

BEDFORDSHIRE CLIMATE CHANGE FORUM

Annual General Meeting, 8/4/09

(Web-site – bedsclimatechangeforum.org.uk)

CHAIR'S REPORT

This has been another very busy year, dominated by the loss of John Crookall-Greening in January. We have all been devastated by this and are exploring ideas on how to remember him. Grace generously suggested that donations in his memory could be sent to us or Greenpeace, and as a consequence we have a lump sum which could be used for such a purpose. Ideas are very welcome.

We have had 6 EC meetings this year and 3 Forum meetings, including a first in Luton. We learned about the RSPB's work in Sumatra and about Permaculture at our AGM last year. Will Wason of the Santa Pod windfarm proposal made a presentation to the Forum on 11 September in Dunstable and Abigail Basketter talked to us on 21 January about her experiences as a Luton environmental officer and ZCC. We have been able to mount a stall on 8 occasions during the year, 6 in different parts of Bedford, one in Luton and one in Flitwick, bringing useful publicity (aided by our new banner), right across the County. A briefing for those staffing the stall was produced and we are looking at more display facilities.

We have also produced a definitive Position Statement and a new BCCF leaflet. The former has been necessary, as we receive appeals to support local initiatives such as wind farm proposals and national concerns such as nuclear power and we need to be clear about what we can and cannot do. An attempt to find out more about an organisation calling itself CLOWD and opposed to wind farms was rebuffed.

Our 3 public meetings have been on 2 October, when we learned about Sustainable and Modern Construction Techniques and Materials; on 5 November when we learned about the Desertec Project on Combined Solar Power; and on 26 March when we explored the conflict embodied in A Greener Lifestyle, Businesses and Jobs, in Luton. One of our speakers, Jane Varley, from GBN, did not arrive because of a puncture en route.

We have maintained strong contacts with a number of other groups and organisations in Bedfordshire, including the County-wide Assembly and Local Area Agreement teams at Bedfordshire level and in Luton. Zero Carbon Castle remains close to our heart and Bedford College has supported us with interest. Bedfordshire University has also been very helpful, providing us with accommodation for meetings in Luton and Bedford. I must mention our thanks to Sarah Wells from the University, who has now moved on. Meetings have been attended on your behalf on Cutting Carbon at Cardington, at the Rufus Centre organised by the County, in Cambridge over 3 of 4 days and in London organised by David Green's organisation, UKBCSE. We were represented at the Bedford Borough Debate on 24 January, when I had the opportunity

to present a paper on suggestions for helping to make Bedford the greenest town in the country. At national level, we continue to receive invaluable information from PRASEG and have attended their Conference in May, their Christmas reception and a meeting about Desertec, all at Westminster.

We have had letters published in the local press calling for a rational debate on waste disposal (leading to a meeting with the County-wide group working on future plans), Energy Certificates in public buildings and climate change deniers. We also responded to the Government's consultation on Renewable Energy in September. We have had 6 articles published in BoS, though that seems to have dried up now. We have had an offer to put together a newsletter, which has not yet proceeded because there has been no response from members to an appeal for articles, etc.

We have tried to share our views on climate change with Bedfordshire MPs. Meetings with Patrick Hall in Bedford and Alastair Burt in Biggleswade were fruitful, but Nadine Dorries failed to keep a promise to meet us after postponing an arranged session and Andrew Selous feels that he has enough to do listening to his constituents. On 14th May, a group of Luton Councillors gave of their time to listen to us. We thank them and the other authorities for much support in cash or kind or personnel.

The end of this BCCF year is marked by the disappearance of the County Council and the emergence of two new Unitary authorities. As a consequence, we have had to say goodbye to Paula Judd, but many familiar faces will still be there, with slightly different hats on. I must thank Paula for all her work on our behalf and wish her well – though pleased to have had Stephen in her place. Those thanks are extended to the rest of the EC, especially the officers, who have worked hard for the Forum again this year. Joel has kept us focussed with his work programme. Obafemi made a great contribution but has been replaced by Trevor Brennan. We also welcomed Monica during the year in place of Nick, and are currently concerned about Stephen Tomlin's ill-health and wish him a swift recovery. Gordon Glass has kept us supplied with imaginative flyers, invaluable help with the web-site and supplies of stall 'literature' from USEA.

I would like to finish with a plea to members to become more involved if you possibly can. We have tried to arrange an interesting programme of meetings, which have been fairly well attended. We have also consciously tried to provide opportunities for members to take action and influence what we do, asking for ideas on the sort of meetings you would like, contributions to the newsletter, a visit to a wind farm, notice of meetings such as the one in London on 28 March, helping on the stall, providing ideas for the LAA, ideas to reinforce the production of an article underlining the positive effects of going green and so on. There has not been a robust response. Please try in the year ahead to make us feel that we are not leading a phantom army, which I am sure some people out there think we are. Above all, try to get to a screening of *The Age of Stupid*, at the Friends Meeting House in Bedford, at 7-30 on 14th April, which features certain happenings in Bedfordshire.

With all best wishes

Tony Mitchell

