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1. Positive news from PLACE, the public concern group on powerline renewal in the Peak District National Park. "Recent meetings with National Grid (NG) over the summer and early autumn have given a sense that a positive collaboration is now taking place. NG has agreed to undertake our additions to their study into the options for renewal of the Stalybridge to Woodhead 400kV overhead transmission line which runs through the Peak District National Park." There may be prospects for surface trenching, with minimal ground disruption, instead of overhead lines through a critical area. For more:

<http://www.p-l-a-c-e.org/News.htm>

2. An interesting legal ruling has occurred in France, on a telecoms mast and possible health risks. The ruling of a Nanterre court was in favour of the plaintiffs (residents) and required the mast to be taken down. The ruling was confirmed and further reinforced by the Versailles Court of Appeal, the first time that an appeal court has upheld a ruling against a phone mast. An English translation of the Judgement of the Versailles Court of Appeal on 4 Feb 2009 is available at

<http://www.next-up.org/pages/Justice.php#1>

The essence of the ruling seems to be recognition of the infliction on residents of the possible health risk, even though it is an uncertain risk. The Court took into account the existence of reputable science challenging safety, the uncertainty of the science, the failure of the phone company to take practical precautions within its means, precautionary practice elsewhere, and distress caused to the residents.

Such a ruling might create some precedent in principle for powerlines, if the company fails to take reasonable measures to avoid or reduce exposures, compared with practice elsewhere and in other countries.

3. Jonathan Porritt has highlighted the question of population growth and global sustainability. More than ten years ago he gave an interesting lecture at Sunderland University where he identified three dimensions to sustainability: population growth, per capita consumption and technological fixes. At that time he concluded that per capita consumption was strongly dominant, and the answer was to reduce it. Now at last he seems to realise that population growth is a vital factor, and it needs to be discussed. That's not to suppose silly solutions, like "bedroom police". Many factors affect population growth, with incentives and disincentives. It needs discussing.

<http://www.optimumpopulationtrust.org/>

4. I have little faith in the WHO population models and suggestions that, following some temporary western observations, global population will level off around 9 billion by mid-century. There are too many uncertainties in such models of human

behaviour, and pressure for survival tends to fill up spare capacity of the lowest quality. Even at 9 billion, with increased mobility and economic growth, life would be uncomfortably compressed – it is already! Sure, 9 billion or 90 billion could be accommodated somehow, but who wants to live like a battery hen?

5. The forthcoming National Policy Statement on electricity transmission (news266) might be modelled on or adapted from last year's New Zealand version.

<http://www.mfe.govt.nz/rma/central/transmission/index.html>

That's a short statement (4 pages) which seeks to impose national policy on local communities to secure large-scale expansion of the overhead grid to meet the needs of renewable generation. For example:

(from Policy 11) "Local authorities must consult with the operator of the national grid, to identify an appropriate buffer corridor within which it can be expected that sensitive activities will generally not be provided for in plans and/or given resource consent."

(from Policy 9): "Provisions dealing with electric and magnetic fields associated with the electricity transmission network must be based on" [ICNIRP and WHO].

There is no policy on undergrounding.

God help us!

6. A UK government nuclear "consultation map" of January 2009

<http://www.berr.gov.uk/files/file49850.pdf>

mentions (at item 17) the forthcoming DECC consultations on transmission networks (news266):

"The overarching Energy NPS will set the overall framework to guide the IPC in considering applications for development consent for nationally significant energy infrastructure projects. The Electricity Networks NPS will guide the IPC in considering applications for large-scale changes to the electricity transmission network (e.g. reinforcements to power lines, new connections to the Grid etc.)."

7. The above "consultation map" says that powerlines arising from new nuclear power stations can be considered by the Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC) along with the power stations. That is better than the sneaky way Energy Minister and then Enron Director John Wakeham consented the Teesside Power station in 1989, slipping it through without the affected local authorities knowing.

8. Also released January 2009 is a large (126-pages) DECC document "Towards a nuclear National Policy Statement":

<http://www.berr.gov.uk/files/file49865.pdf>

9. A Worcester North Proposed Growth Area has been announced for consultation before a decision in October:

http://www.swjcs.org/html/worcester_north.html

It appears that a site for 500 homes is proposed around and under a 132kV powerline. Given the SAGE report, the case for precaution and the improvement on cost ratio for undergrounding, this may be a good candidate for burying the powerline.

10. A third wind farm has been mooted for Hambleton District, following the Bullamoor and the (rejected for now) Seamer proposals. The latest, for 9 turbines at Welbury and Appleton Wiske, has had a Scoping Report prior to an EIA and

Application. Objections cannot be received until an Application is made, probably towards the autumn. The turbines appear to be very close to homes and villages. The affected Parish Councils have held well-attended meetings which were strongly opposed.

11. The EU Scientific Committee on Emerging and Newly Identified Health Risks (SCENIHR) provided an Opinion on EMFs and health in 2007, generally along the lines of WHO. It has adopted an updated Opinion on 19 January 2009, which recognises the seriousness of the new research findings on Alzheimer's disease (news250, 263, 264), calling for more research, but which is unchanged in its overall assessment.

http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_risk/committees/04_scenihr/midday_en.htm

Full Opinion:

http://ec.europa.eu/health/ph_risk/committees/04_scenihr/docs/scenihr_o_022.pdf

12. The DH sponsored stakeholder group SAGE had written to the Health Minister Dawn Primarola regretting the government's failure to respond to the SAGE Report last year as promised. Dawn Primarola has responded in a letter of 3rd February saying the meeting between the three government departments involved (DH, DECC and DCLG) was postponed at short notice. She and her ministerial colleagues are "keen that this Government Response should be completed as quickly as possible". No further date was given.