

CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

1. Public EV charging infrastructure - Following on from our recent success in obtaining almost £1m of Government funding for EV chargers in our car parks and streets, Shropshire Council is now hoping to obtain additional Government grant money towards a new post to help develop and implement an EV Charging Infrastructure Strategy and bid for further funding, including installations at additional public car parks, park & ride sites and parish halls. We plan to publish a 'Public EV Charging Infrastructure Strategy' and supporting resources later this year, including a 'toolkit' to help the public and businesses with their understand of the technology. We may also be able to bid for funding to support the installation of a strategic network of more powerful 'rapid' chargers to provide faster top ups for both visitors and local communities alike. This is expected to help ensure that Shropshire towns remain attractive to visitors who may need to charge electric vehicles during their stay. We have recently asked Parish and Town Councils to identify potential locations for public EV chargers in their areas.

2. Community Benefits from Solar Farms – Shropshire Council is working with SALC to develop and distribute guidance to help Parish and Town Councils and Parish Meetings to engage with the prospective developers of new solar farms to help them to negotiate a package of community benefits if appropriate.

3. Roof-mounted solar and the Big Solar Co-op – Shropshire Council already has 27 roof-mounted solar arrays on its buildings and is currently reviewing its own estate to identify potential opportunities for additional arrays. Shropshire Council has also provided a grant to the not-for-profit Big Solar Co-op to provide free advice to businesses and community organisations (including parish councils) wishing to explore the installation of solar panels on appropriate roofs in Shropshire. The capital costs of the installation are also met by Big Solar Co-op and funded through crowd funded investment, with cheap, renewable energy being supplied to the host organisation at 10-20% below market energy costs.

4. Business Energy Breakfast – Shropshire Council recently organised an event at Shrewsbury Town FC (which Ian attended) to provide local business with access to authoritative advice and practical information and guidance on sustainable energy solutions, funding sources and energy and environmental auditing. Additional value has been derived by filming the event and making the footage more widely available through the Council's Youtube channel. <https://newsroom.shropshire.gov.uk/2023/03/energy-resilience-affordability-and-sustainability-top-of-the-agenda-for-business-leaders/>

5. Cool Shropshire - Shropshire Council has grant funded a local environmental consultancy, E4 Environment, to provide a free environmental support scheme for local micro businesses and SMEs looking to be a little greener and start their carbon reduction journey. Businesses registering with the scheme will receive tailored advice about how they can reduce overheads through increased efficiency, enhance their reputation, and connect with like-minded businesses to collectively make a difference.

6. Biochar plant – Shropshire Council is exploring the potential to develop a demonstrator project around the manufacture of biochar from natural woody materials from grounds and highway maintenance using a pyrolysis plant which cooks (rather than burning) the woody feedstock to reduce it to pure carbon. There is a rapidly expanding market for the resultant biochar, which as well as storing carbon which would otherwise be released to the atmosphere from burning or natural decomposition, can be used to improve soil quality and in the manufacture of low carbon building materials. The process can also generate internationally recognised 'carbon offset credits' for sale to organisations wishing to offset their carbon emissions.

7. Area-based Carbon Insetting – Shropshire Council has recently applied for Government funding to develop and test a mechanism which would provide a local alternative to the purchase of internationally validated carbon credits in rainforest countries, allowing them to invest in projects which reduce emissions or capture and store carbon in Shropshire (including through the manufacture of biochar above). This is called ‘insetting’ as opposed to ‘offsetting’. If successful, this project has the potential to revolutionise how local climate action and carbon reduction measures could be funded.

8. Supply-chain emissions modelling – 94% of Shropshire Council’s carbon footprint is generated by what it buys in from suppliers. The Council has commissioned detailed modelling of everything which it has purchased during the last 3 years to help it to identify the goods and services which generate the most carbon. The Council will then work with its suppliers to help them to improve their carbon performance and proposes to update its corporate procurement policy to identify carbon performance as key consideration in the procurement process.

9. Green hydrogen feasibility – It is widely recognised that current battery technology is unlikely to be suitable for heavy goods vehicles due to issues of range, weight and recharging infrastructure. This is relevant for council buses, gritters and refuse vehicles in particular, but is also crucial for the agriculture, construction and road freight sectors. The Council is therefore working with Kier and their technology partner Protium to explore the potential to establish a small-scale demonstrator hydrogen fuel manufacturing facility, co-located with renewable energy generation on Council owned land. This work may also identify a separate network of potential refuelling facilities in strategic locations. It is expected that, if proven, such a facility could then be replicated locally, for example at the scale of an individual farm business.

10. Battlefield heat network – Shropshire Council has commissioned consultants to develop proposals for a local heat network which would capture and distribute waste heat from the Battlefield Waste to Energy plant to nearby businesses. It may be possible in future to extend the network to include local community buildings and social housing. The study is expected to report later this year and if a business case is established, will inform a bid for Government funding towards the capital costs of the heat network.

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