



Winter Newsletter: February 2026

Dear YCE Member

Much has been happening since I wrote to you last, so this newsletter will round up what has been happening and what your board is working on.

Community Benefit Fund

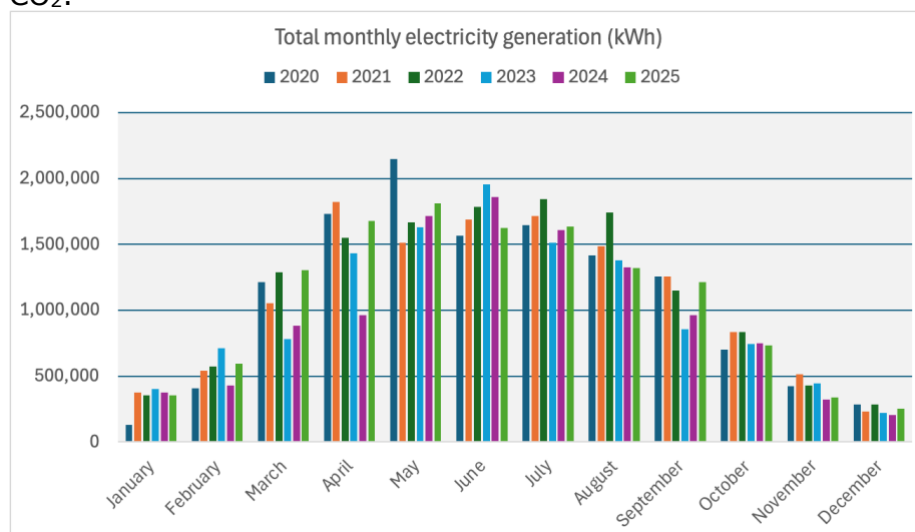
I am delighted to tell you that the 2026 round of applications for grants to the YCE Community Benefit Fund is now open, with a total of up to £20,000 available for grants. We have advertised this on the YCE Facebook page, on parish Facebook pages, via parish councils, and by directly emailing community halls. You can help us by telling your friends – and everyone you meet.

It has been clear that applicants have often not read the instructions accompanying the application form, hence this year we have revamped the documents so that applicants must read them. That's not simply being officious; we want good applications that can be funded. Poor applications waste everyone's time and can be wasted opportunities for bettering our communities.

Applications should be in by mid-April, and announcements of those successful will be made in June, hopefully in advance of our AGM.

Electricity generated in 2026

In 2026 our three solar farms generated 12,857,029 kWh (units) of electricity. That's enough to power about 5,000 homes and prevent release of around 10,000 tonnes of CO₂.



The picture shows the combined output of our three plants for each month since 2020, the first year when all three were working. Output has been consistent year on year. There was a low month in April last year when a transformer was being changed, and an exceptionally good month in May 2020 during the 'Covid Spring'. Plymouth weather records show that May 2020 was exceptionally sunny, with 288 hours, way above the decadal average. And curiously, despite the record deluges in December and January, sunshine hours in both months have been average. Anyone wanting to look at weather records can visit this website: <https://www.bearsbythesea.co.uk/index.php>.

Maintenance of our solar farms

The fire at Creacombe was traced to water ingress into unshielded inverter fans corroding the wiring to the fans. They then failed, resulting in overheating of an inverter and the subsequent fire. Fortunately it was an easy short-term fix to replace wiring in affected fans.

A longer-term fix comes in the form of 'inverter umbrellas' to prevent rain getting in



in the first place. We now have two designs and are in discussion with two companies to have the umbrellas fitted and the rain problem solved. This does not look to be a particularly expensive resolution.

Storm Goretti in early January resulted in 15 solar panels being blown off their array. Directors on site noted the issue, reported it, and the panels were refixed or replaced

within 24 hours. For context, 15 panels are not a lot in a site with over 30,000 of them.

And all the lichen has been cleared.

Selling our electricity

It has been said that electricity markets exist to make quantum mechanics look easy. And, as the late, great Nobel laureate Richard Feynman is reputed to have said "If you think you understand quantum mechanics, you don't understand quantum mechanics."

Your board has been experiencing this firsthand over the past month in negotiations for the sale of our output from April 1 2026 to March 31 2027. The bottom line is that we have decent prices for each farm. Not as good as the exceptional prices negotiated in the post Russian invasion of Ukraine situations, but good enough. I will spare you the details, but the board is looking to be looking far ahead, perhaps for long-term deals to maximise our income.

Sheep and solar farms

Our Newton Downs farm has sheep – a contented sheep pictured. Sheep like solar panels because they provide shelter from wind, rain, and snow, and shade from the sun. And the grass is always greener under the panels.

However, being doubly productive in this way is not always possible. At Newton, panels could be fixed high off the ground to prevent sheep climbing on them; it made no difference to external visibility of the site. But at Creacombe and Marlands, panels had to be lower to reduce visibility. Sheep could climb on panels and damage the panels and themselves. So no sheep there, unfortunately.



Administrative stuff

The day-to-day operation and maintenance of the solar farms has been problematical since we bought them in 2023. Our purchase coincided with a change in ownership of the O&M company, with a successful British company being taken over by a large overseas conglomerate.

In our view, the service received by YCE and others has been less than optimum over the past two years. Despite administrative and contractual difficulties YCE pushed for change, latterly with some other societies in our group.

The result is that change is on the way, and the expectation is that a new O&M company will be looking after our solar farms later in 2026.

Second share offer

I very much hope that YCE will be able to announce its plans for a second share issue before too long. You would be right in thinking that we have told you that before, but we are closer now to resolving the issues that have held this up.

So, fingers crossed.

Best wishes

Andrew Moore, Chairman

