

WBGE Forum

Wednesday 30th April 2014 - 7:30pm- 9:30pm
Community Furniture Project, Newbury

In Attendance: Richard Foster (Chair), Evangeline Wood (Minutes), Robert Pattison, Yvonne Redgrave, Ken Neal, Gill Hall, Kelvin Hughes, Royce Longton, Graeme Panting, Tricia Marshall, Richard Marshall, Sue Plackett, Tim Clark, Anne-Louise Budd, Lesley Atkinson, Martha Vickers, Frances Lofthouse and Bernard Mackey.

Apologies: Gareth Beard, Dominic Boeck and Christine Essex.

Welcome

Richard welcomed the group to the Community Furniture Project/Newbury Resource Centre and introduced our host Kelvin Hughes.

Tour of the Community Furniture Project

Kelvin explained that they were Newbury Community Resource Centre and they ran all the various projects under which we were more familiar: Community Furniture Project (Newbury), Community Furniture Project (Basingstoke), Growing 2gether, Renewal Project and Link Up Project.

The new centre at Bone Lane is made up of re-use and training activities, there are usually around 50+ people at the centre on any one day. Takings for the project have gone up around 30% since moving to the new premises. There was a good footfall from the surrounding businesses e.g. people buying books.

Kelvin gave the group a tour of the building.

Swap Shops and Up-coming Meetings

Richard thanked Kelvin for hosting us and giving us the opportunity to see how items can be reused.

Richard mentioned that there was a hustings for the European Elections on the 15th May at St Nic's Church Hall (7:30pm). It was being organised by the UN and anyone interested was welcome to attend or pass questions through to Richard in advance to be given to Graeme Panting, the Southern Region rep.

Events

- The next WBGE event will be a Summer Social BBQ on 16th July, further details to be confirmed shortly. We had taken comments onboard from last year and would start cooking earlier and have some kind of ice breaker sessions to get people chatting from the start.
- Greening West Field's are holding their first Swap Shop on 24th May at Ace Space Newbury.
- Growing 2gether Open Day is Saturday 17th May, 10am-3pm at Cottismore.

Swap Shops

Robert said that WBGE were keen on promoting Swap Shops, we felt that they were especially good for new groups/Greening Campaign's entering Phase 2. The Community Furniture Project (CFP) were key to supporting Swap Shops- they PAT tested (electrical safety checking) small electrical items for re-homing and took away remaining items at the end of the event.

Issues had come up whilst arranging the West Field's Swap Shop event; the events require a lot of CFP man power (2 PAT testers) and do cost them money to attend. WBGE Management Committee had voted to pay £50 per Swap Shop to the CFP to contribute towards these costs, produce a banner to promote CFP and we would like to get members of WBGE trained up as PAT tester volunteers.

Kelvin said that there are 6 places available on a one day training course; once a CFP volunteer you would be covered under their insurance. There are courses running at the end of May/June, the course would run 09:00-15:30 at the Centre on Bone Lane, Newbury. Robert Pattison said that he would be volunteering and anyone interested in volunteering should let Evangeline know.

Kelvin to send through syllabus flyer to Evangeline.
Evangeline to add something to the WBGE website.

Gill asked what happened to the items taken away by the CFP from events, as much of what was left was 'rubbish'. Kelvin said that they stripped out everything they could that was useful to them.

Richard Marshall asked what could be done about the professional Swap Shoppers. Richard Foster thought that by helping CFP with a volunteer we were at least sharing the work load somewhat. Martha felt it didn't matter if there were 'professional Swap shoppers' so much, as long as the items were being re-used in some way. Most groups collected cash donations at the events.

Yvonne said that there was a Carbon Conversations course in Reading 12-13th July. If anyone was interested in attending they should contact Yvonne for further details.

Fracking talk and discussion – Ken Neal

Richard explained that WBGE had wanted to have a 'for' and 'against' fracking speaker but we couldn't get a pro speaker despite our best efforts.

Richard said that his personal view on where it might be argued to be beneficial, if the process could be made safe, was that gas was better than coal in terms of emissions. If it was being used as a bridge from coal-based emissions to fossil-free energy generation, and if the displaced coal could be guaranteed to remain in the ground, there could potentially be a case for it providing all the uncertainties could be guaranteed.

Ken Neal introduced himself; he worked as a Building Design & Environmental Consultant and small holder. He had recently completed an Msc and had been working in low energy design since the mid 70's. He had recently attended a fracking talk by CPRE that was very pro-fracking.

What is fracking?

Fracking is the use of high pressure fluid to break up rocks in order to release oil and gas from rocks- typically hard/dense rocks, such as shale, containing organic material. The rocks were generally source rocks for other oil extraction processes. The 'fluid' was a mixture of water, sand and chemicals. Some fluid would come up after fracking, this was contaminated with chemicals.

Advantages for the UK

- A study (paid for by Cuadrilla) says that fracking in the UK could be worth £3.7 billion a year to the economy.
- 74,000 jobs could be created, mostly during the drilling period.
- It could save us money with fuel becoming cheaper, but this is unlikely, we are linked to continental prices which are in fact higher than we have here currently.
- Fuel Security- we need our own supply, particularly with what is currently happening in Russia/Ukraine, as supply prices go up we would be somewhat protected.
- 1% of profits will be paid to local authorities but companies like Starbucks manage to trade without 'profits', how much of this money will materialise? There will be costs in road repairs, with great numbers of 44 tonne trucks during the drilling phase.
- £100,000 payment per well could be 'swallowed' up by other costs associated with fracking- pollution, road repairs etc.
- Most drilling companies are small or off shoots of larger companies, in the US, when they finish drilling, they go bust, many aren't paying up, leaving landowners with the clear up costs.

Problems for the UK and the World

- We already have enough known sources of fossil fuels to take us over the so called 'safe' threshold without adding extra fuel.
- We need to reduce the amount of fossil fuel we are using, even if we don't use the fossil fuel, companies are likely to still export it e.g. the US exporting their coal cheaply now they have shale.
- If we are going to use shale gas we have to stop using, and mining, coal. We cannot make other countries do this, so coal will still be used.
- Depletion with shale can be as high as 40% in the first year; wells require re-fracking after 3 years and can be drained within 5 years.
- Earthquakes are not so much of a problem however faults could allow movement of oil, gas and fluids, and chemicals to aquifers.
- Water pollution is not so much of a problem if properly regulated- IF!
- Old wells are sealed with concrete that will leak in 40-50 years time, the gases will then escape.
- It's difficult to gauge how far fractures go, so cannot guarantee there will be no leakage.
- There is an increased risk of methane in water near well heads. Health problems arising in those living near sites, we are far more densely populated than the US.
- Noise and light pollution- 24/7 working and a large number of trucks servicing the site.
- Water shortages- 6-8 million gallons of fluid are required per frack, equivalent in the South East to adding a town the size of Basingstoke. Already have water shortages in the South East. Most of this fluid also needs to be taken away and disposed of from the sites.

- Traffic congestion and road damage- 10-12 truck movements a day, 500-600 over a few days when fracking a well. Road damage will need to be paid for from the 1% funds a local authority will get.
- Erosion of civil rights- changes in Laws to allow drilling under your land. Lobbying in Parliament Rules have changed, making it difficult to appeal.

We discussed some of the individual arguments and whether energy use may increase/reduce and whether cheaper coal would actually increase energy use.

Cold Ash has a talk on nuclear power on the 4th June.

The ground in the US is less disturbed, with less fault lines than in the UK. Companies will need to frack longer to get supplies out in the UK.

Extended drilling rigs, drilling under the sea bed, would be drilling 60+ wells drilling out from one point. A rig would be there for a very long time in the UK, whereas in the US it may have drilled 10 wells and stayed there for a couple of months.

Regulation

The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) is the name of a trade agreement that is currently being negotiated between the European Union and the United States. The negotiations aim at removing trade barriers (tariffs, unnecessary regulations, restrictions on investment etc.) in a wide range of economic sectors so as to make it easier to buy and sell goods and services between the EU and the US.

It contains something called Investor to State Dispute Settlement (ISDS). This enables companies to sue governments in closed tribunals staffed by corporate lawyers if they perceive that any proposed legislation might affect their profits.

- ISDS is being used in Australia by Philip Morris, the tobacco giant, to sue the government which is trying to legislate for plain tobacco packaging
- ISDS is being used in Canada to prevent environmental regulation of tar sands projects

Fracking West Berkshire

Ken showed us West Berkshire and the surrounding area gas fields. It is unlikely that we will be fracked whilst there are better oil fields to be fracked.

Conclusion

Ken felt that if equal quantity of coal was removed from the market and left in the ground; regulation would be effective; investment in renewable continued; effort was made to displace fossil fuels with renewable; there was no accidental gas leakage AND all of these could be guaranteed; than fracked shale gas might be a good transition fuel.

However, there is also talk about coal bed methane, in situ gasification of coal and methane clathrates being used as well as fracked shale gas and oil.