

Chaddesley cares about Planet Earth

Oh dear, here we go again – two newspaper articles within a few days of each other saying exactly the opposite, or so it would seem!!

Last Thursday's Independent carried an article headlined "Climate chaos predicted by CO₂ study". This study is saying that the World will have exceeded its 2050 safe carbon emissions limit as soon as 2020. Global emissions are rising at 3% per annum at present, which is far higher than the earth can ultimately sustain, if we are to avoid exceeding the safe threshold. The implication is that substantial reductions have to begin right now, not by 2020 which is the current target date.

The scientists concerned have concluded that the world needs to agree to a more than 50% reduction in emissions by 2050 if we are to avoid the rise in average temperatures that everyone fears will lead to all sorts of disasters. Another comment was that we will have to limit the total amount of carbon we inject into the atmosphere, not just the emission rate each year.

So, still a bad picture, if not a worse one, and still the need to act now.

But also in the Independent the previous week, a very different article, talking about sunspots and activity in the surface of the sun. This is relevant to us as the sun's activity is ultimately the driver for our climate. Sunspots come and go apparently, but recently they have stayed gone for longer than any living scientist has known. On top of this there is also a solar wind and this is at its weakest since records began.

What's it all mean? Sunspots are present when the sun is active. In periods of high activity, the earth gets hotter; in periods of low activity, correspondingly cooler. It has been believed up to now that the sun has been a major player in our climate, until the past few decades when the rise in greenhouse gasses overwhelmed it. But now there are signs that, as the sun's activity started to decline, the rises in the earth's temperature started to slow, despite the rise in emissions.

Where is this heading? Well, to saying that the sun's activity still has the major effect on our climate. This means that we could have overestimated the sensitivity of earth to carbon emissions. It also seems to me to say that the earth may be static if not actually cooling at the moment, rather than getting hotter!

As I have said before, much of what we have chosen to do, such as avoiding plastic bags, we should definitely carry on doing. It can only be good for the planet. But this clearly raises questions about the future of fossil fuels, for example. Watch this space!!!

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For the Working Group set up by the Parish Council