

Andrea Passe asked if we would write how we obtained approval for the fitting of solar panels at Kol Chai's synagogue and if we learnt something in the process that might help others.

The key to obtaining approval for the installation of the solar panels to the synagogue was to build support within the Community on measures to reduce Kol Chai's environmental impact and also showing the financial benefit to the community. Joining Eco Synagogue and forming our own Kol Chai Green Group proved decisive in building support. We held a series of events, including a well-attended Green Debate, which generated a lot of interest within the community, and resulted in a large number of people joining the Group. We also held a Green Shabbat and various Zoom meetings to progress our agenda. It was helpful to have our current rabbi, Rabbi Naomi Goldman and our emeritus rabbi, Rabbi Michael Hilton, both keen supporters of a green agenda.

The community had plans to refurbish the building and the Green Group pressed for energy saving measures, including solar panels, to be included in the refurbishment plans. Initially, some members felt that given limited resources there were other items that had a higher priority.

We pursued with obtaining quotes from various suppliers and presented a proposal to management. There were several concerns from members regarding visual impact of the panels, the amount of maintenance required (very little), how reliable were the supplier's forecast of energy generated and savings to be made (no independent verification, but the figures supplied were similar to other suppliers). We were fortunate to have an expert we could call on who was able to give us independent advice on the technical specification.

The proposals showed a significant long term saving. Our building does not have a gas supply so our electricity usage is high and solar power offered significant savings. The approximate cost of installation of £10,500 for 16 panels is expected to be recovered within 10 years and the estimated electricity bill savings over the lifetime of the installation of 25 years (having deducted the cost of the installation) is forecast at approximately £45,000. The payback time was substantially reduced by a substantial donation from a member, specifically for the installation of solar panels so, in fact, we expect to recover the cost (including Gift Aid) in approximately 5.5 years.

To summarise, the most important aspect in obtaining support for the installation was the body of support we had built within the Community, combined with the clearly substantial cost savings in the long term and the generous donation we received.

Michael Collins

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