

HEREFORDSHIRE FRIENDS OF THE EARTH

ANNUAL REPORT – OCTOBER 2011

Our last AGM took place in May 2010, so this report covers the time since then.

During 2010 and 2011 we have continued to hold open meetings once a month at Canal Road under the auspices of *Exchange for Change*, with Oxfam sharing the same premises several times during the year for their meetings.

The original idea of the *Exchange for Change* meetings, which have been happening for around 10 years, was to offer a venue and opportunity for people to network and exchange information over a simple vegetarian meal of local food, followed by a talk or presentation of a topic relevant to Herefordshire.

- In October 2010 Frank Hemming talked about the “Hobbit House” which is a straw-bale house he built for Anita Sancha. The objective was to build a small house cheaply, using natural and salvaged materials, to a high level of insulation, making use of warmth from the sun, and minimising the use of wood for heating.
- In November we showed the film “A Convenient Truth: Urban Solutions from Curitiba, Brazil”
- In February 2011, Frank gave a very well attended talk entitled "Learning from 'The Resilient Gardener': Food Production and Self-Reliance in Uncertain Times”
- In April Peter Linnell – our local expert on renewables – gave us information on the different sources of renewable energy currently available in our region and explained that the only way we could move forward more quickly is by participation in community owned projects.

During this period we submitted responses to Herefordshire Council's:

- Place-shaping consultation
- Preferred Options: Hereford: follow-on consultation
- Preferred Options: General policies: Second Tranche
- Hereford relief road: Study of Options

We supported Pete Linnell's report concerned with bringing about a more sustainable energy policy for Herefordshire. We proof-read it and made suggestions, and when it was in the public domain we drew it to the attention of Regional FoE.

With regard to the Energy Bill:

- Letters to MPs: We found on-line the suggested letter to MPs asking them to support amendments to the Energy Bill. Melodie wrote to Bill Wiggin and Ruth to Jesse Norman.
- Energy Performance Certificates. Ruth has been to estate agents and letting agents in Hereford and they all seem to be well-informed about the need for Energy Performance Certificates.

We continue to subscribe as a group to the “Ethical Consumer” magazine which is then lent to the Hereford Library to be displayed for public use. The Library no longer keeps back copies, so back copies are now kept at Ruth's and are available to members on request should they want to refer to them.

We also subscribe to the on-line eg magazine and eg-e website which provides a wealth of information on climate change and sustainability issues. In 2010 our registered users were Paige Mitchell, Rodney Archard, Frank Hemming and Kate Gathercole, but only Paige and Kate are registered in 2011 as

Frank and Rodney found they did not use it sufficiently to warrant the payment.

We contributed towards the cost of the Hereford Transport Modelling and Forecasting Study by Metropolitan Transport Research Unit. This together with another study currently taking place concerning Hereford's traffic flow will play an important part in the ongoing discussions with the Council on the arguments for and against a Hereford bypass.

We were involved from the first with the planning and eventual implementation of the "Sustainability and Resilience for Herefordshire" (SURE) Conference, an event focused on engaging with the planning system at a time of rapid change and uncertainty. Our involvement included providing the refreshments for the initial pre-planning meeting at the Watershed in November 2010, paying the deposit for the hire of the Shire Hall for the Conference itself which took place in February 2011, helping on the actual day, as well as on the Follow-Up SURE Meeting in Breinton Village Hall in July.

In July 2011 we made a donation of £50 to WAIL – Worcestershire Residents Against Incineration and Landfill.

We have pledged a loan of £500 to the Woolhope Dome Community Woodfuel Project which aims to set up a co-operative to supply cost-effective, sustainable heat to local businesses and individuals. We await further news about this enterprise.

Early in the year, a small group of FoE supporters met at Miriam Young-Hart's house to respond to National Friends of the Earth mid-term review, using the local groups discussion kit. We used the cards we had been sent to discuss:

a) "Friends of the Earth believes in sustainable development and our current vision for 'a living planet and a good life for everyone on it, now and in the future'. Do we all know what we as an organisation think the future should actually look like and what that means for our work?"

We liked the phrase used in 'Change Your World' : "making life better for people by inspiring solutions to environmental problems". We cannot envision the future, because there is too much uncertainty; the best we can do is take one step at a time, but anything we can do now to save resources is a good thing for the future. We would like to focus on specific campaigns in response to specific problems.

b) "At the moment, Friends of the Earth focuses most of its limited resources on a few big campaigns at any one time. Is this the best way of doing things?"

We agreed with this general policy. It would be even better if resources were redirected away from providing us with campaign materials that we do not want and towards building up the expertise which National FoE has, and which we appreciate being able to call upon. It would also be valuable if National FoE had a list of contacts in similar organisations with expertise on environmental subjects not included in FoE's current list of campaigns.

Rodney Archard continues to maintain our website (www.herefordshirefoe.org.uk) for which we are very grateful.

Most FoE supporters are also closely involved with other associations whose interests include the environment, such as Transition Hereford, Herefordshire in Transition, Green Party, Civic Society. The general subject of Food and Farming is one of the most important ones for our group and Frank Hemming continues to be involved with it both as a FoE representative and in his own capacity. We welcome the interconnectedness of the various groups, as by working together we can often achieve more.

Ruth & Melodie
September 2011