

## HILLINGDON FRIENDS OF THE EARTH

### Secretary's Report for Year ended 31 August 2010

2009/2010 was an exceptional one for Hillingdon FoE, we welcomed former members back to take up an active part in the Group again, we welcomed new members, and we met interesting and inspirational people. It was also a busy year that saw us doing new things and taking the environmental message further across the Borough than usual. The key word for the year is Transition, as we were introduced to the Transition movement and discovered that we already had a Transition community in the area.

We continued to hold our monthly meetings at Christ Church, being convinced that the amenities there, and its central position, with public transport close at hand, made it the right place to be. However, the hire charges are high and represent by far the greatest part of the Group's expenditure. As it stands, our fundraising activities are needed to make up the shortfall between our subscription income and the cost of our meeting room. It is definitely time to consider an increase in our subscription rates, and to try to recruit more members of course.

At the AGM Sue Mattock had recommended "End of the Line" as a film that everyone should see. With her help and the generous loan by new members Debbie Chivers and Darius Ossowski of a 42" television, the film was shown at the November meeting. We were all shocked to see the devastating impact on the oceans that is being caused by overfishing, and the hunting to the brink of commercial, and actual extinction, of certain species such as the bluefin tuna.

I am sure all the fish eaters left the meeting resolved to take care that we buy only sustainably resourced fish and have to hand a copy of the Marine Conservation Society's pocket good fish guide that Sue had obtained for us.

It has become the tradition of meeting up for a meal together each December and last year eight of us returned to the Orchard in Ruislip to enjoy a pleasant evening in a seasonal atmosphere. Coincidentally, this also meant a saving of room hire, and we made further savings during the year when two more of our meetings were held away from Christ Church. I have to say however that saving money was not the reason but rather the opportunity to enjoy the summer and see examples of sustainable local food production in action.

The date of the June meeting came in the middle of the Ickenham Festival and coincided with an Open Evening at the Glebe Allotments. We invited members to join us for strawberries and cream at the Guide's Strawberry Fayre and then to visit the allotments, where one of the hosts was our own member Gavin Roberts. The extent of activity and variety of crops being grown on a site in Ickenham that I am sure not many people knew existed was a real eye-opener. It was good to see this community of local people



growing food for their families, enjoying the company of fellow allotment holders and sharing their skills and knowledge. I was amused by the “L” plates on one plot.

Going back to the beginning, the year made a slow start, with only four members at the September meeting at Christ Church. Fortunately, this was the exception and overall numbers were higher for another year running, at an average of almost nine. The best attended meeting was in February, when a most satisfying 18 people, including a couple of students from Brunel and friends from the Quakers, heard Gavin Roberts introduce us to the Transition Initiative, peak oil and his ambition of making Ickenham a Transition Town, where the community would respond to the challenges of climate change, peak oil and economic stagnation. There are 12 steps to Transition and Gavin explained that it was at the early stage- raising awareness, contacting other Transition groups and meeting local community groups- that he had come to Hillingdon FoE. He hoped his efforts would complement what is being done locally and could help FoE achieve its goals.

We were all surprised to learn that we already had a Transition community in Hillingdon – Transition Heathrow – and we were very pleased to meet Paddy and to hear of the various activities already happening and planned at Heathrow. This was a key inspirational evening and, as one member said afterwards, “It was absolutely marvellous to walk into the room and see the vast attendance! And a very good presentation and discussion”. We were to meet up again with Transition Heathrow during the summer, including at the Hayes Carnival, where they filled a large site with all manner of examples of sustainable living, from solar panels to bicycle-driven smoothie makers, film shows in a tent to free clothes and plants grown in their nursery.

Gavin shared our stall at the Ickenham Festival Gala Day, promoting his Transition idea, as well as raising awareness of oil depletion and energy saving information alongside FoE’s literature, lucky dip and feely boxes. He reported that there was not a great deal of interest in Transition Ickenham on the day but plenty of enquiries about saving energy measures, solar panels and the like. Gavin had also converted two wardrobe doors into exhibition panels, meeting a need we have had for some time for exhibition panels to use outdoors.

Gala Day saw the first use of the new tables and gazebo we had purchased with the £285 that was



our share of the Ruislip Waitrose’s Community Matters scheme in March. The tables are lighter and easier to carry than the wooden ones we had used for many years, the gazebo much easier and quicker to erect and take down than the previous one, bought after the Ickenham Festival “wash out” in 1998. All of this new equipment proved its worth during the three summer events we attended. The old gazebo found a good home – when offered on Freecycle no fewer than 35 people had applied for it within two hours! The gazebo was given to Coteford Junior School in

Pinner for use for their cake stalls.

If February attracted the highest number of people at our meeting, we had a good turnout also for the next meeting. Corin Freshwater-Turner, an Energy Efficiency Officer for Hillingdon Council,

spoke to us about the work of his team, which is primarily directed at helping owner-occupiers and tenants in privately rented accommodation to maximise the energy efficiency of their homes. Advice is given on grants for more money-efficient installations, and information on all forms of domestic energy-saving. This is of course very important to help people afford to keep warm as well as to reduce their carbon footprint.

The intensive question and answer session that followed the presentation was informative for us all and two-way, since in Gavin Roberts and Geoff Stephenson Corin had two people with considerable knowledge and practical experience of energy conservation. He was particularly keen for our help in promoting the Green Doctor initiative that was being piloted in Hillingdon. He thought encouragement from local people would help the willingness of some residents, particularly the elderly, to accept the help and advice on that was available. In principle we were very willing to help this valuable initiative but the very small targeted area, around Yeading Lane, is not a part of the Borough in which any of our members lived or with which we were familiar. We did, however, express our keenness to visit the Council's eco-friendly housing development in Hayes at a future date.

In addition to the Ickenham Festival, for which Hillingdon FoE once more contributed the Treasure Hunt and marched in the procession, we took bric-a-brac, books and the lucky dip to our regular main fundraising event, Hayes Carnival. Takings were £148, thanks especially to three members for very generous donations of bric-a-brac and books. The other regular fundraising occasion is the Ickenham Festive Night in December which was again an enjoyable evening and raised £45, all from the lucky dip. This was much less than in previous years, but we were charging just 50p a dip. This year additionally we had a stall at the Ruislip Woods Open Day in May and a week after the Hayes Carnival we were present at the Eastcote House Picnic that celebrated the re-opening of the historic walled garden.



We used this event to launch the next phase of Friends of the Earth's Fix the Food Chain campaign. It has to be admitted that, although HFoE had signed up to this campaign the previous year, we had been effectively inactive, working mainly on local issues. However, we decided that the issue of real food was a suitable one for Eastcote House and, by happy coincidence, the new campaign material had arrived a week before. This material, complemented by some farm animal figures, created an attractive stall with which we were very proud. The campaign by that point had become the "MOOvement for rainforest-free meat and dairy" with the hope of getting a Sustainable Livestock Bill adopted in the autumn.

In August, for the last meeting of the year, we accepted an invitation from Grow Heathrow, a part of the Transition Heathrow initiative, to visit them at Sipson, where in just a few months they had transformed the neglected Berkley Nurseries with its dilapidated glasshouses, piles of rubbish and old car wrecks, into a productive area offering the community fresh produce, the chance to learn new skills at its workshops and, importantly, pride in itself. as it attempts to recover from the years of

the threatened expansion of Heathrow. We spent a lovely summer evening looking around with wonder at what had already been achieved by the hard-working and dedicated group of young



people – 30 tonnes of rubbish removed, the glasshouses being repaired and reglazed, and impressive crops everywhere. We enjoyed warm hospitality, relaxing in a choice of comfortable armchairs and sofas that had been donated by local people. There are many more plans for the future, and Grow Heathrow has the support and thanks of its neighbours, so it was sad to hear not long after our visit that the owners of the land had applied for Grow Heathrow's eviction.

We have always felt that local issues are important, and a controversial issue under

discussion has been Hillingdon Council's plans for Ruislip Lido. No one would object to improved toilets, but the Council also plans a second car park and the re-introduction of boating, and there is serious debate on the effects some of the measures could have on local residents and on the wildlife and wild places that are to be found around the Lido. Hillingdon FoE was asked to support the opposition to the Council's plans led by Friends of Ruislip Lido, but we felt we needed to know more before taking either side. The heated debate has in part been of Hillingdon Council's own making since they were for a long time very reluctant to provide full details of their plans and the consultation was extremely limited. A Planning Application is expected. We took advantage of being at the Ruislip Woods Open Day to take a look at the area and to try and identify the site of the proposed additional car park. There appear to be some areas of concern, with the proximity of the car park to the water and the apparent mixing of vehicles and pedestrians on the approach road to the car park and the Lido Railway station. This is an issue on which there may be varying views within the Group and members must make up their own mind and their own comments in response to the Planning Application.

Last year the Group and individual members sent in objections to the proposed Biofuel Power Station in Southall, having heard from Food not Fuel about the problems posed by the large-scale use of biofuels, both globally and locally. September brought the welcome news that Ealing's Planning Committee had voted unanimously against this power station.

We must no doubt expect representations at some point on another "local" issue, that of the proposed High Speed Rail link from London to Birmingham that is set to run through West Ruislip.

May 2010 saw the General Election and a Coalition Government. True to their pre-election word, the Conservative / Liberal Democrat government made the scrapping of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Runway at Heathrow one of its very first announcements. A welcome right step in the interests of combating climate change and the Heathrow Communities so long blighted by the threat of this airport expansion. We would like to celebrate this victory wholeheartedly but at the back of the minds of many is the feeling that this may not be the end. Could a future government reverse this decision? We all remember the guarantee given by the Chief Executive of BAA when T5 was approved in November 2001 that they did not want and would not seek an additional runway, indeed it should be

ruled out forever, yet only months later lobbying had started for a 3<sup>rd</sup> Runway. The supporters of R3 have been very quiet since the May announcement!

Putting aside our doubts, it was right to mark the successful end to the eight year fight and a Family Fun Day was held at the end of August to bring campaigners and local residents together to celebrate “No Third Runway”. The event took place in Sipson Recreation Ground where in May 2008 members of Hillingdon FoE joined thousands of others in creating a giant NO. Holiday and illness meant we were not out in force at this year’s Fun Day but a few members did go along to join in the fun, not failing to remember that Sipson is the village BAA wanted to wipe off the map.

Another event where the Group’s full participation was affected by other commitments was “The Wave”, the Climate Change March held in London on 5 December. The colour was blue and an estimated 60,000 marched through the Capital, suitably clad or painted! Some HFoE members were able to join the March and were heartened by the vast attendance, from all over the country, and the energy and enthusiasm generated.

2009/2010 was another busy year and I think we ended it in a good financial position (unlike national FoE, who launched an appeal for £500,000 to enable them to be tackle the three urgent actions they believe the Government must take in the next year to tackle climate change). The Group’s current account is now held with the Cooperative Bank following completion of the transfer of our funds from the Alliance and Leicester (Santandar) and we hope to see our bank balance increase as the first subscriptions for two years come in.



We have also seen more members coming to meetings and supporting our events. I would like to say a very big thank you to all of you for being a part of Hillingdon FoE. I have calculated that at least 20 members have helped us in some significant and special way with events, fundraising or campaigns, during the year but I have decided not to try and name everyone for fear of forgetting someone. It will be understood however that three demanding events in less than a month as we had this summer stretch our limited “manpower” resources and there are more invitations to campaigning and fundraising opportunities than we can manage. We really do need more young and energetic members to effect the “transition” of Hillingdon Friends of the Earth to a bigger and more active campaigning group.

Susan Sweeting

16 October 2010