

Case study – Bristol community solar farm provides local benefits



Bristol Energy Cooperative's solar farm in Lawrence Weston, Bristol

In 2016 Bristol Energy Cooperative (BEC) funded and built a 4.2MWp solar farm in the Lawrence Weston area of Bristol. BEC has a particularly close relationship with Ambition Lawrence Weston (ALW), a resident-driven organisation striving to make Lawrence Weston an even better place to live and work.

BEC and ALW worked together to gain planning permission for the solar farm, which is on Bristol City Council land. When BEC was raising funds to build the solar farm it took out a "blended loan" from Social and Sustainable Capital. As part of this loan arrangement ALW received a £155,000 grant from Power to Change.

ALW described this funding as transformational. It enabled it to apply for and win additional funding for housing and a new community and health hub in the local area.

BEC continues to contribute revenue from the solar farm to ALW each year. ALW has used these funds to run intern-led projects on fuel poverty, co-ordinating energy surveys for residents, and supporting them to switch energy supplier. It also employed an energy consultant to lead on a local community-owned wind project. This received widespread community support and led ALW to set up Ambition Community Energy (ACE) CIC. In 2020 Bristol City Council granted ACE CIC planning permission for a single wind turbine in Avonmouth with a tip height of 150m – the tallest onshore wind turbine in England. The turbine began generating electricity in 2023.