

STROUD DISTRICT GREEN PARTY

Newsletter, December 2010



Ideological Savagery Made Manifest

Most people, aware of Britain's enormous balance of payments deficit, would agree that steps must be taken to reduce it. Cameron and his Chancellor, relying on popular support fuelled by the media, have introduced Draconian measures and while Osborne claims his proposals are fair, the reality is that the hardest hit will be the very poorest. To make the welfare state nothing more than the last resort of the poverty-stricken by dismantling universal benefits is at the very centre of this Government's ideology.

The extent, if not the full effects, of cuts in Gloucestershire is now evident. Massive County Council savings of £108m over four years will have to be made, 1,000 staff are to go, and all open youth work is to be discontinued. As for libraries, Stroud's will remain, but Nailsworth is to become a 'link' branch, and Minchinhampton Library will be handed over to the community with no paid staff. The jobs of 63 county-paid police officers will come to an end over a two year period, and subsidised bus services are to be drastically reduced.

The cuts, both local and national, are not just an assault on those in greatest need, but utter economic folly. So what are the alternatives? It would be a huge step forward simply to make the tax system fairer. We need to tax high earners more, by introducing a 50% higher rate of income tax at £100k. If evasion and avoidance were to be seriously tackled, then perhaps as much as **£60b**, a vastly greater sum than that raised or saved by the Government's measures, could be acquired. And there are other options, like taxing the banks. We must cut road building, cancel Trident immediately and forever, and introduce VAT and fuel duty on aviation.

The decision to start the Green Investment Bank with a budget of just £1b is deeply disappointing. Our Green New Deal would invest £18b in creating a million new jobs in energy efficiency and renewables, so that people would be re-skilling and not claiming benefits. While the deficit is serious, the situation may be less dire than we're led to believe, and the most egregious dishonesty lies in the insistence that such cuts are the only way to fight it. The blame rests not with the public sector but with growth-addicted globalised capitalism. It is of paramount importance that we promote an alternative low-carbon economy based on sustainability and equality.

Reading through the CSR, one occasionally finds a diamond among the disregard. For example, we welcome the news that PFI funding has been withdrawn for the county's proposed incinerator, as in theory a greener alternative might be adopted. But for the poor, the sick, and the vulnerable, for those who aren't blessed with the means or the luck to get by, there's little in this catalogue of ruthlessness but misery and fear. And while it's hard not to feel incandescent with rage, our energy should be channelled into shouting loud and clear that this is not the only answer. We have a critical obligation to convince people that fairer access to sufficiency and jobs and a more environmentally just world are not just a dream, but attainable. It is a bold, positive vision that must generate and shape our opposition.



From r-l: Stroud District Councillor Martin Whiteside, the Socialist Party's Chris Moore and ex-MP David Drew at the 'Fight the Cuts' meeting in Stroud on November 3rd.

Fundraising Ceilidh

Saturday, January 15th

at the Trinity Rooms,

Stroud, from 8-11pm

with The Rash Band

and a licensed bar

FUN FOR EVERYONE!

Tickets £9 or

£7.50 (concessions),

from Caroline on

01453 884092.

District Council elections 2011 - your Party needs YOU!

You all know that in our struggle for a greener world, nothing will be achieved without a giant effort. And we won't do it without your help. Next year's District Council elections mark a twofold difference from most years, first because we have four seats in Stroud District to defend, and second, because every one of Cotswold's 44 seats are up for election. We won't win them all, but we need candidates in as many wards as possible. To those of you who live in Cotswold, please consider putting your names forward, even if it's just to get a Green on the ballot paper. If we don't start building there now, it'll be another four years before we get the chance. That mustn't happen. You won't have to run a campaign, and the paperwork will be done for you. In Stroud District, we must continue our ascent towards being the second largest party on the Council. We already have seven candidates adopted for Stroud District - John Marjoram (Trinity), Martin Whiteside (Thrupp), Catherine Farrell (Nailsworth), Molly Scott Cato (Valley), Phil Blomberg (Rodborough), Richard Dean (Chalford) and Miriam Yagud (Dursley), as well as one for Cotswold - Neil Voller (Kempsford -Lechlade). But we need more, not only to win seats but to make a strong case for voters to read what we're saying, to take notice, to feel inspired, and ultimately, to join our cause. Let's make it happen!

Striving and Succeeding: Sarah on Gloucestershire County Council



The administration at Shire Hall is currently drawing up its budget for 2011/12 which will be presented in draft form at December Cabinet. The administration is currently preoccupied with how it is going to provide statutory services while demand grows and finances are cut. The waste agenda has been stopped in its tracks with the withdrawal of £92m of government funding. This presents an opportunity for Stan Waddington – Waste Supremo, to think again, and to this end I presented a petition organised by Friends of the Earth, SWARD and GlosVAIN, calling on the County to exclude mass burn incineration from the technologies it considers appropriate for Gloucestershire's waste. As this petition had over 5,000 signatures there will be a debate on the subject at the next full council meeting.

I must be prepared. However, the tedious paragraph shuffling business of being an elected member continues. It's still hard to reconcile my desire for change and action with the reality of committee meetings and report writing. Currently I sit on two task groups which will report back to the Environment Scrutiny Committee. The Scrutiny committee can then choose to make recommendations to Cabinet (effectively the decision-making

body at Shire Hall). Cabinet can ignore Scrutiny recommendations, but it's not good practice to do so and often it prefers to accept their recommendations. My task groups are looking at the County generating energy from its own estates (both land and buildings) and if blanket 20mph zones are appropriate for the County's residential areas. I am hopeful that both could be beneficial and action is taken that we as Greens would applaud.

What's happening on Stroud District Council?

Councillor Martin Whiteside writes:

OK.....Philip has been involved in a long-running scrutiny enquiry to improve the system for deciding planning applications. The Tory cabinet made additional changes removing the right of Parish and Town Councils and District Councillors to refer contentious applications to the Development Control Committee (made up of elected Councillors). Instead more decisions will be taken behind closed doors by unelected officers, with which we disagree. We fought this in Full Council, but lost 22-24, though it will be reviewed in a year. I am busy developing community plans for the redevelopment of Brimscombe Port as part of the canal regeneration. I would like to hear particularly from anyone able to draw/CAD what alternative designs might look like. Meanwhile, in the coming weeks we will be addressing budget issues – trying to balance our opposition to the cuts in general with also trying to ensure that the poor and vulnerable are hurt the least. It will be a tricky and busy time. We are sorry to see Gwen retire after fifteen years on the Council - she has made a huge contribution, especially on housing issues. To play your part in getting more Green Councillors elected, please join us on the streets in 2011.



Brief Oldbury Update

There was deep disappointment with the announcement that Oldbury remains on the list of eight preferred nuclear sites. A new re-consultation on a revised draft of DECC's National Policy Statement closes on January 24th 2011. 'Shepperdine against Nuclear Energy' have responded to Horizon's recent statement that they are now favouring up to four powered 'hybrid' 70m towers instead of 200m natural convection ones, maintaining that they will still be vast and noisy. They also criticise the use of a flood plain site for the above ground storage of waste. More Oldbury news next time.

A quick shout out to our award-winning Green bloggers - Philip Booth's colourful, critical and cheerful Ruscombe Green can be found at <http://ruscombegreen.blogspot.com/>, while Molly Scott Cato stalks and shadows the world of Green economics with a razor-sharp eye and an understanding heart in Gaian Economics at <http://gaianeconomics.blogspot.com/>. Meanwhile, the District Party now has its own website, packed full of news, letters and events. You'll find it at <http://stroudgreenparty.org.uk/>.

Stroud Eco-Renovation Homes - our only security is our ability to change

This year's Stroud Eco-Renovation Homes saw 24 householders throw open their doors to an incredible figure of over 1,000 visitors. First stop on my tour was a 16th century house with a wood pellet boiler and solar PV. Owner Phil Davis aims to get solar thermal and heat recovery systems in the future, and believes micro-generation to be hugely important but is unconvinced by tiny wind turbines, maintaining that they need to be 50KW minimum to be worthwhile. Solar PV was installed two years ago, generating approximately 1,500KWH per year, and Phil is hopeful that it will pay for itself in five years. He estimates that use of the boiler is financially neutral in terms of how much it would save on heating for a typical year compared with a modern gas boiler.

In Cranham's deep valley lies a house once flawed by its old and uneconomical heating system, but which has now been transformed. Concerned about climate change and also wishing to be warm and have fewer costs, owners the Haydens decided to radically greenify their abode. Their first port of call was the Green Shop, from where they were referred to the Severn Wye Energy Agency, who carried out a survey and gave copious advice. They now have a thermal store - an 800 litre water tank heated by solar panels, a log burner and an oil boiler. The burner provides 70% of its heat to the store while the other 30% heats the living room. The stored heat supplies hot water and space heating. The total cost, including other measures, was £26,000, but they received a 50% grant managed by SWEA for some of the work by volunteering to be a case study house. Planning permission for the solar panels was given readily.



South-facing solar panel at Cranham

Sadly there is insufficient space to comment on all the houses I saw. My final visit was to the single room twelve-sided wooden house among the trees at The Camp, into which Richard Richardson's family of four will soon be moving. The practicalities of an uncompromisingly ascetic lifestyle will certainly be tested, as the house has no mains electricity or water, and while the walls are insulated with fleeces, the room's warmth has yet to be determined in the chill of winter. Water for needs other than drinking is harvested, heating is simply from burning wood, and lighting comes from paraffin lamps. Richard thinks the cost of solar panels is prohibitive, and clearly the need is in winter rather than summer. Implicit in his philosophy is a wish to distance himself from the darker side of 21st century civilisation but also the rejection of a world of cupidity, observing of modern technology, "To a large extent it's like having too much money, and I believe it's better to strive for simplicity."



Wooden house at The Camp



Anaerobic News Digest

The question of whether anaerobic digestion is a better and cheaper organic waste solution than in-vessel aerobic composting may take a new turn with recent research at the University of Alaska, which has shown that extremophile bacteria capable of living in permafrost produce biogas in near freezing temperatures. This raises the possibility of not having to heat anaerobic digesters, thus making them far more efficient.

BY-ELECTIONS - DESPERATELY SEEKING LEAFLETTERS!

With the death of Conservative County and District Councillor Stephen Glanfield, we're faced with two by-elections to fight, in Rodborough division and Amberley and Woodchester ward. Our candidates haven't yet been chosen, but we'll keep you updated. Winter elections present unique challenges, but this is fertile Green territory, so we'll be out leafleting. **But we really need your help.** If you're available either day or evening and can spare a couple of hours, please contact John on 01453 750962. Rodborough County division is one of our targets for 2013, and we must do everything to build on our support there. **It's easy work - so please give us a call!**

Party meetings and other events coming up

- ◆ The next meeting of the District Party is on Tuesday, December 14th at Star Anise, Gloucester St., Stroud at 7.30. All monthly meetings are now held on the second Tuesday of the month.
- ◆ The local Party Christmas meal is on Friday, December 17th, at Star Anise café at 7.30, at a cost of £10. This annual event is always great fun and you can spend time enjoying the food, live music and drinks, and of course, the company! Phone John on 01453 750962 for tickets.
- ◆ The annual ceilidh, our biggest fundraiser of the year, will be on Saturday, January 15th, at the Trinity Rooms, Stroud, at 8pm (see front page for further details).

John Marjoram on Speakers' Corner...

Greens in Stroud have long contemplated having a speakers' space in town, so that anybody can get on a soapbox and spout! Unfortunately one problem with a permanent location in any town is that business properties may object.

Coming to the rescue is the 'Speakers' Corner Trust', whose Chair is Jack Straw, and while not everyone's favourite politician he writes, "The 'Speakers' Corner' project is a celebration of freedom and a valid tool in the drive to combat political disengagement at home and abroad." One criterion for the initiative is that a group of Trustees are appointed to see that abuse, bullying or racism do not occur. I intend to put a proposal to the Stroud Town Council to adopt this project. See www.speakerscornertrust.org.



CDC - news on waste and recycling

It looks as though Cotswold District Council may begin kerbside collection of plastic bottles in 2011. Earlier this year trials began in 900 households in four separate locations, the aim of which was to test the suitability of a new collection vehicle designed to collect all of the current recycling materials as well as plastic bottles. Cotswold, which already collects both food waste and cardboard, has agreed to continue with a joint waste service along with Cheltenham BC, Forest of Dean DC, Tewkesbury BC and Gloucestershire CC. In the short term, the five councils will be working to deliver this service with joint management arrangements and governance rather than each authority continuing separately under existing contractual arrangements.

A very warm welcome to those who have joined, rejoined or moved to Stroud and Cotswold! You are: Sue Wilson, Andrew Pride, Bryn Colvin, Steve Redman, Jessica Hardiman, Sam Iles, Jane Serrailier, Hagar Niblett, Peter Richardson, Lindsay Gray, Anya Whiteside, Fiona Eadie, Mary Jeans, Anna Bonallack, David Bullock, Adam Druett, Christopher Jockel, Richard Dean, Catherine Farrell, Cyril Laffort, Greg Pilley, Monika Mikrut, Francis Barton, Richard Swann, Sonja Kostine, Lysander Barron, Julie Collier, Sue Hartley, Neil Smith, Neil Voller, Robert Dewey, Norman Kay, Stephanie Foley, Eley Furrell, Kim Baker, Michael Cooksley, Gail Bradbrook, and Luke Homer. Now get your family and friends to join up too! Our District Party membership now stands at 217, an increase of 24% in the last year, while national Green Party membership has increased by 50% since spring 2009.

Local Party Officers and Contacts

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Membership Secretary - Gerald Hartley, New Moreton Farm, Standish Lane, Moreton Valence, Gloucester, GL2 7LZ; 01452 724000. info@vectasolutions.co.uk

Treasurer - Sheila Booth, 45 Bisley Old Rd., Stroud. Sheila is currently in hospital, so for now please contact Carol at ckambites@btinternet.com. Very best wishes to Sheila.