

## **Topic: Darebin Energy Upgrades Program**

### **Submission on the: Draft Our Darebin Action Plan 2026-27 and Draft Operating Projects 2026-27**

#### **Introduction**

The goals of the Energy Upgrade program are to remove known barriers, reduce carbon emissions and improve equity in the energy transition by increasing access for low-income households to energy upgrades.

#### **Draft Our Darebin Action Plan 2026-27**

Darebin Climate Action Now (DCAN) rejects the description of item 4.2.4.1 “Complete the one year Energy Support Program.” This description is misleading and does not accord with the Climate Emergency Plan 2024-2030 where the action is stated as:

2.2.1 Create a program that provides tailored support and a financing mechanism to support electrification and renewable energy for both households and transport, with a target of engaging **1000 Darebin households per year** (2.2.1).

It is puzzling to contemplate why Councillors would permit the investment of so much staff and community time in designing a program, if the intention was that it be for only 12 months duration. How will Council meet the stated goal in the Climate Emergency Plan of engaging 1000 households per year?

**DCAN requests that the description of this action item be amended to state:**

**“Implement the first year of the Energy Support Program and provide recommendations on its ongoing implementation”.**

#### **Draft Operating Projects 2026-27**

**DCAN requests that the draft Operating Projects 2026-27 be amended to include \$200,000 for the Energy Upgrades Program**

This Program is a key element of the Climate Emergency Plan which underwent extensive consultation with the community and comprehensive design phase. The program delivers practical action on the climate emergency by cutting emissions, improving the health and thermal comfort of residents and reducing exposure to energy hardship. It also

complements Council's heat health program by providing more efficient and permanent equipment.

While the program received funding in the 2025-2026 budget (after a strong community campaign) the program was only launched in February this year. Detailed planning by staff took place to ensure that it met with the needs of the Darebin community, was fair and accessible and would provide much needed cost of living relief to families and share houses.

The program replaces the highly successful, award winning Solar Savers program which operated for more than 10 years and has been widely recognized as a groundbreaking program in helping low income residents and the broader community make the switch to electrification of their home.

The popularity of the program is a testament to the need for the service. Data provided at the May Council meeting show that 333 households have expressed interest in the program in the space of just four months, with 56 households using the program to upgrade equipment, 38 of which were considered low income and financially vulnerable. 110 energy saving products have been installed.

The popularity of DCAN's free home electrification advisory service provides further evidence of this community need. So far, 50 people have contacted our service needing help. They have found the service with minimal advertising which means that the real demand must be quite large and deserves the allocation of Council resources to respond to this demand.

If no allocation is made for the program in 2026-27, there is a very high risk that once the current funding runs out, momentum will be lost, and the reputation of Council as a climate leader will be severely damaged. Darebin will be in danger of lagging behind other Councils offering "solar savers" type programs to their residents.

In addition, the Darebin community will see this as a breach of trust and a disincentive to participate in future consultation processes. Council has promoted the program as a way of helping low income earners make the transition from costly gas to electric households by reducing energy bills. Councillors need to hold firmly to this commitment for the longer, rather than the short term.



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