

Summary of Breakout Discussion Sessions

A public event which explored many of the opportunities and challenges associated with the development of a future energy system for Islay.

The event considered how energy is generated, supplied and used on Islay and the surrounding islands of Jura and Colonsay.

Facilitated discussion groups were convened on five topics. Attendees were invited to share their views on the following issues, with the result of each meeting summarised below:

1. What does a successful energy system for Islay look like in 2035?

- The cost of a new energy system for Islay must be balanced against the need for sustainable renewable energy. Islay cannot make an assessment based solely on cost; sustainability must be the critical factor.
- Islay must move past studies and consultations. It should adopt an implementation strategy which will introduce tangible change now and through the delivery of a new local energy system.
- The transition to net zero will involve upfront costs which will take time to pay back. The long-term benefits of change should be communicated clearly to the community.
- Islay should invest in and apply the technologies that are available and viable now, while keeping in mind likely future developments. Enabling technologies such as anaerobic digestion, wind and tidal generation projects will make an important contribution.
- Attracting investment to the island can be challenging, due to the higher costs of delivering projects there. Local and national incentives are needed to address market failure.
- Electricity will be a fundamental part of Islay's future; decarbonisation will be driven by electrification. Existing infrastructure should be upgraded to enable this with new infrastructure introduced over time.

2. How do we raise awareness of the Island's energy system?

- Efforts to raise awareness must involve the whole community. Engaging with schools, particularly primary schools, is an effective way to do this. The island has a strong history of engagement between sustainability initiatives and primary school.
- Projects must be relevant to people's everyday lives – how can the island's energy system be communicated as relatable and relevant to people within the Islay community?
- Raising awareness will raise expectations, and action must credibly follow from community engagement and consultation. For example, the local supply chain across Argyll and Bute cannot always support the delivery of sustainable energy projects on Islay. Support will be needed in this area and others.
- A holistic approach should be taken. While a new energy system cannot solve other challenges directly, such as those associated with housing or employment, it can be written to engage with these issues.

3. What role can transport play in Islay's future energy system?

- Transport has an important role to play, both independent of and associated with other factors such as heat and power generation.
- As well as systemic change, 'quick wins' are important. This could involve the extension of bus services or the introduction of the new ferry, which will have greater capacity, use less fuel and create fewer carbon emissions than the existing service.
- Islay's electricity grid should be improved to provide capacity to support electric vehicles on the island. In general, progress towards a sustainable transport network is perceived to follow behind heat and power initiatives.
- Transport of whisky will remain a significant activity. This is a potential constraint in greening the transport network. In time, hydrogen infrastructure may be necessary to support haulage.
- The community is well aware of the challenges associated with transport, and it is supportive and motivated to make changes.

4. How can distilleries collaborate further to achieve net-zero on Islay?

- Islay's distilleries have a common understanding of the challenges faced and a desire to collaborate where practical within the industry, as well as more broadly with the island community.
- There is recognition that a collaborative approach is more likely to achieve a better outcome for all.

5. How can public investment and support enable the development of Islay's energy system?

- Islay needs a shared vision. This could be a clear goal, such as a target to meet net zero carbon status by 2030. Buy-in will be needed across the whole community.
- Greater momentum, attention and focus is needed. The island needs to move beyond options appraisals towards an implementation strategy. This may require a dedicated member of staff who will manage projects and advance the development of Islay's energy system.
- The pace of change is unlikely to be uniform, with some industries (distilling) likely to move faster than others. The public sector may have a role in bridging this gap.
- A trial project would be an opportunity to test solutions and de-risk the delivery of a new energy system for Islay. The public sector could play a role in piloting a project of this nature. Are there any spade-ready schemes which could be started now?