

MY WAY OF THINKING

MARK CARWARDINE

The conservationist discusses Britain's new fossil fuel projects, from airports to coal mines, and invites your thoughts on the subject.

I'm exasperated by the number of naive and self-serving politicians who argue that new carbon-intensive industries 'will boost the local economy'. Everyone from ministers to local councillors have been giving the green light to so many ill-considered schemes it's hard to believe they've even heard of the climate crisis.

Take the new £150m terminal at Leeds Bradford Airport. It's all very well for the director of the Northern Powerhouse Partnership to embellish the green credentials of the building itself, but what about the proposed increase in annual capacity from four million passengers to seven million? As one campaigner pointed out, it's like cutting down the Amazon rainforest with an environmentally friendly axe. That extra capacity would require at least 15,000 more flights every year, resulting in a 75 per cent increase in emissions over the next 10 years. Yet Leeds City Council approved the expansion, claiming that carbon emissions from international flights "should be primarily tackled at a national level".

Leeds Bradford is a test case that could open the floodgates. If all current airport expansion plans were approved, UK capacity could surge from 297 million passengers in 2019 to 532 million by 2050. Even the Government's own climate advisors warn that this would be a very bad idea.

Then there was the decision to continue exploring the North Sea for new oil and gas reserves. We should have followed Denmark's lead (the EU's largest oil producer has banned all new exploration licences) but, instead, ministers promised to devise a "climate

compatibility test" to determine whether drilling applications are "compatible with the UK's climate change objectives". My guess is that no oil or gas exploration would be compatible with any climate change objectives.

Another shocking project under review is the construction of the UK's first deep coal mine in 30 years. The already infamous colliery, in Cumbria, is scheduled to extract up to 2.78m tonnes of coking coal a year, for use in steel production.

Advocates argue that it will create hundreds of jobs and that we need coking coal to produce steel. But this particular coal is too sulphurous to be used to make steel in Britain, so about 85 per cent of it will have to be exported. (That's another win for the Government because, in theory, it can still meet its 'net zero' targets by depositing all those greenhouse gas

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emissions on other nations' books.)

Yet again, the Government failed to intervene, with the brilliant excuse that it was a 'local issue'. You can imagine the joy at 10 Downing Street, though: "It's perfect – we'll win the votes of working-class northerners, in Labour's historical heartland, and make the greens see red at the same time". Under pressure from the USA, it has been forced to do a U-turn. But who knows what will happen – the company responsible is now taking legal action.

If every government made similarly dreadful decisions, the world would be toast. But it's particularly bad for ours to be so out of touch in the year we are hosting COP26.

Besides, polluting megaprojects are not 'necessary evils'. There are other ways of boosting local economies, and alternative technologies. It is technically possible to produce steel with hydrogen instead of coal, for example, so we should be supporting efforts to make this a commercial reality. And, as Joe Biden points out, jobs come with state investment in green technologies.

In the meantime, the House of Commons should provide compulsory evening classes for politicians who are shamelessly ignorant about climate change. They can start by writing an essay titled: 'Why tackling climate change trumps every single greenhouse gas-producing business enterprise that passes across my desk'. 📧

MARK CARWARDINE is a frustrated and frank conservationist.

WHAT DO YOU THINK? If you want to support Mark in his views or shoot him down in flames, email wildlifeletters@immediate.co.uk



A new terminal is set for take off at Leeds Bradford.