**Will Guernsey Clean up?**

The topic of the 2019 Guernsey IOD Convention was “Climate Change: Can Guernsey Clean up?” This issue was very topical with our student table, as over 1000 young people had partaken in the climate activism march in the previous week. I was interested to see how leading local businesses would respond to emerging views on the future of our environment.

An idea I found particularly engaging was from John Clacy at the start of the convention, when he said that now, more than ever, Guernsey needs a well defined plan of action. He explained our need to come up with affordable and achievable business goals to mitigate climate change, and I saw an example of this thought process in Russell Clark’s later speech. After shining a light upon a large yet affordable opportunity for renewable energy which Guernsey is currently ignoring, Clark addressed our lack of engagement with achievable environmental goals. The use of tidal power to generate electricity is not new, however on an island with one of the largest tidal ranges in the world, our present lack of action could lead many to believe that we have simply never heard of the idea!

The first keynote speaker of the evening was Kathryn Porter. She described the illogical nature of the phrase carbon neutral, explaining how such a system would be near impossible to put into practice. Given the popularity of discussions for going ‘carbon neutral’ I was surprised to hear this, however it allowed me to view the topic of climate change in a more realistic light, as it accounted for the practicality of ideas rather than the simple magnetism of their words.

During the first debate, CE of Guernsey Electricity Alan Bates revealed to the audience how popular the topic of renewable resources was in conversations with the States over the past few decades. However these concerns have remained almost fully unaddressed, with no clear policies being put into place. I was interested by Deputy Barry Brehaut’s response which was in line with one of Kathryn Porters earlier points, stating that the cost of connecting renewables to the grid is just financially and politically unattractive. However, I found this claim controversial, as I think it could have disregarded the mindset of the younger demographic who will soon be engaging with the financial and political world. There is no doubt in my mind that protecting the environment is at the forefront of young Guernsey minds, yet I think this issue was tactfully avoided in order to reduce conflict with current State plans.

I thought that the questions posed by Alastair Stewart on the evening helped to individually engage each of the businesses. At one point, Stewart asked how many individuals were willing to make lifestyle changes to protect the environment. There was unanimous agreement in the room, which gave me hope that the idea of mitigating climate change had successfully permeated the minds present. However, a later question over willingness to engage with the idea of a plastic free business resulted in an empty show of hands. It seemed slightly contradictory to me that the same companies who said they were willing to make lifestyle changes were not willing to engage with the idea when it was put into action.

In the second debate, Dr Andy Sloane tackled the importance of individual business responsibility. Dr Sloane described the current position of the States of Guernsey as lacking ambition and immediacy, and hence declared that it should be businesses leading necessary environmental changes. This idea had a big impact on me, as it allowed me to see a world where climate change mitigation could be achieved without worry about policy delay. Given the global financial reach of Guernsey companies, I think this tactic could be very effective in helping Guernsey ‘Clean up’.

It was the last speaker, Micheal Bonte-Friedham, who I thought fully expanded upon company responsibilities toward the environment. As a founding partner of a leading investment company, NextEnergy Capital, Bonte-Friedham was in the perfect position to address the success of environmentally conscious businesses. In an interesting response to individuals at the convention, Bonte-Friedham explained how business manifestos which prioritise environmental concerns do produce better investment returns in the long run.

This evening offered me a vital insight into the engagement of local companies with the topic of climate change. I think that the ways to tackle this issue were discussed in great detail, which alleviated some of my worries over what world of work would be left for me and my fellow students in the future. However I felt that the overarching question arising from the debate and audience response was not simply “Can Guernsey Clean Up”, but rather “Will Guernsey Clean Up?”