Meet Your MP - Climate Coalition Day of Action 12th October
Notes from meeting with Brian Mathew (Case Ref: BM00420)

1. **Jill Johns, Climate Friendly Bradford on Avon**, Community Involvement group lead climatechampions@gmail.com

Question: Where does he see his role in parliament? Within the context of climate and environment how do the Lib Dems see their role?
BM reply: A big part of the role is case work, which as well as being useful in itself also helps him to get an overview and inform his role. However, since childhood he has been concerned and active on environmental issues. He has worked extensively in overseas development, eg for WaterAid, and his first-hand experience of extreme poverty, as well as the impact of climate change, has led to long-term commitment. He has lived on a kibbutz, doing project work in Israel and Egypt, and has both Israeli and Palestinian friends – and so took part in the Westminster Hall debate on Gaza this week. All these issues are inter-related, and he sees his role as trying to make the world a better place.

2. **Rowena Quantrill. Bradford on Avon Fairtrade group**
rowena.quantrill@btinternet.com

Question: Can he work with Sarah Gibson to table a parliamentary motion to raise awareness of what is being done across communities to promote fair trade and to revive the All Party Parliamentary Group on Fairtrade?

BM reply: He worked in Honduras for 6 months, and saw the devastating impact of low paid, seasonal work for coffee workers' families: it was often the little girls who suffered most from the lack of food. He contrasted this with the situation in Costa Rica, where coffee workers were paid a fair wage. He has seen the effect of fair trade and supports it.

3. **Gill Brooks. Bradford on Avon Oxfam group**
brooksgill45@gmail.com

Question: Can you send a letter to Rachel Reeves urging her to place higher taxes on climate polluting wealth, especially targeting fossil fuelled private jets & super yachts.See Oxfam: It's time that polluters pay Could this be hypothecated for climate action?

BM reply: He has worked in countries suffering from the impact of climate change, and is happy to send a letter.

4. **Kate Nottage, Climate Friendly Bradford on Avon (CFB), Biodiversity/Environment group lead** climatechampions@gmail.com

Question: How can you act to ensure the Local Nature Recovery Strategy fulfils its purpose? In his current dual roles as MP and Wiltshire Councillor, he is well placed to support taking this forward locally, as well as providing scrutiny and support at Westminster.

See background notes provided in a separate document.

BM reply: With regard to rivers, for example, he has done work on water quality in the Bybrook in the past, and recently met with Simon Hunter at the Bristol Avon Rivers Trust. The river goes through other Lib Dem constituencies. The Lib Dem MP Roz Savage for South Cotswolds is sponsoring the Climate and Nature Bill, with full Lib Dem support. He will also attend the Wiltshire Council full council meeting next week, at which Councillor Robert MacNaughton has proposed a motion to protect Wiltshire rivers.

5. **Sarah Kearney, Winsley Parish Council's Climate & Nature Group (lay member).** sarahakearney@aol.com

Question: Will you ask the Rt Hon Steve Reed OBE MP to give the Environment Agency more resources to sufficiently monitor water quality and uphold breaches of water pollution , increasing fines so they are not part of "Business as usual "accounting costs?

See background notes provided in a separate document.

BM reply: Yes, he will support action, as described above. He noted that the problem was not just sewage discharge (18%), but also included run off from chicken farms and septic tanks, for example. Maize crops are also problematic, as they provide minimal soil cover: these were never grown traditionally.

6. **Graham Ellis and Pat Aves, Melksham Environment Group** graham@sn12.net paaves@btinternet.com

Question: Graham presented some of the main issues with local public transport, such as planning of the future network, reliability, an increased Melksham train service and continuation of the £2 bus fare beyond this year. He asked Brian to support action on these issues, as presented in the attached paper.

See transport briefing provided.

BM reply: Yes, he will look at the briefing and see what he can do.

7. **Ros Edwards, CFB Sustainable Food and Drink group lead**
   climatechampions@gmail.com

Question: Will you please ask the government, on our behalf, to support the adoption of better tools for a standardised assessment of sustainability in the food and farming sectors?

See food and farming briefing provided.

BM reply: Brian understands the difference between regenerative farming and beef production in feedlots, for example, as well as the importance of soil conservation. He agrees that more sustainable agriculture approaches are essential, though cost is an issue and there's a need to control cheap meat imports. He's a member of the Institute of Agricultural Engineers, and has worked in Malawi and East Timor on ecological sanitation, where use of composted human waste has helped increase moisture holding capacity of the soils. He will look at Ros's paper and see what he can do.

8. **Dorothy Robertson, Wild Colerne and Colerne Parish Council Climate and Biodiversity working group.** info@wildcolerne.org

Question: We will need many more ecologists in future, as well as a well-informed public, so can he support progress on the proposed Natural History GCSE? This addresses the problem that while primary school children are enthusiastic about nature, interest declines in secondary school with its packed curriculum. A consultation was timetabled for 2024, with publication of findings in 2024-25.

See timeline provided in a separate document.

BM reply: He knows the importance of nature for people's wellbeing, including for mental health problems and would support increased inclusion of natural history in schools. He added that allotments produce four times more food than farms (ref Lovelock).

9. **Clive Spencer, Wild Colerne and Colerne Parish Council Climate and Biodiversity working group.** clive@wildcolerne.org

Question: What will you do to ensure the transition to zero carbon housing in our constituency is fit for purpose and not just a half hearted move, that will potentially be led by the major developers? Scotland has already passed legislation requiring all new homes to be built to Passivhaus standard, but there is real concern that the Future Homes Standard in England will be watered down.

See background notes provided in a separate document.

BM reply: He's a member of the Colerne Community Land Trust, and he was impressed by the 10 passive houses built by Seend Community Land Trust. The new Wiltshire Plan has improved standards, but he will do what he can to raise these, especially since Wiltshire is now required to build 84% more houses.

10. **Amy Starr, chair, CFB Energy Group** climatechampions@gmail.com

Question: What action will you take to address the economic barriers to retrofitting our homes at scale? Amy listed barriers such as the high up-front cost of improvements, the inadequate EPC methodology, and the higher cost of electricity compared to gas, since social and environmental charges are added to electricity but not to gas. She also highlighted the need for an increase in the skilled workforce.

See background notes provided in a separate document.

BM reply: Brian agreed that standing charges should be scrapped, and the costs incorporated into the general cost of energy use. He suggested that new technology, such as microwave boilers, could cost the same as a gas boiler and be suitable for older homes, in particular. (Amy pointed out that Bath and West Community Energy are successfully installing heat pumps and retrofitting in listed buildings).

11. **Jane Laurie, CFB Energy Group**
janeslaurie@gmail.com

Question: Thank you for signing Wera Hobhouse's community energy amendment to the Great British Energy Bill. How can you support taking that forward, especially to make solar farms and onshore wind more acceptable to local people? For example, it would be good to see further action to support community energy, as proposed in the Local Electricity Bill in the last Parliament. Could best practice management for wildlife on solar farms be supported through planning requirements?

See background notes provided in a separate document.

BM reply*:* He was involved in ensuring that the Lyneham Solar Park created a community fund to support local projects from repairing the church fund to tackling fuel poverty. He would like to see more schemes of this sort. However, there is a potential problem with large–scale battery storage, such as at Lime Down solar park. If the lithium batteries catch fire, this would be difficult to put out and toxins would be released. If the storage area is above an aquifer (eg at the Holt proposed scheme), this would be even more of a problem. There are other innovative options to provide storage, eg the proposed REEF tidal power scheme, which he supports. This would produce more energy than Hinkley C.

With regards to wildlife management on solar farms, he supports sharing this kind of best practice, possibly through requirements in the NPPF.

Conclusion: Brian welcomed everyone's contributions, as helping him take these issues forward. Informal conversations continued over coffee, with a group photo, while Jill thanked Brian for joining us.