

# Meet Be.EV, pioneering the future of EV charging across the country

As part of our quick fire questions series – or QFQs – we spoke to Asif Ghafoor, CEO and cofounder of Be.EV about being a catalyst for change, connecting the community and leaving a vital legacy.

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## What was the catalyst for launching Be.EV?

A genuine desire from Adrian (my business partner) and I to leave a positive mark on the planet, and create a catalyst for change. We think about how to reconnect the community, deliver infrastructure, and drive a new way for us all the move from A to B.

The responsibility on our shoulders is great, and we have to step up to the challenge if we're going to meet the UK's EV targets.

## Tell me about the business – what it is, what it aims to achieve, who you work

# with, how you reach customers and so on?

Be.EV is a public EV charging network that is expanding across the UK. We're pioneering the future of EV charging across the country – much like the early railways and motor vehicles. We want to create a reliable network of chargers, design led, in locations that fit within the lifestyle of the everyday driver. Be.EV is all about the end user, and we want the user experience to be great.

But we have an uphill battle to fight. Landowners are often reluctant to install chargers, and once we have permission there's a maze of red tape and regulation to navigate. We're constantly competing for power – the UK grid is outdated and there's only so much to go around.

I believe that building a community-focused charging network is an opportunity to change the planet and leave a legacy. We're not just building EV charging hubs and reducing emissions, we're making a positive impact with our infrastructure. "We're creating local jobs, engaging with universities and schools, and consulting with the community about their needs.

## How has the business evolved since its launch? When was this?

Be.EV has evolved significantly since we first launched in 2021. My view on the business has been that we need to tilt every five minutes. We're quite good at adapting the way we approach the market after listening to what people are saying to us, or after a failed idea. We try things out and if they don't work, we learn and move on.

For example, we drove down every main road coming out of central Manchester and pitched to landowners on all the major sites we saw. We had zero success, but that led us to identify car washes as targets for charging hubs. Now we have a contract in the UK with IMO, the largest car wash company in the world.

## Tell us about the working culture at Be.EV

Adrian (my cofounder) and I decided that Be.EV should be employee-owned because we wanted everyone to feel like an integral part of the business. I look at a lot of companies and see the owners running their staff into the ground,

and there is no real reward for their efforts.

Business equity is a great incentive for employees. If Adrian and I end up with 20% of profits rather than 50%, it doesn't matter. Our team has worked to bring the value of the business up – it's a big prize that is rightly shared by everyone if we're successful.

We're focussed on fostering a great workplace culture too. We have bells of all sizes in the office that we ring when we close a sale or advance a project. The office can feel like a constant celebration in a busy week!

Once someone is in our business, we're committed to them and we want to receive the same commitment back. A lot of my team from my previous company followed me when I announced I was starting Be.EV – I suppose the proof is in the pudding!

## How are you funded?

Installing EV chargers is a capital intensive business – you need to pay upfront for power, infrastructure, and the technology.

We recognise the scale of the problem, but when we were looking for investors we weren't just searching for capital. We wanted someone that shared our mission and had good synergy with our business. With its strong reputation in EV leasing and renewable energy, Octopus Energy Generation was a perfect fit. We drove the £110M deal to a successful close last autumn, which will help to grow our network by a further 1,000 charge points across the UK by 2024.

Closing the raise was an incredibly proud moment. Getting the deal with OEG over the line was a big milestone for the business, and we now have the ability to deliver the business plan that we all believe in.

## What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

There's a whole host of challenges when trying to install EV charging infrastructure – every link in the chain is doing something wrong.

Landowners are slowing the process down, sitting on their land and not giving it up for charging hubs. The way people recharge their car should look more like charging your phone than filling up at the pump. It needs to fit into your lifestyle – charge the car whilst you're at the gym or the supermarket – and landowners are reluctant to modify their car parks to fit this vision.

Once we get access to a site (which in itself can be a long process), we then have to argue with power suppliers. Our national grid was built in the 60's – there's only so much power to go around. To apply for the rights to access this power, we often have to submit multiple applications – this clogs up network operators' time and slows the entire process to a crawl.

From that first conversation to an asset being energised, it takes on average 18 months. That's for a privately owned site – for a publicly owned site, it can take up to three years.

It's a challenging process, but our work with Transport for Greater Manchester has been the gold standard. TfGM understand that they need a robust EV charging network to hit their green targets. At Be.EV, we have the capital and resources to provide this network – all we need are the sites to install our chargers on. We worked closely with their team to share our knowledge and develop a strategy."

## How does Be.EV answer an unmet need?

Currently, there's more chargers within the M25 than the rest of the UK combined. When the ban on new petrol and diesel cars comes into effect in 2030, the rate of EV adoption will dramatically increase and a lot of people are going to need safe, convenient access to reliable charging ports."

At Be.EV, we're working to create a charging network that's futureproof and reliable across the rest of the country.

I make a point to visit every potential site. Any site can look good on paper (or Google Maps) – but it's only by visiting in person that you can know whether it's truly a viable site. My litmus test is – would you feel comfortable with your family charging there on a cold December evening? If the answer is no – either in terms of safety or comfort – that site can't work.

We want to ensure that each location in our charging network offers drivers the best experience possible and we are constantly asking our 20,000 members how they want this network to be built.

We're also thinking about other generations and demographics. The behaviours we're seeing from the early adopters are going to be different from the mass market. It's great we have this data from the early adopters, but it can't be the only thing we work from. We have a very close eye on that mass market – it's not just the technology that needs to be future proofed, but the user experience as well.

# What's in store for the future?

The backing from Octopus Energy Generation is transformational for us. With their investment, we're on track to install 1,000 new charge points across the UK by 2024. The government has set an ambitious target to install 300,000 chargers by 2030 – we're always looking for new sites around the country to continue expanding Be.EV's network and contribute to that target.

We're also building infrastructure that communities can be proud of, reinventing charging locations as green neighbourhood hubs and developing iconic designs. The support from Octopus means we can now take this unique approach to other parts of the country, addressing the imbalance in charging provision across north and south, urban and rural communities.

We've grown the business in Greater Manchester, refining our product and service delivery to get it to the highest possible standard. Now we've got capital behind us and big visions for expansion – it's going to be an exciting year ahead.

# What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

Preparation is king. Preparation, but not overthinking. You have to be prepared to be flexible. We're on our tenth business plan since we founded two years ago. As a founder you have to continually think, evolve, change.

You can't get stuck on one path, too committed to one idea. You have to always be looking ahead, looking for what may happen further down the line – and make sure you're ready for those possibilities.

# And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

I get up at 5:30 and go to the gym, or sometimes I'll meet my PT. I'm usually at my desk by 8:30 – then I'm working or travelling all day. I'm usually taking the train home by 8 o'clock, and then I'm having dinner and unwinding with a bit of TV. My current favourite is The Traitors, which I'm watching with my mum whilst I camp out in the spare bedroom. I'm generally in bed by 10 or 10:30.

Asif Ghafoor is CEO and cofounder of Be.EV.

