

On 9<sup>th</sup> December 2015 senior leaders, policy makers and business people came together for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sustainable Severn event to debate and develop the strategy, guiding principles and governance frameworks to support a strategic approach to the unique Bristol Channel and Severn Estuary energy resources. The first event, in 2013, had concluded that

*'Everyone agreed that there is a huge opportunity in the Severn. The best way to get a sustainable Severn is to create a mixed technology approach to capturing energy; a long-term approach to creating economic benefit; and a restorative approach to the estuary's environment.'*

Whilst delegates discussed a diverse range of topics the overall progress from the 1<sup>st</sup> Sustainable Severn event in 2013 event was clear. In our 2<sup>nd</sup> event we moved from a discussion on "how can we find a common approach?" to "what do we want to do?"

The day was about setting guiding principles in an overall strategy and we seemed to get good agreement on the vision of a balanced approach underpinned by a long term strategy and proper governance. Although this requires further elaboration, the key elements include:

- Multiple energy projects and technologies are possible in the Bristol Channel and Severn Estuary and an evidenced based approach, within an appropriate spatial planning and policy framework, should determine which projects and technologies are deployed in a way which generates significant energy and economic benefits in balance with the environment and other marine users in the region.
  - We heard how eco-system service mapping can shed light on the considerable benefits already provided by the Bristol Channel and Severn Estuary and about the vital economic role of the regions ports.
- Development pathways that enable offshore renewable energy projects to operate in harmony with the natural environment of the Severn.
  - Few projects are likely to be zero impact themselves, as energy abstraction from the estuary will affect the environment. However the significance of these natural assets is such that outcomes should be net positive.
  - Positive environmental outcomes should include reducing climate change impacts such as coastal erosion, storms and flooding as well as actively helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through the development of renewable energy projects.
- Projects should incorporate appropriate mitigation, compensation and other measures into their development plans.
  - Tidal Lagoon Power presented their plans for the estuary and discussed their latest plans for adaptive environmental management.
  - Environmental stakeholders will need to be ready to help describe high quality outcomes.
- Project development teams should work with local government and economic stakeholders to develop regional skills, the supply chain and local infrastructure required to deliver their projects.
- Strong engagement, and support from stakeholders and communities on both Welsh and English sides of the channel.

All the interests in a Sustainable Severn will benefit from powerfully articulating a vision, principles and values, and helping to create a shared strategic direction – one fit for the huge opportunity of realising real high value progress in the Severn. However, to make the

vision a reality we also need to find and support strong leadership in the many communities of place and interest that exist within the Severn region to champion it.

### Leadership

There are a plethora of existing strategies and plans relevant to the management of the Bristol Channel and Severn Estuary. The consequence of this is that the public interests are represented by multiple agencies, but largely in a disconnected way. We learnt how the Welsh Government are developing a joined up approach and this is a good model for those on the South side of the Severn. In Wales, they have benefited from the overarching vision articulated in the 'Well-being for future generations Act' which makes sustainable development a central organising principle of the Welsh Government. To this end we have noted the importance of big cities as leaders and influencers. In a Severn regional context driven by the industrial past, present and future of this area, which remains a powerhouse of traditional and modern, cities have the opportunity to get big regional agendas into the national interest, for example in making progress with getting National Policy Statement (NPS) on marine energy. NPSs are important to define spatial planning which we would all welcome as it gives clear guidance to developers and stakeholders and shows the direction of travel.

### Collaboration

At the same time, we also need genuine collaboration across public, private and third sectors to align vision, spend and effort and describe an effective route map for a Sustainable Severn. We heard from initiatives which may provide a role in realising this collaboration. The Severn Estuary Partnership (SEP) is working to integrate the views of issues, policies and proposals for a wide range of estuary wide groups into a Severn Estuary strategy document to be published in 2016. The SEP could connect the energy agenda to other interest groups. Working specifically on energy, the Bristol Channel and Severn Estuary Energy Group is a recently formed initiative of Local Authorities to collaborate on strategy, planning and economic development to support sustainable energy projects.

Further discussion highlighted the need to ensure sound evidence is available to inform strategic plans, develop spatial policies and mitigate adverse impacts. There is a particular need to manage the conflicts between information held by universities and private developers that also has a commercial value; and unlock a desire to share this in a way that enables pathways to a Sustainable Severn. We also need to move quickly to develop a spatial planning framework in a constructive and collaborative way, recognising that there will be no development unless there is market appetite and stakeholder support.

### Next Steps

In 2016 we will hold another Sustainable Severn conference, in Wales, to take the day's discussions further. But it is important to use the intervening time to make progress on the issues. The existing Sustainable Severn website can be used to disseminate information and progress some of the day's ideas and plan for next year's conference. This will include;

- Updating and enhancing the principles document
- Progressing the discussion on governance frameworks
- Developing appropriate leadership
- Initiating work on a draft vision using the existing evidence base and informed through consultation with all stakeholders, from developers to ports, government to NGO's, the supply chain, The Crown Estate and other informed parties.