

NEWS RELEASE

M40 COMMUNITY GROUP IN THE FAST LANE WITH NOISE REDUCTION AND RENEWABLE ENERGY PROPOSAL

An innovative scheme to tackle noise on the M40 and generate energy is set to get motoring after a Chilterns community group powered its way to the top of a national competition designed to energise community-owned energy and bring about a clean energy revolution across the UK.

The “Community Energy Challenge” - launched by The Co-operative in conjunction with the Centre for Sustainable Energy (CSE) - has confirmed M40 Chilterns Environment Group as one of seven groups across the UK selected to share £200,000 of support including specialist mentoring, enterprise development and technical advice.

The Chilterns and South Oxfordshire based group are dedicated to tackling issues of excessive noise pollution on a 20 mile section of the M40 while creating solar energy capacity through use of photo voltaic enabled noise barriers. They beat-off competition from over 120 other hopefuls to win the competition which will showcase the nation’s community energy champions by demonstrating a range of technologies and the benefits of community ownership.

In 2004 neighbouring communities came together, determined to achieve a better quality of life, and set about finding solutions for the M40 Motorway between Junction 3 (Loudwater) and Junction 8 (Wheatley).

Dr Ken Edwards, Chair of the M40 Chilterns Environmental Group, “We are very proud to be one of seven winning proposals, this is a major step on a journey we started eight years ago. Noise pollution from the M40 has affected the lives of local communities since 1990 - now we believe we can begin to address this problem and tackle this needless noise.

“Our proposal stemmed from addressing the question of how to make noise reduction barriers self financing and, we believe that our solution is win, win, win! It will improve the quality of life for local communities, will offset installation costs, and benefit the environment. Similar schemes have

succeeded in Europe and we hope we can work with the Highways Agency to make it a reality in the UK too.”

Paul Monaghan, The Co-operative’s Head of Social Goals, said: “Community energy has huge potential and can deliver local economic and social benefits in addition to helping the UK to meet its energy and climate change goals - here it is also helping to improve the quality of life for local communities.

“However, community-owned energy can encounter many obstacles. Through this competition we will share expertise and provide the tools needed to help communities to overcome those obstacles and enable them to control, generate and benefit from their own renewable energy.

“Ambitious community-led projects can contribute to a step-change in people’s thinking about energy and, inspire others to take action – providing a catalyst for a clean energy revolution across the UK.”

The Community Energy Challenge will nurture community projects until they are ready for further investment and build. They will then be eligible for other assistance from The Co-operative including The Co-operative Enterprise Hub’s revolving £400,000 fund to underwrite community share offers, and finance from The Co-operative Bank which has ear-marked £100 million for community renewables.

For further information about M40 Chilterns Environment Group visit www.m40-chilterns.org.uk

Community groups interested in co-operative solutions to the running of business and services can contact The Co-operative Enterprise Hub by visiting www.co-operative.coop/enterprisehub