

# Coventry Friends of the Earth Diary

## July - October 2005

### July

Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> – Friday 8<sup>th</sup> G8 Conference, Gleneagles.  
International Action to highlight climate change.

Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> Speaker Meeting - Organic gardening (tbc),  
Friends Meeting House, 7.30

Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> Campaign Meeting, Council House, 7.30

### August

Friday 5<sup>th</sup> – Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> 'Power Up' campaigning conference, Barnsley.  
Focussing on Planning and Freedom of Information

Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> Speaker Meeting: Water Aid (tbc),  
Friends Meeting House, 7.30

Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> Campaign Meeting, Council House, 7.30

### September

Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> Speaker Meeting: Mike Murray,  
City Council Countryside Project Officer.  
Friends Meeting House, 7.30

Friday 9<sup>th</sup> – Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> Friends of the Earth Local Groups Conference,  
Reading

Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> Campaign Meeting, Council House, 7.30

Monday 19<sup>th</sup> Warwickshire FOE meeting, Council House, 7.30

### October

Friday 7<sup>th</sup> – Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> Weekend at Centre for Alternative Technology

Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> Speaker Meeting: Water Fluoridation – Joy Warren  
Friends Meeting House, 7.30

Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> Campaign Meeting, Council House, 7.30

**For more information about any of these events please contact:**

**John Verdult**

**[johnverdult@yahoo.com](mailto:johnverdult@yahoo.com)**

**024 76225395**

# Coventry Friends of the Earth Newsletter



July 2005

## Whitley Lake and Green Belt at Risk

**Five years ago, ninety acres of Coventry's inner-city green belt was lost, when land that lay between the rivers Sowe and Sherbourne at Whitley lost its protected status. Following an enquiry, and much resistance from local people and environmentalists, outline planning permission was given for Jaguar to build a business park on the area. Coventry council recently ratified this decision and Jaguar will start looking to sell the land to a number of 'joint-venture' partners to begin development. However, the ninety acres includes 15 acres of what were Whitley Abbey School's playing fields, and under retrospective legislation the decision to sell the land must be made by the Secretary of state, following a public consultation.**

Part of the school grounds earmarked for sale is a 14<sup>th</sup> century lake, and trees and landscaping from an old manor house. It supports rich amphibian, fish, insect and bird life and forms part of an unbroken circle of Coventry 'nature conservation areas' linking Whitley Grove, the Sowe



and the Sherbourne. All the indicative plans submitted to the council have shown buildings being erected right up to the edge of the lake, and the only mention of the lake is to 'landscape' it – which would disturb bird life and destroy the habitat of amphibians such as newts. Despite all the 'fine sounding' policies in the Coventry plan and local and national biodiversity directives; to protect and enhance habitats in imaginative ways; the pressures to sell such an area to business interests are great. Both the school and Sport England who advise on the sale, are keen to see the development of a school sports academy and the money raised from the sale will go towards this. Ironically the land being sold to pay for the academy would also be the perfect brown field site for it and another good reason for not selling it. At present the proposed site is in the middle of the school's remaining green belt playing fields.

So far Coventry FOE have put in a submission to the Secretary of State arguing that the land should remain in local hands and become a nature reserve open to public access. There are a number of ways of doing this: the school or council could retain ownership or the National Playing Fields Association could 'own' and hold the land in trust in perpetuity. Jaguar has already agreed finance for habitat improvements at sites outside the proposed business park. If the lake and surrounding land is sold to Jaguar it will be vital to campaign to ensure its protection at the final planning stages. Also, as well as campaigning, we have been actively trying to confirm the existence of the greater crested newt! – who's existence may well secure the future of the lake and its banks.

Jane Green



## Mass lobby of Parliament to campaign against GM

**On 23<sup>rd</sup> February four intrepid Coventry FOE members and a baby joined hundreds of people (and symbolic scarecrows) braving snowstorms and freezing temperatures to call for the right to choose GM free food, and urge their MPs to support this choice.**

We did get some strange looks as we travelled on the underground with 'Rags', our very own scarecrow, but at least we didn't have to buy a separate ticket for him!



**The mass lobby and rally in London** organised by Friends of the Earth, the Five Year Freeze, the National Federation of Women's Institutes and FARM proved a big success despite the weather.

While nearly **two thirds of people in the UK want tough laws to prevent GM contamination**, the Government is apparently planning a legal framework that would allow widespread contamination.

“ So who is in favour of GM in the UK? It's the Government, and only the Government. ”

Michael Meacher MP

### Inspiring speakers

Participants first gathered near Westminster to listen to a group of inspirational speakers - including former Environment Minister Michael

Meacher MP, US lawyer and journalist Claire Hope-Cummings and Friends of the Earth's Tony Juniper. The key message was that while we have won many battles on GM, **the threat remains.**

“ The US has contamination everywhere. It's widespread, rampant, and out of control. ”

Claire Hope-Cummings

### Key demands

Participants then left for the House of Commons, scarecrows in hand, to ask their MPs to sign up to our key demands:

- o **Sign** a parliamentary petition, Early Day Motion 406 calling for tough rules to prevent GM contamination
- o **Write** to Margaret Beckett, Secretary of State for DEFRA expressing their concerns
- o **Sign** a European GM Free Zones petition calling for the right for local and regional authorities to decide whether GM crops are grown in their area
- o **Sign** the Bite Back Citizens objection, calling on the World Trade Organisation to throw out the US-led attempt to force GM into Europe.

Of the four MP's whose constituencies we represented three came out to the lobby to speak to us personally and the other sent out a secretary. One of us even had the privilege of refreshments in the House of Commons tearoom. Two of the MP's have subsequently signed the EDM.

Another small step in the struggle to prevent the introduction of GM food into this country through the back door in the face of widespread opposition and scepticism.

John Verdult



Coventry FOE members, and their friend Rags, joined FOE members from around the country

## The Coventry Green Gig

**The annual Coventry Green Gig was held this year at the Spencer in Earlsdon on June 10<sup>th</sup>, and it will surely go down as one of the best. A great night was had by all.**

First on the stage was locally acclaimed originals band "Little Girl Screaming" who impressed everyone with the quality of their songs and the tight performance. I was one of the first people in the queue to buy their CD after the show. Next on was "Echo Park" who brought along a great following and warmed us up nicely with covers of the Jam and The Who songs for a fantastic finale. This came in the form of the "Joe Beale Blues Band".

Although Joe Beale has been around the area playing for years, I along with many other people at the Gig had never got around to seeing him and now that I have, I feel I have missed out on his past performances, for he is truly a fantastic guitarist. The choice of material he played had everyone in the room dancing. Everything from Hendrix to ZZ Top was performed. The event was organised by Coventry Friends of the Earth, Coventry Greenpeace and the Uni Environmental. Together we raised £244 for the local groups.

**Thanks to everyone who came.**

## The Leamington Peace Festival

**The Leamington Peace Festival fell on two glorious days this year and the crowds came out in force to enjoy the music, food and stalls.**

Coventry Friends of the Earth, with the Nuneaton, Stratford and Rugby groups had the pleasure of attending a stall there for the period.



Much notice was taken of our leaflets and notice boards.

Also on display was the newly renovated "Energy Bike", a pedal generator constructed by the Coventry Group, which brought a lot of attention to the stall, especially from children.

Many hundreds of cards were filled in, by visitors to the display, and handed back to us asking the government to do more in terms of investing in renewable energy.

**All in all a mainly positive vibe seemed to come from the two days.**

Dan Foulstone

## Heavy Mob Targeted with Action to Stop Urban 4X4s

**In May, Coventry Friends of the Earth marked the start of the summer by challenging mums and dads driving 4x4s to re-think their choice of car, as they dropped their children off at Bablake School on Coundon Road.**

Bablake school was chosen for the campaign after a reccy by John and I a few weeks earlier revealed that approximately one four wheel drive vehicle passes the school gates every one and a half minutes during the peak times of school drop off and pick up.



On the day George Riches made an excellent teacher dressed in a traditional flat black hat and gown. He gave out spoof school reports giving marks ranging from A for pedestrian injuries and a B+ for climate change. John Verdult meanwhile was a convincing lollipop man with the unique message on his lollipop '**STOP urban 4x4s**'

Joy Warren was the media star of the day giving an interview on climate change live from the school on BBC radio West Midlands. Jane took the lead on public communications, giving out leaflets and explaining the issues to passers by. Media coverage in general was very good with pictures and articles in both the evening telegraph and the Observer plus two radio interviews.

The aim of the campaign which is gaining momentum across the country is to highlight that 4x4s cause more pollution and therefore

contributing more to climate change than normal vehicles. They are also more dangerous due to the fact that they are heavier and have worse rear visibility. According to a certain website, in the USA one person per week accidentally reverses over their own child in an urban 4x4.

After a successful day's action John reported that generally parents had reacted well and children had been delighted to see protesters in fun costumes in front of their school, though several drivers had refused to wind down their windows.

However Mrs Thompson who had dropped off daughter Amy age 10 at the school said

*'In the last year I have noticed an enormous increase in the number of parents owning 4x4s. I totally agree with the points made by the protesters – parents should be paying attention to what these people are saying because it is a growing problem.'*

Thank-you Mrs Thompson!

Jenny Sansom