



A Green Thought

News and Ideas from Winchester Green Party

The Winchester Green Party

The Winchester Green Party was formed in 2007. While we have published election campaign literature before, this is our first edition of a more general paper that will bring, not just news of what we are doing, but what we hope will be seen as thought-provoking comment.

We don't have all the answers. There should be no debate now about the scale of the problem facing us, but there will be much disagreement about the effective-ness of solutions. This is matter that we can debate within these columns.

We hope through this means to raise an awareness of the issues, but also to encourage a belief that, despite the seemingly appalling future of the planet, here in Winchester we can do something that matters.

What's the Problem?

The Green Party is literally about world problems. The Credit Crunch is a world problem that none of our supposedly expert and worldly-minded political parties or financial gurus saw coming. The Green Party did.

Is it Hopeless?

It is late and the future seems bleak. But we do not yet know that it is too late. Things can be done but we can be pretty sure that governments across the world are not yet ready to do them. It will not be solved from the top, so that it must be solved from the bottom.

It is so easy to believe that the problem is beyond us, that there is nothing we can do. But, as Jonathon Porritt once said, 'the battle for the planet starts in our own backyard'. It is, after all, in our own backyards and all our individual choices that the fires of planetary destruction are being kindled.

Winchester has the reputation of being one of the worst towns in the country for carbon footprint. Though aspects of the calculation are suspect, the conclusion ought to be a matter of some embarrassment.

But it is within the power of individuals to do something about it. What we do individually or as families has a value for our moral sense of duty. But lifestyle choices have a diffusive effect on friends and colleagues and tend to be socially reinforced. Anyone who has been involved in any environmental or social campaign, for example, will know that a community of ideas and action can also bring other, deeper aspects of community – friendship, conviviality and mutual understanding.

But it is not the only world problem, nor even the greatest one. None of the mainstream parties are paying attention to the other, much bigger impending Crunches – we are living beyond our means in so many ways and our credit is exhausted - the world is running out of oil, water, land and food. And the population of those who want to use what is left is growing.

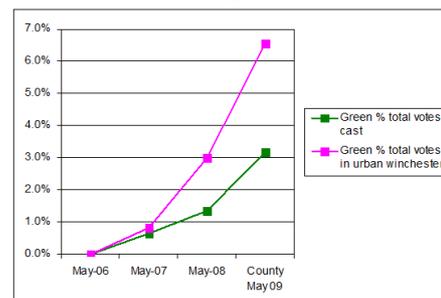
All of the mainstream parties know this, but they pretend it is not true. They do nothing, on the assumption that yet-to-be-invented, magical technological bullets will solve all the problems. They stick to the absurd notion that there can be a 'sustainable growth' for ever.

So, What Can we do in Winchester?

There is a lot of will in Winchester to start doing the self-help things that need to be done. Winchester Action for Climate Change has had a remarkable success in getting sign-in to carbon reduction targets from many individuals, groups and local authorities. There is a group coordinating local action in the Fulflood area.

But grass-roots campaigning also needs to put pressure on government, local and national, which will do nothing without it. There is an active Friends of the Earth group in Winchester, which does involve itself in the local political process.

But there is a need locally, as nationally, for a dedicated political voice for green issues. As a result



of proportional representation the Green Party has some high-profile European presence. Elsewhere, in

local and national government, the voting system gets in the way of small parties succeeding. But the Green Party has made inroads into places like Brighton and Oxford and has been consolidating and slowly expanding its representation there. We have begun this process in Winchester in the District and County elections.

Myth Busting

Myth 1: Motorists are over-taxed.

Whenever a penny is put on fuel duty there is an outcry from motoring organisations and other road lobbyists, which always declares that the motorist is burdened with excessive taxation, little of which ever gets spent on providing roads.



What is sad (indeed outrageous) is that the media seem never to question the basis for this complaint. In fact it is baseless.

There have been a number of studies which have shown that motorists externalise (i.e. make somebody else pay) many of their true costs, especially the costs of pollution, policing and accidents. The most thorough studies, the Blueprint reports, indicate that the motorist dumps on the rest of society costs equivalent to three times the total vehicle and fuel duty tax paid.

We will look at the specific costs motoring places on Winchester in future issues.

Meanwhile central government has ignored all the consultation responses, deciding that the best way to solve the air pollution problem is to stop measuring it.

Discussion

There are many things that, even those with a strong green leaning, will disagree about, fundamentally, in detail or in degree. For example, nuclear power, meat-eating and high-speed trains are things that to some extent divide green sympathisers.

We will raise one or two of these in each issue. But because the issues are debatable we would expect that

there would be responses that we could follow up in subsequent issues.

Wind turbines and landscape: The first priority for meeting our climate commitments should be to reduce our appetite for consuming energy. But because we have built an elaborate energy-wasteful infra-structure to our lives, lifestyles cannot be changed completely in the necessary time-scales and we cannot reduce demand quickly enough.

So we urgently need to produce convenient energy in a sustainable manner. Wind and wave power seem to be the major options in this country for sustainable non-nuclear power supply.



Winchester Green Party goes to Vestas

Some people find wind turbines are perfectly acceptable even (or especially) in dramatic landscapes, whilst others abhor them. Environmental campaigners have been active for years defending landscapes from road schemes and other undesirable development. So it comes as a matter of great difficulty for some campaigners to accept major sky-line intrusion in loved countryside.

We must, of course, first ask of all the areas of the countryside that are physically suited to wind power generation, which are those that have the lowest landscape value. Are there enough potential sites that designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty can be avoided in their entirety? We don't know that yet.

But if it comes to a choice of evils, there is no doubt that failure to reduce carbon emissions is the greater. Unlike destruction of landscape for road building, for example, there is at least a prospect that wind farm intrusion in the countryside does not have to be forever, but long enough to get us past the climate crisis and into a world of different lifestyles.

But the preservation of landscape ought to be a higher priority than preserving the right to waste energy by maintaining cheap road and air transport or by keeping our houses so warm that we can stay in shirtsleeves. This energy demand should be cut first.



Green Party



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