



- As I write this column the TV news is treating the nation to the tirade of abuse suffered by Environment Secretary Owen Paterson. I have long been sympathetic to government ministers accused of being responsible for the weather (I remember one woman in the West Midlands in recent years firmly placing responsibility for a tornado on the powers that be), but that sympathy gets a bit stretched when it concerns an environment minister who has presided over a 41% cut in funding for “climate change initiatives” in the UK. Those are figures published in *The Independent* on 26 January in response to a freedom of information request.

- There is further woe for the fracking companies, who are desperately trying to reassure us that nothing...not anything...at all can possibly go awry with their operation. Every time things seem to be going quiet, something else crops up.

Wastewater being produced by the drilling in Lancashire is contaminated by low-level radioactivity that occurs naturally but needs to be disposed of safely. The Environment Agency is reluctant to grant a ‘radioactive substances permit’ until it is satisfied such will be the case. Cuadrilla, meanwhile, is busy rewriting its licence applications.

- A major global story this week, reported elsewhere on the *Environment UK* site, is the report of a study carried out jointly by Southampton University and Massey University in New Zealand into people’s attitudes to climate engineering. Climate engineering is the rather Huxley-like approach to combatting climate change by manipulating climatic events on a large scale.

Not surprisingly, people are a tad wary of meddling on such a large scale – as opposed to the meddling on a much larger scale that created the problem in the first place.

According to the report's co-author Professor Damon Teagle of the University of Southampton: "Because even the concept of climate engineering is highly controversial, there is pressing need to consult the public and understand their concerns before policy decisions are made." Talk about stating the obvious.

- On a smaller scale, an amazing project has just started in Oxfordshire. Construction has begun on the UK's first 'eco-town': North West Bicester. There have been 'eco-estates' and 'eco-homes', but to construct an entire new town with a zero-carbon footprint is astonishing. The first phase will comprise 393 homes, a primary school, community centre, pub and an 'eco' business centre. All the homes will sport solar panels and the new town will also feature a combined heat and power plant.

Even the construction process is designed to achieve zero waste to landfill, a feat only hitherto seen with London 2012.

The lead developer on this exciting project is A2Dominion, who are to be saluted.

Chris Stokes