



Grapevine

Newsletter of the South Shropshire Green Party

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Spring 2013

Local Elections in May



Following the meetings on 4th and 5th March, South Shropshire Green Party has now approved candidates who will be standing in the following wards for the Shropshire Council elections:

Bishop's Castle
Chirbury
Clun
Ludlow North
Ludlow South

The names of the candidates will be released soon.

We will need people to help with delivering leaflets in all these areas, so if you can help please contact our election agent, Janet Phillips (contact details on back page).

Successful Green Party Conference in Nottingham

The Spring Green Party Conference was held at Nottingham University on the weekend of 23-24 February.



Natalie Bennett gave a strong Conference speech of which some of the highlights are given below and the full speech can be read on the Green Party web-site. The speech was covered well by the BBC News web-site. Natalie emphasised the need to tackle poverty and has supported the launch of the People's Assembly against Austerity, which was launched on 6th February (see article by Janet Phillips on page 4). She attacked Labour for being close to the Tories in policy terms and highlighted the tenth anniversary of the start of the Iraq War, for which Ed Milliband has failed to apologise.

She said that people were saying 'no more' to poverty wages – people working fulltime, yet unable to meet the cost of even the basic necessities; 'no more' to child poverty; 'no more' to shivering pensioners in cold homes they can't afford to heat; 'no more' to zero-hours contracts; 'no more' to 'workfare'; 'no more' to the demonization of benefit recipients; 'no more' to putting the profits of the chemical companies before the health of an essential link in our ecosystem - and our food growing.

She said that the Green Party has a positive alternative vision, of a country where the minimum wage is a living wage, where benefits are set at a level allowing a decent life and granted ungrudgingly to all who need them and where there are warm, low-carbon homes for all. A country with a jobs-rich, low carbon economy, with orchards and richly growing fields, vibrant manufacturing industries and strong local economies built around small businesses and cooperatives. She said that was the kind of vision the founders of the Green Party began with forty years ago and she looked forward to working with Conference to hone and polish the vision and ways in which it can be delivered.



Will Duckworth (Deputy Leader) also gave a speech, emphasising the need to fight poverty. He blamed the tragedy of homelessness on the greed of the bankers, property owners and multinational corporations; which successive governments have not just failed to stop but have continually encouraged through lowering taxation for the richest corporations and individuals, refusing to implement a financial transaction tax and attacking the most

vulnerable in society while steadfastly ignoring the massive amounts of money taken from the Treasury by tax avoiders and evaders alike. He said that this Con/Dem government, aided and abetted by their friends in the tabloid media, are systematically demonising the disadvantaged and poor in our society.

He said that if we want to stop the worst excesses of this vengeful government, and start to put the environment and people ahead of profit and greed, then we cannot rely on a Labour party hewn from the same rock. We must be the voice defending the environment and the poor. While Labour tell us how they would return us to growth, none of the bigger parties even mention the increasing gap between rich and poor, let alone having ideas to reverse the trend.

We are the only party talking about quality of life and equality. We are the only party with a real vision for the future of our Country and the planet. We must be the alternative, and we must get out there, and we must win!

Also Will Duckworth spoke on a motion that was carried strongly condemning the spread of payday loans, especially across the West Midlands. He said that local councils across the West Midlands should take a lead role in supporting ethical moneylenders like credit unions, rather than payday loan firms.

Motion opposes covert NHS privatisation

GREEN Party conference expressed strong opposition to plans to force the opening of all NHS services to competition, noting that the action by Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt contradicted assurances given by the Coalition government during the passing of the Health and Social Care Act last year.

Green Party leader Natalie Bennett said:

‘We believe in a publicly owned and publicly run NHS, and there’s strong evidence that this is also what the public supports. Opposition to forced privatisation was so strong that last year the then Health Secretary promised that NHS commissioning bodies would not be forced to put all services out to competition. However, secondary legislation introduced by the Health Secretary on 13th February this year, which could become law just 40 days after that without further debate, would introduce competitive markets to become compulsory except in rare exceptional circumstances – effectively ensuring that private health companies will have access to every area of NHS services.

‘This is despite international evidence that competition harms the outcomes for patients in health services, and the fact that the stability and financial base of traditional NHS services will be put at risk by private providers “cherry-picking” lucrative patients. The government must be held to account – and this secondary legislation cannot be sneaked through. Parliament must debate it – and must defeat it.’

THE PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY AGAINST AUSTERITY

The People's Assembly Against Austerity is a call to the millions of people in Britain who are suffering impoverishment and uncertainty as the effects of Government's austerity programme intensify. It was launched on 6th February with the Leader of the Green Party, Natalie Bennett and Caroline Lucas MP signatories; other supporters included Tony Benn (*President, Coalition of Resistance*), John Hilary (*War on want*) and Wendy Savage (*Keep our NHS Public.*)

With 80% of austerity measures still to come, the assembly will bring together campaigns against cuts and privatisation in a movement for social justice powerful enough to generate co-ordinated action and national demonstrations against austerity.

There is a meeting in Westminster on 22nd June, and around the country there is a continuing programme of local events.

To find out more, or register your support log onto www.coalitionofresistance.org.uk

Janet Phillips

THE CONSERVATIVES AND EUROPE

David Cameron's speech on Europe in January is unlikely to lead us anywhere. A promise of a referendum on the EU after the next General Election speaks rather to his own party and particularly to those members and supporters who might desert to UKIP in next year's June election. This is playing politics, when what is required is to build a more sustainable Europe, one that we play a part in.

Given that some forty years have elapsed since the original treaty was signed, the Community has grown out of all recognition; it is 27 Sovereign States now; new generations have grown up in the meantime and they are entitled to a democratic vote. Although I voted against the original EU treaty, as there were real alternatives then (EFTA etc), I see the need to work for a Reformed Europe, from inside the Union. We have common cause with Green Parties throughout Europe and it is this kind of cooperation that we need to foster on a broader scale.

There is much that is wrong with the EU from our perspective. There has always been a serious bias towards the interests of neoliberalism and 'the market' and not surprisingly these are the very policies that both UKIP and the Conservatives find little fault with. So, when the Coalition talks of 'reform', it wants to dismantle EU social policies, such as human and workers' rights. We see it differently, as we accept that there are needs which should transcend national boundaries in the cause of justice to protect the vulnerable. Both climate change issues and international crime also need international action.

Whilst it is said that 'The UK has never taken the EU to heart', we have travelled a long way since the 'Iron and Steel Community' days. We are part of Europe and not just in a geographical sense. The Green's task is to build strong local communities that decide their own way but this does not exclude having a framework of minimum standards that cover EU countries and even beyond.

John Lloyd
FOOD AND AGRICULTURAL ISSUES

Horse-meat saga - by John Lloyd

The horsemeat saga goes on and the murky world of the international meat trade gradually becomes unravelled. Seeing it is almost impossible to police at source where suspect meat products come from it has to rest entirely with the retailers. In the current circumstances these are the supermarkets, however much they try to blame others. Seeing their dominant power and their considerable financial clout, they are well able to verify what they sell is true to the label. Yet instead of welcoming the help that state funded food agencies might give, they have, under consecutive Governments, sought to lessen the inspection regime. That being so, it's perhaps not surprising that it was not the U.K inspectorate who alerted the public to the horsemeat scandal but that of the Irish Authorities. What is noteworthy is that **if** it had been horsemeat found in a beef product in one of our local family run general stores or butchers, they would have been jumped on fast by the Inspectors; no doubt closing the whole shop down and making it clear that criminal proceedings were likely. No such action was taken with the supermarkets - at least they could have closed down their meat sections and this would have been a salient warning that is where the "buck stops". There is no excuse for the supermarkets. They have been found out. They use their buying might to depress the prices they pay their suppliers and now their customers have had an eye-opener that there is another side to the "cheap offer" on the Supermarket shelves.

Hedgerows, Wildlife and Shropshire farms – by Heather Williams

You may have noticed that a farmer near Chirbury, just inside Shropshire (who already has planning permission for a large, indoor dairy unit nearby but in Montgomery), put in a planning application to remove 11 kilometres of hedges so he could use his giant machinery to grow fodder for his indoor cows. There was a big outcry and he withdrew the application - but it will resurface in pieces, as he applies in a more targeted fashion. One of our wildlife group realised that there is actually very little protection for hedges when planning applications are received and has set up an e-petition which needs 100,000 signatures in 12 months so that government has to look at it - they don't have to do anything of course. Some wildlife groups, etc, have already expressed support but I wondered if the Green Party, at least locally but wider would be nice, would be willing to encourage members to sign. The contact details are <http://petitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/44531>.

Loss of farmland birds and butterflies – and why eat organic by Hilary Wendt

A recent report by DEFRA has shown that 19 species of farmland birds have decreased in number by 50% in England since 1970. Woodland birds have decreased by 20% in the same period. A study by BTO into regional trends in farmland birds in England from 1994 to 2009 found that they had decreased most in the south-east (28%), followed by the south-west (23%) and West Midlands (19%). Butterfly Conservation found that 46 species of butterflies decreased by an average of 60% from 1990 to 2010. A WWF report on organic farming found that wildlife is 50% more abundant on organic farms and there are 30% more different species than on non-organic farms. Organic farms have almost twice the number of plant species and about a third more birds and bats than non-organic farms. One ton of fertiliser for non-organic agriculture uses 1 ton of oil and 100 tons of water and gives off 7 tons of greenhouse gases. UK organic farms use 26% less energy per ton of food than non-organic

farms (according to the Soil Association).

Diary Dates

Monday 8th April – Monthly meeting 10.30, Acorn Cafe, Church Stretton

Tuesday 9th April – Monthly evening meeting 19.30, Feathers hotel, Ludlow.

Monday 29th April – Pre-election meeting 10.30, Acorn Cafe, Church Stretton

Thursday 2nd May – Election Day

Tuesday 7th May – Post-election evening meeting 19.30, Feathers hotel, Ludlow

Monday 3rd June – Monthly meeting 10.30, Acorn Cafe, Church Stretton

Tuesday 4th June – Monthly evening meeting 19.30, Feathers hotel, Ludlow

Monday 1st July – Monthly meeting 10.30, Acorn Cafe, Church Stretton

Tuesday 2nd July – Monthly evening meeting 19.30, Feathers hotel, Ludlow.

13-14th July – National Association of Green Councillors Conference, Birmingham City Centre (see Green Party Web-site for details, open to non-councillors).

Please note the following important letter from John Lloyd



Rock Cottage
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Dear Grapevine Reader,

In the light of increased postal charges we are having to review the circulation of Grapevine. As far as possible we are encouraging all readers to receive it by email, though we recognise that not everyone has this facility.

If you are a paid-up Green Party member you are entitled to receive Grapevine by post if necessary. **However, if you do not pay a party subscription, we request that you either opt to receive Grapevine electronically, or send payment (minimum £2.00, payable to “South Shropshire Green Party”) to cover postage costs to me at Rock Cottage.**

If you are willing to change to being an email recipient, please let Madeline Haigh know on MHaigh3@aol.com. Also, if you have changed your own email address recently, please remember to keep us updated.

Yours sincerely,
John Lloyd

P.S. If you live in Church Stretton or Ludlow we are happy for you to continue to

receive hand-delivered copies of Grapevine but we cannot do this in more rural areas.

South Shropshire Green Party Officers 2013

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