People Stories: Jon

Why did you decide to install solar panels and batteries in your home?

As an environmental consultant for the last 20 years I strongly believe in 'walking the talk' and so when we moved house in 2024 I wanted to make moves to reduce the environmental impact of our home. There were 4 PV (solar electric) panels on the roof when we moved in. Whilst a nice start a more meaningful contribution to household energy comes with a few more panels and a battery. We have recently installed 8 more panels and a 5 kWh battery.

Why did you choose the suppliers you went with?

In our last house I had 14 panels and a battery installed. I received several quotes then and decided to go back to the same firm I chose, Contact Solar. I had also referred them to ~5 friends who all had good experiences so I was confident about using them again. Whilst not specific to this supplier with minimal space inside for the battery and inverter and not wanting to put a long cable run to the garage the use of an outside battery and inverter neatly fitted on the wall has been a massive benefit.

Has it made a difference?

Whilst the install was in November we are already reaping the rewards of the battery. We have an 'Octopus Go' electricity tariff with cheaper rate electricity overnight, for charging our electric car, and so we have set the battery to charge then and so we are using the battery during the day (having charged it at 7.5p per kWh as opposed to the daytime price of electricity at ~25p per kWh. We are also producing enough energy during the day now to cover much of our background consumption – fridge, lighting etc.

How many years will it take you to get your money back?

The forecast is ~6 years but it will be faster with the battery charging overnight as mentioned above and use of that electricity during the day.

Are you planning to do anything else?

Yes – considering switching from a gas boiler to Air Source Heat Pump.

What advice would you give to others?

Investigate your options to live more sustainability. Different options work for different people. Lots of installers / suppliers will provide great advice and insight to help you on your journey, as will the team at Sustainable Wantage.
Our solar PV install took less than a day and there has been no internal work with the battery and inverter outside, so minimum fuss!

People Stories: Michael

Why did you decide to install solar panels, batteries and an air source heat pump in your home?

Our main reason was environmental: to do what we could to reduce our carbon footprint, without moving house.

Solar PV: The main reason was to make a direct contribution to generating renewable energy, and using it efficiently, since we could use most of its output at home. Financially, we expected the money invested in it would provide a better return, through reduced electricity bills, than deposited in a savings account.

Battery: Mostly for environmental reasons. On sunny days, surplus solar charges it for later use. On gloomier days, it fills up off-peak - cheaper, lower-carbon power from wind or nuclear.

Heat pump: A straightforward choice—no gas supply in the village, and we wanted off oil: the carbon, the smell, the hassle of storage and imports. Our old boiler and tank were due for replacement. With the Government Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) payments, and assuming that the running cost would be similar to that of oil, we estimated that the overall cost would be reasonable.

Why did you choose the suppliers you went with?

We sought quotes for the solar and heat pump from a few local companies. In both cases we chose suppliers whose proposals seemed most suitable for our property, and who had carried out satisfactory installations for people we knew.

Has it made a difference?

The panels facing east and west generate less than those facing south, but they were worth installing. The array has generated about 7,000 kWh each year, with 2,000 kWh exported and 5,000 kWh used, about 50% of our needs. With the battery, we import very little from the grid during May to August. The heat pump keeps the house warm, with adequate hot water. The running cost is less than expected, due to the off-peak tariff.

How many years will it take you to get your money back?

I don't know—I've never attempted a serious assessment. The goal was environmental, not financial, and breaking even someday is fine. The system's components interact, and future electricity and oil prices are unpredictable. Any estimate comes with uncertainty, but ten years seems as good as any.

Are you planning to do anything else?

Nothing major for now. We've switched to an electric vehicle (EV), added a charging point, and an 'eddi' to divert surplus solar to the immersion heater. Another battery is possible, but ideally, our next EV will have 'Vehicle-to-Grid' capability for domestic storage.

What advice would you give to others?

Talk to people who've installed the devices you're considering. Obtain three free quotes—companies may suggest different setups. If installing solar and you have an immersion heater, consider a solar diverter to use surplus power for hot water. For a heat pump, check dual tariffs for cheaper off-peak electricity—it's saved us a lot, especially since we already had one for EV charging.

People Stories: Kathryn

Why did you decide to install solar panels and an air source heat pump in your home?

I moved house due to marital separation in July 2024. The property I purchased was built in 1980 and had an EPC rating of D, having double glazing, cavity wall insulation but little else by way of energy saving assets. I noted that the aspect of East/West would be suitable for solar panels so I made some enquiries. I've been wanting to go green for a long time and as I had some capital to invest I thought better to do it sooner as it would make the bills lower in the long run. I had solar panels installed in October and an ASHP installed end November.

Why did you choose the suppliers you went with?

I went with my energy provider Eon Next. They have a solar arm and a friend recommended them after they did both his previous and current properties. I initially enquired about solar PVS with Eon. I had an independent quote but E.on were cheaper so I chose them. During the survey for the solar PVS I chatted with their engineer and discussed ASHPs. He told me that the property would be suitable for an ASHP - and as I'd struggled to make sense of the process with independent installers I asked for a quote from E.on. I was happy with the price, especially as I was getting the BUS grant, so decided to use Eon for the whole project. There was also a deal with the Solar PVS of a free EV charging point, so it seemed good value.

Has it made a difference?

As this is my first winter it's hard to say. I'm really enjoying the heat pump - the house is always a comfortable temperature and there's never a problem with hot water capacity (previous property with conventional boiler/hot water cylinder set up would have drained hot water by 3rd shower if family visiting) as I've got 200 litre hot water tank/thermal store. However, I had to forfeit my airing cupboard for the thermal tank/store.

How many years will it take you to get your money back?

Before installing solar and a heat pump, my estimated annual dual fuel energy costs were £2052. Now, with no gas and an ASHP installed my electricity estimate is £1038 (price cap change), an overall/annual saving of 50%. My solar setup (12 panels, inverter, 5kw battery, EV charger) cost £10,500, and the ASHP system (after the Boiler Upgrade Scheme £7,500 grant) was £2,600 for ASHP, seven replacement radiators, and hot water cylinder (thermal store). Estimated annual savings from self generation and export to grid total £1,190, with a potential 10-year payback of capital invested - though a full year's data is needed. I've just switched (end Feb 2025) to a new heat pump tariff (using green generated energy) from Eon, reducing the estimated annual bill from £1038 to £903, and I'm still waiting for solar generation payments to kick in.

Are you planning to do anything else?

I've done everything! I had the roof cleaned prior to Solar PVS installation and also upgraded the loft insulation. Next job will be to get new EPC as previous one has expired.

What advice would you give to others?

The process of applying for the BUS grant and various paperwork was handled by Eon but still took time - about 6 weeks from date of order. I was surprised the solar team came from Wales, the ASHP team from Manchester (staying a week) and the EV charger team from Nottingham. The downside of a big company is extra travel emissions, but the upside is having a single point of contact and the stability of a large firm.

People Stories: Neil

Why did you decide to install solar panels and batteries in your home?

We installed a 3.8 kW PV system in 2014 to reduce grid energy use and earn a feed-in tariff, £8,000 capital. In 2022, we added a Zappi EV charger and a 40 kWh Nissan Leaf to reduce fossil fuel use, with cheaper EV running costs, especially when charged using our solar panels. In 2024, we installed a MyEnergi Libbi 9.6 kWh battery and MyEnergi Eddi to store solar energy and divert excess to the immersion heater, cutting grid electricity use and providing savings year round. The original inverter was 10 years old by then, so its replacement and co-location with the battery was considered a good hedge against possible failure.

Why did you choose the suppliers you went with?

We chose EnergyMyWay for our original PV system after meeting them at a Sustainable Wantage event. We were impressed by their competence, local presence, and value for money. Based on their track record, we returned to them for the installation of our Libbi and Eddi systems. For our Zappi, we opted for a local electrical contractor on recommendation, as they had good experience with PV and home energy systems. We also chose MyEnergi (Zappi, Eddi, Libbi, and inverter) to ensure compatibility and ease of use, with the MyEnergi app proving to be very useful. Our switch to Octopus was due to Avro's collapse, but their commitment to green energy and tariff innovation has made them our preferred supplier.

Has it made a difference?

Yes, our electricity import from the grid has reduced, but it's hard to quantify fully due to changes like our children leaving home, acquiring an EV, and new work patterns. The feed-in tariff has been a great financial incentive, providing over £800 annually. Our use of diesel/petrol has halved with most journeys now in the EV, and the Time of Use tariff offers cheap EV and battery charging. Overall, the process has been very worthwhile and transformed our energy use into a fascinating hobby for an "early retired" scientist, with access to detailed energy usage data from both Octopus and MyEnergi.

How many years will it take you to get your money back?

Our PV system recovered its capital outlay after about 8 years, based on the feed-in tariff payments plus the value of the grid electricity that we would have bought but is now provided by the PV panels. I haven't run a detailed "return on investment" model because of the significant changes in our demand (such as nest-emptying, EV purchase, changes in our work patterns) coupled with interest rate changes, fuel price volatility, etc...
Ultimately, as the driving force was to reduce our use of "external" energy (grid power and fossil fuels) the financial benefits are important but secondary.

Are you planning to do anything else?

In 2018, we decided against installing an air source heat pump, opting instead for a replacement gas boiler due to upfront costs and uncertainty about the technology's performance. Six years later, heat pump technology has improved, and our confidence in it has grown, so it may become a project in the near future.

What advice would you give to others?

If you have the capital or can use a "pay as you go" scheme, go for it, but consider making changes in stages, such as starting with PV panels, a 5-10 kWh battery, and a Time of Use tariff. There's plenty of good advice online, especially from the YouTube channels "Fully Charged" and "Everything Electric." Meet companies, try out products, and learn about key topics. Live events, such as "Fully Charged Live" offer expert talks and 'hands-on' experience.

People Stories: Lucy

Why did you decide to install solar panels in your home?

To decrease our carbon footprint.

Why did you choose the suppliers you went with?

It was important to me to use a local company. The person they sent around was lovely, seemed to be doing this because he believed in it (not 'just' a job), their price was actually cheaper than the others I was quoted, whereas I'd have gone with them even if it had been (slightly) more expensive. They also gave me good information beforehand about the options available.

Has it made a difference?

YES! Not least that I have become an energy bore. We have a device that dumps unused electricity we produce into our hot water tank, so in summer we have a constant supply of carbon-free hot water. It has less effect in winter, but it means we have the option of heating one room using an electric heater and still using very little energy from the grid. On a sunny day we can still get a tankful of hot water.

How many years will it take you to get your money back?

I haven't worked this out. I am looking at our carbon budget, rather than our money budget.

Are you planning to do anything else?

'Planning' would be a bit strong, but decarbonisation is a process.....

What advice would you give to others?

I think solar panels are brilliant. I would give batteries more consideration than I did. I highly recommend our surplus-solar-electricity-heats-our-water-tank device.

People Stories: Pedro & Maria

Why did you decide to install solar panels in your home?

There were a number of reasons. We strongly believe that a decentralised energy mix is healthy for the country and planet. Our house has a Southeast-facing roof with an ideal pitch and no obstructions, and of course with the increasing energy prices we thought this could be a good investment to future proof our energy independence.

Why did you choose the suppliers you went with?

We went with the Solar Streets programme because it made sense to us to get the panels via a community based approach. Additionally, we were happy that a percentage would go to our local environmental charity - Sustainable Wantage.

PLEASE NOTE: THE SOLAR STREETS PROGRAMME IS NO LONGER RUNNING.

Has it made a difference?

Yes, it has made a difference on various fronts.
Knowing we are contributing to clean energy production without additional footprint by using the free roof space and also the savings in electricity and export payments.
With the SEG programme this is really an ideal investment for houses with appropriate roofs.

How many years will it take you to get your money back?

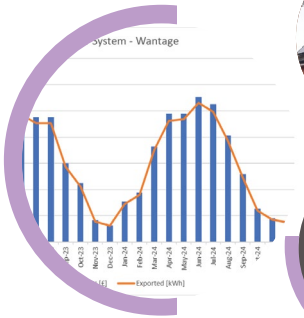
The cost of our 4.8 kW System with inverter was £5,719.76. We monitor the SEG payments and although it is more complicated to estimate savings for electricity produced and used, we do have an approximate idea.
Over 2 years (2023 and 2024) we produced 8373 kWh, exported 7184 kWh, earned (from SEG Octopus) £1056, saved £279 in electricity bills. This is a total of £1355 over 2 years which equates to £668 savings per year! Considering these figures, the system is expected to break even in 8.5 years which is in line with the assessment made by the installers at the time.
Important to note that we are very conscious of our energy consumption and our ratio Production/Export is higher than the national average.
The system is expected to last 25 years so it will operate for 16.5 years after it breaks even.

Are you planning to do anything else?

No, we considered also installing a battery but decided it wasn't cost effective for our particular circumstances. Our house has Gas heating.

What advice would you give to others?

If they have a south (or SE / SW) faced roof with no obstructions this is a great investment for a number of reasons. If they can access a community solar programme such as Solar Streets, even better! Finally, see right a pretty chart from our power export and earnings over 2023 and 2024.



People Stories: Cecile

Why did you decide to install solar panels and batteries in your home?

Primarily for environmental reasons. Solar is an energy source that is very passive and once installed has zero emissions. The system will last for decades before any appreciable degradation occurs to the battery. As an added bonus a significant chunk of your energy is essentially free to use once installed, and that's the worst case scenario. Once you start selling back to the grid or use a battery then you're generating income.

Why did you choose the suppliers you went with?

We have chosen the supplier on the advice of the installer. They have a battery / inverter / EV charger that all seems to work together reasonably well. We have chosen the installer on the advice of a friend.

Has it made a difference?

Very much so. In March, our average daily electricity use is about 10 kWh, with solar panels producing 5-10 kWh a day, totaling around 250 kWh for the month. Solar energy is generated during the day, so adding a battery allows us to store excess power for use at night or on cloudy days. By charging the battery with both free solar energy and cheap overnight electricity, our monthly electricity costs are reduced to about £20, compared to £100 without solar and a battery. Additionally, excess solar power helps charge our electric car, further reducing energy costs.

How many years will it take you to get your money back?

Somewhere between 5 - 10 years.

Are you planning to do anything else?

There is a device that shunts the excess energy from the solar panels that would otherwise be sold to the National Grid into the immersion heater, allowing you to heat your hot water tank for free instead of using the gas boiler. However my gas tariff costs 6p / kw for gas and I sell electricity for 8p / kw so I would actually be missing out on 2p / kw. If / when gas prices rise then it's something to consider.

What advice would you give to others?

Buy the biggest battery you can afford, as charging a 10 kW battery overnight at 8p/kWh can cut your daily electricity costs from £2.40 to £0.80, saving £584 a year. This would pay for itself in about five years, especially with a cheap overnight tariff, and adding solar panels further boosts savings.
Solar panels are inexpensive, with installation scaffolding costing more than the panels themselves, so install as many as possible.
Be sure to read reviews on system setup, as configuring the solar and battery import/export can be complex to optimise.

People Stories: Paul

Why did you decide to install solar panels, batteries and an air source heat pump in your home?

My decision to install low-carbon energy solutions was driven by energy bill savings, home renovations, and practical needs, including an electric vehicle, high electricity use for our disabled son, and frequent power cuts. Our 7.5kWp solar system with a 9.5kWh GivEnergy battery soon needed an upgrade, leading to a second 13.5kWh battery with 6kWh output for better independence. Planning for gas's decline, we designed our home for a heat pump, initially using a gas boiler until improved ASHPs and a higher grant in 2023 made switching viable. Our 13kWh Grant Aerona3 heat pump, with a COP of 4.6, is cost-effective, Quiet Mark accredited, and mostly covered by the grant, significantly cutting energy costs and improving resilience.

Why did you choose the suppliers you went with?

While we didn't initially choose GivEnergy, their inverters and batteries impressed us, and we now highly recommend them. Our Triniasolar panels work well with the GivEnergy system, but our original installer, Oakray Ltd., caused significant roof damage, preventing us from recommending them. For our second battery, GEC Electrical Contractors Ltd. provided excellent service, demonstrating expertise in low-carbon energy. We chose the Grant Aerona3 heat pump for its efficiency, low noise, and competitive pricing, and SC Miles & Son stood out as the best installer due to their expertise and transparent pricing. Our heating system, including underfloor heating retrofitted to solid floors, was expertly handled by SCC Ltd., another company we highly recommend.

Has it made a difference?

Absolutely! Even in a low-sunlight year like 2024, our PV system covered most of our summer electricity needs and helped charge our electric car. In winter, bright days still provide power, while batteries store solar energy and charge overnight with low-cost electricity, reducing daytime reliance. The GivEnergy All-in-One system also protects us from power cuts. Our new heating system has been transformative—underfloor heating keeps temperatures comfortable with efficient room controls, and since installing the ASHP, we haven't needed an open fire, even in -4°C conditions.

How many years will it take you to get your money back?

It's complex. Maximising savings depends on choosing the right electricity and export tariffs. Eliminating gas also removes standing charges, and battery systems can be optimized to buy cheap electricity and sell high, though we haven't used these services due to our high energy use. Future factors like electricity prices, weather conditions, driving habits, and petrol costs make precise payback estimates tricky. However, the impact is clear—our total energy costs (electricity, gas, and electric vehicle charging) dropped from £5,674 in 2023 to just £770 in 2024, a £4,904 annual saving. With our total investment of £21,900, including the heat pump (after the grant), PVs, and batteries, payback could be around five years—but time will tell!

Are you planning to do anything else?

While we have no plans to expand our system right now, we'd consider adding more battery capacity to our All-in-One system (you can never have too much storage!), installing additional west-facing PV panels, and upgrading to a 3-phase electricity supply to charge and discharge batteries faster, maximising time-of-day electricity savings.

What advice would you give to others?

Be clear on your goals—cost savings, carbon reduction, or both—and factor in what else matters, like power cut resilience. If solar isn't an option, a battery can still cut costs and emissions by shifting energy use to cheaper, greener off-peak times. Plan long-term if needed, integrating upgrades with home improvements, and consider a heat pump when replacing your boiler—especially in a well-insulated home. Get multiple quotes, prioritise quality installation over the cheapest offer, and stay informed on government incentives. Most importantly, be confident—the technology works, has long warranties, and is well-supported.

People Stories: Linda

Why did you decide to install solar panels and an air source heat pump in your home and why did you choose the suppliers you went with?

We had been thinking about getting solar panels in 2011 when Sustainable Wantage had some talks which resulted in them suggesting a scheme whereby Energy My Way would install solar panels on a certain number of houses and we'd get a discount. As a result we had solar panels installed in May 2011 for about £10,000, but with FIT payments for 25 years. It was 2.8kW peak system. It took 7.5years to get our money back. Even though it is over 13.5 years old it is still producing well. At some stage we may have to get a new inverter, but otherwise it has been no problem. It is certainly the best thing to do after insulation, cavity wall insulation and double glazing. At that point batteries were not available as now.

When we were looking into heat pumps, Regen Renewables phoned and we invited them to talk to us, they were fairly local to us in Northamptonshire. The scheme then was that you had to get rid of your gas boiler to get RHI payments for 7 years and have a good EPC (Energy Performance Certificate). Heat pumps are very clever, but take some regulating. Finding the right place for the thermostat needs some care. We also have an app to set up a weekly timer and manage the system as the heat pumps own controller is more complex and not as convenient.

Has it made a difference?

We used to use 13,000 kWh + petrol, Now we use 5,500 – 6,000 kWh for heating, water, and car charging,
Even though we use much less energy than before, because electricity is so much more expensive than gas and energy prices have increased considerably, then we probably haven't made any savings on our heating costs. We are doing what we can to save the planet though, which is the point of it as far as we are concerned.

How many years will it take you to get your money back?

The system cost £16,000 but the RHI has given us back £5,000 already and we will get about £11,500 over 7 years (we could have installed a slightly smaller, cheaper heat pump for our house at present, but this one will cater for an extension being built).

Are you planning to do anything else?

We are thinking about more solar panels and a battery, as well as upgrading our present panels, but this will be quite complex and need more space in the meter cupboard and else where.

In 2020 we bought an electric car and a charger.
We charge mostly at home so the pricing is not bad. You can sign up for an Octopus tariff that is 7p an hour for some hours over night if you need to use it each day, but then the units are more expensive for the rest of the day. It is good for us to slow charge the car when the solar panels are producing, because when on a FIT payment you don't get paid much for electricity you export.

What advice would you give to others?

When positioning the outdoor unit, ensure it is parallel to an exterior wall, at least 0.5m away, and 1m from the boundary—placement restrictions may limit your options. The unit must be on a level surface, and since it produces significant water in cold weather, avoid installing it on a flat roof despite potential benefits like a shorter pipe run. Be prepared to lose your airing cupboard, as the heat pump requires a much larger tank and space for additional electronics. You may need electrical upgrades, including new circuits for the outdoor unit and controls, as well as a separate meter. Planning ahead for these factors will help ensure a smoother installation.