

Somersham

Just to expand on a couple of items in the Mid Suffolk report to parishes.

New bin lorries

The councils' have carried out the biggest upgrade to their 35-strong waste fleet in almost 10 years investing some £2 m. You will have seen the publicity about the competition to name them. Twenty-two environmentally friendly bin lorries replace most of the current fleet which has emptied around 40 million bins over their working lifetimes.

They will be fuelled by certified sustainable Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) produced from waste cooking oil, after Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils became the first rural UK councils to switch to the fuel last year. The change cut our carbon emissions by around 90%, as well as reducing other pollutants.

A good news story but it is a bit surprising that we have changed the fleet just ahead of the government's changes to the waste collection strategies. The need to collect glass and food waste separately may well demand a different vehicle configuration. Jumping early may delay the move to new rules or just block progress. I hope not!

£2.8 m carbon-cutting solar investment

We have finished building solar carports over 110 existing car parking spaces to help power the leisure centres. 70 solar carports are at Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre in Stowmarket, meeting almost 24% of its annual electricity demand. The remaining 40 are at Kingfisher Leisure Centre in Sudbury, meeting just over 16% of its annual electricity demand. Each site also includes battery storage so excess energy produced during sunnier periods can be saved for later. There are eight electric vehicle charging points, including two rapid chargers.

Babergh and Mid Suffolk are among the UK's first rural local authorities to trial the technology. The carports will generate a combined 292,000-kilowatt hours (kWh) a year reducing annual carbon emissions (CO₂) by 62 tonnes, not a vast amount but a step in the right direction.

The works cost £1.4 m total, £800 k from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' Getting Building Fund and £650 k from the councils.

The scheme is part of a wider £2.8 m overall investment in solar across the councils' four leisure centres. Last year 1,278 solar panels were installed on the centres roofs, along with other energy saving measures, including heat pumps. These were paid for by £1.4 m in grants from the Government's Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme.

Overall, the solar carports and roof solar panels are now producing nearly 50% of Mid Suffolk Leisure Centre's annual electricity demand. This is something we have been advocating for several years as a way to generate green energy without taking additional agricultural land or requiring grid reinforcement. At a time when the cost-of-living crisis sees them playing their part as warm spaces for residents in need it is good to see.

How do the economics work? Well 292,000 kWh at feed in prices would yield about £11,680 which would hardly pay the interest on £1.4 m, perhaps £56,000 at 4% let alone repay the capital. However, substituting power purchased at around 44 p per kWh it looks a bit different. The value of the electricity generated would then be £128,480 for about a 11 year pay back.

That does not of course value the CO2 reduction and the reduction in climate impact that would bring but it does assume you would use all the power generated and we haven't seen an estimate that covers that. Probably ok for a leisure centre.



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