

NORTH WEST ENERGY FORUM

“Fuel for Thought”

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The North West Energy Forum does not necessarily endorse the views expressed by our contributors

Climatic Change - We're Back!

Al Gore films a mixture of fact and fiction, launches it with devastating effect at the school science curriculum and wins the Nobel Peace Prize. After an enforced absence, attributable in part to a mixture of don't ask awkward questions, don't call upon politicians to justify their green targets and please don't stir the green industry honey pot, 'Fuel for Thought' is back on line. Funny old world!

We will continue to support energy efficiency, the recycling of domestic and industrial waste, research on carbon reduction, the responsible pursuit of renewable energy and action on environmental protection. We may also on occasion play devil's advocate by providing fuel for thought that may provoke open debate on relevant issues. The caveat or health warning is that the views expressed in 'Fuel for Thought' do not necessarily represent the opinions of the North West Energy Forum.

In a democracy all of us can support the government or the establishment some of the time, some of us may even offer such support all of the time and all of us will, or should, recognise the right to agree to disagree. It is simply 'Fuel for thought'. Enjoy!

Core Values

Media hype about a 'whose policy is it anyway' scramble and ownership claims about potential vote winning manifesto ideas, the pre-budget report and the comprehensive spending review may have diverted your attention from the end of a court enforced Government consultation on nuclear power.

After environmentalists successfully challenged the Government's original consultation in the courts, a new consultation has been completed in near record time. Does this mean that the nuclear argument is over and we are going to get on with a future of real carbon free power generation? Who knows! The fact that the go ahead for London's Crossrail has only been secured after almost two decades of wrangling and delay is a sobering thought. We cannot afford the luxury of arguing until the cows come home let alone until the lights go out!

Delay in deciding upon replacement of our ageing reactors has already caused Britain to lose its leading edge in nuclear technology. The reactors we have produce one fifth of our power but complete and partial shut downs at Heysham and Hinkley Point are but the latest in a list of serious operational problems that threaten British Energy's ability to keep the home fires burning during the winter.

When we do get moving, as we surely must, in reconstructing an industry that can deliver security of supply, economy of scale and carbon emission reduction, the design and construction may well have to be outsourced. Sad but true!

Of course we need to overcome the unacceptable delays in planning – a few months or years may be OK - but decades? And this time around we really do have to plan for the disposal of waste. Two big asks but is there any other real solution on the horizon?

Value Judgements

Many readers will be familiar with the details and consequences of BP's global cost cutting exercise that reputedly paid insufficient regard to health and safety. The death of 15 people and serious injury of 180 others together with massive collateral damage in Texas and environmental damage in Alaska were both headlined worldwide. Did you note that BP also got into trouble for less publicised business practices and price fixing that, though alleged to have damaged the integrity of the propane market, caused no other casualties?

Death and environmental damage in Texas resulted in fines of \$50m. Damaging the environment in Alaska brought a fine of \$20m. But get this, the damaging of the integrity of the propane market brought a whopping \$303m fine!

Fuel for Thought: Readers who may have attended Sunday School or those familiar with scripture will no doubt have encountered the text "Where your treasure is there will your heart be also". Can we take BP's experience as confirmation that in our measurement of success in exploiting and growing the global economy, life and the environment are of lesser value or importance than market integrity?

How Green is their Valley?

Commercial logging in Malaysia, as a precursor of the development of palm oil plantations to provide bio-fuel, is threatening the very existence of one of the few nomadic peoples in the world. According to a government report the Penan people who live in the rain forests of Sarawak are losing a peaceful and non-violent campaign to protect their ancestral lands.

The British charity 'Survival' asks a pertinent and poignant question; 'do we have to destroy their environment to protect our own?' Soldiers, police and contractor gangs are reported to have driven all but a few hundred of the proud and peaceful Penans into static settlements.

Fuel for Thought: Has humanity reverted to Lord Tennyson's depiction of 'nature red in tooth and claw' or is the plight of the Penan people merely an extension of a Darwinian truth about 'the survival of the fittest?' Dress it up anyway one pleases, but will those of us who will not perhaps have a nuclear power plant in our backyard dare to say no to environmentally friendly bio-fuel supplied to us at such human cost? Hey, it's a hard old world and, at the end of the day it's them or us, their environment or ours. No contest then!

Minister wants Zero Carbon Housing

Yvette Cooper, minister for housing, has said that: "The Government has set a target for all new homes to be zero carbon by 2016. We need a revolution in the way housebuilders design and construct new homes." Revolution? Just run that past us again Minister but a little bit slower so we can grasp the full enormity of your plans. You really do believe do you, that by waving the magic wand of targets you can work miracles? Well - have I got news for you!

It's hard not to believe that the civil servant who said "Yes Minister" to this particular target was a real toady. Homes, in their design, construction and usage, can never be carbon zero. So, "Yes Minister" we now have another target that will have to be reassessed. But you can take one positive thing from the publication of such a target.

Minister, you have yourself earned a big zero rating for perceptive analysis and understanding of what green targets are attainable in the construction industry. Sound bite emissions may sound good but they emit carbon and pollute the environment of informed debate on serious issues. Carbon reduction, energy conservation and waste management – yes, yes, yes – go for it and more power to your elbow as they say. But please don't burden the construction industry with unattainable targets or expect other than the most foolish of us, who might enjoy living in cloud cuckoo land rather

than in a proper home, to buy in to carbon zero housing!

EDF gets itself tied-up in Notts!

Europe's largest power generator, Electricite de France, has recently obtained approval for the construction of a natural gas-fired power station near Nottingham.

Designer Madness and Environmental Correctness

The Daily Telegraph recently published an amusing item in its business dairy about the efforts of the Design Council's magazine DCM, to appear and sound environmentally correct. Apparently the magazine's front page had a banner editorial headline about an article on sustainable design - whatever that is - "Lead in ammunition can harm the environment and pose a risk to people." Get out of here. I don't believe you! Or, as the Telegraph's diary editor put it: "Isn't that rather the point?"

Who said Electricity and Water don't Mix

International Power has just completed upgrading the former Norweb Hydroelectric power plant at Dinorweg (*The Electric Mountain*) in North Wales.

IP, which now operates in twenty countries, says the upgrade will enable the plant's reservoir to store more water.

Fuel for Thought: It is nice to reflect on the glory that was and is Dinorweg and to remember just how far ahead of its time was our own pioneering regional electricity company - NORWEB - in technical know-how and low carbon generation.

Centrica scraps plans for £1bn 'Green' Power Plant

The decision of Centrica, part of the British Gas Group, to pull the plug on a planned "green" coal-fired power station suggests that the Chancellor is not everybody's Darling! The scrapping of the plans, after the Chancellor announced backing for rival technology, is another damaging blow to the Government's hopes for a greener UK.

Centrica is reported to have initially spent millions on a planned £1bn plant on Teeside with a "pre-combustion" carbon capture facility. Government now says that post-combustion is its preferred technology.

Fuel for Thought: Why can't we have both? Do we really have the time or the money to waste on review after review, policy change after policy change and will-o'-the-wisp targets that, on the face of it, appear to be as changeable as the weather.