



TRANSITION TOWN HIGH WYCOMBE Energy Group

Minutes of the THW Energy Group Public Meeting held on Friday 12th June at The Environment Centre

Present:

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Introduction

Although a list of topics were prepared for discussion it is emphasised that the Energy Group meetings will be quite informal and kept down to one-and-a-half hours. As an experiment the formal committee & agenda structure will not be adhered to. Notes (rather than formal minutes) were taken to summarise the main points of discussion so we can share these with people who couldn't make it.

Meeting Notes:

1. **Solar Hot Water Club** – a review of the Maidenhead experiment appeared to expose the weakness in such ideas when implemented by community groups – without a supplier on board, early-on, it is difficult to deliver any real savings. It may need the professional bargaining skills & buying power of a local government organisation to make such a scheme worthwhile. However this should not put us off. If the proposed High Wycombe Home Energy Club could come together it could collect the names of, say, 10 people interested in a discounted price.
2. **Skyblue Energy** – a representative of High Wycombe's own Skyblue Energy had phoned the TTHW Chairman after our enquiry about their "Low Carbon Consultancy". They had suggested a meeting but given the lack of time (we all work) we suggested they write to us with their information. No such further communication had been received. This led us to believe that SE were under the false impression that TTHW is a commercial organisation – since we are a non-profit-community organisation (not corporation) they saw no further opportunity to make money from their HIPS & Certification work. As such we do not believe they actually supply and real Low Carbon Consultancy. We hope we are wrong! Our invitation to them remains open.
3. **Anaerobic Digestion update** – EW repeated her earlier support for AD. The Government does appear to be sponsoring six sites for installation. EW was set the task of finding out how the local High Wycombe Community or local Government could proceed practically to get such a system installed in this Town. There were some doubts in the team about how much energy from such a scheme may be practically available given that so much biomass (ie, food scraps) is distributed through the community. How would it be collected and centralised? Essentially we should recycle carbon. Without a local pilot scheme we might not know the answers. Given that the town already has a large and impressive waste vegetable oil recycling plant that was completely ignored by the County Council's recycling



scheme (they send the oil to Norfolk) then we have a poor track record of joining the dots and “keeping it local”.

4. **Creating a Sustainable Wycombe 2026 Conference** – EW & MB will be attending. Further to the Biogas discussion it was proposed to pilot biogas on local buses.
5. **Finance (& other) ideas** – presented by SN – householders could part-borrow money for renewables and pay the money back out of the savings. Loans would be secured against the equipment. The team supported a local solution with local money. However there was low confidence in Air-Source Heat Pumps. There was somewhat more confidence in Ground-Source Heat Pumps as long as it was not used to generate Hot Water (Underfloor Heating preferable). The preferred option remains Solar Hot Water as it yields the best savings based upon energy & money invested. The outlay was also far lower than GSHP or Biomass.
 - a. Maybe the Council Tax should be levied based upon each Home’s Energy Certificate?
 - b. Likewise maybe parking in the town should be free for any car with a CO2 footprint less than 110gm/km?
 - c. How about a local careers day for renewable technology installers? Clearly there is a lack of such installers in the area. How do the area’s installers meet? They met at the Reggie Goves Renewable Energy Showcase exhibit otherwise it would be via the Chamber of Commerce.
6. **Home Energy Club** - how could we get such an idea off the ground? The organisation should attract the home hobbyists who tinker with low-carbon technologies in their garden sheds. It may reach out to people who may have never considered the Peak Oil or Climate Change implications of their work... But they may have the skills to create a low-carbon technology industry in the town. There is already a small group who built home-bio-fuel-refining equipment. We could leaflet houses that have solar panels on the roof.
7. **Demo Projects** – the team would like to promote a demonstration Community-Generation Project in the town. Ideally these would be financed locally, maybe through share ownership. They should be Community Interest Companies. They should produce a useful amount of revenue and make/save a useful amount of energy. Proposals:
 - a. **Holywell Pool** – the proposals were not discussed in detail due to lack of information. There is also doubt that, given the financial predicament of the pool and the current fiscal climate, that the money would be raised to realise any of the Low-Carbon Technologies proposed. These remained only on the “Save Our Swim” wish list. They were aspirations that were not core to what the pool group was attempting to achieve – ie, keeping the pool open. Whatever could be done did deserve our support so we will monitor progress.
 - b. **Highworth Combined School Wind Turbine** – to be promoted at an up-and-coming “Environment Day” at the school on Wednesday afternoon 24th June (with family picnic). It is proposed that a Proven 6kW unit be installed there. The team were more enthusiastic for this proposal but there were some doubts that such a location would every yield anything like the promised “up to £1000 worth of electricity per year”. We also felt that the best model for such a proposal maybe to follow the lead of a hydropower scheme featured in a recent article in “The Ecologist” magazine that described a Community Interest Company (or similar) where the Community raised the money by issuing shares. The proposed cost of the scheme was unknown. We can offer our help for fund-raising and lobbying but see obstacles ahead. A similar scheme at the John Hampden Grammar School



was blocked due to proximity to Booker Airfield...

- c. **Pann Mill Hydro-Power Scheme** – few knew of such a proposal prior to this meeting. Again the team was enthusiastic to help out but nobody at the Wycombe Society had even mentioned the idea. We should find out more at the next Pann Mill Open Day in July that TTHW will be attending in an official capacity. A unit could power the adjacent pumping station or even the Holywell Mead Lido although the cooperation of Thames Water is required.
- d. **Anaerobic Digester** – EW set the task of finding out more. No such proposal even exists for the town.
- e. **Electric Rickshaw** – although a transport project, this was included for discussion. JI proposed a £1000 purchase of an electrically-powered three-wheeler he had seen for sale. This would provide demonstration rides across the Rye to the Environment Centre where it would be based. The energy for it would be generated with a Wind Turbine and Photovoltaics. Although a great idea such a Taxi organisation would need licensing and insurance. If we overcame this by doing it for free then there would be no revenue to pay the shareholders or make-up the running costs. The installation of PV & Wind Turbine could only be temporary given the legal & planning restrictions. Turbines are difficult and dangerous to erect even temporarily! Given the impracticalities such a scheme would need to be run professionally by a dedicated team with semi-permanent facilities. Given the uncertain future of the Environment Centre then where would it be based? Like the other good ideas it should be done but would take a lot of hard work. The team felt their time might be better spent on another project.

The meeting concluded at 8.30pm. However informal and far-ranging discussions (from politics to consumption) continued in the car park for another 30 minutes! The team felt that it was an enjoyable use of time but, given the informality, we could equally well have met in a pub beer-garden! Seriously – we had to collect the key for the EC from Frances because no EC staff were on hand to let us in. If we didn't have Julian there we would not have been able to disarm the EC Alarm system. Consider the practicalities of using the EC in future.

Conclusion

The enthusiasm of the team is great for Local Energy & Community-Power Generation. It has bold ambitions. However, given the low-key role of 'energy' within the recent "In Transition" Movie (previewed online briefly only last 11th/12th/13th June) it seems that we might be best of spending our time on conserving energy rather than generating it. This doesn't mean that Community Generation Schemes are not "transitiony". The low ranking is probably a reflection of the sort of people in the Transition Movement and also of the great obstacles such schemes face. Microgeneration schemes are expensive enough at the domestic level. Moving up to the Community level requires time, money, skills and experience. It is of no surprise that "In Transition" focused mostly on Gardening and Art projects. These are within most people's grasp. Growing your own food is highly scalable, does not require large amounts of capital, accountants, planning permission or lawyers.

Although we can promote Community Generation Projects we don't have much to bring to the table other than the time of volunteers. Our hope is that TTHW can (almost literally) mount its flag on a high-profile local initiative as a real "physical manifestation". Where we plant food we must plant wind turbines. We may be the ONLY Civil Society grouping who actually support these initiatives (outside a few enthusiasts within School PTA's or our friends at Pann Mill). If needs be, we must support projects vocally at the Planning Stage



so that local Government understands that many in the Community are pro-green-energy.

But what of the future of this local group? Hopefully we can attract Green Energy Pioneers and Entrepreneurs through vigorous networking. We should work to raise the profile of the group by being in contact with the local shakers and movers. We should also not forget our role in promoting energy efficiency and usage curtailment (even if this is less glamorous). There are still more commercial organisations working on Home Insulation than Microgeneration in the Town. We should maintain our working relationship with our friends in the District Council and promote the Energy Efficiency message.

The Energy Group should persevere with the Town's first "Home Energy Club" and work towards getting our message into Schools with the proposed "Renewable Energy Roadshow" for kids. This project alone could take up all the spare time of the Group. It may also be beneficial if the expertise of the team is wielded as a form of Community Low-Carbon Consultancy. The Team should generate Low-Carbon Fact Sheets specifically for the Town as is already planned for the local Biomass industry.

All ideas for the next meeting...