

Reading Friends of the Earth

Newsletter July/August 2017

For more information: <http://www.foe.co.uk/reading> or www.readingfoe.org.uk
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Diary:

General Meetings: Reading FoE usually meets on the **second Wednesday of each month** in Room 1 upstairs at RISC, 35-39 London Street, at 8:00 p.m. **But not this July.** Most meetings include discussion of general topics – some have a particular focus or guest speakers. Meetings are open to all.

Wednesday July 26th – Summer Excursion – 7:15 pm London Street outside RISC (option to eat or merely gather at RISC Global Café from 18:30) – We're proposing to meet in town and go for a short fairly flat cycle ride – if the weather is OK. Route to be decided – up the Thames looking at the proposed cycleway, or down the Kennet and Thames to look at the MRT and PNR sites near Kennetmouth (and maybe on to Sonning), or up the Kennet to the Cunning Man. Confirmation and more details later by e-mail, including target pub so non-cyclists can join us.

Wednesday August 9th - 8:00 pm at RISC – **General meeting** – topics by e-mail later.

Other Activities with Reading FoE:

Saturday August 5th – Earley Green Fair – Please offer to help on our stall – need to arrange a rota to cover from 11:00 to 15:00. Likely to be featuring petitions on air quality and pesticides, and information on other topics.
<http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/events/2017/08/05/earley-green-fair-0>

Other Activities (not run by Reading FoE so check for changes):

Tuesday 4th July: 19:00 to 21:00 at the Reading Borough Council Offices, Bridge Street. **Reading Hydro AGM**
They say "Only Members may attend an AGM, but if you want to support us, why not come along and pay the £1 membership fee at the start of the evening? There'll be cake and a chance to give your input on our current tasks."
<http://hydro.readinguk.org/>

Wednesday 5th July: 19:30 at RISC - '**Corporates – Saints or Devils.**' Global Justice Now meeting.
Corporates turn labour and raw materials into goods and services to 'raise our standard of living'. However, they often harm people and ecosystems in their greed to make profits. Should they be more strictly regulated? Discussion led by Jackie Oversby.

Thursday 6th July: 20:00 at RISC – Berkshire Greenpeace monthly meeting. <https://twitter.com/berksqp?lang=en>

Sunday 16th July 12:00 to 4:30 - **Repair Cafe** - rLab, C1 Weldale Street, RG1 7BX ... all the usual opportunities.
www.readingrepaircafe.org.uk and <https://www.facebook.com/ReadingRepairCafe> (no Repair Café in August)

Saturday 5th August: **TEDx Reading** event – sign up for details <http://tedxreading.com/>

Reading Bicycle Kitchen – has left Jackson's Corner but is now running 'pop-up' events apparently every Monday in July at RISC and on either a Saturday or Sunday each week <http://www.readingbicyclekitchen.org/>

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>

Campaigning in June :

Waterfest on June 12th – we enjoyed a busy sunny day on the riverbank near the band. 70 people signed our Bee petition cards to MPs and 30 our Bee petition sheets to Ministers – both petitions in favour of keeping the EU ban on 'neonicotinoid' pesticides as we go through 'Brexit'. 46 people signed our new petition cards calling for 'Clean Air Everywhere'.

East Reading Festival on June 25th – weather was not quite so good and not so many people stopped at our stall but we still collected 37 more signatures on our Bees/Neonics petition and 20 signed petition cards on Air Quality.

News from Basecamp:

Tanja brought us news from 'Basecamp' – FoE's annual gathering in the Peak District over the first weekend in June.

This year there was a focus on international actions and the global network – the message from the closing ceremony was “We stand against state repression in Brazil, against oil extraction in Nigeria, against Trump's war on climate. We stand for climate justice, for a frack-free UK, for a people-powered renewable future.”

FoE's web-page suggests a good time was had by all <https://www.foe.co.uk/page/memories-basecamp-2017> .

Tanja was particularly impressed by a session on 'Doughnut Economics' with Kate Raworth <https://www.kateraworth.com/doughnut/> who defines a 'safe and just space for humanity' between the 'environmental ceiling' set by planetary capacity and the 'social foundation' to ensure that no-one falls short of life's essentials.

She also liked 'Nature's Keepers' – a beautiful book and collection of photos and videos for FoE Europe telling personal stories about successful efforts to prevent damage to wildlife and habitats <http://www.foeeurope.org/natures-keepers> . One UK initiative featured Victoria Harvey in 'Keeping the Buzz in Leighton Buzzard' <http://www.natures-keepers.org/portfolio/victoria-harvey/?id=59>

SOAR! - Save Our Ancient Riverside:

The East Reading campaign against Park and Ride and Mass Rapid Transit proposals around Kennet Mouth has been re-branded as 'Save Our Ancient Riverside'.

The PNR site in Wokingham has planning permission but the MRT bus route to it across Kennet Mouth, which would entail loss of many trees and significant loss of visual amenity, has not yet been given planning permission by either Reading or Wokingham.

Both schemes are expected to be considered for funding by the Local Economic Partnership's Berkshire Local Transport Board on 20th July. East Reading Campaigners are appealing for the 'business case' documents to be released for public review and the decisions delayed until this has been done. Proposals to spend around £30million and devastate a landscape should not be taken lightly. Please write to relevant Councillors and the LEP following the line taken in this document <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B6MH5AdaZjpwOTdldnZOTDjmaXc/view> .

Progress on Neonicotinoids:

A report published last January by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food states that the effects of pesticides on non-target organisms are hugely underestimated: “neonicotinoids (...) are causing soil degradation and water pollution and endangering vital ecosystem services such as biological pest control. Designed to damage the central nervous system of target pests, they can also cause harm to beneficial invertebrates as well as to birds, butterflies and other wildlife.”

The battles in Brussels continue - last March, the European Commission proposed a complete ban of three neonicotinoid pesticides known to harm bees and other species, citing neonicotinoids' “high acute risks to bees” but Julie Girling, a Conservative British Member of the European Parliament, <http://www.juliegirling.com> , presented three resolutions calling on the Commission to withdraw these proposals. These resolutions were defeated in the European Parliament Committee on Environment and Public Health on 22nd June so the European Commission proposals to completely ban neonicotinoid pesticides will be voted on by European governments at some future date.

We continue to campaign until the EU ban is in place with concerns at what the British government will do after Brexit. FoE briefing on the evidence is at <https://www.foe.co.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/bees-threat-from-neonicotinoid-pesticides-89431.pdf>

Government 25-year Environment Plan:

In 2015 the Government pledged to reverse the trend towards ever more destruction with a bold commitment to a '25-Year Environment Plan' that would tackle pollution of land, water and air, save wildlife and reduce flooding among a host of other ambitious aims.

Now Michael Gove has been appointed Environment Minister and officials say that the publication of the plan — already a year overdue — may now not take place until next year with the new Environment Secretary apparently keen to put his own personal stamp on the document.

Heathrow Expansion

'Business Green' reported that “A final parliamentary vote on plans to build a third runway had been expected later this year, but the government's failure to secure a majority appear to have prompted a rethink.”

<https://www.businessgreen.com/bg/news/3012438/queens-speech-sparks-fresh-doubts-over-heathrow-expansion>

It seems that both Labour and Conservative parties are split on the issue. There was good news that Heathrow expansion was omitted from the Queen's Speech last week but the Transport Secretary now says a vote can be expected during this Parliament – i.e. in the next two years.

A Reading FoE response to the Department of Transport's consultation on the proposed '**Airports National Policy Statement**', to set the planning requirements for a Northwest Runway at Heathrow Airport to be built by 2030, was submitted and will be posted to the website. Key points were:

- "Air travel damages the local environment near airports (noise from 'planes, and air quality and congestion from surface traffic) and the global environment (by greenhouse gas emissions). We want to see substantial improvements on all these issues but the proposals appear to offer further degradation."
- "There is no pressing national or local 'need' for expansion – the adverse consequences of not expanding capacity do not appear to be catastrophic in any sense."
- To address perceived problems of airport capacity in the South East government should "Reduce demand for flights by imposing VAT on fares, imposing fuel tax and carbon taxes on fuels, and by further restrictions on night flights that disturb sleep. Consider taxing 'frequent flyers' – relatively few flights are business trips and a relatively small proportion of the population are frequent flyers."

New Local Plan:

Reading FoE responded to Reading's draft local plan that calls for 658 new homes to be built in the Borough every year until 2036 and discusses possible large new development areas at Pingewood and Grazeley. We called for higher standards of insulation and consideration of embodied carbon in new development and made many other points including:

- "We have concerns about how quality of life and sustainability can in practice be balanced with role as a hub for the growth in population envisaged for the Western Berkshire Housing Area.
- "A larger residential catchment area for the town centre, much of it outside the Borough, will increase demand for transportation. A larger population will increase demand for food, energy, water and recreational space whilst presumably reducing local agricultural land and greenspace.
- "We don't accept that identified 'needs' for housing or employment are accurate or should be met. They were developed without assessment of environmental capacity. The Strategic Housing Market Assessment is based on pre-Brexit trends. Future employment patterns will depend on emerging trends in automation, working from home, and UK competitiveness following Brexit.

Reading is expected to produce a revised version of the plan for further consultation later in the year. See

<http://www.reading.gov.uk/newlocalplan>

Reading Climate Change Partnership (RCCP) and Climate Change Strategy:

Reading FoE submitted comments on the revision of RCCP's Reading Climate Change Strategy. The 'Strategic Priorities' seemed generally sensible but often did not lead to quantified targets for action. It was disappointing that some of the detailed Actions were proceeding slowly because of lack of resources.

Air Quality:

Reading FoE submitted comments on the Government's consultation on tackling Nitrogen Dioxide and John was interviewed on South Today in May.

The consultation document has revealing graphics on the failure of diesel vehicles to meet their standards, and their contribution to roadside NO₂ levels, in sections 6 and 3 of https://consult.defra.gov.uk/airquality/air-quality-plan-for-tackling-nitrogen-dioxide/supporting_documents/Draft%20Revised%20AQ%20Plan.pdf. Appendix L lists when various local authorities are expected to comply with the legal limit – for Reading this is 2021 unless further action is taken.

Reading FoE comments included:

- We don't expect instant compliance but want the government to put in place measures expected to achieve legal compliance everywhere by the end of 2018.
- The Plan does not set out what difference the proposed measures can be expected to make, nor how long they will take to be effective, nor what they may cost, nor what funding the government may supply. So we cannot be satisfied that anything will be achieved on any timescale.
- The ideal would be to include Air Quality management in a nationwide road pricing scheme using GPS but this does not seem practical within our 18-month timescale.
- Diesel vehicles are the major source of the 'roadside increment' of NO₂ with a significant proportion arising from cars. Charges *{in Clean Air Zones (CAZ)}* should apply to diesel cars as well as to other vehicles. Charges should be high enough to deter frequent use by the most polluting vehicles – encouraging modal shift by users of passenger vehicles and vehicle replacement by all vehicle owners.
- When developing a CAZ and promoting alternatives to diesel vehicles local authorities should take account of the other beneficial effects of traffic reduction – reducing emissions of pollutants other than NO₂, reducing congestion, and reducing carbon emissions. Funds raised from charging may be used to reduce costs of public transport or to improve cycle or park-and-ride facilities.

The revised draft plan was the result of legal action by Client Earth to force compliance with EU regulations 'as soon as possible'. Unsurprisingly ClientEarth believes that the draft air quality plan has some serious problems. They are going back to the High Court to consider their concerns, and a hearing is due in the coming weeks.

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 12th 2017 Enrico Petrucco and John Booth were re-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 2017/18

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.