

North Herts Friends of the Earth

May 2011

www.nhertsfoe.co.uk

North Herts Friends of the Earth lobby local MPs

Millions of vulnerable people in Britain live in cold homes that make them ill and cost a fortune to heat.

Spending time in a cold, damp house can make heart disease, strokes and flu more likely. And there's an increased risk of illness and death among older people, young children and those with a disability.



Homes with shoddy insulation and inefficient boilers don't just harm people's health and leak heat. The wasted energy means tonnes of climate-changing emissions are needlessly pumped into the atmosphere. More than a quarter of the UK's carbon emissions come from heating our homes and water.

Making our homes energy efficient is one of the cheapest and quickest ways to slash CO2 and help avoid dangerous climate change. Friends of the Earth's Warm Homes campaign is calling

for the coldest two thirds of British homes to be improved by:

- Setting a minimum energy-efficiency standard for private rented homes.
- From 2016 making it an offence to re-let the worst homes until they're improved.
- Insulating enough homes to meet carbon and fuel poverty targets.
- Giving greater financial support for landlords and homeowners.
- Ensuring people know what it costs to heat a home before moving in.

Matt and Vicky meet Peter Lilley MP

Myself and Vicky met with Peter Lilley on 6th May at one of his surgeries. We asked him to support an amendment of the proposed energy bill which would give it more 'teeth'. Currently private landlords will be *voluntarily* obliged to ensure their properties are energy efficient and the legislation will not come into action until 2020. The amendment asks for stronger action (see above).

I asked for reassurance that he listens to our letters/emails as we know he does not sign amendments that do not affect his constituency or are not of personal interests.

We know that he does not accept climate change science so we made the point that increasing energy efficiency of rented homes helps some of the poorest in the area who are already suffering from higher energy bills and that it could create jobs. However, he merely seemed excited that oil had gone down in price by \$10 the previous day. Oblivious is the word that springs to mind.

The discussion moved onto climate change, a green deal and the economic benefits of greening the economy. Mr Lilley claimed that using renewables would not create more jobs, just simply move people from the fossil fuel industry into renewables. He also claimed that shale gas would provide for us anyway (shale gas

produced by 'fracking' has recently been found to be even worse for the climate than coal).

(It is worth noting that Peter Lilley MP is a Director and shareholder of Tethys Petroleum Limited, a gas and oil exploration and producing company!- Ed.)

Submitted by: Matt Sutcliffe

Andy meets Stephen Mcpartland MP

On Thursday 12th May I met Stephen McPartland in Westminster to discuss FOE's two proposed amendments to the Energy Bill.

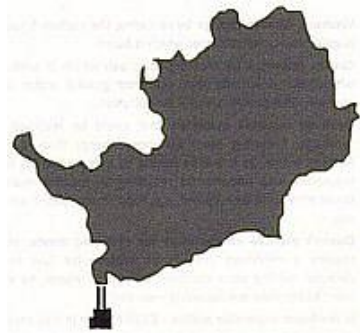
The previous Monday Chris Huhne had announced at the second reading that the Government will amend the Bill to include the minimum standards in the Warm Home Amendment, but with an effective date of 2018 instead of 2016. Stephen McPartland did not support any earlier deadline on the grounds that there might not be enough qualified builders and fitters to meet the demand the Bill will create.

On Local Carbon Budgets, Stephen McPartland said he supported these in principle, but he would not support the amendment unless it included an explanation of how the requirements would be enforced if councils missed their targets. He said financial penalties are ineffective as they are passed on to the public by way of reduced services.

Submitted by: Andy Holtham

Friends of the Earth are following this campaign up with a wider 'energy conversation' for local groups to have with the public regarding renewables and energy efficiency. We will be having a survey of sorts/questionnaire on our stalls which people can fill out to express their opinions on whether they should be made easier/cheaper to access etc.

Herts County Council - emptying our pockets and polluting our lungs



At least £220 million of council tax money is to be spent on an incinerator at New Barnfield in Hatfield if planning permission is given.

On April 28th 2011 Herts County Council decided to go ahead, despite all the opposition that has been expressed, both to incineration as a method of dealing with waste, and to the use of New Barnfield in South Hatfield as a site for waste treatment. They are negotiating a contract with Veolia Environmental Services to build an incinerator at New Barnfield and to run it for twenty-five years. To build the incinerator, Veolia have to submit a planning application (probably in November 2011), and this application will be considered by a Panel of Herts County Council. Veolia also have to conduct “pre-planning consultation”, starting in May 2011.

So the council decision to go ahead marks a new phase in the campaign against the incinerator. North Herts Friends of the Earth have recently funded two public meetings against the incinerator. The arguments against incineration have been covered in previous newsletters; the campaign will now focus on the planning issues and the siting of the incinerator. The site is right next to a primary school for children with special needs. There is a library on the site which would have to be closed. It is on a nature reserve and next to another one. The site would massively

increase already high levels of HGV traffic in a residential area and HCC would have to break a covenant on the land which restricts its use to those for public amenity.

So, the fight goes on. For more information see:
<http://hertswow.webs.com/>
<http://www.hatfield-anti-incineration.co.uk/>

Food campaign update

As the Sustainable Livestock Bill failed to gain enough support from MPs Friends of the Earth's campaigning focus has shifted to targeting MEPs to press for measures to support planet-friendly farming in the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (due to be completed in 2013). Specific 'asks' are support for small-scale farmers to increase grazing and mixed farming, as opposed to development of large monoculture farms and factory-farming units, and the growing of animal feed (protein crops and legumes) within the EU rather than feeding livestock on imported soy. The growing of soy (mainly in South America) is causing widespread environmental destruction.

At the Friends of the Earth Food training day we were told that the current UK subsidy for factory farming is £700million and much of this is spent on animal feed.

FOE, who are working with the Soil Association and Compassion in World Farming on farming issues, would like supporters to write to each of their MEPs. We have a template letter which I will be happy to send out to anybody who asks and a list of MEPs (there are 7 in the Eastern Region and you can write to any or all of them) can be found here: <http://www.europarl.org.uk/section/your-meps/your-meps> We will have the letters on stalls over the next couple of months so that people can sign them and we will send them off on their behalf. Letters have more impact but if you would prefer to send an email

FOE have set up an online action here:

http://www.foe.co.uk/campaigns/biodiversity/press_for_change/fix_the_cap_30282.html#action.

FOE are supporting campaigns against large-scale factory farms such as that recently proposed (and defeated) at Nocton and the current proposal for a large-scale pig farm at Foston In Derbyshire. The deadline for comments on the latter has passed but you can still support the campaign against this and other potential similar applications via the Soil Association 'Not in My Banger' campaign:

<http://www.soilassociation.org/Takeaction/Notinmybanger/tabid/1270/Default.aspx> There are (as far as I know!) no proposals for this sort of thing in our area at the moment, and hopefully there won't be in future, but it is important to fight these proposals wherever they are to try to prevent one being granted planning permission and setting a precedent.



At the Food day we had a very interesting talk from Suzanne from Sustain, about the Local Action Food Network. This is all about helping people to source and to buy locally-grown food, setting up food co-ops and so forth. As a local group we don't really have the resources (i.e. time) to get very heavily involved in this at the moment but if anyone is interested in looking into this further or in joining the Network details are on the website:

<http://www.sustainweb.org/localactiononfood/>

Take Action:

You can contact Alison - alisonm1taylor@hotmail.com to find out more

Recycling

Friends Of the Earth are calling on David Cameron to increase recycling rates to 80%. 50 postcards were signed in Hitchin town, on 30th April, calling for this. It was part of our recycling survey which asked people what else they would like to recycle, would they support this increase and whether they were aware of the incinerator proposal. Results to be discussed at next meeting but many people did wish to recycle plastics at home (NHDC don't collect plastics), which we will use in article/letter to come to help push for this.

Submitted by: Matt Sutcliffe

North Herts District Council think about introducing doorstep plastic recycling

David Billing and Deepak Sangha (both Hitchin Councillors) proposed the following motion at the last Council Meeting on 7 April:-

“That given the opportunities for shared services in the Herts Waste Partnership Agreement, recently approved by the Cabinet, a full report should be brought to the Cabinet on the feasibility of using such shared services to introduce, as soon as possible, a kerbside collection of recyclable plastics in North Herts, as is already done by eight of the Herts District and Borough Councils.”

Following a full debate, and upon being put to the vote, the motion was carried.

The next Cabinet meeting is on Tuesday 14 June at 7.30 and I believe this is on the agenda.

Take Action:

If you want plastic recycling collections in North Herts contact North Herts District Council leader:

Cllr Mrs L.A.Needham
lyndaneedham@north-herts.gov.uk

Submitted by: Chris Honey

People Power persuades government to keep climate change promises

A huge email campaign by Friends of the Earth, 38 Degrees, Greenpeace, Christian Aid, the RSPB and others has persuaded the Government to accept its climate advisors' call for significant cuts in UK carbon emissions by 2027.

The announcement makes the UK the first country in the world to have declared a "legally binding" target on greenhouse gas emissions beyond 2020.

The set of five-yearly carbon budgets maps out the stages the UK should go through on the way to its long-term goal of cutting emissions by 80% by 2050 by what advisers consider the most economic route.

Despite serious opposition in government from George Osborne and Vince Cable among others, pressure from the public helped ensure science based advice was followed.

But a get-out clause - which would enable Ministers to weaken UK climate targets if EU nations do not deliver sufficient cuts - could undermine business confidence in investing in a greener future.

Friends of the Earth's Executive Director Andy Atkins said:

“David Cameron's welcome decision to back Chris Huhne over the Climate Committee's call for tougher global warming action will boost his flagging green credentials.

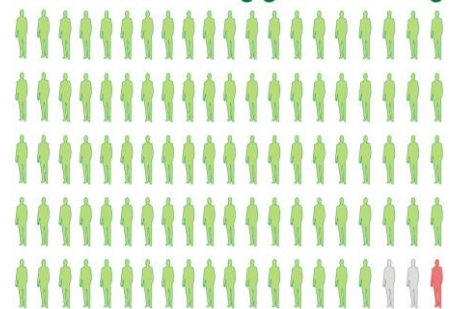
But the inclusion of a get-out clause, in case Europe doesn't cut emissions fast enough, creates needless uncertainty that could dent business confidence - and all just to save face for the Chancellor and Business Secretary, who opposed this agreement.

Ministers must now get on with the urgent task of fast-tracking the development of a low-carbon economy which will create new jobs and business opportunities and wean the nation off its costly addiction to fossil fuels.”

The Committee on Climate Change's recommendations are supported by many of the UK's leading companies - whose leaders recently wrote to David Cameron urging him to heed the advice and reiterating 'our longstanding support for strong and clear action on climate change, based on the science'.

There is still a lot of work to be done. But everyone who helped convince David Cameron to accept the call for tougher action on emissions should give themselves a pat on the back.

97 out of 100 climate experts think humans are causing global warming



Our money financing climate change

Thousands of lives are under threat from French oil giant Total's plans to mine tar sands in Melaky, one of the poorest regions in Madagascar.

Using taxpayers' money, the bailed-out Royal Bank of Scotland is helping to finance this heavily polluting industry. Since the 2008 recapitalisation, RBS has helped provide £303million to oil company Total in corporate loans. Total are now actively exploring and building infrastructure to extract tar sands from Madagascar.

With your help, we can push the UK government to stop our money supporting companies that harm the world's poor.

-Over 120,000 people living in villages within the Bemolanga oil field will have their water supply disrupted and land poisoned as a result of the tar sands project.

-Toxic pollution from the Canadian tar sands has been linked to rising rates of cancer amongst the indigenous

population. The increased risk of cancer is a direct threat to the human rights of ordinary Madagascan people.

-Activists Holly Rakotondralambo and Jean-Pierre Ratsimbazafy have condemned working conditions and treatment of workers by both Madagascar Oil and Total at their existing sites.

-Oil deposits are also being investigated close to the Tsingy de Bemaraha nature reserve, a UNESCO World Heritage Site containing undisturbed forests and mangrove swamps essential to the ecology of Madagascar.

-In March 2009, the democratically elected regime in Madagascar was overthrown. Accusations have been made within Madagascar that Total were involved in the overthrow because the previous regime was not supportive of tar sands projects.

-It is estimated that after 30 years of commercial production, the government of Madagascar will only be receiving four percent of the oil revenues.

The Bemolanga oil field is located in one of Madagascar's poorest regions.

In the Melaky region 70% of the population live below the poverty line and 50% of children under the age of three have stunted growth due to malnutrition. The tar sands will threaten the survival of villagers throughout the region and could pave the way for further exploitation of tar sands the world over. We must not allow this to happen.

Take Action:

Email Vince Cable at

www.wdm.org.uk/clean-bailed-out-banks/tar-sands-madagascar

Environmental protection - under threat

The government is branding key laws to protect wildlife, the countryside, and the environment as "red tape". Without a strong public outcry, these laws could be scrapped.

278 regulations designed to protect wildlife, tackle pollution, protect the countryside, and reduce climate change have been branded 'red tape' by a government consultation, "The Red Tape Challenge".

The government says it wants to "free up business and society from the burden of excessive regulation". But included in the list of regulations under review are very important laws such as the UK Climate Change Act, National Parks Act, Clean Air Act and the Wildlife and Countryside Act. These aren't little-known laws that no one cares about. The Wildlife and Countryside Act protects wild birds, their nests and eggs, and makes sure that national parks and marine reserves are protected. The UK's Climate Change Act was a world first which helps make sure we reduce our emissions.

Take Action:

Sign to keep them:

<http://www.38degrees.org.uk/dont-scrap-environment-laws>

Dates for your diary:

Film Nights:

Every (or nearly every!) second Thursday of the month - see email bulletin for details.

Transition Town Letchworth talk/film nights

These take place at Howgills on South View, SG6 3JJ and are usually on the last Tuesday of the month.

Evenings start at 7.30pm and will include time to discuss the ideas raised by the films. We ask for a £3 donation to cover costs. Refreshments will be available.

Too Many Beans?

Come and swap your surplus garden produce at The Letchworth Amateur Food Growers & Producers Market in Letchworth town centre on the first Saturday of each month, from May to November

Jazz fundraising evening for the Green party

19th July (evening) at the Half Moon in Hitchin Ad-Hoc Jazz Combo

North Herts Friends of the Earth stalls - PLEASE HELP!

Sunday 12th June

Stevenage Day, from 12.30pm at the King George V Playing Field.

Saturday 2nd July

Letchworth contact Simon for more details

Saturday 9th July and Sunday 10th July

Hitchin Rhythms of the World.

Stalls are a great opportunity to promote our current campaigns and recruit new supporters, so please consider whether you can spare an hour or two to help out on one (or more!) of the above dates.

Contact Simon:

siwebb@ntlworld.com
07958114275

Real Farm Festival!

From Friday, 17 June 2011 to Sunday, 19 June 2011

Tickets are now on sale for the Real Farm Festival! The midsummer farming event of the year will unite a new generation of farmers, scientists, musicians, performers, people and animals for a weekend where the soul of the city meets the heart of the country. Find out why Church Farm does what it does and take part in practical and positive local action and global thought to make the future of food and farming a healthy one. Tickets cost only £50 for an inspiring weekend of workshops, talks, games and music, all set in the gorgeous fields and woodland of Church Farm. All ages are welcome, but children under 16 must be accompanied by an adult.

www.realfarmfestival.com

North Herts Friends of the Earth
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**Please help with the
newsletter.**

Please send your letters or
articles to Tracy at:
84 Jackmans Place,
Letchworth SG6 1RQ, or
tracy@tracypez.co.uk

**Deadline for the next
newsletter:
Monday 5th September 2011**

LOCAL GROUP MEETINGS

***Please come along and get
involved***

Thursday 16th June

Thursday 21st July

Thursday 18th August

(summer social)

Thursday 15th September

All 7:30pm-9:15pm

**Friends Meetings House,
1 Paynes Park, Hitchin,**

**Come to the pub
afterwards!**

Emails to North Herts
Friends of the Earth
supporters

**We send out occasional
(monthly) action email
bulletins.**

**If you'd like to be sent
these please contact
Peter on**

peterfoord@gmail.com

**If you want an action to be
included in our email
bulletins please let Peter
know well in advance so it
can be added to the email**