

North Devon Conservatives

t (Press) 01271 344300

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CONSERVATIVE BIOMASS AND WOOD FUELS SUMMIT 5 MAY 2009

MR PHILIP MILTON attended the Biomass and Wood Fuel Summit at Roadford Reservoir on 5 May 2009, A subject which will be of great benefit to North Devon with our dependable and higher annual rainfall, accessibility to woodlands and well-spread housing. The well attended meeting was chaired by Mr Greg Barker MP, Shadow Minister for Climate Change.

Philip chaired two of the breakout sessions entitled "Prospects for Biomass in the South-West" and "Woodland Biomass – Making it Pay".

A number of leading consultants and specialists in the alternative and renewable energy sector were present and gave presentations, along with Mr Nigel Symes, the Land Management Advisor of RSPB and Mr Stephen Green, Technology Project Manager at RegenSW.

The summit was particularly valuable. It gave opportunity for Conservative Alternative Energy Policies to be aired and for the attendees to ensure their views were heard and will be passed up the line to continue formulating final plans.

Philip, who is Prospective Member Of Parliament for the Conservatives in North Devon, was very enthusiastic about attending the summit, not only because it was a Conservative Party initiative for the South-West but because he has long been interested in the environment, conservation and alternative energy sources. Indeed, his father was way ahead of his time with his own thinking and consequently, he has a legacy of books, pamphlets, newspaper articles, etc, going back over the last forty years when his father experimented with wind energy and methane from pig manure amongst others!

Says Philip "the Conservative Party is the Party of the countryside. Ensuring such valuable resource is provided from appropriately managed woodland particularly to help heat our homes in the South-West is not only commonsense but will help us achieve reductions in our carbon footprint and help create energy security. Whilst developing this tremendous resource on our doorstep is imperative, it can never be the full answer to the problem and in keeping with Conservative Policy, we do not believe there is a single solution to the issues we face. Localising the demand and the renewables' opportunity has to be the key, empowering local communities accordingly. On top of this, I should like to see more grant-funding directed at energy saving through viable and financially effective alternative energy solutions to encourage more people to adopt them and indeed, to use economies of scale to reduce the cost of manufacturing energy-saving / generation equipment".

Later in the year a Marine Energy Summit is planned to be held in Cornwall and Philip looks forward to hearing further about that.

Thursday 4 June for Europe and Devon County: If you want to Go Green you must vote Blue!

What else has Philip Learnt?

Published and promoted by Sir Richard Peek on behalf of the NDCA, The Strand, Barnstaple, N. Devon
EX31 1EU. Tel 01271 343101

Why are most boilers and wood burners imported? He is making representations to British manufacturers to ascertain policies for expanding to meet this inevitable growth in the alternative energy industry for boilers.

Notes for Editors

Wood fuel is on our doorstep. The key points which came through from the Summit were:-

1. Few of our woodlands are managed. Managing woodland effectively improves the woodland, dramatically increases biodiversity and at the same time generates an invaluable fuel source, from coppicing, thinning and standard logging. (Under managed woodland soon develops "simple" structures not conducive to best management.)
2. Well-managed woodland increases the value of the woodland for commercial purposes.
3. Wood produced for biomass and domestic heating should be a valuable by-product from effective woodland management, generating an additional revenue stream.
4. There are over 212000 hectares of woodland in the South-West. Most of this is conifer. The typical home would require 4 tonnes of wood to heat it and its water in a year and this suggests about 2 hectares of managed woodland per house. If we are to meet the 15% EU target for alternative energy production by 2020 this would suggest 1.2 million hectares of managed woodland in the South-West – an impossible target. However, there remains the vast majority of available woodland ready for the picking. Whilst some woodland is inaccessible for harvesting processes, much is attractive for use.
5. It is imperative that wood is used for heat production and not electricity generation where the energy value of the wood is diminished dramatically. Forty per cent of electricity production is for heat only.

Myths

1. Effective management of woodland is imperative for the woodlands' own long-term survival.
2. So many bird species have diminished dramatically in numbers over the last forty years as the management has disappeared as the economics have not made any sense at all.
3. Invertebrates related to woodlands have also dropped dramatically in numbers (partly impacting bird numbers of course).
4. Bird species (specialist species particularly) suffer most from the lack of woodland management. Second on the list accounting for declines is the explosion of deer numbers in the country and the damage caused to trees / shrubs / undergrowth.
5. Plants – there has been a 36% decline in the overall number of woodland plant species and the majority of that decline is seen in the "red list" of woodland plants which need light.
6. The imperative requirements of a wood for birds / insects are particularly coppicing and thinning and added to that are woodland edges, rides and general humidity levels within woods.

7. Clearing, thinning and effective management of woodland is imperative in a symbiotic relationship between ongoing woodland management and the natural environment.
8. Decaying trees and boughs present a tremendous resource to invertebrates, etc, and about half of all insects rely upon dead / dying vegetation as a core part of the food chain. Simply removing logs for burning does not remove much in the way of nutrient from the area in that most of the nutritional value is in bark, leaves and twigs – the bulk of wood mass is pure carbon hence its energy value.
9. Decaying trees are good for fungi and developing the woodland soil as well as providing protection for nesting birds.
10. We now have the most trees in the country since the 13th century but most woodland is not managed.
11. Woodlands are drying-out and so are ponds – can we reverse this trend by effective conservation measures?
12. Since the Second World War, there has been an 82% decline in coppicing (only 20,000 hectares left in the whole country). 40% of ancient woodland has been converted to plantation.



Picture shows from left to right; Nigel Symes - Land Management Adviser, RSPB; John Tucker - Woodland Operations Director The Woodland Trust; Greg Barker MP - Shadow Minister for Climate Change; Geoffrey Cox MP for Torridge and West Devon; Stephen Green - Technology Project Manager – RegenSW; Sian Flynn - Conservative

Prospective Member of Parliament for North Cornwall; Philip Milton - Prospective
Conservative Member of Parliament for North Devon