Number 94

Spring 2025

Welcome to Nottingham Friends of the Earth. We are one of over 200 local Friends of the Earth groups campaigning for a better environment locally as well as nationally and internationally. **Friends of the Earth** has a reputation for effective campaigns backed up by authoritative research.

Not in Service: East Midlands' residents demand better buses

Better Buses East Midlands demonstrating last year in Bakewell.

The recently-formed Better Buses East Midlands group is part of the wider Better Buses Campaign, which is calling on the Government to urgently deliver high quality bus services, safe and accessible for everyone including disabled people, for all communities throughout England.

Campaigners across the East Midlands are calling on Regional Mayor Claire Ward to come on board their drive to take buses back into public control.

For more on this, go to page 4.

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Nottingham Friends of the Earth

NOTTINGHAM FRIENDS OF THE EARTH

Down to Earth

United for Warm Homes

Campaigners from United for Warm Homes and Friends of the Earth gathered in Parliament Square on 4th February 2025, calling for stronger government action on home insulation and affordable heating.

On 4th February, groups from around the country took the Warm Homes campaign to parliament. Community scarves with messages for MPs was displayed in Parliament Square.

Last year Friends of the Earth published briefings for each constituency listing the number of homes needing basic insulation and calling on MPs to support the campaign. Find the briefing for your constituency at https://nottfoe.gn.apc.org/UWHbriefings.html which also includes a link to research showing the serious health impacts of cold homes.

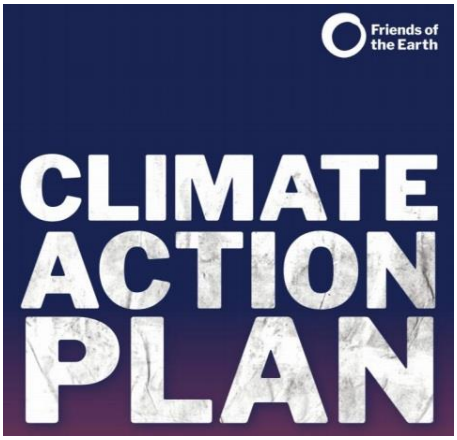
Friends of the Earth is calling for a street-by-street programme of basic insulation, starting with those who are most vulnerable. And a big expansion of the Government's Warm Homes Plan to ensure all homes are insulated by 2035.

Climate Action Notts has been lobbying local MPs, particularly in Gedling and Mansfield, as well as continuing support from Nottingham East MP Nadia Whittome (see last year's Down to Earth No 93).

For more information email climateactionnotts@gmail.com

Climate Action Notts

Climate Action Plan



In many parts of the country local government has been reorganised with executive mayors covering larger areas. The new mayors have significant powers over transport, housing, training, energy and environment.

Friends of the Earth has been working with local environmental groups in each area to persuade candidates to commit to tackling the climate and ecological emergencies.

See our 10 point Climate Action Plan for East Midlands at https://nottfoe.gn.apc.org/metromayor.html

Nigel Lee

Why won’t our Mayor have a Climate Plan?

EM Climate Coalition meets Mayor Claire Ward (front right)

In May 2024 we got a new Combined County Authority for Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire with a new ‘East Midlands’ Mayor Claire Ward.

During the election campaign Mayor Claire supported a climate pledge put forward by a coalition of community groups led by Friends of the Earth. But, unlike most combined authority mayors, she has refused to develop a Climate Action Plan.

She claims ‘Net Zero’ will be considered as part of her growth plan so a separate climate plan is not needed. She has appointed an Inclusive Growth Commission (IGC) to advise on a longer term strategy – we wait to see what will come of that.

Of some concern, instead of promoting a just transition to green jobs – insulating people’s homes and investing in renewable energy – she has been promoting “fusion, fission and hydrogen”. Our comments on this have been submitted to the IGC consultation:

The IGC should critically appraise EMCCA's claim that fusion, fission and hydrogen will make a major contribution to the East Midlands economy. And compare it to the jobs which could be created more quickly in retrofitting energy efficiency measures in homes and businesses, and renewable energy such as solar.

Fusion may make a contribution in the second half of this century but will make no contribution to energy supply before 2050. Even the optimists accept it will be at least 20 years before they could develop it as a commercially viable source of energy. It will create good research jobs at West Burton, but don't overhype how quickly it could produce useful energy.

Fission: Rolls Royce has a good track record in producing very small (and very expensive) reactors for nuclear submarines. But still has no credible programme to produce small modular reactors. According to one energy economics analysis: "Small modular reactors still look to be too expensive, too slow to build, and too risky ..." https://ieefa.org/articles/small-modular-reactors-are-still-too-expensive-too-slow-and-too-risky
Hydrogen is not a source of energy, it is a means of storing energy - and not a very efficient means of storing energy. Hydrogen is much less efficient than batteries at storing energy. And less efficient than heat pumps for heating. So should only be used for applications that are difficult to electrify, such as some heavy industry. For a basic analysis see a 2020 review by Energy Cities based on a Carbon Brief article: https://energy-cities.eu/where-should-green-hydrogen-fit-in-your-city/

Some of these issues will be examined in a conference to be organised later in 2025.

Nigel Lee

Better Buses for Notts and Derbyshire

Better Buses East Midlands protest at the Mayor's office

BETTER BUSES FOR EAST MIDLANDS

A new group has been formed to campaign for better bus services in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. Better Buses East Midlands is calling on Mayor Claire Ward to use her new powers to take buses back under public control.

They say bus services are in crisis following deregulation in 1986 (apart from Nottingham where the main bus operator is owned by the Council). Cuts to vital services have left many people locked out of jobs and opportunities, unable to visit friends or family, or forced to buy cars.

They want the Mayor to assess the business case for reregulation and consult the public so that action can be taken before her current term ends in 2028.

You can support their petition and see a briefing on Bus Franchising on our website at: https://nottfoe.gn.apc.org/BBEM.html

Nigel Lee

Bus user

(Words by Chrissy Grocott and Lisa Hopkinson, to the tune of *Wild Rover*)

I've been a bus user for many a year
But sadly my buses have all disappeared
So now I'm campaigning as it's very clear
We need better buses to get into gear

Or it's no, nay, never, No, nay never, no more
Will I be a bus user? No never, no more

People need buses to get to the shops
Hospitals, colleges, families and jobs
But it might not be easy to get very far
Without better buses some have to use cars

Or it's no, nay, never, No, nay never, no more
Will we get to net zero? No never, no more

We need better buses for young and for old
And for all inbetweenies, our Mayor must be bold
Our Mayor has the power, to start the process
To regulate buses and end all this mess

And it's ho hey ever, Ho hey ever and more
She should regulate buses For ever and more

And it's ho hey ever, Ho hey ever and more
Then I'll be a bus user For ever and more

Explorers dig for gold

Maintenance at 1st Keyworth Explorer Scouts' allotment

Explorer Scouts at 1st Keyworth in Rushcliffe are digging on their allotment for their Duke of Edinburgh Award, taking them from Bronze right up to the Gold level. The allotment site in Keyworth features fifteen raised beds, two poly tunnels and a fruit cage. Protected by tall hedges and fencing, it is an ideal site for producing fruit and vegetables.

Nottingham FoE member Richard Lumb used to be Keyworth's group scout leader, and is still warranted for his work with Scouts on the allotments. He says "It is important that we make best use of the land available by growing local produce, much of which is shared with the local community. Our young people get their first taste of allotment gardening to appreciate where good food comes from – hopefully they will enjoy this and take those skills into adult life. Usually, after 3-6 months, they will get their skills module signed off and be a step closer to their DofE Award".

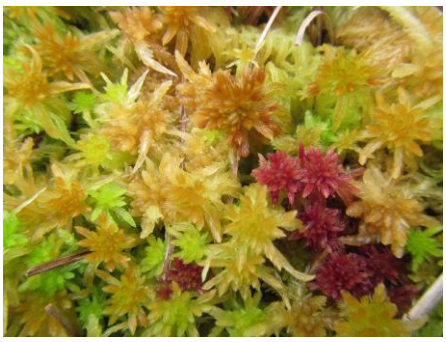
Starting an allotment is quite easy and usually begins by contacting your local parish council who will put you in touch with organisers. You can always set aside a patch in your garden but there are many advantages to working on a larger site; other gardeners will offer advice and growing tips, share seeds and there may be shared equipment to use. A lot of crops can be grown outdoors but a greenhouse or poly tunnel is invaluable for crops such as tomatoes and peppers.

Richard's only piece of expert advice is to be flexible in your approach, expect the occasional disappointment and remember that every year will be different. Climate change has brought us more extremes of weather which can be difficult to adjust to; we can have a heatwave in February, biblical floods of rain in March and frost in April, all of which confuses the plants and cause setbacks or even kill the plants. Last year was excellent for onions, shallots, rhubarb and soft fruit but potato yields were low and it took three attempts to germinate carrot seeds – the only thing we can predict is that the new year will be completely different to the last so we need to plant a wide range of seeds in succession and keep an eye on the weather forecast.

The Explorer Scouts also planted some free trees from the Woodland Trust and organise activity evenings for the younger sections in Cubs, Brownies, etc. On these activity sessions the youngsters learn about composting, planting and growing, and take something home to grow. They can also observe how many objects are scavenged and repurposed on the allotment site as part of Reduce-Reuse-Recycle.

Richard Lumb

Sphagnum Moss – the big little plant



Sphagnum colours

Damaged peatland – exposed peat

Sphagnum growing in glasshouse

I'd love to share with you why I consider Sphagnum moss to be probably the most important plant on the planet! Sphagnum occurs on our peatlands across the UK, and plays a key role in stemming the impact of global warming. These humble, tiny Sphagnum plants are often un-noticed as you walk over the moors, but they are beautiful, with colours of red, pink, orange and green.

Sphagnum creates our peatland areas: naturally accumulated layers of peat forming from carbon rich, decaying plant material under waterlogged conditions, which the Sphagnum creates by storing water within its spongy forms.

Peatland covers around 10% of the UK land area – nearly 3,000,000 hectares providing us with iconic landscapes which offer breathing spaces for millions of people and provide a special sense of place.

Sadly an estimated 80% of UK peatlands are in some way damaged, mostly through human activities, particularly during the industrial revolution which affected the Peak District. There was so much acid rain from coal being burnt that the sphagnum and other vegetation died off completely, to expose the carbon-rich peat below.

Peat accumulates over thousands of years. Dramatically, ten million tonnes of carbon dioxide are lost to the atmosphere from the UK's damaged peatlands each year, around 4% of the UK's total annual greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

I am lucky enough to run a Climate Action business (BeadaMoss) in East Leake, which over the last 15 years has developed a sustainable way to propagate Sphagnum for re-introduction on damaged peatlands. We have a wonderful team of 40 staff, all passionate about the environment and mitigating impacts of climate change. See our website www.beadamoss.co.uk.

We work closely with the main NGOs, particularly in the Peak District, such as The National Trust, RSPB and Moors for the Future Partnership. Peatland management experts can rewet the landscape and reduce the carbon emitted from the exposed peat. They can also plant Sphagnum. This tiny plant is one of the best at sequestering of CO2 from the air by photosynthesis and then locking it away as peat. Two great climate benefits!

This year we will be supplying 6 million clumps of Sphagnum moss (BeadaHumok®), planted in an area of 2,500 hectares. In 5 years this colonised Sphagnum can be locking away 4,000 tonnes CO2 each year. Peatlands are the world's largest terrestrial carbon stock – storing at least 550 gigatonnes of carbon

globally – more than twice the carbon stored in all the world's forests.

But UK peatlands are also important for a number of other reasons. Their rainfall catchments feed down into reservoirs and supply our drinking water. Sphagnum naturally filters out the numerous particles of peat clearing the water to drink.

Sphagnum can also soak up more than eight times its own weight in water, so slows the flow of rainfall to reduce potential flooding events downstream.

Peatlands have critical biodiversity benefits as they support unique species and habitats that depend on often extreme, waterlogged conditions, so peatlands are of international importance for biodiversity conservation. There are over 30 sphagnum species in UK with about 300 species globally. Sphagnum is an ancient plant, around when dinosaurs walked the lands, and is now a humble plant with a big role to play.

Barbara Wright

What are Forever Chemicals?

An extensive family of man-made substances is the subject of new investigation. PFAs (Per- and Poly- Fluoro Alkyls) used in industry since the sixties, earn the term 'forever' by being nearly indestructible. Persistent in living things, some are linked to health concerns.

PFAs are synthetic compounds of the natural element fluorine. Fluorine itself is an element vital to nature - probably its most familiar natural compound forming our own tooth enamel, calcium fluoride. Fluorine bonds strongly, forming stable compounds. In the 20th century wholly new ones were built: initially academic curiosities, several showed exceptional properties - heat resistance, low friction, water repellency. Amid all these, all evidence showed the 'fluorocarbons', as they were named, were safe biologically and environmentally inert, which set the stage for wide commercial use.

In the early sixties, new weapons were needed against fires, especially those involving petrol and aviation fuel, and 'Aqueous Film-Forming Foams' or AFFFs transformed the picture. Using two PFAs to enhance water's fluidity they were quickly adopted in military and civil firefighting. In recent years, however, these substances proved far from inert biologically. They are water soluble, unlike earlier synthetic fluoro compounds, increasing the possibilities for interference with biological processes. Multiple studies link them to cancers and thyroid, endocrine and fertility problems. The main US manufacturer ended AFFF production in the early 2000s and will exit all PFAs this year. UK makers are believed to have followed suit. Non-PFA fire foams are in use, though PFA foams remain legal in UK.

Soluble PFAs have been detected in drinking water and surface waters across the UK, though currently, the most acute concern centres on specific contaminated sites. Residues in waste water can contaminate aquifers. The Environment Agency has a list of high-risk sites, including RAF bases where fire training accounts for much foam use. RAF Waddington (Lincs), which is in a drinking water supply area, has groundwater contamination at more than five times the maximum allowable drinking water levels. Although PFA pollution is partly a 'legacy' issue, it is formidable. The cost of cleaning up existing UK pollution is estimated at £428 million p.a. for 20 years - and that assumes that PFA emissions stop immediately. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is reported to be investigating measures including finally banning PFAs foams. Independent scientific research is progressing on wastewater treatment, though there is an urgent need for new remediation options, whose development is underfunded. The Royal Society of Chemistry is calling for public protection from toxic PFAs to be enshrined in the Water (Special Measures) Bill, which is now at the committee stage.

Jeremy Jago

Contacts

Co-ordinator: Jeremy Jago (c/o Sumac Centre, address as below)
Membership Officer: Nigel Lee, 0115 9788059; Jeremy Jago
Newsletter Editor: Roger Steele, 07474 257029
Website Editor: Nigel Lee, 0115 9788059

Campaigns:
Climate: Nigel Lee (liaising with Climate Justice Coalition), 0115 9788059
Nottm ProWA: Roger Steele, 07474 257029 & Richard Lumb
Clean Air: Nigel Lee (liaising with Clean Air Nottingham), 0115 9788059
Waste & Resources: Nigel Lee, 0115 9788059
Fossil Fuel Divestment: Jon Simons
Warm Homes: Jon Simons (liaising with Climate Action Notts)
Food system: Dan Swinton

For general information, please visit our website (see below), or write with an SAE to Nottingham Friends of the Earth, c/o Sumac Centre, 245 Gladstone Street, Nottingham NG7 6HX.

For information about joining the group, please mark the envelope “Membership”.

For latest campaign news and contact details, visit
https://nottfoe.gn.apc.org

National Friends of the Earth: The Printworks, 131-143 Clapham Road, London SW9 0HP (020 7490 1555), or email info@foe.co.uk.

See national website https://friendsoftheearth.uk for easy online actions.

We meet online on the second Tuesday of each month, between 7.30pm and 9.30pm. Please email nottinghamfoe@hotmail.com for details. You would be very welcome.

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If you would like to receive future editions of this newsletter electronically to save paper, please let us know your email address. You can contact us by email: nottinghamfoe@hotmail.com. Please note that the file size can be over 1MB.

AGM Announcement

Our next Annual General Meeting will be held online on Tuesday 11 March 2025 at 7:30pm. Email nottinghamfoe@hotmail.com for details.

We look forward to seeing you there.