

Pembrokeshire Friends of the Earth

Cyfeillion y Ddaear Sir Benfro

Newsletter July 2016



Blackbridge biomass plant



On 7th July about 70 people gathered at a public meeting on the proposals by Egnedol to build a biomass plant at Blackbridge.

The meeting was organised by FoE Pembrokeshire and chaired by Blaise Bullimore, an independent and distinguished marine biologist and long-time resident of Pembrokeshire, who began by pointing out that despite several approaches Egnedol had declined to come to the meeting. They simply referred the meeting to their updated environmental impact survey. Several of the speakers from the panel and the floor noted their disappointment that Egnedol had not come.

Guy Woodman, County Councillor and Town Councillor for Milford East, pointed out that the CC is not the determining officer and that although the plans look great and 450 jobs would be fantastic, he recognises that there are real environmental concerns, as well as concerns about the viability and validity of the claims being made by Egnedol. Chris Jessop, a renewable energy engineer, went on to describe the proposed process which is to import prepared biomass via the Haven which is then heated up in closed containers generating a gas. This gas is then be refined to produce liquid fuel, electricity which is exported to the grid, waste heat to be utilised by greenhouses, prawn and algae farms, and exhaust gas. The CO₂ from the exhaust gas is separated and fed into the greenhouses to increase their output. The rest of the exhaust gas is cleaned and discharged from a tall stack. Finally the ash is compressed, treated and removed by road to be then used as road base. The company describe this as a holistic process but will it work and is it sustainable?

Almuth Ernsting from Biofuel Watch went on to address this question. At present there are eight 1-megawatt plants in the UK and none are running at more than 10% of their load factor. There is one 8-megawatt plant running successfully in Austria but

Egnedol are proposing 50 megawatts in the first phase, increasing to 350 megawatts thereafter. In Scotland a similar plant achieved a 3% energy recovery and it was closed down following explosions, fire and emissions breaches due to forced venting of the gasification chamber. All of this raises serious concerns regarding the feasibility, viability and safety of the plant.

Almuth also discussed the issue of sustainability. This is a very important issue but not one the planners will consider. It takes 70 years for the carbon released from burning established woodland to be re-sequestered and a plant of 350 megawatts will burn 350 tons per hour. Finally, Almuth turned to the downstream activities; algae farms have not been commercially successful and 100 hectares of greenhouses will be required to utilise the CO₂ from 50 megawatts.

The third and final speaker was Ged Davies from Natural Resources Wales, who talked about the planning process. The proposal will be considered by the Planning Inspectorate Wales under the new procedure for developments of national significance.

<http://gov.wales/topics/planning/developcontrol/developments-of-national-significance/?lang=en>

Egnedol plan to submit the full planning application within the next few weeks and after all papers have been received and validated there will be a consultation period of five weeks. Ged also detailed all the additional permits Egnedol would need for this operation. Egnedol can only start operation after all permits have been granted, and Ged estimated that this process could take up to three years. The documents can be viewed at -

<https://acp.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/ViewCase.aspx?caseid=3146073>

There was then a lively discussion during which concerns were raised regarding air pollution from the stack and the increased road traffic, noise, smell from the prawn farms, loss of habitat including ancient woodland and protected trees, and the sustainability of the feedstock.

So what now?

There was a call for PCC to carry out monitoring of air pollution in Milford Haven so that the background level is known. Currently the nearest monitoring site is in Narberth. We hope to set up a petition demanding this.

There was also demand for another Public Meeting attended by Egnedol and we hope that this will be held early in the consultation process.

So keep checking our website.

Brexit – red alert for the environment



European legislation accounts for 70% of our environmental safeguards and legislation, and it is more important than ever that we work together to ensure the continued protection of our environment and implementation of climate change policies, and build an independent, but truly sustainable economy that puts people and the environment first.

As Britain faces an uncertain future outside of the EU there is a strong possibility that Leave supporters will blame economic woes on EU laws, including environmental and wildlife protection laws, which they see as anti-competitive and “spirit-crushing” and a barrier to free trade

It is vital that we defend the good policies that the EU has brought to us, for example the Cleddau Special Area of Conservation is a European designation.

Many people have quoted TTIP (the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) as a reason for leaving the EU, but there is a real danger that if Britain stands alone then its power to compete or control the activities of the multinationals and the US government will be severely limited and that it is even more likely that the UK will be forced to remove protective legislation which is seen as a barrier to free trade.

The EU, unlike the US, has generally adopted a precautionary principle; the banning of neonicotinoids is a good example of this. The UK government opposed this ban and without intense pressure from the electorate it seems likely that in future the UK will follow the US lead. A US which may be headed by Donald Trump.

So what this means is that we can no longer rely on Europe - it is up to us to hold the Government to account and apply pressure to protect our children and grandchildren’s heritage.

Activists close Ffos-y-fran opencast coalmine

Ffos-y-Fran is an enormous open cast mine near Merthyr. It's nearly exhausted and the owners, Miller Argent, have a lodged a planning application to extend it.

On 15th June, a group of activists (Reclaim the Power <https://reclaimthepower.org.uk>) along with local residents (and one member of Pembs FoE) organised a camp and mass trespass to close the mine. With several hundred others we camped on the neighbouring common for two days of workshops and action training before entering the mine on Tuesday. The camp itself was fascinating. Despite non-hierarchical organisation and consensus decision-making, it functioned very smoothly and efficiently.

We were apprehensive as we went in, knowing we were risking arrest for aggravated trespass.



Fortunately, the owners and police had decided on a softly-softly approach (presumably to avoid bad publicity), and had written off the first shift. The police asked us to leave at lunchtime so that the second shift could start, but we refused - so the mine was closed for the whole day.

What did we achieve?

Plenty of publicity, and significant costs to the owners and the police which hopefully will make it more likely that the Nant Lesg extension won't go ahead, either because the Welsh Assembly decides to turn down the planning application or because the security costs of guarding the extension from protesters make it commercially non-viable.

<https://storify.com/RTP/reclaim-the-power-end-coal-nog>

Summer Solstice walk

Our annual walk was planned to be a joint event with the local Green Spirit group – a walk and evening beach get-together at Abermawr on the solstice. Unfortunately, this was cancelled due to bad weather. Apologies to all those planning to come.

Welsh Assembly Elections

In the run up to an election many of us briefly pay attention to the message of the political parties but once it is over we do not spend much time considering the result.

For this assembly election Pembrokeshire FoE interviewed the candidates, and held a hustings for West Carmarthen and South Pembrokeshire. Following this, it is interesting to look at how the candidates had fared and how the Parties had done overall.

Prior to the election FoE Cymru rated the parties on their green policies. Plaid came out on top with the Green Party in a close second, then came the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives with the Labour Party in a disappointing 5th place and finally UKIP trailing a long way behind.

Encouragingly all the candidates at the hustings, with the notable exception of the UKIP candidate, expressed similar concerns and interest in our environment, though clearly they had differing priorities. Worryingly, in the light of the overall results, the UKIP candidate denied man-made climate change and opposed any restriction on development on environmental grounds.

So what was the result?

Electorate: 2,248,050

Turnout: 45.3%

Party	Constituency	Region
Labour	34.7% /	31.5%
Conservative	21.1% /	18.9%
Plaid Cymru	20.5% /	20.8%
UKIP	12.5% /	13%
Liberal Democrats	7.7% /	6.5%
Green Party	2.5%/	3%

Of those who attended the hustings Angela Burns was re-elected as member for West Carmarthen and South Pembrokeshire and Simon Thomas was re-elected as a Plaid Cymru regional member for Mid and West Wales.

Pembrokeshire FoE are confident that we can continue to work with these candidates. We need to ensure that Wales leads the way in looking for new radical approaches and does not fall back on jingoism and out-moded economic models which rely entirely on growth at any cost.

Plant Sale

FoE had a stall at the Narberth Plant Sale on Saturday 30th April. Thanks to all members who donated plants. Thanks also to Ellie, Rebecca and Jan, who helped behind the stall. The weather was fairly kind this year (i.e. it didn't rain!), and we made £120.

££££ Dyfed Reinvest ££££

Divestment is the opposite of investment – it means taking money out of stocks, bonds or investment funds.

Pembrokeshire County Council, as part of the Dyfed Pension Fund, has an astonishing £64.8m of public money directly invested through workers' pension funds in fossil fuel companies like BP and Shell, with a further projected £76.5m in indirect fossil fuel investments.

We think that fund members and taxpayers won't be happy to learn that their money is tied up with such a risky and polluting industry that contributes so greatly to climate change.

80% of fossil fuel reserves need to remain in the ground to avoid catastrophic climate change. Consequently, there are growing concerns about the long-term financial risks of fossil fuel investments.

Together with Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire FoE groups, we will be calling on the Fund to wind down their exposure to the top 200 fossil fuel companies over a 5-year period. The money could instead be invested into building new homes, improving public transport or supporting local clean renewable energy projects.

Legal clarification in 2014 suggested that wider social, ethical or environmental considerations can affect investment choices by fund managers, provided there is no material detriment to the fund. However, last year UK Government issued proposals on regulation of investment principles that may prevent this, due to fears that councils may use pension and procurement policies to pursue their own boycotts and sanctions.

It is therefore important that our campaign shows clearly how risky such an investment strategy is, so that the fund trustees can take the decision to divest based on the 'best return' basis.

You can help by signing the campaign petition –

<https://campaigns.gofossilfree.org/petitions/divest-dyfed-pension-fund-from-fossil-fuel-investments>



Base Camp – Ellie’s report

Creativity is at the heart of campaigning it’s what keeps us evolving and engaging ourselves and others and one of the highlights of the weekend at Basecamp was a relaxing afternoon I spent in a beautifully decorated marquee learning to make earrings, using recycled paper.

This is the fourth year I’ve come to Base camp and the choice of activities is expanding. Saturday I was up early for a Yoga session and Sunday afternoon before leaving I had a Tibetan back massage. I also spent some time at workshops including: “Local Groups and local action-maximising our effectiveness” and

“Women’s empowerment” led by Jenny Hawley, who edited “Why women will Save the Planet” a book published last year. Both workshops were helpful in seeing how we might evolve as a group in Pembrokeshire.

The highlight of the weekend was going to be Shami Chakrabarti’s lecture (Shami led Liberty, the civil right’s organisation for 12 years). I sat down in front row so I wouldn’t miss a word, but I can’t remember what she said because the combination of a late night, camping and wonderful food set me nodding off, much to my shame.

There was live music in the evenings, a folk band, Fitty Gomash with a sort of ceilidh-come-break-dance, leaving a trail of unruly revelry in their wake. As always, I finished my weekend with a day’s walking. I camped in Edale by a stream and climbed the magnificent, Kinders Scout (Where the mass trespass occurred in 1932 eventually leading to the right to roam legislation of 2000)

Big gains for renewable energy

For 5 days in May, Portugal met all of its electricity requirements from solar, hydro and wind-generated power. A few days previously, Germany had also announced that almost all of their electricity needs came from clean energy for a 24-hour period.



Picture Credit: Worradmu, courtesy of <http://www.freedigitalphotos.net>

James Watson, the CEO of SolarPower Europe said –

“The age of inflexible and polluting technologies is drawing to an end and power will increasingly be provided from clean, renewable sources.”

This is great news, and we anticipate that this may well have been repeated on many days since May, and in other countries.

Check out the full story –

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/may/18/portugal-runs-for-four-days-straight-on-renewable-energy-alone>

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