



Visiting schoolchildren at the Ballantrushal wind turbine give a sense of the scale of the tower, and, inset, board members of the Galson Trust, Agnes Rennie, Carola Bell and Norman Thomson are joined, left, by former Energy Minister Brian Wilson as part of the share issue promotion

Share offer aims to spread community benefit from windfarm scheme

By Katie Macleod

For the first time in the Western Isles, individuals are being invited to become directly involved in investing in a community project on a commercial scale, with the launch of the second phase of the Urras Energy windfarm at Baile an Truseil.

Urras Energy Society is planning to add two more turbines to the one currently on site in order to fund long-term development within the community-owned Galson Estate. In the early stages, each turbine could produce £100,000 in income for local development – a figure that will rise once loans are repaid. These profits will then be dispersed locally through a Community Investment Fund, with spending priorities determined by the results of a recent community survey.

While 90 per cent of the funds are being raised through a commercial loan from an ethical bank, the community landowner, Urras Ghabhsainn, is seeking private investment for the final ten per cent. At £50 each – with a minimum investment of £250 and a maximum of £100,000 – the shares allow investors to become a member of Urras Energy Society, and in turn have a direct involvement in the development of the community.

“We’re really keen that as many people as possible within the community buy shares, because by buying shares they

become a member of the society, and they then have a stake in the future, and they effectively own these turbines,” said founding director of Urras Energy Society, Carola Bell, at a media event in Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn’s offices on November 24th. “It’s really giving our community a share of the development.”

The community share offer opened in October, and will close on January 16th 2015. Although the total share target was set at £600,000, the minimum required is £450,000; by the end of November, Urras Ghabhsainn had already raised more than £200,000 in shares. Shareholders can expect to earn four to five per cent in interest on their investment each year, and taxpayers can expect even more money in their pockets, thanks to tax relief.

But this project isn’t just hypothetical: the community has already proved it can do this successfully, as the presence of the current turbine, which has been generating electricity since January, shows. In fact, the turbine had its most successful day shortly before the share launch, producing 21 megawatt hours in a 24 hour period - the equivalent of £2730.

Most of the infrastructure – such as the grid line, substation, and cabling – has already been put in place by Urras Energy. German manufacturer ENERCON are supplying the turbines and building the

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EVENTS always welcomes contributions, listings, photographs and information about Island activities – and we are very happy to have advertisements as well, since we don't charge for the newspaper.

Communities powering ahead as turbines turn

There is a quiet energy revolution taking place across the Outer Hebrides where a number of community trusts are progressively harnessing natural resources for significant local gain.

Community groups throughout the Outer Hebrides have reached a major milestone with the installation of 10.5MW of community energy and there's a further 11MW to install in 2015.

Five Community Trusts have now installed large-scale wind turbines, and with the income they aim to tackle projects dealing with fuel poverty, transport and housing.

Community Energy Scotland, which has assisted the community groups from their inception, are hosting an event on Thursday December 11 at 6.30pm in Martin's Memorial Hall, Stornoway, to showcase local successes.

This event is part funded by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and part funded by the Community Development Trusts, and is a perfect opportunity for the wider community to hear about the journeys these projects have been on and the benefits that will come from these schemes. There will also be information on the exciting opportunity for local people to invest in a local renewable energy scheme.

Everyone interested in community energy, whether living in a community with a renewable energy project already installed, part of a group looking at installing renewable energy, or interested in more information on these schemes, should come along.

This event will detail the experiences which groups such as Horshader Community Development in Shawbost have gone through to get their turbine installed. Urras Energy (part of Galson Estate) will be there to explain their share offer opportunity and how anyone can invest.



The event will also highlight projects which Trusts such as Coimhearsnachd Bharraidh agus Bhatarsaidh are able to fund, as well as the application process. As part of this event there will also be sessions on local energy economies and how these could help new groups to install renewables, and on the proposed Energy Supply Company (ESCO) which is aiming to sell locally sourced energy to households.

"Community energy projects were the first to install large scale renewables on the islands and have been at the forefront of renewable developments across Scotland. This is a great

opportunity for the Development Trusts to showcase what they have achieved and to inform and inspire other communities and the general public," said Kathleen Macdonald, Community Energy Scotland.

Meanwhile Coimhearsnachd Bharraidh agus Bhatarsaidh/Barra and Vatersay Community Wind Energy Project were awarded the Best Community Project Award at the Scottish Green Energy Awards which were held at the Edinburgh International Conference Centre on Thursday 27th November.

The Awards, a celebration of the success of

the Scottish renewable energy industry, reward organisations, projects and individuals who have demonstrated outstanding performance.

Councillor Alasdair Macleod, Chair of Sustainable Development at CnES, said: "I would like to congratulate all concerned with the Barra and Vatersay project. This is a great example of a community working together to utilise the fantastic renewable development opportunities we have here in the Western Isles. I sincerely hope that many more communities use this as an example of what can be achieved through community partnership and innovative thinking."



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Katie Macleod, from EVENTS, left, joins the media briefing on Urras Energy on Monday November 24

Share offer from windfarm

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foundations, committing to a 'supply and install' contract that includes a 12-year maintenance contract, ensuring the turbines operate successfully. When completed (hopefully by the end of 2015), the three turbines will provide enough green electricity to meet the needs of over 2000 homes each year.

The idea of a renewable energy scheme for local benefit was first planted with the community buyout in 2005. Without this initial ownership of the land, "there would be no guarantee or even likelihood of delivering a venture of this nature," explained Brian Wilson, who addressed the founding directors and the media.

"Community ownership changes that. It removes the biggest obstacle to utilising these natural resources in the interests of the people who live, work, and raise their families here. Indeed, it is difficult to think of a better argument in favour of community land ownership, not just here but throughout the country, than the kind of

project we are promoting today."

The former UK Minister for Energy and current Chairman of Harris Tweed Hebrides went on to emphasise that the project "is a commercial proposition with a community interest... People who invest in this should get a double benefit – a decent rate of return plus the satisfaction of supporting the principle of community land ownership and the practical benefits it brings."

Mr Wilson also echoed what Carola had said previously about the benefits being both environmental and economic, describing community landownership and renewable energy schemes as "natural bedfellows."

He said: "Whatever the other arguments about renewable energy, the absolute certainty is that they can bring capital into communities which have suffered for generations from having very little of that commodity. To me, that is the overwhelming argument in favour of renewable energy developments in these islands – the economic ones. The ones that make it possible to live and work here."