Beyond NIMBYism Project: Summary of findings from Work Package 2.1: Interview Survey

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Working Paper 2.1

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This document has been produced for dissemination to two groups, the subjects of the interviews themselves, and the individuals who attended the project’s ‘Practitioners’ Workshop’ in May 2007 in order to hear and offer feedback on the preliminary findings of the survey.

Background

Forty-two semi-structured interviews were undertaken with individuals from the world of renewable energy, selected through contacts known to the project partners, through ‘snowballing’, and according to a set of criteria. Subjects were selected so as to ensure that a sample was achieved of representatives from a number of categories, with experience of a range of Renewable Energy Technologies (RETs), including organisations and individuals based in the four nations of the UK.

The categories of interviewees used were: Developers (including major utilities and technology specialists); Policy, Regulators (including national and regional bodies); NGOs, Interest groups (including environmental and opposition groups, statutory bodies and trade groups); Politicians (including Parliament/Assembly members of each nation); Consultants (including EIA experts and producers of visual material); Manufacturers, Engineers, Designers (of different RETs); Finance bodies (including major banks and renewables investors), and; Marketing, PR (this category was found to overlap with consultants).

For the purposes of the Beyond NIMBYism project, the technologies defined as RETs are: Wind (on- and off-shore); Solar (PV and heat); Bioenergy (biomass and biogas, excluding biofuels); Marine (wave, tidal and hydro), and; Micro-generation (including all technologies).

Analysis

Interim findings from the interviews were presented to practitioners at a workshop on May 17th 2007, in four presentations that reflected the four main
themes of the interview schedule, with a focus on ‘the public’: What do we mean by the public? How do people respond to renewable energy technologies? How are public responses shaping the design and development of renewable energy technologies? What issues are there in public engagement? The analysis that follows is based on three of the presentations given at the practitioner workshop, and summarises broad findings to these questions, identifying the main answers and minority or interesting views coming from different categories of interviewees, applying to different technologies.

What do we mean by the public?

Who are the public?
The following is a list drawing out some of the dominant characterizations made of ‘the public’ in response to a direct prompt in the interview – “who are we talking about when we talk about ‘the public?’”. Responses differed according to the category of the interviewee, with some categories simply explaining that they had no real direct experience of the public in their work.

Table 1: Common constructions of ‘the public’

| Locals (farmers, landowners) | Incomers |
| Experimenters | Citizens |
| Shareholders | Consumers |
| Environmentalists | Middle-class activists |
| Gadget lovers | Parents |
| Leaders of the community | The ‘average person in the street’ |
| The ‘majority of people’ | Nimbys |
| lobbyists | School children |
| Various community groups: women’s club, sports club, church group, etc. | As culturally distinct British people, different from Danes or Germans |

A common distinction drawn (especially in relation to wind-farms) was that between locals and ‘incomers’ in an area:

“…a lot of the incomers in the Fens, as it happens, tend to be from east London. … it became quite predictable that if someone came up with an estuary English accent, they were going to be against it. It’s purely subjective stuff. I didn’t do detailed studies. That might just be my prejudice against estuary English …! But I think that’s valid. Cos those people have bought into this community; they’ve bought property cheaply and they don’t want their lives to change. They want to fossilise it.”

Even within apparently similar groups such as local farmers, interviewees drew out distinctions between the members of groups, for example on the basis of age:

“this particular farmer has had quite a lot of interest from other farmers interested in doing the same thing. It’s a fairly conservative …group of people that they can see that it does make sense in some circumstances. It would be
the younger farmers, not the majority of farmers who are actually quite elderly now, who would be more likely to take it up. Maybe those who are also more open minded about other management regimes”

Other distinctions were made on the basis of motivations, when thinking about people’s willingness to engage with novelty, or their resistance to change:

“There will also be [...] people who are experimenters and want to be ahead of the curve. There are people who will do something only when they think it’s the norm amongst a certain type of people, who need to be reassured that they are in the right place”

Numerous interviewees identified that addressing ‘the public’ involved talking to local communities in some form or another (e.g. in advertising consultation events addressing specific proposals, leaflets were delivered and home visits tailored according to proximity to the location), and yet the idea of there being pre-existing, easily identifiable ‘communities’ was also questioned:

“...there’s a notion, somehow, that community’s some coherent unit, when it’s clearly not. You know, maybe so on a little island like Gigha or somewhere [...] Who’s the community? There are all sorts of different communities within “The Community” and they all have different interests.”

Consultants described a process of ‘community profiling’ as being one of the main services they offer to developers, in the sense of identifying community networks and groups that could be approached as well as sampling general likely levels of support or opposition.

What are they like?

The presentation drew out common characterisations of opponents (again, primarily of wind-farms). In many cases, these fulfilled our expectations of representing stereotypes that fit a ‘NIMBY’ model, including:

Unfulfilled people with nothing else to do

“I meet quite regularly people like Professor [name] who sort of tours around the country, perfectly nice chap, retired, he’s a professor, actually his background’s nothing to do with renewable energy or wind or whatever but he’s made it his [...] retirement purpose to oppose onshore wind farms. Fair enough, he’s entitled to that view but he does amplify and exaggerate and distort significantly and that’s his mission.”

Self-interested people protecting house values

“...it’s going to be some fairly well heeled middle class house owners who perceive a wind farm coming to their area, [...] they perceive it as being a threat to house values. It’s dressed up in a whole range of things. [...] you know, these myths and rumours get spread around but behind it all I think is a fear amongst this grouping that their house prices are going to be affected”

People who are only concerned with self-interested cost-benefit analysis

“People might sort of say, “I don’t want a wind farm. There’s no direct benefit to me. But I can’t get a mobile signal, so I’d have a mobile phone mast,” [...] they’re looking at their own personal cost-benefit analysis. It’s like, what’s affecting me, what’s the benefit for me? They might not mind a mobile mast rather than a wind farm if it meant that they’d get a signal and they can’t get a
signal otherwise. [But] They’re not cut off from the grid […] “Well, I haven’t got a problem, there’s no benefit to me.”

People who refuse to yield/compromise

“So yes the similarities between the anti-nuclear and the anti-wind lobbies is that both groups have a set of sort of sacred cows, received wisdom […] and there’s no room for any kind of debate about it, […] so you get kind of trapped into the situation where you can’t really argue […] with someone from the other side”

Conversely, there were also some dominant characterizations of the broader public that focused on the ways in which public engagement could help the public with their legitimate concerns, uncertainties, and gaps in knowledge or understanding:

“at public exhibitions initially people are sort of very concerned about an issue and if you can sort of …unearth out of what they’re saying what the issue is and give them comfort, […] Presenting them with that factual information and a sort of a recognition […] when you present it with that, an awful lot of people who were initially […] concerned about things, go, oh right, OK, they accept the information, assuming they trust you’re giving them the factual information, they accept it and it’s just sort of recognition on those circumstances […] the majority of people then aren’t just implacably opposed to them.”

How do they inter-relate?

Descriptions of interactions between different segments of the public tended (understandably, especially when developer viewpoints were concerned) to focus on examples of conflict:

“…if you want to get a farmer going, just talk about incomers. If I’m walking across the field and running out of conversation with a landowner, I just ask him about incomers… And he’s off! “I parked the tractor outside the pub the other night and the next thing I know, I’m hearing complaints about mud in the street! I’ve been doing that ever since I was a boy,” you know? And rightly, they get fed up. But that’s changing the countryside and you’re not going to reverse it, but it is a major problem.”

In some cases, opponents were characterized as dominating consultation events (especially public meetings, see below), as being quite aggressive, and as intimidating potential or actual supporters of projects:

“it’s very difficult to get local people to stand in front of TV and support the scheme […] they can become victimised if they stand up and support a scheme, we’ve had that […] It’s down to the level of kids at school being bullied by other kids because their parents have an opposing view […] And it tends to be the opposed that do the bullying rather than the other way round […] Because the person who supports a scheme is just a normal person supporting a scheme but the person who is against it is Mr Angry.”

“it’s usually sort of the loudest will over-shout others who may have a balanced view […] because there’s no control generally as to who can speak and who can’t speak and it all ends up in a big, a big sort of shout type of thing and it can often gets distracted down to a real petty issue that can be addressed but it becomes the focus for huge opposition and it’s not really an issue. So it’s more that sort of where […] there’s a mob sort of mentality can form”
This view or construction of opposition overwhelming support was also seen to have an effect not in direct face-to-face interactions between publics, but through the presentation of opposition views, especially through local press, that would tend to sway the ‘silent majority’:

“I mean people casually reading letter-pages of the County Times with no particular opinion themselves will gather the impression that there’s a lot of opposition to wind farms so they will, […] tend to sort of gravitate towards that position because it seems to be the norm.”

Another strand recognizable through the interviews was an understanding of how interaction between segments of the public was shaped by existing community dynamics or characteristics:

“But the anti-wind lobby I know in England has been much, much tougher than it has here [Northern Ireland], And I would attribute that to a couple of factors to do with the difference […] the country is a much more rural country, it is a country - Northern Ireland - where people are less recently removed from the land, and therefore have more of a relationship with the people that live there. It is a country where those that do live on the land and see their neighbour who is a farmer gaining something out of a piece of land that he would never have gained anything from before, they don’t like to stop him getting that money.”

“There was extensive consultation to try and get them to do [biomass development] but […] it was a great challenge and unlike a lot of communities, they didn’t really have what I would term a professional class, there’s no university lecturers there […] so from that aspect they didn’t have the capacity. I thought we could build it [to revitalize the community] but they didn’t like it you know, I think it frightened them when they understood […] and I think the fear of actually being part owners of this in whatever you know, […] it frightened them.”

“some friends of mine in a small community in Scotland we’ve tried to set up a community wind turbine, […] and the reason it failed, it’s never been built, is because the community itself couldn’t reach decisions about how to organise itself around ownership, who would be paid what, what would happen. I mean essentially […] a community isn’t a corporation, it doesn’t have the same sort of […] decision making, it doesn’t have the same kind of sharpness about property rights and law and everything, it’s just a group of people who meet in a village hall and […] to ask a community to take on what is essentially a public interest corporation, that’s actually quite a task for people and it’s whether communities have that kind of clout to do it.”

How are public responses shaping the design and development of renewable energy technologies?

In the interviews, most initial responses to a question about how public views, responses or sensitivities might have influenced the development of RETs downplayed the significance of the public. However a number of examples and different perspectives emerged during discussion and reflection.

General perspectives

Several interviewees recognised the difficulty of prejudging or predicting public responses:
“There’s nothing quite like the public I have given up trying to predict them […] I never trust anyone who says they understand the public”

“It’s difficult for me to see how engagement on a tidal stream technology is going to particularly alter the, alter the trajectory but maybe that’s just a failure of my imagination”

“It’s a hazardous business trying to figure out public opinion, it really is”

A typical approach in response to this perceived unpredictability was seen as simply trying out technologies or projects and seeing what happens:

“the public’s so unpredictable that it’s almost pointless trying to prejudge them I think, I think it’s basically just do it and you find out”

“I think that the renewable energy developers are not really much more socially attuned than other technology developers in the sense that they go about it thinking that they’ll get the technology and then sort out the public, the public relations afterwards”

In regard to the public influence, there was a near consensus in the distinction made between development (of the technologies and ‘kit’) and the deployment (of the technologies in projects):

“I don’t think they have a huge impact on the development process because it’s often at that stage we’re still looking at the engineering issues in terms of bringing the technologies forward, bringing them on stream, you’re looking at engineering issues. […] What they have, what they have a huge impact on is the speed of deployment rather than the speed of development of the industry”

Issues around institutional or organisational reputation and Corporate Social responsibility (CSR) management were also important for some subjects. And an unexpected finding was that of all interviewees, those from the category of banks and finance were found to be most sensitive to public opposition:

“…if we perceive that there is local, strong local opposition to a project, we won’t touch it, we would not touch it.

Interviewer: Right, so public sensitivities are very key to whether or not you finance it?

And interestingly yes, absolutely very, very strongly I would say, very strongly and so I’ll stand by the statement I’ve just made that if there was strong public reaction then we would not finance it”

In addressing the model of the public having influence through their status as consumers, the demand for green tariffs was seen by some as significant, by others as insignificant in pushing forward their particular sector.

The main substantial influence that public sensibilities were seen as having over the actual development of technologies was that of a general sense of engineering aesthetics:

“I mean obviously you engineer something and then you, then you in doing so you consider the aesthetics as well you know there’s elegance in engineering and I think you know that is something that you certainly can’t pin down. I don’t think it’s a sort of process of, it’s not quite like a car where you produce it and then sort of go through a sort of panel of things but you know in terms of you know, the machine has, has certain markings on it, colours, they’re chosen for practical reasons but also aesthetic reasons” (Developer)
Differences were also noted in the responses according to which technologies were being referred to, with: wind most discussed in this context; solar to some extent in terms of design; biomass to a much lesser degree, and; wave and tidal technologies discussed more prospectively, in anticipation of potential public influence.

**Wind**

Wind turbine design and development was seen as responding to public views in four different ways, firstly in terms of the abandonment of the 2-blade design in favour of 3-blade models:

“You may or may not like turbines at all but I think everybody would agree the three bladed one is easier to look at than the two bladed one. So I would say public reaction has prevented the deployment of two bladed turbines so it used to be, so fifteen years ago they were, they were part of the choice, some people were making two, some people were making three and as a result of a visual intrusion of the two bladed and the higher noise, they’ve gone”

“And it’s really quite unsightly, it’s quite unnerving actually, so the whole reason for having three which is not so efficient actually you generate more power if you just have two blades curiously. Which is what they’re thinking about doing offshore now actually have two blades because the aesthetics therefore don’t count”

Secondly, as the research team predicted, the move towards offshore schemes was seen as a response to the assumption that acceptability is primarily linked to visibility.

Thirdly, and based on the same assumption, the issue of colour was raised, with off-white or grey as the most preferred and least obtrusive design. It was also noted in passing that on the continent, it is common for turbine towers or hubs to carry company logos or other decoration, whereas this is the case for only two turbines in the UK.

Fourthly, it was acknowledged that the development of quieter turbines had arisen both as a response to technical concerns but also through sensitivity to public concerns:

“there is certainly, it’s like I think interest from developers because noise is an issue and that’s creating sort of like a technology moving you know, the technology moving forward so noise is of concern to the public, it restricts what developers can do, a machine comes along that gets more output, quieter, developers are interested you know, so it is influencing in that sort of way”

Finally there was the complex issue of size, where in engineering terms there is a trend towards larger turbines despite the public being seen as preferring smaller ones:

“I think the public’s perception may be that sort of they probably would like them to be smaller, however I think that’s at the moment that’s being overridden by the sort of like the technology drive and to an extent I think professional opinion that probably fewer, larger machines rotating slower is better than a lot of smaller machines rotating faster”
“if you are on the anti side of the fence you might actually say well I prefer much smaller turbines and not these great big monsters as they’re branded”

“there probably is a limit on the size of turbines just as a result of public perception because this isn’t, doesn’t again doesn’t really apply to big open spaces but if you are somewhere where there will be people living within say half a kilometre or kilometre then there is a certain size above which you simply can’t go because people feel dominated by it”

Solar

The design trend towards making PV cells themselves less visible, through being more integrated into the angle of the roof (“flush”) was seen as the primary response to the issue of the visibility of roof installations. This was also mentioned as an explicit request from architects and planners in some instances:

“the visual impact was a consideration so the contractor for that ordered special modules with I think it was a sort of matt black rim instead of the usual aluminium so I suppose that’s, that’s giving a signal to the developer that there is demand for that consideration that’s come through the planning system which probably is in turn reflecting public opinion and I suppose the other thing would be with solar water heating the development of in roof systems so they don’t have to sit on top of the plates, more flush, lower profile. It’s certainly responding to the planning system, whether it’s responding to public opinion I don’t know”

Wave and tidal

Views on the relevance of public responses to the development of offshore marine technologies were more varied. It was also considered (in a ‘stakeholder’ model of engagement) that there were few ‘publics’ who could be seen as affected by marine technologies, and that therefore, adverse reactions were not expected:

“But wave and tidal deployment shouldn’t - shouldn’t be a problem with the public - only with a few fishermen, and there’s no fish left anyway so not a big problem - less of a problem”

“my immediate reaction is that for things like marine and wave and tidal, public perception really doesn’t come into it at the minute, they are too, the technologies are too early but also the public doesn’t interface with them so they don’t really, I don’t think apply pressure to design”

Another response was based on similar assumptions to those raised above, that visibility was much less of an issue with these technologies:

“the pressure again on offshore is saying, is saying well these are going to look ugly you know, I’m going to be on the beach and I’m going to be able to see a wind farm a mile out to sea. So again it’s then people starting to look at things like wave farms and you know a technology that you can’t see that’s under the sea but it’s using the power of the waves rather than wind so I think, I do think that the, we may not be developing the most efficient or effective technologies, we may be also developing technologies which are actually more likely to be successful because they’re going to be less visible”

“there’s a lot of interest in it because also it will be invisible. Now whether it mashes up dolphins and seals and all the rest of it we don’t, we don’t know
yet but in terms of its visibility it won't, it won't be visible so maybe it'll be more easy to get that sort of technology through"

As the last quote indicates, if the marine sector is to learn anything from the deployment of wind technologies, it should be that ecological interests and concerns are a major issue, and therefore in the early implementation phases it is important for the industry to address these concerns. Larger mammals were seen as having particular symbolic importance for the public:

“if a particular technology caused real problems for dolphins and you know, porpoises, that type of thing, the statutory authorities would be concerned if those species were protected and that would drive, could stoke up public pressure but I think that’s a very, there’s a whole series of connections and I think more likely it would be the statutory authorities rather than the public”

This issue seems to have been identified by marine developers, who see themselves as taking extra precautionary steps to address it through their baseline assessments and the EIA processes:

"we have actually modified our concepts and our proposals quite significantly to address people’s concerns [...] I mean we now carry probably around thirty or forty thousand pounds worth of additional instrumentation and monitoring equipment to allay people’s concerns about interactions with boats and things like that. Actually, we’ve actually got three hundred and sixty degree video monitoring on the system because people are concerned about it, so”

What issues are there in public engagement?

The received wisdom, and some counter-examples

The following section is structured by presenting ‘the received wisdom’ (the views of public engagement, its worth, and the best and worst ways of conducting it) along with counter-examples, where these commonly-held assumptions were implicitly or explicitly challenged by interviewees.

*Engagement was generally seen as ‘good’*

This was true especially in the eyes of politicians, NGOs, PR people and consultants. It is hardly worthwhile spelling out this assumption amongst interviewees. More interesting is the question raised of whether ‘better practice’ in engagement is necessarily more ‘effective’ (from a developer perspective):

“when you look at the statistics with regards to the number of planning applications that have gone in and been refused as opposed to passed before and after the BWEA document came out as a kind of benchmark, as a kind of before and after when hopefully the industry had improved in its public consultation. I’m not sure that there’s a great deal of evidence to show that.”

“So I think probably poor consultation and poor public engagement will have a negative impact for the developer as well but there’s no evidence to show that good consultation will have a positive impact.”

In was unsurprising to find that engagement was seen as ‘a good thing’ in the eyes of developers too. A strong theme that we encountered was the un-self-conscious admittance that the value of engagement is ‘strategic’:
“I think it’s just that’s the way you need to do things, it’s you’ve got to get the public on side really, it’s not just renewable, it can be if we’re trying to build a new coal power, a gas power, you’ve got to have very good stakeholder management otherwise I think you haven’t got much chance in succeeding.”

However, this ‘strategic’ approach was viewed as problematic, as it was felt that it can backfire if it is suspected to be or viewed as a cynical attitude:

“So if they do it, they have to really engage - not just asking permission. If they’re coming at it from the point of view of, “What is it going to take for me to buy off people?” then they end up […] being regarded, quite rightly, as being just some bunch who are only in it for the money and they don’t give a toss.”

**Early engagement is an accepted best practice**

However the timing of early engagement was viewed as problematic, because of a number of factors including the lack of specific project information at the early stages of development, and the potential for early engagement to allow opponents more time for mobilisation:

“If you put your head above the parapet too soon it’s going to get blown off and you’ll never recover. If you leave it too late then you know, you’ll find a swell of misunderstanding and misconception out there which is terribly difficult to break down again”

“If you do it too early then you raise hackles and you can’t tell people what you’re going to do. […] Because you don’t know. […] So you almost look stupid saying well I don’t know what I’m doing so it’s a question of, of finding a proper, an easy solution.”

**Community buy-in, through planning gain, 106 or community funds, was seen as ‘good’**

This view was especially supported by interviewees from the finance sector, however as with more general engagement processes, timing was seen as being of key importance. A problem raised by a number of subjects was that offering community benefits early on could be viewed as bribery:

“We will introduce the principle fairly early on so that people are aware of it, also so we can, because again the objectors will then pick on the idea of a community fund is a bribe and you know, can’t win”

“In Spain it will be completely normal to say OK we’ll build a new town hall or a swimming pool or a school or you can have a chunk of the revenue from the swimming baths. If you start to do that overtly in the UK it’s considered to be you’re verging on bribery.”

Another problem that developers were advised to be aware of was the fact that approaching a segment of the public in the form of local community groups or networks could lead to the view that these groups were ‘getting into bed’ with the developers:

“Try and negotiate with us […] and set something up because we’re willing to do that and the obvious suspects for managing a fund I generally feel is the parish council […] And the parish council didn’t want to go through the whole process because they saw themselves as getting in bed with the developer too early and it would prejudice their position that they might chose to take when they saw the planning application further on down the line.”
Alternatively, given the high level of uncertainty in progressing a project through to consents and construction, an early approach to offering benefits to the community can be seen as unnecessarily ‘raising hopes’:

“they don’t say anything till it’s up and then it’s too late and they’ll go to the developer or they might mention it and then someone might say well you know, it’s not going to happen and then how do you tell a community that you’re not going to get the funding because the project’s not going ahead so they’re probably just trying to protect the community in the way they do it.”

A refreshingly honest view came from one interviewee, who compared RETs to other developments, and viewed the offering of community benefits as a bribe, seen as acceptable in other cases of ‘unwanted’ development:

“the reason they’re doing it is not because they’ve got any altruistic aspirations, it’s because they get money and so the other way of dealing with it is to bribe people to accept it [laughs] in the same way as you’d be bribed for having a car factory or a paint plant in your community”

Innovations in approaches to community benefit raised in our interviews included an unfortunately abandoned attempt to provide a cheaper price for electricity to customers in the nearby vicinity of a wind-farm (there are rumours that this model is currently being reassessed) and the channelling of ring-fenced community funds into either regeneration projects or energy efficiency measures.

Public meetings are terrible!

There was a consensus that public meetings, as an engagement form, are viewed as ‘worst practice’, and are widely seen as a prime cause of antagonistic attitudes forming in a community. It is not worthwhile quoting the many descriptions of the atmosphere at many public meetings, which are represented by quotes in an earlier section. The following quote describes the experience of developer representatives:

“They spend their life going to public meetings and it’s a very depressing set of circumstances because it doesn’t appear to have moved on particularly.”

A potential solution to the situation where the first, or sometimes only, opportunity for the public to formulate and express their views about a proposed project is seen as a public meeting where there is insufficient opportunity for discussion, was suggested, that of early online engagement:

“So they set up a kind of infrastructure that allows people that objection debate to happen online so they can deal with a lot of the issues so that when they get round to having a public meeting, a lot […] has you know been sorted.”

Exhibitions are the way forward

The unpopularity of the ‘public meeting’ may now be a commonplace, and so it has been replaced as the default method of engagement (or rather, consultation) by the exhibition. The main benefits of this form of engagement were viewed as: the facilitation of one-to-one human contact between representatives of the public and of the developers (or their PR company or consultants); the opportunity to allay fears and counter misconceptions held by the public; and to demonstrate that the developer is approaching the development in an open and transparent manner. It should be remembered
that these views are those that are expressed by the industry themselves, and that opponents or interest groups may not view the public exhibition as an improvement in the quality or level of engagement and consultation. Best practice was mostly said to involve reducing divisions between the consultation staff and the public they were to meet:

“It defuses antagonism - people are, literally and physically, on the same level. And people engage with our staff as people. They don’t all turn up in suits; they turn up, you know, smart casual. It was a conscious decision on our part. So if you stand back and look at the assembled group, you can’t tell who’s who [...] And that way it’s possible, maybe, to have a reasonably considered debate”

“You have to be careful what you wear sometimes [laughs] you know wearing a suit and tie is not the best thing in a rural community”

“It’s good to talk…”

The benefits of discussion or deliberation are obviously taken as a given in the wide-spread acceptance that more communicative engagement is ‘a good thing’. The majority of interviewees went along with this view, but there were a few occasions where potential problems with this model and this assumption were raised:

“I mean, there is a feeling you just sort of talk to people and somehow everything will be all right. But in fact the reverse can be true - you can talk to people and you merely fossilize the points of view.”

“They just thought that by talking it out [Laughs] in a sort of local authority way, good sense would prevail or there’d be a happy outcome. I personally don’t think that when everyone’s got really entrenched positions with two protagonists and opponents that that is sensible, and one probably has to adopt rather more formal conflict resolution methodology.”

“ Whereas a group of large wind turbines in a field are, in some people’s eyes, just alien things they don’t want there, simple as that. And no amount of consultation’s going to change that whatsoever! [Laughs]”

**New forms of engagement**

A number of interviewees brought up examples of innovations in engagement practices, the more novel of which are summarised below.

**Novel locations for engagement: in shopping centres**

“so for example you know I’ve organised events and exhibitions on renewable energy which have been a way of getting the public to actually see themselves what opportunities there are and that’s been really successful as well and so on [...] Well one of the energy companies actually sort of hosted it at my suggestion, it was done in a big shopping centre, very successful.”

**Online forum: for existing and potential micro-generation technology owners**

“We have recently set up within the last eight weeks a discussion forum for people about climate change and they can go in and they can chat and there was nowhere before and no one knew anyone that had a system in and they may be thinking about it but they would want to talk to someone first because
yes they've got the maths to add up but they want to see in practice does it really work”

**Naming turbines**

The process of allowing a community to name their local turbines was seen as a simple and yet strangely effective process by which a sense of local ‘ownership’ had been established:

“Gigha, G-i-g-h-a, another good website to look at actually, Friends of Gigha and they call their turbines the Dancing Ladies or they're called Faith, Hope and Charity and all this sort of business”

“It was a local paper story to name it and there were over 600 entries […] it made people proud that they were beginning to make something again and they work”

**School windmill**

There was an example of an attempt to very directly involve young people in renewable technology (something which was mentioned by a large number of interviewees as advisable in theory), that was partially successful:

“actually we tried and we failed to do a deal […] we were going to pay for the wind turbine and […] they were going to offer the space and then we were going to instrument the thing […] we would sell them the electricity and we would sell the rest to whoever we could so that basically they would have their own wind farm, their own windmill on the site.”

**Visioning**

In one interview, the subject drew on experience with urban development and regeneration schemes as a potential model for RET development and implementation to learn from. As stressed in much sustainability thinking and particularly the LA21 process in local authorities, the introduction of longer time-scales is seen as key to a ‘visioning’ process:

“just broaden the time horizon, you kind of say, “This is about your children and grandchildren […] when you’re looking at retiring, this is the world and these are the actual pressures that they will be facing. […] Well, what kind of problems have we got at the moment?” […] “OK. Let’s run the scenario 50 years from now, when we’re pretty much out of oil, how does that look then?” […] broader frames and saying, actually a lot of people are going to be in that position. Most people want to procreate, have families and they think and care about their families […] And that’s the way in which you’d start tackling this public engagement locally.”

**Deliberative techniques**

There was a suggestion from a number of interviewees that the appropriate place for deliberative techniques of public engagement (such as focus groups or citizens' panels) would probably not be at project level, but at a higher or wider decision level. Most suggestions included the idea that there was a need for strategic thinking about energy policy, possibly at regional or county levels, in which regions would both develop their own obligations (reflecting national or industry targets) and deliberate on the specific deployments of technology that could fulfil them:
“I think if you took them to a focus group and discussed for example you know, the disadvantages of the national grid and the advantages of focussing energy locally, I think you would find that most of them would be quite sympathetic”

“I’ve not seen debate about, well, we’ve got to have it somewhere. So where do you put it” […] a massive, full-scale TAN-8 kind of approach I think it would be very interesting. I mean, you’d basically say to counties, “This is what you’ve got to do. Come back to us in a year and tell us how you’ll do it. You’ll have to start talking to people, won’t you?” Then councillors as well. It’s a different question. They’ve go to engage proactively rather than reactively and there’s an overall sort of, it’s a decision that you’re making.”

“They were quite useful in having councillors come up, they didn’t participate but they watched, some councillors watched and I think they got a much broader understanding of a community view of a project, less skewed because the sample was taken totally randomly […] most people there were kind of mildly interested but not vociferous either for or against […] despite the best efforts of some of the opposition to get in on it by phoning us up and saying I want to be there”

It is perhaps worth mentioning in summary that the great majority of examples of innovative engagement (beyond, for example, a model that included local leafleting followed by a public meeting or exhibition) were raised by other categories than developers, and in other countries than England.