Introduction
This short intervention will explore the ways in which individuals, as consumers and citizens, are implicated as subjects in the political goals associated with the inter-related issues of climate change, energy and carbon. In doing so the intervention will outline, by way of context, the relationships between research and policy to describe both the current political constructs surrounding the role of individuals as agents of change and the practice of such policies through the notion of ‘sustainable lifestyles’. The intervention will then argue that policy makers face particular challenges in applying the notion of sustainable lifestyles through discussions of climate change both because of the popular contestations of climate science and also due to the anti-consumption implications of combating climate change. In particular, these implications often create conflicts for ‘consumer-citizens’ in contexts dominated by conspicuous forms of consumption.

Consumer-citizens
The title of this panel session implies a necessary shift: from energy consumers to energy citizens. Yet recent reflections on the relationship between these two fundamental concepts have argued that viewing individuals simultaneously as consumers and citizens is critical to the functioning of the state in a Neo-liberal context (Clarke et al., 2007). When extended to the environmental field, scholars such as Berglund and Matti (2006) and Slocum (2004) have argued that individuals are encouraged to use their power as consumers through exercising choice (e.g. DEFRA, 2005, p. 25) to make responsible environmental decisions. Indeed, despite the disciplinary diversity in studies of individual environmental commitments (from psychology, sociology, economics, marketing and anthropology), there has been a tendency to focus on the role of individuals engaging in incremental behavioural changes for sustainability, which Crompton and Thøgersen (2009) have argued are ‘simple and painless’ practices, likely to have only marginal collective benefits (Crompton and Thøgersen, 2009).

‘Sustainable lifestyles’ and social marketing
Alongside the scholarly focus on consumer-citizens and incremental change, the growth of ‘sustainable lifestyles’ as a key policy term has emerged through successive reviews of research on lifestyles and the environment (Jackson, 2005; Darnton and Sharp, 2006). Despite the varying disciplinary definitions of ‘lifestyle’ and debates concerning its practical utility (Hobson, 2002), the publication of the Framework for Environmental Behaviours (DEFRA, 2008) has operationalised the term specifically through the notion of segmentation (Darnton and Sharp, 2006), which has been applied in a wide range of studies to explore the role of ‘lifestyle’ groups in classifying different types of practices, attitudes and demographics. In so doing, DEFRA has used segmentation as part of its ‘toolkit’ to develop social marketing strategies for promoting behavioural change (McKenzie-Mohr, 2000; Frame and Newton, 2007) in which policies are targeted at particular groups using tailored marketing campaigns to change a range of behaviours, from waste management and home energy use to short-haul air travel.

Reflections and Challenges for Research and Policy
In the light of these academic and policy developments, the following sections outline four related reflections and challenges for scholars and politicians seeking to reduce energy demand and thus curb carbon emissions in the light of climate change:

Siting energy practices
Debates concerning public engagement with environmental issues and the wider role of social practices (Owens, 2000; Shove, 2003; Shove et al., 2007) have emphasised the importance of understanding behaviour within particular consumption contexts, framed by the embedded nature
of energy use in everyday, normalised routines. Yet researchers have paid less attention, in the
light of climate change, to exploring the relationships between energy use within the ‘home’
environment and the ways in which other forms of energy consumption, in particular for leisure
and tourism, have become equally embedded in often highly conspicuous consumption practices
related to increased levels of mobility. Evidence from researchers studying sustainable tourism
(e.g. Becken, 2007; Gössling and Peeters, 2007) indicates that in this context, levels of energy
consumption and the factors influencing such behaviours are different from the home
environment, implying that seeking to create ‘sustainable lifestyles’ is deeply contingent on the
site of practice in question and that spaces of ‘pleasure’ constitute valid and important sites for
studying energy demand because of both the carbon emissions associated with tourism and the
value individuals place on high levels of mobility.

The challenge of climate change for energy practices
Despite the apparent scientific consensus, popular discourses on climate change continue to be
volatile (BBC, 2010) and are framed by a range of factors relating to scepticism of the science,
‘denial’, ascription of responsibility to others and lack of response-efficacy (Barr, in press;
Lorenzoni et al., 2007). The issue of climate change therefore represents a major problem for
policy makers seeking to reduce energy demand, but it is particularly challenging when related to
contexts of conspicuous consumption. Evidence suggests that whilst home-based practices such
as energy saving or technologies like smart meters can be promoted through the incentive of
‘saving’ (as a principle or financial motivation), appeals to reduce energy use through cutting
back on carbon-intensive practices like flying are problematic because individuals are confronted
with the choice of reducing carbon emissions or the perceived sacrifice of (symbolically) valuable
consumption (Barr et al., 2010). Accordingly, the conflict that emerges between climate change
and certain forms of consumption may be indicative of a major political barrier to reduced energy
demand when significant changes in behaviour are considered in such contexts.

Marketing reduced consumption?
The role of energy consumption contexts and their relationship to climate change discourses
presents a formidable challenge to current political frameworks for promoting (high impact)
reduced energy demand. First, there is scepticism amongst academics that the logic of
‘sustainable lifestyles’ can deliver the required ‘spillover’ effects between different practices
(Haq et al., 2008), not least because pro-environmental behaviours at one site of practice can
often lead to an inversion of such behaviours at other sites. Second, Peattie and Peattie (2009, p.
261) have specifically questioned the ability of social marketing to promote reduced consumption
because “Creating meaningful progress towards sustainability requires more radical solutions
than just the development of new products and product substitutions amongst consumers”. In this
way current policy frameworks may be avoiding the much harder questions of how to tackle
forms of behaviour that require major and sustained reductions in consumption.

Towards Energy Citizens?
The range of contexts and practices in which energy is embedded raises fundamental questions
concerning the relationship between consumption and citizenship that places choice at the heart
of policy frameworks. We need to question whether, in certain contexts, the ‘simple and painless’
(Crompton and Thøgersen, 2009) approach of policy towards sustainable consumption needs to
be challenged. From a political perspective, critics of the ‘consumer-citizen’ concept argue that
the universal logic of the market creates passive citizens and a block to progressive politics
(Johnson, 2008; Scammell, 2000). Accordingly, exploring contexts where carbon intensive
behaviours have remained largely unchallenged demonstrates the potential blocks to tackling
energy demand and the move towards ‘Energy Citizens’ in an age of climate change. It also raises
more fundamental questions concerning the political acceptability and viability of tackling carbon
intensive practices like air travel and the ways in which social scientists need to consider the
implications for individual choice alongside the increasingly important role for communities,
democracy and participation in an age of climate change.
References
Barr, S., in press. Climate forums: virtual discourses o climate change and the sustainable lifestyle, Area. Article available online.