

Case Study

Wadebridge Renewable Energy Network (WREN)

“Our energy, our future”



INTRODUCTION

WREN is a not-for-profit co-operative, owned and run by its members, working to transform energy from an individual cost to a collective asset. WREN believes that instead of allowing millions of pounds to flow out of its local economy in energy bills, local energy resources should be harnessed to *sustain* the local economy and *cut* energy bills. WREN aims to establish a low carbon economy within Wadebridge and the surrounding area, and then invest the benefits locally.

WHERE IN THE REGION

Wadebridge, North Cornwall

DATES WORK CARRIED OUT

September 2010 – founding of Wadebridge Renewable Energy Network (WREN)

May 2011 – legally constituted as an Industrial and Provident Society

November 2011 – winner of the 2011 Best Community Initiative at the South West Green Energy Awards

December 2011 – WREN energy shop opens offering energy saving advice

February 2012 – £5,000 allocated from community fund to three local groups

May 2012 - winner of Cornwall best third sector business award

July 2012 - Ed Davey, Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change becomes 652nd member of WREN when visiting the Energy Shop in The Platt, Wadebridge.

August 2012 - Launch of a local 'energy backed' currency Wr (Wrens) accepted by 50 participating local businesses

KEY MESSAGES

- WREN is a not for profit co-operative which works to raise income from renewable energy generation for the benefit of local projects and works to help individuals cut their energy use.
- WREN has 660 members, each of whom paid £1 to join and receive one equal vote.
- The aim is to produce 30 per cent of Wadebridge's electricity from local renewable energy resources by 2015.

- WREN has so far assisted the installation of solar PV arrays totalling in excess of 1.2 MW.

THE FULL STORY

Background to the project

WREN was set up in 2010 as a catalyst for local economic resilience. Concerned about Wadebridge's dysfunctional energy strategy where, like most of the UK, individuals are isolated and passive recipients of a centralised supply, the organisation wanted to go back to a situation where local energy resources are harnessed to complement central supply, retaining economic value in the local area.

The organisation was set up with the intention of operating as an energy company, enabling homeowners, businesses and others, through marketing and support, to generate renewable energy, and to help its members cut their energy usage, saving money on bills.

How does the project work?

WREN is a not for profit cooperative, owned and run by its 660 members, who receive an equally weighted vote for their £1 membership fee. WREN sees itself as a facilitating body and a catalyst for renewable energy development locally, operating as an energy company, not an installer. It acts to enable homeowners, businesses and others to increase their renewable energy generation and reduce their energy consumption.

The organisation receives no formal funding, and is operated by a group of volunteers and through generous donations. A Local Energy Assessment Fund (LEAF) grant was applied for with assistance from Communities for Renewables CIC, and upon receipt of this a feasibility study for a wind development was conducted.

The organisation also offers advice on energy saving techniques, opening up an energy shop in Wadebridge where people can go to get advice from the volunteers. It aims to reduce Wadebridge's demand for energy as well as increasing its renewable energy generation.

What has been achieved?

The launch of the project was attended by over 600 people, and the group now has 660 members, each with an equal say in how it is run.

So far domestic solar systems installed directly through WREN total 288 kW, but many other installations have been prompted by WREN's promotional activities, with a total of some 500 kW in this category. WREN has also been working with Cornwall Council and has helped with the installation of 200 kW on buildings in Wadebridge, including social housing and the library. Additionally, a 242 kW solar PV array has been installed by WREN member and holiday park 'The Olde House.' In total WREN has assisted with the installation of over 1.2 MW of solar energy. WREN has worked with installer Plug into the Sun to organise a solar buying club, whereby WREN members receive discounted prices. Plug into the Sun also donate around £100 to the community fund for every successful installation, of which there have been around 15 so far.

WREN has also worked to create community support for the repowering of St Breock wind farm, a project managed by REG Windpower. If successful the 11 wind turbines at the site will be replaced by five larger ones, giving a total installed capacity of 12.5 MW.

WREN has taken advantage of the government's CERT programme which ends this year, allowing the group to offer free domestic property cavity wall and loft insulation to local people.

By installing insulation for free through WREN's scheme, not only do homeowners save money on their heating bills but money will be put back into the community. For each house which is insulated, the contractors will make a donation to the WREN community fund. It is believed that if 500 homeowners sign up for this scheme then total savings in Wadebridge's energy bills could be in the region of £185,000 – money that would otherwise leave Wadebridge.

Additionally, to help residents save money, WREN has given away 250 smart energy meters that homeowners can use to track and reduce their consumption, which in turn will save them money on their bills.

So far, £5,000 has been raised for the community fund, and in December 2011 this was allocated to three organisations. Wadebridge Foodbank and Storehouse and the Wadebridge Youth Project each received £2,250, and Wadebridge and District Guides received £500.

WREN has also created the UK's first energy backed currency, the Wadebridge Pound, designed to boost the green economy and protect local shops and businesses. Householders who take advantage of WREN's insulation scheme will be entitled to receive 25 Wadebridge Pounds which can be spent locally.

Who is involved?

WREN is owned and run by its 660 members, each of whom has an equal vote in how the organisation is run. The whole operation is run by volunteers and is funded by generous benefactors. Harriet Wilde is the director of WREN, Stephen Frankel acts as chair for the group, and Jake Burnyeat of Green Trust CIC acts as commercial director.

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Relationship with Regen SW

WREN worked with Communities for Renewables CIC (CfR), a joint venture between Regen SW and Green Trust CIC to successfully apply for a Local Energy Assessment Fund (LEAF) grant to conduct a feasibility study for a wind energy development. CfR is also working closely with WREN to help them fulfil their ambition of completing a wind turbine development within the next two years.

What's next?

WREN hopes to secure funding to develop a wind project within the next two years and is working with Communities for Renewables CIC to help fulfil this ambition. The ultimate goal is to provide 30 per cent of Wadebridge's power locally from renewable sources by 2015.

CONCLUSION

WREN has been a very proactive community organisation, encouraging many local people to install renewable energy technology and has actively promoted energy saving through its energy shop, insulation offer and smart meter provision. It has ambitious plans to meet 30 per cent of Wadebridge's energy demands from renewable sources by 2015 and is making progress with a wind development.

QUOTES

On winning 2012 best third sector business:

"Cornwall can lead the way in renewable energy for years to come, so WREN's approach, involving the local community, is very exciting."

Suzanne Bond | Cornwall Development Company chief executive

" said "It is a great boost to our team to be given this Award. We want our approach to become the mainstream, so that all localities in Cornwall will see how easy it is to turn energy from a cost to an asset. This Award makes us more confident that we are going in the right direction, and may encourage others to do what we are doing."

Stephen Frankel | WREN Chairman

On WREN CERT Free Insulation offer:

"Sometimes things that seem too good to be true, really are true. If you do not have either good loft insulation or cavity wall insulation this is probably the last chance you will have to get it done for free."

Jerry Clark | WREN technical director

(The network recently launched its own local currency, the Wren, and those who take advantage of the insulation scheme will also receive 25 Wrens (£25) to spend in the collaborating town centre shops.)

FACTS AND FIGURES

- Has 660 members, each with an equal say in how the group is run
- Assisted with the installation of 1.2 MW of solar PV in Wadebridge
- Distributed £5,000 from its community fund to local groups
- Aim to provide 30 per cent of Wadebridge's energy by 2015.

CONTACTS

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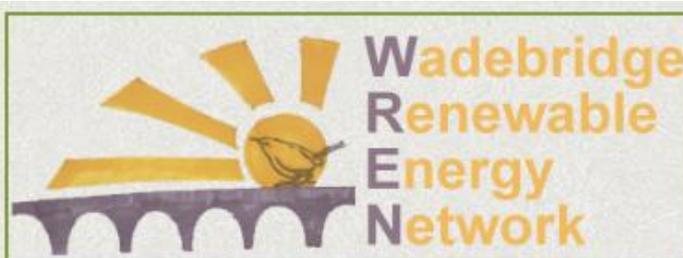
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LINKS

Wadebridge Renewable Energy Network website: <http://wren.uk.com/>



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