



South Shropshire Green Party



Officers 2007

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All cheques should be made payable to South Shropshire Green Party

Please let the Editor have articles for the next edition of Grapevine by Friday June 8th 2007

**Grapevine is available on screen in colour
Email the editor for a copy**



Grapevine



Newsletter of the South Shropshire Green Party

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LOCAL ELECTIONS - Can you help?

This year sees significant local elections for the Green Party, in South Shropshire as everywhere else. The feeling that SOMETHING MUST BE DONE about Climate Change, transport, security of energy supply and so many other matters, has never been stronger.

This could translate into Green Party votes if we take advantage. Across the country, a good Green showing would increase the pressure on the present and future governments to change their ways, profoundly and urgently. Here in South Shropshire:

- We must retain the seat in Church Stretton which John Lloyd has (nobly) agreed to defend.
- We would like someone to join John in this two-member constituency. If he is left as a lone Green candidate, this simply hands second votes to his opponents and makes the job so much harder
- Help to distribute leaflets and to knock on doors.

- It is vital to field a candidate in Ludlow. There is a revived interest in our ideas in the town. The Green members and supporters in Ludlow need the catalyst of at least one local candidate, sending out the message that we're around and active
- Help Jim Gaffney in Bishop's Castle. Many positive things are happening in BC. The Town Council has begun to take a lead, supporting the Wasteless Society and, vitally, the CLT (see page 3). Jim is Deputy Mayor at the moment .

If not standing for the District Council why not join in, in a significant way, by putting up for one of the Town Councils ? If not, discuss other ways of helping by ringing Jim on 01588 638712

INSIDE

*Affordable housing in Bishops Castle
The unitary debate rumbles on
Incinerate - now a burning local issue
The Iraqi war raises wider echoes*



NEW COUNCIL STRUCTURES

John Lloyd challenges some of the assumptions behind the current bid to create a single council for Shropshire.

It was no surprise that almost 20,000 people (58% of voters) chose not to participate in the Unitary Poll. This is not a concept that the public are easy with. The vote, generally speaking, followed party political lines. There was little else to guide the electorate. Good factual information was not in evidence. Yet this was a significant occasion as a new form of Local Government is being demanded by Whitehall and it is very important that what comes out of these deliberations offers us better, more locally based, structures than exist today.

Unitary Authorities are not a new arrival. They sprung out of the "reform" of the Metropolitan Boroughs back in the 70s. They also inherited much of the centralising characteristics of the old Boroughs. This is the rub. Can they be restructured to answer the needs of a rural area? At present there are only 3 existing rural unitaries; Herefordshire, South Gloucestershire, and the East Riding of Yorkshire. They are worth having a look at.

Neighbouring Herefordshire has retained many of the old trap-pings. It is a sort of expanded Hereford City writ large. At our recent AGM, Felicity Norman gave us an insight of what is happening there. Increased centralisation of all functions to the Hereford offices at the expense of the small towns. A nine member Cabinet reigning supreme over backbenchers and

committees alike. Promises to beef-up parish councils, which have featured large with unitary advocates here, have not been followed through, leaving parish & town hugely frustrated.

Big "prestigious" project are favoured and claims to green credential on the part of the Council are spurious. Looking north, the East Riding has settled down to a pattern of administration that gives some respect to local opinions by devolving as many services as possible into DSOs (Direct Service Organisations). These draw representatives from councils across the area so offering a stronger input. It also raises an interesting proposition which has not been discussed here - the possible introduction of workers' participation in DSOs.

Seeing that most Local Government functions are labour intensive this could be a positive step towards "industrial democracy" in the way that the successful John Lewis Partnership operates.

Whilst the East Riding offers an example of a good way forward it is questionable whether it fulfils Green Party expectations. It is reliant on a strong Chief Executive, who sees his role in business terms, and the DSOs – which incorporate a strong local voice but still need effective managers because they work with a tight monitoring system.

The local government system needs to devolve power by rights and

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Israel already has its own undeclared nuclear weapons arsenal, outside any international controls or inspection regimes.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty allows development of civilian nuclear power programmes, which at present is what Iran is pursuing: as yet it does not possess a single nuclear weapon. Yet the USA possesses thousands of nuclear warheads, has military bases around the globe, and is developing "Son of Star Wars" which will enable it to dominate space. Will it really plunge straight into another military disaster?

ENERGY ADVICE

The Marches Energy Agency, based in Shrewsbury has good advice on its website - and discounts for low-energy light bulbs. Visit: http://www.mea.org.uk/front_page

BAGS

Alan Manser's article in the last edition referred to his letter to our MP, Philip Dunne. Mr Dunne wrote to Environment minister Ben Bradshaw. The following is from his reply.

"Retailers have been asked to look at ways of promoting greater reuse and recycling to help bring about a change in consumer behaviour."

"We are continuing to monitor developments in other countries, in particular the Irish tax on plastic bags. We are currently waiting for the Irish Government to undertake an assessment of the overall impact the tax has had in Ireland. This assessment is due to be completed this year."

He also referred to the enquiry by the Scottish Parliament into a tax on bags proposal. It concluded there could be "unintended consequences" and that the net environmental impact could be disputable.

DIARY

March 22nd to 25th - Green Party Spring Conference, Swansea. A simple journey from Shropshire - join our party for a worthwhile weekend.

Tues April 3rd 11am Former Vice-President Al Gore's Oscar winning documentary "An Inconvenient Truth" is being shown at the National Trust, Cardingmill Valley. It will be repeated on June 5th at 11am and 7.30pm

Thurs May 3rd Local Elections - District, Town and Parish councils. Make sure you have a postal vote if away - call 01584 813277 or 813272

Sun 27th May Green Fair, Ludlow. Ideas please to meetings (see below)

Monthly Meetings

Daytime - 1st Monday - 10.30am, Acorn Restaurant, Sandford Avenue, Church Stretton

Evening - 2nd Tuesday - 7.30pm, Gallery, Ludlow Assembly Rooms, Mill Street, Ludlow

SOME THOUGHTS ON IRAQ

As Tony Blair prepares to resign and George W Bush approaches the final years of his presidency Madeline Haigh reflects on the modern disaster which will surely be their legacy

I joined the Green Party because of Iraq. It was 1991, the closing stages of Operation Desert Storm, the day of the "turkey shoot" on the road to Basra when fleeing Iraqi troops were being slaughtered. The Green Party was the only one opposing the military action which, it appeared to me all along, could only culminate in long-term disaster, both for the region and for ourselves.

Since then as the tragedy of Iraq has been compounded via sanctions, arms inspections, Desert Fox, Shock and Awe and the continuing and accelerating violence, only the Green Party has stood firm in its opposition to the calamitous meddling of US-led forces.

It is useful now to remind ourselves of the facts we have known all along: that Saddam Hussein could not have attained the level of power he reached without the connivance of the West; that "civilised" governments turned a blind eye when Halabja was used as a chemical weapon test-site; that in the run-up to the illegal invasion of Iraq Chief UN Weapons Inspector Scott Ritter was reviled and ridiculed in his native USA for asserting that Iraq's stocks of weapons of mass destruction had already been effectively destroyed.

The White House deliberately encouraged the lie that Iraq was involved in the atrocities of September 11th, a lie which grew and grew among a US population in

whom a massive sense of paranoia was cynically fostered: we visited family in the States several times during this period and watched in horror as war became the inevitable outcome. In the UK Tony Blair persuaded many worried and reluctant back-benchers that he had compelling information to justify war. Why he didn't believe Scott Ritter's expert testimony was never explained.

Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis have died because of these policies; service men are being sacrificed for the ambitions of US neo-Cons, disaffected Muslim youth is being seduced by the merchants of hate, and the repercussions of the last 16 years are likely to last generations, both at home with increasing reductions of our civil liberties, and abroad as the chaos in the Middle East intensifies. Was it all to secure US oil supplies? Will the dawning realisation in the "fact-averse" White House that gas guzzling has to end result in disengagement from this region? Could climate change actually give peace a chance, at least in decreasing reliance on Gulf oil?

Sadly, by the time you read this, another route map may be unrolling, as the US accelerates its threats against Iran's nuclear programme. The double standards in operation here are breath-taking:

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HISTORIC MOMENT IN THE BATTLE FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN SHROPSHIRE

On 1st March the 3 "Founding Signatories" met and signed the papers which bring into legal existence the "Bishop's Castle and District Community Land Trust". One of the signatories is Green Party member Jim Gaffney, who is Chair of the Land Trust Steering Group.

A Community Land Trust (CLT) is a non-profit, community run organisation that owns land and property for public benefit. Land is taken out of the market and is only leased, never sold. The CLT has an elected board, open membership from the area it serves and a small professional staff. The priorities are to:

- acquire and permanently hold land for the benefit of the community
- lease land for affordable rental homes, part equity and mutual home ownership
- re-invest any surplus income for local benefit
- promote resident involvement, local democracy and active citizenship
- enable residents on low incomes to participate fully in the prosperity of the community
- develop land for affordable workspace
- maintain community facilities, manage green spaces and provide access to new entrants to farming.

Much good work has already been done in Bishop's Castle, including conducting a Housing and Business Needs Survey. The CLT has received offers of support, and some donations. Negotiations have begun with supportive landowners. Grapevine readers wanting more information or who would like to offer practical help (the catchment area extends to several parishes around Bishop's Castle), please contact Jim Gaffney on 01588 638712.

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should not be reliant on a single individual, or a small elite executive, managing a 'hand me down' formula. Devolved power should be built into the system. It should empower at the lowest level of local government and build up from this so that the electorate feels involved in the process. If it fails to engage in this way alienation of the political process will grow.

All the deliberations on the reforms to our present system have

been divorced from the financial implications. All councils are 'big businesses', handling millions of pounds, and they are often the largest employer in their area. Some hard thinking has to be done on how revenues are raised in the future.

Simplistic answers such as local income tax fall short of an answer. We need participation by the electorate to focus on the local agenda, and on a local tax which funds their local expectations.

PROPOSED PYROLISIS GASIFICATION INCINERATOR

Where you cannot recycle, you can land fill at a high cost or you can incinerate - that is the reality of waste. At Brockton, near Lydbury North, local people are facing the prospect of an incinerator. What they are finding out about incineration is something we should all be aware of.

Waste incinerators are being sold to the public and local authorities as an answer to our waste disposal and energy generation problems.

It isn't until this issue becomes a local dilemma that people are forced to research for themselves the negative aspects of such a scheme. This is exactly what the residents of the Kemp Valley, in South Shropshire are now facing – what cost, environmentally and to their health will they pay?

Back in July 2006, local company, Shropshire Highland Services Limited, who currently operate a seed potato business in store sheds in Brockton, presented to South Shropshire District Council their proposal for a Pyrolysis Gasification Plant. It would be housed within their buildings and used for processing waste from a variety of sources e.g. plastics, black bag waste, forestry and farm waste, animal waste products and shredded tyres. It would all be burned to produce electricity.

The Kemp Valley Group was set up by local residents and business people, who strongly object to this industrial process being placed in the heart of the South Shropshire countryside.

The proposed scheme would hugely increase traffic movements, particularly heavy goods vehicles,

servicing the proposed plant. Based on the original plans put forward by SPG Limited, this would add an extra HGV journey every 25 minutes throughout the working day.

As Brockton is served by a single track lane which cuts through the middle of the village this would have a dreadful impact in the immediate vicinity and would also seriously affect the road infrastructure of the surrounding area with 'fuel' for the incinerator being sourced from a 25 mile radius.

Noise levels will be substantial and continuous from equipment, vehicles and machinery, coupled with the constant drone from the turbines and the waste gases being emitted from the chimneys at high speeds (24 hours a day, all year round). These will far exceed the ambient levels that currently exist, thus destroying the tranquillity in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Evidence also tells us that the emissions from a plant such as this would have a devastating effect on all those people living in the valley. Highly toxic pollutants such as dioxins and furans, emitted into the air, would greatly increase the risk to us of serious health problems, such as cancers, birth defects and heart disease.

Dioxins can readily enter the food chain when deposited on grass

and crops, via milk and meat. Indeed, local farmers are already raising concerns about the impact this proposal could have on their livestock and livelihoods. As many of them are considering converting to organic this would affect them significantly. These dioxins will also have a severe effect on the wildlife in this beautiful area.

The public have, for several months now, been told by SPG Limited to wait until a full feasibility study has been undertaken on the project, before raising concerns and objections.

It is clear, however, from recent dialogue the directors have had with the AONB, that this feasibility study will not be made available to the general public, and therefore it is likely that we will have little information put into the public domain on which to make a reasoned judgement prior to a planning application being submitted.

What we do know is that SPG Limited have been erratic and inconsistent in the information they have provided publicly to date – they have most recently suggested that the scheme will be a Biomass power station. However, it has also been stated by the company that they intend applying for a waste disposal licence. This would not be required if their intention was to use biomass alone.

Is this stunning countryside the right location for any industrial process of this magnitude?

Do we really want to change our valley from an agricultural to an industrial area?

Do we really want to wait to see the health of our families

deteriorate and the eradication of wildlife species in this area forever?

This could well be a test case for incinerators in the countryside as more and more of these sites are planned. With resistance to local incineration building in the cities developers are targeting the smaller rural communities where they envisage the least resistance.

The Kemp Valley Group are adamant that this must never happen.

If you would like to know more about this important local topic, contact the Kemp Valley Group via their website,

www.kempvalley.co.uk

Or telephone

01588 680490 (Jim Collin) or
01588 680203 (Rachael Kennedy).

SPRING APPEALS

Green Party members are reminded that annual subscriptions (£12) should be sent to the Treasurer as soon as possible, if not already paid (address on page 8).

Local members wishing to become full members should contact the Membership Secretary (address also on page 8). Full national members receive a number of benefits including the quarterly *Green World* magazine.

If you wish to become an election candidate at the District/Town/Parish elections in May or to help campaigning at these elections please contact either John Lloyd (01694 723143) or Jim Gaffney (01588 638712)