

ECOVILLAGE RESIDENTS' BULLETIN

21 October 2022

#8



WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE ECOVILLAGE COMMUNITY?

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Solar energy update

*By Jey Shivakumar - Principal – Energy
Transformation Services, Cossill & Webley*

We can appreciate the frustration Ecovillage residents are facing in relation to the installation of the solar PV on site. I have been in constant discussion with Western Power on these systems. Western Power approved the overall energy design some years back and approved the PV submissions, which are consistent with the original intent, design, connection approvals and size of infrastructure installed throughout the Ecovillage.

We design systems for many residential developments throughout WA and I have to say the frustrations that we're experiencing with approval timeframes from Western Power are not isolated to WEV; they are industry wide. Our added complication is that our solar systems are so much larger than standard subdivisions are able to install, due to the size of the connections and energy infrastructure installed at WEV (at great expense to Sustainable Settlements and Perron Developments).

However, we have progressed to a point where we can commence with the installation of the additional solar PV systems.

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I need to reiterate that the energy sector in WA, as well as nationally, has not seen this level of change since it was created. There are significant labour shortages in skilled technical engineers / designers and network officers as a result of them leaving to join the mining sector, and or

network from large scale network failures and outages (even though our first solar applications were lodged last year). This may still occur, and therefore WP is taking more time to consider systems that are to be connected to the network, especially large systems like ours, with a focus



other areas in the energy infrastructure industry. The workload from the expansion of renewables due to carbon reduction strategies through WA (including private and public business, as well as Western Power and Synergy) has resulted in even greater shortage in the labour resource. Western Power is also facing a materials shortage due to national and international demand for electrical systems. All of which is causing long delays in projects.

All of this is then added to the overall aggregate quantity of solar PV that has been installed in WA, which is causing major system issues with Western Power in managing its network. This resulted in all the protection measures that were introduced early this year to protect the

on ensuring these systems don't make it worse. The measures taken include generation caps and export limiting. It is trying to find the balance between providing an opportunity for entities to generate as much solar as possible to service themselves, and the community, but not at a level which will be detrimental to the network.

Current status

1. Approval for the maximum solar PV generation per cluster, up to 215kW which is the total aggregate capacity of solar PV, as outlined in the WEV energy handbook, was received in 2019.
2. Approval for the export limit for each cluster

(increased through extensive discussion with network office) to 100kW per cluster.

What we are waiting for

Confirmation of the commissioning process and network requirements for the systems that are to be installed. This process is taking far longer than it should considering what has been completed to date, but we are at the mercy of Western Power and its limited capacity to deal with the backlog of work associated with the construction boom. This approval has been pending for many months. The upside is that once approved, our microgrid controls are going to enable each cluster to participate in Western Power's DER opportunities, which has the potential to contribute to significant income for each cluster in the future.

Next steps

If you wish, Integrated Electrical (IEC) can commence solar PV installation mid-November on all the remaining systems, making them eligible for 2022 STC rebates. The systems will be left OFF until the WP approval is finalised, but IEC will still need full payment for the system as their scope and capital outlay will remain the same. Alternatively, you may wish to wait for the WP approval to be finalised so that your system can be left on after installation, but this could potentially result in installation in 2023 (depending on timing and IEC workload) and the STC's will be calculated accordingly. While the installation works are undertaken, we will continue to engage with WP to finalise the commissioning process and look to energise these installed systems as a priority. Those that decide to proceed with installing from mid-November will therefore be ready to energise as soon as the final approval comes through, which is expected before years end.

I appreciate your patience in this, the final solution for the sites will be a showcase on what

can be done within residential developments in the move to energy independence and reduction in greenhouse gas emissions to WP and others. We expect that WP will use the learnings from this setup and others so that future developments have a much simpler process, as this is what future developments will require. I can now understand Mike's frustrations over the past 13 years, as this process reflects what he's had to endure with all government departments due to the pioneering nature of the project.

The Tritium EV chargers are being installed in Stages 1 and 2 before years end and your Tesla batteries will be energised as soon as the final systems commissioning process is confirmed.

Integrated Electrical will be in touch to schedule your installation. If you're installing with another provider, please ask them to contact me direct via email on jeys@cosweb.com.au.

Regards

Jey Shivakumar

Principal – Energy Transformation Services

Fencing update

If you are yet to book your lot's internal side fence build with WEV, please read on.

In early 2021, the WEV team made a decision to provide stage 1-3 internal side fencing, as we had secured a low-cost fencing quote from a local contractor to roll out standardised fencing to internal fence areas (between lots) across the stage 1-3 clusters. It was a genuine attempt on our behalf to save money for our purchasers as we could achieve a per fence price in bulk that couldn't be achieved by individuals. As part of the contract, we installed the corner fence posts to each lot in the Stage 1 and 2 Clusters and installed temporary

horse line barriers to restrict the builders and trades from parking on and damaging your common property and EUA's and this has been a very effective strategy.

Many of those in stage 1 have had side fences installed as they finished their build, however, earlier this year, our contractor pulled out of the



contract, due to the difficulty they found with liaising with so many different purchasers and builders—the admin cost of trying to coordinate the fencing was more than a small local farming contractor could cope with.

In hindsight, the fencing provision would have only worked for the contractor if we could have rolled out all fences prior to the start of building, which was not what the builders or owners preferred, as fencing is usually installed after homes are completed.

In order to fulfil our original promise, and to bring us in line with regular developments where fencing (if offered at all) is provided as a fixed price rebate to the owner on completion of the fence within a timeframe, we will now offer the following fencing programme:

1. We have engaged a fencing contractor to provide internal 1.8m post and wire

fencing to currently completed homes. (Specifications: 1.80m high farm fence with 160mm diameter treated pine posts at 4m spacings, 1.80m high galvanised 150x150x3mm ringloc mesh with a 3mm single top wire and 100 to 125mm diameter treated pine box ends.)

2. This work has commenced and will be completed by end of December 2022.
3. If you have/will have completed your home within this timeframe and would like us to install your fence, you must advise us in writing by November 7.
4. If your home is not going to be completed within this time frame, you may opt to provide your own fence to the requirements of the BDG's and apply to WEV for an Internal Fencing Rebate ("Rebate").
5. The Rebate will be provided at the current contracted fencing rate of \$1400.00 per internal fence.
6. As per the Dividing Fences Act, adjoining lots share the cost of adequate fencing between them, so the Rebate (and any additional fencing cost) would be shared by both lots.
7. To receive the Rebate, your fence must be installed by a qualified contractor and the Rebate applied for before the original completion date specified by your contract (36 months after settlement), and you must provide us with:
 - > a paid invoice from a fencing contractor with an ABN showing the location and date of the installation;
 - > the lot numbers that receive

the benefit of the fence (e.g., 1A-1 & 1A-2; not street address); and

- > name and payment details of the owners for each lot benefited.

8. The Rebate is not transferrable to any other party.

Please note, as per the original offer, the provided internal fence and Internal Fence Rebate only applies to internal side fences between adjoining strata lots. Any fence that adjoins Common Property, EUA, Laneway, or the council verge doesn't qualify, as these are not standard 1.8 m fences and are subject to other requirements in the BDG's.

Due to OH&S requirements and Consumer Law obligations, we can't provide a rebate for an owner built fence.

Next steps

Please read all points above carefully. In true Ecovillage spirit, have a chat with your adjoining neighbour/s and your builder to discuss the optimum fence construction timing for both lots, how you will organise fencing quotes, who will apply for the rebate, etc, and then respond to this email letting us know if you would like to:

1. Book your fence to be built within the next 3 months; or
2. Opt to construct the fence and apply for the Rebate within the 36-month cut off;
3. Not build a fence—this is an option if both neighbours agree.

Please familiarise yourself with the *Dividing Fences Act* and the Ecovillage BDG requirements for fencing before having this discussion. You can google the *Dividing Fences Act* and the BDG's are in the WEV Document Library.

Lot owner's contact details

Many of you already know your immediate neighbours and can make contact via your group messaging app. If you are in stage 1 and 2, you can obtain your neighbour's details from your strata council. If you are in stage 3, we can put immediate neighbours in touch with each other.

A new builder on the block

The WEV team is hyper-aware of the challenges currently facing our community from inflated building prices, labour shortages and associated financial pressures.

Sustainable Settlements is a land developer, not a builder. Yet the WEV team has been treading a fine line between offering support and advice to Ecovillagers building their homes while endeavouring not to step on the toes of builders or muddy the waters, but it is a tightrope indeed!

Lately though, we have been focusing instead on how we can bring more choice, competition and affordability into the Ecovillage housing market through discussions with a new, large, project home builder which we have asked to price up our six Ecovillage-pre-designed homes. These include the Pioneer, Settler, Pavilions, Bungalow, Foxcliffe and Shervington, all of which can be found on our website here <https://www.ecovillage.net.au/housing/pre-designed-homes/>

While negotiations between Mike and this building company are still ongoing, we are excited to report that preliminary pricing, timeframes and resourcing is looking extremely positive and we expect to be able to reveal detailed information about this new builder and its offering in early November.

Please don't ask for ballpark figures or timelines as we are not in a position to offer



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any more details yet, but as soon as we have formalised this arrangement, we will let you know.

Introducing “The ECOH”

By Jo Thierfelder, Communications and Marketing Manager

I’m excited to announce a new communications proposal for the future development of an Ecovillage Community Online Hub or “ECOH”, as we have nicknamed it. The ECOH will be the Ecovillage Town Crier, our e-newspaper, community noticeboard and social grapevine.

This valuable community-owned asset will be an essential communication tool that encourages interaction, provides information and support, and enhances the lives of Ecovillage residents and businesses in a myriad of ways. It will serve only to foster and augment the face-to-face chats and in-person get-togethers upon which our community is built, not replace them.

How will it work?

The ECOH will be a private online site accessible to Ecovillage residents through a secure login and password portal on www.ecovillage.net.au. Think of it as a website with social networking capabilities that will replace the WEV Community Facebook Group and provide all the function and content our community needs into the future. We hope it will resolve the security and privacy concerns many residents have about Facebook. There is no advertising (except, maybe, for worm farms and yoga classes), no algorithms, no tracking or selling of data.

While the web platform and mobile app will initially be set up and administered by the WEV team under its communications umbrella, the site is a collaborative user platform to which every member can contribute via their own member

profile. Its social networking interface is very similar to Facebook so most residents should find it intuitive to use.

Key features of the ECOH will include (but are not limited to):

- Blog / Forum
- Events Calendar – events, courses, workshops, etc
- Resource Library
 - > Strata Information Hub
 - > Ecovillage Commons
 - > Community Centre Book Library
- Unlimited Groups
 - > Permaculture, art / craft, conservation, book clubs, recreation, EVs, etc
 - > Marketplace – Buy, Sell, Free, Share
 - > Tool Library
- Business Directory
- Skills Register
- Classified ads module
- Photo and Video Gallery
- Future e-commerce “Shop” (linked to ECL bank account)
- Forms, surveys, file sharing between members

The software platform is called Buddyboss and it integrates perfectly with our existing Wordpress digital architecture and has a seamless [mobile app](#). There is scope to further expand its capabilities with additional compatible software modules called “plugins”, for

example, an e-Learning Management System for running courses, and Classified Ads through which Ecovillage business owners can advertise their products and services to the community.

Who will own it and pay for it?

This community digital asset will be owned and managed by Ecovillage Commons Limited (ECL) whose funds are derived through the ECL Levy, part of Ecovillage residents' annual strata levies.

ECOH is a new initiative and was not included in the original ECL budget. So, we are in the process of reviewing the budget to determine whether the current \$100pa ECL Levy is sufficient to fund the ECOH or whether it will require a small additional charge to cover the one-off development and annual software licensing costs. These are likely to be in the order of an additional \$1/month on top of residents' current levies. We will have more information on this to come once our review is complete. Sustainable Settlements will fund my time to establish the site.

Once this proposal receives the green light and development is underway, I will send Ecovillage owners and residents an email with your login credentials, which you can use to set up your profile and start exploring the site. Ideally, I would like to have the ECOH up and running by early 2023.

We think this is a vital investment in the future development, engagement and cohesion of the Ecovillage community and we hope you do too.

If you have any questions about ECOH, please email me at jo@ecovillage.net.au or call the office on 08 9757 6688.

Loomio app for cluster decision-making

During research into communication tools for our community, we discovered Loomio, a decision-making app that helps groups of people, like our strata clusters, have ongoing discussions, build consensus and make decisions.

As a community, there will always be different views about ways to do things and we are conscious that operating in the digital space is not for everyone. However, there are wonderful e-tools, like Loomio, at our disposal that can be utilised to boost engagement, improve efficiency and augment traditional processes of collective decision-making and meetings.

It's important to recognise that Ecovillage residents are a diverse group of people who have varying degrees of time and capacity to be involved in the day-to-day operation and management of our clusters. For the busy and time-poor among us, Loomio may be an incredibly helpful way to facilitate remote, equitable, efficient involvement in cluster decision-making.

The Ecovillage Community Online Hub (ECOH) will be an Ecovillage-wide site whereas we see Loomio sitting alongside this as a separate decision-making tool for clusters.

Loomio has a one-off lifetime pricing of USD\$199 for community groups run by volunteers. It also offers a one week free trial and we encourage strata councils to make use of this to decide if the software is right for them. The WEV team is going to have a play with it too to gauge its usefulness.

We realise these are new platforms for a lot of people and that we are all often in a space of trying to simplify

our online time and commitment. We have wrestled with this ourselves and have come to the conclusion that the most inclusive way to have engaged, equitable discussions and input from people at all stages of Ecovillage residency is to use these well-designed online platforms. If anyone needs assistance with becoming involved, please ask fellow cluster residents for help. We know there are a lot of talented, knowledgeable folks about who are willing to share their expertise.

Traffic management road closure for defects work

Wormall Civil will be undertaking defect rectification works to Kulbardi and Yornitj Grove commencing Monday, 24 October and continuing through to Wednesday, 27 October 2022. This will require the closure of Kulbardi Way from Wolghine Avenue roundabout up to the Mardo Avenue intersection, and also traffic management on Yornitj Grove east of the Public Open Space playing field carpark / Community Hall. Appropriate traffic management plans and detour requirements have been approved by the Shire and will be implemented on these dates while re-surfacing and re-grading works are completed. We appreciate everyone's patience during these times and for any concerns or issues please contact Wormall Civil on (08) 9755 5313.

Post office numbers

The Witchcliffe Vibe service station owners and Australia Post managers have asked Ecovillage residents to get in touch with them to request a Post Office number to allow efficient collection of mail. Like many small businesses, the Witchy servo is suffering from staff shortages and, during peak times, can often find it difficult to serve customers and search for mail.

A PO number is not the same as a PO box. You will be allocated an alphanumeric number, e.g. L3, which will allow post office staff to quickly retrieve your mail from behind the desk rather than searching for your surname.

Your strata clusters may want to do this collectively, by first gaining permission from all residing residents, and then forwarding the Post Office a list of names, addresses and phone numbers.

There will soon be 100 new post office boxes being installed in Witchcliffe to help cater to the growing number of residents in the area. If you haven't already filled out an application form for a PO box, we suggest you do so immediately as there is quite a waitlist.

WEV Design Review contact change

It's a case of the revolving door within the WEV design team of late as we said thanks and farewell to Grant Johnston in September and welcomed back Jeff Thierfelder in his original role as Planning and Architecture Project Manager.

For more than a year Grant had ably stewarded the design review process and managed the construction of the Community Centre while Jeff was on an extended medical leave of absence. Jeff has now rejoined the team in a part-time capacity, working two days a week, while he continues his recovery. Grant continues to offer support to the WEV team in an unofficial capacity and is completing the project management of the Community Centre.

For all WEV design review or building related advice, please contact Jeff on jeff@ecovillage.net.au or call him at the office on Tuesdays and Fridays between 9:00am and 3:00pm.

Change to wall insulation in Design Guidelines

The next iteration of the Witchcliffe Sustainable Building Design Guidelines will include a modification to the wall insulation requirements. This should improve the affordability of construction for timber framed buildings. The previous minimum insulation (R value) for walls was R3.0, which effectively required R2.7HD Batts in 90mm studs with a 35mm batten creating an air cavity between the stud and the cladding. We are now changing the minimum requirement to R2.8, which is in line with the current National Construction Code. This should provide more flexibility in wall assembly and enable some cost savings, while maintaining an effective thermal envelope for the buildings.

If the building design has already gone through the WEV formal approval process and you'd like

to apply this change to your design, we would need a new NatHERS assessment to confirm that the building still meets the minimum star rating for thermal performance that applies to your cluster.

Any questions, please direct them to Jeff Thierfelder on jeff@ecovillage.net.au or call the office on 9757 6688.

Wastewater treatment reminder

Please, no wet wipes!

A reminder from Tony Johansen, owner and operator of TMC Witchcliffe, the Ecovillage's wastewater treatment service provider, please DO NOT flush wet wipes down the toilet as they will block and break the pumps. He has noticed them in the Ecovillage sewerage system already (with only 20-odd homes connected) during regular inspections.

Perhaps this learning curve represents an opportunity? Here in the office we've used a biodegradable / compostable wet wipe and have noticed they break down in a few months

Special Reference Items

- **Chlorinated disinfectants** such as bleach will cause operational problems in the treatment facility by killing the process bacteria responsible for sewage treatment. Strong natural disinfectants such as eucalyptus-based cleaning agents have a similar effect. There are many alternative and treatment facility friendly options that will be advised by the service provider.
- **Large Quantities of Animal Fats and Vegetable oils** if allowed to enter the sewer line will contribute to line blockages and increased maintenance or loss of service. Excess cooking fats and oils should be absorbed on paper and disposed via the garbage waste service or composted.
- **Food waste disposal units** macerate food scraps. If excess food scraps enter the sewer network it will contribute to sewer blockages increasing maintenance or loss of service. Food scraps should be composted or disposed via the garbage waste service.
- **Wet Wipes** Under no circumstance must "Wet Wipes" be disposed to sewer via toilets or other discharge points. Wet Wipes create significant maintenance issues in sewer lines and pump stations that may limit operation or create blockages.



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in a thriving compost bin. Acknowledging that the compostable wipes can be more expensive, perhaps if there are a few people using them, you could consider a bulk order to reduce the price?

The insert is an excerpt from the letter that TMC Witchcliffe sent to all Ecovillage residents. It is also included as an appendix in the Residents' Handbook.

We all need to do our bit to ensure the health of the wastewater system that we all share. Please make sure you understand the do's and don'ts and implement any changes to your lifestyle habits.

Residents' Handbook update

A draft copy of the Ecovillage Residents' Handbook was circulated to strata councils in 1A, 1B and 1C in September requesting feedback. The WEV team has now collated this information and is conducting a final edit. We will then print and bind a hard copy to live in each cluster meeting shed and provide a digital PDF accessible to all residents. This is an example of one of the documents that will live eventually on the ECOH. The Residents' Handbook is a live document that can be edited, updated and be made specifically relevant to your cluster by strata councils into the future.

Login and archive reminders

Here's a little reminder of where to find past copies of the Residents' Bulletins and all the login details for Ecovillage access. Remember that these login details are for Ecovillage owners and residents only.

Residents' Bulletins

<https://www.ecovillage.net.au/news-events/residents-bulletins/>

Password: Ecoresinews123

Ecovillage Supplier Deals page

<https://www.ecovillage.net.au/ecovillage-supplier-deals/>

Password: Ecovillagedeals123

Pedestrian gate code for stingray (northern) dam

4343

We have just placed a new extreme weather-proof padlock on the pedestrian gate (thanks for your patience while we waited for this to arrive from over east) and the code remains 4343. This code is for the use of Ecovillage residents and their guests only in accordance with access to Ecovillage Commons land.

Vehicle access has always been restricted from stingray dam to ensure the protection of flora and fauna, and the amenity of the dam for all users. Can you imagine 20 cars parked around the dam compacting the soil, blocking access, and spoiling the view for picnickers and swimmers? This is a special place that Ecovillagers have the privilege of using and this is one of the ways we can care for it so that it stays healthy and accessible for all.

We are now redirecting all contractors and civil works vehicles to a different access gate to avoid them accidentally restricting access to the pedestrian gate. Please get in touch with the office regarding any access issues. A reminder that there is a snake bite kit in a red toolbox just inside the dam gate.

Ecovillage Residents Q&A page

<https://www.ecovillage.net.au/library/ecovillage-resident-qa/>

Password:
EcoresiQA123



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Construction Bond lodgement and return

On completion of your build, please get in touch with the WEV office to let us know your move-in date and to book in a Completion Inspection. Once this inspection has been completed and no damages are recorded on common property or infrastructure, your strata council will be able to release your \$1,000 construction bond. If you haven't lodged a construction bond for your build, please get in touch with your Strata council to do so. (We have a couple of residents outstanding who have commenced their builds before this system was put in place.)

Construction Agreements with your strata cluster's bank details can be found here:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/nu6meur4i5j5u9r/AACBApoFj5mZ0tqeet1jUoPLa?dl=0>

We encourage everyone to lodge their bond to ensure a fair and equitable process for all residents.

AMR Shire crossover subsidy

A reminder that you have six months from the completion of your driveway to apply for a crossover subsidy from the Augusta-Margaret River Shire.

<https://www.amrshire.wa.gov.au/planning-and-building/streets,-roads-and-verges/crossovers-and-battle-axe-driveways>

Apply for the \$400 State Government Electricity Rebate

In case you missed it, the State government is offering \$400 off your electricity bill.

https://www.wa.gov.au/service/community-services/grants-and-subsidies/apply-household-electricity-credit?fbclid=IwAR2YdZDkwPPXR-yMuxgvRaHzmeODux4s2N6tZ_SkzNTJJlZ3Il5Nhfu_Vc

You will need a copy of your invoice and proof of payment from your Electricity bill covering 12 May. The answer to the question, 'what type of meter do you have', is: 'a sub-meter supplied by an embedded network'.