

## **Wiltshire Wildlife Trust – “Time to Back Renewable Energy”**

In the winter 2011 members' magazine '*Wiltshire Wildlife*' Wiltshire Wildlife Trust is urging its members to back renewable energy.

The Trust recognises that difficult decisions have to be made regarding renewable energy and how we are going to power our future. It is good to hear that 87% (of those completing the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust's 2010 members survey) agreed that investment in renewable energy is essential.

In the survey 67% of those surveyed supported wind power, whilst only 46% supported biomass.

According to the *Wiltshire Sustainable Energy Planning Study January 2011* (a document prepared to support Wiltshire Council's emerging planning Core Strategy) wind and biomass are the two main renewable energy technologies for Wiltshire when considered by the electricity they could produce. In fact over 25% of the county's electricity could be sourced from these two technologies.

It is now time for hard choices. I do not feel that we can afford to turn a blind eye to the situation that now faces us. We may well have to rely even more on gas imports from Russia or nuclear power (although many have rejected this approach). But I would be much happier if at least 25% of our electricity supply was in our local hands.

I expect those that do not want wind or biomass would state that before generating more we should consume less. I agree. However let us not fool ourselves – this on its own will not address our future energy requirements and the need to reduce our impact on the climate.

We need to address two key issues – the use of a limited source of fossil fuel supplied from an ever reducing number of countries and the impact of climate change. We should also not forget that

much fossil fuel abstraction is associated with local and regional pollution. I do not want to feel that we are maintaining the beauty of Wiltshire by exporting our need for environmentally damaging fossil fuel.

There is a problem though. Clean energy is considered an issue which only the wealthy can address. The recent solar PV 'rush' has been criticised as a way for the wealthy to put high earning saving accounts 'on their roof'. However this is a gross simplification. The purpose of the feed-in tariff is to help provide a *transition* from high carbon to renewable technology. I hope that the feed-in tariff is no longer required in 2025, because this would mean that renewable energy had matured and the feed-in tariff had been a success.

Those that do not like wind power should remember that onshore wind power is currently the most cost effective way of producing low carbon electricity, and is in fact cheaper than electricity produced from coal and only marginally above the currently cheapest technology gas (combined cycle gas turbines)<sup>i</sup>. Of course in the future this may change (as highlighted by the rapid reduction in cost for solar PV for example), but this only highlights the need of ensuring diverse local renewable generating capacity.

When considered from an international perspective Wiltshire is wealthy and well educated. If we cannot lead by promoting our own energy generation then who else will? Communities throughout Wiltshire are well placed to promote renewable technology and are in the unique position of knowing their local people and environment well.

Happy Christmas

Jack Mason

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<sup>i</sup> UK Electricity Generation Cost Update Mott MacDonald June 2010