

WBGE Forum & AGM

Wednesday 7th October - 7pm
Council Chambers, West Berkshire Council, Newbury

In Attendance: Richard Foster (Chair), Evangeline Wood (Minutes), Ken Neal, Martha Vickers, Gareth Beard, Tony Drewer-Trump, Yvonne Redgrave, Lesley Atkinson, Keith Richards, Tom Linley, John Gardener, Laura Proudfoot, Susan Millington, Richard Benyon MP, Heather Thorne, Cliff Thorne, Lauren King, Royce Longton, Robert Sharpe & Graeme Panting

Apologies: Richard Pattison, Maryanne Thomas

Welcome

Richard Foster welcomed the group to the Forum and gave some background information on how tonight's Forum visit by Richard Benyon had come about. In May a small group had gone to London for a climate change march. As part of this many groups called their MPs and asked them to come out to speak to them. Some MPs didn't come out to speak to their constituents but Richard Benyon had come out to meet the group.

Richard Benyon

Richard Benyon said that it was an incredibly important time for our future; he was looking forward to Paris with a hope of getting a result and getting back on track to respond to climate change. He is involved with a number of different organisations, trying to increase knowledge around climate change. It was frustrating that there were still many deniers and there was still work to be done in increasing knowledge within policy makers. He hoped that sense would prevail.

Richard Benyon had been involved in local initiatives such as churches aiming for carbon neutral; then he had been Environment Minister and wrote the Government White paper introducing the idea of 'natural capital'. He thought we were starting to see a greater understanding of the natural world. He was also involved in some water schemes - reducing use and conserving supply, both in this country and abroad - water regulators now have sustainable duties included in the Water Act. Richard has also been involved in obtaining funding for projects for river improvement, fisheries and ocean policy.

Richard Benyon said that he feels there is a clear commitment as to where we need to get to from the Government; they want to be a leader. He finds it frustrating that the Prime Minister doesn't come out and say what he feels around climate change issues. Many MPs are lobbying for David Cameron to speak out on his views before Paris.

Questions (grouped where appropriate):

- 1) *Your government have removed or greatly reduced the subsidy on wind turbines and solar panels, you have stopped the Green Deal (admittedly a pretty useless policy in the first place) without replacing it with something that works, you have removed the requirement for zero carbon homes from next year, you have removed the target to increase the take from green taxes, there is speculation that you will remove the support for the Swansea Bay Tidal lagoon which could be the first of about 30 such projects around our coasts, you are allowing fracking under SSSIs and National Parks and in areas (this constituency for instance) where we rely completely on underground aquifers for our water supply despite mounting evidence of pollution of ground water coming from the US, you are supporting and subsidising nuclear power, at twice the current electricity price, despite mounting evidence, especially from Dr James Hansen, that sea level rise will be much more than is currently thought and you are selling off up to 70% of the Green Investment Bank despite the influential Tory think-tank Bright Blue being unimpressed by the move, saying it was "the last thing we need."*

Can you justify any of this, please, in view of Mr Cameron's promise to be "The Greenest Government Ever" and your criticism of Tony Abbott's Australian government?

Ken Neal

- 2) *As someone who supports action to combat Climate Change. What do you think of the following actions by your Government which are overturning Green initiatives introduced by the Coalition:*
 - *Scrapping the zero carbon target for new homes.*
 - *Reducing by 90% the subsidy to installers of Solar Panels.*
 - *Scrapping the Green Deal.*
 - *introducing a law whereby it can call in any decision to approve Green Energy schemes or decisions to refuse Fracking schemes.*

Martha Vickers, Greening West Field's, Newbury Town Council

- 3) *Richard, your Government has brought forward by one year the ending of subsidies for onshore wind turbines at the same time as effectively ending subsidy for the highly popular domestic solar panel industry, putting 20,000 jobs at risk. Your Government's latest move is to reject the Navitus Bay wind farm which had the capacity of a nuclear power station because it'll spoil the view of the Jurassic Coast for people out at sea on ships, carefully forgetting the impact that rising sea levels will have.*

How does your Government plan to meet the 15% renewables energy target against this background of gradually killing every Renewable incentive and plan in this country?

Adrian Foster-Fletcher, Newbury Friends of the Earth

- 4) *This government is removing incentives for sustainable energy creation and is actively encouraging further fossil-fuel-based energy production, e.g. through fracking. Is it seriously committed to reducing greenhouse gas emission levels domestically in line with recommendations from scientists and to meet targets in the 2008 Climate Change Act (i.e. reducing greenhouse gas emissions from approximately 10 tonnes per head to 2 tonnes per head by 2050)?*

If it is seriously committed, then what are the major elements of its strategy to both achieve those levels domestically and to persuade the international community to do likewise?

Richard Foster, Chairman West Berkshire Green Exchange

Richard Benyon said that independent analysis suggests we are on track for meeting the Climate Change Act targets, yet a variety of messages are reported in the media.

Take up for renewables is far greater than anyone expected which is an issue when some are subsidising others profits. As far as he understands, the Swansea Tidal Lagoon project was very much alive and exactly the kind of big project that the Government supported.

The Government have had to make some tough decisions to cut spending, particularly as we are on target to meet the Climate Change Act targets. He would however have liked to have seen us exceed our targets and trade any surplus.

The Green Deal was a great idea but it was too complicated and the finance offer was not a good deal.

Richard was rude about Australian Tony Abbott because he believed we need a united front in Paris, particularly with the countries like Australia. He'd written an article in the Guardian and tried to use politics to help achieve this.

Fracking, it would be wrong for us not to develop a greater knowledge and to do so by allowing test fracking. There is a place for this in not relying on other countries for fuel. It must however be done properly; we need to be careful about a technology that uses a lot of water. Some areas such as the south east don't have very much rainfall and have a high demand; we may need different rules to cover abnormalities such as these. It's up to people like him, to hold Government to account to make sure no corners are cut.

Richard Foster said that he feels that the interim 2020 and 2030 targets would be hit but how will we meet an 80% reduction, it feels like we are a long way from what's needed. Ken Neal said he felt that that fracking gave the wrong message about increasing renewables and encouraged us to keep using fossil fuels. We are being taken off the path to decreasing fossil fuel use. How will we reduce fossil fuel use when we are actively seeking more? Companies will need help to come out of fossil fuels; the trouble is companies have to actively seek more fossil fuels to satisfy their shareholders.

Richard Benyon said that he is optimistic that we will find solutions, things are moving quickly. He believed that we couldn't look at the far off dates through today's ability to act.

Martha Vickers said that many politicians and our leaders seemed to be focusing on selfishness and not what we should be doing, we needed to change behaviours.

Richard Benyon said that there is a selfish worry about climate change e.g. economic issues. The Conservative Environment Committee is one of the best attended committees; there is a real will to make a difference. Some were very active in progressing things. He felt it was an issue they cared passionately about but didn't always focus on.

Yvonne Redgrave said that we are a small group, for many voters climate change was low on their Agenda. How do we drive this forward?

Richard Benyon said that civic society - churches, voluntary organisations, schools, education etc are very important in this. They had polled candidates in the last election over thoughts and there was a fairly positive response to climate change actions. It was not up there with schools, education etc but we needed to talk about it in the right way e.g. quality of life, future of their children, landscape etc. Language we often use is not conducive, we need to keep going.

Richard Foster asked if going on climate marches etc was the right action ahead of Paris?

Richard Benyon said it was really important to lobby your MPs, it was important to encourage others to join in so it wasn't just the usual suspects. Paris talks are a milestone, there were various conflicting reports as to whether we are moving in the right direction or not. These negotiations are hard work and it was often difficult to get agreement.

Richard Foster thanked Richard Benyon for his time.

Heather Thorne said that the PAWS group were producing post cards to send to David Cameron, so far they had 50-60 signatures. They will send round the template so other groups can use them. There were a number of charities doing petitions nationally. The template can be found at <http://www.wbge.org.uk/minutes-of-meetings.html>.

Graeme Panting said that the UN branch have Caroline Bearder MEP speaking on Saturday 28th November at St. Nics. Graeme to send on further details nearer the time.

Richard Foster said that the Green Exchange's next event will be attending a Lord Stern Book Talk in October on Monday 19th October (5pm) Evangeline to send round a reminder of how to register, this must be done with Oxford Martin College.

This would be followed by joining the Climate March in London on Sunday 29th November. We would decide on a particular train and let people know nearer the time.

AGM

Apologies

Robert Pattison & Maryanne Thomas

Minutes of last AGM

Tony Drewer-Trump proposed the Minutes are acceptance as correct, ken Neal seconded.

Chairman's Report

Richard Foster gave the Chairman's Report – See [WBGE Chairman's Report 2015](#)

Richard Foster thanked all those attending.

Martha Vickers asked what kind of projects and amounts of funding the Green Common Trust (GCT) grant covered. It was explained that funds were originally for Greening Campaign start up, GCT had agreed to change the term slightly in light of reduced costs for Greening Campaign fees but there was still a focus on projects of a similar aim and getting more people involved with sustainable activities.

Martha Vickers asked if Swap Shops were still happening, were they still a good thing to do. Tony Drewer-Trump said that they were running in Hungerford/Lambourn and East Garston but that they had a bit of a lapse lately. People were asking them when the next would be though. Cold Ash Parish were also still running Swap Shops and had one scheduled for November. Richard Foster suggested that Martha attend a Green Exchange Committee meeting to discuss Swap Shops as two members of the Committee were involved with Swap Shops. Evangeline will send details of Committee meeting to Martha.

Graeme Panting said that the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals had recently been agreed and he was pleased to see there were some around water. See <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics> for more detail.

Treasurers Report

Richard Foster gave the Treasurers Report – See [WBGE Audited Accounts 2014-15](#) for account transaction details.

Cash in the bank account was originally £7400, now £5698, almost entirely spent on the running of EV-ENT in May. We had used some GCT funding towards this to get more members of the public to green events.

Electing Officers for the Management Committee

The Committee was made up of three official Officer posts- Chairman (Richard Foster), Treasurer (Robert Pattison), Secretary (Evangeline Haggarty); plus ordinary members (Yvonne Redgrave, Tony Drewer-Trump, Ken Neal, Maryanne Thomas and Sarah Jones). All were happy to remain as Committee Members. Richard Foster said that if anyone else was interested in joining the Committee there was room for more and they should let him know.

Royce proposed the Committee remained in post, Graeme Panting seconded.

AOB

Graeme Panting said that it was good that water was starting to get more coverage. He also asked if anyone that had commented on the Council Strategy – 2019 had received any feedback. Evangeline said that feedback was normally published on the website and she would try and find out further information.¹

Richard Foster said that he had brought up the fact there was no mention of the environment and climate change at the Greener Sub Partnership (GSP), which he explained was the groups' only formal link into the Council. Gareth Beard said that the GSP was set up as a partnership for business, the Council and voluntary groups, there were other Partnership groups such as Safer Communities, Economic Partnership, and there had once been money available for groups to do things to meet targets. Since funding was withdrawn many such groups had folded but the GSP was still going. Gareth Beard said he thought there needed to be more focus on the business side of things as in recent years this link seemed to have been lost.

Graeme Panting said he was under the impression that Councillors were not interested in green issues, there were certainly none here. Should we invite them to Forums? Evangeline said that she thought it would be helpful if people spoke to their Ward members, Parish Councillors, Town Councillors etc about their views on climate change and what should be happening. If people weren't talking about such issues Councillors won't necessarily act on them.

It was pointed out that Round And About Magazine had an interesting article on electric vehicles this month.

¹ The results of the Council Strategy Feedback are listed on the WBC Consultation page:
<http://info.westberks.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=30922> Further details can be found on the Council Meeting Minutes (Item 17)
<http://decisionmaking.westberks.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=25261>