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1. People in Nailsea are concerned about NG's proposed 60km 400kV Hinckley Point powerline, writes local resident John Mash. He says this would be a totally new route through open, green countryside (the last green space remaining between Backwell and Nailsea) and would cross a local lake/nature reserve which attracts a significant population of large and small waterfowl.

<http://www.nationalgrid.com/uk/Electricity/MajorProjects/HinkleyConnection/>

2. National Grid's major projects page lists just the two projects at present: Hinckley Point and Bramford-Twinstead (news280).

<http://www.nationalgrid.com/uk/Electricity/MajorProjects/>

3. "The go-ahead for a power line from Beaulieu to Denny is expected to be given by the Scottish government in the next few weeks, BBC Scotland understands." Will it be at the favourite "bury bad news" time around Christmas Eve?

http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/em/fr/-/1/low/scotland/highlands_and_islands/8325105.stm

4. The Beaulieu-Denny decision should be an opportunity for the Scottish government to reflect the genuine concern and damaging impact, especially to Scotland's unique landscapes and heritage, in the costs of protection by requiring long sections to be buried. That would be the "polluter pays" principle at work. By attaching such large penalties to overhead lines, less damaging alternatives such as undersea routes become even more competitive. Strategic undersea alternatives on a UK scale were never part of this application, but are emerging late in UK-wide thinking (news283).

http://www.ensg.gov.uk/assets/1696-01-ensg_vision2020.pdf

5. Stour Valley Underground, a group objecting to the proposed 400kV Bramford-Twinstead line (news280) has developed its web site. It is considering Danish style pylons and undergrounding in key areas.

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

6. Message from Safe Electricity for Armagh and Tyrone: Due to increased demand (and the postal strikes!) the SEAT prize fund draw has been rescheduled for Friday 27th November 2009. Buying a ticket will support this group opposing pylons.

<http://www.seactiongroup.com/>

7. Ireland's national planning body, An Bord Pleanála, has 27-10-09 over-ruled their inspectors' recommendations and approved plans for the 110kV lines in west Donegal, under Ireland's new fast-track Strategic Infrastructure processes (news272,

266 etc). The proposal was in two main parts: a 68km Binbane-Letterkenny line between existing substations and a 33km spur to a new substation near the west coast. The inspectors recommended rejecting the 33km spur “on the grounds of unacceptable negative impacts on visual amenity”, as we had sought. It looks like the politics of wind farms over-riding a proper balanced assessment.

<http://www.pleanala.ie/casenum/va0003>

8. Relations between UK government and science have been top of the news 31-10-09 with the dismissal of Professor David Nutt from a drugs advisory committee. HPA chairman Professor Colin Blakemore suggests the dismissal will deter scientists from accepting advisory positions. But there are structural problems underlying this tension, as my short letter (submitted) to the Times outlines (APPENDIX A). It may be scientifically arguable that alcohol and tobacco are more harmful than cannabis. Yet prohibition ran into political difficulties last century. De-criminalisation of all “recreational” drugs, including heroin and cocaine, may be arguable in social science, taking account of costs of crime and other impacts. Yet such a step also has political dimensions. Blurring the distinction between scientific and political assessment invites conflict, perhaps even more so with drugs than with EMF.

APPENDIX A Drugs classification: a structural problem

Drug classes A, B and C are defined under the Misuse of Drugs Act according to penalty. That is legal and political.

Other classifications might be by medical harm (physical science) or by social impact (social science). Mixing the three blurs the distinction between expert advice and political decision.

It might help to have separate, openly published, medical and social classifications by expert advisers. Then let politicians decide openly what is possible and acceptable.

The terms of reference of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs cover measures to be taken. That is political, not just scientific, advice. The terms are limited to advising ministers, not the public. Transparency then is part of the problem.

In speaking out, Professor David Nutt exposes structural faults in the system.
