Case study: Delivering scalable depot charging infrastructure at pace

Intended audience

This case study is intended for anyone interested in how Bidfood has established foundations for fleet decarbonisation and the practical delivery of depot electrical charging infrastructure, in a context of challenging timelines.

The challenge being addressed

Bidfood is committed to reducing Scope 1 emissions from its vehicle fleet as part of its wider net zero strategy. As BEVs (Battery Electric Vehicles) are expected to play a key role in the decarbonisation of transport operations, the business recognised the need to understand how EVs could be integrated into its fleet and what supporting infrastructure and network capacity would be required to enable the transition.

Bidfood has been actively trialling various BEVs within its operation to gain learnings and build experience in this area. The business already operates a fully electric fleet of around 1,350 forklift trucks, and has done so for many years, making the commercial vehicle fleet the next natural step.

With this operational experience established, the next challenge was ensuring the infrastructure and network capacity were in place to support wider fleet electrification. Bidfood secured UK government funding through the Depot Charging Scheme on 28 January 2026. This left only 43 working days to design, approve, construct and substantially complete charging infrastructure at two operational depots by 31 March 2026 – a huge challenge.

The project had to be delivered while managing material delivery risk and the possibility that the final 10% of grant funding, approximately £74,000, might not be achieved. The programme also required approvals and coordination across multiple parties, while keeping disruption to live depot operations to a minimum.

Actions taken

The project was led by the non-inventory procurement team, who took the following actions:

- Selected Slough and Paddock Wood Depots because both sites had sufficient electrical capacity and offered complementary strategic value, and the opportunity to trial two different approaches: Slough provided a scalable solution at a landlord-owned site, while Paddock Wood created an opportunity to make better use of existing solar generation with a battery storage system.
- Appointed a specialist charging infrastructure provider following initial surveys and design work, ensuring the solution was scalable, operationally practical and aligned with project requirements.
- Established cross-functional governance involving depot and transport teams, Health & Safety, Facilities, Property, the landlord, our insurers, specialist contractors, the distribution network operator and local authorities.
- Used planned weekend power shutdowns to complete panel-board upgrades while limiting operational impact.

- Built an enhanced shutdown arrangement into both sites so the charging systems could be isolated in the event of an ammonia leak or fire alarm.
- When the original proposed BESS hardware at Paddock Wood lacked a required UK safety certificate, an alternative supplier was identified, allowing the project to maintain progress.

Outcomes and results

Bidfood successfully delivered the following outcomes:

- Slough Depot: a scalable overhead gantry system with four charging points and an 600 kW power cabinet.
- Paddock Wood Depot: two chargers integrated with existing solar generation and a battery energy storage system (BESS), designed to support depot resilience and return surplus energy to the site.
- Both sites reached 'substantial completion' by 31 March 2026, and the full grant (just over £740k) was subsequently received.
- Two scalable depot charging systems delivered for circa 25% of the total project cost to Bidfood.

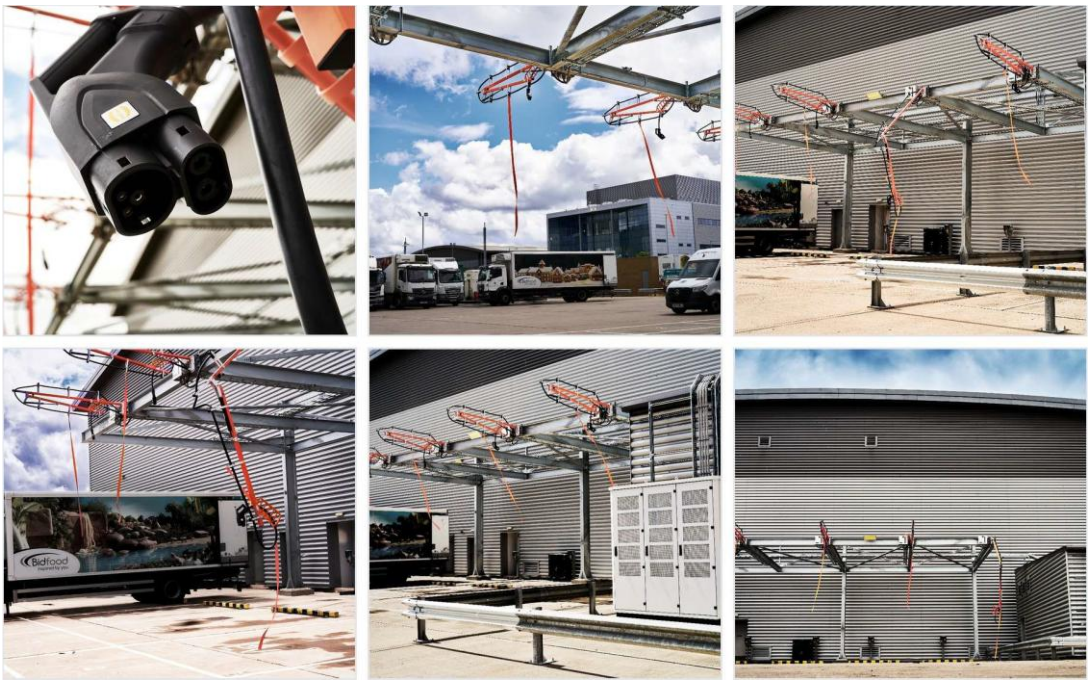


Figure 1 Slough Overhead gantry, charging connections and power cabinet



Figure 2 Paddock Wood Battery energy storage system (BESS)

Challenges encountered

- A substantially compressed delivery programme, with only 43 working days available between the award of funding and the substantial completion deadline.
- Landlord and planning approvals, limited engagement with the distribution network operator and constrained hardware lead times.
- Managing work at live depots, including planned power interruptions and coordination with operational teams.
- Unrecorded underground services and complex interfaces with ammonia refrigeration, solar generation and battery storage.
- A required change of battery storage supplier when the original Paddock Wood hardware lacked the necessary UK safety certificate.

Lessons learnt

- **Delivering ambitious projects sometimes requires calculated risk-taking.** Proceeding with the project despite the tight timeframe was essential to securing the funding opportunity.
- **Contingency planning is essential when working to fixed funding deadlines.** Flexibility and the ability to adapt to unforeseen challenges helped maintain programme progress and ensure project delivery.
- **Cross-functional collaboration is critical to successful infrastructure delivery.** Early engagement with operational teams, landlords, utilities, local authorities and specialist contractors helped maintain project momentum.
- **Careful planning can minimise disruption to live operations.** Planned shutdowns and close involvement from depot teams enabled essential electrical upgrades to be completed while limiting operational impact.
- **Considering the wider depot energy system can create additional value.** Integrating charging infrastructure with existing energy assets can help maximise the utilisation of on-site renewable energy.

Next Steps

- Complete the set-up of supplier Connect system to provide access to charging data, support EV management and enable remote monitoring of charging.
- Brief the depot teams on the support and maintenance arrangements for the charging infrastructure.
- Use operational and charging data to inform ongoing fleet decarbonisation and future infrastructure requirements.
- Start using two 18-tonne BEV's confirmed for mid-October 2026 (one of which is pictured on the right, in the new charging gantry.)

