

North Herts Friends of the Earth

September 2008

www.nhertsfoe.co.uk

NHFOE Help Change The World - Again!

Europe cuts biofuel targets to 4% in 2015, 6% in 2020

The European Union significantly reduces targets for biofuels produced from food sources, while boosting goals for other renewables.

Over the summer we took part in lobbying for a cut in Bio-fuel targets.

Back in January the EU pledged to double the amount of bio-fuels used in transport, but after groups like ours campaigned against the environmental and social destruction and threat to food supplies such a target would cause, they back-tracked. The European Parliament's Industry and Energy Committee said it would push a plan calling for a 5% share of renewables in transport fuel by 2015 and a 10% target by 2020, a reduction from the 20% target set in March 2007. The plan effectively cuts targets for biofuels produced from conventional feedstocks to 4% in 2015 and 6% in 2020. The remainder of the goal would come from renewable electricity and hydrogen (solar, wind, tidal, geothermal) as well as energy feedstocks that do not compete with food production (potentially cellulosic ethanol). Critics say that the rush to produce ethanol and biodiesel from grains and oilseeds has caused food prices to surge worldwide.

The new plan includes social sustainability criteria, including respect for the land rights of local communities and fair remuneration for workers, as well

as environmental standards, including offering at least 45% carbon emission savings compared to conventional fossil fuels, a figure that would rise to 60% in 2015. The plan would seem to address some of the criticisms raised by environmentalists and human rights groups who say that biofuels are triggering displacement of local people and driving the conversion of important ecosystems, including peatlands and rainforests in the Amazon and Southeast Asia.

These requirements also mean that the most damaging crops are highly unlikely to be used for European bio-fuels. The 2020 target will be up for review again in 2014. (Adapted from mongabay.com September 12, 2008)



Palm Oil Fruit



North Herts Friends of the Earth stall at Rhythms of the World. Campaigning on bio-fuels.

Membership

Thank you to everyone who has renewed their subscription. Over 75% of members are now using standing orders which reduces my workload and resources used considerably. You're all great and thank you for your continuing support! Renewal rates are the same as before: £6 or £2.50 unwaged.

Thanks, Jill

The Future for Hertfordshire Report from Hertfordshire University's Urban Design Workshop June 2008

"I am concerned about Hertfordshire which could end up with the worst of all possible worlds – with congestion and friction caused by increased densities but not being dense enough to generate income sufficient to deal with the congestion." - André Duany, American planning consultant.

The public were invited by the University to participate in debating Hertfordshire's future design and growth. The sessions were run by Duany Plater-Zyberk, an American planning firm, looking at six options for our county. These were:

1. **Oppose** the East of England plan to build 63,000 homes in the county by 2021.
2. **Infill** development on brown and grey (car parks, etc) sites.
3. **Intensify** existing centres.
4. **Even out** growth all over the county.
5. **Create** several new 'villages'.
6. **Build** one New Town.

André Duany thought that number 6 was the most effective solution but only if Hertfordshire wanted to try to accommodate the 63,000 residential units decreed by the East of England Plan. Provocatively, he suggested that perhaps Hertfordshire should do nothing to ease existing congestion problems. In fact, these could alleviate the problems by discouraging inward development and encouraging out-migration.

Planning: intended to help local planners deal with political problems created by the 'Top-Down' approach of the East of England plan. Duany encouraged local planners to tell people that the East of England Plan (or Regional Spatial Strategy) was intended to convince everyone that 63,000 dwellings will be built whatever is said locally. He criticised the insensitive and arrogant requirement that all future housing should be at 40 residential units per hectare. He

described this as 'monoculture' especially as the University's research showed that Hertfordshire enjoyed a remarkably low average residential density of 7 persons per hectare.

Transportation: Here, Duany opposed road 'improvements' because they simply encourage more traffic. Although the county appeared to suffer from poor east-west road links he suggested that improvements to these would simply encourage more developments. Railway improvements and innovative cross-county public transport solutions should be investigated urgently.

Environment: Building Research Establishment staff described the environmental benefits from the BRE's brand of environmental assessment drawn up to use less resources by substituting materials, re-using and re-cycling. BRE favoured an ecological approach to residential development by creating linked natural habitats like green 'corridors' and green 'stepping stones'.

I look forward to the University publishing the results of these workshops (known collectively as the Hertfordshire Charrette) because we can then discuss them ourselves. I understand that they may be published in November 2008.

Submitted by: Harvey Ward.

TAKE ACTION: Town centre planning shake-up



The Government has revealed new plans for town centre planning policy.

You have until 3rd October to respond

The Government's current proposals could lead to more empty high streets. The proposals billed as a boost to small shops - revealed on closer inspection further support of the supermarket takeover. We urgently need to **ask them to re-think their plans.** Please contact the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Hazel Blears - and tell her not to miss this opportunity to promote **vibrant, diverse and sustainable** town centres

Suggested wording as a guide:

"I am concerned that proposals for Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning for Town Centres (PPS6) are a missed opportunity to support local shops and low carbon development. I am particularly concerned about the proposal to remove the need test and replace it with a weaker 'impact test'. The need test is a vital tool for local authorities to control out-of-town development. In a survey of local authority planning officers conducted by Friends of the Earth last year, 96 per cent of officers said they believed that the need test is important and 81% believed that the absence of a need test would make it harder to focus new development in Town Centres.

Instead of simply removing a key test, the need test must be integrated into a more robust set of policies to make the Town Centre first policy more effective, to place a stronger emphasis on more sustainable patterns of development and carbon reduction, and to encourage genuine retail diversity. Sustainable transport and access and social inclusion must be an integral part of such a test and not just an add-on. The recent Competition Commission inquiry failed to do anything to halt the takeover of our high streets by the big four supermarkets, and it is

even more vital that we now have a strong retail planning policy to support existing town centres and local shops. Please introduce a stronger policy for Town Centres that retains the need test and includes a presumption against out-of-town development, a new test for carbon emissions, and a tougher test for diversity to ensure that planning policy helps create more sustainable patterns of development and a real choice of where to shop."

**Hazel Blears MP
Houses of Parliament
London SW1 OAA**

http://www.foe.co.uk/campaigns/real-food/press_for_change/13714.html

Oilics Anonymous



So you have got rid of the car and cycle or walk to lessen your dependence on public transport, eschew flight and boat trips, grow your own fruit and vegetables, recycle everything imaginable, use your cloth bag, maybe you even burn paper logs and knit your own knickers out of shredded T shirts - good for ventilation but I don't recommend using hemp or sisal! But look around you, your home may contain some of these products - Aspirins, sticky tape, lycra socks, glue, paints, varnish, foam mattresses or upholstery fillings, carpets, nylon, polyester, CDs, DVDs, plastic bottles, contact lenses, hair gel, brushes, toothbrushes, rubber gloves, washing-up bowls, electric sockets, plugs, shoe polish, furniture wax, computers, printers, telephones, candles, plastic bags, coats, bubble wrap, bicycle pumps, inner tubes, fruit juice containers, rawlplugs, credit cards,

loft insulation, PVC windows, shopping bags, lipstick and that's just some of the things made directly from oil, not those that needed fossil fuels and the energy they consume in their manufacture - which is pretty much everything. (*List kindly supplied by Rob Hopkins. Cross out those which don't apply and add any omitted*). We have been seduced into acquiring and using oil based products during the cheap oil age - **we are all oil addicts** and I'm not referring to teak, olive or cod liver varieties here (try them on your bike for that equatorial, Mediterranean or marine aroma). Often this dependence has not come about through deliberate choice, unlike drug, tobacco or alcohol addiction, rather it has been due to lack of choice - an oil free alternative has not been available. The outcome, however, is the same, and its time to set up Oilics Anonymous groups. Congratulations: you've passed the first stage - recognizing the problem, now look at the three elements of this situation (*according to Dr Chris Johnstone*) - hazardous use, harmful use and dependent use. Our current pattern of oil use is hazardous because of where it is taking us, namely energy famine. It is also harmful because climate change, or disturbed weather patterns, can be thought of as a toxic effect of heavy use of fossil fuels. In dependent use the idea of stopping or even reducing it is threatening so we tend to block out the harmful information, or continue our habit despite knowing it's harmful. Dependent use is when someone is hooked like this. Recognising oil dependence makes it easier to understand why it may be difficult to wean ourselves off our oil habit. If we are to look towards a richer post oil life (which sooner or later is inevitable) we need to look at proven strategies from the addictions field that might help us forward. I will tell you more about this soon when I have gone through the treatment, but first I'll

have just one more drink - benzene I think, it's weaning me off aviation fuel!

Submitted by: Chris (hic) Honey

Benington Wind Farm

East Herts Planning Dept. have been receiving a lot of supportive letters for Benington wind farm as a result of our campaign. The website set up by Friends of the Earth, alone has generated 141. I have also been receiving letters from our members letting me know they have written in support. Thank you to everyone. We have around 10 years, some say less, to severely cut our CO₂ emissions; without renewable energy projects such as this one we are condemning the earth to destruction.

Recently Tyndall Centre scientists said global carbon emissions are rising so fast that they would need to peak by 2015 and then decrease by up to 6.5% each year for atmospheric CO₂ levels to stabilise at 450ppm, which might limit temperature rise to 2C. Even a goal of 650ppm - way above most government projections - would need world emissions to peak in 2020, then reduce 3% each year. Globally, a 4C temperature rise would have a catastrophic impact. According to the government's Stern review on the economics of climate change in 2006, between 7 million and 300 million more people would be affected by coastal flooding each year, there would be a 30-50% reduction in water availability in southern Africa and the Mediterranean, agricultural yields would decline 15-35% in Africa, and 20-50% of animal and plant species would face extinction. Mike Childs of Friends of the Earth said: "We can't afford to wait for magical solutions to get us out of the hole we have dug ourselves into. The solutions that exist now, such as a large-scale energy efficiency programme and investment in wind, wave and solar power, can do the job if we deploy them at the scale and urgency that is needed." Whatever your view on the

aesthetics of turbines, they must be supported to help stop global catastrophe.

Support renewable energy targets

Last year the Government agreed an EU renewable energy target. 20% of all EU energy should come from renewable sources by 2020. The UK itself has a proposed 15% target.



At the moment less than 2% of the UK's energy comes from renewable sources. Renewables need a major boost. The Government is now trying to undermine the target by proposing that:

- Countries buy renewable energy credits from outside the EU.
- Carbon capture and storage (CCS) from fossil fuel plants could count.
- Extra concessions be granted for large-scale projects.

This would damage the development of clean green energy in the UK and beyond.

Setting an example

The UK has the potential to be a world leader on renewable energy and climate change. Carrying on with our old polluting energy systems whilst buying credits from outside the EU is not a solution. Friends of the Earth is calling for a ground-breaking law that will reduce the UK's emissions.

TAKE ACTION:

Please either use the suggested letter below to John Hutton MP or email him using the on-line form: http://www.foe.co.uk/campaigns/climate/press_for_change/support_renewable_energy

"I am writing to express my support for a strong Renewable Energy Directive.

The development of renewable energy is clearly crucial given the urgent need to drive down carbon dioxide emissions. At present only around 7% of the EU's energy comes from renewable sources, with a lamentable 2% in the UK. Achieving a 15% target by 2020 in the UK, as proposed in the draft Renewable Energy Directive, would be an important start and deliver investment in our own considerable renewable resources such as wind and wave power.

I am therefore alarmed that the UK is seeking to introduce mechanisms that would undermine domestic achievement of the renewable energy target, not just in the UK, but in other European countries. Buying renewable energy certificates from countries outside the EU, shifting the deadlines for large projects, or diluting the target with rewards for carbon capture and storage would seriously hinder the development of renewable energy in the UK and EU. Such concessions would encourage us to continue with our current polluting energy technologies.

The UK should instead be promoting the use of a strong compliance regime that sends clear signals to countries to meet the targets or suffer penalties, with binding intermediate targets so that countries do not slip in their ambition. The Directive should also rule that renewable energy should have priority access to the power and gas grid networks, currently a major obstacle for projects. The price of oil has hit record levels recently and energy prices have risen dramatically. This alone shows that we should be developing our own renewable energy sources. With resources in abundance, the UK needs to commit to developing our own domestic renewable energy industry considering our current low base. The 15% target by 2020 is a good start and will lay the foundations for further

development of renewable energy beyond 2020. The target will require ambition and the willingness to drive change - but that change needs to happen."

Send to John Hutton MP

Houses of Parliament
London, SW1 OAA

Canada's Ice Shelves

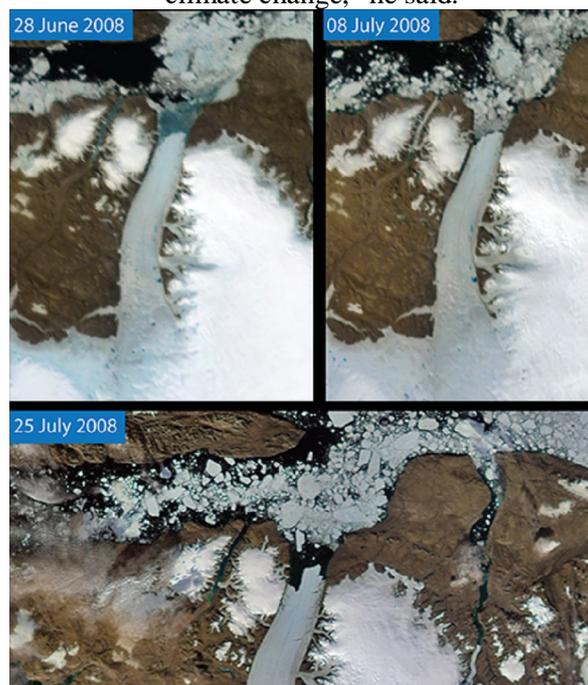
OTTAWA (AFP) - Two ice shelves in Canada's far north have lost massive sections since August while a third ice shelf now is adrift in the Arctic Ocean, said researchers who blamed climate change. The entire 50 square kilometer (19 square mile) Markham Ice Shelf off the coast of Ellesmere Island broke away in early August and is now adrift, while two sections of the nearby Serson Ice Shelf detached, reducing its mass by 60 percent or 122 square kilometers (47 square miles). Ward Hunt Ice Shelf, which halved in July, lost an additional 22 square kilometers (8.5 square miles). "These changes are irreversible under the present climate and indicate that the environmental conditions that have kept these ice shelves in balance for 4,000 years are no longer present," said Trent University's polar expert Derek Mueller. Canada's summer ice shelf losses now total 214 square kilometers

(82.5 square miles), which is more than three times The area of Manhattan Island, the researchers said. Extensive cracks in Ward Hunt, the largest remaining ice shelf, mean it will continue to disintegrate in the coming years, said Luke Copland, director of Ottawa University's cryospheric research lab. In an interview with AFP, Copland blamed "very warm temperatures and reduced sea ice" for the crumbling ice shelves. The sea ice usually braced the shelves and without it, wind and waves more easily broke them apart,

he explained. The coast of Ellesmere Island has also warmed an average two degrees (Celsius) in the 50 years, he said. In winter, temperatures are now five degrees warmer, making it more difficult for ice lost in summer to recover in winter. "We see that warming is concentrated in the winter," Copland said. "It's part of global warming. When we warm up the planet it gets concentrated close to he poles."

"Usually the ice shelves would use the winter to recover from the previous summer. They would reform, but the ice shelf can't recover in the winter any more." "We have now reached a threshold where (the environment) is too warm for these ice shelves to exist any more," he said. "What it tells us is that the Arctic is changing." Mueller told AFP: "The Markham Ice Shelf was a big surprise because it suddenly disappeared. We went under cloud for a bit during our research and when the weather cleared up, all of a sudden there was no more ice shelf. It was a shocking event that underscores the rapidity of changes taking place in the Arctic," said Muller. "It's not just the ice shelves that are changing. These changes are occurring in concert with sea ice reduction and other indications of climate change," he said.

The Ellesmere Island ice shelves were formed some 4,500 years ago, composed of sea ice, accumulated snow and glacier ice up to 40 meters (131 feet) thick



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New Scientist says

A bowl of cereal has the same carbon footprint as a 7 kilometre journey in a 4x4.

A steak is equivalent to driving 30 kilometres.

Submitted by Jill

Lowlands in danger.

Chairman of the Delta Commission Cees Veerman spoke during a nationally televised news conference in The Hague, Netherlands, Wednesday, Sept. 3, 2008. The Netherlands needs a massive new building program to strengthen the low-lying country's water defenses against the anticipated effects of global warming for the next 190 years, a key panel advised. The plan by the Delta Commission includes more than 100 billion Euro in new spending till the year 2100 to take measures such as broadening coastal dunes and strengthening sea and river dykes. It is expected to be the central reference point for policymakers for decades to come. (AP Photo/ Rob Keeris)

Reach for the moon!

One element of my life I've tried to alter over the past few years is my use of disposable items, including sanitary products. In a flush-it-and-forget-it culture, millions of used tampons and sanitary towels find their way out to sea with the raw sewage. Environmental campaigners say tampon applicators and the plastic backing from sanitary towels can harm dolphins, seals and turtles when they are mistaken for prey and swallowed, although it's impossible to say how common this is. Even dead albatross chicks have been found with tampon applicators in their stomachs. Apart from the obvious pollution caused by the manufacturing processes, the average woman uses 12,000 pads/liners/tampons during her menstrual lifetime. It takes 6 months for a tampon to biodegrade (when, if it is flushed, it can be floating around in the sea) but the plastic used in pads

can remain in the environment indefinitely.

One excellent solution I've found is called the mooncup: a reusable, sustainable alternative to tampons. It's a soft silicone cup costing £19.99, and the fact that it is reusable avoids the need for tampons that are by their very nature disposable and therefore also more expensive. As well as being reusable, the mooncup has not been associated with toxic shock syndrome, and it lasts for up to 20 years! It can be easily cleaned with soap and water between uses and sterilized in boiling water each month. It is available at Boots, good independent health food shops and eco-shops and over the internet. The website (see below) has a search facility where you can find all your local stockists (for example, Harvest Moon, The Health Emporium and Boots in Hitchin).

If you are interested, there is lots more useful information on the website:

<http://www.mooncup.co.uk/> and I'm happy to chat/email about my extremely positive experience of using the mooncup. Of all the changes I have made in the past few years to try to be more environmentally friendly, I would definitely say that the veggie box and the mooncup are the two most positive and successful. Perhaps it's time to challenge some of our disposable habits by reaching for the moon.

Submitted by Nic Garner

Freecycle Local



The Stevenage Freecycle Network (covering Stevenage, Hitchin and Letchworth) is open to anyone living in North Herts who wants to "recycle" that special something rather than throw it away. Whether it's a chair, a fax machine, piano or an old door,

feel free to post it. Or maybe you're looking to acquire something yourself! Non-profit groups are also welcome to participate!

One constraint: everything posted must be **free**. This network is brought to you by The Freecycle Network, a non-profit organization and a movement of people interested in keeping good stuff out of landfills. Check out freecycle.org for info and to join the movement!

Sorry, another example of facilities available on-line only – but certainly a great step in the right direction! I've already used it to pass on some stuff and it worked a treat!

Submitted by Jill

Five things to green your travelling (I hope it's not coals to Newcastle !)

1. Give your car the day off. Try to swap at least one car journey a week for walking, cycling or public transport instead. Think about shopping locally, using your nearest leisure facilities, or working from home.

2. Check out the quickest way to get from A to B via public transport, cycling or walking, using a journey planner. See www.transportdirect.org.uk for a door to door journey plan via public transport anywhere in the country. For Hertfordshire try also www.intalink.org

3. Get on your bike! Cycling is cheap, green healthy, and often quicker for short journeys. Herts CC holds a number of courses – find out more at <http://www.hertsdirect.org/envroads/roadstrans/rsu/riding/cyctrain/cyccourses/>.

4. Consider a new approach to car journeys. 'Pay as you go cars' are now becoming more available and car clubs are expanding all the time. Visit www.carplus.org.uk for details of car-club and car sharing schemes across the UK .

5. Make your car greener – when you buy a car consider a greener model - www.whatgreencar.com or make your current car more

fuel efficient by sticking to the speed limit, avoiding unnecessary accelerating, servicing it regularly, avoiding using air conditioning, leaving off the roof rack, keeping the rev counter down, emptying your boot, avoiding short trips and keeping your tyres suitably inflated.

Happy travelling!

From www.hertsdirect.org.uk

LONDON (Reuter's) - High fuel costs and a biting economic downturn are proving effective measures in cutting road congestion, a report showed recently.

Fewer people are opting to use their cars -- put off by petrol prices topping 120 pence per litre and diesel at as much as 140 pence per litre -- and those who do take to the roads drive more slowly to save fuel, the Trafficmaster report showed.

Congestion was 12% less in the first six months of 2008, compared with January to June 2007. "Rising fuel prices and general economic concerns are making people think carefully about how they drive," said Georgina Read, a spokeswoman for Trafficmaster, a road monitoring company. "The upshot of less traffic is a drop in congestion levels, meaning motorists can get from A to B quicker while travelling at lower and more economical speeds."

Using data collected from 7,500 cameras on major roads and motorways across Britain, Trafficmaster found that in the year June 2007 to June 2008, congestion eased as opposed to worsening for the first time in the four years the study has been carried out.

The average speed on motorways slowed to 62.2 miles per hour from 63.3 miles per hour in the previous year, but journey times improved, with people shaving 0.3% off their travelling time.

According to the Automobile Association (AA), the average annual cost of running a family

car in Britain is currently around £6,250.

Transport for London also says cycling in the capital has risen by more than 83% since 2000, with around 480,000 journeys made by bike in London every day.

(By Kate Kelland Reuter's - Editing by Tim Castle)

Wind is competitive

BWEA submission to the House of Lords in June 2008, based on research on comparative costs of electricity from different sources including costs of CO₂ offsetting, shows that electricity from wind is now cheaper than electricity from either coal or gas. At £62 per MWh electricity from wind costs considerably less than £68 for coal and marginally less than £63 for gas. Dwindling fossil fuel supplies and price increase trends could lead to electricity from conventional sources becoming even more expensive.

PARIS (AFP)



French nuclear group Areva is facing a 50% rise in the cost of building the world's first next-generation pressurised water reactor in Finland, the business daily Les Echos reported.

The cost of constructing the plant at Olkiluoto has risen from three billion to 4.5 billion euros, the paper reported citing an unidentified source.

The increase was due not only to the global rise in prices, but to Areva's having to send in additional workers to "ensure work proceeds better," the report said. Finnish nuclear safety agency STUK launched a probe

earlier this month into whether safety procedures were respected at the site after Greenpeace disclosed confidential documents indicating there were no qualified personnel supervising the welding and that the quality of the welding had not been verified.

Areva has been forced to set aside one billion euro in provisions to absorb the rise in costs, the newspaper said, but the company will still announce record profits of nearly 750 million euros. Construction delays have already forced Areva to push back the target date for the reactor to enter service to 2011 from 2009.

Measure your energy use

Save up to 25% off your electricity bills. We have an electricity monitor to loan to members. It helps you work out where you are wasting electricity and which appliances are using it most, so you can control your electricity use more efficiently. Contact Dan if you'd like to borrow it.

Concern over food miles prompts return of tall ships

Facing environmental concerns about food miles, a French shipping company has chartered five sailing vessels to ply their trade around Europe. The Compagnie de Transport Maritime a la Voile (CTMV), a newly-established French company specialising in merchant sailing, has used a 100-year-old British schooner to transport a full cargo of wine from France to Dublin – the first time in living memory such a trip has taken place. The company is looking to use its regular return journey from the Irish sea to bring Irish Whisky and scotch back to France.

A spokesperson for the Environmental Transport Association (ETA) said: "This most environmentally benign mode of transport enables food producers to label their products as having been moved in a green way, but the high price of oil may add a financial incentive."

The term "Food miles" referring to the distance food is transported from production to consumer illustrates hidden environmental consequences of food production. Over 4% of global CO₂ emissions come from merchant shipping. Over 90% of world trade is carried by the international shipping industry, which comprises around 50,000 merchant ships.

21st Century Sailing



A company called SkySails is developing a range of giant kites for use by modern conventionally-powered freighters (see photo). SkySails kites, which can be as large as 320m², are claimed to reduce a ship's annual average fuel costs by 10- 35%, depending on wind conditions. (ETA).

Small signs of culture change in council meetings ...

North Herts Friends of the Earth was recently invited to participate in a 'fundamental review' of North Herts District Council's transport plans. In addition NHDC invited Alasdair Massie, the North Herts CTC Right to Ride Rep, and Robin Harwood from Hitchin Forum. We spent two half days exploring opportunities with councillors and officers not usually involved in transport, to take a fresh look at things. I was cautiously optimistic after the first session and even more positive after the second, that attitudes might be changing. We were welcomed as 'critical friends' providing valuable food for thought. We spoke up in favour of better policies and provision for walking and cycling, taxis and

flexible buses to improve health, access for people on low incomes as well as for carbon reduction reasons. We argued against expensive road building and extra car parks as a first resort to all our congestion problems. Some of the ideas we floated at the first meeting seemed to inspire people. For example, I mentioned demand responsive buses, and now the Royston Town Centre Initiative is starting a flexible bus on Sundays to bring people from villages to the Farmers' Market. There is also talk of a community interest business to run a flexi-bus in Royston to replace and enhance services which were axed by the council.

Overall, there was a concern about lack of political will amongst the senior politicians who sit on NHDC Cabinet and have the final say on funding. None of them had attended the workshops. The meetings' recommendations will be fed up to PARC (a committee of NHDC) and then to Cabinet to approve or otherwise. It's likely these will include a Travel Plan for the council (to reduce car use by staff), NHDC support for School Travel Plans (County do most of this already) and a new parking strategy and some ideas for Modal Shift, i.e. reducing car use and increasing healthy, smart travel by foot, bike, taxi, bus and rail, combined with public spaces which are safe and inviting to travel.

I found the meetings quite stressful but still managed to participate actively, and by the end I felt that my input was genuinely welcomed. I don't hold out much hope of any rapid changes in policy, but I was pleased that the councillors and officers who had chosen to take part in the review had a genuine desire to move in the right direction.

As a separate process, we still have the prospect of a County Council-led Transport Plan for Hitchin which will recommend a bypass, but it's positive that there

are signs of wider thinking at District level.

If you want to add to the ripples of change ... please feel free to write to your District Councillor and ask them what they are doing to promote low carbon travel options like walking and cycling, both in their wards and the district as a whole. Even quite general correspondence would be received well at this stage. We have a cycling strategy with route recommendations dating from 1998 which needs to be implemented. Also it would be good if, like Welwyn Hatfield Council, we adopted a walking strategy.

Susan Dye

01462 442432

suedye@btinternet.com

What's the plan?

As you may know Herts County Council (HCC) are in the process of writing a new transport plan for Hitchin. Unfortunately it has not really occurred to them that they should, perhaps, implement the previous (1998) plan first!

The 1998 plan was really a very good plan, with lots of positive proposals for improving walking and cycling links in the town, together with traffic calming and better bus and train information. Sadly, there has been little appetite in County Hall to make any of it a reality. In fact, with the exception of (part) pedestrianising the Market Square and High Street, I don't believe that ANY of the cycling and walking schemes have been implemented.

Yet, HCC and NHDC are planning to spend a load more of our money to produce another plan. What is the point of producing a new plan when the original hasn't been implemented? Is the new one going to be another waste of money? What is the reasoning behind the new plan that has no objectives stated within it? Is there a bypass lurking? Watch this space!

With thanks to Alasdair Massie and North Herts Cycling Touring Club (www.northhertsctc.org.uk)

Farmers and Scientists Working Together

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Cuba, left without her main trading partner, faced a food crisis. Today, its network of small urban farmers and sustainable food production is thriving, bringing benefits for its people and the environment.

Despite having just 2% of Latin America's population, Cuba has 11% of the scientists, and the challenge to produce sufficient food was answered by Cuban farmers and scientists working together. One of these scientists, Dr. Humberto Rios Labrada, visited the UK earlier this year and spoke to CubaSi about how the collaboration between scientists and farmers has led to increased crop yields and diversity and raised the confidence and skill of the farmers.

"The key is to use the knowledge of the farmers in selecting seeds for their own land. There are no 'mono crops' such as you see in conventional farming here, but many varieties of crops are grown together. To start with large farms became impossible to manage without oil for transport of labour and machine operation, but then it was discovered that smaller farm units were more efficient as crop diversity increased yields."

"We can increase yields by greater mechanisation and by more intensive use of fertiliser, but the equation needs to take into account the real level of energy inputs and their environmental costs and the real level of carbon dioxide emissions."

The programme sets as its objectives capacity-building in the country-side, aiming to stimulate local innovation and initiative alongside modifying the farming system to limit climate change factors.

This demands a new way of thinking. "It needs a paradigm shift at every level of our agriculture" he says. "We cannot endlessly extend inputs."

"Our agriculture must be a primary centre of biological

diversity. Even a simple farm has an enormous capacity to innovate."

One enormous resource is the great variety of seeds. Many are specific to a particular area and farmers have strongly ingrained preferences that are not at all arbitrary, he says.

Even in Cuba, many farmers have under-developed literacy skills and this is even more marked in other Latin American countries.

"But our farmers still hold this knowledge – which seeds are best in which fields - in their heads. Part of our job is to get them to share this knowledge, so we sponsor grower groups and use songs to popularise good ideas."

Gardens attached to schools and factories have become more common, and most rural homes produce their own staple foods, including beans and root crops. The benefits of the food programme are enormous – the organic and traditional agriculture methods greatly reduce soil, air and water contamination from synthetic pesticides and fertiliser, the diversity of crops had led to a more varied diet, food transportation costs are reduced, waster is recycled, food security is high, green spaces in cities are increased and jobs are created.

In October 2006, a World Wildlife Fund report cited Cuba as the only country in the world with "sustainable development", and it appears to be working, offering valuable lessons to others around the world committed to sustainable agriculture.

*Submitted by: Carol Howard
From CubaSi*

For Fun! Are you old?

According to today's regulators those of us born kids in the 60s, 70s and early 80s probably shouldn't have survived, because:

1. Our cots were covered with brightly coloured lead-based paint which was promptly chewed.
2. We had no childproof lids on medicine bottles, or latches on

doors or cabinets, and it was fine to play with pans.

3. When we rode our bikes, we wore no helmets, just flip-flops and fluorescent 'spokey dokey's' on our wheels.

4. As children, we would ride in cars with no seat belts or airbags.

5. We drank water from the garden hose - not from a bottle.

6. We ate chips, bread and butter pudding and drank fizzy juice with sugar in it, but were never overweight because we were always outside playing.

7. We shared one drink with four friends, from one bottle or can and no-one actually died from this.

8. We would spend hours building go-carts out of scraps and then went top speed down the hill, only to find out we forgot the brakes.

9. After running into stinging nettles a few times, we learned to solve the problem.

10. We would leave home in the morning and could play all day, as long as we were back before it got dark. No-one was able to reach us and no-one minded.

11. We did not have play stations or X-Boxes, no video games at all.

12. We did not have 99 channels on TV, no videotape movies, no surround sound, no mobile phones, no personal computers, no DVDs. We had friends.

13. We played rounders & elastics – sometimes that ball really hurt!

14. We fell out of trees, got cut and broke bones but sued nobody.

15. We walked to friends' homes and believe it or not, we WALKED to school!

This generation has produced some of the best risk-takers and problem solvers and inventors, ever. The past 50 years have been an explosion of innovation and new ideas. We had freedom, failure, success and responsibility, and we learned how to deal with it all.

For those of you who aren't old enough, you might like to read about us.

The majority of students in universities today were born in the 1990s ... They are called youth. - They have never heard of 'We are

the World, We are the children', and the 'Uptown Girl' they know is by Westlife.

- There has always been only one Germany and one Vietnam.
- AIDS has always existed.
- CDs have always existed.
- Michael Jackson has always been white.
- They can't imagine life before computers.
- They'll never have pretended to be the A Team, RedHand Gang or the Famous Five.
- They'll never have applied to be on Jim'll Fix It.
- They can't believe a black and white television ever existed.
- And they will never understand how we could leave the house without a mobile phone.

Now let's check if we're getting old ...

1. You understand what was written above and you smile.
2. You need to sleep more, usually until the afternoon.
3. You are always surprised to see small children playing comfortably with computers.
4. When you see teenagers with mobile phones, you shake your head.
5. You remember watching Dirty Den in EastEnders the first time around.

Yes, you're getting old! Enjoy!
Submitted by: Jill

EMails

I have spent some time over the summer updating the email list. I send out occasional action bulletins and invites to events such as film showings on this list. If you'd like to be on it and are not, then please contact me at dangomm@yahoo.com

GREEN DRINKS

Join us for Green Drinks on the first Tuesday of the month at 8:30pm. We meet at:
The Millstream Pub
Cambridge Road
Hitchin
SG4 0JH

Good news for Letchworth

Letchworth Garden City is interested in becoming a Transition Town.

If you're interested in helping and you live in Letchworth, please get in touch with Joanna & Nick at: "TTLetchworth@gmail.com" or call them on 01462 487630.

North Herts Friends of the Earth CONTACTS:

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Food Coordinator:
Ann De Bock
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01462 632479



APPLE DAY!

Old Market Place, Hitchin town centre, on **Saturday 25 October** from 10am-2pm.
Come and join NH Friends of the Earth's stall. Contact Dan

LOCAL GROUP MEETINGS

Please come along and get involved

Thursday 16th October

Thursday 20th November

Thursday 18th December

Thursday 15th January A.G.M.

All 7:30pm-9:15pm

Friends' Meeting House

1 Paynes Park, Hitchin

Come to the pub afterwards!

Environmental book bank

If you'd like to read up on some of the issues we have a bank of books to borrow:

- Calculate your carbon footprint- Collin's Gem
 - How to save cash and save the planet-
 - Don't throw it all away - FOE's guide to reducing waste.
 - Funny Weather - Kate Evans' cartoon guide to climate change
 - Air Madness - Runways and the blighting of Britain - Cedric Pulford
 - How to win campaigns against incinerators - FOE
 - Hope in the Dark - The untold history of people power -Rebecca Solnit
 - How we can save the planet - Mayer Hillman
 - No Logo - Naomi Klein
 - Toxic Childhood - How the modern world is damaging our children and what we can do about it - Sue Palmer
 - The tipping point. How little things can make a big difference - Malcolm Gladwell
- Contact Dan - 01462 632479**
dangomm@yahoo.com

Please help with the newsletter by sending your letters or articles to Tracy at: 84 Jackmans Place, Letchworth SG6 1RQ, or tracy@tracypez.co.uk
Deadline for the next newsletter: Friday 9th January 2009