

Supporters rally round troubled factory Call for green policy change to save Egger

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CHIPBOARD manufacturer Egger UK has won widespread support for its call on the Government to change renewable energy policies that are threatening the long-term future of the wood panel industry.

As the *Courant* reported exclusively last week, subsidies to new large-scale biomass power stations are dramatically increasing the price the Hexham plant has to pay for its wood supplies.

Although it is better placed than most of its rivals in the industry, jobs are potentially at risk if there is no change in policy.

Egger is a major player in the national lobbying campaign Make Wood Work, and as part of a European Day of Action on Friday held an industry summit at the Hexham site.

In a debate around the impact of energy policies introduced by the previous Government, participants were unanimous in their support for the company and its workforce.

Among those attending was MEP Guy Opperman, who said the subsidies to power generators had distorted the market and unfairly made for unfair competition which impacted not only on Egger but the entire wood panel industry.

Mr Opperman is a member of the All Party Parliamentary Group on the wood panel sector and recently met with ministers, as well as voicing his concerns in a House of Commons debate.



United voice: Egger joint managing director Bob Livesey (left), was supported by MEP Fiona Hall and MP Guy Opperman during Friday's debate.

North-East MEP Fiona Hall added: "I agree on the need for the most efficient use of wood."

Her sentiments were echoed by regional director of the Forestry Commission Brendan Callaghan.

He said: "It's a no-brainer for me. In times of economic stress it's vital that we maximise the benefits of wood and wood products."

Former Northumberland county councillor and industrialist Lord Vinson, who has been outspoken against energy policies which adversely impact on businesses, said: "The true cost of burning wood to generate electricity is something

we need to highlight. The enormous cost of electricity coming out of biomass plants is inescapable and it's the consumer who will have to pick up the bill."

Research commissioned by the Wood Panel Industries Federation – of which Egger is a leading member – shows that burning wood for fuel is inefficient, contributes to greenhouse gases and threatens the viability of

an industry sector that provides employment for 8,700 people across the UK.

Egger employs nearly 500 people at Hexham, with another 1,000 jobs in the haulage and forestry industry heavily dependent on the factory.

Egger joint managing director Bob Livesey said the European Day of Action had been a huge success in terms of raising public awareness of the issue, and particularly concerns around the human cost of bad Government policy.

He said: "All of us in chipboard manufacturing and associated industries are very worried about these short-sighted policies which threaten

our raw material supplies and in the longer term the future of the UK wood panel sector."

"Thanks to our recent multi-million pound investments in Hexham we have an efficient, state-of-the-art factory and a growing recycling operation – so are better placed than most of our competitors to weather this storm."

"But although our employees need have no worries about job security in the immediate future, Government policy has to change and it's encouraging to see the high level of support from the politicians here today, our customers, suppliers and the general public."



Under the hammer: Hexham Book Festival director, Susie Troop, with some of the books to be auctioned. Photo: D441035

Authors put pen to paper for book festival funds

THEY came, they saw ... and their hearts were conquered.

Now PD James, Margaret Drabble, Wendy Cope and a whole host of their literary bedfellows are doing their bit in return for Hexham Book Festival.

Between them they have donated dozens of signed copies of their latest books – one or two of them first editions – for an auction designed to raise some much needed funds.

At just five years old, it appears Hexham, the youngster in the world of book festivals, is already looked upon kindly by its patrons.

Founder and director Susie Troop said: "PD James's secretary said they don't usually send out books, because they get so many requests."

But they not only sent us a signed hard copy of her latest book, *Private Patient*, but also a first proof of one of the chapters – complete with all the amendments in her

own hand.

"People have been very generous, and I think it's because they love coming here."

"Hexham is such a nice place to visit and we look after them well, too, so I think they feel quite kindly towards us."

David Almond, a local author with a rising profile, has donated a signed American first edition of his latest novel, *Clay*.

Another Northern author, Ann Cleeves, has sent over a signed copy of her latest work, *The Crow Trap*, just as she herself teters on the brink of fame.

Her previous novel, *Vera*, is currently being turned into a television drama by ITV.

And children's authors Ralph Steadman and Debi Gliori have gone one step further – their signatures are each accompanied by a hand-drawn illustration.

Susie hopes their contributions will go some way to raising the £8,000

still needed to ensure next year's Hexham Book Festival does go ahead as planned.

Already pencilled in to run from May 4 till May 12, it was given a fillip this week when the Arts Council unexpectedly stumped up £14,000, but that won't pay all the bills.

The book auction will take place during a special meal at the Bouchon bistro in Hexham on November 24.

Fifty tickets are being sold at £20 a head, entitling the bearer to a two-course meal and a glass of wine.

"It's a bargain really," said Susie. "We will make very little out of the ticket price, but hopefully the auction will go well."

Further information and tickets are available by contacting Susie on either (01434) 60601 during office hours or via email: info@hexham-bookfestival.co.uk

A catalogue detailing the books to be auctioned is available upon request.

False alarm at care home

RESIDENTS in Haltwhistle got a rude awakening when alarm bells rang out at Greenholme last week.

A fire alarm went off at the former care home on Tuesday night and lasted for 15 minutes.

According to Northumberland Care Trust, which owns the site, a faulty detector had activated the alarm.

The alarm was fixed and there have been no further problems.

A spokesman for Northumberland Care Trust said: "Fire and intruder alarms at Greenholme are linked to an on-call arrangement operated by our security company, who can respond at any time of day or night."

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Footballer challenges bail conditions

NEWCASTLE United star Andy Carroll has been told he must continue to reside with his club captain in Ponteland.

Last Thursday, the England U21 forward's plea to remove a residency condition of his bail, which states that he has to reside with club skipper Kevin Nolan in Darras Hall, was refused by

Tynedale magistrates.

The condition had been imposed by Tynedale Magistrates' Court on Carroll on Monday, October 18, when he appeared to answer a charge of assaulting ex-girlfriend, Laurie Henderson (18), in Darras Hall. He denied the charge.

Last week, magistrates said that he must continue to

live with Nolan – or move into his new home when it has been completed, the address of which was being kept secret for security reasons.

A change, however, made to Carroll's bail was that he was allowed to reside elsewhere when engaged in Newcastle United activities, such as staying in a hotel

before big home games, like the Tyne Wear derby on Sunday.

The conditions previously stated that he could only join in with United's stays at hotels for away games.

Carroll was told he must not contact prosecution witnesses in the case or enter the home of his alleged victim Laurie Henderson.

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Thieves target car badges

A NUMBER of brand badges were stolen from cars in Prudhoe last week.

Between Wednesday evening and Thursday morning, thieves stole two Mitsubishi badges from a Shogun in Tilley Crescent.

On Friday night, thieves stole badges from a Mercedes car in Castle Close.

A Ford Fiesta, also parked at Castle Close, had its wheel trims stolen.

Anyone with any information should call police on 03456 043 043 or Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

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BRIEFLY

A BIG Tea event held at Hexham Abbey raised almost £300 for the charity Independent Age.

The event organised by local volunteers and friends was part of a national appeal to raise vital funds for the charity, which works to help older people on low incomes maintain their independence.

The organisers thanked all who attended, and hope to make the event an annual occasion.

THE role of parents in developing young children was celebrated at a Haltwhistle children's centre.

Adults were invited to attend Parents' Week at Western Tynedale Children's Centre, where they received a pie and peas supper and were entertained by a children's entertainer.

A GARDEN fence was ripped out by a gang of youths in Hexham on Saturday night.

At around 11pm a group of teenagers kicked a section of fence and pulled out its panels at a house in Woodside.

One of the youths has been described as 13 to 14 years old, 5ft 5ins tall, with short blonde hair and wearing a light-coloured fleecy top.

Anyone with any information should contact police on (03456) 043 043.

HEXHAM MP Guy Opperman will be holding a public meeting to discuss environmental issues at Ovingham Reading Room on Saturday, November 13 at 2pm.