



Malvern Hills Green Party E-Newsletter

Issue No. 25

February 2014

This February Issue of Malvern Hills Green Party's E-Newsletter has been prepared and circulated a little ahead of time particularly to draw your attention to two forthcoming events. First, a final reminder for this Friday's (24th Jan) Burns Night Ceilidh at Malvern Cube - tickets are still available (see inside page). Second, we need to give advance notice of our forthcoming Branch AGM on February 6th. It would be good to see as many of you as possible at this annual review of the past twelve months and forward look at the next. And we shall be appointing our office-holders for 2014 - and we know we have a few vacancies to fill because of departures from the area and the wish of current incumbents not to stand again. So please try and come long - at 8.00pm at the Great Malvern Hotel (first floor).



Up-and-Coming Events

Friday 24th January *Burns Night Ceilidh with 'Loose Canons'; Malvern Cube; 7.30 til 12.00 midnight - with bar and light refreshments.*

Saturday 25th January *Councillors' Surgery at Elim Café, West Malvern, from 11.00am- 1.00pm*

Saturday 1st February - *Councillors' surgery at Malvern Vale Community Centre, 9.45- 11.45am (please not the new earlier time here - and for all future surgeries at Malvern Vale. This is to avoid clashes with other activities at the Centre)*

Thursday 6th February - *Malvern Hills Green Party Annual General Meeting, 8.00pm, Great Malvern Hotel - Come along and hear how we have fared this last year and help us set our priorities and appoint our office-holders for 2014.*

Saturday 15th February - *Malvern Repair Café - Malvern Cube from 10.00am - 2.00pm (and with further sessions on 15 March and 19 April).*

News from the Councils

It's Official! Malvern Hills District Council needs to make policy with more openness and transparency

The criticisms that have been repeatedly cited over the past twelve months by your three Green District Councillors (and by our like-minded colleagues who with us, now work together as a 'Democratic Group' on the Council) have at last been justified as fair in a special scrutiny report that has recently been prepared and presented on the decision-making processes that led to the introduction of wheellie bins in April 2013. Here is not

the place to go into detail, but the report (by a cross-party group of councillors) concludes that there were indeed instances of policy-making and of decisions being taken behind closed doors and with information being withheld from other councillors until it was too late for their views to influence the outcome. The report calls for more a much more open and democratic approach to policy-making into the future and for more willingness to share ideas and information at an early stage. We must see what difference results – the Executive Committee will be responding to the scrutiny report very shortly.



More planning grief for MHDC

On January 16th the District Council's main planning committee was asked by officers to overturn a decision made by the Northern Area Development Control Committee to refuse the application for 53 houses in Kiln Lane, Leigh Sinton (on the edge of the (hitherto protected) 'strategic gap' between the village and Malvern. Then a day or so earlier, a planning inspector accepted an appeal by developers for a significant housing development adjacent to the Crown Pub at Powick Top – much to the dismay of the many local residents who had pressed to see it refused. It is indeed 'open season' for developers now – and Malvern Hills now faces an uncomfortable 2014, with the South Worcestershire Development Plan having been sent back by the Inspector for more work, because he considers the area needs more (not less) new housing. The key problem is that the District neither

has an approved Local Plan (since the old one lapsed and the SWDP has not yet been approved) nor a five year supply of approved sites for housing; which means that the Council is subject to the rules of the National Policy Planning Framework (NPPF) and particularly paragraph 14 that favours all sustainable development. The Council also seems to be running close to being put into 'special measures' because of its poor performance in deciding planning applications in a timely manner (which would mean surrendering control to the national Planning Inspectorate for a year. It is all very sad and depressing for the area – and the fact is that, with better leadership, it need not have been like this at all.



Incinerator plan is finally approved by Worcestershire County Council

Regrettably, as anticipated, a majority of Worcestershire county councillors raised their hands on January 16th in support of the Leadership's recommendation for approval of the financing arrangements for the proposed mass-burn incinerator at Hartlebury as the main replacement for land-fill. Herefordshire (with whom the proposal has been jointly developed) has yet to vote – but, subject to their endorsement, work on building the plant is expected to commence later this year. Despite the valiant efforts of the campaign groups who have vigorously opposed the idea, particularly on the grounds that incineration is less environmentally friendly and likely to damage our commitment to recycling and that it is also likely to cost a huge amount more than necessary – and at a time when cuts in other services are being proposed, 41 county councillors preferred to get the controversial decision out of the way as quickly as possible rather than taking more time for a fuller appraisal of other options.

Some 11 councillors, including the Greens, smaller parties and independents, all voted against the recommendation, and had the Labour councillors also done so, the outcome would have been very different. It has been difficult to understand Labour's unwillingness to challenge the Conservative leadership on this issue. But with one exception (who stayed away from the meeting at the time of the vote), Labour were right behind their Conservative counterparts on this issue.

The following is the speech made in the debate by Green County Councillor John Raine:

Chairman, It's not easy to know how best to use the few minutes I am allowed to speak on this hugely significant, technically complex, and highly controversial matter. But as I waded through the 27 or so pages of my agenda paper for this item, skimmed the 229 pages with which our Cabinet had been presented back on December 12th, and all the other reports, documents and other contributions that I have amassed on this subject, I cannot help but contrast the care, creativity and expertise that our officers have shown in relation to making the financial case and the arrangement of a financing scheme for this scheme of Energy from Waste by a mass-burn incinerator, with what I see as the very shallow and, I think, highly questionable input provided by the independent consultants ERM who previously undertook the work on evaluating the different methodological options for waste disposal for our two counties which has led us to that Energy from Waste plant being chosen as the 'preferred' approach and the one to be financed.



There have been a baffling plethora of figures, calculations and estimates about what will be the cost of this chosen approach to our taxpayers over the next few decades, and it is hard to know what to believe. It is particularly hard to know whether it represents value for money because that is as much a judgement about the relative costs and merits (benefits and disbenefits) of the different treatment options for waste management. And that is where I feel the work of consultants ERM has let us down badly. For our part, our officers have successfully persuaded DEFRA and the Treasury about financing arrangements that, intriguingly for PFI - where normally the private sector provides the finance and bears the associated risks – will involve us, as client, using our prudential borrowing rights to support the contractor financially. I am no expert in PFI, but that certainly seems to me a creatively novel outcome to a financing problem.

But then, as I said, I contrast all this with the comparatively scant and, I suggest, very questionable work done by ERM on the all-important issue of the appraisal of the different possible options for waste disposal, and which together with the relative costs and different financing options, would allow us to make a proper value-for money judgement for our tax-payers. And this takes me back to ERM's Options Appraisal Refresh report published some 14 months ago, the front cover of which, I note, claims the company to be 'the world's leading sustainability consultancy'!! Possibly so, but not demonstrably apparent in relation to the piece of work they undertook for us on options appraisal.

In particular, I have been astounded at the simplistic approach they adopted in comparing and evaluating seven different methodological options (Energy from Waste incineration with and without CHP; Mechanical Biological Treatment via gasification or cement kiln; one or two autoclaves; and an out-of-county disposal (i.e. into someone else's energy from waste plant) against a curious list of 14 criteria (several of which are very subjective and pretty well unmeasurable). This piece of work was all captured in Table 1.6 of their report, and from which has stemmed the recommendation to proceed with an Energy from Waste incinerator for Hartlebury.



The weakness of their assessment method is all too evident in its reliance on rank-ordering rather than on proper scientific data (and indeed that weak assessment method extends to their 'averaging' of the rank order scores – something any primary school maths teacher would tell you would be statistically unsound). One of the criteria used here was 'reliability' – and because this is a highly subjective matter, they had to assign the same ranking (1st equal) to five of seven treatment options. The same problem also beset another of the criteria they had chosen to use - 'flexibility in composition'.

Neither such criterion should, I suggest, have been included in the analysis, given such measurement difficulties. But including them, and others, would certainly have one important effect – it would counterbalance some of the very poor rankings on environmental and health criteria of certain of the treatment options – especially Energy from Waste by mass-burn incineration – which according to ERM's own rankings emerges as the worst of all seven for 'ecotoxicology'; the 2nd worst for 'global warming emissions'; the 2nd worst on 'acidification'; the 3rd worst on 'eutrophication' (that's the creation of high levels of algae in water courses that reduces oxygen content and causes extinction of other organisms) and also the third worst on 'compliance with (waste management) policy'. It was also the 4th worst on the criterion of health risk. As a result of this very questionable piece of pseudo-statistics, Energy from Waste incineration emerged from ERM's analysis as the 2nd best performer (and it would be the best if CHP could be harnessed in as well).



So that, I have concluded, is how the choice of a mass burn incinerator came to be made; and from the same analysis, that is why the other widely applied technology of Mechanical and Biological Treatment – the option widely favoured by more environmentally-minded observers (because it includes anaerobic digestion and composting, and because its outputs - including residual waste- are far less toxic) - was ranked a lowly 5th worst! Yet Mechanical and Biological Treatment (MBT) happens also to be the method of choice of many other local authorities, particularly in recent times. Indeed, a review of DEFRA figures reveals a pretty even split between waste disposal authorities with Energy from Waste incinerators on the one hand and those with Mechanical & Biological Treatment plants on the other. There are 21 large-scale domestic waste incinerators currently operating in England (and a further 12 under construction) and there are 23 MBT plants, with 4 more under construction. But it is also to be noted that 13 of those 21 incinerators were built before 2000 – some go back to the 1970s; whereas all the MBT plants have been built in the past three or four years.

So the overall pattern for this century is of more local authorities opting for MBT than for mass burn incineration. Yet the world's leading sustainability consultancy would have us believe that all 27 local authorities have got it wrong and chosen the fifth or sixth worst option!). But of course those local authorities have made their choice because they have recognised that MBT is more environmentally friendly and indeed, also more consistent with the Waste Hierarchy. Sadly, DEFRA stays 'on the fence' on this issue and continues to support both solutions with PFI credits (or WIG, as it is now called) and that, I feel has been part of the problem for local authorities like ours.

To conclude, Chairman, I am just sad and disappointed that Herefordshire and Worcestershire haven't chosen to be in the vanguard of the developing trend away from incineration and towards more environmentally-friendly waste disposal and instead have opted to be part of what I believe to be 'yesterday's solution' to the waste management problem – and for which, I might add, our taxpayers will now be asked to pay a considerably larger sum than other authorities who have chose MBT plants instead. And this all at a time when we are having to make potentially devastating cuts in our other public service budgets. Chairman and Council, thank you for listening – for all the reasons stated, I cannot support the recommendation.

Repair Café will suit Young People as much as older folk!



Don't forget the next Repair Cafe session on 15 February, from 10.00am – 2.00pm at Malvern Cube. The café is keen to attract the younger generations and the Repair Cafe session and the forthcoming session (on 15 February) will specifically focus on youth equipment – skateboards, games consoles, smartphones or whatever! The café is scheduled for each third Saturday in the month, except during August. So the next two sessions, after February 15th will be 15 March and 19 April respectively. ,



Low Energy Log Cabin Homes – a cheaper and more environmentally sustainable housing option?

Those who attended January's branch meeting on January 7th all enjoyed a fascinating and thought-provoking illustrated talk by Paul Sherratt (Architect and Engineer) on the potential of log cabin homes as an environmentally sustainable solution to the housing shortage. Following his talk, Paul has provided the following link to his webpage (which he says is in the process of being updated)but is as follows: <http://www.nordiccountryloghomes.com/index2.html>

He has also provided some YouTube links referring to a self build house that he supervised in the Shetland Islands: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YhNrdsssUgl> and to another low energy log home based on his designs and built in Norway: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XWCmY93BY-Q>

The following weblink also provides a catalogue of some of his house designs:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qCCuL3mL7rc>

Two Recent Books on Responses to Resource Depletion, Climate Change and our Global Future.

Berners-Lee M and D Clark (2013) 'The Burning Question: We can't burn half the world's oil, coal and gas. So how do we quit?' London: Profile Books Ltd (£9.99)

Porritt J (2013) 'The World We Made' London: Phaidon Press Ltd. – 'a heartening portrayal of how the world could look in 2050 if we play our cards right'.

Finally....don't
forget...

MALVERN HILLS
GREEN PARTY

**BURNS NIGHT
CEILIDH**

Friday 24th January

**— THE —
L O O S E
C A N O N S**

Malvern Cube

— 7.30 PM —

**TO MIDNIGHT
with a bar**

**£8 (IN ADVANCE)
£10 (ON THE NIGHT)
£25 FAMILY OF FOUR**

**INCLUDES A LIGHT
PLOUGHMAN'S STYLE MEAL**

email j.w.raine@bham.ac.uk
or phone 07786 198332

this
Friday!!

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Councillors

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

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

District Councillor (Link Ward) – Clive Smith (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)

Parish Councillor (Malvern Wells) Malcolm Victory (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/malvernhills.html>

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

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