

Back Balcombe, 10:10



About the project

10:10 is a charity which aims to help people to take positive and practical action on climate change. In 2013 10:10 developed the project Back Balcombe to support the community initiative REPOWERbalcombe. REPOWERbalcombe is a co-operative social enterprise aiming to generate 100% of the the village of Balcombe's (a village in west Sussex) electricity demand through community owned, locally generated, renewable energy.

REPOWERbalcombe began in response to Cuadrilla's (an oil and gas exploration and production company) attempts to dig an exploratory well on the outskirts of the village. As a result of fierce opposition Cuadrilla's plans were scrapped. However, in a positive response to the devastation the drilling caused, a group of villagers got together to generate their own power from the sun.

The project involved a group of 14 locals The Balcombe Community Energy Group, who formed a co-operative which aimed to raise funds for the solar power installation by offering shares to its members. The community energy group was supported by a team of two 10:10 employees who used their knowledge and contacts in the industry to further the project's aims.

Insert community group logo here

In October 2013 research to find potential sites to install solar arrays began. Planning required a large amount of work to select sites, discuss feasibility and secure legal agreements. In 2014 the family run farm Grange Farm agreed to host REPOWERbalcombe's solar panels.

Over the same period a big effort was made to raise awareness, liaise with groups such as 10:10 and sign local residents up as investors. Residents received a REPOWERbalcombe Christmas card, the website was launched and the project was featured in the local and national press. A celebratory launch was also hosted in the village pub and the project even made an appearance on the BBC's One Show!

Finally, in 2015 the first 69 panels were installed at Grange Farm, generating enough power to supply 7 houses. In February of this year a public share offer opened. The project has already raised £60,000 achieving 50% of their target in only five days.

REPOWERbalcombe hopes to continue developing the project with two further installations at local schools and the creation of a ground solar plant that will be open to national investment.



Successes

The hard work of everyone involved has contributed to the success of the project. However, 10:10's proudest achievements include the level of media coverage the project has received and the number of other community groups which have been inspired by Balcombes's success.

As well as appearing on The One Show the project has been featured in radio interviews and described in several national newspapers including: the Times, Guardian and The Mail on Sunday. The project's exposure in the media also helped to recruit the six other similar community energy projects Back Balcombe hopes to support, using the knowledge and experience gained from working in Balcombe.

The number of subsequent community projects can be used as a measure of the success of Back Balcombe. REPOWERbalcombe is also on track to meet the project's target of 100% renewable power by 2016.

Challenges

Back Balcombe encountered many challenges whilst working towards installing the first solar panels. One of the greatest obstacles faced was to obtain the necessary legal agreements to secure the lease of roof space and access to land. This was due to the fact that community energy projects are a relatively new concept and many of the legal considerations are being encountered for the first time. A large amount of groundwork was required to overcome these challenges and 10:10 relied on expert and organisations such as Energy for All to provide advice.

Involvement

10:10 recruited and sustained interest in the project by employing several measures. One of the most successful was a regular news letter which contained detailed information about the projects progress. Over 2000 people signed up to receive the newsletter. 10:10 also shared information through the website and a variety of media channels. In addition, they reached out to similar organisations to encourage interest and support.

Learnings

Finding an appropriate site for the solar panels was one of the most crucial aspects of the project, it was also one of the most time consuming. 10:10 learnt that seeking help from experts and inspiration from similar projects was vital to the success of Back Balcombe's work.

Funding

The whole concept of the project relied on the solar panels generating a profit from government feed-in tariffs. The profit from which would be used to pay a return to investors. All of the work by REPOWERbalcombe was done on a voluntary basis and Back Balcombe was funded by 10:10s work as a charity.

Legacy

The legacy of this project is an inspiring story of how a village was empowered to turn the decision caused by the possible return to traditional fossil fuels, to an inclusive community run initiative which is supporting the renewable fuels of the future.

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