



THE SOLENT CLUSTER

# HOW TO...

## EXPLORE PLAUSIBLE FUTURES WITH COMMUNITIES

Two-way dialogue between decision makers and the public is crucial to generate buy-in and maximise potential socio economic benefits of decarbonisation. Understanding stakeholder perceptions of decarbonisation helps develop a feasible decarbonisation plan.

# STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

## 1. ARRANGE PLAUSIBLE FUTURES WORKSHOPS

The University of Southampton have tested the process of Plausible Futures workshops during the development of the Solent Local Industrial Decarbonisation Plan in 2024. The findings from these workshops show the gap in where the public currently sees the region, i.e., today, compared to what they believe is likely in the future based on business as usual (BAU), and in a plausibly ideal future (PIF). Despite some variance between preferences across different stakeholder groups, a clear picture does emerge with a broad consensus on perceived and ideal future states. The output of the engagement is a perception roadmap to help the wider region and policy makers understand public preferences and visions of a low-carbon future for the Solent region.

## 2. QUANTIFY QUALITATIVE DATA

Capturing opinions, feelings and other qualitative data is valuable, but difficult to handle, compare and interpret at scale. The University of Southampton used online survey software to score each participants decisions as they considered a number of different trade offs. For example, the question 'where does current decision making sit in relation to decarbonisation activities' has a trade off between central (extreme score of -5) and devolved (extreme score of +5). Each participant can chose a score along that continuum, and when combined creates a heat-map of scores showing the most popular scores as well as the outliers.

## 3. USE DATA TO PROMOTE DISCUSSION

On the basis that there is unlikely to be full agreement amongst a diverse group of people about complicated decisions, discussion is key. Allowing participants to air their views in a safe environment, and having an

opportunity to listen to others is crucial to developing understanding and empathy. This is helpful when decisions are made, and those who feel disadvantaged by the decision can understand why it was made, even if they don't agree with it. Likewise, those who are content with the decision are better equipped to understand why some feel aggrieved.

## 4. SUMMARISE AND SPREAD THE WORD

Any consultation needs to end with a summary of responses, and the conclusions drawn. These should be communicated firstly to the consultation participants, and also to wider stakeholder groups. The exercise should provide useful evidence for policy makers.

### TIPS AND TRICKS

- Universities are well placed to support policy makers and Industrial Clusters to design and deliver public consultation activities to help develop policy.
- Run plausible futures workshops on different dates, at different times and different locations to ensure accessibility from a wide spread of participants.
- Carry out a stakeholder mapping exercise prior to the consultation process to ensure a diverse spread of participants.

### LINKS AND FURTHER INFORMATION

[The Solent Cluster](#) Working towards a lower carbon future

[Innovate UK](#) UKRI

[Sustainability and Resilience Institute \(SRI\)](#)

[University of Southampton](#)

[IDRIC's Social Science Projects](#) | [IDRIC](#)