

Press Release – 21st December 2017

Environmental Finance

Environmental Finance advises a pioneering partnership between Big Society Capital and Power to Change, embarking on a £40m programme to transfer solar assets into community ownership

Leading social and environmental impact investor, Environmental Finance, has advised Community Owned Renewable Energy (CORE) Partners, the £40m social investment partnership between Big Society Capital and Power to Change, as they launch their innovative programme to facilitate community ownership of solar assets in England.

To deliver their programme of acquiring existing solar farms over the next 12 months, CORE Partners has appointed Environmental Finance as its exclusive advisor, who are working to direct global investment into projects that protect the environment in balance with local communities.

CORE Partners has purchased its first 5 MW solar site at Newton Downs Farm, near Plymouth, from renewable energy supplier, Good Energy. Environmental Finance will now work with local community group, Yealm Community Energy, to optimise the asset before selling it back to the local community over the next three years. The Newton Downs solar farm is projected to deliver more than £1.4m of income over its lifetime to be spent on community benefit.

CORE Partners was set up in response to the renewable energy subsidy cuts and changes in legislation, which stalled the development of community solar projects and resulted in a significant number of completed operational sites that were intended for the community, remaining under the ownership of private developers. CORE Partners aims to reinvigorate the community energy market by securing projects on behalf of the community to deliver the envisioned community benefits.

Environmental Finance has also advised CORE Home Nations, a community investment programme funded by Big Society Capital, to commit to purchase a 5 MW site at Brynwhilach Farm, near Swansea, with planned completion in early 2018. Environmental Finance are working closely with the local community energy partner, Gower Power, to enable the community to acquire the solar project over the next three years and maximise the collective environmental, social and financial benefit from the asset within the local area. The Brynwhilach site is projected to deliver more than £1m of income over its lifetime to be spent on local community projects.

Richard Speak, Founder of Environmental Finance, said: “We are delighted that having developed the programme, Environmental Finance is now an integral part of delivery and investment that provides the stimulus that the community energy market really needs after changes in legislation crushed the sector. We are really looking forward to collaborating with community energy groups to use these assets to tackle the environmental and social challenges in their local areas.”

Newton Downs and Yealm

Big Society Capital and Power to Change enable Yealm Community Energy to take control of a Devon solar farm as they launch their community energy investment programme

A pioneering social investment partnership between Big Society Capital and Power to Change has purchased Newton Downs solar farm, near Plymouth, with the objective of enabling local community energy group, Yealm Community Energy (YCE), to take ownership of the site and to maximise the financial, social and environmental benefits generated for the local community.

YCE have been actively engaged with the Newton Downs site since its inception and negotiated planning approval with the aim of purchasing the site post completion. Since construction was completed in January, YCE had been unable to reach agreement with the developer, Good Energy, until now.

Community Owned Renewable Energy (CORE) Partners was formed to address the current challenges facing the community energy market to facilitate community groups, such as YCE, to take ownership of solar power assets and maximise the community benefit generated for the local area.

Vidhya Alakeson, Chief Executive of Power to Change said: “We are extremely excited to team up with BSC to empower communities to make the most of their solar assets and achieve more cohesive and resilient English communities.”

CORE Partners will work closely with YCE and community energy advisor, Communities for Renewables (CfR), to enable full transition to community ownership over the next three years through a community investment offer. YCE will manage the projected lifetime income generated of £1.4m to support community projects that tackle social and environmental issues in the local area.

Jake Burnyeat, founder of CfR, said: “After months of negotiations, I am thrilled that the Newton Downs solar farm will finally fall into the community’s hands and be used to build a strong and sustainable local economy.”

Brynwhilach and Gower Power

Innovative community energy programme set up by Big Society Capital will deliver its first solar power asset into the hands of the Gower community in Wales

CORE Home Nations, a social investment programme funded by Big Society Capital, has committed to purchase the 5 MW Brynwhilach solar farm near Swansea, with the ambition of enabling local community energy group, Gower Power, to transition the site into community ownership.

CORE Home Nations was set up in response to government legislation and renewable energy subsidy cuts announced in 2015, which resulted in a large number of developed solar farms, intended for the community, remaining under ownership of private developers. CORE Home Nations are looking to stimulate the community energy market by securing operational solar farms throughout Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland and deliver the intended benefits to the community.

CORE Home Nations will work closely with Gower Power to carry out a community fundraise to fully transfer the site into community hands over the next three years. Gower Power will manage the projected lifetime income of at least £1m to support community projects that maximise the financial, social and environmental benefits generated for the local area.

Chief Investment Officer at Big Society Capital, Jeremy Rogers, said: “We are delighted that our new programme will enable the enterprising Gower Power community group to take control of this solar asset and use it to transform their local area.”

Ant Flanigan, Founder Director of Gower Power, added: “This is a fantastic opportunity to use renewable energy sources to drive community benefit around Gower, and we are looking forward to this being a catalyst to achieve a more vibrant and sustainable local economy.”

Notes to Editors

About CORE Partners: CORE Partners is a social investment partnership between Big Society Capital and Power to Change, targeting solar power assets in England, with the principal objective of turning these into community owned assets, whilst maximising the financial, environmental and social impact for the local community. Big Society Capital is a financial institution set up to build the social investment market in the UK, so that charities and social enterprises can access appropriate repayable finance to enable them to grow, become more sustainable and increase their impact on society. Power to Change is an independent trust, whose funding is used to strengthen community businesses across England.

About CORE Home Nations: CORE Home Nations is a social investment programme funded by Big Society Capital, targeting operational solar farms across Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, with the ambition of facilitating local community ownership, whilst maximising financial, environmental and social benefit for the community. Big Society Capital is a financial institution, set up to build the social investment market in the UK, so that charities and social enterprises can access appropriate repayable finance to enable them to grow, become more sustainable and increase their impact on society.

About Environmental Finance: Environmental Finance is a leading social impact investment advisor, working across the conservation, natural and built asset sectors, forming partnerships to create innovative, investable projects. Environmental Finance develops solutions that will tackle environmental and social challenges whilst delivering fair financial returns for investors, local communities and the environment at large. Our mission is to be a core part of the impact investment movement to redirect global investment into projects that protect the environment in balance with local communities. We provide targeted advice working with our partners such as the National Trust, RSPB and CORE Partners to deploy funding into community and environmental initiatives. We are members of the Finance for Sustainability group, a non-profit organisation working on big ideas to connect new forms of investment to social issues in the UK.

About Big Society Capital: Big Society Capital is a financial institution with a social mission, set up to build the social investment market in the UK, so that charities and social enterprises can access appropriate repayable finance to enable them to grow, become more sustainable and increase their impact on society. It is doing this by building a diverse social investment market and encouraging investors to lend or invest money to achieve a social as well as a financial return. Since it was set up as an independent organisation in 2012, Big Society Capital has invested over £270 million in specialist organisations who lend to charities and social enterprises.

About Power to Change: Power to Change is an independent trust, whose funding is used to strengthen community businesses across England. At a time when many parts of the UK face cuts, neglect and social problems, PtC are helping local people come together to take control, and make sure their local areas survive and stay vibrant. Follow Power to Change on Twitter at @peoplesbiz and visit www.thepowertochange.org.uk for the latest community business news.

About Yealm Community Energy: Yealm Community Energy Ltd is a Community Benefit Society, set up to provide improved energy services to the residents of the parishes bordering the Yealm estuary. YCE aims to produce low carbon energy from community-owned assets for the Yealm area and to generate a community fund to re-invest in supporting energy saving, tackling energy poverty and local community projects.

About Gower Power: Gower Power develops community energy and agriculture projects with the ambition of creating greater social, economic and environmental resilience and sustainability around the Gower Peninsula. Gower successfully energised a 1MW ground-mounted solar farm on behalf of community shareholders which will create a projected surplus of over £550k during the project's lifetime for supporting social enterprises and community eco-projects in the local area, building skills and education, and helping to create a more sustainable future.

About Communities for Renewables: CfR helps communities and renewable energy companies work together to develop and deliver shared ownership models for MW-scale solar and wind projects. CfR has helped raise nearly £30 million in community investment and loan finance for community energy. From feasibility grants to community share/bond offers and loan finance, CfR can help raise the investment needed to make local energy projects happen.