

PCAP Countryside and Environment Notes for Meeting 8 October 2015

Autumn is with us and the countryside is looking great, although there are still the flooding hotspots with which to contend. Harvest is in after some good weather (now changing) and the farmers are getting ready for winter.

As there is now only verge cutting by WC once a year, responsibility is now resting with landowners and parish councils to keep the verges clear, whilst respecting the wildlife in the Vale.

The pylon project is not coming to the Pewsey Vale, as mentioned elsewhere.

Concern has been expressed re the possible closure of Everleigh Recycling Centre and the potential for an increase in fly-tipping and general rubbish disposal problems.

PEAT news and challenges from Iona and the team are:

FRACKING

As many of you will be aware, PEAT have been raising awareness about fracking (hydraulic fracturing) for a couple of years now and, in the latest round of licencing, 4 blocks in Wiltshire were made available for unconventional oil and gas exploration. The block nearest to us here in Pewsey is just south of Devizes.

The government recently released a statement saying that any delays in planning decisions, over the standard 16 weeks, would not be accepted. 16 weeks is standard, but delay is also common, in order to fully assess and mitigate public or council concerns. However, what we think the government is saying is that delay for responding to/mitigating concerns will not be allowed, and that they reserve the right to step in at the 16 week point if they choose to. Delay will not be allowed.

If you do not already know about fracking, would like to know more or have questions there will be a public meeting before the end of the month. There will also be regular updates on the 'Pewsey Environmental Action Team' facebook page.

Please read on for a statement from Wiltshire Clean Energy Alliance (of which PEAT is a member).

WCEA fears fracking will not be subject to normal planning process

The Wiltshire Clean Energy Alliance* has expressed concern that Wiltshire fracking sites will not be subject to normal planning rules. New planning guidance forces local authorities to decide on whether to allow controversial fracking operations within 16 weeks. If they fail to approve them, government ministers have the right to intervene.

Last week the government announced that four large blocks in Wiltshire are to be licenced for fracking.

ST84 - near Warminster, ST85 - in and around Trowbridge, ST94 - Salisbury Plain, and ST95 - south of Devizes.

Lesley Bennett, spokesperson for the WCEA said, 'These changes dangerously undermine UK planning rules. The government has torn up its commitment to local democracy. Local councils can no longer adequately protect community health or the environment in this bizarre rush to impose fracking on the British people. Fracking has been banned in Germany and France, but in Britain we are to have fracking forced upon us.'

Lesley Bennett said, 'We are deeply worried that fracking is being imposed on Wiltshire's beautiful and fragile countryside and its densely-populated towns and villages. Fracking is divisive and public support has slumped to just 32%. Renewables on the other hand are popular with over three quarters of the British public. Wiltshire is already a leading solar county, and is equally suitable for wind farms and biomass.

Fracking also contributes to climate change. While natural gas produces lower carbon emissions than dirty coal, its methane emissions are high. Methane is a more potent greenhouse gas than CO2. Evidence suggests that the overall climate impact of fracking is as just as bad as coal.

Lesley Bennett said, 'The Wiltshire Clean Energy Alliance believes energy security is best delivered through a commitment to home-grown renewables, community-owned renewables, and investment in electricity storage. Fracking unnecessarily extends our reliance on fossil fuels, and diverts financial and political efforts to develop clean, renewable energy infrastructure in Britain.'

****BEE PEWSEY UPDATE****

We welcome Chris Body as the new 'Bee Pewsey' co-ordinator and thanks too to Pippa who will be assisting her in the role. We had a good meet up with Robert Carpenter Turner, Kennet Beekeepers Association, last month and showed him around the site with Justin. We have postponed the arrival of the bees until next Spring to allow us to get everything in order and get all the administrative matters covered before they arrive. Chris will be in touch as soon as another training session is lined up. Thanks to the Bee Team for your patience with this.

If you would be interested in learning about beekeeping and tending the hives please contact Chris direct at: chris.beepewsey@zen.co.uk

SUCCESS AT THE ANNUAL PEAT BAT WALK

Despite damp weather, at least a dozen people turned out for the Bat Walk at Ladies' Bridge. Pipistrelles, Serotine, and Daubenton's bats were detected/seen.

Thanks to Mark Lovelace, who allowed parking nearby, and joined us, and of course to Paul, for expert knowledge.

PEWSEY WILD FLOWERS

Old Hospital Road verge has now been cut by Wiltshire Council, and by the time this reaches you, will probably have been raked. We will add more seed this autumn, and plants in the spring, so it will be even more glorious next year!