

Reading Friends of the Earth



**Friends of
the Earth**

Newsletter May/June 2011

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 meet on the second Wednesday of each month upstairs at RISC, 35-39 London Street, at 8:00 p.m. Check website www.readingfoe.org.uk for latest details.

May 11th: – 8:00 p.m. at RISC – **General Meeting** – including discussion with John Halladay – Friends of the Earth Board Member for South Central, and representative on **Climate Berkshire** (see below) – about progress in these two bodies.

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

Other FoE Activities:

Saturday June 11th – provisional date for public meeting on **Insulation and Feed-in-Tariffs** – TBA between us and GREN and Reading Energy Pioneers.

Saturday June 18th – **Reading Waterfest** – helpers needed for this chance to get our ideas across to the public.

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

Wednesday June 15th – General Meeting of **South East Form for Sustainability** – London <http://www.sefs.org.uk>

Saturday 25th June - FoE Greater South East Gathering – http://www.foe.co.uk/events/greater_southeast.html

Climate Berkshire

Climate Berkshire is a partnership of the Local Authorities and other key organizations from across Berkshire. Working to address the challenges and opportunities associated with climate change at a strategic level across the County, the partnership reports to the Berkshire Economic Strategy Board.

Its vision is “a low carbon Berkshire that is resilient to the impacts of climate change” and its mission “to provide leadership through encouraging organizational commitment, providing and informing strategic direction and assisting in the delivery of projects. It will pave the way to the development of a market in low carbon technology.”

Berkshire Friends of the Earth Network (the FoE local groups in Reading, Bracknell, Newbury and Maidenhead) was asked to take part as an environmental non-governmental organisation with cross-county support. John Booth attended the October 2010 Climate Berkshire meeting, and John Halladay (the ‘permanent’ representative) the meetings in January and April 2011.

Back in October Climate Berkshire had been developing and sharing information on energy saving initiatives, solar power for schools and Council buildings, and renewable energy potential in Berkshire. At our May meeting John Halladay should be able to bring us up-to-date with the progress of these and any other initiatives. Representatives of other groups are expected to join us.

According to <http://www.livingreading.co.uk/berkshirelepappendix.html> the Berkshire Economic Strategy Board is the sub-regional economic partnership covering the geographical county of Berkshire. It was funded by SEEDA (South East England Development Agency) and the six unitary authorities, and controlled by a Board drawn equally from the public and private sectors, with a private sector Chairman. In addition Thames Valley Chamber of Commerce, Thames Valley CBI and Thames Valley FSB have joined the Board. Presumably as SEEDA closes down and the Thames Valley Local Economic Partnership becomes more active the Board will develop new relationships. See also Berkshire Economic Assessment at <http://www.berkshireobservatory.org/Economy/BEA-2011/>

Rushy Mead Turbines:

Wokingham Planning Committee have rejected Partnerships for Renewables' (PFR) application to build four 2.5 MW turbines at Rushy Mead, south of the M4 between Shinfield and Arborfield, because they found that the renewable energy benefits of the proposed development are not considered to outweigh the harm identified to landscape character, to the setting and amenity of a number of settlements, and to the significance of two listed buildings.

The decision was unanimous – Conservative and Lib-Dem councillors voting together eight days before a local election. PFR are considering whether to appeal against this decision.

The good news is that the Borough Officers agreed with the applicants that the risks of noise, flicker, and flooding – which objectors had suggested could blight the lives of many people – and the effects on wildlife and rights of way, did not provide grounds for rejection of the application. It would be interesting to know to what extent local opposition was based on these fears, and what local opposition there would be based on visual amenity alone.

The opponents of Rushy Mead made much of what they call the 'inefficiency' of turbines in low-wind locations. This is technically known as the load factor - the ratio of average output to peak rated output over a year - which is said to average 17% for the Green Park turbine.

This measure is irrelevant. If Green Park had the same tower and blades but a lower rated generator it might have a higher load factor but generate less electricity at higher unit cost. What matters is the benefit in terms of the reduction in fossil fuel use compared to the costs - both financial and environmental.

Turbines at Rushy Mead can be connected to the national grid at low cost – the pylons cross the site – and will require little expenditure on access roads compared with many high-wind sites, so they can be cost-effective. Windier locations are likely to be more visible and may well cost more to connect to the grid.

The financial subsidy to renewables is paid per unit of electricity generated and the rate will be very similar for any on-shore turbine, whatever load factor it achieves. Off-shore turbines receive subsidy at twice the rate so provide electricity at much higher cost.

See http://www.readingfoe.org.uk/Rushy_Mead.doc and <http://www.pfr.co.uk/rushymead/>

Waste Campaign

FoE nationally are pushing for a goal to halve household 'black bag' waste by 2020. This is equivalent to recycling 70% of our waste at current rates of waste generation, but we can meet this goal through more waste prevention and reuse as well as increasing recycling. They are asking for a similar ambition for business waste.

They are calling on David Cameron to stick to his promise to run the greenest Government ever by halving the rubbish that has to go in our bin. This means boosting recycling and re-use services and making sure that products are built efficiently and designed so they can be easily repaired, reused or recycled.

On Saturday 19th March we were photographed outside the Civic Offices with "David Cameron" sawing a dustbin in half. The local press did not run our photo or press release, despite (or perhaps because of) finding acres of space to cover the half marathon. See also http://www.foe.co.uk/what_we_do/talking_half_rubbish_27167.html

South Reading Development

In 2009/10 we had sponsored two separate teams of students to look at options for the "Courage Brewery" site and the old "Digital Pyramids" site between the old A33 and the A33 Relief Road. Both are interesting because of proximity to the M4 – what 'green' options are there for a site with excellent motorway access?

The reports on the two sites are complete, see <http://www.anjoro.plus.com/downloads/southreading.doc>.

The Council has held another consultation on its 'Sites and Detailed Policies Document' which is intended to guide development to appropriate locations within the Borough. Our response noted that there had been suggestions that both South Reading sites might be developed for warehousing, so the opportunity for public transport interchanges, community facilities, wind turbines, anaerobic digestion and a CHP Energy Centre could be lost.

For the 'Worton Grange' site the Council proposed major office development as one option. We said this should not be allowed because of its effect on demand for long distance commuting and potential to increase delays at J11. Warehousing could substantially reduce vehicle movements compared to major office development.

Warehousing may be an appropriate use for the site and non-housing uses would give less cause for rejection of wind turbine proposals for the Brewery site, and less cause for concern over air quality. However this has to be balanced by consideration of the benefits of more housing to reduce demand for long-distance commuting.

For the Brewery site we welcomed a new emphasis on continuing employment use and specific limitation on office development, and said that housing should be ruled out completely because of noise issues and the problems of a small 'island' development of housing between the M4 and A33.

Localism Bill

The Town and Country Planning Association and Friends of the Earth are leading a "Planning and Climate Change Coalition" to improve the new Bill which is set to introduce a level of 'neighbourhood' planning below the local authorities.

They say it "is an opportunity to enshrine an effective and open system which allows communities to face up to and tackle the major challenges, as well as to deliver the kind of visionary sustainable development which can help deliver a low carbon economy and better places to live." But their greatest concern is that, at present, the duty to consider climate change only applies to the preparation of Local Development Frameworks (i.e. at the level of Reading Borough) and not to neighbourhood planning.

They are proposing a new clause which will require that anyone involved in planning at any level must ensure that the development and use of land in the local planning authority area contributes to the mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change.

Also FoE national campaigners are working with Wildlife and Countryside Link <http://www.wcl.org.uk/> to ask that a definition of sustainable development is included in the Bill. The lack of a definition has led to vague duties and weak delivery on the ground, and the government is set to introduce a 'planning default' in favour of granting permission for 'sustainable development' so good definition is vital.

Their joint statement says that "an effective, strategic planning system has an essential role to play in delivering true integration of economic, social and environmental priorities and objectives at all levels."

Their preferred definition is:

"sustainable development" means development that meets the social, economic and environmental needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs including the application of the following principles:

- (i) living within environmental limits;
- (ii) ensuring a strong healthy and just society;
- (iii) achieving a sustainable economy;
- (iv) promoting good governance;
- (v) using sound science responsibly."

For the full list of amendments on sustainable development for the Localism Bill, see the briefings by the Greenest Ever Planning coalition at <http://www.wcl.org.uk/planningreform.asp>.

FoE's briefings on the Localism Bill are on the [community website](#) under "more information" and include a draft letter to send to MPs.

Reading FoE AGM

Our AGM on April 13th re-elected Enrico Petrucco as Co-ordinator and John Booth as Treasurer.

The Treasurer's report said that spending in the financial year had been significantly more than income and the group should seek a better balance in future.

It was agreed not to increase the present level of membership subscriptions and to continue to meet monthly at RISC, but to ask for voluntary donations from attendees at meetings when there had been unusual costs such as ICT hire and/or speaker's expenses. It was agreed to investigate running a street collection to raise funds.

It was agreed to change the cheque signatories (four in total, two signatures required per cheque) to Enrico Petrucco, John Booth, Chris Burden and Michael Brice.

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 now with new shop in Emmer Green!

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

South East Forum for Sustainability: <http://www.sefs.org.uk>

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 (by e-mail unless you only have a surface address) 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.