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I may have lost my seat in parliament, but I haven't lost my interest in offshore wind.

Last week at a lunch at a famous Scottish University not far from here, I found myself sat next to someone from the House of Lords (looking very relaxed as he had not just had to fight an election!). Inevitably we talked energy.

He said, 'There's far too much emphasis on offshore wind – it's too expensive; we don't know how to make turbines in this country; they won't work anyway and wind is unreliable!'

Well! Not much equivocation there! But I thought I'd better make that my starting point for this speech. And he didn't even mention grid connections and the consents processes!

What I'd like to do is to look at the drivers behind offshore wind and:
- Firstly show how these drivers overpower the challenges offshore wind faces. And show how some of the supposed obstacles are not as relevant as they are sometimes portrayed by people such as the Noble Lord.

- Secondly, by looking at where we've got so far, I want to demonstrate that actually offshore wind is overcoming these challenges and indeed we have forward momentum.

The two drivers are the most powerful we could have.

1. We know we are currently in something of economic crisis and even maybe some kind of political crisis. But there are two even more serious crises.

Climate change, or perhaps we should say climate destabilisation, is a bigger and more chronic crisis.

We know this from all the science, the Stern Report and the Copenhagen summit where, although all the countries of the world couldn't agree on a satisfactory solution, they did all agree we have a severe problem. The University of East Anglia may have got in a muddle with their emails, but only a fool would deny climate change, as the enquiry into the UEA affair showed.

Copenhagen may have been disappointing, but we have made real progress in this country. We have:

The Climate Change Act – with legally binding targets for CO₂ reduction. The Committee on Climate Change - setting rolling intermediate targets. So we HAVE to, by law, reduce CO₂ by 80% by 2050, and by 34% by 2020.

We can't do this without a huge shift to renewable energy – and we are committed to generating 15% from renewable by 2020.

Only wind is capable of being deployed at the scale and pace we need to meet that 2020 target. Yes we have tidal and wave coming along and they will have their day, but wind is easily closest to the market place now in terms of proven technology and price.

So the legislation provides the nearest thing you can get to a guaranteed market for offshore wind – and as we know – investors and developers are responding.

2. The second powerful driver stems from another crisis – the Energy Crisis.

It starts from this fact. There are 78 million more people in the world each year! More people means more demand for energy.

If we add to that the rapid economic growth of an increasing number of developing countries, we can see we face a huge increase in demand for energy – that cannot simply be met by energy efficiency and conservation

alone. And we are all wedded to expecting energy to be there when we want it.

So a government that lets the lights go out is soon out itself!
Therefore we will need ALL the energy we can lay our hands on from all available sources. And a mix of sources means we are not over-dependent on and vulnerable from an interruption to one source.

So to those who say – we must go nuclear – yes. Go for clean coal – yes. Import gas – yes.

But we would be mad not to use OUR wind. We are the windiest country in Europe. It's here. It's ours. It doesn't blow all the time (which is why we need nuclear baseload), but it does blow most of the time. As I know coming from Lowestoft!

Cost?! Yes, offshore wind is more expensive than onshore. I tell that to objectors worried about the alleged devaluation of their properties. But even if we develop all the sites that do meet the planning criteria, we would soon run out of them, given the scale of renewable energy we have to achieve.

Yes, offshore wind is more expensive than the energy we've been used to in the past. But where is the cheap energy of the future? \$10 oil is long gone, never to return. Nuclear is not cheap. Clean coal and carbon capture are not cheap.

Most frightening of all is this. Although the world's hydrocarbons are not yet 'running out', they are finite, and PEAK OIL production will be reached, maybe sooner than we think.

So if production cannot meet demand, and we caught a glimpse of that before the recession, oil and gas prices will SOAR again. And that's not to mention the worries about security of supply from some of the unstable parts of the world and the unreliable political regimes that produce oil and gas.

Hydrocarbons will one day be the most expensive energy source of all.

So the real point about the cost of offshore wind is that, unlike the unpredictability of oil price, once it is in place, offshore wind as a source is everlasting. We can know the cost and it's not variable. It's stable and ongoing.

Large scale offshore wind will give us not just security of supply, but security of price. And the industry predicts it can reduce its cost by 30% by 2020.

So the two drivers:

- the legal obligation to reduce CO2
- the need to exploit wind to keep the lights on

mean that offshore wind will overcome the challenges it faces. As indeed it is doing.

More wind energy was installed in Europe in 2008 and 2009 than any other form of electricity generation.

Britain is now leading the world in offshore wind energy. This is the result of important government policy decisions. Not only in setting binding targets, but the incentive provided by ROCS, and now the recently announced Green Investment Bank. It was the Economic State Secretary of Schleswig-Holstein who told me that ROCS are better than the German feed in tariffs for kick starting wind energy. And with his state generating over 40% of its power from wind, he should know!

To demonstrate the progress we are making I want to cite the example of my own area, centred on Lowestoft in East Anglia.

Greater Gabbard, the largest offshore wind farm in the world, so far, is currently under construction and the developer, Scottish and Southern, has chosen Lowestoft as the operational base with new helipad and port facilities.

The port of Lowestoft is ideally located close to some of the best areas for offshore wind. And we have transferable skills from the offshore oil and

gas industry and our maritime tradition. But we were chosen because some years ago we looked ahead and saw the opportunities.

As the local MP, I set up a Lowestoft Wind Energy Steering Group, so that all the key local organisations were in a line. We obtained £9m from our RDA for our OrbisEnergy centre so that the highest quality accommodation was there when the energy companies came looking. It showed we meant business.

Next door to it we have the largest onshore wind turbine in the country – as a symbol of our commitment – named Gulliver by the local community, because they like it and are behind our drive to be a leading centre for the industry.

By the way, Gulliver is in the centre of town. There are no noise problems. No tv reception problems, and no dead birds underneath!

Lowestoft College is a centre of excellence for offshore skills, with energy skills development in the pipeline.

We have been supported by Eeegr – the best named organisation I know – which promotes our area as a centre for energy industries. And our area includes Great Yarmouth with its port and available land.

We became part of the POWER partnership to widen our horizon. We have shared experience and learned from that. The energy challenge is too big for any one country. We need shared goals.

So we ARE overcoming the challenges for offshore wind. We know that because the energy companies WANT to invest.

Last week's announcement that the Greater Gabbard will double in size (the so called Round Two and a Half, with four similar extensions around the country) demonstrates this. I can only quote the Director of Marine Estate of the Crown Estate who said this expansion had been driven by 'developer appetite' for offshore wind energy.

This was already borne out by developer response embodied in the £100 billion Round Three announcements in January.

Again, at Lowestoft, we have one of the largest zones on our doorstep – the East Anglia Array. The developers, Scottish Power and Vattenfall are impressed with what our area has to offer – location, Orbis, port and helipad facilities and available waterfront land. They like the existence of local political leadership.

I say all this not just to promote my area, but to show what is needed to overcome those challenges and how it IS happening. What is breathtaking is the scale of Round Three. 7.2GW; 1000 turbines in the East Anglia Array alone. A £15 billion investment; 4000 jobs. It's one of 9 zones in Round Three.

But there is an issue here. How can we source all those turbines? If we rely on imports, we might not get them or be held to ransom on price. We have to manufacture here in Britain. And it's not as simple as – manufacture in the North East; O and M in other places like Lowestoft.

There's a whole lot more to manufacture than just turbines. The wind farm developers themselves want us to look at some manufacturing in our area, close to the wind farm itself.

So we need an industrial policy for offshore wind manufacturing that would see steel works open up again rather than closing for lack of demand. Because there's even more beyond Round Three. Many of you will know of the Supergrid project.

Wind farms across the North Sea, networked into a single system and a single market, less costly than connecting individual wind farms to national grids and offering security of supply (and price) to Europe.

Blue sky thinking? Well Supergrid is spearheaded by people like Mainstream, already a successful Round Three developer with a track record under the name Airtricity, with Greater Gabbard. They are not fools.

Finally. (Painful though it is for me personally), we should cast our minds over the recent election. Did anyone hear the environment or energy mentioned..? Is the public not interested? No, I don't think so. I think the

lack of focus on these issues says something about the way our elections are conducted, rather than doubting their importance.

Someone said these issues didn't emerge because all the main parties are agreed and there's not enough to argue over. I don't think so. Not when we now have a Sec of State for Energy and Climate change opposed to nuclear power who says he will abstain when the new government takes nuclear proposals forward! Sorry, I couldn't resist that one.

But where is the new government on offshore wind? The Lib Dems must be keen. They have to be if they don't want nuclear. The lights have to be kept on somehow. The Conservatives generally oppose onshore wind and they don't seem to have the same passion for offshore wind as the previous government, but they've said they'll keep banded ROCS and the new Green Investment Bank. That's good.

But actually, they have no choice. It has to be this way, because energy is too important to be party political. The new government is still facing those same two drivers:

The need for secure and sufficient energy supply to meet the Energy Crisis.

The need to reduce CO2 to tackle the Climate Destabilisation Crisis.

Offshore wind delivers on both!!