Wesley Church Centre, Chester

Wesley Methodist Church, Chester is a Grade II Listed building in the City Centre Conservation Area. The Church dates back to 1812, with 20th Century extensions which were fully integrated and modernized in development projects in 2009 and 2017. The Church is registered as an Inclusive Church, Fair Trade Church, Church of Sanctuary and achieved their Gold Eco Church award in July 2025. The premises are used throughout the week for a wide range of activities, including a café and Fair Trade shop.


Welsey's café and Fair Trade shop.

Wesley's worship space.

During the 2017 project restoring the historic worship space, the lighting system was converted to LED's, two gas boilers and an underfloor heating system were installed and the church loft insulation was upgraded. In 2020, a 'warm' flat roof (with insulation above the structural deck) was installed on the Upper Room in the Church Centre and Wesley switched to greener gas and electricity tariffs. An Eco Group was formed in 2020- you can read more about their work here.

In March 2023, Wesley's Managing Trustees commissioned Inspired Efficiency to survey the buildings and provide guidance on how best to prioritise decarbonisation projects. The Church found this report very helpful and have carried out, in line with the recommendations, the following works;

- All Church Centre lighting converted to LEDs (around 120 fittings).
- Wesley's fridges and freezers fitted with Savawatt energy saving devices.
- Insulation upgraded for the Crèche room ceiling and boiler room fittings.
- A 'warm' flat roof installed on the rear toilet block.
- Gas oven replaced with an electric oven.

- 2 separate electrical feeds to the premises replaced with a single supply.
- Solar Panels installed on the south facing roof of the church, with battery back-up (see details below).
- Church Centre street frontage fitted with 18 double glazed windows, plus one window fitted at the back (see left).

Solar Panel and Battery Project

Based on the Inspired Efficiency report, consultations with three potential PV system suppliers and assessment of the Wesley's power usage pattern, it was decided the scope of the project would be;

- The installation of 39 solar panels on the south facing roof of the worship area (see right)
- The installation of a 15kWh battery
- Associated connection and control systems

This would primarily generate electricity for Wesley's own consumption, with electricity import costs projected to reduce by 39%, achieving a 7 year payback period, supporting the long term financial viability of Wesley's, as well as reducing their dependence on fossil fuels.

Two Managing Trustees managed the project on behalf of the Church Council, alongside the installation of double glazing. This involved;

- Setting up the project on the Methodist Online System
- Church Council, Methodist Circuit and District approval
- Grant application submissions to the Circuit, District, Benefact Trust and Ursula Keyes Trust
- Methodist Listed Building Advisory Committee approval
- Local Authority Planning Application approval
- Roof structural assessment
- Supplier selection and then contract placement with Barlows UK

- Application to supplier for VAT exemption under the HMRC's provisions for energy saving materials (EMS) for charities
- Installation and commissioning
- Setting up a Smart Export Guarantee (SEG) export tariff for generated electricity surplus to internal requirements.

The project was approved by Church Council in June 2024, received Methodist District and Conservation approval in November 2024 and was installed and commissioned in March 2025, within the planned project timetable.

Solar panels as viewed from the city walls.

The project was also completed within budget. The overall costs for the solar PV and battery were £21,100 and for the double glazing were £22,200. This was funded through a combination of;

- Wesley's Legacies= £21,000
- Grants (Circuit, District, Benefact Trust and Ursula Keyes Trust)= £10,300
- The balance from Wesley's Building Contingency Fund

Across the six full months of operation to date, the system has generated 13.2MWh of electricity, covering 75% of Wesley's electricity usage, with the remaining imported from the grid at night or on dull days. 4.2MWh of electricity generated was exported to the national grid. So far, the indications are that the system is performing better than predicted, though operation across the winter months needs to be seen. The financial return will be assessed once the system has been operational for a year. At the time of project approval there was no guarantee of Wesley's benefitting from an export tariff, so the payback time for the system is predicted to reduce from 7 years due to this additional income.

15kW inverter and 15kWh battery in church hall store room.

Learning Points

Wesley's key learning points for other churches are;

1. Commissioning an energy audit by a competent body to identify decarbonisation priorities for a church premises can be a very helpful process. Inspired Efficiency are highly recommended by Wesley.
2. Solar PV projects benefit from having focused project management by 2 or more people acting on the church's behalf, who can assess competitive offerings from a number of suppliers and manage all related aspects to achieve approvals and apply for grant support.
3. Barlows UK provided the most competitive solar PV proposal and sorted out the necessary connection agreement with SP Energy Networks, assisted on VAT exemption and provided Wesley with the required information to obtain an export tariff agreement.
4. For Listed buildings, early consultation with the Methodist Conservation Officer, Joanne Balmforth, is an important step. Wesley is very grateful to Joanne for her help on their project.
5. The biggest challenge faced in order to achieve a short project implementation timescale was to prepare and plan carefully to ensure that applications for the necessary approvals were all made in a timely fashion. These included;
    a. Methodist approval bodies- Church Council, Circuit Meeting, District Resources Meeting and Listed Building Advisory Committee
    b. Local Authority Planning Application
    c. Connection Agreement with the responsible body

   In particular it is very important to be clear on the key dates and processes for the Methodist meetings (often taking place every 2-4 months) and the timetable for determination of a Planning Application.
6. It is important to liaise with the church's insurance company about a solar panel and battery project at an early stage.

Wesley plan to continue their decarbonisation work over the coming years, as funds allow, by the further installation of warm roofs (as two large areas of the hall's flat roof reach the end of their lives) and replace two sets of clerestory windows in the hall with double glazed units.

With thanks to Brian Heald for sharing Wesley's story and photos.