

Coventry Friends of the Earth Newsletter

Spring 2004



**Friends of
the Earth**

Council called to Boycott GM Crops



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RAISING ISSUES: Friends of the Earth's Joy Warren hands over the petition to Cllr Phil Townshend. Picture: JAMES BALFOUR

Photo:Coventry Evening Telegraph

Everyone should have the right to grow GM free if they want to. The GM Free Land Register for Coventry and Warwickshire (which now has approx 550 GM Free land declarations including farmers, allotments holders and gardeners) has made this point on several occasions to date. We used it in the Government public debate last summer and also as part of the successful campaign to make Warwickshire County Council declare itself GM free.

Coventry Friends of the Earth hope it will have the same effect on Coventry City Council. On Friday 6th February we presented the register to Cllr Phil Townshend. Hopefully press attention will help him to follow in Warwickshire's footsteps and move forward the long promised GM Free Motion for Coventry.

New scientific studies show that GM pollen can in fact travel up to 16 miles, and also that it takes 16 years for land where GM crops have been grown to return to a contamination rate of below 1%. Scary stuff! By this count, to maintain the rights of our GM free land register to remain GM free, GM crops should not be planted through out the whole of Warwickshire and a 16 mile radius beyond. Although I'd extend it to the rest of the world just to be on the safe side.

Jenny Sansom

Welcome to Newsletter 2004

As the 'new' newsletter editor I'd like to welcome you and hope you enjoy this issue. I'd like the newsletter to be something that reflects the character (and characters!) of our Coventry group, reflecting our personal experiences and interests.

In this issue we have pieces on two of the issues we hope to prioritise this year: **Global Warming** and the proposed campaign for the return of an **Ecology Officer** for Coventry. We also catch up with our longstanding **GM campaign** and the **Coventry Airport** debate. We have Tom's work with **sustainable housing**, a view from a new member and the (first of) Irene's book reviews.

Please note that our speaker meeting with Andrew Thompson will be on the Wednesday 10th March – not the usual Thursday.

Our next issue will appear after Easter. I'd love to receive your contributions anytime.

Jane.

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'Switching off' the Gulf Stream could threaten the British climate

by Joy Warren

At the AGM last month, I told you all that I was really concerned about the health of the Gulf Stream. I thought that I should put into writing my concern about this.

Global warming could switch off the North Atlantic Gulf Stream in the not-so-distant future. The Gulf Stream is a powerful underwater current which, by bringing warm water from the other side of the World to the North Atlantic, has protected the British Isles from the extremes of cold weather. The Gulf Stream is responsible for preventing an ice age in Britain and Europe because of the heat, which it gives up as it goes past Western Europe and Britain. Averaged over a year, the Gulf Stream provides Western Europe with a third as much warmth as the Sun does.

Although we are not geographically located in the Pacific Ocean, we receive constant warmth from the Pacific. As a contrast, even though parts of Canada and North America are geographically situated south of Britain, they experience far colder weather because they do not benefit from the warmth of the Gulf Stream.

Continued overleaf

Warm water is less heavy than cold water so in the Atlantic, as the current travels up past the West African coast, the current is at the surface where water evaporates making the current increasingly salty relative to the surrounding ocean. As the current, pushed by the water behind it, travels northwards towards Iceland, the very salty water cools, contracts and gradually sinks due to its greater density until, south of Iceland, the current gets even colder, sinks even deeper and does a U-turn. The cold water eventually returns to the Pacific Ocean where it is warmed, rises to the surface and begins its journey back to the Atlantic.

This ocean warmth is so important to Europe that climatologists are seriously concerned about the stability of the Gulf Stream. If it is switched off, Europe would be plunged into a mini-Ice Age. Current studies suggest that the unseen river in the North Atlantic is dangerously fickle although the ocean conveyor belt has run more or less smoothly since the end of the last Ice Age. Global warming is causing the ice at the North Pole to melt and climatologists think that global warming may put the brakes on the Gulf Stream. While the rest of the world comes to swelter in greenhouse conditions, Europe would freeze!

It works like this: the ice melt dilutes the Gulf Stream off Iceland with freshwater and although this water is very cold, it reduces the saltiness and density of the Gulf Stream water so that it is less likely to sink to the depths and return to Africa and the tropics. It is thought that the U-turn point of the conveyor will move southwards since as the water between Britain and Iceland becomes colder from the ice melt, the dilution effect of the melt water will dissipate and the status quo may be restored but further south than previously. The latitude at which the U-turn finally settles will influence the temperature of Britain and Western Europe. And as if that is not enough to worry us, notice from the map that the deep ocean current passes close to the Antarctic Continent!

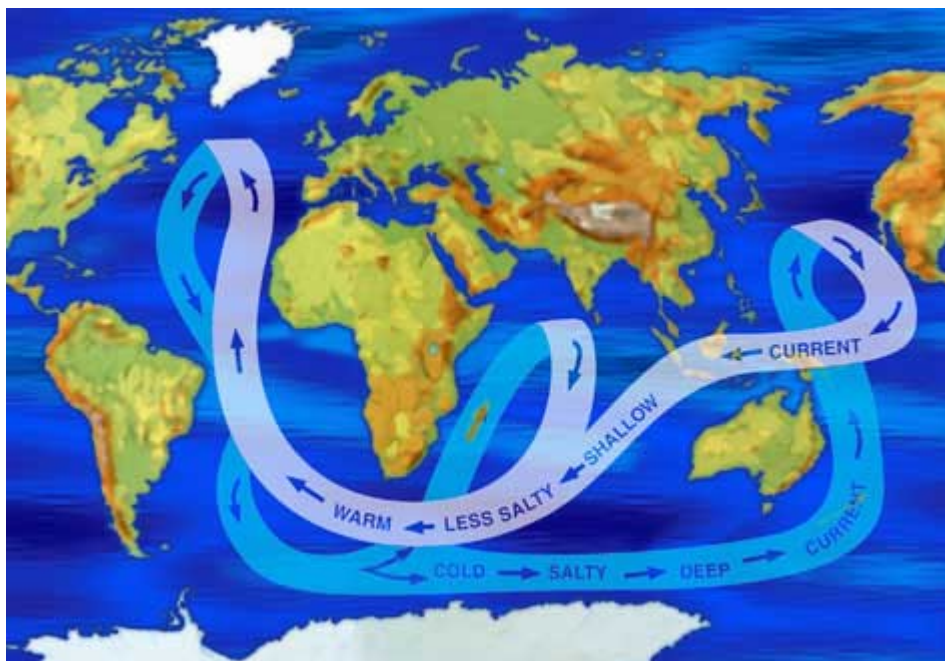


photo - Pioneer Online Ltd.

Diary, February – April 2004

February

- 19th – Campaign Meeting (7.30)
21st - Talking Trade Public Meeting –
Speakers TBC
Queens Road Baptist Church
(3.00-5.00)
21st – Friends of the Earth Social:
Whitefriars, Gosford Street
(7.30 onwards)

March

- 1st – 14th – Fairtrade Fortnight
10th – Speaker Meeting:
Andrew Thompson (Warwickshire
Wildlife Trust), 7.30pm
* **Please note change from usual
day (Wed not Thurs)**
10th – Planning Meeting to discuss
proposals to expand Coventry
Airport, Kenilworth School, Leyes
Lane (7.00)
15th – Rural Transport Seminar –
Birmingham (11.00 – 5.00)
18th – Campaign Meeting (7.30)
25th – Rural Speed Management
Seminar – WM Regional Assembly,
Birmingham.

April

- 3rd – FOE Stall at Environmental
event, Coventry Cathedral (10.00 –
4.00)
8th – Speaker Meeting: Karen Leach
(Localise West Midlands) – Local
Sustainability Bill (7.30)
15th – Campaign Meeting (7.30)

For more details about any of these
events please contact:
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'We are making a difference'

Hi Readers!

I joined Coventry FoE because I'm a little obsessive when it comes to ecological issues. Being a full time secondary school teacher I don't have the time I'd like to dedicate to such concerns. That's why belonging to Coventry FoE is so important, because I feel that, as a team, we are making a constructive difference. Belonging to a group also enables me to learn more about what is going on, locally, nationally and globally. I've volunteered to work on promotions for the Coventry FoE. I see this as promoting the work of Coventry FoE and promoting the ecological good practice which is taking place in the Coventry and Warwickshire area. I am working on a website which will pull these two things together. This is in the early stages but you can see how it's developing by visiting:

<http://uk.geocities.com/anjicol/>

Of course, the look, the content and perhaps even the URL may well change as the website develops. Watch this space to keep abreast of developments!

If you'd like to contribute to the website send materials to anjicol@yahoo.co.uk.

Peace,
Angela

Tom looks at Sustainable Housing

Last year I got involved with a feasibility study into making old housing stock more energy efficient in Small Heath, Birmingham.

In February 2003 the West Midlands New Economics Group [1] was awarded a grant of £10,000 by the West Midlands Social Economy Partnership which had obtained EU funding. Although my role was to survey three typical properties for which I had submitted a competitive tender, another local consultant called Energy 21 went on to estimate the cost of the installation and maintenance costs of various renewable energy technologies: over the lifetime of the hardware. These were then scaled up by the number of houses of each type in the district. They looked at wind-power and solar energy in the form of photovoltaic tile cells. They looked at how long it would take to payback the embodied energy in their manufacture under current conditions. They discovered that a wind-farm of 5 rotary generators would be required to provide all local energy needs.

The WMNEG also wanted to see whether people in Small Heath had the skills and expertise needed to form new enterprises or be employed by others in the manufacture, assembly, installation and maintenance of the items – in other words whether the money could stay in the area. I will give a summary of their findings in a future newsletter after the final report is published in book form in late March 2004. This will be available free from WMNEG: 26 Taywood Drive, Small Heath, Birmingham B10 0DB, United Kingdom [2]

Tom Hellberg tomhellberg618@hotmail.com

1:THE NEW ECONOMICS GROUP first met in 1994 to apply the ideas of the New Economics Foundation to the economy of Birmingham and the West Midlands. Since then they have developed their own unique response to the practical economic problems of the City and the Region through dialogue with many other organisations and bodies of opinion.

2:Further details can be seen at www.sustainable-housing.org.uk

The Coventry Airport Debate

On the evening of 4th February I attended a public meeting regarding "The Development of Coventry Airport" at Leamington Spa. The aim of the meeting was to give clearer details of the plans of the development of the airport due to the contradictory information given in the press. It was divided into two parts, the first with for and against arguments, and the second a question and answer session.

John Reeve the General Manager for Air Atlantique who run Coventry Airport spoke for the airport. He gave a history of the airport back to 1936 when it was first built. The airport has previously been given planning permission to the build the terminal they are currently asking for, however it wasn't built. Without planning permission they will be continuing to use Coventry for freight and in actual fact claim that the numbers of flights won't change, just that the types of flights will. In fact by giving permission then the company are offering to let the Council cap the number of flights and the possibility of further expansion.

Objecting to expansion were three members of the Campaign against Expansion of Baginton Airport. They had two main causes for concern, the planning application and the ongoing building activity. They believed the environmental impact assessment was not substantial, and specifically drew attention to the 5 SSSI sites in the area. There are also likely to be a lot of problems with roads and increased numbers of traffic – especially at the Toll Bar round-a-bout. The "crowd" were overwhelming against expansion, however some people seemed more against expansion in their area rather than any environmental reasons and it wouldn't be a problem to them if flights grew at Birmingham.

A special meeting of the Planning Committee to determine the current application from Coventry Airport in respect of a new passenger terminal on the site will be held on Wednesday 10th March at Kenilworth School, Leyes Lane, Kenilworth and commence at 7pm.

Friends of the Earth's ongoing worries about the impact of airport expansion on climate change were not addressed.

Fiona Blackwell

Book Review

Fast Food Nation. What the All-American Meal is doing to the World.

By Eric Schlosser. Penguin Books 2002 £7.99

Eric Schlosser is a correspondent for the 'Atlantic Monthly' magazine. This is his first book and although I know nothing else about him or his journalistic style, this book is well-researched, well-argued and easy to read. He analyses the impact of the Fast Food Industry on all aspects of American Society from its politics to the dietary habits of its population, but it also is a call to all of us to consider the effect of Fast Food on our lives and society. This book considers the de-skilling of the work force in the Fast Food Restaurants and in the abattoirs. In the Fast Food Restaurants – which are usually franchises of a giant corporation the average employee is young, unskilled, paid at the minimum wage rates, taught one task only and rarely lasts in the job for more than 3 – 4 months.

In the abattoirs in the United States the workers are usually unskilled, illiterate and paid minimum wage rates. They are often illegal immigrants desperate for work – any work. They are compelled to work in conditions that put their health, safety and even lives at risk. The chapter titled 'The Most dangerous Job' is not for the squeamish. It describes work practices and conditions where serious injuries – fractures, lacerations, limb amputations, crush fatalities and even decapitations have occurred. The picture painted is horrifying.

The author discusses the impact producing for mass markets has had on potato growers and beef producers: The small, independent potato farmer is being gradually driven off his own land by the power of the giant corporations to drive down prices and yet still demand increased productivity. (Haven't we heard this somewhere before? With supermarkets?) The dispossessed farmer may even, ironically, find himself having to accept a livelihood as a manager of the parcel of land he used to own. The increased yields of what often becomes a mono-variety potato crop can only be achieved with the extensive use of fertilisers, pesticides, fungicides and herbicides. These eventually result in a denatured soil, no wild life, changed landscape and soil erosion.

The tradition of the cowboy, the rancher and the cattle grazing on the prairie is in serious peril as the giant corporations find it more cost effective to build giant feedlots; capable of holding up to 1,000 head of cattle in cramped conditions, fattened rapidly by being fed grain, and producing a fatty, tender meat suitable for burger production. Anabolic steroid implants in each animal's ear ensure rapid growth. Some companies have even built abattoirs near to the feedlots so the life of a battery beef is 'nasty, brutish and short'. (Lawrence Delagio – in one of the current Mc Donald's advertisements – may be satisfied that the hamburger is "100% beef, no more, no less" – but in my opinion, there's beef and there's beef!

I could go on and on about other issues raised in this book – advertisements targeted at children; fast food and obesity, heart disease etc; the globalisation of the fast food industry; the loopholes and scams used to obtain government and federal funding and the author's obvious admiration of the British couple who took on Mc Donald's in the famous Mc Libel case, but I don't want to monopolise this newsletter further. Read it yourselves. I highly recommend it.

Irene Rogers

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION - ANDREW THOMPSON

Andrew Thompson, (Head of Warwickshire Wildlife Trust) will speak to our meeting in March on 'The Conservation of Wildlife in Coventry'. Coventry has been very proud of its inner city 'green – belt', ancient woodland and parks. However, it also has urban areas with poor access to green space and some recent building projects have had adverse effects on nature conservation. Our members have been very active in some campaigns to preserve green space in Coventry: but it is often difficult for non-experts to understand the best way of examining and challenging adverse planning applications.

We were concerned when the post of Ecology Officer for Coventry was frozen about four years ago and consequently the ecology group on Agenda 21 ceased to meet. The post itself has a very wide remit, covering such things as planning applications, surveys, liaison and education. We hope to discuss the most effective way to work with other groups to protect our Coventry wildlife.

**Please note the meeting will be on
WEDNESDAY 10th March.
Jane**

Coventry Friends of the Earth - Who Does What

Coordinators:

Jenny Sansom and John Verdult

Newsletter Editor: Jane Green

Treasurer: Cathy Mackle

Membership Secretary: John Verdult

Monitoring Planning Applications:

Falcon and Tom Hellberg

Promotions:

Angela, with Euan to design website

Administrator, yahoo user group: Ben

Chair of meetings: Rotating

Minutes: Rotating



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