

TRANSITION

BY

Meeting Britain's energy
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CONSENT

Cameron Tait

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Despite generous support and input from a great many individuals, the arguments contained here on in are my own, and responsibility for any mistakes belongs to me.

Summary

This report is about the role of community consent in addressing the 'energy trilemma' of affordability, security of supply and decarbonisation.

From research into priorities for UK energy policy, current government progress on renewable energy development, and a review of best practice from the energy industry itself, this report finds that winning community consent is the only sustainable way to deliver affordable, green energy to the UK in the long term. The crucial investment needed to address the energy trilemma is at risk because public opinion and policy priorities create uncertainty for investors in renewable energy in the UK.

- The permanent revolution of priorities within the energy sector makes it difficult for developers to identify specific needs for specific communities at specific times.
- Public support for renewable energy remains strong in theory, even when questions are asked about developments in local areas, yet development plans are failing to win consent.
- More renewable energy projects are being rejected than ever before as a new analysis shows 57 per cent of wind farm applications are currently being turned down, up from 21 per cent in 2008.
- The communities secretary is adding further uncertainty to market predictability with top-down interventions on 50 wind farm applications.

Meanwhile, innovative developers are clearing a new pathway for transition to a low carbon economy by winning community consent in local areas. A review of best practice in the industry shows that successful developers are:

- Including the community as a partner in project design
- Making the project more than just an energy proposition

With increasing opposition to renewable energy proposals, the role of community consent becomes even more important in addressing the energy trilemma. Public support is crucial if progress on delivering clean, affordable energy is to be sustainable. Some businesses have already recognised this, and government too has a role to play in facilitating a stronger focus on community consent in renewable energy infrastructure.

Government can facilitate this transition by consent by giving a clear commitment that if developers can demonstrate community consent in the local area, in addition to ensuring it is in line with legislation, they will be allowed to build their renewable energy infrastructure.

1 INTRODUCTION: COMMUNITY CONSENT IN CONTEXT

The UK can only successfully transition to a low carbon economy with the support of its people and its communities. Renewable energy infrastructure built on the sands of distrust may create additional clean energy in the short term, but it will place the long-term future of public support for renewables on an insecure footing.

The concurrent challenges of affordability, security of supply and decarbonisation make up an energy trilemma in the UK energy sector. These three factors mean there is a pressing need for a greater supply of renewable energy capable of making up a bigger part of the overall energy mix and translating to cheaper energy bills for consumers. However, all three of these national goals are in danger of being derailed by local opposition to renewable energy projects.

This danger emerges from the disconnect between national support for renewable energy projects and local consent for developments. On the one hand, there is a widespread recognition of the need to address the energy trilemma in a responsible manner, but increasingly when sites for planned developments are located, proposals are met by a now all too familiar call from the local community: 'Not In My Back Yard!'

The increasing regularity of local opposition to renewable energy proposals amplifies the challenge of the energy trilemma. To increase the supply of clean, affordable energy with long-term sustainability, many more sources of this energy need to be developed over the coming years.

Over past three decades, the ensuing acronym NIMBY has come to represent more than just opposition to local development plans, but an opposition to the way in which planning decisions too often ignore the views of the local community. The phrase was first used in public parlance in 1980¹ and its first use in the House of Commons in 1985 gives a good example of its early deployment. Michael Colvin, then the Conservative MP for Romsey and Waterside, labelled opponents to plans for a fifth terminal at Heathrow Airport as 'nimbys'.² In hindsight, we can view this as a sign of times to come for local planning – despite local opposition, the plans for the terminal went ahead.

American academic Robert Lake summed up these early definitions of nimbyism as "selfish parochialism [that] generates locational conflict that prevents attainment of societal goals."³ 'Selfish' is rarely a word used to describe local reaction to proposed infrastructure developments today. Yet when we consider some of the proposals to meet the country's infrastructure needs currently on the table, it is hard to argue that there has been any significant change from the view that societal goals should not be obstructed by 'parochial' voices.

While a government failure to monitor and adequately respond to a sharp rise in the number of renewable energy projects being rejected at the planning stage, calls for a top-down approach to ease the passage of new infra-

structure will not solve the problem. The recent sudden rise in unsuccessful renewable energy development applications in chapter three of this report sets out the level of the challenge needed to solve the UK energy trilemma. While renewable energy installations are still increasing, statistics show that for the first time, the majority of onshore wind development applications are failing to win consent. But instead of attempting to plug this gap of consent and rethink how renewable energy projects are developed, recent work from the Fabian Society has highlighted the development establishment's desires for a 'double down' on 'top down' in order to meet the UK's infrastructure needs.⁴

The Labour party's current approach to infrastructure looks to be heading towards this top-down route. The key recommendation from the Armitte Review was the formation of a National Infrastructure Commission which would assess needs across the UK, decide on which projects would be developed, and then ruthlessly monitor their delivery. Similarly, while the Adonis Review acknowledges the role of city and county regions in delivering growth, the solution presented is to promote local enterprise partnerships. In these partnerships, which currently only exist in England, members are appointed from businesses, local authorities, and higher and further education institutions to support economic growth in local areas.⁵ At no stage in either the Armitte or the Adonis Reviews do the communities affected by these infrastructure projects have a genuine input.

Clearly, while such a top-down infrastructure strategy may increase the number and scale of renewable energy projects for the time being, it will only act as a trigger for opposition in the long term. A government strategy that fails to recognise the importance and power of including local communities in the development of local projects will further stoke feelings of discontent that drives nimbyism and parochial responses to current developments. While only those developing the projects can deliver this meaningful local engagement, government can and should be clear about the need for developers to develop projects that go with the grain of local public opinion. This report sets out the sustainable alternative to the top-down approach, building renewable energy capacity by winning community consent. Chapter four covers various innovative approaches taken by energy developers who have recognised the importance of community consent. These developers highlight the importance of prioritising the inclusion of the local community as a partner in project design and creating developments that are more than simply an energy proposition.

An approach towards energy production that fosters a transition by consent is the only sustainable option for building capacity, decarbonising the economy and increasing the affordability of energy. However, this approach is not without its challenges, and the next chapter sets out why this is the case.

2 A REVIEW OF PRIORITIES FOR UK ENERGY POLICY

The competing priorities for UK energy policy combine with growing demographic pressures and a volatile international energy market has injected a sense of urgency into the national energy debate. This has led governments and the development establishment alike to vie for short-term fixes, top-down measures, and constant changes in energy policy. Yet the stability and continuity that is essential for investment and the affordability of energy can only be delivered through community engagement and by winning consent at a local level.

Examining the permanent revolution of external priorities for UK energy policy over the last 25 years gives context to the constantly shifting debate within the sector today. This shifting energy debate can be characterised by its most prominent feature: new government reviews.⁶

Today our debate on energy is dominated by affordability. But during the 1990s, the problem of rising bills for household customers was assumed to be a thing of the past. Meanwhile, decarbonisation was consideration lower order consideration – partly as small but significant steps such as the Non-Fossil Fuel Obligation (1990-2000) were being taken - until the turn of the millennium but by 2007 it was the main priority for energy policy.

As a net exporter of energy over most of the 1980s and 1990s, security of supply was no major concern to the public or the sector over that period. But now security of supply is back at the centre of the debate again, following the UK's shift to a net importer status in 2004.⁷

This change of priorities within the sector makes winning community consent for renewable energy projects more difficult. Presenting a new development as an attractive, appropriate offer to the community can be a fraught balancing act. Should developments be framed as an answer to decarbonisation, a way to keep the lights on, or a strategy to reduce energy bills? In addition, public attitudes towards energy typically remain mixed. These considerations make it all the more important that developers are able to identify the specific needs of specific communities at a specific time - and that means involving local people in the project development process.

Priority areas for energy policy

The energy trilemma is made up of the three key priorities for UK energy policy: affordability, security of supply and decarbonisation. A government serious about implementing infrastructure transitions with public consent must take these factors - and how they interact with public opinion - firmly into account.

1. Affordability

In recent years, energy affordability has become a major policy priority. There is a public expectation that everybody in the UK is entitled to a basic standard of living which includes adequate access to energy, but the recent rise in energy prices has had a disproportionate impact on people with low incomes, represented by the growing issue of fuel poverty.⁸

Another reason for government to focus on affordability is because it has the power to determine public acceptance of energy policy. For example, the rate of price rises and the lack of transparency around them has led to the energy sector in the UK becoming increasingly unpopular, shown by a recent detailed assessment of the energy sector public relations crisis by YouGov.⁹ Energy affordability is a social justice issue, but the sector itself also has an enlightened self-interest in making sure that energy is seen to be reasonably priced.

2. Security of supply

Security of supply is an area that is becoming more politically relevant as international relations show signs of instability. Though the UK is not currently reliant on Russian gas imports, there is a perception that it is or that it will be in future, with nine in ten respondents to a recent CBI survey currently considering energy security very or fairly important.¹⁰ Barack Obama has used the narrative of security of supply to frame arguments for new energy generation subsidies in the USA. A country with too high a reliance on energy imports is a country whose economy is vulnerable to shocks. This is demonstrated by the coalition government's reaction to recent warnings from the National Grid, in which the former has been keen to deny any danger to security of supply.¹¹

3. Decarbonisation

There is an increasing emphasis on policy that expands on the number of renewable sources in our overall energy mix. A recent ComRes poll commissioned by RenewableUK found that 48 per cent of the public want to prioritise developing renewables – significantly higher than the next most popular option, nuclear energy, with 15 per cent support for prioritisation.¹² The power sector has been identified as an essential starting point so that other sectors such as transport can be decarbonised. It is now widely (though not uniformly) accepted that to not take seriously the imperative to decarbonise our economy would be to neglect our international obligation to counter climate change. The global dimension of climate policy requires that energy policy be thought about across boundaries. For well over a decade, the government has clearly signalled to markets both in the UK and abroad that the UK economy is decarbonising. Any attempt to re-route this signal could bring huge costs to UK business.

Having looked at the three challenges posed by the energy trilemma, we can now turn to current approaches to fulfilling the three priorities for energy policy.

3 RENEWABLE ENERGY AND DECARBONISATION: THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

The energy industry is grappling with a profound disconnect that threatens to endanger the security of renewable energy supply. While public support for renewable energy remains strong, a growing number of projects are failing to win local support. In order to outline this trend, this chapter contains an analysis of consent figures for onshore wind farms, the biggest renewable energy subsector.

We have recently seen a sudden sharp rise in the proportion of wind farms being rejected at the planning stage. The gap between national public backing for renewable energy sources and local obstruction of renewable energy developments has long been a source of frustration within the energy industry. Recent trends show that this gap is widening.

Yet as this threat looms over Britain's renewable energy industry, several innovative developers are testing new ways of winning community consent for renewable developments.

Public support for renewable energy is resilient at a local and national level. Previous polling from the Fabian Society has demonstrated high levels of public support for renewable energy with over 70 per cent of the public agreeing we have a collective duty to protect the environment for future generations.¹³ The government's own public attitudes research suggests that these values do translate to a local level, with six in ten people happy to have a large scale renewable energy development in their area. In fact, enthusiasm for local renewable energy developments has risen in recent years, from 55 per cent supporting in March 2012 to 59 per cent in March 2014.¹⁴

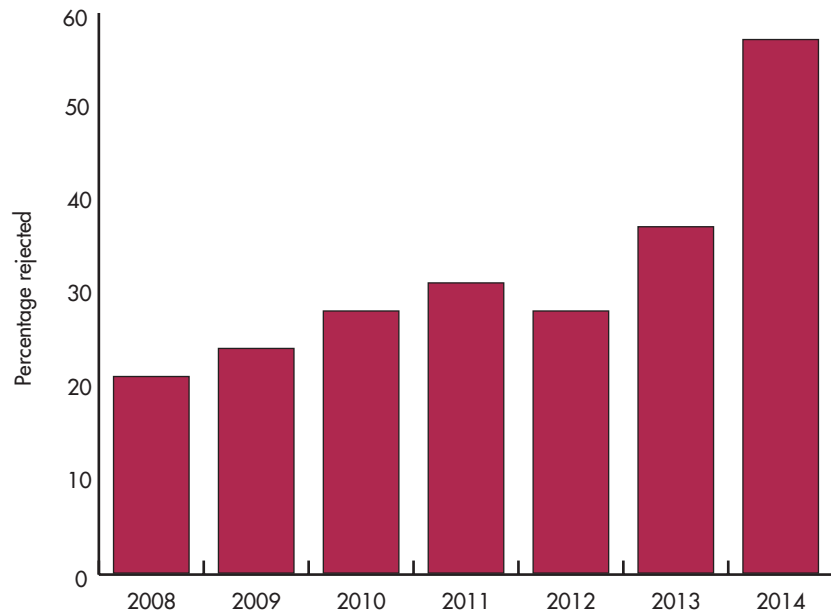
Despite these levels of public support, more renewable energy applications are being rejected than ever before. While more wind farms were approved in 2013 than in any previous year, there was also a record number of rejected applications for wind farms. This trend has spiked even further in the figures for 2014 released so far – with the current rejection rate at 57 per cent. For the very first time, in 2014 the majority of onshore wind farm applications have been rejected. This rate has more than doubled since the coalition government took power in 2010, and applications are nearly three times more likely to fail now than in 2008.

This trend of a rising rejection rate marks out a clear and dangerous threat to the future of renewable energy supply. While the approval ratings for 2014 provided in the table are not yet complete and therefore the approval rate alone cannot be compared with previous years, we can make a comparison based on the rate at which renewable energy developments are being rejected or accepted. Approvals and installations have risen year-on-year from 2008 to 2013, but unless there is urgent consideration given to the trend of rising likelihood of rejection, year-on-year renewable infrastructure growth could go into decline.

Percentage of onshore wind farm applications in the UK rejected, 2008-2014

| Year | Approved | Rejected | Percentage rejected |
|------|----------|----------|---------------------|
| 2008 | 92 | 24 | 21 |
| 2009 | 109 | 35 | 24 |
| 2010 | 110 | 43 | 28 |
| 2011 | 143 | 65 | 31 |
| 2012 | 285 | 111 | 28 |
| 2013 | 459 | 274 | 37 |
| 2014 | 161 | 214 | 57 |

Percentage of onshore wind farm applications in the UK rejected, 2008-2014



Source: Author's analysis of DECC Monthly Extract Figures for UK Onshore Wind applications. Last updated on 10/12/14 <https://restats.decc.gov.uk/app/reporting/decc/monthlyextract>

This rise in wind farm rejections has been accompanied by an ongoing intervention from Eric Pickles, the secretary of state for communities and local government into wind farm planning applications that fall under the Town and Country Planning Act (1990). Pickles has made a political intervention from Whitehall on 50 wind farm projects including pulling in every single 'larger project' of two turbines or more that has gone to appeal.¹⁵ While the communities secretary has no such power over Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP) which fall under the Planning Act 2008, this intervention implies that government is not taking the threat to renewable energy provision seriously.

The increase in interventions combined with an increasing rejection rate is putting off renewable energy investors. One investor speaking at one of

the Fabian Society roundtables said that the current political mood and likelihood of project failure had made them think very carefully about future involvement in the renewable energy industry in the near future.¹⁶ Now that such projects are more likely to fail than succeed, many more investors could be making the same conclusions.

Renewable energy projects are more likely than ever to be rejected at the planning stage. Renewable energy projects are being pulled in from Whitehall. Investors are casting doubt over future involvement in the renewable energy sector. These problems combine to raise serious questions over the decarbonisation agenda, localism and market certainty. Currently this government is failing to adequately address these issues, ignoring an alarming rise in the rejection rate of renewable projects.

But meanwhile, innovative developers are stepping in, determined to build renewable energy capacity. At a risky time of an increasing likelihood of rejection, some developers are prioritising community consent to achieve a higher likelihood of success. The next chapter looks at examples of where this prioritisation is happening in the renewable energy industry.

4 BEST PRACTICE IN THE RENEWABLE ENERGY INDUSTRY

Despite the political mood music sharpening in tone against renewable energy development, there are some important examples of local energy developments winning the consent of the community in which they seek to build infrastructure. Forward thinking energy providers are bringing the community into the design process and transforming the role of consultation from an afterthought into a fundamental stage of development.

The role awarded to community consent outlines a potential new pathway for renewable energy infrastructure strategy and avoids unnecessary interventions from the centre. If community consent can be prioritised, it is possible to build sustainable public support and thereby give investors greater certainty.

Developers have historically struggled in identifying which aspect of the energy trilemma to prioritise in selling their developments to local communities. Yet engagement with the community can inform how they develop their infrastructure to meet local need, and can give a sense of how developers can sequence their messages to win maximum support.

From looking at renewable energy projects that are winning public consent, there are two overriding rules of best practice: include the community as a partner in project design; and make the project more than just an energy proposition.

Include the community as a partner in project design

In order to win genuine public consent within local communities, the community needs to be involved in the design of the project from the outset. This allows the developer to look at what the specific needs of the community are and determine how they can make the project more than just an energy proposition.

The risk from not involving the public early on in the planning process is too great. There are projects, such as the River Valley wind farm in Hull or the Olveston wind farm in Thornbury, on which a great deal of money has been spent that have failed to get off the ground because they did not manage to get consent from the local community.¹⁷ In his 2005 study of public attitudes on renewable energy, Maarten Wolsink found that simply consulting the community after a plan has been announced is often seen as a “trigger for opposition”.¹⁸ That is, when local communities are presented with a set plan and asked to respond to, rather than shape, the proposals, they see it as a threat to their local environment.

The challenge, therefore, is to embed the principles of inclusion and participation into the development stages of the project. Though there are unavoidable costs, developers cannot afford not to do this. A comprehensive study

of wind farm applications found that those projects in which developers involved the community early on, and continued to engage with them, were more likely to be successful.¹⁹ Experts at the Fabian roundtable agreed that pre-planning engagement with the local community is a part of all successful planning application routines, and that gaining community consent requires going far further than statutory obligation dictates.²⁰

Tidal Lagoon Swansea Bay's (TLSB) engagement strategy aimed to go far beyond the usual group of activities associated with community engagement for infrastructure projects. As part of this, and in the interests of transparency, TLSB aimed to provide the community with as much information as they needed or required. For example, TLSB made engineers and impact assessment staff available at the consultation events. This gave the community access to all of the workings and thought processes that had gone into designing the Tidal Lagoon project, and did much to shave away any sense of manufactured veneer over the planning process.

Similarly, in the design development process for the proposed Delabole wind farm in Cornwall, Good Energy gave the community an important decision making role in the planning stages. For example, in a consultation exercise, they set different options for the size and number of turbines on the farm.²¹ The overwhelming majority of attendees preferred a smaller number of turbines (six) that were bigger and produced more energy, than nine smaller turbines. Good Energy revised their plans to incorporate this.

The crucial importance of involving local communities as partners in project design is that developers are able to find out how they can make their development meet community needs. Different communities will have different needs and only from involving communities from the initial stages can developers maximise ongoing public consent for projects.

Making the project more than just an energy proposition

This is a challenging time for developers when looking for permission to build renewable energy infrastructure. Chapter 3 of this report highlights the discrepancy between strong theoretical support for renewable energy projects that does not match up with approval rates for renewable energy developments. In order to turn theoretical support into tangible support, several local projects have successfully adapted their renewable energy development to meet local needs beyond simply as an energy proposition. This is a fundamental rule in gaining community consent and can be critical in winning the support needed to progress the project.

A crucial aspect of this is early work in engaging with the local community to find out what the local needs are and how they can be addressed. Successful developers have been able to detect a range of needs identified by the local community – from jobs to marine life protection – and have been able to sequence their development and messaging on each of the issues to successfully deliver community consent.

It is important to emphasise that if it is to be effective, the additional offer made to the community has to be designed with the community. We have listed six examples of where this has happened effectively and what the outcomes have been:

Local solution 1: Broadband

The introduction of renewable energy infrastructure can provide an opportunity for other forms of infrastructure to be installed simultaneously at a marginal additional cost for the developer.

When the Banks Renewables group first started looking at a possible project in Killington, they consulted the local community not only on their energy needs, but on what other infrastructure they felt was needed in their community. The main priority for local residents was broadband access. A lack of access to broadband is a common complaint in rural areas, and Banks Renewables went away and found a way to include broadband in their own infrastructure plans, and thereby planned to connect Killington to more than a new energy supply.

Residents were then able to recognise the potential benefits a new wind farm could provide and fell in behind the broadband proposals, which were key to winning community consent and being approved by South Lakeland District Council's planning committee in January 2014.²² The Banks Renewables group were successfully able to bring the community into the planning stages, and subsequently gained support.

However, having won consent, the wind farm application was intervened on by the communities secretary as one of the 50 political interventions outlined in the previous chapter. This is a strong example of top-down measures clashing with local community support, while also damaging market certainty and creating a treacherous ground for investors.

Local solution 2: Local investment

In areas where local businesses are in need of additional investment opportunities, there are opportunities for adapting the renewable energy project to meet this local need. Many rural communities which developers might identify as good locations for onshore wind farms may suffer from isolation, particularly those in remote rural locations.

A good example of this need in a rural area is the Pen y Cymoedd wind farm in South Wales. The developer, Vattenfall, engaged the local community and learnt about the declining steel communities in the surrounding area and the economic damage it was causing for the community. As a result, the developers encouraged as many local firms as possible to bid for contracts to supply the wind farm, ultimately awarding the steel producing contract to Express Reinforcements, a local Neath-based company. One participant in one of the Fabian Society roundtables highlighted the significance of this by comparing it to the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff where all steel was sourced from Italy.

Similarly, Tidal Lagoon Swansea Bay set up an industry advisory group in order to engage with local businesses and facilitate local employment. The industry group members then became strong advocates of the development.

Local procurement and investment can give local communities the sense of ownership and shared benefits that lead to winning community consent. These example also shows that the business community in the local area can also be an important advocate in winning community consent and therefore outline the importance of engaging early on to establish any economic and industrial needs that the development can deliver on.

Local solution 3: Jobs

The promise of jobs can be an important offer to make to local communities, particularly in communities with comparatively high levels of unemployment. While one attendee to a Fabian Society roundtable event urged developers to “always talk about jobs, never about carbon savings...that is what sells – what matters directly to people’s lives,” it is not necessarily always the key offer but can often become part of a strong offer to communities.

For example, Tidal Lagoon Swansea Bay found high levels of local concern regarding the breadth and depth of local employment opportunities. It shaped a project offer with a variety of promising local career paths, including 1,900 construction jobs, 100 long-term turbine assembly roles and 181 ongoing jobs in operations, mariculture, tourism and leisure.

Local solution 4: Cheaper energy bills

With real average incomes falling over recent years, the rise of energy and utility bills has become an important concern in all households, not just those on low incomes. Action to reduce local energy bills is also a tangible offer to those in local communities that are not won over by the green case for decarbonisation or worried by the security of energy supply.

With affordability one of the three big challenges facing the industry, the developer and supplier Good Energy has reacted to local demand for cheaper energy bills by providing a local tariff. Residents surrounding Good Energy’s four turbine wind farm in Hampole near Doncaster receive a 20 per cent discount on electricity from the standard tariff for Yorkshire and the Humber. Another example is the Local Electricity Discount Scheme operated by Res, where residents and businesses located near wind farms are eligible for a minimum discount of £100 which is paid directly to their energy supplier, whichever supplier they receive energy from.

One attendee at a Fabian Society roundtable said that in his experience, cheaper bills were effective in persuading concerned landowners that were worried about spoiling the landscape to come round to renewable projects. It can be a persuasive tool to deal with local energy bills and demonstrate the added value a renewable energy development can bring to the local area.

Local solution 5: An ongoing income stream

The current debate about energy affordability has shone a spotlight on energy provider profit levels and the remuneration of energy provider executives. This attention has led to some feeling that energy companies are profiting from new energy developments and not fairly sharing the proceeds with the community that houses the development.

The promise of ongoing income streams to local communities has been a decisive factor in those communities wanting to see a direct ongoing financial benefit. For example, in February 2014 the Louis Dreyfus Group promised community groups £8.25 million over the 25-year lifetime of the renewable energy project they sought to build near Edinburgh, thereby sharing the financial benefits of energy generation with the local community. Climate change campaigners 10:10 have also established the ‘Solar schools’ project to support schools in setting up solar panels, which provide an ongoing income

stream through the feed-in tariff and reduce the ongoing cost of energy, freeing up funds for other resources.

These projects have been effective in demonstrating a distribution of the proceeds from energy generation. The promise of an ongoing income stream has been used as a tool to get buy-in from local communities who can recognise the additional value generated by the project.

Local solution 6: Culture and leisure

Energy propositions can also be cultural propositions. Recent squeezes on local authority budgets have resulted in funding being withdrawn from many culture and leisure facilities across the UK. Many areas are left with a dearth of culture and leisure opportunities and this can be a demand that renewable energy projects are able to meet.

As well as reacting to the jobs market in Swansea, Tidal Lagoon Power Swansea Bay has also responded to consultation by building a leisure and culture element into their development. Tidal Lagoon Power has established its own cultural group led by a local artist and have made an open call to artists for a major sculpture commission and multi-disciplinary commission. The site will also offer water sports facilities to the public, creating a new leisure space and boosting local tourism. The creation of leisure and culture facilities further embodies the notion of the renewable energy proposition as an aspirant emblem of the future and can help regenerate areas. It can also be a strong opportunity for developers to meet local infrastructure needs alongside their own projects.

5 FACILITATING THE TRANSITION BY CONSENT

In order to make a long-term, sustainable transition to low carbon energy generation, community consent is essential. Winning over the support of local communities to developments in their area will ensure lasting support for renewable energy projects, and give a degree of much-needed certainty to the renewable energy industry.

Support will need to be won locally and, as this report demonstrates, community needs vary from place to place. Only developers have the ability to win community consent for their own projects, and the onus should be on them to prioritise the process in their project development. However, central government has a role in clearly stating an expectation for all project developers – whether those developing projects under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 or the Planning Act 2008 – to ensure they are working in partnership with local communities when designing their developments.

The role of developers

Developers should be assured that if they win public consent and the project lies within the laws of the land, it should be free from government intervention. Reducing the risk of intervention from the centre would give greater market certainty to renewable energy developers, and would open the renewables sector up to further investment. However, developers could further minimise the risks of failed projects by learning from the key principles arising from this review of the sector:

1. Including the community as a partner in project design. Developers should give a greater role to local communities in the project design process with prioritisation of meaningful consultation of the needs of the local area, with the aim of fulfilling these needs and building trust with the local community. In doing this, developers should be engagement-driven, going up and over statutory limits. Chapter 4 shows that in doing this, developments have much higher chance of success.

2. Making the project more than just an energy proposition. Developers should recognise the benefits associated with modifying the project to include additional elements at a marginal cost. These additional features would represent a ‘deal’ between the energy developer and the local community, and mean community consent would be more likely. The corollary for developers would be greater certainty and increased long-term support for future projects.

The role of government

As seen above, if renewable energy project developers can demonstrate community consent in the local area, in addition to ensuring it is in line with

legislation, government nationally and locally should grant them permission to be built. This means a renewed focus on ensuring developers are getting local consent, and radically reducing central interventions on popular proposals.

There are two outcomes of this approach, depending on the type of project involved. In the case of renewable energy projects that fall under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 which includes most onshore wind farm projects, central government should commit to reducing interventions to an absolute minimum and letting local authorities take the lead based on levels of community consent. For the bigger Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects falling under the Planning Act 2008, including Tidal Lagoon Swansea Bay, government should be clear that prioritising and winning community consent should be a key component of successful project development. In both cases, there needs to be a call from government to go above and beyond statutory minimums.

6 CONCLUSION

The long-term low carbon transition can only occur with the consent of the public. Rather than a renewed focus on top-down solutions, communities need to be given a greater role in infrastructure design and development. Community consent plays an essential role in providing market certainty, establishing a clear and popular infrastructure framework, and making further progress on greening the UK's economy.

The permanent revolution of priorities in the UK energy sector makes it difficult for renewable energy developers to pitch their developments to the public. Public opinion muddies this water further with support for renewable energy projects at a national level in principle on one hand, contradicted by local opposition to developments on the other.

Set against the urgent need to address the energy trilemma and the increasing difficulty in getting consent from local communities, the easy option is to reach for top-down measures to increase the supply of renewable energy. But it will be the energy sector that suffers in the long-term because local opposition will only grow in response to the community being shut out of planning decisions. This lack of local public support will accelerate the rise of 'nimbyism', and will create a real political risk for any government wishing to proceed with a national strategy for energy provision. This is why top-down intervention only works in the short term.

Instead, the review of innovative practice from renewable energy developers has shown there is a new pathway to delivering affordable clean energy. Involving the community in project design and fulfilling local community need will bring the public on board with renewable energy, and will create the critical mass of support needed to give market certainty and therefore a sustainable of renewable energy supply.

While some developers are pursuing new approaches in order to win community consent, many more are failing to get their plans approved and therefore to see their developments come to life. For this reason, government has a role in facilitating the rollout of this best practice and supporting developers in the transition by consent. The key role of government in this regard is to set the standards for developments, and then allow developers to meet those standards. The energy trilemma provides a pressing challenge for the energy sector, politicians and the public. But only by winning consent amongst the public can renewable, affordable, sustainable energy be delivered in the long term.

ENDNOTES

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- 5 For example, see the Terms of Reference for the South East England LEP, which contains 12 business representatives, 12 local government representatives, 1 higher education representative and 1 further education representative. <http://www.southeastlep.com/the-board/terms-of-reference>
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- 14 DECC Public Attitudes Tracker Survey – Wave 9 (DECC, April 2014) https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/306898/summary_of_key_findings_wave_9.pdf
- 15 RenewableUK condemns Pickles' 50th intervention in a wind farm application. (RenewableUK Website, 24 September 2014. <http://www.renewableuk.com/en/news/press-releases.cfm/renewableuk-condemns-pickles-50th-intervention-in-a-wind-farm-application>)
- 16 Three roundtables with experts, practitioners and campaigners from the energy sector were held over the course of the project in 2014. The roundtables discussed the project's ongoing findings and generated case studies, possible future approaches, and analysis of the renewable energy sector.
- 17 More details are available here: River Valley (RWE) <http://www.rwe.com/web/cms/en/1303640/rwe-innogy/sites/wind-onshore/united-kingdom/in-development/river-valley/> and Olveston (REG Windpower) in 'Councillors reject plans to build wind turbines near Olveston' in *Gazette* (18 December 2014) http://www.gazetteseries.co.uk/news/thornburynews/11673275.Councillors_reject_plans_to_build_wind_turbines_near_Olveston/ http://www.gazetteseries.co.uk/news/thornburynews/11673275.Councillors_reject_plans_to_build_wind_turbines_near_Olveston/
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TRANSITION BY CONSENT |

MEETING BRITAIN'S ENERGY NEEDS TOGETHER

Cameron Tait

Future sources of renewable energy in the UK will need to deliver affordability, security of supply and decarbonisation. However, the crucial investment required to meet these energy needs is at risk because public opinion and policy priorities create an uncertain environment for investors.

From research into priorities for UK energy policy, current government progress on renewable energy development, and a review of best practice from the energy industry itself, this report finds that winning community consent is the only sustainable way to deliver affordable, green energy to the UK in the long term.

Innovative developers are already clearing a new pathway for transition to a low carbon economy by including local communities as partners in project design. *Transition by Consent* argues that government too has a role to play in facilitating a stronger focus on community consent in renewable energy infrastructure.