

27 02 2019

Hi

It seems that there were particular problems with the layout of the last email, so I'm doing this one in Word and cutting and pasting. Just in case it still isn't clear on your device, I am **also attaching a Word copy - you may well find the layout more readable**. Hope that works. Feel free to let me know...

Here's some news I hope you find interesting.

1. **Fossil fuel car sales drop worldwide**
2. Why **cutting plastics** is relevant to climate change
3. **New houses shouldn't have gas boilers**
4. Heating and the Internet of Things
5. Where does your energy company get its electricity?
6. **Is capitalism the problem?**
7. Carrots or sticks? **Starbucks gives an insight....**
8. The Greens in Germany are on the rise – the media just can't work out why...
9. **Suing Shell**
10. **Two hammer blows for coal in Australia**
11. European Trading Scheme for carbon may end coal in Europe quicker than expected

1. There is **cheering news on car sales**. It seems that [last year, for the first time, fossil fuel car sales dropped in all major markets – the EU, the US and China...](#) Extraordinary. Multiple sources are predicting that **2019 will be the tipping point**, with greatly increased sales of electric vehicles expected everywhere. It seems that if you plan to own your car for four years or more, an [electric car is now the cheapest option](#) in the UK. For a look at which [cars are the most popular across Europe](#), this article is useful. And for real enthusiasts, there's the [Fully Charged show](#) 7th – 9th June.

2. It is sometimes argued that the **plastics campaign is a bit of a distraction from the main issue – climate change**. But an article in the FT last week, written by a former executive at BP, pointed out that the move away from plastics is likely to have a much bigger impact on oil production than has been acknowledged. **Petrochemicals are expected to be half of the growth in demand up to 2040**, and two thirds of petrochemicals go to plastic production. The author estimates that half of that demand growth could be cut by the anti-plastics drive, and since it is confidence in growth that spurs investment, this could seriously impact the industry.

This [You and Yours from Radio 4](#) gives a good update on **why we're still using so**

much 'virgin' rather than recycled plastic, and why we're actually *importing* plastic to recycle... (Article starts 18 minutes 12 seconds into the programme.)

3. About **14% of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions are from our heating, and last year that went up 1%**. The problem is that most of us rely on gas (methane) and we have a well-developed gas grid across most of the country which we don't want to abandon. (But I was shocked to find out recently that **almost half of Cornwall is oil heated!**).

In the Netherlands, the government has already said that no new houses will get gas connections, and our Committee on Climate Change has recommended the same for the UK. Cookers should be electric with induction hobs, and heating should be through heat pumps. And of course, we need to get serious about insulation. It seems that Osborne's 2015 decision to scrap the Zero Carbon Homes policy is adding about £200 to the bills of new home owners – as well as the increased emissions.

One option to decarbonise our heating is to use hydrogen in our gas network instead of methane. Various trials have been conducted and it seems we are now looking at using 100% hydrogen in some industrial areas and 20% in the domestic grid. To go above 20% and achieve full decarbonisation we will need to modify our boilers and cookers at home, and we will need to source the hydrogen as clean 'power to gas' from electrolysed water. (The alternative is to crack methane which leaves carbon to be stored). **We don't have the excess renewables to do this at the moment and seem a long way off achieving this at the scale needed. Meanwhile the gas industry is itching to get us to go down the 'dirty' hydrogen route...** Hydrogen isn't going to be a solution for some while so I guess it is back to cutting our use – we waste a third of our heating...

4. Some utility companies are looking at innovative heating solutions. Centrica has developed a solar, battery and heat-pump package for customers; and Bristol Energy Company is trialling an app that gives you room-by-room control of your heating. It seems a large part of the answer is the '**Internet of Things**' in which all our gadgets, including our heating, are linked. Part of the Bristol Energy trial, for example, involves using 'smart air bricks' that minimise the problem of needing ventilation while maximising heat retention, *and* provide data to landlords and the energy company.

The problem for many of us – myself included – is that we don't understand the implications of this 'valuable personal data' that companies will sell as well as use (How? To whom?). Nor the security implications of viruses being able to attack our gadgets at home... I hadn't realised till recently that the smart thermostat company, Nest, is actually owned by Google – and that Google is in competition with Amazon

[to penetrate our homes with 'smart' technology](#).... If you want to understand these issues better, [here's a good 'Bottom Line' on Big Data](#), and [here's one on the Internet of Things](#) (get to the end for a good discussion on security and privacy).

5. If you haven't yet **changed your fuel supplier to 100% renewable**, you might find this [link](#) useful. The source of power is given for each utility company so you can compare. You can see also **why big companies don't want to go green – they own the coal, gas and nuclear power stations...**

However, it's worth noting that **not all '100% green' suppliers are equal** as some buy their renewable certificates on a secondary market and therefore signing up with them doesn't necessarily incentivise more renewables. Three that definitely source directly are **Green Energy UK, Bristol Energy Company and Good Energy**.

6. **Is capitalism the real problem when it comes to climate change? – 'The Real Story'** on the World Service has just broadcast an excellent discussion on this – really worth a listen, very easy listening.

I would also highly recommend [Kevin Anderson's latest lecture](#) in Oxford – the first minute has dodgy sound but hang on in there.... Is inequality the problem? Yes, Kevin Anderson makes a **convincing argument that we don't solve climate change without solving this problem**.

7. **Unfortunately, most of us are among the top ten per cent for whom behaviour change is essential**. Although the 'super-rich' may be completely out of touch with their consumption, we're all pretty wasteful.... So the question is, do we respond best to the stick or a carrot, or both?

Starbucks' reaction to the plastic crisis gives an interesting insight into human behaviour. They originally offered a **50p discount to anyone bringing their own cup – but that had almost no impact**, so they reduced it to 25p. Still no impact. So they introduced a **5p penalty – and that did produce a reaction!** It seems threats and penalties achieve more than inducements.... Something for our policy makers to

consider...

8. The political news we hear from Germany is all about the rise of the far right (AFD) and the decline of Angela Merkel's conservatives, but in fact the **Greens have been doing incredibly well – achieving 20% in recent elections and 25% in national opinion polls**. They are now in coalition in one state, and the main opposition in another.

This World Service [‘The Real Story’](#) seeks to explain their rise – but **hardly mentions climate change.....** It's bizarre. Maybe it really is the Greens' stance on immigration that has won them popularity but I suspect that this is still our media and pundits, analysing politics within very conventional parameters, unable to consider the new factor – climate change - that is really worrying the public.

9. Although we don't hear it on our news, it seems the [Germans are pretty upset with our government's plans to allow Shell to abandon its rigs](#) in the North Sea. And in the Netherlands, Friends of the Earth is suing the company – Royal *Dutch* Shell – for its part in causing climate change. As the website points out, we can all do our bit to cut fossil fuel use, but we do need these companies to stop their exploration and drilling.... You can sign this [petition](#) to show your support.
10. In the last email I wrote about the [extreme weather and destruction Australia](#) has experienced in the last few months – and that Prime Minister Morrison was **refusing to discuss climate change**. Well, the government has finally launched a 'climate change plan' that acknowledges the aim of meeting Australia's Paris commitment – progress of a sort! But the **plan only involves paying landowners \$1.4bn** over the next decade to cut their greenhouse gas emissions – but there are **no plans for their coal power production or mining sectors.....** It is being roundly criticised as 'Business as usual'...

But a couple of hammer blows have just landed. First, the Australian [courts have rejected an appeal for a new coal mine](#) because of the 'dire consequences' for the **environment and climate change**. This has big implications for the wider sector. Second, **Glencore – one of the world's largest mining and trading companies, and**

most 'bullish' on coal – has just announced a 15 year cap on its coal production. It's not enough, of course, but this came about from **intense investor pressure** – including the Church of England – and it has sent shock waves through the industry. Glencore has a big presence in Australia.

- 11. Coal is, of course, under pressure everywhere** – and in Europe the **price of carbon is on the rise, finally**. The trading system which hasn't worked well since the financial crash is now kicking in and the [carbon price has recently been up to €25/tonne](#) – that's beginning to be a meaningful price. One hedge fund, Landsdowne Partners, is reported to be betting on the carbon price going up to €50/tonne within three years as industry wakes up to the fact that **climate change 'is not a political thing, it's real'...** They predict the total collapse of coal in Europe within three years... Expect a lot of push-back from other industries (airlines, steel, car manufacturing etc) and consumers as prices rise.

Obviously nobody has told Aaron Banks this and a [proposal for a new open-cast coal mine in Northumberland](#) is back in UK courts, having been dismissed by the Home Secretary. David Attenborough has said it would be 'shameful' if this is allowed go ahead. You can [support the campaign on this link](#).

I hope you have found this news email useful but **if you do want to come off the list, please just email me.**

A date for your diary is **Extinction Rebellion's 'Global Rebellion Week' beginning 15th April.**

Many thanks and warmest wishes

Nikki