

ADVCE Hydropower Project



About the project

Transition Belper are a group of local people from the market town of Belper in Derbyshire. The group are part of a growing 'Transition Network' made up of towns and cities all over the world, who are exploring how to increase their communities resilience to climate change.

The Derwent valley (where transition Belper is based) is rightly hailed as the birthplace of the industrial revolution and initially used water to power mills that were built along its length between Matlock Bath and Derby.

In 2011 several members of transition Belper enquired as to whether the Derwent was used for producing hydropower. The answer was 'yes'. The Transition Belper energy group were successful in their Local Energy Assessment Fund (LEAF) bid (£2.5k) from DECC and one of the projects was a desktop study, completed by T4 Sustainability, of hydropower potential in the Derwent Valley.

Insert community group logo here

The desk study identified Ambergate weir as the largest remaining unused potential sites. Ambergate weir is a disused wire works on the River Derwent. The area is part of the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage site and once housed at least two hydro turbines, until they were removed in the 1960s.

Following the identification of the site meetings were held with the site owners and research was conducted into how to go about a community benefit hydropower project. The decision was made to progress the project and apply for support via the Co-operative Community Energy Challenge. With the support and funds (£10k) received, as one of seven winners, the interested Transition Belper members were able to update the pre-feasibility study, commission a fisheries assessment and set up the legal entity, Amber & Derwent Valley Community Energy (ADVCE) Ltd. ADVCE is a community energy co-op which aims to raise funds via a community



share offering, creating a co-operative producing renewable energy.

To-date the studies confirm that **YES, a scheme is feasible**, but there are a number of different options on site.

Successes

The project's greatest successes to date have been in engaging the site owner in backing the process and in consulting and involving the local community and stakeholders. ADVyCE are now certain that the community are fully behind the project having made the project known at local community events, delivered a survey questionnaire to every house in the community, held an open day at the site attended by 140 people, built an online mailing list to over 185 interested people in a very short time and invited people to open project team meetings.

The project is still at the feasibility stage and so has a long way to go before it can measure success. The number of interested stakeholders and supporters is monitored and is a measure of success so far.



Challenges

A significant challenge continues to be trying to manage a complex project as volunteers. The project continues to go through peaks and troughs of activity based on funding opportunities and time availability.

The other significant challenge is the complex regulatory issues that seem to be continually changing, such as new EA best practise guidance, FiT digression and organisational structures enabling community energy co-operatives.

Involvement

Encouraging, and maintaining, the community's interest has been one of the most successful aspects of the project:

- Transition Belper have been organising and hosting open day events at the Belper and Milford Hydropower plants annually since 2011 with cooperation from the World Heritage team and Derwent Hydro Ltd. During 2014
- Transition Belper attended many outdoor events, including 'Belper Goes Green', and the 'Ambergate Carnival'. Regular meetings have also been held

with the site owner and the environment agency to maintain stakeholder relationships.

- Through various events, meetings and workshops, including the newly formed Derwent Catchment Partnership, we have been able to engage in dialogue with the Rivers Trust, canoeists, anglers and local residents.
- ADVCE have just run a series of open project meetings with an aim of recruiting more active project team members, and whilst people have shown interest, we have not yet seen them in attendance at official meetings.

Funding

The project has received 3 separate direct funds and 1 indirect fund support:

- Approximately £2k from the LEAF fund meant Transition Belper could carry out a desktop 'Hydro opportunities study' in the Derwent Valley area;
- Approximately £10k from the Co-operative Community Energy competition allowed the setting up of the social enterprise, a

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fisheries assessment and an update to an out- of-
date site feasibility study

- Approximately. £20k from WRAP and the RCEF fund was used for a detailed feasibility study to identify the best options, with the new best practise guidance.

The project team, all Transition Belper members, have given a significant amount of time 'in kind' to this project. Part of the Co-operative community energy award was 'in kind' support from the Centre for Sustainable Energy.

Legacy

The project has not yet been completed so it is hard to say for sure what its legacy will be. However, it is hoped that after the turbines installation they will continue to produce sustainable power for generations to come and encourage other communities to embark on similar projects.

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