

Community fund awards; WREN Energy Equality Project; Chacewater Energy Group; WPD Electric Vehicles Strategy, and more...

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Newsletter of the Wadebridge Renewable Energy Network

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£64,000 Community Fund Awards

The two community funds administered by WREN have awarded over £64,000 to 32 local community groups and projects. In its fourth year, the St Breock Wind Farm community fund, provided by REG Power Management, awarded £55,348. The new WREN community fund, supported by CleanEarth Energy, awarded £9,000 for environmental and sustainability projects. For a full report [click here](#), and for the detailed lists of awards, [click here](#)

WREN Energy Equality Project

As announced at the AGM last September, and mentioned in the December

newsletter, WREN has been developing a local peer-to-peer electricity trading concept. Peer-to-peer trading is when someone with solar PV panels produces more electricity than they can use and rather than just push it into the grid, they sell it to other people locally who are not generating. The producer could sell for more than the export tariff (around 5p a unit at the moment), and the consumer could pay less than to a standard electricity supplier (14p-18p a unit), so both benefit. If the finances stack up, we would look to offer lower prices to fuel-poor households.

The name “Energy Equality” comes from this distribution of the benefits of roof-top electricity generation.

It’s a very simple idea, but gets complicated when you try to put it into practice, not least because you need a system that measures accurately how much electricity is bought and sold between all of the participants.

Enter “Power to Change”, which was offering grants up to £100,000 to develop innovative new business models for community energy groups. The Energy Equality project seemed to us to be exactly the sort of thing they were looking for, so WREN submitted a bid. Power to Change received 31 applications, and asked 8 to come for interview, including WREN, so directors Chris Coonick, Tony Faragher and Kevin Smith made their way to Bristol at the beginning of February. The interview went well, we thought, but sadly we did not make the final five. The feedback we were given was that the Energy Equality project was certainly innovative, but looked too complicated and risky and would, in their view, likely require more than the £100,000 available.

This was a bit of a blow, but we believe that the concept has merit and we are actively pursuing other sources of funding.

Chacewater Energy Group

Chacewater Energy Group will be holding its second Electric Vehicle and Renewable Energy Fair on Saturday 27th July in Chacewater Village Hall and Millennium Green. The event will be showing off electric cars, vans and cycles and renewable energy equipment from PV panels to heat pumps via biomass boilers. They will be open 11am to 5pm. This is a great opportunity to see a range of electric vehicles - they’re expecting at least eight manufacturers and a dozen vehicles - and find out more about them, all in one place.

WPD Electric Vehicles Strategy

In February, Western Power Distribution (WPD) held a stakeholder workshop at the Royal Cornwall Showground Pavilion, which WREN attended (it's where we met John Carley and Steve Leech of Chacewater Energy Group, in fact). This was the start of the process for implementing the next Ofgem price control period which will run for five years from April 2023. How to accommodate electric vehicles (EVs) was a key topic and WPD have now published their strategy. They say:

“It is predicted that the number of EVs on our roads will increase from 130,000 to 36 million by 2040 which, of course, presents a challenge for DNOs [Distribution Network Operators].

“In order to respond to this challenge, we have published our EV strategy. This has been developed in consultation with a range of stakeholders, including: local authorities; government departments; the Welsh Government; Local Energy Partnerships; Go Ultra Low Cities; fuel station operators; house builders; vehicle manufacturers; and fleet operators. The strategy can be found on our website: <https://www.westernpower.co.uk/electric-vehicles>”.

It is a 35 page document, with some dense and technical reading, but in essence WPD expect that their backbone network and transformers, and the majority of larger local transformers, will be able to accommodate EVs. The cables which supply streets and houses have more chance of needing upgrading, and already WPD is installing larger cables in in new-build developments, including a trial of 3-phase domestic supply. Flexibility will also play a key role, encouraging users to charge cars at night when electricity is cheaper. The strategy recognises that 40% of cars do not have access to off-street parking and addresses what to do.

The timescale of the strategy is long, running from 2023-28 (too long, Extinction Rebellion would say) but WPD have to work within a framework dictated by government and implemented by Ofgem. To accelerate it will require a change of heart by government.

The End of FiTs

FiTs (Feed-in Tariffs) came to an end on 31st March, along with the export tariff. For quite a few years if you installed PV panels on your roof or buildings, or put up a wind turbine, you got paid a certain amount for what you generated (FiT), plus another amount for what you didn't use but put into the grid (export tariff). For early adopters, the FiT was over 40p per unit, the export tariff a little under 5p.

This was payable for 20 years. Over time, the FiT was reduced for new installations, reflecting the reducing cost of installing renewable energy systems.

On 31st March the tariffs were abolished. Existing installations continue to get their original amounts, but new installations will get nothing.

The FiT has gone for good, but there will be a replacement for the export tariff. After all, would it be fair to pay £5,000 for new solar on your rooftop and give away for free all the electricity you produce but do not use?

The replacement is called the “Smart Export Guarantee”, in which the Government will require large electricity suppliers to buy your power in future. Note the future tense - that’s where the snag is.

The Government’s policy proposals are not yet finalised, but though they have made it clear that households that invest in solar from April 2019 will be eligible to receive these payments, they are very unlikely to be backdated. Also the most that the Government has said about the price is that it will be greater than zero.

The Solar Trade Association’s website has more information about the Smart Export Guarantee, Click here: <https://www.solar-trade.org.uk/resource-centre/advice-tips-for-households/smart-export-guarantee/>

The website lists some supplier companies which have already announced offers, such as Octopus, Bulb and E.On. These offers may be fixed rate (like the export tariff) or variable rate, pegged to the half-hourly wholesale rate. The fixed rates quoted seem to be around the same as the export tariff, 5.24p. The risk with a variable rate is that at the time you are producing most solar electricity, lots of other people are as well, and the wholesale rate plummets. If you have a battery, you can store the electricity and sell it in the early evening when demand surges and the wholesale price rockets, but batteries will increase your installation costs.

Does this mean that new rooftop solar is dead? No. Panels have become cheaper and there is still money to be made, as well as getting your own electricity for free and knowing that you are helping cut carbon dioxide. But the simple calculations of the past have been replaced by more complex ones, with more variables to consider, which does nothing to encourage the take up of renewables, nothing to help meet the target of zero emissions by 2050.

WREN’s Energy Equality project, discussed above, would be another way of addressing the lack of an export tariff. Rather than selling to a big supplier, you would sell to your neighbours.

The End of Gas Heating

The Chancellor, Phillip Hammond, announced in his Spring Statement in March, that gas boilers would no longer be fitted in new homes from 2025. The “future homes standard” requires new homes to have low carbon heating systems (such as heat pumps) and world-leading levels of efficiency. The Financial Times had a good write up [here](#). (I managed to read it, but checking it again, it had disappeared behind a firewall. You might be lucky.) The government’s own website summarised the Chancellor’s speech, but you’ll have to go a long way down to find it, under the heading “Clean growth”. [Click here](#).

It’s a pity, then, that almost the first act of the Cameron Conservative government after the election in 2015 was to scrap home-building regulations that would have gone a way towards “world-leading levels of efficiency”. By 2025 we will have lost ten years of improvements in our homes, ten years of reduced carbon dioxide emissions, ten years of lower energy costs for home owners.

‘Grow Your Own Veg’ Workshops

The Real Food Garden, an organic veg producer near Wadebridge, is opening their gates to keen gardeners for three veg growing workshops.

[Unfortunately, the first one was in March, so this newsletter comes too late for that.] Participants will learn how to plan, start and nurture their own no-dig veg plot. The remaining workshops on Sunday 23rd June and 22nd September will be a thorough look at organic and sustainable methods of producing your own veg including rotations, soil care, pest management, weed control, preserving the harvest and seed saving. They are led by Head Grower and horticulture teacher Amelia Lake and are set in a 2 acre commercial no-dig market garden at Trelowarth, Inches, Bodmin, Cornwall, PL30 5L. Each half day workshop stands alone. Workshops run 10:00- 13:30, £40 per workshop. For more info or to book visit

www.realfoodgarden.co.uk/events/

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