



This week the House of Commons is debating amendments to the Government's Energy Bill before it shunts off to the House of Lords to continue its tortuous route to the statute book. The debate was opened by the chair of the Energy and Climate Change Committee, Tim Yeo.

Mr Yeo, together with a colleague on the committee, proposed an amendment to commit to the decarbonisation of electricity generation by 2030, rather than leave it to the whim of the Energy Secretary in 2016.

The logic behind the amendment, to quote Mr Yeo's constituency website, was that: "Delaying this decision for three years leaves investors wondering whether the UK is really serious about decarbonising its electricity sector. Concerns have been heightened by the publication of the Gas Generation Strategy that includes a scenario which envisages the revising upwards of the Fourth Carbon Budget and construction of up to 37GW of new gas-fired power stations."

Predictably, however, the amendment was voted down. Less predictably, it was voted down by only 290 votes to 267. It was one of the narrowest majorities in the Commons for a whipped vote in the Parliament and one in which both Tories and LibDems voted against. One wonders who is getting the whipping.

Andy Atkins, the executive director of Friends of the Earth, is quoted in The Guardian as saying: "The Liberal Democrat leadership's green credibility has been left in tatters after siding with the Conservatives to back a headlong dash for gas."

Now, what credibility would that be, Andy?

- The dash for gas has already started – it is manifest in the EU’s decision to award enormous prizes to the gas companies. The race to start extracting shale gas has also intensified, with the BBC seemingly seduced by the size of the prize. The national news bulletin on 3 June was breathless at the figures being bandied about. Locally, in the North West, the story was about the new kid on the block, so to speak, in the form of IGas, which is exploring for shale gas in Cheshire. How much of that is below the feet of George Osborne’s constituents remains to be seen.
- Fish have been in the news as well this week. The Irish Government claimed a major triumph for the agreement on discards during its Presidency of the EU. The issue that has dogged the policy for decades and caused so much outrage among the nation’s TV chefs has, it seems, been cracked. At the same time the Environment Agency was encouraging people to go angling. I’m thinking of offering permits for part of my garden that is still under water, despite the fact it hasn’t actually rained for nearly a week.
- Still in the local area, Environment UK’s sister publication, Ecclesiastical and Heritage World has news of progress in the installation of a ground source heating system in Manchester Cathedral. The underfloor system installed in the 1950s started spring leaks some years ago and the new system will make the cathedral one of the greenest in the UK.

Chris Stokes