



# A Green Thought

News and Ideas from Winchester Green Party

## River Park

The Council proposes to spend £25M on a replacement leisure centre, doubling its existing size and using up the cricket pitch immediately north of the existing centre. The Green Party would never endorse such a scheme - the last thing Winchester needs is the loss of valued open space near its centre. This open ground is used by many residents and city workers for healthy formal and informal sport and recreational purposes. The irony of a Council proposing such a loss of healthy activity in the name of 'Olympic Legacy' is very obvious. A free outdoor activity is being replaced by chargeable indoor exercise.



The Council proposes a big increase in car parking provision here, attracting even more traffic onto the central road system of Winchester.

The Green Party believes in localisation of services: - everybody should have green spaces, leisure facilities and shops within walking or cycling distance of their homes. The benefits of this include stronger local communities, improved health and fitness, and less reliance on cars, thus mitigating the impact of climate change. We are not convinced by the City Council's assertion that a larger leisure centre is needed, or that the current one cannot be refurbished. The city council should instead focus on creating multiple leisure opportunities throughout the city and closer to people's homes; for example making school sports facilities available to the public in the

**Shocking Parking Strategy:** The City Council is starting a 'consultation' (unfortunately full of leading questions) on parking strategy. It does not bode well, by assuming that more parking in a town centre implies better economic performance. There is no evidence for such a view – a proper study would look at the evidence

for how other historic towns in the country and in Europe work – what is the correlation between their prosperity and their level of central traffic? Access to Winchester is not parking-limited, it is congestion-limited. The data shows that the town functions for much of the day just short of gridlock. Even at the height of the Christmas market, when

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Better still, come to a meeting: held always on the first Wednesday of the month, Hyde Tavern, 7.30 to 9.30pm.

If you have views on anything written in this newsletter or would like to know more about your local Green Party group contact us via our website: [www.winchestergreenparty.org.uk](http://www.winchestergreenparty.org.uk)

evening and at weekends, building smaller leisure facilities on existing brownfield sites and as a part of all new housing developments, protecting green spaces for walking, jogging and play, and creating safe cycle paths.

Support the campaign to protect the River Park Recreation Grounds: [www.savetherec.org](http://www.savetherec.org)

the streets were in gridlock there were still empty central car parking spaces. The network is incapable of delivering the cars to the car parks this strategy proposes we have.

The level of traffic and pollution in Winchester is unacceptable. Traffic occupies space that could be better and more healthily occupied by people and it intimidates and deters people from visiting shopping areas that would benefit from their visit, e.g. Parchment Street isolated by the barrier of traffic in St George's St. Yet the draft strategy clearly increases traffic in Winchester by building in even more parking.

Strategy needs a vision - the economy of Winchester needs people to live in the centre, to come into the centre and to find things to do that keep them there. It needs a quality of attraction and it needs efficiency of access. A polluted, noisy, intimidating street pattern is not attractive; traffic-filled streets prevent efficient access.

### Air Pollution in Winchester:

Few will be surprised to learn that the City Council has taken no action to do something about air pollution in Winchester in the wake of our formal European complaint (see Green Thought 7). Indeed from the continuing commitment to extra parking for Silver Hill, its failure to take any real action in anticipation of the Barton Farm traffic generation and the emergence of the Parking Strategy (see above) with its proposals to increase central car parking, the Council is on a wilful path towards increasing pollution in the centre.

The Council persists in its hand-waving assertion that it must '*balance*' action on air pollution with what it calls a need to encourage the economy. Quite apart from the absurdity of the assertion that the two things are mutually incompatible, why does the Council think there can be a *balance* between keeping the law and breaking it, between poisoning children in Winchester and not poisoning them?



Extraordinarily, central government (DEFRA) has decided that the easiest way to avoid being held responsible for air pollution in Britain is to stop  
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measuring it. A phoney consultation, softening up the public for this preposterous proposal, has recently closed.

But the law on air pollution is well-established and central government was deemed to be failing in its duty by the Supreme Court earlier this year. We trust that our Council is not failing to take action locally on the assumption that the DEFRA consultation somehow lets them off the hook.

We have been carrying out our own air pollution monitoring in Winchester this summer and it is clear that the problem remains. We will be reporting back to Brussels later this year.

### The Case for a Living Wage?

*A contributed article by Ben Watts*

With 4.8 million people now earning less than a living wage, I am proud to be a member of a party that supports paying workers a living wage<sup>1</sup>. Currently, because the minimum wage is clearly insufficient, taxpayers are left to pay for the benefits needed to enable people on low wages to live. Taxpayers thus subsidise the profits of employers including large corporations that seem to do everything within their power to avoid paying anything back into the society and system that benefits them so unequally.

In its drive for austerity, where the most vulnerable are suffering the most, the coalition government cannot justify its assertion that we are '*all in this together*', indeed the broadest shoulders seem expected to carry the lightest burden.

Comparing a working life on the minimum wage, to a life on benefits, there seems little to incentivise individuals to seek employment. Paying the minimum wage seems to say that the employee is not valued by a company.

Benefit payments are supposed to be calculated to provide a basic quality of life, more or less the definition of a living wage. When the minimum wage is well below the living wage it clearly fails to meet basic need and benefit payments are needed simply to reach subsistence level.

Even if one takes the step from benefits to below-living-wage working there are problems in the transition. Benefits are lost before employment wages are paid and individuals can be trapped into cycles of debt at exorbitant interest rates. A living wage however gets people past this barrier of having to incur debt simply to subsist, prevents

<sup>1</sup> See (1) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-23953573>

the state subsidising the profits of corporations and reduces inequality in society.

**Bushfield Down:** The City Council, with its silly ambition for a Knowledge Park, has been trapped<sup>2</sup> into making this precious place vulnerable as an anything-goes development site like the infamous Solstice Park at Amesbury. Expect now to see applications for such delights as 'megashed' retail distribution centres, off-motorway burger bars and cheap hotels here.

The Church Commissioners, who own the land openly stated at Public Inquiry that they welcomed any of these money-making horrors. The Church Commissioners have also been ruthlessly resisting the campaign for a Village Green on this site. They sought a Judicial Review on the decision to hold an Inquiry into the Village Green application, which, with threat of costs, excluded those involved in the campaign. Having lost in the High Court they have challenged that decision again.

This land should never have been considered as a brownfield site. The exigencies of war resulted in an area which had been available to the public since time immemorial, being temporarily used as an army camp under wartime emergency powers. Geographically, this hill is part of the South Downs, through to Farley Mount and ought to have been part of the National Park. Scenically it is critical to the landscape to be seen when the South Downs Way eventually enters Winchester via the St Catherine's Hill area.

Its development would be an act of Philistinism and the Council should be ashamed of its behaviour in allowing this to happen. The Church Commissioners ought also to have had some sense of social and environmental responsibility in pursuing profit in such a bullying fashion.

**In the Red:** 20th August 2013 was the day our use of the Earth's resources ran into the red<sup>3</sup>. We are now globally un-sustainable. The government is moving further away from acting as if it cared – indeed the Environment Minister, Owen Patterson, has now firmly joined the climate change sceptics.

**Fracking:** If proof were needed that the Coalition Government is far and away the least green government ever, one only has to look at how both Parties are supporting the fracking of Britain's shale levels.



Green Party MP, Caroline Lucas, was arrested at the drilling site at Balcombe in Sussex. The Crown Prosecution Service has declared '*After careful consideration, we have concluded that there is sufficient evidence and that it is in the public interest to prosecute Ms Lucas*'. Really? What is the public interest exactly?

We have discovered enough fossil fuels already to ensure that the Earth is irredeemably damaged by our activities. What kind of madness is it that makes us want to find more? How is the public interest served by sucking up the last drops of oil and gas from the ground, wrecking our water courses and landscapes? We need to be as ready to resist this dirty and dangerous business<sup>4</sup> in mid-Hampshire<sup>5</sup> as they have been in Sussex.

### **M3 Junction 9 – cyclists don't count:**

George Osborne wants to balance the books, but can find plenty of money to 'invest' in further oil-dependency and climate damage with a new road-building spree. One local result of this generosity is the increase in capacity of Junction 9 on the M3. While welcomed by both Conservatives and LibDems on the Council it will result in more traffic in the City centre.

One effect will be to make the already intimidating crossing of this junction for cyclists very dangerous indeed. Since this is supposed to be a major link in the National Cycle Network (route 23) it is an extraordinary decision, even for the Highways Agency to make and disgraceful that the City and County Councils have signed up to it.

Our MP, Steve Brine, however, has been most helpful on this matter, managing to raise the matter twice in debate in Parliament and getting a commitment from the then Minister, Norman Baker, to take another look at the matter. We are grateful for Steve Brine's intervention.

<sup>4</sup> We note that the drillers, Cuadrilla, have just been granted licence to handle radioactive materials

<sup>5</sup> See '*Frack Free Hampshire*' via your Facebook account.

<sup>2</sup> See Green Thought 7

<sup>3</sup> Global Footprint Network: [www.footprintnetwork.org/](http://www.footprintnetwork.org/)

**By-election Result:** Winchester Green Party member, Marjorie Pooley, kindly agreed to stand in the East Hants Council seat of Medstead and Four Marks, recently vacated. The seat was essentially a UKIP-Tory battleground, but Marjorie achieved a 5.8% vote, very creditable for a first time attempt in such an unpromising ward.

## **Economics for a Sustainable Future:**

Natalie Bennet, leader of the UK Green Party, and Miriam Kennet of the Green Economics Institute, addressed an open meeting in Winchester in May.

Natalie focused on the increasing trend to underemployment and “*enforced casualisation*”, through reduction of rota hours and zero-hour contracts with no guarantee of work. Government does not count these people as ‘unemployed’, but, working below the living wage, they are now part of the so-called ‘*Precariat*’.

Natalie made the Green Party case for increasing localisation. While looking towards a more equitable world in which dwindling resources are better shared, we can see the western consensus of globalisation has brought only exploitation of the poor elsewhere. Cheap goods brought to us by the big High Street names come at the cost of sweated and dangerous labour practices.

But, even if the resentment of the world’s poor could be contained, the era of cheap food and clothing cannot last, as planetary resources dwindle, transportation costs rise and global supply chains become less secure.

Miriam’s perspective was more hopeful, seeing change coming from the grass roots. Dynamic young countries in Asia and Africa are going in for green economics because it creates the most jobs. Indonesia spends 20% of its GDP on education, while Spain, in dire straits, has a new phenomenon – Los Indignados are reclaiming the future by demanding a new fusion of ecology and equality. This is where the future lies.

Both speakers drew attention to the mythology of GDP as a measure of economic welfare. Natalie quoted Robert Kennedy, who said of GDP that it: *“Does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education, or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages; the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither our wit nor our courage; neither our wisdom nor our learning; neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country; it measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.”*

Can you help us campaign for a greener Winchester?

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Please send cheques (payable to Winchester Green Party) to Rob Parker, 16 Back Street, Winchester SO23 9SB



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