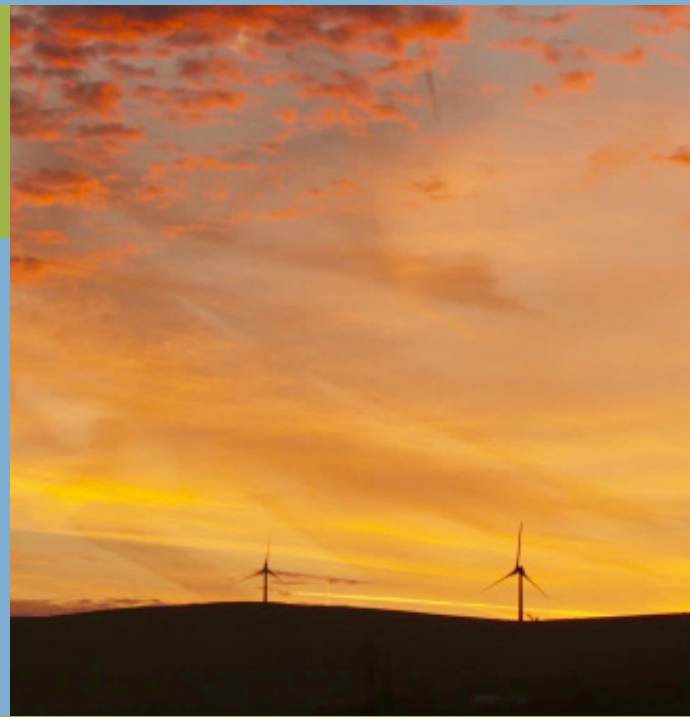


Awel Co-op: Mynydd y Gwrhyd Wind Farm

Project type: Wind

Location: Neath Port Talbot

Aim: To generate and sell clean, low carbon renewable electricity, and use the profits generated to tackle climate change by delivering sustainable community projects in the local area.



About the scheme

The Awel Co-op wind farm is situated on Mynydd y Gwrhyd which is 20 miles north of Swansea.

This community wind farm originated in a Local Agenda 21 meeting organised by the local Council in 1998. Local people suggested 'wind power not opencast'.

A group of volunteers took the project forward and secured funding from the Department for Trade and Industry, as it was then, to undertake a year of consultation. They established a charity, Awel Aman Tawe (AAT).

Following a considerable amount of community consultation, AAT commissioned the Electoral Reform Services to undertake an independent referendum.

The results of the community referendum demonstrated that a clear majority of people supported the idea of a community wind farm. The high level of local involvement was demonstrated by the large turnout at the referendum (48.5% of people voted).

Following the referendum result, detailed feasibility and development work was undertaken. The two turbine 4.7 MW wind farm secured the statutory consents required to register for the Feed-In Tariff in September 2015.

Once the consents were secured, a community share offer was launched which raised nearly £1m. Bridging and longer-term loans totalling £4.75M were provided by Welsh Government, which enabled the project to start construction whilst negotiations with a commercial lender, Triodos Bank, were ongoing.

The windfarm was completed ahead of schedule and the turbines were commissioned on January 25th 2017. These turbines produce clean, low carbon energy and are forecast to generate an estimated 12.4 GWh of clean energy a year, enough to supply around 2,500 homes. Production levels so far are ahead of this estimate.

Partners

Awel Aman Tawe: a community energy charity founded in 1998 working to make a difference to the lives of people at the top of the Swansea and Amman Valleys. The charity raises awareness of the importance of clean energy in the fight against climate change and has developed community renewable energy schemes, energy efficiency programmes, and innovative arts activities. Mynydd y Gwrhyd wind farm was developed by Awel Aman Tawe following a large community consultation on the project and a local referendum. Surplus profits generated by the wind farm will be gift-aided to Awel Aman Tawe to enable them to continue their important work and support local projects.

Awel Co-op: a Community Benefit Society which wholly owns the trading arm, Awel y Gwrhyd CIC. Awel Co-op has undertaken the community share offer.

Welsh Government: provided support to the project through the Ynni'r Fro programme and Local Energy Service; providing technical support, development funding and capital loans, which enabled the project to stick to its strict construction timetable and meet its Feed-in Tariff deadline.

Robert Owen Community Banking Fund: provided development funding to the project of £190k.

Big Society Capital Community Generation Fund: provided funding to the project of £125k.

Renew Wales: provided mentoring support from Shareenergy, to help develop Awel's community share offer.

Triodos Bank: provided a 15 year loan to the project of £5.25M.

Volunteers/Supporters: Awel Aman Tawe and the wind farm project have been supported by a fantastic, enthusiastic team of local active volunteers and supporters throughout the project's development.

What was the outcome?

Two 2.35 MW wind turbines were installed and commissioned in January 2017. To date, over 8 million kwh hours have been generated, saving 4,000 tonnes in carbon emissions.

A loan, secured from Triodos bank, was used to complete the funding package required by the project and to refinance a bridging loan provided by Welsh Government.

Approximately £2.5M has been raised to date by Awel Coop through community shares and at the time of writing the cooperative has nearly 1,000 members.

The project secured funding to enable local community groups and schools to buy shares in Awel Coop. This includes Tiddlywinks in Ystalyfera who visited the site and would not otherwise have been able to invest. They now co-own the turbines and gain a small income stream from their £500 of shares. In addition, 12 schools around the site also own shares.

The project is backed by Hollywood star, Michael Sheen, who hails from Port Talbot; Welsh rugby legend Paul Thorburn; former National Poet of Wales Gillian Clarke; and Paul Allen of the Centre for Alternative Energy in CAT. Double BAFTA Cymru winner, Mike Harrison, who lives locally, volunteered and made a **stunning film** of the turbines going up at dawn.

Over 300 people have attended site visits to the wind farm and Awel aim to continue to facilitate these visits on an ongoing basis.

In 2016, the project was recognised as the best community energy project in Wales and England; won the best co-op in Wales in the Plunkett Foundation Awards; and best fundraising at the Wales Council for Voluntary Action Awards.

What was learned?

Be patient

It took 19 years for the project to develop from an initial idea to an operating project. The project undertook a significant amount of community liaison before development work could begin in earnest and experienced setbacks with respect to securing planning and common land consent. The project team listened to the feedback provided by the consenting authorities and redesigned the scheme at various points in order to establish an acceptable final project.

Develop other opportunities and an 'Energy Mix'

Alongside development of the wind farm, Awel Aman Tawe have delivered and been involved in a number of other energy advice, efficiency and renewable energy projects, including the Egni Solar PV Coop which has installed 179kw solar PV on seven community buildings in the local area.

There is a lot of institutional and public support for community renewable energy

This project was initiated from a local ambition to develop and own a community wind farm. The project has been sustained through its development, by the enthusiasm and support of local people. A number of funding and technical support programmes have helped to enable the project to come to fruition.

Welsh Government's Local Energy service support

The Welsh Government has supported this project through both the Ynni'r Fro programme and Local Energy Service. These support mechanisms have provided technical support, development funding and capital finance to the project.

Local Energy Service technical support was provided throughout the due diligence process and construction of the wind farm. The capital finance, including bridging loan finance, provided by the Local Energy Service enabled the project to stick to its strict timetable in order to meet its Feed-in Tariff deadline.

About Local Energy

The Local Energy service supports the development of locally owned renewable energy schemes through development officer support, grants and loans. To find out more visit the Local Energy website.

For more information contact:
Paul Smith
 Local Energy Programme Manager
 e: localenergy@est.org.uk

