

Delivering a local community energy solution for Manor Royal Business District in Crawley

Manor Royal BID, Crawley Borough Council
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Summary

This project focuses on how a partnership between the public and private sector gave rise to a local energy project involving a community of businesses on one of the UK's largest business parks.

“We are incredibly proud of this project and the example it will set for the power of public-private sector collaborations and the huge potential it has for delivering real benefits for our businesses, our business park and the planet.”

- Steve Sawyer, Manor Royal BID Executive Director

The problem

Manor Royal Business District is one of the UK's largest business parks based in Crawley, West Sussex next to London Gatwick Airport. It provides over **9 million square feet of commercial floorspace** to over **600 companies**, whose appetite for operating more sustainably was reflected in the Manor Royal BID's Business Plan as one of its five priorities.

Despite the ambition to operate more sustainably, businesses at Manor Royal faced a set of shared structural challenges: insufficient local grid capacity, high energy costs, and the prohibitive upfront capital required to invest in renewable energy and low carbon heating.

It was against this backdrop that discussions began with West Sussex County Council and Crawley Borough Council, with the aim of bringing together multiple companies and landlords working in close proximity to form a **local energy community** to explore the potential to use the abundance of under-used roof space to house solar panels.

Manor Royal BID, formed in 2013, provided the opportunity to begin that dialogue between different organisations – public and private – and formed a good basis for collaboration that previously didn't exist in a complex, multi-

use commercial environment with hundreds of different land and property interests.

With no comparable model to draw on, partners explored options for installing, managing and operating a Community Benefit Society made up of energy users and investors. Before progressing, it was necessary to **secure commitment and demonstrate feasibility**.

Significant time was spent obtaining legal advice on company structures, ownership and finance, while maintaining support from companies whose expectations moved faster than the project.

There were also complexities in managing the solar arrays across multiple tenants and landlords, plus the added challenge of Manor Royal's **proximity to an international airport**.

However, despite this, the potential for Manor Royal **to take control of its own energy future and to make significant financial and carbon savings** galvanised and motivated the core project team that principally consisted of representatives from Crawley Borough Council, West Sussex County Council and Manor Royal BID with input from key businesses and landlord representatives.

The solution

Having resolved these issues Re-Energise Manor Royal (REMR) was formed as a Community Benefit Society in 2023. A separate and independent non-profit company, REMR would exist solely to deliver a low-carbon energy future for Manor Royal, **owned and directed by its members**. Any surpluses generated are reinvested into future solar installations across the business district. Companies benefit from **free rooftop solar panels in return for signing a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA)** to buy the lower-cost energy generated on their roofs.

By signing a Power Purchase Agreement, companies become part of the local energy community, gaining a voice in future decisions and investments made by Re-Energise Manor Royal. Brighton and Hove Energy Services Co-op (BHESCo) was appointed following a competitive process to provide **specialist management and operational support** to Re-Energise Manor Royal.

Model agreements and airspace leases for both landlords and tenants were drafted, and **£1m from the Crawley Town Deal provided necessary pump-prime funding** for the first solar installations to get Re-Energise Manor Royal operating as a practical, working entity. However, progress was delayed while subsidy control and other legal issues were resolved, with the final agreement between the Manor Royal BID and Crawley Borough Council **signed in May 2025**.

A key element of success was the solidity of the public-private partnership and the commitment to see it through. This was recognised when Manor Royal BID [won an award at the 2023 Association for Decentralised Energy Awards](#) alongside Crawley Borough Council and West Sussex County Council for establishing the pioneering Local Energy Community.

Timeline

The initial idea and earliest conversations about the concept of forming a local energy community of businesses, started as far back as 2016. The early phases involved researching the feasibility and appropriate business model. Once that was concluded, along with the new subsidy control issues related to the use of public funding to

kick start the initiative, things picked up pace with the negotiations between Re-Energise Manor Royal and businesses (the energy users and customers) becoming the main focus, which can take as long as four to six months depending on the company, so we hope to have our first panels on roofs by May 2026

Stakeholders

This was a partnership project between Crawley Borough Council, Manor Royal BID, West Sussex County Council, Brighton & Hove Energy Services Co-op and Manor Royal based businesses.

Impact

Once operational, the project is expected to generate ongoing income for REMR, which as a Community Benefit Society, all participating businesses will have a stake. Any surpluses generated will be re-invested into the project to support investment in more solar arrays on other commercial properties. With installation, operation and maintenance undertaken by REMR, participating businesses benefit from a hassle-free renewable energy solution. Energy costs are expected to at least halve in many cases, depending on installation complexity, system size and on-site energy use.

Businesses within the scheme are also insulated from variable price changes, thereby providing greater energy price certainty and security. By securing access to locally generated power through long-term arrangements, the project supports business resilience and enables more confident planning, while helping to shield participating organisations from future energy price shocks.

Lessons Learned

It is important to allow sufficient time for legal advice on company structures, ownership and finance when establishing a Community Benefit Society with partners, alongside the contractual and governance arrangements required to operate across multiple landlords and tenants. Transparency about timescales with partners proved essential in maintaining commitment and ultimately delivering a viable Local Energy Community.

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The first phase of the project is currently underway and involves investing approximately **£1,000,000** of Crawley Town Deal funding by **2026-27 to kick start the initiative**. Development of the concept evolved through a strong public-private collaboration between **Crawley Borough Council, West Sussex County Council and Manor Royal BID**. Initially, in 2016, West Sussex County Council were successful in securing £500,000 as part of the EU Interreg 2 Seas Programme BISEPS (Businesspark Integrated Sustainable Energy PackageS) project, making Manor Royal the UK's "living lab" in this cross-border project to explore the feasibility of increasing the uptake of renewable energy generation on business parks.

Once the initial start-up fund is exhausted, REMR are likely to begin a new round of fundraising to facilitate the next phase of installations to expand the number of solar panels installed in Manor Royal. This is likely to be through a share raise where the wider community can invest in REMR by buying shares and therefore support the mission.

Next steps

The first Power Purchase Agreements are being signed with the first installations expected to follow soon after in early 2026. As well as delivering on the Manor Royal BID's Business Plan objectives for a more sustainable business park, the project is set to **save companies thousands of pounds** and – importantly – **give them more control of their energy future** while according with **Crawley Borough Council's declared climate emergency plans, the County Council's commitment to a sustainable economy and the Manor Royal BID's stated Business Plan objective for sustaining and renewing the Business District.**

Alongside the solar installations, there is also interest in sharing learning from Manor Royal. We are already talking to colleagues from the Greater Brighton Economic Board and Sussex Energy about our experience of setting up REMR to support uptake in other business parks in Sussex. We hope this shared learning will enable other business districts and local authorities to replicate and adapt the model to their own contexts.

Links, contacts, and credits

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