

WBGE AGM & Forum

Wednesday 23rd September – 7.00 pm
Zoom session

AGM

In Attendance:

Richard Foster (Chair),

Yvonne Redgrave (Secretary)

Ken Neal (Treasurer)

Richard Marshall (Committee Member)

Miriam Hall (Committee Member)

Gareth Beard

Gabrielle McGarvey

Martha Vickers

Brian Hoskins (PAWS)

Jackie Hoskins (PAWS)

Robert Hill (PAWS)

Adrian Foster-Fletcher (FOE)

Susan Millington (FOE)

Welcome

Richard Foster welcomed the group to the Forum and AGM. He announced that after the AGM Steve Ardagh-Walters would present the West Berkshire Environment Strategy followed by a Q&A session

AGM

1. Apologies

Robert Pattison, Gill Hall, Evangeline Haggerty

RF sent warm wishes on behalf of the committee to Evangeline as the reason she couldnt attend was the birth of her baby son, Freddie on August 25th.

2. Minutes of last AGM

The minutes of the previous AGM were accepted as correct by Ken Neal and seconded by Richard Marshall.

3. Chairman's Report

Richard Foster gave the Chairman's Report. In summary Richard mentioned what an eventful year it has been since our last AGM. Against a background of UK upheaval with an election, our exit from the EU and Covid-19 there was the increasing effects of climate change. Richard mentioned that locally we had a successful political husting, the launch of West Berkshire Environment Strategy, several useful discussions with our local MP and Lockdown Wood. He thanked the committee for their hard work and mentioned we still had around £2000 available to support local climate initiatives.

The chairman's report is available in full on the WBGE website.

4. Treasurer's Report

Ken Neal reported on the Finances. The current balance in the bank is £2307.74 of Greenham Common Trust funds and £202.81 of WBGE Operating funds. There was a total expenditure of £1315.76. Major items of expenditure last year were supporting the political hustings organised by WBGE, Greenfest and XR activities.

Susan Millington asked if the funds could be used for a portable PA system for all climate groups in the area to use. Richard F asked that she document this and submit it as an idea.

5. Electing Officers for the Management Committee

Richard announced that all the current officers of the committee were happy to continue. However, Gill Hall will be stepping down as a member but Gareth Beard will be joining. The continuation of Richard Foster as Chairman, Yvonne Redgrave as Secretary and Ken Neal as Treasurer was proposed by Adrian Foster-Fletcher and seconded by Susan Millington.

The election of Gareth Beard to the committee was proposed by Robert Pattison and seconded by Richard Foster.

6. AOB

Adrian FF raised the issue that at a recent meeting with Laura Farris she had expressed negative views about XR. It was generally agreed that this was probably a response to some of the more aggressive views by a number of early founders of XR and not to the local XR group. Miri Lee confirmed that this was the case as Claire Wiltsher who is a member of the local XR had started a dialogue with Laura which had resulted in a more positive discussion. It was felt that we should raise our own concerns and Richard F would write to Laura on the subject.

The Government Green Recovery Challenge Fund was mentioned. As the deadline for the fund is only a few days away Gareth Beard suggested the committee meet to discuss any opportunities in the next few days.

Notes from FORUM

Presentation on West Berkshire Environment Strategy by Steve Ardagh-Walters

For the presentation we were joined by
Daniel Culkier (HEAT)
Helen Culkier (HEAT)
Annie Welch (Mortimer Climate Group)
Vanessa Collins
Steve Ardagh-Walter (Presenter)

Steve firstly gave a presentation of the Strategy and then took questions. He introduced the strategy with a short video which provided the background to the strategy.

He started by stating that the purpose of the Vision and Strategy was to be a static document showing the direction and a public facing delivery plan with a detailed list of projects was to be published sometime during October. This delivery plan would be the document that was updated regularly.

He then walked through the strategy covering the different sections. Steve raised that although Environment was a priority for the council it had to be balanced against their other priorities such as schools, social services, health and business.

He highlighted that West Berkshire is a high emitter of carbon dioxide compared with other councils and the areas that affect that the most are Transport and Buildings. If the emissions from M4 and AWE which are not under the control of the council are removed then the amount of emissions significantly reduces but it is still relatively high compared with other councils.

One of the major issues is how to engage the public as there are circa 80k houses in West Berkshire and reducing the emissions from these houses is a significant challenge both in terms of heating and insulation.

Steve also said that he was hoping the new Government Environment Bill will be a way to influence industry in the area.

There then followed questions which covered the following.

Housing – Miri Lee and Rob Hill

The housing questions centred on what influence that council might have on new developments. Steve said that the Housing strategy has not been issued but he is expecting it to contain an insistence for high environmental standards and certainly he would be pressing for this. He did say that previously developers though have been able to overrule councils but he was hoping with all the government push for a Green recovery that moving forward they would start to push back on developers.

Steve also raised that we were lucky that 2 of our 3 MPS are environmental champions, Laura Farris is on the cross-party environmental group and Alok Sharma is driving the COP26 event next year. He said we should be encouraging them to push for changes we want to see taken forward.

Transparency and consultation with Local councils – Ken Neal

Ken Neal raised that many local councillors felt excluded from decisions made at West Berks council level. Steve stated that whilst he would endorse private council committee meetings there was no desire to exclude input from local councils. He stated that as soon as a council committee had completed their deliberations he would expect then to publish and ask for input.

Ken also raised the subject of wind farms. Steve mentioned that one of the challenges for the council is the amount of land that comes under AONB. He was keen for there to be better engagement with parties involved as there seems no reasons why that land cannot be used for wind turbines.

COVID and the effect on carbon emissions – Gabrielle McGarvey

Gabrielle asked if the recent reduction in emissions due to COVID would mean the council may relax and take their eye off the ball. Steve assured us that this would not be the case as the task was immense and a small reduction would make hardly any difference at all.

Council and Green groups – Miri Lee

Miri mentioned that she was really pleased with the way the council were now communicating with the residents of West Berkshire. On that subject though is there a way that the council would be able to help Greening groups in the area publicise the initiatives like Solar Streets. Steve stated that he was hoping they could though they had to be careful about backing certain suppliers. He felt there was a way forward on this especially with the Green Grants only available through 'trusted' suppliers.

After the questions the meeting was closed by Richard Foster.