

Reading Friends of the Earth Newsletter Jan/Feb 2015



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

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 14th - 8:30 p.m. at RISC – **General meeting.** **Late start to allow people to attend 'Time to Act' meeting (see below) from 19:00 first.**

February 11th – 8:00 p.m. at RISC - **General Meeting** – details by e-mail later.

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

Wednesday 7th January – 7 p.m. – Council Chamber – Bridge Street RG1 2LU - **Reading Sustainability Centre** – open meeting to launch as a Community Interest Company – including speaker Saskia Huggins from Oxford on Community Projects <http://readingsustainabilitycentre.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/20141217-Open-meeting-flier-II.pdf>

Wednesday 14th January – 7 p.m. at RISC - **'Time to Act'** – Campaign against Climate Change meeting in run-up to their march in London on 7th March. Discussion of local actions with local members of Greenpeace, Global Justice Now (aka WDM), and FoE. See: <https://www.facebook.com/events/745801682161161>

Saturday 17th January – **'Revolution'** – 7:30 Aldworth Philharmonic to premier a new piece on climate change <http://www.aldworthphilharmonic.org.uk/> - plus free education event with climate scientists from 3:00.

Monday 23rd February – 7:30 pm – **Population Matters** are giving a talk to Earley Environmental Group at the Function Room, Maiden Place, off Kilnsea Drive, Lower Earley <http://www.earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk/>

Green Drinks at RISC – usually 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>

2015 – a key year for climate change

2014 has seen some progress on agreements to tackle climate change but a great deal now depends on the 'Conference of the Parties' (COP21) set for Paris in December 2015. So a busy year lies ahead, starting with Climate Action Network's 'Time to Act' march on Saturday March 7th <http://www.campaigncc.org/TimetoAct> and then a lobby of Parliament (aimed at newly-elected MPs) being set up by the Climate Coalition on June 17th.

- In autumn 2014 the EU signed-off a new target of “at least 40%” cuts in greenhouse gas emissions on 1990 levels by 2030, and the USA and China reached a high-level agreement that China's emissions would peak by 2030. But the EU, US and Chinese proposals don't provide the levels of cuts needed – unless they expect every other country to make deeper cuts than their own.
- In December 2014 the Lima 'Conference of the Parties' (COP20) agreed that governments will submit national plans for reining in greenhouse gas emissions by an informal deadline of March 31, 2015. However the U.N. Climate Change Secretariat said that the combined pledges by all nations will likely be too weak to achieve a goal of limiting warming to an agreed goal of two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels – which will be the main focus of the negotiations in Paris.
- After Lima Susanne Sherbarth of FoE Europe commented: “We have to tell the truth – the progress is pitiful and fails us given the scale of the planetary emergency. World governments remain far from where they need to be if they are to make an adequate equitable agreement to tackle climate change in Paris 12 months from now.”

Countries are aiming to reach agreement in Paris on a deal that will come into force from 2020 under which each nation pledges its own 'nationally determined contribution' for post-2020 action, no later than March 2015.

Friends of the Earth has launched a 'Climate Fair Shares' website <http://climate-fairshare.herokuapp.com/> which explores the issues in detail. It presents illustrative national "fair shares" of effort as related to the actions and support needed to address climate change at the global level, based on principles including:

- The global emissions budget and the effort to remain within it must be divided fairly among all people
- To be fair, this division must consider countries' historical use of the budget (historical responsibility) and their capacities to address climate change, while addressing the needs of the poorest

FoE argues that, because of our historic emissions and our advanced capabilities, the UK's present climate targets are not enough to be 'fair' and that the UK should offer to achieve 75% reduction in emissions by 2030 (relative to 1990) when the current EU target is only 40%, and should offer far greater technical and financial assistance to developing countries.

<http://www.foe.co.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/paris-2015-fair-global-climate-deal-48137.pdf>

"A Convenient Truth" – a cause for optimism

'The Spirit Level', published in 2009, argues that people are better off in a more equal society.

Its authors have now published a Fabian Pamphlet pointing out that "There are ways of moving towards environmental sustainability which would simultaneously bring real improvements in human wellbeing" – a counter-argument to those who see reducing carbon emissions as an unwelcome belt-tightening exercise.

"Greater equality is then a key objective, not only because it reduces social dysfunction and improves health and wellbeing, but also because it makes it possible to overcome some of the main obstacles to sustainability. The most important of these is consumerism, which, driven by status competition, intensifies the demand for ever higher incomes and leads people to see sustainability simply as a threat to living standards."

"It is an important and extraordinarily convenient truth that, just as higher material standards have ceased to be critical to raising wellbeing in the rich countries, improving the quality of social life and the social environment has become crucial." <http://www.fabians.org.uk/publications/a-convenient-truth/>

Traffic Growth on the M4 – Keep the Hard Shoulder

In December Reading FoE worked with national FoE campaigners to start a regional e-campaign against plans to increase traffic on the M4. Hundreds of FoE supporters were e-mailed with our plea to say 'No' to a consultation on turning the M4 into a 'Smart Motorway' with permanent hard-shoulder running to increase capacity.

The Highways Agency plans to spend up to £862 million by 2022 increasing capacity of M4 between J3 and J12 - from 130,000 to 160,000 vehicles per day. <http://www.highways.gov.uk/roads/road-projects/m4-junctions-3-12/>

Compared to traffic reduction, traffic growth will increase CO2 emissions and dependency on imported fuels but the "Preliminary environmental information report (Non-Technical Summary)" doesn't even mention climate change.

The Advanced Motorway Signalling and Traffic Management Feasibility Study, published by the Department of Transport in March 2008, highlighted the following causes of congestion in the scheme area:

- the large number of commuters using the strategic road network;
- the number of commuters willing to travel significant distances;
- low vehicle occupancy;
- widely dispersed origins and destinations; and
- a low proportion of trips starting or ending in urban centres.

The study identified the M4 Junction 3 to Junction 12 as a priority for the provision of additional capacity, but these causes of congestion could largely be addressed by traffic reduction measures and public transport initiatives. 'Predict and Provide' transport policy was discredited about 25 years ago. Increasing capacity will encourage traffic growth both on and off the motorway.

The Automobile Association has previously warned that it has significant reservations about permanent hard shoulder removal because breakdowns and other emergencies could take place in a live traffic lane rather than the hard shoulder. It found in a poll that 87% of motorists agree that having hard shoulders are what makes motorways safe. <http://www.theaa.com/newsroom/news-2014/first-english-smart-motorway-opens.html>

The proposals include introduction of 'Managed Motorway' techniques – cameras and lane and speed controls – which on their own should reduce congestion and improve safety. Adding hard shoulder running from J3 to J12 would require 11 bridges to be replaced – at considerable cost.

A 'Managed Motorway' without hard shoulder conversion would be safer, could be finished sooner at much lower cost, would keep the hard shoulder for use during repairs to vehicles or the motorway, and would not encourage traffic growth that we cannot afford.

The consultation has now closed. We now need to persuade FoE and/or the Campaign for Better Transport to make formal objections in spring prior to the planning examination in the autumn – and perhaps to try to make it an issue for the May elections. Secretary of State decision is scheduled for April/May 2016.

Bee Cause Progress

At our December meeting we discussed proposals for a Bee World on the corner of Trooper Potts Way and Vastern Road – a site just being vacated by the Reading Station up-grade team and in need of remedial work. Because of the First World War connection poppies might be an appropriate flower bank to have in the mix – at least until 2018. Joanna is to progress this with the Council and Network Rail.

On 4th November the government at last released its National Pollinator Strategy (NPS)

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/370199/pb14221-national-pollinator-strategy.pdf

A recent article in British Wildlife magazine by dipterist Alan Stubbs pointed out that it's not just about Bees. Hoverflies and many other flies are important as pollinators, and they are important for wildflowers as well as crop-production, and in turn wildflowers enable pollinators to survive when crops are not in flower.

The article commented that neonicotinoid insecticides are present in nectar and pollen, and may well be affecting other pollinators as well as Bees – toxicity of neonics and any replacement chemicals must be tested on a range of fly groups. The importance of larval habitat for pollinators was emphasised – hedges, ditches, ponds, field-margins etc. – because pollinators need to survive all stages of their life-cycle.

Un-sustainable Development

The Communities and Local Government (CLG) Committee has found that developers are taking advantages of loopholes in the National Planning Policy Framework to launch 'speculative' planning applications leading to unwanted developments contrary to the wishes of local communities.

Clive Betts MP, Chair of the Communities and Local Government Committee, said: "*We must also close the loophole that allows developers to challenge the inclusion of sites within a council's five year supply on the grounds of viability. We heard that developers were claiming sites were unviable in order to obtain planning permission on other, more lucrative sites against the wishes of the council and community.*"

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmcomloc/190/19002.htm>

FoE Housing Briefing

FoE has produced a briefing on "An environmental and socially just agenda for housing" <http://tinyurl.com/k6v6fhr> which says that "Currently housing policy is neither providing affordable quality homes, nor protecting ecosystem services nor ensuring homes are built to the right standards in the right locations."

The document accepts that UK population is going to grow substantially by 2030 and calls for 'quality homes in compact towns and cities' by a programme of both renovation and new-build. It says that Friends of the Earth is campaigning with a large number of poverty groups and businesses for a publicly-funded energy efficiency programme which should by 2018 be insulating one million homes per year to a high Energy Performance Certificate band C (including at least 500,000 low-income homes).

It also calls for a "Property and Land Tax" to discourage hoarding and speculation, and for measures to reduce the over-heating of London and the South East through developing the other regions.

Keep in touch with FoE!

'Change Your World' – the national FoE magazine for local groups and activists - is to close this spring – saving paper, staff time, and money. FoE have launched two monthly e-newsletters for all local group members:

- Community News brings you news from the network, your region, and about opportunities in FoE
- Campaign News gives you the latest news and upcoming plans on major campaigns.

To get onto these mailing lists send a request to localgroups@foe.co.uk

Useful Websites etc.:

Friends of the Earth 'England, Wales and Northern Ireland' <http://www.foe.co.uk>

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

Reading Climate Action Network - <http://www.readingclimateaction.org.uk/>

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

Reading Sustainability Centre - <http://readingsustainabilitycentre.co.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

True Food Co-op: www.truefood.coop - shop in Emmer Green.

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 9th 2014 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 2014/15

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.