

# Chairman's statement for year ending 31<sup>st</sup> December 2015

## A breakthrough year for REPOWERBalcombe

### **REPOWER Board**

This report covers production, governance and financial reports for 2015. Thank you to the board and small operations team of volunteers for their hard work and commitment during the year to make REPOWERBalcombe a success. During 2015 the board and team met 12 times to plan, manage and develop the Co-op with several more meetings and site visits throughout the year to develop opportunities and make things happen. At the last AGM all 3 existing directors were re-elected to the board; myself as Chair, Tom Parker and Technical Director and Joe Nixon as Communications Director.

Tom is REPOWER's primary source of technical knowledge of all things renewable and sustainable. He has been instrumental in initiating all of our projects, developing the sites in the first instance and then working closely with them and our installation partners to make each project a success - without Tom we would not have accomplished nearly so much.

Joe and Tom acted as excellent spokespeople for the group, featuring several times in UK national newspapers, as well as on BBC's The One Show reaching several million people with a positive message about community energy. Joe wrote a guest blog for Greenpeace and was interviewed by the National Geographic reaching a global audience. Joe and Tom have been the public voice and face of REPOWER and their eloquently delivered messages have helped win REPOWER national recognition and support.

### **The rest of the team**

Recognition and thanks must also be given to Jane Fitzpatrick, Jackie Emery and Charles Metcalf – who have all contributed towards the running, development and success of the co-op during 2015.

Jane has volunteered hundreds of hours tirelessly dealing with the administration, paperwork, phone calls and day to day management without which a renewable energy co-operative could not function. Jane and Jackie are our key liaisons to the wider community, managing all of our public engagements and events and additionally helped to raise over £1000 pounds for Solar Aid through the sale of solar lights to village residents – thank you both and well done!

### **Share Offer 1 - Grange Farm**

In January our first installation went live on the Cow Shed at Grange Farm – funded by the co-founding members of REPOWER. You may recall the photographs of Joe's daughter, Ebony, sweeping snow off the panels at the opening celebration! This was a huge milestone for the team and a result of so much effort in 2014; we were up and running and generating renewable energy.

### **Share offer 2 – Turners Hill and Balcombe Primary Schools**

In April we launched our second share offer for two new PV installations at our local primary schools. Overwhelming public support saw the share offer oversubscribed meeting our target in just a few weeks but it was to take a further four months of effort to get the legal pieces in place meaning we had missed the best part of the year for generating. Still, we got there and during the school summer holidays both of the installations went live.

### **West Hoathly Solar Farm**

Over the summer of 2015 the board, with assistance from Energy4All, entered in to negotiations with a commercial developer to build a community owned 5MW solar farm. We played a large part in the planning process resulting in permission being granted for the solar farm to proceed. Sadly, several quickly implemented legislative changes conspired against us in the Autumn which made proceeding with the project as a community owned venture simply too high risk. Obviously a massive blow after the amount of time and effort that we had invested but a few positives ensued; the solar park was built and is generating

clean renewable energy and our co-op will receive a yearly contribution to our community benefit fund for our part in its success.

### **2016 and beyond**

I seem to be re-iterating how much effort it has taken to get to this point but that is the truth. In addition to West Hoathly, we worked on several other opportunities including St. Wilfrids School - where in the end the roof was not strong enough for panels. In fact, since we started in September 2013 we have explored and worked on over 100 potential projects that has resulted in just the 5 live sites we have today.

2016 has already seen our third share offer and the installation of two more school systems at Imberhorne and Crawley Down Schools. In total we have now raised £190,000 of investment from over 80 local households to install almost 150 kWp PV solar arrays across 5 sites. These sites will collectively save thousands of pounds on their energy bills, the community will benefit from our profits being spent on further renewable and community initiatives and our members will receive interest on their investments.

Even if REPOWERBalcombe does no further projects, as it stands, our work will result in putting more than £250,000 in to the community over the next 25 years – something we can be very proud of.

### **Special Projects**

As mentioned earlier this year in a member newsletter, when the directors of REPOWERBalcombe were faced with the difficult decision of withdrawing from developing the Chiddingly solar farm opportunity as a community project, we negotiated a one off payment of £50,000 from the developers of the West Hoathly Solar Farm for our part in bringing the project as far as we did and in helping to gain planning permission.

In accordance with the unilateral undertaking, the directors have ring-fenced this money to be spent as follows (the funding allocation is indicative rather than absolute. Analysis on projects will need to be carried out as co-op returns could be affected)

- 50% of the fund to be allocated to renewable and sustainable energy based projects in West Hoathly and Imberhorne School
- 20% of the fund to be allocated to renewable and sustainable energy based projects at Balcombe School
- 20% of the fund to be allocated to REPOWER projects at our remaining sites
- 10% of the fund will be used to reimburse Energy4All for their costs incurred with the solar farm project

### **Administration**

In addition to standing down as Director and Chairman, I will also be standing down as company secretary. It is very important that we have business continuity and that our members have the confidence in the long term administration of the co-op. To this end, we have an agreement in place with Energy4All to take over the financial and secretarial administration of REPOWERBalcombe and I have been working for several months now on a handover of duties for a seamless transition.

There is a financial cost to the co-op for E4A to take on these tasks this but it is a low risk option and relieves the pressure on our small team in undertaking these financial and legal obligations indefinitely.

Annette Heslop, director of E4A will become REPOWER's secretary after the AGM.

### **Performance**

We have not yet had a full years generation from any of our sites but initial monitoring suggests that 2 of the three sites commissioned in 2015 are generating slightly better than forecast and one slightly below. Because the Schools were installed later in the year than we expected, the profit is lower than expected.

**Financial**

Sales income for the year amounted to £4,135 from electricity generated at Grange Farm. The result for 2015 is a profit of £1,938 and if we add this to the £268 loss from last year this will leave £1,670 to be distributed as share interest to the members. This gives a return on investment of 2.08%. Members will be asked to vote on a motion at the AGM to distribute the funds.

**Conclusion**

I hope that the remainder of 2016 will see a new board and more members actively participate in running and developing REPOWERBalcombe. Our co-op was borne out of a desire to make a positive change after the threat of fracking in our community. That threat has not gone away and we now have a great platform in REPOWERBalcombe, to demonstrate that there are clean and viable alternatives to energy generation that can directly benefit communities.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julian Fitzsimons', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Julian Fitzsimons  
Chair  
REPOWERBalcombe.