

# Leith Biomass Plant turn attention to government subsidies



Protesters against the planned Leith Biomass Plant have turned their attention to government subsidies in the hope that they will be the key to preventing Forth Energy's plans to build a power plant in Leith. The photograph shows what the plant would look like in situ and has been supplied by Forth Energy.

The Scottish Government is due to reconsider the way it incentivises the production of energy from renewable sources in the New Year. Scottish Energy Minister, Fergus Ewing, has already spoken out publicly against electricity-only biomass, urging the UK Government to remove subsidies for large-scale biomass electricity generation. But environmentalists now argue that the same restrictions should also be applied to large-scale combined heat and power (CHP) processing, despite it being a significantly more energy efficient method than electricity-only.

A spokesperson for [Greener Leith](#) said: "Large plants end up relying on imports so you can't guarantee the quality of the fuel. It's the imports that are the problem."

Biomass generates energy by burning wood, but according to data supplied by [Biofuelwatch](#), the UK can only provide 17% of the wood necessary if all the current planning applications for biomass power stations are given the go-ahead. This means the remaining 50 million tonnes of wood needed would have to be sourced from abroad, adding significantly to the carbon footprint of biomass production, and perhaps causing further damage to tropical regions where the cheapest wood is sourced.

Emilia Hanna, Biomass Campaigner at Biofuelwatch, said:- “The irony of it all is that it’s classified as renewable energy which it’s not because we’re cutting down more trees than we can supply.”

“You can’t overstate the power of the word ‘bio’ in the word ‘biomass’; it really does these big companies a lot of favours in selling and branding themselves as green, and they’re the ones who have been lobbying for more Renewable Obligation Certificates.”

In an attempt to reach a target of having 100% of energy from renewable sources by 2030, both the UK and Scottish Governments offer energy companies incentives in the form of Renewable Obligation Certificates (ROCs). The more renewable energy produced, the more ROCs the companies receive. These can be traded between suppliers, meaning that the providers who are unable to meet the legal green energy target – currently at 12.4% – use billpayers’ money to buy ROCs from suppliers who have already exceeded their annual requirement.

Biofuelwatch say that if [Forth Energy](#)’s plans for four new plants across Scotland go ahead, they stand to make between £292 million and £355 million a year through the sale of ROCs alone. The Leith plant would have the greatest output of electricity of all their planned power stations, and therefore stands to generate the most ROCs for Forth Energy.

Hanna added: “We’re financing the destruction of our planet through a so-called ‘renewable’ form of energy.”

Campaigners for No Leith Biomass hope that if biomass is removed entirely from ROC entitlement – regardless of whether or not it uses CHP – the financial attraction for Forth Energy will be significantly reduced, and would perhaps even result in them pulling out all together.

Speaking about the government’s forthcoming consultation on the distribution of ROCs, a spokesperson for Forth Energy

said:- “The Scottish Government is calling for no subsidies for electricity-only large-scale biomass. Forth Energy don’t sit in that category because we use combined heat and power, so it doesn’t have an impact on Forth Energy plants.”

Yet when asked if the government’s forthcoming decision was likely to affect their plans, Forth Energy said: “None of the energy companies will know what the impact is until the policy is set.”

Forth Energy confirmed that they plan to source the wood predominantly from overseas and import it through Scotland’s major ports – one of which is Leith. They said that shipping is the most carbon-efficient means of transport, and by importing the fuel they will not be competing with Scotland’s existing wood-using industries for resources. They added that the fuel requirements of the proposed plants only make up 0.23% of current European wood production, and that there is ample global supply to meet demand.

In a press statement, Calum Wilson, Managing Director of Forth Energy said:- “Our proposals represent a reliable, secure and stable low carbon source of heat and electricity that will help to create jobs, boost the Scottish economy and provide heat both for industrial use and for homes.”

Despite these reassurances, the impact that Forth Energy’s plans will have on the environment is just one of many reasons local residents are concerned. The building itself is expected to cover the area of 17 football pitches with a chimney twice the height of the Scott Monument, which could potentially put Edinburgh’s World Heritage Site status into jeopardy. Another is that the fumes from the plant, which [No Leith Biomass](#) describe as containing toxic chemicals known to cause cancer, will significantly worsen an area that is already an [air management zone](#) because of its poor air quality.

Sally Millar, a member of No Leith Biomass, said: “You name

it, there's worries about it. It's madness, but it's big business and big money and that's what they're after."

No Leith Biomass explain what stage the planning process has reached:-"The City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) had planned to make their decision on 12 December 2011 but it is not clear now whether or not that will be going ahead.

If it does go ahead, and CEC accepts the proposal – with or without imposing conditions on Forth Energy – that is presumably a very significant step towards making permission from Scottish Ministers likely. If CEC rejects the proposal, that again points to a Public Enquiry."