



Forum 21 Newsletter

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<http://www.forum21.org.uk>

Working for a Fair and Sustainable Western Somerset

'Eco' home owners to open their doors again

More than 20 'eco' homes in Western Somerset will be open this autumn for visitors to find out how they can carry out cost-saving measures in their own homes. This follows the success of last year's Open Homes initiative.

Organised by Transition Minehead and Alcombe and Forum 21 the homes will be open between 13 September and 11 October.

Visitors will be able to:

- see inside a new build 'passive house' which needs little or no heating
- learn how air or ground source heat pumps can produce renewable heat
- find out how thermodynamic panels work

- see an old water wheel being restored. Some of the homes to be open have had installed, among other things, electric charging points, water saving devices and underfloor heating.

Programmes will be available later in the summer in libraries, tourist offices, council offices and local shops.

More information can be found on our websites: forum21.org.uk or transitionmineheadandalcombe.org

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Work to begin on woodland project



Notices have been posted at entrance points to the site setting out the project's aims and inviting people to get involved. Above, the gate at Woodcombe.

Work will soon begin on a community woodland project on North Hill after Exmoor National Park granted a licence to Forum 21 to manage the project.

A public meeting earlier this month was attended by several Woodcombe residents, members of Forum 21 and the leader of the West Somerset District Council Tim Taylor.

Those present heard from Exmoor Park's forestry officer Graeme McVitie and Forum 21's Graham Boswell who stressed the importance of recording the biodiversity of flora and fauna in the area.

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Like us? Please go to our Facebook page and say so – Forum 21 at Facebook.

Forum 21 is a not-for-profit company whose aims are to raise awareness about ecology, natural history, resource conservation, sustainable development and environmental studies as well as to conserve and protect the environment and natural resources.

Fracking: drilling to be allowed under people's homes

The government plans to introduce a law allowing fracking companies to drill under people's homes without their permission.

The plan was announced in the Queen's speech and could become law despite 74 per cent of the British public being opposed to it.

Some Conservative MPs, fearing a backlash from their voters, are beginning to voice doubts. Nick Herbert, who represents Arundel and South Downs, is urging councillors to throw out Celtique Energie's bid to drill near Wisborough Green in

West Sussex.

The plans would involve up to 24 lorry journeys each day through the village.

A group of local landowners around the drilling site has attempted to frustrate Celtique's plans by forming a 'legal blockade' using trespass law to deny the company rights to drill out horizontally beneath their land, which would be required in the event of fracking.

The MP said he was not opposed to fracking in principle but that the site was the wrong location.

Campaigners fear full-scale fracking is planned for national parks

An oil company has been given the go-ahead to drill for gas in the North York Moors causing campaigners to fear that full-scale fracking will follow.

Environmentalists fear the permission sets a precedent for future fracking applications in national parks.

Third Energy, backed by Barclays Bank, is to begin working in Ebberston Moor in the North York Moors after getting permission to get rid of vast amounts of potentially radioactive waste water (a product of drilling for gas) by pumping it back into the ground.

The Environment Agency (EA) has been warned that public water supplies could be affected. Yorkshire Water is concerned about the re-injection well which will travel through the rock from which they draw water.

Anti-fracking campaigners argue that a report to the EA justifying the water re-injection plan underplays the risk of failure of the well.

Russell Scott, of Frack Free Yorkshire, says Third Energy intent to inject, via mechanical means, a total of 5.88 million cubic metres of waste over nine years. He said: "Third Energy's suggestion that this process will not have any negative impacts on the well casing protecting our drinking water from the injected water is ridiculous".

Mr Scott fears such logic could lead to fracking in national parks despite government assurances of protection.

The North York Moors are thought to be rich in shale gas which can only be extracted by fracking.

New sites sought for pv panels

Local communities seeking to reduce fuel costs could be helped by the installation of photovoltaic (PV) panels.

Speaking at the annual meeting of Transition MInthead and Alcombe (see also report on p.3) Gareth Hoskins of Brendon Energy described the Wiveliscombe-based community energy company's progress in installing the panels on sites where they can benefit local communities in the area.

The installation is free, some free electricity is available and the community receives a community dividend to

spend as they wish.

Brendon Energy is also working on hydro schemes and other energy sources but PV panels are the quickest and easiest way to achieve carbon reduction in Western Somerset.

The company is keen to find new sites for energy production to benefit local communities and can be contacted at: www.brendonenergy.org.uk

There is a current share offer which carries the social enterprise tax rebate for investors.

Food

Research finds organic food has 'significant' benefits

Research at Newcastle University has found wide-ranging differences between organic and conventional fruits, vegetables and cereals.

The results are based on an analysis of 343 peer-reviewed studies from around the world – more than ever before – which examine differences between organic and conventionally-grown fruit, vegetables and cereals.

Helen Browning, chief executive of the Soil Association, which campaigns for organic farming, said: "The crucially important thing about this research is that it shatters the myth that how we farm does not affect the quality of the food we eat".

Organic food has more of the antioxidant compounds

linked to better health than regular food, and lower levels of toxic metals and pesticides, researchers found. The international team suggests that switching to organic fruit and vegetables could give the same benefits as adding one or two portions of the recommended 'five a day'.

The team, led by Professor Carlo Leifert, concludes that there are 'statistically significant' differences, with a range of antioxidants being 'substantially higher', between 19% and 69% in organic food.

Not all experts agree with the findings. Tom Sanders, a professor of nutrition at King's College London, said the research showed some differences. "But the question is, are they within natural variation? And are they nutritionally relevant?"

Carbon dioxide to be retained in 'blanket bogs'

Measures to retain water and carbon dioxide in 'blanket bogs' in the centre of Exmoor National Park were outlined at the annual meeting of Transition Minehead and Alcombe.

As one of TMA's main aims is mitigation of climate change, they invited Dr David Smith to talk about the measures known as the Mire Project. This is funded by South West Water and is helping to ensure a steady supply of good quality water for the company.

Dr Smith explained that mechanical drainage in the mid 20th century, or earlier, had dried the bogs causing loss of carbon into the atmosphere and reduced biodiversity with sedge grass (molinia) dominating the landscape.

Small blocks made of wood and turf are placed in the drains after they have been identified by surveys, some now done with unmanned airborne vehicles. The

Government supports use of water-source heat pumps

The heat from rivers and estuaries could supply energy to over 20,000 homes according to research funded by the Department of Energy and Climate Change.

Water-source heat pumps draw residual heat from rivers which is then fed into local networks or single buildings, providing low-carbon energy.

The first system of its kind in the Thames provides hot water for 150 homes and a hotel, saving 500 tons of carbon emissions. The water is drawn from two metres below the surface of the Thames where

retained water creates many benefits including:

- sustained base load in rivers
- improved water quality, thus reducing processing costs downstream
- increased biodiversity of wildlife and plants, in particular, the increased growth of sphagnum moss, which encourages bacteria to feed on methane, should eventually reduce the release of this gas from the bogs.

This process, which is being carried out in blanket bog land across the world, is part of South West Water's Upstream Thinking Programme. Ecosystem reward payments will be made to landowners to maintain and continue the work into the future.

Dr Smith encouraged TMA members to visit the Mire sites, including the state of the art monitoring equipment

Information is available on www.exmoormires.org and their Facebook page gives day-to-day progress reports.

latent heat is sustained at a constant temperature of between 8C and 10C.

The Department has produced a map illustrating how much heat could be supplied by six rivers: the Thames and the Tyne could produce up to 10,000 gigawatt hours per year, the Ouse (in York) and Avon between 1,000 and 5,000 and the Cam and Cole (in Birmingham) under 1,000.

Energy secretary Ed Davey wants to see fast development of water-source heat pumps, especially in areas where there is a high demand for heat.

Davey wins battle to keep UK's emissions target

Chancellor George Osborne's attempt to weaken the UK's carbon budget for the next decade was thwarted when Ed Davey, secretary of state for energy and climate change, said the target would not be changed. Mr Davey said the targets for 2023-2027 – the most ambitious in the developed world – were legally-binding (*theguardian.com 22 July 2014*).

The target of 50% across 2023-2027 against 1990 levels was agreed three years ago after a fierce political battle between the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, with David Cameron having to intervene in the target's favour.

Osborne has warned of the UK being too far out in front of other countries in action on global warming and claimed green policies were a burden on business.

But Mr Davey said: "The fourth carbon budget, which caps the UK's emissions, will not change. It will cement the UK as a global leader in combating climate change in an affordable way. We are increasingly seeing other countries, who recognise our shared responsibility to tackle climate change, join us in ambitious action."

"We are close to a new EU climate deal that would cut emissions by 40% across Europe by 2030 – meaning that there would be a level playing field for British business and industry with our biggest trading partners when it comes to cutting emissions."

"In reviewing the fourth carbon budget, I was reassured by the vast majority of business groups, investors and environmental groups who agreed that any change would be unjustified, would deter investment and undermine our efforts to get a global climate deal in 2015."

The Committee on Climate Change, the government's statutory advisers on climate change, which sets the carbon budgets, welcomed the decision.

Lord Deben, the former environment secretary and committee's chairman, said: "I am very pleased that the government has accepted our advice given under the terms of the Climate Change Act. This was that the fourth carbon budget should not be changed because the basis upon which it was drawn up had not altered. This confirmation is a further example of the commitment of government and parliament to the battle against climate change."

Home Improvement Fund runs out of money

The government's Green Deal Home Improvement Fund has closed. It ran out of money after only six months in operation.

Currently only 5% of England's 2.3m fuel poor homes reach the band C standard with a typical band C home costing £1,000 a year less to heat than a band F or G-rated home.

Government wants a 'voluntarist' approach to geological disposal of nuclear waste

The government has published a white paper setting out its plans for the long term management of higher activity radioactive waste through geological disposal. This will be implemented alongside ongoing interim storage and supporting research.

The plan envisages the use of geological disposal facilities (GDFs) capable of isolating radioactive waste within multiple protective barriers, deep underground which will, says the white paper, "ensure that no harmful quantities of radioactivity ever reach the surface environment. (The GDFs) will provide a permanent solution for the UK's existing higher activity radioactive waste (including anticipated waste from a new build programme)".

The government wants a 'voluntarist' approach to identify sites where a GDF could be located. Communities willing to participate will get 'significant benefits', such as long term employment and infrastructure investment and additional investment

the government is committed to provide.

The white paper gives background information about:

- radioactive waste (existing and future) to be disposed of in a GDF, and how it is currently managed;
- How geological disposal became UK government policy;
- Information on what it is, including its design, how it is constructed and regulated, and the roles and responsibilities of organisations involved.

It also sets out the policy framework for its future implementation.

Formal discussions between interested communities and the developer (Radioactive Waste Management Ltd) will not begin until 2016.

The new siting process will provide more information to communities before they are asked to get involved.

More information is available from the Department of Energy & Climate Change www.gov.uk/decc

Grants available from Forum 21

Forum 21 is able to offer small grants (maximum £1,000) for measures that meet our sustainability criteria.

The grants are available to community groups to fund small projects or to part-fund larger projects.

Application forms and criteria can be downloaded from the home page (grants) of our website: <http://www.west-somerset-forum21.org.uk>

For more information ring 01984 634 242 or email: mail@forum21.org.uk

Rate of Antarctic ice melting doubles

Antarctica is shedding 160 billion tonnes a year of ice into the ocean, twice the amount of a few years ago, according to new satellite observations. The ice loss is adding to the rising sea levels driven by climate change and even east Antarctica is now losing ice.

These revelations followed the announcement that the collapse of the western Antarctica ice sheet has already begun and is unstoppable, although it may take many centuries to complete.

Global warming is pushing up sea level by melting the world's major ice caps and by warming and expanding

the waters of the oceans. The loss of the entire western Antarctica ice sheet would eventually cause up to 4 metres (13ft) of sea-level rise, devastating low-lying and coastal areas around the world.

The new data, published in *Geophysical Research Letters*, comes from the European Space Agency's CryoSat-2 satellite launched in 2010. It shows that the western Antarctica ice sheet is where 87% of the lost ice is being shed, with the east Antarctic and the Antarctic peninsula shedding the rest.

The data collected from 2010-2013 was compared to that from 2005-2010.

Race against time to protect Fukushima from toxic water

Engineers are racing against time to construct an ice wall to keep Fukushima safe from damaged nuclear reactors. The frozen barrier, costing £185m, is being built around Fukushima Daiichi's four damaged reactors. If all goes to plan, by next March the damaged reactors will be surrounded by an underground frozen wall that will be a barrier between highly toxic water used to cool melted fuel inside reactor basements and

clean groundwater flowing in from surrounding hills. (*The Guardian, Sunday 13 July 2014*).

Up to 400 tonnes of groundwater that flows into the basements each day must be pumped out, stored and treated – and on-site storage is edging closer to capacity. Decommissioning the plant will be impossible until its operator, Tokyo Electric Power, addresses the water crisis.

Forum 21's newsletter is published quarterly in July, October, January and April.

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