

GreenAction

2008

The magazine of Friends of the Earth Cymru



**Cyfeillion
y Ddaear
Cymru**

**Friends of
the Earth
Cymru**

**MOTORWAY MADNESS
Saving the Gwent Levels**



The path to 3 per cent | What to do about waste | Join a Friends of the Earth local group

Action, that's green



Croeso. Welcome. To the brand-new, first issue of the magazine of Friends of the Earth Cymru.

“Green Action”. You wouldn’t believe it, but that name took us eons to come up with. And no, we didn’t pay some marketing guru thousands to do it for us.

It’s simple, it’s direct. It’s a magazine about green issues, and it’s about taking action. And not just the changing your light bulbs, switching off stand-by sort of action (of course you do that anyway).

This is political action. Which doesn’t have to mean taking to the streets, standing for election or joining a political party. What it does mean is taking part in the important debates, and telling our leaders that we care, that we want them to make the right

decisions on our behalf – for Wales, for the world, for people and for the environment.

This first issue is all about the big gap between talking green and acting green. Our Assembly Government has talked some big talk - promising to cut Wales’ greenhouse gas emissions by 3 per cent a year, and consistently out-greening Westminster. But it’s still considering building a new carbon-generating motorway through important habitat, and has given the go ahead to opencast coal mines just 35 metres from people’s homes. Turn to page 6 to find out what the Welsh Assembly Government really needs to do to lead us to those 3 per cent cuts.

Opponents to wind power do a lot of talking too. But they seem determined

to mislead and misinform us about the technology that is our best chance of producing the clean, green energy we need. So read our myth buster on page 12, and make up your own mind.

And don’t let anyone tell you that waste incinerators are ‘project green’ – see ‘What to do about waste’ on page 5 to find out why.

Throughout the magazine there are actions you can take. Write an email, join a local group or even start your own. Or just get better informed. Sometimes, that can be enough.

Green Action. Give it a go in Welsh – Gweithredu Gwyrdd. Some of us think it sounds even better.

Simon Williams, Editor



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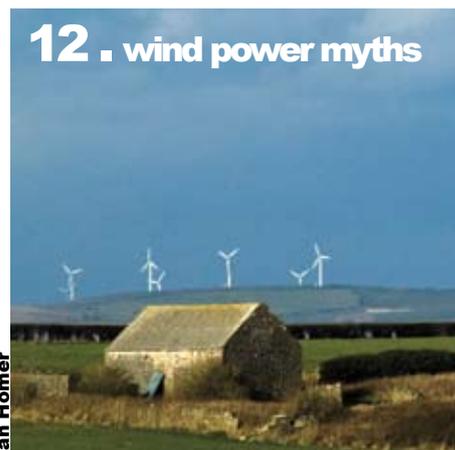
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Barrage not only option for Severn tidal power

A £9 million, two year UK Government study is looking for the best way to harness tidal power in the Severn Estuary – and it might not be a barrage.

In its report of October '07, the UK Government's Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) showed a clear favouritism for a barrage stretching from Cardiff to Weston, and controversially dismissed a number of other options and technologies.

Thankfully, the new study is more open-minded, and will compare and contrast various tidal energy technologies, including the large-scale tidal lagoons recommended in Friends of the Earth Cymru's own Severn Barrage Report.

Friends of the Earth Cymru maintains its opposition to the Cardiff-Weston barrage. Other technologies exist that could well be much less expensive and less environmentally damaging, yet capable of creating equal amounts of urgently needed energy from renewable sources.

Phase one of the government study, launched January '08, will identify if any project is suitable for being taken forward for more detailed consideration next year. Importantly, the project could be one scheme, such as a Cardiff-Weston barrage, or a combination of schemes, such as tidal lagoons and a smaller 'Shoots' barrage or 'tidal fence' close to the Second Severn Crossing, which would carry the main London to south Wales railway.

The study has asked environment groups to submit non-tidal energy projects of 'equivalent cost' that would achieve similar or better levels of UK CO₂ emission reductions. This is to fulfil the requirements of the EU's Habitats Directive, which states that if the protected habitats of the Severn Estuary are to be negatively affected,

there would have to be an 'overriding need' that could not be achieved in other ways.

For more information on Severn tidal power options, and to download a full version of Friends of the Earth Cymru's **Severn Barrage Report**, go to www.foecymru.co.uk

Planning bill threatens Welsh democracy

A nuclear power station is proposed two miles from your home. Local residents, councils, AMs, MPs and the Welsh Assembly Government all oppose it.

Under the new Planning Bill, likely to be passed by the UK Parliament by autumn 2008, not only can they all be ignored, but there will not even be a fair chance to present a case in person at a public inquiry.

Currently, nearly all planning decisions in Wales are devolved to the National Assembly and will not be affected by the Bill. However, the exceptions to this are power stations over 50MW (ie not very large at all) and other energy infrastructure, which remain under the control of Westminster.

The Bill proposes that 'national' policy statements will be drafted by the UK Government. These will be interpreted by an appointed Commission, whose decisions will be final and unaccountable.

Friends of the Earth Cymru lobbied Assembly Members when the Bill was discussed in the Sustainability Committee. The Committee's consequent recommendations fully supported our view that ALL planning decisions for Wales should be taken in Wales – now we need to make sure Westminster listens.

If passed as it is, the Bill will make it considerably easier to build nuclear plants, opencast coal mines or gas pipelines in Wales, whatever the wishes of people in Wales.

Contact your MP now to tell them to oppose this erosion of our democracy, Go to www.planningdisaster.co.uk for further information.

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Friends of the Earth Cymru:

-  is dedicated to protecting the environment and promoting a sustainable future for Wales
-  is part of the UK's most influential environmental campaigning organisation
-  is part of the most extensive environmental network in the world, with almost one million supporters across five continents and more than 70 national organisations worldwide
-  supports a unique network of local campaigning groups, working in communities throughout Wales
-  is dependent upon individuals for over 90% of its income



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Biotech companies in Wales to be liable for GM contamination

Biotech companies will in future be held liable for any contamination caused by their genetically modified (GM) crops planted in Wales.

This is the strong proposal set out in the Welsh Assembly Government's draft regulation on environmental liability, which has been up for public consultation. The final regulation will come into force towards the end of 2008.

The equivalent rules for England, set by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), are much weaker and will not hold the biotech companies responsible for any resulting contamination.

The proposals are a clear sign from the Assembly Government that they do not want GM crops in Wales and, with all-party support, are willing to stand up to both DEFRA and biotech companies to keep Wales GM free.

In 2000 the National Assembly voted unanimously against growing GM crops in Wales and, despite attempted field trials in Pembrokeshire and Flintshire in 2000 and 2001, Wales has been GM-free since 2001.

Friends of the Earth Cymru, Women's Institute Wales, Farmers' Union of



Adrian Shepherd, Sea Trust

Minke whale mother and calf in coastal waters off west Wales

Marine life threatened in Cardigan Bay

Much of Cardigan Bay is designated a Special Area of Conservation because of its importance to a wide range of wildlife. Bottlenose dolphins, harbour porpoises, grey seals and whales share the Gulf Stream warmed waters with large numbers of sea birds.

But once again this wildlife haven is threatened by the prospect of oil and gas exploration. Green groups prevented previous attempts to drill in these protected seas during the

1990s and again last year. Now we might have to do it all again, as this year Cardigan Bay appeared on the Government's list of areas available for companies to bid for exploration licences.

Write to Malcolm Wicks, Minister for Energy, DTI, 1 Victoria Street, London, SW1 0ET or email him at: mpst.wicks@dti.gsi.gov.uk, to urge him to keep oil and gas developments out of Cardigan Bay.

Wales and GM Free Cymru form the GM Free Wales Alliance, and continue to push for greater protection for Wales to remain GM-free.

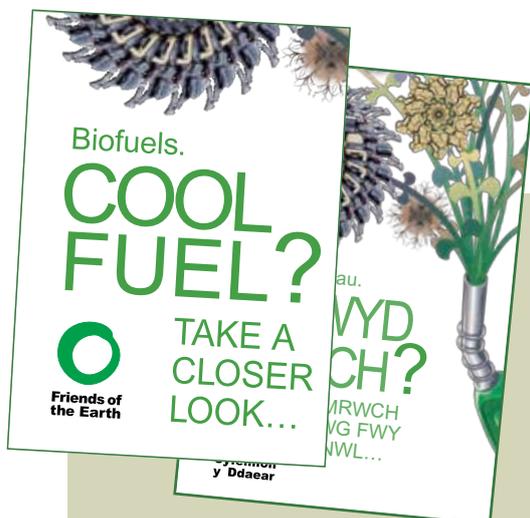
Public opinion against genetically modified organisms (GMOs) is also holding fast in Europe, as more and more regions join the European GM Free Regions network.

While the Westminster Government keeps up the pretence of a pro-GM UK,

devolved governments in Wales and Scotland are strongly opposed to GM crops in their countries.

In European Union meetings, DEFRA currently decides how the UK votes on authorising GMs to grow in Europe, and can vote in favour even if Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all strongly oppose any proposal.

See www.gmfrecymru.org for more information



Send a postcard asking your MEP to vote against biofuel targets

Biofuels 'part of the problem'

The European Parliament proposes that damaging biofuels should make up 10% of road fuel by 2020

There is mounting evidence that large-scale production of biofuels (also known as agrofuels) will destroy the forests that are some of the world's most important habitats, take food and land from the poorest people and increase climate change.

Friends of the Earth Cymru is campaigning against the European Union's 10% target proposal, hoping to persuade Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to oppose it in a

What to do about waste?

What should we do with our mountains of rubbish? Certainly not send it up in smoke, according to **Rod Walters** of the South East Wales Friends of the Earth Waste Group

All over Wales local authorities (LAs) are hurrying forward programmes to deal with waste. The European Landfill Directive compels them to reduce the amount of biodegradable waste sent to landfill – and will dish out heavy fines if they don't meet the targets. All the signs are that many LAs might be tempted to plump for the 'easy option' of incineration.

Incinerators are beguilingly marketed as 'energy from waste' – a grossly misleading term which suggests that incineration might be the best (or even the only) way of energy recovery from waste. While other treatment technologies recover energy from waste more efficiently than incineration, the greatest energy savings of all come

from high levels of recycling.

And incinerators may not even be the 'quick and easy option'. They could face intense local opposition and take much longer to build than smaller and more flexible waste treatment facilities.

So what are the solutions? The main strategy must be to reduce volumes of residual waste to a minimum by waste avoidance, reuse and recycling. Decreasing residual waste significantly will rule out large and inflexible technologies such as incinerators. But how is the remaining fraction of residual waste to be treated?

Solutions must follow two guiding principles: impact on climate change as the first consideration, the second flexibility – facilities must be able to adapt to changes in waste content and volume as rates of recycling increase.

Mechanical and Biological Treatment (MBT) is a set of modular technologies that might be one solution. With MBT, once all the useable materials have been extracted, the remainder can be composted or deposited as an inert material in landfill sites. Other emerging technologies include mechanical heat, gasification and pyrolysis - all of which are already being tested around the United Kingdom.

Any of these new technologies could be a better option than incineration, which is definitely not the answer.

The South East Wales Waste Group is co-ordinated by Janet Rawlings of Chepstow Friends of the Earth [janet@alg.myzen.co.uk]

Incineration is bad for climate change

Incineration is amongst the worst performing waste treatments for greenhouse gas emissions. Incinerators release a large amount of CO₂ to produce only a small amount of energy

Incinerators emit toxic chemicals

Incineration results in higher emissions of nitrogen oxides, particulate matter, arsenic, hydrogen chloride dioxins and furans than any other residual waste treatment

Incinerator economics favours large plants

Incinerators are expensive to build. As the cost of pollution abatement tends to be the same irrespective of size, large plants are favoured over small. Such large plants, serving large areas, contradict the well-established 'proximity principle', which emphasises that waste should be dealt with close to the place where it is produced.

Incinerators create a demand for waste

Because of an incinerator's high capital costs, operators require contracts with local authorities for guaranteed minimum amounts of waste over a period of typically 25-30 years. Research shows that rates of recycling suffer – data from Denmark clearly shows that regions with high rates of incineration have lower recycling.

Prosiect Gwyrdd and the South East Wales Friends of the Earth Waste Group

Five Friends of the Earth local groups are working together to fight a grouping of five local authorities proposing a giant incinerator in Cardiff Bay.

The incinerator could burn 500,000 tonnes of waste every year, over a likely contract period of 25 years.

The local authorities – Cardiff, Newport, Caerphilly, Monmouthshire and Vale of Glamorgan – have named the incinerator proposal "Prosiect Gwyrdd" (Green Project).

vote this autumn.

In Wales we have four MEPs, each covering the whole of the country. Friends of the Earth Cymru will be lobbying them through local group action and a postcard campaign. Get in touch with your local group to help (see page 9), or come along to our stalls at the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show and the National Eisteddfod of Wales this summer to send a postcard.

Of our four MEPs – Glenys Kinnock,

Jill Evans, Jonathan Evans and Eluned Morgan – Jill Evans has already called for the 10% target to be scrapped. Speaking after a vote in the European Parliament in April '08, she said:

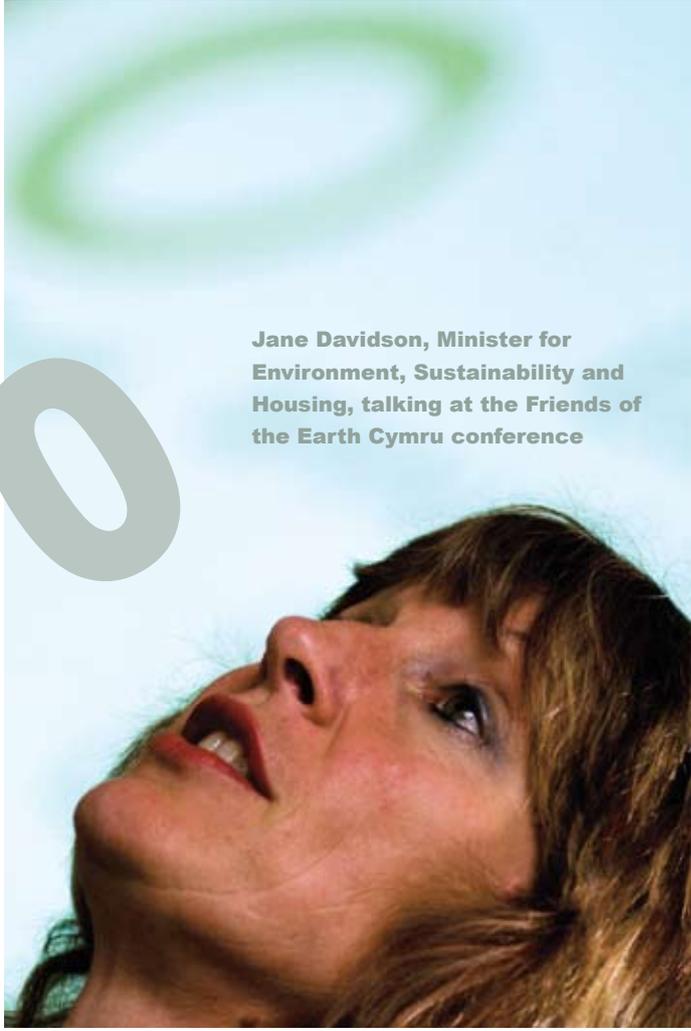
"Agrofuels are not the answer to the current challenges we face in increasing our use of renewable energy. There is widespread concern about their harmful effect on food prices and food supply and it would be very unwise for the European Commission

to continue pursuing this policy with such obsession.

"We need to reduce demand for energy and invest much more in truly renewable energy sources. Agrofuels are part of the problem, not part of the solution."

To find out more, and to email your MEP, go to: www.foe.co.uk/campaigns/biodiversity/press_for_change/stop_targets

The path to 30/10



Jane Davidson, Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing, talking at the Friends of the Earth Cymru conference

Ian Homer

The Welsh Assembly Government has committed to achieving cuts of 3 per cent a year in Wales' greenhouse gas emissions. Friends of the Earth Cymru director **Gordon James** looks at how it might be achieved

We should be proud that, in June of last year, the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) became the first government in the world to adopt the central demand of Friends of the Earth's climate change campaign. From 2011, it will aim to cut Wales' emissions of greenhouse gases by 3% a year.

But aiming and achieving are very different things – does the Assembly Government really have the will to make this happen? Does it have the power, and does it even know how?

The scientific evidence for climate change is becoming ever more frightening. Arctic ice is now thawing so quickly it seems likely that the area will have ice-free summers decades sooner than expected. At the other end of the planet, British Antarctic Survey scientists have reported an alarming increase in the rate of movement of giant glaciers towards the sea.

It is evidence such as this that has led one of the world's top climate experts, James Hansen of NASA, to state that we are on course for a five metre sea level rise this century. He believes we have just ten years in which to put in place the "draconian measures" needed to curb carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions quickly enough to avert a dangerous rise in global temperatures.

We know that most of the measures to deliver these emission reductions already exist. A study from the renowned Tyndall Centre for Climate Change at Manchester University, commissioned jointly by Friends of the Earth and the Co-operative Bank, has shown that UK CO₂ emissions could be reduced by 70% by 2030. We could do this largely using such existing technologies as improved fuel efficiency, better energy conservation and renewable energy.

The Welsh Assembly's Sustainability Committee launched an inquiry in September 2007 to examine how emission cuts can be achieved in Wales. The Committee's first reports, released in March 2008, have been on the residential and transport sectors, and both conclude that a great deal more could be achieved within the Assembly's existing powers.

Planning policy, for instance, could ensure that new building developments produce at least 10% of their energy from on-site renewable energy systems. In transport, the committee urges WAG to increase funding for sustainable transport from 50% of the transport budget to 70%, as in Scotland.

Other initiatives indicate that the Assembly Government is keen to take a lead role in tackling greenhouse gas emissions. It aspires to ensure that all new buildings are

“ Wales could be as important in the global green economic revolution as we were when producing the coal that powered the industrial revolution ”

constructed to zero carbon standards from 2011 onwards, five years ahead of England. And, having stood up to the ill-informed arguments of the opponents of wind energy, WAG's draft Energy Route Map states the aim to see all of the electricity we consume generated from renewable sources within 20 years.

Even as we battle to see emissions from aircraft and shipping included in the Climate Change Bill at Westminster, Wales' impressive Environment Minister, Jane Davidson, has already stated that she wants to see these included in Wales.

But not all is good news. WAG's failure to say no to the Ffos-y-Frân opencast coal mine being dug just 35 metres from people's homes near Merthyr Tydfil, and the proposed extension to the M4 across the Gwent Levels, have cast doubt over its stated commitment to place climate change at the top of its agenda. Is there really the strength of vision and leadership required to follow this through at every level?

Devolving power

Even with the best will in the world, it is unlikely that all the commendable proposals emanating from Cardiff Bay will be sufficient to reduce Wales' overall emissions of greenhouse gases. WAG's policies, and its commitment to 3% greenhouse gas emissions reductions, can only be within "areas of devolved competence" – those areas over which WAG has control, such as the public, residential and transport sectors.

Most powers relating to the energy sector, which is the largest emitter of greenhouse gases, remain in London. This means that WAG has little influence on decisions relating to power stations, which, alone, are responsible for a third of Wales' CO₂ emissions. Since 1990, emissions from this source in Wales have increased by a quarter and are set to mushroom in the future.

From its early days, the Welsh Assembly has had a vision of being a global leader in clean energy. Despite its lack of power over energy matters, it has tried to take this forward by using the planning system, as in the Technical Advice Note (TAN) 8 on renewable energy, and by giving extra funding to the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme.

But decisions being taken in Westminster for Wales have not been so green. Aberthaw power station, despite being the country's biggest single source of pollution, has been given permission to increase output. This will result in CO₂ emissions increasing from seven million tonnes a year to around eleven. Aberthaw will be fuelled partly by coal mined from the Ffos-y-Frân mine – it was apparently pressure from Whitehall that pushed the Assembly Government into shamefully giving this the go-ahead.

At Pembroke, an application has been submitted for a large liquid natural gas (LNG) fired power station that would emit almost six million tonnes of CO₂ a year. We've calculated that the heat energy wasted from this power

station would be equivalent to over half the electricity demand in Wales. Yet our proposal for the waste heat to be used at four industrial locations on the shores of Milford Haven in combined heat and power (CHP) systems has so far been ignored.

Along with other approved or proposed power stations, CO₂ emissions from electricity generation could increase by over 20 million tonnes. If they are allowed to go-ahead, annual CO₂ emissions from Wales would reach 64 million tonnes, making three percent a year reductions of green house gas emissions little more than a pipe dream.

We should be proud of the intentions of the Welsh Assembly Government to tackle our rising greenhouse gas emissions. With the right vision and leadership, Wales could be as important in the global green economic revolution as we were when producing the coal that powered the industrial revolution. But aims and rhetoric are not enough. We need a commitment to action at every level of government – local authority, Welsh national and UK. Every decision taken needs to be seen through the lens of climate change.

We are creating a world in which our children are being denied a future. If we are to avert this nightmare scenario, we all have to take responsibility by doing all we can to reduce our personal carbon footprint. We also have to make our politicians understand the seriousness of the crises we face, and the need for radical action that would transcend party politics. Most of the solutions already exist. All that's lacking is the political will. The stakes could not be higher. We have to act now.

Clear green water 'tween Cardiff and Westminster

Is the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) leading the UK towards a greener future?

Renewable energy February '08

WAG proposes that 100 per cent of Wales' electricity consumption should be generated from renewables by 2025. Westminster is aiming for 50 per cent by 2020

Recycling December '07

Wales aims to recycle 70 per cent of waste by 2025. England's target is 50% by 2020

Cutting emissions June '07

WAG is the first government in the world committing to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 3 per cent a year

Climate change February '07

Assembly Members vote unanimously that climate change should be WAG's first priority

Sustainable buildings February '07

WAG says that all new buildings in Wales should be built to zero carbon standards from 2011 onwards - five years ahead of England

Friends of the Earth is not a faceless organisation happening somewhere else. All over Wales, there are people making their world a greener place. Wherever you live, you can get involved

Starting a group



Look on the map and you'll see there are Friends of the Earth local groups all around the country. If there's not one in your area, why not do what Sue Price did and start one yourself?

“ Six months ago it struck me – I wanted to do more to be green, to do something that would encourage other local people to make small, achievable changes. But how?

First stop was contacting Friends of the Earth Cymru, hoping to find an established local group to join. Surprisingly there wasn't one, but Local Groups Development Officer Bleddyn Lake offered to meet up, and fired me with the enthusiasm to establish a new group myself.

I put up posters, booked a room and was all set to change the world – or at least Rhayader. Loads of people came, and our group was established.

There's been quite a lot of work – from agreeing the group's name (it's

'Heart of Wales', covering Rhayader, Llandrindod Wells and Builth Wells), to electing officers and setting up a bank account – but Friends of the Earth Cymru has given great support.

Then there's deciding what issues to focus on. There are so many opportunities for change it's hard to decide what to do. We've ended up with several campaigns – making a local town plastic-bag free, supporting local produce, and writing to local papers supporting green initiatives.

It has been an interesting six months since I first contacted Friends of the Earth Cymru. A lot has happened, both highs and lows. But I'd definitely encourage anyone thinking of starting a group to give it a go. ”



Bleddyn Lake Local Groups Development Officer

Simon Williams

“ My work takes me all around Wales, helping our ever-increasing network of local groups. The range of work our groups do is amazing and never ceases to inspire me.

I might work with groups on recruiting new members, running effective meetings, campaign information or getting stories covered in the local press.

We organise networking and training sessions to bring people together and provide groups with a range of materials and information.

If you're thinking about starting a new group, get in touch and I'll help organise a launch meeting with lots of publicity. All you need to bring is plenty of enthusiasm and the desire to make your world a little greener. ”

How to get involved

Most groups meet once a month and work on various local, national and global campaigns - find the relevant contact for your local group on the map above. If you want to start a new group in your area, contact Bleddyn Lake on 02920 229 577, or email bleddyn.lake@foe.co.uk

Some local group successes

Chepstow

Helped make Chepstow a Fair Trade town. Have now started Chepstow's 'Transition Town' initiative, aiming to reduce local carbon emissions

Llangollen

Leading Llangollen towards plastic-bag freedom, encouraging 85% of shops to take part in 'Plastic Bag Free Week'

Flintshire

Plans for a seven lane super-highway were ditched in March '08 after the group led a massive public protest

Pembrokeshire

Held a series of high profile events featuring speakers such as Nobel Prize winner and eminent climate scientist Sir John Houghton

Monmouth

Started a Farmers Market in July '06, which has since gone from strength to strength. Their experience now helps other groups start markets in their areas

Cardiff

Organised a mass bike ride to campaign for a cycle bridge over the River Ely, linking Cardiff and Penarth. The project is now going ahead, helped by Sustrans' £50 million Big Lottery Fund 'People's Millions' win

Newport

At the forefront of Friends of the Earth's 'Big Ask' climate change campaign in Wales. Organised a campaign-promoting gig of local bands, and enlisted rap stars Goldie Lookin Chain to lobby local MPs

Friends of the Earth local groups in Wales

1 Abergavenny & Crickhowell
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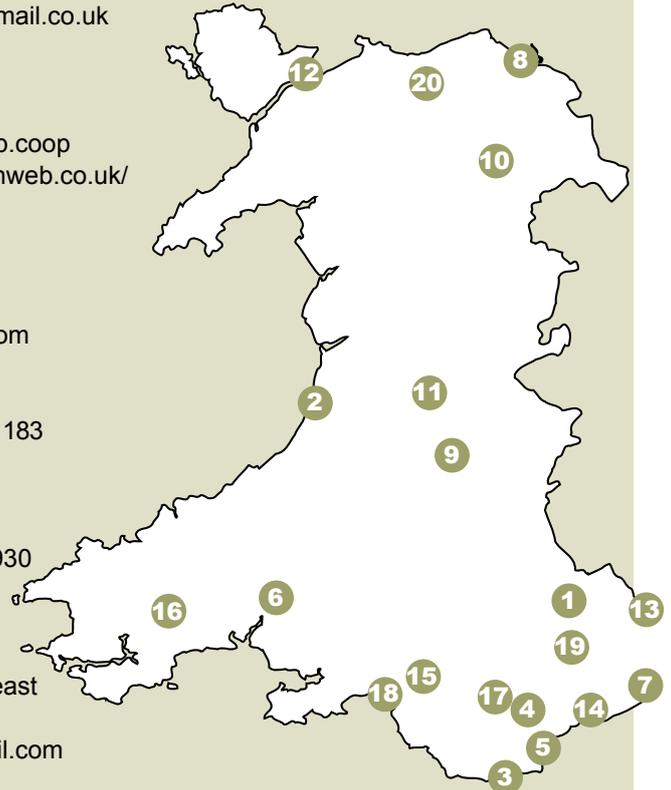
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Simon Williams

All work and no play?

Heather Webber has been co-ordinator of Cardiff Friends of the Earth since January '08

Being a local group co-ordinator must be lots of hard work?

Not really. The variety of tasks and challenges means it's always interesting. All I mostly do is act as a point of contact, disseminate information to the group and help co-ordinate our various activities.

What's the greatest challenge?

Trying not to spread ourselves too thinly. There are so many issues we'd like to cover, but I've been wisely advised that it's better to stick to a few campaigns

and do them well than tackle too much and not make a success of any.

And the greatest rewards?

When you feel you've made a difference, however small - through a successful campaign, a letter in the paper, lobbying an MP or just talking to people at a stall and knowing they've engaged with your message.

And what are you doing in that boat?

Persuading the Government that the climate change bill must include international shipping and aviation - by dressing up as sailors and chasing 'Gordon Brown' around in a boat. And learning the valuable lesson that the mixture of boats, dubious rowing and wind make for a very tricky photo stunt!

Motorway madness

A six lane toll road is planned to cut through one of Wales' most important habitats. Is this the action of a government committed to sustainable development?

Wetlands can have a very special, eerie beauty. And the Gwent Levels is one of the best. It might not have the wild majesty of the North Wales ranges or the rugged splendour of the Pembrokeshire coast, but in its own way this is just as important a slice of Welsh landscape.

A low-lying coastal strip south of Newport, the Levels is important enough to have over 5,000 hectares designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). It's one of the largest surviving areas of ancient grazing marshes and reed (drainage ditch) systems in Britain, and a nationally important habitat for many rare invertebrates. There are significant populations of otters, rare water voles, breeding birds, and plant species that appear nowhere else in Wales.

Huge skies, distant horizons and the constant accompaniment of bird calls make the Gwent Levels a calming place to wander. Catch an early morning mist, or watch the winter evening spectacle of thousands of starlings flocking together to roost, and you'll feel a bit of the magic.

Julian Branscombe of the Gwent Wildlife Trust believes the Gwent Levels is a very special place. "This is the best wetlands area in Wales," he says, "and now the Assembly Government is planning to destroy it."

No one denies that there is increasing traffic congestion in south east Wales. The crucial east-west transport corridor along the M4 has 'bottlenecks' where the highway goes from six to four lanes, including the well-known Brynglas tunnels. These bottlenecks and other out-dated

design features are causing safety concerns, and are contributing to increasing, though relatively mild, peak-time traffic congestion. But it was the police action of closing both carriageways following two crashes, one caused by joy-riders and the other by a suspected heart-attack, that led to recent severe gridlock, rather than the design of the road.

It was after a horrendous crash in September of last year that the Assembly Minister for Transport, Ieuan Wyn Jones, reconfirmed the Assembly Government's intention to build a new motorway looping south around Newport, saying that the road could be started in 2010 and completed 'hopefully' by 2013.

This new toll road would be a six lane, 10 mile monster, ploughing up chunks of the Gwent Levels as it went. But this is not a new idea. First proposed by John Redwood and the Conservative Government in the early nineties, it was reinstated into the Welsh Assembly Government's roads programme in December 2004.

A public inquiry is likely to be held next year, and the business case for the road will have to be made. It is currently estimated that the project would cost around £400 million, though a much higher figure already looks likely.

More roads or public transport?

But would these congestion and safety issues be solved by substantially increasing road capacity, leaving aside the issue of building roads across nationally important habitat? Friends of the Earth Cymru Transport Campaigner Neil Crumpton believes not. "Investment in public transport and



“ The decision about this scheme will be a major test of the Assembly Government's resolve on sustainable development ”

road safety across south east Wales would be a more cost-effective way to reduce congestion and improve safety,” he says. “As for the M4 itself, upgrading the existing route to modern design standards and widening to three lanes throughout needs to be looked at seriously.”

Rather than building yet more traffic-generating roads, these are sensible and sustainable solutions that would also help reduce carbon emissions, oil imports and car dependency – reductions which would be seriously compromised by a new motorway drawing investment away from sustainable infrastructure and services.

According to Neil Crumpton, it's issues like this where the Assembly Government needs to show it's serious about tackling climate change and creating a low-carbon economy for Wales. “The decision about this scheme will be a major test of the Assembly Government's resolve on sustainable development,” he says.

CALM

The Campaign Against the Levels Motorway (CALM) Alliance has been fighting the motorway proposal from the beginning. Friends of the Earth Cymru and Friends of the Earth local groups are working with other organisations such as the Gwent Wildlife Trust and the RSPB, and with local residents and community groups who all oppose the building of the motorway. In response to the road project moving back up the political agenda again, the alliance has recently launched a new website, www.savethelevels.org.uk, and a new campaign leaflet is available.

Julian Branscombe is heavily involved in the campaign, and has done much to engage with local people on the issue. “We've been raising awareness of the proposals through events such as walks around the marshes, stalls at local events and giving talks to local groups,” he says. “Anyone can get involved in the campaign locally, as CALM meets every two months at Newport Civic Centre and always welcomes new members.”

Chepstow Friends of the Earth's representative on the



Ian Homer

Members of CALM outside Nash Community Hall

Left to right: Anne Were; Bleddyn Lake, Friends of the Earth Cymru; Peter Varley; Julian Branscombe, Gwent Wildlife Trust; Suzannah Evans, Newport Friends of the Earth; Rebecca Price, Gwent Wildlife Trust; Stuart Levington, Friends of the Earth Cymru

CALM alliance, Steve Rawlings, is dedicating much of his spare time to the campaign. Explaining his concerns about the proposal, Steve says, “The cost of building this motorway on a flood plain, across several Sites of Special Scientific Interest and providing a transport route already served by an existing motorway represents really poor value for money.

“In a world of increasing energy costs and reducing oil supplies, the Welsh Assembly Government needs a new vision. It needs to acknowledge the realities of rapidly increasing oil prices, and set aside its out-of-date ‘business as usual’ policies.”

A Gwent Levels motorway would have national significance and consequences, as it would divert funds from public transport, increase Wales' carbon emissions and threaten our biodiversity. We must make sure that Transport Minister Ieuan Wyn Jones scraps the plan.

For more details on getting involved in the campaign, contact Friends of the Earth Cymru campaigner Haf Elgar on 02920 229 577, or haf.elgar@foe.co.uk, or go to www.foecymru.co.uk. For more information on the Campaign Against the Levels Motorway, go to www.savethelevels.org.uk

Wind power: The myths

Wind power offers a clean, safe and efficient source of energy. Yet the opponents of our most advanced renewable technology seem determined to mislead and misinform

MYTH: Wind farms are unpopular

FACT: The Sustainable Development Commission assessed more than 50 public opinion surveys carried out since 1991 and found that 80% of people were in favour of wind farms

MYTH: Wind power is expensive

FACT: The Cabinet Office's Energy Review stated that "onshore wind is likely to become the cheapest of all generating technologies within 20 years"

MYTH: Wind energy is inefficient

FACT: A typical wind turbine in the UK will generate electricity for 80 to 85% of the time

MYTH: Wind produces little power

FACT: Current policies and proposals for wind farms could result in as much as 25% of Wales' electricity demand being wind generated by about 2012

MYTH: Wind turbines are noisy

FACT: Turbine design has improved substantially as the technology has advanced. It is perfectly possible to stand directly underneath a turbine and have a normal conversation without raised voices

MYTH: Wind turbines kill birds

FACT: The RSPB says, "The available evidence suggests that appropriately positioned wind farms do not pose a significant risk to birds"



Go to www.foecymru.co.uk to download a full version of
Wind Power: 20 Myths Blown Away