

Hello

So, here we are heading into 2020, the last chance for the world to peak its emissions if we are not to trigger a [‘global cascade of tipping points’](#). The challenge is to **transform our economies, our culture, ourselves, within ten years** - and it looks as if we are going to have to do this with no governmental leadership.

If you need **help drawing up your own personal strategy for cutting carbon**, on Tuesday [14th Jan, the BCR Energy Group will be hosting a Green New Year Resolutions](#) event in Bristol, including speakers from Triodos and Bristol Energy Company. The event is free and all are welcome.

And if you want to see what real crisis leadership might look like, here’s a [fictional Canadian government 26-week transition plan](#). What could *our* government be delivering?

And here’s some news which I hope you find useful and interesting.

1. Positive Thoughts on the World’s Energy Transition
2. Biggest Drop in UK Retail Since Records Began
3. The UK’s Power Generation Figures for 2019 - We Need a Lot More Renewables, and Efficiency
4. Hinkley Point C - Could It Go?
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1. Positive Thoughts on the World's Energy Transition

There is much in this [Bloomberg New Energy Finance statement](#) of our energy transition that is positive and truly encouraging. The author reminds us that **China’s new coal capacity is *only capacity*** – many of its coal plants are loss-making, running well below their potential and a **third are expected to retire by 2021**; **renewables are now ‘obscenely’ cheap**; and the costs of managing intermittency have not materialised. Over-capacity is no longer a problem.

But the overall message is, of course, that **even with the expected massive uptake of renewables, electric vehicles and other new technologies over the next decade, it won’t be enough to keep us below 1.5 degrees.**

2. Biggest Drop in UK Retail Since Records Began

However, I think there's something that Bloomberg touches on but is not fully factoring in - and that is **consumer change, personal choices to cut waste and over-consumption.**

I may be too optimistic about human nature - business analysts always put our very slow growth down to political factors and trade wars, not personal decisions - but it seems to me that cultural change is afoot. We see it in today's retail figures for the end of 2019 - the *biggest drop in shopping since figures were first collated in 1995.* (Please listen to the [Today programme, approx. 7.20](#) from Thurs 9th - truly cheering!). We see it in Europe's **reduced demand for aviation, our changed diets and our reduced power demand.**

We absolutely have more power than we think, and alarmingly, it really is down to us to lead, to create the better, safer world we want. **We don't have to wait till everyone's on board - just a 3% change in consumer habit is enough to get any company board's attention...**

3. The UK's Power Generation Figures for 2019 - We Need a Lot More Renewables, and Efficiency

The UK's 2019 electricity generation figures are out. They're confusing, and need careful unpicking - partly because some analyses don't include Northern Ireland, and also because we now have five interconnectors so our domestic generation does not automatically equal consumption.

However, some things are clear. **Coal is now down to just 2% of UK electricity generation (compared to 40% in 2012)** and we had **83 days completely coal free** last year. Gas usage was steady after a significant drop between 2016 and 2018, and **overall our electricity generation is down 3%, equivalent to more than two new Hinkley power plants.**

Renewable generation is up from 33% in 2018 to 37% and renewables beat gas and coal generation in four whole months, including December, which is extraordinary. But almost a third of this is from biomass, mainly [wood pellets imported from forests in North America](#), and therefore *not* low carbon or renewable. **Biomass is now a shocking 11% of our total generation; wind and solar together are around 26%.**

In general, our renewable figures look poor compared to **Germany (43%) and Denmark (47%).**

The government is now backing a big expansion of off-shore wind in the 2020s, from **8 GW to 40 GW** and the National Grid is **planning to be fossil fuel free, for periods, by 2025.** But as this [Carbon Brief article](#) (first chart) shows clearly, **we need a much bigger expansion of renewables if we are to cover our retiring nuclear and remove coal entirely and stop using gas.** Our nuclear plants have already been given ten-year extensions and they are becoming unsafe. They *have* to close in the 2020s and we have nothing in sight to adequately replace them.

How do we help? Cutting our electricity waste is *essential*; sign up to a genuinely 100%

renewable tariff; invest directly in renewables (Ethex, Triodos etc); and install solar if you can. [Anesco is one company offering low carbon 'packages'](#) to homeowners - an interesting development. If anyone investigates this option, please let me know how it goes - It's not a personal recommendation.

4. Hinkley Point C - Could It Go?

Replacing our nuclear with nuclear is not an option. EDF's financial position is pretty catastrophic – it survives because it is 85% owned by the French government and Hinkley is proving to be a massive extra strain. As this [very clear blog explains](#), EDF has been unable to take up UK low-interest loans because it **had to demonstrate the technology working at Flamanville by the end of 2020 to qualify**. That most definitely isn't going to happen so it is forced to borrow at much higher rates.

Even the French government is getting exasperated. At the beginning of December, they gave EDF a month to come up with a plan on how to restore faith in the industry. The response seems to be a massive investment in a skills programme - but **that's not going to change the fundamental fact that nuclear is a ridiculously expensive - and fraught - way to generate electricity**.

5. Shell Got a Grilling - But Not Enough

Did you hear the [Today programme \(30th Dec\) guest edited by Greta Thunberg?](#) It was wonderful to hear a senior Shell executive (significantly *not* the CEO) being grilled on the figures: Shell's commitment of \$2bn/year into renewables this year against its \$25-30bn into oil and gas exploration. Wooh - did he sound grumpy!

In fact, it seems likely that [Shell will fail to meet even its own limited green targets](#). And what a shame the interview didn't go on to quiz the executive on how much Shell spends on [lobbying to keep demand weighted](#) towards oil and gas. Or whether they attend these [secretive Leadership Group wining and dining events for Tory funders?](#) Or on the fact that Shell paid *no corporate income tax* on its profits of £731 million in 2018.

Please do write to the Today programme (today@bbc.co.uk) and thank them for inviting Greta to edit, and put forward your suggestions for next Xmas. My vote is for [George Monbiot](#), [David Goulson](#) and [Benedict Macdonald](#)... Let me know yours.

6. Client Earth Takes BP to Court

If you think you've been seeing a lot of [oil industry 'greenwash' advertising](#) the last few months, you're not alone.

The good news is that Client Earth (the law firm that has taken our government to court three times over air pollution) is now pursuing BP, which continues to spend \$15bn - \$17bn per year on oil and gas exploration. Please watch this [great 2 minute video and sign the petition](#).

7. Give Half Our Farmland Back to Nature

The government's former chief scientific adviser, Sir Ian Boyd, has hit the headlines [again](#) – this time saying that [half the UK's farmland should be returned to nature](#). This would bring about a **90% decrease in livestock numbers in this country**. The aim is both carbon sequestration and the halting of our biodiversity crisis.

Many [farmers have responded angrily](#), arguing (correctly) that not all livestock farming is the same, that animals are an essential part of our land management, that we (the public) have caused much of the problematic intensification by demanding ever cheaper food.

The scientific consensus is that we *do* need to cut our meat and dairy, but it's true that **vegetables and cereals treated with chemicals and growth hormones multiple times, in dead soil, isn't great for the planet either, especially if it's flown in...**

What surprises me is that there isn't more questioning of why we farm [non-native breeds](#) that need to be housed six months of the year and fed grain. This now-standard practice creates massive amounts of [nitrous oxide from vats of collected slurry](#). (Nitrous oxide is almost 300 times as potent as carbon dioxide.)

Our goal needs to be a return to rotational, mixed farming. Having read around this subject for several years, my personal conclusion is that we should eat meat sparingly, supporting small family farms practising organic ['Pasture for Life'](#).

8. Saving Our Insects

If you want to do more to stop our decimation of species the Avon Wildlife Trust has produced an [excellent report, written by David Goulson](#), with ideas on how to protect and encourage insect life across the UK. As Goulson states, although the tonnage of pesticides used in the UK may have gone down, the toxicity has gone up. Miniscule amounts of neonicotinoids (just one part per billion in food) harms bees. An **horrific 41% of insect species are now in danger of extinction** – we are losing the web of life we depend upon but still don't fully understand. Cutting your own chemical use is fantastic, but supporting organic food production is essential if we are to tackle our 'green deserts'.

9. Other News in Brief

Here are lots of other bits of news that all deserve a paragraph of their own.

- [UK electric vehicle sales are up](#)
- Producing [almond milk](#) - a massive bee problem
- Germany is [cutting long distance train fares](#) to encourage use
- The company [Amazon has threatened to sack climate activists](#)
- Goldman Sachs, the 'vampire squid' of the financial world, has declared it will [stop financing Arctic oil exploration!](#)
- Great broadcast on [Rachel Carson, author of 'Silent Spring'](#)
- Where are we on [divestment?](#)
- Bath is hosting an [Ocean Plastic Day on 13th Jan](#)

- Octopus is looking for [volunteers to try out vehicle-to-grid technology](#)
- [Siemens is considering backing out](#) of the extremely controversial Adani coal mining project in Queensland - feel free to write on their Facebook page...
- [Dutch activists have won in court](#): the Netherlands will need to close some recently opened coal power plants
- There will be a talk from the Environment Agency and Bristol City Council Flood Risk Manager on the city's flood defences on 7th March, 10 - 1pm, Shirehampton Public Hall

- Clifton Climate Action will be hosting a talk by Dr Steve Melia on [How to Get Free Traffic Spaces in Bristol on January 23rd](#). All are welcome.

I hope you have found this interesting and most of all, I hope that it has spurred you into doing one more thing to help keep our planet stable and safe.

All good wishes, as ever!

Nikki Jones