

Nuts and bolts



ENERGY



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Wales & West Utilities is one of Wales' largest companies with assets worth more than £5 billion, yet you won't find its name on billboards or plastered across a myriad of marketing material. Although one of Wales' most successful businesses, Wales & West Utilities is largely invisible, as the company provides the gas infrastructure that is vital to the 2.5 million homes and businesses it serves throughout Wales and the South West of England. Invisible, that is, until a gas leak is reported. It's then that the essential role the company plays in the community becomes clear. It is Wales & West Utilities' experienced gas engineers who respond when a gas leak is reported 24/7 365 days a year.



Wales & West Utilities owns, operates and maintains 35,000km of gas pipes across a region covering over 15 per cent of the UK geography - and spends more than £2 million every week improving the network to ensure the safe delivery of gas to a population of around 7.5 million people.

Wales & West Utilities was established as an independent gas distribution company in 2005, following the sale of a number of gas networks owned by National Grid Transco. The Wales and south west of England network was acquired by a consortium of infrastructure investors from across the globe.

Since those early days, Wales & West Utilities has created more than 350 new jobs and now employs nearly 1,500 people across its total operating region. It is also investing heavily in new skills, with the recruitment of over 90 apprentices and graduates over the past four years.

Its leading position in the gas industry has seen the business acknowledged as Company of the Year in 2008 and be successful in winning the industry's coveted Customer Service Award for the last two years in succession.

But it's not just within the industry that this business is seen as successful. Wales & West Utilities has also won major recognition in The Sunday Times 'Buyout Track Biggest 10' league table, which ranks the UK's 10 biggest private equity-owned companies with the fastest-growing profits of more than £50 million over a two-year period.

Chief executive, Graham Edwards has led the business from its launch and has seen the company grow from strength to strength.

He explained: "Being included in the UK's 'Biggest 10' league table was testament to the company's hard work and commitment over the past five years since our start up. Significant profit growth is somewhat unusual for a highly regulated company operating in the utility sector, but it reflects the progress we have made in key areas of business performance – from industry leading customer service to significant cost reduction and leading edge efficiency improvements – and all in a sector which operates to the highest levels of public and occupational safety.



"Our improvement in financial performance over the past two years in particular is the result of a range of business initiatives all coming together to produce this excellent performance. However, operating profit is only part of the wider story – this is a business that is constantly upgrading its infrastructure and which requires substantial capital investment to support that – for example we are investing over £600 million in the 5 years between 2008 and 2013" said Edwards.

As the company continues to play its part as a major service provider to the communities it serves, Wales & West Utilities recognises the continuing pressure that energy costs generally place on consumers.

As a fundamental link in the energy distribution chain, the company will continue to look for ways of improving the efficiency of its activities and work with partner organisations in developing the technologies essential in delivering energy in the most efficient and sustainable way into the future.

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On the crest of a wave

Meryl Cubley

Wales is set to become energy self-sufficient using renewable electricity by 2020 and reducing waste to zero by 2050.

Energy efficiency development plans in Wales are far in advance of anything planned for England or Scotland and will see Wales become energy self-sufficient in using renewable electricity within 20 years and reducing waste to zero by 2050.

These radical plans will make Wales one of the most energy and resource-efficient countries in the world within a generation, and Wales one of only three countries in the world legally bound to develop "sustainably".

In May 2010, Environment Minister for the Welsh Assembly Government, Jane Davidson, promised a low carbon revolution and added that Wales has the potential to produce nearly twice the amount of electricity it currently uses through wholly renewable sources by 2025. Whether through marine, wind, water or biomass generation, Wales will have a secure and resilient supply of power – and crucially – boost opportunities for new jobs and skills.

"The Energy Statement details how Wales has the potential to produce twice the amount of electricity it currently uses from renewable sources by 2025 – with

about 40 per cent coming from marine, a third from wind and the rest from sustainable bio-mass power or smaller projects using wind, solar, hydro or indigenous biomass" said Davidson.

"The potential is truly inspiring and I am confident that our low carbon revolution will provide the right framework to realise this potential. Wales once led the way in carbon-based energy; our goal now is to do the same for low carbon energy."

Peter Davies, Commissioner for Wales for the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) agrees: "Wales is well placed to use the opportunity of renewable energy to renew the economy. I welcome this statement as it gives a clear message of the way ahead for businesses, the public sector and communities so that through investment, this potential can be turned into reality.

"I am particularly pleased that the statement tackles the two key energy themes identified by our Low Carbon Wales report: retrofitting the existing housing stock to vastly improve energy efficiency and the commitment to low carbon energy generation. This is an important part of building a stronger economy, with great potential for jobs."

Jonathan Porritt, the chair of the UK Sustainable development commission, states that Wales is setting an example for the rest of the world to follow, with WAG "showing a serious commitment to making Wales a truly sustainable country."

Communities in south Wales are set to become part of one of Europe's few "low carbon regions", with 40,000 social housing homes equipped with solar, wind and heat-saving equipment. And rural fears have been allayed with only 2 per cent of Welsh land to be used for wind farms in areas that are already forested.

In Milford Haven the Wave Dragon unit – an offshore floating device that works by channelling waves into a reservoir above sea level generates electricity in the same way as hydro power plants. And elsewhere in Pembrokeshire, trials for an undersea tidal power scheme (developed in Wales by Welsh scientists) have been given the go ahead and will generate not only energy but worldwide attention.

Wales could become the only "one planet" country in the world – meaning that as a nation our use of resources could be sustained for the entire global population. Now that really is something to shout about.

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