



Forum 21 Newsletter

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Working for a Fair and Sustainable Western Somerset

Habitat protection will be at risk following Brexit



Puffins join shags and guillemot birds on the Farne Islands, one of Britain's most important seabird colonies. Photograph: Owen Humphreys/PA

Pledges made by pro-Brexit ministers to scrap the birds and habitats directive “in the heat of the campaign” should not set the tenor of post-Brexit environmental policy, the new UN environment chief, Erik Solheim, says in an interview with the *Guardian*.

Global or regional agreements are vital for cross-border problems such as pollution and wildlife crime, he said. Solheim has called for a post-Brexit Britain to link up with the EU on environment policy, adopting key bloc cli-

mate laws and maintaining its nature directives.

He told the *Guardian* it was vital that supranational decisions continued for problems such as pollution and wildlife crime which crossed borders and could not be dealt with by states acting alone. He said: “The UK can relate to

the EU's climate decisions and be covered by them, just as Norway and Switzerland are. Norway brought its emissions into the Emissions Trading System (ETS) and adopted nearly all of the EU's environmental law. You can coordinate closely with the EU even if you're outside it.”

“It is very, very important to defend these regional environmental mechanisms as there is no way we can protect migratory animals like birds in just one habitat. You need global or regional agreements and I'm absolutely confident that the UK will remain committed to this.”

Maintaining environmental progress that the EU had driven forward would require “huge coordination in Europe, which will have to be done by the EU,” he argued.

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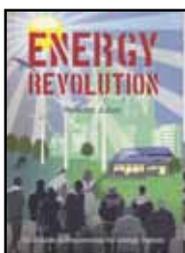
We need an energy revolution more than ever now

Solar power eclipses coal in power generation

‘Solar power in the UK produced more electricity than coal in May, the first ever month to pass that milestone...’

But a report from Ernst and Young found that the attractiveness of the UK to investors in renewable energy projects was at an all-time low. (*Guardian*, 8 June)

What can government communities and individuals do to revolutionise our energy system? Some answers are provided in a new book by the renewable energy expert Howard Johns. See page 4.



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

Without stricter regulation shale gas exploration will breach UK's climate change targets

Shale gas production will breach the UK's climate change targets unless there is stricter regulation now, according to government advisers.

The warning comes in a report published before the change of government by the Committee on Climate Change (CCC).

The committee also said more action would be needed to cut emissions in other areas to cope with full-scale fracking.

In its response to the report the government said it will take no regulatory action, arguing that the current regime is "adaptive" and will change if fracking companies go into full scale production. It says it is important to take advantage of the "fantastic opportunity" of fracking and that it is determined to meet its carbon targets.

David Cameron's government was

committed to "going all out" for fracking, arguing it can boost UK business and reduce the nation's reliance on imported energy. But plans to frack in Lancashire and Yorkshire attracted large protests from campaigners concerned about potential pollution, disruption and health impacts.

Campaigners have applied to the high court for a judicial review of North Yorkshire county council's recent decision to allow fracking exploration. Ministers will decide the fate of the application in Lancashire, which the county council rejected, by October.

The CCC report, published early in July, concluded that shale gas production on a significant scale would breach the nation's targets for emissions cuts unless three tests are passed.

First, strict regulation is needed to

ensure leaks of methane, a potent greenhouse gas, are kept to a minimum. Second, shale gas must replace imported gas, not be burned in addition. Third, emissions from the production of shale gas itself must be offset by more carbon cuts elsewhere, such as increasing the number of electric vehicles.

The report found that fracking regulation today is below the "minimum necessary" to meet the first test: "It certainly requires that a strong regulatory framework is put in place now."

Professor Jim Skea, at Imperial College London and one of the authors of the CCC report, said: "We need stronger and clearer regulation. UK environmental policy allows quite a lot of discretion to the regulator and, depending on how things develop, it would be necessary to be more precise if you are to regulate emissions effectively."

Conservation

What we may lose post-Brexit

A week before the EU referendum Forum 21 member Bill Butcher set out some of the projects which the EU funds in Western Somerset.*

Projects funded by the EU which benefit Western Somerset range from clean beaches and rivers, habitats, renewable energy and farming.

Since the Bathing Waters Directive in the 1970s and the Water Framework Directive in the 2000s came into effect we have benefited from clean beaches and clean rivers for wildlife.

Many of our village halls and other community buildings have solar power and other improvements, thanks to the EU funded Rural Development Programme for England. In Western Somerset this programme is called LARC, the funds managed locally according to local priorities by local authority representatives and civil society leaders. These community buildings are now cheaper to run and

getting income from the renewable energy they are generating.

The latest version of this programme, worth over a million pounds to Western Somerset, is aiming to support forestry and local tourism initiatives.

Many of our favourite places in the countryside are protected from development by the EU Habitats and Birds Directives. Horner Woods, Withypool Common, Winsford Hill and the Quantock Hills Heaths and Woodlands are just some examples of Natura 2000 sites, part of a European network of sites that stretches to Poland and the Danube delta.

Widely regarded as the most effective conservation law in the world, these Directives focus on avoiding

damage and ensuring good site management for the rare habitats and species that they support. Scientists from across Europe have worked together to find the best ways of conserving these beautiful places for us and future generations.

Our ordinary farmland is supported by a strong range of European agricultural subsidy schemes. With nearly 40% of the EU budget spent on farming and the livelihoods of our more marginal farms in the hills especially relying on subsidy, our exit from the EU could bring considerable change to our rural economy and landscapes.

The European Union has led the world on climate change research and policy, so vital to the future quality of life of our children and grandchildren, playing a leading role in the Paris Agreement of December 2015.

**First published in the News Trader* 2

We need strong mitigation activity now to reduce risk of climate tipping points says Professor of Climate Change



Professor Tim Lenton

Protecting the future from climate change was the subject of a talk by Tim Lenton Professor of Earth System Science and Climate

Change at the University of Exeter on 18 July. It was organised by Wivey Action on Climate.

The planned carbon reductions from the Paris conference will not achieve the 2 degree C target unless we can find a way of removing carbon, Professor Lenton said. We should be at peak emissions now but instead they are accelerating.

Almost all the global carbon allowance is used by China, USA and the EU

although even China's rapidly increasing emissions are nowhere near US per capita emissions.

'Business as usual' will probably lead to 'tipping points', he said, with research showing potential early warning signs. There is also research into human behaviour that could bring about substantial change, such as food production and consumption.

Early warning methods exist for tipping points and

have been successfully tested against past climate data and models but will require advances in past and contemporary climate monitoring. A climate tipping point early warning system could reduce the risk they pose by helping us adapt in advance if not avoid them.

The threat of multiple, interacting uncertain climate tipping points should be triggering strong mitigation activity now to reduce their likelihood.

Mixed reactions to the abolition of Decc

The Department of Energy and Climate Change (Decc) was closed in a series of sweeping changes to the government unveiled by the new prime minister, Theresa May.

Its functions, which include representing the UK at international climate talks, responsibility for meeting carbon targets and levying subsidies for green energy, have been transferred to a beefed-up business department – the Department of Business Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS).

Ed Davey, who served as Liberal Democrat secretary of state at Decc between 2012 and 2015, has criticised the decision. "This is a major setback for the UK's climate change

efforts. By downgrading the Whitehall status of climate change, Theresa May has hit low carbon investor confidence yet again," he told the *Guardian*.

Many environmental groups strongly criticised the decision as downgrading action on climate only months after more than 170 countries signed the Paris climate deal in New York.

The UK is under pressure to ratify the agreement, both as part of the EU and domestically. "This is shocking news. The new prime minister has already downgraded action to tackle climate change, one of the biggest threats we face," said Craig Bennett, the CEO of Friends of the Earth.

But other green groups and experts were sanguine or positive about the folding of Decc into the business department. Lord Stern, a leading climate economist, said he was content with the change, and WWF said the department could be a "real powerhouse for change" if climate change "was hardwired" into it.

"Rather than bemoaning the demise of Decc, we should embrace the creation of BEIS," argued the Policy Exchange thinktank. "Decc has always been regarded as something of a minnow in departmental terms. By merging with BIS, energy and climate change issues can be elevated to a much higher level politically".

Source: CSE Volunteers News

An expanse of sea ice twice the size of Texas has vanished

The summer sea ice cover over the Arctic reached a new all-time low in June, breaking all previous records.

The Arctic sea ice extent was a huge 260,000 sq km (100,000 sq miles) below the previous record for June, set in 2010. It was 1.36m sq km (525,000 sq

miles) below the 1981-2010 long-term average, according to the National Snow and Ice Data Center.

That means a vast expanse of ice – an area about twice the size of Texas – has vanished over the past 30 years, and the rate of that retreat has accelerated.

Aside from March, each month in 2016 has set a new low for sea ice cover, after a record warm winter.

January and February saw global temperatures reach record levels, setting up conditions for further retreat of the summer ice cover. The loss of the reflective white ice cover in

the polar regions exposes more of the absorptive dark ocean to solar heat, causing the water to warm up.

This then raises air temperatures and melts more ice – reinforcing the warming trend. Scientists have warned the extra heat is the equivalent of 20 years of carbon emissions.

We need an energy revolution now more than ever

What can government communities and individuals do to revolutionise our energy system? Some answers are provided in a new book by the renewable energy expert Howard Johns.

This book, *Energy Revolution: Your Guide to Repowering the Energy System*, is becoming the bible of the community energy movement, led by community energy companies in the South West. Bristol and West Community Energy Company (BWCE) will become the largest community energy company in the UK this month when it takes ownership of a solar farm near Crewkerne, producing enough renewable energy to power 1,650 homes.

BWCE also runs solar power projects for schools and a solar farm near Hinkley Point.

The company is funded by share and bond issues which have delivered the promised 7% in each of the four years since launching and some of the income is distributed to low carbon and fuel poverty reduction projects in the community. The Crewkerne project will recycle £3 million into these projects over its 25-year lifetime. With interest levels on investments at an all time low, this is a win-win option taken up by many small investors all over the UK.

BWCE has joined up with Mongoose Energy, a leading community energy firm which works with commu-

nity groups to develop and manage community-owned renewable energy projects. BWCE plans to launch an energy supply company which will be the first to be majority-owned by community groups.

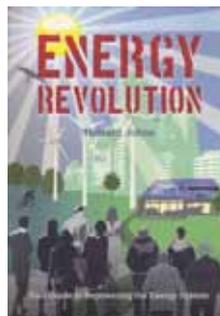
Priority

In Western Somerset, Brendon Energy has pioneered community energy in the area over the past five years and is looking for more community-based groups

with which to work. Wedmore Community Power Co-operative and Avalon Community Energy are successfully raising share funds for commu-

nity projects in the Mendip area. In West Somerset, both Forum 21 and the joint Exmoor National Park and West Somerset District Council Low Carbon Strategic Group have community energy as a priority. (Contacts: www.avaloncommunityenergycoop.co.uk www.wedmorecpc.co.uk www.brendonenergy.org)

Howard Johns, a former government energy advisor and pioneer of community energy, describes the stupendous rise in community energy in Europe and the benefits of de-carbonising our energy supply for the future of the planet. The government decision to remove support for renewable energy and the vote



to leave the EU came after the book was published but its guidance is still valid and very useful. Many communities are determined to carry on with this vital change to energy production which will inevitably lead to the demise of the big energy companies and

The company is funded by share and bond issues which have delivered the promised 7% in each of the four years since launching.

the disproportionately vast power stations, such as Hinkley Point C, which are vulnerable to terrorist attack, produce long duration toxic waste and are incredibly expensive.

Manifesto

At the end of the book the author gives his Manifesto for the Energy Revolution which includes

personal aims such as making homes, schools and community buildings energy efficient and moving investments out of fossil fuels into local renewable projects, where it can act as a local savings bank.

Amongst the aims for our leaders is giving priority to energy efficiency policies which would enable replacement of the most polluting fuels such as coal, ending fossil fuel subsidies (yes, they are far bigger than those paid out for renewables in the past!) and creating energy connections to enable countries to share energy and use it more efficiently.

With climate change caused by human activity reported to be racing ahead of expectation, this timely book is essential reading for us all.

Energy Revolution by Howard Johns is available from www.green-shopping.co.uk and as an e-book .

Review by Forum 21 director Maureen Smith

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