



A Green Thought

News and Ideas from Winchester Green Party

May 2015 - Elections



Dr. Michael Wilks

The last occasion on which the people of Winchester had the opportunity to vote for a Green MP was in 1987. This year we will try to give as many people as possible the chance to vote Green. In addition to our usual campaigning in the City Council elections, we plan to contest the Parliamentary seat in Winchester. Our candidate is Dr. Michael Wilks.

Bartholomew's ward. While concentrating our efforts on this ward, as usual, we will also put up candidates in the remaining City wards.

Such has been the growth of support for the Green Party locally in recent months (see *Green Thought 10*) that areas previously within the Winchester group are achieving the critical mass to campaign independently. An Alton and

Michael will also stand in the City Council election in St



Dan Hill

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Petersfield group has now established itself. And in the Andover area a group is evolving to the extent that we now have a candidate, Dan Hill, for the North-West Hampshire seat.

Those who remember Alison Craig, who started up the Winchester Green Party and so energetically built up support in the St Bartholomew ward, may be interested to hear that she is now the Parliamentary candidate in Salisbury, where she now lives.

Paris 2015 – Will This Change Anything?

After the disastrous Rio+20 conference in 2012 (that David Cameron did not even bother to attend) it was very hard to hold on to any hope that rich countries would ever act responsibly on climate change. The next conference, COP21, in Paris later this year is probably the last chance to get a commitment to limit emissions enough to hold the global temperature rise to 2°C. There is some small hope this time since countries have signed up to presenting their plans to hold down emissions in advance of the November start date.

We can be sure that these plans will be completely inadequate – our leaders will not really change anything. As Obama releases the US plan, he simultaneously permits Shell to drill the Alaskan

Arctic for oil. And the UK will go to Paris claiming a meeting of an initial 5-year target, forgetting, of course that this was only achieved by the financial crisis and would logically be reversed if the supposed economic recovery were to be real. The Coalition Government is certainly going out of its way, e.g. with fracking and its roads programme, to make sure we burn ever more carbon.

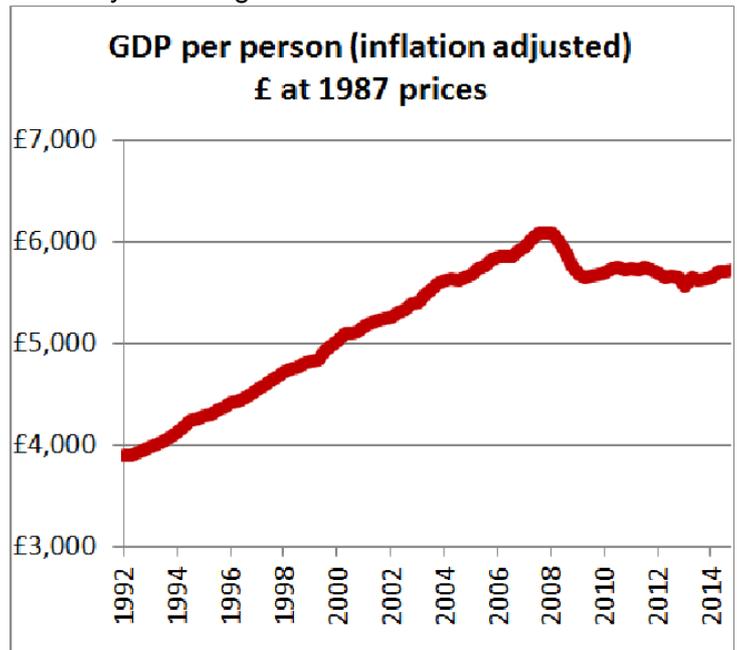
The hope, as Naomi Klein, author of *'This Changes Everything'* points out, rests not in the actions of heads of state, but in the growing movement on the streets – will the call (www.campaigncc.org/COP21Paris) to shut down Paris in November raise the barricades and shout out a message that Governments can no longer ignore?

Austerity – False Analysis, False Blame and a False Recovery

False Analysis: All the other main parties in England have swallowed George Osborne’s narrative that the 2008 crash was caused by excessive public spending and the size of the state. In fact it was reckless de-regulation (of which Osborne would like much more) that allowed the speculative testing to the limit of stability of a free-market mechanism that is not understood. What started out with the sub-prime mortgage failure in the US, rapidly revealed huge underlying instabilities, different only in scale from all the financial bubbles in history. What had welfare spending and public service to do with this?

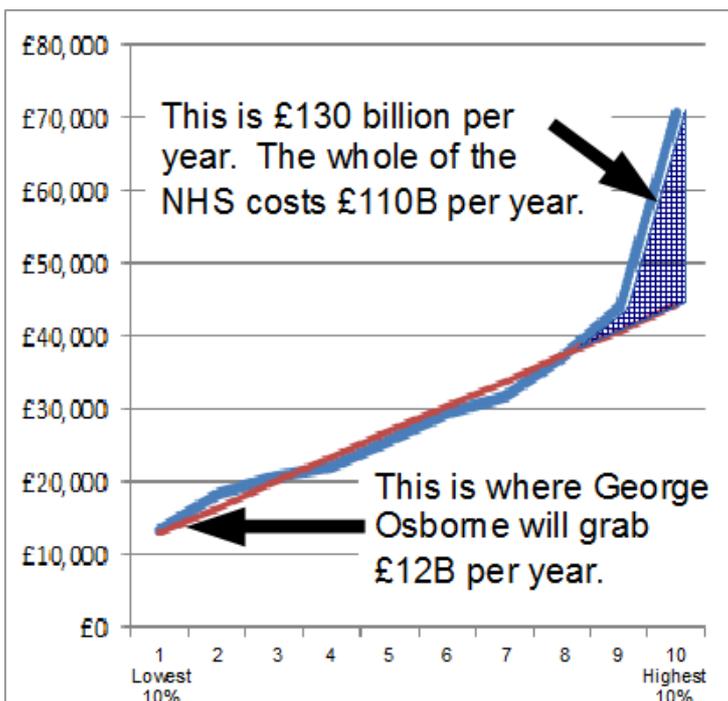
False Blame: After the South Sea Bubble Robert Walpole confiscated the estates of the directors of the South Sea Company and used them to relieve the suffering of the victims. The Coalition Government has chosen to take money away from the poorest, who had nothing to do with the speculation, and left the speculators, the bankers and the hedge-fund managers richer than before. Osborne (a career politician who has never done a proper job of work) shifts the blame by inventing the classes of “*strivers and skivers*”. He offers “*hardworking people*” the prospect of a better future through ‘*drip-down prosperity*’ – reward the richest and a bit of wealth will filter down to the rest of us. This is what Osborne calls “*Fiscal Competence*”.

False Recovery: We do not believe unlimited economic growth is either realistic or desirable. Sustainability is about recognising limits – the growth agenda is highly coupled to the depletion of primary resources of energy and materials, the destruction of natural environment and climate chaos. Nor on the Government’s own terms is the economy doing that well. We are told that we have a recovery of growth. If we do, it is a very small one, entirely unlike any previous recoveries from slump and is probably already failing. Corrected for inflation and population growth it scarcely looks like a recovery at all. GDP per hour worked (i.e. productivity) is especially low, now lower than most other western economies.



Data: Office National Statistics

The Green Party Alternative – Fair, Affordable, Sustainable



Source ONS: 2012 household income after tax and benefits by decile

We do not advocate growing debt – sustainable policy, by definition, cannot borrow from the future in the way that growth-obsessed policy does. We advocate good housekeeping, but recognise that balancing the books can be achieved in much fairer ways, specifically through progressive taxation. The enormous disparity of reward in the British economy is a scandal.

The distribution of income (after tax and benefits) for more than 95% of households takes a simple progressive form (the underlying red line in the graph). The steepness of this line is such that ambition, fortune, effort, ability can all be supposed to have the possibility of increasing reward. It is not a graph that the rich have any cause to complain about.

But when one gets to the top 5% (indeed most of it in the top 1%) of household incomes, the graph becomes rampant. Here are the people that George Osborne thinks are most deserving. We

argue that the linear graph, as a reasonable metric for the rest of society, must be reasonable for all of society. The scale of the discrepancy between this reasonable metric and reality is enormous. It amounts to £130 billion pounds per year (2012 figures). Osborne's reluctance to extract any of this must be measured against his willingness to take another £12B per year from the poorest and the disabled. £130B p.a. is more than the cost of the whole NHS and more than the current government deficit. All of the Green Party's aims for a fairer society could be paid for from a fraction of this and the budget balanced.

The affordability of civilised health care, welfare, social services, free education etc. can also be enhanced by not spending money on bad things. In a section below we point to a significant part of the current shortfall in NHS funding being equivalent to the funding of Trident. Road transport is another area where there are enormous fiscal distortions. We will leave to another Green Thought an analysis of the effective subsidy of this activity, but there has been no professional disputing of estimates that road transport externalises costs (Including many to the NHS) to between 2 and 3 times the total taxation on the activity (fuel tax, VED and VAT) – a conservative estimate of this level of subsidy would then be about £90B p.a.

Why we should not replace Trident.

All three main parties have muddled thinking about nuclear weapons. They describe Trident as an 'insurance policy' and a 'last resort'. Insurance policies are there to help recovery from misfortune. If Trident is used there is nothing left in a radioactive wasteland to enable recovery. A *last resort* is a desperate measure that may or may not have a good outcome. There is no good outcome if Trident is used.

We are told that having nuclear weapons keeps us safe. Those of us old enough will remember the naked fear of the Cuba Crisis. The doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction was no comfort then to us living in one of the world's most prominent targets. 50 years on, does having the means to kill millions make us feel safer in Britain now than if we lived in, say, Sweden?

The argument for keeping Trident is the argument for every country to develop nuclear weapons. We cannot sensibly argue for non-proliferation if we maintain a special claim to be different.

Nor should we be perpetuating the ideology of the Cold War – it is a ludicrous assertion that Putin's adventurism in the Ukraine is a resurrection of the old threat of monolithic Soviet expansion. Ukraine is a complicated mixture of peoples, history and allegiance – an attempt by the west to understand it would be better than shoe-horning it into a Cold War fantasy. And there are far greater threats to our survival – climate change for example.

Apart from the moral price of assent to wholesale slaughter, there is an economic price to Trident – at a time of 'austerity' when we struggle to find £3B to fill an immediate gap in the NHS, Trident costs about the same sum of money each year in its maintenance and the same again in the programme of renewal.

The Housing Crisis: There is a consensus that we have a shortage of housing in the UK and that there is a growing unaffordability, particularly amongst the young. There is also a general unease at the pressures that big new housing developments place on existing communities. How can these concerns be reconciled?

The first thing to recognise is that 'need' and 'demand' are two different things. We address the need for people to have decent homes to live in below. 'Demand' is a construct of central government and is to do both with its obsession with growth at all costs and its dominant responsiveness to the profit motives of big developers, for reasons we can easily guess.

At the Barton Farm Inquiry it was clear that the market demand assumed a net migration from north to south (indeed without it the demographics of the Winchester area would have led to a negative housing requirement). Other local areas, notably Wiltshire are making the same calculations. There is a general UK population increase but it does not explain these growth ambitions for southern counties.

There is a flip-side. Large areas of northern towns (e.g. Liverpool) have huge stocks of empty but readily re-usable Victorian and Edwardian houses. And the Pathfinder projects that so devalued this resource left acres of desolation that the Coalition Government has done nothing to remedy - a failure of regional policy.

CPRE has identified enough brownfield land in the UK for 1.8 million houses. But Government has been far too willing to serve property developers' interests, virtually giving them free rein to build for maximum profit on agricultural or amenity land.



The Government also invites developers to avoid affordable housing commitment by pleading poverty – as with Silver Hill, ‘non-viability’ can be claimed by greedy developers with no necessity for proof.

Mrs Thatcher’s *right-to-buy* legislation may have been conceived with the ideal of a property-owning democracy. But there were no honest intentions in the subsequent removal of councils’ abilities to use the sale of council houses to build replacement properties. It is clear whose interests have been served by the transfer of public housing to buy-to-let landlords – instead of owning property and getting a fair rent, the public purse, through the welfare system, now pays profit to private landlords for using the homes Councils were forced to sell.

Keith Taylor, the Green Party MEP for the SE, presented his recently published report (see <http://www.keithtaylormep.org.uk/2015/03/19/new-report-out-today-on-the-uk-housing-crisis/>) on the subject, to a meeting in Winchester.



The Green Party manifesto pledges the building of 500,000 social houses by 2020. This would go some way towards undoing the legacy of the Thatcher years; people would once again be able to afford to live in the areas they were raised in and work in; housing benefit budgets would not be diverted to private profit. Aspirations of those in social housing to get on to a property ladder can be achieved by other mechanisms (e.g. housing associations with shared equity schemes). Rent control and powers to discourage keeping properties empty would also be used.

Winchester Big Planning – nothing learned, nothing forgotten: After its bloody nose in the High Court over Silver Hill, one might have expected some humility and some acknowledgement of failure from the chief officers of the Council. But no. Their obsession with building *Step Change Winchester*, as they call it, is undiminished – not content with bullying us on River Park and Silver Hill they are pushing the Station Approach plans with the same arrogance as ever.

Steve Tilbury, corporate director (nobody has ever told us why we need a corporate director), tells us we have to get on with it or ‘*we may miss the tide.*’ Yet, after the Winchester March, in what the Council called a *myth-busting* document we were told we had nothing to worry about with Station Approach as it was still to be consulted on and not a plan (even though it is in black and white in the Local Plan Part II). Tilbury himself has said that the Tibbald Report (with all its defective traffic analysis), that figures in the Local Plan was the report he asked them to produce.

Who now believes that the current exercise in consultation is a more genuine one than the phony consultations we have had before? Who believes that the senior officers don’t already know what they want and intend to get it? Who believes that the process of dealing with developers will be any more open than we have seen over Silver Hill? Who believes that a supine Cabinet of the City Council will give the plan any more critical examination than it has given to such plans before?

Election May 7th
Vote for what you believe in, not
against what you fear

Vote Green



Green Party



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