



# Malvern Hills Green Party E-Newsletter

Issue No. 22

October 2013

On Monday October 14<sup>th</sup> Malvern Hills Green Party is delighted to play host to a visit by our national Leader, Natalie Bennett. As reported in last month's E-Newsletter, Natalie will spend the better part of the day with us in Worcestershire meeting a number of individuals and groups and hearing about our various green-minded projects and initiatives. Then she will round off her day by giving a key-note speech at Malvern Cube at 7.30pm on 'Is it time to Re-Nationalise our Railways?'

We hope readers already have this significant date in their diaries and we look forward to a full-house at the Cube, and to an inspiring talk on the opportunities and prospects for developing our rail network in ways that benefit the nation as a whole and which ensure affordable and environmentally friendly travel for all. The event is open to everyone (although it is sponsored by Malvern Hills Green Party, it is not just for Greens!). There is no admission charge (just a voluntary 'donations bowl' at the door at the end of the evening) – so please bring your friends and family along too and let's all give a rousing welcome and show our appreciation for the leadership that Natalie is providing at national level.



And while on events... well done and a big thank you to all the groups and individuals whose hard work made last month's first 'Malvern Hills Community Festival' such a wonderful demonstration and celebration of all our local environmental sustainability initiatives. The event was so successful that it was an easy decision to take to agree to make the festival an annual event. Indeed, the date of September 20<sup>th</sup> 2014 has already been reserved! So please begin thinking now about ideas to make next year's Festival at least as successful and even more impactful for our communities.

## Up-and-Coming Events

Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> October – *Councillors' Surgery at Malvern Vale Community Centre, 11.00-1.00pm*

Monday 14<sup>th</sup> October – *Green Party Leader, Natalie Bennett visit to Malvern. Speaking at Malvern Cube at 7.00pm (see below)*

Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> October – *Councillors' Surgery at Sugar Loaf Café, West Malvern, 11.00-1.00pm*

Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> October – *Searching for Resilience in Sustainability: Book launch and discussion 6.30-8.00pm in meeting room 1, Library of Birmingham (the new central library) see below for more details.*

Friday 1<sup>st</sup> November – Malvern Book Co-operative Quiz Evening, 7.30pm at the Bookshop, St Anne's Road, Malvern (with our Town Mayor, Julian Roskams, as Quiz-Master)

Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> November – Smaller But Better? Post Growth Public Services, 6.30 - 9.00pm, Studio Theatre, Library of Birmingham (new central library) see below for more details.

Friday 15<sup>th</sup> November – *Malvern Hills Green Party Quiz Night! Another fun-filled evening of questions posed by Cllr Roskams; 8.00pm, Great Malvern Hotel.*

Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> November – *Malvern Hills Green Party Monthly Meeting. 8.00pm, Great Malvern Hotel*

### Searching for Resilience in Sustainability

Book launch and discussion on Thursday 31 October, 2013 from 6.30-8.30pm. at Meeting Room 1 Library of Birmingham.

John Blewitt's (FRSA) and Daniella Tilbury's (FRSA) new book *Searching for Resilience in Sustainable Development* will form the basis of a wide-ranging exploration of resilience: what it is, and how it can, or should, form part of our search for a more sustainable world. Organisations taking part in the lively discussion include: RSA, the Schumacher Institute, Library of Birmingham, Sustainability West Midlands, E.ON, Localise West Midlands, Pop Up Foundation, Network Rail/Quest for Solutions, Routledge-Earthscan and Aston University.



Further details can be found at: <http://www.l.aston.ac.uk/aston-business-school/events/searching-for-resilience-in-sustainable-development/>

### Smaller But Better? Post-Growth Public Services

Thursday 14 November, 2013 from 6.30 - 9.00pm at the Studio Theatre, Library of Birmingham

The independent think tank The Green House will be presenting its far reaching ideas on public policy as expressed in its latest discussion paper *Smaller But Better? Post Growth Public Services*. Greenhouse presenters will include Dr Andrew Pearmain, Mr Brian Heatley (paper author) and Professor Andrew Dobson.



The evening will start with a brief discussion from Andrew Dobson on the importance of the public sector and this will be followed by an outline of the key issues and possibilities offered in the Green House paper *Smaller But Better*. Following this, responses from Cllr Stewart Stacey, (Cabinet Member, Birmingham City Council), Heather Wakefield, (Unison), Matthew Taylor, (Chief Executive of the Royal Society of Arts), Dr Josie Kelly (Aston University). There will also be audience members who will be able to ask questions or offer contributions of their own. The future of the public services is of utmost importance to everyone.

Further details can be found at: <http://www.l.aston.ac.uk/aston-business-school/events/green-house-event-briefing/>. Even if you can't attend the above event, do have a read of the very interesting report that the think tank 'Green House' have published, and which can be found at: <http://www.greenhousethinktank.org/page.php?pageid=recentpublications>.

## News from the Town Council



After some good news stories from Malvern Town Council (again winning the Gold Award in Britain in Bloom, giving it an entry next year into the national competition, a very successful programme of Bands in the Park over the summer; the first ever open-air theatre in Rose Bank Gardens), it has again managed to hit the headlines for all the wrong reasons. The council made the frontpage of the Gazette when letters sent to a handful of cemetery plot owners advising them of their duties in relation to their plots caused some distress - leading to a deputation to the last town council meeting. Fortunately, we have been able to put in place a review of current policy, and a revised policy will be in place by the end of the month - should council decide a change is required. At the same meeting, the Town Council considered a case brought before against one of its members at the District Council Standards Committee, and the Committee's recommendation that the Town Council take disciplinary action. The Town Council declined to consider the report, concluding it was not a Town Council matter.. However, at the same meeting, the Council accepted recommendations of a working party chaired by Julian Roskams, putting in place

far more robust and long overdue procedures for the governance of the Council. It would perhaps be naive to believe we will not need to call upon those procedures.

## News from the District Council

The Chief Executive's 'Managerial Response to the District Council's Strategic Review', discussed in last month's E-Newsletter, and which proposed as top priorities 1) the 'joint procurement exercise with Wychavon and other councils of waste collection' (i.e. outsourcing or privatisation) and b) a review of 'delivery options for strategic policy planning and development control services' (in all probability, a shared development control service with Wychavon and Worcester) has indeed set the alarm bells ringing at MHDC! Such was the shocked and critical reaction when the report dropped through councillors' letter-boxes that the Leader decided to withdraw the item from the Executive Committee meeting where it was to have been discussed. It was similarly withdrawn from the Council agenda the following week, and instead a round of meetings with each political group of the Council has been hastily arranged to 'explain the proposals and deal with any "misunderstandings"'. The main point that your Green councillors are making here is that waste collection and planning/development control are the two most significant public services remaining within the Council's own direct responsibility and control, most others having been contracted out, placed in a shared service arrangement with other councils or simply allowed to run down in scale. So if these two are to go the same way, the viability of, and justification for, the district council is drawn into question and local democratic control is put at risk. No doubt there will be more news to report on this following our meeting with the Chief Executive and the Council's decisions about next steps! Watch this space!



The other (and much more exciting) item of news from the District Council is that our planners have refused the planning application from the County Council to build four executive houses on the land immediately adjacent to, and within the curtilage of the Malvern Cube (former Youth Centre) on Albert Road North. This decision was taken under delegated powers, so did not need to be presented before the Development Control Committee of councillors. So now we are hoping that the County Council, as applicant, will not appeal to the Planning

Inspectorate. To that end, John Raine will be putting a Notice of Motion to the County Council when it meets on October 17<sup>th</sup> urging the County to respect the local decision and also the views of the vast number of Malvernians that the land should remain available to the Cube and in support of the excellent work being done there with and for young people in the town and its hinterlands.

## News from County Hall

The shock news this month at the County Council was the withdrawal of the item for decision on the Energy from Waste (Incinerator) plant from the Cabinet agenda for October 4<sup>th</sup>, and also for full Council on October 17<sup>th</sup>. The reason apparently is that national government (DEFRA and HM Treasury) was unable to agree the proposed financing arrangements and wants an alternative approach to be considered. The word is that this is likely to take several months, and so, for the moment at least, there is to be no decision made. This news broke just a day after John Raine had appeared before the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Performance Board to try to persuade members to agree to a formal scrutiny of the issues ahead of the Cabinet decision-making meeting. Unfortunately the Board declined – it seems most minds of longer-serving county councillors are already made up on the incinerator and do not want to see further debate and investigation. But with perhaps another six or more months now available before the decision can be taken John sees fresh opportunity to reconsider and will continue to press for a formal scrutiny review into the value for money aspects of 'going down the incineration road' and doing so under a variation to the existing 25 year PFI contract that is already 15 years old and the financial terms of which are now of questionable benefit to local residents compared with those that have been negotiated more recently by other councils.



And while on the Hereford and Worcester Incinerator, the following article appeared recently in Private Eye...

"...The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) is to be investigated over its handling of almost £4 billion in grants for waste incinerators. The National Audit Office (NAO) has told the Eye it wants to find out if the taxpayer is getting value for money.



The move by the NAO comes after a campaign group contacted it warning Defra had problems in overseeing the numerous waste infrastructure projects it had commissioned and that millions of pounds were being needlessly lost under contracts weighted in favour of the private sector, contracts authorised by Defra.

Hereford and Worcester Action Group is fighting the building of a waste burner at Hartlebury, on the Worcestershire side of the county border. The county council refused to show it the contract or the business case and when it attempted to press Defra for details it discovered the department could not find the file detailing the contract and the supporting business case.

The campaigners also noticed a discrepancy on a list of PFI contracts which Defra produced for the Treasury. According to the list, the Hereford and Worcestershire PFI for an incinerator runs until 2027 and each of the last four years will see payments of £40 million being made. Not according to Worcestershire county council, which told the Eye the contract ended in 2023 and no further payments were due after that date. When the Eye pointed this out to Defra, it said it depended on local authorities to provide it with the relevant data. It would now amend its records.

Louise Brookes, on behalf of the group, said: "Defra pays over £5 million per year towards this contract but has no copies of original documents, or the business case and refuses to investigate taxpayers' concerns.

"It seems to support a complete lack of financial transparency and is allowing many similar projects to proceed, even though their own information states that there are many better, cheaper options of waste treatment than creating new incineration capacity. Defra should be investigated as it ignores the potential to save billions of taxpayers' money."

The NAO said it was "looking specifically at three PFI waste incinerator projects to gain insight into the role of Defra in promoting value for money in such projects." It should be interested in looking at the contracts Defra says are standard and which force local authorities into heavily compensating the waste disposal firms if the contract is cancelled.

Bizarrely, councils are encouraged to sign contracts for incinerators to be built before granting planning permission. Under the contracts they then pay the waste firm's costs if planning permission has been refused and the applicant wants to appeal. As the Eye pointed out three years ago (Eye 1277), cancelling a waste contract could have cost Cornwall £30 million and Shropshire had to fork out £800,000 to pay both its own and Veolia's legal costs when the waste firm successfully appealed against a planning decision. In November, Gloucestershire county council faces an appeal and has already set aside over £800,000 to cover the expected costs. The Royal Town Planning Institute told us: "Our recommended approach would be to secure site allocation before entering into a contractual commitment."

Under its Waste Infrastructure Delivery Programme, Defra has allocated £3.6bn in grants to 29 local authorities for waste infrastructure projects. The NAO is not revealing at this point which three projects it is investigating for "value for money".

It is estimated that in the first year of operation the cost of waste disposal using the proposed Norfolk incinerator would be £108 per tonne, climbing annually throughout the contract to around £170 per tonne, costing taxpayers around £596million over 25 years (Hereford and Worcester's estimated cost is £1 billion).

There is so much over capacity for incinerating waste in Europe that representatives from the Amsterdam incinerator firm Rebel Group recently offered to take Norfolk's rubbish from a transfer station in Norfolk, pre-treat it and ship it to their own incinerator for £85 per tonne, a massive saving on the £170 proposed under the present contract. The Eye has seen a copy of the letter, which was sent to the council on 30<sup>th</sup> June. To date its receipt has never been officially acknowledged and certainly no official discussion has taken place on what the firm proposes.

*Maybe Norfolk could be the NAO's first port of call when it investigates which of Defra's PFI waste contracts are offering value for money...". (Private Eye, October 2013).*

### Malvern Hills Repair Café

The Repair Café session on 7 September was the busiest ever with 68 reparaees, many of whom started to arrive at 9.30 am so the café was full by the time the repairers strolled in at 10.00 am. As usual they coped with patience and good humour and everyone was seen eventually although some people chose to go and do their shopping and return later/next month. We have recently heard that MTC has generously awarded us a grant of £500 which will be used to purchase the equipment needed to carry out a range of furniture repairs, one of the most popular. We are still awaiting the outcome of our other application for a start-up grant.



Chris and Jan were interviewed again on BBC H&W on Monday and this time both a repairer and a satisfied repairer were interviewed too. Roman, possibly our most talented repairer, accompanied us to the studio and was given three repairs to carry out while we were on the air. He then gave his assessment of the problems and advice – he repaired one item, a teapot with a stuck lid, the paper shredder had been misused and was broken beyond repair and an angle grinder needed new brushes. Next stop...Midlands Today?? We are still being invited to do outreach clinics and assist with the opening of other Repair Cafes throughout the two counties. The repairer was interviewed on the phone.



### Malvern Hills Food Alliance



The period of contractual assistance from the Plunkett Foundation is now at an end and three MHFA members attended the final closing workshop at Wyre Forest Discovery Centre in September. The development of the website is the next task for which funding is available and the development of the Incredible Edible Malvern project is also moving forward. 5 more VEG beds are due to be erected outside the Cube within the next few weeks. A survey of local catering outlets will be conducted over the next few months to establish how many actually purchase, cook and serve local food. The Abundance group is now fruit-picking at the weekends but there will be no juicing this year due to the cost and storage problems.

### Visit to Malvern of Natalie Bennett (14 October 2013)

- 12:25 Natalie arrives at Malvern Link Railway Station
  - 12:35 Transport to the Fold at Bransford to see the Care Farm there and other initiatives
  - 13:15-15:15 Lunch/presentations at the Fold (Malcolm Victory (rotary drier); Robin Coates (Energy Cooperative/ Car Club/Electric Bikes); Jan Dyer (Repair Café); Chris Dyer (Food Alliance); Nathan Burlton (Transition Malvern Hills/Gaslights); Jackie & David Smethurst (Green & Easy); Adrian Burden and Emma Philpotts (Wyche Innovation Centre).
- Also present will be representatives of Worcester Green Party and West Midlands Green Party
- 15:30-17:00 Hope Unlimited (presentations on various projects, including: Overdrive Project; Malvern Cycles CIC; Food Bank; Penny Broderick (nappy library); Big Pickersleigh Project, Malvern Special Families)
  - 17:15-19:00 Supper
  - 19:00-19:30 Natalie is shown around Malvern Cube
  - 19:30-20:30 Key-Note Speech by Natalie Bennett 'Is it Time to Renationalise our Railways?' followed by Q&A (Malvern Cube Main Hall)

(free admission but donations at the door)

## Contacts

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## Councillors

County Councillor (Trinity Division) – John Raine (078786 198332 or [j.w.raine@bham.ac.uk](mailto:j.w.raine@bham.ac.uk))

District Councillors (West Ward) – Julian Roskams ([jdr@eticapress.com](mailto:jdr@eticapress.com) or 01684 565739) and John Raine (as above)

District Councillor (Link Ward) – Clive Smith ([CTSmith@waitrose.com](mailto:CTSmith@waitrose.com))

Town Councillors (Dyson Perrins) – Julian Roskams (as above)

Town Councillor (Link Ward) Clive Smith (as above)

Town Councillor (Chase Ward) Alex McLellan ([alexander.r.mclellan@gmail.com](mailto:alexander.r.mclellan@gmail.com))

Parish Councillor (Malvern Wells) Malcolm Victory ([malcolmvictory@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:malcolmvictory@tiscali.co.uk) or 01684 575156)

As well as the E-Newsletter, keep up to date by visiting the Branch's website:  
[http://www.greenparty.org.uk/localsites/malvern\\_hills.html](http://www.greenparty.org.uk/localsites/malvern_hills.html)

We also have a Facebook page:  
<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Malvern-Hills-Green-Party/171627822885633>