

Reading Friends of the Earth Newsletter Mar/Apr 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.

March 12th: – 8:00 p.m. at RISC – **General Meeting** – topics likely to include a review of FoE campaigns for summer 2014, the National Pollinators Strategy consultation, and finally Europe and the Environment to share ideas before some of us go to a meeting on Friday 14th <http://ymlp.com/zEv0SY> (venue changed to Henley Business School).

April 9th - 8:00 p.m. at RISC – **Annual General Meeting** – (it will be short!) report on year plus election of officers – plus topics likely to include a strategic view of Reading's transport options and a discussion of Reading Climate Action Network <http://www.readingclimateaction.org.uk/> after its first six months.

Other Reading FoE Activities and Meetings:

Saturday 26th April: - Reading FoE stall at **Beanpole Day** at Caversham Court – very probably asking public to comment on the proposals for a Pollinators Strategy – helpers needed – details later by e-mail.

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

Sunday 16th March – Repair Cafe – at Reading Voluntary Action, Highbridge House, 16-18 Duke St, Reading RG1 4RU. 12:00 to 16:30 <https://www.facebook.com/events/200514803491537/>

Sunday 23rd March – Reading Science Week, '**Biodiversity in Berkshire**' event in Forbury Gardens 12:00 to 16:00 - <https://www.facebook.com/events/622154411185333/?ref=22>

Friday 28th March: - progress meeting for **Reading Sustainability Centre** – Civic Offices 7:00 pm - <http://www.gren.org.uk/ReadingSustainabilityCentre.cfm>

Saturday 26th April: - Friends of the Earth Greater South East Regional Gathering – King's Cross, London – contact tim.gee@foe.co.uk for details. Unfortunately clashes with Beanpole Day (above).

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>

Bee Cause Progress

The Government's consultation on the National Pollination Strategy (NPS) aka Bee Action Plan was expected to start in January, but it was only launched on March 6th. Consultation closes on May 2nd. FoE is already running an on-line petition at <http://foe.co.uk/beespetition> and we expect updated campaign materials soon.

We have always believed it is a complex situation with no single cause for the decline of bees, and therefore no single remedy, so it is good that the proposals include:

- 12 actions on evidence-gathering on pollinator status and impacts of pressures.
- 18 priority policy actions for Government and for others to implement from 2014 reflecting current evidence and in some cases building on and expanding current initiatives to refocus on the essential needs of pollinators.
- A commitment to review and refresh the strategy's aims and actions as additional evidence becomes available.

FoE believe the proposed actions will be a great step forward but would like to see the NPS improved, rather than weakened, when it comes in to force after the consultation. They call on the government for:

- Support for farmers: so that bee-friendly farming is normal, not optional
- A stronger pesticide plan: that makes alternatives to toxic chemicals available to all farmers
- Better land use: so bee habitat increases with development, not the reverse
- Health checks: invest in proper monitoring to check how bees are doing
- Government funding: don't just rely on people and charities taking action

There should be campaigning materials available for us to take to Beanpole Day (26th April) to ask keen gardeners to keep the pressure on the government to make the strategy brilliant, rather than bowing to commercial pressures to water it down. There is a FoE briefing document at <http://tinyurl.com/beebriefing>

Official consultation documents are available at <https://consult.defra.gov.uk/plant-and-bee-health-policy/a-consultation-on-the-national-pollinator-strategy> and there is an on-line consultation form there.

There is a really good presentation by Professor Potts of Reading University, dating from September 2013, which presents key data and arguments at http://www.parliament.uk/documents/post/Potts_Presentation.pdf. Among other data England has lost 54% of its colonies between 1985 and 2005, and the value of pollination in England was put at £603 million per annum.

Flooding and Third Thames Bridge

The flooding and the congestion resulting from closure of the road north of Sonning Bridge has led to calls for a Third Thames Bridge from Rob Wilson MP, supported by several hundred people at a recent meeting in Caversham. South Oxfordshire has long opposed this – presumably because of fears that it would open up the area for development.

Reading Council is in favour of a third bridge, although Councillor Page did comment that to attract private finance it was quite likely that it would be a toll bridge. Our recent comments on the proposed Cycling Strategy called for road user charging – see http://www.readingfoe.org.uk/Documents/Cycling_Strategy_2013_RFoE.pdf

It does seem very likely that - because Reading already has high levels of traffic and congestion at peak hours - a relatively small increase in traffic diverted from the Sonning route will make congestion in Reading much worse, and this seems to be the case. Several people have pointed out that the first priority should be to investigate if it is possible to flood-proof the short length of road north of Sonning Bridge which frequently floods.

As well as a road bridge Mr. Wilson is also advocating a north-south bypass for Caversham – but produced no route maps which might have caused concern among residents. This seems a step towards the London Outer Orbital which was discussed in the 1990s, and was revived by the Association of British Drivers some years ago - see <http://www.abd.org.uk/pr/286.htm> - a massive loop from the Channel Tunnel to Junction 10 of the M4 and then back east to Harwich.

The 2002 Cross-Thames Travel Study (Google 'Cross-Thames Travel Study Wokingham') found that much of the travel across Reading bridges was relatively short cross-river trips which could to some extent be met by improved public transport and cycling. It reported traffic modelling which showed that a bridge would have knock-on effects on other routes and so increase through traffic in Caversham.

The report says:

- .Given the potential suppressed demand for cross-river trips, any new road capacity is likely to rapidly induce traffic growth to match the capacity of the new bridge(s). While this would provide some benefits by displacing traffic, for example {a bridge} at Sonning, would create considerable additional traffic flows on the surrounding road networks in South Oxfordshire and south of the river in Reading and Wokingham. The existing road networks do not have sufficient spare capacity to deal with the significant additional demand, especially in South Oxfordshire.
- A new mass transit system for the Reading/Wokingham area, together with network-wide bus and rail service enhancements plus parking restraint and traffic constraint, would provide a modern and effective means of reducing river-crossing traffic congestion, and addressing future travel demand in the area.

An economic analysis <http://www.giuliani.co.uk/pics/Community/Strategies/xThames-WEBSITE.pdf> concluded

- The solution within the 'Study' area is seen to rest with the extensively enhanced provision of mass transit, especially for commuters. The option of additional road infrastructure in the form of a by-pass to avoid and/or alleviate congestion although tendered as an option is rejected as impracticable in terms of cost, environmental implications and on the basis of computer modelling which shows that this type of provision does not solve the problem in this case.
- The provision of mass/public transport has to be made in the light of a predominantly car based transport system, a major city intent on economic expansion but with a remote employee base, the presence of a substantial rural area plus significant across district long distance commuting.

It is important that a full long-term assessment of alternatives, including traffic and environmental implications, is undertaken before the proposal gathers too much momentum. Surely the floods should strengthen, rather than weaken, the arguments for reducing vehicle use? If there is a strategic plan to expand Reading over the Chilterns and create an Outer Orbital motorway loop it should be assessed and debated, not implemented incrementally.

Renewable Energy and Smart Grids

Dr. Phil Coker, Lecturer in Renewable Energy at Reading University, told a Reading Friends of the Earth meeting on 23rd January that a big switch to renewable sources of power is already happening.

He said that viewed as a resource renewables are not particularly intermittent (i.e. not subject to sudden large step-changes in output), but are fairly predictably variable. With knowledge of weather and tides gas-fired or other generation can be scheduled in to meet predicted shortfalls in supply.

Offshore wind and tidal resources are not close to where most energy is used so new low-loss interconnecting cables will be needed if they are to be exploited. Major challenges in moving to a low-carbon economy will be space-heating and road transport, which are largely supplied by gas and oil at present.

Dr. Ben Potter of Reading University gave a talk to the Institution of Engineering and Technology on 'Distribution Networks and the Smart Grid' on 27th February. He described his work with Thames Valley Vision <http://www.thamesvalleyvision.co.uk/> who are working to demonstrate techniques to manage electricity supply by local storage and by using automatic controls to switch off certain appliances for short periods when supply is limited.

He has been analysing data on energy use and pointed out that variations in demand (e.g. when using night storage heaters or charging the batteries of electric cars) or in local supply (e.g. from solar panels) can make it difficult to maintain supplies to consumers within the required voltages. One aim is to forecast how demand will vary to predict when supply will be available either to charge batteries or to supply loads which do not need constant supply.

TVV are installing 25 large (70 kWh) batteries, with control electronics, in the local low-voltage electrical distribution network in Bracknell. These will take in energy when it is available (either because demand is low or because embedded solar generation is high) and source it when it is required. They are also developing 'software agents' to take local control of these batteries and switchable loads.

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 Plan is intended to set out actions up to three years ahead, to be reviewed by the RCCP every six months, and to be revised annually. There are around 200 actions to be done by various 'Delivery Partners'. Actions range from an organisation's statutory duties to a variety of projects or research that are expected to be beneficial.

John Booth has taken on two Actions on behalf of Reading FoE:

- T3SP1.10 Assess adequacy of control over conversion of front gardens to parking. Review of policy to Committee with recommendations. Target - March 2014 – RFoE Lead organisation.
- T3SP1.12 Raise awareness of the importance of green infrastructure for adapting to climate change and the economic benefits it provides. Produce a briefing for multi-agency use in publicity. Target - March 2014 – RFoE supporting organisation (RBC Lead).

John has responsibility for these and would welcome any assistance, comments or relevant references.

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.