

All fired up in North Wales

April saw the launch of a flag ship biomass project in north Wales. The National Trust at Dinas, Betws-y-coed launched one of the few biomass installations in north Wales, and the first for the National Trust. The scheme is part of the National Trust's commitment to reduce its electricity use by 10% within the next twelve months, and was opened officially by the National Assembly's Presiding Officer Dafydd Elis Thomas on 26th April.

The boiler is a 50 kW system, fuelled with approximately fifty tonnes of woodchips sourced from the Trust's Ysbyty Estate. The Trust converted existing agricultural buildings into a fuel hopper, fuel store and boiler house. An interpretation room has also been created, explaining how the system works, 'We are keen to demonstrate the technology to members of the public and anyone is welcome to come and visit' says Trystan Edwards of the National Trust.

The boiler was funded from several sources: Cronfa Arbrofol Eryri, Conwy Energy Agency and the Forestry Commission Wood Energy Business Scheme (WEBS). Mike Pitcher, who leads the WEBS team commented, "This new system at Dinas is a vital key in unlocking the potential for wood fuel in north Wales, and the level of interest is accelerating all the time – largely thanks to rising fuel bills, but also because people are looking for secure local sources of sustainable energy."

Across Wales there are more than 60 biomass systems installed, and Wales is leading the way for biomass development in the UK (the WEBS grant is only available in Wales). Most of the current installations run on wood chip and are fuelled by forest thinnings. However, they could equally use wood chips produced from purpose grown short rotation willow coppice. You can grow this on set-aside and still get payment under the SFPS, and if you grow it on non set-aside you will receive SFPS plus € 45 energy crop payment.

These rules also apply to Miscanthus – which requires slightly different boiler technology due to its higher ash content and lower burning temperatures. These boilers are available, and there are several Miscanthus fuelled installations proposed for Pembrokeshire.

CALU has planted several energy grass demonstration plots, and will be running a joint open day with IGER's Willow for Wales project at Glynllifon college on 18th October. Visitors will be shown the CALU energy grass plots and IGER's short rotation coppice and experts will discuss economics, biodiversity and end-uses.

CALU also has several Information Sheets about biomass production available on its website – www.calu.bangor.ac.uk/technotes

Useful contacts:

National Trust: Trystan Edwards, 01690 713311 for more information and Interpretation room

Forestry Wood Energy Business Scheme, WEBS: 01970 821226, www.woodenergybusiness.co.uk

Willow for Wales (IGER): John Valentine 01970 823190 or Chris Duller 01970 823157.