



Grapevine

Newsletter of the South Shropshire Green Party

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Parliament rejects military action against Syria

On 29th August, Parliament rejected a Government motion that would have led the way to military action against the Assad regime in Syria, in response to a suspected chemical attack on civilians on 21st August, by 285 votes to 272 votes.



Green Party MP Caroline Lucas stated that the case for military action against Syria had not been established. She said ‘While completely deploring the action of Assad and his regime, and believing that all those responsible for war crimes should be referred to the International Criminal Court, it is by no means clear that military action will reduce suffering in the region.’

New Green Party peer, Jenny Jones said ‘My heart goes out to the thousands of Syrian families who have been injured, lost family members and been dispossessed by their own government. We now have a generation of children and young people who have seen horrors and will be forever damaged. Sadly, military intervention won’t help them. They need us to redouble our efforts for a diplomatic agreement and to step up humanitarian aid. More violence from us is not the solution.’

Choosing a Green Party Parliamentary Candidate

The next parliamentary election will be called by June 2015, and of course, might happen earlier, so we have to be prepared. Now is the time to begin the process of choosing our candidate for the Ludlow Constituency, in good time to get our unique messages across to electors.

Please consider standing if you believe that you could take on this work, and do support other Green Party members who might consider standing.

Here's an outline of the procedures. Do get in touch if you'd like more detail.

The Local Party should appoint an Electoral Returning Officer (ERO) who is responsible for ensuring that the selection of the candidate is conducted democratically and in accordance with local and national party procedures.

Nominees should not campaign for votes other than through written statements and any official hustings process managed by the ERO, unless authorised by the local party.

Each nominee must have two nominators who must be fully paid up national Green Party members, and members of the Ludlow constituency.

Each nominee must have been a member of the national Green Party for at least one year by the last possible date for the election and must hold continuous membership up to the date of the election. However, an exemption from this requirement may apply if at least ten nominating signatures are obtained from fully paid up members resident in the constituency.

The prospective candidate is democratically selected by all Green Party members resident in the constituency, with provision for postal voting. There should be at least one husting meeting at which members may ask questions of nominees, and notice will be sent in reasonable time to each member eligible to vote in the selection ballot giving the timetable for the selection process.

The voting process is the Single Transferable Vote with provision for negative voting (Re-open nominations).

If, following the first close of nominations, there is not at least one female nominee, there must be a second call for nominations.

Nomination forms will be posted at a date to be decided.

Janet Phillips
Election Agent
janetphillips.nuthatch@virginmedia.com



Site Allocations and Management of Development (SAMDev) Plan for Shropshire



By now you should have responded to the final SAMDev Consultation. All townships throughout the county have been asked their views on where houses should be built and what land should be allocated for industrial purposes. The exercise is somewhat restricted to "preferred" sites, which are based on a landlord willing to sell and they are in line with planning policy. Therefore, it is not possible to say "A row of 'affordable houses' would fit in nicely there", because Compulsory Purchase Orders are not part of the remit. Neither does it permit the respondent to specify what type of housing should be built.

The number of houses to be built is arrived at by a formula, which shares out the total given by the Government between the towns in the county, with Shrewsbury taking the major share. This means that though some villages might benefit from new housing stock to assist their sustainability, they are not in the ring.

SAMDev is not going down well in Church Stretton, because they have been told that 'no new houses' is not an option and if one 'preferred' site/sites is rejected somewhere else needs to replace it in the town. Seeing there are few 'brown field' sites in the town and it is the only town in the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, finding space is difficult. Furthermore, the town is in a valley, with limited flat areas and building on higher ground is environmentally compromising.

The Town Council has taken a stand, saying that we do need a few houses over the next twenty years, especially 'affordables' and they should be distributed on small sites throughout the town. It so happens there has already been a considerable expansion, with housing behind the school, so the 'quota' is nearly met.

A general consensus had emerged in the town on the way forward, when just prior to the closing date, one of the biggest landowners locally joined forces with Morris & Co, a significant employer from Shrewsbury, offering a site for housing and industrial land at the foot of Caer Caradoc, one of the beautiful Stretton hills, overlooking Church Stretton. This would amount to a satellite village on the east side of the A49, which would not have a convenient footpath to Church Stretton, a bridge over the A49 or a bus service. Residents would be entirely reliant on the car. Essentially, this is unspoilt green field site, with mature trees that forms part of rural border of the town. Needless to say this proposed development goes against all our green credentials and is being opposed by local residents.

The other controversial site is along the Shrewsbury Road and is currently the secondary school's playing field. The school wants to sell this off and provide an enhanced replacement behind the school. The objection is that this field is at the end of the development from

Church Stretton and building here could in time foster creeping development all the way to All Stretton. The land is presently owned by Shropshire Council but now the School has opted for Academy Status it is moving out of democratic hands. My personal view is that if the school wants to move their playing field, that's up to them but the site should become a community orchard or some low impact community scheme. However, the school has its eye on the money.

The matter of employment land is also under scrutiny and whilst it is desirable for work to be close to where people live, some processes need space on their own. As Craven Arms and Church Stretton are linked together politically at County level, there is no reason why Craven Arms could not take the industrial firms, as it has plenty suitable land available, while Church Stretton caters for small scale enterprises.

Whether it is housing or factories, the outcome of the consultation will be revealed in time. We hope that planners will listen to the will of the people and not the developer.

John Lloyd (organiser, South Shropshire Green Party)

P.S. For those who knew him, Dick Crowe recently died peacefully at his Ludlow home. He was a local member and acted as auditor for the branch. Since his retirement he gave a lot of his time helping at the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Caroline Lucas arrested at 'Fracking' demonstration

As you have probably heard, Green MP, Caroline Lucas was arrested, along with other demonstrators, on 19th August, while peacefully protesting at the Balcombe, Sussex site where fracking firm Cuadrilla are planning test drilling. Caroline said 'As an MP, I am in a very privileged position – I get to speak up on behalf of constituents, put questions directly to the Government and push for parliamentary debates. However, like the people of Balcombe – most of whom oppose fracking and who have written countless letters to MPs and ministers on the subject – I have found that the Government has its fingers firmly in its ears'.

Background to the problem

What is 'fracking'? It is the extraction of shale gas (methane) trapped in tiny pockets in shale rock formations, sometimes in vast quantities. Extraction is by forcing water at high pressure into the rock in the process of hydraulic fracturing (or 'fracking'). Gas is released from the rocks, via a pipe to the surface, where it is collected and shipped off to be burnt, like conventional gas in homes and power stations. Fracking became a large-scale operation in the United States in the late 1990s but has become a much larger operation with innovations such as horizontal drilling, which enable a vast area of shale to be exploited with apparently minimal disruption at the surface. Shale gas is now cheaper than coal in the USA and is rapidly replacing it for electricity generation. This has partly contributed to a reduction in carbon emissions in the USA since 2005, as burning methane produces less carbon dioxide than does burning coal. However, the process of 'fracking' can cause earthquakes. In 2011, tremors of magnitude 1.5 to 2.3 were felt around an exploratory fracking site near Blackpool, England and reports commissioned by Cuadrilla (again the company involved) concluded that the earth tremors were caused by fracking activities. Of course, other activities can also cause earthquakes, notably the impounding of water in large reservoirs.

Perhaps a greater concern is that the water used in fracking contains sand to prop open cracks, lubricants to get sand into the cracks, biocides to ensure that bugs do not clog up the pipes and hydrochloric acid to dissolve excess cement in the pipe bores and fracked rocks. About 20% of this cocktail does not remain in the ground but flows back to the surface, carrying heavy metals and radioactive elements flushed out of the rock. In most US states this water is treated in wastewater plants but the safety of this has been questioned and Pennsylvania has banned it. Could toxic chemicals from fracking leach into groundwater and contaminate drinking water supplies? A US study considered the risk to be low but there was an issue with methane contamination in water drawn from within a kilometre or two of the well. The US Environmental Protection Agency is carrying out an investigation into the effect of fracking on drinking water and the arguments continue.

Besides the concerns about earth tremors and ground water contamination, there is also the more general argument about whether we should be exploiting a new fossil fuel source, which will add to greenhouse gases, even if not in such quantities as coal. Enthusiasm for fracking has made some politicians question the need for large investments in renewable energy and with the vocal opposition to land-based wind generation, there is a danger that targets for renewable energy and reduction of carbon emissions, will no longer seem a priority. The Centre for Alternative Technology has a strategy for a 'Zero Carbon Emission Britain'. This is much better target to aim for than the use of shale gas to replace coal as a fossil fuel.

Reference: New Scientist, 10/8/13 volume 219, No. 2929, pp 36-41.

Mike Tucker

News in Brief

8 July 2013 – Michael Gove has abandoned plans to drop climate change from the national school curriculum following a widespread campaign organised by '38 Degrees', the UK Youth Climate Coalition and 'People and Planet'.

23 August 2013 – Plans for a £27 million hospital at Ludlow's eco-park hang by a thread after County health chiefs voted against raising the cash to save the scheme (South Shropshire Journal). (N.B. John Lloyd, Green Party convenor, criticised the scheme for moving the hospital and GP surgeries out of Ludlow town centre).

30 August 2013 – European Union binding biofuel targets could drive up food prices by dramatically increasing the amount of food crops used for car fuel. Public pressure has led to a proposal to revamp biofuel laws. EU politicians will be voting on the proposal very soon. Friends of the Earth has a campaign to ask MEPs to vote for a change in the biofuel rules (FOE website)

30 August 2013 – 'Village declares war on alien invader'. The three metre high Himalayan Balsam has colonised 8 kilometres of the Clun riverbank near Clun, smothering other vegetation in its path. Contractors organised by the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership have declared war on the weed. This highly visible plant with pink to white slipper-shaped flowers has been found along 41km of the Rivers Clun, Usk, Redlake and Hopesay Brook. (South Shropshire Journal). (I also saw it by the River Lugg at Hampton Court – Ed).

(Perhaps Himalayan Balsam could be used for biofuel !? – Ed)

Diary Dates

Monday 2nd September – Monthly meeting 10.30, Acorn Cafe, Church Stretton

Tuesday 3rd September – Monthly evening meeting 19.30, Feathers hotel, Ludlow

Saturday 21st September – Michaelmas fair, Bishop's Castle Green Party stall.

Thursday 26th September - Acton Burnell, SY5 7PF 15.45 - 17.15, Concord College, talk by Vijay Mehta, on his latest book, "*The Economics of Killing*". Open to anyone interested in promoting peace, disarmament and sustainable development.

Wednesday 2nd October, Ludlow - 19.00, Chris Cole, from *Drone Wars UK*, speaking on *Drone Warfare: Convenient Killing?*, Methodist Church, Broad Street.

Monday 7th October – Monthly meeting 10.30, Acorn Cafe, Church Stretton

Tuesday 8th October – Monthly evening meeting 19.30, Feathers hotel, Ludlow. John Newnham from the Shropshire Ramblers Association will give a talk.

Monday 4th November – Monthly meeting 10.30, Acorn Cafe, Church Stretton

Tuesday 5rd November – Monthly evening meeting 19.30, Feathers hotel, Ludlow

Monday 2nd December – Monthly meeting 10.30, Acorn Cafe, Church Stretton

Tuesday 3rd December – Monthly evening meeting 19.30, Feathers hotel, Ludlow

Saturday 25th January – Proposed household energy forum and debate

Members are welcome to all meetings. The Church Stretton meeting is a purely business one, while we are trying to make the Ludlow evening meeting more general with discussions and occasional speakers.

South Shropshire Green Party Officers 2013

John Lloyd
Organiser and Membership Secretary
Rock Cottage, All Stretton, SY66HH
Tel. 01694 723143

Madeline Haigh
Branch Contact
The Tan House, Little Stretton, SY66RE
Tel. 01694 723627
Email: mhaigh3@aol.com

Mike Tucker
Grapevine Editor
Beechings, Hopton Heath, SY70QD
Tel. 01547 530935
Email: tucker25@btinternet.com

Imogen Herford
Treasurer
14 Belle Vue Terrace, Ludlow, SY82NZ
Tel. 07989498399
herfimo@hotmail.com

Janet Phillips
Election Agent
1 Walcot Ave, Lydbury North
Tel. 01588 680528
Janetphillips.nuthatch@virginmedia.com



