

because ultimately winds are produced by sun. There are, of course, a number of other forms of direct and indirect solar power such as photovoltaic cells, tidal power and even biofuel; and we shall need to have recourse to all these technologies if we are to produce enough energy without destroying the planet. No one of them alone will suffice for our present needs, but a portfolio of different forms of power generation can make a significant contribution. This is why the argument that wind farms do not produce enough to make the effort worthwhile will not wash: we are on a journey to a more sustainable future, but no one pretends that we have yet arrived at the perfect solution.

The sound

I have trouble with the noise objection, because my experience is that turbines do not produce anything other than minimal sound – and I say that having camped next to a wind farm. When Shell erected a wind turbine on South Bank in London for a few months last year, no one, as far as I know, complained at the noise. Some of the early turbines, which were designed for use in Californian desert sites, did produce some noise; but modern ones have to comply with planning guidance (ETESU-R98) which ensures that noise levels at the nearest residences are very low, even in rural areas where background noise is absent.

The alternatives

What are the alternatives to generating power from wind? Continuing to burn fossil fuels is not an option, both because fossil fuels are running out and, more critically, because their combustion emits large amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere and this is one of the main causes of global warming. Should we introduce rationing or nuclear power, or bury our heads in the sand and practise extreme nimbyism?

Personally I think the idea of rationing would be worth considering. If something is in short supply, then to share it out so that everyone has enough for their needs but not enough to squander seems sound. Sadly, however, it is highly unlikely that any political party would risk electoral suicide by introducing rationing.

Nuclear power is certainly an alternative, though it is not without its problems. Several of our ageing nuclear power stations are now being de-commissioned because their safety can no longer be guaranteed; and even if they were still in pristine condition, we are nowhere near solving the problem of what to do with the

nuclear waste they produce. To store up problems for our grandchildren, or even our great-great-grandchildren, by burying dangerous detritus in land or sea or scattering it through space, is hardly a responsible way to treat the planet. For as long as I can remember we have been on the verge of nuclear fusion, which has the potential to give us unlimited nuclear power without most of the disadvantages of fission. Scientists around the world are working together in pursuit of this goal, but still it eludes us.

There is a good chance that we will achieve fusion in time, which is one good reason why we should be concentrating on wind power now. When we finally grasp the philosopher's stone, we will be able to dismantle wind turbines quickly and easily, leaving the countryside or sea bed virtually un-changed. The same can certainly not be said of other more conventional power stations.

The regions

People who live in privileged parts of the UK are sometimes surprised that they should have to consider generating power in their own area. After all, isn't that what the Midlands is for? To put up with being dirty and polluted so that the rest of us can enjoy unlimited power in our own beautiful clean areas?

As soon as this attitude is described it is obvious how unacceptable it is. We should be producing the energy we require in the area where we require it. This is both a justice issue (why should somewhere else put up with pollution to provide our power?) and an economical one (huge amounts of energy are lost transferring power from the national to the local grid). With the development of new energy generating technologies, the dream of producing power locally, wherever one lives, becomes that much more achievable.

And now . . .

In the meantime, research must go on. We have masses of unharnessed tidal and wave power and potential for generating from biomass (which, though not free of CO₂ emissions, achieves a balance with the CO₂ sequestered during growth). Also, nuclear fusion combined with hydrogen cell technology holds promise. While these other technologies come to fruition, wind farms work now and can contribute to our insatiable demand for energy.

Alwyn Marriage

Sustaining Energy

Once you knew
By the leaning thorn
Whence the wind blew.

Now you may tell
By the bone-white sail
Of the wind-machine
Turning and tossing
All day long
On the distant hill
Catching the sun
Catching the wind
Catching the eye
Commanding stillness
Not to be still.

Michael Tanner