



## Poplar Housing and Regeneration Community Association (HARCA)

Poplar HARCA has around 9,500 homes and some 60,000 residents within one square mile. With a corporate sustainability target in place, Poplar HARCA is looking to fully embed sustainability in its culture over the next three years. This will involve assessing infrastructure, housing stock, office premises, staff and communities and instigating substantial projects across the organisation.

RE:NEW spoke to Nick Martin, Environmental Innovation Coordinator, to find out more about Poplar HARCA's work to improve the energy efficiency of its housing stock.

# 1

## What is the project?

*Sustainability is a rapidly changing field and we see it as an important part of regenerating our area. We are looking to get our residents more involved across the board in enterprise, sustainability, jobs and skills. The award-winning Accents team leads on sustainability at Poplar HARCA.*

*I'd like to tell you about our £1 million solar PV project which involved a 750 kWp installation on 20 residential blocks. It was funded partly through us and partly through Triodos Bank, a world leader in sustainable banking, who wants to see an ethical/social return on its loans and investments. The project involves a community benefit society owning the panels and channelling profits into a community benefit fund, which are then recycled into community oriented projects.*

*Four years ago we decided to focus more on the energy consumption of our stock to address our worst performing homes. The first step involved finding working partners with whom we could share a clear and open relationship. We established the scope for energy efficiency and renewable energy in our housing stock in partnership with AgilityEco, a specialist in funding, design, surveying, project management for low carbon retrofit. We have worked together throughout the last four years developing a strong relationship. We first completed a project on how we could get the most out of Energy Company Obligation (ECO) funding and insulated 1,400 of our hard to treat cavity wall blocks.*

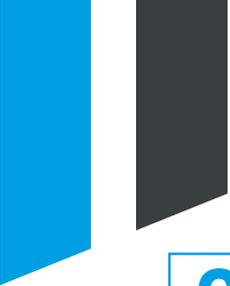
*We had one simple goal of improving energy consumption but we had to show solar PV would be a practical and positive step in that regard. We completed a successful pilot of approximately 100kWp of rooftop solar PV across three residential blocks. We communicated the results, which showed the project to be relatively simple and risk-free. This enabled us to move on to a significant rollout. It's easier to get high level buy-in from directors when a pilot has clear, positive and demonstrable results.*

*We went through a standard assessment process which involved a desktop survey to identify roofs with the potential for solar based on their orientation and sizes, and the energy used. We then completed a physical site assessment to check for practical difficulties. This resulted in selecting 60 blocks that could benefit. We then assessed these looking at the cost of panels and the income generation potential, and using a commercial model we identified the most cost-effective options. This resulted in 20 installations.*

# 2

## What help have you received from the RE:NEW Support Team?

*RE:NEW provided support and advice throughout the project by acting as a critical friend. The RE:NEW team members were very knowledgeable and their second opinion was always invaluable. We were able to drill down into any problems with the Support Team providing a different angle on certain issues such as financing and pre-accrediting agreements. They were also great at providing best practice examples and bringing a wealth of experience from other organisations' experiences. It was very reassuring to having someone else sense check our critical decisions.*

  
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### **Please explain the process you went through?**

*We used some of the ECO funding from our original project to help fund the pilot solar PV project, which helped us to create internal momentum. We completed stock appraisals, considered our funding options and did commercial modelling to identify the payback on each roof. Our process involved us getting potential contractors up on to our roofs so their proposals were practical, realistic and met our financial expectations. We ensured excellent levels of internal communications and we managed expectations throughout by involving different teams from across the business such as housing, finance and technical.*

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### **What challenges did you face in taking the project forward?**

*Our biggest challenge was around the cut in feed-in-tariffs (FITs), which happened during the planning stage. We benefited from the community energy pre-registration rules in the FIT legislation, which enabled us, as a community benefit society, to lock in the tariff for a year, giving us that time to do the work. Even with the 'extension' we had to move quickly on Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs) and getting the roofs pre-accredited.*

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### **What results have you seen from the project?**

*Profits are currently expected to be in the region of £50,000 pa (an average across 20 years) into a Community Benefit Fund (CBF) to be used to deliver beneficial community activities for residents - including around fuel poverty - locally. The fund has local residents on its board and will be reported on to the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) yearly.*



**Q&A**