

Debate on energy security

I spoke yesterday in a Westminster Hall debate about the UK's energy security. The Minister Greg Hands confirmed that the UK is pressing ahead with new oil and gas investments as part of an effort to reduce European dependence on Russian hydrocarbons. He told us the UK is supplying gas to the continent this summer from its LNG import facilities, to help fill their storage facilities ahead of the winter. The UK of course has very little storage of its own. It had low storage because it used to be able to produce 100% of the gas we needed so the storage was the original gas fields themselves.

The Opposition parties continued to live in a make believe world where a bit more investment in windfarms would solve the problems of our energy supply. They revealed two mistakes in their thinking. They firstly failed to realise that electricity supplies a minority of our total energy needs, as we depend substantially on gas delivered direct to homes and factories for heat and power, and on petrol and diesel for much of our transport. If you wish to depend on renewables you first have to convert all vehicles to electricity and take all homes and factories off gas. They secondly would not accept that our present solar and wind power is intermittent, meaning we need to have back up generation capacity for when the wind does not blow and the sun does not shine. We are often generating a majority of our electricity from gas, wood pellets, and coal.

I reminded them that to make more wind and solar work we will need ways of storing the electrical power generated when intermittent sources do work to use on days when they do not. That may be large batteries. It might be conversion of the renewable electricity to green hydrogen for use in our boilers and vehicles. There might also be breakthroughs to allow gas or coal to be burned in power stations with carbon capture and storage systems to achieve CO2 goals.