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# Confidence on the Edge

## How leaders see the UK energy landscape in 2026

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# Foreword

**Andrew McCallum**
Founder and CEO, Aspect

The UK energy landscape is at a pivotal moment. Few people working in the industry would disagree with that. What is less often explored is how leaders across the system actually feel about the direction of travel, the credibility of delivery, and the demands the transition is placing on them and their organisations.

**That was the motivation for this paper.**

At Aspect, we work with leaders across energy and decarbonisation globally – building trust, driving growth and navigating complex change to create competitive advantage. Over the past few years, we have observed a growing tension in those conversations: strong alignment on ambition, but far less confidence in execution; genuine commitment to transition, alongside frustration, fatigue and uncertainty about what comes next.

**We felt it was time to listen more carefully.**

This research brings together candid perspectives from senior leaders across the UK energy system – oil and gas, renewables, networks, storage, supply chains, finance and advisers. We asked them to reflect on confidence: in policy, regulation, markets, infrastructure, skills, technology and targets. We asked not only what they think, but how confident they feel – because confidence, or the lack of it, shapes behaviour in powerful ways.

**What emerges is a nuanced and sometimes uncomfortable picture – but also a constructive one.**

This is not a story of an industry split into winners and losers, or heroes and villains. One of the clearest messages from the interviews is how deeply interconnected the system has become – and how unhelpful it is to frame different parts of the energy economy in opposition to one another. Offshore oil and gas, renewables, networks and storage are not separate debates; they are interdependent parts of the same system.

That is why empathy matters. This paper allows readers to step outside their own part of the system and understand how the transition looks and feels elsewhere. For many, that perspective shift may be as valuable as any single finding.

The confidence picture itself is uneven. In some areas, particularly regulated networks, confidence remains relatively strong, underpinned by long-term frameworks and stable investment conditions. In others – most notably oil and gas and energy services – confidence has eroded sharply, driven by policy volatility and uncertainty about the UK's long-term intent. Renewables and storage sit somewhere in between: aligned with the direction of travel but increasingly exposed to delivery risk.

These differences matter. Confidence influences where capital flows, where skills settle, and how willing leaders are to commit to long-term decisions. A system in which confidence is misaligned risks moving more slowly, at higher cost, and with greater friction than is necessary.

At the same time, the interviews are far from pessimistic. There is deep belief in the UK's underlying strengths: its engineering and technology capability, its energy expertise, and its ability to integrate complex systems at scale. Technology is not widely seen as the limiting factor. The challenge lies in turning ambition into delivery – aligning policy, regulation, planning and investment in a way that is credible, predictable and honest about trade-offs.

**That brings us to leadership.**

Leadership in this moment is not just about running individual organisations well. It is also about leading on behalf of sectors, supply chains and communities; about articulating interests clearly and constructively; and about helping the system navigate difficult choices. From our work helping leaders think strategically about the challenges they face, we see that the most effective leadership combines deep understanding of the system with clear judgement, fresh insights and a focus on impact. The energy transition will bring change and disruption. Avoiding simplistic narratives, and engaging seriously with those consequences, is essential if public trust and investor confidence are to be sustained.

*Confidence on the Edge* is intended as a stake in the ground, not a final word. It reflects Aspect's belief in listening first, synthesising carefully and contributing constructively to the debate. We do not claim to have all the answers. We are curious, engaged and committed to learning alongside the industry.

I would like to thank all those across the energy system who gave their time, insight and candour to this research; without their thoughtful contributions, this paper would not have been possible.

I hope you find the insights that follow useful – and at times challenging. Above all, I hope they prompt reflection, discussion and debate.

This paper is the beginning of a conversation, not the end of one. We look forward to continuing it with you.

# Executive summary

In energy, confidence is as important as capacity. Capital will not flow, skills will not stay, and supply chains will not invest if they do not believe the future is worth betting on.

This white paper asks a simple question: how confident are UK energy leaders about the prospects for the sector in 2026?

## Key findings

- Confidence in the UK energy sector is fractured: very low in oil and gas and energy services, higher in networks, mixed in renewables.
- Leaders broadly agree that strategic direction is right, but execution, fiscal stability and credibility are weak.
- Oil and gas on the UKCS is widely viewed as uninvestable, while grid, storage and some renewables remain attractive.
- Clean Power 2030 is seen as directionally right but unachievable on current trajectories, but net zero is still viewed as possible with a reset.

Aspect conducted in-depth, structured interviews with senior figures across the UK energy system: oil and gas operators, energy services companies, renewables developers, grid and transmission operators, storage specialists, investors and advisers. Each was asked the same set of questions about sentiment, policy, investment, infrastructure, supply chains, workforce, technology and the balance between decarbonisation, security and affordability.

The picture that emerges is not of a transition in free fall, nor of one serenely on track. Rather, it is of a system on the edge: directionally committed, technologically capable, but suffering from fiscal whiplash, political volatility and a growing anxiety that the UK is becoming a difficult place to do energy business.

Oil and gas and energy services leaders describe confidence as "spectacularly low", "dismal", even "back in 2015 crash territory". Some say they would not advise their children to enter the industry at all. By contrast, grid and transmission companies are relatively upbeat.

"It [oil and gas] feels like a **twilight industry** in policy terms, not in practical need."

One senior leader notes that: "Where the rules are clear and the framework is stable, capital shows up very quickly". Renewables developers and advisers stand somewhere in between: bruised by auction mishaps and cost inflation, wary of politics, but still convinced that offshore wind and storage will be central to the UK's energy future.

"The UK energy sector has **lost confidence** – in government, in big oil, and even in itself."

# The **confidence landscape** splits three ways

**Bleak sentiment in oil and gas, upbeat confidence in networks, and cautious optimism in renewables.**


## 4.5 Grid, transmission and network leaders

Grid, transmission and network leaders sit comfortable in the 4-5 range across policy direction, investability and technology, softening to around 3.5 on planning risk.

## 3.0 Renewables and storage leaders

Renewables and storage leaders occupy the middle ground: wary of auctions and 2023 targets but buoyed by long-term demand and increasingly mature technology.

## 1.5 Oil and gas and energy services leaders

Oil and gas and energy services leaders cluster at the bottom of the scale on policy and investment with 1.5 out of 5, yet score 4 on technology confidence.

**How to read this**

We invited each interviewee to provide a quantitative confidence rating from 1 to 5 across key dimensions of the energy transition, including policy, investment, infrastructure, skills, technology and targets.

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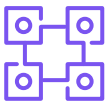
## Across this spectrum of views, a few points of consensus stand out.

**Strategic direction is broadly clear.** Net zero by mid-century, a heavily renewables-based power system, large grid upgrades and a role for hydrogen, carbon capture and storage (CCS) and nuclear: few contest these high-level aims. The difficulty lies in execution. As one interviewee puts it, "We have clear strategic vision but a lack of organisational response to deliver it."

**Government policies for offshore oil and gas** – the Energy Profits Levy (EPL) has done real damage to the UK's reputation as a place to invest. Oil and gas executives speak of the basin as "uninvestable". Capital is heading to Norway, North America and the Gulf, even as British politicians continue to rely on North Sea revenues and skills. The irony is not lost on those who must decide where to deploy drilling rigs and subsea engineering teams.



**Technology is not seen as the binding constraint.** From fixed-bottom offshore wind to subsea systems, from gas turbines to short-duration batteries, most of the necessary hardware already exists. Floating wind, carbon storage, hydrogen systems and long-term power storage are progressing. The harder questions concern system design, grid integration, storage at scale and the practical business models that will hold it all together.

**Clean Power 2030 will not be achieved** on the current trajectory. Since interviews were conducted, the AR7 offshore wind auction has restored near-term momentum, reinforcing confidence in delivery while leaving longer-term pipeline, grid and system constraints unresolved. The language is frank: "not a chance", "impossible", "emperor's new clothes". Yet most argue this should not be confused with failure. Getting to 80–90% clean power by the mid-2030s would still be a remarkable achievement – if the country can avoid losing the industrial and supply-chain base that will be needed to deliver it.

**Energy security, affordability and the public's willingness to tolerate disruption** have moved back to the centre of the conversation. Leaders worry that the UK has "sold its soul" and become a price taker on global markets, even as it demonises domestic production. Public support for climate action in principle remains high, but it is shallow. "People like the windfall tax because they think it stops fat cats," notes one executive. "They don't connect it to their dad's job."

> "We're in the **five-year countdown** to 2030. If you haven't got planning consent or a spade in the ground, you're probably post-2030."

## What follows

What follows is a narrative synthesis of these interviews: a tour of sentiment across the system, an examination of policy and investment, an assessment of infrastructure, supply chains and skills, and a look at the technologies and trade-offs that will shape the next decade. It concludes with implications for policymakers, industry and investors, and with a brief guide to the decisions in 2026 that will matter most.

## What this means

The interviews point to a system at a tipping point rather than in terminal decline. Confidence is highest where policy is stable, delivery mechanisms are clear and capital can be deployed at scale; it is lowest where fiscal volatility, planning delay and political ambiguity persist. For policymakers, the priority is not to restate ambition but to stabilise the conditions for delivery – particularly around planning, auctions and the treatment of legacy assets. For industry leaders and investors, the message is equally stark: the transition will reward those who plan for system integration, resilience and long-term execution, rather than those optimised for short-term cycles. The next two years will be decisive in determining which of these paths the UK ultimately takes.

# About this paper

This paper explores confidence and sentiment across the UK energy landscape at a moment of heightened uncertainty and accelerated transition. It seeks to understand how senior energy leaders assess the direction of travel, the credibility of current policy frameworks, and the challenges and opportunities facing the sector over the remainder of the decade.

## Purpose and scope

The purpose of the research is not to advocate for a particular technology or pathway, but to capture how decision-makers across the energy system currently perceive risk, opportunity and deliverability. The focus throughout is on confidence: where it is strengthening, where it is eroding, and what this implies for investment, delivery and system resilience.

Interviews covered the full breadth of the UK energy system, including oil and gas, offshore and onshore renewables, networks and system operation, supply chains, carbon storage, finance and advisory roles. Interviews were conducted between 6 November and 11 December 2025.

## Methodology

The findings are based on a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted using a common question framework. Each interview explored sentiment across a consistent set of themes, including overall confidence, policy and regulation, investment and finance, infrastructure and grid readiness, supply chains, workforce and skills, technology and innovation, and the balance between decarbonisation, security and affordability.

Responses were analysed qualitatively, with particular emphasis on points of convergence and divergence across different parts of the system. Quotations included in the paper have been lightly edited for clarity but retain the original meaning and intent. All interviews were conducted under the Chatham House Rule.

## How to read the confidence barometers

Throughout this paper, we refer to a series of confidence barometers that summarise how senior leaders across the UK energy system view key dimensions of the transition, including policy, investment, infrastructure, skills, technology and targets.

As part of each interview, participants were asked to provide short quantitative ratings of their confidence on a consistent five-point scale, where 1 indicated very low confidence and 5 indicated very high confidence. These scores were used to complement the longer, qualitative discussion and to enable comparison across different parts of the system.

The confidence barometers presented in each chapter reflect a synthesis of these 1–5 ratings, interpreted alongside the qualitative evidence from the interviews. They are not intended to represent statistically weighted averages or precise measurements. Rather, they provide an indicative guide to where confidence is strong, weak or highly uneven across three broad clusters of leaders: oil and gas and energy services, renewables and storage, and networks and system operators.

# Acknowledgements

Aspect would like to thank all those who participated in the interviews for their time, candour and insight. Their willingness to speak openly about both opportunities and concerns has been central to the depth and value of this research.

**This paper draws on interviews with senior leaders from across the UK energy system, including:**

- Andrew Gardner, CEO, INEOS FPS
- Andrew Barr, Regional Director, Baker Hughes
- Barry Macleod, CEO, Flotation Energy
- Bob Drummond, Executive Chairman, Hydrasun
- Geoff Holmes, CEO, PX Group
- Gitte Gard Talmo, CEO, North Star
- Glenn Barber, Director of Corporate Affairs, SSE
- Graeme Sword, Global Energy Investor
- Iain Sinclair, Chief Strategy Officer, Global Energy Services
- Jake Tudge, Corporate Affairs Director, National Gas
- John Cameron, Managing Partner, Energy & Natural Resources, Boyden
- John Macaskill, Group Growth Director, ABL Group
- Kevin Pringle, Head of Communication & Brand, SSEN Transmission
- Lawson Steele, CEO, Haldane Energy
- Malcolm Forbes-Cable, Vice President of Energy, Wood Mackenzie
- Nick Dalgarno, Managing Director, Piper Sandler
- Sarah Moore, CEO, Energy Logistics, Peterson
- Scott Barr, UK Managing Director, Harbour Energy
- Susie Lind, Partner, Energy & Infrastructure, CMS
- Zoë Barnes, Partner, Everoze Partners

Interviewees participated in a personal capacity, and views expressed do not necessarily represent those of their organisations.

Chapter 1

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# The UK macro context: an early mover facing second-generation problems

The UK likes to think of itself as a climate leader, and with some justification. It decarbonised earlier and faster than many peers, replacing coal with gas and then rolling out offshore wind at impressive scale.

## Key findings

- The UK has been an early mover on decarbonisation, with coal-to-gas and rapid offshore wind deployment.
- Early success has created second-generation challenges: grid constraints, ageing gas fleet, industrial decline and cost politics.
- Public debate has shifted from "how fast can we decarbonise?" to "how do we balance net zero with security and affordability?"

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> "We went early and fast on decarbonisation – now we're **discovering** the **awkward middle bits**."

Emissions have fallen while GDP has grown. Carbon has become part of mainstream political vocabulary.

But early movers acquire second-generation problems before others. The UK now has a power system with very high penetration of intermittent renewables connected to a grid designed for a different era. It has an ageing gas fleet and a North Sea province that has been asked to be, at different times and sometimes simultaneously, a cash machine, a strategic reserve, a climate villain and a bridge to a greener future.

The country is also grappling with the politics of cost. A long period of relatively cheap energy and stable supplies left the public complacent about security. The gas price crisis and the recent spike in electricity bills have changed that. Today, the UK endures the highest industrial electricity prices of any member country of the International Energy Authority. The question is no longer simply "how quickly can we get to net zero?" but "how do we get there without breaking the bank or the grid?"

> "The **energy transition** is **not a straight line**; the UK is learning the messy bits in public."

Energy leaders are acutely aware of this shift. "We've focused too much on net zero costs," says one interviewee. "And now we've swung too far towards just cost." Somewhere between those poles lies a more balanced path. Whether the UK finds it over the next few years will determine not only whether it meets its climate targets, but also what remains of its industrial base when it does.

> "We built the **front end** of the system faster than we built the **back end**."

Chapter 2

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# Sentiment: high, lows and everything in between

## Key findings

- There are three emotional geographies: bleak in oil and gas, upbeat in networks, cautiously optimistic in renewables.
- Oil and gas leaders speak of "zero" confidence; network operators see strong, funded pipelines; renewables leaders report short-term pain, long-term belief.
- Virtually all distinguish between confidence in direction (reasonably high) and confidence in delivery (low).

## The interviews reveal three distinct 'emotional geographies'.

In the first, centred on the North East of Scotland and the traditional offshore oil and gas hubs, the mood is "bleak". Oil and gas and energy services-sector leaders describe their confidence as "spectacularly low", even "zero". One executive speaks of "back in 2015 crash territory", recalling the last major oil price downturn. Another says bluntly: "From an oil and gas perspective, confidence is zero."

These leaders see a government that treats their sector as a "twilight industry", suitable for taxing but not for nurturing, and a Scottish government that, in their view, oscillates between hostility and opportunism. Investment is leaving, rigs and vessels are being redeployed, and every young engineer who moves to Abu Dhabi with their family reinforces the sense that the tide is going out for good.

In the second geography, among grid, transmission and some network operators, the tone is very different.

Here there are large, regulated asset bases, multi-decade investment plans and a clear regulatory compact. "I would be positive," says one senior executive. "I'm confident in the sector as we look to 2026." Another notes that "confidence is high where the system behaves like a system, not a political experiment" and contends that investors still regard the UK's networks as a safe bet.

> It's not that we don't believe in the **transition** – we don't believe **in this version** of it."

The third group, composed mainly of renewables developers, floating wind specialists, carbon storage firms and advisers, is caught between the two. They are frustrated by auctions that fail to clear, by transmission charges that make Scottish projects look "catastrophic" on paper, and by turbine original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) struggling to make money. But they retain a fundamental belief in the direction of travel. "It's not rosier than a year ago," says one executive, "but there is more clarity. I prefer clarity – even if the market is 60% of what it was."

> "Emotionally, the industry **feels bruised** – particularly in the North East of Scotland."

On floating wind, the mood is almost counter-intuitive. Most accept that the early hype was unsustainable and that costs, logistics and supply-chain realities were always going to bite. The recent "crash" in confidence is seen, in some circles, as necessary. "The crash in floating was inevitable," says one interviewee, "but it's happened early enough that we can catch it."

What unites these views is the distinction between direction and delivery. Few argue the UK should abandon net zero or temper its climate ambition. Many question whether the country has yet worked out how to turn that ambition into a stable, investable programme that communities, companies and capital can organise around.

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> "We've moved from **euphoria to realism** in renewables – that's painful, but it's also **healthier**."

## Confidence barometer: **overall sentiment**

**1.5**

### Oil and gas and energy services leaders

Oil and gas and energy services leaders cluster at the bottom of the scale on policy and investment with 1.5 out of 5, yet score 4 on technology confidence.

**4.5**

### Grid, transmission and network leaders

Grid, transmission and network leaders, by contrast sit comfortably in the 4-5 range across policy direction, investability and technology, softening to around 3.5 on planning risk.

**3.0**

### Renewables and storage leaders

Renewables and storage leaders occupy the middle ground: wary of auctions and 2030 targets but buoyed by long-term demand and increasingly mature technology.

Chapter 3

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# Policy and regulation: clear targets, tangled paths

## Key findings

- At the strategic level, UK energy policy is widely seen as clear and stable; at the operational level, it is viewed as volatile and politicised.
- The EPL has become a symbol of fiscal instability and is blamed for driving capital away from the oil and gas industry on the UKCS.
- Scottish energy policy is described by many leaders as chaotic and incoherent, especially regarding oil and gas.

On paper, the UK's energy policy looks enviably clear. It has a legally binding net-zero target, a Clean Power 2030 goal, and successive governments that have championed offshore wind and low-carbon technologies. Annual Contract for Difference (CfD) auctions provide a mechanism to support projects. Regulators have been tasked with facilitating the transition. Scotland has its own targets and strategies.

Yet clarity at the level of targets has not translated into predictability at the level of implementation. Several interviewees distinguish between three layers: the strategic, the tactical and the operational.

> "If you're a long-term business, you want **certainty – fiscal** and **regulatory.** We have neither."

At the strategic level, most are complimentary. "Compared to the rest of the world, UK policy is stable and clear," says one leader. Another points out that the UK's alignment of industrial policy with energy policy – through the Scottish National Investment Bank, the UK Infrastructure Bank and the nascent GB Energy – is "better than we've seen before".

> "**Compared to the rest of the world**, UK policy is stable and clear."

At the tactical and operational levels, the criticisms begin. The CfD framework, though respected, has at times been mis-calibrated, as in the AR5 auction that delivered no new offshore wind contracts. Transmission charging in Scotland is widely described as punitive. Persistent tinkering with auction rules, and hints that future rounds might be altered further, leave developers wary.

The treatment of the North Sea is harsher still. The EPL looms large in the minds of upstream and supply-chain leaders. Its design, amendments and uncertain end-date are seen as emblematic of a fiscal regime that cannot be trusted. "The UK oil and gas sector is uninvestable," says one executive. "Capital has simply gone elsewhere."

> "I don't think we have an energy policy. I see positions, consultations and politics – **but no plan**."

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> "We talk a lot about leadership, but most of what investors see is **improvisation**."

The Scottish Government attracts particular ire from those in oil and gas. "Scottish energy policy is as shambolic as you can possibly get," one executive declares. Interviewees complain about a "presumption against oil and gas" that is not matched by a realistic plan for the jobs and revenue that would be lost, or for the offshore skills that the transition will still require.

This is not just a hydrocarbon complaint. Offshore wind and floating-wind developers also worry about policy being used as a political football. Reform UK's talk of ripping up auction results, and the polarisation between Labour's renewables rhetoric and Conservative scepticism, all contribute to what one interviewee calls "horrendous uncertainty".

The paradox is that, at precisely the time when the system needs slow-changing, boring infrastructure and a predictable regulatory pipeline, it is being buffeted by short-term political calculations. "You can't mobilise against vagueness," notes one executive, referring to local protests against pylons. The same is true of capital: it will not mobilise where it cannot see the path.

## Confidence barometer: **policy and regulation**

**4.5**

On policy, the barometer is particularly stark. Grid, transmission and network leaders give the direction and stability of UK policy scores of around 4.5 out of 5, praising clear targets and predictable regulatory frameworks.

**3.0**

Renewables and storage leaders mark it down to a middling 3, citing auction design and politicisation.

**2.0**

Oil and gas and energy services leaders, bruised by the EPL and shifting rhetoric, sit down at 2 out of 5, seeing the North Sea as a fiscal sponge rather than a strategic asset.

**3.0**

At the sector-level, the blended score for policy direction is roughly 3 out of 5: the destination is widely understood, but trust in the route is fragile.

Chapter 4

Aspect

# Investment and finance: capital flows to where it is welcome

## Key findings

- Networks and regulated assets remain attractive to investors; storage, particularly batteries, is also buoyant.
- Offshore wind retains strong fundamentals, but investor confidence has been dented by auction missteps and cost inflation.
- The UKCS oil and gas industry is widely viewed as uncompetitive and unstable, with capital flowing to other jurisdictions.

Despite the worries, not all parts of the UK energy system are starved of capital. Regulated networks, in particular, remain attractive. Long asset lives, inflation-linked revenues and predictable regulatory resets make for comfortable reading in investment committees. "Long-term frameworks like RIIO are seen as good places to invest," says one interviewee. "They give certainty."

Short-duration electricity storage, especially batteries, is another bright spot. Several interviewees describe the battery market as "absolutely flying", with dense deal-flow, active investors and developers keen to capture arbitrage and balancing opportunities.

Long-duration power storage remains harder to finance but is increasingly recognised as essential to system adequacy.

Offshore wind occupies an uneasy middle. The long-term logic remains strong: vast resource, falling levelised costs over the past decade and a clear role in decarbonising power. Yet the short-term picture is messy. Cost inflation, supply-chain strain and the AR5 auction debacle have left scar tissue. "Investor confidence is weary," says one interviewee. "They've put money in; now they need to see orders." The subsequent success of AR7 has helped rebuild confidence in revenue certainty and near-term delivery, though investors remain focused on whether future rounds sustain that clarity.

> "Capital goes where it's welcome. **Today, that isn't the UK.**"

Floating wind, in its current industrial infancy, is more fragile still. Private capital is cautious; public capital, via GB Energy, Crown Estate investments and other funds, is increasingly being asked to move first. This is not unusual in emerging technologies, but it does raise questions about the balance of risk between taxpayers and investors, and about the conditions under which the private sector will follow.

The great outlier is upstream oil and gas on the UKCS. Here the verdict is almost uniformly negative. Basin economics have deteriorated; politics is adversarial; trust is low. "Our implied long-term oil price is $40," says one interviewee, referring to the valuations implied by asset deals. "That's an extraordinary destruction of value."

The consequence is that capital that might, in a different regime, have funded late-life engineering, incremental recovery, CCS integration or repurposing of infrastructure is being deployed elsewhere. The highly mobile industrial and skills base that grew up around the North Sea is at risk of dispersal precisely when its expertise is needed for offshore wind, CCS and hydrogen projects.

> "Why would you choose the UK when you can invest in the same technology overseas **without the political drama?**"

Global capital is not short of opportunities. It will go where frameworks are stable, policy is predictable, and returns are commensurate with risk. The UK still offers such environments in parts of the system. The question is whether it can extend that stability to the parts that are currently treated as expendable.

> "We've shifted from asking 'is there enough capital?' to **'is there enough confidence?'**."

## Confidence barometer: **investment and finance**

**4.5**

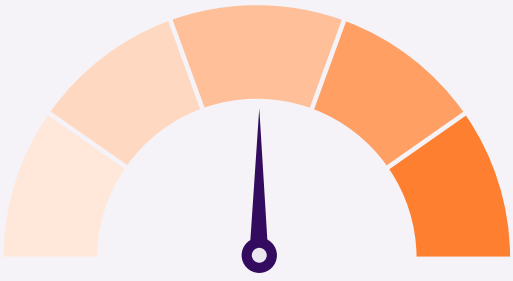
Grid, transmission and network leaders and system operators report investment-environment scores of 4.5 out of 5, buoyed by RIIO and long-dated capex plans.

**3.0**

Renewables and storage leaders sit at 3 out of 5 – investable, but jittery – split between mature fixed-bottom wind and more precarious floating and early-stage technologies.

**1.0**

Oil and gas and energy services leaders, staring at discounted asset values and unstable taxes, pitch the UKCS at 1 out of 5 on investability.



**2.5**

Averaged across the system, the investment score comes out around 2.5, but that gentle median hides extreme variance. Capital is not scarce; it is selective.

Chapter 5

# Infrastructure and the grid: The new critical path

## Key findings

- The grid is now widely recognised as the main bottleneck, not turbines or panels.
- Transmission and distribution investment plans are large and funded, but planning and consents are the key risk.
- Ports and yards have improved for fixed-bottom wind but are not yet ready for floating wind at scale.

> "The **pylon is the new wind turbine** – it's where the arguments are now."

If the past decade was about building turbines and panels, the next will be about wires and substations. Almost every interviewee, regardless of industry, points to the grid as the new critical path.

Constraint costs and curtailment payments – "paying windfarms not to generate" – are emblematic of a system in which generation has raced ahead of transmission. Leaders are quick to note that such payments – which are projected to reach £1.8 billion in 2025 – are not a sign that renewables "don't work"; they are an indication that the network cannot always cope with the power on offer.

Transmission companies have responded with ambitious reinforcement plans. New 400 kV lines, multi-terminal HVDC links and technologies such as dynamic line rating are being deployed or proposed. "Dynamic line rating lets us get a lot more power through the grid when it's windy," one interviewee explains, describing real-time monitoring that allows circuits to operate closer to their physical limits when conditions allow.

These programmes are, in principle, funded. The challenge lies less in finance than in planning and consent. Communities in the Highlands and elsewhere are organising against pylons and substations. Environmental objections, visual impact concerns and frustration about past underinvestment all play a role.

The Scottish Government's promise to decide strategic infrastructure consents within 52 weeks is widely welcomed – but also seen as a test it may struggle to pass. "Planning decisions are crucial," says one executive. "If we don't get timely decisions in 2026, that's what will put 2030 at risk."

> "The money is there for the grid; the question is **whether the permissions will follow.**"

> "Ports are our next bottleneck after planning – we're **not configured yet** for serial floating wind assembly."

Ports and yards form another part of the infrastructure story. For fixed-bottom offshore wind, the UK has made progress, with upgraded facilities in Leith, Ardersier and many other locations around the UK. For floating wind, the picture is less reassuring. Few ports have the necessary quayside space, depth and lay-down area to assemble large floating structures at scale. Fabrication yards that might once have built jackets or topsides are either full, underinvested, or focused on projects abroad.

The moral is simple but hard to execute: if the UK wants to deliver on its ambitions for offshore wind, power storage, CCS clusters and hydrogen hubs, it must treat the infrastructure that underpins them – grid, ports, pipelines, storage – as the first order problem, not the afterthought.

## Confidence barometer: **infrastructure and grid**

On infrastructure and the grid, the confidence map is more level-headed. All three groups recognise that the network is now the critical path.

**3.5**

Networks score their own infrastructure readiness at about 3.5 out of 5 – major projects funded, technology in hand, but planning a known risk.

**2.5**

Oil and gas and energy services leaders, and renewables and storage leaders are harsher, at 2.5 out of 5, arguing that planning delays and community pushback could turn grid ambition into another set of missed targets.

**3.0**

The industry-wide average settles around 3 out of 5: a grudging acknowledgement of progress, tempered by anxiety over whether consent systems can keep up.

Chapter 6

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# Supply chains: capability in seach of certainty

## Key findings

- The UK has world-class offshore supply-chain capability, but financial resilience is weak and resources are mobile.
- The same supply-chain backbone is needed for oil and gas, offshore wind, CCS and hydrogen.
- Floating wind is especially exposed: its supply chain is, in leaders' words, "not yet born".

The UK's offshore oil and gas supply chain is one of its genuine industrial strengths. Decades of North Sea experience have produced world-class subsea engineers, fabricators, marine contractors and project managers. These firms have already diversified into offshore wind, interconnectors and subsea cables. In principle, they are well placed to support floating wind, CCS and hydrogen too.

They are, however, financially fragile. Years of boom and bust, followed by pandemic disruption and now uncertainty at home, have left many supply-chain firms cautious. They are reluctant to invest in new equipment or facilities without long-term visibility of work. "Are we ready? Absolutely. Are we resilient? No," says one executive.

> "Our **offshore muscle** is being **run down** just as everyone else wants to hire it."

> "You lose **assets** and **people**, and the **supply chain** withers."

A recurring theme in the interviews is that the same companies and skills underpin oil and gas, offshore wind, hydrogen and CCS. "We are throwing away an innovation engine – the North Sea created world-leading subsea technology," notes one leader. If upstream oil and gas activity declines too fast, the shared offshore backbone will fray.

Nowhere is this tension more acute than in floating wind. "The supply chain for floating wind simply does not exist right now," one specialist states bluntly. There are not enough chains and moorings; industrial-scale foundation production is not in place; the right vessels are scarce; European turbine OEMs have been reluctant to commit; and ports are not yet set up for serialised assembly.

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> "Developers **optimise for the lowest CfD price;** that rarely means the UK supply chain."

Supply-chain leaders are not asking for protectionism. Several warn against closing the UK market to non-European OEMs. But they do call for clarity: clear auction volumes over multiple rounds, clear port and yard strategies, and clear roles for GB Energy and other public investors. Without that, they argue, the UK will continue to lose the race for industrial capacity to countries that make more predictable offers.

## Confidence barometer: **the supply chain**

The supply-chain row of the barometer is one of the most sobering. Everyone agrees the UK has exceptional capability; nobody thinks it has robust resilience.

**3.5**

Grid, transmission and network leaders, with their more stable pipelines, rate supply-chain resilience around 3.5 out of 5.

**2.5**

Renewables and storage leaders, including offshore wind developers drop that to 2.5 out of 5, citing OEM fragility and under-developed floating infrastructure.

**2.0**

Oil and gas and energy services leaders come in at 2 out of 5, warning that years of policy uncertainty and EPL have hollowed out balance sheets and confidence.

**2.5**

Taken together, the blended score of 2.5–3 sums up the dilemma: The UK has the know-how, but not yet the conditions to keep it anchored and investing.

Chapter 7

# Workforce, skills and the just transition

## Key findings

- Transmission and networks report high confidence in workforce growth and reskilling; oil and gas and energy services report a serious talent drain.
- The political narrative of a "just transition" is widely seen as not matched by reality on the ground.
- Some argue that the UK doesn't lack skills so much as credible project pipelines that anchor people and training.

> "Ask me today and workforce is a four out of five; in two years it could be a two if **we keep losing people.**"

The debate on skills splits along similar fault lines. Grid and network operators are relatively bullish. They report strong recruitment, record graduate intake and active programmes to retrain people from high-carbon backgrounds. One executive commented: "The idea that the transition is destroying skills doesn't match what we see on the ground – many of our newest recruits are coming straight out of oil and gas."

Elsewhere the picture is more troubling. Oil and gas and offshore energy services firms describe a growing talent drain. Engineers and technicians with 10 to 20 years' experience – the cohort most able to deliver complex projects – are leaving for the Middle East, the US and other markets where energy is viewed as a strategic industry, not a problem to be solved. One executive notes wryly that "Abu Dhabi is now being called Abu Deen."

The political narrative of a "just transition" is not holding up well under scrutiny. Many interviewees see little that is "just" in a process that allows supply-chain companies and skills to wither before new industries and jobs have matured. Several argue that a transition worthy of the name would keep the legacy skills base alive long enough to repurpose it, rather than driving it away.

Some renewables and advisory voices push back against the idea that the UK lacks skills. "If you create the jobs, the training will come behind you," says one. "We have people – what we need is visibility," says another. Their contention is that the labour market will respond rapidly once credible projects move into pre-construction and construction, but that skills programmes without pipelines are of limited use.

> "There is **no shortage of young people** who want to work in energy – they're just not sure this country wants them to."

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> "A 'just transition' is political nonsense unless you keep the skills base alive."

Both perspectives have merit. The UK does have a strong education system, a relatively mobile workforce and a keen interest among younger cohorts in working on climate issues. It also has communities in Aberdeen, Grangemouth, Teesside and elsewhere that have experienced industrial decline before and are acutely sensitive to the prospect of history repeating itself. Bridging these realities will require more than slogans.

## Confidence barometer: **workforce and skills**

The skills row of the barometer is one of the few that leans into the upper end. All three groups rate workforce and skills at or above the midpoint:

**3.5**

Grid, transmission and network leaders at around 3.5 out of 5, renewables and storage leaders similarly upbeat.

**2.5**

Oil and gas and energy services leaders at 2.5 out of 5 but falling.

**3.0**

The averaged industry view is roughly 3 out of 5 – good foundations, but under pressure.

The divergence lies not in whether skills exist, but where they are going. Grid, transmission and network leaders are hiring aggressively; renewables and storage leaders expect "skills to follow jobs"; oil and gas and energy services leaders worry about a one-way talent drain to the Gulf and the US. There is tension between an apparently ample pool of skills and a growing sense, in certain regions, of being left behind.

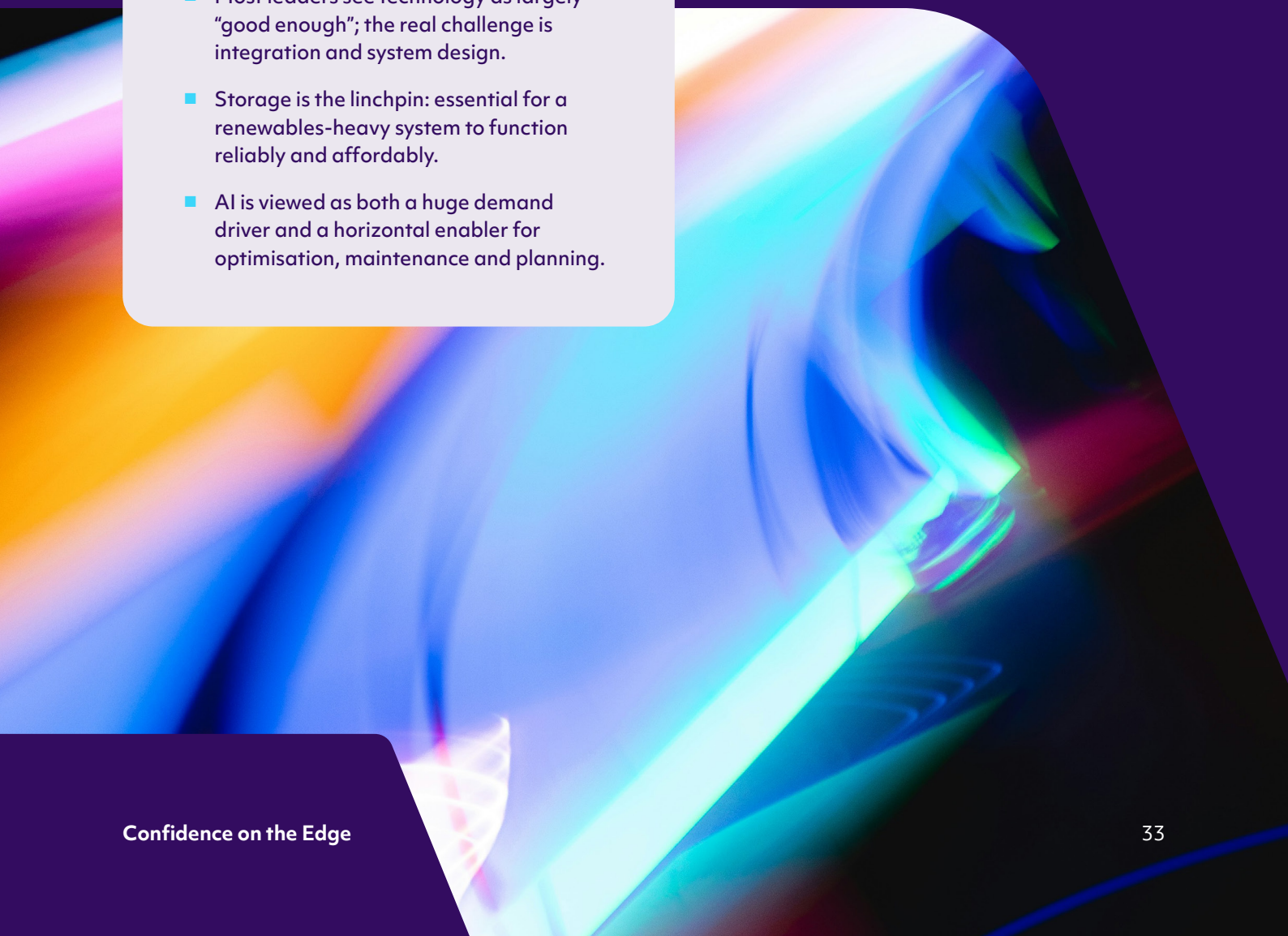
Chapter 8

Aspect

# Technology, storage and AI: less wizardry, more integration

## Key findings

- Most leaders see technology as largely "good enough"; the real challenge is integration and system design.
- Storage is the linchpin: essential for a renewables-heavy system to function reliably and affordably.
- AI is viewed as both a huge demand driver and a horizontal enabler for optimisation, maintenance and planning.



The technological story is, in some ways, the least dramatic topic from the interviews – which is precisely the point. Few leaders believe that the UK's energy future hinges on some yet-to-be-discovered magic technology. The tools are mostly present; the challenge is in deploying them intelligently and at scale.

Fixed-bottom offshore wind is mature. Gas turbines are familiar. Subsea engineering is a British strength. Nuclear technology is well established, even if programme management has been patchy. Storage technologies – from lithium-ion batteries to pumped hydro and emerging long-duration options – are progressing. CCS and hydrogen are technically feasible, if commercially tricky.

Floating wind is the most obvious frontier. Here, too, the issue is less whether the underlying concepts work – they do – than how to industrialise them at acceptable cost. One expert urges people to stop thinking of floating as science fiction: "Floating wind isn't future tech – it's an infrastructure and logistics game."

> "We're not short of widgets – we're **short of systems thinking**."

Storage emerges as the quiet linchpin of the whole endeavour. "Storage is fundamental – it's the key that lets a renewables-heavy system work," observes one interviewee. Batteries can smooth intra-day fluctuations and provide fast frequency response; pumped hydro and other long-duration options can provide low carbon dispatchable power when the grid needs it; gas storage, hydrogen and other molecular forms can provide seasonal resilience. Without sufficient storage, the temptation will always be to keep a larger fleet of gas-fired stations running, undermining decarbonisation.

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Artificial intelligence (AI) is seen as sitting astride both sides of the ledger: it will both consume and save energy. On the consumption side, data centres and AI-heavy services will drive significant new demand. On the savings side, AI can optimise network flows, refine project design, enhance predictive maintenance, monitor offshore assets, and process consultation responses and regulatory submissions at a pace no human team could match. "AI will be in almost everything we do over the next 20 years," predicts one executive. Another remarks that "AI means one thing: energy, energy and more energy."

If there is a technological gap, it is less about hardware than about system modelling and institutional imagination. Several interviewees lament that too many policy debates still treat individual technologies in isolation – floating wind without storage, hydrogen without grid impact, data centres without power provenance – rather than as part of a single, integrated system. That is an intellectual failure, not a technological one.

> "AI is like adding a new heavy industry to the grid, but one we can also use to run the grid better."

## Confidence barometer: **technology and innovation**

4.5

Across the barometer, one area stands out as consistently high: technology and innovation readiness. Oil and gas, networks and renewables groups all score this in the 4.5 out of 5 range, making it the most uniformly positive dimension. Whatever else divides them, leaders broadly agree that technology is not the binding constraint – and that storage, rather than more exotic inventions, will be the linchpin.

Chapter 9

Aspect

# **Security,** affordability and the public licence

## Key findings

- Most leaders believe the UK has not yet struck the right balance between decarbonisation, security and affordability.
- Rising import dependence and double-running of systems are major concerns rarely explained to the public.
- Public support for net zero is broad but shallow, and easily shaken by bills, local impacts and perceived unfairness.

Energy policy is often framed as a triangulation between decarbonisation, security and affordability. Nearly all the leaders interviewed feel that the UK has not yet found the right balance.

Some argue that, in the early years of climate policy, decarbonisation was rightly emphasised. Others contend that it was always over-weighted in rhetoric, but under-weighted in practice. Either way, the political conversation today feels different. Security and affordability are back on the table, and not at the margins. "Security deserves more weight – it resonates with people in a way net zero never has," says one industry leader.

The concern is that the UK is on course to be increasingly dependent on imported gas and power, even as it proudly shuts down domestic production. "We've sold our soul – we're now price takers on global energy markets," laments one executive. Importing LNG from Qatar or the US while refusing to support economically viable domestic production in the North Sea strikes many as morally tidy but strategically incoherent.

Underlying this is the awkward arithmetic of running two systems at once. "We are running two systems – the hidden cost politicians refuse to admit," notes one interviewee. For a period, the UK will need both a large fleet of renewables and a substantial amount of dispatchable capacity, whether in the form of gas, nuclear, storage or some combination. The cost of duplication is rarely discussed honestly in public.

> "Support for net zero is a **mile wide** and an **inch deep**."

Public opinion, meanwhile, is both supportive and fragile. Polls suggest broad backing for net zero and renewables. But support weakens as soon as specific costs or local impacts are involved. "The public wants green energy but doesn't want to pay for it," observes one leader. Another captures the paradox of the EPL debate: "The energy transition only works if people believe it improves their lives, not just the emissions spreadsheet."

Offshore wind has been particularly vulnerable to narrative shifts. Curtailment stories, information about constraint payments, and headlines about auction failures have dented confidence. "Public perception of offshore wind isn't good at the moment – and it's about to get worse," warns one interviewee, arguing that the sector became complacent and stopped making its case just as opponents became more vocal.

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> "We've told people the **transition will be painless;** now we're discovering that's not true."

The implication is clear: if the UK wants to sustain its climate ambitions, it must do a better job of explaining the trade-offs, costs and benefits of different paths, and of connecting policy choices to tangible outcomes in people's lives – jobs, bills, reliability – rather than only to atmospheric $CO_2$.

> "Under no circumstances do we not need some **oil and gas** by **2050**."

## Confidence barometer: **energy security and decarbonisation**

When the barometer turns to energy security and the trilemma balance, scores drop back to mid-range.

**3.5**

Grid, transmission and network leaders give this dimension about 3.5 out of 5, confident that grid investment can improve both security and affordability.

**3.0**

Renewables and storage leaders sit at 3 out of 5, arguing for a pragmatic mix of renewables and gas.

**1.0**

Oil and gas and energy services leaders, alarmed by import dependence and policy hostility, rate security closer to 1 out of 5.

**2.5**

Public and political support tracks a similar pattern: clustered around 2.5 out of 5 overall, but seen as shallow and volatile, easily jolted by bills and local opposition.

Chapter 10

Aspect

# Net zero, targets and timelines

## Key findings

- Industry leaders see no plausible route to Clean Power 2030; "no chance" is the closest thing to consensus.
- Long-dated net zero targets are treated as directional markers, not credible delivery commitments.
- Companies respond to near-term obligations, not distant dates; credibility erodes when milestones slip without explanation.
- The UK's transition is threatened less by ambition than by sequencing, planning and political candour.

The UK's climate ambitions are written in dates, but the industry treating those dates as working assumptions is vanishingly small. Across oil and gas, renewables and networks, leaders describe a widening gap between targets as published and timelines as physically achievable.

Clean Power 2030 attracts the bluntest assessments. "Not a chance," says one executive; "a political slogan rather than an operational milestone," argues another. Even grid operators – by far the most optimistic interviewees – tend to treat 2030 as a stretch goal that would require "timely consents in 2026 and a fair wind thereafter", hardly a rock-solid prognosis. Developers note that large offshore projects still in planning cannot realistically connect before the early 2030s, and some players point out that "infrastructure takes most of a decade; we're already out of runway."

The problem is not ambition but sequencing. As one oil and gas executive puts it, "We're imposing expensive decarbonisation on assets at the twilight of their lives – too much, too late." Renewables leaders, for their part, highlight a mismatch between auction cycles, supply-chain readiness and grid capacity: "We set the target before we built the pathway." Network companies worry that 2030 now anchors expectations the planning system cannot meet.

Long-dated net zero targets fare little better. Several executives describe 2045/2050 as "just numbers" without detailed pathways. One interviewee made it plain: "2050 is just a number until there's a plan, a vehicle and a way to enforce it." The sentiment is not hostility to the goal – few argue against net zero itself – but frustration that targets have raced ahead of institutions. One interviewee notes that "targets don't drive behaviour; auctions and price controls do," a reminder that corporate planning cycles run on three-to-seven-year horizons, not 30.

Others stress the risk of credibility erosion. Leaders expect the UK to miss interim targets; what concerns them is the absence of candour about slipping timelines. "If we started by being honest about what we can't do by 2030," argues one senior figure, "people might finally believe us about what we can do by 2050." Another echoes the point: "We'd get more respect for realism than ritual optimism."

> "We've set ourselves a **2030 power target** that doesn't match the project pipeline or the planning reality."

Yet few see the targets as useless. Some argue they have already dragged the UK into difficult but necessary conversations about grid investment, storage and planning reform. "Even if we miss 2030," one leader notes, "we'll be closer to it than we would have been without the target." In this view, stretch goals function as industrial pressure – forcing decisions earlier, even if the deadlines themselves slide.

But good pressure becomes bad politics when promises persist long after feasibility has evaporated. Several interviewees worry that repeated slippage without explanation will harden public cynicism. "The closer we get to 2030," says one executive, "the less believable it becomes." Oil and gas leaders link this credibility gap to public misunderstanding: "People think you turn off oil and gas and wind picks it up the next day. That's not how systems work."

The pattern across interviews is clear. The industry is not rejecting net zero; it is rejecting wishful timetabling. Across energy industries, leaders want fewer headline dates and more believable pathways; fewer slogans, more sequencing; and above all, a restoration of what one interviewee called "contractual seriousness" – the idea that a national milestone should mean something operational, not merely rhetorical.

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> "The closer we get to 2030, the more it looks like a **political slogan** rather than an operational milestone."

## Confidence barometer: **net zero targets**

On targets and timelines, the confidence barometer shows the sharpest divergence across the energy system.

**1.0**

Oil and gas and energy services leaders score the achievability of the Clean Power 2030 target at the very bottom of the scale (1 out of 5), describing it as technically and procedurally unrealistic on the current trajectory.

**1.5**

Renewables and storage leaders are only marginally more optimistic, averaging 1.5 out of 5, arguing that planning delays, auction cycles and grid constraints make delivery structurally impossible within the decade.

**3.0**

Even the grid, transmission and network leaders - typically the most bullish segment - offers only a conditional mid-range score (around 3 out of 5), stressing that 2030 depends on 2026 consents landing without slippage.

**2.0**

Long-dated net zero milestones are treated with similar caution. Across all groups, confidence settles around 2 out of 5, with leaders viewing 2045/2050 as credible in principle but poorly grounded in actionable pathways. They differentiate sharply between headline dates and near-term, enforceable obligations, which shape real corporate behaviour. The system-wide takeaway is clear: the industry accepts the direction of travel but sees both 2030 deadlines and mid-century targets as aspirational rather than operational without a major acceleration in planning, infrastructure and political candour.

Chapter 11

# Implications and recommendations

Policymakers, industry leaders and investors alike are encouraged to accelerate the shift to a unified system narrative, rather than pitting renewables and oil and gas against each other.

Embedding such a shift will be key to unlocking further progress through the facilitation of shared objectives for every stakeholder in the UK's energy and decarbonisation pathway. On a case-by-case basis for stakeholder groups we would also recommend the following:

- Policymakers are urged to move from targets to credible delivery, stabilising fiscal terms and planning regimes.
- Industry leaders are encouraged to prioritise system-wide collaboration across sectors, recognising that this will maximise operational value for every part of the energy mix.
- Investors are advised to focus on system enablers (grid, storage, digital optimisation) while engaging closely on policy risk.

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# The interviews suggest three broad implications:

## For policymakers

The message is that direction is no longer the problem; delivery and credibility are. Announcing new targets is of limited value if past ones are visibly unattainable, if fiscal regimes change without warning, and if key infrastructure decisions are delayed. There is a strong call for stabilising the EPL and the wider tax regime over a 10-15-year horizon, for developing a coherent gas strategy that recognises the fuel's role as a transition enabler, and for resourcing planning and consenting bodies so that the promises of 52-week determinations are kept.

## For industry leaders

Especially in oil and gas and offshore energy services, there is a need to present a more integrated narrative. Many interviewees are tired of the "renewables versus oil and gas" framing. They stress that the offshore capabilities forged in oil and gas are the same ones needed for floating wind, CCS and hydrogen. Companies that retreat into defensive postures risk being left out of new value chains; those that invest in people and innovation, even in lean years, will be better placed when sentiment turns.

## For investors

The landscape is nuanced rather than uniformly bleak. Regulated networks, storage and certain parts of the renewables sector remain attractive. Oil and gas in the UKCS are, for now, deeply out of favour; elsewhere in the world they are not. Patient capital has an opportunity to shape the next phase of the transition – particularly in long-duration storage, grid-enabling technologies and deep-water wind – if it can navigate policy risk and work with governments to design viable business models.

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# Against this backdrop, several concrete recommendations emerge:

## Actions for policymakers

**Stabilise fiscal terms for oil and gas:** The introduction of the OGPM alongside the EPL provides clearer parameters and expiry conditions. But confidence in the UKCS will depend on how predictable and durable the regime proves in practice and whether it can avoid retrospective changes.

**Finalise a gas strategy:** Treat gas separately from oil, explain its role to 2040 and beyond, and map how hydrogen-ready infrastructure and storage will be used.

**Make planning deadlines real in practice:** With the Planning and Infrastructure Bill now in force, confidence will depend on whether reforms translate into faster more consistent consenting across Scotland and England, particularly for major grid and infrastructure projects, including where Public Local Inquiries are required.

**Adopt an electricity storage plan:** Set indicative ranges for short-, medium- and long-duration storage, and adjust auctions, capacity markets and network charging to encourage the right mix.

**Speak frankly to the public:** Explain that for a period the UK will pay to run overlapping systems, and that this is the price of a secure transition – not evidence of failure.

**Invest in people and places:** Build place-based strategies around hubs like Aberdeen and Shetland that integrate energy projects, skills, housing and community benefit, so that the transition feels like renewal rather than retreat.

## Actions for industry leaders

**Lead with system thinking, not sectoral advocacy:** Frame engagement with policymakers and the public around the needs of the energy system as a whole – recognising shared infrastructure, skills and supply chains – rather than advancing narrow, technology-specific positions.

**Be more explicit about delivery constraints and trade-offs:** Avoid over-promising in pursuit of competitive advantage or political favour. Honest articulation of what can realistically be delivered, and by when, will strengthen long-term credibility even if it complicates short-term narratives.

**Take greater ownership of public-facing communication:** Do not leave explanation of the transition solely to government. Industry voices are well placed to explain how change affects jobs, communities, costs and security – and to do so in practical, human terms.

**Invest in skills, capability and supply-chain resilience:** Treat workforce transition and supply-chain continuity as strategic priorities, not secondary considerations. The erosion of offshore capability is seen by many interviewees as a system-level risk.

**Collaborate more visibly across traditional boundaries:** Joint initiatives across oil and gas, renewables, networks and storage can help demonstrate interdependence and counter the perception of competing camps.

## Actions for investors

**Signal clearly what drives investability:** Be explicit with policymakers and industry about how policy stability, planning certainty and regulatory predictability influence capital allocation decisions, rather than allowing those judgements to be inferred after the fact.

**Adopt a system-level investment lens:** Value assets not only on standalone returns, but on the role they play in enabling wider system resilience – including networks, storage, ports and supply-chain platforms.

**Support delivery realism, not just ambition:** Back projects and business models that prioritise execution, resilience and sequencing, even where this tempers headline ambition or short-term returns.

**Engage as long-term partners, not just capital providers:** Active engagement with industry and policymakers can help shape more credible frameworks and reduce misalignment between ambition and delivery.

**Recognise confidence as an investment variable:** Treat confidence and credibility as factors that materially affect risk, cost of capital and long-term value – and factor them explicitly into investment decisions.

**Engage more proactively in shaping the debate:** Investors should play a more visible role in informing policy and industry discussion – helping to articulate what credible, investable delivery conditions look like, rather than remaining reactive to outcomes.

Chapter 12

Aspect

# What to watch for in **2026**

"The next two years will tell us **whether the UK is serious about being an energy nation,** or just a market for other people's kit."

## Key findings

- 2026 is seen as a pivotal year for planning decisions, auctions, fiscal resets and GB Energy's first moves.
- Outcomes in transmission consents and allocation round design will heavily influence confidence.
- Signals on EPL reform, storage strategy and talent flows will show whether the UK is stabilising or drifting.

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> "If **future allocation rounds wobble**, you can forget investor confidence for the rest of the decade."

Several of the interviewees described 2026 as a pivotal year. A few developments will reveal whether the UK is edging towards a more confident trajectory or drifting into prolonged uncertainty.

**First is the handling of planning and consents for major transmission projects.** If Scottish and UK authorities honour the 52-week determination commitments for strategic lines and substations – even where local inquiries are involved – that will signal serious intent. If decisions slip into 2027 and beyond, confidence in the 2030 ambitions will erode further.

**Second is AR7 and its successors.** The outcome of AR7 has been widely welcomed, restoring momentum after a difficult period for offshore wind and signalling that the UK remains serious about delivery. But confidence will ultimately be shaped by what comes next. The framing, volume and outcomes of AR8, AR9 and AR10 – particularly for floating wind and supply-chain continuity – will determine whether this renewed momentum is sustained or fades again.

**Third, any reset or rollback of EPL** will be watched closely. A move to a more stable, time-limited or price-triggered regime would be taken as a sign that ministers have grasped the link between fiscal stability, investment and supply-chain resilience. Continued ambiguity would confirm the view that oil and gas are fair game for arbitrary policy shifts.

> "We're about to find out whether **52 weeks** is a slogan or a promise."

**Fourth, GB Energy's first major moves** will matter. Where the new public entity chooses to take equity stakes – in ports, fabrication yards, OEMs, storage or generation – will shape industrial geography and crowd in, or crowd out, private capital.

**Fifth, the emergence of a coherent national storage strategy** – or the absence of one – will indicate how seriously the system is treating the integration of renewables, demand from AI-driven data centres, and the need for resilience in cold, still spells.

**Sixth and finally, labour and sentiment indicators** will bear watching: whether the outflow of mid-career professionals from the North Sea slows; whether net-zero job numbers in key regions start to rise; and how the public responds to rising infrastructure activity, be it pylons in the Highlands or battery installations near towns.

"What would boost my confidence? Honesty. Just honesty about where we are and what it will cost," one executive told us. The UK energy system is not short of ambition, ingenuity or capital. It is short of candour, stability and a willingness to treat energy as the strategic system it is, rather than as a convenient backdrop for short-term political theatre. How that changes – or does not – over the next two years will set the tone for the 2030s.

It's the beginning
of a conversation.
**We look forward to continuing it with you.**

Let's talk: hello@weareaspect.com

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