



Forum 21 Newsletter

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Working for a Fair and Sustainable Western Somerset

Boost for Forum's Landlords' and Tenants' Project

Owners and tenants of privately rented accommodation will benefit from an unexpected and very welcome grant from West Somerset Council's Health and Wellbeing Fund.

The grant, for Forum 21's Landlords' and Tenants' Project, means we shall be able to go ahead with approaching people

who live in or own privately rented accommodation to help them make it more energy efficient. Nationally, some of the most energy inefficient homes are in the private rental sector and the government has introduced new regulations that mean these properties must reach a certain energy standard by 2018.

Churchs take strong stand on fossil fuel



Students calling for institutions to divest from fossil fuels. Glasgow University is the first university in Europe to do so.

Now the Church of England has followed the Methodist Church in deciding to divest £12m of its £9bn fund from tar sands oil and thermal coal investments. It has also divested and ruled out future investments in any company that makes more than 10 per cent of its revenues from thermal coal or oil from tar sands.

Level E of the standard is the new requirement. That's not a high level and we would hope to be able to help landlords do better. With support from our trained volunteers who do an energy check, provide information about the best energy improvements to make, and help to find finance, we aim to help landlords improve their properties and make life warmer and more comfortable for their tenants.

We are starting with a pilot project, with a few willing landlords who are helping us to explore the most effective – and cost effective – ways of achieving the improvements, and provide case studies to inform others.

If you would like to know more about what we are doing, contact Lorna Scott mail@forum21.org.uk, or Hester Watson, hestertavens@yahoo.co.uk

We would be pleased to hear from you.

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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.

Nuclear energy

The legacy of nuclear power will cost future generations dear

It is immoral to leave the legacy of nuclear waste and its cost to future generations was the message at a meeting organised by Stop Hinkley in March.

Speakers also condemned the low investment in alternatives such as energy conservation.

How the waste is stored was explained by science teacher Allan Jeffery.

Nuclear energy production creates waste in the form of spent nuclear fuel, which has to be cooled, contaminated materials (intermediate level waste) and gas and aqueous emissions.

Hinkley A and B are gas cooled reactors. A was closed in 2000 for safety reasons and has a 100 year decommissioning programme. B has had its life extended to 2023 but the graphite core is cracking. C is planned to have two water-cooled reactors but this model has not been successfully completed anywhere and all four in construction are over budget and behind time.

Spent fuel from A and B is cooled for 90 days and transferred weekly to Bridgwater in flasks to travel to Sellafield by train for reprocessing. This transport on road and rail is vulnerable to terrorist attack. The train transport was stopped for the duration of the Olympics for this reason.

Spent fuel from C is proposed to be cooled for

ten years and stored for a further 100 years in cooling ponds only 15 metres away from low cliffs which are vulnerable to erosion and rising sea levels. This is deemed 'temporary' storage but in effect will be a medium term depository which will need constant security and monitoring. The sea defence wall had to be raised in 1980 and in 1981 the area on the landward side of Hinkley flooded extensively.

Intermediate waste from A and B is encased in concrete and stored on site in yellow metal boxes. This process has now been changed to concrete boxes at a saving of £10,000 per box, down from £30,000.

Low level waste is dissolved and the fluid discharged to the sea; solid waste is placed in public landfill. The Drigg site in Cumbria is used and is vulnerable to sea erosion over the next 100 years. Two thirds of the heat produced by B is released into the river Severn.

The myths of 'harmless' emissions

The origins of nuclear power and how the myths about 'harmless' emissions were perpetuated were explained by Tim Deere-Jones, a marine radioactivity consultant.

In the 1940s, nuclear technology evolved from the need for weapons material and national security dictated that large emissions were allowed and 'the justifying hypothesis' that radioactive emissions were



not harmful was spread through science education and nuclear training up to the present day, despite evidence to the contrary.

The 'justifying hypothesis' posits that soluble emissions dissolve to infinity in the sea and solids sink and become incorporated in sedimentary rock in the long run. Two trained scientists in the audience confirmed that this is what they were taught. One worked at Hinkley and now thinks it should be closed down and that C should not be constructed for safety reasons.

Of 54 radioisotopes produced in nuclear fission only 24 have been researched. The Environment Agency refuse to monitor them (they are possibly reconsidering this) and denies there is any risk of sea to land transfer of contamination. Privately funded research has found high concentrations of radioactive contamination in river estuaries which seem to concentrate the density tenfold, possibly because silt or clay has a greater particle surface than sand. If silt is dug out and allowed to dry out there is a risk of inhalation.

Risks from the sea and terrorists

The risk of a tsunami in the area was also discussed. It is now thought that the tsunami in the 17th century, which affected large parts of Somerset was due to the slump of a build-up of silt on

the edge of the continental shelf tipping over into deeper water and setting off the tidal wave.

The terrorism risk is impossible to avoid and it is thought that a nuclear power station could be knocked out with two drones aimed at the main and back-up power supply systems.

It was confirmed that there is a geological fault under the Hinkley site and this necessitated the rotation of the footprint of B, before it was constructed, to avoid placing it on the fault line.

Arguments over subsidies continue

Economic arguments rather than safety carry weight at the European level, Molly Scott Cato, MEP, said. Despite the general belief that mature energy industries should not receive subsidy, the outgoing Commission refused to take this into account in 2014 and approved the 'Contract for Difference' or strike price for Hinkley C. This is now being tested in law and will cause further delay to EDF's investment decision.

A report due on renewable energy in the South West will show that 124,000 jobs and 66 MWh p.a. can be produced by renewable energy in the region.

Report by Maureen Smith. Maureen is a director of Forum 21 and a Minehead Town councillor.

CRPE makes compelling case for improving energy efficiency

The Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) has shown little enthusiasm for renewables: wind turbines, solar, biomass, have all come under their hammer at different times. But that is no reason to dismiss their new report* which summarises the evidence and makes a compelling case for improving the energy efficiency of existing homes and community buildings in rural areas. Unsurprisingly – and correctly – it insists that reducing energy use should come before generating power through renewables.

But we will need both if we are to meet the challenge of climate change. CPRE accepts that everything will need to be part of the package: insulation, renewable heat, and small scale generation - as well as good design!

The CPRE claims that we could reduce 44 per cent of carbon emissions by 2050 by upgrading our homes. At the moment, only 1,000 homes are retrofitted each year, compared to the 65,000 per annum that are needed. Another shocking figure it gives is that only 1 per cent of government spending on energy efficiency goes to rural areas although 18 per cent of the population live in these areas.

But upgrading homes will not be enough on its own. Cuts of the huge emissions from transport would be needed; and allowance made for those people who will simply enjoy their warmer homes and not make any energy savings. There are also the many rural homes that are currently under-heated: these residents may well use the additional heat without making much in the way of carbon saving.

Much of what it says is common knowledge in West Somerset: the number of rural homes with solid walls and no mains gas, the high incidence of listed buildings. All these

things make carbon reduction more difficult - and more pressing. The report focuses its survey on three areas: Derbyshire, East Anglia and Somerset, using case studies from each. Local readers will recognise the references to the the Rest and Be Thankful Inn at Wheddon Cross, and Dunster Lodge residential home, which have made extensive energy improvements.

Report by Forum 21 Director Lorna Scott

The report's recommendations

- Implementing a bold and effective national programme to reduce energy and carbon emissions from homes and community buildings: this should be at least an equivalent priority to the commitment to reduce emissions from energy supply.
- Ensuring that rural communities get their fair share of sources of finance: if 18 per cent of the population live in the countryside, they should get 18 per cent of government support, not less than 1 per cent.
- Publishing an authoritative, evidence-based comparison of the carbon savings and costs of different low carbon technologies – for both energy demand and energy supply.

** Warm and Green: a CPRE report on energy efficiency in rural buildings. Read the full report at: <http://www.cpre.org.uk/resources/energy-and-waste/item/3903-warm-and-green>*

Community Woodland Project

Forum 21's Community Woodland Project is now well under way

Tree felling has been carried out on the west facing slope of Woodcombe. Sycamores have been encroaching into the heathland over the past 30 years. This area is designated a Site of Special Scientific interest and, in this context, the sycamores are invasive species; hence their removal. The felling was undertaken by members of Forum 21 who have been trained and assessed for national qualifications.

Ecological survey

Members of Forum 21 and the general public are engaged in an ongoing project to identify all species present on

the site. To date we have accumulated a good list for trees, herbs, ferns, mosses, liverworts, lichens, mammals and birds. The list, along with images and where to find things, will appear on the F21 website shortly. The long-term aim is to use the species list and species location to link in to the woodland management plan.

Wood fuel

Our long term aim is to generate some income from the sale of logs and other timber products. Next year we will have logs for sale. If you are interested in purchasing logs, please register your interest by emailing Graham Boswell togooutdoors@hotmail.com or forum21@btinternet.com.

The trees we have recently felled will not be ready as wood fuel for over a year as the wood is wet with sap and very inefficient to burn.

Public meeting on 21 May

One of our aims is to inform people about the value of woodlands. To this end we have held two public meetings on the site. The third is on 21 May 6.30 to 8.30pm. Please come and share your experience and learn new things about the woodland.

Any comments please contact Graham Boswell at: togooutdoors@hotmail.com or forum21@btinternet.com

Fossil fuel companies say global warming a crisis “predicted by flawed computer models”

The world's biggest fossil fuel companies are taking a defiant stance against warnings that reserves of coal, oil and gas are already several times larger than can be burned if the world's governments are to meet their pledge to tackle climate change.

As campaigns by the *Guardian* newspaper, university campuses and now the Church of England gather pace, companies continue to lobby governments to carry on with 'business as usual' in exploiting fossil fuels.

Peabody Energy, the world's largest private coal company, said that global warming was “an environmental crisis predicted by flawed computer models”.

Another coal giant, Glencore Xstrata, said that governments would fail to implement measures to cut carbon emissions. Oil and gas major ExxonMobil said new reserves in the Arctic and Canadian tar sands must be exploited, moves scientists deem incompatible with tackling global warming.

The fossil fuel companies' rejection of the consensus of governments and scientists that urgent action to cut emissions is needed comes as the G20 group of leading nations launched a joint probe into global financial risks posed by fossil fuel companies investing in expensive projects that could be left worthless by international action

‘Eco-modernists’ say economic development will preserve nature and address global poverty

A group of scholars from the United States and Australia involved in the environmental debate have issued what they call the 'Eco-modernist Manifesto' which proposes economic development as a pre-condition to preserving the environment.

This requires abandoning the goal of 'sustainable development' and replacing it with a strategy to use nature more intensively.

The group says that to mitigate climate change, spare nature and address global poverty requires “intensifying many human activities – particularly farming, energy extraction, forestry and settlement – so they use less land and interfere less with the natural world”.

To feed 9 billion people using small-scale farming, they argue, would consume every hectare of the world's

surface. Big Agriculture, using synthetic fertilizers and modern production techniques, could feed many more people using much less land and water. In the west, over the last half century, the amount of land required for growing crops and animal feed per average person declined by half.

Development would allow people in the world's poorest countries to move into cities and get better education and jobs. Urban living would accelerate demographic transitions, lowering infant mortality rates and allow fertility rates to decline.

“By understanding and promoting these emergent processes, humans have the opportunity to re-wild and re-green the Earth – even as developing countries achieve modern living standards and material poverty ends”, the manifesto argues.



on climate change, the so-called 'carbon bubble'. The World Bank and Bank of England have already warned of the serious risk climate action poses to trillions of dollars of fossil fuel assets.

“A toxic brew of climate denial and environmental irresponsibility is steering Big Coal and Big Oil towards ever greater fossil fuel extraction, and towards an economic precipice,” said Doug Parr, policy director at Greenpeace UK. “The problem is their headlong rush to disaster could drag many ordinary people's pensions and investments over the edge with them. We can only hope that our political leaders can stand up to the lobbying muscle of fossil fuel companies and their short-sighted recklessness.”

But in the meantime, poor countries will require access to other forms of energy: hydroelectric power from dams, natural gas, perhaps even coal.

The alternative, the group maintains, is for the poor to continue to burn dung and wood, further degrading the world's forests.

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

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