

Nuclear, wind and gas – the energy question

I read that the government is debating amongst itself how much additional commitment to make to new nuclear and new wind energy as it responds to the current energy crisis. As one of the few that has been advising successive governments over the last ten years of the pending energy shortage and the need for more national self sufficiency I am glad they are now actively discussing these matters. It is quite clear today we import too much and have too little spare margin to keep the lights on and the wheels of industry turning.

I have no objections to government making a substantial commitment to new nuclear . It could well make a good contribution to our needs in fifteen years time. It needs to do so understanding three crucial matters.

1. Whatever it now does nuclear will represent a considerably smaller part of our electricity output in 2030 than today because all but one of the existing stations are scheduled to close, with only one new plant coming on stream. Nuclear agreed in principle today will not be producing any power this decade.
2. To bring off this nuclear growth the UK will need to rebuild our nuclear industry and secure good intellectual property under our control. We should not want to have the Chinese or others controlling the IP and capable of using it as leverage over us.
3. The state will need to be involved in financing. A way would need to be found to ensure some competitive discipline and genuine risk for the private sector partners to avoid the taxpayer ending up with plants that are much delayed and massively over budget bankrolled by the taxpayer.

I have no objections to the government encouraging more offshore wind farms. I would accept more onshore windfarms as long as landowners and Planning authorities had a veto over locations, and could share in the revenues as compensation. The government needs to understand that whilst windfarms could be put in much more quickly than nuclear, they too will not solve our current energy shortage without tackling three problems they pose.

1. On Monday wind energy supplied just 1% of our electricity. On Saturday writing this wind was only supplying 5% of our electricity. If you are going to rely on more wind there has to be breakthroughs in storage technology to allow you to harvest the wind power when it is not needed and supply it when the wind is not blowing.
2. If you press ahead with more wind energy you need to understand that will still leave us short of total energy, as renewable electricity only accounts for around 5% of our total energy. Most energy is still needed as gas to heat our homes and fuel industry, and as petrol and diesel to fuel our trucks and cars. We cannot rely on more renewable electricity all the time most of our transport, heating and industrial energy is not electrified. It will take time for the electrical revolution to convert

every home, factory and vehicle to allow electricity to take more of the strain away from directly used fossil fuels.

3. If you encourage more renewable power you need to allow more back up power generation for the times when the wind does not blow. All of this entails more cost.