

Reading Friends of the Earth



**Friends of
the Earth**

Newsletter Jan/Feb 2012

For more information see <http://www.foe.co.uk/reading>
email info@readingfoe.org.uk or 'phone 0118 9868260.

Diary:

General Meetings: Reading FoE usually meets on the second Wednesday of each month upstairs at RISC, 35-39 London Street, at 8:00 p.m.

January 11th: – 8:00 p.m. at RISC – **General Meeting** – including review of 'Final Demand' campaign.

February 8th: - 8:00 p.m. at RISC – **General Meeting** – details by e-mail – should include report back from 'Reading Means Business on Climate Change' meeting discussed below.

Other Activities and Meetings (not run by Reading FoE):

Monday January 16th – " **Building and Construction, can it really improve the environment?**". Earley Environmental Group AGM followed by talk by Edwin Trout. Function Room, Maiden Place, Earley, 19:30. All about recycling and enhancing the environment while producing building materials and during construction projects. <http://www.earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk/> - check for final details.

Thursday February 2nd – '**SEFS AGM**' – Canterbury Hall, London, 10:30 to 15:00 – see below.

Saturday February 4th – '**FoE South East Gathering**' http://www.foe.co.uk/events/greater_southeast.html – London – all day – see agenda http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/event_background_documents/gserg_feb_2012.pdf
We have been asked if someone from our group would give a 'Lightning Talk' for a few minutes – along with people from other groups.

December 2011 Meeting on "Heating your home without Hot Air":

Two of our members gave short presentations on their ideas for domestic energy management.

Graham Hutchinson said that to achieve the UK target of 80% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2050 would require almost total decarbonisation of energy supply because about 20% of present emissions come from landfill and agriculture.

He said we need to move away from hydrocarbons (coal, gas and oil) as fast as possible and advocated 'making friends with our meters' and doing some maths (to work out where we were using energy); reducing total energy use (both through technology but also through lifestyle choices and common-sense measures); and switching to renewable energy.

John Stumbles showed us the calculations he had done on energy use in his home including estimates of cost-saving and energy-saving from different measures. Radiator thermostats could set different temperatures in different rooms. Loft insulation, cavity wall insulation, and draught-proofing all played a part.

He had been very impressed by Prof. David MacKay's book 'Sustainable Energy – without the hot air' which is downloadable from <http://www.withouthotair.com/>

Planning Policy Changes - GREN AGM

The main speaker after the 'business' of the GREN AGM on 30th November was Paul de Zylva from FoE's London office. This was billed as a 'debate' with Councillor Ruhemann, Chair of RBC Planning Committee, but both speakers were in agreement that the government's 'National Planning Policy Framework' (NPPF) was a grave threat to the environment and to local democracy.

Paul de Zylva said the NPPF needs a sustainable development framework to ensure that growth is low carbon and wildlife-rich. He welcomed new opportunities for 'neighbourhood planning' in principle but pointed out that

government estimated costs as between £17k and 220k per plan so he questioned how many people would take it up - although government was committed to providing assistance. He wanted certainty that standards will be higher, environmental quality will be improved, and people will be able to voice concerns effectively.

Councillor Ruhemann said the NPPF was a 'developer's charter' - increasingly developers will fall back on the mantra "the default answer to proposals is 'Yes' ". This will lead to more decisions on appeal - by un-elected civil servants based on their views of national policies. Sustainable development sounds good but in the government's opinion sustainable development is simply equivalent to economic growth.

In December the Communities and Local Government Committee (with the Environmental Audit Committee) published a report <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmcomloc/1526/152602.htm> that was extremely critical and called for major changes and a second consultation. Key points included:

- The Government has set great store by the brevity and simplicity of the NPPF, but the significant gaps in planning policy and guidance could lead to a huge expansion in the size of Local Plans as local authorities attempt to plug the gaps.
- There is a danger that, far from speeding up the planning process, in the short term the NPPF will slow it down by introducing ambiguity where previously there was detailed guidance—'planning by appeal' could be the outcome.
- The phrase 'sustainable development', which is key to the policy in the NPPF is a poorly defined phrase—for example, the document continually conflates 'sustainable development' with 'sustainable economic growth'.

“Final Demand” – National Energy Campaign:

FoE's new national energy campaign calls for the government to

- Hold an urgent public inquiry into the power and influence of the 'Big Six' energy companies
- Not to axe support for clean British energy produced by communities, councils, business and householders.

At the end of October the government spread chaos through the Solar PV industry by proposing - with only six weeks notice - a drastic cut to the feed-in tariff and a condition that homes should achieve good standards of insulation before being eligible for the FiT. The campaign became more urgent and more focussed on PV.

Local media showed that Rob Wilson MP (Reading East) had quickly been contacted by Photon Energy http://www.getreading.co.uk/jobs/news/s/2103027_solar_tariff_cuts_could_cost_jobs so we contacted solar companies in West Reading and found that Erica Robb of Spirit Solar was critical of Alok Sharma MP (Reading West) who had been very unhelpful in response to her loss of £80,000 and forced redundancies of her staff so we issued a joint press release. GREN also achieved some media coverage on the issue. http://www.getreading.co.uk/jobs/news/s/2104872_solar_energy_boss_lashes_tariff_cuts

Latest news is that the Energy and Climate Change Committee has published a critical report <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmenergy/1605/160502.htm>

- The scale and pace of the changes now proposed was a 'shock' for the industry and the suddenness of their introduction has damaged investor confidence across the whole energy sector. This damage would not have occurred if the Government had recognised the unsustainable rate of the expansion of solar installations at an earlier date, something which ought to have been identified by Ministers and officials sooner than it appears to have been.
- The use of a reference date for new installations to qualify for the existing tariffs that precedes the end of the consultation smacks of retrospective regulation, which undermines confidence in the Government's management of other energy policies.
- The impact on community schemes of the proposed changes will generally be greater than for individual homeowners, and could undermine the finances needed to support the other environmental activities of such groups.
- The Government ... has not demonstrated the logic of linking technologies used to generate electricity in homes to energy efficiency

In addition the national FoE organisation, acting with two Solar PV companies, has taken the government to court and the consultation into the changes to the feed-in tariff has been ruled illegal – the government now plans to appeal which will simply delay resolution of these issues creating more uncertainty for businesses and customers.

Back at the longer-term campaign, we were pleased that the Cabinet of Reading Borough Council agreed to support the FoE Joint Statement online with all the other signatories, including Erica Robb, which is at www.foe.co.uk/resource/briefing_notes/fd_joint_statement1.pdf

For more details and to sign the petition see: http://www.foe.co.uk/what_we_do/final_demand_info_32893.html

SEFS AGM

SEFS – the ‘South East Forum for Sustainability’ - is an alliance between FoE, CPRE, RSPB, Wildlife Trusts, and other groups in the South East Region. <http://www.sefs.org.uk/> It originally had three seats on SEERA – the South East England Regional Assembly – and did much good work influencing regional planning policies.

SEERA was closed by the Labour government in March 2009 and some of its powers passed to SEEDA – South East England Development Agency – which is to be closed in 2012. The present government has abandoned Regional Plans in favour of “localism” which makes a South East Forum less directly relevant.

So SEFS is now to close but the various groups will talk at the AGM about how networking can continue.

The AGM will feature two speakers – Catrina Riddell (ex-Director of Planning at SEERA) and Ian Christie of the Green Alliance – to bring insights into the impact of ‘localism’ and how to stand up for “real” sustainable development.

Reading Means Business on Climate Change.

We have been invited to send two delegates to this Borough Council event which is from 09:00 to 13:30 on Thursday 12th January. The intention is to allow community groups to have our say in the development of Reading’s new Climate Change Strategy.

The meeting will include presentations from Dennis Moynihan of the Institute for Sustainability and from Peter Harper of the Centre for Alternative Technology. There will also be a review of progress against the current strategy which can be found at <http://www.reading2020.org.uk/climate-change/>

There will be a report-back from this meeting at our February meeting.

Sites and Detailed Policies Document:

The formal examination of this Council planning document took place from late November to mid-December. The changes to the planning system mean it’s even more important that the Local Plan is sound.

On the strength of comments submitted to the Council’s consultations John Booth attended on two days to argue for our aspirations for development of South Reading and for strengthening of the Council’s policies on decentralised energy.

It seems that the owners of the ‘Worton Grange’ site – having gained planning permission for warehousing – are quite keen to use the site for mixed uses – housing, offices and retailing – and gave the impression that they would like the Council to include options for quite intensive development to make it worthwhile for them.

Policy DM1 on adaptation to climate change seems very worthy. Policy DM2 on ‘decentralised energy’ is all about requiring developers to give consideration to combined heat and power in their plans – it wouldn’t actually require them to do anything practical if they didn’t want to. John suggested stronger wording would be necessary for it to have any effect.

See <http://www.anjoro.plus.com/downloads/southreading.doc> For official documents on the examination see: <http://www.reading.gov.uk/environmentplanning/planning/localplanningpolicy/localdevelopmentframework/General.asp?id= SX9452-A785C833>

Durban Climate Change Agreement

Friends of the Earth gave a lukewarm welcome to the outcome of the Durban climate talks in December – their report says:

“By 2015 a new treaty will legally require all countries, including the USA, China, and India, to cut greenhouse gas emissions after 2020. But scientists have warned global emissions need to decline well before 2020 to prevent catastrophic climate change.

“This will leave millions at threat from more extreme weather events, like flooding and drought. And will hit the world’s poorest people hardest. Rich countries are responsible for the majority of emissions in the atmosphere and have benefited most from burning fossil fuels. But they are failing to take a lead on cutting emissions - even though they are better placed to tackle climate change.”

Useful Websites etc.:

www.greenlink-berkshire.org.uk
www.foe.co.uk

GREN - Greater Reading Environmental Network <http://www.gren.org.uk/>.

Transition Reading - Reading's Transition Town movement <http://www.transitionreading.org.uk/>

Doorstep collection of WEEE (Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment) service in Reading being offered by Midex Reverse Technologies <http://www.midex-rt.com/>

True Food Co-op: www.truefood.coop - Winner Best Retail Initiative BBC Food & Farming Awards 2011 - shop in Emmer Green and local markets!

Reading Borough Council Waste and Recycling:
<http://www.reading.gov.uk/environmentandplanning/wasteandrecycling/>

Citizens Committee on Oil Peak And Decline (COPAD) www.copad.org

<http://www.fishonline.org/> gives info on over-fishing, fish to avoid, etc.

www.ejfoundation.org (Environmental Justice Foundation)

Local Food Directory, with links: http://www.greenlink-berkshire.org.uk/Local_Economy.htm

RISC <http://www.risc.org.uk/readingfairtrade/>

Reading FoE Officers

At our AGM on April 13th 2011 Enrico Petrucco and John Booth were elected to the posts of Co-ordinator and Treasurer respectively.

Reading FoE e-mail communications

If you would like to be on our main mailing list and join in our day-to-day communications please email info@readingfoe.org.uk.

Alternatively we have a separate list for people who only want to receive our newsletter and information about important events and actions.

Reading FoE Subscriptions – Subscribe NOW for 2011/12

To join or renew, just fill in the slip below and send it off with your subscription. We aim to provide a regular newsletter to keep members up to date with the group's activities. Our subscriptions run from April to March and are set at £7.00 / £4.00 (waged / unwaged) to cover newsletter costs, meeting room hire and campaign expenses. Further contributions would be greatly appreciated. Even if you don't have time to take an active part, your support is welcome and allows us to demonstrate more local support.

Name: _____ Telephone: _____

Email: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

Please tick if you are able to take an active part in our campaigns. We may contact you by phone.

I heard about the group from: _____

Please make your cheque payable to Reading Friends of the Earth, and return to the Reading FoE Treasurer, c/o 27 Instow Road, Earley, Reading RG6 5QH.