

# Renfrewshire Case Study

## Harnessing Renfrewshire's Watery Wealth

### Overview

**Who?** Renfrewshire Council.

**What?** Two hydro projects, a hydro and district heating strategy, and an ambitious plan to grow willow coppices as biomass fuel on derelict industrial sites.

**Where?** Paisley, Lochwinnoch, Renfrewshire

**How much?** £76, 780 (development grants in total).

### Background

**Water powered the industrial** revolution in Renfrewshire – and it's now making a comeback as part of ambitious plans to beat fuel poverty. The local authority is using almost £20,000 of grant money from the Warm Homes Fund to explore two potential small-scale hydro sites for electrical power generation – one in the centre of one of Scotland's largest towns and the other near a pretty rural village.

Also on the cards is a forward-thinking scheme to grow willow trees on derelict industrial land around the region, then use the wood to fuel biomass boilers at council buildings, as well as selling any excess on the burgeoning renewable energy market.

Renfrewshire had hundreds of water-powered mills in the 18th century – they ran the textiles industry which saw Paisley pattern cloth exported across the world. Right next to the council's offices is a weir on the White Cart Water which was the site of two of those mills.



The council is now conducting a feasibility study to see if they can harness the water at the weir to drive a turbine which would supply some of the power used at Renfrewshire House, where the majority of the council's staff are based. Money generated from Feed In Tariffs could then be used to create a community benefits fund to provide affordable warmth to households.

**“At the moment we have several schemes on the go using Warm Homes Fund money, which has been wonderfully easy to access.”**

**Ron Mould, Energy Officer (Housing), Renfrewshire Council**



## Renfrewshire Case Study

Harnessing Renfrewshire's watery wealth(cont.)

### Further project details

**In Lochwinnoch**, a village about eight miles away, they are working with the local community to look at another hydro scheme on the River Calder. It would be sited at the edge of the village, at a point where the Victorians had dammed the river to provide power to some of the many mills in the village.

Energy generated by that project, close to the site of one of the first mills in Scotland to employ a water turbine for driving machinery, could be used to power community buildings and reduce fuel bills in Lochwinnoch, which is home to 2,900 people.

A separate Renfrewshire Council scheme could see parts of Paisley planted as temporary willow groves – with one possible location sitting cheek-by-jowl with St Mirren Football Club's modern 8,000-seat stadium.

The Council already run several biomass systems which heat schools and council buildings, so they know there is demand for the wood chips or pellets which they burn to produce energy.

Currently, they're using £20,000 of the Warm Homes Fund money, a strategy grant, to look at planting fast-growing willow trees on some disused former industrial sites which are owned by the council. That would provide employment opportunities, as well as habitat for plants and animals. Any money generated by the sale of the wood chippings or pellets which we don't use would go back to the communities where the wood was grown.

### Further opportunities

**Renfrewshire Council has also** been offered more funding from the Warm Homes Fund to examine the possibilities for district heating systems in rural areas, which provide more than one building with heat from a central boiler.

Ron Mould, Energy Officer (Housing) for the council added: "These are properties which are hard to heat and often don't have access to mains gas. On top of that, the occupiers are often on low incomes – it's a classic fuel poverty scenario and one we're trying to address in new ways."

They have also been offered funding to develop a hydro strategy for Renfrewshire.

**"I'd recommend the Warm Homes Fund to any organisation. The application process was simple and flexible, and the grants we have been given are helping us do things to really make life better for the communities we serve."**

**Ron Mould, Energy Officer (Housing), Renfrewshire Council**

For more information or to apply, please contact [warmhomesfund@est.org.uk/](mailto:warmhomesfund@est.org.uk) or visit [www.est.org.uk/warmhomesfund](http://www.est.org.uk/warmhomesfund)