

“The issue of Energy in Wales is both a grand challenge, and a grand opportunity”

Thirty4/7 Communications, Burges Salmon and Barton Willmore facilitate industry discussion with National Infrastructure Commission Wales (NICW) on issues affecting sustainability and deliverability as Wales moves towards a carbon-free future.

On 21st May 2019 industry leaders and key stakeholders in the renewables sector in Wales met with the [National Infrastructure Commission Wales](#) to discuss how to deliver positive change to Wales’ energy infrastructure to achieve a low carbon future.

Will Morgan, Director of [Thirty4/7 Communications](#) chaired the event, which heard from event partners Liz Dunn, Partner at [Burges Salmon LLP](#), Ben Lewis, Infrastructure and Energy Director at [Barton Willmore](#), and Auriol Miller, Director at [Institute of Welsh Affairs](#) (IWA).

Eluned Parrott, Commissioner at NICW introduced the Commission and set out the remit and aims of the newly formed body in Wales. The NICW is keen to understand how to assist industry, and Welsh Government with finding a path to achieving the aspirations set out in numerous pieces of Welsh policy and legislation, such as the [Wellbeing of Future Generations Act](#) and the recent [Prosperity for All: A Low Carbon Wales](#) report.

Liz Dunn explained that one of the key findings from Burges Salmon’s recent [Perspectives on Infrastructure](#) report was the a requirement for clear and consistent policy against which to work. Developers need clarity and detail about how to consent energy projects in order to ensure certainty around delivery and viability. There is also a clear desire for collaboration between the public and private sectors – neither can deliver schemes of the magnitude required by themselves. This includes the need for public money to be spent in some of the perceived ‘riskier’ places, such as new energy technology development, to ensure consistent innovation and progress towards a carbon free Wales.

Ben Lewis noted that Barton Willmore operates across the country on large scale energy and infrastructure projects, and that one of the key issues that arises through the planning process is the need to bring communities into the discussion. Local communities need to feel that they are gaining something from a proposed project close to them, but at the same time there has to be an understanding that some areas – such as mid-Wales – have fantastic natural renewables resources that need to be harnessed for the rest of the country. It’s a difficult balance.

Auriol Price and Hywel Lloyd of the IWA explained that recent work set out in its [Re-energising Wales](#) report shows that the issue of de-carbonising the country cannot be addressed by focusing on any one single issue – it needs to be a cross -sector approach, and there are a number of specific points set out in the report that should be considered.

Discussion from other attendees including representatives from on- and offshore wind, solar and tidal energy developers, Natural Resources Wales, Welsh Government, RenewableUK Cymru and Afallen, focused on subsidy support, the conflict between Government desire to reduce consumer bills which pushes developers into developing larger projects to achieve economies of scale, and the impact larger schemes have on the immediate communities, as well as issues related to support for emerging technologies such as wave and tidal energy.

Will Morgan, Director at Thirty4/7 Communications said: “What came from the discussion was a clear desire for collaboration from all in the room. Developers from all sectors and public bodies are

clearly keen to work with one another to achieve a low carbon future for Wales, and that is encouraging.

“Having a clear understanding of the needs of local communities is paramount to the future development of nationally important infrastructure and ensuring that local residents living near to a project have an opportunity to feel some sense of ownership and connection is something we need to look harder at. It is relatively straightforward to meet the pre-application consultation requirements for consenting a new project – it is not straightforward to really understand how to bring a local community along that journey with you. This is something that developers, public bodies and legislators need to grapple in coming years.”

This is the first of three events organised with the National Infrastructure Commission Wales, each on a different topic. The next event on ‘Housing’ takes place in June, and the third event on ‘Transport’ in early July. If you would like to find out more about the issues discussed, or would like to attend an upcoming discussion, please contact Thirty4/7 Communications at info@thirty47.co.uk.