

SSCES Chairmans Report 2020

I hope you have all managed to keep well and avoid COVID19. We are fortunate that SSCES can still function, though obviously lockdown has caused some problems. We have had meetings via Zoom and we have yet to see how school closures and less use of our power output by the premises has affected returns. We will still have the FIT income and export payments though.

Meter Reading

As I said in my report last year, Melissa, our Administrator has improved the efficiency of our meter reading system. Over the year she has persuaded three of our sites to do the readings “in-house” and save us on travel, fuel, time, etc. We were disappointed that Westfield Academy requested payment for this, even though we have pointed out the considerable savings our p.v. system provides the Academy, saving them nearly £5,700 in 2018 and a saving approaching £10,000 in 2019. John Clark, our Company Secretary/founding Director, obtained the agreement of the Principal that they would get the students involved and read the meters for us free-of-charge. We look forward to their support this year.

Henry Lovegrove (who became a Director at last years AGM) investigated our paying Meteronline or Green Nation to do the monitoring for us on a daily basis, but we decided for Melissa to carry on monitoring via SolarWeb for now, in light of the efficiency improvements that she has already achieved.

Westfield Academy Science Block Roof Removal

As I announced in my report last year, we had just been informed that the Science Block roof was going to have to be replaced during the school summer holiday. This meant that our array of 48 panels had to be removed at the very beginning of the school holiday and then reinstated after the roof renewal before the autumn term started.

We were grateful to the Business Manager at the Academy who agreed to pay half our costs. We obtained a quote from Solarsense (who installed all our arrays) which the Board accepted. However, then at minimal notice the Business Manager requested a cheaper quote. I managed to obtain a lower quote from Mole Energy. They kindly rescheduled their workload to accommodate us, arrived and removed the array as planned. Once I was informed that the roofers were nearing completion towards the end of the school holiday, I informed Mole Energy and their team reinstated the array in less than a day and ahead of schedule. While the scaffolding was up, we also took the opportunity to have those panels cleaned. Our insurance would not cover this work, so SSCES lost the income from that array for the summer holiday and we had to meet half the expenses.

Ofgem Audit

The Stanchester Academy Ofgem audit has still not been fully completed and signed off, though John Clark has not heard from them in months. The audit has required a lot of John’s time, but also that of Solarsense (our suppliers) in answering their questions. Unfortunately, this has added to our costs this year.

Westfield Academy Electric Vehicle Charge Points (EVCP)

As a result of a comment made at last years AGM and because we cannot export some of the un-utilised power at the Lower School, it occurred to me that we should investigate having EVCP's at Westfield Academy. This would utilise some of the wasted power and get a better return for SSCES, while also helping those at Westfield to switch to EV's. I investigated the possibilities with the school Site Manager and his team and eventually got surveys done. It was decided it would be feasible to have up to 9 charge points at the Lower School and possibly 5 at the Upper School without any cable trenches needing to be dug. We would have needed to get agreement with SSE and SCC as well as have the support from the Academy. Disappointingly, the Business Manager deferred any meeting and decision until January and our Board decided it was not worth our expense to progress at present. So, I suggested to the Principal and Business Manager that they get the grant and install the EVCP's. I did not get a response. I will raise the issue again, if it looks as if it will be financially worthwhile for SSCES.

Somerset Community Energy (SCE)

The collaboration of SSCES with Bath and West CE, Avalon CE, Frome Renewable Energy Co-op (FRECo), Low Carbon Gordano and Wedmore CE is progressing slowly. A core group of the steering committee had a meeting at County Hall last autumn to present the possibilities of collaboration with District and County Councils. Mendip DC appear to be more supportive so far and we are still seeking funding, but understandably since the arrival of COVID19 everything has been put on the back burner with the councils and all the committee having other priorities. There is going to be a meeting of the steering committee with council officials on 10th July, so I will give an update on any progress at the AGM.

Strategy for the Future and Potential Projects

We will look after the investments we have through their life but we are also looking for opportunities arising following the end of FITs, as the equipment costs continue to decrease, while interest from the public and all levels of Government in renewables and smart grid technology is increasing. The development of collaboration across the County through Som. CE will help strategically to create opportunities for projects large and small to support the transition to net zero carbon.

We had an enquiry from a tent firm in Wincanton about SSCES installing p.v. on their premises. David Rabone (Director, founding Member) met them and assessed the scheme but concluded that it would not be financially viable for us as they use so little power. He also enquired about a neighbouring cheese factory having p.v. who he learnt did have a high-power requirement, but so far that project has not been taken up.

George Reynolds Centre (GRC), Crewkerne

Crewkerne Town Council have taken back the management of the GRC and are seeking ways to reduce their energy consumption. Chris Adcock (Treasurer Director, founding member), who made the original proposal for the GRC in February 2018 has taken this on and has obtained a revised proposal from Solarsense and we have obtained a couple of other quotes. We made our proposal to Crewkerne Town Council and a Councillor from SSDC on 25th June 2020 and we are awaiting their decision. I will provide an update at the AGM.

Community Fund

We have not yet made any awards in the year from the fund.

Extra Costs

This year, we have had extra costs which had not been anticipated in our budget forecasts. Primarily the Westfield Science Block roof, but also a smashed panel at Holyrood Academy that had to be replaced. We bore the costs of these as the roof replacement was not covered by our insurance and the damaged panel was not economical to claim once we had paid the excess. We have also suffered various inverter faults due to cabling being submerged in water lying on the roofs. Thankfully, we have a good working relationship with Solarsense who agreed to rectify many of these issues, thanks to John Clark , to ensure the installation remained “fit for purpose” and as a good-will gesture. We have also had extra costs dealing with the Stanchester Ofgem audit.

Interest Rate 2019

Henry Lovegrove studied our budget projections and advised it would be prudent to reduce the interest rate for future stability. As a result of his report and the above extra costs incurred this year, the Board have decided we will pay an interest rate of 5% to members for 2019.

Changes to the Board

Regrettably, I must announce that Henry Lovegrove resigned in February 2020. Also, at our meeting in February 2020 David Rabone announced that he will retire in the autumn because of ill health. Therefore, we will be seeking nominations for people to join the Board. Please get in touch if you are interested.

I would like to thank those who have put in so much of their time and effort into running SSCES and especially to Melissa for holding us all together and to Judith for doing all the book-keeping and accounts. Judith has also announced that she will retire after completing our accounts for this year, so I wish to take the opportunity now to thank her for all her work over the years since SSCES was formed.

John Christmas