

## Save the Vale Association takes a new look at the challenge of renewable energy

*Campbell Dunford, chairman of the Save the Vale Association, explains how what started as a one-issue action group has become an association dedicated to protecting the Blackmore Vale and encouraging a wider understanding of the whole subject of fossil fuels and renewable energy.*

BACK in early 2003, rumours began circulating in the tiny villages at the head of the Blackmore Vale, that giant wind turbines were to be built on the ridge behind Cucklington and looming over the several other communities that cling to that escarpment. Incredulity turned to doubt and then, in the absence of any official word, to panic, anger and fear. Yet it was true.

The rest is now familiar. Local communities met, organised themselves into an action group and resisted what they saw as a ruinous threat to their beloved Vale. And, for the time being they have been successful in that battle, which was closely followed and reported in these pages.

But to oppose, you must also understand, and it is neither sensible nor responsible to reject anything on the grounds that you just don't like it. That is especially so when we are being told that the production of green energy is vital if we are to avoid the Armageddon of global warming. So the group, aptly called Save the Vale, set out to become informed about the threats, the realities and possible courses of action.

From the passionate anger that welled up when the people of the Blackmore Vale and far beyond realised what was proposed grew a common hunger for knowledge and a real wish to be part of the solution. Such energy and goodwill should not be wasted, so in response, Save the Vale, which by this time had accumulated very extensive academic and engineering contacts, and a large body of reliable, factual information, agreed to broaden itself into a full Association, with a remit to preserve, to protect

and to promote the well-being of the Blackmore Vale.

An important part of this remit is to share the knowledge they now have and to inform and improve our environment. Save the Vale was uniquely lucky, in its original formation, to attract an eclectic array of backgrounds and talents, and it is truly humbling to discover the skills and knowledge that exist quietly in our villages - scientists, engineers, lawyers, journalists, bankers, teachers, property developers, artists and volunteers from all possible walks of life, all working with a common purpose and passion.

From their research and the links they established across the UK and into Germany, Denmark and Holland, they learned a great deal which took them far beyond the single issue of wind turbines. The fact of climate change is given and, although the issue is far from agreed, it seems sensible that greenhouse gas emissions should be curtailed. Even though the entire UK's contribution to any savings can only be trivial, that is not a reason not to act. Less politically fashionable among the chattering classes, who are threatening naysayers with global warming in similar terms used to describe Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction, but much more immediately relevant to everyday life, is the whole issue of energy supply. The United Kingdom is running out of power. We are already net importers of all the fossil fuels - coal, oil and gas, and are expected to be dependant upon imported gas for 75% of our

needs by about 2015. In addition, by 2020 more than 70% of our generating capacity will have been shut down, leaving a huge gap to be filled. Electricity prices are already rising, as are gas prices, to the extent that the government, caught unawares, has ordered a parliamentary enquiry. The only new power stations planned are for gas - more or less guaranteeing that supplies of a commodity on which we shall be helplessly dependant will continue to cost more. These changes are happening at a much faster rate than forecast and our electricity consumption is rising - not helped by our profligate waste of power. Per capita we use twice as much electricity in our economy as Japan, for example. No renewable, and especially not a random supplier such as wind, will ever fill this gap.

To help people understand what individual homes and households can do about saving and generating energy, and what different methods are available now, Save the Vale have organised a Renewable Energy Forum, to be held in Wincanton Memorial Hall on Saturday 12th March. The Forum will be free and open to all and will feature exhibitors of a wide range of environmentally friendly ways of generating energy, some of which can be used in individual homes. There will also be presentations on all the main aspects of renewable energy, wind, solar, biofuels, photovoltaic, mini hydro etc., and a biofuel powered car on display.

Speakers will include local interests, a contribution from SSDC, and contributions from national experts. Local school children will be invited to take part in an essay writing competition\*, in the form of a magazine article on saving energy. The event will be opened and addressed by Noel Edmonds, who is Chairman of The Renewable Energy Foundation. **Campbell Dunford**

*\*Full details of the essay competition will appear in next week's Blackmore Vale and Fosse Way Magazines.*