

Welcome to the first edition of the Community Energy Newsletter. In this newsletter we hope to give an overview of renewable energy projects which communities across the Highlands and Islands have undertaken over the past few months, together with news and views.

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Stornoway waterwheel turns history around

The Stornoway Trust, in partnership with the Stornoway Amenity Trust have restored and revived the site of a historic watermill in the Trust-owned Stornoway Castle grounds. The watermill, originally constructed in 1816, was destroyed by fire in 1890. The restoration project revives an aspect of Stornoway's history and has created an additional visitor attraction for the area, while creating general interest in renewable energy. The waterwheel generates 4kW of hydro power which is used for lighting the castle grounds. The timber-built interpretive centre and wooden bridge across the glen river were built

by Stornoway Trust sawmill with timber supplied from the castle woodland. Civil engineering works on the mill pond construction, mill race, weir and waterwheel were carried out by a local firm and landscaping with assistance from a group of special-needs workers. A local school was closely involved in the design of the display board for the interpretive centre. The restored waterwheel/hydro project, which received an SCHRI grant, was officially opened in October 2005. Further information on the project can be found at the Trust's website at www.stornowayamenitytrust.co.uk

COMMUNITY STARS



Highlands & Islands community energy projects dominate Green Energy Awards final

Community renewable energy projects in the Highlands and Islands were the toast of the Scottish Renewable Energy Industry at the annual Green Energy awards ceremony recently held in Edinburgh. Stars for the night were Gigha Renewable Energy Limited and The Westray Development Trust who were announced joint winners in the community initiative category.

Westray Development Trust uses renewable energy as a means of regenerating the islands. Initially installing a small wind turbine to heat a local youth centre, the Trust has gone on to take forward pioneering projects such as their biofuels projects, using waste cooking oil to fuel a vehicle. They are now in the advanced stages of development of a larger wind turbine project which will generate revenue to underpin the island's regeneration.

Gigha Renewable Energy Limited operates the island's own windfarm, the first community-owned windfarm in the UK. Three large turbines have generated nearly 2m kilowatt hours of electricity since they were commissioned in December 2004. Profits from the scheme are re-invested in the development of Gigha for the benefit of the island's population.



Tiree votes for wind

At a recent, well attended public meeting in An Talla, Tiree, it was announced that, from a 60% poll of the electoral roll, 83.5% voted to proceed with plans for a community wind turbine. The meeting was chaired by HICEC which has assisted the Tiree community group to date. Presentations were given on the optimum site for the turbine, how it would be financed and the likely revenue it could generate. However, the community has received a high grid connection offer from Scottish and Southern Energy and have since lodged their concerns with Energywatch, the watchdog for gas and electricity consumers.



Inverness College training green plumbers

Inverness College plumbing school is now able to offer training in installation of renewable energy systems. This training includes fault-finding techniques, installation of different types of solar panels on various roof surfaces and safe handling procedures. Following the course, students will receive provisional accreditation by BUPEC which will allow them to fit solar panels as part of the SCHRI scheme. The new installation was part-funded with an SCHRI grant.

ALlenergy / HICEC go to Holyrood

HICEC and its partner in Argyll, ALlenergy, have been invited to take part in Scottish Environment Week from 7 - 13 February 2006 and taking place in the Garden Lobby of the Scottish Parliament. This annual event seeks to raise awareness of environmental issues amongst MSPs and HICEC will be ensuring that the importance of community renewable schemes is seen not just in a local setting but widening the focus to consider its role in the wider global context. Through HICEC's involvement in this series of events, we will be offering Highlands and Islands MSPs the opportunity to visit renewable projects in their respective constituencies as part of their general awareness-raising week. If you feel your group would be keen to host an MSP visit to your community project, please let us know.

Highland renewable energy strategy

Highland Council has just published its draft Highland Renewable Energy Strategy and will be open for a consultation period during which six regional public meetings will be held. HICEC has given its response to this strategy document, copies of which are available on request.

3Rs at Scoraig (Reading, Writing and Renewables)

With assistance from HICEC, Scoraig Primary School, situated on an isolated peninsula south of Ullapool has installed a wind turbine to provide the school with

a reliable source of energy, as Scoraig has no connection to the main grid network. Equipment and controls for monitoring the performance of the unit provide

data which is interpreted through software and sent via a modem and used by the school for renewable energy projects and curriculum based activity.

In order to reduce our paper usage, this newsletter will be circulated electronically. However if you would prefer to receive it in hard copy, please let us know.



Help to fund your project

HICEC has produced a step-by-step guide to financing community renewable projects. The A5 booklet, prepared by Energy4All has an accompanying CD which provides a financial model that can be used to demonstrate the financial implications of different financing packages. This model was road-tested by representatives of community groups who were involved in the final model. Free copies of this guide are available from HICEC, details below.

View from the board

Nicholas Gubbins, Chief Executive of the Highlands and Islands Community Energy Company, reflects on the organisation's first year.

- Q** What are the major challenges facing communities wanting to develop their own renewable energy projects?
Be realistic. A large, complex project is probably not the best place to start. Small projects give people the confidence to tackle larger ones.
- Q** How can HICEC help communities overcome these difficulties?
Our team happily provides advice – with no strings attached.
- Q** Where do you see HICEC's role developing in future years?
We intend to become a community-owned charity working with and through our members – while continuing with our wider advice and grant-providing service.

Power to the people

The Island of Foula west of Shetland, one of Britain's most remote island community, should become self-sufficient in electricity in 2006 through the refurbishment of an off-grid renewable energy-based electricity production and distribution system serving the whole island. Foula Electricity Trust received an SCHRI grant of £80,000 towards the scheme – which will comprises wind, water and solar power. The scheme had to be redesigned to meet strict planning laws as Foula is a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest, Special Protection Area and National Scenic Area due to its unique plants, birdlife and geology.

“*Our aim is for all communities in our area to be able to generate and use renewable energy for their long-term and collective benefit.*”



PURE genius on Unst

In Unst, Shetland's most northerly island, the Unst Partnership has developed the PURE (Promoting Unst Renewable Energy) project, Europe's first off-grid renewable hydrogen system and the first community-owned hydrogen production plant in the world. Hydrogen, a clean fuel produced through electrolysis of water, is easy to store and regarded by many as the fuel of the future offering a clean, renewable alternative to fossil fuels. The PURE project has recently hosted visits from other Highlands and Islands community group who are considering developing their own hydrogen projects.

Grid fee threat to community wind projects

HICEC has called on distribution operator Scottish and Southern Energy to employ creative network management solution to the address the “punitive high” grid connection quotes to avoid stifling community wind farm projects proposed for the Highlands and Islands. HICEC are working with a growing number of communities who are desperately keen to get their own wind projects up and running but are being held back due to excessive grid connection charges.



Future events

Western Isles Community Renewables, HICEC conference – large-scale projects
Tarbert, North Harris 25/26 April 2006.
(More details in next issue)

All-Energy 24th & 25th May 2006
The annual renewables exhibition and conference will take place in Aberdeen on 24/25 May 2006. This event is free to attend, although there is a charge for exhibition space. More information is available at www.all-energy.co.uk

Community Land Unit training programme
HIE's Community Land Unit is running a programme of training events aimed at current community land initiatives but welcomes attendance from other aspiring community groups. For further details, please contact Neil Gerrard at neil.gerrard@hient.co.uk.

Got a story?

We are very keen to hear from our readers. If you have any community energy news, stories or event information that you would like to see included in the next issue of Community Energy News, please send your articles to HICEC's Marion O'Hara at: marion.ohara@hient.co.uk
The next issue will be in March 2006.

Websites

Highlands and Islands Community Energy Company
www.hie.co.uk/community-energy.html
Allenergy – www.alienergy.org.uk
Isle of Gigha Heritage Trust – www.gigha.org
North Harris Trust – www.north-harris.org
Knoydart Foundation – www.knoydart-foundation.com
PURE – www.pure.shetland.co.uk
Westray Development Trust – www.westray-orkney.co.uk



Team time

HICEC has a team of ten staff and agents covering all areas in the Highlands and Islands. Full details can be found below. In future issues, we hope to highlight how team members individually demonstrate their practical commitment to renewable energy.

Jon Priddy – development officer, north Highland

"When we built our house, we wanted to have as low carbon emissions as possible and – as I had a background in forestry – we decided on woodfuel. We looked at downdraft boilers, woodchip boilers and pellet boilers but they were all either too big for our needs or they required further infrastructure, e.g. hoppers or an external boiler house.

After some discussion with a heating engineer, we chose a large wood burning stove (16kW), an accumulator and some natty controls. The accumulator is a massive body of water heated by the stove. They are commonplace in Nordic countries. In more traditional systems in the UK when your stove goes out, your house gets cold, but the great thing about our system is that the stove goes out and the accumulator stores the heat for up to 24 hours – depending on when you need it and how much you use. It turns a stone-age fuel into a fuel of convenience.

We love it and it's great to have a low carbon footprint. The whole system, excluding installation which I did myself, cost £2,700."

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