

05.01.2018

Hi

It's the new year so I thought you might be interested in a **few thoughts on the coming challenges for UK energy**, and some more thoughts on personal action. Plus a few other bits...

1. **UK energy policy - will renewables continue to grow?**
2. **Roof top solar still makes sense**
3. Focus on workplace energy use
4. **Plan B** take UK government to court
5. BP - a small move into solar
6. Planning changes at **Hinkley**
7. Our **personal use of chemicals** - you can make a difference
8. **Support organic farming and forestry**
9. 2017 total to SolarAid
10. **Talks coming up in 2018**

1. When it comes to keeping fossil fuels in the ground, there are four parts of the economy we all need to think about - **our electricity, transport, heating and 'stuff' that we buy.**

Although it may seem that the cavalry has now arrived - big corporations and big investors are now seriously looking at all things green - it is clear that we as consumers, investors and civil society still have a big role to play.

Generating more clean electricity and cutting our overall use remain key. While Scotland is heading towards 100% renewables, and Wales is at 43%, the UK as a whole is expected to have reached only 30 - 32% in 2017. There are particular power generation challenges for the coming years. Our government is committed to getting coal off the grid by early 2020s, but this is largely being **replaced with gas and imported biomass, debatable improvements.** We are still **20% reliant on nuclear, but four old plants need to stop generating by 2023, another four by 2024, and another two by 2028.** Hinkley (the first of the new plants) may - or may not - start to generate by 2028 - it certainly can't be relied on and, for reasons I have often given, needs to be abandoned.

This means we need much new renewable generation. According to a recent Triodos Bank presentation of BEIS figures, **the number of renewable power projects planned plummeted dramatically in 2016 and further in 2017,** because of the drop in government support (**down to less than 40 projects in 2017 compared to over 800 in 2015, less than 700 MW new capacity, compared to more than 14,000 in 2015**). This is truly alarming. The successes we have seen over the last year have been 'projects in the

pipeline' - this is now **coming to an end**, it seems. **It is possible that coal will come back to fill this void.**

What we do have coming on line 2019 - 2022 are **seven new interconnectors** that will allow us to import and export more electricity, some of which will be from renewables. And we will have more **battery storage**, although the **government projections are very limited** (just a few GW by 2035). The **BIG QUESTION is whether the investment appetite, new tech and cheaper costs will mean that big and small new projects will happen anyway, regardless of the lack of government support.** There is good reason for optimism but we can all help - switching to 100% renewable tariffs, and pushing your employer and friends to do the same, is one way.

2. As consumers, we can also cut consumption. **Efficiency, and shifting demand from peak periods (4-8pm winter evenings), is the 'unseen fuel', quickest to implement (no planning consent required!) and our reduced consumption is having a big impact on planning major power plants.**

It is also still **worth considering roof-top solar. Feed-in-Tariffs are still available till March 2019, and the costs of installation have come down.** The pay-back is around ten years, but you will **continue to get an income for another ten**, and a shield against rising electricity prices, plus an asset that is likely to be increasingly valued. Bristol has several excellent solar companies that are friendly and easy to deal with and happy to give quotes. From my experience, their financial projections have been completely accurate.

3. Over New Year I was looking through this winter's data on **Gridwatch**. Despite the fact that we have had some very cold weeks, we have **only topped 50 GW of consumption a couple of times (in mid Dec)**. It seems likely that the winter of 2017/18 will continue our long-term downward peak-demand trend. **This matters - it helps under-cut the argument for more major power plants. It's worth turning off unneeded lights and not putting the washing on in the peak hours (4pm - 8pm on winter nights).**

The figures also confirm **the importance of cutting usage at work**. You may think Christmas lunches put a big strain on the grid but on national holidays, our consumption is comparatively very low (29 - 35 GW compared with a normal winter working day which is well into 40+ GW). **A suggested New Year's Resolution - talk to your manager, boss, Sustainability Officer, whoever, about how your workplace can cut its energy use, and turn things off when you leave...**

4. You may have heard of the **Plan B legal case against our government**, backed by **Sir David King**, the government's former Chief Science Adviser. The aim is to get our Paris goals enshrined in law, as our weaker Climate Change Act budgets are. There is a **crowd-funding campaign** for this, open for another couple of days. Please support if you can.

5. It seems that **BP may be making small steps to follow Shell and Total into some renewable investment**. In December they bought a [large stake of LightSource](#), Europe's biggest solar developer. This \$200m investment is tiny compared to their £17bn annual investment in oil and gas, but it's a start....

6. Just before Xmas, Hitachi was given [consent](#) for their design of new nuclear plant at Wylfa, Anglesey. But it is clear they are looking to **taxpayers to, one way or another, help pay for construction. Please write to your MP and protest against this**. The risks, financial and practical, are enormous.

Just to underline this, it appears that EDF's new nuclear plant in China (same design as Flamanville and Hinkley) [has now developed cracks](#). It also seems that EDF has applied for a **planning change at Hinkley**, to allow them to [store high level waste long-term on site in dry conditions](#) rather than the usual 90 days in cooling ponds before transferring to Sellafield. EDF describe this as a 'non material' change but locals see things differently. The change seems to be because there is still **no prospect of a Geological Disposal Facility and dispersed storage is now considered the safest option...**

7. About a **third of our gas in the UK is used to make chemicals**, and about 8% of oil goes into plastics globally. Reducing our chemical use in the home and garden is probably easier than going plastic-free (but do try a bamboo toothbrush and refuse those straws!). Again, if you are in search of a New Year's Resolution, **think about ditching all those chemicals that are giving us so many health problems and find some natural alternatives**. There's plenty of advice around if you want to make your own, but just buying plant-based cleaning products is a worthwhile start.

9. **Increasing the amount of organic food you eat** is another way of cutting your chemical use, while at the same time supporting an industry that naturally sequesters [carbon back into the soil where we need it](#). Although the current wisdom is that organic production cannot feed a growing population, [recent research by the Food and Agriculture Organisation \(FAO\)](#) finds, along with many [other research](#) studies, that the reverse is true. As Michael Gove pointed out in September, [the UK only has 30 - 40 harvests left from its depleted soils](#).

If you are already thinking about **your next holiday**, why not consider [staying on an organic farm](#), or in a UK forest. I seem to be on the mailing list for one organisation - [Forest Holidays](#). This isn't a recommendation, but you may want to consider giving UK forests some value other than as biomass....

10. And finally.... Just to let you know that, with your help, I sent off £3212 to [SolarAid](#) in 2017, either as donations or to buy lamps that I then sold to raise more funds. **Particular thanks to Katherine Piper and her aerobics group for their Xmas donation.**

Over the next few months I will be giving **talks in Frome, Bradford on Avon, Pill, Cornwall and Plymouth**. Links will soon be on [my website](#). I will also be giving a series of 6 talks on

energy and climate change for the **Clevedon Adult Studies Association**, starting 8th Feb (no talk on the 15th). If you would like to book these, please email casa2012clevedon@gmail.com. There is a charge of £60 for this course. Other talks are free.

As ever, please let me know if you would like to come off the mailing list. Apologies if this email is not as upbeat as the last! I hope you have found it both interesting and useful.

All good wishes for 2018.

Nikki