

Large Scale Solar Project 2023

The Climate Partnership CIC is delighted to have been a catalyst for the 'Large Scale Solar' project at Furze Platt Secondary School, where community energy organisation MaidEnergy has raised £280k to install 600 solar panels on the roof of the school. This is the largest community-funded solar project undertaken in the Royal Borough to date with the installation of 240kW of solar PV adding to the existing 35kW installed in 2020.

The project proved without doubt that:

- large scale solar projects can be delivered, saving money and reducing carbon emissions
- communities are keen to invest in renewable energy on public buildings
- volunteers are vital in bringing skills and passion to their communities

MaidEnergy is a community energy organisation with a track record of delivering renewable energy owned by the community. Since its first installation in 2015, MaidEnergy has financed and installed solar panels on seven community buildings and provided a heat pump as replacement for failing gas boilers for one of them.



The money for the installation at Furze Platt Senior School was raised through community investment. MaidEnergy, with the support of community share specialists Our Community Enterprise, prepared a Community Share Offer which invited local people and others to invest in MaidEnergy to deliver the project. The Climate

Partnership supported MaidEnergy with a loan to underwrite the costs of the Large Scale Solar project. This loan has been converted to community shares in this scheme and,

together with a further significant investment of £60,000 from the Climate Partnership and £43,000 from the local Council, The Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead, has seen MaidEnergy secure £280k from 96 individuals and organisations. Financial investment from the Climate Partnership and the Royal Borough was vital to ensure that installation could proceed during the summer holiday window on the school site and avoided the need for further financing arrangements for this project. As with all investors, the Climate Partnership and the Council will receive a return on their investment and can withdraw their capital if required, subject to the approval of directors.

The funding is sufficient for MaidEnergy to install the maximum amount of solar PV on the available roof space at Furze Platt senior school, benefiting the school, the community and the planet. This scheme will reduce the school's energy consumption and costs and make a significant contribution to the Royal Borough's net zero target.



MaidEnergy commissioned Photon Energy to undertake the installation. Photon Energy is an award-winning micro-generation certified solar panel installer head-quartered in Reading, Berkshire. The organisation specialises in the design, supply, installation and maintenance of solar PV systems and battery storage systems for commercial, industrial and new build projects.

Barnaby Briggs, Executive Chair of The Climate Partnership CIC said: "The Large Scale Solar project at Furze Platt demonstrates what can be done with local commitment, community support and the right catalyst. I'm delighted that The Climate Partnership was the catalyst in this case, providing essential investment to ensure that MaidEnergy, a valuable volunteer-led organisation, could confidently tackle its biggest installation to date. All of the projects we are supporting are enabling community and business leaders to take action and do things differently in the race to net zero."

In addition to lowering CO2 emissions the installation funded by this share offer will provide considerable benefit to Furze Platt Senior School, supporting the provision of education to young people. The school will benefit from a donation of shares in MaidEnergy, which will provide income from interest payments and a future cash benefit when the school requests to withdraw its share capital. MaidEnergy has offered to donate the panels to the site after 15 years. To help protect Furze Platt Senior School from excessive energy prices in the future, MaidEnergy is offering to provide power at a nearly 40% discount to the current price for power from the grid, increasing with inflation, and guarantees not to charge more than the price from the grid in future. This approach has been endorsed by the Education Funding Agency.

The project will also provide locally owned renewable energy to serve the community and strengthen the local economy by providing a return for shareholders. Income will be earned from electricity generated by the solar panels and MaidEnergy expects 70% to be sold to the school with the rest exported to the grid.

MaidEnergy is a volunteer-led community organisation with no paid staff, democratically run with an asset lock to preserve the solar panels for the community. MaidEnergy is a Community Benefit Society, Reg 30926R.

MaidEnergy works by:

- Finding community buildings that are interested in cutting carbon emissions
- Raising community finance from people in the local area and throughout the UK, through the issuing and managing of community share schemes, to fund installations
- Providing all relevant legal documents and arranging grid export capability
- Managing the installation and all ongoing maintenance
- Working with sites to maximize financial, environmental, and community benefit.

The Climate Partnership CIC is an independent organisation initially funded by the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead which is already delivering projects addressing decarbonisation of homes, schools & and other organisations, renewable energy generation, and engaging local people with nature to improve wellbeing and biodiversity, all of which support the overarching ambition to achieve carbon net zero by 2050 or before.

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