

Pilot £4m lithium extraction plant in Cornwall completed

A £4m pilot plant which will extract valuable lithium from superheated underground water in Cornwall has been delivered “on time and on budget”, according to the firm behind the development.

Mining firm Cornish Lithium has announced its subsidiary company GeoCubed has commissioned the facility at United Downs, which was [previously slated for completion by the end of March 2022](#).

Initially, the plant – the first to operate Direct Lithium Extraction (DLE) technologies in the UK – will test to see if lithium can be produced in deep geothermal water obtained during GEL’s testing at its own United Downs site last year.

Cornish Lithium said it was expecting the tests to confirm production capability, which could enable the design of a commercial lithium plant in the county. The metal is seen as a vital component in the production of [batteries for electric vehicles](#).

During the course of this year, further DLE technologies will be trialled to establish preferred systems for more potential facilities.

Jeremy Wrathall, chief executive and founder of Cornish Lithium, said: “We are delighted to announce that the United Downs DLE pilot plant has been successfully commissioned on time and on budget. This is testament to the hard work and commitment of the GeoCubed team and our technology partners at GeoLith.

“The pilot plant will be a great asset for the company as we work to establish the most appropriate DLE technology with

which to process Cornish geothermal waters.”

Cornish Lithium now wholly owns GeoCubed after it reached an agreement to buy the 10% shareholding in the joint venture owned by partner Geothermal Engineering Limited (GEL).

Mr Wrathall said: “This will allow us to fully integrate GeoCubed within Cornish Lithium and benefit from the engineering expertise of its team across our portfolio of projects. Importantly, all ten jobs that were created during the project will be retained in Cornwall.”

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The pilot scheme has been supported by the [Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Local Enterprise Partnership \(LEP\)](#) with £2.9m from the Government’s Getting Building Fund for “shovel-ready” projects.

The minister overseeing the government's so-called "levelling up" agenda Neil O'Brien said: "The delivery of the UK's first direct lithium extraction plant is an incredible example of innovation at its finest and a proud moment for the people of Cornwall.

"Backed by nearly £3m of government funding, the extraction plant will contribute towards the UK's net zero target and is excellent proof of levelling up in action".

The pilot plant has been constructed in standard 6.1m (20ft) containers, with its design enabling relocation to different sites to test new boreholes if required.

Basingstoke's Ross-shire Engineering was appointed earlier this year to provide engineering, procurement, construction and commissioning support to the project.

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