

Appendix 3

Solar Together – Scheme 2 (2023/24) Report

Scheme Context

Solar Together gives residents and businesses the opportunity to invest in renewable energy from a trusted provider to reduce their energy bills and improve their carbon footprint. The scheme utilises group buying to leverage competitively priced solar panels, batteries and Electric Vehicle charge points by vetted providers. The core principle is that coming together as a group provides enhanced buying power and allows the approved providers to offer a better price than individual home or commercial business owners might get from entering the market alone.

The lower cost of the product and installation is made possible by iChoosr holding a reverse auction with vetted installers who compete to offer the group of residents who have signed up the best price. Infinity Renewables and Infinity Energy were the winning installers in the 2023 scheme, achieving a 34% discount for the average 14-panel system across Wiltshire and Swindon.

Solar Together Scheme 2 ran from June 2023 to April 2024. The scheme came at a time when the cost of living continued to rise, and energy prices were fluctuating less. Despite this, residents continued to seek ways to reduce their bills, reduce their dependence on the grid and generate their own clean energy. With the energy crisis becoming less volatile, registration rates for Solar Together 2023 were slightly lower than scheme 1, but in line with expectations. This is compared to the higher registration rates we saw in a more volatile market in 2022.

Registration

The scheme campaigning delivered a total of 5,924 registrations, with a registration rate of 5.7% compared to the benchmark expectation of 3.5%, which is the percentage of households registering in response to the total number of direct mailing letters sent. Broken down between regions, Swindon saw 2,011 registrations at a rate of 4.5% and Wiltshire saw 3,913 registrations at a rate of 6.6%. The registration rate is the percentage of registrations generated from the direct mail letters sent. The scheme delivered 5,611 registrations for Solar PV and 313 registrations for retrofit battery storage only (where homeowners already have a PV system in place and wish to add a battery).

Table 1 - registrations by Local Authority for Solar PV, Battery Storage or both.

Council	Total Registrations	Solar PV or Solar PV and Battery	Retrofit Battery Storage Only
Wiltshire Council	3,913	3,674	239
Swindon Borough Council	2,011	1,937	74
Total	5,924	5,611	313

64% of respondents to the question ‘how did you hear about the scheme’ said they heard about the scheme via the letter or leaflet from the council demonstrating the ongoing importance of this channel of communication (63% in Swindon and 64% in Wiltshire). Other main communication channels included the Wiltshire Council website and newsletters, leaflets, social media, word of mouth and local news publications.

Acceptance

Offers were sent out to all households and SME’s that had registered an interest, and at the end of the decision period 950 households accepted the offer for Solar PV. Of the households that accepted the Solar PV offer 94% also added the optional battery storage to their solar PV package at the point of acceptance. An additional 51 residents accepted an offer for retrofit battery storage only. In total 1,001 customers accepted an offer from Solar Together Wiltshire & Swindon 2023 meaning the overall acceptance rate was 17%, and 19% for Wiltshire only which is above the expected rate.

Table 2 - Acceptances by Local Authority for Solar PV, Battery Storage or both.

Council	Total Accepted	Solar PV	Retrofit Battery Storage Only
Wiltshire Council	744	705	39
Swindon Borough Council	257	245	12
Total	1,001	950	51

Installations

In the installation phase, 539 installations were completed and finalised as part of Solar Together Wiltshire & Swindon 2023 – 508 solar PV installations totalling 5,139 panels or 2.15MW of installed capacity, and 31 additional customers installing retrofit battery storage.

Nearly 50% of those interested and accepting quotes do not go on to installation. For participants that do not proceed with an installation after accepting their offer, the most common reason is due to changes in personal financial circumstances or changing their mind. Higher than expected dropout rates also were seen across Solar Together schemes in all regions.

Table 3 – Solar PV installations by Local Authority (most also include battery installation)

Council	Total PV Installations	No. of PV Panels	Total MW installed	Estimated CO₂ Reduction (kg over 25 years)	No. of Batteries Installed alongside Solar PV	Total Investment (£)
Wiltshire Council	379	3,805	1.62	8,993,070	341	3,525,960
Swindon Borough Council	129	1,334	0.53	2,543,387	116	1,360,275.57
Total	508	5,139	2.15	11,536,457	457	4,886,235.57

In total 90% of residents that participated in the scheme opted to add a battery following the survey on their property (457 solar PV customers added a battery to their installation). This indicates an extremely high appetite for battery storage and an increasing focus on self-consumption

Table 4 - retrofit battery storage only installations by Local Authority

Council	Total Retrofit Battery only Installations	Total MWh Installed Battery	Total Investment (£)
Wiltshire Council	23	21	94,846.51
Swindon Borough Council	8	8	40,147.34
Total	31	29	134,993.85

The 2023 scheme has delivered total private resident investment in renewables of over £5 million across Wiltshire and Swindon. We estimate that the installations delivered through this scheme will deliver over 11,000 tonnes of carbon reduction over 25 years.

Electric Vehicle Chargers

In total 48 Electric Vehicle (EV) charging point installations were completed in the Wiltshire & Swindon 2023 scheme. Broken down by area this was 7 EV installations in Swindon and 41 installations in Wiltshire.

Small and Medium Enterprises

137 registrations of the 5,924 total (2.3%), were from small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). In total 5 SME's went ahead with an installation through Solar Together. Whilst the scheme accepts registrations from businesses, these are not the primary focus for campaigning and targeting of Solar Together. In all regions iChoosr see high dropout rates from business

customers, this is often because businesses must pay 20% VAT on the installation, which residential customers do not currently have to pay.

Complaints and Customer Satisfaction

Scheme 2 had a very low volume of complaints, with iChoosr only receiving 11 complaints over the course of the scheme, representing 1.3% of all participants.

A customer satisfaction survey is sent out by iChoosr following the completion of each scheme, allowing a Net Promoter Score (NPS) to be calculated, which asks how likely customers are to recommend the winning installer to a friend or family member. NPS ranges from -100 to +100. Within the Solar industry a score of below 0 is considered low, between 0-15 is average, between 15-30 is good, between 30-50 is very good and 50+ is excellent. The installer during the Solar Together Wiltshire & Swindon 2023 scheme, Infinity Renewables, achieved a 'very good' score of 43. Infinity Renewables and EE Renewables will be the installers for the latest Solar Together scheme 3.

Financial implications

Wiltshire Council receives a small fee for every installation completed through Solar Together to cover the external promotion and marketing of the scheme during the registration period, as well as some of the administration costs.

Summary

This 2023 scheme marks the second Solar Together Wiltshire and Swindon scheme since 2022. The combined Solar Together Wiltshire & Swindon schemes have delivered 1,581 installations in the region, resulting in 5.9 MW installed capacity, and over £16 million in private resident investment in renewables. The schemes together will contribute more than 29,500 tonnes of CO2 reduction in the region over the guaranteed 25-year lifetime of the systems installed.

The third Solar Together Wiltshire and Swindon scheme is currently underway. As of August 2024, over 3,000 Wiltshire residents and businesses have expressed an interest in the scheme so far, which is ahead of iChoosr's forecasted value. A more varied approach to raising awareness of the scheme has been trialled this year. This has included a range of social media posts, advertising on Smooth Radio, the Climate and Environment Summer Showcase, and working with other service areas within Wiltshire Council. Promotional activities focused on Small and Medium Enterprises has also been increased, using social media and business e-newsletters.

Annex 1

Microgeneration Certification Scheme (MCS) Data

Data from MCS, an accreditation body for low-carbon installers and installations, shows that running the Solar Together scheme in Wiltshire contributed to a sustained increase in the number of domestic solar PV installations, both during and beyond scheme completion. This suggests a growing appetite for solar PV across the county, with the launch of Solar Together likely contributing to this, both indirectly and directly through installations from the scheme.

Since the first scheme in 2022, Solar Together has installed 26% of all MCS-registered solar panel installations in Wiltshire & Swindon (including the time between active schemes).

Figure 1 below shows the total number of solar panel installations in Wiltshire, certified by MCS. The installation windows for previous Solar Together schemes ran from September 2022 – April 2023 for Scheme 1, and September 2023 – April 2024 for Scheme 2. Clear increases in the number of installations across Wiltshire can be seen during these periods, as well as high numbers even after each scheme was completed.

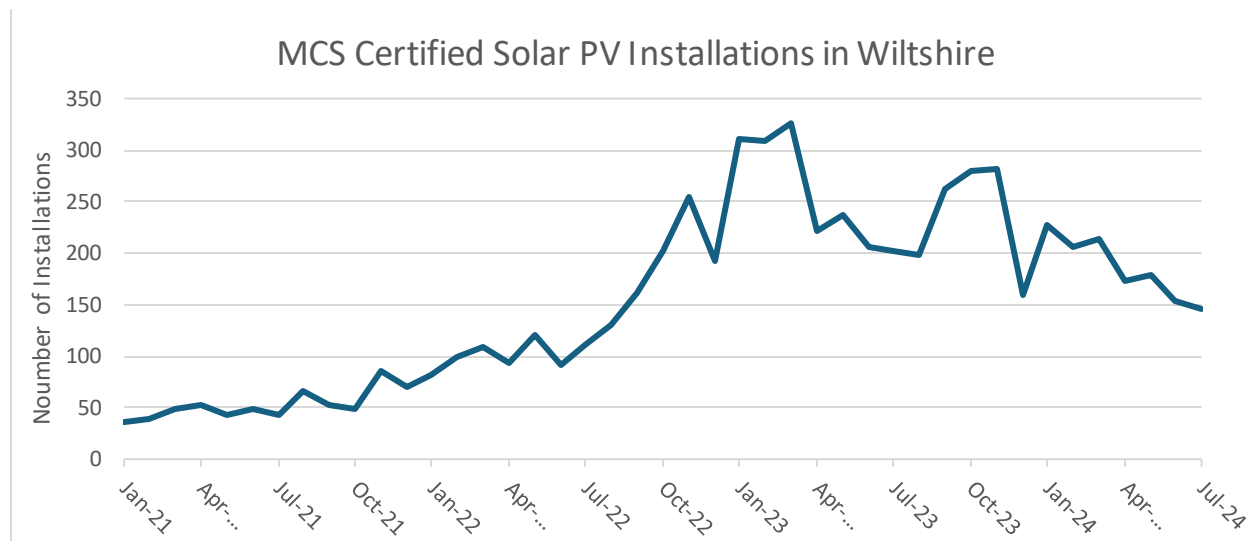


Figure 1 – Total MCS registered solar PV installations in Wiltshire & Swindon (including those delivered through Solar Together), data from “The MCS Data Dashboard”

Annex 1

Maps of Solar Together Scheme 2 registration and installations across Wiltshire

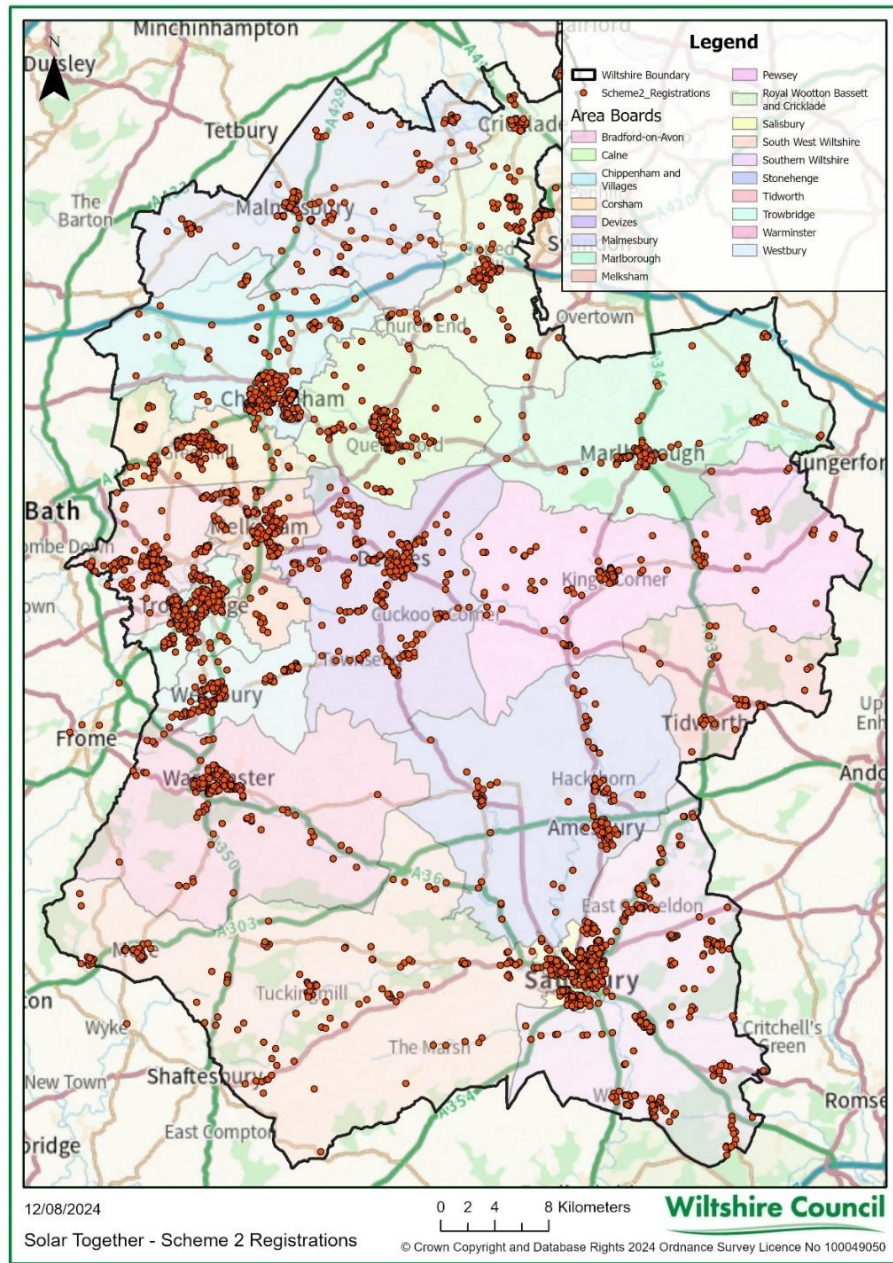


Figure 2 - Map of Scheme 2 Registrations in Wiltshire

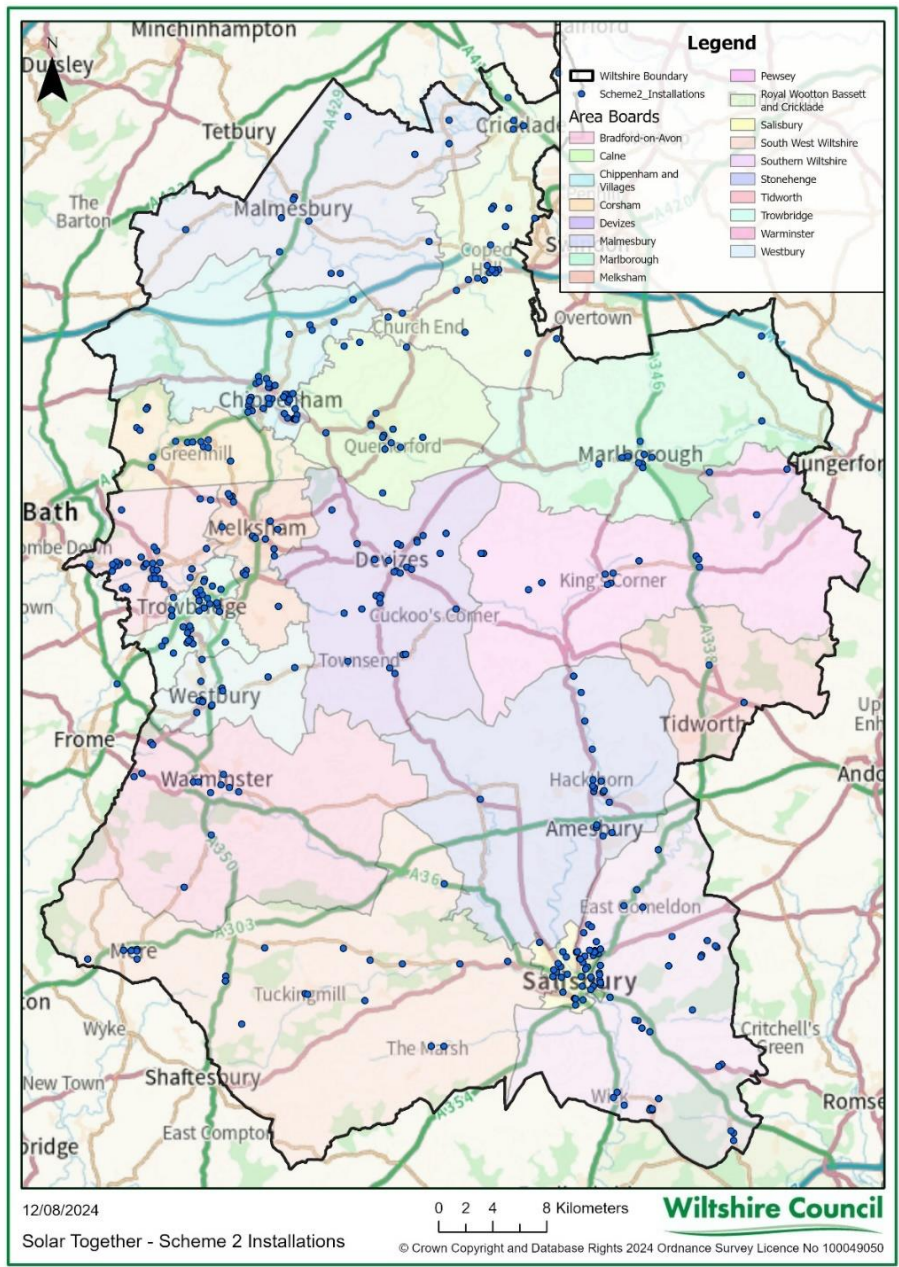


Figure 3 - Map of Scheme 2 Installations in Wiltshire