

WBGE Forum & AGM

Wednesday 17th September 2014 - 7:30pm- 9:30pm
Council Chambers, West Berkshire Council, Newbury

In Attendance: Susanne Stedman, Nick Stedman, Evangeline Wood (Minutes), Robert Pattison (Chairing), Maryanne Thomas, Ken Neal, Kelvin Hughes, Richard Marshall, Martha Vickers, Gareth Beard, Tony Drewer-Trump, Jacky Akam and Helen Dean.

Apologies: Richard Foster (Chair), Yvonne Redgrave, Lesley Atkinson, Sarah Jones, Heather Thorne and Tim Clarke.

AGM

Welcome

Robert welcomed everyone to the Forum and AGM. He gave apologies for Richard Foster, the WBGE Chairman who was unable to make the meeting.

Chairman's Report

Robert read out the Chairman's Report from Richard- see website for report details.

Martha asked about electric vehicle charging points locally. Evangeline explained that we had one Council point currently and were looking into if this could be accessed publicly; the grant with which it was installed was for fleet vehicles so it makes the situation a little complicated.

Treasurers Report

Report went through the Treasurers Report- see website for slides. He explained that we had £788 WBGE funds and £6632 of Greenham Common Trust (GCT) funding remaining. He explained that the Community Furniture Project were corporate members funding WBGE £500 membership a year which really helped in running WBGE.

Robert reported that the GCT funding was not getting spent which was disappointing. The message to the groups is that if you have a project and need funding, please get in touch with the Committee to discuss.

Martha said that Greening West Field's had used some Town Council funding rather than all WBGE/GCT funding. Martha said they may be looking to start a project in Greenham.

Kelvin asked if there was a deadline to spend funding. There was no deadline that WBGE are aware of. Jacky asked what the criteria for funding were, e.g. could Newbury orchards use the funds. Martha said that the Town Council were funding and groups were also fundraising themselves. Kelvin wondered if schools could benefit, e.g. trout projects. Robert said that groups would need to fill in a request so the Committee could consider it. Details and request form can be found on the WBGE website: <http://www.wbge.org.uk/community-groups.html>

Robert said that the WBGE would also be paying £50 a swap shop to the Community Furniture Project to help with the cost of attending to PAT Test and taking away left over items.

Electing Officers for the Management Committee

Robert said that the existing Committee were happy to re-stand for election, except Ricky Josey due to his work commitments. Robert asked if there any volunteers for joining the Committee. Ken Neal volunteered to join the Committee. Richard Marshall proposed the Committee and Kelvin Hughes seconded that the existing Committee and Ken Neal be elected.

Priorities for the Coming year

- The Conference
- To continue what we do- Robert talked through some slides on WBGE and the groups purpose to explain what that was.
- WBGE are also considering holding an EV event in the spring for members of the public to come along and try EVs. We would invite a number of manufacturers and promote the event to members of the public.
- Richard Marshall wondered how we could reach out to all the groups that were not attending meetings. Kelvin suggested that we ask each group for a few lines update on what the group was up to. This could be presented on a board at the Conference so we could all at least see what the groups doing.
- The Conference will be held on Saturday 22nd November at the Community Furniture Project. Gareth Beard will be talking on new nuclear, Karl from EST will be talking about EVs. We also hope to have Green Deal Together who are a Green Deal provider CIC backed by a consortium of local authorities. They are just beginning to promote in West Berkshire. We should also have Sarah Jones updating on renewable and lighting.

AOB

Robert explained that it had come up at the LSP Greener Sub-Partnership meetings that basically there were pockets of land where trees could be planted that the Council owned. If community groups could identify any such areas that they wish to plant, they should feed these back to the WBGE so that they could be discussed with the Council.

Community Energy and How to Get Started- Nick Stedman (Kennet Community Energy/KCEL)

What is a community energy company?

- A co-operative, there are very few in the UK compared to in Germany.
- There are two types of scheme- owned by members of the community (BENCOM- Community Benefit Company).
- ISPs are able to do all the things 'normal' companies can without the same amount of red tape that companies have.
- Membership is open to anyone over 16.
- Each member gets one vote, regardless of how much subscription they put in.
- Subscriptions can be £250-£100,000. Many companies, including KCEL, have a minimum £500 investment.
- Directors can be any member who puts themselves forward to be elected.

How do KCEL operate?

- Formed and run by volunteers with no paid workers or offices.
- Eligible for Enterprise Investment Fund (EIS). This allows investors to get 30% tax relief back on their investment providing they pay tax of that amount in that tax year.
- Return on investment to aimed at 5-7% dividend annually.
- Any profits are ploughed back in to the company and they are in the process of setting up a community fund.

How do you get started?

- You need a registered sponsor (there are only about 12 available) and at least £600. KCEL use Co-Operatives UK.
- Every rule you need to change and you will need to change some, will cost an additional £300.
- You need people with confidence and skills, e.g. commercial, engineering, finance etc and an attractive project.

How did KCEL get started?

- Started through the Energy Group for Transition Marlborough.
- Bath and West Community Energy presented to them on how you get started and how they got started on their own solar on schools scheme.
- SEIS- Seed Enterprise Investment Scheme, this means that the first £150,000 of money raised by a company is subject to 50% tax relief making starting projects very attractive to early investors.
- Investments came easily without really advertising- perhaps because of SEIS.
- KCEL are only interested in PV and biomass projects.
- The first project was a 40kW system at Wadworth Brewery Visitor Centre, planning permission has just been granted for a 50kW system at Devizes School. Other potential projects in the pipeline include other school roofs, a Civic Centre building and some commercial biomass.
- KCEL is all volunteers with around 35 shareholding members.
- Local suppliers are used where possible.

Questions

Maryanne asked how you define community. Nick said this was difficult, they had tagged on surrounding areas onto North East Wiltshire to try to cover this.

How long does a site need to be available for. Landlord needs to agree to lease site for 20+ years to take advantage of the years FITS and RHI are available to claim for.

It was asked why Council's weren't doing projects e.g. schools themselves. The Council's don't have the money but there is money in the community for investment. It is very difficult for Council's to access this.

KCEL sell the energy to the landlord at a reduced rate, linked to RPI so they get a very good deal on the energy. KCEL don't really pay to lease the roof as such but a small token amount is paid, i.e. £1.

Robert asked what happens if an investor dies. Nick said that the KCEL can repay the money to their estate and no inheritance tax is due.

What happens at the end of the scheme, e.g. 20 years time? With KCEL, as long as there are projects the investor gets a dividend, the money can also be withdrawn but it is not the intention to repay the money after 20 years as is the case with some schemes. Some people are using such schemes as an alternative to pension funds.

They tend to use one local supplier. There have been limited responses when tendering from other companies.

Gareth asked how panels are sourced. Nick said that they rely on the supplier to choose the best panels, they need to be reliable but also keep the costs down where possible to reap the returns. They build in degradation of panels into their forecasting calculations and now have equipment in place to monitor for equipment failures after an inverter issue at Wadworth.

Ken wondered if it was worth setting up a CIC for Newbury Kennet Hydro. Nick thought it would be if there was the support but if not and they were wary of going it alone, they could get in touch with an existing CIC.

Further details on Kennet Energy can be found on their website www.kennetenergy.org.uk

Hungerford Food Festival- Tony Drewer-Trump (Hungerford Environmental Team)

Hungerford Food Festival

- Tony played a promotional video that had been made. The video can be accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Khy8joMw4s>
- The festival has run the last 4 out of 5 of years.
- In 2013 there were over 40 exhibitors, over 1000 visitors.
- The event has been self funding for the last 4 years.
- Promotion used includes- roadside signs, flyers (5000), website, Facebook page, Twitter, Parish Magazines, Out and About etc. Basically anywhere free to advertise where possible.

How to organise a food festival

- Have clear principals e.g. food rather than crafts and non-edible food products
- Think about food hygiene and Risk Assessments
- Keep resources required to a minimum
- Make the event sustainable
- Use other local events to find exhibitors
- Charge sensible fees for exhibitors e.g. £45 exhibitor, some free stalls for community groups
- Build a Facebook page and website to promote the event and keep visitors informed of events on the day
- Event parking- Utilises town centre car parks, much easier and requires less resource than organising parking,

HEAT are willing to help groups with documentation and advice. Approx £3000 is made from the festival (entrance fees, exhibitor fees and commercial sponsors), this funds HEAT activities for the year.

News from the groups

- Apple Day, Newbury Market Place Saturday 18th Oct 9am-4pm.
- Apple Day, Thatcham Community Orchard, Nature Discovery Centre, Sunday 19th October.
- Cold Ash- Green week (16th – 22nd November) - Swap Shop, Love Food Hate Waste workshop, EV talk. The group also has a demonstration lighting rig to show different bulbs and the uses. Hoped to be able to loan this out to groups in the future.