South Brent Community Energy Society

The project was conceived in 2006 following a talk by the Devon Association for Renewable Energy, which led to the formation of Sustainable South Brent, now a local charity that aims to initiate projects that support the long term sustainability of South Brent.

Constraint mapping showed the best place for a medium scale wind turbine in South Brent to be at Marley Thatch farm, and a good relationship was built up with the landowners.

Exhibitions were held outlining the idea of a community owned wind turbine and different possible sizes of machine, which produced a generally favourable response. The Parish Council was kept informed throught the project.

In taking one step at a time and following a least-cost route, all the preparatory work for the planning application was done by volunteers, including background noise and bat surveys. However, the level of work required should not be underestimated!

A planning application was submitted to SHDC in January 2010 and approved in April that year. The application had the support of the Parish Council and received no objections.

In December 2011 members of Sustainable South Brent established the South Brent Community Energy Society (SBCES Ltd) as a Community Benefit society. A full height met mast was installed by the founders of the society to confirm that the project would be viable.

With help from CooperativesUK and Carbon Leapfrog a detailed business plan and share offer document were drawn up and the community share offer was opened in November 2012.

The share offer was closed in March 2013 having raised £430,000.

The foundations for the wind turbine were installed that month and the order placed for a remanufactured Vestas V27 wind turbine.
The turbine was installed at the end of August 2013 and began generating in September.

By early December 2013 it had generated over 80,000kWh towards an annual target of between 300,000 and 400,000kWh.
The wind turbine is 31.5m high (to the hub) and 27m in diameter - 45m to blade tip. It is classified by SHDC as a "small" wind turbine and does not need a red light on top!

As a Community Benefit Society, SBCES Ltd must ensure as much benefit as possible goes to the local community, and not just its members - it is different to a cooperative in this respect but otherwise has a similar democratic structure. The Society hopes to be able to reinvest around £10,000/year into local energy saving and generating initiatives in the South Brent area. Its directors are unpaid volunteers.

Although intermittent in nature, the UK's fleet of wind turbines reduces the amount of gas and oil imported and burned in power stations. As such, they should be seen as fuel-saving devices. During windy spells of weather they contribute over 12% to UK electricity demand. The website <http://www.bmreports.com/bsp/bsp_home.htm> gives realtime figures for the UK electricity generation mix from which the impact of wind energy can been seen. (NB the website takes a while to load and you will need to scroll down to see the fuel mix). When there is no wind they generate nothing, which comes with a 100% guarantee! Fluctuations in national demand occur faster than fluctuations in overall wind power output and are accommodated by varying the output from gas and coal powered stations.

Community owned generating assets typically return far higher levels of economic benefit to the area they are located in than commerical renewable installations. Common throughout continental Europe, this sector has lagged behind in the UK but is growing fast. The UK government has recognised the importance of community energy and is due to release its Community Energy Strategy early in 2014.

Wedmore Community Power Cooperative is the most recent newcomer in the greater South West: <http://www.wedmorecpc.co.uk/>

See [www.sbces.org.uk](http://www.sbces.org.uk) for updates about the South Brent project.

