

## Gloucestershire Council green energy ideas for the future

Written by Lisa Bonnell

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Renewable energy could be used in future to power Gloucestershire County Council's buildings to save money and cut carbon.

The innovative idea, being looked at by the Environment Scrutiny task group, could see the council saving £5m annually, generating income and becoming almost carbon neutral within 10 years.

The aim is to use green technology like solar panels, wind turbines and anaerobic digestion to become a lean, green council which provides all its own energy, reducing the financial burden on the council taxpayer.

At the moment as a council we produce around 60,000 tonnes of carbon every year and spend more than £8million on energy bills.

The pioneering approach to renewables would make Gloucestershire one of the first councils in the UK to look at generating and selling our own electricity on this scale.

At the moment there are no firm plans in place, but feasibility studies will be carried out over the next six months to determine what could be done.

One of the ideas is to set up a separate company to sell our surplus energy generated back to the grid, which will generate further income for the council.

The scrutiny group charged with looking into the issue was asked to investigate everything that we could achieve.

If we took on all the ideas scrutiny have looked at, an estimated capital investment of £180million would be needed to put all these ideas into place – but that would bring an annual return of £420million.

To achieve the £5million savings and become carbon neutral would mean investments of around £25million, however no money has been committed to this project yet.

The council would also be eligible for funding from government if it decided to go down the renewable route and if the renewable plans are feasible they could generate additional incomes of around £14million a year.

Cllr Mark Hawthorne, leader of the council, said: "This is not a quick fix, it's about finding a sustainable way of working which dramatically cuts costs, reduces our impact on the environment and increases the security of energy supply."

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“There is a cost involved here and before we commit to spending any money, we will ensure whatever we end up doing is worthwhile and will provide the benefits we expect.

“We have to invest now to save for the future and if we can save around £5million every year and then make money on selling energy on top of that, this money can be ploughed into frontline services and that for me is the most important thing.”

Cllr John Cordwell, who is the chair of the scrutiny committee looking into the project, said: “This group is looking into ways of saving money and investing into renewable energy by using council buildings and land.

“We are pleased to see the administration is of the same mind and we shall look forward to scrutinising the plans as they develop.”