

West Berkshire Green Exchange AGM

27th September 2017

Chairman's Report

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

I said last year that in the political world there had been two momentous events that moved us in the wrong direction for addressing climate change, namely Brexit and the cuts to local authority budgets. I expressed the hope that there wouldn't be a third when the United States voted for its new president. So much for that hope. But I just wonder whether the threat of the United States' withdrawal from the Paris accord has served to strengthen the resolve of all the other countries to achieve its targets.

It does seem to me that there is general acceptance now that human activity is causing climate change. Three hurricanes with a likelihood of one in 500 years, Harvey, Irma and Maria, all occurring in the same year, have added their weight. But there isn't the realisation that we can reverse the direction of climate change and to do that we can and should take the necessary action to end our use of fossil fuels. And while that's the case, there is a need for organisations like ours to keep plugging away with the message.

Last year I mentioned that the cleaner/greener local sub-partnership forum, LSP, had been a victim of the local authority budget cuts. This was our way of communicating with West Berks Council on environmental matters. Coupled with the WBC's cessation of secretarial support to us, the demise of the LSP meant that we really have no communication channel in to West Berks Council. This has caused the committee to question whether we should be orientating ourselves to be more of a focus for lobbying on behalf of our members. But there has been a view that our constitution does not enable us to do that. Actually it is pretty silent on the matter, but I would like to make it explicit that we can lobby. Accordingly the committee is proposing changes to the Constitution explicitly to give WBGE the power to lobby. With your agreement we will formalise that at an EGM later in the year. There will be more discussion on it in a moment.

This year we did not hold an electric vehicle event, as we had in the previous two years. I think people are now more generally aware that electric vehicles are out there, but resistance to change means that people think they are not for them. The government has said that after 2040 no new petrol or diesel cars can be sold. That is a long way off, in fact too far off, but I think the

announcement is significant because it is the first time that a government announcement will force behavioural change on people, rather than incentivising it. Already people are considering whether diesel is a good investment and that has to be a good thing. Pollution caused by nitrous oxide particulates, and the government's failure to clean up some of our major cities, London in particular, have helped to advance the case for electric vehicles and to keep the manufacturers investing in the necessary R&D and infrastructure. You can now find multiple Tesla charge points in certain motorway service stations complementing pair of Ecocentricity ones to be found in most.

For WBGE the high point of the past year was the talk by Professor Sir Brian Collins at a members' meeting on 1st February at the Bowler's Arms, Wash Common. Brian provided some reassurance that plenty is happening at government level to meet our current emission targets but he was less optimistic about meeting the targets in the medium term. Over 50 people attended his talk and, such being the interest in what he had to say, I hope he will return to keep us updated sometime soon.

On 26th April we met here in St George's Church where the theme was transport, and we heard from the Green Taxi company about – well – green taxis, and from Colin Duff and myself on the plans for electrification of the line from Paddington to Newbury.

In July we had a social gathering for a barbecue at Bunker Farm and we are grateful to Ken and Carole Neal for their generous hospitality.

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.

I should like to thank your committee for their work during this year. There are four of us at present, our speaker today, Richard Marshall, Ken Neal, our secretary Yvonne Redgrave and myself. We are all willing to continue for another year.

Finally, thank you all for coming and for your support. We are here to support and encourage you and the committee and I welcome any ideas from you on how we could do that better.

Richard Foster