

Somerset Green Growth

Green News from around our County *Issue 4*

Alternative Vote? Greens say 'Yes'!

The system we use to choose our political leaders may be one of the more boring subjects you might discuss down the pub or over a cup of tea, says Michael Fox.

YES!

But like it or not, by next year a new law could be in place which will mean we will have to do more than place an X on the ballot paper. Before that, though, we will all have to decide whether we want that change to happen, in a referendum at the 5 May local elections.

David Cameron offered LibDems the Alternative Vote system as a way of satisfying their demand for reform of our electoral system. It's been criticised for being the smallest possible reform, and campaigners for reform don't like it because it doesn't ensure that the views of most voters are reflected among those chosen to govern;

they prefer the system used in the European elections (Proportional Representation or PR), which for Parliament would require the creation of much larger constituencies with lists of candidates. Supporters of the current first-past-the-post system say this would make MPs somewhat more remote from those they represent.

Greens have traditionally backed PR and should support the move to AV. It's far from perfect, but it will give more power to smaller parties. Many Labour and Tory supporters say it will mean we'll never have decisive government again, with a constant series of hung parliaments. You can criticise our current coalition government for many things, but it is not lacking in decisiveness. And for Greens, hung parliaments are much more likely to see Caroline Lucas and other Green MPs getting an influential voice in government.

So what is the 'Alternative Vote'?

Instead of placing an X in the box of your candidate, you number your preferences 1,2,3 etc

If no candidate wins an outright majority, the candidate with the least votes is eliminated, and the ones they rated 2nd are distributed among the remaining candidates

If there is still no outright majority the 3rd preferences of the next candidate with the least votes are redistributed, and so on until a candidate has a majority

Does our pension future look rosy?

'Could your pension put your future at risk?' asks Green Party member Alex Lawrie.

Somerset County Council manages a £1bn Pension Fund - not only for its current and former employees, but for those of District and Town Councils, Housing Associations, the Police, and other public sector bodies in the area. Its pensioners depend on it to provide for their future. But what if it is contributing to a future that is insecure, dangerous and impoverished?

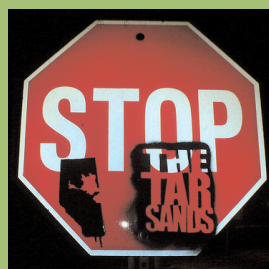
Pension funds have enormous power in our economy. They direct huge sums of money to some of the biggest businesses around the world. and have a legal obligation to act for the sole benefit and interests of their pensioners. But that is too often assumed to mean delivering financial return, often at the expense of undermining the foundations of

everyone's prosperity.

Climate risks are the most obvious example of this. If we continue with the 'business as usual' scenario, by 2050 temperatures will most likely be 2.5C higher than pre-industrial levels. That means soaring food prices, chaotic weather, and worldwide economic losses.

To prevent this, the campaigning organisation *Fair Pensions* recommend some measures that would make our pension funds future friendly:

1. 'Statements of investment principles' that guide fund managers should include objectives relating to climate change - for example, full disclosure of a company's carbon emissions
2. Criteria used to appoint fund managers should include their ability to assess carbon risks
3. AGM resolutions to increase pressure



on companies that persistently refuse to disclose or manage climate impacts

4. Disinvestment in the most serious climate risks - coal mining, tar sands and deep water drilling

We have asked Somerset Pension Fund to take up these four modest policies, but they say they don't intend to adopt any of them. Does this adequately protect contributors from climate risks? SCC's stance may even place the fund trustees in breach of their duties.

We need to take action! You have the right to raise this issue with your County Councillor - after all, the impact of their policies will be felt by all of us. If you are a pension contributor, or know anyone who is, please get in touch; you have the greatest stake in getting climate risks out in the open. We can change this policy, if we make clear what we expect of the Pension Fund.

This Party needs You!

5th May 2011 is the date for the next South Somerset District Council elections. Alex Lawrie makes the case for more of us to stand for the Green Party.

The 60 seats in 39 wards (currently dominated by 37 Liberal Democrats) will all be up for election - as will 824 seats on Parish and Town Councils. You should stand!

Yes, really - you. It's true that contesting elections is the first step to actually being a Councillor, but for most of us that is an objective that, if we are seeking it at all, is still a fair way off. More important here and now is just raising the Green banner in local politics, and that is something all of us can contribute to.

Standing in local elections forces other parties to shift their position to protect

their weak spots. It encourages candidates who want to make the case for greener policies within their own parties. It gives heart to Green supporters locally, and may encourage more of them to join us and become active. It helps community activists to get support for non-political projects consistent with our values. It gets us party election broadcasts on TV, and builds the credibility of the party nationally.

It also builds interest in other elections: one or two second places would be a great result for us in 2011, but in 2014 - if we have built up an election fighting organisation - we could be winning our first MEP.

What is more, it is easy. Ten signatures from local residents is all that is required to get your name alongside the Green

Party logo on the ballot paper. You may wish to campaign for every vote, or leave the electors to decide for themselves: what matters is that you've given an option they may never have had before. Let's set a record for the most candidates ever in South Somerset!



For more information, contact me at alex@lawriefamily.me.uk or call 01935 826531. I'll be happy to share my experiences of being a Green Parish Councillor and standing in more electoral contests than I care to remember!

Can we feed ourselves?

Linda Hull, Green Party Town Councillor in Glastonbury, introduces a new project, Somerset Land and Food, and the recently launched 'FoodMapper'.

FoodMapper has been designed by Wells-based Somerset Community Food to close the gap between those seeking land to grow on and those enlightened and sympathetic landowners willing to make land available for new allotments and other kinds of growing spaces.

Demand for land to grow food on currently exceeds supply in many parts of the country. Allotment waiting lists are long, while there exist acres of land that could be used for community-based food production.

Mapping existing growing spaces and assessing where demand for land exceeds supply is FoodMapper's first job.

It enables the mapping of all manner of

local food initiatives – small-scale producers, co-ops, apiaries, chicken and pig co-ops, school growing projects, farm shops, markets, growing and cooking courses and other food-related events. The vision is to build a rich map of the location and availability of locally grown and produced food, together with links to training, skill sharing and a toolbank in a bid to help secure local food supply in the years and decades ahead.



Only our continued and increased patronage of community-based and small-scale local production will secure its future. We'll need much more creative thinking and acting to keep our local producers in business, to retain and increase access to land and to equip ourselves with the skills to provide for some, if not all, of our own food needs.

If you live in Somerset and can map your area, Somerset Community Food would really like to hear from you. Email linda.hull@somersetcommunityfood.org.uk or call 01749 678770.

Also, have a look at 'Somerset Land for Food': www.wessexca.co.uk



JOIN US!

Want to be part of the Green revolution? Get in touch by calling 0845 456 2592 or email southsomerset@greenparty.org.uk

Join the Green Party - a party working hard for a fair future. Find out more at www.greenparty.org.uk



DID YOU KNOW?

Green Party membership has risen by 50% in the past 18 months. We have Town, District and County Councillors across the south-west.

We believe it's unfair that the irresponsible bankers that got us into this mess continue to get extortionate salaries and bonuses, while many hard-working people still earn less than the minimum wage. We want a 'High Pay Commission' to ensure bankers and highly paid executives (in the private and public sectors) are not rewarded for failure.

Unison are fighting on many similar issues in Somerset. Visit: www.somersetcountyunison.org

Visit our blog: somersetgreenparty.blogspot.com

South Somerset Green Party