

Report to: Cabinet

Date of meeting: 28 February 2022

Report author: Sustainability Officer – Susheel Rao

Title: Joining Bulk Solar Initiative

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 Dacorum Borough Council (DBC) has been developing the bulk solar initiative as part of the Hemel Garden Communities (HGC) development. It has brought the idea to Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Panel (HCCSP) members to see if they also want to be part of the initiative, and it will be discussed at the next appropriate HCCSP meeting.
- 1.2 Taking part in the initiative does not incur any financial costs, as the only financial costs are for a mail out and these will be borne by HGC. DBC would sign the contract with the broker, and Watford Borough Council (WBC) would enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) along with the other Hertfordshire authorities. WBC would be expected to provide addresses of private residences if required, although it is currently anticipated the Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) will be able to provide these.
- 1.3 There are potential reputational risks both of being involved and not being involved, described below in the risk section.
- 1.4 The bulk solar initiative works by bringing together home owners / private owners who are potentially interested in installing solar panels. This information is collected by a third party, in this case iChoosr, who act as a broker who then goes out to potential suppliers to bid for a bulk order. The successful bidder then contacts the individuals to provide a specific quote, and if agreed installs the solar panels. It is anticipated that for the mailout of 100,000 people across Hertfordshire, around 400 people would get solar panels installed.
- 1.5 If there is a problem with the installation or process for the individual, initially they would go back to the supplier, and failing that to iChoosr. iChoosr is aware of the importance of good customer service in relation to this, and it will also be part of the selection process for the solar installation provider.
- 1.6 iChoosr have run similar successful schemes for at least 12 local authorities including Greater London Authority (GLA), Devon, Cambridgeshire and Essex. There

are currently no known similar brokers, with both Devon and GLA having put this on their procurement portal and having no responses.

1.7 Watford Borough Council needs to decide whether it wants to participate in the bulk solar initiative, and if so whether there are any caveats to participation.

2.0 Risks

2.1

| Nature of risk | Consequence | Suggested Control Measures | Response (treat, tolerate, terminate or transfer) | Risk Rating (combination of severity and likelihood) |
|--|---|---|--|---|
| Reputational risk if the process and installation doesn't work well. | WBC seen as the instigator, and are asked to intervene | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure all throughout the supply chain have good customer service / complaints procedures • Ensure that it is clear to people taking advantage of the scheme what the complaints procedure is • Agree within HCCSP the approach across the county, and if appropriate nominate one person across the county | | 2 x 3 = 6 |
| Reputational risk of not being involved | Either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No letters in WBC will be sent out and local home/property owners will not have the | Either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide to take part. • Come up with a WBC specific approach. • Have a prepared | | 2 x 3 = 6 |

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|--|--|--|--|--|
| | <p>opportunity to take part, and if residents see this is taking place across the rest of Hertfordshire it will raise questions as to why they are not included. Or</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letters are sent out to WBC home / property owners, but without the WBC logo and/ or endorsement. This would raise the question as to why WBC does not want to put its name to it. | <p>statement about why we are not taking part.</p> | | |
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3.0 Recommendations

3.1 That the Council participates in the bulk solar initiative.

3.2 That the entering into of a MOU with Dacorum Borough Council who will lead act as lead authority is delegated to the Group Head of Community and Environmental Services in consultation with the Group Head of Democracy and Governance.

Further information:

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Report approved by: Alan Gough, Group Head of Community & Environmental Services

4.0 Detailed proposal

4.1 Background

- 4.1.1 Hemel Garden Communities (HGC) is an ambitious development programme that will transform Hemel Hempstead and create attractive and sustainable new neighbourhoods and communities to the north and east of Hemel Hempstead, through the delivery of more than 11,000 new homes and 10,000 new jobs by 2050.
- 4.1.2 The HGC partners, Dacorum Borough Council (DBC), St Albans City and District Council (SADC), Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) and Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) are working with the Crown Estate (the major landowner) to deliver the HGC programme of transformation, which will provide a variety of benefits to Hemel Hempstead.
- 4.1.3 There is a huge opportunity to introduce sustainable and renewable energy sources across Hemel Garden Communities, such as combined heat and power generation within planned neighbourhoods, and the use of solar and wind resources, with the potential to make clean energy generated available to adjacent residential areas or similar models introduced.
- 4.1.4 Solar bulk-buy was introduced as a suitable delivery solution as a means to embed renewable energy into HGC and bring discounts to the wider community. There is the opportunity for cross border working to support those not large enough to obtain the benefits i.e. Buckinghamshire Council (Bucks), a unitary authority.
- 4.1.5 As part of the HGC bid to Homes England, it was reported that a joint scheme would be useful as Bucks alone could not support a scheme due to lack of household numbers.
- 4.1.6 Bucks have indicated they have joined with one or more Berkshire (Berks) unitary authorities, which will allow them the numbers they need, but have approached us to join this scheme.
- 4.1.7 Bucks and Berks authorities are able to enter into their own contract with iChoosr, and Herts its own, making Herts severed for the point of risk from the Bucks and Berks contract. The main benefit will be at auction as we can combine our household numbers and afford residents better buying power for Herts, Bucks and Berks.

4.2 What is a Solar Bulk Buy scheme?

- 4.2.1 The scheme targets home-owners and private occupiers, offering them the opportunity to sign-up and pay for installation of solar panels, as well as electric vehicle charging (EV) and energy storage at a discount to the market rate. This

offers considerable savings, and incentives to homeowners to benefit at a faster rate compared with individuals purchasing and installing the panels themselves. Local Authorities also benefit from de-carbonising the local electricity supply and retrofitting of existing private housing stock to have renewable energy, which would otherwise be difficult to secure.

- 4.2.2 The solar panels are paid for by the homeowner. The Local Authority's main involvement is a one-off letter campaign that could be repeated in future, and it commissions the scheme paying for the marketing exercise to the relevant households identified by the provider (Circa £30k). For each successful installation of the panels, £75 is recouped by HGC / DBC, which could then be re-used in future campaigns. With the estimated uptake of the scheme at around 400 homes, the money recouped by HGC will about cover the initial cost.
- 4.2.3 The interested households are collated and iChoosr, after vetting potential suppliers, goes out to auction for the best price supplier. iChoosr then contracts with the supplier to complete the installation process directly with the homeowner.
- 4.2.4 The Local Authority does not put in any capital costs for the panels, essentially the Local Authority's contribution is to facilitate a connection between the households/homeowner and the provider, and recoups this money, as long as there is sufficient take-up of the scheme by homeowners.
- 4.2.5 The scheme runs on an annual basis (there are three 'windows' for Authorities to sign-up per year). Timeframes for homeowners is six to nine months between signing up and having the panels installed.
- 4.2.6 iChoosr is the only known broker of this sort, and other authorities, such as Devon and GLA, have used their procurement portals to source other potential brokers, but none have been forthcoming. iChoosr has run schemes for at least 12 Local Authorities, including GLA, Devon, Cambridgeshire and Essex.
- 4.2.7 A similar scheme to bulk solar is solar streets. In this case it depends on enough residents in a particular street or area to take up the offer, and it is through the savings in installation costs primarily that savings are made and passed on to the home owner. In addition, there is also a community fund set up, where for each home owner that takes part an amount is added to the community fund, which is then used on something to support the whole community. St Albans District Council has been running a solar streets initiative, and further information on this can be found here: <https://www.stalbans.gov.uk/renewable-energy>
- 4.2.8 Appended to this report is a set of FAQ's which sets out some due diligence Q&A's raised by HGC/HSOG and prepared by Dacorum Borough Council et al to assist the HCCSP board, and therefore associated authorities in their understanding of bulk solar and its appropriateness for their area.

4.3 Legal documents

- 4.3.1 Dacorum Borough Council will sign the contract with iChoosr on behalf of all parties. The main implication of the contract is providing addresses to iChoosr (not names) for private residents, so iChoosr can readily mail out to them.
- 4.3.2 Dacorum Borough Council are suggesting that all interested parties sign a simple memorandum of understanding. This was sent to HSOG members, and has been passed to Legal Services to review.

4.4 Next steps

- 4.4.1 It is proposed that the bulk solar proposal will be taken to an upcoming HCCSP meeting, for approval. Exact date is not confirmed as it was not on the 27th January 2022 agenda as anticipated. Prior to that, the Council needs to determine if it wants to join the scheme.
- 4.4.2 The Council needs to agree before the HCCSP meeting its preferred approach.
- Participation with no caveats;
 - Participation if the majority are taking part;
 - Participation with other caveats;
 - Non-participation.
- 4.4.3 It is recommended that the Council agrees to participation with no caveats.

5.0 Implications

5.1 Financial

- 5.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments that there are minimal financial implications arising from being part of the scheme. The initial outlay for sending out letters will be funded by HGC and any additional mail outs will be funded through the scheme. There are some staff resources required for promotion of the scheme and engagement in the complaints procedure (see staffing) which will be managed within existing resources.

5.2 Legal Issues

- 5.2.1 The Group Head of Democracy and Governance comments that the Council will be required to enter a MOU with Dacorum and any other council wishing to join the Hertfordshire scheme. The Council will need to ensure it complies with the Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR with respect to the transfer of personal information and amend its privacy notices.

5.3 Equality /Human Rights/DPIA

5.3.1 There are no equality / human rights / DPIA issues related to this project.

5.4 Staffing

5.4.1 There will be some staffing requirements. Our promotion of the scheme will be through our website and usual social media channels. Content for the posts will be created centrally for each partner to adapt and use. It is anticipated therefore that the additional resources for this will be minimal and will be incorporated within current resources.

5.4.2 There is potential customer service staff requirement, should there be any stage 3 complaints, where the complaint has not been resolved either by the contractor or by iChoosr. It is anticipated that this will be very low as iChoosr has a good customer service reputation and understands the importance for local authorities. It should therefore be possible to be addressed this within current resources, with support from the Sustainability Officer/ HSOG / HCCSP. The HCCSP board is still considering whether to allocate a Member Authority to represent/be main point of contact, in which case the staffing requirements would be reduced.

5.5 Accommodation

5.5.1 There are no accommodation requirements for this project.

5.6 Community Safety/Crime and Disorder

5.6.1 There are no community safety or crime and disorder issues related to this project.

5.7 Sustainability

5.7.1 Participating in this scheme and facilitating and encouraging home / property owners to take part will help reduce the carbon emissions attributed to the borough as a whole.

Appendices

- FAQ's developed regarding due diligence for the bulk solar scheme.

Background papers

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

- Report to HSOG on Bulk Solar proposal