

Reading Friends of the Earth Newsletter Nov/Dec 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.

November 12th - 8:30 p.m. at RISC – Chris Burden will tell us about the 'Roads to Nowhere' conference he went to in October – see below - plus general discussion. **Late start to allow people to see the WDM film from 19:30 first.**

December 10th - General Meeting – details by e-mail later.

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

Wednesday 12th November – World Development Movement film screening 'Alternative Economics' – a short film by Tony Pursey – and discussion - 19:30 at RISC

Sunday 16th November – Repair Cafe – Jacksons Corner, – 12:00 to 16:30.
<http://www.transitionreading.org.uk/projects/reading-repair-cafe/>

Monday 17th November – “Why bother with Fracking?” – Prof. Chris Rhodes - Maiden Place Community Centre 7.30pm. Earley Environmental Group meeting. www.earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk

Tuesday 25th November – Climate Action Network – 6-monthly networking meeting will focus on local activity relating to food growing – 16:30 to 18:00 - Peter Brett Associates, Caversham Bridge House, Waterman Place, RG1 8DN – book by email climate.change@reading.gov.uk. <http://www.readingclimateaction.org.uk/>

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>

'Roads to Nowhere' - Chris Burden reports from the CBT conference:

18 October 2014; 10.30am – 5.00pm / Toynbee Hall, London E1 / Organised by Campaign for Better Transport

Chris Burden, Reading Friends of the Earth, will bring a load of material from the conference and talk about the event at the next Reading FoE meeting, at RISC in Reading, on Wednesday 12th November 2014.



Roads to Nowhere

Spending Billions - The Government and local councils are planning to spend tens of billions of pounds on new roads over the next few years. George Osborne is planning to announce a new wave of major schemes in his Autumn Statement, and new 'growth funds' and spending powers for business groups threaten to add many more disastrous projects to this list from 2015. Read why this is a bad idea.

http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/sites/default/files/Roads2Nowhere_Factsheets_2014.pdf

Road Proposals - Over the next two years more than 100 road schemes, from new motorways to bypasses and widenings, will need to go through planning and funding approval processes before the diggers move in, and local campaigners are more important than ever. Some of these projects already have funding or planning permission, while others are at a much earlier stage with plenty of chances left to stop them. The bill already adds up to more than £30 billion - all of which would be better spent on smarter travel improvements instead.

<http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/roads-nowhere/roads-policy-alert>

Plans on the Map - The roads on the map (on the link below) are set to be built soon by local government or the Highways Agency. Business-led Local Enterprise Partnerships are also getting in on the act, taking on new transport spending powers. Many of these roads are 'zombie' projects, left over from 1990s plans that would have doubled the size of the trunk road network.

<http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/roads-nowhere/road-proposals-map>

That time, the plans sparked a wave of campaigns and protests that stopped many projects, and the whole policy was finally dropped in 1997. Now, we need to act again . . .

roads2nowhere campaign

See <http://www.bettertransport.org.uk/roads-nowhere> and <https://www.facebook.com/roads2nowhere>

On 18 October 2014, I attended a training conference 'roads2nowhere 2014', hosted by CBT to help local campaigners stop this new wave of road building covering the country with Tarmac. The conference, in central London, was full of information and intelligence on what's being proposed, together with training and advice on how to get a road campaign off the ground.

The day began with an introduction by Stephen Joseph (Chief Executive of Campaign for Better Transport), followed by a panel discussion with prominent figures in the anti-road building movement, including Stephen Joseph, John Stewart (from ALARM UK etc.), and Ralph Smyth (Coombe Haven Defenders).

In the afternoon, I attended two (traditional) workshop discussions:

'Nationally significant infrastructure projects – the new planning processes'

See the following graphic diagram which explains these new processes, including the (rather tight) timescales.

<http://infrastructure.planningportal.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Application-process-diagram2.png>

and 'Campaigning towards the general election'

Finally, we formed a number of small groups to engage in 'Open Space' discussions. Here the grand topic was 'How can road campaigners have the most impact up to and after the General Election'

{Links to 'Open Space' discussion concept: <http://peopleandplanet.org/goinggreener/skills/using-open-space> and <http://transitionculture.org/2008/03/21/12-tools-for-transition-no10-how-to-run-an-open-space-event/> }

Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership - TTIP

Campaigning against the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and its ISDS (Investor-State Dispute Settlement) mechanism continues and seems to be gaining wider support. See November 2014 article by George Monbiot at <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/nov/04/british-government-leading-gunpowder-plot-democracy-eu-us-trade>

FoE sees it as making it harder to stop fracking, harder to protect our bees, and harder to combat climate change – other organisations see threats to public services and to the NHS in particular <http://www.foe.co.uk/page/secret-eu-us-trade-deal> also <http://stopttip.net/> and <http://www.wdm.org.uk/trade-campaign/transatlantic-trade-and-investment-partnership-ttip>

While local activity has mostly been led by the World Development Movement Chris Burden gave a speech about it for Reading FoE at a 'Speakers' Corner' event in the Butter Market on October 4th – braving the adverse weather. <http://www.getreading.co.uk/news/local-news/speakers-corner-returns-reading-international-7940864>

Bee Cause Progress

On 4th November the government at last released its **National Pollinator Strategy** (NPS) after more than 200,000 actions had been taken to support Friends of the Earth's Bee Cause campaign - from bee-friendly wildflower planting to calling for pesticide bans and demanding action from MPs, councils and the Government.

This follows on from a backbench debate on pollinators on 16th October when government MPs spoke of their value and Labour MPs including Alan Whitehead, Joan Walley and Barry Gardiner called for more action soon. <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmhansrd/cm141016/debtext/141016-0003.htm#14101687000002> (*the preceding debate on cycling may also be of interest*).

The new Pollinator Strategy is on the link below. It accepts that “pollinators face many pressures which have led to declines in numbers, and a reduction in the diversity of species to be found in many parts of the country” and points to the economic value of bees and other pollinators. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/370199/pb14221-national-pollinator-strategy.pdf

Over the next 10 years the strategy aims to “build a solid foundation to bring about the best possible conditions for bees and other insects to flourish.” It proposes a combination of voluntary practical actions, use of the Common Agricultural Policy, and research sponsored both by government and others, including pesticide manufacturers.

FoE's comment was “This action plan is an important step towards safeguarding Britain's bees and other pollinators - but unless it properly tackles the impact of pesticides and helps all farmers to develop bee-friendly practices its effectiveness will be significantly undermined.”

FoE say the NPS falls short in two key areas: It doesn't support all farmers to help save bees, and action on pesticides doesn't go far enough - [it refuses to rule out pesticides that threaten pollinators](#).

The results of Friends of the Earth's Great British Bee Count, published on 28th October, found that allotments were best for bees while parks and roadsides need improving. More than 23,000 people used a smartphone app to take part in the 12-week citizen science project this summer, spotting 830,000 bees in total.

We had a FoE stall at the Ufton Court Open Day on 14th September giving out information on the B'n'B campaign – advice on pollinator-friendly gardening – thanks to Michael, William, Veronica and Clive for their efforts.

Climate Change - IPCC 5th Assessment Synthesis Report

As one commentator has said: “**The core message from the IPCC is the growing urgency of action ... The scientists have done their job. Now it's up to governments to do theirs.**”

The Synthesis Report (released on 1st November 2014) provides an integrated view of climate change as the final part of the IPCC's Fifth Assessment Report. Here are some of its findings – for the details (contained in 40-page or 160-page reports) see <http://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/syr/>

- Human influence on the climate system is clear, and recent anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases are the highest in history. Recent climate changes have had widespread impacts on human and natural systems.
- Anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions ... are *extremely likely* to have been the dominant cause of the observed warming since the mid-20th century.
- Continued emission of greenhouse gases will cause further warming and long-lasting changes in all components of the climate system, increasing the likelihood of severe, pervasive and irreversible impacts for people and ecosystems. Limiting climate change would require substantial and sustained reductions in greenhouse gas emissions which, together with adaptation, can limit climate change risks.
- Without additional mitigation efforts beyond those in place today, and even with adaptation, warming by the end of the 21st century will lead to high to very high risk of severe, widespread, and irreversible impacts globally (*high confidence*).

- There are multiple mitigation pathways that are *likely* to limit warming to below 2°C relative to pre-industrial levels. These pathways would require substantial emissions reductions over the next few decades and near zero emissions of CO₂ and other long-lived GHGs by the end of the century.
- Climate change is a threat to sustainable development. Nonetheless, there are many opportunities to link mitigation, adaptation and the pursuit of other societal objectives through integrated responses (*high confidence*).

The next major climate talks will be held in Paris in December 2015. At these talks Governments need to agree what emissions cuts their countries must make. Friends of the Earth say that climate scientists must make it clear that equitable sharing of the remaining carbon budget between and within countries is essential and is calling for the IPCC to complete an equity report in time for the talks in Paris. To inform Governments' decisions, it should recommend how the remaining carbon budget should be fairly split between countries.

Meanwhile The Guardian reported that the differences between climate scientists and sceptics were decreasing - <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/oct/03/climate-consensus-scientists-and-sceptics-suspend-hostilities>

Climate Action Co-ordination in Reading – “Time to Act”

The Campaign against Climate Change is planning a major day of action on 7th March 2015 when there will be a national climate march in London to insist that it is “Time to Act”. They want as many people and organisations as humanly possible to march on that day to say enough is enough.

They say “two months before the UK General Election, we will be taking to the streets of London with our allies in a creative mass action, telling the story of climate change: from the causes (fossil fuels and investment in them), the consequences (for food and water, for example) and the solutions (renewable energy, climate jobs, better transport). Following imaginative actions to highlight these, we will all assemble around Parliament for a mass wake-up call - Time to Act!”

Watch out for news of planning meetings in Reading in December or January – and put 7th March in your diaries!
<http://www.campaigncc.org/7march>

Some of us went on the ‘People’s Climate March’ on 21st September 2014 – too many people to get near the final rally!



“Burning Biomass for Electricity: Solution or disaster?”

Duncan Law of Biofuelwatch <http://biofuelwatch.org.uk/> and of Transition Town Brixton <http://transitiontownbrixton.org> gave this presentation at a Reading FoE meeting on Wednesday 15th October.

He said that Biomass is classed as ‘renewable’ so its use contributes to EU targets, but in practice it can be far from environmentally benign – depending on its source – carbon emissions can be several times worse than coal. DECC’s new biomass calculator exposes that but DECC refuses to change its flawed carbon accounting model.

He questioned the assumption that carbon emitted from burning ‘biofuels’ does not have to be counted – because of the assumption that it will quickly be taken up by regrowth! But it takes ‘seconds to burn – decades to grow’ and the emissions from clear-felled and cultivated land can be extremely high – palm oil from freshly-cultivated peatlands can have a 900-year ‘carbon debt’. He was particularly concerned about imports from USA and Canada following clear-felling, and planted Eucalyptus in South America.

While some burning of waste materials or locally grown material may be sustainable the sheer scale of biomass burning envisaged in DECC’s Renewable Energy Strategy far outstrips UK capacity to supply it. Figures 2 and 13 of the Roadmap show over 58% of renewable electricity is currently from biofuels https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/255182/UK_Renewable_Energy_Roadmap_-_5_November_-_FINAL_DOCUMENT_FOR_PUBLICATION.pdf The UK produces 10 million tonnes of wood for all uses today but if all consented biomass plants go ahead it could be burning 66 million tonnes per year.

Although the government will introduce 'Sustainability Standards' for biomass from April 2015 Duncan is concerned that they will not be adequately audited or enforced.

Duncan recommended we watch <http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/2014/biomass-emergency-video/> support Biofuelwatch actions, and subscribe to their mailing list at <http://www.biofuelwatch.org.uk/>

"Why Bother with Fracking?"

Reading FoE arranged this public meeting on Wednesday 29th October as our contribution to Reading International Festival. Professor Chris Rhodes, chairman of Transition Town Reading, discussed the options for global and UK energy in the context of declining supplies of conventional crude oil. If you missed it Chris is repeating his presentation to Earley Environmental Group on 17th November (see Diary on first page of this newsletter).

Production of 'light crude' oil peaked in 2005. Globally we need to find a new "Saudi Arabia" every 3–4 years; half our oil supply will be gone by 2030. Much of the oil left is high-sulphur (sour) and 'heavy' needing more costly processing and reducing the 'energy return on investment' (EROI - the ratio of the energy output to the energy input to used extract and process it).

Fracking – 'hydraulic fracturing' (used both for oil and for gas) - involves drilling into shale-rocks and forcing water and other materials down the well at high pressure to fracture the rocks so that the gas can come out relatively freely. This can produce several million gallons of wastewater, containing a cocktail of chemicals, and radioactive elements etc. The gas flow can deplete rapidly – by about 80% over two years – so the well then has to be abandoned or re-fractured. Many wells will be required with consequent local impacts from vehicle movements and drilling sites. There are concerns that the process can contaminate groundwater/air, though there is much dispute. Globally fracking for oil or gas will not be able to supply energy at the rate required to replace conventional oil. Fracking in both Poland and the USA is said not to be achieving the expected amounts of output.

Conventional oil is a key resource – particularly for transportation - and as a chemical feedstock, and for agriculture – and its decline in output is likely to have serious impact very soon. Globally 1,000 barrels of oil – about 160 tonnes - are used every second. Burning oil contributes 30% of all carbon emitted by humans. As oil runs out we will emit far less carbon, but civilization will collapse without alternative fuels. Global population may peak and start to decline over the coming decades.

'Renewable' energy sources will be useful but it seems extremely unlikely that we can replace oil in the enormous quantity that we use it now – in the UK context the area required for wind-power or biomass would be too great, and proposals for electrification depend on supplies of 'rare earth elements', most of which currently come from China which is restricting supply.

Biodiesel from algae – solar power by another route – perhaps integrated with sewage/wastewater treatment – has some potential for fuelling transportation which should be explored, but it appears to have a very low EROI compared to conventional oil.

"Transition Towns" aim to achieve resilient, more localised communities which avoid the worst potential of peak oil and climate change - replacing the "global village" we live in today.

Population Matters

The Reading PM group held an interesting meeting as part of the Reading International Festival. It included the amazing statistic that human beings and their domestic animals now accounted for 97% of the biomass of all land-based vertebrates.

The focus was mainly on global numbers: population increase from 2bn to 7bn since the 1930s; environmental footprints (including carbon) – demand is already at 2.7 Ha each when only 1.8 Ha are available; and population trends for a number of 'total fertility rate' scenarios. Different countries have different footprints, different population densities, and different levels of consumption and affluence.

The availability of affordable fossil fuels was seen as one of five major factors in rapid population growth, along with hygiene and medicine, religious and cultural attitudes, faith in economic growth, and of course human reproductive instincts.

<http://www.populationmatters.org/making-case/points/population-problem/>

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 9th 2014 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 2014/15

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.