

# The Forum 21 Flier



Towards a Sustainable  
West Somerset

VOLUME 4. ISSUE 1

JANUARY 2012

<http://www.forum21.org.uk>

The Forum 21 website is updated regularly and includes a link to the F21 Constitution and to the Energy Efficiency Pack as well as a downloadable membership form and a Library of Forum 21 articles which have appeared in the *News Trader*. If you have any items for the website please e-mail them to Marlene at [forum21@btinternet.com](mailto:forum21@btinternet.com)

## IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

It is with great regret that we have to announce a charge for posting future copies of our newsletter. For fifteen years we have been able to absorb the costs, but we are living in hard times with decreasing income and increasing costs. We now have to pay nearly £2 for posting a newsletter 3 times a year. Multiply this by the 200 we post each time and it's easy to see that the cost is becoming unworkable. We have therefore decided to ask for a £5 annual subscription for posted newsletters. We will continue to send newsletters by e-mail without charge. So if you have an e-mail address please let us know. This is the easiest way for us to send newsletters. Whether on our postal or e-mail list, you might wish to become a member of Forum 21 by completing an application form and sending it with your newsletter subscription, if appropriate, to our co-ordinator, the address is on page 4. A membership form can also be downloaded from our website at [www.west-somerset-forum21.org.uk](http://www.west-somerset-forum21.org.uk)

### New Planning Policies and Our West Somerset Environment

A Forum for community groups, local politicians and planning officers to debate and explore the potential opportunities and barriers of new **Localism Act** and **National Planning Policy Framework** for those who are working on green and sustainability initiatives in Western Somerset and Exmoor.

**Key Speakers from Local Authorities, National Trust and Somerset Wildlife Trust**

**Venue: Methodist Church Hall, The Avenue, Minehead**

**Date: 22nd February 7.00pm**

*Organised and independently facilitated by West Somerset Forum 21*

**Anyone wanting more information please e-mail [forum21@btinternet.com](mailto:forum21@btinternet.com)**

## Community Woodland

Forum 21 is currently looking into creating a Community Woodland in the Minehead area. The not-for-profit model of woodland management has become more common, as a source of timber for wood-fuel, sustaining wildlife habitats, and for recreational purposes.

As a result of both public demand and policy shifts in Scotland, England and Wales, the opportunities for civil society and community groups to own forests and woodlands, or contribute to decisions about their management, are now significant.

Community woodlands now number about 700 across Great Britain.

Rapidly changing times and government policies are allowing community groups to get involved in managing woodlands in their area, the benefits and possibilities to create a closer bond with a local woodland and for it to work for the local community.

Would you, as Forum 21 member and local resident, be interested in getting involved in the creation of a Community Woodland project in this area? The Forum 21 Steering Group is in talks which could bring about the formation of a Community Woodland in this area. If you are interested we would like to talk to you. Please contact Tim Greenland on 07971 580057.

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Newsletter Costs	1
Dates for Your Diary	1
New Planning Policies and our West Somerset Environment	1
Jump in Fuel Poverty Figures	2
The PV Debacle	2
Borrowing an Energy Monitor	2
The Surviving Winter Project	3
Grant Applications	3
Forum 21 and Hinkley Point	4
Community Energy Working Group – TMA and Forum 21	4

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

**2012**

**February**

**11th Seed Swap and Seed Potato Sale**  
10am-12 noon Methodist Hall, Minehead, organised by Transition Minehead and Alcombe  
Info contact: 01643 709478 or e-mail [tma2009@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:tma2009@hotmail.co.uk)

**22nd New Planning Policies and Our West Somerset Environment: Forum 21 public meeting** Minehead Methodist Church, 7.00pm. More information on the enclosed flyer and on page 1 of this newsletter.

**March**

**WWF's Earth Hour 2012** is on Saturday 31st March at 8.30pm Copy this into your browser address bar to get involved: <http://earthhour.wwf.org.uk>

**Most Sundays: Sedgemoor Conservation Volunteers:** see [www.sedgemoor.f9.co.uk](http://www.sedgemoor.f9.co.uk)

## Jump in Fuel Poverty Figures

CSE predicts that more than 10 million people will be struggling to keep warm this winter. Energy price rises will force a further 1.2m households into fuel poverty.

Fuel price increases will average at 17% for gas and 11% for electricity across the main five suppliers, according to the Centre for Sustainable Energy in Bristol. This means increases of around £150 in energy bills. And it will mean that the number of UK households in fuel poverty will go up from 5.1 million to 6.3 million. This is a shocking figure.

But it has serious implications for West Somerset, where fuel poverty figures are one of the highest in the country. We know fuel poverty already affects more than three thousand people in the district, the majority of them elderly. This is why the Surviving Winter project (*see page 3*) is so important and why Forum 21 is committed to working with it.

You can read the testimonies of people struggling with fuel poverty in the CSE report 'You Just Have to Get By'. Download from [www.cse.org.uk/have-to-get-by](http://www.cse.org.uk/have-to-get-by)

## The PV Debacle

By now you will probably have heard that Friends of the Earth have won their legal challenge against the government in the High Court on December 21<sup>st</sup>. The judge ruled that the government's plans to cut support for solar PV were 'legally flawed'. The government proposed cutting the amount of cash-back - known as feed-in tariffs - for solar projects installed after 12 December. But this date was 11 days before the official consultation on the plans closed. The ruling means the Government must provide more money for feed-in tariffs and also support solar projects in schools and social housing.

Like many others, Forum 21 was appalled by the way the government changed the goalposts for the feed in tariff, and brought forward the date for schemes to be completed - all before their consultation on the plans ended. While there are arguably grounds for cutting the tariff for future installations, enormous damage was done to the growing solar industry by changing the date, potentially jeopardising thousands of jobs. It's just what we don't need at this time of rising unemployment.

What next? The DECC website states:

*"While the judgement allows the campaigners to seek judicial review of the consultation, it is only the first stage of a potentially lengthy legal battle and they will need to persuade the court that DECC has acted illegally. Since the decision, [DECC has announced its intention to appeal](#) which will only cast further doubt over the level and timing of the FITs projects will obtain under the scheme. In particular, owners of installations commissioned since 12 December will need to wait for DECC's response to the consultation before they can be sure of the FITs they will receive. The response was originally due in January 2012 but the threat of impending court action may delay the publication or temper the content of the response."* So we wait and see.

## Borrowing an Energy Monitor

Do you want to know exactly how much electricity your house is using every moment? And how much it is costing you? Then you need an energy monitor. Local libraries have a small number to lend, called OWLS. Forum 21 also has a number it lends to people who ask for a free energy survey. This is just one way of helping to save energy in your home. Surveys show that homes with a monitor save up to 30% of their electricity just by knowing exactly

## The Surviving Winter Project

Earlier this year, we were approached by the Somerset Community Foundation asking if we could help them with this project. They knew of our energy work and thought we might be able to help them find pensioners in West Somerset who were struggling to keep warm in winter.

The Foundation had a good idea last winter. It advertised to ask pensioners who didn't need their government winter fuel payment to donate it so that it could be used to help those pensioners who did. The request was very successful (and has since been copied by similar Foundations around the country). The donation has been promoted again this year, and we've been told that more money has been donated so far this year than last, in spite of the winter fuel allowance being cut from £250 to £200.

Forum 21 began to work on the project in July with extensive promotion around the area, and by September applications for the grant were beginning to come in. By Christmas we had had 55 applications. We have to visit each applicant to make an assessment of their income and eligibility for the grant; by the end of December we had made 26 visits, with the rest planned for January, and have been able to make grants to 22 of them, in time for Christmas.

When members of the energy team make the visits, they also carry out an energy survey of the property, and as a result we have been able to refer some of the pensioners for free insulation and help them with energy saving advice. We've realised that these very needy people are not those we normally meet in our other energy activities, and who would not usually be asking for surveys. So being involved in this project has given us a real and unexpected opportunity to get in touch with these people. Partly because of this work, Forum 21 made more referrals this autumn for the Council's Warm Streets insulation grants than any other group in Somerset.

The project is still active. Donations are still being received by the Foundation, and applications for the grant are still being sought. So if you can promote this scheme through any of your networks we would be grateful. More details of the scheme, with promotional fliers, are on our website. There are still plenty of needy people in West Somerset for whom the grant could make a real difference. These two comments from recipients say it all:

*Your help has alleviated so much stress for me. Please accept my gratitude.' 'Thank you. This money does mean we can have our heating on more now in the colder days for longer.'*

## Grant Applications

Forum 21 is involved in three applications for grants.

1. We have applied to the NEA (National Energy Action) Community Footprint Award to take our Energy Advice Centre around rural communities in West Somerset. We will know the result in mid-January.
2. A consortium of local environmental and community groups is applying, with Forum 21, for a Big Lottery grant: Communities Living Sustainably would provide up to one million over five years for a successful community. It's competitive, of course, and the deadline is tight.
3. The National Park is bidding for another competitive grant: the Local Energy Assessment Fund, with an even tighter deadline. If the bid is successful, Forum 21 would be involved in carrying out some of the activities.



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Thank you for reading,  
we hope to see you at  
some of the  
forthcoming events!

**Forum 21 is an environmental group in West Somerset working with West Somerset Council and other partners to help avoid climate change and to promote sustainability.**

### Forum 21 and Hinkley Point

The planning application for two new reactors at Hinkley Point has been submitted by EdF to the Government's Infrastructure Planning Committee. If approved, this development will have an enormous effect on our area for years to come and will affect us all. It is also hugely controversial. So we think it would be useful to say something about the Forum's position on all this.

Forum 21 is not a specifically anti-nuclear group. But it is an environmental group, many - perhaps most - of whose members believe that the government policy to build eight new nuclear power stations is misconceived and mistaken. In 2010 the Forum steering group discussed this policy and a position paper was agreed. You can read this paper on our website [www.west-somerset-forum21.org.uk/Forum%2021%20nuclear%20position%20statement.doc](http://www.west-somerset-forum21.org.uk/Forum%2021%20nuclear%20position%20statement.doc)

It states that Forum 21 does not believe that building new nuclear is the way to go ahead, for several reasons: economic, safety, and the problem of waste. And it explains how inflexible are large centralised power stations; they are at odds with the smaller distributed networks that will be needed for local power produced from renewables. Instead, with a major commitment to energy efficiency measures and support for renewable energy production, we would not need the immense cost and disruption of a Hinkley C. We also support the work of other groups that are concerned about the effect on biodiversity in the extensive area set aside for the reactors and associated works.

For all these reasons we believe we should keep our supporters informed about the progress of the application, and at the same time, provide information about the activities of other groups, like Stop Hinkley, which have views about nuclear policy. We would welcome readers' comments on this issue.

### Community Energy Working Group – TMA and Forum 21

Co-ordinator: Mark Ogden; members: Alec Gannon, Bill Butcher, Chris Smith, Joe Hull. This working group has been tasked with exploring the possibility of setting up a community energy scheme in the Minehead / Western Somerset area. The objective is to find the best way of engaging the community in shared ownership of locally sited renewable energy installations.

Action may involve the formation of a locally owned co-operative style entity, such as a Community Interest Company (CIC), or an Industrial and Provident Society (IPS) in which residents can take up shares. IPS shareholder's liability is limited to the extent of their investment, and this investment is regarded as social as well as financial. There are two very recent examples of successful IPS launches in the Somerset area. The most local is Brendon Energy (BE), based in Wiveliscombe, which held its first shareholders meeting on 1st December. BE has completed its first project, installing 123 solar pv panels (29KW) on the new Children's Centre in the town. BE has acknowledged help and advice received from the other IPS, Bath and West Community Energy (BWCE). In this case the community enterprise has already completed 12 projects, installing solar pv panels mainly on school and farm buildings in the Bath and North East Somerset district, as well as north and west Wiltshire. Although both initiatives have identified solar pv as the preferred first investment, they are each actively looking at the possibilities and practicalities of other forms of renewable energy. The TMA/Forum 21 community energy working group is holding its inaugural meeting in the first week of January.