

BLACKPOOL AND FYLDE GREEN PARTY

GREEN VIEW

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Green Mondays



Following the success of the Reclaim the Power month of action at Preston New Road, members of the North West Green Party have launched a new initiative to keep the ball rolling.

The aim is to get the biggest number of protesters possible on at least one day a week in order to display opposition to Cuadrilla and slow their activities. This is not restricted to Green Party members, of course, but it would be brilliant if Blackpool and Fylde members were there to help swell the numbers.

The action kicks off on MONDAY 14th AUGUST. The national party will be expressing its support - Natalie Bennett will be at PNR, offering an opportunity to meet her and show a welcoming local GP presence.

On Monday 21st August, our deputy leader Amelia Womack will be the featured guest at PNR. Caroline Lucas is expected to visit us on either 18th or 25th September. Co-leader Jonathan Bartlett has already been to PNR in July, as some of you might remember.

Green Party members can, of course, also show their support for PNR and opposition to fracking by visiting Maple Farm on Solidarity Saturdays.

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Preston New Road Update



One of the most significant environmental and local democracy issues for decades is coming to a head at Preston New Road in the Fylde. Cuadrilla are poised to start drilling, despite the fact its planning permission, granted by central government against the decisions of all levels of local government, is still being challenged in the courts. It has taken them seven months to get to this point, and despite their denials there has been significant delay to their plans caused by the anti-fracking protests. There is no sign of protest fading away, and it is vital that local people help in keeping the national interest and support at a high level.

The July month of action prompted by Reclaim the Power was tremendously successful in raising the profile of the fracking issue, the threat it poses to our environment and local communities, and the strength of opposition.

Green Party members, both local and regional, have played their part over the last six years, not only recently by adding their presence to the PNR protests, but by working in many different ways to raise awareness. Back in 2011 it was the Blackpool and Fylde Green Party's then chair, Philip Mitchell, who led the campaign locally and nationally to raise awareness of fracking's dangers. He launched the Green Party's national campaign against fracking, and achieved the vote for an immediate moratorium on fracking at the GP 2011 autumn conference in Sheffield.

More recently, Green Party Lancaster County Councillor Gina Dowding (pictured above) was one of six women and three men arrested on 3rd July for their part in a lock-on. In court on 7th August she pleaded not guilty to charges brought against her, and is due for trial in November. Readers will remember Caroline Lucas was arrested and charged (and subsequently acquitted) during her support of action against Cuadrilla at Balcombe.

A regular at PNR is heroine Anne Power (pictured on the next page with Jonathan Bartlett last month). Tireless in her opposition to the oil and gas industry and fracking she is a veteran not only of PNR but of Barton Moss – she won the environmental local hero award at the Observer Ethical Awards 2014.

Protests at PNR have of course led to some problems, with a police force which was clearly unprepared for the scale and duration of the actions and is now perceived by many as facilitating Cuadrilla rather than facilitating lawful peaceful protest. Accusations of violence against protectors continue, from both Cuadrilla security and police, but few or no similar claims have been made against protesters for other than peaceful behaviour. Road disruption is to be expected with the police responsible for road and lane closures. In many locals' view, however, far more local traffic disruption is caused by the United Utilities works.

The action at PNR is a just and necessary stage in opposition to an industry whose ambition is to drill up to a hundred wellpads in the Fylde, with several thousand fracked wells. This is not only a nightmare scenario, but one which is doomed to failure. It is a pipe dream. The community living near Preston New Road must not be used as guinea pigs in an experiment doomed to failure. Once wells are drilled and fracked, the legacy of risk to air, water and health will remain. We can only hope PNR Action Group's legal action in the Court of Appeal at the end of this month can stop Cuadrilla in its tracks.



Future Party Plans



After the May and June elections this year, it's time to look forward to preparing for the next elections, which – unless there is another General Election called – will be the Blackpool Council and Fylde Borough Council elections in May 2019.

At the August members' meeting it was felt that we need to find a new strategy for the elections, and increase our party's activities, member outreach and participation.

We recognise that whilst some of our members have spent, and are still spending, much of their time on fighting fracking, we need also to devote some time as a party to more positive initiatives, policies – hopefully building a local manifesto - and action.

It's recognised that priorities may be different in Blackpool from those in Fylde, and the ambition is to have more separate meetings, some central to Blackpool and some to Fylde, making them more accessible, and to focus on the more local issues. For that to be successful we shall need more local member input, so please consider how you can help.

We also hope to organise more open meetings with quality speakers on environmental and social issues affecting our area or indeed green issues from a national perspective.

As part and parcel of planning for the next elections, we will consider target wards, where we might expect, if not immediately but in the mid to longer term, to establish a councillor base. It is surprising how just a single Green councillor or MP can have an effect – an influence far in excess of what you might expect – as Gina Dowding and indeed Caroline Lucas have shown.

A few weeks ago Caroline said this -

"Have you ever thought about what a difference Green councillors make?"

"Stroud District is running the first natural flood prevention scheme in the country thanks to a Green councillor. Lancaster City Council created its first new allotment site for many years following a Green Party initiative.

York Greens secured the first 'trial' 20mph residential street in York and paved the way for a citywide scheme. Buses in Sheffield now run on Boxing Day and New Year's Day, thanks to Green councillors, whilst in Norwich, Greens have cleaned up the city's dirtiest diesel buses.

Bristol councillors worked to get more overnight beds for the street homeless; our St Alban's councillor got a family of Syrian refugees housed; Islington schools now teach LGBT History all year-round thanks to the Greens; and in Brighton and Hove, the Green minority council introduced a living wage for staff and care home workers.

"...Even on councils where there are just one or two Greens, never underestimate the important role we play in putting issues on the agenda which, without us, simply wouldn't be there."

Not everybody wants to be a councillor, but it can be an incredibly rewarding experience, whether at Parish/Town, Borough or County level. We hope that over the next couple of years we can build an effective team, a set of policies and support base to help achieve our party's representation in local government. We hope, too, that all members will think about how they can become involved in that process and make their own contribution.