

Leighton Linlade a low carbon town.

Summary of meeting 22nd September 2016 in All Saints Church Leighton Buzzard .

A large and enthusiastic group of people attended the meeting at All Saints Church on Thursday 22 September to start making Leighton Buzzard a low carbon town. The meeting was jointly organised by South Bedfordshire Friends of the Earth and the Leighton Linlade Christian Ecology Group with speakers from RSPB and Tring Community Energy. The meeting followed on from the showing at the Library Theatre of Naomi Klein's film This Changes Everything.

RSPB Policy Officers Alice Collier and Melanie Coath explained the RSPB's vision for the future. Action is needed because of the impacts of climate change on wildlife, there are fewer insects, plants are flowering earlier, and flooding is becoming more serious. This is having a serious impact on bird numbers. Climate change affects every area of the RSPB's work. More species of birds are moving north and uphill to track suitable climatic conditions eg the Dartford Warbler. Warmer waters in the ocean are causing sand eels to move northwards affecting very negatively the numbers of Puffins, Kittiwakes and other sea birds who depend on them for food. Large scale shifts and reduction in species range are expected to occur especially affecting European birds over the long term. Something has to be done.

Burning of fossil fuels is driving climate change and energy use accounts for 75% of UK's greenhouse gas emissions. A new treaty on climate change was agreed in Paris earlier this year aimed at keeping temperature rises well below 2 degrees C. However we are not doing very well so far in meeting our targets due to lack of government action and in some cases reversal of government action.

The RSPB is therefore working on a 2050 Energy Vision as a culmination of 3 years of work aimed at delivering energy that is in harmony with Nature. They have worked out how much energy will be needed for energy security ie keeping the lights on and environmental sustainability. They have looked at the physical constraints ie national Parks, wild landscapes, ecological sensitivity, assessing where the best sites are for location of renewables including solar and wind and assessing the impact on wildlife. The report made 10 recommendations to meet the UK's climate targets and working in harmony with Nature. These include 100% low carbon energy by 2050, planning for Nature and identifying suitable sites, developing roadmaps for decarbonisation in harmony with Nature, eliminating energy waste and promoting low carbon and low impact innovations. Energy production must be affordable, secure, low carbon and work in harmony with Nature.

The RSPB is now playing its part by installing solar panels on its buildings and constructing a wind turbine at its headquarters offices at The Lodge in Sandy. During the ensuing discussion it was pointed out that solar farms are good for wildlife. As well as providing space for wildflowers meadows they can be shelters for animals.

What can others do to help? We can start saving energy, switch our supplier (eg to Ecotricity), support well-sited renewable energy, talk to others about climate change, campaign with RSPB and Friends of the Earth, contact your MP and support community energy initiatives.

Jan Sisson spoke about Tring Community Energy (TriCE) which is part of Tring in Transition (TrinT). Tring in Transition is part of the Transition Towns Movement that started in Totness aimed at communities achieving sustainability and becoming better places in which to live. In Tring they started 7 years ago and have 250 members including a food growing group (community orchard and allotments). Initiatives can include community bakeries, alternative local currency (eg the Bristol pound), closing off streets for play and promoting community, establishing community breweries and the reason for the talk – Community owned energy supply.

The Tring group started up by talking to people about how they could decrease energy consumption and measuring their consumption and with the help of thermal imaging cameras suggesting methods of energy conservation. They started the community energy project in 2014 by setting up an investment fund and working on 7 solar PV projects which would provide returns of between 3 and 5% to investors, low cost electricity to the community facility and community benefit fund . Their first project was at Tring Cricket Club with 28kW solar PV on the roof. As people take part in the project they become more aware of their energy needs and how they can combat climate change. It was stressed that it is useful to start the group with people who have useful contacts, the need to find a project and get

the users involved with you, look at and learn from other local energy projects ie Brixton, Woking, Kings Langley, there are lots. Be prepared for a long haul – projects can take a long time to reach fruition. Useful links are Community Energy England and Low Carbon Chilterns.

Future action and follow-up -

Andrew Selous MP has agreed to chair a meeting on Leighton Buzzard becoming a low carbon town on Saturday 26 November 10 am-11. The venue is still to be confirmed but will be in the town centre.

LB First are about to launch a scheme with a local energy expert, to enable individuals and companies to get independent advice about local installers of renewable energy systems and about getting the best deal. Contact Gennaro Borelli who is chair of LB First at A Touch of Class on Bridge Street.

There will be a meeting of the Energy Action Group to start setting up the Community Energy scheme on Wednesday 2nd November at the Friends Meeting House in North Street All welcome

People were urged to support the Heath & Reach wind turbine which will produce electricity directly to local homes, by writing letters of support to Central Bedfordshire Council planning@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk quoting reference number CB/16/01389 and attending the planning meeting at Chicksands on 9 November. Details on South Bedfordshire Friends of the Earth website www.southbedsfoe.co.uk

People were also urged to take immediate action to write to their MP Andrew Selous andrew.selous.mp@parliament.uk to stress the urgency of acting on Climate Change

And also to write to their councillors to stress the urgency of acting on Climate Change;
to find your councillors for the town council; <http://www.leightonlinlade-tc.gov.uk/your-council/councillor-profiles/>, and to find your Central Bedfordshire council councillor <http://centralbeds.moderngov.co.uk/mgMemberIndex.aspx?bcr=1>

People were made aware of Buzz Cycles www.buzzcycles.org.uk who are campaigning on cycling, South beds Friends of the Earths Campaign to support the farmers market and local food and their campaign Keep the Buzz in Leighton Buzzard to create brr friendly habitats around the town.

Contact

South Beds Friends of the Earth campaign on climate change, renewable energy etc and need volunteers to help maintain the Community Orchard and wildflower meadows and support their local sustainability campaigns – contact Victoria on vapharvey@btinternet.com. www.southbedsfoe.co.uk

For information on the Leighton Linslade Christian Ecology Group contact Esther on eclarke75@aol.com

For More information on other groups see the newsletter.