

## **Report of Lerwick Public Engagement Event**

### **Shetland Museum and Archives**

**11 April 2018**

*Note: The following is a distillation of a public engagement event held by the RSE Energy Inquiry Committee. The views expressed at the event are those of the attendees and do not necessarily represent the position of the Royal Society of Edinburgh.*

#### Committee Members Present

Sir Muir Russell

Prof Gavin Little

Sir Muir welcomed the audience to the engagement event and provided background on why the inquiry was taking place, what it looked to achieve, and what the Committee hoped to gain from holding public engagement events. Sir Muir noted that at this stage in the process the Committee was seeking input and not making recommendations. The audience was taken through a presentation on the context of the Inquiry, examining how energy is currently used in Scotland, and where this energy is generated.

Prof Little then took over to guide the room through the 15 questions the Inquiry posed in the consultation document published during summer 2017.

The first comments from the audience addressed the high rates of fuel poverty on Shetland. While switching between different energy providers and tariffs is becoming easier, many people remain on restricted tariffs. There is no obvious package of measures that would provide a solution.

Fuel poverty is part of the larger problem of poverty in general. People can look to reduce their energy use or we can look to increase household incomes. A decent standard of living costs more than it does on mainland Scotland. There is no silver bullet that can address both reducing carbon use and reducing levels of fuel poverty simultaneously. Transport poverty is also a salient issue, particularly for those who need to travel off island.

The point was raised that the way in which fuel poverty is measured is being recalculated by the Scottish Government. This could potentially result in the official numbers of people in fuel poverty being reduced without actually improving the standard of living for anyone.

The next issue raised centred around the difficulty in accessing funding for renewables projects. Doing so needs to be made much easier. Local Energy Scotland should be better resourced, both in terms of staff and funding. Agencies like this and local authorities need to work more closely together.

A member of the audience discussed problems they had experienced getting permission to erect wind turbines that would power a local scheme. Approval was denied on the grounds that decibel levels were marginally too high, despite there being no other residential properties within a kilometre of the proposed project. Support of communities for a project

should be reflected when this exists. It is far easier for developers to access finance than for the community to access funding for community energy schemes.

The next major issue broached was transport. This is an area of concern for many rural regions. Renewable energy is not currently very adept at powering rural transport. Hydrogen may prove more effective. The fleet of buses used in Aberdeen runs on hydrogen, has an acceptable range, and refuels similarly to a conventional car. This is a technology that requires thoughtful consideration.

Concern was expressed by some over safety aspects of hydrogen fuelled cars.

For hydrogen to be widely used a great deal of new infrastructure would be required. A level of infrastructure for electric cars already exists, be that specialised charging points or the ability to charge cars at home from the main grid.

The environmental impact of wind farm development was raised. Climate change requires the production of more renewable energy, but development of windfarms has led to them being placed in increasingly sensitive areas.

Concern was expressed by some over whether the proposed interconnector from Shetland to the mainland would further incentivise developers to build windfarms on the islands. There is no obvious, publicly supported, location on Shetland for further development. There is a view that the Scottish Government views the islands as little more than an offshore platform which can be used to meet renewable energy targets. Community and health impacts are not given the consideration they deserve. Concern was expressed by one member of the audience regarding whether wind turbines could have health implications for the public.

Consultations were held with the local community before major windfarm development. At each of these meetings a majority of those in attendance opposed the projects. The suggestion was raised by some in the room, however, that the economic benefits to developers trumped local opposition. While the UK has made some progress on conservation it is still far behind other countries. Consumerism and shareholder benefit are still the priorities.

The benefits of embracing microgeneration were brought up by an audience member. Every household should be able to create some level of electricity. Shetland should look to be 'green' islands. It is difficult to envisage a future in which Shetland is blanketed in windfarms which continue to produce more energy than be can be used. This wasted energy highlights the lack of joined-up policy thinking. The extra hydrogen produced could be used for any number of things. The Scottish Government should be providing grants and encouraging innovation in this area.

The next topic to arise was around informed debate and access to information. There is an issue with baseless rumours around energy spreading. Unsubstantiated claims, such as that subsea cables produce harmful radiation, have circulated. Such stories become imbedded.

Concerns over 'fake news' are currently shared across all forms of political debate. Bad information is coming from all sides of the energy debate. Shetland Oil Terminal Environmental Advisory Group is a good example of an organisation with a good reputation as an independent body that can provide credible information. This is important.

The debate around energy also needs to be accessible to all. The information provided in the final RSE report should be easy to read, useful and useable.

Connectivity between energy production and consumption should also be addressed. Many people do not truly appreciate where the energy they use comes from and the Scottish Government could do more to inform. Everyone seems to be looking to someone else to take the lead on this.

More responsibility needs to be taken by society for the energy we use. There needs to be a better form of consumerism and a significant societal shift. Shetland could serve as a shining example of secure energy production with minimal, or even positive, environmental impact.

The final issue raised by the audience was around community benefit from energy development in Shetland. Real debate is required about who benefits from any financial windfall and how this is decided. There are many people in Shetland who will have no interaction with windfarms, yet benefit from the roads or sports centres that community benefit money may fund. This is part of a wider debate about how local democracy functions.

**Craig Denham**

**Inquiry Secretariat**