



The upset to the weather continues to be a major topic of conversation. After returning to the UK in the middle of an – albeit shortlived – heatwave a couple of weeks ago, I had the spectacular sight today of a lightning strike in the valley just a few hundred metres from where I am sitting. The storm is also dumping a few millimetres of rain onto the garden that has only just dried out.

That was shortly before I logged onto Twitter to see what's going on and was informed of a "yellow warning" for rain in London and the South East. Nice to know the Met Office is on the ball.

And my Christmas cactus – that I rescued from certain death at a local supermarket five-and-a-half years ago – has decided to flower!

- One of the biggest restoration and rejuvenation projects in the North West is the Manchester Town Hall extension transformation. As well as restoring elements of the fabric of this strangely beautiful building and the circular Central Library next to it, the project will be implementing measures to shrink its footprint, including the installation of a combined cooling, heating and power plant.

The plant is the solution to a target set by Manchester City Council to reduce energy consumption by the two buildings by 20% and carbon emissions by 41%.

According to main contractor Laing O'Rourke: "Given the heritage nature of the buildings and city centre location this presented a significant challenge to Laing O'Rourke and their design

team as the obvious choices for renewable energy were not achievable. After ruling out the usual selection of green technologies such as solar, wind and ground source energy the team turned their attentions to a combined cooling and heating power generation solution.”

- With fracking for shale gas about to commence not a million miles from here, despite widespread opposition from local residents, there is a disturbing report in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America (PNAS). The report is of research carried out on water from wells near to the fracking plant at Marcellus in Pennsylvania, which found “increased stray gas abundance”.

Indeed, the burghers of St Anne’s – a solidly conventional middle-class lot – were out in force to oppose the practice, citing just such as fear – that even the possibility of contamination could spell disaster for both the agriculture and tourism of the Fylde Coast.

- Environmental and climate science is characterised by ‘uncertainty’. Nobody has all the answers – indeed anyone who says they know for sure precisely what is going to happen is either a liar or a fool. The public, and politicians in particular, have difficulty in dealing with uncertainty, however. They want answers to questions when quite often they don’t really know what the question is. Persuading the lay community to embrace uncertainty as a GOOD THING is the subject of a publication from Sense About Science, the charity that looks to make scientific research accessible to ordinary people (me!).

In a review on the website Carbon Brief, Kate Pond writes: “In the case of climate change, confusion arises when media reports focus on areas of uncertainty without also explaining the areas where scientists have reached high levels of certainty, or suggest that scientific uncertainty throws all of climate science into doubt.”

What also happens, of course, is that people who are well aware of what is being said deliberately misconstrue it in order to promote their own denial of the science. Wonder if ‘uncertainty consultant’ should be a listing in the Environmental Directory.

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