

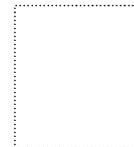


Friends of the Earth

Bromley

July 2009 No. 259 Newsletter

Bromley FoE: inquiries to Birch House, Grays Road, Westerham TN16 2JB
email: raywatson@iclway.co.uk; website: www.bromleyfoe.co.uk



July Meeting

Friends Meeting House,
Ravensbourne Road, Bromley

Bill Rigby
(FoE – MARINET Campaign team leader)

on

The Marine Reserves campaign
A last chance to rescue our seas?

Tuesday 7th July
7.30pm.

Copy for the next Newsletter must be with the Editor by
SUNDAY 19TH JULY. Contact details inside front cover.

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August 15th – Bromley FoE's Summer Fun Day – see page 2 for more info

Diary dates:**July 5th (Sun)****Keston Countryside Day** – Keston Common, 2pm – 5pm
Bromley FoE Stall**July 7th (Tues)****Bromley FoE's July Meeting** – Bill Rigby from MARINET on FoE's Marine Reserves Campaign. MARINET is the marine info network of FoE and is campaigning to establish marine reserves and to halt overfishing.**July 19th (Sun)****Foal Farm Country Festival** – Foal Farm, Biggin Hill, 11am – 5pm**August 4th (Tues)****Bromley FoE's August Meeting** – Doug Black re Bromley's proposed development plans**August 15th (Sat)****Bromley FoE's Summer Family Fun Day**, Birch House, Grays Road Westerham, courtesy of Ray and Marina**Sept 1st (Tues)****Bromley FoE's September Meeting** – Ronel Klopfer from Stop Climate Chaos coalition**Sept 26th (Sat)****Bromley FoE stall** in Bromley High Street on Climate Change**Bromley FoE's Summer Fun Day - An invitation to have fun**

Relax...and have fun on a summer's day. Bromley FoE will be having a Fun Day for all members on Saturday August 15 between 1pm and 5pm at Ray and Marina's garden which is in green belt land on the boundary between Bromley and Kent (where Birch House, Grays Rd, Westerham, TN16 2JB). And if it rains we will hold it on indoors.

There will be a very light lunch at no charge, though a donation to Bromley FoE funds would be appreciated. And, while you do not have to bring food, please bring your own drinks – wine, beer, soft drinks etc.

The garden has an extensive patch of ancient woodland so if you want to explore bring some stout shoes and clothing that can withstand the occasional bramble. There will also be some not-so-serious games and a raffle is being organised to boost FoE funds. Donate a prize if you can.

We are limited to 30 people so first-come-first-served. Contact Ray and Marina by email at raywatson@iclway.co.uk or phone 01959 571566.

Next Newsletter - copy details:

Any news, articles, poems, questions, views etc for the next Newsletter must be with the editor **by SUNDAY 19TH JULY**.

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

by phone to: 020-8460-1078, **by email** to: johnstreet@gn.apc.org.

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

Transport information – Ray Watson, transport campaigner

Taken for a ride...

At first sight park-and-ride schemes seem attractive -- traffic is kept out of busy centres and car journeys are shortened. Certainly, Bromley's Christmas park-and-ride scheme is relatively popular.

But also note the disadvantages, as evidenced by the furore caused by plans by Bath council to introduce a scheme calling for parking spaces for 1,400 vehicles on an historic meadow just out of town – and sited in the green belt. This was part of a £50million transport plan to help control the city's four million visitors a year.

The proposal brought a storm of protest but the council went ahead with the park-and-ride scheme, which is now awaiting a ministerial decision.

Bromley's small scheme has the same problem – the parking area is the car park of Norman Park, which is far from ideal. Any further such schemes in the borough would invariably take up valuable open land, possibly green belt territory.

A further question arises over CO2 emissions. It may be that the buses used for the scheme emit more CO2 than the amount saved by cars not driving right to the town centre.

The answer to congested town centres like Bromley's is for the council to develop local shopping and employment areas so that there is no need for park-and-ride and also to campaign for better public transport for

those obliged to go to the overcrowded town centre.

This makes much more sense than the council's current policy of giving the town centre a revamp that will add considerably to traffic problems.

Bikes ahead

As this column pointed out last month, there is a bright spotlight now shining on cycling as a means of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The mayor of London has joined up with a Summer of Cycling campaign – helped, no doubt, by research showing that Londoners make 545,000 cycle journeys each day, up 10 per cent in a year.

The mayor's objective is to take cycling to schools and offices, set up cycle hire schemes, provide more cycle parking spaces and to create 12 Cycle Highways providing clear routes linking outer London with the centre.

It had better work: because the bill is £111 million.

Pot of transport gold

In spite of the success of London's congestion charge zone, road pricing seems to have stalled in other towns and cities, with Manchester residents famously rejecting a scheme that would have brought the benefit of a multi-million pound expansion of public transport in the region.

Which means that a tidy amount of cash is sitting unspent in the Department of Transport fund to

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June meeting report, from Sheila Brown

Helen Rimmer from Underwood Street joined us to unveil the new Food Chain campaign, through which Friends of the Earth seeks to break the vicious circle of deforestation and land degradation to fuel intensive farming in Europe, which results in a huge contribution to greenhouse gases.

The campaign seeks to achieve a move from current intensive farming practices towards more sustainable farming on a human scale, replacing the emphasis on quantity produced with better quality, and encouraging people to eat less meat. It in no way seeks to dictate that everyone should become a vegetarian.

There is ever-growing awareness of livestock's impact on the environment and on climate change. The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation published a report in 2006 entitled "Livestock's long shadow" stating that livestock's contribution to environmental problems is on a massive scale. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment in 2005 pointed to livestock's negative impacts on ecosystems through deforestation, nutrient overloading, greenhouse gas emissions, nutrient depletion of grazing areas, dryland degradation from overgrazing and related factors.

In 2008 the Government's Strategy Unit produced a report "Food Matters - towards a strategy for the 21st Century, which looked among other things at the world livestock situation.

It has now been established that livestock farming practices contribute to 18% of global greenhouse gas emissions responsible for climate

change. This is a colossal amount, and actually greater than that of transportation which has up till now been the focus of our campaigning. We need to break the destructive link in the chain and we hope to achieve this by getting more media attention. One positive step was the NHS announcement earlier this year that it would reduce its use of meat and dairy products.

The 18% of global greenhouse gas emissions is roughly made up of one-third due to deforestation – forests and soils store carbon which is reduced when land is cleared, one-third due to methane from ruminants and one-third nitrous oxide from animal waste and fertilisers. It is not an efficient use of land and has huge negative impact on biodiversity.

Contrary to this, small-scale non-intensive farming methods, especially livestock in upland areas and sustainable hill farms, are judged to have a positive environmental impact.

In addition to the huge and ongoing situation of forest clearance for cattle ranching, the rise in the use of soy in animal feed is seen as one of the major negative factors. Soy provides a cheap source of protein for animal feed; its use has soared as a result of agricultural policy and since BSE led to the ban on bone meal and animal products in animal feed, so that our pigs and poultry are now totally dependent on soy. Huge amounts of the soy grown in South America and imported into Europe are Genetically Modified, another concern.

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June meeting report, *continued*

Importing animal feeds makes UK farmers very vulnerable to volatile commodity markets, and farmers and consumers have both seen a huge price rise because of this, and it's caused a real financial headache for farmers.

These are the horrifying statistics. The EU has become the biggest market for South American soy meal and a third of all Brazilian soy is exported to Europe. The EU market needs an area the size of Hungary to grow the soy it uses. Since 1996, the amount of land needed to produce soy for the European market is roughly equal to the area of deforestation in Brazilian forests.

In 2007, the UK imported 1.7 million tons of soy meal and 650,000 tons of soy beans from South America, from an area of 1.2 million hectares; this is larger than Devon and Cornwall. Deforestation and intensive farming leads to dustbowl conditions. A major concern is the negative social impact of people being forced off the land and being displaced into the cities; there have been violent evictions and quashing of resistance, even resulting in slave labour. In Paraguay 100,000 small farmers have been evicted from their land since the soy boom started.

The Food Chain Campaign offers a range of solutions.

Firstly, stop spending over £700 million of UK taxpayers' money on factory-farming subsidies. Divert money towards subsidising small farms that deliver environmentally friendly solutions and invest in home-grown

feeds, such as peas, beans, lupins to replace imports.

**Get the public sector to buy less meat and dairy; with £2.2 billion being spent on food this could have a massive impact. Extend from the NHS to schools and the military. Defra should divert money towards this, rather than supporting intensive farming practices.

**Tackle climate change – an international agreement to protect existing forests and halt destruction.

**Fund and research sustainable farming – put money into alternative breeds, feed plant varieties and cropping systems that can deliver planet-friendly farming.

**Change global investment policy

**Make corporates accountable for their impacts on people and the environment.

**Revise the sustainable consumption and production strategy to consider global impacts of UK consumption, and review European trade policy.

More details about this can be found in "What's feeding our food?", of which we were given copies. We had a little quiz, trying to fit statistics and statements together, and certainly felt better educated on this vast and hugely important subject. Further details on aims, timetable and logistics of this campaign are contained in the Regional Gathering report on page 8.

Bromley Goes Green

Many thanks to all those who turned up to support our stall in Bromley High Street which we held all day on June 5th. Although it was cold and rainy, we managed to get about 30 Food Chain cards signed, and members of the public took joining FoE and other leaflets. The Council environment officers were pleased to see their leaflets on the stall as well !

Two of us wore animal masks and made sounds to attract people ! The response was generally positive and the day well worthwhile.

Special Climate Talks

World leaders are to meet for an unprecedented second summit on climate change this year to get agreement on a tough new treaty by December in Copenhagen. The UN Secretary- General Ban Ki-Moon, is to call the heads of government together in September to " galvanise political will " about what he describes to be the " defining issue of our time ." There are also plans for another G20 summit to discuss the issue in the autumn.

These will follow a meeting of the 17 key world leaders convened at the initiative of Barack Obama immediately after the annual G8 summit in July. The aims of the summits are "for an ambitious and effective treaty to help establish a firm foundation for a sustainable economic future."

One of the main stumbling blocks is how much the rich countries will undertake to cut their emissions of greenhouse gases in the short to medium term. There is a general

agreement that they should be reduced by 80% on 1990 levels by 2050, the minimum that scientists say will be needed to avoid dangerous climate change. Getting developing countries to slow the growth of their emissions is another great challenge.

In the end, senior negotiators say that success or failure will depend not so much on the climate talks themselves, but on whether the world adopts a Green New Deal as the best way to revive the world's economy.

Explorer returns after months on thin ice

The situation in at the North Pole is even more serious than ever. The explorer Pen Hadow, has been out on the Arctic ice cap in temperatures down to 90C, measuring the thickness of the ice and finding less of it beneath his feet. He and other colleagues found only two spots where it was more than 5.2 metres thick, normal for the permanent polar ice cap. The average they reported was just 1.774m.

There was also a strange lack of snow causing the team to abandon the usual practice of anchoring their tent, and resulting in screwing fixings directly into the ice. During 20 years in the Arctic, Pen Hadow has never had to use screws before. They experienced a terrifying moment when the ice flow on which they were camped began to break up in the middle of the night, causing them to move very quickly to a safer place. They barely got off the ice flow in time, and were lucky to survive.

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Campaigns info, *continued*

The unsettling information gathered will go for scientific analysis to see what it tells us about the future of the polar ice cap. The situation certainly doesn't look very hopeful.

Local Groups Conference - Media Workshop

This was very useful and included knowing how to get the media interested, how to write and implement a media strategy, and be confident in using the media to the benefit of local groups. Discussion in pairs and groups took place about the importance of using the media for a new campaign, topical issues and events, all of which can be supported by occasional stunts and public meetings.

We analysed different FoE news articles from a range of local papers, and saw how vital it is to have succinct eye-catching headings, effective photos, and the inclusion of key points of information such as campaign facts, name of organisation, contact details, and information about any action and appearance of celebrities.

I hope my occasional efforts can live up to some of the ideals!

Finally it was pointed out that newspaper readership is slowly declining but that papers are still more significant than the internet and Ceefax. TV news viewing figures have dropped sharply, too, due to satellite, cable and increased commercial competition.

According to the media agency MarketTiers, people now listen to radio for longer than they watch TV.

Audiences for speech radio in particular are rising. It's interesting to note that it's not always the newest technology that captures public attention!

Transport info, *continued*

finance transport innovation – probably something like £1 billion.

What to do with it? There is just one suggestion: use it to boost public transport backed by providing one-on-one journey planning advice as successfully tried in cities like Bristol. That is the way to get motorists out of their cars.

Stop spending!

Environmentalists have had a tough time opposing the growth of aviation, but the recession is at least putting a cap on some expansion. Take Gatwick Airport where there are plans to spend £900 million on improvements.

Not so fast, a group of airlines has told owners BAA, pointing out that traffic at the airport was down 12 per cent this year. They are demanding talks about the scheme.

Of course, the hidden reason behind the airlines' attitude is that they fear the costs will be passed on to them via higher landing fees – and they, in turn, would have to add that charge to ticket prices that are already turning off people flying.

London Regional Gathering – from Sheila Brown

Ann and I attended the South East Regional Gathering in London on 30th May. These happen twice a year and are an opportunity to be energised and updated, and to network. Here are a few highlights.

The opening plenary encouraged us to build on the success of the Big Ask campaign as we continue to campaign for climate change, culminating in the climate change march in London on 5 December, linked to the United Nations Climate Change Conference to be held in December in Copenhagen.

Food Chain Campaign

The day marked the introduction of the new Food Chain campaign with an introductory session and a workshop on activism tools and tactics.

What do we want to achieve from this campaign?

- 1) A change in agricultural policy and a shift away from intensive farming and feeding soy. Produce better quality and less.
- 2) Sustainable procurement with less damaging impact on the planet; tighten up labelling.
- 3) A strong deal to protect forest areas and lessen the impact on climate change
- 4) Research into ways to prevent reliance on imports
- 5) Redirect investment so the UK does not support damaging projects
- 6) Work on the corporates – challenge supermarkets, drawing on past supermarket

campaigns; work towards having an Ombudsman.

- 7) Achieve sustainable consumption through product strategy; ensure UK policy does not push production abroad
- 8) Trade – campaign on EU trade rules, working towards not damaging the environment.

We want to work with Friends of the Earth in Europe and also in South America.

What's happened so far?

December 2008 – the political launch with Friends of the Earth's report "What's Feeding our Food?"

January 2009 – the NHS announced it was reducing meat on menus for climate change reasons

February 2009 – Fr Edilberto Sena visited the UK speaking of the impact on the rainforests and EDM 845 was tabled

April 2009 - individual activism launched; people writing to MPs

May 2009 – Launch of local group activism and EDM 845 in top ten with over 200 signatures.

How will we do it?

Phase 1 – ask MPs to support EDM 845

Phase 2 – from December onwards with further lobbying.

Friends of the Earth is working with Compassion in World Farming on this campaign.

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London Regional Gathering – *report continued*

We came away with our action packs for our Day of Action on 20th June, postcards for signing, leaflets with pop-up chickens, Fix the Food Chain badges and, for the fun factor, huge “sandwich board” cows and hens to bring our campaign to life.

Closing Plenary – Stop Climate Chaos

We had a highly stimulating closing talk from Dr Ashok Sinha from Stop Climate Chaos. He was a really dynamic speaker – absolutely no chance of falling asleep during his talk!

Stop Climate Chaos is a coalition of 100 organisations and 11 million people working to halt environmental damage being caused by climate change. This is vital to reduce the devastating effects on rainforests, the Barrier Reef, to avoid conflicts arising from scarce resources, to prevent war, to have access to water due to climate change. Rise in sea levels will result in refugees. 20% of economic losses are due to climate change. Peace, security, green, economic, political and humanitarian reasons dictate that we should work to avert climate change.

All the things needed to do this will improve the world generally, with life on a more human scale and more cohesive societies, conserving resources and protecting the global community. We have the know-how and we have the means at our disposal.

This is an immense challenge for political leaders, who would have to make unpopular decisions based on long-term rather than short-term

objectives. Short-term is the norm. We need brave political leaders to take these hard decisions. We need to encourage politicians. We need to turn this around by 2015.

The United Nations Climate Change Conference to be held in Copenhagen in December will be “the most important talks in the history of humankind”. If no good deal is reached at Copenhagen, then the will to do this will dissipate. We must engage the decision makers. That is why Friends of the Earth and Stop Climate Change (Andy Atkins is on its board) are cranking up towards Copenhagen.

It is planned to encircle the Houses of Parliament, and similar events are being planned in other cities (including Copenhagen itself on 12 December) being organised by Friends of the Earth International. There will be a blue theme, reflecting the threat of rising sea levels.

- Coal is the biggest single problem; UK needs to send a strong signal that it will not burn coal.
- There will be no deal at Copenhagen without money on the table – China and India will not sign up without a financial incentive. Money from the West will be needed as an incentive to help them adapt.
- A trillion dollars a year is needed to control climate change – far less than has gone into propping up the banks.
- It is vital that the industrialised nations move first and fastest on cutting emissions.

Friends of the Earth says - Support anaerobic digestion

Stop taxpayers' money being used to fund incinerators and demand investment in new biogas plants instead. Anaerobic digestion (AD) is a biological process that produces biogas - rich in methane - from food and farm waste.

The biogas can be used as a source of 100% renewable energy by:

- * Feeding it into the gas grid.
- * Burning it to generate electricity and supply heat for community heating schemes.
- * Using it as a transport fuel.

AD has not been used much in the UK so far, but its climate benefits mean there is now a lot of interest in increasing its use. Lots of councils, companies and farmers are hoping to use it in the future.

But dozens of councils are planning to build large incinerators, which will require huge amounts of waste every year. These will burn food waste that could be anaerobically digested. This makes no sense in the fight against climate change.

Incinerators contribute to climate change, even if they also generate electricity by:

- * Generating energy so inefficiently that their carbon dioxide emissions are worse than fossil fuel power stations.
- * Burning materials that could be recycled, which would save energy.

Alternatives such as recycling and AD are much better for the climate than incineration.

The government is offering councils £2 billion of taxpayer funding to subsidise new waste plants. Much of this money is going to be spent on incineration unless we can change the Government's mind.

Email Hilary Benn, Secretary of State for the Environment –

I am pleased that the Government is now recognising the benefits of AD, for example through assigning an extra £10 million to support the technology in the last Budget.

However, this funding is a drop in the ocean compared with the £2 billion that the Government is giving councils to fund PFI waste projects, many of which are likely to include incineration.

I am concerned this will mean that we severely limit our future opportunities to maximise AD of separately collected food waste. These proposed incinerators will take vast quantities of food waste every year for decades, preventing the proper development of AD.

Your Department already predicts that there will be too many residual waste plants (like incinerators) built by 2020, but their predictions are likely to be an underestimate as they have assumed that waste will grow in volume - in reality it is going down - and that recycling is only 50%, when it is clear that much higher rates can be achieved.

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The future of Green Belt land, from Rob Clark

Following the item in last months newsletter about 'Green Belt in Danger' and the mention of CPRE readers might be interested in a survey about the Green Belt commissioned by CPRE. It is available to complete online or to print off and return at www.sustainweb.org/localactiononfood/greenbeltsurvey/

Completing the survey could really help shape the future of campaigning on the Green Belt - something Bromley dwellers in particular should be concerned with.

Below is the intro from the website Rob refers to -

Green Belt is rural land around cities that is protected from excessive housing and other development, thus preventing urban sprawl. Around 13 per cent of land in England is estimated to be in one of the fourteen Green Belt areas. The land is protected by planning and development policies. Green belt land around Cheltenham

During spring and early summer 2009, the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) has commissioned Sustain to undertake a survey, which aims to find out how people think we should use the Green Belt. The survey focuses on three areas - London, Bristol and Merseyside.

Through this survey we aim to:

* Find out your opinions about the most important future uses of the Green Belt.

* Discover what a range of people in large towns and cities feel is the main benefit of having countryside next door to where they live.

* Raise awareness of the issue of litter and fly-tipping in Green Belt areas and find out what people might be prepared to do to stop it.

Support anaerobic digestion, cont'd

The more excess plants there are, the more they will suck in waste that should be recycled or go to AD. This is because new incinerators will require a fixed amount of waste every day over their 25-30 year lifetime.

Please stop risking Defra's vision of making AD an established technology by 2020, and focus on funding this true solution rather than incineration.

Please also push for a rapid increase in the separate collection of food waste from households and businesses to provide the feedstock for new AD plants.

See

http://www.foe.co.uk/campaigns/biodiversity/press_for_change/anaerobic_digestion_20303.html for further info.

Re-User Item (2)

PP9 battery suitable for old radio. Free to good home. Our old Roberts radio has finally expired after several decades of valiant service.

Contact Sheila Brown on
01689-851605

FoE's Earth Matters - A rough guide to Copenhagen

It's best known for its quality of life and the Little Mermaid statue in the harbour, but this year Copenhagen is also hosting crucial climate change talks. Henry Rummins on why this gathering of the world's governments is the most important yet.

C is for Copenhagen and the climate change talks in the city this December. This is the latest in a series of efforts to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions. This began with the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, where the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change was agreed, and continued with the Kyoto Protocol in 1997. Now, governments are coming together to negotiate global action to cut emissions from 2012.

O is for offsetting — a key issue Friends of the Earth is campaigning on. Industrialised countries want carbon reduction projects they pay for in developing countries to count towards their domestic reductions. But a growing body of evidence shows offsetting won't solve the problem. It is merely a ploy for politicians to avoid making difficult decisions at home. The only way to tackle climate change is for rich countries to reduce their emissions on their own doorstep — and they need to come clean about this.

P is for who pays? Rich countries have done most to contribute to climate change. They have pumped out the most greenhouse gases for more than a century. Friends of the Earth will be campaigning for rich countries to acknowledge this, step up to the plate and take action first.

E is for emissions: we need to cut them — right now, and radically. The science shows that to stand any chance of avoiding runaway climate change, rich countries need to cut their emissions by at least 40 per cent by 2020. This will be one of Friends of the Earth's key demands in the run-up to the talks.

N is for new hope, new White House, new money, new energy. Following the election of Barack Obama as US President, there is now an expectation that the United States will finally show some leadership in tackling climate change. Already, the new administration has made commitments to invest heavily in green energy. Big challenges remain to achieving an agreement, and many western governments have been slow to commit to the scale of action needed to tackle climate change.

H is for hotting up. Climate change is already causing areas in Africa and Asia to experience more frequent storms, droughts and floods. Friends of the Earth will be asking rich countries to recognise this and find new money for poorer countries to adapt to these changes, while helping them develop using clean, green energy.

A is for action. During the Copenhagen talks, Friends of the Earth International is organising a flood of people through the streets of the Danish capital. This is to show world leaders the huge public support for a strong and fair international climate agreement.
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Campaign Against Climate Change, Rough Guide to Copenhagen

The Climate Emergency Parliament goes online

The Climate Emergency Parliament will be held in Parliament Square on Wednesday 15 July at 6pm, and will come up with plans for 10 by 10 (a reduction of 10% in greenhouse gas emissions by 2010).

What will be the most effective means of doing this? We have some ideas, but we want to hear what you think. The most convincing will be part of a strategy submitted to Parliament itself, challenging MPs who are failing to respond to the Climate Emergency.

Join in the debate at www.campaigncc.org/onlineemergency-parliament and of course come along on the day!

We have a couple of specific requests for help:

1) To make a strong case on how emissions can be cut by 10% by 2010, we need the relevant facts and figures, so we need someone to do internet research to find out what information is already out there.

2) We have a good line-up of speakers already for the Emergency Parliament, but are looking to have some dramatic entertainment as well and would like to hear from anyone who could help.

If you think you might be able to help with either of these, contact info@campaigncc.org

Rough Guide to Copenhagen, *cont'd*

The action will be big, it will be bold and will show that we expect our governments to listen.

G is for the green economy. We're calling on the Government to build a cleaner, greener economy by investing in renewable energy and efficiency measures such as loft lagging. Action like this will cut emissions — offsetting won't.

E is for employment. Did we mention jobs? A green economy will provide thousands of new jobs, just when we need them most. The German renewable energy sector shows just how important this could be to the UK: it's worth £20 billion and employs 250,000 people, compared to just 20,000 in the UK.

N is for next steps. Time to take action. Go to www.demandclimatechange.org to see how you can add your voice to the thousands already calling on the Prime Minister to support a strong and just agreement in Copenhagen this year. Also, look out for the Copenhagen appeal later in the year.

**Bromley FoE's
Summer Fun Day**

Saturday August 15th

See page 2 for more details

FoE's Earth Matters - Biofuels: the ugly truth

Biofuels added to petrol and diesel could produce more emissions than the fossil fuels they replace, research for Friends of the Earth has found.

Since April 2008 the Government has required suppliers to add biofuels to petrol and diesel in an attempt to cut climate-changing emissions. Much of this biofuel is produced from crops such as soy and palm oil, grown in countries such as Indonesia, Brazil and the United States. In theory it is good for the climate because growing the plants absorbs the same amount of carbon as burning them. But in practice growing crops for fuel increases demand for land and leads to more rainforests being turned into farmland.

The Government attempts to take into account the amount of forest being cleared for biofuel plantations. But official statistics ignore the fact that forests are also being cleared to grow food crops displaced by biofuel plantations. This causes extra emissions because forests release carbon when they are cut down. Forests store billions of tonnes of carbon.

When the full impact is taken into account, many crop-based biofuels cause more climate-changing emissions than the petrol and diesel they replace.

"It's clear that biofuels policy is a failure," says Friends of the Earth director Andy Atkins. "Trying to cut emissions by adding biofuels to petrol is like trying to cut down on beer by lacing your pints with vodka. Until

Ministers can do their sums properly and prove that growing crops for fuel actually cuts carbon, the Government should stop biofuels being added to UK petrol and diesel."

Friends of the Earth is calling for a new direction in transport based on solutions that work, such as first-class public transport, more cycle routes, and smarter cars that save on fuel. Nearly a quarter of all car trips are less than two miles, for example, short enough to be taken on foot, or by bicycle or public transport. If measures were taken to boost the number of journeys taken on foot by 50 per cent and by bike to 15 per cent, we could save more than 7 million tonnes of carbon dioxide per year.

Post Script to May meeting report

Richard Priestley sent through the following more detailed information about an alternative power source in Germany that he mentioned in his talk.

Interseasonal Heat Storage

In the example at Wiggerhauser-Sud, (near Friedrichshafen, Germany) 600 flats and houses utilize 4300 m² rooftop solar water collectors and one 12,000 m³ superinsulated interseasonal heat store. Using the sun's summer heat to heat our homes in winter in this way seems one of the smartest and simplest energy saving solutions I've come across and I'd love to see such schemes in the UK. There are one or two similar but to me less impressive schemes in the UK, but Germany is leading the way on this one.

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www.bromleyfoe.co.uk

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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!

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.

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 raywatson@iclway.co.uk.

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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