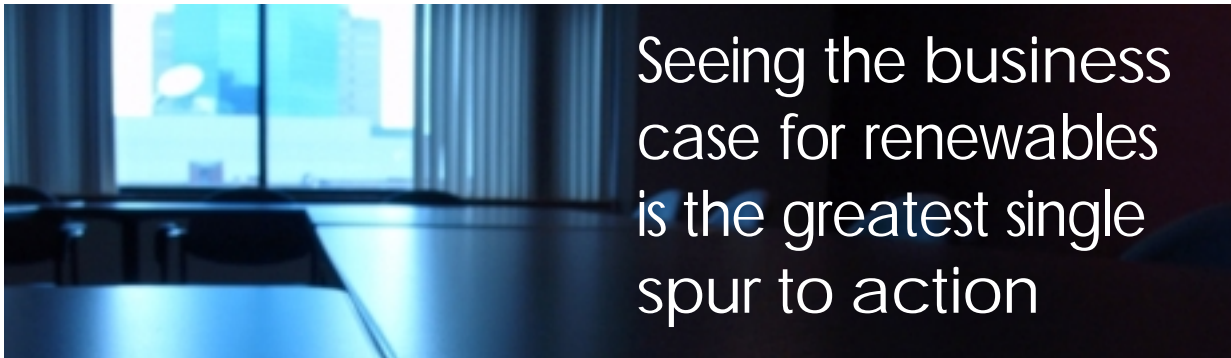


The Informed Executive



Passengers on the Eurostar service between London and the European Continent find it hard to believe that there has not always been a tunnel linking the two sides of the English Channel. The technology to construct the Channel Tunnel was available for much of the twentieth century: what had been lacking was a combination of political will, financial backing and a sound business case for such a link. Of these, the business case is perhaps the most significant hurdle: the politicians and financiers fall into place if the economics make enough sense.

There are parallels to be drawn in many other walks of life. Wind and water power were crucial to the agricultural industry for centuries: they also played a major role in the manufacturing sector until steam technology in the early 19th century offered a more consistent and manageable source of power.

Yet it is to wind and water that the UK is turning once more as the most viable alternative sources of energy to carbon-packed fossil fuels. The technology for converting these natural resources into useful energy has obviously improved by several orders of magnitude since they virtually disappeared from the energy scene first time round.

With climate change not seen as an issue outside the scientific community until the final decades of the 20th Century, there was no overt political will to explore the potential of wind and water. But the factor which kept 'unconventional' energy generation off the networks was the business case.

With (comparatively) cheap energy supplies readily available from British coal seams and North Sea oil and gas, it made very little commercial sense to start exploiting the inherently more expensive renewable technologies.

The political will to bring renewable energy up the agenda grew because governments of all persuasions across Europe accepted that conventional energy production impacted upon climate adversely.

Even the most diehard sceptics on the subject of climate change are prepared to admit that burning fossil fuels probably has some influence on the climate: they disagree with mainstream thought over the extent of that influence.

This edition of *The Informed Executive* focuses on three related aspects of sustainability - the issues surrounding renewable energy, the future of the UK water sector, and examining how local authorities have moved on from pious intent into managing carbon effectively.