

Abergavenny Community Trust (prepared by Abergavenny Community Trust)

1. Introduction

1.1 A financial partnership was agreed between the Town Council and Abergavenny Community Trust in 2019 with funding made to the Trust as follows:

£25,000 Capital funding in 2018/19 and £10,000 Revenue funding for each of the years 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22.

The agreement was to incorporate:

Capital funding to invest in energy efficiency/energy generating measures which will result in reduced energy consumption and a lower carbon footprint, and Revenue funding to invest in running costs and in bringing in additional resources thereby freeing up current employees to focus on developmental project work and safeguarding the asset.

1.2 The Capital funding enabled the Trust to invest in a new efficient central heating system for the main hall, Welcome Room and toilets as part of the major improvements to the front of the building.

1.3 The £10,000 annual contribution to the Centre's running costs has provided very welcome security and a platform for generating other income towards running costs, projects and further improvements to the building which in turn have increased energy efficiency – for example £3,000 EU funding from the Regional Development Fund to install LED lighting and a private donation which funded a new suspended ceiling and roof insulation in the small hall.

1.4 The purpose of this paper is to provide background information in support of a request for a further Capital payment during 2021/22 to increase energy efficiency and to indicate that the Trust would like to explore how the financial partnership might be taken forward from May 2022.

2. Request for financial support towards the cost of installing PV Solar panels on the Community Centre

2.1 One of the Trust's strategic priorities is to secure the ongoing sustainability of the Trust and the Community Centre. One of the strategic objectives within this priority is to develop the building and grounds as a green exemplar. For the past three years one of the Trust's fundraising priorities has been to invest in the building in order to reduce running costs, thereby supporting the Trust's financial viability, and to cut carbon emissions. Reducing reliance on fossil fuels and increasing energy conservation have been key priorities of the Trust's environment policy since it was drafted in 2019.

2.2 The Trust first sought permission from MCC to install PV solar panels on two of the roofs of the building in late 2018. This year, following the signing of a 25 year lease, MCC has agreed to this in principle, subject to the specific design.

2.3 At the beginning of July, the Trust made a Pre-application Enquiry to MCC's Planning Department. In a telephone conversation, an officer explained that the installation of solar panels was permitted development unless a roof 'fronted' the highway. He considered that the side roof did not 'front' a highway but was uncertain about whether or not the main roof elevation 'fronted' Merthyr Road (although there is no entrance in that direction and the roof is more than 37 metres from the road). A decision on this is still awaited.

2.4 Investment in renewable energy would contribute to the PSB Wellbeing environmental objective as it would extend the way in which the Trust could help to address climate change as well as being an example to others.

2.5 The proposal is to install a total of sixty-six PV solar panels on two roofs at the Centre. A design was submitted by a potential contractor in late 2018 at which point the size of the panels proposed were 285W. We understand that panels are now more productive. The proposed scheme would generate sufficient electricity to meet the Community Centre's current daytime needs including those of the commercial class kitchen with its dish washer (that uses extremely hot water), fridge, freezer and other electrical equipment. In addition, batteries would store energy to meet the night time needs.

2.6 Prior to COVID 19, a change in electricity provider & the new LED lighting, annual electricity costs averaged c£3,000. Investment in this scheme would, therefore, constitute a substantial financial saving for the Trust as well as a significant reduction in energy use.

2.7 The Trust's financial regulations require that at least two quotations are obtained for work on this scale. At this stage, apart from the initial design & indicative costing from a local contractor, the Trust has not yet sought quotations but intends to do so shortly. The Trust's Procurement policy gives weight to both value for money and supporting the local economy.

2.8 It is anticipated that the total cost of the project will be in the region of £40,000 for the panels and storage batteries. An application for £15,000 to the Community Benefit Fund associated with the Solar Farm at Llanvapley in July was successful. This grant has to be spent within twelve months

2.9 The Trust requests a Capital grant of £25,000 during the current financial year to enable the work to be completed by next summer.

3. Renewing the financial partnership beyond May 2022

3.1 The Trust would also like to discuss with the Town Council renewing a partnering agreement for a further three years. The detail for this would be in a further report in October.

4. Recommendation

That the Town Council considers an appropriate financial contribution towards the Solar PV in light of other funding commitments and level of reserves

To request a further report at the October Policy & Resources Committee meeting setting out the request for renewing the partnering agreement for a further 3 years.