



South Shropshire Green Party

Officers 2005/6



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Please let the Editor have articles for the next edition of Grapevine by Monday September 19th 2005

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supermarkets, post offices, medical centres and railway stations. Real time information at bus stops would inform passengers the destination of the next bus and whether it was late. This technological innovation is already operating in parts of Shrewsbury.

Grapevine readers who have further ideas about making more use of public transport should make them known to the Editor and we can discuss the issues through these pages.



Grapevine



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ENCOURAGING THE GREEN VOTE

Jim Gaffney reflects on the recent General Election and what it means for the Green Party in South Shropshire

In the recent General Election, 852 voters in the constituency voted Green, almost exactly the same number as last time. I was very pleased that we maintained our vote because we were unable to organise as vigorous a campaign as in 2001.

The departure of our most active members and the understandable "burn-out" of some other veterans has left the South Shropshire party very dependant on very few activists. The good news is that we have loyal Green voters out there.

It's also very encouraging to report that our policies went down very well at the hustings meetings, everywhere getting the best responses from the audiences. We might not have got the most votes, but we got the most applause! There was memorable strong positive reaction to our opposition to the war in Iraq and the hypocrisy of our

government. Our recommendations for building peace and stability in the Middle East from now on were applauded.

Similarly cheered were our determination to take seriously, and to tackle, climate change; our opposition to even more privatisation in health and education; and our commitment to restoring good public sector housing (otherwise known as council houses!). After every one of the five hustings meetings several people spoke to me and assured me they would vote for me if only it

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Inside

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- Public transport - debating South Shropshire's needs
- Can a children's book change the world?
- Diary dates - we are hosting October's regional meeting

Lessons from the Election ... continued

wasn't so important to stop the Conservative winning. I'm sure that some of you reading this felt the same and all of us Green supporters come up against the point from time to time.

Well, if we're really concerned about the core Green message – peace, people and planet (and without the planet everything else is meaningless), how much difference does it really make if our opposition MP is LibDem or Tory?

Wouldn't a really big Green vote send a far, far more powerful and useful message?

I'm sure we would have got 4 or 5 times as many votes if people had just gone ahead and voted with their hearts. Philip Dunne, the conservative, got in anyway so all those people who voted just to keep him out wasted their votes - as the Green Party slogan said, "the only wasted vote is one you don't believe in".

If it's any consolation I think Mr. Dunne will be at least as committed and conscientious a local MP as Matthew Green.

Two more positive items to report from the Election front. This is the third time I've stood and the first time I've avoided last place! We did

better than the UKIP candidate. Perhaps more significantly, for the first time ever, both Conservative and LibDem candidates (but not Labour) showed signs of having been fairly well briefed on some Green issues.

Don't get carried away, they're not about to get to grips with the multinationals and start building a



Newly elected MP Philip Dunne meets up with Jim Gaffney at the Green Fair in Ludlow.

localised and sustainable economy or anything, but there were distinct signs of better thinking about energy generation and use, food labelling and fair trade issues. I invited all candidates to pinch as many Green policies as

they liked!

So finally, my heartfelt thanks to all who helped, donated and voted. Without a doubt we're making progress - nationally, this was by a long way our best General (and County) Election ever.

Here in South Shropshire, we need, as usual, to recruit more, and more active, members. The good will is there, but we need to persuade more people to put at least some of their effort for the Green cause into the political process. Without real political clout (ie VOTES) we can only move a very little way towards a real future for the planet and its people.

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In Craven Arms this problem had been partly solved by the 49 Link minibus which is organised by Tess (Transport for Everyone in South Shropshire). This service used to run weekdays every two hours calling at the supermarket and the station and including a round town service. As only one bus can be funded the service was limited to a different country area each day. In effect a weekly service. The number of passengers using this service was not enough to make it viable.

Consequently this regular service has now been discontinued (from April 1st) and is replaced by what is effectively a taxi service. Passengers need to telephone the previous day and be picked up at home or at point of their choosing. As the funding only allows one bus it still has to cover a different route each day so as before it is a once a week service for any particular area.

The cost at £4 return (£2 Seniors) is rather high. Whether this system works well remains to be seen. With a number of people attempting to book the bus on any particular day the pick up time will not always be convenient. When I used it the other day I had to arrive at the station for the Shrewsbury train too early although it got me home again without too much waiting.

The Rail Service

The main line rail service through South Shropshire is in a healthy state with plenty of passengers. There is pressure for an annual

National Rail Card to be made available to all passengers. This innovation would almost certainly increase rail use.

Arriva Trains Wales (ATW) is to introduce a hourly clockwork service along our line in December 2005 and ATW have undertaken to then improve the bus-train integration and even to consider through bus-train ticketing. This would make our bus services much more attractive. A sensible scheme with a reliable service to serve well used morning and lunch time trains and with buses waiting to collect passengers from lunchtime and late afternoon trains would be most welcome.

Further Thoughts

Getting more people to use buses is clearly a very difficult problem. One incentive might be a Travel Card similar to the present Senior Rail Card and which gave a discount on both buses and trains. This would be purchased annually and from the example of the Rail Card would very probably be put to good use. This Travel Card would be available to people of all ages.

Although the national research above suggests elderly people are not dissuaded from using PT due to cost there is pressure to issue a national rail card for all passengers and its extension to buses should be encouraged, .

Another helpful move would be to arrange buses, as does the 49 link, to call specifically at places passengers are likely to visit such as

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Using Public Transport

The debate about the desirable modal shift from car to Public Transport (PT) continues to run. This note from Gordon Gissing gives an assessment of the situation in South Shropshire and acts as a prompt for further discussion.

The Elderly

National statistics indicate that for the year 2001 54% of the elderly (65+) used PT. Of the remaining 46%, 26% had access to a car in their household or with a friend, 12% did not use PT because of health or disability problems, and the rest (8%) cited inconvenience or other reasons.

Cost did not appear to be a factor in preventing elderly people from using PT perhaps because discounted fares are generally available on both rail and bus. Elderly people without a car amounted to 31% of the total. With a majority of elderly people relying on PT the recent cutting of rural bus services in South Shropshire is of serious concern.

The number of Senior Rail Cards currently in use is just over 700.000 and one suspects that a substantial number of Seniors in South Shropshire have one. Some counties (Devon and Suffolk are two examples) issue Senior Rail Cards at a discount and we should pressure SCC to do the same.

Other Users of Bus Services

The reason for the very limited use of our rural bus services is quite clear. A sparse population, the majority of whom own a car, and bus services which are too infrequent. Some car owners, especially the more elderly, would probably welcome leaving the car behind for local trips if they could get to town and back in a reasonable time.

DIARY

Mon Aug 8th 1030am Acorn Restaurant, Church Stretton
From September the monthly Church Stretton meeting will always be the first Monday in the month - 1030am at The Acorn Restaurant

Green Party Conference at the University of Lancaster
Thu Sep 8th to Sun Sep 11th Wonderful venue - not to be missed.

Regional meeting - we are the hosts - Sat Oct 1st 1030am to 430pm
Education Room, Ludlow Library, Ludlow. Guest speaker at 2pm.
Everyone welcome.

In Celebration of the Apple (Apple Day). Tan House, Little Stretton.
Sunday October 23rd - 4.00pm onwards. Members and their guests only.

Help is needed to re-start regular evening meetings in Ludlow. Please offer your assistance to Linda Senior (01584 872806).

Thoughts on the "Wheele Bin"

From 'wheele bin' to the world, John Lloyd probes through the District Council's rhetoric on waste and appeals for us all to address fundamentals.

What the District Council prosaically call 'the wheeled bin' is due to be introduced across South Shropshire.

Stepping aside from some of the problems households will have getting used to them in terms of storage, movement, and possibly aesthetics, they represent the Council's latest answer to refuse collection.

The actual receptacle will have some 240 litre capacity in the standard model. This is dictated by the contractual link with Biffa, who insist that health and safety regulations make the demise of the black bag inevitable. What they really mean is that the mechanical approach suits them better and is in line with the ever increasing centralisation of the waste business. Local preferences take second place.

That said, what needs to be guarded against is that recycling initiatives, however successful, do not become simply an adjunct to the throwaway society and to consumerism more generally. European or government targets must not be a back stop and a reason to evade actions which can really count.

The real difference would, of course, be made in the early stages of a production cycle – before goods get into consumers' hands. This is where the Green Party diverges from the 'Blue, Red and Yellow' Party. We must persuade society to make every effort to use fewer resources in the first place, to design for durability, and to re-use and repair. Only

when such policies come on stream does the re-cycling of waste have real meaning and then it should be maximised.

In this way the focus would switch to 'inputs' to the production cycle, rather than to 'outputs'. It would open the way to taxation of virgin resources – getting increasingly scarce as man ravages the world's resources. Our aim must be to reduce what we take out of the ecological system. Recycling on its own is not an answer to that. It is becoming very big business and a lot more sophisticated. The contractors are developing new technologies which will boost recycling rates, and they will be well paid for doing it, often with guaranteed income, as with South Shropshire's 25-year contract with Biffa.

What these companies cannot do is underwrite our consumerism, which is unsustainable. Furthermore these recycling projects, including our new bio-digester system at Coder Road in Ludlow, give us a good feeling that allows us to bypass the more fundamental problem of getting people to take responsibility for the waste they create.

In a growing economy more recycling is not necessarily a sign of success. Big businesses are externalising their costs and are not taking responsibility for such things as unnecessary packaging, or food miles. Local councils can only act on the waste. Governments must tackle

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Linda Downey has developed a range of talks and workshops on core Green themes including food, water, travel, pollution in the home and conservation.

Attractively illustrated and digging deep into the issue of choices that make a difference, they are available to groups in Shropshire, Herefordshire, Worcestershire and the Welsh Marches.

Linda's excellent website gives all the details, including the choices that have to be made about each workshop itself.

www.choicesthatmakeadifference.co.uk

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resource depletion, environmental degradation and pollution.

Growth as an indicator of economic health sets Green bells ringing a warning. Unconsidered growth is alien to the Green movement. The waste business is consuming more energy as waste is moved around and as more waste is created more energy will be consumed. We are spending millions on recycling and nothing on addressing unnecessary production and consumption.

Its not too late for society to re-think its goals – its a pity we seem unable to think this issue through.

How did Greens do elsewhere in the General Election?

Local results were not dissimilar to the result in Ludlow.

In Shrewsbury Emma Bullard polled 2.3% of the vote, slightly better than Jim Gaffney's 1.8% in Ludlow. However Jim beat the UKIP candidate for fourth place. Also taking fourth place over the UKIP were Felicity Norman in Leominster (with 4.5% of the poll) and Brian Lunt in Hereford (with 2.2%).

Felicity Norman is probably the best known of our local candidates and her campaign was probably the strongest local campaign. The result shows the difference.

Nationally Darren Johnson (a member of the London Assembly - which uses proportional representation) polled 11.1% of the vote in Lewisham Deptford (also in fourth place) and Keith Taylor in Brighton Pavilion came third with 22% and only just under 10,000 votes.

Brighton shows us the strongest reason for Green members and sympathisers not voting tactically. Keith Taylor's showing was 12.7% up on the 2001 election and reflects the positive role that Greens are playing in the local council in Brighton. The Green Party only got into the position of having an active say in Brighton Council by getting its voters voting for what they actually believe in.

Think what might happen if the Green national vote was 22%, like that of Brighton.

Can a children's book change the world?

Sally Ford is trying with "What a Hoot"

Two owls who can't hoot discover that they were not born in an oak wood as they had supposed, but at Modibeast Inc.'s laboratories. Whilst trying to get their hoots back, they discover all the other animals who are being experimented on and get involved in a mass break out.

Genetic modification and vivisection don't sound like the sort of topics which would fit in well in a children's story. Would children and their parents want to read about them? How could they be made palatable without losing their seriousness?

This was the challenge Sally Ford she set out to address with her story "What a Hoot". The idea came to her as a result of Ludlow's Green Fair where she had searched in vain in the local library for a story with environmental or animal welfare themes to read in the children's story tent. She couldn't find anything suitable, so she wrote her own short story and the response encouraged her to make it into a full-length children's novel.

A vegan and supporter of humane research for the past 20 years, Sally has a keen interest in alternative education and feels that philosophy and discussion of ethical and environmental issues should be right up there with literacy and numeracy. There are lots of books about vegetarian dragons and the like and being vegetarian or even vegan is no longer considered extreme, but what goes on in laboratories is a taboo subject.

Sally firmly believes there is a growing acceptance that a lot of the experiments are cruel, unnecessary and at times misleading. "I hope that the story will get children thinking and asking questions. They are a lot more perceptive than they're often given credit for. They are able to distinguish fact from fiction, magic from reality. All the information is out there, but their interest needs awakening."

"What a Hoot" is first and foremost an inventive and heart-warming story, at times exciting and amusing and at times deadly serious. Many fairy stories have serious underlying themes and "What a Hoot" tackles GM and vivisection in a non-confrontational way, filling a gap in children's literature.

The book has been delightfully illustrated by Kevin Lawley whose sensitivity to a difficult subject is very much in evidence. The book is also printed on recycled paper.

Shortly after Sally wrote "What a Hoot" she noticed that science had caught up with her. An article in New Scientist alerted her to GM experiments on cats to modify them so that their fur would no longer cause allergic reactions in humans. Not so far from genetically modifying owls so that their hoots don't disturb humans.

"What a Hoot" is published by Savoir-Faire Publishing at £5.99. Contact David Ashworth on 01584 856542.