

Pembrokeshire Friends of the Earth

Cyfeillion y Ddaear Sir Benfro

Newsletter April 2012



Pictured are supporters manning a stall, calling for a stop to the use of tropical hardwoods, outside a super-market in Haverfordwest during the 1990's.

Twenty-Five Successful Years

Pembrokeshire FOE will this year celebrate 25 years of successful campaigning, lobbying and awareness-raising. This has been achieved as a result of the time and effort put in voluntarily by our supporters over the years. It has often been difficult and there have been occasions when we have almost folded but the results we have achieved have certainly made it all worthwhile. There has also been a lot of fun.

We began by setting up recycling facilities in Narberth, putting up bird boxes in Robeston Wathen, cleaning litter off beaches and campaigning for proper coastal sewage treatment. Since then, we have not stopped campaigning on issues large and small with notable successes on, for example:

- forcing the government to require environmental impact assessments for off-shore oil and gas exploration off the West Wales coast and throughout British waters
- preventing the burning of a dirty fuel, orimulsion, at Pembroke
- forcing a legal prosecution following the Sea Empress oil spill
- helping to scupper plans to store nuclear waste at Trecwn and grow GM crops at Mathry
- defeating plans to dual the A 40 between St Clears and Haverfordwest.

These successes and many others are testament to the effectiveness of the FOE structure in which a local group campaigns on issues with support from the FOE Cymru team in Cardiff and our colleagues in London. We have reciprocated by supporting FOE's national and international campaigns on issues such as protecting rainforests, using peat-free compost, and cutting emissions of climate-changing gases.

As well as campaigning, we have consistently lobbied our local and national political representatives, and have given or organised countless talks, public meetings and other events. All this activity has meant that we have maintained a high profile in the media throughout. We have moved from being regarded as green cranks to a position where environmental concerns are mainstream. Despite considerable progress, we still face immense challenges from issues such as climate change and biodiversity loss. We have another busy 25 years ahead of us.



.Group members recently planted 25 trees to celebrate 25 years of successful activity on a wide range of environmental issues. Further events will take place during the year to celebrate our anniversary.

'Unfortunately, our campaigner, Gordon James, will have to take a back seat for a while for health reasons. We always need more active supporters so if you think you're able to help please get in touch.'

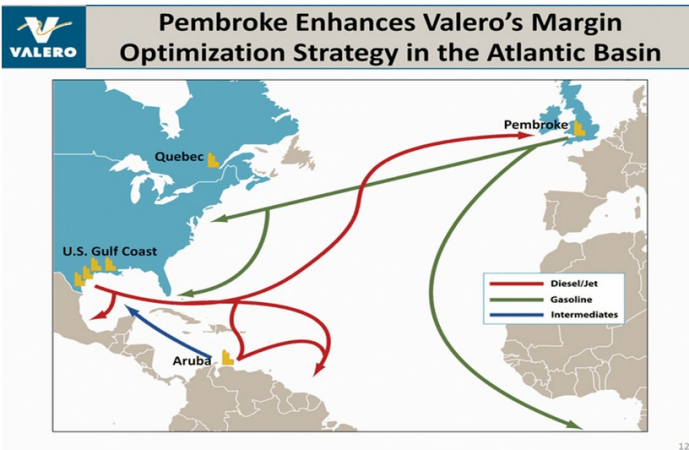
Pembroke Refinery Could Import "World's Most Damaging Fuel"

We have also learned that one of the world's most harmful fuels, tar sands oil, could be imported via the Pembroke refinery.

The new American owner of the refinery, Valero, has a major interest in exploiting Canadian tar sands bitumen. According to research by Greenpeace [<http://www.greenpeace.org.uk/files/pdfs/tar-sands-in-your-tank.pdf>], it is the second biggest consumer of tar sands crude in the US Gulf Coast refineries where it is converted to diesel.

Valero is also a major backer of the Keystone XL pipeline that has been proposed to carry tar sands from Canada to the US Gulf Coast refineries. Although President Obama has for the moment blocked part of this route, this decision could be overridden and, in the meantime, other routes are being explored.

The importance of the Pembroke refinery to Valero's export plans has been highlighted in a presentation to investors by the company in August 2011. The company sees a profit opportunity in bringing diesel to Europe where it is highly sought, and taking gasoline, which is less in demand here, back to the US. Valero calls it the 'Margin Optimization Strategy in the Atlantic Basin' - see map.



Tar sands oil is the most devastating fuel in commercial production today, producing three times more climate changing emissions than conventional fossil fuels. The pollution and deforestation from tar sands mining does irreversible ecological damage, kills wildlife, scars the landscape and threatens indigenous communities. There can be no justification for burning a fuel which will have such a damaging impact on our climate when scientists and energy experts are warning of the urgent need to use cleaner sources of energy to avoid catastrophic consequences of climate change. Currently the European market for tar sands oil has been largely untapped, with only traces of it entering Europe. This could dramatically increase in the future. We are concerned that it could be imported through Pembroke either as diesel or as tar sands oil to be refined here. Pembroke is regarded as a 'complex' refinery capable of dealing with heavier tar sands oil.

There are similarities here with the threat posed by the proposal to import orimulsion fuel in the 1990s. Tar sands oil is processed from a bitumen which has similar properties to orimulsion.

Tar Sands Public Meeting
Emily Coates of the UK Tar Sands Network
will be speaking at
the Bloomfield Community Centre, Narberth
at 7:30 PM on Friday, April 20th.

She will be talking about the whole tar sands issue and the significance of the new owners of the Pembroke refinery being so involved in developing this harmful fuel.

Pembroke Power Station

Construction of the power station is almost complete and it will begin generating power later in the year. Our campaign did not prevent this from happening, we didn't really think it would, but we have gained improvements in the environmental operation of the station. We have also forced many important issues into the public domain, exposed the hypocrisy of the Environment Agency and the governments in Cardiff and London in their failure to provide adequate environmental protection, and, hopefully, make sure that this sort of thing will not be allowed to happen again.

The European Commission continuing to investigate our complaint but it might be some time before they report. Our campaign has clearly ruffled feathers at the highest level. In his autumn budget statement, Chancellor George Osborne, stated that the government would "make sure that gold-plating of EU rules on things like habitats aren't placing ridiculous costs on British businesses". The government review that followed found that the Habitats Directive impeded the progress of less than 1% of developments and that, in the words of Environment Secretary Carolyn Spelman, it "allows genuine green growth, boosting our economy whilst looking after the environment."

New Gas-Fired Power Station for Pembrokeshire

We have learned that there might be a new gas-fired power station adjacent to the South Hook LNG terminal. This is ideally placed to use a CHP system where the waste heat would be used to re-gasify the LNG on the tankers. If this is the case we would not object to it but we would point out that gas emits CO₂ and that it should only be used in the most efficient way possible. We would also have to make sure that it would not have an adverse impact on the very important Pembrokeshire marine environment.

Treasury turns its back on Producers of Most Carbon Neutral Fuel in UK

George Osborne effectively put in the killing punch to all the remaining small firms producing biofuel from Used Cooking Oil (UCO) in his budget in March. He did this by not renewing the lower duty rate for biofuel made from UCO. Such fuels now have to pay the full 57.19p/l (68.62p/l once VAT is added) that is charged on fossil diesel and petrol. This was despite small biofuel companies coming together to form the SOS Biodiesel Coalition and communicating their case to various levels of Government, including the Treasury, that the higher rate of duty would spell the end for their businesses.

In response the Government has put in place a system to support UCO biofuels, but the system only seems to profit such biofuels when produced by, or directly for, Big Oil Corporations. This system is a form of carbon trading called the Renewable Transport Fuel Obligation Scheme. Certificates are issued for each litre of renewable fuel produced, and these are sold to the Big Oil Companies to stop them being penalised for not hitting their renewable fuel targets. Right from the beginning this scheme has been mismanaged by the Government which has often made the certificates price worthless and easily controlled by Big Oil. All this makes it an inequitable and unreliable form of assistance to small companies.

I run a very small company called Veg Oil Motoring that has been supplying UCO fuel to a mini fleet of Buses in Pembrokeshire. This fuel has been recognised for the last 4 years as the most carbon neutral in the UK; substantially surpassing any other UK company in this respect, especially big oil companies. As a result of these changes I will not be able to supply this fuel at a price that the bus companies that run these buses will be able to accept - spelling an end to this project. Initiatives like this will currently be winding down right across the UK.

Daniel Blackburn of Veg. Oil Motoring

Unashamedly Pro –Growth Budget,
Last years' budget had already made it clear that the chancellor, George Osborne, is not interested in our environment, so this budget was really no surprise, just extremely disappointing.

The familiar themes of building and growing ourselves out of trouble were on display and one suspects that the only green elements, retaining the 3p rise in fuel duty due in August and the increase in air passenger duty, were driven more by the need to feed the treasury's coffers than any desire to tackle global warming.

At a time of rising gas prices, he declared that "gas is cheap" and less polluting than coal, justifying tax subsidies of 3 billion pounds for the oil and gas industry.

He also announced more spending on roads and infrastructure, making U- turns on expanding airports in the South East, and a soon to be unveiled planning system which he described as "unashamedly pro-growth".

What should be our response? I believe we must continue to push for support for renewables and challenge the assumption that growth, growth and more growth is the only way forward. We must challenge unsustainable

developments locally and here in Wales to push the Welsh Government in showing the rest of the UK there is another way.

Feed in Tariffs

The government has just lost its appeal to the Supreme Court - its third legal challenge - against a successful action taken by FOE and some solar companies to prevent the government rushing through drastic cuts in funding for FITs.

The proposed cuts will now only affect panels installed after 3rd March. At least 62,000 homes, businesses and organizations managed to install panels between 12 December and 3 March.

A rolling system of cuts to solar feed-in tariffs (FITs) will be introduced to reflect expected drops in solar panel prices. Tariff rates will fall again in July and October, potentially by a total of 40%. They will then fall by 10% every six months unless the number of solar photovoltaic (PV) panels installed is above government forecasts. If this is the case, the cuts will come in earlier.



Making the Most of Pembrokeshire sunshine

FUEL POVERTY

Friends of the Earth has a long history of opposing fuel poverty, including introducing legislation, such as the Home Energy Conservation Act, and taking the UK Government to court for failing to meet targets. By improving energy saving in homes we cut fuel use and bills, reduce carbon emissions, improve home comforts and health, and create local employment.

Despite the significant social, environmental and economic benefits of tackling fuel poverty, the problem is increasing. It is estimated there are now 6.4 million households in fuel poverty in the UK, up from a previous estimate of 3.4 million

A campaign, called the Energy Bill Revolution and created by Transform UK, is calling for the government to use £4 billion it raises from carbon taxes to be invested directly into eradicating fuel poverty.

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To sign the Energy Bill Revolution petition click here:

<http://www.energybillrevolution.org/>

Our campaigner, Gordon James, gave a presentation on fuel poverty at the conference launching the disability communications group, Welsh Focus, on April 4th.

Welsh Focus has been set up by local disability campaigner Henry Langon. Their website is: <http://www.welshfocus.co.uk/>

Lammas Ecovillage household in court

“After a gruelling process to get planning permission and with no political will within Pembrokeshire’s County Council (PCC) to implement their new Low Impact Development (LID), we are currently subject to criminal prosecution in the magistrate’s court. This is despite repeated acknowledgements from PCC employees that the building regulations system does not seem to be compatible with LID. At least one of the requirements placed on us directly contradicts the requirements of the planning policy to which we are bound” *This is an extract from a document arguing the case for changes in the building, regulations written by Simon Dale, a resident of Lammas.*



Simon Dale and Jasmine Saville who have 2 young children were the first family at Lammas to build their house, they have degrees in ecology and considerable experience in ecobuilding. Like everyone at Lammas they were given 5 years to set up the infrastructure, horticulture and livestock systems and prove the viability; at the same time they are having to battle with the courts.

Following a building control officer from PCC inspection of their home and the breaches the building regulations cited included:-

- Having battery powered smoke detectors not mains powered, *but the planning permission dictates the building should be off-grid;*
- Having an outdoor compost toilet instead of indoor toilet.
- No insulation beneath the floor, because they use the underlying earth for passive solar heating.

“That LID and the common practice of building control are at odds has been acknowledged verbally on many occasions by PCC building controllers and by our building control surveyor in his court witness statement against us.”



Simon and Jasmin's living room

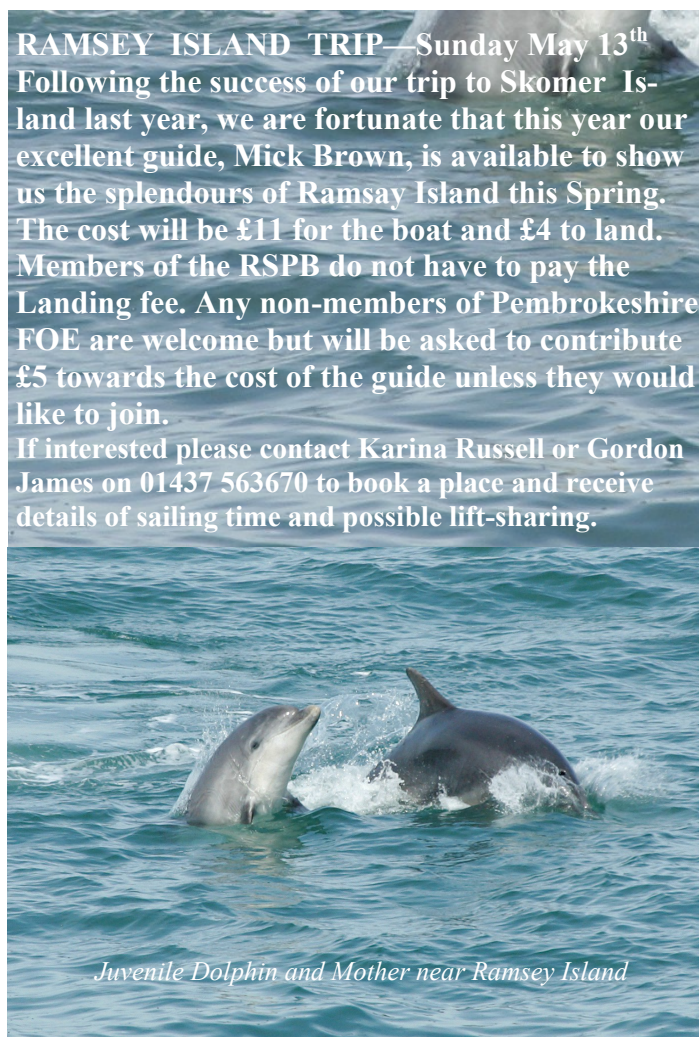
“The use of ‘natural locally’ sourced materials and having minimal foundations and infrastructure does not achieve compliance with ...” requirements ... in the Building Regulations” (EJ Lewis 6/7/11) *quotation from Simon's document:* www.simondale.net/bregs

More pictures at : www.simondale.net/house/archive
Other Lammas households were taken to court by PCC, but acquitted on the grounds that their dwellings are temporary. They intend to build houses conforming with the building regs. in the future.

Pembs. FoE hopes to organise a visit to Lammas this summer.

*Lammas will be running guided tours very **Saturday** from **Saturday 14th April - Saturday 29th September**. Tours start at the Community Hub car park at 11am and last for about 2 hours. . Tours will be charged at £4 per adult and children under 16 are welcomed for free.*

RAMSEY ISLAND TRIP—Sunday May 13th
Following the success of our trip to Skomer Island last year, we are fortunate that this year our excellent guide, Mick Brown, is available to show us the splendours of Ramsay Island this Spring. The cost will be £11 for the boat and £4 to land. Members of the RSPB do not have to pay the Landing fee. Any non-members of Pembrokeshire FOE are welcome but will be asked to contribute £5 towards the cost of the guide unless they would like to join.
If interested please contact Karina Russell or Gordon James on 01437 563670 to book a place and receive details of sailing time and possible lift-sharing.



Juvenile Dolphin and Mother near Ramsey Island

Wind Energy

There has been a lot of controversy about applications to erect wind turbines on some farms or businesses south of Narberth. This has resulted in the formation of a group called Save Our Skylines opposing these applications. We have not had time to do site visits on each application but have made general comments about the importance of wind energy in fighting climate change and the need for accurate information.

Wind energy is a clean technology which does not directly emit carbon dioxide, the main cause of man-made climate change. It is expanding rapidly globally producing significant environmental and economic benefits. It's important that local businesses also have the opportunity to reap some of these benefits.

And despite a flurry of opposition when wind farm proposals are announced, opinion polls consistently show overall public support for wind energy.

We have been critical of the Save Our Skylines group for focusing solely on the landscape impact of wind turbines when the South Pembrokeshire landscape is already blighted by fossil fuel activities. The tall chimneys at the oil refineries, which emit millions of tonnes of carbon dioxide and a cocktail of other pollutants each year, and the massive power lines straddling across South Pembrokeshire from a large power station seem to be of less concern to them.

It would be easy for us to oppose wind applications but, if we are to overcome the immense challenge of climate change, we're going to have to accept changes to our landscape and much else.



Pictured are the wind turbines near Steynton. There appears to be little objection to these now that they are up and running.

We have supported the appeal against refusal for two wind turbines on a farm near Boncath.

Climate Change

The International Energy Agency (IEA) recently issued a stark warning in its World Energy Outlook 2011. Even if governments fully implement policy commitments, average global temperature would, by the end of the century, rise by 3.5° above pre-industrial levels. It is widely accepted in international negotiations that a temperature rise of 2° C will take us into an irreversible danger zone.

Even this relatively small temperature rise is now considered by some experts to be excessive. James Hansen, one of the world's leading climate scientists, has said [http://www.columbia.edu/~jeh1/2008/TwentyYearsLater_20080623.pdf]:
“The oft-stated goal to keep global warming to less than two degrees Celsius is a recipe for global disaster, not salvation.”

If we fail to take urgent action soon, he warns:

“It will become impractical to constrain atmospheric carbon dioxide to a level that prevents the climate system from passing tipping points that lead to disastrous climate changes that spiral dynamically out of humanity’s control”.

The instability and turmoil that would affect our social, economic and environmental systems as a result of a climatic system spiralling out of control does not bear thinking about. If we fail to wean ourselves off fossil fuels and embrace cleaner forms of energy, we are in danger of creating for our children and grandchildren the terrifying prospect of a world in which they have no future.

The IEA advocates, amongst other things, a doubling of energy efficiency improvements, a five-fold increase in power generation from renewables, and a major shift in subsidies from fossil fuels to renewables. It points out that, contrary to the frequent complaints of opponents of wind energy, fossil fuels receive six times more subsidy than renewable energy systems.

A shift from fossil fuels to renewables would also reap the benefits of the rapidly expanding green economy. The UK government recently announced that over the last year, companies have agreed to invest almost £2.5 billion in renewable energy projects. This will create 11,600 jobs, with 849 coming to Wales.

Even if action on climate change did not offer economic and job-creation gains, the climate threat alone demands urgent action. We ought to be on a war footing, similar to 1939, accepting that major changes, some unwelcome, have to be made.



**Friends of the Earth Cymru's annual conference
will be held at Gladstone's Library, St. Deiniol's,
Hawarden (nr Wrexham) on the weekend of 25th – 27th May 2012.**

Gladstone's Library, St. Deiniol's

Gladstone's Library is unique. It is Britain's finest residential library, and its only Prime Ministerial library. It was founded by the great Victorian statesman himself and, following his death in 1898, became a national memorial to his life and work as well as one of the few Grade 1 listed buildings in Wales.

We have a host of great speakers lined up, including:

Andy Atkins – Friends of the Earth's Executive Director

Gareth Clubb – Friends of the Earth Cymru Director

John Griffiths AM - Welsh Government *Minister for the Environment and Sustainability*

Dr Carly McLachlan - Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research



Bee Prepared

FoE is launching a national campaign on bees and biodiversity

There is a training day in Cardiff on Saturday April 28th

Contact Pembrokeshire FoE if you are interested



**The Big Plant Sale is on Saturday May 5th
If you can donate plants or seedlings
phone Eleanor
Tel:01437 532575**

Tens of thousands call for public inquiry into Big Six energy compaies

Friends of the Earth campaigners delivered **David Cameron a final demand for affordable energy on 26th March.** Tens of thousands of you signed the petition to **stop the Big Six energy companies** taking us for a ride. It demands a public inquiry into their power and influence.

If you signed - thank you. Campaigners handed over the petition at No.10 this morning. Friends of the Earth's Final Demand Campaign showed that **energy bills** will keep rocketing while the Big Six keep us hooked on imported fossil fuels. Switching to clean British energy and cutting energy waste are the only way to guarantee **energy we can all afford** in the future.

The overwhelming majority of people want David Cameron to end the energy bill rip-off and force the Big Six to invest in clean power from our wind, waves and sun.

Paul Steedman, Energy Campaigner, Friends of the Earth

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Our website is currently being redesigned and will be completed at the end of April

