



A Green Thought

News and Ideas from Winchester Green Party

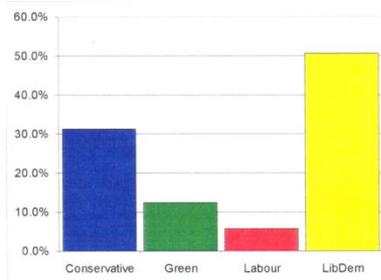
News

While the Green Party has stood in local elections in Winchester before, this has been on an ad hoc approach. This year we decided to make a serious effort in a single ward. We chose St Bartholomew's as a ward largely of a distinctive village character that we felt would lean towards a party of community politics. The risk was that in this election the ward was strongly represented by a long-serving and popular Lib-Dem, then still Mayor.

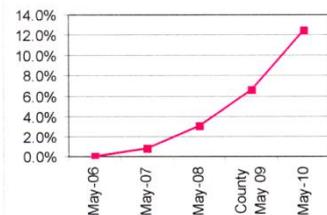


Alison Craig, the Convenor of the Winchester Green Party, was our candidate in the ward. On limited funds for election material and with a small but energetic group of canvassers, we delivered Alison's election leaflet to all households with letterboxes and knocked on almost every household door to which we could get access. The result was:

Although 12.4% of the poll may not sound much, it gives good cause for optimism. Of the 12 council wards contested by the Greens in Hampshire, the next best result was 6.9% of the poll. It also represents accelerating progress in this ward:



Green % total votes in urban Winchester wards fought



This is similar to the way in which the Green Party developed its presence in Brighton Pavilion and its local government wards, to the point at which the first Green MP was elected this year. In fact early progress in Winchester is faster than that which was made in Brighton.

Your views

Earlier this year we carried out an opinion survey in the St Bartholomew's ward. We were anxious to avoid the usual party political questionnaire. This can be designed to elicit a particular response in order to justify a desired political action (there is a famous Yes Prime Minister episode about this). Or it can be bland and empty

of content in order to seem to involve the public without commitment to doing anything. We think most real choices are difficult and a poll should ask a question only if qualified by its consequences.

For example we asked if people would like traffic reduction in the town, but also asked if they would favour realistic ways of reducing it. Of 1200 delivered questionnaires we collected 53 completed. Statistical validity is not high at this level of response, but the results are interesting nevertheless.

98% were in favour of traffic reduction. 40% of these would favour car parking reduction to achieve traffic reduction. 89% felt that there was a need for more affordable housing in Winchester, but only 19% thought this should be at the expense of greenfield development. While 92% were unsurprisingly happy that unspecified brown-field sites could be used for housing, 51% were actually in favour of building housing on central car parks.

The question on what people would be prepared to do to reduce carbon was posed on a priority ordering basis. At the high priority end was investing in home insulation, then eating more local and seasonal food, then using the car less.

At the low priority end, flying less was the 6th choice of 8, eating less meat the 7th and supporting local wind technology was the least popular. Obviously the choices were not all of equal impact, so that reluctance to reduce air travel would be more serious than reluctance to reduce the temperature in one's home.

Myth Busting

Myth 3: Cars are necessary for the economic welfare of Winchester. The reason that politicians always give for doing nothing about the traffic and pollution problems in Winchester is that it will harm trade. The Leader of the previous administration in the City even

went so far as to say that Winchester needs to compete with Hedge End. There are many reasons for questioning this:

- 1) It supposes that the economic welfare of the City is more dependent on the shopping economy than it is on other things. It is

probable, however, that the wealth of Winchester comes from two main areas: the fact that the city is a centre for employment, both for prestige and historical administrative reasons; and that Winchester is a dormitory for higher-paid London commuters. The way some of this wealth spreads in Winchester is certainly through shops and restaurants, but it is hard to see why any of it should be dependent on car access to the City.

- 2) The kind of trade that needs easy car-borne access is of the daily needs variety. While this is necessary for the residents of Winchester, most of it does not represent an economic benefit to the town (it is low margin, generates little employment and all its profits are taken out of the area).
- 3) The kinds of trade and services that do make higher margins, that do employ more people and do tend to spend their profits in the vicinity are those small local businesses that are likely to flourish within a decent living environment. These are the businesses that most depend on leisured strolling (this would benefit the tourist economy most since a slower environment would encourage overnight stays instead of stop-by visiting) and least need quick and easy car access. Indeed they will most flourish where the cars least impact on the all-important ambience and sense of place.
- 4) Cars represent probably the least efficient transport. Essentially congested streets limit the overall access of people to the centre.
- 5) There are continental towns, big and small, that flourish with much more civilised use of road space than prevails in Winchester. Some large towns function with many more cycling trips than car trips; some medium-sized tourist towns prosper with no cars at all.

Supermarkets

In a previous issue we dismissed the mythology that supermarkets like to promote, that they bring jobs to an area. The opposite is true – more jobs are lost to a local community than are gained when a supermarket moves in. Those objecting to the Sainsbury application at Bishop's Waltham have clearly identified this threat.

It is hard to imagine life without supermarkets. Certainly they offer economies of scale and they offer convenience. But the price is high. Supermarkets bring nothing to a local economy and take all the profits out. In doing so they externalise a significant part of their costs. This largely arises from their transport effects.

Road freight itself massively externalises its costs – i.e.

lorry operators do not pay anywhere near enough tax to meet the environmental and infrastructure costs they impose on society as a whole. But the large part of the externalisation comes from the customers.

Not all the costs of car access to supermarkets are paid for either by the customers or the supermarket owners. Private motoring is subsidised (i.e. it externalises much more costs than it makes up for in tax – see Green Thought Issue1). Supermarkets that depend on car access are thus beneficiaries of this subsidy.

In these days in which important public services are being cut and when taxation is generally becoming more regressive (i.e. burdens the less-well-off more than the better-off) it seems a very poor organising of society that allows supermarkets to be so subsidised, especially since encouraging car-borne access to shopping is essentially regressive – it deprives the car-less of local shopping by unfair competition.

It is time to redress this unfairness. A simple and permissible mechanism is for Councils to charge supermarkets for their customer car parking and divert the money to providing socially inclusive (and more efficient) transport alternatives.

HCC Climate Change Strategy

The County Council has published its strategy for reducing carbon emissions. This strategy was put before the Cabinet of the Council on 26th July. Alison Craig led a Green Party deputation to the Cabinet meeting, expressing disappointment at the limited ambition of the Strategy.

HCC makes the claim that it wants to be seen as a 'Centre of Excellence' for local authorities. Yet in terms of target actions its proposals rank Hampshire as fifteenth of 19 county authorities it cites. It does not, for example, sign up to the 20:12 (20% reduction by 2012) Winchester Declaration that the City Council has taken on board.

We recognise the difficulties. HCC's main carbon problem in its own estate is the 58% attributable to schools, over which it has less control than may be thought and which is an area already significantly threatened by budget cuts. But if the Council is limited within its own estate, there is all the more reason for it to exercise its very real power to reduce carbon emissions elsewhere in the County. A mere 5% reduction in road transport emissions across the County would be equivalent to making all its own estate carbon neutral. Such a reduction would be easily achievable through very moderate speed limit or car parking policy changes.



Green Party



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