

Reading Friends of the Earth



**Friends of
the Earth**

Newsletter Nov/Dec 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 meets on the second Wednesday of each month upstairs at RISC, 35-39 London Street, at 8:00 p.m.

November 9th: – 8:00 p.m. at RISC – **General Meeting** – but including first look at new 'Final Demand' campaign – see below.

December 14th: - 8:00 p.m. at RISC – **General Meeting** – but maybe arrange a look at home energy solutions – keeping warm in winter - with local experts – details by e-mail.

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

November 17th – "God's World": an evening with the Bishop of Reading exploring why and how to become an EcoCongregation. At St John and St Stephen's Church, 121-147 Orts Road, Reading, RG1 3JN
7.30 - 9.30 pm. <http://www.greeningstjohns.blogspot.com/> - Reading FoE intend to have a stall at this event.

November 24th – 'Working Better with You – The Future' – town hall 5:30 to 8:00 - register at <http://www.reading.gov.uk/letstakevents> - to talk with the Council

November 30th – 'GREN AGM' – Friends Meeting House, Church Street, at 7:00 followed at 8:00 by public discussion with FoE's Paul de Zylva and Cllr. Ruhemann on changes to planning policies – see below and www.gren.org.uk

GREN AGM – 20:00 November 30th – Presentation by Paul de Zylva

The main speaker after the 'business' of the AGM is to be Paul de Zylva from FoE's London office. Paul is Senior England Campaigner, Friends of the Earth, and chairs the Wildlife & Countryside Link <http://www.wcl.org.uk/>.

He leads a team of FoE campaigners in each of England's nine regions and is a specialist on local government, the planning system and the Olympics. He's currently campaigning for sustainable development of England's towns and rural areas.

His focus is to be the current proposed changes to the planning laws (see below) which a team of FoE staff have been opposing in parliament. His wide experience should ensure a stimulating and challenging talk.

This is to take the form of a debate/discussion with Councillor Ruhemann, Chair of RBC Planning Committee.

Planning Policy Changes

The Government consultation on its proposal to replace hundreds of pages of planning policy that had evolved over decades with a 57-page document with a 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' and including the statement that "Decision-takers at every level should assume that the default answer to development proposals is yes" has now closed - but the debate continues and the National Planning Policy Framework is not yet finalised.

By 'development' it means 'building' and there is no satisfactory definition of 'sustainable development' that would conserve undeveloped land for the long term for agriculture, forestry, wildlife, recreation and energy production.

The document abolishes formal strategic planning above the Local Authority level and merely says that authorities should co-operate. It talks of localism but repeatedly says that says that local areas should meet 'Objectively Assessed Development Needs' which would have to be found 'sound' by a government inspector.

The draft Framework is at: www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/draftframework
FoE's response to it is at http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/briefings/friendsoftheearth_nppf_response.pdf
A response on behalf of Reading FoE is at http://www.anjoro.plus.com/RFOE/RFoE_NPPF_Response.doc

“Final Demand” – New Energy Campaign:

FoE's new national energy campaign calls for the government to

- Hold an urgent public inquiry into the power and influence of the 'Big Six' energy companies
- Not to axe support for clean British energy produced by communities, councils, business and householders.

Next year the government will bring plans to reform the electricity system before Parliament – this is the long-term target of the campaign – to get MPs to support a shift to put us on a path to zero-carbon electricity by 2030.

But this week the government is spreading chaos through the Solar PV industry by proposing a drastic cut to the feed-in tariff with only six weeks notice. It's right that the tariff should fall as the industry matures and costs fall – many people were hurrying to install equipment before a long-planned reduction scheduled for April 2012. But this rapid cut at very short notice can only bring waste, frustration and disappointment to many small businesses, householders and community groups – not least to Reading Borough Council which had planned a £5m investment in solar PV over the next six months.

'The Big Six'

Six big companies supply 99% of our households' energy and own more than two thirds of our power stations. It doesn't affect their bottom line if fossil fuel prices rise – they can pass the costs on to consumers. While consumer bills spiral, they can still make huge profits and their dividends to shareholders and executives' pay continue to rise.

The Big Six are not investing enough in clean, safe energy. The Government's uncertain energy policy means that overall they are still largely sticking with what they know – building more fossil fuel power stations, keeping us all firmly on the fossil-fuel hook.

Meanwhile the cost of renewable energy is predicted to fall rapidly. Cutting the energy we waste in our homes through better insulation saves money. Getting out of fossil fuels and wasting less energy offers us the best hope of putting an end to nightmare price hikes in the long run.

Campaign Aims:

The campaign aims – from now to the spring – are to

- Get people to sign the petition to David Cameron
- Get publicity in local media
- Show MPs the benefits of local green energy projects
- Get local organisations, representatives, allies and MPs to back the 'Final Demand Joint Statement'

Campaign Resources

We have been sent posters, leaflets, petition forms, copies of the Final Demand Joint Statement – and can discuss these at our meeting on November 9th.

For more details and to sign the petition see: http://www.foe.co.uk/what_we_do/final_demand_info_32893.html

Reading abandons “Merton Rule”:

Reading's commitment to using the planning system to encourage on-site renewable energy development seems to have been ineffective even before it dropped the requirement for it from its revised 'Sustainable Design and Construction' document this summer.

Reading's Core Strategy Policy CS1, dating from 2008, says larger developments "incorporate on-site generation of energy from renewable sources and energy efficient design measures (including the use of CHP where appropriate) to off-set at least 20% of predicted carbon dioxide emissions from the estimated energy usage of the completed and occupied development". The Core Strategy had a Target "Increase in the generation of energy from on-site renewable sources to 100% of major developments by 2012". But nothing much seems to have happened.

At the Council Meeting on 18th October Green Councillor Melanie Eastwood asked "how much renewable energy provision has been installed?" and got the answer "monitoring did not specifically monitor whether any renewable energy provision has been installed. This is because renewables generally form only one part of an integrated approach to carbon dioxide emission reductions which developers are able to approach in a number of ways. Energy efficiency measures tend to be more cost effective and would be prioritised over energy generation technologies."

A report on the Reading Central One development ('Sustainability and Tall Buildings' by planning student Ian James Rees) says the reason that no renewable energy technology was implemented in this case was attributed to 'insufficient policy weight' by the planning officers.

Planning permission for massive warehousing on the Brewery site has been given without any renewable energy features being required – despite this being the only site in the Borough identified for large wind turbines in a Thames Valley Energy report.

It's often true that it's cheaper to insulate than to generate. But surely the point of the policy was to get renewables in place to offset the residual consumption after good design had been achieved, or the policy could simply have been expressed in terms of reduced levels of emissions without reference to renewables.

The intention was surely both to reduce emissions directly and to stimulate the renewable energy industry to reduce the cost of equipment. The requirement should have given an added incentive to design-in high levels of insulation and energy-efficient use of fossil fuels to reduce the cost of renewable energy capture.

(Q 14 in http://ww2.reading.gov.uk/documents/Committee_Services/Council/2011-2012/111018/questions.pdf)

South Reading Development:

The Council has granted permission for Tesco's vast warehouse with no rail access, no bus terminal, no solar roof, no CHP, and no large wind turbine. But overall it's probably much better than building even more offices or houses on the Brewery site - with none of the above either. They have placed a condition that it is for ambient storage only, so it should use less energy than a cold store.

Sites and Detailed Policies Document:

The formal examination of this Council planning document takes place from late November to mid-December. The changes to the planning system mean it's even more important that the Local Plan is sound.

On the strength of comments submitted to the Council's consultations John Booth is going to attend on two days to argue for our aspirations for development of South Reading – the Council has given planning permission on the two sites but building has not started - and for strengthening of the Council's policies on decentralised energy.

See <http://www.anjoro.plus.com/downloads/southreading.doc> For official documents on the examination see: <http://www.reading.gov.uk/environmentplanning/planning/localplanningpolicy/localdevelopmentframework/General.asp?id= SX9452-A785C833>

Red Tape Challenge:

Do take a look at – and contribute to – the government-given opportunity for people to express their feelings about regulations. At least in the 'Environment' section so many people have argued for strong regulation – it's really quite heartening! <http://www.redtapechallenge.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/environment/>

December Meeting:

e-mail discussion of ethical energy and home energy consumption had just started on our list as this newsletter was written. It would be good to air these issues with some of the knowledgeable people in the group.

Talk of electric heating brings to mind the old comment that heating water with electricity is like cutting butter with a chain-saw. The context was probably heating water for space heating to 20 Centigrade using nuclear electricity from a steam-generating reactor running at about 300 Centigrade. Let's hope renewable energy really can become plentiful and affordable – at least compared to the old-fashioned alternatives.

Wokingham Waste Initiative:

Wokingham Council are to introduce 'Recyclebank' to encourage waste recycling.

<http://www.letsrecycle.com/news/latest-news/councils/recyclebank-scheme-to-be-introduced-in-wokingham> □

Local Strategic Partnership:

See website at <http://www.reading2020.org.uk/climate-change/> for minutes of Reading Climate Change Partnership. Main website has a lot more information.

Local Economic Partnership:

See website at <http://www.thamesvalleyberkshire.co.uk/> to follow what business interests are pursuing.

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 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 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.