



# A Green Thought

News and Ideas from Winchester Green Party

## News

It now seems likely that the General Election will be in early May, probably coinciding with District elections. As the big parties are already squaring up in the national media, and the same old pots are criticising the blackness of the same old kettles, the hustings process has begun even in Winchester.

The local National Childbirth Trust held a meeting before Christmas to quiz parliamentary candidates for this year's election. Local Green Party co-ordinator, Alison Craig, was invited to join the panel as fourth member. Though questions were very narrowly focused on childbirth and parental support issues, it was a worthwhile first foray.

## Copenhagen

Green Party members joined the Winchester march organised by the Winchester Action for Climate Change on Dec 5th, before going to London for The Wave march from Grosvenor Square to Parliament Square.

Even though world politicians were briefing to lower our expectations of Copenhagen, it remained a disappointment. There were no real achievements – all that can be said of it was that it was good to get all the nations of the world together, acknowledging that a problem existed.

The UK government certainly appeared more enlightened than many others in the developed world. But we must still wonder if more could be achieved if we brought moral commitment rather than just words. Ed Miliband's eloquence on Global Warming would have sounded more sincere if he had stood up in Cabinet against the climate-destroying policies of Lords Mandelson or Adonis.

You cannot lecture China (a large part of whose carbon emissions are generated by the manufacture of products that we buy) at the same time that you subsidise a car scrappage scheme, widen motorways and permit airport expansion at home.

## Myth Busting

### Myth 2: New supermarkets create jobs.

A headline that we often get in local papers, and typical of lazy journalism, is something like Tesco store creates 500 new jobs. A little thought ought to dispel this idea immediately.

Supermarkets make their money by ever increasing efficiency and cutting of margins. Most of what supermarkets sell is everyday commodity and there is only so much of this that we can consume. The supermarket efficiency is such that the number of employees needed to sell the fixed amount of commodity is minimised.

That the Climate Change Act has been passed in the UK and that Copenhagen has happened at all is because green campaigners of many groups have dragged the politicians towards them. So it must go on. They will not act unless we make them. It is up to us to go on dragging them.



The Green Party is a direct channel into the political system that has potential to change it. But there are many grass roots struggling to feed the delicate green of planetary survival.

*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.*

Margaret Meade

It is clear, therefore, that if a supermarket opens it must compete, for a fairly fixed amount of trade, with other retailers in the vicinity who operate with a less-efficient work force. More jobs are lost elsewhere in the economy than are gained in the supermarkets.

In future issues we will look further, but fairly, at the problems that supermarkets bring with them and how local government should deal with them.

## Transport

Hampshire County Council has recently put out a document for consultation on its next Local Transport Plan (LTP). This document is a great disappointment.

The LTP is Hampshire's transport policy for the next 15 years.

Over the next 10 years the EU and UK position is that we will have achieved a 30% reduction in carbon emissions. All sectors of the economy must play their part and transport is the sector that has the most potential for carbon reduction. Astonishingly the LTP does not discuss at all how the County will contribute to this.

Indeed the County still inhabits a world of transport thinking that should have been abandoned in the last century. It is still clearly thinking in terms of capacity increases on main roads, i.e. it still plans to encourage traffic growth at the same time that it says it wants to reduce it.

While it spends many millions on traffic-generating park-and-ride schemes, it cuts back on support for conventional bus services that can genuinely reduce traffic. The County has been doing good work on speed controls, progressively introducing newer limits and reducing existing limits. It needs to do more.

In towns and villages there is a need to get speed down much more. There is no reason now for delay in imposing a uniform 20mph across Winchester. Nonsensically at the moment there is an idea that 20mph could be introduced but not on the main roads in the City – i.e. those where the danger to pedestrians and cyclists is actually greatest.

In rural Hampshire and on the trunk roads it would also be desirable to reduce speeds for other reasons. Carbon emissions grow increasingly rapidly as speeds increase above 40mph.

### **Peak Everything?**

WinACC and Southampton University recently organised a conference on Transition to Low Carbon at the Discovery Centre in Winchester. An interesting paper addressed the question 'Why Cap Emissions if Peak Oil is Coming Anyway?'

There is a body of opinion now that we are at Peak Oil or even just past it. Some serious commentators ([www.econbrowser.com/archives/2009/05/Hamilton\\_JEC\\_2009\\_05\\_20.html](http://www.econbrowser.com/archives/2009/05/Hamilton_JEC_2009_05_20.html)) believe Oil is the main cause of the Recession. The point is that reducing our fossil fuel consumption in a planned way and starting now is much safer than waiting for the fuel to run out of its own accord.

But according to Richard Heinberg ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=ybRz91eimTg&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ybRz91eimTg&feature=related)) it is not just oil that is running out, but gas, phosphates, lithium (batteries for those electric cars!) and uranium:

even reserves of coal are smaller than was imagined. Only population is not peaking.

We've heard all this before, of course, with the Limits to Growth in the 1970s. The popular notion is that the decades of growth that followed has somehow proved the Meadows' book got it wrong. In fact in 2008 a new book by Graham Turner (*"A Comparison of 'The Limits to Growth' with Thirty Years of Reality"*) compared the Meadows' predictions with reality and found a good correspondence.

### **Discussion** (*Difficult subjects section*).

**Nuclear Power:** The Green Party has consistently opposed nuclear power. But there are many strong environmentalists who believe that we should reconsider, because the need to decarbonise our energy supply is simply too urgent and because the true renewable sources cannot be developed in time.

Pros: Low (but not zero) carbon; base load supply (can be switched on instantly to compensate variations in supply from renewables); fuel stockpile reliability when post-peak sources of fossil fuels become unreliable; spent fuel remains a re-usable resource; can consume weapons material.

Cons: Waste disposal needs to anticipate safe handling for longer periods than all of human history so far; increased potential for weapons material to spread; risk of catastrophic failure.

Balance: We may see balances of risk in these pros and cons, but, for some, the last of these overrules everything – one cannot compare a very low risk of something very major happening with a high risk of many minor things happening.

Windscale happened to a generation just out of total war and still kept in the dark by government secrecy. Three Mile Island was a lucky escape so was never fully brought home to the US population. Chernobyl has probably killed thousands, but happened under an authoritarian regime.

1500 miles from Chernobyl and 20 years on, more than 300 Welsh farms are still under restriction. If Chernobyl had happened in the UK, contaminating an equivalent area (most of England) for decades, the democratic political process would mean that would be the end of nuclear power forever in this country.

France, with its huge dependence on nuclear power, risks its whole energy future on the chance that not a single Chernobyl-scale event will occur in a western democracy.



**Green Party**



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