



# A Green Thought

News and Ideas from Winchester Green Party

## Flooding – Is Anyone to Blame?

Various agencies have worked well to spare Winchester from the worst effects of the rising Itchen. Blaming the behaviour of pharaohs or governments for natural calamities is an absurdity we should have grown out of. But maybe, after all, we should be asking questions. First about the failures of preparedness and the silliness of politicians leaping on simplistic solutions; and secondly about whether we are bringing the whole thing on ourselves.

This Government has been ruthlessly emasculating the watchdogs of environmental protection (what the Prime Minister was pleased to call '*green crap*' and Eric Pickles calls '*red tape*'). It has systematically starved them of funds and has effectively given them instruction not to stand in the way of development – anyone who has attended major planning inquiries in the last couple of years will know how silent the Environment Agency, Natural England and English Heritage have been in the face of the most preposterous assaults on our countryside.



Pickles has given free rein to green-field development (e.g. Barton Farm) with no regard for whether flood plains are involved. Yet he is the first to point the finger of blame at the Environment Agency. While the Prime Minister, anxious to appear a man of action, dashes in with a 'pledge to dredge' – can anyone explain why increasing the flow of water from the Somerset Levels into much more heavily populated Bridgwater is a good idea, when we are saving Winchester's houses by damming the Itchen?

But we really can nowadays ask why we may be getting more extreme weather events. Before he was elected to government, David Cameron seemed really concerned about climate change – he posed with huskies in Lapland and even hosted showings of '*An Inconvenient Truth*'. Now it is '*green crap*'; now we must frack for dirty oil and gas; we must build roads and airports to get deeper and deeper into oil dependency. There is a price to pay for this behaviour – we are perhaps just beginning to see it.

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01962-890160

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)

**Parking Strategy:** In our last Green Thought we reported on a parking strategy for Winchester - a '*consultation*' comprised a set of mostly leading questions, designed in such a way that one could not offer an opinion on whether car parking should be reduced in the town centre (something that the Council has previously promised). This hardly mattered since the strategy document emerged from the consultation unaltered in any meaningful way and was rubber-stamped by the Council. We now have a parking strategy seemingly designed to increase traffic and pollution in Winchester City centre.

**Air Pollution – Europe is Stirring:** The local branches of the Green Party and Friends of the Earth made a joint complaint at the end of 2012 to the European Commission (EC), on the failure of the City and County Councils to meet air quality legislation in Winchester. Just before Christmas we heard from the EC that it was pursuing our case along with others, following a ruling by the UK Supreme Court that the UK Government was in breach of its obligations. The EC has now decided that it will prosecute the UK Government – see [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-14-154\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-14-154_en.htm).

Meanwhile we are going back to the EC with a letter of further particulars, showing that the Council is taking a number of actions (especially on Silver Hill, but also in the Parking Strategy – see above) that will have the obvious consequence of making air pollution worse in Winchester. It is way past time our Council took this matter seriously.

### **The Wrong Measure of Wealth**

The government would have us believe that the economy is growing again but most people do not feel any improvement. Many will have their own ideas why. One theory is that we are producing too much of what does not serve humanity well.

It is a problem of poor economic evaluation that is deluding some people into thinking we are getting richer. A problem of deeming all we produce, and what people and governments are willing to buy, to be wealth creation, even when some of it is contrary to the individual or common good.

This wrong economic accounting has an effect on the money we use. Money has no intrinsic value but is simply a means of exchange, unit of account and store of value. This practice of assessing all production to be of positive value (even if some of it is detrimental to societies and the natural world) devalues money. This is a cause of price inflation in goods and services that sustain or enhance life, and provide shelter and comfort - the historic purposes of work.

Take the arms trade as an example. From a global perspective, consider the financial, material and human capital expended in their manufacture and eventual use and, above all, their effect on people and the environment. Is this an efficient use of the resources used up? Does all this effort improve the life of anybody? No, quite the opposite but most importantly, the company and country balance sheets say it does. In reality, the act of

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their manufacture and deployment destroys wealth and devalues global currencies. As a nation, we may choose to hold and use arms but their manufacture should not be treated as a global increase in wealth.

**River Park:** Following the chaotic meeting last September when Council Leader Keith Wood and Corporate Director Steve Tilbury were surprised by passionate public reaction to their high-handed presentation of proposed redevelopment of the Leisure Centre, a local group, *Save the Rec*, was formed to try and get a more sensible plan.

The group held its own meeting, which attracted 200 people, seemingly unanimously opposed to WCC's plans. Support came from across Winchester and beyond, although opposition is particularly strong among the residents of Hyde/St Bartholomew's ward. Council propagandists trotted out the usual cheap accusation of 'Nimbyism' – why should people not protect their backyard against out-of-town politicians who care nothing for what locals care for?

Campaigners point out that they are best placed to witness how much this green space is valued and used by all sorts of people for organised sport and informal leisure. There has been some political success. Major planning decisions were meant to have been taken by last November but the Council were forced into a consultation exercise and will now have to consult more.

Campaigners do not lobby for a particular alternative solution, merely requiring that if the new leisure centre is to be at River Park the development must be within existing borders of buildings and car park.

The latest development is that an Informal Scrutiny Group has been formed, under the chairmanship of another out-of-town councillor (and with only one of the seven members representing a Winchester City ward). It is disappointing to discover that this Group will meet in private and aims to have a recommendation to Cabinet prior to the Council elections in May. There seems little time or inclination to gather the evidence necessary to produce a report likely to inform a sensible reappraisal.

**The Cost of Nuclear Power:** There is much argument, even amongst environmentalists, about the costs and benefits of nuclear energy. This piece looks at what it will cost the consumer.



The race by all main political parties to create an illusion of cheap energy prices for consumers in the future is deeply worrying.

This problem has recently emerged with the announcement by the Lib/Con coalition that an agreement has been reached with EDF<sup>1</sup> to build a previously untested nuclear power station in Somerset, with financial backing from China, with a wholesale price for the electricity set and guaranteed at twice the current rate and indexed against inflation for 35 years.

Ed Davey has set this high price to create parity with a gas price he assumes will increase considerably by 2023. Analysts<sup>2</sup> are quoted as saying they are “*flabbergasted*” that government would commit future generations to this deal.

Nuclear power is very expensive. Current estimated costs for decommissioning the 20 old power plants is £100bn. Cleaning up Sellafield re-processing plant is £65bn. And then there is the vexed and uncoded question of what to do with the waste after decommissioning.

How is it to be paid for? The construction of the previous generation of 1960's power stations was paid for from general taxation and so still is the decommissioning which is currently taking place. The new arrangement with EDF is for the construction and part of the clean-up costs to be paid for by consumers through their electricity bills.

The subtle point here is that only taxpayers funded the capital costs of nuclear power in the past whereas now with this new arrangement, the capital cost will be paid for by all users of electricity, including those of modest means. This increases the cost to those least able to pay.

The Green Party is the only party opposing this new boost for nuclear power. There are many reasons to do so but cost – not least to the less well-off is a good place to start.

**The Silver Elephant:** The Council is pressing ahead with its Silver Hill ambition. At last, local businesses are waking up to the likelihood that they will suffer from this development. It is a pity that they did not attend the Compulsory Purchase Order Inquiry in 2012, when their concerns might have had an impact.

The scheme has obvious harmful consequences for traffic and air pollution, but it is also of highly

dubious economic value. The Council that brought us the failed Brooks development believes it now has the commercial nous to speculate again with ratepayers' money on a grandiose project.

It simply has no idea whether such a project can succeed – believing that businesses saying they want to move here is all the proof that is needed. Of course there are businesses that want to move to a brand new site in the heart of a well-to-do town. But at what competition with and at what cost to existing businesses? What happens to the High Street and Jewry Street as the centre of gravity moves towards Silver Hill?

A cautious, sensible Council would have developed this area incrementally and observed its effects. But an arrogant Council, with only past commercial failure in its record, feels able to be reckless. A revised planning application will be brought forward this year, though only minor changes are sought. It is, however, one last opportunity to hinder this dangerous development.



### **Food Banks – the Unequal Society:**

Winchester Basics Bank saw an increase of 20% in demand last year over 2012. It fed 2936 clients, over 1000 of whom were children, and 1415 people received clothes. People were coming from mainstream society, not just its margins. That's in wealthy Winchester.



Green MEP for the South East Region  
Keith Taylor,  
together with Green Party Leader

Natalie Bennett, recently visited the Food Bank to offer support and thanks to the staff and volunteers. But Keith's recent report “*Food Bank Britain*” ([http://issuu.com/greenkeith\\_mep/](http://issuu.com/greenkeith_mep/)) found the trend for increased need is all over the South East Region, and called for the Government to increase the minimum wage to a living wage (see previous Green Thought).

Winchester Basics Bank is open at Highcliffe on Tuesdays and Fridays, and at Weeke on Thursday mornings.

### **SWVG – A Welcoming Society:**

Our Green Party leader and MEP also visited the SWVG (Southampton and Winchester Visitors Group)<sup>3</sup> in Southampton. Natalie and Keith were updated on the work of the charity, which was founded in 2002, to provide support to vulnerable

<sup>1</sup> Électricité de France

<sup>2</sup> Liberum Capital Utility Analysts

<sup>3</sup> See <http://swvg-refugees.org.uk/public/>

refugees and asylum seekers, initially for people held in Winchester prison, and now to those staying in Southampton.

SWVG aims to reduce the isolation and marginalisation of asylum seekers and improve their wellbeing. Their 'Visitors' maintain a one-to-one relationship with clients, usually meeting weekly, providing practical advice and links to legal and health services and connections with community and faith organisations. The group, which is entirely run and almost entirely staffed by volunteers, many from Winchester, also provides basic financial support and a room to those left destitute by the asylum-seeking process.

Keith and Natalie talked with and were moved by the stories of several asylum seekers, helped by SWVG, including Mary and her daughter Louise. Mary has been seeking asylum for 10 years.

**Electoral Changes:** The Local Government Boundary Commission is to review the City Council's electoral arrangements in time for the 2016 elections. They will review Council size, wards and ward boundaries.

The City Council is considering changing the existing system of 'elections by thirds'. Over a 4-year cycle we have an opportunity each year for three years to elect one of our three councillors; in the fourth year we have a County Council vote. The change would be to elect all three City Councillors in one year, leaving two years without any electoral opportunity to change things.

This clearly favours big parties and encourages the arrogance of power – once in place a ruling party can ignore its electorate for four years.

There is renewed interest in our long-held view that the electoral arrangements in Winchester City are simply unfair. The population statistics of the wider District together with the Cabinet system in Winchester means that all the important decisions about the town have been taken in recent years by a committee of councillors, none of whom represents any ward in the town.

The furore over the high-handed behaviour of the Council in relation to the River Park proposals and the Barton Farm debacle are just two consequences of this deficit in democratic arrangements. Winchester Green Party will this year be pressing the case for the introduction of an elected Town Council.

**Elections 22<sup>nd</sup> May:** There are both City Council and European elections this year.

In the South-East England constituency at the 2009 Euro Election the Green Party secured 271506 votes with the LibDems getting 330340 votes. That margin gave the LibDems two seats to the Greens' one seat. Given the electoral collapse of faith in the LibDems it is reasonable to hope for a reversal of that distribution. Our present Green MEP, Keith Taylor, has been a frequent campaigning visitor to Winchester and helped us especially with our EC air pollution complaint.

Can you help us campaign for a greener Winchester?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_ email: \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to:

Join Winchester Green Party:

Deliver leaflets:

Make a donation or contribution to production of these leaflets:

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

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



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