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# Community Solar Accelerator

Final Summative Assessment Report



**BRIGHTON ENERGY**  
**COOPERATIVE** 

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Date of document: Final

Version: 2

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# List of abbreviations

BEC	Brighton Energy Coop
CSA	Community Solar Accelerator
DLUHC	Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
EOI	Expression of Interest
ERDF	European Regional Development Fund
ESIF	European Structural Investment Funds
EV	Electric Vehicle
EVCP	Electric Vehicle Charging Points
FIT	Feed in Tariff
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
LEP	Local Enterprise Partnership
LoCASE	Low Carbon Across the South East
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PV	Photovoltaics
PCR	Project Change Request
PIV	Project Initiation Visit
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise

# Contents page

## Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
1.1 Evaluation Approach .....	2
1.2 Report Structure.....	3
2. Project Overview .....	4
2.1 Project Logic Model.....	4
2.2 Project Updates.....	11
3. Changes to Project Context .....	12
4. Project Progress.....	15
4.1 Performance Against Contractual ERDF Targets.....	15
5. Delivery and Management .....	17
5.1 Project Management.....	17
5.2 Marketing and Promotion.....	19
5.3 Take-up and Prioritisation.....	20
5.4 SME satisfaction .....	23
6. Outcomes and Impacts.....	24
6.1 Outcomes for Businesses .....	24
6.2 Carbon Saving Impacts .....	26
6.3 Value for Money.....	27
6.4 Case Study Evidence.....	29
7. Conclusions and Lessons Learnt .....	32
7.1 Project Design and Rationale .....	32
7.2 Progress Against Contracted Targets .....	32
7.3 Project Delivery and Management .....	32
7.4 Project Outcomes and Impacts .....	33
7.5 Lessons Learnt.....	33

## Table of tables

Table 3.1: Key contextual factors and impact on the programme.....	12
Table 4.1: IC7 performance against contracted output and expenditure.....	15
Table 6.1: Summary of carbon emissions savings .....	27

## Table of figures

Figure 5.1: Beneficiary feedback relating to project management and administration .....	18
Figure 5.2: How beneficiaries first heard about Community Solar Accelerator.....	19
Figure 5.3: Location of each installation .....	21
Figure 5.4: Factors influencing decision to install Solar PV .....	22
Figure 5.5: Factors influencing decision to install ECVPs.....	22
Figure 5.6: SME satisfaction levels.....	23
Figure 6.1: Extent to which barriers have been overcome .....	24
Figure 6.2: Additional actions to reduce carbon footprint .....	25
Figure 6.3: What beneficiaries would have done without Community Solar Accelerator support.....	26

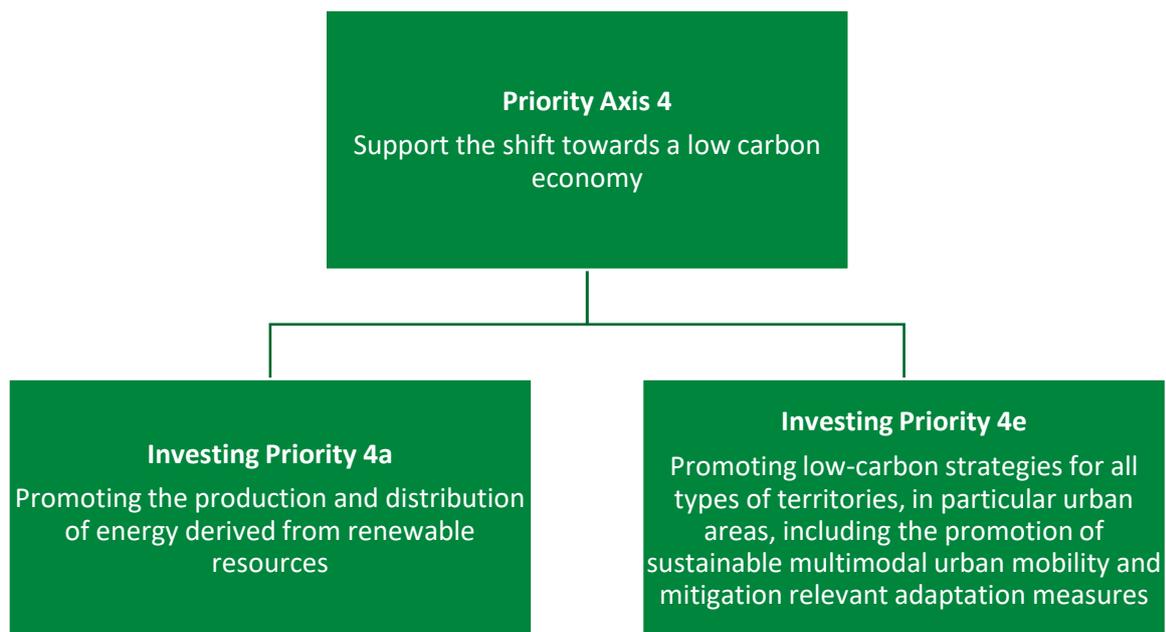
# 1. Introduction

In November 2021, Brighton Energy Coop (BEC) commissioned Wavehill to conduct a summative assessment of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Community Solar Accelerator (CSA) project. This report is the final evaluation report.

The CSA project is a £2.2 million project which aimed to support the shift towards a low carbon economy in the Coast to Capital Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) region. The project provides financial support for eligible Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) to install solar photovoltaics (PV) only or solar PV and Electric Vehicle Charging Points (EVCP) on their premises.

The project falls under the ERDF Priority Axis 4<sup>1</sup> and the call to ‘support the shift towards a low carbon economy in all sectors’. The Investing Priorities CSA falls under are shown below in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1: Community Solar Accelerator ESIF priorities



The project started engaging with SMEs in mid-October 2021 and project activity ended at the end of June 2023 with practical completion set for September 2023.

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<sup>1</sup> European Regional Development Fund Operational Programme 2014-2020

## 1.1 Evaluation Approach

This evaluation adopts an approach which is consistent with the requirements of the European Structural and Investment Fund (ESIF) programme and associated guidance. The evaluation is an independent review of project performance, underpinned by five key requirements, as set out in national programme guidance. These are:

- 1. Relevance and consistency:** exploring the continued relevance and consistency of the project in light of contextual changes, such as shifts in policy, socio-economic circumstances and technological advancements;
- 2. Progress against contractual targets:** setting out project progress when measured against contractual targets and projected lifetime results at project closure;
- 3. Experience of delivering and managing the project:** outlining the practical experience of implementing and managing the project, lessons learned and evidence of best practice which can be applied to the delivery of other projects;
- 4. Impacts attributable to the project:** demonstrating the projected impacts attributable to the project on both supported businesses and the reduction in carbon emissions
- 5. Cost effectiveness and value for money:** an assessment of cost-effectiveness and value for money based on the balance of quantified costs and carbon savings

The evaluation draws from a variety of sources of relevant information, as well as data and qualitative insights:

- **A review of background documentation** submitted as part of the ESIF bid, to understand project context and assess its continued relevance
- **Detailed analysis of project monitoring data**, captured by the team and via beneficiaries, to assess performance against financial, output and outcome targets
- **A review of changes in the delivery context** considering economic, policy and organisational dynamics which are likely to have impacted on the delivery and impact of the project
- **Stakeholder consultations**, engaging five members of the core delivery team capturing perspectives on project design, delivery, governance and impacts
- **Beneficiary surveys** distributed online to 33 SMEs and designed to explore business sentiments, satisfaction levels, achieved impacts and how the project could evolve to better meet their needs and support growth aspirations. A total of 25 responses were received giving a response rate of 75 percent.
- **Beneficiary case studies**, allowing for more in-depth analysis of the impacts of engaging with the CSA project on three businesses.

## 1.2 Report Structure

- **Chapter 2:** A review of the original project rationale and associated logic model;
- **Chapter 3:** Setting out key contextual changes that have taken place since the project's conception and have subsequently impacted on project performance and delivery;
- **Chapter 4:** A summary of project performance, benchmarked against contractual financial, output and outcome targets;
- **Chapter 5:** A summary of delivery progress, considering marketing and engagement, beneficiaries supported, quality of support, management and governance;
- **Chapter 6:** An outline of evidence on project outcomes and impacts achieved to date;
- **Chapter 7:** A summary of research conclusions and lessons learnt.

## 2. Project Overview

This section sets out the project's logic model detailing the rationale, market failures, inputs, activities, outputs and intended impacts of the project. The content set out in the logic model provides the theoretical link to impacts through which to assess the project's effectiveness. The logic model was developed through reviewing project documentation as well as through conversations with the delivery team.

### 2.1 Project Logic Model

#### 2.1.1 Context and Rationale

The Climate Change Act 2008<sup>2</sup> requires the UK to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by at least 100percent of its 1990 levels by 2050. In achieving this aim, the UK Government's Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener<sup>3</sup> sets out the longer-term policy intentions that plan to be phased in over the next decade in the following eight areas:

- **Power**
- **Fuel Supply and Hydrogen**
- **Industry**
- **Heat and Buildings**
- **Transport**
- **Natural Resources, Waste and Fluorinated Gases**
- **Greenhouse Gas Removals**
- **Supporting the Transition with Cross-Cutting Action**

There are synergies between the direction of travel indicated through this strategy and what is planned to be achieved through the CSA project. The strategy states the intention to fully decarbonise the power system by 2035 with a focus on improving the proportion of power generated through renewables. With regard to transport, a priority within this strategy is the progress towards zero emissions vehicles through the commitment that by 2035, all cars must be fully zero emissions capable, and the significant investment required for the improvement of Electric Vehicle (EV) infrastructure.

The UK Industrial Strategy, at the time the project commenced, set out four Grand Challenges<sup>4</sup> one of which was clean growth. This outlined the ambition to position the UK as a world leader in the development, manufacture and use of low carbon technologies, systems and services. According to the strategy, one estimate suggested the UK's clean economy could grow at four times the rate of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the coming years highlighting the potential significance of the sector to the UK economy.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> HM Government, 2008, Climate Change Act 2008

<sup>3</sup> HM Government, 2021, Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener

<sup>4</sup> Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, 2021, Policy Paper: The Grand Challenges

<sup>5</sup> ibid

At a regional level, the three south eastern LEPs<sup>6</sup> developed a Local Energy Strategy setting out the following vision:<sup>7</sup>

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‘To become a leader for sustainable energy production within the UK, powering innovative, decarbonised and clean economic growth’ – (South East LEPs Local Energy Strategy)

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The plan set out how the region can provide local energy provision and support the shift to a low carbon economy. This was to be achieved through making targeted interventions to reduce emission in the electricity, heat and transport sectors as well as foster clean growth by supporting public and private sector investments in novel low carbon technologies and take advantage of the opportunities these present. Two of the five priority themes set out in the Local Energy Strategy, renewable generation and transport revolution, closely align with what the CSA project seeks to achieve.

The Local Energy Strategy states “calculations show that solar PV schemes can produce up to 36percent more electricity than elsewhere in the UK”.<sup>8</sup> The Coast to Capital region is thus one of the best solar resource areas in the UK, though PV arrays in the area only make up 1.3 percent of the UK total. This is primarily due to land use and land value meaning there are few large-scale ground solar farms.

The project’s ESIF application draws attention to the end of the UK Government’s Feed In Tariff (FIT) scheme which enabled applicants to receive payments for generating their own electricity through eligible systems. According to the project application, since the FIT scheme had ended, there has been a 94 percent drop in domestic PV installs. The reason for this is reported to be due to the return on investment in PV being marginal without the support through FIT, however this is likely to improve as global PV prices continue to drop.

The CSA project intended to utilise public sector investment through the ERDF to enable solar PV projects in the Coast to Capital LEP to take place until ‘grid parity’ is reached and no subsidy is needed to attract SMEs to invest. Left to market forces, grid parity for PV may take up to three years and therefore there is a need to stimulate demand for solar PV installations in the meantime.

The ESIF application indicated that there is an under-served need for EVCP in privately owned, publicly accessible parking locations. This need can be met by large corporates who are financially able to install EVCPs as loss-leaders that don’t need to be profitable, but SMEs that own publicly accessible parking facilities may delay installation of EVCPs until there is a business case.

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<sup>6</sup> Note: This includes the Coast to Capital, Enterprise M3 and South East LEPs

<sup>7</sup> [South East LEPs Local Energy Strategy](#)

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*

Whilst there are some local authorities in the area investing in EVCPs, the CSA project is differentiated from these existing initiatives. For example, existing provision is focused on publicly owned car parks or roads whereas CSA enables SMEs to install EVCP on their premises. The other advantage of the CSA project is that the EVCPs use energy produced through solar PV. The ESIF application states:

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“Having EV charging on SME’s own premises is more attractive and practical for their own vehicles than using public charge points which may not be nearby. Also having this facility available to their customers and visitors to charge will help their reputation and customer retention. Finally, the charge points in our project will offer renewable electricity generated on site” - (ESIF application)

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### 2.1.1 Market failures

Market failure is a description of a situation where, for one reason or other, markets cannot achieve full economic efficiency. Their existence thus provides reasoning for intervention. The key market failures present in this case which help to justify public intervention include the following;

**Negative externalities-** Externalities result when a particular activity produces benefits or costs not directly priced into the market, and thus lead to a sub-optimal outcome. Greenhouse gas emissions impose a cost on society which is not borne by those who produce and consume energy and can therefore be considered a negative externality. It is socially desirable to generate more energy from renewable sources to reduce this externality. Since the end of the FIT scheme, levels of installations have dropped off suggesting public intervention is needed until ‘grid parity’ for PV is achieved.

Externalities are central to the rationale for public intervention in this case. The intervention encourages SMEs to invest in renewable energy production and EV infrastructure which carries wider social and environmental benefits. It also addresses the negative externality of greenhouse gas emissions, and helps businesses to de-risk investment, thus overcoming challenges of imperfect information.

**Imperfect information-** Information is needed for a market to know the quality of a good or service and value its benefit. Businesses often lack the information and expertise to make optimal decisions on investments in renewable energy or EV charge points.

### 2.1.2 Objectives

The stated objectives of the CSA project are as follows:

- To increase renewable energy use at 33 SMEs through implementing solar PV.
- To increase renewable energy use and electric vehicle charging at 9 SME-owned premises and car parks through implementing solar PV and EV charging points.

### 2.1.3 Inputs

The table below shows the breakdown and source of the £2.2 Million funding for the project.

Table 2.1: Breakdown of funding sources for CSA

Funding Contributions	Public/Private	TOTAL
ERDF Funding	Public	£1,101,745
SME Match Funding	Private	£1,101,745
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>£2,203,190</b>

### 2.1.4 Activities

The project aimed to provide a grant scheme with the target of creating 33 x 50kWp PV arrays and nine PV arrays with EVCPs installed over a three year period. The grant scheme was to allow any eligible applicants based in the Coast to Capital LEP to apply for a 40 percent grant for the installation of PV or PV and EVCP on their premises.

The beneficiary journey lifecycle can be seen in Figure 2.1 and detailed below.

Figure 2.1 Overview of beneficiary journey



### Initial client engagement

The project planned to engage SMEs through a combination of marketing, referrals from partners and proactive targeting by the Account Manager.

SMEs would then be able to complete an expression of interest online and the criteria around grant ratios and total project costs explained.

### Check initial eligibility

BEC then planned to review expressions of interest to check eligibility including SME status and whether a grant would affect de minimis under state aid.

### Check site suitability

Site suitability would then be assessed, and the terms of the grant discussed including the analysis of electricity bills. Outputs would include:

- PV or EV charge point installation proposal including detailed grant funding terms and conditions
- Checklist of typical PV project activity including structural surveys, DNO applications and planning permission where required
- Best practice guidelines for choosing and managing installers, getting best value for money and quality, typical costings, operation and maintenance considerations.
- Criteria for suitability will include roof state, access, size, orientation, shading, ownership, site electricity usage
- This information will allow the SME to provide a specification from which to get quotes

### Plan project and submit a grant application

SMEs at this point would be required to source installers and complete the grant application form. SMEs were free to select a supplier of their choice, however, in line with ESIF guidelines, were required to provide:

- Three different quotes from suppliers for the work
- Potential energy savings expressed in CO2e
- Proof that the organisation has the necessary funds to pay for the work before claiming the grant
- A declaration that the grant amount would not affect their De Minimis threshold for State Aid
- Self-declaration from undertakings that they have read the definition and confirm this is not the case.

### Review and detailed eligibility check

Applications would then be reviewed, scored and prioritised by the Project Board. SMEs would be notified if their application is successful. SMEs would then receive notification of

the total grant amount offered, the deadline for completion, and the evidence needed to ensure grant funding can be claimed.

### Project implementation

During this stage, the work would be undertaken by the preferred installer.

### Claiming of grant

Once the installation is completed and all project costs incurred, SMEs are able to claim for the grant to be repaid by submitting the following evidence to the BEC.

- Grant Claim Form
- Proof of implementation (before and after photos)
- MCS certificate for a PV array
- Proof of expenditure (supplier/contractor invoice)
- Proof of defrayal (bank statement)
- An invoice to BEC for the grant amount

## 2.1.5 Outputs

The table below shows the project's contracted output indicators and targets.

Table 2.2: Summary of project outputs

Indicator	Project Target
<b>Priority 4a</b>	
C1 Number of enterprises receiving support	33
C5 Number of new enterprises supported	6
C30 Additional capacity for renewable energy production	1.65 MW
C34 Estimated annual decrease of greenhouse gases (covering 4A and 4E)	701.36 tCO <sub>2</sub> e
<b>Priority 4e</b>	
C1 Number of enterprises receiving support	9

## 2.1.6 Impacts

The intended impacts of the scheme are detailed below. These are not core indicators for the purposes of ESIF funding, but are however useful indicators to track the longer term impacts of the investment.

- Reduced business expenditure on energy (if usage remains constant)
- A reduction in CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions from electricity use
- Wider societal benefits from reduced grid energy usage including cost savings and enhanced air quality
- Wider benefits from SMEs engaging with renewable energy and energy savings, increasing appetite for further investment in this in the future.

## Context

- The UK Climate Change Act (2008) aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 100% of 1990 baseline by 2050. In 2019, the target became to reduce emissions to net zero by 2050.
- The Industrial strategy sets out four 'Grand Challenges' one of which is clean energy.
- Regional policy and strategy sets out the south east LEP plan to reduce carbon emissions and support clean growth.

## Rationale

- The end of the UK Government's Feed in Tariff scheme has resulted in a large decrease in the number of domestic solar PV installs.
- Left to market forces, grid parity may not be achieved for three years and therefore intervention is required to stimulate interest and make solar PV installation a more attractive proposition for SMEs.
- Financial support for SMEs to install EVCPs in publicly accessible places that derive energy from solar PVs has multiple benefits.

## Market Failures

- Negative Externalities: The cost on society of high carbon emissions is not borne by those that produce and consume it. Greater proportions of energy derived from renewable sources is socially desirable.
- Imperfect Information: SMEs often do not have the necessary knowledge and expertise to make decisions on solar PV investments.

## Project Objectives

- Implement solar PV in 33 SMEs
- Implement solar PV and EVCP at 9 SME-owned premises and car parks

## Summary Logic Model

### Impacts

- Reduced business expenditure on energy (if usage remains constant)
- A reduction in CO2e emissions from electricity use
- Wider societal benefits from reduced grid energy usage including cost savings and enhanced air quality
- Wider benefits from SMEs engaging with renewable energy and energy savings, increasing appetite for further investment in this in future

### Outputs and Outcomes

Indicator	Project Target
<b>Priority 4a</b>	
C1 Number of enterprises receiving support	33
C5 Number of new enterprises supported	6
C30 Additional capacity for renewable energy production	1.65MW
C34 Estimated annual decrease of greenhouse gases (4A and 4E)	701.36tCO2e
<b>Priority 4e</b>	
C1 Number of enterprises receiving support	9

### Input

**ERDF Funding:** £1,101,745  
**Private Sector SME Match:** £1,101,745

### Project Activities

An end-to-end process for approving grant funding for eligible SMEs to install Solar PV or Solar PV and EVCPs on their premises.

## 2.2 Project Updates

The project has been delivered largely in line with what was set out in the initial ESIF application. The main changes relate to the project timelines which were delayed slightly at the outset. This was due to the fact that the application was submitted to the Managing Authority in February 2020 coinciding with the outbreak of COVID-19 in the UK. This meant that there were some delays in the application being appraised and approved.

The project was expected to start in February 2021. In practice the Grant Funding Agreement wasn't signed in late April 2021 and the Project Initiation Visit (PIV) meeting happened in late September 2021. The project launched in mid-October 2021 after some PIV follow up actions.

One Project Change Request (PCR) was submitted towards the end of the project which altered the practical completion date to enable a final project to be completed. This PCR did not affect any output indicator targets or the project budget.

### 3. Changes to Project Context

This section provides an update to the socio-economic and policy context CSA has operated in and considers the potential impacts this has had on the project’s original rationale.

The delivery context can play a significant role in a project’s success and therefore understanding the tangible or more discrete shifts in the delivery context is integral to an assessment of progress. The table below outlines these factors and describes their influence on the project.

The rating in the final column relates to the extent to which updated contextual data has had a positive or negative impact on the need/rationale for the scheme and/or ability to deliver the scheme.

Table 3.1: Key contextual factors and impact on the programme.

Change	Description	Impact on Project	RAG
<b>National Policy Strategy</b>	<p>Since the project began, a new Industrial Strategy was developed. A central element of the <b>Build Back Better: Our Plan for Growth</b><sup>9</sup> strategy is the focus on green growth and the action that needs to be taken to improve the natural environment.</p> <p>UK Government’s <b>Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution</b><sup>10</sup> aims to lay the foundation for a Green Industrial Revolution, prioritising green jobs as part of the economic recovery from COVID and support 90,000 jobs across the UK within this parliament.</p>	The changing national policy landscape has highlighted the importance for action around the renewable energy agenda. The Government’s commitment to prioritising green growth, through the creation of green growth and green infrastructure has strengthened the overall relevance of the CSA project.	Positive

<sup>9</sup> [HM Treasury Build Back Better: our plan for growth](#)

<sup>10</sup> [HM Government The Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution](#)

Change	Description	Impact on Project	RAG
<b>COVID-19</b>	The COVID-19 outbreak coincided with the delivery of the CSA project. The social distancing restrictions and lockdowns that came into force during the pandemic led to significant changes in the way businesses were able to operate. It also caused substantial economic disruption across the country.	Initially, the pandemic caused some delays in the signing of the Grant Funding Agreement and start date. The project had to change the way in which the application and approval process was conducted. This involved a shift to predominantly meeting with businesses virtually to administer the project. Delivery staff felt that whilst more client contact was delivered remotely than envisaged, this did not have any significant bearing on the project and may have improved the overall efficiency of the process.	Negligible Impact
<b>Increase in Energy Costs</b>	Over the course of the project, the UK economy has been hit by inflationary pressures and significant increases in energy costs, partly as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This has had a major impact on businesses who were suddenly hit with soaring energy costs. This was the number one challenge facing businesses in the last year, and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) reported the number of insolvencies in May and June 2022 at a 13 year high. <sup>11</sup>  Between October 2022 and March 2023, the UK Government subsidised electricity and gas for businesses through an £18 Billion scheme. Despite this, the energy crisis has caused	The rising energy prices meant that the CSA project saw an increase in demand. The rising costs that many businesses were experiencing led to more businesses exploring opportunities to install solar PV on their premises.	Positive
		The increased demand also meant that there was an increase in the costs and lead times associated with installing Solar PV. The timescales for connecting arrays to the grid were also extended.  As a result, the scheme stopped processing new applicants in March 2023 as the lead times for installation meant projects approved after this period were at risk of not being completed by the end of the scheme.	Negative

<sup>11</sup> [ONS Rising Business insolvencies and high energy prices](#)

Change	Description	Impact on Project	RAG
	considerable disruption to many SMEs.		
<b>Public Perception around Net Zero</b>	<p>The public awareness and support for green policies and achieving net zero emissions continues to increase. Many local councils have declared climate emergencies and public attitudes towards renewable energy and tackling climate change is at an all-time high.<sup>12</sup></p> <p>There is also an increased focus on the need for SMEs to support the net zero transition. The British Business Bank estimate that around half of all industrial emissions are produced by smaller businesses. Whilst individually, their carbon footprints will be small, the collective impact is significant.</p> <p>Research suggests that the costs and access to finance is one of the main barriers facing small businesses in reducing emissions.</p>	The increased awareness and public support for net zero policy and action has had a positive impact on the project as a result of increased awareness and interest amongst businesses.	Positive

<sup>12</sup> [Renewable UK, Public support for renewable energy reaches record high](#)

## 4. Project Progress

This chapter provides a summary of CSA's financial and output performance against targets.

### 4.1 Performance Against Contractual ERDF Targets

An overview and assessment of CSA's contracted output and expenditure targets against the project's performance is displayed in the table below.<sup>13</sup>

Table 4.1: IC7 performance against contracted output and expenditure

Indicator	Targets	Performance at time of evaluation		Projected performance at project closure		Overall assessment (RAG)
		Target	No.	%	No.	
<b>Financial Performance</b>	£2.2 million	£1.57 million	71%	£1.87 million	85%	A
<b>C1 Number of enterprises receiving support</b>	42	32	76%	33	79%	R
<b>C5 Number of new enterprises supported</b>	6	0	0%	0	0%	R
<b>C30 Additional capacity for renewable energy production</b>	1.65 MW	2.19 MW	133%	2.57	156%	G
<b>C34 Estimated annual decrease of greenhouse gases</b>	701.36 tCO <sub>2</sub> e	718.38 tCO <sub>2</sub> e	102%	847.07 tCO <sub>2</sub> e	121%	G

#### 4.1.1 Financial Performance Against Original Profile

Financial performance is expected to be below the profiled target. The main factors affecting this were:

- the scheme started slightly later than initially planned which meant that costs were not accrued as expected in the initial months
- the scheme did not complete the expected number of installations leading to an underspend in the amount of grants approved and claimed.

<sup>13</sup> The overall assessment is red where the projected performance is less than 85 percent of the original target, orange where the project performance is between 85 and 95 percent of the original target, and green where the project performance is over 95 percent of the original target.

### 4.1.2 Output and Result Performance

As table 4.1 above shows, the project has underperformed in relation to the number of enterprises it aimed to engage. The main reason for this is related to the assumptions made when the initial application was developed. The project assumed that each enterprise would install on average a 50KW array and therefore would need to engage 33 enterprises to achieve the 1.65MW target of additional renewable energy capacity produced. In practice, the average installation was larger and therefore a fewer number of installs were required to achieve the same capacity target.

This means the CSA project has provided better value for money than what was anticipated having generated greater impact in relation to the additional renewable capacity created and estimated decrease in greenhouse gasses, whilst spending less than the allocated budget.

There was an under performance in the number of EVCPs installed on SME premises having completed 3 installations of the 9 that was targeted. The delivery team indicated that the demand for EVCPs was not as strong as expected and this was mainly due to the increased cost of energy over the course of the project which made the installation of EVCP less attractive to SMEs. As such, SMEs tended to fully utilise the CSA grant to install as many solar panels as possible in order to reduce their energy bills..

The delivery team felt the underperformance in the C5 indicator (new enterprises supported) was due to the challenging economic conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic with many new SMEs facing considerable short- and medium-term financial pressures and issues with their cashflow. This impacted on their ability to cover the upfront costs of the solar array needed to access the CSA grant and led to withdrawals. Of the thirteen SMEs that qualified as a new enterprise at the initial stage, none made it through the application and selection process.

The delivery team indicated that the main factors that influenced the underperformance against the C1 target were:

- Delays to the start of the project which reduced the delivery timeframe
- The increase in demand and shortage of solar PV supplies lengthening the installation times
- The need for upfront grant payments from BEC and retrospective claiming from DLUHC limited the number of grants the BEC board were happy to approve in any one quarter

## 5. Delivery and Management

This section assesses the effectiveness of the delivery and management of the CSA project, drawing on evidence from a range of sources including:

- Project performance data and background information collected by BEC;
- Consultations with the project delivery team conducted in Summer 2023 – for a list of consultees see Appendix A;
- 25 responses to an online beneficiary survey conducted with businesses accessing the CSA scheme.

### 5.1 Project Management

The project was overseen by the BEC's board which consists of two executive directors and four non-executive directors. A project board was set up which consisted of the project manager, account manager and one non-executive board member. The project board was responsible for providing strategic oversight of the project and reviewing and appraising all applications. The final decision for approving grants sat with the project board.

The project manager assumed responsibility for the day to day management of the project which included oversight of the implementation of all project processes. The delivery team felt that the processes that were implemented for beneficiary applications, eligibility testing and site suitability testing were all effective.

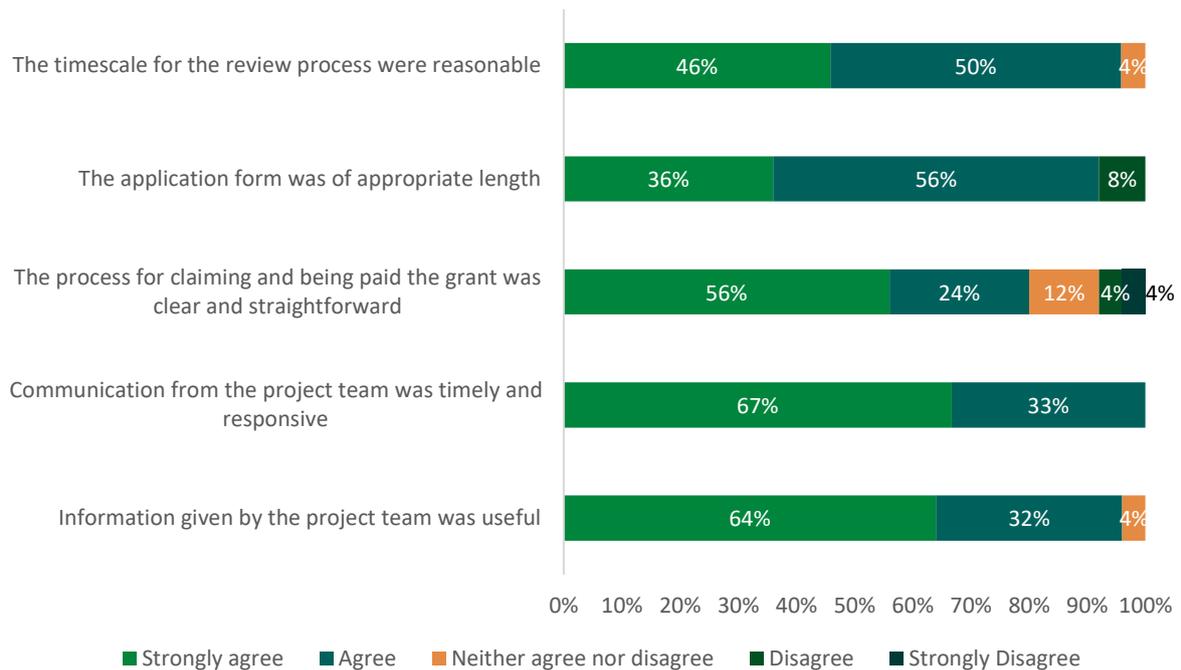
The delivery team consulted with as part of the evaluation reflected that the project management had been effective and the project had run smoothly. Whilst there may have been an opportunity to streamline some of the paperwork, the delivery team felt that the processes implemented worked well.

The project manager took advantage of communicating with similar ERDF projects at the outset and these conversations informed project design and processes. These contacts also proved helpful throughout the delivery of the project in providing peer support.

An important aspect of the project management was the need to ensure strong communication with beneficiaries, keeping them informed of the next steps and supporting them with the completion of paperwork. This was to ensure that businesses continued to make progress towards the installation and that timelines were not unreasonably long.

Comments from the delivery team were corroborated by beneficiary survey respondents who, on the whole, were very satisfied with the manner in which the scheme had been managed and administered.

**Figure 5.1: Beneficiary feedback relating to project management and administration**



Source: Wavehill Beneficiary Survey 2023 n=25

Figure 5.1 shows:

- All beneficiaries either agreed or strongly agreed that the communication was timely and responsive;
- Over 95 percent of beneficiaries agreed or strongly agreed that the timescales were reasonable and that the information given by the team was useful;
- Over 90 percent of beneficiaries felt the application form was of an appropriate length.

There were fewer beneficiaries (80 percent) that agreed or strongly agreed that the process for claiming the grant was clear and straightforward. Those that disagreed (2 respondents) were asked to provide a reason for this and whilst one did not respond to that question, the other said that it was related to the use of a hire purchase agreement to cover the remaining costs of the installation. This meant that the grant could not be paid as the business did not own the asset outright. This issue was subsequently resolved and overall, that business was satisfied with their involvement with the scheme. It did however, serve as an important learning opportunity for the delivery team regarding the use of hire purchase agreements and this was subsequently incorporated into the advice they provided potential applicants.

Towards the end of the scheme, BEC were the victim of a fraud when they wrongly repaid a grant meant for a beneficiary to a fraudulent account. This has resulted in the organisation losing £22,000 that cannot now be reclaimed. This has been a lesson learnt for the company and more stringent checks and balances in their invoicing and payment process have been adopted.

## 5.2 Marketing and Promotion

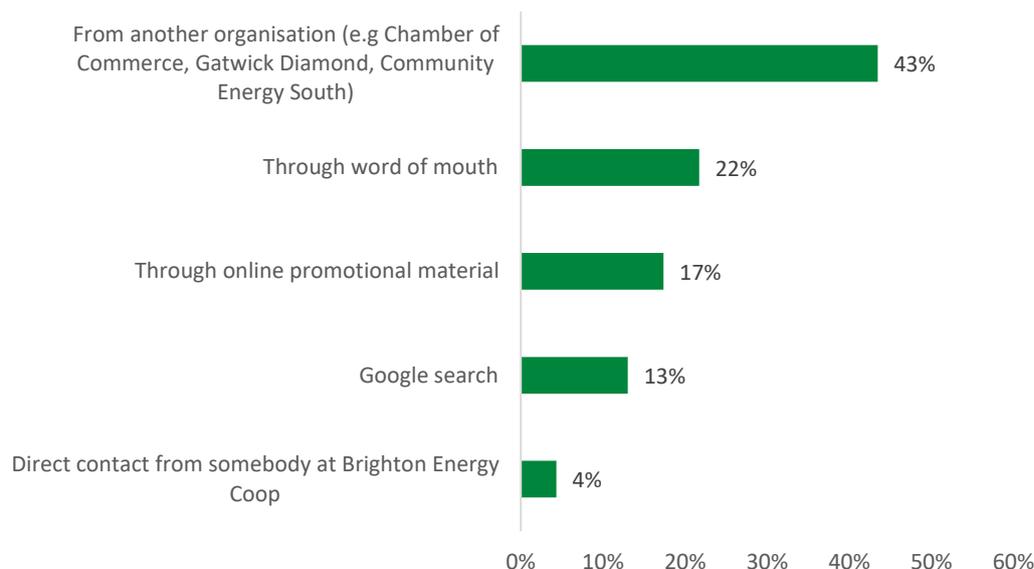
Overall, there was good demand for the support offered through the scheme. This was due to the attractiveness of the offer coupled with the rise in energy costs which led to an increase in businesses exploring opportunities to reduce their energy expenditure.

The scheme adopted several approaches to client engagement including digital advertising, events such as business fairs and tradeshow, editorials in local magazines and information in the BEC newsletter that was distributed to 4,000 businesses on their database.

The delivery team reflected that the most effective approach was the paid-for targeted advertising through Google Ads. One members of the team had previous experience using Google Ads and was able to tailor the messaging and tag words to good effect. This approach was also viewed as providing the best value for money with an estimated cost of £150 per month over three months generating in the region of 40 applications and 15 successful installations. The delivery team felt that the face to face events and business tradeshow were less effective in generating leads.

Figure 5.2 shows how businesses first heard about the CSA support. The scheme benefited from engaging with other organisations supporting businesses including the Coast to Capital LEP and Chamber of Commerce. They also received some referrals from partners delivering similar schemes including the Low Carbon Across the South and East (LoCASE) scheme. Indeed, this was incorporated into the project design where CSA support started at £10,000 and LoCASE support had a maximum limit of £10,000. As such, the two projects were able to refer clients between each other.

Figure 5.2: How beneficiaries first heard about Community Solar Accelerator



Source: Wavehill Beneficiary Survey 2023 n=25

Word of mouth has also been a key factor in promoting the scheme. For example, businesses that had taken advantage of the scheme were approached by neighbouring businesses who inquired about their installation, and this subsequently led to applications and installations being completed. This led to multiple EOIs and applications being submitted from businesses in the same industrial estate.

Overall the scheme has been marketed and promoted effectively utilising a range of approaches including successful integration with strategic partners and other similar schemes. The most significant negative factor affecting the scheme's ability to convert the strong demand into a greater number of outputs was the shortened timeframe of the project. In particular, this was coupled with longer timeframes associated with Solar installations than had been initially envisaged.

### 5.3 Take-up and Prioritisation

The scheme received a total of 212 expression of interests (EOIs) through the webform that was setup. This webform enabled the collection of high level information that would enable SMEs eligibility to be tested at the earliest point in the process. The delivery team reflected that building in eligibility testing into the initial EOI process was beneficial and saved time by screening out ineligible SMEs at the earliest opportunity.

From the 212 EOIs, 47 full applications were received and this resulted in 33 installations. The most common reasons for projects not progressing was due to SMEs being ineligible, having unsuitable sites or businesses withdrawing interest.

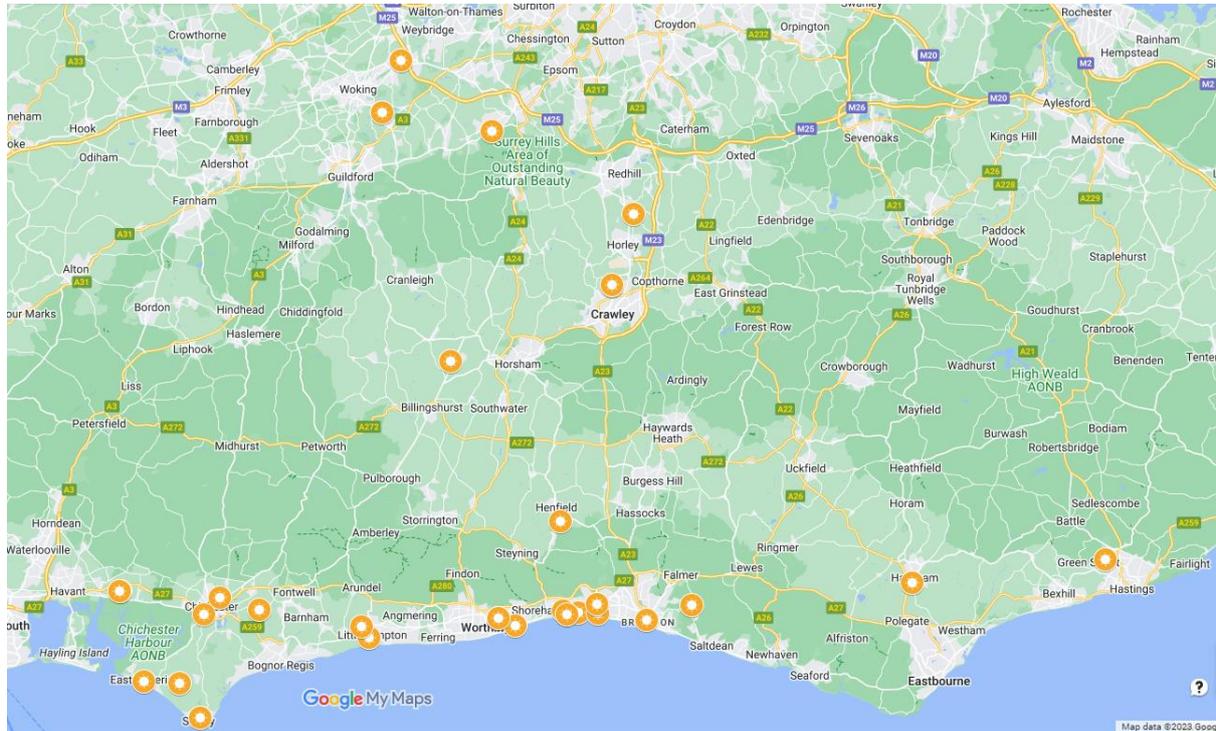
Prior to applications being formally agreed, an initial assessment of the proposed site was carried out using Google Earth to get an approximate calculation of applicants' roof size to see if they would meet CSA's minimum requirement for array size. A further video call between the CSA team and applicant took place to assess further compatibility requirements and needs against CSA grant requirements.

Each SME was responsible for procurement of the solar PV and installers. Scheme rules meant that each project was required to submit three quotes. Whilst the scheme had no say in decisions relating to procurement, the delivery team supported SMEs by providing them with information relating to picking out installers as well as providing a price comparison service to support SMEs to make an informed decision. The delivery team felt that this approach worked well and was valued by the SMEs.

The final decision for agreeing the application fell to the project board and this provided a level of scrutiny and accountability. The project board were also responsible for ensuring that the amount of approved grant funding did not exceed £150,000 per quarter. This was the amount stipulated by the BEC board who agreed this was the maximum amount of financial exposure they were willing to accept. Delivery staff indicated that this limit necessitated by the retrospective claiming of grant funding acted as a barrier affecting the number of projects they could approve and subsequently deliver in the project timeframe.

Overall, the project will have delivered 33 installations of which 3 also included the installation of an EVCP. The installations were spread over the Coast to Capital LEP region as can be seen in Figure 5.3 below.

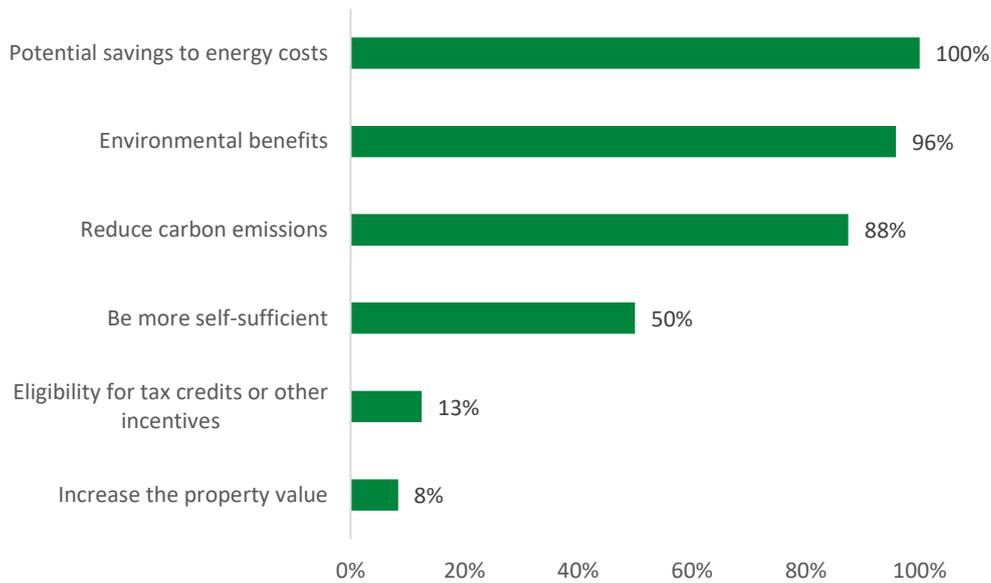
Figure 5.3: Location of each installation



The scheme worked with a broad range of businesses in terms of size and sector. The smallest businesses employed fewer than five people and turned over less than circa. £500,000 and the largest employed over 200 employees and turned over £23 million.

Figure 5.4, below, shows the most common factors that SMEs considered in their decision to install solar PV.

**Figure 5.4: Factors influencing decision to install Solar PV**

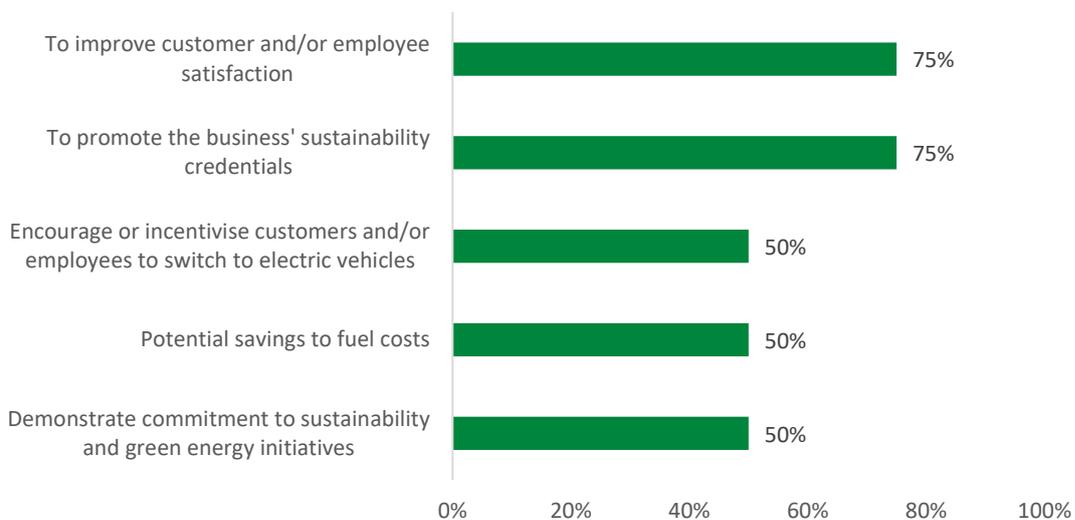


Source: Wavehill Beneficiary Survey 2023 n=24

The most important factor was the potential energy savings installing a solar array would bring and all respondents indicated that this was a factor in their decision. The environmental benefits and reduction of carbon emissions were also important considerations.

Factors driving the decision to install EVCPs are shown in Figure 5.5 below which shows that employee and customer satisfaction (75 percent) and promoting sustainability credentials was more of a factor in this decision.

**Figure 5.5: Factors influencing decision to install ECVPs**

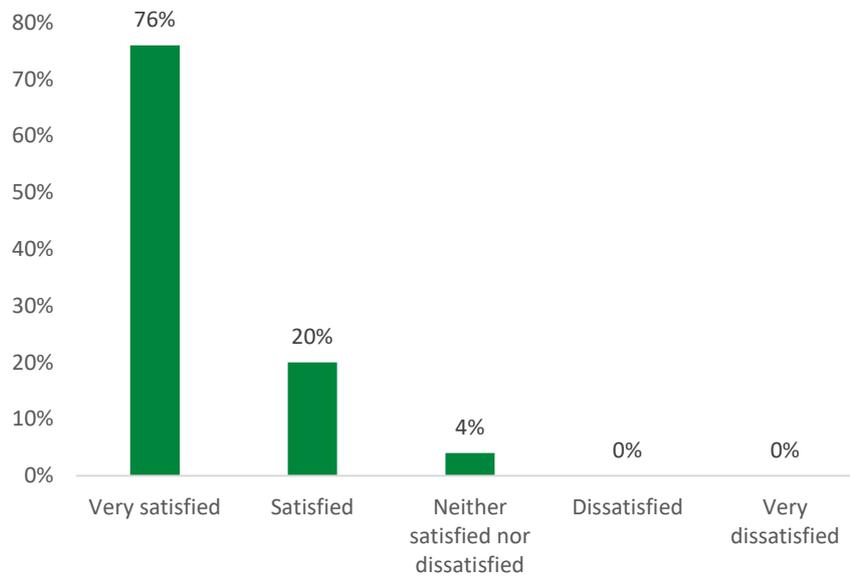


Source: Wavehill Beneficiary Survey 2023 n=4

## 5.4 SME satisfaction

SME satisfaction levels with the scheme were high with 96 percent of survey respondents indicating that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the scheme.

Figure 5.6: SME satisfaction levels



Source: Wavehill Beneficiary Survey 2023 n=24

Analysis of the qualitative responses to the survey indicated that the key factors driving the high satisfaction levels included the highly effective communication from the project team and the efficient process.

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‘We were really impressed with the project and all the assistance, both financial and otherwise, from the team’ – **(Project Beneficiary)**

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‘The project was incredibly well run from start to finish with a consistently supportive team and the process was both smooth and efficient’  
**(Project Beneficiary)**

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Businesses were asked to provide their suggestions for how the project could be improved. The majority of businesses felt that the project worked well and offered no suggestions for improvements. Two businesses felt there could be some streamlining of paperwork which at times felt onerous and two suggested that there could be clearer guidance on how installations could be funded by businesses.

# 6. Outcomes and Impacts

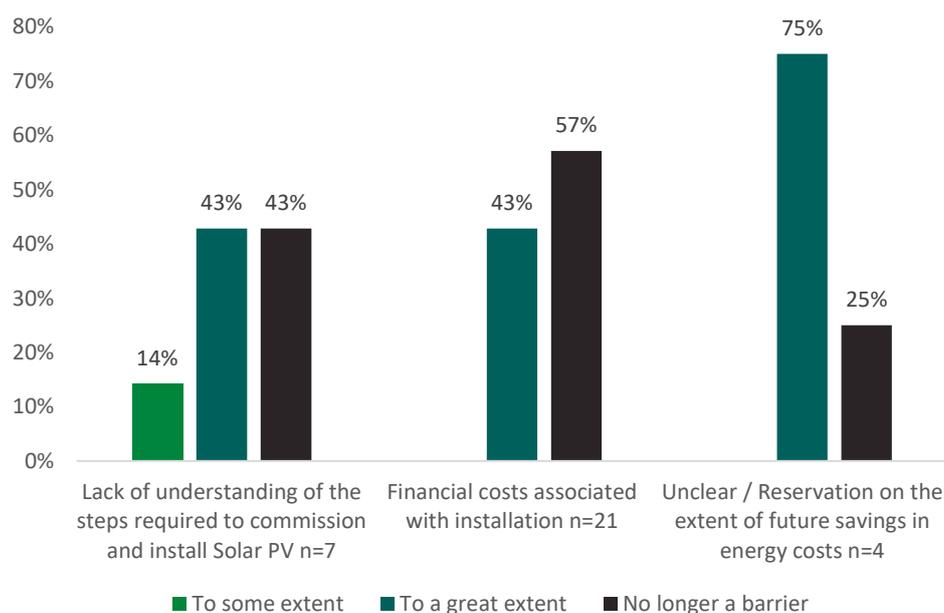
## 6.1 Outcomes for Businesses

Businesses indicated that their involvement with the scheme had helped them overcome a range of barriers that existed to installing solar PV and EVCPs. The three most common barriers to installing solar PV were:

- Financial costs associated with installing solar PV (92 percent)
- Lack of understanding of the steps required to commission and install solar PV (29 percent)
- Unclear / reservations on the extent of future savings in energy costs (17 percent)

Figure 6.1 shows the extent to which the barriers indicated above have been overcome as a result of the scheme. All businesses indicated a level of progress in overcoming the barriers and in many cases, the barriers had been wholly overcome.

Figure 6.1: Extent to which barriers have been overcome



Source: Wavehill Beneficiary Survey 2023

For EVCPs the main barrier to installation was the financial costs associated with installation and of the three businesses that indicated this as a barrier, two said that the scheme had helped overcome this to a great extent and one said that this was no longer a barrier.

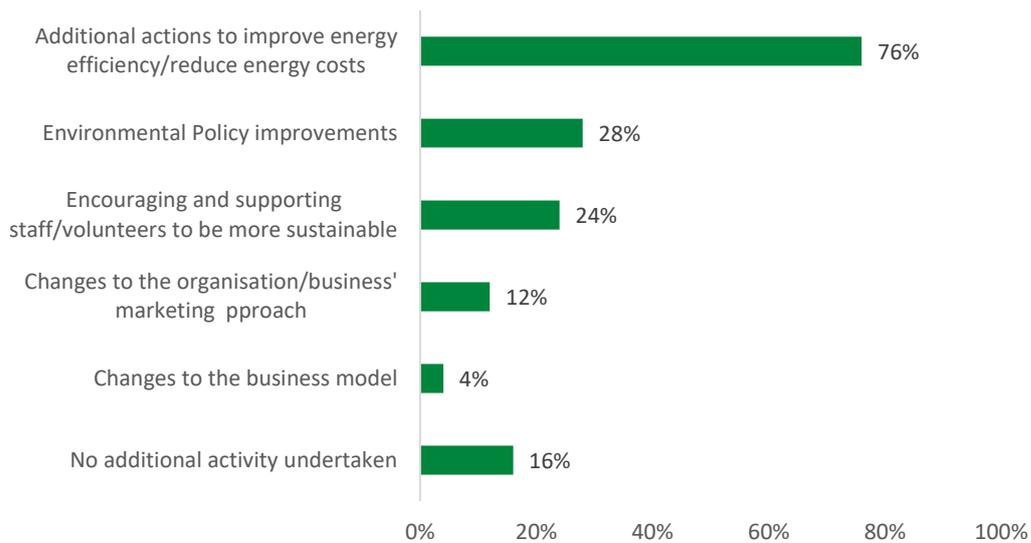
In addition to overcoming the barriers that existed to installing solar PV and EVCPs, the project has also led to:

- 40 percent of businesses seeing a decrease in their overall energy use
- 60 percent of businesses seeing a decrease in their fuel bills

A further 36 percent of businesses said that it was too early to see a decrease in their overall fuel bills and therefore this percentage is expected to increase over time.

The survey responses provide evidence that many businesses (84 percent) have undertaken additional activity to reduce their carbon footprint since engaging with the scheme. Most commonly this included additional actions to improve energy efficiency, however, a range of other actions have been taken which can be seen in Figure 6.2 below.

**Figure 6.2: Additional actions to reduce carbon footprint**



Source: Wavehill Beneficiary Survey 2023 n=25

When asked to say the extent to which the scheme influenced the additional activity to reduce their carbon footprint:

- 40 percent said that the scheme influenced the decision to a great extent
- 50 percent said that the scheme influenced the decision to some extent

This provides good evidence that for many businesses, involvement with the scheme has prompted them to reflect more broadly on their energy usage and expenditure and has encouraged them to take actions to reduce their carbon footprint beyond the installations.

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‘Reduction in energy bills, huge decrease in carbon emissions, a very big contributing factor on our journey to becoming a net zero company’ – (Project Beneficiary)

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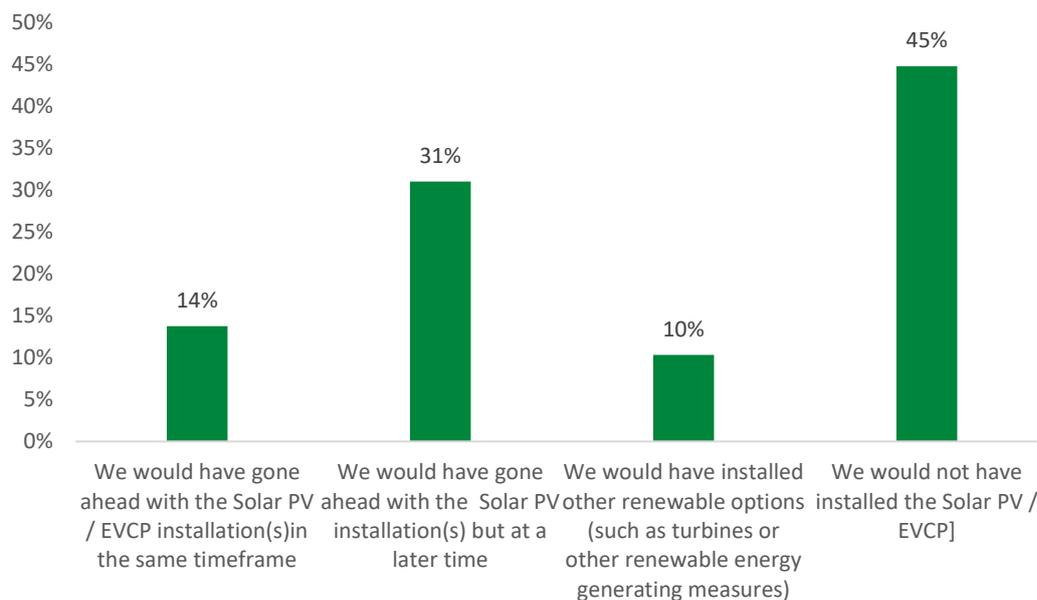
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‘Installing PV has help us to reduce our carbon footprint, our energy bills and helps us to demonstrate our commitment to prospective clients’ – (Project beneficiary)

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The project has also provided good additionality in that it has led to the installation of solar PV and EVCPs that otherwise would not have been installed. Almost half of businesses (45 percent) said that they would not have installed the solar PV / and EVCP without the support offered through the scheme. A further 31 percent of businesses indicated that they would have gone ahead with an installation, however, the scheme had accelerated this process somewhat. These findings are shown in Figure 6.3 below.

Figure 6.3: What beneficiaries would have done without Community Solar Accelerator support



Source: Wavehill Beneficiary Survey 2023 n=25

## 6.2 Carbon Saving Impacts

Analysis has been undertaken to model the impact of the CSA scheme in terms of the amount of carbon emissions that will be reduced over the next 20 years (the average life span of the installed arrays) and the associated cost savings.

Using the estimated annual output of each installation and taking into consideration the date in which each array was installed, the total annual output of energy was calculated between 2022 and 2043. Over the next 20 years, it is estimated that the CSA installations will generate 49.0 million kWh of energy.

Using the emission factors published in the HM Treasury Green Book,<sup>14</sup> the reduction of carbon emissions (as a result of energy now coming from renewable sources instead of the

<sup>14</sup> [HM Treasury Valuation of energy use and greenhouse gas emissions](#)

grid) has been modelled. This shows that over the next 20 years, there will be a reduction of an estimated 4,340 tonnes of carbon emissions as a result of the installed solar PV.

Cost of carbon figures from HM Treasury Green Book Guidance suggest that this amount of carbon savings will generate a value of £1.18 million relating to carbon emissions savings. This information is summarised in the table below.

Table 6.1: Summary of carbon emissions savings

Measure	No.
Total estimated output (2022-2043)	49,000,000 kWh
Total Carbon emissions savings (2022-2043)	4,340 tonnes CO2e
Value of Total Carbon Savings	£1,183,440

It is important to note that there are a number of limitations to this analysis:

- Firstly, this impact value represents all of the savings relating to carbon emissions from the installations. However in practice, some of these may have gone ahead in the same timescales without project support i.e. deadweight effects (14 percent of those surveyed indicated this would be the case). This adjustment has not been made to the figures above.
- Secondly there are a range of wider benefits that are expected to have been generated that are not captured in this quantification, including:
  - Energy bill savings for businesses reducing their costs and enhancing profitability.
  - Wider actions catalysed - the survey evidence above suggested that the CSA scheme also provoked many businesses to reflect further on their carbon footprints and to take actions to reduce it. The range of measures that businesses subsequently took to reduce their emissions further are not factored into the above calculation but will lead to further carbon reduction impacts in the future.
  - Wider factors that could be quantified – additional modelling could be undertaken to analyse impacts associated with enhanced air quality as a result of reduced demand for energy from the grid.

## 6.3 Value for Money

Overall, the modelling that it has been possible to do for the CSA project indicates that the project represents fair value for money. This has been assessed through reviewing the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of the project and taking into consideration the impacts that have been achieved against the ERDF investment.

The project has been delivered economically by a small team allowing overheads to be kept to a minimum. The overall revenue costs associated with administering the project were slightly over £200,000.

Building on the experience of other similar projects as well as having a focus on process improvement has enabled the project to be delivered efficiently. For example, incorporating remote meetings, paperless documentation and an efficient information management system have all contributed to an efficiently run operation.

A project's effectiveness takes into consideration the quality of the outcomes that have been achieved as a result of the projects delivery. CSA were initially targeted to install a total of 1.65MW of renewable energy production through 42 installations. In practice, this target was surpassed through 33 grants which represents better value for money than initially expected.

The carbon savings the project is expected to deliver over the lifetime of the solar PV is £1.18m and this compares to an overall ERDF investment of £1.10m.

## 6.4 Case Study Evidence

### T&G Engineering Co. Ltd.

T&G Engineering Co Ltd, founded in 1975 is a precision subcontract machining company with customers in aerospace, automotive, pharmaceutical, medical, can tooling and special purpose machinery sectors around the world.

T&G Engineering's Managing Director, wanted to not only reduce their carbon footprint but also ensure that the business was resilient enough to prevent passing on costs to customers, particularly with the recent energy price increases.

The 175kW solar PV array is expected to generate 152,000 kWh every year. With the high energy prices, **the estimated energy bill savings are £108,000 per year** which makes the project very profitable with the return on investment being only one year.

T&G Engineering Co. Ltd are **expecting to use 98 percent of the electricity that will be generated by the solar panels on site** which will help towards energy efficient manufacturing.

“It is important that British manufacturing take a lead in reducing energy consumption. This will help raise awareness and encourage others to follow suit.”

He has been using an energy monitoring app to identify unnecessary energy consumption which has also **led to a reduction in wasted energy and improved efficiency**. With the solar PV installation, they are also promoting the benefits of solar to other businesses in the industrial sector.



- Size of Solar PV array: 175 kWp
- Predicted production of electricity: 152,000 kWh per year
- Predicted cost savings: £108,000 in the first year – this is expected to increase in the following years with increased cost per kWh of electricity.
- Return on Investment: 1 year
- Grant Amount Received: £25,000
- Expected lifetime of the solar PV system: 25-30 years
- Carbon Reduction: 35.4 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e per year

## Eskimo Ice

Eskimo Ice are an ice manufacturing business based in Crawley. They have been manufacturing and distributing packaged ice across the UK and Northern Europe since 1978.

They operate in a 16,000 sq.ft commercial property which has a very high energy consumption as the business runs freezers and equipment in a 24hr operation.

Eskimo Ice received a grant of £25,000 through the Community Solar Accelerator Programme which was used **to install a 190 kW solar panel system with over 500 panels, expecting to generate at least 170,000 kWh per year.**

The production of ice is an energy intensive process. Therefore, installing solar panels brings financial, environmental, and publicity benefits. **The financial savings are significant at around £50k per annum.** As summer is their busiest time of year, the energy production from solar will be fully used and this will help reduce emissions.

Eskimo Ice are conscious about using fewer fossil fuels, particularly gas which benefits the whole world environmentally. They felt **the installation of solar panels projects a positive picture to customers both current and prospective as well as suppliers.**

“Consumers, particularly the younger generation, care what companies are doing to look after the environment. It is important for us as an energy intensive company to make a difference where we can to reduce our consumption.”



- Size of Solar PV array: 191.99 kWp
- Predicted production of electricity: 170,000 kWh per year
- Predicted cost savings: £50,000 per year
- Return on Investment: 2.6 years
- Grant Amount Received: £25,000
- Expected lifetime of the solar PV system: 25-30 years
- Carbon Reduction: 39.4 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e per year

## Fireco

Fireco develops, manufactures and sells their own unique fire safety products and systems. They operate from their 18,000 sq ft premises in Southwick, East Sussex. They manufacture their products and run test equipment on site, as well as running a large office.

The flat roof has about 200m<sup>2</sup> available for solar and was refurbished in 2019. Fireco operates during daytime hours and will use most of the solar generated throughout the day. Fireco received a Community Solar Accelerator grant of **£19,600 for a 39.7kW solar array and 2 x 22kW electric vehicle charging points.**

They installed over 70 solar panels that are expected to **provide about 40 percent of their electricity usage every year. This will save them roughly £6,000 every year.**

Fireco also installed 2 wall-mounted Zappi 22kW electric vehicle charging points. Zappi is an adaptive EV charger that has the intelligence to use the solar power when it's being generated and switch to using grid electricity at other times. The switching between these modes allows for the most efficient use of the chargers.

“Fireco is working towards the environmental ISO14001 standard. The installation of PV and EV equipment will support our goal in achieving this and minimising our impact on the environment. We are proud of our company and the steps we are taking to be more eco conscious,”



- Size of Solar PV array: 39.7 kWp
- Predicted production of electricity: 40,000 kWh per year
- Predicted cost savings: £6,000 in the first year
- Return on Investment: 4-5 years
- Grant Amount Received: £19,600
- Expected lifetime of the solar PV system: 25-30 years
- Carbon Reduction: 9.3 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e per year

# 7. Conclusions and Lessons Learnt

## 7.1 Project Design and Rationale

CSA was designed to reduce carbon emissions by supporting SMEs to overcome the most significant barriers they face when seeking to install solar PV on their premises: cost. As such, the project was designed well to meet the needs of businesses seeking to generate energy from renewable sources.

The project aligned well with both regional and national policy around renewable energy, climate change targets and energy security. The increased public awareness of the need for cleaner methods of energy generation, coupled with the large increase in energy prices seen over the past 18 months means that the project has been well placed to respond to the increased interest amongst SMEs seeking to install solar panels.

## 7.2 Progress Against Contracted Targets

Whilst the project fell short (33 out of 42) of the overall number of businesses carrying out installations (C1), it has overachieved in terms of the amount of additional capacity of renewable energy production installed (C30) and the estimated greenhouse gas reduction this will generate (C34). This was down to the size of arrays that businesses installed being higher than what was anticipated when the project was designed.

A key reason for not engaging with the target number of businesses was the delay in the project starting caused initially by the COVID-19 pandemic. This was compounded by the increase in demand for solar PV installations, which was itself caused by the increase in energy prices and led to the lengthening of timescales for installations to be completed. This meant that by Q1 2023 and despite the strong demand, the project was no longer able to approve applications as it was unlikely installations would be complete by the time the project closed.

The number of EVCPs installed also fell short of the contracted target (3 out of 9), due to the demand for EVCP installations not being as strong as expected.

Despite the delays and the challenging delivery context, the project has performed well to achieve 33 installations and exceed both C30 and C34 output targets over the 18 months of delivery.

## 7.3 Project Delivery and Management

Overall, the project has been managed well with effective governance structures in place to provide scrutiny and oversight to delivery. This is supported by the findings from the beneficiary survey which showed that businesses were overwhelmingly positive about the way the programme had been managed and administered. Central to this was the effective

systems and processes that had been implemented, as well as the consistent communication and support provided to businesses.

The marketing and promotion of the project was also effective and benefited from good integration with similar schemes and referrals from strategic partners working closely with SMEs (including the Chamber of Commerce and Coast to Capital LEP).

Beneficiaries indicated that they were highly satisfied with the support they received. All but one respondent to the survey (96 percent) indicated that they were either satisfied or highly satisfied with the support they received. These high satisfaction rates were driven by the level of support the team provided to businesses to navigate the application and claiming process as well as their effective communication.

## 7.4 Project Outcomes and Impacts

The project has successfully supported businesses to overcome the barriers they were facing in installing solar PV. The most common barrier that was overcome was the financial barrier that SMEs faced. Businesses were also supported through the necessary steps to installing and commissioning solar PV and to better understand the future savings that could be achieved through an installation.

An important finding from this evaluation is the extent to which engagement with the CSA project instigated further carbon reduction actions amongst supported businesses. This was included as an impact in the project's logic model and the evidence shows that 84 percent of survey respondents had undertaken additional activity to reduce their carbon footprint since engaging with the scheme.

In terms of impacts on the environment, our analysis estimates that as a result of the solar PV installed through the project, there will be a reduction of 4,300 tonnes of carbon emissions over the next 20 years. This equates to £1.2 million in carbon savings.

## 7.5 Lessons Learnt

**There was a clear need for the support provided to businesses:** The CSA project design has been simple but effective. It sought to help SMEs in the Coast to Capital benefit from reduced costs of installing solar PV (and in some cases EVCP) which in turn has led to reductions in carbon emissions. It responded to a clearly defined market failure and demonstrated that it is an attractive proposition to businesses.

**With growing demand for solar PV, it might be worthwhile considering a lower intervention rate for future schemes.** The funding under CSA was provided on a 60/40 match funding basis with SME investment. However the increasing demand for investment in solar over the delivery period indicates that the targets could have been reached with a lower amount of public funding as an incentive. With a lower intervention rate, it might be possible for the investment to have achieved greater outcomes with the same funding.

**Aligning project design to complement the delivery of similar project in the area is important:** The project dovetailed well with other similar grant programmes running across the area. As a result, this enabled the two projects to refer potential clients to each other instead of competing for demand.

**There is a need to provide continuous support for beneficiaries to maintain momentum throughout the process:** In order to control the timeline, it is important to factor in sufficient resource to provide beneficiary SMEs with support to navigate the process of form filling, eligibility and site suitability testing and claims process. Without this, there is a danger that momentum can be lost, businesses lose interest and installations are not completed which affects the overall efficiency of the project.

**There could be a benefit in the managing authority facilitating peer to peer support amongst those delivering similar projects:** The project has benefitted from connecting with projects in other LEP areas who were conducting similar interventions. This enabled the project to learn from the experiences of these projects in relation to processes, interpretation of guidance and collecting monitoring information. This has been very helpful and there could be a role for the Managing Authority to play in facilitating peer support between projects enabling the sharing of knowledge, experience and learning.

**All projects and programmes should be vigilant to reduce the risk of becoming a victim of fraud:** The unfortunate incident relating to the incorrect payment of a grant to a fraudulent account should serve as a lesson for all projects to ensure appropriate checks are in place to safeguard against fraud.

**The requirement to pay out grants and claim the payments retrospectively serves as a barrier to smaller organisations administering these types of projects:** This arrangement affects the number of grants that can be approved and processed in any given quarter without leaving the organisation financially exposed.

**The installation of solar PV provoked organisations to reflect on their carbon footprint and introduce further carbon saving actions:** The installation of solar PV was a catalyst for many businesses to take further carbon reduction actions and they felt that their involvement in the scheme played a role in this.

# Appendices

## List of Consultees

<b>Consultee</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
<b>Damian Tow</b>	Project Manager	Brighton Energy Coop
<b>Matt Brown</b>	Account Manager	Brighton Energy Coop
<b>Mirco Cordeiro</b>	Account Manager	Brighton Energy Coop
<b>Peter Davies</b>	Chair of Project Board	Brighton Energy Coop
<b>Svenja Czubayko</b>	Account Manager	Brighton Energy Coop

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