Bad Biofuels in Battersea

Battersea Power Station biofuel power plant.

What are the plans?

In 2010, the previous owners of Battersea Power Station, REO, obtained outline planning consent for wider development that included a biofuel powered 10 MW Combined Cooling, Heat and Power Plant. Outline planning consent is granted when a local authority agrees with the overall nature and scale of a development, but has not yet seen any Environmental Impact Assessment or similar documents and is thus not in a position to decide whether the development should go ahead. This outline planning consent automatically transferred to the new owners of Battersea Power Station, a Malaysian consortium which includes one of the largest and most contentious palm oil companies worldwide, Sime Darby.

The new owners are expected to apply for full planning permission for the biofuel plant later this year.

REO had said that they wanted to run the biofuel plant on used cooking oil and not burn any palm oil, although several groups sent an Open Letter at the time, warning about competition for used cooking oil for biofuels and pointing out that similar plants built in Germany and Italy have all ended up running on palm oil.

Unlike REO, Sime Darby as owners of Battersea Power Station will have no qualms about burning palm oil. They are looking for new markets for palm oil from their plantations in South-east Asia and West Africa.

A biofuel power plant in Battersea can thus be expected to burn palm oil, with serious impacts on climate change, tropical forests, biodiversity and the rights and livelihoods of local communities displaced by oil palm plantations. For local people in Wandsworth and Westminster, a biofuel power plant will mean even more air pollution and risks of respiratory and heart disease.

Palm Oil

Scientific evidence shows that burning bio-liquid fuels, including palm oil, generally releases more greenhouse gases than burning fossil fuels.[i]

According to the UN Environment Programme, oil palm plantations have been the main cause of permanent rainforest loss in both Indonesia and Malaysia.[ii] Palm oil is threatening the survival of the orangutan and many other critically endangered species while destroying the livelihoods of local communities, including Indigenous Peoples. Indonesia is the world's third largest emitter of greenhouse gases after the US and China, with 80% of these emissions coming from deforestation. It has a striking 1.5% annual deforestation rate and has set aside an area four fifths the size of the UK for monoculture oil palm plantations. In Sumatra alone four times as much land has been converted to oil palm production as there is habitat left for orangutans. Other critically endangered species include the Sumatran tiger, Sumatran elephant

and Sumatran rhinoceros. Oil palm plantations are increasingly being expanded outside South-east Asia, too, including in West Africa, causing rainforest destruction and land-grabbing in ever more countries. This includes Liberia, where Sime Darby is a leading palm oil investor.

Burning palm oil for energy is the very opposite of 'low carbon'. Not only are vast amounts of carbon emitted from cutting down rainforests for oil palm plantations but in Indonesia and Malaysia, new oil palm plantations are increasingly being established in peatlands. According to Wetlands International, scientific evidence shows that:

"*Draining peat triggers oxidation of the organic, carbon-dense soil. Under tropical conditions, this leads to yearly emissions of 86 tonnes of carbon dioxide per hectare. With harvests of 2-6 tonnes of palm oil per hectare, palm oil is causing carbon dioxide emissions 10 times the magnitude of fossil fuels*."

Any palm oil which is directly linked to deforestation and peatland destruction should not, in theory, be eligible for renewable energy subsidies, which are paid through the Renewables Obligation (for electricity) and the Renewable Heat Incentive. In practice, however, companies simply have to get a consultant of their own choice to say that their palm oil (or other biofuels) does not come from plantations for which forests or peatlands have been destroyed since 2008. Those claims are not verified or audited – and the recent horsemeat and other food scandals show how entirely unreliable sourcing rules are without independent verification. Furthermore, as virtually all scientists agree, the indirect impacts of biofuels can be at least as serious as the direct ones. In this case, Sime Darby could use palm oil from their older plantations, where forests or peatlands were destroyed before 2008, get it classed as 'sustainable biofuels' and then destroy more forests and peatlands elsewhere to grow palm oil for their other customers.

Finally, under EU and UK rules, human rights violations and hunger are ignored in biofuel standards. Even palm oil from plantations where people have been murdered for resisting land-grabs can lawfully attract subsidies as a 'sustainable biofuel'!

Assertions of sustainable sourcing are thus unenforceable, unverified and obscure the huge issue that *any* expansion of the demand for palm oil (and other biofuels) drives catastrophic deforestation, carbon emissions and human rights abuses.

Prof John Beddington, until very recently the government's Chief Scientific Advisor, said, "*Cutting down rainforest to produce biofuel crops is profoundly stupid*."

Sime Darby – Pushing Palm Oil.

Sime Darby is a Malaysia based conglomerate that owns a 40% stake in the Battersea Power Station development. It is one of the world's largest producers of palm oil with an output of 2.4m tonnes a year, 6% of global production.

According to evidence by the investigative news organisation Sarawak Report:"*Sime Darby is the world's largest palm oil producer and it owns vast plantations across Borneo in areas that used to be pristine jungle. Few of its plantations had been certified as being sustainable. The company has also recently caused outrage and been forced to pay fines in Africa, where it is currently attempting to expand its operations, again at the expense of native people.*"[iii]

According to evidence by Friends of the Earth[iv], Sime Darby has illegally deforested thousands of hectares of Protected (Rain)forest in Kalimantan (Indonesian Borneo) for oil palm plantations.

Sime Darby openly admits to having oil palm plantations on peatlands in Malaysian Borneo (Sarawak) and on the Malaysian mainland.[v] In Sarawak, the government announced plans in 2010 to expand oil palm plantations by 2 million hectares, 1.5 million of them in 'native customary lands', i.e. rainforests on which indigenous forest-dependent communities rely. Sime Darby, as one of the main investors in the region, was reported to be interested in this 'opportunity' to expand plantations.[vi]

Sime Darby's oil palm plantations in Liberia have come under heavy criticism from local, national and international organisations, including Friends of the Earth.[vii]

In 2009, Sime Darby took over 311,000 hectares of Liberia for palm oil plantation. According to one report by Friends of the Earth:

"*The contracts for land concessions signed by Sime Darby and the Liberian Government violate several Human Rights principles in conventions ratified by the Liberian Government as well as principles enshrined in Liberian Law*."

A public declaration by affected community members in Liberia states:
"*Our communities were not consulted prior to the government signing the contracts with oil palm companies. Despite not having been given the opportunity to grant our consent to the contracts, it is we who will experience the effects of oil palm plantations in Liberia. The contracts are not transparent, with unrealistic terms and conditions, and do not respect our rights to Free, Prior, and Informed Consent. We are the rightful owners of the land where our communities have made our farms, raised our children, and practiced our traditions. We rely on the land that was given to foreign companies in the contracts to grow our food, hunt, drink water, build our homes, heal our sick, celebrate our culture, and make our livelihoods. As owners of the land, we should have been involved in the negotiations with oil palm companies before the contracts were signed*."[viii]

According to Kenneth Richter, biofuels campaigner with Friends of the Earth: *"Sime Darby's business empire is built on industrial palm oil plantations, one of the main drivers of deforestation in South East Asia according to the United Nations. Now they are seeking to expand their business globally. In Liberia their acquisition of land totalling more than 1.5 million acres for oil palm and rubber plantations jeopardizes land rights of local populations, threatens the livelihoods and well-being of communities, and puts the future viability of one of the world's most significant biodiversity hotspots into doubt."*

Pollution

Burning biofuels in diesel engines emits significant quantities of nitrous oxides, most of which turn into harmful nitrogen dioxide (NO2), as well as small particulates (PM10, which includes the particularly small PM2.5 particulates). Those air emissions are far higher than ones from burning gas – they are similar to those from burning fossil diesel and thus equate to thousands more diesel cars being added to local streets.

Additionally, biofuels would be delivered by trucks, which would add to already heavy local traffic and traffic emissions.

The whole of Wandsworth and Westminster - parts of which lie in the prevailing wind direction from Battersea Power Station - have been declared Air Quality Management Areas because legal limits for both NO2 and small particulates are being regularly exceeded. It is important to note that the legal limit for small particulates has been set much higher than what the World Health Organisation recommends. WHO also state there is *no safe level* for the smallest

particulates.

The closest NO2 measurements taken in Wandsworth are at the Newton Preparatory School, Battersea Park Road. There, annual legal NO2 limits are already being exceeded. Installing a biofuel plant at Battersea would further increase those levels, with serious health implications for children and staff at the school and residents living nearby.

Legal NO2 limits are being exceeded across most of Westminster, too. According to a report published by the Mayor of London, Westminster residents have a 48% greater risk of dying due to exposure to small particulates than the average person in the UK - that risk is higher than anywhere else in London, except in the City of London.[ix] In Wandsworth, too, the risk of dying sooner due to air pollution from small particulates is higher than the UK average causing more deaths than obesity or alcohol.[x]

In April 2013 the Supreme Court confirmed in a ruling that the UK government is in breach of EU Air Quality Directives in respect of NO2 levels in 16 different areas – including London. This judgement makes enforcement action more likely – yet adding a large new source of air pollutants from diesel generators burning biofuels in Battersea will make it even more difficult for Wandsworth and Westminster Councils to bring pollution levels down in future.[xi]

The Battersea Power Station site would be ideal for investing in real renewable energy, such as solar thermal or solar PV, yet no such investments are proposed by the current owners.

What can you do about these plans?

A strong local campaign is urgently needed to prevent this Biofuel Power Plant in Battersea and to help protect local peoples' health as well as rainforests and communities in South-east Asia and West Africa. We must oppose these false solutions to climate change. Please help us urgently build this campaign.

A biofuel plant in Ealing was refused planning permission on appeal by the planning inspectorate and the secretary of state because of the air quality impacts. This decision followed a passionate local campaign that really educated local councillors about the issues and the relevant planning issues.

To help build a campaign against a biofuel plant in Battersea, please email biofuelwatch@ymail.com or phone Duncan Law, 07958 635181.

---

i European Environment Agency Scientific Committee (2011) SC Opinion on Greenhouse Gas Accounting in Relation to Bioenergy: http://www.eea.europa.eu/about-us/governance/scientific-committee/sc-opinions/opinions-on-scientific-issues/sc-opinion-on-greenhousegas/view ; North Energy (2010) Comparison of the Greenhouse Gas Benefits Resulting From Use of Vegetable Oils for Electricity, Heat, Transport and Industrial Purposes, available from http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/NNFCC-Vegetable-Oil-Study-v061-March-2010.pdf

ii http://www.unep.org/publications/search/pub_details_s.asp?ID=3920

iii http://www.redd-monitor.org/2012/02/07/can-redd-save-the-forests-of-sarawak/

iv "'Sustainable' palm oil driving deforestation. Biofuel crops, indirect land use change and emissions", Friends of the Earth Europe, 2010, http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/briefings/iluc_palm_oil.pdf

v http://www.simed arbyplantation.com/Achievements.aspx

vi http://news.mongabay.com/2010/1130-ncr_sarawak_palm_oil.html and http://news.mongabay.com/2010/1213-sarawak_oil_palm.html

vii http://www.foeeurope.org/sites/default/files/news/foee_simedarby_factsheet_010213.pdf and www.foei.org/simedarby

viii http://www.forestpeoples.org/topics/palm-oil-rspo/news/2012/12/statement-and-declaration-affected-community-members-sime-darby-an

ix http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Air%20Quality%20for%20Public%20Health%20Professionals%20-%20City%20of%20Westminster.pdf

x http://www.wandsworthguardian.co.uk/news/9608465.Pollution_kills_more_than_alcoholism_and_obesity/

xi http://www.clientearth.org/201305012170/news/press-releases/supreme-court-rules-uk-government-is-breaking-air-pollution-laws-2170