

West Berkshire Green Exchange AGM

Wednesday 22nd September 2020

Chairman's Report

Welcome to the WBGE 2021 AGM.

The last year has been one with two halves. This time last year we were bracing for a second lockdown which came in November and lasted until Easter. Since then the country has been slowly relaxing Covid restrictions and learning how to live safely again.

Against this background WBGE has operated mostly on Zoom, the only exception being a most enjoyable summer barbecue hosted in July by Ken and Carole Neal. About a dozen members were present.

During early 2021 West Berks Council's Local Plan was out for consultation. This is the plan that allocates land where planning consent for new houses will be looked on favourably, and outlines design features that will be expected. Your committee put in a response which drew attention to the lack of acknowledgment in the draft plan of the climate emergency, and a failure to recognise that West Berks Council's Environment Strategy and its ambition of reaching Net Zero by 2030 needs all new houses to be built to a Zero Carbon standard. Subsequently the plan is on ice following the government's requirement for such plans to look ahead 30 years when in fact it only covered 15.

That took place in February and during the same month you will remember a national outcry about the proposed Cumbrian Coke Mine. Your committee wrote to Laura Farris MP expressing disagreement with the project. Her reply, though politically couched, showed sympathy with our objection.

Also in February WBGE held a Zoom meeting in which Helen Cukier of Hungerford Environmental Action Team (HEAT) presented the many different ways in which HEAT remain a vibrant local environment group. We are grateful to Helen for sharing their success with us, and we look forward to

continuing a close relationship with HEAT as one of their core members, Frances Lofthouse, has kindly agreed to join our committee. Her appointment coincided with a vacancy arising on the committee when Miriam Lee, who had formed the Facebook group West Berks Climate Action Network (WBCAN) announced that she and her family were moving to Lancashire. I would like to record our enormous thanks to Miri for the huge amount she contributed to the environmental movement during the short time that she and her young family lived in this area.

While talking of individuals I would like to mention three others. Evangeline Haggarty, our former secretary, following the birth of Freddy last year, has moved to Newquay, Cornwall, to work for Cornwall County Council in the implementation of their electric charge points in their car parks. We wish her well, as we do Adrian Foster Fletcher in his recovery from heart surgery. Before his operation Adrian attended one of our Zoom meetings from his hospital bed. Whether that was through extreme dedication or extreme boredom I am not sure. Thirdly, Susan Millington has been progressing the Lockdown Wood project almost single-handedly. This project plants trees to commemorate those lost to Covid during lockdown.

Our other meeting of the year was in May when Megan Dalgarno and Helen Ramsey presented West Berks Council's Local Climate Action Plan. This plan embodies WBC's recognition of the need to influence behaviour in the community, to reduce emissions. Their approach is to try to persuade communities to adopt the Greening Campaign which many of you will remember from just over ten years ago. There is a difference this time, though, in that the focus is on getting parish and town councils to implement and own it, as opposed to the drive coming from local activists. If you have any influence or connection with your local parish council I do urge you to help them to adopt it.

I should like to thank the committee for their work and support during the year.

Finally, we still have money to support local environmental initiatives.

Richard Foster