

EUROPEAN ELECTIONS 'QUESTION TIME' ON CLIMATE CHANGE

On May 7th 2014 Climate Friendly Bradford on Avon organised a question time for the European Election candidates in South West England, giving the electors an opportunity to listen to the candidates' views. The hall was packed with over 70 people.

The panel consisted of Michelle Donelan (Conservative Party Parliamentary candidate standing in for their MEP candidate), Alan England (English Democrats), Prof Molly Scott Cato (Green Party), Dr Brian Mathews (Liberal Democrats) and Clare Moody (Labour Party). Unfortunately Dr Julia Reid (UKIP) withdrew the day before. We were not able to invite representatives from The British National Party or The Independence from Europe Party as they announced their candidates after the arrangements had been made. The debate was chaired by Dennis Tate, formerly Professor at the Centre for European Studies at Bath University. In his introduction he linked the recent IPCC Report on Global Climate Change with the severe flooding in Bradford on Avon at Christmas 2013.

The first question was whether climate change is the greatest challenge of our times. All except the English Democrats agreed that it was; Alan England thought that the threat of war, for example in Ukraine, and financial catastrophe were equally important.

The second question was about the candidates' support for fracking. Molly Scott Cato said that the Green Party was the only party totally opposed to fracking and the UK should join France and Bulgaria in banning it. She said fracking is not carbon free, as gas is a fossil fuel, and it will distract from investment in renewables. Both Brian Mathews and Clare Moody thought that more research into fracking was needed and that it needed to be closely regulated. Michelle Donelan thought it must be part of a long term plan for energy use and that it was important for energy security. She said that it had been safe in the USA, which was disputed by other panel members.

Then the panel were asked about the government and Wiltshire Council appearing to be turning against wind farms and solar parks and how this could be changed locally and nationally? Brian Mathews, Clare Moody and Alan England thought that local communities should have more say and more

benefit from these developments and that they should be community owned where possible. Clare Moody felt that the countryside has always been changing:- electricity pylons, new crops such as rapeseed oil and that we would get used to wind turbines. Molly Cato wondered if they could be designed to make them more attractive!

The next question was on how we can hope to influence EU policies is we withdraw from the EU? Alan England is in favour of the UK withdrawing from the EU, a tired organisation in his eyes, and for us to develop stronger links with the Commonwealth and the UN. The others all thought that we should remain in the EU with the UK playing a full part in the organisation and that the EU must play a larger role on the world stage.

The panel were then asked about helping the poorest countries, who have done least to cause Climate Change, to adapt to these changes. All agreed that it was important to do so, though Alan England had doubts whether Climate Change is entirely man made.

The last question was about EU targets for carbon emissions and whether a 20% reduction by 2020 is enough. Michelle Donelan stressed that targets must be feasible with plans for how to achieve them, but Molly Scott Cato replied that it was not a management problem but that we must re-evaluate our lives. Brian Mathews said politicians must show leadership and that we could not wait for consensus, though Alan England thought that consensus was essential to achieve the targets. Clare Moody said that the EU does operate by consensus but stressed that this challenge must be dealt with now, it could not wait.

So there were disagreements between the members of the panel. They did not agree about solutions to combat and prevent Climate Change but did agree about its importance and urgency.

The debate was lively with all the members of the panel listening to other points of view and respecting their opinions.