar Together, will then be sent their recommended provider and costs, with no obligation to proceed with the installation.

Like last year, iChoosr will send out a letter from the week of 12 June to a selection of properties in Wiltshire that are likely to be eligible for the scheme, to give them all the information they need to consider participating should they wish to. The scheme will be promoted using all the available council communication channels prior to this as well, including social media, press releases, newsletter articles and posters at public facing council buildings. There will be no selling by phone or doorstepping of residents.

How does the scheme work?

- 1. Register without obligation from 5 June:** in Wiltshire via www.solartogether.co.uk/wiltshire or in Swindon via www.solartogether.co.uk/swindon.
- 2. Auction:** Solar Together's approved solar installers will bid for the work in a reverse 'auction'. The most competitive offer, from these pre-vetted installers, wins the auction.
- 3. Personal recommendation:** Individuals will be emailed a personal recommendation for their home based on the details they provided during registration. This will include the costs and specifications for a complete solar panel installation.
- 4. The decision:** the decision is then up to individuals as to whether they want to accept or decline their personal recommendation. There is no obligation to continue and they will have four weeks to decide. If they choose to go ahead and accept with Solar Together, a £150 deposit is required, which is conditionally refundable.
- 5. Installation:** if they accept, the winning installer will contact them to survey their roof and set an installation date. All installations are planned to be completed six months after accepting.

How successful was the first Solar Together scheme in Wiltshire?

The first scheme launched in 2022 is on track to deliver almost 700 installations in Wiltshire, totalling more than 6,000 solar panels and resulting in a £6 million investment by residents into the green economy.

What can you do to help?

Our Wiltshire Climate Strategy is very clear that as a county we need to reduce the energy we use as well as using low carbon forms of energy. Within the strategy we aimed to encourage installation of renewables through group buy schemes and we're pleased to offer this opportunity to residents to consider.

If you are contacted by residents who want more information about this, people can visit www.solartogether.co.uk/wiltshire, email wiltshire@solartogether.co.uk or call 0800 0488113. IChoosr are responsible for managing and rolling out the scheme and all enquiries about it will be going via them.

We would welcome and encourage you to share any council communications, such as social media posts and press releases, with your contacts and the local community to help spread the word about the scheme.

For those residents not eligible for this particular scheme, but who still want ideas on lowering their carbon footprint or information on how to access support or grants for energy efficiency in their homes, then there's more information available at www.wiltshire.gov.uk/climate-change-individual.

If you have any questions or queries, please contact climate@wiltshire.gov.uk.

More about Solar Together and iChoosr

The Solar Together scheme has been running successfully across the UK for five years and, to date, has completed over 6,720 installations consisting of installing over 74,300 solar panels (over 20 MW of solar power) and reduced over 125,000 tonnes of carbon emissions. More information can be found at: <https://solartogether.co.uk/>.

iChoosr are the independent experts in group-buying who facilitate the scheme locally. iChoosr was founded in 2008 and is privately owned by two co-founders. Before it entered the UK energy market in 2012 it had focused on collective schemes in the Netherlands and Belgium where it works with community leaders helping households to select energy and solar power suppliers. As in the UK, its operations continue to grow across Europe, North America and Japan.

iChoosr has a strong track record of delivering group purchase schemes for local authorities. It has worked with 160 UK local authorities on its collective energy switching schemes. More information can be found at www.ichoosr.co.uk.

More information about climate projects

We recently provided a six-month update on our efforts to tackle the climate emergency locally. You can find a summary of the work we've done at <https://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/news/council-continues-commitment-to-tackling-the-climate-emergency>

Our progress to becoming a carbon neutral organisation

Air source heat pumps installed at three sites reducing gas usage by c. 6,200 MWh per annum

Our work to mitigate climate change praised as 'impressive' and 'exceptional' by independent Corporate Peer Challenge

Our case studies featured at the UN Climate Change conference COP27 in Egypt

5x↑ Renewable energy on council property increased more than five times between 2019/20 to 2022/23

75%↓ Our 2021/22 greenhouse gas emissions are 5,275 tCO2e which is a reduction of 75% on our 2014/15 footprint - 2022/23 data available later this year

90% of staff training carried out online rather than face to face

Carbon Literate Organisation Bronze 58 members of staff complete carbon literacy training to help them become more energy efficient in their work and home lives and we've been awarded Carbon Literate Organisation Bronze award

Upgrading our gritters and replacing them with a new modern fleet with Euro 6 compliant diesel engines - much better for emissions

Telematics have now been installed in all 200 of our own vehicles - providing vital data on fuel consumption and CO2 emissions related to driver behaviour

54 installations of solar photovoltaics at council sites helped generate 1,746 MWh of electricity

Adopted a socially responsible procurement policy which played a part in awarding recent £80m highways contract

Number of printers reduced by 50% and ageing printers replaced with ones that use 60% less energy

#WiltCanDoThis

Wiltshire Council

Supporting Wiltshire to become carbon neutral

210
Up to 210 cold and draughty Wiltshire homes will have increased energy efficiency and a reduced carbon footprint through successfully secured funding

90 council homes retrofitted to be more energy efficient

15 tonnes of batteries collected so far through new kerbside collection scheme

58+ tonnes of reusable items were collected at household recycling sites, between August 2022 and January 2023, saving 23 tonnes of CO2e compared with sending this waste to landfill

Funding successfully secured to support tree planting and woodland creation targets – delivering 111 hectares of trees in 2023/24 and 222 hectares in 2024/25

#WiltsCanDoThis



Council scheme supports town and parishes to investigate 35 sites for installation of electric charging points

Leisure items recycling scheme launched at four centres

2.1 tonnes of items from recycling centres, such as bikes, toys and tools, sold at pop-up reuse shop

1,200 pupils have attended Bikeability training since the start of the 2022/23 school year

£878k allocated for further Active Travel schemes in the county

74 cycle parking spaces and an e-bike docking station installed at Salisbury Train Station

£1m additional investment between 2022/23 and 2024/25 to empty gullies and help prevent flooding

700 installations to be delivered in Wiltshire as part of the Solar Together scheme – totalling more than 5,000 solar panels and £6m spent by local residents into the green economy

The Warm and Safe advice service has been extended for a further three years

Wiltshire Council