

Reading Friends of the Earth Newsletter Nov/Dec 2013



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.

November 13th: – 8:00 p.m. at RISC – **General Meeting** – future plans for the Bee Cause, initial review of Council's Cycle Strategy proposals, and other topics.

December 11th: - 8:00 p.m. at RISC – **Shale Gas** – Reading FoE member Joanna Hanson, who has been involved in advising on the social management of shale gas in Poland, will share her thoughts and views on what she has learnt about shale gas as an environmental and climate change issue.

Other Reading FoE Activities and Meetings:

Saturday 16th November – Bee Cause stall at Farmers' Market – 8:30 to 12:00 – Great Knollys Street -
<http://www.tvfm.org.uk/market/67/reading+2/>

Sunday 1st December – 'More than Honey' – documentary about honey bee 'colony collapse disorder' discussed below. Film show in Global Café at RISC - 16:45 to 18:30 - free. Check for confirmation nearer the time on <http://www.gren.org.uk/Events.cfm> or www.readingfoe.org.uk .

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

Saturday 16th November – Repair Cafe – at Hackspace - Unit C1 Weldale St, Reading, RG1 7BX. 14:00 to 17:00 – <https://www.facebook.com/events/410968719028671/?fref=ts>

Thursday 28th November – GREN Members Meeting – RISC Room 1 – proposal is to combine home produce swaps, and green book reviews, loans and swaps, with an AGM and a brief initiation into Reading's Climate Change Strategy – check for start time and more details nearer the date <http://www.gren.org.uk/Events.cfm>

Thursday 5th December – MERL Annual Lecture – Hilary Benn MP – former Environment Secretary - 19:00 University Great Hall – booking essential - <https://www.reading.ac.uk/news-and-events/Events/Event532126.aspx>

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>

More than Honey

This recently released film is a hard-hitting, brilliantly photographed documentary about honey bee 'colony collapse disorder'. One review says that it's 'so stuffed with surreal tableau that it makes your head spin'.

Its Oscar-nominated producer/director Markus Imhoof says "In the struggle between bees and the neo-liberal market economy, bee brokers push beekeepers, who respond by pushing bees, to further increase their performance."

The synopsis says "Should we blame pesticides or even medication used to combat them? Maybe look at parasites such as varroa mites? New viruses? Travelling stress? The multiplication of electromagnetic waves disturbing the magnetite nanoparticles found in the bees' abdomen? So far, it looks like a combination of all these agents has been responsible for the weakening of the bees' immune defenses."

Showing in Global Café on 1st December (see above). <http://www.morethanhoneyfilm.com/about.html>

Bee Cause Progress

September started with a showing of presenter Bill Turnbull's 'Horizon' documentary 'What's Killing our Bees' at RISC, set up and publicised by Chris, and enhanced by the involvement of two research scientists featured in the film. Jennifer and Victoria Wickens of Reading University talked to us about their research into using 'wildflower' strips on farms to encourage pollinators and beneficial predatory species.

In late September we had a very successful Bee Cause stall at Ufton Court Open Day – a Grade I listed Tudor manor house on the Berkshire/Hampshire borders, run as an educational trust. www.uftoncourt.co.uk. In October we had a stall at the Town Meal Debate in the University Great Hall, and a very successful stall at the Town Meal itself in the Forbury Gardens, and a presence at the Reading Neighbourhood Network AGM. Thanks to everyone who helped – between these four events we collected 176 signed petition cards.

National FoE campaigners were involved in the government's conference on developing a National Pollinators Strategy (NPS) in late October which was attended by about 70 organisations. The discussions were split into three exercises:

- Everyone involved agreed that there may indeed be further losses of some species but that this is not in itself tolerable and should not be the starting point for the NPS.
- A long list of possible activities proposed by organisations in different sectors - farmers, businesses, land owners, NGOs - was drawn up
- The final topic was which of these activities was needed to stand either a 50% or 95% chance of the NPS being effective - to avoid the declines discussed in the first session.

FoE are trying to work out what all of this means and where they can push the Government to be bold - allowing for the likelihood that the Government will cite cost as a reason for any lack of ambition. They expect the draft NPS to be completed by the end of November when it will go to Ministers.

FoE expect the Bee Cause campaign to run into 2014 and that it may then broaden from its pollinator focus to cover wider countryside, agriculture and wildlife issues.

So for the 'National Pollinator Strategy' November is a really critical month:

- If you would like more information – and especially if you would like guidance on how to write personally to your MP – please see <http://forum.foe.co.uk/campaignhubs/index.php/topic,2279.msg4690.html#msg4690>
- If you haven't yet signed the latest petition to the 'Bees Minister' – Lord de Mauley – please do so at http://www.foe.co.uk/what_we_do/bee_cause_petition_to_lord_de_mauley_40967.html

Reading Climate Change Strategy:

Reading Climate Change Partnership's (RCCP) new Climate Change Strategy was launched on 24th September with a well-attended gathering at Reading University and a new website <http://www.readingclimateaction.org.uk/>.

The launch is documented at <http://www.readingclimateaction.org.uk/news-events/launch/> ... which has links to key presentations.

- Sally Coble, Chair of the RCCP chaired the meeting and introduced the Strategy.
- Professor Nigel Arnell, Director of the Walker Institute for Climate System Research, used three scenarios to describe a future in the UK where mean temperatures will be higher resulting in more days above 25 degrees. There will be less overall rainfall ... however it will often be more intense, causing flooding. He highlighted how much more severe effects would be likely in other countries.
- Scott Balloch, Head of Energy and Carbon Strategy, BT talked about the 'Net Good' project. Scott revealed that BT account for 0.7% of the UK electricity emissions. He inspired the audience by pointing to the many 'good for business' reasons to take up opportunities presented by the climate change agenda.

The Strategy Document is intended to be quite high-level and strategic (and to be valid until 2020). The full Strategy document is downloadable. The website gives summaries of each of the eight themes.

The Action Plans are intended to set out actions up to three years ahead, and to be reviewed by the RCCP every six months, and to be revised annually. It is intended to release the Action Plans before the end of November after agreement has been reached with all 'delivery partners'.

Reading Climate Action Network (RCAN) is for individuals or organisations to join to show support and to share information. Members commit to undertaking one or more 'challenges' – the most difficult is to reduce your carbon footprint by 7% per year for 7 years – but some are much easier. **Take a look – and then sign up to something!** <http://www.readingclimateaction.org.uk/reading-climate-action/>

Cycling in Reading

Third Bridge: The Council has given planning permission for a cycle-pedestrian shared use bridge to link Christchurch Meadows with the Railway Station. It resisted pressure from the Cycle Campaign and many individuals – 110 people joined a ~~Protest~~ Leisure Ride - for a slightly wider segregated facility. See Cycle Campaign website <http://www.readingcyclecampaign.org.uk/> and <https://en-gb.facebook.com/ReadingCycleCampaign>

Reading Cycle Strategy: 'Bridging Gaps, Overcoming Barriers and Promoting Safer Cycling.' A consultation on this revision has been launched and closes in January. <http://www.reading.gov.uk/news/2013/oct/new-cycle-strategy-amp-bike-hire-scheme-reading/> This includes aiming for 2,300 additional cycle trips every day by April 2015, and doubling the percentage of people cycling to work in the next five years (from 3% to 6%). Reading FoE will look to agree a response at its January meeting – please get involved. See Cycle Campaign on links above.

Alok Sharma MP has shown an interest in cycling. He asked the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made on the amount spent by his Department on cycling (a) between 2010 and 2015 and (b) between 2005 and 2010. The 'written answer' was "The Department will have spent £277 million directly on cycling in the five years 2010-11 to 2014-15. In addition £540 million has been spent through the local sustainable transport fund (LSTF), where 94 out of 96 projects have a cycling element; a further £178 million has been announced for the LSTF for 2015-16. Between 2005 and 2010 the Department spent £140 million on cycling projects and £10 million on Sustainable Travel Towns, where projects included cycling.

Energy and Climate Change Roundup:

The attempt to get a clean power target into the Energy Bill in the House of Lords failed by 8 votes. 63 Liberal Democrat peers supported the government. However the government pledged to reconsider the issue in 2016, while Labour are committed to introduce a target if they win the next election.

Another piece of bad news was the government's decision to agree that French-government-owned EDF could build new pressurised water reactors at Hinkley Point in Somerset with financial backing from a Chinese government-owned company. Promising a 'strike price' of over 9p per kWh and guarantees for much of the construction costs and part of the waste management – the deal may yet fall foul of European regulations on government interference in the market.

The local papers have featured advertisements offering free energy efficiency improvements to households under the 'ECO' initiative. The 'Energy Company Obligation' aims to help around 400,000 low-income households per year and has an annual budget around £1.3 bn. Over 173,000 homes have now had Green Deal measures installed with the help of the ECO.

The Green Deal itself has come under fire for its low take-up. By 8th October only 384 households had signed up out of over 71,000 that had been assessed. The All Party Parliamentary Group for Excellence in the Built Environment released a report <http://www.cic.org.uk/admin/resources/sustainable-construction-and-the-green-deal-report.pdf> that criticised the scheme saying "Financially, the green deal is unattractive and uncompetitive. It is overly complicated and it doesn't work for social housing organisations".

Ed Miliband's proposal for an energy price freeze has caused a storm of media and political comment – including suggestions that support for energy saving and low-carbon generation should come from general taxation. The 'polluter pays principle' would suggest that energy users should pay for the carbon emitted on their behalf, but in the absence of a carbon tax on all emissions are electricity generators unfairly burdened?

On a typical household energy bill of £1,267 the ECO initiative is £47, Renewables Obligation (paid by electricity suppliers who don't source enough renewable energy) £30, the Warm Home Discount for pensioners £11, Emissions Trading Scheme (European Union 'cap and trade' scheme) £8, and Feed-in Tariffs (for small-scale renewable generation) £7. It's not very obvious how much of the 'Network Costs' of £257 is down to enhancements to cope with renewable sources ...

The Committee on Climate Change has published its Fourth Carbon Budget Review <http://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/fourth-carbon-budget-review-part-1/> which refutes criticisms that the UK is sacrificing its economy to save the world saying: "The UK is not acting alone. Many countries have made ambitious commitments to reduce emissions, and are delivering against these commitments. There is now widespread coverage by low-carbon policies of major emitting sectors around the world. This provides a good basis for agreeing and implementing an ambitious global deal."

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.