

green action

The magazine of Friends of the Earth Cymru


2013



Where do we get the energy?

Sun, wind, waves and a big dose of political will. We need it all

Seeing things differently
Should Wales get radical again?

 cyfeillion y ddaear cymru
friends of the earth cymru

see things differently

THE  CAUSE Inside the Assembly Friends of the Earth local groups



We've got some big decisions to make here in Wales.

Right now companies are scrambling after the fossil fuels left under our towns

and villages, under our seas and estuaries, our fields and mountains. It doesn't seem to matter that climate experts at the Tyndall Centre say fracking for shale gas would mean saying goodbye to reducing our carbon emissions. It doesn't seem to matter that the world's leading authority, the International Energy Agency, describes our rush to exploit more new sources of fossil fuels as catastrophic for the planet.

And although we know our beautiful country is blessed with massive resources of renewable energy, progress on using the sun, wind and seas to power a sustainable future is stalling in Wales.

So we're at a fork in the road. Do we want to turn back into a dirty fossil fuel nation, whatever the consequences? Or do we want to focus on clean renewable energy, and what could be a new era of prosperity and green growth?

At the moment, the power over these big decisions on energy lies in England. Our director thinks this isn't working for Wales, and to help you decide for yourself, we're giving you the straight facts. Some uncomfortable truths are revealed, but there are some rays of hope too.

Talking of which, our local group members are definitely an energetic and hopeful lot. There's a lot going on all around the country, from supporting renewable energy to campaigning against nuclear power and massive waste incinerators. And there's plenty of practical

action too, with tree-planting, community gardening, seed-swapping, green fairs and food festivals just some of what's happening because of people power.

After all, sometimes it's just about seeing things differently. And to find out what that could mean for Wales, we've asked three experienced campaigners whether they think it's time to get a little bit more radical.

So whether you're already supporting us, or in a local group, or taking action online, or planting a bee-friendly garden, read on for lots more ways you can get powered up, too.



CONTENTS

4 Tide turns against incineration

There are better ways to improve recycling and reduce waste than burning

4 Good news for bees

Welsh Government promises to help our struggling pollinators

5 Nuclear chaos

Government indecision and cold feet from industry means nuclear policy is in meltdown

5 Warm homes for Wales

New law is a great opportunity to improve the quality of housing in Wales

5 In brief

Fracking, underground coal gasification and 20mph speed limits

6 Local groups

Green news from Newport, Llangollen, Caerphilly, Pontypridd and Aberystwyth

7 Inside the Assembly

The recent cabinet reshuffle could have a major impact on the environment in Wales

8 Sustainable development

The new law must be strong enough to create a fair and green future for all

8 See things differently

Three campaigners talk about change

10 Pylons and powers

Is it protests over pylons or lack of political leadership that stands in the way of renewable energy in Wales?

11 The Bee Cause

How you can help bees, and get involved in our major campaign

12 Energy in Wales

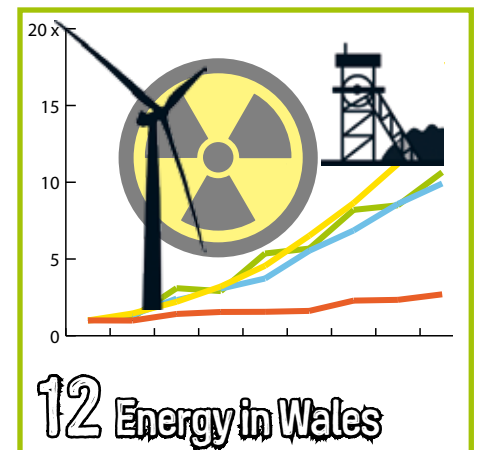
Facts and stats on where our power comes from and how we use it



8 See things differently



11 The Bee Cause



12 Energy in Wales

Support us

Friends of the Earth Cymru is a part of Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland. There are lots of ways to get involved – from raising money by searching the web to taking part in a fundraising event

If you're not already a financial supporter of Friends of the Earth why not sign up today? Your donation will help us find solutions that can protect planet and people, now and in the future. Visit www.foe.co.uk or call 0800 581 0510. We'd be very grateful for your support.

If you want future generations to enjoy a positive relationship with the environment then please consider leaving a gift in your Will to Friends of the Earth. Contact Lesley for more information on 0207 566 1667 or lesley.braden@foe.co.uk. For more details, go to www.foe.co.uk/legacies

Why not raise extra funds for Friends of the Earth just by using the internet search engine Everyclick. Register at www.everyclick.com/friendsoftheearthtrust

Have fun and help us - organise a fundraising event for Friends of the Earth Cymru. Call 029 2022 9577.

Join us online

The Friends of the Earth Cymru website is your hub of information and resources for all the environment issues and activism happening in Wales. It's updated regularly with news, events, local group details, press releases, reports and publications.

Joining us on Facebook and Twitter is also a great way to keep up-to-date with green issues, events and campaigns all around Wales.



www.foecymru.co.uk



Facebook
www.facebook.com/foecymrucydd



Twitter
www.twitter.com/foecymrucydd



Scan the codes with the QR reader on your smartphone (normal data rates apply) to find us on Facebook or Twitter



ISSUE 5 2013

Wales leading the way to a green future for all

Green Action is published by Friends of the Earth Cymru
33 Castle Arcade Balcony, Cardiff CF10 1BY
tel: 029 2022 9577 email: cymru@foe.co.uk
web: www.foecymru.co.uk

Friends of the Earth Ltd. Company no 1012357

Editor and designer: Simon Williams
Welsh language editor: Haf Elgar
Contributors: Gareth Clubb, Bledwyn Lake, Hannah Perry

Friends of the Earth Cymru:

- inspires the local and national action needed to protect the environment for current and future generations
- is part of Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland
- is part of the most extensive environmental campaigning network in the world
- is dependent upon individuals for over 90 per cent of its income
- supports a unique network of local campaigning groups, working in communities throughout Wales

For more than 40 years we've seen that the wellbeing of people and planet go hand in hand – and it's been the inspiration for our campaigns. Together with thousands of people like you we've secured safer food and water, defended wildlife and natural habitats, championed the move to clean energy and acted to keep our climate stable.

Be a Friend of the Earth – see things differently.



Printed on recycled paper made from 100 per cent post-consumer waste, using vegetable-based inks and 100 per cent alcohol-free, by a printer holding environmental accreditation ISO 14001

Tide turning against incineration

Welsh Government must back modern technologies to improve recycling and reduce waste

Newport Friends of the Earth and local residents have fought off proposals for a waste incinerator near Llanwern, with the developers finally withdrawing in March.

This is the second recent incinerator proposal in Wales to be rejected after strong campaigns by Friends of the Earth local groups, working closely with residents and communities. The defeat in 2011 of a massive incinerator planned for Merthyr saw the tide turning against the flood of polluting plants threatening to blight communities. It's now clear that unnecessary incinerators, using technology well past its use-by date, are unpopular with local people, bad for waste management, and bad for the environment.

The Welsh Government's previously pro-incineration position is now looking very difficult to maintain, as new technologies and rising recycling rates show incinerators up as smoke-belching dinosaurs.

But an incinerator is going ahead in Splott, Cardiff, and another site has been designated in Deeside in Flintshire. These Welsh Government-funded projects still seem obsessed with burning rubbish – although so far the process has been farcical, with numerous companies pulling out. Both projects have seriously lacked open decision-making, and taxpayers are likely to be locked into expensive and unnecessary 25 year contracts.

The Assembly's own Petitions Committee

has warned against these inflexible long-term contracts. In its report following anti-incineration petitions, the Committee also warned that large regional incinerators could stop new, more effective technologies such as mechanical biological treatment (MBT) from developing.

Politicians from all the Welsh parties acknowledge there are alternatives to burning waste, and are concerned about incineration's impact on health and recycling. But the Welsh Government is still unwilling to change direction. In an otherwise successful waste story – recycling increasing, waste reducing, the bag charge saving resources – it's time the Government looked again at where our money is going.

Good news for bees in Wales

THE BEE CAUSE

For bees, it's a postcode lottery. If they want a government promoting their well-being, while they get on with the essential job of pollinating 75 per cent of our favourite foods and most vital crops, they'd better hope they're living in Wales.

Many bee species and other pollinating insects are in steep decline, which is threatening our environment, our economy and our food. Managed honey bee colonies fell by over 50 per cent between 1985 and 2005. Wild honey bees are nearly extinct in many parts of the UK, and a quarter of wild bee species are considered rare or endangered.

But now the Welsh Government could be offering help and advice to farmers and communities to protect the more than 250 species of bee in the UK. Thousands of people have already backed our campaign, The Bee Cause, which calls for action on tackling the threats to bees such as habitat loss and pesticide use. And after talks with our campaigners, the Welsh Government has introduced plans for a Pollinator Action Plan for Wales.

We've been working with the Welsh Government, other groups and agencies on the content of the plan, and initial suggestions look promising. They include changes to the Welsh planning system, more pollinator-friendly planting on public

land like verges and parks, and research into the impact of pesticides in Wales.

There's still lots you can do too, and of course now we need to persuade the UK Government to start caring about our

bees neighbours in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Turn to page 11 to find out how you can help save our bees



A weekend of inspiration and activism

Every year, top Welsh and UK politicians, journalists, scientists and activists join Friends of the Earth supporters and local group members in Wales for a weekend of talks, workshops, debate, discussion

and inspiration. The venue is always stunning and the weather, somehow, always manages to be magnificent! To find out about coming along to our next event, email bleddyn.lake@foe.co.uk

Nuclear chaos



The sun sets over Wylfa nuclear power station on Anglesey

Nuclear policy appears to be in meltdown. Almost daily we're hearing of new and ingenious ways that the UK Government is trying to bend the rules to allow even greater subsidy of this dangerous and expensive form of power. The absence of just one of these subsidies – insurance cover for nuclear catastrophes – would render nuclear totally unviable.

Meanwhile, the Welsh Government's latest energy policy made a momentous u-turn by eagerly supporting a new nuclear power station at Wylfa on Anglesey. Or does it? First Minister Carwyn Jones has said that the only reason he supports new nuclear at Wylfa is because an old nuclear power station is there already. Is this really a good enough reason for reverting to a has-been technology?

The few companies currently displaying

enthusiasm for UK nuclear are saying they'll only build new nuclear if guaranteed a future electricity price – four times the current cost of electricity. As the costs of renewable energy are falling rapidly, it's hard to see how these guaranteed prices for nuclear can be granted.

But lest we become complacent, work is already under way at Hinkley Point in Somerset, less than 30 miles from some of Wales' most populated areas. And despite it seeming to be drawing its last breaths, the threat of a nuclear power station at Wylfa just about clings on to life.

There is clearly no role for nuclear power in Wales – the money and political will must be spent where it can tackle climate change and improve our energy security, safely and economically. And that means energy efficiency and renewable energy.

Warm homes for Wales

Over one in four people in Wales live in fuel poverty, meaning they have to spend more than 10 per cent of the household income to keep warm. And housing is responsible for about one fifth of greenhouse gas emissions in Wales. That's two very good reasons why improving the quality of housing in Wales is good for people and good for the environment.

The Welsh Government's Arbed scheme has already improved 7,500 homes with measures such as installing efficient boilers, wall insulation and solar photo-voltaic panels. Another 5,000 are due to be improved by 2015 – but seriously tackling the problem means upgrading 400,000 homes over the next 10 years.

A massive part of the problem are

privately rented homes. These are currently twice as likely to have very poor energy efficiency than other housing. This also means the poorest people are more likely to live in the poorest housing.

A new law coming from the Welsh Government in the autumn is a great opportunity to improve the quality of housing in Wales, as well as to better protect tenants' rights. But it must set minimum standards of energy efficiency for rental houses – a simple but effective measure that could mean warm homes, and would also seriously reduce our greenhouse gas emissions.

Find out more about what we want in the Housing Bill: www.foe.co.uk/wales-housing

in brief

Wales could be fracked

If you're one of the 2 million people in Wales who live in areas being offered for onshore oil and gas licences, then fracking could be on its way. Widespread uptake of fracking – the controversial drilling for shale gas that injects high pressure fluid into underground rocks – would mean farewell to our greenhouse gas reduction commitments and hello to industrial scale environmental damage.

Experts at the Tyndall Centre say that large-scale extraction of shale gas cannot be reconciled with the emission reductions needed to avoid dangerous climate change. If we're to tackle our rising emissions, Wales must remain a frack-free nation. Take action and find out more: www.foe.co.uk/wales-energy

Unconventional energy

Fracking, drilling for oil in the Arctic and underground coal gasification (UCG) are all 'unconventional' sources of energy – which means extracting them is more difficult, more costly, and produces more CO₂ than ordinary gas and oil.

But as the cost of energy increases and conventional fossil fuels become scarcer, the rush to exploit unconventional energy is hotting up. Now UCG could be on its way to Wales too, as Swansea Bay and the Loughor estuary have been targeted for exploitation.

20mph limit is safer and greener

Our streets would be a lot safer if the default speed limit in urban areas and rural villages was lowered from 30mph to 20mph. 20mph speed limits significantly reduce road casualties, with a strong reduction in child victims. They also encourage more people to walk, cycle and use public transport, which reduces health problems, improves air quality and reduces greenhouse gas emissions.

Traffic accidents unfairly affect the poorest in society – children from the lowest socioeconomic group in Wales are five times more likely to be injured in collisions with vehicles than those from the highest. We're demanding policy changes from the Welsh Government to make Wales a safer, more pleasant and less environmentally damaging place.

Local groups in Wales



Suzannah Evans (left) of Newport Friends of the Earth with Pippa Bartolotti, leader of Wales Green Party, ready to release 'nuclear warning' balloons outside Hinkley Point power station

Newport in Gwent has year-round activities for the green-minded, thanks to the Friends of the Earth local group. Every March the Green and Ethic Fayre has stalls, activities and films, while the Green Film Club runs every second month throughout the year. Every autumn the group organise tree planting – last year Jessica Morden MP and John Griffiths AM, then the Environment Minister, joined in with the digging.

The Newport GREEN Hub was launched by the group to encourage collaboration on community projects, and is currently bringing an environment centre to the city. The centre, opening soon, will offer a variety of practical, green workshops.

There's also been strong campaigning on major issues. A public meeting highlighted how close the proposed new nuclear power stations in Gloucestershire and Somerset are to communities in south Wales, while some group members joined hundreds of people to protest outside Somerset's Hinkley Point site.

Newport Friends of the Earth are part of the Stop Newport Incinerator Campaign (SNIC), which opposed a waste incinerator. The group is also keeping a close eye on discussions regarding extensions to the M4, and will be supporting only the most necessary and least damaging options.

Llangollen

Llangollen Friends of the Earth has launched 'Sustainable Llangollen', a coalition of local groups keen to make a difference on social and environmental issues.

The coalition's first projects, already gaining lots of interest, are a community garden and a town centre community hub.

But the spectre of a new supermarket still hangs over the town, and Llangollen Friends of the Earth is still campaigning hard to oppose it.

Caerphilly

Winner of the 2011 Friends of the Earth Group of the Year award, Caerphilly has campaigned successfully for two wind turbines at a local business park, and worked with the Citizens Advice Bureau to offer residents home energy monitors to help reduce their electricity consumption.

The group runs an annual Christmas Green Fayre, and a springtime Sow and Grow event where you can buy or swap plants, seeds and seedlings.

A map of Wales with 22 numbered locations marked with green circles. The locations are distributed across the country, from north to south and west to east. A yellow box with the text 'MAKE A DIFFERENCE Get involved with a local group near you' is placed over the central part of the map.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE
Get involved with a local group near you

1. Abergavenny & Crickhowell	9. Chepstow	17. Neath Port Talbot
2. Aberystwyth	10. Conwy & Llandudno	18. Pembrokeshire
3. Barry	11. Flintshire	19. Pontypridd & District
4. Brecon	12. Llangollen	20. Swansea
5. Bridgend	13. Merthyr Tydfil	21. Torfaen
6. Caerphilly	14. Môn a Gwynedd	22. Wrexham
7. Cardiff	15. Monmouth	
8. Carmarthen	16. Newport	

To find out more call 02920 229 577 or go to www.foecymru.co.uk

Pontypridd

The Little Welsh Nibble is Pontypridd Friends of the Earth's sustainable version of the town's Big Welsh Bite food festival, promoting good quality, local food.

The first Nibble featured cookery demonstrations by Michelin Star chef Franco Taruschio, as well as stalls, talks, music and film showings.

An autumn Apple Fest taught local schoolchildren how to press apples and plant a variety of fruit trees.

Aberystwyth

Aberystwyth Friends of the Earth have been meeting with their local politicians to convince them of the dangers of climate change, and the opportunities and green jobs that would come to the area from developing more renewable energy and improving energy efficiency.

They've also been supporting wind power in the local media, and out and about with a stall supporting The Bee Cause campaign.

Inside the Assembly

A cabinet reshuffle means responsibility for the environment has been spread widely across Welsh Government ministers. So will it be for better or for worse?



Haf Elgar, Campaigner
Friends of the Earth Cymru

It finally happened. After a year of rumours, in March First Minister Carwyn Jones re-shuffled his pack. And he managed to avoid giving anyone the sack, brought in two new faces, and made some changes that could have a major impact on the environment in Wales.

The first surprise is that no minister or government department has either the term 'environment' or 'sustainable development' in their title. The responsibilities of the old environment department are now split between four, if not five, different ministers.

Alun Davies, previously deputy minister for agriculture, is promoted to Minister for Natural Resources and Food. He now has responsibility for much of the environment portfolio, including climate change, energy, waste and farming. Alun Davies has a positive and long-standing track record of awareness of climate change and its international impact. He was involved in youth activities around the original Rio Summit 20 years ago, and has worked for Oxfam and WWF. It's good to see energy back in the brief – hopefully this will mean clearer leadership on renewable energy.

With agriculture and energy added to what was already a packed ministerial job, it's inevitable something had to go. But it's difficult to understand how such closely linked issues as planning, sustainable development and climate change can be led by three different ministers.

The massive job of moving Wales towards a sustainable future and guiding the new Sustainable Development (SD) Bill goes to Huw Lewis. Hopefully his experience of living in and representing an area as full of environmental problems as Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney will drive him to lead the way for a strong bill. His full and varied brief also includes communities and poverty, welfare reform, families, children, equal opportunities and the voluntary sector. The next year is such a crucial time to get the SD Bill right, it needs to be top priority – let's hope it doesn't get lost in such a busy brief.

Carl Sargeant, formerly Minister for Local Government and Communities, takes on housing and regeneration, including the key area of planning. As well as the Housing Bill, which we hope will rapidly improve the energy efficiency of the existing housing stock, he'll face the challenging project of reforming the planning system in Wales. As former minister for local government he'll have experienced many of the challenges of planning, and hopefully will be aware of the current imbalance of power between developers and local residents. But will he back our call for a third-party right of appeal for communities affected by planning decisions?

One of the longest-serving ministers, Edwina Hart, adds transport to her economy brief, but there's no mention of the fastest growing part of the economy – the green economy. And walking and cycling, including the Active Travel Bill, have been separated from transport and given to the former Environment Minister John Griffiths, who's now Culture Minister.

Hopefully this isn't a reflection of how transport is viewed, with roads and rail as a way of travelling, and walking and cycling merely recreational. But it's good news that John Griffiths will still play a role in greening the future of Wales.

An optimist might say this reshuffle is a sign that the whole cabinet is taking its responsibility for tackling climate change and building a sustainable future seriously. A pessimist might say it's a shift of focus away from the environment as a central planning consideration, and the driving force behind sustainable development. What is certain is that now much more effort will be needed across government if the environment is not to be side-lined, and manifesto commitments are to be met – and Carwyn Jones will have to take responsibility for this.

There's no time to settle into new roles, with the government's bills now coming through thick and fast, and plenty of consultations and stakeholder events

Now much more effort will be needed if the environment is not to be side-lined – and Carwyn Jones will have to take responsibility

to keep us busy. Now the real test of the legislative process begins, with scrutiny and amendments by cross-party committees.

The Environment and Sustainability Committee began its term with Dafydd Elis-Thomas as the experienced Chair and nine new AMs. But it's now well established, and with a number of legal minds in its membership and a wide range of experience amongst the party leads, witnesses can be guaranteed a thorough questioning. Its year-long inquiry and resulting report on energy and planning was a substantial piece of work that has gained respect and proven its worth.

The Petitions Committee is increasingly finding its feet and showing its value, including taking up petitions from us and others on fracking and incineration.

There's clearer red water between Wales and Westminster than ever before, and more combative Senedd sessions. With both the Liberal Democrats and Plaid Cymru supporting the government's budget in the last two years, it doesn't seem anyone's keen to bring the government down, the government's lack of majority instead seen as a bargaining tool. We hope however that it's not getting too cosy down the bay, and that AMs will stand up to the government when needed ●

Seeing things differently in Wales

Wales has a long tradition of leading the world in doing things differently. Considering the scale of the environmental challenges we face, is it time to get radical again?

From the Chartists to the Greenham women, from Raymond Williams to Aneurin Bevan, some of the world's most innovative thinkers and activists have come from Wales. These were people who railed against the norms and refused to accept the injustice of the status quo. They didn't just see problems, they found answers – they looked for change, new thinking, a way through. They saw things differently.

To many of their contemporaries they might have been dangerous radicals, out-of-step with the common sense of their time. Yet history has shown many were actually true leaders, heralding in a fairer, more progressive age.

These movements and people were often founded on principles of social justice and strong communities – exactly the values we need to turn to now to tackle our environmental and economic woes. Friends of the Earth supporters and activists have long realised that the well-being of people and planet go hand in hand. Where others have seen problems best ignored, we have instead seen solutions waiting to happen.

Yet even as much of the world lurches from economic crisis to revolution and back again, many politicians in the UK stick

to the business-as-usual approach that offers little chance of the changes we need. But politicians in Wales often see things differently from those in Westminster, with all of the major political parties here keen to show their Welsh distinction. And now with Rhondda 'socialist republican' Leanne Wood as the leader of Plaid Cymru, a little bit of radicalism could be coming back into mainstream politics – in Wales at least.

When she published 'A Greenprint for the Valleys' back in 2011, suggesting community-focused local food and renewable energy production as the path to economic regeneration, some may have viewed it as the manifesto of a political dreamer. But only a year later Leanne Wood was elected as leader of one of Wales' main political parties. We asked Ms. Wood whether we need to see things differently to achieve a fairer, more sustainable Wales. And is now the right time for these ideas to take root in our communities, and find their way into government policy?

We've also asked two environmental activists, with more than a little history of seeing things differently between them, whether we should be thinking a bit more radically about the change we want. So maybe change is in the air, after all.

A radical law

A new law in Wales could lead us towards sustainable development. But it must be strong enough to create a fair and green future for all

Living sustainably means not treating our planet's resources as if they're unlimited and everlasting. It means using only our fair share, rather than consuming all we can at the cost of those in other countries and from future generations. And it means improving the quality of life for all, while staying within the environmental limits that our planet can sustain.

When the Assembly was established in 1998, Wales became one of only a few countries in the world to have a duty to promote sustainable development. But

it remains merely a duty to consider with no obligation to act, and is limited to the Welsh Government. Yet many other public bodies – such as councils, police and health authorities – could help make sustainable development happen in Wales.

The Welsh Government is currently preparing a sustainable development law. But in a country with massive opencast coal sites, a quarter of the population living in fuel poverty, and areas with high levels of air pollution, it's going to take a strong law to make a radical difference.

continued on next page



Leanne Wood AM Leader, Plaid Cymru

“ I think there’s a real appetite for some different thinking to what has gone on before, and the sustainability aspects of this are important.

I’ve long been driven by issues of equality, justice, and poverty. And then there was my eureka moment, when I realised it’s the people on the lowest incomes and in the most disadvantaged positions, not just in Wales but on a world scale, who are bearing the brunt of the effects of climate change.

I think the Assembly could be a lot stronger in terms of meeting the targets for greenhouse gas emissions reductions. I’ve been particularly disappointed to see a lack of action coming from the local authority level. The political reality is that the Welsh Government is struggling to deliver on emissions reductions. The challenge is for us to push climate change back up the agenda as a key political issue. Plaid Cymru passed a policy committing to a 9 per cent annual reduction in 2009, and for us nothing has changed.

Economic growth has to be done in a sustainable way, otherwise we’re storing up problems for the future. The challenges are very great, but we have some chance by adopting a much more local, decentralist approach. Communities being self-sufficient as far as possible in renewable energy and food means they could be sustainable and grow economically as well. I want to see people engaged in projects that will help build resilience and sustainability into our economy, and into our communities.

It’s important to incentivise communities, whether it be around recycling rates or renewable energy production. Giving the responsibility to the community themselves to achieve, and to decide how they achieve, their own locally agreed targets – that’s the decentralist approach. ”

Karina Russell

Pembrokeshire Friends of the Earth since 1984

“ I’ve always been involved in movements that are looking for change. But I think, because climate change is so intangible, it’s been hard for people to really get involved. Yet all the science, all the signs, say it’s such a great danger to us all.

I think we should be marching on the streets, shouting with loud speakers. There should be huge demonstrations telling our governments we have to do more. Yes, we should all be doing more, but politicians need to be taking the lead. And I think they’d be surprised, if a politician stood up and spoke out, there’d be a lot of people who’d be supportive.

We could be greening the economy, making money and doing something about climate change, and yet it seems no one’s willing to take the radical steps needed. ”



Kelvin Mason

Academic and activist

“ Activists in Wales share a particular sense of justice, and an awareness of the potential marginalisation of Wales – we know we have to shout louder to be heard. But the struggle is getting more people politically active in a society that’s structured to achieve the

opposite. The more we take responsibility for our energy, waste and food, the more we know where stuff comes from and where it goes – and the more likely we are to do something to put things right. We have to restructure politics from the bottom up. In the words of the Billy Bragg song, ‘Change will not come from above!’

What gives me hope is initiatives like the Occupy movement. We do need really radical thinking, we’re not asking ourselves the right questions and we’re too ready to say ‘it can’t be done’. But to persuade people it’s worth asking such radical questions, the answers have to matter in their everyday lives. ”

The new Minister with responsibility for sustainable development is Huw Lewis. As AM for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney, which includes some of the most deprived areas in Wales, and the UK, he knows all too well about some of the problems.

But even if we can put Wales on the path to sustainable development, can our small country really make a difference? People in Wales certainly think we should. A recent public survey by the Climate Change Consortium of Wales shows that 80 per cent of us are concerned

about the impact of climate change on the developing world, and nearly three quarters believe that Wales should set an example to the world on climate action. This sends a strong message to the Welsh Government that the people of Wales overwhelmingly support taking responsibility for our global impacts on people, and on the planet.

We’re part of an alliance of organisations campaigning for a strong bill. Now is our chance for Wales to really lead the world. Let’s not miss this opportunity.

A Sustainable Development Bill must:

Clearly define sustainable development and how it can work in Wales

Place a strong duty on public bodies to operate with the objective of achieving sustainable development

Create a strong and independent Sustainable Development Commissioner

www.foe.co.uk/sustainable-development-wales

Pylons and powers

Progress on renewable energy has stalled in Wales. Is it protests over pylons, or lack of leadership from a powerless Welsh Government that stands in the way?



Gareth Clubb, Director
Friends of the Earth Cymru

Few people say they love electricity pylons, even though many of us in Wales have got used to them over the years. But are they a necessary evil?

If we must have more major power lines across Wales, why can't they be buried underground? The argument against this has always been the greater cost. But now, following a detailed, independent analysis of the costs of grid connections to wind farms, Friends of the Earth Cymru is clear that in the majority of cases, rural wind farm connections to the grid could be placed underground at acceptable cost.

The spectre of giant pylons marching across Powys has been strongly, and effectively, evoked by the vocal minority that is opposed to wind power in Wales. Yet a recent poll suggests that 88 per cent of people in Wales want to see more electricity generated from the wind, waves and sun. Is it the lack of strong leadership from the Welsh Government for onshore wind that has allowed noise from minority opposition groups to reverberate more loudly than it would otherwise?

Thankfully, there have been some recent signs that the Welsh Government has upped its game on renewable energy. Many in the renewables sector will have been heartened by much of the Government's latest energy policy. But as ever, words in a policy document only go so far. We need a consistent voice from ministers that says Wales is open for business with renewables operators – and that we are keen to develop the

community sector in particular.

Former Environment Minister John Griffiths agrees. "Wales offers great potential. You do need a mix and onshore wind needs to be an important part," he said last year. "We do need further consenting powers for energy projects here in Wales, and if we had those we could offer a much more certain and stable situation here for energy companies."

We're in complete agreement on this. And we've the evidence to back up our opinions. Compared to England and Scotland, Wales has performed poorly in renewable energy. In 2003, Wales had 40 per cent more wind energy capacity than England, and slightly less than Scotland. Yet by 2011 (the most recent data available), both countries had nearly five times the capacity of Wales.

Meanwhile, dirty fossil fuel installations have been sprouting up across Wales. Per head of population, Wales has had nearly four times as much non-renewable capacity installed as England since 2005, and over seven times more than Scotland.

The comparison with Scotland is revealing, and the difference in performance can be pinned on three factors. Firstly, the Scottish Government's policy on renewables is much stronger than that of the Welsh Government, consistently stating that the future for Scotland lies firmly with green technology, and renewable energy forms a very strong plank of this. Having the powers and the tools, such as the Renewables Obligation, to back up this policy is working to attract businesses to Scotland.

The second factor is nuclear. As a result of the Scottish Government's decision to not allow any new nuclear power stations, the renewables industry knows it is not competing with nuclear for a share of electricity generating infrastructure.

Thirdly, the Scottish Government's renewable energy target – that it generates 100 per cent of electricity consumption by 2020 – must be met solely

🔗 We need a consistent voice from ministers that Wales is open for business with renewables operators 🔗

by projects in Scotland. A clear policy is dependent upon decisions entirely within the Scottish Government's power, and so it can be held accountable for its success.

The Welsh Government has no real role in determining energy projects. This power lies with the UK Government's Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC). DECC must meet EU targets, and is focusing on where large amounts of renewable energy can be generated rapidly. This means offshore windfarms, mostly off the east coast of England.

So it's no surprise that Wales has lagged so badly behind Scotland, as DECC pays no account whatsoever of the Welsh Government's ambitions. Taking decisions in England on energy projects in Wales hasn't served us well. Our renewable installations have largely stalled. And Wales is evidently seen as a convenient place to develop non-renewables, presumably because well-organised resistance to polluting industrial development is less likely in more deprived parts of the UK.

So devolution of these powers is important for all of us in Wales, if we don't want more fossil fuel power stations dumped on us, and if we want Wales to have a piece of the green economy action. And it's probably the only way we'll produce the clean, green power we need ●

The Silk Commission

Established by the UK Government to examine the case for devolution of tax-raising powers and additional areas of policy to Wales, the Silk Commission's final report will be published in early 2014. Friends of the Earth Cymru's submission to the Commission argues for all powers relating to energy to be devolved to the National Assembly.



We need them. Now they need us

The Welsh Government has promised to help our bees. Now the UK Government must do the same – and you can help too

On a sunny day in north Wales there is a gentle hum of constant traffic. But this traffic isn't polluting the air and belching out carbon dioxide. This is traffic we really need – and it could be disappearing.

Stephen Thomas, from Dyserth near Rhyl, enjoys the simple pleasures that come with bee keeping. "Every time the weather is warm there's a constant background hum of buzzing bees," he says.

But Stephen is also aware that his hobby benefits the environment, and ultimately us all, as bee numbers are seriously dwindling.

"Bees have experienced a variety of problems lately – disease from abroad, exposure to agrichemicals and their food being reduced by herbicides have all taken a really heavy toll."

It's a problem across the whole of the UK, and bees in Wales have been hit hard, with some beekeepers reporting losses of up to 60 per cent. But it's not just the

beekeepers' friends that are suffering – there are more than 250 species of bee in the UK, and now a quarter of them are considered rare or endangered.

Unless we help these important pollinators soon, there'll be serious consequences for us too. Bees pollinate 75 per cent of our most vital crops and favourite foods, and one third of our food wouldn't be available at all without them. And farmers in Wales need bees to pollinate the clovers in grass that our livestock industry depends on for their top quality products.

The Bee Cause campaign is asking the UK Government for an action plan that will make sure how we farm our food, plan our towns and cities, and protect our wildlife, all work better for bees. Thanks to our campaign, the Welsh Government has already promised a plan to make Wales bee-friendly again – so if they can buzz into action, what's stopping Westminster?

There's plenty you can do too, from signing our petition to making your garden a bee haven. And it's easy to get started – just go to www.foe.co.uk/bees.

How to help the bees

Sign The Bee Cause petition

Join us in asking the UK Government for a Bee Action Plan: www.foe.co.uk/bees

Give a bee a home

Create a bee hotel in your garden – they work so hard they need plenty of places to rest, such as in crumbling mortar, hollow stems or holes in wood.

Plant bee friendly

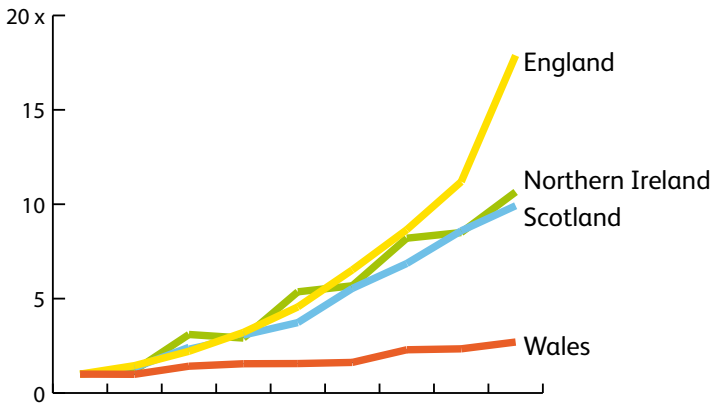
There are lots of flowering plants that that are rich in the nectar that bees need – and they can give your garden a splash of colour too. Find out more at www.foe.co.uk/bees

Energy in Wales

88%

of people in Wales believe we should generate more energy from renewable sources

Growth in renewable energy (2003-11)

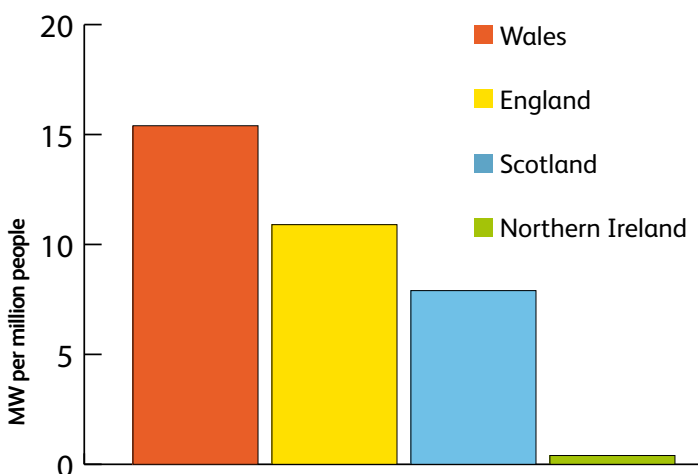


15% by 2020

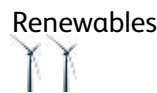
UK Government target for percentage of energy to come from renewable sources

9.4% Percentage of energy in UK from renewable sources (2011)

Solar installed capacity in UK (2011)



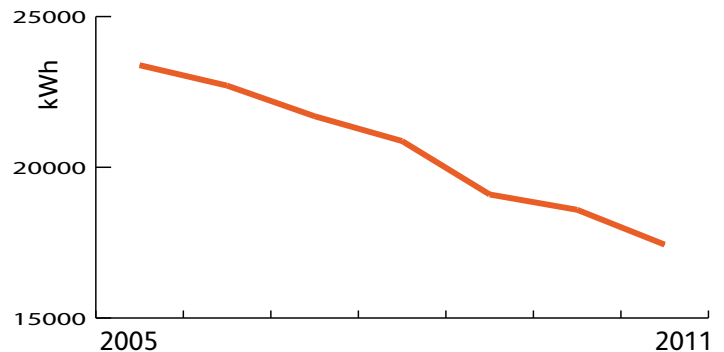
Electricity generation in Wales (2011)



9,500,000 tonnes

CO2 produced by energy generation in Wales (2010)

Gas and electricity use in Wales per household



Double the amount of electricity used:

Potential for renewable energy generation in Wales by 2025, according to the Welsh Government

4.4% Percentage of electricity used in Wales generated from renewable sources (2011)

cyfeillion y ddaear cymru
friends of the earth cymru