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Future events

Permaculture Open Day

Sunday, 7th September, 2–4.30 pm
Brambles, Woodway Road

We are creating a community orchard garden, based on permaculture ideas. Come to see what we are doing, and discuss it over refreshments.

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Apple events 2014

August – November

As in the past few years, we will be holding regular sessions for making some of the best apple juice you've ever had – from your own apples.

Watch for our Apple Day event on 11th October

Editorial: Speaking out on climate change – and changing the economy

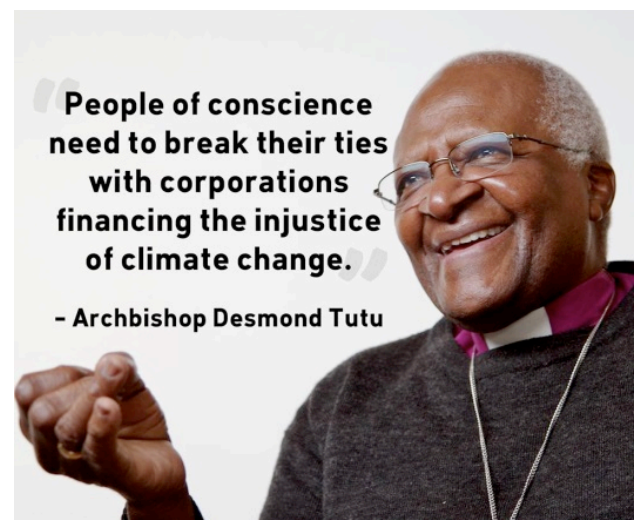
Mike Edmunds

It is increasingly recognised that the climate change debate has shifted from arguments about the reality of global warming to the pressing questions of what needs to be done in response. Hopefully those unbalanced media debates on the proven case of the causes of global warming, between climate scientists and oddball climate change deniers, are becoming a thing of the past. Sir Mark Wolpert, Government Chief Scientist, recently urged scientists to promote discussion of the pros and cons of new energy sources and technologies designed to combat climate change, boost energy efficiency, as

well as working to decarbonise agriculture (which produces 9% of the UK's carbon emissions). But the complexity of the issues of how to 'descend' to a low-carbon economy requires the debate to be taken to society as a whole. For example, if we are serious about decarbonising agriculture this might mean a vegetarian and low-meat-consumption revolution, greatly reducing methane-producing cattle.

The recent UN IPCC report said that the world needed to make a massive shift to renewable energy to curb climate change. Two interesting, if challenging, reports to this end are on the table (by the Centre for Alternative Technology and World Wildlife Fund) to provide a direction in which we may need to move.

However, there is now an interesting economic and ethical aspect to this debate – *disinvestment campaigns*, which are spreading rapidly in the USA and more recently in the UK.



The mayor of Seattle has said that his city was already spending millions building sea walls – what sense did it make to invest in the companies making that work necessary? The trustees of San Francisco State University recognised that it made no sense to have, on the one hand, a physics department understanding climate change and on the other hand, an endowment full of oil and gas stocks. The United Church of Christ, which traces its roots back to the Pilgrims, decided it couldn't pay the pastor by investing in companies that are running Genesis backwards. Just now (mid-July), the World Council of Churches representing over half a billion Christians worldwide, has decided to pull its investments out of fossil fuel companies and urge all its members to do the same.

Here in the UK Operation Noah have launched Bright Now, an ecumenical church disinvestment campaign – the Quakers in Britain being the first UK denomination to do so. To date there are 19 active disinvestment campaigns across the UK, including universities with the largest endowments: Cambridge, Oxford and Edinburgh. There is a newly formed Fossil Free Oxfordshire Divestment Campaign, with its target to get the City, County and other local governments to invest in carbon-free areas. Active in this campaign is an Oxford group – Grandparents Climate Action!



Oil and gas companies are investing vast sums in deep, difficult fossil-fuel reserves. But to minimise climate change, that oil and gas must be left in the ground, and this could cause major financial disruption if these investments become worthless.

The Carbon Tracker initiative in UK challenges the way financial markets work, questioning unsustainable assumptions and re-framing the climate debate in order to align the financial markets with the climate-change agenda. Long-term investors have an inherent interest in resolving the contradictions between supporting climate-change policy on one hand, but investing in these expensive and difficult fossil-fuel reserves on the other. Oxford University has recently established a ‘stranded assets’ programme at its Smith School of Enterprise and the Environment.

As one recent commentator said: *The world's transition to a clean economy is like an unstoppable train: it's going to happen because it makes economic sense.*

* * *

Climate change: reporting-bias in the media

Emily Black

University of Reading (and Blewbury)

Unfortunately, not all reporting of climate change matches the quality of the film *Thin Ice*, which Sustainable Blewbury screened earlier in the year. One source of distortion, paradoxically, is the perceived need for balance and impartiality.

In some spheres, balance is a cornerstone of fair journalism. The BBC, for example, attempts to allocate equal airtime to each of the main political

parties. In other cases, the notion of balance is absurd. We do not expect to hear the views of racist organisations whenever race relations are discussed.

The meaning of balance in scientific reporting is subtle. It is informative to hear a range of views on controversial issues, such as geo-engineering. On the other hand, for issues such as anthropogenic changes in global temperature, where there is a consensus of opinion, reporting opposing views can give a false impression of uncertainty.

In 2011, a report into the BBC's coverage of scientific issues by Prof. Steve Jones of University College London criticised the organisation for giving too much airtime to critics opposing non-contentious issues. A progress report, published this month by the BBC Trust, found that there was still an ‘over-rigid application of editorial guidelines on impartiality’. In April, MPs in the Science and Technology Select Committee criticised the BBC for making ‘mistakes in their coverage of climate science by giving opinions and scientific fact the same weight’.

The quest for balance in reporting of scientific issues can lead to researchers being polarised. Reporters try to be impartial by pitting the views of climate change ‘believers’ against those of ‘sceptics’. This division is, however, oversimplistic. As mentioned above, the recent increase in global temperature is described by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) as being ‘virtually certain’. In contrast, the IPCC reports only ‘medium confidence’ in projected changes in the Asian monsoon. Moreover, there is fierce debate about the cause of the recent failures of the East African spring rains.

As a climate scientist, I hope that the move away from false ideas of balance will give the public a view, not of a consensus, but of a vigorous and diverse research community – focused on issues of huge significance to us all.



New Blewbury Bee Group

Blewbury Bees

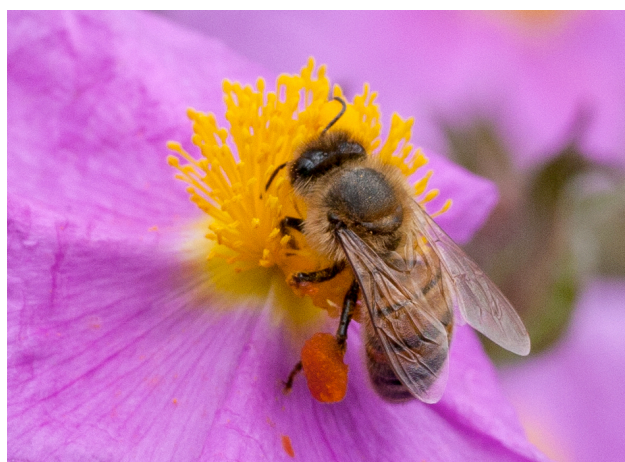
*Promoting awareness of bees and other pollinators
and working towards restoring populations.*

The formation of a Blewbury Bee Group as a Natural Environment project of Sustainable Blewbury stemmed from the Oxford Bee Summit organised in February by Friends of the Earth. Blewbury now only has one bee-keeper, who suffered significant hive losses last winter. He is concerned especially about diseases (invasive species) and also lack of government policies to combat disease and spraying insecticides.

The world's most widely used insecticides have contaminated the environment across the planet so pervasively that global food production is at risk, according to a comprehensive scientific assessment of the chemicals' impacts published by an international group coordinated by the French CNRS. The researchers compare the impacts with those reported in Silent Spring, the landmark 1962 book by Rachel Carson that revealed the decimation of birds and insects by the blanket use of DDT and other pesticides, and led to the modern environmental movement.

As a group we are concerned at the dramatic loss of bees and have already been proactive with national campaigns: the Friends of the Earth Bee Cause (foe.co.uk/bees) and 38 Degrees, but also take local action (e.g. the Green May Fair in collaboration with the School) to raise awareness. Savages gave us some bee-friendly plants for sale at the Fair. We have plentiful publicity concerning bee-friendly plants, bee identification, bee hotels, seed bombing and more. Please see:

sustainable-blewbury.org.uk/environment.htm#Bees



Here are Gwen's top-10 bee-friendly plants: *Chives, Lavender, Delphinium, Geranium, Pussy Willow, Sage, Thyme, Marjoram, Sunflower, Canterbury Bells.*

Wonderful news! As part of our petition to Downing Street we have helped protect our bees! In early July Syngenta withdrew their controversial application to allow their banned bee-killer pesticides back on UK fields.

Buzz of the day: *How to help a hungry bee that's trapped in the house?*

Since the bee didn't seem injured, I mixed up some water and sugar and splashed a few drops on the floor in front of it. Almost immediately it crawled to the puddle, uncurled its proboscis, and began Hoovering up sugar-water. After a while it had perked up enough to start wandering around the floor. Then the bee sat up (metaphorically speaking), groomed itself clean, tested its wings and flew away.

Follow us on Twitter: [@BlewburyBees](https://twitter.com/BlewburyBees)
or contact us at DebsFurness@gmail.com

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A Letter from Salt Spring Island

Katharine Byers

Dear Blewbury,

I am an island in the Strait of Georgia, located between the mainland and Vancouver Island, British Columbia, Canada. Covering 70 square miles with a permanent population of 10,500, I am proud to describe myself as a largely unspoilt paradise, rich in community spirit and brimming with forested trails, lovely beaches and wonderful views.

And on the subject of community spirit and partnership I want to tell you about a community energy project that is underway, initiated by our Transition Salt Spring Community Energy Group (TSSCEG). TSSCEG is a group of local citizens concerned about sustainability, with a goal to encourage renewable energy and clean technology development on Salt Spring.

With five times as much fossil fuel already identified in reserves than the world can safely afford to burn, the group were motivated to find a solution that would potentially inspire community action away from dependence on fossil fuels and act as a shining example of what can be accomplished. Their project involves a partnership with the school district to place a solar array on the roof of the high school gym, and they are community fundraising to cover the cost of the solar panels.

In addition to harnessing the solar power, the group plans to install monitoring software so that the project can be incorporated into curriculum, and envisions developing the project to establish an electric-vehicle charging station at the school.



School's Environment Group: spot the solar panels!

The value of the electricity generated will fund an annual renewable energy/climate change scholarship fund, which will be awarded on graduation to students pursuing a future in sustainability.

The project is currently two-thirds of the way to its \$60,000 goal! With all the significant 'wins' to the project, the biggest one is nothing less than saving the planet.

The project was launched at the Renewable Energy Conference in April by TSSCEG and the school's Environment Group. With lofty goals, this project continues to engage students, community and local governance around the urgency of alternative energy. The power of partnership and community is the most important factor in this project and will be instrumental to its success.

Salt Spring may only be a fraction of the 137,847 square miles available to the solar producing giant of Germany but local action addressing climate change, the most pressing challenge of our time, will hopefully send out ripples far beyond the shores of Salt Spring Island.

To quote Margaret Mead: *Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.*

Warmly,
Salt Spring Island, BC
transitionsaltspring.ning.com

* * *

At last – the Renewable Heat Incentive

Eric Eisenhandler

In 2010 the government introduced the Feed-in Tariff, to reduce CO₂ emissions by encouraging small-scale renewable electricity generation. On a domestic scale the tariff is mainly aimed at solar photovoltaic panels, and it has had a big effect: more than half a million homes in the UK now have solar panels. So what else can be done to encourage renewable energy sources?

One obvious answer is to help with conversions to renewable heating. About four-fifths (79%) of the energy used in domestic properties is for space and hot water heating, and most of that energy comes from burning fossil fuels – mainly gas, but also oil, coal and electricity.

The Renewable Heat Initiative (RHI) covers technologies and systems ranging from large scale to small, and individual owners and landlords in both private and social housing, community groups, and businesses of all sizes. It aims to make renewable heating a reasonable investment, and to lower the costs by expanding the market. This would also increase the UK's energy security by reducing dependence on imported fossil fuels. Here we concentrate on the RHI for individual homes.

Although the RHI started in 2011, its domestic scheme was delayed until April 2014. However, to compensate for the delay, systems installed as long ago as July 2009 are eligible for coverage. RHI funding comes from government funds, unlike the Feed-in Tariff which comes from electricity bills.

The domestic scheme mainly aims to subsidise the higher cost of installing renewable central heating rather than replacing old fossil-fuel boilers.



Cutaway view of a wood pellet boiler

Although the RHI covers homes with existing gas boilers, users of oil, coal and electric heating will benefit more from switching to renewables because they have higher heating bills. And of course oil and coal also have higher CO₂ emissions than gas.

Domestic technologies covered

The heat-producing technologies that are covered by the RHI for domestic installations are:

- **Solar thermal panels** for heating hot water
- **Ground-source heat pumps**
- **Air-source heat pumps**, but only for heating not cooling, and air-to-water not air-to-air
- **Biomass (e.g. wood) boilers**, and **wood stoves** provided they have back-boilers; systems must comply with air pollution requirements

Only one boiler-replacement technology in a house is covered, but solar thermal panels can additionally be supported. New-build properties are not eligible.

General information

RHI applicants must first have a Green Deal Assessment, and all recommended cost-effective energy-efficiency measures must be installed. Green Deal loans for the costs of the renewable technology may be possible (see next article).

Tariff payments

The RHI tariffs will be paid quarterly for seven years, and will be indexed for inflation. They are based on the estimated heat energy supplied. Payment details are on our website:

www.blewbury.co.uk/energy/grants.htm#RHI

For solar thermal panels, a typical system might get about £230–£290 per year.

For biomass, payments might be roughly £1450 per year for a small house and £2450 for a large house.

For heat pumps, a medium-size house with an air-source heat pump might get about £680–£780 per year. A similar house with a ground-source heat pump might get £1750–£2000 per year.



Air-source heat pump

To help improve performance of renewable heating systems, there are extra incentives if optional heat metering and monitoring packages are installed.

Conclusion

The RHI could cover a substantial fraction of the costs of a renewable heating system.

Links to learn more

www.blewbury.co.uk/energy/grants.htm#RHI

More information about the RHI (and the Feed-in Tariff), including details of the payments.

www.blewbury.co.uk/energy/renewable.htm

Information about various types of domestic renewable systems.

www.ofgem.gov.uk/domestic-rhi

The official source of detailed information about the domestic RHI and how to apply for it.

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Is the Green Deal for you?

Eric Eisenhandler

You may have seen the recent advertising: ‘Up to £7600 cashback ...’. A year and a half after the government’s Green Deal scheme got off to an abysmal start, the hope is that a much-improved cashback offer will revive it (*but see next page*). But is that just hype?

The Green Deal is meant to be the centre-piece of the government’s programme to upgrade the energy efficiency of the UK’s housing. It offers long-term loans to help pay for a long list of improvements that includes cavity-wall or solid-wall insulation, double glazing, and renewable heating and energy generation – see our website for the full list:

www.blewbury.co.uk/energy/grants.htm#GreenDeal

The loans are provided by the private sector from a central fund – very little government money is involved. They are paid back via electricity bills, in payments claimed to be no more than the resulting savings on energy costs. An important benefit is that homes would be warmer and more comfortable.

Some Green Deal measures are also subsidised by the Renewable Heat Incentive (previous article). The RHI provides quarterly payments for solar hot-water panels, heat pumps and biomass boilers.

Despite an initial cashback offer to encourage early adopters, take-up of the Green Deal has been extremely poor. This has had a catastrophic effect on the number of houses installing improved insulation compared to earlier grant schemes.

In June 2014 a new cashback scheme was launched to try to increase take-up of the Green Deal. Called

the Green Deal Home Improvement Fund*, it is simpler, more extensive and, especially for solid-wall insulation, much more generous.

We'll describe the Green Deal for privately owned houses, but it also aims to help community groups and social housing providers. If you live in social housing then contact your housing association.



Internal solid-wall insulation

How the Green Deal works

The first step is to arrange a survey by an approved Green Deal assessor. The survey, typically costing £100–£150, will suggest the best ways to improve the property. Quotations for the work can then be obtained. Some people have been put off by having to pay for an assessment that might not lead to anything.

Green Deal loans must satisfy a ‘golden rule’ – the estimated savings on energy bills must exceed the cost of the work to be done. Of the many measures covered, improved insulation and new boilers feature most frequently. The installation firm informs the electricity supplier, so that the loan can be paid back via electricity bills. But there could be complications if the electricity supplier is changed.

The length of a Green Deal loan varies, depending on the work selected and its potential impact on bills. The loans remain with the property, so future purchasers have to take on the obligation. This could cause problems when selling the property.

The typical interest rate on the loans is about 8% p.a., which is widely thought to be too high. However, there is *no requirement* to take a Green Deal loan. Payment can also be made up-front, either in cash or by obtaining a normal loan that may well be cheaper, as well as not tied to electricity bills or the property.

There are some problems. Sloppy assessments have been reported. The calculated savings are based on average houses rather than actual energy bills. The formulas used do not do a good job, particularly for older or more complex properties. Nor do they take

account of how well the property is actually built. Finally, beware of all offers from cold-callers, unsolicited letters or emails, and doorstep sellers.

The Green Deal Home Improvement Fund*

This new and improved cashback offer is available whether or not a Green Deal loan is taken out, provided the property has been assessed and a certified provider does the work. It has several parts.

First, 100% of costs up to a maximum of £1000 for installing two measures from a long list (RHI measures are excluded) given on our website: www.blewbury.co.uk/energy/grants.htm#GreenDeal

Second, 75% of costs up to £6000 for installing internal or external solid-wall insulation. Third, an additional bonus of up to £500 for people who have bought their home in the last 12 months. Finally, up to £100 towards the cost of the initial assessment.

In principle it is possible to claim up to £7600 from the scheme, though few are likely achieve that. The biggest and most welcome improvement is for solid-wall insulation. Hopefully, this will encourage more people to carry out this expensive procedure, badly needed for the UK's huge stock of old houses.



External solid-wall insulation

Conclusions

The Green Deal Home Improvement Fund* is simpler and more generous than the initial cashback offer, especially for solid-wall insulation. However, the Green Deal loan scheme has not changed, so other methods of finance may be more attractive.

Links to learn more

www.blewbury.co.uk/energy/grants.htm#GreenDeal

How the Green Deal works, what is covered by the loans and the cashback deal, and possible problems.

*** Less than seven weeks on, the cashback offer was suspended on 24 July due to the funding running out – a good offer, rightly popular, but not well-enough funded.**

We should avoid complacency on policy. In residential buildings we have seen new programmes introduced and progress that had been strong has slowed dramatically.
Committee on Climate Change Progress Report, 2014

Green May Fair, 10 May 2014

Jo Lakeland and Angela Hoy

This fair was run jointly by Sustainable Blewbury and Blewbury Primary School. The idea of an EcoFair came initially when I (Jo) went to the Abingdon Carbon Cutters EcoFair last autumn.

At first I thought that it was too big an event for Sustainable Blewbury to organise, but soon realised that yes, we could do it with the help of other village organisations. This would have a double advantage: we would have more people to help, but more importantly many more people would attend than would ever think of coming to a sustainability-themed event. It was then obvious to ask Marion Mills, Blewbury Primary School's head teacher, if the school would join us in organising the EcoFair and if it could be held in the school grounds.

We decided to hold it in May, so it became a Green May Fair and the staff, PTA and children threw themselves into the preparations with great enthusiasm. We are very grateful to them and to Blewbury Village Society, who also helped.

Unfortunately, the weather did not co-operate: heavy showers and 40 mph gales were forecast, so on Friday we booked the Village Hall to house some of the stalls and most of the entertainment. This started with Didcot Junction folk group from East Hagbourne and continued with Blewbury Brass Learner Band. There was country dancing from the school, and the older children put on a spectacular recycled fashion show (photo below), judged by local up-cycler Liz Sweet, who also donated the prizes. The little ones had designed and made seed packets and egg heads (cress growing in decorated egg shells) in class. These were judged by Master Composters Julian and Emma, with prizes donated by Garden Organic.



We did our best to make this a truly sustainable event. The entertainment was all local and so were the refreshments: the PTA bought local meat for their barbecue from Q Gardens, and this was also the source of the locally made ice-cream. All the cakes were home-made, as were the Blewbury Bakers' soup and freshly baked rolls. Outside the school, Blewbury Garden Market kicked off its season with tables groaning with plants, seedlings, seeds, bread, cakes and pastries, whilst hanging on to the gazebo during the worst of the windy squalls! (Blewbury Garden Market will be at Blewbury Garage every Saturday morning from 9.30 to 11.30 until mid-October.)



Even the children's activities were sustainable! The children enjoyed trying out the brass band's instruments, up-cycling (using scraps of fabric to decorate hair slides, etc.) and being shown how to sew by Liz and Josie. In the Vale Room (photo above) children were using willow and hazel to make making exciting things like dream-catchers, stars and fairy wands, and face-painting transformed them into butterflies, animals and wood spirits rather than Sci-Fi characters!



We invited local organisations and businesses to take part, so there were stalls and displays by Sims Solar, the Low Carbon Hub, the Blewbury Village Hall Refurbishment Project and the Blewbury Neighbourhood Development Plan. Outside the Village Hall, the Green School Bus had come along with its environmental displays and a steady succession of people had a go on their electricity-producing bicycle (photo on previous page). They could also admire the newly restored Blewbury Wagon (photo below). (For more on the wagon see: sustainable-blewbury.org.uk/environment.htm#wagon)



Sustainable Blewbury's environmental display focused on bees, with a colourful selection of Savages' bee-friendly plants on sale next to lots of fascinating facts and figures about our pollinating friends, including one splendid human-sized bee (in costume – photo above). There was also a brightly decorated Master Composter stand where Julian and Emma spread the message to anyone they could catch.

Blewbury Energy Initiative provided information about methods of saving energy (and money) and there were low-energy light bulbs to try. Another very important reason for the Fair was to provide some comprehensible information about the recent 5th IPCC Report on Climate Change. Eric had analysed the conclusions of the long reports and produced a brightly illustrated poster-style summary of their findings. You can see these at blewbury.co.uk/energy/ClimateChangeIPCC2014.pdf and you may download them if you would like to use them.

The afternoon ended with a splendid raffle. Prizes included a micro-light flight, a guided tour round the Manor Gardens followed by afternoon tea, a meal at Style Acre, and much more besides. An exhausting but exhilarating day! If you would like to see the Green May Fair programme, it is at: sustainable-blewbury.org.uk/GMFairProgramme2014.pdf It includes the contact details of all the contributors to the event.

Was it worth all the hard work? We think the answer has to be yes. We achieved what we set out to do: we held an event that was broadly sustainable, that provided information about current issues that touch us all, and that at the same time managed to attract a wide spectrum of local people. Thanks to Marion Mills and the staff of Blewbury School the pupils were both actively involved in the preparations for the Fair and also enjoyed the day.

Should we do it again? Maybe not annually but definitely yes, and going by the only negative comments overheard, next time we should include dancing round the May Pole and have a May Queen to open the Green May Fair.

We welcome new members. If you are interested in getting involved please contact our chairman, Mike Edmunds: wme@btopenworld.com