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Another solar power story – Leatherhead

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A four-year fight to install solar panels in a Leatherhead car park has left those behind the green project both “disappointed and very exited”.

Mole Valley District Council declared a climate emergency in 2019 and has been trying to decrease its carbon emissions ever since, with the goal of reaching net zero by 2030.

Now, a pilot scheme set to be approved could to be a step in the right direction – but has left some wishing for a “far more expansive” roll out, after funding was approved to cover just 20 bays in Leatherhead with the new tech, the size of about two tennis courts.

Bays in the centre’s car park will have new coverings with solar panelling installed on top. Electricity from the panels will be used to help power Leatherhead Leisure Centre although it will fall well short of delivering its full need.

It is anticipated that the electricity generated annually by the solar panels will be 37,498 kWh or about 2.7 per cent of what the centre uses – although it would still be enough to reduce the council’s carbon footprint by about 9.7 tonnes a year.

Hope is not lost for those wishing to see greater role out of the panels as the council has said that, should key milestones and performance targets be hit, “the intention is that further role out of solar carports across other Mole Valley District Council carparks including Pippbrook Offices and Reigate Road will be implemented”.

Cabinet Member Councillor Claire Malcomson said: “It’s taken four years to get this far.

“I’m disappointed and very excited about this because at long last we’re going to be doing it, I would love it to be far more expansive but it is only a pilot therefore hopefully it’s going to open some really good doors for us.”

The £175,000 project is expected to take about 16 years to cover its costs and the levels of energy produced too low to require battery storage units.

Regardless, the system will be plugged into the national grid with any spare capacity sold into the network – the most likely scenario here being on days the centre is closed.

She said: “It would take 16 years to pay itself back and I just hope we will consider it as its a very good step in the right direction because other councils are taking over but it was actually Mole Valley that initiated this in the first place.”

A similar project is already in place in the Elmbridge Civic Centre car park in Esher.

Cllr Andy Smith (Independent; Ashtead Lanes and Common) said: “This is a very good scheme indeed.

“I share the disappointment that its taken so long to get off the ground but I’m very keen that we seize the opportunities for this type of solar project rather than using up productive agricultural land with solar arrays.”

Final sign off on the plans are dependent on cabinet approval.

Leatherhead Leisure Centre (Image Google)

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