

Reading Friends of the Earth Newsletter Jan/Feb 2014



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

Change Your World – FoE Local Groups Newsletter:
http://www.foe.co.uk/community/resource/change_your_world.html

Diary:

General Meetings: Reading FoE usually meets on the **second Wednesday** of each month upstairs in Room 1 at RISC, 35-39 London Street, at 8:00 p.m. Most meetings include discussion of general topics – some have a particular focus or guest speakers. Meetings are open to all.

January 8th: – 8:00 p.m. at RISC – **General Meeting** – intend to discuss ideas from the national FoE 'Land, Food and Water Away Day' which Tanja and Steve went to in November, and to decide on response to Council's Cycle Strategy proposals.

February 12th: - 8:00 p.m. at RISC – **General Meeting** – topics later by e-mail.

Other Reading FoE Activities and Meetings:

Thursday 23rd January – “**The fickle wind: can renewable energy be there when we need it?**” Dr Phil Coker, Lecturer in Renewable Energy at the University of Reading, will talk about the variability of renewable energy resources and the implications this has for energy system operation, and will discuss solutions to manage these challenges. See below. 8:00 p.m. in Room 3 at RISC

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

Sunday 19th January – Repair Cafe – at Reading Voluntary Action, Highbridge House, 16-18 Duke St, Reading RG1 4RU. 12:00 to 17:00 <https://www.facebook.com/ReadingRepairCafe>

Green Drinks at RISC - is on the first Tuesday of every month. Come along to the Global Café from 6.30 to 8.30 p.m. to meet like-minded people for a chat over a drink or two. <http://www.greendrinks.org/berkshire/reading>

“The Fickle Wind: can renewable energy be there when we need it?” – Thursday 23rd January

When wind turbines only supplied a small fraction of our electricity it was easy to imagine that when the wind blew coal- or gas-fired power plants were throttled back or switched off to save fuel – reducing carbon emissions and fuel import bills – and that they would take up the load again when wind speed dropped. Now moving from the 2012 record of 11.3% of all UK electricity generation from renewables towards higher targets for future decades the question of what happens when the wind speed is too low, or too high, becomes ever more important.

Dr Phil Coker, Lecturer in Renewable Energy at the University of Reading, has agreed to come to inform us about the variability of renewable energy resources and the implications this has for energy system operation, and he will discuss solutions to manage these challenges.

His core research examines the variability of low carbon energy supplies and the relationship with energy demand variability. This draws on three intertwined themes:

- (i) Characterising the factors that lead to patterns in energy supply availability
- (ii) Examining the factors that drive energy demand patterns
- (iii) Exploring technical and market based options for aligning supply and demand, including but not limited to energy storage.

Dr Coker joined the University of Reading after 15 years as an engineer and manager in the UK gas industry. His wider research and teaching interests include the role of carbon management within the broader sustainability agenda, as well as the application of systems thinking approaches to urban scale energy systems.

Shale Gas:

At our December meeting Reading FoE member Joanna Hanson gave us a talk on shale gas and the environmental and climate change aspects of its extraction.

We saw a presentation she had prepared, primarily for a Polish audience, in which she argued that with good regulation and community involvement the local environmental negatives could be managed and the economic benefits from exploiting natural resources could result in investment in sustainable technologies that would not otherwise have taken place. She believed Poland would exploit shale gas but it could be done well or badly.

She explained how having worked on the community management aspects of shale gas extraction she believes activities opposed to shale gas extraction should be carefully considered and focussed. Opposition can easily undermine its own case if its arguments are not scientifically based, in particular those regarding possible local environmental impacts. Shale gas's carbon emission levels, its impact on climate change, are a more relevant concern – because less likely to be controlled by regulation - than the local environmental effects.

Much has now been learnt from the American experience and this needs to be understood within the context of emerging European legislation and regulation. Certainly there would be local impacts during drilling and fracking - truck movements, noise and visual impact - but these would be temporary. Nationally employment would benefit but there would be few local jobs created.

She also raised the issue of considering how to use community compensation funding, if it is agreed and there is local acceptance of shale gas extraction, for investing in local energy production, in renewables as a sustainable process with community ownership.

Links:

One of the companies hoping to extract gas in Poland: <http://www.3legsresources.com/about-us/introduction/>

Welsh Committee's discussion on shale gas:

<http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/WrittenEvidence.svc/EvidenceHtml/4032>

Bee Cause Progress

FoE handed in the latest petition cards - calling for a strong National Pollinator Strategy (NPS) - to Lord de Mauley in early December. Public consultation on the draft NPS is due in January with the final NPS out in spring 2014 – details of the consultation will be forwarded when they are available.

At the end of October Chris and John took a Bee Cause stall to the Reading Neighbourhood Network AGM where we made a number of contacts, and Tanja, Joanna, Chris, Steve and John followed this with a busy stall at the Farmers' Market on 16th November.

On Sunday 1st December Chris showed the film 'More Than Honey' <http://www.morethanhoneyfilm.com/about.html> at RISC to an audience of about 25 people including bee-keepers and biologists from Reading University.

This documentary showed how honey bees are managed as pollinators and honey-makers in industrial-scale agriculture in the USA, and at a smaller scale in Europe and Arizona. A range of factors including infections, parasites, industrial farming practices, and pesticides were blamed for costly losses of colonies of bees.

Even our fairly well-informed audience found some of the contents new, disturbing, and in some cases shocking. Many of their comments related to the way in which commercial bees were treated, and to scenes showing hand-pollination of fruit trees in a part of China where pesticides have devastated insect populations. This film showed how important pollination is, and how vulnerable bees are, reinforcing our call for a National Pollinator Strategy – for honey bees, wild bees, and other insects – for this country.

FoE say the UK does not have a “mass trade in honeybees for pollination. There is international trade in honeybees, and there is supposed to be regulation to prevent the spread of disease in that trade. But in the last few years a trade has grown up in bumble-bees for pollinating things like tomatoes in greenhouses and polytunnels. And that trade is not regulated.”

If anyone wishes to borrow the DVD of this film please get in touch.

Defending Bees in Court:

The European Union's 2-year partial ban on neonicotinoid pesticides came into force on 1st December but is to be challenged by chemical companies Syngenta and Bayer who make some of the chemicals.

SumOfUs.org, a global corporate watchdog organization, say the hearings will start early in 2014, but also say that such cases can take two years to resolve. It is applying to intervene at the European Court of Justice to defend the ban, supporting Buglife, ClientEarth, Greenpeace, Pesticides Action Network Europe and the Bee Life European Beekeeping Coordination.

Reading Climate Change Strategy - Actions:

Reading Climate Change Partnership's (RCCP) Climate Change Strategy consists of the Strategy Document and Strategic Priorities – high level aims intended to be valid up to 2020 <http://www.readingclimateaction.org.uk/>

The Action Plans are intended to set out actions up to three years ahead, and to be reviewed by the RCCP every six months, and to be revised annually. The website <http://www.readingclimateaction.org.uk/action-plans/> now includes a draft release of the proposed Actions – the Council has agreed its actions but agreement has not yet been reached with all other action deliverers.

Reading Climate Action Network (RCAN) is for individuals or organisations to join to show support and to share information. Members commit to undertaking one or more 'challenges' – the most difficult is to reduce your carbon footprint by 7% per year for 7 years – but some are much easier. **Take a look – and then sign up to something!** <http://www.readingclimateaction.org.uk/reading-climate-action/>

Energy Saving ... bust?

The changes to support for insulation measures under the coalition government have caused a dramatic reduction of 93% in the number of lofts insulated in the first ten months of 2013 compared to 2012 according to a recent 'Guardian' article. ECO schemes, which require energy companies to deliver energy saving measures, account for 98% of the measures installed in 2013, with the green deal delivering only 2% (but its contribution is increasing). <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/dec/30/number-households-insulation-lofts-plummets-green-deal>

Reading Cycle Strategy:

'Bridging Gaps, Overcoming Barriers and Promoting Safer Cycling.' A consultation on this revision of the Council's Cycling Strategy has been launched and closes on January 10th.

<http://www.reading.gov.uk/news/2013/oct/new-cycle-strategy-amp-bike-hire-scheme-reading/>

This includes aiming for 2,300 additional cycle trips every day by April 2015, and doubling the percentage of people cycling to work in the next five years (from 3% to 6%).

Reading FoE will look to agree a response at its January meeting – please get involved. See Reading Cycle Campaign on <http://www.readingcyclecampaign.org.uk/> .

Bed-time reading:

Two former Directors of Friends of the Earth published environmental books in 2013. Both are optimistic that solutions to environmental problems can be found.

Tony Juniper's "**What has Nature Ever Done For Us**" (he must have guessed that Monty Python would re-form) sub-titled "How Money Really Does Grow On Trees" takes a detailed technical look at 'how the welfare of the human species rests on the assets and services provided by the rest of nature, and make the case for natural capital to be integral in a new economy fit for the future'.

He addresses a wide range of topics from soil bacteria to vultures, and from oceans to economics. He concludes that 'We need to garden the earth, to nurture its assets, aware of the implications of our decisions' and that we need to realise 'that nature is not separate from the economy, a drag on growth or an expensive distraction.'

Jonathon Porritt's "**The World We Made**" is an accessible, illustrated, fictionalised review of the next 35 years through the eyes of a 50-year-old history teacher writing in 2050. He describes technological and political changes leading to a genuinely sustainable world 'in which there are still rich and poor, but the rich are poorer and the poor are richer in so many ways.'

However it doesn't all come easily and without loss and hardship – action on greenhouse gases is only agreed after Americans feel the impact of extreme weather and the USA becomes concerned at China's dominance in green technology - action on food and population growth only follows from the 'Great Famine' in 2025 when 10 million people starve.

Useful Websites etc.:

Friends of the Earth 'England, Wales and Northern Ireland' 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>

Action AWE (Atomic Weapons Eradication) is a grassroots campaign of nonviolent actions dedicated to halting nuclear weapons production at the Atomic Weapons Establishment factories at Aldermaston and Burghfield. <http://actionawe.org/>

Greenlink Berkshire www.greenlink-berkshire.org.uk

Pangbourne and Whitchurch Sustainability Group (PAWS) <http://www.pawsg.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)

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

Reading FoE Officers

At our AGM on April 10th 2013 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 receive and join in our day-to-day communications please send an email to 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 2013/14

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 £8.00 / £5.00 (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.