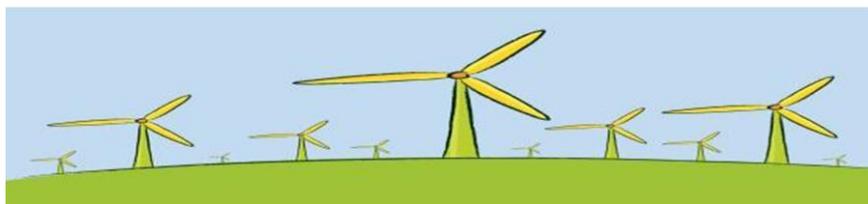


Green Shoots

The News Letter of the Derbyshire Green Party

Issue 18

Dec 2014



Natalie Bennett comes to Belper

The leader of the Green Party in England and Wales, Natalie Bennett, has made a special trip to Belper to meet one of the fastest growing Green groups in the country.

“I’m pretty much booked up until next March,” said Natalie, “but when the Amber Valley group invited me to come I couldn’t say no.”



The group had a packed programme organised for her. She visited students at Belper School and Sixth Form Centre, had a meeting about proposals to build 150 houses on a local Greenfield site and gave a talk at Belper Market Place in the evening.

“[The Green Party] is growing everywhere,” Natalie said. “But we are doing particularly well in the smaller towns and fringe places not far from larger conurbations. I’m thinking of places like Leominster (a market town in Herefordshire) where we did very well in the county council elections.”

Even polling conducted by UKIP peer Lord Ashcroft puts the Greens ahead of the Liberal Democrats. Some polls show the Greens are advancing towards as much as 10% of the vote.

“The old interpretation of opinion polls is just old-fashioned,” said Natalie. “The fact is that the old politics are breaking down. If things break wide open, 25% of the vote could be enough to win you a seat in the House of Commons.”

However, Natalie is not predicting a win for Derbyshire Greens just yet. Although considerable progress is certainly being made here as well as in other places beyond the traditional south-west and southern seaside towns.

“People are looking for an alternative in every part of the country and that’s why in our stronghold seats people are already voting in a proportional representation kind of way. They can see that their votes really do count and add to our momentum. That’s going to be the way it is in the future - people won’t just vote for the party they hate least. They will vote for what they want, knowing their vote counts. And when you start to get a degree of momentum like that you aren’t just adding to your own vote - you’re also taking votes from other parties.”

Natalie recently captured the headlines when she said the Greens were targeting a dozen seats at the next General Election and had high hopes of winning at least six of these. She herself is aiming to win Holborn and St Pancras from Labour and the retiring Frank Dobson.

“People recognise that the status quo is just not sustainable,” she continued. “The Green Party offers people a ten-pound minimum wage, a re-nationalised railway and a house building programme that will help first time buyers. And people are responding to that. Young people in particular want to see a future for themselves and their families. At the moment all they can see are zero hour contracts and no end to their debts. The fact is that 22% of people in full-time employment earn less than the living wage. People are looking for something better and they can see they are not going to get it from the old parties.”



Natalie can see a future for the Green Party in towns like Belper. “We are the natural radical alternative for disillusioned Labour voters. Even Conservatives can see that we have not all been in it together. The Government has taken from the poor and enriched the already rich. Nobody believes this can go on for any longer. What I say to voters in Derbyshire and elsewhere is simple: Vote for what you believe in. Ignore everything and everyone else. That is truly a peaceful revolution.”

Ian Wood
Press Officer

Farewell to Sue Ledger and Welcome to Tony Youens, DGP’s New Chairman

Retiring chairwoman’s report from Sue Ledger:

I would like to start by thanking everyone for their support over the past three years. I have found the experience to be very enjoyable, if a little frustrating at times. The tenure has allowed me to gain a good overview at the local, regional, and national levels which will serve me well as I move on to my new position as Derbyshire Green Party’s election coordinator.

I am encouraged by the recent huge increase in local membership and I hope that many members will come along to Green Party meetings and become more involved with running of the Derbyshire Green Party. I also hope many of the enthusiastic new members will join us in the General Election campaigns that will be taking place in 2015. We all need to work together, if one day Derbyshire Green Party is to field a candidate who can be a real contender to become a Member of Parliament. This day may be sooner than we think!

With these opportunities in mind, I welcome Tony Youens to this challenging position. I am certain that I leave Derbyshire Green Party in safe hands and that Tony will be a reliable and inspiring Chairman.



Sheep Says:

“UKIP if you want to,
The Green Party woke up long ago!”

An introduction from Tony Youens, our newly appointed Chairman:

It is an honour for me to be appointed Chairman of the Committee for Derbyshire Green Party.

In accepting this responsibility, I am only too aware of the challenging task set by my predecessor, Sue Ledger, who has a wealth of experience in the Green Party. So I'd like to begin by offering her my own personal thanks for everything she has done for our group, not least in helping to ease me into this new role.

It was an ever deepening concern about climate change that initially led me to join the Green Party. That was only two years ago but it proved to be nothing short of a revelation. For example, I had read about a 'Citizen's Income' - an unconditional survival payment granted to every individual as a right of citizenship- which I discovered to my delight was also supported by the Green Party. The more I read about the Green Party's policies, the more I felt that this party alone had a clear vision of a better and fairer Britain. Now, it seems that more and more people, disillusioned with the three main parties, want this vision too.



The Tories, aided and abetted by the Lib Dems, are determined to sell off anything and everything. They sold our Royal Mail to their rich mates for a song, continue to privatise the NHS by stealth and now want to hand over the Probation Service to the private sector. All the while, the super-rich are getting richer while the rest of us are bludgeoned with austerity.

Sadly, the response from Labour can only be described as timid at best. I'm reminded of something I heard Green Party ex Deputy Leader Will Duckworth say, "Labour is still going to kick you - but promise to do it with lighter shoes." While the Green Party immediately denounced the bedroom tax, Labour shamefully tip-toed around it, only coming out against it eventually after much back stage debate. It seems to me like they have to consult multiple focus groups before they can decide on what their principles actually are.

Meanwhile the Lib-Dems struggle to differentiate themselves from their Tory masters (they would say 'partners'). They are now paying the price for their spectacular electoral U-turn, as previously loyal voters have decided to switch to the Greens.

This disaffection with 'business as usual' politics has led many to look around for an alternative. Thanks to a steady stream of friendly media exposure combined and hefty corporate donations, some have been lured by the siren song of UKIP. This is quite extraordinary when you consider how much worse they are than all of the above. Their two pantomime villains being immigration and Europe, imply that if only we sort these out then everything else will fall into place. In the last few days we discovered that not only do immigrants make up a much smaller proportion of the UK population than most people realize but they actually bring a net benefit to our economy. Despite these revelations, both the Tories and Labour continue to trip over themselves in their attempts to show how tough they can be on immigration. Of course, the images they show us are of people fighting their way into vehicles at Calais not the countless nurses, doctors, dentists and shopkeepers we all rely on daily.

Europe undoubtedly needs reform but exiting would be disastrous and I suspect there are unlikely to be any circumstances that would persuade UKIP to take a more positive view. If you add to this their denial of climate change then they would seem to be the polar opposite of the Green Party but a few degrees off the Tories; their interchangeability demonstrated by the recent defection of MPs.

Sick and tired of governments that do not serve the interests of the general population Russell Brand has called for a revolution and heaven knows we need one. I truly believe that voting Green is the only way we're going to get it.

The media's veto of a vote for change

There are basically just two options at elections: people either vote to keep things the way they are or they vote for change. If people en masse want to vote for change then, in order to win, a party must position itself as 'The Party of Change'.

In 2010 the Lib Dems managed to position themselves as that party, based on a single good TV debate by Nick Clegg. The media, in desperate need of an election story, hyped Clegg. Voters who wanted change picked Clegg. But the voters were promptly disillusioned when the Lib Dems betrayed students in return for a few cabinet seats.

Realising that the public still want change and that none of the three main parties can be credibly spun to offer it, the media have spent the last couple of years hyping UKIP. This self-serving strategy will give the media the story they want at the 2015 elections but, as with the Lib Dems, UKIP's change credentials are wafer-thin. Get past their reactionary anti-immigrant and anti-Europe shell and UKIP's policies represent the same neoliberal, privatising, de-regulating, pro-corporate interests that have ruled us since 1979.

Embracing neoliberalism, just as the Orange Book Liberals did under Clegg, is the entry ticket to power. The media are the bouncers who check parties' neoliberal tickets at the door. The Green Party is like Cinderella—we are not even invited to the ball. We see this in the recent media decision to exclude the Green Party from the TV election debates, thereby keeping out the only party that offers voters a real alternative to the status quo and eliminating any possibility of real change to business as usual. The Green Party, naturally, opposes being barred from a key part of the democratic process, but it seems to me that Natalie Bennett and the national Green Party of England and Wales are reluctant to call out the media as the bastion of neoliberalism that it is.

In terms of media coverage the Green Party gets just crumbs from the rich man's table and yet it seems we are forever reluctant to bite the hand that feeds (starves) us. When Natalie visited Nottingham in the run-up to the Euro elections I put it to her that she should take a more critical line with the media persistently ignoring us. Natalie responded that, as a former Guardian journalist herself, she understood the realities and she wouldn't expect to be asked back if she used the little coverage she does get to criticise the media.

However, without criticising the media it is impossible to offer a thorough analysis of the very system that is destroying our climate, our public services and our wildlife. The media consistently fail to offer sufficient challenge to power over the major issues of our time. They failed to highlight that Saddam had no weapons of mass destruction in the run-up to the Iraq war; they failed to notice the dangers of financial deregulation in the run-up to the 2008 economic crash; and they are failing to adequately present the scientific evidence of climate change and the urgent solutions.

The reason for this failure to challenge power is not accidental: the media are an entrenched part of the corporate elite system dominating our political and economic landscape. They are not an independent fourth estate holding power to account. Therefore, the Green Party would be naïve to expect the media to change. The media purposefully wants to exclude our views from the bounds of legitimate debate; they want to keep us off the main broadcasts, restricted to a 'red button' option that the already converted can push to hear our policies and opinions.

The few crumbs that we get from the media are not enough to buy our silence. We need to speak up now. We Greens cannot achieve social justice or protect the environment without radically reforming the media first and actively helping to build alternative channels of mass communication. Until we do, democracy in this country will remain severely limited.

Matthew Bain
DGP webmaster

Your Chance to shape the Green Party:

Governance review Consultation

With the Green Party growing in membership and influence, the way we organise and govern ourselves has come under review. A decision at the Autumn Conference 2013 set up a Governance Review body that is currently taking comments from our members. You can find the consultation document on the members' website if you search for 'Governance Review Consultation:'

The consultation is arranged under nine headings each with a range of questions to respond to. You are not expected to respond to them all, just those you have an opinion on. The consultation closes on 31st December 2014.

Topics covered include how well the party works at the moment, what problems arise from becoming involved, how democratic our procedures are and what changes are needed to enable us to be responsive to new opportunities while maintaining member involvement. Opinions are also invited on the possibility of allowing affiliate members to join in and the employment of an elected senior official. A potentially controversial topic is that of decision making. Conference is currently the Party's supreme decision making body, but day to day and emergency decisions must be made by smaller groups. How can we secure efficient decision making while maintaining accountable democratic procedures?

You can send your contributions to your Green Party Regional Council representatives or respond directly to the consultation review at: governancereview@greenparty.org.uk

This is your chance to influence the way the party functions. The Governance review body will consider all ideas and bring proposals to Conference for debate and eventually a vote on our new structure.

Sue Ledger & Mike Shipley

East Midlands reps to Green Party Regional Council

contact@derbyshiregreenparty.org.uk

Make sure you're registered to vote!

The way the electoral roll is drawn up has changed and each elector is now responsible for registering to vote. It is crucial that every Green minded person is registered and able to vote. Have you registered to vote in 2015? If you don't remember registering, you probably haven't!

Check online at: www.gov.uk/register-to-vote

Please register and then please actually vote!

Dates for your Diary

**You are warmly invited to join us at the Derbyshire
Annual General Meeting**

Date: Sunday 18th January 2015

**Venue: The Friends' Meeting House, Chapel Row,
Matlock Street, Bakewell DE45 1EL**

Time: 2:30 until 6:30pm

News from Mid Derbyshire Greens

Mid Derbyshire Green Party all started in May 2014 at the 'Belper Goes Green' eco festival. This annual event is organised by Transition Belper and shares simpler, low carbon and environmentally friendly ways of doing things in a relaxed and uplifting way. At the festival Derbyshire Green Party had a stall where there was information about Green Party policies. There was also an invitation to leave your email address 'if you wanted to know more about the Green Party.' Lots of us did exactly that!

A couple of weeks later we received an email from David Wells, a long standing GP member and former Borough Council candidate, inviting us to meet up for a walk, a pint and a chat. Who could resist? Well, some of us did resist the walk and just went for the pint and chat.

And the rest is history, as they say. Since then, a group of local Green Party members have been getting together a couple of times a month at the Bull's Head in Belper Lane End (please feel free to come along and join us). We've been pretty busy: we attended the Green Party National Conference in September and we are planning to field candidates in all four Belper Wards next year for local and borough elections. We're also hopeful of fielding a couple of candidates for the national elections as part of Derbyshire Green Party's general election strategy. Belper North has been selected as our 'target' ward' and our first newsletter was hand delivered to every house in the ward by volunteers in October.



Our main campaign at the moment is against Labour controlled Amber Valley Borough Council's continued plans for 150 houses on the Bullsmoor 'green field' site in Belper. As Amber Valley Borough Council Candidate I believe that the Green Party promotes building on brown field, not green field sites like this one, which are loved by so many in Belper. Amber Valley should also look carefully at using empty homes and flats over shops. And if these houses are needed for Derby it

would make more sense to build them there. John Devine, Belper Council Candidate, says 'The Coalition Government should not be dictating how many houses we have to build, this should be decided locally.'

Natalie Bennett visited Belper on Monday 17th November, which was really exciting for us as such a new group. She supported our campaign against the building of houses on green field sites, talking to 'Government and Politics' students in the sixth form at Belper School, and spoke to a public meeting at Belper Market Place in the evening.

We also held a successful 'Green Christmas' event in Belper at the end of November. We are also organising a 'Green Adventure' in February when we are going to Brighton to help with Caroline Lucas's campaign! We're also thrilled that Jenny Jones, Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb and Green Party member of the London Assembly, has invited us to visit the House of Lords en route! The rest of the early part of next year will be busy campaigning for the elections.

Our 'activist' group is vibrant and grows at almost every meeting. We may even need to move venues soon so that we can accommodate everyone. We have a fabulously diverse mix of people in the group all with one thing in common: to do our part for the Green Party and the 'common good'. It's a really great group to be part of, especially at a time when we are seeing such a 'surge' in support at all levels of the party. Everybody feels ready for a change and, along with lots of other people around the country, we believe that the Green Party is the one that can make the change happen.

Sue MacFarlane

Mid Derbyshire Green Party candidate for Amber Valley Borough Council

A Big Ask for Big Ambitions

The Green Party surge continues. Our membership is steadily growing and by the time you are reading this, it will have reached 30,000 nationwide, the highest ever.

This is great news in the run up to a General Election. We are also proud to have such a fantastic team of committed activists working hard all over the country to make 2015 our most successful election yet. We have real hopes of achieving more MPs in Parliament and many more councillors in local government.

Here in Derbyshire, we already have five volunteers who have put themselves forward as Green Party General Election candidates. We hope to receive more nominations in due course too.

However, success is not possible without the funding to run a strong and publicly visible political campaign. It is crucial that we reach the voters and raise awareness of our policies and the issues we feel so passionately about and that we know so many of the electorate do too. To offer ourselves a real chance of victory in 2015, therefore, we need funding above all else. Funding will help cover the production and printing costs of leaflets, posters, stall materials and manifesto pledges. This is vital if we are to get our message out as far and wide as possible and present the electorate with a viable alternative.

Derbyshire Green Party needs a minimum of £2,500 just to pay the candidates' deposits.

All our activists work tirelessly for no pay and none of our campaign funds are ever spent on 'administration' or perks for anyone. We receive minimum funding from the national Green Party. Every penny we raise goes to spreading the green message and encouraging as many people as possible to vote green.

We will be using donate buttons on our websites and crowd funding to try to raise money from supporters but we know from experience that most of our funds come from our members.

We are asking you to dig as deeply as you can into your pockets. We don't need the millions that the likes of UKIP have, but we do need to be able to offer voters an alternative to the morally bankrupt main parties.

Please make cheques payable to Derbyshire Green Party and send them to our treasurer:

Peter Allen, 8 Slatelands Road, Glossop, SK13 6LH

On behalf of Derbyshire Green Party, thank you.

Call for local election candidates

Here is a message from Sue Ledger, our election coordinator.

Hi everyone! Isn't it great that we now stand in fourth position in the election polls, overtaking the Liberal Democrats and hoping to take still more council seats in the next general elections in May? With the Greens having 8% of the electorate, this gives us a chance to save up lots of deposits and build our funds for the next general election. I'm sure you've heard that Green Party membership is booming with lots of young people joining us too. It couldn't be a more exciting time to be active in the Green Party!

However, while things may be going well at a national level, there is still some room for improvement in Derbyshire. We have some excellent candidates standing in the Belper, High Peak and Chesterfield areas but, we still need people to stand in other constituencies.

Are you aware how straightforward it is to become a local election candidate? All that is required is for you to get 10 people from your local electoral register to sign a nomination form. You would also need to fill in a town hall form, which we can help with. Please be assured that there is no personal financial cost involved.

I know our target candidates, who hope to win, are working hard in their own wards but you could help them to gain votes because when other Green Party candidates appear on the voting paper it encourages people to vote Green. If you do decide to stand as a tactical candidate, you're not expected to win a seat as no campaigning would be done; you would just be helping gauge support and, most importantly, giving as many people as possible the opportunity to vote Green.

As someone who wants to see huge changes in the way we are governed, I am asking you personally, to please consider standing for your local council.

If you are willing to be a tactical candidate in the 2015 local elections please contact:

sue_mikeshipley@yahoo.co.uk or phone **01663 743120**

Campaign Update

Do you oppose HS2, fracking, fossil fuel energy and intensive factory farming? Then, you've come to the right party! Only the Green Party opposes all four issues. Here is an update on DGP's progress on each of these campaigns. Please keep an eye on the DGP website for campaign updates and actions:
<http://derbyshiregreenparty.org.uk/>

1. HS2 and HS3 high-speed rail networks.

Green Party position: "The Green Party would scrap the pointless and hugely expensive HS2 - a train line for the 1%, not the 99% of rail users".

HS2: As proposals currently stand, HS2 would have considerable impact on DGP's region, especially in the south of the East Midlands, but also as the eastern extension spreads towards Chesterfield and beyond. At present, the HS2 station serving Sheffield and South Yorkshire is expected to be at Meadowhall. The proposed station for Nottingham and Derby in the East Midlands will be built in the quiet suburb of Toton along with the need for a new junction off the M1 or A52 (the road linking Derby and Nottingham). However, consideration is also being given to an alternative site near Breaston, which is in a green belt, and the proposed track route would run along the bed of the Derby and Sandiacre Canal, putting an end to restoration plans for the waterway. DGP is in favour of promoting rail travel, however we do not believe that HS2 is the way to achieve this and we will continue to support the residents of Breaston in their battle to stop HS2 being built near the village. Only last month the World Wildlife Fund reported that over half of global wildlife has been lost since 1970. HS2 will tear up some of our country's most beautiful and biodiverse hot spots endangering even more flora and fauna. You can read more about DGP's case against HS2 at

HS3: HS3 is part of George Osborne's shift in government policy on devolution to city regions by his plans to set up 'Transport for the North'. Transport for the North will be like Transport for London, or so Osborne claims. It will link Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds and Hull. Colleagues at the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England are currently assessing the potential impact of HS3. Their report is available here:
www.friendsofthepeak.org.uk

2. Fracking

Green Party position: "The Green Party would reject harmful long-term solutions to the energy demand. We would ban all fracking and stop building nuclear power stations".

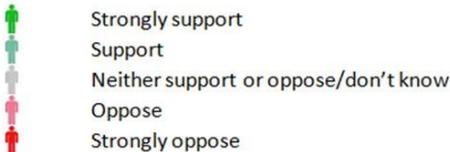
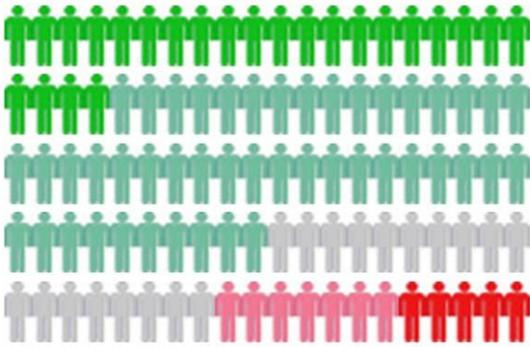
10 good reasons why DGP believes fracking is not the way forward:

1. It adds to the carbon poisoning of the atmosphere globally in breach of EU and UK commitments
2. It diverts investment in renewable energy sources and breaches the coalition's agreement on renewable energy.
3. It leaks methane into the atmosphere- a gas 30 times more harmful than carbon dioxide.
4. It poisons ground waters with 'undeclared' chemicals
5. It is economically unproven
6. It puts a further demand upon scarce water resources
7. It generates heavy vehicle traffic that have not been quantified
8. It will destroy thousands of acres of landscape and wildlife
9. Current levels of public support are based upon misinformation from the media and Government spin
10. It will reduce house prices around every site proposed by far more than the minimum level of compensation.

In July 2014 the Coalition Government announced that even the National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty were now at risk from fracking. Charlotte Farrell, the Green Party's Parliamentary candidate for the High Peak responded to this announcement and said. 'When this Government came to power in 2010, they boasted that they would have a 'bonfire of regulations. These include the downgrading rules on hazardous waste, on air pollution, on degrading land and on noise, some of the very problems associated with fracking. In addition this Government has slashed the funding and staffing of the bodies that have the responsibility to regulate fracking, the Environment Agency and the Health and Safety Executive.'

DGP continues its campaign against fracking in the Peak District and surrounding areas.

Do you support or oppose onshore wind?



Source: Department of Energy & Climate Change Public Attitudes Tracking Survey, Wave 9, 29 April 2014

3. Renewable energy

Green Party position: “The Green Party would change the types of energy we use by speeding up the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy by voting for increased targets in Europe. Cut demand by encouraging European incentives for home insulation, reducing the amount of energy we need to heat and power Britain’s homes, and providing much-needed jobs. We will make a major investment in energy efficiency and the renewable energy industry to create jobs, stimulate research, reduce emissions, and get people’s fuel bills down permanently”.

Wind energy is welcomed by an ever increasing majority in poll after poll. This is a recent one by the Department of Energy and Climate Change.

Renewables are now up to 12% of the mix and can easily and much more quickly replace nuclear. Locally, DGP supports wind farms on a case by case basis; solar arrays and anaerobic digestion all have a place in a mix of renewable energy sources. My Derbyshire Dales Councillor tells me that his council now has a presumption in favour of farm wind.

4. Pig and cow prisons

Green Party position: “The Green Party would end factory farming.”

After a battle lasting nearly five years, Derbyshire County Council is planning to publish the final evidence from its consultation with the Environment Agency at the end of 2014 and submit its report to the Planning Committee for a final decision due in February 2015. Midland Pig Producers have submitted an application to build what will be the UK’s largest intensive pig farm next to the beautiful village of Foston, near Burton.

This form of intensive farming exists to produce meat, eggs and dairy products as quickly and cheaply as possible. Farms on this massive scale, wipe out local smaller often family run farms, threatening their livelihoods and wreaking havoc on the environment. To keep production costs down the animals are given the bare minimum they need to survive. They are fattened in huge, cramped sheds and deprived of everything that makes life worth living. They can hardly stretch their wings or legs and will never be able to roam. Most farmed animals are slaughtered at just a few weeks or months old. These crowded conditions mean that farmers have to resort to the routine use of antibiotics to control diseases.

These farms contribute to global warming and are an inefficient way of land use to feed the growing human population. DGP will be running campaign events and representing the party’s position at the final Committee stage to keep the pressure up and prevent this pig prison, which is as bad for people as it is for the pigs, from going ahead.

John Youatt

Green activist; community and renewables planner

The Climate Crisis that cannot be ignored

The recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Report is a call for action to deal with the climate crisis. But the window for action is closing fast.

In response to the IPCC Report, the Green Party leader Natalie Bennett has said, "Only the Green Party offers the comprehensive set of policies that can deal with our economic, social and environmental crises together, building a new society that works for the common good within the environmental limits of our one planet." You can read Natalie's comments in full along with comments from Caroline Lucas and MEP Molly Scott-Cato on the Green Party website: www.greenparty.org.uk/news/2014/11/02/ipcc-report-climate-crisis-cannot-be-ignored/

I believe each one of us has a part to play, in whatever way is open to us, to change the focus of those who see every decision in economic terms only. We need to dance to a new tune – hence my poem.

Dance to a New Tune

We keep hearing about economic growth
The economy is overcooked!
The most important issue of our time is A thriving future
Survival

I'm convinced even if you're not
Temperatures rising
Oceans warming
Polar ice melting
Sea levels creeping up

Earth's ice cloak shrinking
Each melt, another layer of
Reflective ice shield lost
Fiery methane set free
Dancing dangerously

Tempo quickens
Without her cloak to keep her cool
Earth starts spinning out of control
Dirty energy needs to go
Let's change the tune

Create a new rhythm
One that will drown out
The loud ostinato lies
Of the fossil fuel mega stars
With their capitalist chorus
All-singing, all-dancing political allies

Break free and dance a new dance
The Caller is ready
The moves have to be agreed
Everyone can join the global dance
To a cleaner greener future
Now is the time

Antibiotic use on intensive farms is killing us

Britain is under a new threat. Antibiotics are now considered one of the greatest threats of the 21st century and are to be placed on the national risk register alongside terrorism, climate change and wildfires.

Like most people, I have reached for these faithful friends in countless moments of coughs and aches. They have been the helping hand that has nursed us through operations and it is thanks to antibiotics that we can be in and out of hospital within the day. These drugs have saved millions of lives.

But the overuse of antibiotics has meant that bugs have become more resistant and so the antibiotics used to treat patients aren't effective anymore. 5,000 people are dying every year in the UK from infections that are no longer treatable.

However, the area where antibiotics are used the most is on farm animals. Just under half of all the antibiotics used in the UK and 80% of all antibiotics worldwide are given to farm animals for treating or preventing the diseases caused by intensive farming.

Rather than exercise good farming practices and treating sick animals

individually farmers depend on the routine use of antibiotics to stave off diseases caused by the poor diets and cramped unsanitary conditions rampant in farms across the country. Farmers that improve their husbandry practices, use wholesome feed, provide more space and withhold antibiotics have seen disease outbreaks virtually disappear altogether and animal mortality rates plummet. We know this is the answer, not popping more pills to our pigs, and yet, unbelievably, "megafarms" - where hundreds of cattle, chickens or pigs are kept in vast warehouses - are on the increase. One such megafarm is awaiting planning permission here in South Derbyshire in the village of Foston. Housing a total of 26,000 pigs under one roof would make it the largest pig farm in British history.

Jumbo sized farms like the one proposed in Foston, come with a national health warning. The extent of its overcrowding and the consequential conditions mean diseases can engulf its entire 26,000 pig herd in one swoop and mandate the overuse of the most potent antibiotics to maintain control. Flying in the face of everything that scientific evidence advises it is the gross misuse of antibiotics on exactly these kinds of intensive factory farms that mean we all lose out on critical health care and find our lives are unnecessarily under threat.

In the UK we seem to have a perverse reactionary way of dealing with ticking time bombs. Rather than a precautionary approach that makes policies based upon the best scientific evidence available and eliminates the foreseeable health threats associated with mega farms by refusing their applications in the first place, we wait until the nation is in the grip of a health emergency. You don't have to look far to see so many examples where decisions have been made in this way to serve the economic interests of a small elite group of affluent and powerful, but that fly in the face of the public's health interests and scientific evidence.

To protect both farm animals and humans, the Green Party supports the urgent need for the reduction of antibiotic use in farming to become government policy and intensive factory farming to end.

Victoria Martindale
Green Shoots editor

