

GreenTEA AGM, Chair's Annual report, 21 April 2021

Purpose of the Report

It is not a comprehensive reflection of our activities, but a primer for discussion.

Review of Last Year

Helena's report has covered the key features: in summary, no public events because of Covid yet a productive shift to remote working, digital cooperation and professionalism. Has Green TEA become an environmental tribune and a surrogate critical consultancy rather than a community based voluntary group? Our locus of concern has moved to those activities, Covid notwithstanding, where our competences and interest can have a positive influence, such as planning/design/development, transport and energy. No longer opposing the principle of large scale local development, we try to mitigate the bad and enhance the good. Is this stepping back from radicalism to revisionism?

Core Group

We are blessed with people of exceptional ability, commitment and ethics, which have been recognised by Oxon Low Carbon Hub in our innovative joint projects. Although onerous to choose, especially thanks to the excellent work of Sarah, Amanda, Ros, Hywel, Helena, Sue and Lucy.

Systemic Connections

Just as the environment is interdependent and connected complex, should Green Tea be more networked?

We have strong connections with EPIC, Peace Oak, Eynsham Parish Council and Nature Recovery Project and emergently with West Oxon District Council (Saltcross and West Eynsham), the Oxford –Witney railway group and Need not Greed.

Can we be more influential by stronger connections to cognate groups in Eynsham, surrounding villages, Witney and Oxford? Smart and Fair Neighbourhoods has included areas outside Eynsham.

Boundaries

Are we attracting sufficient younger and working class people to the cause? Is our demographic profile too old, professional and middle class to be culturally welcoming (split infinitive) for other socio economic groups? Should we accept our role as respectable realists-almost a local vanguard-and leave environmental radicalism-social movements-to the Young and XR? We know that collective thinking and action is the engine of major historical change. Nevertheless, and in contradistinction, change has to start somewhere and research shows the influence of small coherent groups for change.

Succession Planning

All successful organisations plan for their survival by seeking people to take over the key functions. Are we recruiting the necessary and sufficient enthusiasts for the medium and longer term?

Covid, Climate Emergency and Biodiversity Crisis

What can we learn strategically and tactically from the Covid?

Making the Impossible Possible

The Covid measures have shown what could be achieved for climate and biodiversity.

Although individually isolating, the communities in Eynsham and surrounding villages rose to the challenge of supporting those in need, privileging the Local (services, facilities, public spaces and Active Travel) and rediscovering Nature, quiet and less air pollution. Will we carry over seeing not just looking, and listening not just hearing?

Public Engagement

Most acted people responsibly and ethically, and followed evidence based government advice. The clear threat enhanced the ethics of the public good (thinking of others, not self interest). There has been rapid behavioural change: reduced travel (domestic and international), more Active Travel and working from home. How can these changes be sustained?

International Cooperation

Only a global equitable response can deal with Covid: a model for climate action? See COP26 below.

Rapid Action

Governments can react quickly and strategically to avert a crisis when the reasons are sound and explained; unlimited financial resources and expertise can be secured when they choose to.

Research and Evidence

Success has followed:

scientific advice, investment in scientific research and pursuit of evidence based policies and innovation;

partnerships and collective action between all levels of government, public services, private companies and academia; and

effective public communication (daily TV briefings of data and science).

Economy

Covid economic recovery should be a low carbon, socially and environmentally **sustainable economy** with new jobs, industries and decent prospects (Green New Deal).

Transport

Digital infrastructure enabled remote working, meetings and events without the need for commuting and business travel. Access to local facilities and the 10-15 minute settlement is now more desirable and feasible. Pollution, noise, danger and greenhouse gas emissions have declined during the lockdowns. On the other hand, where travel was necessary, car travel has been preferred to public transport. An emission rebound after Covid is likely.

Environment

The increased appreciation of locality, green spaces and Nature (noted above) should increase public support for environmental enhancement and protection.

Inequality

Covid has exposed structural inequality in housing, work, health and wealth among different classes, ethnicities and places. Climate and biodiversity change will have a similar inequitable effect on the poor and powerless. Have the voices of the less powerful been heard?

Strategic Perspective

The need for resilience (the word of the moment) should help reduce carbon heavy supply chains and food systems. Will local food production become government policy?

Governments can act strategically and radically. As the adage says, failing to plan is planning to fail.

A Democratic government in the US, and Biden's commitment to rejoin the Paris Climate Agreement, bodes well for a revised effective international climate agreement.

COP26

How can we help make COP26 more effective and less window dressing for inaction?

How can Green Tea support COP26?

Will government transform post Covid Britain to meet the increasing existential challenges or will COP26 be used for grandstanding?

Government has recently pledged to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 78% by 2035 compared with 1990. Laudable intentions that now have to be implemented by resolute politics, comprehensive policies and programmes of action, which are awaited.

There are many Greenwash portents of influential interests blocking government action, such as reduced building energy standards and freezing the fuel tax escalator.

Ideas For Spending Our Cash Surplus

For discussion.

Great Big Green Week, 18-26 September.

Organisations for Action

COP26 Climate Alliance, Oxford Friends of the Earth.

From the Ground Up with many relevant Zoom presentations.

Climate Coalition. XR Citizens' Assembly on Climate and Ecological Justice.

Community Action Groups in Oxon.

Tony Bovey, Chair, GreenTEA