

Hello

Here are some news items that I hope you find useful and interesting. Also, a reminder that [economist/author Chris Goodall will be speaking at the Wills Building, 30th March, on his new book 'What We Need To Do Now'](#). He'll also be repeating this talk the following day at [Chippenham Town Hall](#). Chris is a leading thinker on the economic and tech trends in our energy revolution - and all ticket sales will go to benefit [Avon Need Trees](#). I hope to see you there.

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1. 'The Loss of Corporate Influence on Energy Policy is Dangerous' says Financial Times Energy Correspondent

'Once upon a time, companies held a decisive influence over public policy. Yet, in one of the most remarkable shifts of the last decade, they have lost such sway.' So says Nick Butler, energy correspondent at the Financial Times and former oil company executive. **'Corporate expertise and the importance of the companies to national economic life in the past gave them access to the corridors of power and the strongest of voices as decisions were made.'** It's what we've all known, but it's rare to see it so clearly, in black and white. Shell, BP and EDF have been writing our energy policy.

Now they are **limited to 'defensive lobbying'**, says Butler. Well, good. One of the very big prizes of this energy revolution, and the transformed, localised, less consumerist economy we are heading towards, is that we **may just get some of our democracy back**. Won't it be good to get energy policy that is genuinely in the interests of the population? - with a long-term view that includes the environment and public health and societal welfare. That's a good thought. We just have to avoid the apocalypse first.

The fossil fuel industries have clearly become 'sunset' industries, on the way out. The Chair of the regulatory Oil and Gas Authority says they will lose all social licence to operate unless they transition quickly to renewables, and in one survey this month, 39 fund managers with \$10.2 trillion under management confirmed that oil and gas is no longer a viable investment for them. Funds worth almost [\\$14 trillion have already divested](#). According to [Bloomberg](#), since 2012 shares in the energy sector have lost substantial value while other big sectors such as health care, financials and tech have stayed steady or increased.

This does not mean that oil, gas and coal will disappear from our world fast - all our infrastructure is geared towards them - but nobody can deny that the **pace of change is accelerating at an astonishing and unpredictable rate**. **If you haven't contacted your pension scheme yet and asked where your top 10 investments are, please do - even if you can't move. Just ask the question and tell them you don't want to be invested in oil, gas or coal. The same for your insurance company.**

[2. 'I'm With The Teenage Zealot,' Says Daily Telegraph!](#)

And another arresting headline - this one from the *Daily Telegraph*. 'If it's a choice between Trump and Greta, I'm with the teenage zealot'. Pardon?? Wow...

Since the media has such a decisive role in whether / how we tackle climate change it's good to read that there is a [split in the Murdoch family](#), with James and wife challenging father Rupert and brother Lachlan over their climate denialism. As many journalists have noted, everywhere Australians face ['high frequency, low research blog posts...' from a 'monochrome' media](#), feeding them climate denying opinions.

The Murdoch's Newcorp owns [140 local and national Australian newspapers](#), many of which have been celebrating Australia's coal exports even as the fires have been burning up to the coast...

To understand just how far-reaching the fires in Australia are, [please see the map in this link](#). Fire and smoke has covered an **area the size of western Europe**. At 2 - 3 degrees of warming, this will be normal.

3. The Average UK Home is Using Less Electricity, But Gas is Steady

Ofgem's figures show that, over the last two years, the [average UK home has cut its electricity consumption - but not its gas](#). And electricity has not gone down for those who use it for heating. Heating remains our greatest challenge - we waste approximately a third of it on rooms and buildings we're not using, over-heating the ones we're in, and losing masses through our leaky roofs, walls, doors and windows... Two thirds of us don't understand our central heating systems...

One degree down on the thermostat is calculated to take 8% off the average home's bill. If you live in Bristol, consider a [CHEESE survey](#) to help you identify exactly where you're losing heat. There are many other options to consider including smart thermostats and air source heat pumps. Although Bristol Council has big plans for district heating, this will take years - which we don't have. See what you can do now.

4. The EU Gets Serious About a Carbon Tax on Imports

The EU launched its new [Green Deal](#) in December and as Nick Butler in the FT comments: 'It's bold, comprehensive and detailed... Any company or investor who thinks the notion of a carbon-free Europe is just rhetoric or public posturing needs to think again... This is a serious shift in European policy.'

One strand of the policy is a border carbon tax that will ensure that European production using clean power (eg steel, cars, textiles etc) is not undercut by production elsewhere that is cheaper, using fossil fuels. Of course, this has immediately brought the EU into conflict with the US and other major economies who see a border tax as protectionist, ie Europe simply trying to safeguard its own companies. The US has threatened to retaliate and slap tariffs on EU exports to the US. Let's hope Butler is right on this one and Europe does indeed stand firm. It will require a lot of public understanding.

Where this leaves the UK, who knows?

5. Growing Food Insecurity - We Must Cut Grain-Fed Meat

It's not just imported goods where Brexit leaves us facing in two contradictory directions. The government has just published its new Agriculture Bill which, although it

has a [big, welcome emphasis on soil restoration](#) and ‘public money for public goods’, **does not mention organic farming** and critically, there is **no mention of protection against sub-standard food imports**. It seems inevitable that food standards will be negotiable in any US trade deal and indeed, in mid-January, Chancellor Sajid Javid stated that he does not expect the UK to maintain EU standards *across the economy*. Here is the [Soil Association’s response](#). It seems to be a **mystery to everyone how we will support farmers under the Agriculture Bill if we open up our food sector to the US and other low-standard economies**.

Regardless of agricultural policy, there are **increasing concerns about food security across the world**. You will have heard about the [locusts](#) in East Africa but did you know that across the same countries [flooding is the biggest threat](#) to crops? - **where is this on our news?** While global prices rocket, it’s important that we in the Global North cut our grain consumption and that’s principally by **eating less/no grain fed meat**. Several reports this month have highlighted how [our move to chicken is causing massive deforestation](#) and inefficiently using a precious crop - but this is true of all grain-fed animals. [This good New Scientist article](#) explains how, with a **shift in diets, we can sustainably feed 10 billion**.

Scientists are also warning about the UK’s food security. The Atlantic current that brings us warm air from the Tropics has been slowing since the 1970s, and scientists warn that a [total collapse will leave the UK much colder and drier](#). This is seen as a ‘low probability event’ at the moment but everything is moving so fast, it has to be considered.

6. Plastics - What's Happening?

Bizarrely - and catastrophically - it seems that the **world’s demand for plastics went up 3.5% in 2019** - despite the big rise in public awareness. Even in the UK, only [Tesco, Waitrose and Sainsbury’s managed to marginally reduce](#) their plastic use.

Part of the problem is that **virgin plastic is too cheap**. This is because the world has an **over-supply of gas** making global gas prices very low, (plastic is made from [natural gas liquids](#)). As the oil industry has watched EVs become a reality, and gas falls from favour as a ‘bridging fuel’, it has **invested heavily in petrochemical and plastic production, particularly in the US**.

There is some good news. [China is planning to phase out all single-use plastic](#), starting this year, and the **EU is planning a levy on all non-recycled plastic with money going**

to the EU to plug the Brexit budget hole. But consumer convenience is a big argument for non-moving companies. Amazon produced 44.4 million tonnes of CO2 last year, much of which was packaging, and [Coca Cola says it will continue with plastic bottles because of customer demand...](#)

[Here's](#) one very cheering short film on how waste plastic is being turned into building blocks for schools in Cote D'Ivoire (at least, **the children will make you smile, but the plastic waste won't**) . . .

7. Indoor Air Pollution - Paediatricians Call For Regulation

It seems that we have stalemate on air pollution. Our government has lost three court cases but its answer is simply to delegate responsibility to Local Authorities, leading to a patchwork of responses with most - like Bristol - **not likely to get nitrogen dioxide within safe limits before mid/late 2020s (and particulates ignored)**. However, as mentioned in emails last year, [Nottingham has dramatically cut their air pollution with a bold work-place levy](#), and proceeds going to the city's public transport.

Similar court proceedings in Germany have ended up in the EU's top court and [prison sentences for individuals](#) are now considered possible. Another reason for leaving the EU?

Meanwhile, **indoor air pollution has gone unregulated** - although the chemicals from our furniture, paint, cleaning products etc can make indoor air highly damaging to our health. The Royal College of Paediatrics and two other medical bodies produced a [report this week calling on the government to monitor and regulate air in public buildings](#) such as schools and hospitals. If you've watched the film [Merchants of Doubt](#), you'll know what a scam fire retardant is - straight from the petrochemical industry. The report's findings are another good reason to **stop using aerosols and chemical cleaners** and choose [VOC-free, organic paint](#).

8. What Does The Government's Reaction to Flybe Tell Us?

[Green levy on air travel would pay for 100m new trees a year](#) This headline is from The Times - just another little jolt to make you realise how the world is changing . . . But at the same time, the government is proposing [cuts to air passenger duty to help Flybe](#), the failing domestic airline.

In addition, one of the first pieces of legislation to be published after the election was a [new air traffic management bill](#) - but it hardly got any coverage in the media. It will lift the limit on the number of flights airports can accommodate - through expansion and presumably by lifting restrictions on night time arrivals and departures. Would this have anything to do with the [£8 million given to the Conservatives](#) and Brexit party by the aviation industry over many years? Meanwhile, airports around the country are claiming [goals of carbon neutrality](#) with electric vehicles and [solar panels](#) - conveniently ignoring what the core of their business is . . .

9. HFCs Being Brought Into Europe Illegally

F-gases are our most potent greenhouse gases, some of them tens of thousands times more powerful than CO₂. We use them mainly in refrigeration, electrical insulation and materials such as Teflon. They were brought in to replace the CFCs that were creating a hole in our ozone layer - but we now need to get rid of them urgently. The industry has a 2030 target.

We've long known that an [illegal trade in CFCs](#) has continued and although our [ozone hole has stabilised](#), it has not gone. Now western chemical companies are complaining of an illegal trade in HFCs, coming from China. Although production is allowed, [there are quotas](#) and it seems these are being breached, depriving western companies of \$500m profits per year, money they say is needed for research into cleaner alternatives. The damage is estimated as the equivalent of another 3.5 million vehicles on Europe's roads. A report in the FT indicates that illegal HFCs are mainly being used in car servicing but it's not clear exactly how.

10. Some More Useful Links

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

- The UK's [first bi-facial, sun-tracking solar farm](#) has gone into operation, without subsidies, commissioned by Warrington Council in Cheshire;
- UK [rooftop solar installations hit one million last year](#);
- Greece just elected an [environmentalist woman as President](#);
- [Kenya is at 93% renewable](#) power (of a small capacity) but the UK just hosted a trade summit with African leaders where [90% of the energy deals were fossil fuels](#). This includes massive direct support from us for ailing oil companies such as Tullow which operates in Ghana and Kenya;
- The UK installed [only one onshore wind farm](#) last year. Please sign the [Possible petition](#);

- A recent survey showed that [82% of adults support 'carbon neutrality' goals](#) but only 44% realised this would mean driving an electric car and only 38% realised they'd have to change their heating;
 - More developments on [organic, flexible solar thin film PV](#);
 - A UN court ruling says that [climate refugees cannot be returned home](#);
 - The sale of [fossil fuel cars had dropped almost 5%](#) across the world;
 - Not flying? [This page](#) has useful links for alternative holidays, and [this article](#) gives ten UK 'green' destinations you can get to without a car

And finally, if you - like me - struggle with the personal impact of facing up to climate change, and like me you're grateful you no longer have to make that big decision about whether to have children or not, here's a [well-written article](#) by a young father. It is worth a read.

Warmest wishes

Nikki Jones