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Newsletter of the Wadebridge Renewable Energy Network

Promoting local renewable energy and supporting local people since 2011

November 2022

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On the Road to Net Zero

One of the issues that people continually raise about renewable energy, particularly solar PV, is that it isn't always generated when people most want to use it. This is true. But there are a number of responses. One is that a lot of it is nevertheless produced when people want it, and that is worth having. Another is that people (and businesses) can shift the time at which they want to use it by changing their habits and processes. Indeed, some firms make a living by turning off the air conditioning in hotels, conference venues and the like and selling that reduction in demand to the electricity distributors instead of firing up another gas plant. A third is to use storage systems to hold the electricity until it is needed. A fourth is to reduce demand overall, a requirement that is something you can, and should, say in any discussion about energy usage.

Let's go back to storage systems. The BBC News website had a story very recently headlined "[Europe's biggest battery storage system switched on](#)" at Cottingham in Yorkshire. The site uses Tesla technology and has capacity to store 196MWh, enough to power 300,000 homes for two hours.

I found the story on Twitter, and so not unnaturally there were a lot of people finding objections. It's the wrong sort of battery, you should be using flow batteries. Batteries are only any good for storing electricity over a few hours, they're useless when you want summer energy to be stored until winter. 300,000 homes for two hours isn't much; you'd need 200 sites to cover the whole country. And so on.

And also, it being Twitter, there were as many people knocking down these objections. It's been built, using known technology, without subsidy, and it will be useful. The summer/winter problem is a different one; this site will help supply the demand peak from 5pm to 7pm each day, without firing up a gas plant. 200 such sites? - why is that impossible?

A common thread from objectors is that renewables don't instantly replace 100% of what we have now and that therefore it is not worth doing any of it. This brushes aside what it can achieve now. It's like saying in the early 1900s that this new-fangled electricity is a load of rubbish and you're going to stick with gas lights, thank you very much.

So what happens is that some people take up electricity and some stay with gas lights, at first, and over time the bugs get worked out of the electricity system and eventually everyone has electric lights. And then you find that electricity can do so much more than just lights. Gas-powered TVs and broadband routers, anyone?

Not everything has to be instantly 100% coverage to be useful. Every time you don't have to turn on a gas plant to generate electricity is a win for the climate.

What's different now from the early 1900s, and why we are pushing the change to Net Zero, is that the climate has given us a deadline.

Energy Clinics

We've started holding what we are calling "Energy Clinics" every 1st and 3rd Wednesday at the John Betjeman Centre in Wadebridge, 10am – 1pm.

Our Net Zero Community and Energy Equality projects are mid to long term and do not immediately address the energy crisis so many people are facing this winter. Therefore we have started up the clinics to help people with their energy costs right now.

It's a drop-in clinic, no appointments necessary. Just call in to the JBC between 10am and 1pm and we will endeavour to help you. We might not be able to answer all your questions on the spot, but we are working with Community Energy Plus (CEP), Cornwall's energy advice charity. On the 3rd Wednesday, someone from CEP will be with us, able to advise on benefits, grants and so on, which is their speciality. When CEP are not present, and if we cannot help, we will pass your details on to them to contact you.

So if you have a question or something you want to discuss, just drop in.

Worried and struggling to pay your energy bills this winter?

Want to work towards a net zero future?

Let's work together on this...

We've teamed up with local organisations, networks and environmental groups, so we can offer a greater range of information and advice for our community in Cornwall

Drop by our Energy Clinic at the John Betjeman Centre every 1st and 3rd Wednesday of the month, 10am - 1pm

Wadebridge Renewable Energy Network

NZCom

COMMUNITY ENERGY PLUS

£65,000 St Breock Windfarm Community Fund Opens

The Fund opens for applications on 1st December. Application forms and guidance can be downloaded from wren.uk.com/community/apply-for-funds. The closing date is mid-February 2023 and grants will be made to successful projects in April.

The Fund has approximately £65,000 for projects in Wadebridge, St Breock, St Wenn, Withiel, Egloshayle, St Issey and St Columb. Over the years the Fund has supported a wide variety of projects - educational, sporting, artistic and cultural, improvement of community facilities and so on.

The Fund was set up to give priority to energy conservation, installing renewables, and energy related education projects. So, if you have a project related to energy in mind, do have a look at the Fund details. You might want to install energy efficient lighting in a community building, or insulate it to a higher standard. Or you might need funding to run courses on energy issues. Or you might be a newly formed group getting set up to tackle 'energy' in your community and you need a bit of initial funding to get you on your way. Because WREN administers the Fund it doesn't apply to it for grants - so if the money is to be used for 'energy' it need to go to groups other than WREN.

Any questions about the Fund? Email communityfunds@wren.uk.com and we will do our best to help and advise.

Net Zero Community Project

Our own contribution to net zero, the NZCom project, has been powering forward. We have a report on technical solutions in the areas of heat, electricity and transport, and also solutions that address more than one of these at once.

We have developed a carbon accounting tool that works for individuals and communities. It projects energy usage over the next 30 years, based on when you implement energy efficiency and other low carbon measures. For example, if you install a heat pump to replace a gas boiler, how much CO2e will you save and what will it do to your costs. The underlying database is complete and we have contracted a developer to build an easy-to-use online interface.

We have developed an analysis of potential business models that community energy groups like WREN might implement, and we are looking closely at these to help shape our future direction.

Through all of this we have been holding regular meetings of the Advisory Group and the Focus Group to advise and comment on what we are doing.

A closing event is planned for Thursday 26th January 2023 in Wadebridge Town Hall, to which all are welcome. More details to follow, but put the date in your diaries. In the meantime, you can find our reports so far on the [Project Workstreams](#) page on our website.

Net Zero Heroes - 5

Nicky Gilmour - Vega Rosa

Nicky is a florist and grower inspired by traditional makers and artists: basket makers, spinners, hedge layers and growers, who tend, process and transform the materials growing in their landscape by hand.

Vega Rosa's floral work is from flowers, foliage and willow grown on a small holding near St Tudy, North Cornwall. Materials are cut, harvested and dried seasonally, using chemical free and peat free methods. All arrangements are hand-made using sustainable floristry techniques.

She works to 3 core principles:

1. Develop a sustainable business model
2. Only use sustainable materials
3. Avoid debt if possible - even when starting up in business

On visiting the site, you are struck by how infrastructure is kept to a minimum with only a couple of reclaimed poly tunnels, rabbit and deer proof fencing, a compost toilet and a log store. Nothing is wasted and rotational composting also plays a big part of the sustainable growing process.

Nicky does not use heated greenhouses which keeps both expenditure and carbon emissions down, although it does require transport to be swift. From hand picking in the morning, often before sunrise, there is a two hour post cut de-stressing period (for the flowers, not Nicky!). The flower arrangements will be on sale at two local outlets within 24hours. Transport and carbon miles are minimal.

Words of encouragement:

"Grow what you love. If you love something you're more likely to be able to better apply yourself to it. This approach in life works beyond growing!"

"Join in with others already doing it - you don't have to do it on your own".

For more details go to: <https://vegarosa.co.uk>

Electric Vehicle News

The three EV charging points (six connections) at Higher Tenant, Wadebridge, seem to be accessible again. The gate is still there, but open. They can charge at a rate up to 22kW using the standard type-2 socket, but bring your own cable. The BP petrol station at the top of West Hill has installed an ultra-rapid EV charger (up to 150kW) with two connectors. It's a very posh one with inbuilt battery storage for intelligent grid/load balancing. (Thanks to Marcus Shirley for the info.)

The chargers at Tesco, Wadebridge, which were free to use when installed, now charge for charging - 28p per kWh according to the Podpoint app at time of writing. That's still good value compared to, for example, my suppliers charge of 49p.

We also hear that Wadebridge is going to have four new EV chargers, 3 rapids & 1 super, in Cornwall Council's Goldworthy Way & Piggy Lane car parks, to be installed in the next five months or so.

New WREN Director

WREN has a new director, Victoria Smyth, who was co-opted during the summer and elected at the AGM in October.

Vicky has been a long-term friend of WREN. She first heard of the group back in 2011 when she moved to the Wadebridge area after her Masters in chemistry where her final project investigated new architectures for solar PV technologies. Having worked at the BRE National Solar Centre with our Technical Director, Chris Coonick, she brings a wealth of knowledge on how the feed-in-tariff accelerated PV uptake and has seen the change as policies have shifted over the past decade. Her career has moved into the circular economy, but she remains passionate about grass roots movements to reduce the human impact on the planet. Within her role on the WREN Board she is actively involved in engaging with communities across Cornwall to share insights on effective action within the realm of energy efficiency and system changes. In her spare time Vicky can be found walking, cycling or scuba diving around the Cornish coast.

In The News

Since the last Newsletter, back in the summer, we have accumulated a lot of news clippings, including several about Government proposals which elicited a reaction of "They're going to do what?!" However, since they were from a variable number of prime ministers and policies ago, those are no longer worth publishing, so here we have more recent ones.

Let's start with local government. Cornwall Council has published a [Climate Change Risk Assessment report](#).

The Summary presents the findings in a clear, understandable way. The Executive Summary and detailed reports are much more academic in nature and harder to read, but you can have a go if you want to. The focus is on how to respond and adapt to climate change, with only a brief mention of "continuing to reduce our carbon emissions".

So, in case we forget, let's have a reminder of what "net zero" means, as explained by the electricity supplier Good Energy, [here](#).

If you want a more academic approach, here is Professor Myles Allen of the University of Oxford on [achieving net zero](#).

A railway bridge replacement in Oxford is having an impact on the city's journey to net zero, [here](#).

The Guardian reports on the enormous emissions gap between the top 1% and the poorest in the UK, but it's not only the UK that has a '[polluting elite](#)'.

From April 2023 there will be grants available to make homes more energy efficient. The scheme is called ECO+ and is available to homes in council tax bands A-D. It will run for three years. [Read more](#).

Finally, the Government has responded to a petition to [require all new builds to have solar panels as condition of planning permission](#). They say (headline version): "We do not mandate solar panels to enable innovation and tailoring to individual sites. However we expect most developers will use solar panels to meet the recent uplift in energy efficiency standards." It's worth reading the whole response.

It's also worth pointing out that developers build houses according to the standards in force when they were granted planning permission, so the first new builds after June 2022 will not have had to meet these new standards. And I remind you that new regulations due to be implemented in 2015 were abruptly scrapped when the Conservatives won a majority in the general election, so that we'll have had a lost decade so far as energy efficient housing goes.

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