



PRESS RELEASE

SHINING EXAMPLE OF SUSTAINABILITY CELEBRATED BY SCHOOLS' ENERGY CO-OPERATIVE

- The Schools' Energy Co-operative is celebrating the 50th school to benefit from access to clean, green and cheaper energy, but has issued a warning that the current government policy position will significantly impact its ability to support more schools in the future, just at the time when children and parents alike are becoming more aware than ever of the need to switch to renewable energy sources.

The Schools' Energy Co-operative is today celebrating as Perivale Primary School, in Ealing, West London, is named as the 50th school to have a solar panel system installed through its unique co-operative model.

The School's Energy Co-op is an innovative, not-for profit, scheme that's supporting schools to cut their carbon emissions and generate clean, green energy, saving money on their bills, and teaching children about climate change, sustainability and renewable energy technologies. The installation and maintenance costs of the system are covered by share offers taken up by the local community and supporters of community energy generation using a crowd-funding model.

Perivale Primary School is the 10th school in Ealing to become part of the scheme, and the 12th in London. The Schools' Energy Co-op is developing 26 more schemes in London, including seven more installations on schools and children's centres in Ealing.

In Ealing, the Schools' Energy Co-op were brought on-board thanks to local sustainability group, Ealing Transition, who take practical, local action on climate change, energy and food security. Ealing Transition worked with Ealing Council who helped find schools that were suitable for the scheme, as well as providing support to ensure all the relevant paperwork was done, before working together with the schools and the Schools' Energy Co-op to offer parents and residents the chance to invest in the solar panel schemes. The schemes also benefited from funding from the Mayor of London's Community Energy Fund, which supported a feasibility study to help Ealing Transition demonstrate the impact solar energy could have in the borough.

The Schools' Energy Co-op typically offers the schools a deal where they have a 20-year fixed electricity charge of 9p for each kilowatt-hour used (the going rate is about 12-13p) meaning each school will save money. When the panels produce more energy than a school requires, it is fed into the National Grid – and any money the Schools' Energy Co-op receives from this is profit-shared with the schools. The crowd-funding investors make their money back in a similar way. The first school in Ealing to benefit was Castlebar Primary; its new solar panels were installed in 2016.

Ealing Council leader, Julian Bell, said: “The Schools Energy Co-operative is a fantastic scheme and I’m delighted that Perivale Primary marks the tenth school in Ealing to benefit from cheaper, greener energy. We have a climate crisis to deal with and every sector needs to be playing its part to support a rapid decrease in carbon emissions – this is a great way for schools to be part of that through installing solar panels. It’s completely unacceptable that the government is making schemes like this less viable through the ending of the Feed in Tariff. Ministers need to demonstrate their commitment to decarbonisation and reinstate the Tariff immediately.”

As of June 2019, the solar panel systems installed on schools across the UK by the Schools’ Energy Co-op have a combined capacity of 1.9 megawatts (MW), and are expected to produce around 1.7 gigawatt-hours (GWh) of electricity each year. That is enough to power about 500 typical UK homes, or to make more than 25 million cups of tea!

Compared with using natural gas to generate electricity, the expected savings are around 800 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions each year, for at least the next 20 years. The carbon dioxide saved is equivalent to reducing car use by almost 7 million miles a year. The 12 schools in London have a 375kW capacity, and are projected to generate 330 MWh of electricity per year. The carbon dioxide saved via the solar schemes on the 12 London schools is estimated to be the equivalent of reducing car use by almost 1.5 million miles.

Mike Smyth, volunteer chair of the Schools’ Energy Co-operative said: “We are delighted to have installed the 50th solar panel scheme at Perivale Primary School in Ealing.

“Just like at Perivale, each of the installations at schools in London and up and down the country has happened thanks to the collaboration and support of local people who all want to see their neighbourhood school generating clean, green energy.

“Not only do installations save schools money on their electricity bills, allowing them to direct funds to other areas of the school budget like books or playground equipment; importantly they normalise green energy. Children see a practical example of how renewable energy works, and the topic becomes a school-gates conversation for parents and grandparents, demystifying the energy sector and showing a way to help tackle the climate emergency at a local level.”

Perivale Primary School is taking its sustainability seriously; as well as working with the Schools’ Energy Co-op to install the solar panel system they have also undertaken an energy efficiency review and are partially re-lighting their school with LEDs.

Audrey Daley, Headteacher at Perivale Primary School said: “When we were told about the opportunity to install solar panels and generate our own clean, green energy it made perfect sense for us to get involved; it fits perfectly with the ethos of our school.

“We’re able to show the children how we’re making a difference and reducing our carbon footprint. The whole project has helped us think more carefully about how we use energy, and now we’re taking steps to become even more energy efficient, switching much of our lighting to LEDs. It’s great for the whole school community to be able to see how green technology works first hand, and encouraging the children to think about how to live their lives more sustainably in the future.”

Mike Smyth, volunteer chair, Schools' Energy Co-operative continued: "This is a brilliant milestone for the Schools' Energy Co-operative but it is also bittersweet, as it comes in the wake of government closing the Feed in Tariff scheme.

"The closure of the Feed in Tariff means that fewer schools will be able to install solar. Now only schools that fit a particular, narrow criteria in terms of geographical position and type of roof will be able to develop financially viable schemes. It's incredibly frustrating that just as children and their parents are becoming more engaged and energised in the fight to tackle climate change through campaigns like the Schools Strikes movement, we're having to roll-back projects that first-hand demonstrate everything from energy generation, to the science curriculum in action and raise awareness about careers in the renewable energy sector.

"We, along with others in the community energy sector, are calling on government for the reinstatement of the Feed in Tariff or an alternative policy solution that supports community organisations working to make publicly owned buildings more energy efficient and powered by renewable sources. It's a clear way to show young people we want to invest in a sustainable future for them."

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Notes to editors

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The Schools' Energy Co-operative installs community funded solar panel systems on schools free of charge as well as paying all its profits to its member schools. As a social enterprise, we are dedicated to supporting our school members and providing an alternative to the prevailing commercial rent-a-roof or leasing model. Central to this is our aspiration to retain as much as possible of the benefits for the schools, their students and the surrounding communities. We also provide educational support to our schools and work with the schools and local community groups to maximise the environmental, educational and community impact of the solar installations.

Schools' Energy Co-operative was originally launched in August 2014 to install its flagship 150kW array of solar panels at Glenleigh Park Primary Academy in Bexhill, East Sussex. This is still one of the largest community-owned school solar systems in the country.

The minimum share investment in a Schools Energy Co-operative project is £100. Schools Energy Co-operative has over 450 members who have invested £2,090,008.

The share interest payments have been made at the following rates:

2016 – 3.5%

2017 – 2.5% & 5%

2018 – 5%

<https://schools-energy-coop.co.uk>

What is community energy?

Community energy refers to the delivery of community led renewable energy, energy demand reduction and energy supply projects, whether wholly owned and/or controlled by communities or through partnership with commercial or public sector partners.

By placing democratic control, shared benefits and active participation at the centre of project delivery, community energy can create a foundation for the significant infrastructural and cultural change we need to reduce the impact of climate change and increase our energy security.

Where successful, community energy has the potential to draw people in, not just as consumers but also as active participants, or partners, in a process of change. Partners because people share in the benefits, have some say in how things happen, are actively involved and feel a connection with the outcomes. <https://communityenergyengland.org>