



Minutes of a monthly business meeting of the West Oxfordshire Green Party

Tuesday, 7 April 2020 at 8 pm
ONLINE

Present: Rae Cather (RC), Maurizio Fantato (MF, Items 1-4 only), Helen Gavin (HG), Katy Jennison (KJ), Celia Kerslake (CK, secretary), Frances Mortimer (FM, deputy chair), Rosie Pearson (RP), Andrew Prosser (AP), Sue Tibbles (OGP trade union liaison officer), Alma Tumilowicz (AT, treasurer), Barry Wheatley (chair, BW).

Item	Action by
<p>1. Attunement</p> <p>2. Welcome</p> <p><i>There were changes to the order of items at this point, because MF was only able to attend for a short time.</i></p> <p>3. Treasurer's report</p> <p>The balance was £411.22. AT said she had at first been puzzled by the payment of £14.39, which she had no invoice or receipt for. On investigation this had turned out to be a long-standing annual direct debit for the westoxongreens.org.uk web domain name registration (set up years ago by MF).</p> <p>4. Website options</p> <p>MF said there was currently a redirect from westoxongreens.org.uk to a site formerly commissioned and paid for by Stuart MacDonald, but which is no longer active. MF was in the process of redirecting this back to the 'legacy' site (westoxongreens.homestead.com). The process should be complete by tomorrow.</p> <p>Given that the branch could not afford to keep SM's website going, MF said there were 3 options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Resurrect the legacy site and update it (the information given there related to 2017) (ii) Redirect to a landing page on the Oxfordshire Green Party website that would lead to a WOGP section of that website (iii) Get someone else to create a website for us <p>MF explained that If we chose option (i), he would have to be the manager, because it is part of a stable of sites that he maintains. The Facebook and Twitter connections had been set up for administrative purposes, but could also be used for feeding content to the website. MF would be happy to manage the site at a distance, i.e. to upload content and ensure connections were working, but not be expected to play an active role in generating content himself.</p> <p>It was unanimously decided to adopt option (i), and MF was warmly thanked for his willingness to resume the role of web manager.</p>	<p>FM to liaise with Media Working Group to generate content for the website – both immediate holding pages and a more complete set of content</p>



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5. Action points from minutes of last meeting (3 March)

Item 3/3/3/11: BW had not yet contacted HG about a follow-up letter to Robert Courts.

Item 3/4(c)

CK had drafted an appointment letter for Ward Organisers and sent it to BW and FM for comments. It was based on the job description produced by Kate Robinson last year and slightly modified for West Oxon. The purpose was to ensure that ward organisers were clear about what was expected of them and that both they and CK knew which wards they had accepted responsibility for. She had not yet received a clear reply from either BW or FM as to whether this letter was to be used, and if so, whether it should be modified in any way (e.g. to take account of the fact that some of the intended appointees had already sent David Newman an undertaking to abide by the GDPR).

FM said that Rachel Hemingway would not be able to act at the moment, because of family illness.

Items 5(ii) and 6: BW said fundraising was on the back boiler at the moment.

Item 7: The organising of 'endorsements' by AP for his WODC candidacy was no longer a current issue because of the postponement of the election.

With Green Drinks online for the foreseeable future, there was no point in contacting the Plough about their downstairs room.

Item 8: Geoff Coleman and LR had confirmed their willingness to stand as paper candidates in Chadlington and Charlbury respectively. Amy Long was willing to stand anywhere, as was CK. Finalisation of the list of candidates would have to be postponed under the changed circumstances.

It was now too early to be focusing on posters and banners. Similarly, discussion of election literature for Eynsham & Cassington was no longer urgent.

6. Town councillor's report: Andrew Prosser (Witney)

- Because of the Covid-19 restrictions, there had been no meetings of the full council or its committees. However, the Planning and Development Committee was still receiving applications, and these were being reviewed by its members.
- AP was planning to send an email letter to people in Witney North that we had been in touch with, to provide information about local arrangements for dealing with Covid-19, the restrictions brought in to deal with it and needs that people might have as a result. He would also be posting the letter on the North Witney Community Facebook page (which as yet has only 20 members).



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- AP had done a short interview on Witney Radio during the week, in a programme called 'Community Matters'. This was about the Coronavirus lockdown and some implications for the environment.

7. Ward Organisers (see also 5/3/4(c) above)

BW and FM both said they thought AP's letter should be distributed in other wards by the ward organisers (where these exist).

RC said she was happy to be the ward organiser for Witney South.

BW said he would download and distribute the lists of members and supporters to be sent to the ward organisers.

BW would also check with David Newman which of the proposed ward organisers had already sent him a GDPR commitment.

8. Target ward activities (building up to May 2021)

- FM said what a big disappointment the cancellation of this year's elections had been. She and her team were just preparing a 'transition newsletter' (from long campaign to short campaign) when the announcement was made.
- She mentioned that the Witney Land Army has been leafleting and offering support to vulnerable people during the Coronavirus lockdown, including in Witney North. Rather than duplicating, she suggested that we might encourage Green Party members to contribute to this effort (which would also make it less easy for Labour to claim all the political capital from the initiative in future).
- Posts on the North Witney Community Facebook page were continuing [these are of a non-political nature].
- FM had been in touch with Annie Pickering (Green Party Field Organiser for the South East region), who had given some advice about how to keep active in these circumstances. She had emphasised the need to be sensitive to people's concerns and had also provided reassurance by saying that the long campaign was often more important in winning votes than the immediate run-up to the election.
- Despite this, FM felt it was going to be difficult to go straight into county council elections without a district council seat [in 2021, district and county council elections are going to be held simultaneously].



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9. District-wide preparation for county, district and town council elections in 2021

- Should Eynsham or other wards come into the frame?
- In county council terms Witney North is part of the Witney North & East division, currently held by Suzanne Bartington (Con), who has been doing good work although voting with the Conservatives except on the Expressway. At district level Witney East was held by Duncan Enright (Lab), who was very popular and also mayor of Witney.
- We need to bear in mind the possibility of by-elections, where councillors who had expected to reach the end of their term of office in May 2020 decide to resign earlier than May 2021.
- It was decided to hold the April Green Drinks (Thursday, 16 April) online. After the initial email blast about this, ward organisers should follow up with individual approaches to people in their areas.

10. Reports on local campaigns and initiatives

(i) Safer cycling in Witney North:

Not much further with this. AP had written to head teachers, but they had other priorities at the moment. AP had taken photos outside Witney Primary School with new supporter Kasun Mathota and his daughter. Kasun had completed almost half of the February leafleting rounds on his own.

(ii) Church Green:

RC had spoken to Suzanne Bartington, Laura Price (Labour county councillor for Witney South and Central) and Ruth Smith (Labour town councillor for Witney Central), all of whom are sympathetic to our campaign for a cycle path around Church Green. AP said that Suzanne and Ruth had signed and shared the petition.

11. Open discussion: Looking to the future after the present global emergency

A selection of the comments made and questions raised:

- What will 'normal' be after this? Will home working and video conferencing largely replace the office and meetings? There would be great gains in terms of reduced travel. The president of the AA has predicted that the Covid-19 crisis "will change the way we work, live and travel for ever" and has suggested the government might do better to switch funds from transport infrastructure (roads expansion, HS2) to broadband improvement.



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- The amount of traffic on the roads has gone down to 1955 levels.
- Excellent article “Building a community shield to suppress the Coronavirus” by Molly Scott Cato and others on Green Party website:
<https://coronavirus.greenparty.org.uk>
- Caroline Lucas is sponsoring in the House of Commons a Future Generations Bill (introduced earlier in the Lords by John Bird).
<https://greenworld.org.uk/article/caroline-lucas-why-we-need-future-generations-bill>
- There is certain to be a recession following the pandemic.
- On the plus side, there has been a great improvement in both air and water quality as a result of travel restrictions and reduction of industrial production.
- Wartime-style measures will be needed to address the severe disruption to the economy. A temporary nationalisation of communications might be a good idea.
- This could be an ideal time to introduce a Universal Basic Income (already a key part of Green Party policy). The help being given to laid-off workers is like a short-term UBI.
- The government could re-employ laid-off workers on renewable energy schemes.
- We need to build resilience as a society.
- Green Party needs to have a good clear message. One effect of this crisis is that no one can now argue that a Green New Deal is unaffordable.
- Effect of lockdown on children will have been particularly damaging. Children have been asked to make great sacrifices although they are not much affected by the virus. After this is all over, the old will have a debt to repay to the young.
- In more general terms, there will be mental health costs of the epidemic and the resulting social restrictions.
- The lockdown has revealed great inequalities in access to space – living space and green open spaces. People on secure incomes in rural Oxfordshire have had an incomparably more comfortable time than low-income families crowded together in high-rise flats in congested urban areas. In Manhattan,



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people have been calling for streets to be closed to traffic in order to create space for walking.

- We should campaign for no bail-outs for airlines.
- We could press for a 'flatten the curve' approach for air pollution similar to that envisaged for protecting the NHS.
- Naomi Klein argues that in times of crisis government regulation generally increases. But the right has got wise to this, and has its own answers, which we must be on our guard against.
- An unfortunate spin-off of the crisis is that the UN Climate Change Conference COP26, due to take place in Glasgow in November 2020, has been postponed. The pandemic must not be used as an excuse for governments to get out of their environmental commitments. In the USA, the power of the Environmental Protection Agency is already being undermined by moves to reduce obligations on corporations.

12. AOB

- (i) AP said that a new member of the party had joined the 'Ask a Green councillor' online event organised by the Oxfordshire Green Party on 4 April. She had suggested that virtual coffee mornings would be a good opportunity for discussion. Members had also found the Zoom 'breakout rooms' really useful.
- (ii) AT mentioned that at one point 700 people had attended the Green Party Spring Conference, which was held online in March. The party had plans for regular Zoom meetings.
- (iii) BW wondered if we should repeat this kind of discussion, selecting a specific theme for each one.
- (iv) RC commented that Robert Courts is giving the impression that the Conservatives are driving things locally; we needed to counter this.
- (v) HG said she would be giving her talk on renewable energy online. [Subsequent note: this is to take place in Wednesday, 29 April, 8-9.30 pm:
https://www.greenoxfordshire.com/talk_on_integrating_renewable_energy]

13. Date and time of next meeting

Tuesday, 5 May, 8 pm (online via Zoom). Access details will be circulated nearer the time.