



Malvern Hills Green Party E-Newsletter

Issue No. 23

December 2013

As Christmas draws near, welcome to another few pages of news from Malvern Hills Green Party and apologies that we failed to produce a November issue of this E-Newsletter. The only excuse is that it has been an extremely busy time, and the further the month went by, the more logical it seemed to hold back until this Christmas Issue!

On October 14th some 70-80 of us filled the hall at Malvern Cube to listen to Green Party national leader, Natalie Bennett, address us on the subject 'Is it Time to Re-Nationalise our Railways?'. And as well as presenting a particularly strong case for bringing the rail network back into public ownership, she provided a tour de force on the mismanagement of public services under the current and previous governments and laid out her agenda for public services under Green principles and priorities. Her keynote speech in the evening followed a day of visits and talks with a range of green-minded groups and businesses in the locality. All in all, it was a very successful day, and it was characteristic of Natalie's interest in what we are all doing here in and around Malvern Hills, that she was still deep in conversation with people after her talk with just minutes to go before the last train back to London was due.



Up-and-Coming Events

Thursday 5th December - Malvern Hills Green Party Monthly Meeting. 8.00pm, Great Malvern Hotel – come along for a seasonal drink and mince pie!

Saturday 7th December - *Councillors' Surgery at Malvern Vale Community Centre, 11.00-1.00pm*

Thursday 5th January - Malvern Hills Green Party Monthly Meeting 8.00pm, Great Malvern Hotel – Guest speaker Paul Sherratt (www.nordicloghomes.com) on Low Energy Log Houses.

January *Burns Night Celidh with 'Loose Canons'; Malvern Cube; 7.30 til 12.00 midnight – with bar and light refreshments.*

News from the Town Council

These are interesting times for the Town Council, as the government's localism agenda and the county and district's financial pressures, which are causing them to look closely at how they deliver services, has lead to an opportunity for the Town Council to take on additional services and facilities. These are very early days as the balance between county/district and town/parish shifts, and there will be difficult discussions to be had around

funding, but the debate is underway. Related to this, the Town Council has recently committed to developing a neighbourhood plan for Malvern. While it is important to understand that this will not allow us to stop the housing development that is planned under the emerging South Worcestershire Development Plan, it will allow us to influence the type of development that we have - the kinds of homes, their specification and so on. It will also allow us to have a dialogue with the developers, and hopefully to give a distinct green hue to our new housing and the supporting infrastructure.

News from the District Council

Campaign of the moment concerns the issue of provision of a primary school for Malvern Vale – the former Ministry of Defence North Site near Dyson Perrins School, which has now been nearly built out by Persimmon Homes with some 490 houses. In the original design brief, and the basis on which planning permission for the development was granted, the plan envisaged a set of facilities at the centre of what was conceived as a self-sustaining community – with a shop, community centre, playing fields and a primary school located in the centre of the housing area, and with the street configuration carefully designed to ensure safe pedestrian access to such facilities (and to the adjacent secondary school, Dyson Perrins). The community centre – probably the best in the district – is built; the fenced and equipped playing fields are available for use; and there are possibilities for a shop currently being discussed. However, the future of the primary school lies in the hands of the County Council – which has until April 1st 2014 to decide to build it, or the land reserved for the purpose is transferred to Persimmon Homes for other building – presumably more houses. The indications from county hall are now of reluctance to build the school, no doubt a reflection of financial pressures, although their argument is that there is (just about) sufficient capacity at other existing primary schools in Malvern. But these are mostly car journeys away and not how the many young families now resident at Malvern Vale imagined their early years schooling to be organised.



Accordingly John Raine, as county councillor for the division that includes Malvern Vale, is spearheading a campaign to try to persuade the County Council to do its part in honouring the original design concept of a sustainable community there. As a starting point, he is first seeking support from the District Council – which prepared the design brief and gave planning permission in the first place – to urge the County Council to agree to provide the school, and by being prepared to do whatever else it can to ensure early years education provision in the locality. On Tuesday December 3rd he will be putting a question to the Leader on this issue and will be pursuing it at County Hall thereafter.



- Civil parking enforcement (CPE) has now been introduced in Malvern Hills – and unsurprisingly, there have been mixed reactions – delight for many in seeing so many on-street parking spaces suddenly available in the day-time (rather than blocked by traders and office staff parking all day outside their places of work) and irritation and frustration for others on receiving penalty charge notices (parking tickets) for apparently minor infringements or because the permissible waiting times seem unduly restrictive. What is perhaps most disappointing – and indeed surprising, given the statutory nature of the process of introducing civil parking enforcement – is that the launch seems not to have been preceded by a thorough (and public) review of the existing parking regulations – most of which go back many years. As a result various anomalies are now coming to light; such as the 15-minute waiting time restrictions operative outside the shops on Newtown Road, where the hairdressers, the outfitters and other traders all depend on longer-

staying customers; or the terrace of former shops in West Malvern – but which are all now converted to housing – where, again, residents have only 15 minutes parking allowed! John has been pursuing such cases and it is hoped that the problems will be resolved in early 2014 – but really, they should have been anticipated and addressed by council officers many months ago!



Finally to report, this week's District Council meeting on Tuesday will witness the next instalment of the saga of the Chief Executive's 'Managerial Response to the District Council's Strategic Review'. As reported previously, this paves the way for possible outsourcing of waste collection in the District (through a 'joint procurement exercise with Wychavon and other councils); and also for a shared planning service with Wychavon and Worcester). Indeed, it brings into stark relief the fundamental question of the need for a District Council, and for 38 elected district councillors, when most of the key functions and service responsibilities are managed under joint agreements with other councils and with private sector partners.

Part of the problem, as we Greens see things, is that the Conservative Leadership tends to allow the officers to drive the policy agenda and do not seem to welcome democratic debate, often interpreting any expression of other viewpoint as unhelpful and trouble-making. And with the Liberal Democrats these days in cahoots with the Conservative leadership of the Council, the roles of providing 'critical scrutiny' and of 'calling to account' falls to a relatively small group of us – though there are plenty of signs of growing undercurrents of dissatisfaction within both the Conservative and Lib Dem groups with the direction in which matters appear to be moving. And with the next District elections (in May 2015) now on the horizon, more political manoeuvring – perhaps even a leadership challenge! – seems more than likely.

News from County Hall

At the County Council meeting on October 17th, one of the key issues was the proposal to build four executive houses on land adjacent to Malvern Cube. At the start of the meeting a deputation from the Malvern Land Campaign led by Cathy Jackson-Read presented their case for the retention of the land for use by the Cube and handed in a 1000-strong petition on the subject. Then later in the meeting, John Raine introduced his Notice of Motion urging the County Council to respect the decision of Malvern Hills District Council planners to refuse permission for the proposed development and not to go to appeal over it. While there was widespread support from around the Chamber, unfortunately, there was little from the Conservative ranks. And especially disappointing was the failure of any of the three other Malvern county councillors – all Conservative – (two voted against and one abstained!) to support John's motion. Seemingly, loyalty to the party whip took precedence over localism on this issue, and the motion, which would have won had the Malvern councillors all supported it, was narrowly defeated. We wait now to learn whether or not the County Council will or will not appeal the decision, and if it does, whether the Planning inspector will agree with Malvern Hills planners or County Hall politicians!



A little light reading

Some of you will no doubt be aware of the Green House think tank (<http://www.greenhousethinktank.org>). They have produced a range of challenging papers on a whole range of issues. These are some of those that I have read this month, which may be of interest to readers:

The Paradox of Green Keynesianism

The lesson economists learned from the last slump of the 1930s was that a capitalist economy will fail without sufficient demand, and that the social and political consequences of the failure of demand are insupportable.

While the UK Chancellor is still resisting viewing the economy as a system rather than a household or business, his refusal to acknowledge both the importance of multipliers in magnifying the impact of spending cuts and the potential for infrastructure investment to achieve positive multipliers is leaving him daily more isolated.

The Second World War, which was the outcome of the Depression of the 1930s, maintained demand superbly, but by the 1950s the economy began to flag again and so deliberate attempts were made to stimulate demand.

On the production side this meant designing short-life into products through methods such as constant changes in standards and death-dating, i.e. making products that would inevitably need frequent replacement.

On the consumption side it meant the deliberate use of psychological techniques to lure people into a status hierarchy based on conspicuous consumption. All these techniques seemed sensible if not humane in an era when the ecological limits to growth were not apparent, but now they are dangerous.

The persistent economic recession and the need for a transition to green infrastructure and industrial systems has led many environmentalists to call for a form of Green Keynesianism. But how can this co-exist with the fundamental commitment amongst green economists to an end to economic growth?

Four policy proposals are made to resolve this apparent paradox:

- Transitional investment, where energy and money are only invested in infrastructure in the short term if it can be demonstrated that in the long term it will reduce demand for energy;
- Substitution of local economic activity for global economic activity to build local resilience;
- Ecological Enterprise Zones to enable experimentation with policies that would enable a transition to a post-growth economy in pilot areas; and
- A sales tax related to energy and social necessity, determined by a deliberative and democratic process.

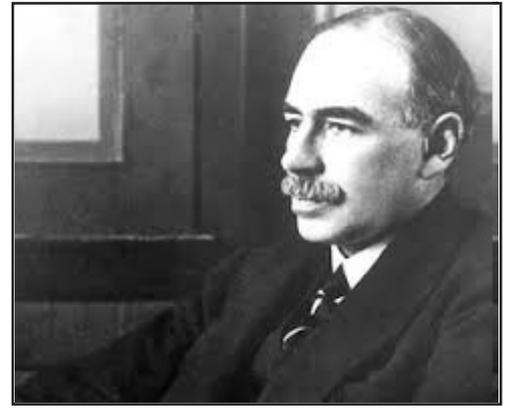
http://www.greenhousethinktank.org/files/greenhouse/home/Green_Keynesianism.pdf

Local Liquidity

Since the failure of the global financial system in 2008, attempts to restart economic growth have been unsuccessful and are likely to remain so until the debt overhang has been resolved. This has been exacerbated in the case of local economies by the large-scale withdrawal of liquidity that the public spending cuts represent, especially in



peripheral economies that rely heavily on the public sector for the existence of well-paid high-skilled employment. The flourishing of local currencies across the world represents a different type of liquidity, but one that has suffered from lack of credibility and from an absence of political support. Local authorities could generate truly 'effective demand' in their communities by introducing local currencies into their fiscal administration on a staged basis, beginning with local services, as partial payment of local tax, and eventually for the payment of staff. Examples from Japan's lost decade demonstrate how



local currencies can help to replace the national currency and soften the blow of jobs losses and the inability to pay for local services. Local currencies tend to be countercyclical, as shown by the historic flourishing of scrip in the US Midwest during the Great Depression and similar schemes in Germany. The government's creation of money through its quantitative easing programme has only created 'ineffective demand' because it has been sucked into banking debts; by contrast money spent into the local economy as a local currency could help to revive local economies and build resilient communities and thus constitute genuinely 'effective demand'.

<http://www.greenhousethinktank.org/files/greenhouse/home/local-liquidity-inside.pdf>

Smaller but Better

All the mainstream British political parties expect to be able to pay for expanding public services by growing the economy. But Green House believes that 'growth' is no longer possible because we are hitting global ecological limits. If this is the case, how then will public services be paid for? We argue that the short-term crisis of public services funding could be solved by a modest tax rise; the issue is political not economic. But in the long run an economy that is not growing means we will need radical change. We cannot go on forever with traditional public service expansion. And there are problems with traditional Labourist public services, despite the valuable public service ethos: excessive professional control, lack of flexibility, unwillingness to use volunteers, national uniformity (for example in terms and conditions), and user alienation. None of the conventional responses is adequate. The Coalition Government's reaction is to spend less on public services and to seek to introduce the market and privatisation wherever possible. The main opposition is from the public sector unions, who want to return to expansion based on growth. The other main line of opposition is to tacitly accept privatisation, but seek greater contribution and involvement from users. This report steps back and considers how public services fit within green political thought. Public services mainly exist because we are living creatures with physical needs. That is why they are essential, and space *must* be made for them in terms of public expenditure and people's time. Moreover they are gendered; they or their absence are more important to women than to men. In addition, public service commodities are *fictitious* commodities in the sense developed by Karl Polanyi, and steps to commodify them create profound problems. It is not appropriate, for example, to think of them as consumer rights. Government policies to reform public services through the market and privatisation are wrong because:



- the activities should not be commodified;
- there is no evidence they will save any money;
- privatisation undermines charities and volunteers; and
- the purpose of private providers is to make money, not provide the service.

Alternative ways of proceeding are needed:

- reformed, less bureaucratic, locally controlled traditional public services;
- not doing some things we do now;
- delivery by the voluntary sector under flexible terms and conditions; and

- doing more in better supported households and by volunteers, where that better support derives in part from wider economic changes such as:
 - a more local life, with a labour market which disperses families less; and
 - Citizens Income and greater equality but also social changes such as:
 - bigger households; and
 - men being more prepared to play their part.

http://www.greenhousethinktank.org/files/greenhouse/home/Public_Services_inside_final.pdf

Here's wishing all our readers



a very Happy and Green Christmas

and a

Peaceful and Prosperous New Year!

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

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

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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>

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