

Key reasons for supporting the Dottery Close community solar project

1)Local financial benefits from low-cost solar electricity -Dorset Community Energy, a not-for-profit Community Benefit Society, has 7 years' successful experience of installing solar panels on 25 schools, hospitals and community buildings and has raised over £1m from local shareholders (members) to finance these installations. Based on this experience Dorset Community Energy estimates the solar electricity supplied to local households or businesses from the Dottery Solar Array will save consumers at total of approximately £500,000 over 20 years. This income will directly benefit the local economy.

2)Opportunity for households without solar panels -The low-cost solar electricity will be available for up to 200 households in the Bridport area. The main benefit will be to householders who do not have solar panels, including social housing tenants, people with insufficient capital to finance solar panels and people without a suitable roof space on their own homes.

3)The Dottery solar array will be locally owned -Local people will have the opportunity to purchase shares to finance the solar array. To date Dorset Community Energy has paid 5.5% interest on shares and capital returned in instalments over a period of 17 years. The solar array will be locally owned and interest payments to members (shareholders) will also benefit the local economy.

4)No cost and low risk for participating households and businesses- The metering and billing for the local low-cost solar electricity supply and back-up electricity (when there is insufficient solar generation) will be undertaken by a national electricity supply company partner, currently Octopus Energy. Participating households and businesses will be free to leave Energy Local Bridport and switch to another electricity supplier at any time and without penalty (similar to the existing right to change electricity supplier).

5)A great example of tacking climate change at the local community level- The UK government has a target for a national zero- carbon electricity supply by 2035 as a key step in helping to tackle climate change. The Energy Local Bridport solar array is an important example in how future electricity supplies can be local, low cost and zero carbon.

6)High level of interest and replication potential- Dorset Community Energy has received expressions of interest in similar local community renewable energy supply projects from Dorchester, Martinstown, Weymouth, Swanage, Beaminster, Milton Abbas, Portland, Broadwindsor, and Ferndown. There have also recently been 2 enquiries from towns in Devon. All these opportunities are dependent on this planning application and the subsequent lessons learned and information that can be shared with replication projects.

7)Increase in bio-diversity- The 1-acre solar site at Dottery Close is part of a larger 18-acre field on the Symondsburry Estate, currently used for agricultural crops. The solar array will be undersown with a wildflower seed mix and sheltered by new hedgerow planting to the west, greatly increasing biodiversity compared with the current land use of annual ploughing and cropping.

8)Educational benefits for children- Energy Local Bridport Limited, currently representing households supplied by the existing 50kW Salway Ash wind turbine, has been registered with the Financial Conduct Authority as a Co-operative. The directors are interested in developing educational opportunities for children, including school visits to the proposed Dottery solar array.

9)Potential for national replication- The Energy Local Bridport solar array would be the first example in the UK (and one of the first in Europe) of local households and/or businesses directly benefitting from new low-cost local renewable electricity supply through the existing grid. There is currently a major government consultation on Electricity Market Reform, which includes decoupling the price of lower cost renewable electricity from the higher price of electricity from gas fired power stations. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-launches-biggest-electricity-market-reform-in-a-generation>

The Ministerial Forward by Rt Hon Kwasi Kwarteng MP states that the aim of the Review is “to design an electricity system which passes the savings of renewable electricity generation onto consumer bills” i.e. the consultation may result in local low-cost renewable electricity supply, as piloted by Energy Local Bridport, becoming available nationally across the UK.