

**NB: THE INFORMATION GIVEN HERE MAY NOW BE OUT OF DATE. PLEASE CONTACT US IF YOU WOULD LIKE UP-TO-DATE INFORMATION ON THIS TOPIC:**  
[CCAN@MEA.ORG.UK](mailto:CCAN@MEA.ORG.UK)

**Enquiry:**

Hello

██████████ Village Hall committee are looking for free fitting of solar panels and free use of the power generated. Our current Electricity bill is £1500/year approx. (£125.00/month).

The south facing aspect available for solar panels is 65 m<sup>2</sup> (approx) x 36 Deg's (5.4 metres long x 12 metres wide, unrestricted by chimney stack etc.)

Our village hall is a lottery funded registered charity. We are under strict income conditions from the Lottery commission for the next 2 years (5 years in total). Although we are on target to meet those conditions we make a profit of something in the region of £2000 per year. We would like to have solar panels fitted but cannot afford the installation cost, can you help in any way please?

**Response:**

**1) Energy Efficiency**

I know your question is about solar panels, but a few things re: energy efficiency, and your bills, first.

Before installing renewables it makes sense to first monitor your usage and to be as energy efficient as possible and to use as little energy as possible. E.g.: it costs nothing to turn off lights and it saves you money straightaway whereas solar panels cost money before they then save you money.. I've just heard this morning from a council in Derbyshire who are installing a biomass boiler in their headquarters – before they did this they spent some time cutting their energy bills by 25% purely through energy efficiency. A few top tips:

Monitoring:

- **Measure how much energy you're using** by taking regular meter readings. In domestic settings people who know how much energy they use typically use less than those who don't and the same is often true of non-domestic buildings. MEA has a free tool to help community organisations to do this: [www.wesave.org.uk](http://www.wesave.org.uk). You can simply input meter readings on a regular basis (once a month is good) and build up a pattern of your usage. The site includes a downloadable guide which was written specifically for community and third sector organisations. One feature of this website is the ability to print out charts of usage – you could put these on a notice board in the building to show people what you are using and how much it is costing. This could encourage them to turn the lights off/heating down etc.
- **Make sure energy bills aren't estimated** – utility companies usually estimate in their favour not yours! It usually just takes a two minute phone call to give them the correct reading and then they send you a revised bill.
- It's worth talking to energy companies about **community tariffs** – they sometimes have them.

## Reducing:

Once you've started monitoring your usage there are some simple ways to keep it low:

- **Is the heating set to be on at times when the building is actually being used**, or is it coming on at other times? It's worth periodically checking this as you may find that the times at which the building is being used change slightly over time. (I appreciate this might lower the gas bills rather than the electricity bills, but still worth doing).
- **Does someone change the heating settings in autumn and spring to reflect the changing seasons?** This is the kind of thing we all do at home, but it can get forgotten about in a community building used by lots of people.
- **As and when your light bulbs go you could replace them with energy saving ones** –by doing it as they go you spread any small extra cost for these bulbs over a period of time. A wide range of bulbs is now available, especially online.
- You could encourage groups using the building to **turn off lights/appliances** etc when they leave it if they don't already.
- As the building is only three years old it will already be insulated/draught proofed/double glazed etc which is all good.

More tips on saving energy:

- [www.est.org.uk](http://www.est.org.uk)
- [www.mea.org.uk/resources/fact-sheets](http://www.mea.org.uk/resources/fact-sheets)

## 2) Funding Options

There are a number of ways of funding a solar pv installation on a community building:

### (a) Rent a Roof schemes:

Rent a Roof schemes are one way to fund the panels and, as you said, A Shade Greener are probably your most local company for this.

A few things to consider:

- The company providing the panels will take the FIT payments, which are the bulk of the money to be made from a pv system. If there is anyway to pay for them yourselves and then get the FIT payments as income for the village hall this would make more sense.
- You will get the free electricity generated by the panels. This will be produced during daylight hours. If you mostly use the hall during the day this makes sense. If you mostly using it during the evening then you won't benefit anywhere near as much from the energy produced from the panels and you bills won't drop as much. If you mostly use the hall at night I would suggest it's probably not worth pursuing this option.
- A number of factsheets/FAQs have been produced regarding Rent a Roof Schemes and questions you should ask a company offering you such a scheme:
  - [www.cse.org.uk/downloads/file/fair\\_deal\\_feed-in\\_tariffs.pdf](http://www.cse.org.uk/downloads/file/fair_deal_feed-in_tariffs.pdf)

- [www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/Generate-your-own-energy/Solar-panels-PV/Free-solar-PV-offers](http://www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/Generate-your-own-energy/Solar-panels-PV/Free-solar-PV-offers)

### **(b) Community Shares**

A number of community orgs around the country have set up community-owned renewables on community buildings. Local people buy shares in the project, these are used to purchase the solar panel. The building gets the free electricity/heat and those who bought shares get a return on their investment as the renewable earns FIT payments. Here are some local(ish) examples:

- Torrs Hydro Project (Derbyshire-based): <http://torrs-hydro-new-mills.blogspot.com>
- SHOCK (Nottinghamshire based): [www.sustainablehockerton.org](http://www.sustainablehockerton.org)
- Green Fox (Leicestershire based): <http://greenfoxcommunityenergy.coop/>
- Tutbury EcoPower (Staffordshire based): [www.tutburyecopower.co.uk](http://www.tutburyecopower.co.uk)

As well as offering payments to shareholders, these schemes often set aside a certain percentage of profits to fund local projects that benefit the community. Either way, the FIT payments are then going to local people and/or local projects rather than a rent-a-roof company.

A short video guide to funding a project through a Share Issue:

[www.planlocal.org.uk/videos/videopages/funding-your-project-through-a-share-issue.html](http://www.planlocal.org.uk/videos/videopages/funding-your-project-through-a-share-issue.html)

Energy4All has worked on a number of community-owned projects (mostly wind turbines): [www.energy4all.co.uk](http://www.energy4all.co.uk).

### **(c) Low Cost Loans**

There are loans specifically designed for community orgs that want to install renewables. You make the repayments with your FIT payments and once it's paid off you start making money.

Here is an example of a church which got a low cost loan for PV: [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-shropshire-14189887](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-shropshire-14189887)

Energy Share (a company) and Pure Trust (a charity) have recently teamed up to offer loans: [www.energyshare.com/make-energy/pure-and-energyshare-loan](http://www.energyshare.com/make-energy/pure-and-energyshare-loan). There is a deadline on their current round of funding of 17th August. Probably too short notice for you, but it's worth keep an eye of their websites as Energy Share regularly offer grants and loans.

### **(d) Grants**

**EDF Green Energy Fund:** This fund is open until 31st August:

[www.edfenergy.com/products-services/for-your-home/our-services/green-energy-fund.shtml#](http://www.edfenergy.com/products-services/for-your-home/our-services/green-energy-fund.shtml#) These kind of funds are always massively oversubscribed, but someone has to win!

Last year the Department for Energy and Climate Change ran something called the **Local Energy Assessment** Fund (LEAF) (<http://greencommunitiescc.org.uk/>). This funded a range of projects, some of them involving community buildings. Grants ranged from £2K to £130k.

It's possible (but not certain) that there will be a second round of LEAF later this f/y. There are no guarantees at the moment that it will happen and the criteria might be different to last time but I would suggest keeping an eye out. Last time orgs like MEA were able to help groups write their applications – they were able to include up to £1K for our time in their bid's budget and if they were successful we then claimed this. If they weren't successful we didn't claim it, so the risk lay with MEA rather than the groups. We would be happy to do this again if there is another round and if DECC allows this again.

These guys got a **lottery grant** for their village hall solar panels: [www.northkilworth.com](http://www.northkilworth.com).

One word of warning re: accepting a grant for the installation of renewables – if the grant comes from public funds it can make an installation ineligible for FIT/RHI payments (but it doesn't always). You would need to check with OFGEM (who oversee FITS) before going ahead with an installation.

### 3) Useful Resources

- I send out a monthly e-newsletter to community groups/orgs in the Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. The service is funded by a number of LAs in the two counties (including Bassetlaw DC) and you'd be very welcome to subscribe to it: just send me an email back saying you want to subscribe. It includes news re: community action on climate change, energy efficiency and fuel poverty, including information about funding opportunities that come up. You can read recent editions here: [www.everybodys-talking.org/communities-area/community-bulletins](http://www.everybodys-talking.org/communities-area/community-bulletins). MEA also runs this website: [www.everybodys-talking.org](http://www.everybodys-talking.org) and include information on funding opportunities in the news section of the site.
- These short videos explore different ways of funding renewables on community buildings: [www.planlocal.org.uk/videos/submenus/submenu-funding.html](http://www.planlocal.org.uk/videos/submenus/submenu-funding.html).
- [www.planlocal.org.uk](http://www.planlocal.org.uk) – this is an excellent resource from a charity called Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE) which guides groups through the process of setting up a community owned renewable. There are short videos on all sorts of topics (including some really inspiring case studies) and lots of factsheets and activities to help groups work out issues such as deciding what renewables to have, finding funding, getting the community on board etc. All the website resources exist in hard copy in the form of a level archer file full of factsheets and two DVDs with the videos on. This can be ordered from the website by community groups.
- [www.acre.org.uk/news/2011-news/news-2011-get-generating-guide](http://www.acre.org.uk/news/2011-news/news-2011-get-generating-guide) - an easy read with lots of case studies. Written with village halls in rural communities in mind.

### 4) Getting Quotes

You mentioned that you'd had one quote for £14,000 for an 8Kw system. I would suggest getting at least three quotes as prices can vary a lot from one company to another. In my spare time I helped set up a domestic bulk purchase scheme for my town; we approached about 10 installers and the variation in quotes was amazing!

I hope this helps and please let us know how you get on.

Ask Me a Climate Question Service, PV on Village Hall, August 2012

Kind Regards  
Caroline