

Coventry Friends of The Earth

Newsletter Spring/Summer 2004

Godiva Energy Garden

Coventry Friends of the Earth has put climate change at the top of its campaigning agenda for 2004. But how exactly do you campaign on an issue which poses such an enormous threat to the future of the planet and impacts on just about every other environmental issue? It seems too vast and overwhelming a topic for the individual to be able to make a difference.

Then somewhere from the ether appeared the germ of an idea which had first been mooted last year, an 'energy garden'. This will basically be a chill out area at the Coventry Godiva Festival with a climate change theme, deliberately avoiding the hard sell approach which tends to keep all but the committed environmentalist from venturing to within a few feet of the conventional FOE stall.

The centrepiece of the garden will be a solar-powered fountain. An energy-generating bike (almost finished at the time of writing after some technical hitches) will reinforce the renewable energy theme by powering a sound system (when we can find volunteers to pedal!). Low energy light bulbs will be on offer and there will be a whole host of other practical suggestions as to how people can reduce the size of their ecological footprint. The garden will be bounded by a circular wickerwork fence decorated with bright pieces of material, wind chimes etc. Banners and display boards will give basic information on climate change to the relaxed punters as they sit on the simple benches, prompted to think about matters more far-reaching than tomorrow's football results!

There will be an activity day to prepare all the props, banners etc at the Peace House on Sunday 6th June. Any of you who helped prepare the float for the GM-free event last October will know that it should be a fun and inspirational day. And there's the added incentive of Penny's wonderful veggie cooking to keep the energy levels up! The Energy Garden is booked for the Godiva Festival on 12th/13th June and the Leamington Peace Festival on 19th/20th June. We will need as much help as possible so please put these dates in your diary and let Jenny or John know if and when you can lend a hand. Other events could be added to this schedule if enough people can help!

John Verdult

Bye Bye Bayer!

Much to all of our astonishment and delight, on 31st March, Bayer Cropscience UK announced their decision to withdraw from commercialisation of GM Maize (Chardon LL variety) in the UK. Key reasons for this decision appear to have been that Bayer did not want to accept corporate liability for the crop under pressure by the Welsh Assembly. Also farmers growing GM maize commercially would have had to use the same spraying regime as used in the farm-scale trials. This seems logical enough, but experience in Canada and the US has shown that this variety is useless unless it is used with the highly potent herbicide – atrazine. So much for GM reducing the need for herbicide use! Lots more interesting stuff to read on this point – so please see www.genewatch.org.uk, www.geneticsaction.org.uk, www.foe.co.uk.

What all this means is that no GM crop will even be considered for commercialisation until 2008 at the earliest. This is a monumental result for Coventry Friends of the Earth and the hundreds of local anti GM groups around the country who have worked hard against GM over the years.

We've won a small victory. Come and join us all for a celebratory pint on the 15th May. See diary dates for details.

GM Animal Feed

Despite the fact that commercial growing of GM crops in the UK has been defeated for the meantime, the UK dairy sector continues to use 400 000 to 2 million tonnes of imported GM soya every year to feed its cows. Its very important now to keep up the pressure on the supermarkets to reject GM animal feed. So far the Co-op and Marks and Sparks are **the only two who have stopped** selling dairy products from cows fed on GM. In March Coventry Friends of the Earth handed in about 50 customer comments forms requesting removal of GM to Tesco at Cannon Park, and leafleted Sainsbury's customers outside three main stores.

Jenny Sansom

BAGINTON AIRFIELD TO COVENTRY INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT Chris Crean

Not only do we have a flawed aviation white paper in terms of our carbon commitments we now have the failure of the Secretary of State to intervene when an airport flouts the white paper. The White Paper said clearly that:

"9.31 Coventry Airport currently serves a specialist role within the region, catering for business aviation, air mail and some freight, and can continue to perform this role within existing constraints. There is a current planning application for a terminal development at the airport. However, in the light of our conclusions on capacity elsewhere in the Midlands, and having regard to potential surface access, environmental and airspace constraints, we would not envisage any significant further development being appropriate beyond the level of passenger throughput in the current application."

This application refers to a passenger throughput of one million passengers per annum (1mppa). This, however, has caused some controversy in that it has widely been interpreted that this means 1mppa *outbound* and so is actually 2mppa. This should be clarified by the DfT and the Government Office for the West Midlands.

However, something more than a mere technicality within the White Paper has been charging local residents recently. The airport signed a deal on December 18th to commence cheap flights out of Coventry on March 31st 2004 with Thomsonfly.com, without planning permission for the terminal building. The local planning authority has finally asked the airport to pull down the illegally erected building as well as digging up illegally laid tarmac for an extended runway. An enforcement notice was issued on the evening of the day on which the first flights commenced. The airport, now owned by Thomsonfly.com, have defied the District Council, appealed against this notice and intend to carry on flying and see the District Council in the High Court.

West Midlands FOE along with local groups from Warwickshire and Coventry are supporting the stance taken by Warwick District Council. This should end in victory for the district planning authority. The airline operator should come forward with a full planning application including both environmental and transport infrastructure needs and impacts outside the airport including public transport access and facilities for walking and cycling. This should then be subject to a **full public inquiry** where it should determine whether commercial operations along these lines are acceptable from Coventry, and what sort of conditions they operate under.

More information from: Warwick District Council <http://www.warwickdc.gov.uk/> Campaign Against the expansion of Coventry Airport <http://www.caeca.co.uk/> Coventry Airport <http://www.coventry-airport.co.uk/> West Midlands Friends of the Earth 0121 643 9117 chrisc@foe.co.uk.

EVENTS DIARY

May

8th **Third World Debt** Public Meeting (Speaker: Ashok Sinha, Jubilee Debt Campaign). 10.15am, Queens Road Baptist Church

13th **Coventry Airport** – Environmental perspective, campaign update and ideas for action Chris Crean , 7.30 Friends Meeting House

15th **Kyoto March**, Campaign Against Climate Change Leatherhead – London. Rally at Imperial War Museum, 3.30pm Tel: 0208 8553327 for info

15th **Social Night** Celebrate the departure of Bayer and a GM - free UK (for the time being!). Upstairs at Whitefriars, Gosford Street, 7.30 onwards

20th **Campaign Meeting** Coventry Friends of the Earth, 7.30pm Hill Street

June

5th **Waste Day of Action**

6th **Energy Garden activity day**, Peace House, Stoney Stanton Road, 10.30 onwards

10th **Speaker Meeting** – City Council Tree Officer (tbc), 7.30

12th/13th **Godiva Festival**, Memorial Park (Energy Garden)

17th **Campaign Meeting**, 7.30

19th/20th **Leamington Peace Festival** (Energy Garden)

July

3rd July **Stall, Nuneaton town centre** (help needed)

8th July **Speaker Meeting** – Andrew Wood (Oxford FOE) – Farming (tbc), 7.30

15th July **Campaign Meeting**, 7.30

All Speaker Meetings and Campaign Meetings are at the Friends Meeting House, Hill Street

For further details of any of these events contact:

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