NET ZERO NEWS

The newsletter of the Midlands Net Zero Hub

Summer 2022

‘A season of positive progress’

Michael Gallagher, Head of Midlands Net Zero Hub

Welcome to the summer edition of the Midlands Net Zero Hub newsletter. Energy projects and programmes take a huge amount of work, determination, and collaboration to progress through each stage and on to completion. Across the Hub portfolio there has been some tremendous progress, resulting from the hard work of the team and our partners.

This is evidenced by the positive and constructive evaluation of the Skills Training programme. It has also been great to see the Hub’s Public Sector Decarbonisation Team hit the ground running this year as they support organisations across the Midlands to identify how they can decarbonise the public estate. It has also been fantastic to see three authorities in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire work together to enable 30 rapid chargers being installed across 15 car parks.

Energy prices are continuing to rise, a real challenge for many people and organisations. For two community groups, with support from the Rural Community Energy Fund, they are a step closer to reducing this impact on their communities as the projects are awarding planning permission.

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The Midlands Net Zero Hub is funded by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) as part of the Clean Growth Strategy. It is supported by Nottingham City Council who are the accountable body.

Funding opportunity

Join the Hub’s consortium bid for SHDF Wave 2.1

On 20th July, BEIS published Competition Guidance Notes for Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) Wave 2.1. SHDF will upgrade a significant amount of the social housing stock that is currently below Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) C. Midlands Net Zero Hub are planning to lead a consortium bid for funding. If you are interested in joining our consortium, please complete a self-assessment through the Social Housing Retrofit Accelerator (SHRA). SHRA provide tailored one-to-one support and will define a detailed support plan.

News

Green jobs supported nationally through Green Homes Grant Skills Training Competition

To strengthen the energy efficiency and low carbon heating sector and to support the roll out of the Green Homes Grant scheme, the Midlands Net Zero Hub ran the national Green Homes Grant Skills Training Competition on behalf of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. After the

competition ended in October 2021, the Hub commissioned an external evaluation to identify areas of success and lessons learnt from this iteration.

6,938 training courses were successfully delivered, and learner satisfaction was very high, with 92% reporting that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the training and support they received and 98% saying they would recommend the course to others. Read the full report.

Local authorities work towards net zero through Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme

The Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) team at the Hub has been supporting local authorities to create applications for the next wave of PSDS funding. The guidance for the scheme is expected to be released this summer and applications are expected to open later in the year. To date, the team has held introductory meetings with 40 local authorities across the Midlands and is still receiving more expressions of interest for support for future waves of PSDS.

We are currently working closely with 12 local authorities to produce OnGen feasibility studies for energy generation technologies for the buildings that were put forward, as well as organising decarbonisation energy audits to assist with obtaining key information for the application.

Thanks to the local authorities that have engaged with the process so far. Local authorities that wish to have support with the coming round of funding should email the team for more information.

Councils collaborate to help taxi drivers switch to EVs

Three Staffordshire councils have come together to install electric vehicle (EV) charging facilities to support local taxis and private hire vehicles to switch to less-polluting vehicles.

With the support of the Hub, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, Stafford Borough Council, and Stoke-on-Trent City Council successfully partnered to secure funding of more than £750,000 from the Government's Ultra Low Emission Taxi Infrastructure Scheme. This funding will result in 30 rapid chargers being installed across 15 car parks owned by the three authorities.

This new network of EV charge points will be operated by SWARCO Smart Charging, who will be supplying, installing, and maintaining the infrastructure. The points are 50kW rapid chargers with contactless payment. While some will be open for public use, at least half will be reserved for taxis and private hire vehicles who will also benefit from reduced tariffs.

Increasing the availability of EV charge points will give taxis and private hire operators the confidence to purchase electric vehicles.

Innovative project converts tree waste into energy

The Energy and Bioproducts Research Institute (EBRI) at Aston University is leading an innovative project to convert urban tree waste, for example fallen and diseased wood from streets and parks around

Birmingham, into high value and useful bioproducts including biochar (a sustainable form of charcoal) and energy such as oils and gases.

This project, called the 'Urban Biochar and Sustainable Materials Demonstrator', is funded by the Local Growth Fund from the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership, as well as the European Regional Development Fund.

The main objectives of the project are to:

- Develop biochar for the benefit of city and town environments and local economies
- Research how biochar can be used as a soil enhancer in urban landscapes
- Conduct scientific modelling to assess the carbon capture merits of biochar

State-of-the-art equipment installed at Birmingham City Council's Cofton horticultural nursery site near the Lickey Hills will be used to process tree waste generated around the city and Solihull area, using a thermal conversion process without oxygen, known as 'pyrolysis', to produce the biochar, gas, and oil. Processing unwanted wood material prevents it from rotting down and releasing greenhouse gases, as well as providing a safe and long-term way of capturing carbon.

Opportunities for your business to move towards carbon neutrality

10 organisations from in and around Birmingham and Solihull will be given the chance to trial this ground-breaking project to help combat climate change through the use of biochar.

These 10 case trials will demonstrate how biochar can be used for practical purposes, for decarbonisation, and for to improve the land as a soil amender. The businesses of any size are encouraged to apply.

Tim Miller, Project Leader and Director of Engagement at EBRI, explains: "What we are looking for is places that people can use this biochar material. It may be green roofs, hydroponics, or green walls, it could be companies that are doing some sort of property development and want to look to see how they can reduce the greenhouse gas balance impact of their property. Alternatively, your organisation might be going through the process of planting trees and wants to be able to use the biochar which will help store carbon in the ground and increase tree growth."

If you are interested in taking part in this trial, email biochar@aston.ac.uk, visit www.aston.ac.uk/biochar, or call 0121 204 3383.

Major milestone reached for two Rural Community Energy Fund projects

This month has seen planning permission granted for two important Rural Community Energy funded projects.

Harbury Future Energy

Harbury Future Energy in the village of Harbury in Warwickshire successfully obtained planning permission for their vertical axis wind turbine along with solar array and battery storage at the village hall site in Harbury Warwickshire. The project has grown is size and will now provide 22 car charging points an increase from the initial six charging points.

Find out more about the project

Cromford Mill

Sally Bowman BBC environmental correspondent joined us at Cromford Mill to congratulate the Arkwright Society for successfully obtaining planning permission for the Hydroelectricity wheel that will generate electricity for the site.

It is a massive milestone for the charity, which is part of the Derwent Valley UNESCO world heritage site. Arkwright's Mill was the birthplace of the modern factory system. The village renowned at the time, globally for its innovation. The Mill and factory operated using solely hydropower in the 17th Century. The Wheel will attract many more tourists to the popular tourist attraction, which already sees over 100,000 visitors.

Planning permission is one of the most difficult hurdles for community groups to obtain, particularly when the schemes involve technologies that may create controversy. Current planning policy and practice can often be a barrier to a scheme's success. Planning issues, particularly planning permission refusal by local authorities, are a reason for several project stalls or failures within the Rural Community Energy Project.

Of the schemes that had struggled at the planning stage, respondents suggested that a better understanding of the benefits of community energy on the part of local authorities could lead to a more equitable and impactful planning system.

Rural areas can play a greater role in mitigating and adapting to climate change, particularly through greater provision of renewable energy. The farming economy is very important, but rural areas are about much more than food production and need to be supported in the transition to mixed, post-carbon economies. Planning is central to that transition.

Our partners

Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy
D2N2
The Marches Local Enterprise Partnership
Greater Birmingham & Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership
Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership
Stoke-on-Trent & Staffordshire Enterprise Partnership
West Midlands Combined Authority
Black Country LEP
sustainability west midlands
CATAPULT Energy Systems
Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership
CWLEP Coventry & Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership
Nottingham City Council Carbon Reduction, Energy and Sustainability
llep Leicester & Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership