

Minister visits projects launching Shetland into the future

UK Government Minister for Scotland Iain Stewart visited Shetland, where he saw how cutting-edge projects, from a sustainable energy initiative to a spaceport, are shaping the islands' future.

His first visit was to the ORION Clean Energy Project, which aims to harness Shetland's natural resources to generate sustainable, affordable energy. He heard about how the project is leading the world as it works to transform Shetland into a green energy hub while contributing to the UK's net zero ambitions.

The Minister then travelled up to Unst, where he met with representatives from the SaxaVord spaceport. The UK's first vertical satellite launch, supported by £13.5 million UK Government funding, is anticipated to take place from the site later this year.

Visits to Shetland's food and drink businesses were also on the agenda, as the Minister met with Shetland Reel distillery, and Cooke Aquaculture, a leading producer of Scottish salmon. As Shetland Reel Gin is exported around the world and salmon is the UK's top food export, he enjoyed discussing how these companies could benefit from upcoming trade deals, boosting Shetland's economy.

The Minister later met with representatives from Shetland Islands Council and other key stakeholders to discuss how the Islands Growth Deal could support developments across the area. The Heads of Terms for the Deal was signed in March 2021 to commit £50 million investment from both the UK and Scottish Governments for Shetland, Orkney and the Outer Hebrides.

Minister Stewart said:

The innovation and resourcefulness of the projects I've visited in Shetland has been truly inspiring. From hearing about how ORION is utilising the islands' natural abundance of wind and wave power to create clean energy, to seeing how Unst's unique position is helping to pioneer vertical satellite launches from UK soil, these projects highlight Shetland's leading spirit of innovation.

Shetland's food and drink offer is also fantastic, with real potential for export growth. It was a pleasure to visit Cooke Aquaculture and even try some delicious gin at Shetland Reel, the UK's most northerly distillery.

Almost a year after we signed the Heads of Terms for the Islands Growth Deal, it's fantastic to see these projects helping the

islands flourish. I look forward to exploring how this funding can work hand-in-hand with our Levelling Up agenda to futureproof Shetland's success.

Shetland Islands Council Leader Steven Coutts said:

We were very pleased to welcome Mr Stewart to Shetland and showcase the economic opportunities in our island community. Our location, natural resources and entrepreneurial spirit ensures there is a lot happening in Shetland, and more yet to come.

We took the time to discuss some of the challenges of living and doing business in Shetland, particularly the increasing impact of rising energy costs, and the need to look to solutions to enable us to address these.

The importance of a just transition from oil and gas to Net Zero was also discussed and acknowledged.

The talks were constructive and we look forward to developing the positive ongoing relationship and delivery on our ambitions.