

MANCHESTER CLIMATE FORTNIGHTLY

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Issue 17, February 8 2009

Two grand a page?!

The controversy around the “Call to Action” report (see MCFly issues 15 and 16) grows and grows. Last week Manchester City Council told us that the report cost “£28,000 plus VAT plus expenses.” That worked out, (excluding expenses), at around £650 per page, as we reported on our blog, *manchesterclimatefortnightly.blogspot.com*.

But the devil is in the detail. The Liberal Democrats have been told by the treasurer of Manchester City Council, Richard Paver, that the total bill, including expenses, was “between 70 and a hundred thousand pounds.” This means that the report's creators, London-based consultancy “Beyond Green” were paid an eye-watering two thousand pounds a page.

MCFly presumes this money has come out of the million pounds set aside for the Carbon Reduction Innovation and Investment Fund. (We'll confirm on Monday). While it's good that the money is finally being spent (after promises of 'imminent announcement of future-proof projects' were made in response to MCFly enquiries last August, see issue 6), not everyone is impressed.

Cllr Lev Eakins, (Lib Dem, Northenden), was dismayed that the report's costs “had risen to the absurd level of £100k, 10% of the entire climate change budget, and as yet the only part of that budget that has been spent since it was created over a year ago.”

Brian Candeland, chair of Manchester Green Party, was similarly scathing. “It's absolutely appalling. The costs of Manchester's 'Call to Action', arguably the most vacuous statement in the history of climate change campaigning, appear to be mounting .”

On Tuesday February 10, Richard Cowell, Executive Member for the Environment, will speak on the “Call to Action” at the Friends Meeting House. 6 Mount St.

The meeting will also see the launch of a “Call to Real Action” process, sponsored by Manchester Climate Fortnightly, that will publish an alternative report by March 31.

Consultation process, or consolation prize?

The Call to Action was discussed at a recent Council “Oversight and Scrutiny Committee” meeting. MCFly asked the committee why the six-months public consultation promised in February 2008 had been replaced by the as yet undefined “Proud Of” campaign.

Vicky Rosin, the Assistant Chief Executive stated that: “What we decided is to bring forward a number of actions and show real leadership from the council. Consulting on the actions we intend to take forward is not something that's part of our exercise as consultation means we are prepared to change it and we intent absolutely on taking this action forward.”

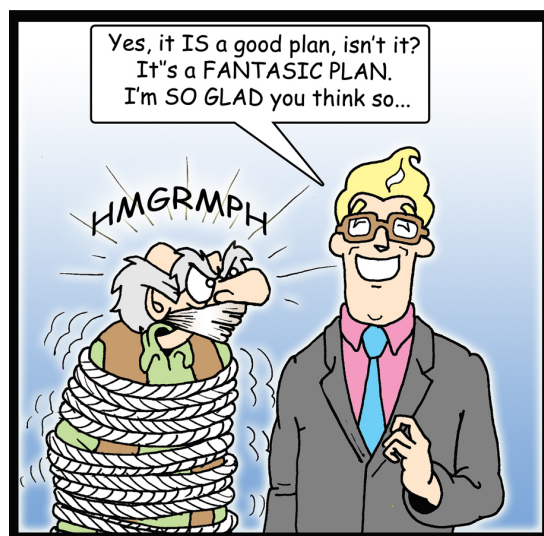
Richard Cowell, the Executive member for the Environment also added that: “Yes, we've set a firm direction of where we want to go, we're not going to carry on [sic] consulting getting nowhere.”

So, now that the nine “catalytic actions”

have been decided, the Council appears unwilling to take onboard any genuine public input (including on the controversial Green Airport). However, in off-the-record discussions, councillors and officers said they were keen to talk to selected green groups.

Cynics may infer a 'divide and conquer' strategy at work here. Time will tell...

To quote the Call to Action (p.4)- “the Council hopes that intensive work to get action under way in Spring 2009 will help to create a buzz around the Call to Action and generate a vigorous debate on the proposals.” They just haven't said how yet.



The Environment Commission: work in progress

A new Greater Manchester-wide body will be a key part of the political ecosystem that climate campaigners work in. The “Environment Commission” is one of seven such outfits that will work across the city region, and report to the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA).

The idea is that the commissions will reduce duplication of effort and enable better co-ordination between local efforts. The seven areas are “Environment”, “Health,” “Transport,” “Economic Development, Employment and Skills” [the outfit previously known as 'Manchester Enterprises'], “Housing and Infrastructure,” “Improvement and Efficiency” and “Public Protection.”

The mission of the Environment Commission is [and we quote]

- 1) To support the AGMA Executive Board in holding to account bodies which impact on the environmental well-being of the city region,
- 2) to deliver strategies, plans and infrastructure that support their core environmental sustainability objectives,
- 3) and to ensure that the wider work of the Executive Board reflects its environmental priorities.

Overseeing the Environment Commission's work will be 11 commissioners. Six are elected politicians from various local authorities. They are, in alphabetical order; Mark Alcock (Oldham), Richard Cowell (Exec. Member for the Environment of Manchester City Council), Dave Goddard, (leader of Stockport Council), David

Info Box: Proud Of Campaign

“the new ‘Proud of Manchester’ campaign... will engage people and communities in a range of activities and projects to improve their local environment and provide additional opportunities to pursue the themes in the Call to Action in every community in Manchester.” (page 5, Call to Action”).

So, expect glossy flyers through your letterbox and banner ads on the website exhorting you to be "Proud Of" Manchester. MCFly will find out how much this is costing and whether any of it is coming out of money that should be spent on *reducing* emissions of hot air.

Molyneux, (Wigan Council's Cabinet Champion for the Environment), Catherine Piddington (Tameside) and James Wibberley (Trafford).

The hunt is on for five others, from business, academia, the third sector, property and development, and communications. The Environment Commission next meets late February or early March. There are many questions yet to be answered about the Environment Commission. MCFly has asked some of those questions, and should have the answers very soon. We'll blog them first, and print them in the next issue, space permitting. The Commission will have its own “web presence” in March. In the meantime, you'll have to make do with www.manchesterclimatefortnightly.info/envcommission.html

Manchester Climate Change Agency

One of the key components of the Environment Commission will be the “Manchester Climate Change Agency,” due to open its doors later this year. The Agency, which is *not* modelled on the London Climate Change Agency (which reliable sources say is due to be drowned in a bathtub by Boris Johnson), will be a “delivery body”. It hopes to learn from the LCCA's mistakes, with “much closer links with the local authorities as well as improved private sector input.”

The budget is “likely to be in the region of £500,000 [in] year one, rising to £5million Year 3.” Staffing levels are not yet confirmed, but by its third year, it is expected it will employ as many as 10 people, including secondments from private and public sectors. A draft business plan will be available for consultation in March, and as we speak, an international law firm, Eversheds LLP, is putting together a report on proposed “governance structures.”

You can see more information here:

<http://tinyurl.com/683v2s>.

Manchester Climate Fortnightly will be following developments closely.

In the meantime, for basic info about the Environment Commission, AGMA, MCCA, the Council etc, see:

www.manchesterclimatefortnightly.info/bluffersguide.html

Roads 1, Climate Sanity 0

Last week two unrelated but very related stories crossed our desk. Firstly, the Northwest Development Agency (based in Warrington, one of seven “development agencies”) had released £1.6 million for a charity called Groundwork to provide financing for local carbon emission-reducing projects. The catch is that Groundwork must find 3 million over the next three years from other sources.

Secondly, on February 5th, the Department for (new runways and) Transport has ponied up “an extra £13m to improve local roads in the North West.” On top of £285 million already allocated for highways maintenance in the region.

So, £13 million right now to encourage more transport-related carbon emissions, but charities have will have to scramble and hustle like mad to support climate change mitigation.... That thud you hear is satirists' bodies hitting the ground. For more information see: <http://tinyurl.com/d9c5tg>.

Campaign dispatches

Manchester Climate Forum's "What do we do now?" short essay contest has closed. There were seven entries. The contest was judged, with all identification of authors stripped away, by Dr Brian Doherty, senior lecturer in the School of Politics, International Relations & Philosophy, Keele University.

The winner will be announced on Tuesday Feb 10 at the "Climate Change: Global and Local" event, at the Friends Meeting House. All entries have been posted on the Manchester Climate Forum website. www.manchesterclimateforum.org.uk

Save Rose Cottage. The Greens and Lib Dems have put out a press release highlighting the "shocking new figures released by Manchester Airport show a 42% drop in air freight compared to the same period last year.... This is unwelcome news for Airport bosses who are attempting to steer through a £20m plan to double air freight capacity by building two giant air freight cargo sheds."

More congratulations are due to MCFly's tireless regular cartoonist, Marc Roberts. A cartoon he drew in 2007, comparing the carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere to an overflowing bathtub (it's funnier than it sounds!), has drawn approving comments from the prestigious websites "Dot Earth", (dotearth.blogs.nytimes.com) run by the New York Times, and "Climate Progress" (<http://climateprogress.org>), an invaluable climate policy/science blog based in the United States. The cartoon is here <http://throboblins.blogspot.com/2009/01/boffin-bathtub-again.html>



Local News

Jan 26 Manchester City Council is looking for between 100,000 and 150,000 sq ft for temporary office accommodation for staff while the town hall complex undergoes a £150m refurbishment.

Jan 26 Crains reports that a new combined cycle gas turbine power station is planned for Trafford.

Jan 27 Bruntwood issued a clarion call to businesses across Greater Manchester and the north west to 'forge ahead' with their environmental programmes during the credit crunch. They state that running a sustainable business is a vital part of the long-term strategy.

Feb 2 The Co-operative Bank has updated its ethical policy and will now refuse to finance businesses which develop biofuels that will actually accelerate

increases in greenhouse gas emissions or have “significant local environmental impact”.

Feb 2 Warrington-based European Metals Recycling has formed a joint venture with US firm MBA Polymers to develop a £17.1m plastics recycling plant which is expected to process 80,000 tonnes of waste per year.

Feb 3 Manchester-founded Arvia Technology, which invented an eco-friendly and cheap way of making contaminated water safe to drink has been nominated for the prestigious Rosenblatt New Energy Awards .

Feb 6 Manchester studio of the Architects firm BDP has been shortlisted in the Green Building category for MIPIM Awards for its commitment to sustainability & low-carbon design.

Manchester Climate Forum

A day of discussion and workshops at Central Hall, Oldham Street. Details of workshops and speakers will be announced in the next MCFly. www.manchesterclimateforum.org.uk

Read all about it

- Can the Copenhagen talks deliver Climate Justice? Danny Chivers casts an eye over the options. <http://www.newint.org/features/2009/01/01/climate-justice-countdown1/>
- NEF report on Climate Change and Poverty
- James "Gaia" Lovelock interview in New Scientist 24 Jan 2009. We're still doomed...
- PTEG (Passenger Transport Executive Group) have published a report on the greening of city region bus fleets. It can be downloaded here: <http://www.pteg.net/PolicyCentre/Bus/GreeningCityRegionBusFleets.htm>

Scary Science

KOLKATA, India: Rising sea levels are causing salt water to flow into Indias biggest river, threatening its ecosystem and turning vast farmlands barren in the countrys east, a climate change expert warned.

Apocalypso Beat

This year's Davos gadget was a little blue pedometer. Each delegate was issued with one and invited to "walk the global village".

"Be fit, get there quicker and count your steps on the way. Enjoy breathing healthy mountain air. Reduce traffic congestion and contribute to a 'Green Davos'. Be recognised as Walker of the Year 2009".

Anyone who walks more than 20,000 steps is entered in a prize draw. With packed snow on the pavements and waist height drifts on the roadside, there will be more broken bones than on the slopes. [FT 28 Jan 2009 page 18]

What's coming up?

Tues 10 at 7.30-9pm Climate Change: Global and Local meeting at Friends Meeting House, Mount St, behind central library. www.manchesterclimateforum.org.uk

Tues 10 at 5.30-7pm AfSL volunteer social at The Knott Bar, across Deansgate train/metro station, www.afsl.org.uk

Tues 10, 6.45pm - 9pm: Friends of the Earth full group meeting, Green Fish Resource Centre, 46-50 Oldham St

Weds 11 at 10-5pm Nature, Social cohesion and the City at Humanities Bridgeford St Building, Room 1.69/1.70, University of Manchester. To attend email ian.cook@manchester.ac.uk.

Thurs 12 at 6pm Consumption and Carbon from Global to Local at Samuel Alexander Building, Room LG12, University of Manchester, <http://www.sci.manchester.ac.uk/news/>

Thurs 12 at 7-9pm Rubbish Revamped, see <http://rubbishrevamped.wordpress.com/> to book your place and for location details.

Thurs 12 from 7.30pm Green Party mtg, Friends Meeting House www.manchestergreenparty.org.uk

Sat 14 at 12noon Meeting for "Call to Real Action" group, Nexus Cafe, Dale St.

Tues 17 at 7-8.30pm Environmental Direct Action in Britain- a short history at University of Manchester Student Union, Room 1, Oxford Road, www.umsu.manchester.ac.uk

Sun 22 at 11-4pm Intro to Organic Gardening at Tangmere Court, Dudley Road, Whalley Range, www.afsl.org.uk/node/1279

A little help...

MCFly is also still in search of an extra pair of hands to help contribute and put the issue together. If you want to get involved why not drop us an email at: editor@manchesterclimatefortnightly.info

Next paper MCFly is out Sunday 22 February. If you have any comments, suggestions or even want to subscribe send a message saying so to info@manchesterclimatefortnightly.info
