

**Biofuelwatch Briefing: 'The Reality Project' on the Isle of Wight**  
**- Local and Global Threats -**

**What is proposed?**

Energy Company Real Ventures wants to build a large 49.9 megawatt biomass plant at Stag Lane, Newport, Isle of Wight. This will threaten the unique natural environment of the Isle of Wight by polluting the River Medina, and with the construction of a 75m chimney. It will also worsen air quality. The plant's massive scale wood combustion will worsen global deforestation and cause an increase in carbon emissions. It is bad news both locally and globally.



*Map of proposed site: Stag Lane, OS reference*

**What can you do?**

The plant can only be stopped if enough local residents object and raise their concerns with their local Councillors.

**What are the main concerns?**

**1. A threat to protected species & habitats**



*From this... the Medina Estuary SSSI*



*...To this? (Biomass plant: Steven's Croft, Scotland)*

The site will have a significant impact on **three unique protected conservation areas**:

- **Medina Estuary** Site of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI). The Medina Estuary supports internationally significant over-wintering migratory populations of wildfowl and wading birds, and important breeding populations of waders, gulls and terns.
- **Solent and Southampton Water** European Special Protection Area (SPA and Ramsar)
- **Solent Maritime** Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

The proposed development poses a **significant risk to these protected areas in the following ways**:

- **A new dock will destroy the bank of the River Medina:** Real Ventures proposes to **build a dock directly on the Medina Estuary SSSI** to unload and transport the fuel, which will arrive in shiploads down the River Medina. This will probably involve dredging and will clearly have a significant impact on the protected estuary.
- **Warm water discharged from the plant threatens fish:** Real Ventures may use water from the River Medina to cool the power station from overheating. The water re-released into the ocean, depending on the technology used, may be up to 10 degrees warmer than the regular temperatures. Such a sudden dramatic increase in temperature, called '**Thermal Shock**' can instantly kill fish and other aquatic species. Furthermore, cooling water intake can kill fish larvae and other small marine life.
- **Biomass pollutes.** Precious natural ecosystems are particularly sensitive to pollution, such as nitrogen and ammonia emitted from the power stations., Levels of **ammonia** at the site are already **90% of legal limits for this kind of protected area and additional ammonia which will be emitted by such a power station thus poses a threat to the plants that live there.**
- **Protected species on the site and surrounding areas:** The site itself contains unique species of fauna which include: the **adder**, the **grass snake**, **slow worms**, common **lizards**, **scrub-nesting birds** such as whitethroat and lesser whitethroat , and green & common sandpipers. A spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* was sighted in 2009. This is at risk of extinction, as listed on the IUCN red list. The surrounding areas are vitally important feeding grounds for wintering birds such as grey plover, oystercatcher and wigeon.

The Isle of Wight Council is under a **legal obligation to protect the sites**. According to EU law, which the UK is obliged to implement, authorities must 'avoid, in the special areas of conservation, the deterioration of natural habitats and the habitats of species as well as disturbance of the species for which the areas have been designated.'

Real Ventures indicates that it will 'take account' of the fact that these are designated areas. But the law states that it is not a question of just weighing up economic gain versus ecological imperatives: the environment **must** come first in the case of SACs and SPAs. According to EU law, planning authorities must refuse to grant planning permission if there is any doubt that the development will have a significant effect on a protected conservation area.

## 2. A threat to health

Even biomass power stations which burn 'clean' rather than chemically treated wood only emit around 75 different pollutants. Those include nitrogen dioxide and small particulates which are linked to respiratory and heart disease and heavy metals and dioxins linked to cancer and birth defects. For some of those pollutants, such as very small particulates (PM2.5), there are no 'safe levels'. Real Ventures state that to mitigate the damage they will consider raising the height of the chimney, or making sure to use the least toxic type of wood available.

### **3. Biomass power stations cause more global deforestation and human rights abuses.**

If approved, the plant will burn hundreds of thousands of tonnes of wood each year, more than almost any existing biomass power station in Europe. Despite the green image of biomass, the wood supplied to the plant will predominantly be virgin wood from forests. Recently, demand for wood for biomass in the UK has skyrocketed, and outstripped supply. The biomass proposals across the UK, including the Reality Project, will require a total of more than 60 million tonnes per year. The UK's total wood production is less than 10 million tonnes of wood per year. The effect of this is that the world's forest supplies will decline even more rapidly as a result of the growing biomass industry and that ever more forests and other ecosystems will be turned into fast-growing monoculture tree plantations which is disastrous for biodiversity, soils, water supplies and very often for local communities. From Brazil to Indonesia to Mozambique, communities are already being evicted, sometimes violently, and are seeing their livelihoods and land destroyed for industrial tree plantations and the demand for UK biomass power stations will make the situation even worse. Although biomass is touted as green, importing wood from abroad cannot be said to be a sustainable sourcing practice. The RSPB has recently joined warnings against burning imported wood in the UK.

### **4. Biomass causes increased carbon emissions**

Real Ventures states that its plant will save 190,000 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub> per year. But this is simply not true. Although it is perceived that biomass is an environmentally friendly source of energy, because trees which release carbon dioxide when they are burned can always be regrown, this is misleading. In fact, burning wood produces an immediate release of carbon into the atmosphere, which can take between 20-30, and in some cases, hundreds of years to be replaced through forest regrowth – that's if forests are allowed to regrow rather than being turned into industrial plantations. Forests and grasslands play a vital role in regulating the climate and destroying them for bioenergy makes it less likely for the climate to stabilise itself in future. Biomass power stations emit on average 50% more CO<sub>2</sub> than coal power stations through their chimneys.

### **5. The plant will be inefficient**

Biomass power stations are generally only 30% (or less) efficient. However, EU legislation calls on governments to promote at least 70% efficiency for burning biomass. Although Real Ventures speaks about possibilities for supplying heat as well as electricity, they have not published any concrete plans nor formally committed themselves to doing so. Virtually all energy companies now speak about a 'heat potential' yet few supply heat from power plants.



*As well as harming the local environment, using biomass on a large scale puts pressure on the world's dwindling forest supplies*

### **The bottom line: Profit, Not people or the environment**

It is extremely profitable for developers to go down the route of biomass. They are eligible for subsidies through the form of Renewable Obligation Certificates. If Real Ventures gets the go ahead, they will be able to claim around **£23 million in money** every year, paid through a national increase on our electricity bills (Renewable Obligation Certificates). With this amount of money available, it is no wonder that they are investing time and effort into claiming that the plant is green.

***We must resist the greenwash and make sure that Councillors are aware that the plant will be devastating . Please write to your Councillor today.***

- To find out who your Councillor is, see: <http://www.iwight.com/councillor/>
- As soon as the application has been published, object to it and encouraged others to do the same.
- To share ideas of what to do about Real Ventures plans and how to campaign on this, please contact [biofuelwatch@ymail.com](mailto:biofuelwatch@ymail.com)

*Biofuelwatch is a not-for-profit environmental and social justice organisation working to raise awareness of the negative impacts of industrial biofuels and bioenergy on biodiversity, human rights, food sovereignty and climate change. Based in UK and US, we work with national and international partners to expose and oppose the social and environmental damages resulting from bioenergy-driven increase demand for industrial agriculture and forestry monocultures.*

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