

BEDFORDSHIRE CLIMATE CHANGE FORUM

Report on PRASEG 2008 Conference

TUESDAY, 6 MAY, 9 TO 5-30, 1 GEORGE STREET, LONDON

A Sustainable Energy Policy Revolution: The 2020 Challenge and Beyond - addressing the opportunities and challenges for sustainable energy policy and tackling global climate change in the UK.

I took my seat in the Conference venue just before our member David Green, as Chief Executive of UKBCSE, began his introductory remarks. This was the start of a day packed with 18 speakers and a Political Panel session – and have you ever tried to stop a politician from making a speech?

Some of the speakers put a summary of their main points up on a screen. Some did not. One provided copies of his presentation. Some speakers were clear and well-organised; some were not. So my notes and memories tend to be sporadic, even kaleidoscopic, not unlike Chinese whispers. We have been promised copies of all the presentations in due course, so you will be able to fill in the background to my impressions should you so wish.

David got us off to a good start, reminding us that inaction is not an option.

Steve Smith, Managing Director – Networks, Ofgem, was next and made a ringing call for more innovation and radical thinking.

Bob Taylor, Managing Director – Generation, E.ON UK, focussed on the Kingsnorth Coal Power Station which his company has won the contract for but is refusing to move until the Government is more definite about carbon capture. He put great stress on honesty and leadership and saw carbon emissions, energy security and affordability as dominant themes. There is no single, simple solution, though reducing demand is the most positive and cost-effective step. He included CHP and de-centralised schemes in his options. This was good stuff, but he finished by suggesting that coal power could keep us going until 2018 when nuclear could take over. However, he felt that if carbon capture does not work, coal is finished.

After coffee, Marian McFafferty, Chief Executive of the British Wind Energy Association, talked about large scale renewable energy projects. She believes that renewables can provide 30% of our needs by 2020. At the moment we have 169 wind farms, 7 offshore, and 1966 turbines providing 2430 mw of power. Germany has 22247 turbines, Spain 15145, Denmark 3125 and France 2454 in comparison. Developer confidence in this country has been badly hit by hold-ups in planning. 3000 approvals in 2004 have dwindled to 1200 in 2007, 250 so far this year. There is a need for strong guidance from the Government and Ofgem to drive through reforms.

There are some doubts now about the industrial capacity to make turbines, so great is the demand internationally. Yet UK is the world leader in offshore wind this year. Marine renewables offer the most potential economic benefit to the UK, but this is currently at a very early stage of development. What is needed is Confidence, Momentum, Commitment, Delivery and Swift Action.

Tom Delay, Chief Executive of the Carbon Trust, spoke next on Business and Innovation, telling us that the Trust is an independent company funded by DEFRA, “a catalyst for low carbon enterprise”, encouraging low carbon ventures. It has to maintain an impartial stance.

Nick Winsor, Executive Director – Transmission, National Grid told us in Delivering Infrastructure Renewal that there is a target of 94 GW of capacity in our system for a normal 57 GW demand by 2020. He feels that planning reform is essential and that local consultation must remain a key part. By 2030 we will need 135 GW of capacity for a 100GW demand. He felt we were involved in an “era of unprecedented change”. He was the only speaker to provide a copy of his notes. He said nothing on the possibility of doing away with the grid system and turning to local generation, nor of the Desertec concept available among the displays, which claims that all our energy power needs can be supplied with massive solar generators located in N African deserts. What will be the effect of a significant increase in CHP and Carbon Trust initiatives in insulation, inter alia?

At 12 pm we were entertained by a Political Panel, Alan Whitehead for Labour, Greg Barker for the Conservatives and Steve Webb for the Liberal Democrats.

Whitehead was not a good speaker, sounding weary, but argued that the role of Government must be more central than heretofore.

Barker said that the sun could provide power for all. The technology to keep emissions below 2% already exists and we are ideally placed to develop it. Could we be the Saudi Arabia of green energy? Why therefore are we so poor? We do not have joined up government. Cameron will change this. The Tories voted for a feed-in tariff in the recent Energy Bill. Markets will sort it out. Much more lively!

Webb said that the recent Energy Bill did not mention energy efficiency. He too was interesting and had some ideas.

I was then thinking of asking a question but it was effectively asked by a Scottish Green MP first. My question was that if we are moving from a world in which energy has been plentiful and cheap, available for our every whim and need, to one limited by cost, availability and climate change, where we are forced to focus on essentials, how would they deal with the necessary lifestyle changes – reducing demand? Rationing? Or what?

None of the panel dealt with the MSP’s question (though I found it hard to hear Whitehead)

We re-started at 2 pm with a session on The Role of Sustainable Heat – Beyond Renewable Electricity.

Inge Madsen, President of the Metropolitan Copenhagen Heating Transmission Co spoke first. It was very difficult to make out what she said as she had a quiet voice and a strong accent. But I did pick up from her visuals that since 1986 District Heating Systems have worked using 70% CHP, 27% waste, 2% Geothermal and 1% peak load (?). CO2 reduction has been 50-55%, SO2 almost 90%.

Russell Marsh, Head of Policy, Green Alliance, talked about the UK heat policy but was almost unintelligible.

Philip Piddington, from npower Cogen, talked about CHP. It produces 5.5GW in the UK at the moment. There is a target of 10GW by 2010, with a potential contribution of 15GW – but we are very poor compared with many other countries.

Philip Wolfe of the Renewable Energy Association said that the Energy Bill was designed to implement 5% of the 15% we need and advocated an end to reviews – just do it!

Paul Gardiner of the CHP Association said nothing worth recording.

Robert Tudway from the London Development Agency talked about the regulation of the heat market. He argued that regulation was there to protect consumers, to increase public confidence and to avoid monopolies.

At question time a fierce case was made for action not talk and for the adoption of the contraction and convergence solution globally. One response was that the latter was a great idea but could only work if there was 100% agreement. This does not exist and will take a lot of negotiation and time. In the meantime we must get on now with whatever we can do, however imperfect. Another was that without centralised heat networks markets and competition need not exist. A final interesting question was how to get several houses with a variety of new and old gas boilers to enter into a CHP scheme for all of them.

After a break for refreshment we had the Keynote address from Phil Woolas, Minister for State, Environment, Food & Rural Affairs. He was a sophisticated speaker, clearly on top of his brief. The Third (Green) Industrial Revolution was upon us and it must be an international one.

At 4.30 we moved in to our final session on Decarbonising the Built Environment, chaired by Michael Fallon MP, whose Bill, completed this Friday, will establish the Merton 10% for LAs to insist on.

Mark Clare, CEO Barratt Homes reminded us, in Journey to Zero Carbon Housing, that there are over 3 million existing houses to deal with as well as new build. Lifestyles will have to change for those who choose to live in a zero-carbon home. Tests have been conducted by Manchester University on a variety of ecohomes. Solar and pv performed well. Ground source heat pumps were liked but expensive. Barratts have designed a level 6 eco home and an estate just outside Bristol is planned. This was a good session.

Andrew Warren from the Association for the Conservation of Energy was a good speaker on Energy Efficiency – Domestic and Commercial Buildings, but made no mention of reducing demand. He told us that his Association had made checks on claims that a house had been built to meet an eco-level, and found that many failed. That is now breaking the law and said that Councils must check on such claims, which they do not do at the moment.

Isabelle McKenzie, from Fontenergy, spoke on Decentralised Energy and Community Schemes and said that 47% of emissions were from buildings and that heating/cooling was the major cause.

Finally, Matthew Spencer from Regen SW, spoke on Microgeneration and outlined some of the ways in which energy technology could help in decarbonising homes.

David Green mercifully brought the day to a close at about 1745 hours with a brief message.

A final impression - as far as I am aware little mention was made directly of solar, every speaker seemed to assume that private investment funding was the way ahead and little consideration was given to the reduction of demand for energy and the lifestyle changes facing all of us.

A good, if wearying and somewhat discouraging day.

Tony Mitchell, Chair, BCCF