

Trust News

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<http://www.balernovt.org.uk>

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Harlaw Hydro comes of age

Harlaw Hydro's postcard flier says it all; 'Yippee for the rain!' Rain is going to be even more significant for Balerno in the future than it has ever been up to now.

There is an untapped power source flowing right through our community. For hundreds of years the Water of Leith provided the power for industry in West Edinburgh, at one time there were as many as 70 water wheels using the water before it reached the Forth.

In the early 19th century it was water that powered the industry of West Edinburgh driving numerous mills in Balerno, Currie, Juniper Green and further downstream in Edinburgh. That's where the 44 bus service gets its name.

The Harlaw and Threipmuir Reservoirs were constructed by the Edinburgh Water Company, around 1847, as compensation reservoirs to regulate the flow of water into Bavelaw Burn and from there into the Water of Leith.

The mills may have closed but a significant amount of the infrastructure is still in place and has been waiting to be re-used.

Enter BVT. After several years in the preparation, at last the idea of hydropower generation on the Bavelaw Burn is close to realisation. The idea of green electricity generation from a micro hydro scheme dates back since before 2010, and a dedicated team have been working hard since then to bring the dream to reality.

The Harlaw Hydro project aims to use the outflow from Harlaw Reservoir to drive a 65kW turbine and feed the energy in to the national grid. To encourage small-scale developments such as this the government established Feed in Tariffs (FiT), which supplement the basic purchase price from the energy companies.

BVT knew almost from the start that it would not be possible for it to build and operate the scheme. An undertaking of that size was always going to need to secure a large quantity of funding beyond the scope of grants and ordinarily available loans. So Harlaw Hydro was born in 2012 as a spin off from BVT, which by then was a charity.

Harlaw Hydro is an Industrial and Provident Society, an IPS, which would always have the ability to raise money through

a share issue. And that is what Harlaw Hydro will be doing when it launches the share issue at 7.30pm on 9 April at the St Joseph Centre. Harlaw Hydro will raise as much as possible of the £313k cost of the scheme through the share issue, grants and donations with any shortfall coming through loans.

So what is BVT's continuing interest in Harlaw Hydro? BVT does not control Harlaw Hydro, which has a separate Board and legal structure. The important thing is Harlaw Hydro's constitution, which is quite clear that the profit from its operations is assigned to BVT. In turn BVT as a charity is bound to apply its free income for the benefit of the community.

The Harlaw Hydro enterprise probably represents the single most important step ever taken by the community in Balerno under its own initiative. The financial model for the Harlaw Hydro operation envisages the company selling electricity into the national grid, and current figures suggest an operating surplus for Harlaw Hydro at approximately £58K pa when the turbine is fully operational. It will take a little time to get to the stage at which that money could come back into the community given the need to pay back loans on start up. But it is hoped that some reinvestment in the community could start from as early as the second year of operation.

Harlaw Hydro is an immensely important development for Balerno, and BVT supports it wholeheartedly. You can get lots more information on Harlaw Hydro and what this initiative could mean for this community at www.balernovt.org.uk/category/harlaw-hydro/.

Tues 9 April: Harlaw Hydro share launch, St Joseph Centre, 7.30pm

Sat 13 April: Farmers Market, Main Street, 9.00am to 1.00pm

Thurs 18 April: Walled Garden Action Group meeting, Balerno Community Centre 7.30pm

Sat 20 April: Sustain Balerno Open Meeting 10.30-12.30 and Pot Luck Lunch 12.30-1.30 (make/bring food to share) at Balerno Community Centre

Further details about BVT activities and all the current projects are available on the BVT website -

<http://www.balernovt.org.uk>