

Bath and North East Somerset Council

Full Council meeting 15 September 2022 (deferred to Nov meeting)

Motion on the impact of increasing charges and taxations to the inhabitants of B&NES as a result of the Government's continued support and funding of nuclear power in preference to renewable energy generation.

To be proposed by Cllr Joanna Wright, Green Party

Council notes;

1. That the National Grid believes it can get to 100% low carbon sources of electricity by 2035. This involves the following assumptions: there will be a massive increase in renewables, a massive increase in storage, and an increase in nuclear to around 20%.
2. That the Government has announced an intention to intensify efforts to explore for new, and exploit existing, oil and gas resources in the North Sea, which defies advice from the Government's Climate Change Committee and puts at risk its legal obligation to achieve Net Zero by 2050.
3. The arguments for nuclear fission and energy generation remain contentious and therefore decisions to continue to invest in expensive, long term nuclear projects require continuous scrutiny.
4. That new research suggests that the assumption that nuclear energy is necessary to form a baseload of energy provision may no longer be valid and that nuclear energy is now one of the most expensive forms of electricity available.
5. That nuclear remains a high risk form of generation, that has not yet found a solution to the disposal of its waste and has the potential to cause considerable harm.
6. That current planning policy governing renewable energy infrastructure, and onshore wind turbines in particular, needs to be amended to encourage investment and innovation in this area.

Council therefore:

1. Calls on the Government to review approvals given for Sizewell C and for investment into nuclear energy in general.
 2. Calls on the Government to set out how renewables can end our reliance on foreign gas, instead of resorting to the exploitation of dwindling local reserves of fossil fuels, or an expansion of nuclear.
 3. Calls on the Government to back investment in renewable energy and storage, and provide financing for this.
- *Unless where specifically set out in the statute, motions approved at Council do not bind the Executive (Cabinet) but may influence their future decisions.*
 - *Councillors are reminded of their public sector equality duty which requires the Council to consider or think about how their policies or decisions may affect people who are protected under the Equality Act.*

4. Calls on the government to change the National Planning Policy Framework on Solar Panels and Wind Turbines.
5. Requests that the Leader write to the Secretary of State at the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and local MPs to inform them of the council's position.

Background information to the Motion

Nuclear versus Renewable Energy

The UK Government is continuing with its commitment to nuclear energy, giving the go ahead for the Sizewell C nuclear plant on 20th July 2022 with funding approved in August 2022.

The move has prompted the Claverton Energy Research Group (CERG (1)), to publicly join the large and growing number of scientists, academics, energy professors and campaigners in opposing new nuclear development on purely economic grounds (2).

Available on the CERG website is research by Professor Mark Barratt at University College London (UCL) (2) which shows that "baseload generators" such as nuclear power plants are not needed in an all-renewable future and their use will almost certainly increase the cost of energy to consumers. Professor Barratt's research modelled the comparative costs and performance of nuclear and renewable power using hour by hour wind and solar data and 35 years of weather data. The research simulated the entire power demand needed to sustain the UK, including meeting the demand for electric vehicles, shipping fuel, and heating buildings.

The modelling showed that

- the total cost of renewable generation would be less than nuclear, and would be just as able to provide continuous power even with wind and solar droughts.
- The continuing fall in wind and solar energy costs, along with cheaper storage of heat and power means that an entirely renewable and highly reliable power supply as a replacement for fossil fuels is available for the UK at a lower cost than any alternative.
- 7 GW of wind will generate about 40% more electricity than Hinkley at 30 – 50% of the cost per kWh and will be built in half the time.
- Under no scenario did nuclear add value to the mix.

Long term effects of Nuclear Energy

Dr Paul Dorfman, Chair of the Nuclear Consulting Group and Associate Fellow, Science Policy Research Unit, University of Sussex states that the idea that the new generation of nuclear will be safe and clean is a fiction (3). "The reality is nuclear is an extremely costly and inflexible technology with the potential to cause significant harm. Not forgetting that coastal nuclear is at ramping risk from climate-driven sea level, storm surge and flooding – with the nuclear industry and regulatory mitigation efforts becoming increasingly obsolete."

The CERG also notes that safe solutions for the disposal of nuclear waste still need to be found also as outlined by Greenpeace (The Global Crisis of Nuclear Waste – Greenpeace France November 2018) (4).

The CERG also notes that nuclear in the UK and Europe has proved to be unreliable with French nuclear currently only 50% available.

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National Planning policies

Wind turbines

As attention continues to grow on the role that renewable energy plays in improving our energy security, new research from UWE Bristol (5) has revealed the impact of current policy on restricting onshore wind farm development in England. The combined impact of a removal of financial subsidies and policy change has led to a 97% decrease in the number of onshore wind turbines that have been granted planning permission in the period 2016-2021 compared to the period 2009-2014. While financial subsidies have now returned, there is a clearly need to address the planning policy.

Solar Energy

Solar energy applications have been rejected in unprecedented numbers (6). Planning permission for 23 solar farms was refused across England, Wales and Scotland between January 2021 and July 2022, which could have produced enough renewable energy to power an estimated 147,000 homes annually, according to analysis of government figures by the planning and development consultancy Turley.

The refusals have jumped significantly since the start of 2021 – the research found only four projects were refused planning permission during 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020 combined.

Carbon Brief, a UK-based website covering the latest developments in climate science, climate policy and energy policy states that solar not being a threat to prime agricultural land, as it currently occupies only 0.1% of UK land area – less than half that occupied by golf courses – and will rise to only 0.3% if the government meets its net zero pledge (7).

Notes

- (1) <https://claverton-energy.com/energy-experts-online>
- (2) <https://claverton-energy.com/baseload-power-generators-such-as-nuclear-power-plant-are-not-needed-in-an-all-renewable-future-and-their-use-would-simply-increase-costs.html>
- (3) <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/108306/pdf/>
- (4) <https://www.greenpeace.org/static/planet4-belgium-stateless/2019/03/f7da075b-18.11.gp-report-global-crisis-of-nuclear-waste.pdf>
- (5) <https://info.uwe.ac.uk/news/uwenews/news.aspx?id=4220>
- (6) <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/aug/25/solar-farm-plans-refused-highest-rate-five-years-great-britain>
- (7) <https://www.carbonbrief.org/factcheck-is-solar-power-a-threat-to-uk-farmland/>

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