

## **Eric Pickles favours profits\* over both rainforest destruction and local opinion in his decision to give go-ahead to W4B's plan for a palm-oil-consuming power station in Bristol (Avonmouth):**

\* & energy security?

(collation from internet by Henry Adams on 7mar11, plus some of my comments - latter in TNR)

+ a few later updates

His decision went against strong local views, also against the LibDem Council's decision, and against views of all local MPs.

His decision has even bigger implications e.g. for the possibility of palm-oil power stations being OK'd elsewhere in UK, and shows that his attitude for improving "localism" is a sham – and is yet another Tory con.

Wider context: extract from [www.biofuelwatch.org.uk](http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk) I searched website for: Palm oil power stations

Experience in Germany and Italy, where large numbers of power plants are run on biofuels, have shown that those are almost always run on palm oil, the cheapest vegetable oil. Running power stations on other types of biofuels, particularly on a large scale, has not been shown to be economically viable so far. So far, very few biofuels have been burned for electricity in the UK but, due to the generous subsidies available, at least 15 biofuel power stations have been proposed. So far, one 7MW biofuel power station is operational (though at far less than its capacity). Four power stations with a combined capacity of 93.5 MW have been granted planning permission. In each of those four applications, palm oil was listed as a feedstock. The largest of those alone, a 50 MW power station in Bristol planned by W4B, would double the amount of palm oil used in biofuels in the UK. At current rates, W4B would receive around £53 million a year in subsidies for this and a smaller, 18 MW, palm oil power station in Portland. If all those four power stations were built and run on palm oil, they would use over 140,000 tonnes a year, requiring more than 28,000 hectares of oil palm plantations (and an even larger area if other types of vegetable oil were burned). Planning applications for two more power station applications with a combined capacity of 21 MW are pending and plans for another three other plants with a combined capacity of 84.5 MW have been proposed but not yet submitted. Four biofuel power station applications (58.5 MW in total) have been rejected or withdrawn. **For a detailed list of UK biofuel power station plans, please click [here](#).**

### **This is worth listening to:**

#### **link to 7mar11 BBCR4 You&Yours on iplayer:**

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b00z58bd/You\\_and\\_Yours\\_07\\_03\\_2011/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b00z58bd/You_and_Yours_07_03_2011/)

Listen to the 7 minute part from 14.44minutes from start of programme, to 21.34m from start.

I wrote a few notes while listening:

Eric Pickles agreed to go-ahead on conditions: as long as fuel is sustainable acc to EU directive [– but I reckon what EU includes as being “sustainable” cannot be trusted acc to its track record of attitude towards biofuels such as palm oil]

Bristol City Council can still challenge the decision in the High Court [But will it? – I hope so – can we encourage it to do so?]

At the moment acc to government, sustainability is a matter for OFGEM not local planners [– but this blinkered view needs to be changed]

W4B said they have no issue with the conditions saying it will be using “sustainable waste oil” from the palm oil production process ... [yet another misuse of word “sustainable”? – likely to be greenwash]

An objector said that the plant will need palm oil from a large area “220sqkm – c.twice size of Bristol”

Energy suppliers receive subsidies for using renewable fuel but this is bad when it is for using environmentally destructive “renewables” such as biofuels e.g. palm oil.

palm oil demand in reality is not sustainable as it strongly encourages rainforest destruction and resulting in e.g. removal of carbon stored in peat and trees, etc etc.

When the LibDem-run Bristol City Council last year denied planning consent, in so doing they over-ruled the [blinkered-] advice from Bristol planners that they should only take into account effect on Bristol, not impacts elsewhere. [Obviously the planning system is fundamentally flawed in the present-day global system if it wishes to ignore impacts elsewhere (with eg climate change being of huge importance)]

[http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/press\\_releases/bristol\\_biofuels\\_11022011.html](http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/press_releases/bristol_biofuels_11022011.html)

## Press release

# Green light for destructive Bristol biofuels power plant slammed

11 February 2011

Today's decision (Friday 11 February 2011) by the Government to give the go-ahead to a biofuel-burning power station in Bristol has been slammed by Friends of the Earth. The green campaigning charity warned that the power plant will help wreck forests and our climate.

Communities and Local Government Secretary Eric Pickles gave the go-ahead to the plant today after the original application was rejected by Bristol City Council in February 2010 because of fears about its environmental impact.

Friends of the Earth's biofuels campaigner Kenneth Richter said:

"It's astonishing that the Government has overturned Bristol City Council's decision and given the green light to this planet-wrecking power plant.

"We urgently need real solutions to the UK's energy challenges - but burning palm oil biofuels on this scale will destroy wildlife-rich forests and increase climate-changing emissions.

"Developing the UK's huge green power potential and slashing energy waste are far safer for the planet, and will create thousands of new job and business opportunities."

ENDS

Notes to editors:

1. WB4, the company applying to build the power station, has said they will initially burn 90,000 tonnes of palm oil per year from Indonesia and Malaysia at the outset, and then use jatropha from India or Africa at a later date.

According to the United Nations the expansion of palm oil plantations is the premier driver of deforestation in South East Asia. Latest research shows that burning palm oil biofuel is worse for the climate than fossil fuel because of the climate impacts of the resulting deforestation.

2. The planning inspector at the August 2010 public inquiry, Mr T Cookson, ruled that evidence on the environmental and social impacts of growing biofuels were not relevant to the planning decision on whether or not the biofuel burner should go ahead. The government did not agree and asked for more evidence from objectors. They now say that only fuel that can meet "sustainability criteria"

should be burnt. Currently there are no mandatory UK standards for liquid biofuels used in power stations. The proposed EU standards are too weak and ignore many of the social and environmental impacts of biofuels.

If you're a journalist looking for press information please contact the Friends of the Earth media team on 020 7566 1649.

**Discuss "Green light for destructive Bristol biofuels power plant slammed" in our forum**

Published by Friends of the Earth Trust

Extract from:

<http://www.thisisbristol.co.uk/wherelive/avonmouth/Minister-ignored-Bristol-opposition-biofuel-power-station/article-3246346-detail/article.html> or try:

<http://www.thisisbristol.co.uk/Minister-ignored-Bristol-opposition-biofuel-power-station/story-11254468-detail/story.html>

## Minister ignored Bristol opposition to biofuel power station

Monday, February 21, 2011

### This is Bristol

THE minister for [Local Government Eric Pickles](#) allowed the appeal by W4B against [Bristol City Council](#)'s refusal of planning consent for a palm oil-powered power station in Avonmouth. This is after the council rejected it, all local MPs rejected it, the vast majority of Hallen residents (closest to the proposed power station) opposed it.

Is this what they call the "Big Society", where we are all involved in decision making at local level? I think not.

The rush for biofuels (of which palm oil is one type) is destroying land and the environment in many under-developed countries, as Western companies buy up land to grow biofuels.

People in overseas countries stop growing food in order to grow biofuels under contract to these companies.

Habitats are being destroyed for many threatened species, such as the orangutan.

Bristol City Council, our local MPs and local residents are aware of this appalling situation, why therefore has the Minister for Local Government ridden roughshod over everyone, ignored our concerns and passed the appeal?

Sue Black Hallen

Extract from:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-12439191>

12 February 2011 Last updated at 12:29

## Bristol biofuel plant given go-ahead by Eric Pickles

**Plans for a controversial biofuel plant in Bristol have been given the go-ahead by the government.**

An application by W4B to build the power station at Avonmouth was refused by city councillors in February 2010.

But Eric Pickles, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government has approved it on appeal. The plant, which will be fuelled initially by palm oil, has been attacked by critics who blame demand for the oil for rainforest destruction.

City planners had told the council last year to make its decision according to material planning considerations, not emotions.

But councillors went against the advice and voted 6-2 against it.

The council has six weeks in which it can challenge Mr Pickles' decision through the High Court.

W4B has said the plant would be capable of powering 25,000 homes.

### 'Current controversy'

Mr Pickles allowed the appeal, subject to a number of conditions which include only using bioliquid that satisfies sustainability criteria.

He said in his report that "given the current controversy about bioliquids...the council and other objectors acted reasonably in wanting to test evidence on this matter".

Mr Pickles added that the development would not have an "unacceptable effect" on the character of the area.

Rob Palgrave, director of the pressure group Biofuelwatch, said: "We are very disappointed with the outcome of the planning inquiry and Eric Pickles' subsequent decision.

"An awful lot of people put an awful lot of time into this campaign both in Bristol and around the country and it attracted some international attention, in particular from countries where the fuel for this power station will be produced, like Indonesia and Malaysia."

City planners had told the council last year to make its decision according to material planning considerations, not emotions.

But councillors went against advice from planners and voted 6-2 against it.

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## More on This Story

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### Related Stories

- [Biofuel plant decision is delayed](#) 07 DECEMBER 2010, BRISTOL
- [Biofuel power plant plan refused](#) 24 FEBRUARY 2010, BRISTOL
- [Complaints against biofuel plant](#) 15 FEBRUARY 2010, BRISTOL

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### Related Internet links

- [W4B](#)
- [Bristol City Council](#)
- [Department for Communities and Local Government](#)
- [biofuelwatch](#)

Extract from:

<http://www.bristol247.com/2011/02/11/government-gives-go-ahead-for-controversial-avonmouth-biofuel-power-plant/>

## *Government gives go-ahead for controversial Avonmouth biofuel power plant*

**24-7**

Posted by [The Editor](#) on Feb 11th, 2011 and filed under [BUSINESS](#), [Energy](#), [FEATURED](#).

The Government has today granted planning permission for W4B Bristol's controversial biofuel power station in Avonmouth.

In issuing his decision, Eric Pickles stated that the sustainability of the plant was required to meet European standards. However, the decision letter expresses confidence that the fuels used will meet sustainability criteria set out in the Government's renewable obligation certificate financial support system.

The decision also dismisses pleas by Bristol City Council, which refused permission for the plant in 2009, and other interested parties for last summer's public inquiry to be reopened to allow further debate on the source and sustainability of the proposed fuels.

Biofuels are under intense scrutiny worldwide because of the impact that growing plants for fuel in tropical areas have on local environments and livelihoods. Studies have concluded that the overall impact of burning liquid biofuels on global climate can be much worse than the fossil fuels they are intended to replace.

Bristol City Council refused planning permission in February 2010 for the 49MW power station because councillors believe imported biofuels like palm oil and jatropha are not sustainable and have no place in a city aspiring to be a Green Capital. W4B subsequently appealed.

In the appeal inquiry in August 2010, the Planning Inspector ruled that only local impacts should be considered by the planning system, and refused to hear evidence about the effects of producing biofuels in other countries.

In the 12 months since Bristol Council's decision though, the price of globally traded palm oil has risen significantly – like most food commodities – and there is now a question mark over the financial viability of the scheme because of fuel cost escalation.

Mike Birkin, from Bristol Friends of the Earth, said: “Bristol councillors rightly took a wider view of W4B's proposal to burn imported biofuels at Avonmouth and said ‘No’. We are very disappointed that the planning system still allows central government to overturn democratically sound local decisions, despite all the talk of ‘localism’.”

Robert Palgrave of Biofuelwatch added: “If we want to have any hope of avoiding the worst impacts of climate change then we need drastic cuts in energy use – not oil crops grown in vast monocultures to produce so-called green electricity. If this development goes ahead, despite apparently being uneconomic, it will increase rather than cut global greenhouse gas emissions, and hasten the end of tropical rainforests.”

Extract from:

[http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/general/news/stories/2011/feb11/17feb11/170211\\_7](http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/general/news/stories/2011/feb11/17feb11/170211_7)

## **News round-up 17 February 2011**

### **Pickles says fuel is material consideration for bio-mass burner**

Plans for a £70m biomass power station proposed by green energy company W4B for a site in Avonmouth, opposed by Bristol City Council, has been approved on appeal by Communities Secretary Eric Pickles who decided that the sustainability of the bio-fuel to be used was a material consideration.

“As a general rule, the Secretary of State does not consider that the sustainability, and, in so far as it is relevant to sustainability, the geographical source of fuels used to fuel non-renewable generating stations are material considerations for planning purposes.

“However, he considers that the sustainability of bioliquids (i.e. liquid fuels derived from biomass and not used for transport) is a material consideration which is relevant to his decision,” the minister's decision letter said.

He allowed the appeal, in line with the recommendation of the planning inspector who heard the appeal inquiry, but added stricter conditions over the sustainability of the fuel to be used.

The project generated significant opposition because of concern plans to use sustainable palm oil to fuel its power turbines.

[Read the decision letter and inspector's report.](#)

Ironically – there is an article on the same webpage entitled: “**Localism Bill makes progress**“ !!!!

The only form of localism in Eric Pickles's decision is that any impacts of a planning decision beyond “local” should be ignored – such as global impacts elsewhere such as destruction of rainforests, loss of tree/peat carbon sink loss, species loss, social community loss, ..... When it comes to the crunch, Tories obviously rate big business profits above the environment and local opinion every time. – comment by HA

Also:

<http://www.bristolfoe.org.uk/pics/PDFS/infoe-winter10.pdf> - see pp8-9

George Monbiot's blog:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/georgemonbiot/2011/feb/10/bristol-biofuels-plant-planning-permission>

## **Bristol's biofuels plant must be refused planning permission**

Burning biofuels in power stations is environmental vandalism on a staggering scale – both in terms of emissions and habitat loss

Demand for biofuels such as this palm oil plantation in Indonesia is leading to forests being cleared, peat wetland exposed and carbon released. Photograph: Reuters

Today, the government will make what should be a very simple decision: whether or not to give planning permission to a power station in Bristol burning [biofuels](#). The answer must be no.

Burning biofuels in cars is mad enough, as it causes more environmental destruction – in terms of both [carbon emissions](#) and the loss of habitats – than petroleum. [I've been campaigning against it since 2004](#). But at least in this case it's a response to a limited set of options: finding a green substitute for liquid fossil fuels is a tough call (which is why [electric cars](#) are the best way forward).

Burning biofuels in power stations is environmental vandalism on a staggering scale. The operators, such as [W4B](#) which hopes to run the Bristol plant, have two options. They could burn the cheapest available vegetable oils, which means palm and soya oil. These are also the most destructive: driving massive deforestation in [both south-east Asia](#) and the Amazon. Growing palm oil produces so much CO<sub>2</sub> that it makes crude oil look like carrot juice. A [paper published in Science](#) suggests that when (as they are in Indonesia and Malaysia), tropical forests growing on peaty soils are cleared to plant palm oil, it takes around 840 years for any carbon savings from burning this oil rather than petroleum to catch up with the emissions caused by planting it.

Alternatively, the operators could burn cheaper oils, such as rapeseed. In doing so, they cause two problems. The first, [by increasing demand, is to raise world food prices](#). Such power stations, in other words, burn food which could otherwise have kept people alive. It's decadence of the worst kind. The second is to create a vacuum in the world edible oils market, which is filled by ... palm and soya oil. Whichever kind of vegetable oil you burn, you'll end up trashing the rainforests of Indonesia, Malaysia and Brazil.

What makes this so frustrating is that there's no shortage of ways to generate electricity. Renewables, nuclear and gas are all 100 times greener than burning biofuels. Even – God help us – coal burning is a lot less damaging than this idiocy. Yet somehow [the government still classes burning edible oils to make electricity as green, and issues renewables obligations certificates for it](#) – which is the only reason why it's happening.

In fact, [you get twice as many certificates for producing a given amount of electricity from vegetable oil as you do by generating it from wind](#), even though it's far less green, and far less renewable. This situation is entirely an artefact of government policy and it's time the government brought it to an end. The planning secretary, Eric Pickles, can at least make a small start today, by turning the Bristol plant down.

[monbiot.com](#)