

# Earth Air Fire Water

## *Science and the Global Challenge*



The Attlee Suite was packed to capacity and standing room only for the annual Parliamentary Links Day on 26 June organised by the Royal Society of Chemistry on behalf of the whole scientific and engineering community and co-sponsored on a bipartisan basis by Dr Brian Iddon MP and Mark Lancaster TD MP with the support of the Commons Science and Technology Select Committee.

The range of speakers was remarkable – drawn from right across the scientific, parliamentary and governmental spheres – and the morning session was introduced by Professor Jim Feast, President of the RSC, who spoke of his pride that the RSC has been able to play such a

consistent part over the years in providing Parliament with its largest and single most important science-related event held in the House.

The Keynote Address was given by the (then) Secretary of State for the Environment, the Rt Hon David Miliband MP, who outlined the Government's approach to global climate change issues and the importance the Government placed on the Climate Change Bill.

Major scientific presentations were given by Lord Rees of Ludlow, President of the Royal Society, Dr Sue Ion, Vice President of the Royal Academy of Engineering, Sir Christopher Llewellyn Smith from the Institute of Physics, Professor Alan Malcolm from the Institute of Biology,

Dr Jeff Hardy from the Royal Society of Chemistry and Dr Peter Cotgreave, the (then) Director of the Campaign for Science and Engineering.

Dr Jeff Hardy, energy manager at the RSC, highlighted a few goals that will need to be met because without the chemical sciences it was very unlikely that the Government will be able to achieve its target of a 60% reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> by 2050. On the technology front, chemists were working with engineers to build four smart energy homes for Europe. These homes, which are expected to consume zero energy, will rely on new energy-saving materials such as smart windows and nanofoam insulation materials, ie foams with tiny nano-sized air bubbles that make them more efficient than conventional insulation materials.

Parliamentary contributions came from Alan Duncan MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who conveyed the renewed commitment of the Opposition to science and innovation and outlined their plans for a new strategy, and Phil Willis MP, Chair of the Commons Select Committee on Science & Technology, who observed that his experience had led him to the view that so many of the ostensibly 'separate' issues considered by the Select Committee were in fact profoundly connected one with another.

The concluding speaker was Sir David King, the Government Chief Scientific Adviser who gave a *tour d'horizon* taking in sustainable development where he argued that each generation should leave at least as large a productive base for its successor as it inherited from its predecessor. His comprehensive presentation covered world population growth, the world's water deficit, the interaction between



population and water supply distribution, health challenges including infectious diseases such as avian flu, and growing obesity, the growing need to invest in sustainable farming and research on food, current models of the Earth's atmosphere, global fossil resources, and future world energy demand. Professor King highlighted the role of the Foresight

programme in a sustainable future that will depend on using "our wealth and technology not only to manage our economies within finite natural resources but also to adapt to a warming planet while reducing the extent of that warming by drastically reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and sustaining the lifestyle we want."



## Special Messages

This year's Links Day had messages from the Minister of Science and the Speaker of the House of Commons. There was also a unique 'double' of *Special Messages* from in effect two Prime Ministers. The outgoing Prime Minister, Rt Hon Tony Blair MP, praised Links Day as "the foremost scientific gathering in the Parliamentary calendar" and ended with a renewed plea for education: "It is our teachers on whom we depend for inspiring, encouraging and training the next generation of scientists."

The Rt Hon Gordon Brown MP stated his wish for "the UK to be the most attractive place in which to do science" and that public investment in the science base "will reach a record level of £6.3 Billion by 2010-11" together with "enhancing the R&D tax credit to incentivise private investment."

The Leader of the Opposition, Rt Hon David Cameron MP, said Links Day was "a great opportunity for Government and Opposition alike to continue their dialogue with the scientific community" and that "only by recognising the links between science, engineering and technology that we can tackle the scientific challenges we face."

Lord Browne of Madingley, President of the Royal Academy of Engineering, conveyed the message that "on climate change, engineers have the means to do something practical about it.... (such as) practical alternative sources of energy to hydrocarbons."