Curia

Backing Britain:

Designing a World-class Investment Ecosystem for Energy

ICE

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Bill Esterson, Chair of the Energy Security and Net Zero Committee, leading the discussion at the Backing Britain Dinner.

Foreword From the Chair: Building Trust, Delivering Change: the Case for a World-class Energy Investment Framework

As Chair of the Energy Security and Net Zero Select Committee, it was a privilege to welcome participants to the Backing Britain: Creating a World-class Investment Ecosystem for Energy dinner in the House of Commons. Held under the Chatham House Rule, this evening of discussion brought together a diverse group of voices – from industry, academia, government, and investment – to grapple with the challenges and opportunities facing the UK's energy future.

The premise was simple: how do we ensure the United Kingdom is not just reacting to global energy trends, but actively shaping them through a compelling, credible investment environment? In doing so, we must face squarely the interconnected goals of Net Zero, energy security, affordability, and economic competitiveness.

Over the course of the evening, contributors were frank in assessing our current position and candid in exploring what more is needed. There was a welcome consensus on the need to move beyond episodic, reactive energy policymaking to a framework that instils long-term investor confidence, accelerates the deployment of clean technologies and ensures public legitimacy.

One of the evening's core insights was the need to build trust – not just in government policy, but in the market systems and public institutions tasked with delivering this transition. Several participants emphasised the central role of well-designed markets in channelling capital efficiently, pricing risk effectively, and maintaining public and investor confidence during a period of rapid change.

Equally compelling was the message that policy must be honest about costs. It was repeatedly said that consumers must be informed about the economic realities of transitioning to Net Zero and must see tangible benefits if that transition is to retain public support. There was a healthy challenge to current assumptions, particularly in relation to energy pricing, retail reform, the role of gas in transition, and how we communicate system costs to consumers.

Throughout the evening, contributors highlighted that the UK still holds a leadership role in climate and energy innovation. Our experience with Contracts for Difference (CfD), carbon pricing, and offshore wind development has built institutional capacity and knowledge that is increasingly in demand globally. That is an asset we must leverage – through both exporting expertise and attracting inward investment.

Another theme that emerged was the need for cross-sector, cross-departmental thinking. Climate and energy policy cannot be siloed. As was articulated powerfully, land use, food security, and biodiversity must be considered alongside infrastructure and energy strategy. A joined-up approach, with proper spatial and land-use planning, is essential to avoid unnecessary conflict and achieve multiple benefits.

This is a moment of inflection. We are at a juncture where the ambition of our policy must be matched by the pace and discipline of our delivery. The Government's Clean Power Mission and its commitment to mission-driven government are welcome steps. But they must be backed by decisions that de-risk projects, streamline planning and deliver clarity to market participants.

What emerged most strongly from the evening's discussion was that we are not short of ambition or expertise. What is needed now is urgency, coherence, and transparency. We owe that to consumers, to investors, and to future generations.

I would like to thank our sponsors, Intercontinental Exchange (ICE), for their illuminating remarks, our Minister for Energy, Michael Shanks MP, for engaging so candidly, and all our contributors who made the discussion so substantive and forward-looking. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the support of ICE and Curia for making this evening possible.

This report aims to capture the spirit and substance of our dialogue – not as a record of who said what, but as a guide to the questions we must now answer together.

Bill Esterson MP
Chair, Energy Security and
Net Zero Select Committee

Gordon Bennett, Managing Director, Utility Markets and Global Head of Environmental Markets at ICE, delivering an opening keynote.

Foreword: Britain's World-leading Energy Futures Markets

Britain's world-leading energy futures markets – anchored by ICE in London – are critical enablers of the energy transition, providing the risk management, price discovery, and capital allocation tools needed to reconcile the physical laws of energy with the unpredictability of human behaviour.

"Imagine how difficult physics would be if electrons had feelings" This fundamental challenge raised by Nobel Prize winner Richard Feynman, highlights the unavoidable difference between the "hard" and the social sciences. In physics, the laws are immutable, objective, and predictable. The terrain is constant and affords precise testing. In economics, the terrain is ever-changing. Economics is about reconciling the complex interplay of human behaviour; the "solution" to explaining and predicting the future is inherently unstable. That is why rational economists make vastly different choices when deciding how best to allocate scarce resources.

This paradox lies at the heart of the energy transition. Electrons flow, molecules combust – energy systems must obey the laws of physics, not opinion polls.

The markets that allocate capital into that system are built by, and for, people – who have feelings, shaped by emotion and perceived value.