

Filling the gap in our energy needs

I have recently asked some questions about the amount of energy we import and about the capacity we have available to generate electricity.

The government said their capacity auctions have “secured the majority of GB’s needs to meet the forecast peak demand out to 2024/5 at a low cost”. It is true it says the majority. Does that mean the minority can be covered but at less satisfactory prices, or does it mean there is still a theoretical gap? If the latter they need to auction some more requirements.

When I asked if they would keep the remaining coal stations available which had to be used recently when we had a windless period, I was told they do not plan to do so as they use the capacity auction system. I fully accept that capacity auctions can be the best way of procuring the cheapest next available power, and these are indifferent as to ways of generating. The point about asking is that they have just had to use the coal stations, so putting a ball and chain through them might not be a great idea. If there are cheaper and better ways of guaranteeing sufficient capacity then of course the coal stations could be demolished but only after better sources of reliable power have been secured.

I went on to ask if they were thinking of converting the coal stations they have just had to use to biomass, as they have done with the bulk of the capacity at Drax. They ruled that out in their response.

When I asked about substituting more UK produced gas for some of the expensive gas we are importing, including long distance LNG, I was told that they offered but “conditional support for ongoing domestic gas production”. I still do not understand why they think imported gas is better in any circumstances. Long distance gas brought in on ships must be less green given the transport involved and probably dearer.

It appears that gaining a low domestic carbon dioxide score is the main driver of policy. Policy needs to ensure sufficient UK energy capacity at affordable prices as well. Importing timber pellets or gas is not a carbon win on any sensible accounting scheme.