

Chair's report on SusWot activity in 2008/9

SusWot is now one year old. In that year we developed those uninteresting but necessary bits that a group needs to function, such as a steering group, officers, a bank account and a meeting structure. And we also agreed on a constitution, with aims and objectives. This seems like a good time to remind ourselves what they are:

In our lifetime the people of Westbury on Trym will have an informed understanding of the effects of rapidly diminishing fossil-fuel reserves and human-induced climate change. We will also have a clear perception of how the way in which we live affects not only our own and our families' lives, but also has an impact both locally and globally.

As a result, many of us will have changed the ways in which we make our choices about our lifestyles and the ways in which we travel, eat, work and consume. We will be happier and healthier, and Westbury on Trym will be a much closer-knit community. By working together with the people in other neighbourhoods we will have succeeded in making Bristol a low-energy city which is vibrant, resilient, re-localised and truly sustainable.

So, what have we been doing to meet those aims?

We held monthly public meetings throughout the year, with speakers on energy saving, zero carbon homes (Barratt's Hanham Hall eco-build project), the effect of traffic on community cohesion, and "food - the local connection". We also ran summer and Christmas socials. We used the remaining monthly meetings to develop projects for the group, and launched working groups on green spaces, transport and waste reduction - more below. We also developed good links with other groups in the village with similar interests to us, and contributed to Neighbourhood Partnership and PACT (Police And Communities Together) meetings. In addition, we've helped out with the excellent monthly local produce market.

We've promoted our activities through our web site, school newsletters, the Westbury Society newsletter, the Bristol 9, Transition Bristol, and posters in the shops, the library, and the precinct noticeboard. We also had a stall at the Westbury Flower show. As ever though, we can always do more on this front!

Our email newsletter list now numbers about 100 people.

Working groups

Our **green spaces** group engaged with the doctors at the new medical centre over the development of the green space next to it. They're continuing to assist with the project as it develops. They're also assisting with the clearing up and re-planting of parts of Westbury that need fairly urgent attention, and are taking part in research work as part of the Council's Bristol Area Green Space Plan.

The **waste reduction** group audited shop keepers in the village about their interest in reducing plastic bag consumption and / or charging for plastic bags.

A follow-up meeting with the shops will soon take place to progress this and other waste-reduction ideas.

The **transport** group promoted alternatives to car travel last November, by running the “ChooseDay without cars” initiative. A particular highlight was introducing our lifesize(ish) Chooseday polar bear to local primary school children in their assemblies!

The group also introduced 2 other initiatives to SusWot: the “Transport For Greater Bristol Alliance” and “20s Plenty for Bristol.” SusWot has now formally endorsed both initiatives. The group also attended Bristol-wide transport meetings of interest to SusWot. These included the Bristol World Café workshop on Transport, the Bristol Bike Forum, the Council’s Sustainable Travel Select Committee, and the Transport for Greater Bristol Alliance.

Bristol-wide links

We've developed good links with neighbouring sustainable groups - Sustainable Henleaze, Sustainable Redland, and Transition Henbury and Hallen - and look forward to working with them on common projects in the coming year.

Most of these groups are also part of Transition Bristol, as is SusWot. We're an established part of that network now, and are delighted to see the enormous number of activities on climate change and peak oil blossoming Bristol and world-wide through the Transition network.

Finance

This is an area we need to improve on. The group has got by largely through donations at meetings, and a couple of funding sources that we were hopeful of tapping into earlier in the year did not work out. The group has therefore ended the year in the red. Now our bank account is established we are asking people on the mailing list to support us with an annual voluntary donation. We are also submitting further applications for funding.

Conclusion

We've done a lot in one year, and thanks are due to the many people who've made this happen. I personally feel more connected to the village as I've met so many people through Suswot. I hope you feel the same, and look forward to developing the group further this year - with things like community-supported agriculture, energy descent plans, communal energy projects... and so on!

Andy O'Brien