



South Shropshire Green Party



Officers 2006

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Please let the Editor have articles for the next edition of Grapevine by Monday June 19th 2006

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sustainable alternatives? This could happen through apprenticeships, through college training, The Prince's Trust, The National Trust, English Nature or through tenancies run by Defra or public trusts.

However if environmentally friendly sustainable farming is to be achieved it will need the energies of those who come from our vast resource of national diversity. Together with equal opportunity, strict environmental criteria will need to be applied, involving an empathy with the land, and all that lives on it and within it.



Grapevine



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THE CHURCH STRETTON TOWN POLL

*Referendum shows clear opinion.
But will local politicians take note and act accordingly ?*

A 41.47% turn-out is very good in any local ballot – and with 1,204 voters against the proposed linkage of the sale of land for housing to fund a leisure centre, with just 262 in favour, it is clear that the Church Stretton electorate knew perfectly well the meaning of the question being posed in the local referendum.

Local politicians must take this on board. The County and District Councils now hold the key decisions and they are not bound by the referendum. The largest group on South Shropshire District Council is the Liberal Democrat Party. Their Party statement of belief includes these two points:

We believe that decisions are best taken at the most local practical level to allow the maximum public participation. Liberals have faith in free and rational debate as the means of reaching decisions.

Conservatives control the County Council. They have no clear

statements of belief, although their newly elected leader is quoted as saying

"Our enduring values mean we believe in trusting people, sharing responsibility, championing freedom ..."

The Green Party calls on the Councils to recognise that the Town Poll (Referendum) demonstrated a truly local opinion, even if it differs with their own.

Statements of belief define the base of trust on which politicians are elected. Ignore your principles, ignore clear local decisions, and face the voter at your peril.

INSIDE

South Shropshire digests and travels in greener style

An informed look at High Speed Rail

A concept for sustainable agriculture

Kate's Ecocabin sets new benchmarks



MARKET TOWNS UNDER THREAT

John Lloyd voices all our fears about the future of our market towns. He challenges the ideas of developers and planners - they have the power and the money, but do they know best ?

It is happening all over. The bulldozers are making merry with South Shropshire's fair and pleasant land. This is especially true of the market towns. The District Council has just approved further developments at Ludlow's Foldgate Lane, against considerable local opposition from foresighted Ludlovians who see the danger of the town's boundaries expanding at the expense of the town centre itself.

One only has to look at the damage done in Shrewsbury, where out of town development has drawn the life out of the town centre. The first casualty is always the permanent produce market. The empty stalls in Shrewsbury's market hall speak for themselves. Ludlow's market is vibrant and is heralded by the Sunday supplements as what small town living is all about, but the threat is very real.

Who is to say that the speculative sheds to go up on Foldgate Lane will stay as business units? They are basic in design, easily adaptable, and have none of the refinements of the Ecopark across the A49. Where is the brown water system, where is the solar gain, where is the comprehensive car travel reduction plan? The whole development has the nasty feel of a 20th century world pre-dating global warming.

Watch the pressure mount for an escape route via retailing if the

sheds prove difficult to let. This may well happen if development of the Lloyds of Ludlow depot comes on stream. Situated as it is beside the railway station and close to all the town facilities, it should prove a far greater attraction to businesses.

In Church Stretton it hasn't quite happened yet on a large scale. But it will if the developers have their way. This is aided and abetted by the planners concept that major development must be in the market towns. There is a desire to classify all towns the same, even though their geographical, economic and social characteristics are so different. Fortunately Church Stretton has its own ideas and is not keen to buy this one.

The recent Town Poll (Referendum) testifies to this when 1,204 residents voted against building on the water meadows behind the school to fund leisure facilities. With what happened in Cleobury Mortimer in mind, this was 'forewarned is forearmed'.

It remains to be seen whether this democratic voice registers in the right places. The County Council and the District Council now have key decisions to make, they are not bound by the Referendum. Liberal Democrats and Conservatives hold sway in these chambers, we will now see what they do.

Aren't you pleased you voted Green Party last time!

Environmental Benefits

A two track high-speed link (HSL) requires only about a quarter of the land of an equivalent motorway and its intrusion and impact on the landscape is nowhere near that of the road. One might compare the present two track railway between Preston and Glasgow on the West Coast main line with the adjacent M6/M74)

Railways are generally considered the greener option in terms of CO₂ emissions and this is certainly the case in comparison with air travel. Eurostar has estimated that CO₂ emissions on a London-Paris flight are 14 times that of a full Eurostar train. Although Eurostars are not always full they are usually very well loaded. There is the further point that aircraft emissions in the high atmosphere are much more damaging than power station low level emissions.

A debate emerged about whether a HSL would abstract sufficient traffic from the current Scotland - London air services. There are at present 46 flights a day from Glasgow to London against 9 trains and air takes 80% to 90% of the market. French experience is favourable, where TGV now has a 90% market share between Paris and Lyons, while between Paris and Brussels the airlines have pulled out of the market completely.

An interesting statistic has been reported by Sir Rod Eddington, former British Airways chief, that an uninterrupted three hours of rail travel is equivalent to one hour in the air. As this ratio is somewhere near the comparative speed ratio, the time

factor is effectively balanced.

Operational Aspects

One of the great advantages of rail travel is the convenience of arriving at or near the city centre. In this context a completely segregated HSL which would entail new (and very expensive) stations, relatively remote (as are present airports) would be less favourable than tying in with the historic routes at the urban centres. Another great operational benefit would be the freeing of lines, especially on the West Coast route, for freight traffic which is much constrained at present due to lack of capacity.

Costs

A London Scotland HSL would cost £30 billion and it might be thought that this puts it out of court considering the present drive towards reducing rail subsidies. However, this is not necessarily the case.

The Treasury has reportedly expressed some interest in the concept. Their view is that a HSL must be shown to provide a positive impact on GDP at the national level. Funding could also be made available from the income generated by a national road pricing scheme, provided the Treasury agreed to pass this on to the rail sector.

Transport Report expected

Sir Rod Eddington is currently heading a commission to look into the nation's transport problems and he is due to report this summer. His conclusions are awaited with interest.

HIGH SPEED RAIL

A recent Conference organised by the Railway Forum and attended by leading players and consultants in the railway industry discussed the need for high speed railway lines in the UK. Green Party policy supports further investment in public transport and it is useful to be aware of the arguments and ideas which emerged from this debate. Gordon Gissing discusses the issue

International comparisons give us important guidance. In recent decades continental countries have invested heavily in new high speed railway lines. For example, Spain has built 1592km and France 1135km but Britain has only built the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL), a mere 112km.

The Economic Argument

There is general agreement that a high speed line (HSL) to the North of England and Scotland would help reverse the imbalance in the economy between the overheated South East (SE), the Midlands and the North. With transport under

pressure and property prices high in the SE there is little room for any further capacity.

Scotland, where population is forecast soon to begin falling, would particularly benefit from a HSL. The example of Lille in northern France was quoted, 20 years ago a declining town, but with the advent of Eurostar and TGV is now third place in France as a business centre.

The city of Lille now attracts many tourists, previously unknown. Eurostar also attracts many French tourists to Britain, not a popular destination before Eurostar and the Channel Tunnel.

It was concluded that the business case for HSL is very strong.

DIARY

Saturday April 29th 2.00 to 4.00 pm Ludlow Library
May Day Lecture - Jim Gaffney - "The Green Party & Social Justice - saving the planet means saving each other".

Saturday May 20th 10.30 am The Varsity (pub), Wolverhampton
West Midlands Regional Meeting (venue is close to station)

Green Festival Events

Sunday May 28th Ludlow Green Fair Green Party stall

Thursday June 1st 7.30pm Methodist Church, Broad St, Ludlow
Climate Change - public discussion with representatives of political parties

Monthly Meetings

Daytime - 1st Monday - 10.30am, Acorn Restaurant, Sandford Avenue, Church Stretton
Evening - 2nd Tuesday - 8pm, Unicorn Inn, Lower Corve Street, Ludlow

BIO-SOUTH SHROPSHIRE

The UK's first full-scale anaerobic digester using municipal waste is now operational in Ludlow. Based in Coder Road (opposite the waste transfer station) the £2.6 m plant can process 125 tonnes of food waste, garden waste and cardboard each week.

The process involves treating the organic waste with microbes while starved of oxygen. Output is a solid, pasteurised fertiliser and a methane gas, which is used to generate electricity for heat and which can be fed into the national grid.

The plant has been developed by Greenfinch, the company led by Michael Chesshire which has run extensive feasibility studies on the technology, including developing a pilot plant used for the 400 household trial in Ludlow five years ago.

The project is a joint venture between Greenfinch and South Shropshire District Council, supported with funding from DEFRA and from the regional development agency, Advantage West Midlands.

Meanwhile elsewhere in South Shropshire biodiesel is now available. Union Street Garage in Bishop's Castle has become one of the first locations in the country to sell the fuel which is suitable for most diesel engines without conversion. Members of the Wasteless Society get a discount.

Derived from vegetable oils biodiesel can be 'carbon neutral' - when burned it emits the CO₂ that was absorbed by the growing plant, particularly when the production processes use low or zero carbon. Therefore, using biodiesel offers a way of reducing your carbon footprint. It also produces less tailpipe particulates, less hydrocarbon emissions and less carbon monoxide emissions. Biodiesel is effectively zero sulphur (although there is a miniscule amount of organic sulphur that occurs naturally in the oil). Using this fuel has other health and environmental benefits. It is non-ecotoxic, particularly pertinent in relation to fish and aquatic life if spilt into watercourses. If spilt, it biodegrades 98% within 3 weeks. It also has a higher flash point than pure mineral diesel.

The biodiesel sold at Union Street Garage has been made locally from used cooking oil collected in Shropshire. Only rapeseed oil is used. The oil is filtered and undergoes a chemical process called trans-esterification to make it suitable for vehicle use. The final fuel uses 5% rape oil diesel and 95% mineral diesel fuel.

In addition to Union Garage, there are filling stations selling B5 Biodiesel developed through the Marches Energy Agency, in Leintwardine, Oswestry, Bicton and Shrewsbury. The network is expected to expand.

Advance Notice - Apple Fair - October 2006
Sunday 22nd October 2006
Silvester Horne Institute, Church Stretton from 10.30am

WHO SHOULD INHERIT THE EARTH ?

How can agriculture become more sustainable and able to meet the challenges of climate change? Jacqueline Morrish asks the question and suggests an unexpected answer.

Farming today, through the acceptance of norms such as inheritance and modern intensive farming practices using large amounts of energy, has been allowed to remain a closed shop and to virtually dictate the way agricultural land is used. If this continues our ability to tackle climate change in this country will be greatly hampered.

What changes in farming could take place to enable sustainability and greater diversity?

In some respects farming is shackled by inheritance, giving rise to a lack of diversity. Farming is male dominated with sons rather than daughters inheriting. There is an aging population of farmers who have no heirs or whose sons have no inclination to farm. Being the son of a farmer does not necessarily mean that the son has the aptitude for farming; just as the son or daughter of a doctor or teacher may not have the aptitude to be a doctor or a teacher.

We should not take it as given that all sons of farmers and all farmers themselves make good farmers.

How willing are farmers to take on the changes needed to conserve water and energy, and create greater biological diversity? Environmental Stewardship Grants are now available to farmers but how many have grasped the ethos behind these grants as well as the money?

The land is on loan to the farmers and they have a responsibility to look after it and pass it on unpolluted and environmentally sound. There are some who take their responsibilities seriously but there are others who do not.

There is need for greater enforcement to ensure that the stewardship schemes are fulfilled. Greater enforcement is also required to curtail run-off from fields, of nitrates and other chemicals, into streams and rivers. With water levels low, pollutants are more concentrated. With less water available – in some areas reservoirs are down to 70% capacity at this time of year when they would expect to be 100% - farmers need to be thinking of water conservation and of growing crops that are less water intensive.

Sustainability of the land may be brought about by various means. One way might be to extend the diversity of people who might make very good farmers.

At the moment the capabilities of a great number of those within our society are lost. For example, we know that farms continue to be sold off in lots to landowners of larger, energy intensive farms, market priced housing or commercial property.

Instead would it not be better for the environment and society as a whole to extend the policy of equal opportunity to the countryside, to find

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ECOCABIN - GREEN & WELCOMING

Kate Grubb is a veterinary nurse and was cleaning self-catering cottages in the area around Bishops Castle after the birth of her daughter. It was valuable income for a farming family. But the cottages used fuel inefficiently and the holidaymakers came with their supermarket shopping, ignoring local shops. She conceived the idea of a green holiday cottage and with the help of a Rural Enterprise Grant from DEFRA she built Ecocabin on a spare corner of her family's farm.

The conception is stunning. The Ecocabin is a wooden bungalow which at a quick glance might recall wooden cabins on a holiday park. But a second look soon dispels that superficial impression. Ecocabin is built entirely from renewable, recycled or reclaimed materials with walls and floors made of Douglas fir, larch and ash, strengthened by reed boards and insulated with sheep's wool. Interior walls are painted with non-toxic paints, heating uses re-cycled fuel (a pellet stove) and green electricity while solar panels heat the water. Biodegradable waste is destined for the worms, waiting patiently in their compost bins just outside the back door.

Furniture comes from the South Shropshire Furniture scheme, and is a fine advertisement for its skills, while delicate touches come

from local artists. Strong fabric colours work well against the natural texture of wood and the gentle natural colours used to paint the lime-plaster walls. Precious Earth in Ludlow has helped with lighting, worktops and other unusual, and green, ways of meeting everyday needs. The cabin sleeps four (one double, one twin) and organic cotton bedding

is provided. Toiletries are available, in the best four-star hotel tradition, but all are organic and chemical free. Holidaymakers can order their food in advance and, as you would expect, it is local producers who supply them.

Outside the garden is planted with wild meadow flowers and the trees are cooking-apple and pear. A barbecue is provided, crafted by a local artist, and its elegant lines provide a focus for the garden.

The whole venture has one overwhelming feeling. Kate is a landlady who cares. Not just about her customers, who get somewhere really special to stay, but about the nature of the home she has created. The deft touches are feminine, welcoming and planet-friendly. The thought which has gone into the building has paid due regard to budgets, but has also captured something unusual and precious. Contact Tel: 01547 530183 Email: kate@ecocabin.co.uk

