

West Berkshire Green Exchange AGM

28th September 2016

Chairman's Report

I would like to extend a warm welcome to all of you to this, the sixth WBGE AGM.

On the political front the most significant event relating to climate change in the past 12 months was the Paris meeting of the IPCC and the signing, by the heads of nearly 200 countries, of the agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions so as to keep the earth's temperature rise caused by them to below 2°C. Getting the agreement signed was hard enough, but putting it into practice is another matter, and certainly in this country there is little sign of that commitment. We have seen two momentous political events since then which seem to move us in the opposite direction: the vote for Brexit and the cuts to local authority budgets. Let us hope there isn't a third around the corner when the United States votes for its new president in November.

The cuts to local authority budgets have affected us directly as West Berks Council has ceased its support for us by no longer providing part of an officer's time as secretary, and by winding up the Cleaner Greener local sub-partnership forum. As a result we no longer have Evangeline as our secretary which is a huge loss. I would like to pay tribute here to the work she has done for us, for her constant enthusiasm, charm and ideas and her unrivalled efficiency. The committee have shown their appreciation by giving her a voucher for her and Dan, her husband, for tickets for the Watermill Theatre, and on your behalf I would like to record the gratitude of all members to her.

Evangeline may be irreplaceable but so too is the greener sub-partnership. This was the one place where eco-professionals, voluntary sector activists, local businesses and West Berks Council could come together to discuss environmental matters and agree initiatives.

It was our formal channel into the councillor with the environmental portfolio and the senior officer managing WBC's work in that area. Without it it will be harder to represent all of you to WBC, and to some extent that is a reflection of the council responding to the fact that, as Richard Benyon has said, climate change does not feature highly on the political agenda of most people. It's there, as an issue, which it used not to be, but it doesn't carry urgency or priority and people don't seem to feel responsible for it. Should we worry about that and if so, what should we be doing about it?

During the past year a group of us went to hear Lord Nicholas Stern speaking in Oxford about about his book "Why are we waiting", putting the economic case for an agreement at Paris, and then just before Paris we attended the climate change march in London. Our efforts since then

were exclusively focussed on EV-ENT 2016 which took place in Northbrook Street in late May where we had Audi, Mitsubishi, Nissan, Renault and Tesla on show. The idea this year was to put these wonderful vehicles in front of the general public, to show that EVs are part of the present, not the future. We purposely included models like the Nissan Leaf, Renault Zoe and Volkswagen e-Golf which are at the affordable end of the range, but perhaps unsurprisingly it was the exotic cars that attracted most attention. We were financially supported by West Berks Council, despite the cuts, because they recognise that air pollution is a real issue in Newbury.

In July we had a social gathering for a barbecue by the banks of the River Kennet in Thatcham.

We still have funds available for communities wishing to embark on a Greening Campaign stage or something similar. The funds typically go towards the costs of venue hire and promotional costs. If you know anyone in West Berkshire starting a scheme please let them know we can help them.

For 2017 the committee is not considering another E-VENT, but we do want direction from members on what they would like us to be doing on their behalf, and I have included an agenda item for this later in the meeting.

Finally I should like to thank your committee for their work during this year, especially on E-VENT. I am sorry to say that we will be losing Robert Pattison as Treasurer, and Tony Drewer-Trump as a committee member, but I am delighted that Richard Marshall has agreed to have his name put forward to join the committee and that Yvonne has kindly agreed to take over as Secretary. That still leaves us without a Treasurer so if anyone might be willing to fill this role, please let me know. In the meantime I would like to express my personal thanks to both Robert and Tony for the significant work they have done while serving on the committee.

Richard Foster