

Item 13: Motion to East Lothian Council – Security of the Nation's Energy Supply
Amendment Submitted by Councillors Jardine and McIntosh

Delete paragraphs 1-6 and replace with:

The Seventh UK Carbon Budget was recently published, which lays out the need for rapid expansion of renewable infrastructure in order to meet our legally binding emissions pathways. This includes, by 2040, electrification of much of our heat and transport sectors, which will mean the UK requires twice as much electricity as we used in 2023. To meet this demand, the UK Climate Change Committee recommend a six-fold increase in offshore wind capacity, doubling of onshore wind, and increase of solar capacity to 82Gw (all by 2040).

The Carbon Budget report underlines the economic benefits this transition will bring with upfront investment soon leading to paybacks in cheaper bills and protection from volatile international fossil fuel markets. Other multiple benefits identified include skilled jobs, opportunities for green finance, health benefits from reduced air pollution, and restoration of nature.

East Lothian as a county is enabling the delivery or planned delivery of substantial amounts of this energy infrastructure. Such development brings opportunities in terms of jobs, skills, and the potential realisation of community ownership and community benefits.

While energy developers have paid staff, consultants and often significant budgets for each project, with the burgeoning of some more speculative projects, often small communities, represented by volunteers, need to engage and respond meaningfully to all the development plans. This is a burden over and above the impacts of both implementation and operation of projects, many within a small locality. In such communities, this is increasingly contributing to people feeling overwhelmed and under threat.

Currently, renewables projects offer varying and inconsistent levels of community benefit, although the UK government have recently announced they will bring forward guidelines for benefits around **transmission infrastructure**, and the Scottish Government are consulting on revised Good Practice Principles for developments. East Lothian Council has responded to the Scottish consultation, stressing the need for all forms of energy development to be considered for inclusion in future community benefits schemes and highlighting the positive role that might be played by shared ownership of developments.

Although a small number of recent projects have offered communities an ownership stake as part of their community benefit offering, this is still not usual practice, and some technologies (solar, BESS) are habitually offering nothing at all. International examples, in particular from Denmark and the Netherlands, indicate that higher levels of community ownership tend to result in greater public acceptance¹ of energy development.

¹ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2214629624004821>

This Council, while benefiting from bulk purchasing arrangements for energy, spent in the region of £7M on energy costs in 24/25. As we face further increasing costs of energy, we continue to take proactive steps to reduce costs through both procurement and lowering energy consumption. Increasing numbers of public bodies (councils, health boards, etc.) are investing in renewable energy projects directly in order to contribute to carbon reductions, reduce energy costs directly or provide a revenue stream from the production of energy.

The National Energy System Operator already provides strategic oversight of how much capacity is likely to be required for different technologies; however, this is not necessarily currently being passed onto either the Energy Consents Unit or local planning authority. For instance, recent analysis showed that the UK has already consented for BESS units providing more than double the capacity that NESO predicts will be needed for 2030 targets.² The Scottish and UK Governments should work together to ensure that the pipeline of projects for all technologies are aligned primarily to need rather than to market speculation.

It should be noted that a significant power to plan future energy developments also lies with the Local Development Plan and, with LDP2 currently underway, this is an opportunity for this Council to consult with communities and direct development to appropriate sites.

It is also an opportunity to clearly articulate how projects should be delivered to mitigate their negative impact, and maximise the benefits, of this development in the area.

From paragraph 7 replace proposal with the following:

- This Council will maximise use of our powers, under the workstream of Local Development Plan 2, to prepare a Landscape Sensitivity Study to identify which types of landscape are more sensitive to different types of energy developments and that local communities are fully consulted on the draft version of the Sensitivity Study and their comments are taken into consideration.
- LDP2 should also contain policies to encourage community ownership and local and sustainable procurement as part of local approval of energy developments
- East Lothian Council calls on the Council Leader to write to UK Government Secretary of State for Net Zero and to the First Minister of Scotland to request that the UK Government take immediate action to decouple the price of electricity from the price of gas to reduce the cost of energy for our industrial, commercial and domestic consumers, and to the First Minister of Scotland requesting:
 - That the distribution of applications between the Energy Consents Unit and local authorities be subject to consultation and review; including consideration as to whether the 50mW threshold for developments is still an appropriate 'trigger' for ECU determination, applications of fees to reflect any changes, as well as whether different technologies require different approaches.
 - Request that local government is an integral part of any planning for the delivery of new technologies that they will be expected to accommodate in their area. Councils will also have the appropriate powers and resources to deal with any proposals and ensuring the Energy Consents Unit pay due regard to the Local Development Plans when they are determining applications.

² <https://www.thenational.scot/news/24962632.battery-storage-site-project-queue-double-grids-2030-requirement/>