

# Abingdon Hydro Director's Report, 23 January 2015

Looking back at last year, much that follows does not seem to have changed much. Yet it has been a demanding year. Many different activities had to come together at the right time before we could offer shares. It was against a background of pressure from three different directions - the need for:

- speed, as most documents are time-limited, and the feed in tariff is falling;
- money, to pay for the various professional services that are needed;
- publicity, and taking part in public events, to keep growing the mailing list.

Here are some agencies and tasks that we have to deal with.

The **Environment Agency** is key because they are responsible for the river and affect the project in many ways. We are fortunate in dealing with an officer who thinks highly of our project.

- The abstraction licence has been granted, but it will expire because we are not yet generating, so an application for renewal must go in very soon;
- the Local Operating Agreement is also in preparation, to specify how we will operate in collaboration with the lock keeper;
- the Fish Pass Panel is an EA committee that has to approve the fish pass separately (our application is on its way through the system);
- Flood Defence Consent is a catch all permit that can include other permissions, such a Water Framework Directive assessment (fortunately not in our case - that could add a year);
- automation of a small radial gate to provide the canoe clubs with white water is looking possible sooner than expected.

**Planning permission** was granted in late 2013. Updated drawings will be needed, but it was a big boost when it was passed unanimously by the planning committee.

The **District Council** also provides the lease - heads of terms are written and the legal process is happening. The Vale is prepared to accept a low rent because they see the wider benefits of this project.

**Scottish and Southern Electricity** provide the electrical connection (it will be at Curtis Avenue).

**Ofgem** received the appropriate documents to secure the feed in tariff and it is in the pipeline.

There have been other challenges and new things to learn: legal, business, marketing, wildlife, contracting, and of course hydro technology. In the background were other concerns: that some vital piece of the jigsaw may have been forgotten, or that someone would move the goalposts and send us back to square one, or that the cost would turn out to be too high for the project to be viable – more about that at the meeting.

As pieces began to fall into place, the next question was the timing. The risk of flooding means that contractors do not want to build in the river during the winter or spring. But if we waited until 2016 we would lose our place in the feed in tariff queue. It means that the civil engineering has to be done later this year. Therefore the share offer had to start before Christmas. It was a scramble, and still is. We learnt from others, especially the Low Carbon Hub, and cut some corners, and here we are!

It is a good project, with many benefits – as the postcard says, we tick a lot of boxes. The vast majority want it to happen, you have decided that it is worth your investment, and some have come forward to offer the help we needed, when it was needed. That is the joy of a community project (this one anyway!) Long may it continue.

Richard Riggs, Secretary