



exeter community energy

**Exeter Community Energy
Annual Report
1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024**

INTRODUCTION

This year, the rapid ongoing growth of the Healthy Homes for Wellbeing project has led to a significant pivot in the strategy of ECOE's energy advice services. We are separating Healthy Homes and our advice services for retrofit insulation for homes into a charity that will have two ECOE directors as trustees. The large increase in revenue from grants for Healthy Homes has temporarily greatly increased our surplus for the financial year. However, most of the increase relates to expenditures due in the following financial year, in line with our status as a non-profit.

Revenue at ECOE's solar photovoltaic (PV) sites increased as we received delayed payments from previous years. We continued to develop new potential PV projects, having won grant funding to develop a new large site.

During the year, secretary David Thompson stood down, and Peter Dempsey succeeded him.

PROJECTS

Solar Power Generation

During the year to March 2024 all ECOE solar sites performed reasonably well. There were no significant losses of generation. In total ECOE produced 363,192 kWh of power. We prevented emissions of approximately 61.7 tons of carbon dioxide, the equivalent of just under eight British people's annual carbon footprint. That assumes that each kWh of electricity consumed from the main grid causes 170g of carbon dioxide emissions.

However, generation was down slightly from the previous year. There is some degradation in performance occurring, as we have expected and planned for. Also, in 2022 the UK received 9% more sunshine than average, making 2022 the second sunniest on record for England.

Some panels are no longer working. At Exeter College Technology Centre 48 panels are down due to failed components called optimisers. However, we can't do repairs until the cost of scaffolding is justifiable. At many sites we don't currently have remote communications to allow live generation updates. We have fixed this problem at Exeter Library. However the issues are ongoing at The Beacon Community Centre, which lost comms in February 2024, and at Shillingford Farm, which has had no comms all year. We are considering installing cellular smart meters to help make our data as clear as possible. In the meantime, we can extract data by visiting the sites and physically reading the meters.

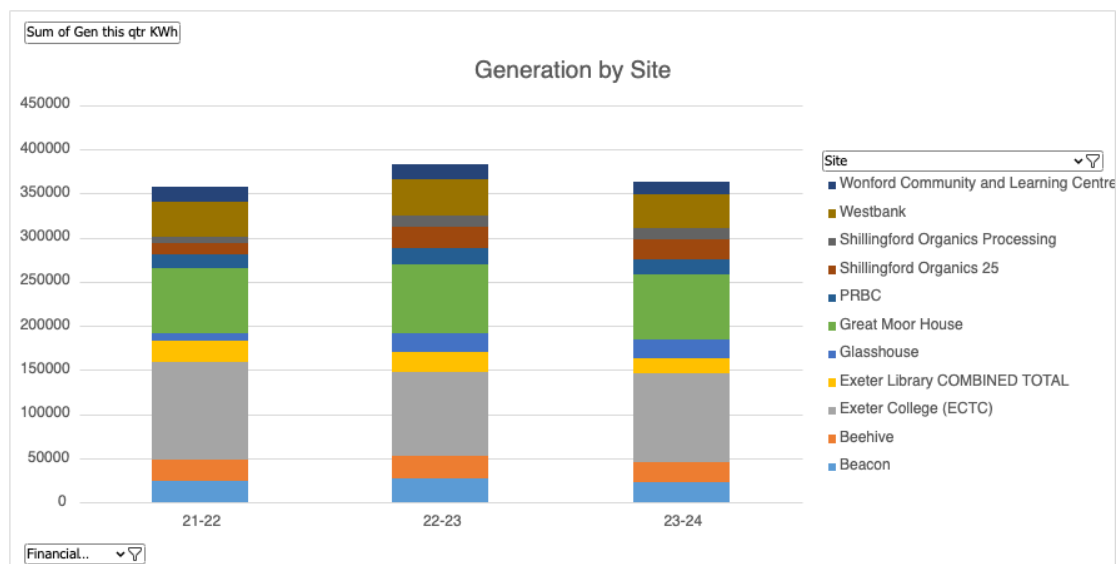


Figure 1: Power generation across ECOE's sites over the last three years

Healthy Homes for Wellbeing

The focus on fuel poor and vulnerable residents continued this year, with more homes being helped than ever before. Thanks to considerable funding opportunities and increased partnership working we have significantly increased the savings made to residents. They increased by 67% to £2.72m

We received 2,864 new enquiries this year, and attended 589 events, including drop-in clinics. The team delivered 1,592 Local Energy Advice Partnership (LEAP) home visits, and a further 4,263 client interactions. This includes 581 benefits and debt appointments and 607 annual aftercare calls.

Main funded activities

LEAP provided full funding this year, so the number of home visits substantially increased. We introduced additional services, providing air fryers, heated airers, dehumidifiers, fuel vouchers, as well as continued white goods and broken boiler schemes. Funded projects with British Gas Energy Trust in Exeter and the Communities Housing Action Team (CHAT) Tiverton/Mid Devon Energy Partnership continued.

We started two new funded projects with Torbay Council to help with fuel poverty and carbon reductions. We also got funding from Teignbridge Council to deliver energy advice and outreach in the district. Additionally, we started Local Care Partnership projects, focusing on respiratory patients, in Mid Devon, Teignbridge and Torbay. And we started two projects funded by National Grid Electricity Distribution (NGED), focusing on people eligible for the priority services register, linking in with health teams, family groups and refugee/non-English language groups.

Devon County Council's Household Support Fund 4 helped us to launch our energy efficiency fund. It provided £80,000 last winter to supply practical measures in homes. These ranged from dehumidifiers and heated blankets to loft insulation and boiler repairs.

We have a new partnership with Cornerstone Housing, focusing on damp and mould advice. We also have a new debt partnership with CHAT, which includes moving a debt service from Community Money Advice to CHAT. We are recruiting a new debt team manager, which, along with other changes, will lead to better debt advice provision in 2024 and beyond. We've also introduced a new training and team development manager role.

The biggest development of the year has been gaining £992,000 from Wales and West Utilities for the period January 2024 to March 2026. The money is intended to develop services, make our projects and teams more sustainable, fill gaps in our funding and open an energy advice centre in Exeter. This has led to an extensive search for a property to host the advice centre.

Key takeaways

Increased funding levels was the main theme of the year, which enabled us to increase team numbers, improve training and support to the team, recruit additional managers and offer additional services to residents.

We improved the team structure. This included developing the project support team to take over the monthly reporting to funders, quality assurance checks, funded measure ordering and lots of administrative tasks. This enables advisors to concentrate on client advice, and managers to focus on business and team development.

We have made improved services available to residents. The diverse range of additional funding means we are now able to support clients better, with lots of practical solutions available, and increased funding for complex cases and ongoing support.

There is lots of overlap with the Retrofit team, which will lead to joint projects in the future.

Future

We are opening an energy advice centre in Exeter to increase our range of talks, workshops and drop-in services. We want to continue to develop our Energy Efficiency Fund services to better support residents, helping them to cut carbon emissions and retrofit their homes. This funding is crucial when government-funded schemes are inadequate.

We will develop new Smart Energy Action Plan services in 2024/5 to help residents navigate the technology and smart solutions. We want to secure ongoing funding for the general advice service and consider opening an advice Hub in Torbay.

Retrofit

The focus this year has been on launching the Paid-For Retrofit advice service. This service delivers a whole house retrofit plan following a detailed assessment of the property by our qualified Retrofit Coordinators. Alongside this we have helped the Devon Energy Group consortium to deliver the first year of the Local Energy Advice Demonstrator (LEAD) project. We have also supported Devon County Council to deliver the Home Upgrade Grant round 2 (HUG2) project.

Main activities

From June 2023 we delivered activities for LEAD including engaging with 421 households at events and drop-in clinics, delivering 89 free retrofit advice home visits, and 21 whole house plans.

From September 2023 our team supported the Devon County Council led HUG2 scheme. The scheme got off to a slow start, then just as we gained momentum the scheme was halted for new registrations. Many of our clients have been told they will not get measures installed. This is due to the complexities of the scheme, which is extremely disappointing and frustrating for everyone involved.

The Paid-For Retrofit service launched in Autumn 2023. The team focused on contacting clients who had previously registered for this service. We spent this period getting to grips with the nuances of delivering a paid-for service for the first time.

We have been developing the phase 2 of our retrofit service with local architects, Studio Skein. We have been testing this phase 2 services and process with clients and hope to launch this fully in 2024.

Harry Bonnell joined us as Project Manager from February 2024

Key takeaways

Government grant schemes are still chaotic and wholly inadequate if we are to help meet Net Zero targets. We are waiting to hear what the new government will do about this.

This grant situation makes it hard to keep team members. There is a lack of regular work due to lack of control at our end. Despite our best efforts to plan adequately across the year, funders and grant schemes change the terms often. This leaves us often in limbo, awaiting the next phases of funded projects to start.

The Paid-For Retrofit service was slow to get started, and we're still learning. We have lots of ideas and area seeking new funding to help us develop this service. We are getting good levels of client feedback which is encouraging.

The LEAD project is going well, with all members of the consortium working well together and we're now discussing what next after March 2025.

Future

We're keen to be 'go to' for impartial retrofit advice. The new energy advice centre in Exeter will help with this. We're talking to funders, councils and partners about new project ideas, and future funding. Much will depend on what the new government announce this winter.

We'll continue to develop the Paid-For service as this income will be crucial to the future success of the initiative, helping to reduce our reliance on grant funding.

COMMUNICATIONS

ECOE was a double winner at the 2023 national Community Energy England awards. ECOE's Healthy Homes for Wellbeing scheme won the Fuel Poverty Action and Community Engagement and Inclusion Awards, helping people in Exeter, Mid and East Devon, Teignbridge and Torbay. We were also shortlisted for the Community Energy Initiative category in the UK Green Energy Awards 2024.



Figure 2: ECOE won the Fuel Poverty Action award at the 2023 Community Energy England awards.

Julie Poole, Energy Advice Manager at agilityeco, which funds ECOE through the Local Energy Advice Partnership (LEAP) said the awards 'are well deserved'. 'As always we appreciate the high standard of work that ECOE continue to deliver on LEAP,' Poole adds.

This is the sixth award in three years for the Healthy Homes team. In 2022, they helped Exeter Community Energy (ECOE) win the Community Group/Charity/Non-Profit category in the 2022 Exeter Sustainability Awards. Also, that year ECOE won the Community Energy Initiative category at the UK Green Energy Awards. Healthy Homes won the Southwest Energy Efficiency Award 2020/21 for outstanding vulnerable customer support. Finally, in April 2020, Tara Bowers won a national Heat Hero award. That recognised her achievements going above and beyond in her work to help keep people warm in their homes.

Currently 807 people receive our main newsletter, up from 559 last year. On social media, we largely stopped posting on X/Twitter since Elon Musk bought it. Our Facebook page had 1269 followers, up from 1092 last year. We had 681 LinkedIn followers, up from 513 last year.

SUMMARY FINANCIAL POSITION AT 31 MARCH 2024

The accounts for this financial period to 31 March 2024 show a surplus of £176,318. This has increased the surplus on the profit and loss account reserve of £15,419 at the start of the period to a surplus of £191,737 at the end of the period. This surplus is after taking account of the proposed 5% interest payment on members' shares. This is the sixth successive year in which ECOE has made a surplus.

There has been an increase in turnover in the year of 133% increasing total turnover (including grants and donations) from £429,046 to £999,707. The increase in turnover was driven by the Healthy Homes for Wellbeing project which saw an increase in home visits and the provision of services. When considering the current year's performance and surplus, it should be noted that grants are received over the winter period, with most of the grant income being accounted for on receipt (in accordance with accounting Regulations), whereas the project's expenditure will continue throughout the year. Consequently, if we were to look at the figures in a few months' time, part of that surplus will have been spent.

ECOE's cashflow has remained positive during the year. ECOE will continue to seek to use surplus funds to repay share capital and medium-term loan investments where requested. The Directors target repayment of share capital at 5% per annum. A reserve of £42,700 has been earmarked for that purpose. As we repay more of our loan and share investments, interest payments will reduce, and surpluses will increase.

On the strength of the results and of the financial projections going forward, the Directors will recommend to members at the AGM that a transfer is made to the Community Fund of £5,000 this year based on the surplus generated and anticipated future income from Solar PV and Healthy Homes for Wellbeing projects. This may be supplemented by donations from members.

COMMUNITY FUND

Over the past seven years, the Exeter Community Energy (ECOE) Community Fund has played a crucial role in supporting local groups working on clean energy initiatives and addressing fuel poverty in Exeter and surrounding areas. Since its inception, the fund has consistently provided financial aid to organisations that align with ECOE's mission of promoting sustainability, reducing carbon footprints, and enhancing social welfare. Drawing on the income generated from our ten solar power sites, along with donations from ECOE members and surplus income from our Healthy Homes for Wellbeing project, we have been able to make a significant impact in our community.

Summary of Funding Achievements

Since the Community Fund's inception in 2017, ECOE has distributed a total of **£36,381** in grants to **29 local organisations**. These funds have been used to support a wide range of projects, from improving energy efficiency in community buildings to running educational workshops on renewable energy.

2023 Community Fund Recipients

In 2023, the ECOE Community Fund awarded £9,549 to four local groups. These grants have enabled a diverse range of projects aimed at improving energy efficiency and sustainability. The groups funded this year include:

- **Exwick Community Centre:** Awarded £3,024 to enhance insulation in their community centre, ensuring greater energy efficiency and comfort for users throughout the year.

- **Hurly Burly Nursery:** Received £5,000 to install a new heating system featuring air-source heat pumps and electric radiators, crucial for maintaining a warm environment in a facility located in an area of high deprivation.
- **LOVE Food CIC:** Granted £1,000 to run cookery sessions teaching participants how to prepare affordable, healthy meals using minimal electricity, helping to foster a more energy-conscious community.
- **Pippins Community Centre:** Awarded £524.58 to improve energy efficiency in a Grade II listed building by installing secondary glazing, sealant strips, and thermally insulated curtains.

These awards demonstrate ECOE's commitment to not only reducing energy consumption but also to empowering local organisations with the resources they need to make sustainable choices that benefit the wider community.

Case Study: Exwick Community Centre – Enhancing Energy Efficiency and Comfort

Grant Awarded: £3,024

Project: Insulation Improvements for Enhanced Energy Efficiency

Beneficiaries: Local residents, community groups, and volunteers

Objective: To reduce energy consumption and improve comfort levels in a heavily utilised community space.

Background

Exwick Community Centre is a vital hub for the residents of Exwick, offering a wide range of services, events, and activities that bring people together. The centre, which hosts everything from children's playgroups to senior citizen meetings, is in constant use, making it essential that the building is both comfortable and energy-efficient.

Over time, it became clear that the centre's insulation was inadequate, leading to high energy bills and a less-than-comfortable environment for users, especially during colder months. Recognising this issue, the centre's management sought to improve insulation to reduce energy costs and enhance the building's sustainability.

Project Details

With a grant of £3,024 from the ECOE Community Fund, Exwick Community Centre embarked on a project to improve its insulation. The grant was used to install high-quality insulation materials in key areas of the building.

The objectives of the project were threefold:

1. **Energy Efficiency:** To significantly reduce the amount of energy needed to heat the building, thus lowering utility costs and the centre's carbon footprint.
2. **Comfort Enhancement:** To create a more comfortable environment for users by maintaining a consistent indoor temperature, regardless of the weather outside.
3. **Sustainability:** To align the centre's operations with broader environmental goals, demonstrating a commitment to sustainable practices within the community.

Outcomes and Impact

Improved comfort and Energy Savings:

Since the insulation was installed, the centre has reported already on improved level of thermal comfort. Although it's too early to see an improvement in energy efficiency and therefore energy bills, it's estimated to have made an improvement.

Long-Term Benefits:

The long-term benefits of the project are significant. Not only will the centre continue to save money on energy bills, but it will also serve as a leading example of how small-scale community projects can contribute to broader environmental goals. The insulation improvements have extended the building's lifespan and made it more attractive for future events and activities, ensuring that it remains a cornerstone of the Exwick community for years to come.

Conclusion:

The Exwick Community Centre insulation project, supported by the ECOE Community Fund, is a prime example of how targeted investments in energy efficiency can yield substantial benefits. By reducing energy costs, improving user comfort, and promoting sustainability, the project has had a lasting positive impact on the community. As a result, the centre is now better equipped to serve its users while contributing to Exeter's overall environmental objectives.



Figure 3: ECOE Director Andy Extance and Exwick Community Centre chair of trustees Trevor Sharp celebrate the ECOE community fund award

Previous Awards Recap

Below is a summary of the organisations that have benefited from the fund over the years and their projects.

2022

In 2022, ECOE distributed **£5,307** across five local groups, focusing on energy efficiency and environmental education:

- **Alphington Community Association:** £1,000 to replace old heaters with energy-efficient radiators.

- **Countess Wear Village Hall:** £1,307 for solar panels and a battery installation.
- **Exeter Phoenix:** £1,000 towards secondary glazing to reduce heat loss.
- **SEADREAM:** £1,500 for educational resources on energy efficiency.
- **Whipton Community Hall:** £500 for secondary glazing in a historic building.

2021

In 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic, ECOE had **£6,990** available, which was awarded to five groups:

- **Transition Exeter:** £1,000 to set up a Community Emergency Centre focused on energy-saving and sustainability.
- **Hospiscare:** £460 for LED lighting in their Exmouth office, improving energy efficiency and working conditions.
- **SEADREAM:** £920 to deliver energy-saving education sessions in schools, benefiting students and teachers.
- **TRIP Community Transport:** £1,000 towards an electric wheelchair-accessible vehicle to reduce isolation and loneliness.
- **Whipton Community Association:** £500 to replace old lighting with energy-efficient alternatives in their community hall.

2020

In 2020, ECOE distributed **£6,235** to eleven groups, marking a significant expansion in the fund's reach:

- **Countess Wear Village Hall Community Association:** £960 towards a renewable energy project with solar panels and a battery.
- **TRIP Community Transport:** £500 for staffing and disability support equipment.
- **Friends of Eastcliff Park:** £450 for planting and path improvements.
- **Halberton Primary School:** £300 for educational kits on renewable energy.
- **Six other groups** received £670 each, including **Exeter YMCA**.

2019

In 2019, ECOE made **£4,100** available, with grants awarded to four groups:

- **Art and Energy:** £1,400 for creative solar workshops.
- **Pinhoe Road Baptist Church:** £900 for LED lighting installation.
- **Estuary League of Friends:** £900 for an electric vehicle charge point.
- **Music in Devon Initiative:** £900 towards solar panels, which were reallocated when the project couldn't proceed.

2018

In the inaugural year, 2018, ECOE awarded **£4,200** to three community organisations:

- **Music in Devon Initiative:** £2,000 for a solar-powered public address system.
- **Wonford Community and Learning Centre:** £996 for an informational display on their ECOE solar installation.
- **Pinhoe Road Baptist Church:** £1,275 for LED lighting in a large meeting room.

Conclusion

Over the years, the ECOE Community Fund has made a substantial impact on the local community, empowering organisations to adopt sustainable practices, reduce energy consumption, and educate others on the importance of renewable energy. The diverse range

of projects supported by the fund underscores ECOE's commitment to fostering a greener, more resilient Exeter.

Looking Forward

As we look to the future, ECOE remains dedicated to its mission of fostering a greener, more sustainable Exeter. The projects funded through our Community Fund not only reduce energy consumption but also help to build a stronger, more resilient community. With ongoing support from our solar power sites, members, and projects like Healthy Homes for Wellbeing, we are excited about the continued impact the fund will have in the years to come.

This holistic approach to grant-making ensures that we are not only addressing immediate energy needs but also laying the groundwork for long-term environmental stewardship across the region.

FUTURE STRATEGY

ECOE Advice Charity

Following much deliberation and fact-finding by the board of directors and others, we are moving ECOE advice services, Healthy Homes and Retrofit, to charity status. We are doing this by transferring the activities to the existing Climate Action Hub Exeter charity.

Now referred to as ECOE Advice, the team is moving into its first premises. We'll have a permanent advice drop in, space for events, talks and workshops, offices and storage space and, best of all, a place to call home.

We teamed up with Climate Action Hub Exeter, which previously ran a building in Princesshay for communication and outreach. Having premises that could be shared between our energy services work and the objectives of the Climate Action Hub suits both parties.

The Healthy Homes project successfully applied for sufficient funding to cover the costs of the premises for three years. The search for a suitable property started last October. After a couple of false starts, we ultimately found a suitable building on Queen Street, Exeter. Almost a year on from when we first agreed to work together, we finally have a set of keys.

The building will be called Pulse and will be run by the charity. The charity is now a shared entity, covering Climate Action Hub Exeter and ECOE Advice.

ECOE retains its renewable energy projects, because our Community Benefit Society (CBS) structure suits raising funds for capital investments. We will retain the income generated from them and continue to pay out interest to members and donate from our community fund. However, CBS status suits energy advice work less well than charity status. This has become increasingly problematic as the amount of revenue we've received for energy advice has grown. The entire ECOE organisation couldn't become a charity because the law requires different rules for a CBS and a charity and it's not possible to convert between the two.

To help maintain the link between ECOE and ECOE Advice, two ECOE directors will become trustees of the charity.

The management structure of ECOE Advice remains unchanged with Tara Bowers continuing to head up the team and projects as she has done since 2020.

Why?

ECOE's energy advice work was set up to tackle the challenges of fuel poverty in Exeter and local area. The award-winning work of the Healthy Homes for Wellbeing Project and more recently our Retrofit services has been very successful. The size of the team has grown substantially but there is more we could do to tackle the fuel poverty challenges.

Main reasons for the decision:

1. Some grant-based funders only give money to charities, particularly the Energy Redress Funding scheme. This scheme, run by the Energy Saving Trust, distributes millions of pounds. It gets the funding from energy companies that have breached OFGEM rules.
2. Charity status enables potential exemption from Business Rates on property, and at the very least 80% mandatory tax relief on business rates, corporation tax relief, and gift aid on donations.
3. A new premises for the Energy Advice Centre will provide a permanent location to host energy services.
4. Funders don't always understand that Healthy Homes is a separate part of ECOE's business model. Also, they are not keen to fund fuel poverty work through grants because of the assets we hold.
5. As our income grows, we will exceed certain funding eligibility thresholds. Therefore, separating out renewable energy generation gives us more time until that happens.
6. The Healthy Homes team has difficulty explaining what ECOE and community-owned energy is to residents, including people in fuel poverty. These people will better understand the charity status.
7. Partners and residents in areas that Healthy Homes serves outside Exeter tell us that the Exeter name is a barrier. Generally, they assume we only serve Exeter.
8. Partners and residents tell us there is confusion about the link between the Healthy Homes project and our solar projects.

Solar PV4

We have been working hard to develop new sites, mainly our project manager Rachel Kelly, who we appointed in March 2023. Unfortunately, despite great effort, progress has been slow. At the last AGM we were optimistic that ECOE could progress up to three sites at a Devon-based educational institution. All these sites now face problems. In October 2023, when we were expecting a decision to agree to proceed on the site that seems most possible, we found out that it faces a delay. We have now learned that this delay may be up to five years. Rachel is trying hard to unblock that bottleneck, so far unsuccessfully.

As such the share offering that we won a £14,900 grant from Reach to set up in the financial year 2022/2023 is as ready as it can be at this stage without a lead site. We have completed a basic business plan and share offer document and submitted it for a Community Shares Standard Mark because of grant funding deadlines. We obtained a £1,500 grant from Power to Change for the Community Shares Standard Mark work. It will be an open share offer, which can continue to accept investments indefinitely. This allows us to raise further funds whenever new sites are ready to be deployed.

However, an alternative lead site for the share offering has emerged south of Exeter. We expect further feedback from the institution in the next quarter. Then we can decide if this potential 86kW rooftop site will either progress or be taken off the option list.

In March 2024 we won a £39,667 Community Energy Fund bid to do a feasibility study for the new lead site. Work on that is progressing. Rachel is working with Shrewsbury-based consultants Sharenergy on that study.

We continue to get regular enquiries from organisations interested in hosting our solar panels on their sites. However often the idea turns out to be unfeasible or too low on their priority lists to progress. We are now exploring some interesting new ideas and will provide updates if they prove to be viable.