

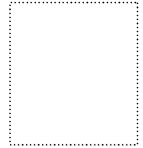


**Friends of the Earth**

**Bromley**

# August 2010 No. 272 Newsletter

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## August Meeting

Friends Meeting House,  
Ravensbourne Road, Bromley

*Roisin Robertson*  
will talk on

**Greenpeace: still riding high!**

**Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> August**  
7.30pm.

### *In this Issue:*

Diary Dates	2	FoE press releases	10
10 years ago	2	JDC review 2009/10	11
Campaigns report	3	FoE Europe	12,13
July mtg report	4,5	JDC mission statement	12,13
Transport info	6,7	JDC vulture campaign	14
Airport hours - letter	7	Bromley FoE contacts	15
Marinet news	8	Non-members section	16
Big butterfly count	9		

Copy for the next Newsletter must be with the Editor by  
**FRIDAY 13<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST**. Contact details inside front cover.

***Jo Johnson MP responds to our letter on concerns over Biggin Hill – page 7***

**Diary dates:**

**August 3<sup>rd</sup> (Tues)**

**Bromley FoE's August meeting** – Roisin Robertson on Greenpeace: still ridinn high!

**Sept 7<sup>th</sup> (Tues)**

**Bromley FoE's September meeting** – tbc

**Sept 26<sup>th</sup> (Sun)**

**High Elms Open Day, 12noon to 4pm**

**Oct 5<sup>th</sup> (Tues)**

**Bromley FoE's October meeting** – How Bromley will cut its carbon output (Alastair Baillie, Bromley Council)

**Nov 2<sup>nd</sup> (Tues)**

**Bromley FoE's November meeting** – Quaggy Waterways Action Group

**Ten Years Ago - What Bromley FoE's speakers were on about in 2000**

**January**

Grand Auction in aid of Salt Box Hill SSSI

**February**

Biggin Hill Airport

**March**

Tea and Chat (I guess that means they couldn't find a speaker)

**April**

Bill McGeachie, Manager, Bromley Field Study Centre

**May**

Matthew Frith, London Wildlife Trust

**June**

Getting the public to use public transport

**July**

Ash Green Organic Food Suppliers

**August**

Pat Ellender, Bromley's Environmental Promotions Unit (didn't turn up and was represented by a hat while everyone talked about recycling)

**Next Newsletter - copy details:**

Any news, articles, poems, questions, views etc for the next Newsletter must be with the editor **by FRIDAY 13<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST.**

**by post** to John Street, 82 Babbacombe Road, Bromley, BR1 3LS

**by phone** to: 020-8460-1078, **by email** to: [johnstreet@gn.apc.org](mailto:johnstreet@gn.apc.org).

The editor reserves the right to shorten contributions for space, or other, reasons

## Campaigns, Climate and Energy, Ann Garrett

### **Campaign stalls**

Many thanks to all who turned up to Foal Farm on July 11th to make this a really successful and enjoyable day. The weather was fine, the ducks swam well and we made a good profit! We also got 21 Get Serious cards signed and had some useful discussions with people. Our support from Viva the animal rights group was particularly helpful, and we were able to put some of their cards and information on our stall, and continue to build our contact with an important local organisation.

Special thanks to Anne Clark who had the usual large task of loading up and unpacking her car beforehand and afterwards, booking the stall and buying the prizes. Also to Bill Priestly for bringing plants to sell.

The next stall is at Cudham on August 30th - already several people have offered their help, for which we're really grateful.

### **Scientists cleared of 'Climategate' affair**

It was a relief to learn that scientists accused of manipulating climate data to strengthen the case for global warming have been exonerated by an independent inquiry.

The 'rigour and honesty' of academics at the University of East Anglia's Climatic Research Unit is in no doubt according to Sir Muir Russell who headed the review.

The so called Climategate affair was sparked last November when global warming sceptics hacked into the CRU server and leaked emails dating back

13 years online. The unit attracted severe criticism over its unhelpful and defensive responses to request for information, making outsiders suspicious. This was very damaging, as scientific proof is vital in helping the public and Government engage with the whole global warming campaign.

Professor Phil Jones, who was at the centre of the furore and had to resign, has now been offered a new role as director of research at CRU. He has maintained that the science of the unit has always been honest and sound. This has now been vindicated by three different independent external bodies.

### **Europe and solar power**

In a follow up to one of my previous articles for our newsletter, it is encouraging to see progress regarding harnessing the sun from the Sahara and Middle Eastern deserts, as part of a new European energy consensus.

There are proposals for vast solar farms in the Sahara to meet Europe's need for clean energy. According to the European commission's Institute for Energy it would require the capture of just 0.3% of the light falling on the Sahara and other Middle Eastern deserts (an area around the size of Wales) to meet all of Europe's energy requirements.

It is possible that Europe could be importing hundreds of megawatts of solar-generated electricity from North Africa within five years. This is looking promising as the EU is committed to sourcing 20% of its energy from renewable sources by 2020.

## **July meeting report – Debbie Witherick Becoming a Transition Town – Sevenoaks**

Susan Fallman and Mary Bassendine, from Transition Town Sevenoaks, shared with us their philosophies on the Transition Town movement in general and their experiences in achieving official Transition Town status in Sevenoaks in particular.

The talk was a hugely positive one emphasising how the Transition Town movement, whilst it does have eco movement elements, is more about the power of communities acting together at a local level to find ways of dealing with the massive global issues facing us over the next few decades, predominately rising energy and food prices.

Susan who has an MSc in environmental science was initially inspired at a talk given by Rob Hopkins (founder of the Transition Town movement) by the positivity of the movement, after often being rather depressed by what she sometimes felt to be the rather negative approach of many of the environmental groups to which she belonged.

Whilst being a very positive movement, it is realistic in the face of the challenges posed. The term “transition” itself implies a long term slow process of change to a smarter and better way of living, rather than being forced to make an abrupt change when problems really start to bite.

Taking the philosophies of the movement to their full conclusion, requires a wholesale revolution in the way that we exist at the moment

with a shift from global to local, macro to micro economies. In practice the methodology is to start of with a vision of what you would like your town to be like in the future and then work back to discover what needs to be done to achieve it.

Susan focused a lot on the world’s dependency on oil and spoke about ‘peak oil’, stating that 64 of the 94 oil producing countries in the world had reached their peak, i.e. extracted all the oil that can easily be extracted, such that from now on each barrel of oil becomes more and more expensive to extract. One of the ideas behind the transition town movement is that if we start to act locally now we can attempt to be in control of the situation when oil runs out rather than thrown into chaos by it. The key to this is for the transition plan to contain at its core an energy decent plan, such that the town is weaned off of its reliance on oil.

Three of the main objectives of the movement are:

- 1) resilience – making sure that the community is resilient to shocks outside of its control, primarily oil and food shortages;
- 2) re-localising – ensuring that the key components of life, such as food production, health care and education can all be done on a local; and
- 3) re-skilling – working to ensure that people in the community have all the necessary skills to allow it to be self sufficient e.g. farming, building, and basic electronics.

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## July meeting report, *continued*

Susan told us that in the UK there are 200 Transition Towns, ranging from Brixton in South East London to Totnes in Devon, and many more globally. Brixton, she said, had even introduced its own Brixton pound to be used in the local economy.

In Sevenoaks itself, Susan and Mary are part of a small core group of volunteers raising awareness and planning events on the many aspects of Transition – from dependence on fossil fuels, in so many areas of our lives, to much greater local self-sufficiency: in energy, transport, food local economy skills, building, health etc. Examples of events held are: workshops on home insulation with the cooperation of the local council and some energy suppliers and a community lunch attended by 200 representatives of local groups such as the Chamber of Commerce, local government and the WI.

Sevenoaks also have a Food & Growing working group, planning several projects in that area including a food and growing info centre and a communal food growing plot. Mary talked about the links to FoE, of which she is a member of Sevenoaks group. They have worked together on the Food Chain campaign for example.

When asked what one of the most difficult obstacles faced had been, Susan replied that she had been hugely frustrated when having attended a meeting on the new 25 year transport policy at Sevenoaks District council and asked the question about how it addressed the issues

posed by 'peak oil', she received the reply 'what's that?'

Susan was asked whether Sevenoaks being a wealthy area makes it easier to make Transition happen there. Susan replied that in fact in some ways it made it more difficult as there was an attitude by a few that they were wealthy enough to buy their way out of problems caused by increased oil prices. In addition Sevenoaks being a commuter town means that they face problems with the absence of a strong community as a starting point.

In answer to a question about what checks and balances are in place to ensure that Towns are meeting their aims and objectives, Susan replied that once you meet the few criteria necessary to become a transition town there are no further official requirements, it is up to the community to decide on the direction they should follow.

Whilst the problems we face are so large as to sometimes appear insurmountable, Susan said that she gains comfort and purpose from knowing that they are not waiting for government, industry, business to provide a solution but have started work themselves.

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## Transport information – Ray Watson

### **A sobering victory**

Friends of the Earth is among those celebrating the recent decision by BAA to withdraw plans to expand Heathrow and Stansted airports in the light of opposition by the new Government – but the decision produces a sobering thought.

That victory took years to achieve, causing much angst and fear – and costs – to local residents. There was at least eight years of blight for homeowners and businesses around the airports.

The sobering thought now is: the gloom may have been lifted for Heathrow and Stansted, but as a result what if there is now a new drive to expand other airports including our own Biggin Hill? For example, Birmingham Airport has just won permission for a 400m runway expansion to allow larger jets to make flights to the USA's west coast, and, nearer home, Southend is hoping to start European passenger services with a target of two million passengers annually.

Indeed, Biggin Hill has been quietly expanding by using a planning clause that allows construction of airport buildings without going through the entire planning process. It is called Permitted Development (PD) and it requires only that the planning authority – London Borough of Bromley – to be advised of the plan. In fact, some residents in the borough argue that the council has been too weak in allowing developments which may not be covered by PD rules.

Another such application has just been submitted by the airport.

The only glimmer of good news is that the hotel planned for the airport – granted by Bromley Council after much opposition from FoE and residents' associations – has been delayed because of money troubles.

But, overall, Bromley residents should be on their guard at this expansion by stealth. Do we want eight years of blight and battle like Heathrow and Stansted have suffered?

### **How much does a bus cost?**

Well, if you are the mayor of London you are prepared to pay up £7.8 million. For that you actually get five new Routemaster buses – but that is still exorbitant at a time of cutbacks, say his critics.

The mayor pledged a re-designed Routemaster as part of his election campaign and the first has now appeared. Its design allows a hop-on-hop-off platform just like the old Routemaster, a London favourite that was withdrawn from service in 2005. But cost-wise mayor Johnson's critics say that it is nothing more than an expensive vanity project.

The mayor says the £7.8million includes design and development, prototypes and testing costs. He said the bill per bus will drop to £300,000 when mass production begins.

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## Discussions on airport hours, letter to Jo Johnson MP

Several Bromley organisations are concerned that renewed efforts are being made to extend operating hours at Biggin Hill Airport, together with loosening the terms of the airport's lease to permit flights with fare-paying passengers. Such moves have been strenuously opposed on several occasions in the past 10 years. Bromley FoE has been in the forefront of such campaigns.

So that there should be no doubt as to our views, the letter below has been sent to Jo Johnson, MP for Orpington.

### Dear Mr Johnson

I have closely followed recent emails to and from you regarding Biggin Hill Airport. Please be aware that Bromley Friends of the Earth is one of a number of bodies that has vigorously opposed expansion at the airport – in particular any extension of operating hours.

We fully accept the terms of the current lease – for good or bad – and oppose any changes to it. Altering the lease may well eliminate the protection granted to residents by the High Court. For this reason we are prepared to live with the 125,000 limit on the number of permitted flights. Any reduction in that figure would, no doubt, result in a trade-off with the airport in other respects, probably an extension of hours.

Every so often the cry goes up that airport expansion would result in more jobs. Biggin Hill has a low rate of unemployment and any new jobs created would not necessarily benefit local people.

On the macro economic front, you should note that people travelling abroad from Biggin Hill add to the country's £19 billion tourism deficit.

You should also be aware that in recent years there have been a number of accidents involving fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters using the airport. For that reason alone, it is foolhardy to have an international airport where aircraft fly in over crowded suburbs, schools and hospitals.

For 10 years this group and others in the borough – and outside too – have opposed expansion at Biggin Hill Airport and we will continue to do so. We should therefore appreciate your answer to the points made above.

**Mr Johnson replied:** 'I have made my views known in previous emails you've seen and have nothing more to add at this stage'

### Transport info, *continued*

#### Driven to the wall

Inevitably, some excellent ideas have become victims of the Government's cost-cutting drive.

One that has been driven to the wall is the £5000 subsidy for new electric cars that was due to be introduced next year. This will be a blow to companies like Nissan which is due to market its Leaf all-British electric car next year. And it will be a considerable setback to the whole non-petrol vehicle market being pursued by the other major carmakers.

## News from Marinets

### **Eco warrior's Pacific journey shows how 'dumb plastic' is killing our seas**

David de Rothschild set out on a mammoth ocean crossing aboard his recycled yacht to highlight pollution of Earth's waters — but even he was shocked by what he found.

The voyage has been overshadowed by the more graphic pollution of the BP oil spill, but even that is dwarfed by the scale of the problem the Plastiki highlights. While the deaths of seabirds and marine life in the Gulf of Mexico are still being measured in the hundreds, according to the UN Environment Programme, plastic debris causes the deaths of more than a million seabirds every year, and more than 100,000 marine mammals. Back in 2006, the UN concluded that every square mile of ocean contains 46,000 pieces of floating plastic. Since then the problem has only grown. For the full story see The Guardian of the 11th July 2010.

### **Scientists call for worldwide system of highly protected marine reserves**

More than 245 marine scientists from 35 countries are calling for the establishment of a worldwide system of very large, highly protected marine reserves as 'an essential and long overdue contribution to improving stewardship of the global oceanic environment.'

While small marine reserves are known to protect some species, large reserves comparable to large national parks on land are necessary to better protect sea life in our oceans, which cover 71% of the planet.

By signing the statement, the experts endorsed the scientific case for designating very large, highly protected marine reserves and called on policymakers to take bolder action in establishing these areas. The statement issued by Global Ocean Legacy, a project of the Pew Environment Group, has been released in conjunction with World Oceans Day.

"The need to set aside more and larger marine reserves as one means of ensuring the continued health of our oceans is well accepted among marine scientists", said Dr. Bernard Salvat, noted coral reef scientist and professor emeritus at the University of Paris' École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE) and the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS). "We have to work on very large trans-boundary marine protected areas with intergovernmental agreements. We now need to speak out to educate governments and the public about the crisis facing our oceans and the long term benefits of establishing large, no-take marine reserves."

Overfishing, pollution and climate change are adversely affecting the health of the world's oceans, and ultimately threatening the livelihoods, food security and economic development of millions of people. Very large reserves can help reduce these problems, according to a recently published book, *The Unnatural History of the Sea*, by Dr. Callum Roberts, who is with the UK University of York.



## About the big butterfly count (you've just missed it, though)

The big butterfly count is a nationwide survey aimed at helping us assess the health of our environment.

### Why count butterflies?

The survey is being launched during 2010 to mark the International Year of Biodiversity. Butterflies react very quickly to change in their environment which makes them excellent biodiversity indicators. Butterfly declines are an early warning for other wildlife losses. That's why counting butterflies can be described as taking the pulse of nature.

The count will also identify trends in species that will help us plan how to protect butterflies from extinction as well as understand the effect of climate change on wildlife.

### How to take part

Simply count butterflies for 15 minutes during bright (preferably sunny) weather from 24th July to 1st August. We have chosen this time of year because most butterflies are at the adult stage of their lifecycle, so more likely to be seen. Records are welcome from anywhere: from parks and gardens, to fields and forests.

If you are counting from a fixed position in your garden, count the maximum number of each species that you can see at a single time. For example, if you see three Red Admirals together on a buddleia bush then record it as 3, but if you only see one at a time then record it as 1 (even if you saw one on several occasions) – this is so that you don't count the same butterfly more than once. If you are doing your count on a walk, then

simply total up the number of each butterfly species that you see during the 15 minutes.

You can submit separate records for different dates, and for different places that you visit. Remember that your count is useful even if you do not see any butterflies or moths.

You can only send in your sightings online at [www.bigbutterflycount.org](http://www.bigbutterflycount.org). Unfortunately, we cannot accept any counts sent in on paper or by email, text or phone. Anyone can take part, young or old, but if you are under 16 you'll need a parent or guardian to assist when you submit your count online. The website will be open to receive records throughout July and August.

### Celebrity backing

Sir David Attenborough, President of Butterfly Conservation, and Alan Titchmarsh MBE, Vice President of Butterfly Conservation, have given their enthusiastic backing to the project and will support its launch and operation.

### Who is running the survey?

The survey is run by the charity Butterfly Conservation, in association with Marks & Spencer as part of their Plan A commitments to encourage sustainable agriculture and help to protect the environment.

You can help Butterfly Conservation in many ways. Visit <http://www.butterfly-conservation.org/> to find out how to - Become a member; Help their other surveys; Donate money to help them save butterflies and moths.

## What FoE has been saying – some recent press releases

### **£34m cuts to low carbon technology will harm UK's economic recovery**

Commenting on £34 million of cuts to low-carbon technology spending announced by the Government today, Friends of the Earth's senior economy campaigner Simon Bullock said:

"Slashing spending on low-carbon technology is a false saving - especially on the same day Ministers announce that building a strong green economy is crucial to financial recovery. It's essential that the Government prioritises the shift to a greener Britain - this will create thousands of new jobs, save money on fuel bills and make us less reliant on dwindling oil and gas supplies.

"Climate change is an urgent problem that cannot be ignored - and failure to invest in a low-carbon future now will lead to huge bills later on."

### **Government to re-consult on national planning statements**

FoE has welcomed the decision by the coalition Government to strengthen and re-consult on the Energy National Policy Statements (NPS)

FoE's senior economy campaigner, Simon Bullock, said: "National Policy Statements must require applicants to quantify the greenhouse gas emissions from their projects and ensure that decisions on new power stations are compatible with the Government's legal targets under the Climate Change Act.

"This re-consultation must include a far stronger process for addressing the views of people and communities

directly affected by new developments - this was a major failing of the previous Government's approach."

### **Huhne calls for 30 per cent cut in EU emissions**

Speaking in response to the joint announcement by Chris Huhne, the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change - and his French and German counterparts - that they support the EU moving to a 30 per cent emissions reduction target by 2020, Friends of the Earth's Head of Climate Change Mike Childs said:

"Calling for a 30 per cent cut in emissions is a positive first step - but Chris Huhne must also ensure the UK shows leadership by unilaterally upping our national target for cuts to at least 42 per cent by 2020, without resorting to dodgy mechanisms like carbon offsetting, providing much greater momentum to move Europe forward."

"To have a reasonable chance of effectively tackling climate change these European Ministers need to be bolder and aim for cuts of at least 40 per cent by 2020 without offsetting." This would be world-leading, realistic and affordable, and would send a powerful signal that those countries most responsible for global warming are willing and able to take strong action.

"And cuts of at least 40 per cent would also send a positive signal to investors that the EU is serious about developing a low carbon economy, new jobs and new industries."

## Jubilee Debt Coalition – Review of 2009-2010

### A world fuelled by debt

If we had begun to forget the power that debt can have over people's lives, the last 18 months have been a wake up call. From mortgage lending in the US, to online savings in Icelandic banks, we have seen that irresponsible lending is essentially gambling with the lives and livelihoods of people around the world. We have the proof that the financial system is out of control.

In recent years, we have been told repeatedly that the debt crisis is over; that poverty will be made history as long as we continue with the policies we are following. The bursting of the rich world's debt bubble has shown up that story for what it is. But the financial crisis has also presented us with the opportunity to once again get to grips with the real underlying causes of global poverty.

That's why we helped found the campaigning platform Put People First — not just to make sure the poor don't pay the price of this crisis, but to change the debate on global finance. We mobilised thousands of people onto the streets of London in 2009 to demand a very different type of financial system. World leaders patched up the old order, but the seeds of a new one have been sown, and radical reform is being discussed across the world.

We also took concrete steps to change the systems that promote poverty. We ensured the UK became the first country in the world to pass a bill prohibiting the activities of vulture funds. Following the earthquake in

Haiti, we took part in an international mobilisation of hundreds of thousands of people to ensure total debt cancellation for that exploited country. And while the rich world's answer to climate change has been to throw new, unjust loans at the problem the Jubilee movement helped put climate justice on the agenda, to stop a terrible deal from being forced through at Copenhagen.

In this booklet we will celebrate these successes, but also lay out the enormous challenges still to be overcome. We will present a vision of a world in which countries are freed from the burden of unjust debts and in which finance serves the needs of people rather than people serving finance.

We hope this will inspire you to continue being a part of the Jubilee movement in the years to come.

Nick Dearden, Director, Jubilee Debt Campaign.

The booklet referred to was sent to Jubilee Debt Coalition supporters recently.

More info about Jubilee Debt Coalition can be obtained from: JDC, 28 Charles Square, London, N1 6HT, 020-7324-4722, or by email to [info@jubileedebtcampaign.org.uk](mailto:info@jubileedebtcampaign.org.uk) or by visiting their website [www.jubileedebtcampaign.org.uk](http://www.jubileedebtcampaign.org.uk).

## FoE Europe - New plans could open Europe's fields to GM crops

### EC proposals to ban GM crops: an empty and dangerous deal

New proposals to be introduced that are supposed to allow European countries more autonomy over the decision to ban genetically modified (GM) crops form an empty and potentially dangerous deal for member states, according to FoE Europe.

Member states are being offered no additional powers to ban GM crops on health, environment and contamination impacts, despite these being the most serious and legally reliable grounds. Instead, only additional ethical grounds are offered, which are legally intangible, subjective and easily overturned in court.

Additionally, while the European Commission proposals address the

banning of GM crops by national governments, there is nothing to protect conventional and organic farmers, and consumers, in countries that decide to allow GM crops to be grown. The Commission's own impact assessment concluded that the proposals would lead to a "negative impact for non-GM farmers".

The European public, environment and food and farming sector will only be protected if the GM framework includes strong Europe-wide measures to prevent food and feed from being contaminated, and the member states' demands to improve the safety assessments for GM crops are fully implemented. It will be vital that these measures ensure that the biotech industry is liable for damages caused by any cross-contamination as a result of GM cultivation.

## Jubilee Debt Coalition – mission statement

In the 1960s and 70s rich country governments and their banks lent enormous sums of money to Third World countries, newly liberated from colonialism. This lending was used to buy allies in the Cold War, and to shore up Western economies. In the Third World, all too often, it flowed into the hands of dictatorial regimes, was spent on useless or even harmful mega-projects or arms sales and was siphoned off in corruption.

At the end of the 1970s, the very institutions which had lent so much money vastly increased interest rates. Scores of Third World countries were caught in a debt crisis.

This debt crisis meant that however much poor governments repaid, the stock of debt never got smaller. And in order to make these repayments, governments were prevented from spending on health, education and economic development.

The 1980s and 90s were 'lost decades' for development, when vast sums of money flowed from the global South to the global North, making the poor poorer and the rich richer.

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## FoE Europe welcomes new timber law

### **New timber law first step towards banning illegal timber in Europe**

Friends of the Earth Europe welcomed the majority vote in European Parliament today in favour of the European directive to ban illegal timber from the European market. Friends of the Earth Europe has been campaigning for over ten years for this law, to save the world's forests and to make sure forest dependent people get a fair deal. Friends of the Earth Europe will continue to follow the implementation process, to ensure countries and companies turn it into an effective law.

The directive is a compromise deal between representatives of the European Parliament and Commission. It contains strong and weak points, but is an important first

step towards a level playing field in the international timber sector.

Geert Ritsema, Friends of the Earth Europe, said: "This law, if properly enforced, will have a huge positive impact on the world's forests and their inhabitants. It will also mean that developing countries will finally start benefiting from the revenues that, until now, have disappeared due to illegal trade."

The new law obligates operators to be transparent about the origin of their wood. Also, they have to assess the possibility of illegality and try to reduce the risk of selling illegal wood. All operators have to give information on where their timber is bought and sold. These measures will provide more transparency in the chain of trade and will reduce the risk of illegal timber appearing on the market.

## Jubilee Debt Coalition – mission statement, *continued*

The international debt movement, of which Jubilee Debt Campaign is a part, has had enormous successes. As a result of our work, over \$100 billion of Third World debt has been wiped out, meaning tens of millions more people are now receiving basic health care and education:

\*\* Debt relief in Tanzania allowed teacher numbers to double in three years

\*\* Primary school fees were abolished in Ghana, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and rural areas of Benin

\*\* Almost a million children have been vaccinated against disease in Mozambique

\*\*In Zambia, user fees were abolished at rural healthcare clinics.

But debt remains a massive issue for many countries. Developing countries are still repaying debts which benefited their rich country lenders but harmed their own people and environment. As a result, governments of these countries are still more accountable to international institutions than to their own people.

We aim to break the chains of this debt slavery— an essential ingredient in the quest to make poverty history.

## JDC – Ending the vulture campaign – successes in 2009/10

Few companies can claim to represent irresponsible finance as well as so-called 'vulture funds'. Unlike the birds they are named after, which only scavenge off the dead, these funds profit from the poverty and misery of the living.

Vultures make money out of buying up bits of defaulted Third World debt very cheaply, and then suing the country for the face value of the debt plus interest and compensation. They make extortionate profits off some of the poorest countries in the world. When they can't get their money straight away, they hound the country over years, trying to seize potential investments — including even aid money.

Last autumn, two such companies attacked Liberia and successfully sued it for £20 million in the British High Court, on the basis of a debt taken out in the 1970s.

Little is known about vulture funds — they benefit from the secrecy of the tax havens in which they're based. But we do know that at least 54 companies have taken legal action against 12 of the world's poorest countries, for claims amounting to \$1.5 billion. One-fifth of these cases are or will be tried in UK courts.

The money these companies take means, of course, that those countries have less money to spend on health, education and the basic needs of their people. It also means that British debt relief is effectively flowing into the hands of these companies.

In Spring 2009, Labour MP Sally Keeble raised the issue of vultures in the House of Commons through a 'ten minute rule' bill. Along with the thousands of postcards that debt activists sent to their MPs throughout the year, this persuaded the government to launch a consultation and come out in favour of legislation to stop the activities of vulture funds against very poor countries.

In November, Labour MP Andrew Gwynne was chosen as one of the MPs who could introduce his own piece of legislation into the House of Commons. He chose the vultures bill, though due to illness, Sally Keeble steered the bill through the Commons.

The bill had many set-backs — and was up against the timetable of the General Election. But ultimately the work of our campaigners ensured the bill maintained its support, and it became one of the first private members' bills in history to be passed as part of the end-of session 'wash-up' procedure.

This is still not the end of the road. As a price for passing the bill, a compromise was made that the bill will expire in 12 months' time unless it is made permanent. Moreover, the bill only covers very poor countries — and leaves out many other developing countries also plagued by vulture funds.

But it is a momentous step forward and, we hope, will now help convince legislators in the US to adopt their own bill and end the vulture culture once and for all.

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### Press Officer:

vacant

### Programme Organiser:

Sheila Brown 01689-851605

### Outings organisers:

John & Sue Boccock 020-8464-5990  
*email – johnboccock@hotmail.com*

### Newsletter Editor:

John Street 020-8460-1078  
*email - johnstreet@gn.apc.org*

### Membership Secretary:

Dan Sloan 01689-838819

### Merchandising:

Anne Clark 020-8289-8483

### Teas:

Anne Clark / Ivy Smith

### Campaigns –

### Transport:

Ray Watson 01959-571566

### Climate and Energy:

Ann Garrett 020-8460-1295

### Food and Ethical Farming:

Peter Gandolfi details below

### Planning and development:

Tamara Galloway 01689-855352  
*tamaragalloway@yahoo.com*

### Energy and Renewables

Jonathan Stanley  
*jjstanley171@hotmail.com*

### Waste and Recycling

Annette Rose  
*annette.rose1@ntlworld.com*

### Bromley FoE web site:

**[www.bromleyfoe.co.uk](http://www.bromleyfoe.co.uk)**

Peter Gandolfi  
*famgando@hotmail.com*

### Letters to the Editor

Why not write us a letter if you have a strong opinion on something or just want to share your thoughts. Send them in and perhaps even start a discussion - who knows.

### Need a lift to meetings?

If you require a lift to Bromley FoE meetings, please contact Ray Watson or Sheila Brown on the numbers shown above.

### Disclaimer

Please note that any opinion expressed in this Newsletter is not necessarily that of Bromley Friends of the Earth or Friends of the Earth.

**Reuser Column**  
**Don't throw It away - Reuse It!**

If you have any items to sell, or anything that you require, please send details to the Editor. Items will be displayed for three months, the number in brackets after an item indicating for how long it has appeared. Could you please contact us if an item has been sold/obtained, so that it can be removed from the newsletter.

Any donations to Bromley FoE generated from this column gratefully received!

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### **Non-members' Section**

If you are not a member of Bromley Friends of the Earth, BFoE, then hello. We are an active local group affiliated to national Friends of the Earth concerned with promoting the understanding of environmental issues. We also campaign on these issues at a local, national and international level.

If you would like to know more about who we are and what we do please contact either of our co-ordinators, Sheila Brown (01689-851605) or Ann Garrett (020-8460-1295); their email addresses are on the previous page. Alternatively, you can come along to one of our free monthly meetings held on the first Tuesday of every month at the Friends Meeting House, Ravensbourne Road, Bromley (that's towards the bottom of the High Street and on the right going south). If you would like to join us then please fill in and send us the form below.

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### **Membership Application/Renewal\* Form** (\*please delete as appropriate.)

Please return this form to: **Bromley FoE, 2 Bucks Cross Cottages, Chelsfield Village, Orpington, Kent, BR6 7RN**. Other enquiries regarding the group should be sent to: Birch House, Grays Road, Westerham, Kent, TN16 2JB; phone 01959-571566, email [r.watson865@btinternet.com](mailto:r.watson865@btinternet.com).

I wish to support Bromley Friends of the Earth and enclose my £8 annual subscription. I also enclose a donation (optional) of ..... To help towards the cost of producing and distributing the monthly Newsletter.

Name.....

Address.....

..... Postcode.....

Email Address.....

Do you have any hobbies or interests that may be of use to the group?

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