

## **SHROPSHIRE COUNCIL ELECTIONS – JUNE 2009**

### **CANDIDATES' QUESTIONNAIRE ON CLIMATE CHANGE**

**Electoral division: Church Stretton and Craven Arms**

**Name of Candidate: Bob Welch**

**Party or description: Liberal/Democrat**

**1. How will climate change affect the county of Shropshire and what, in your view, are the urgent actions that the Council needs to take?**

Climate change and peak oil have to be addressed in tandem, because the shortages of energy supply must promote greater energy conservation, reducing our carbon footprint. In the absence of national targets, the Council should work towards assessing the current carbon footprint of town areas and setting challenging targets for reduction.

These twin challenges necessitate the creation of more sustainable local economies that reduce the need for travel and capitalise upon IT and communication technologies. The Council needs an Economic Development Strategy that recognises that fact, dividing the county into more explicitly defined, potentially more sustainable economic areas, each examining ways to generate more renewable energy, consistent with their own circumstances. It means also that the Council must press for more consistent and faster Broadband and Wi-Fi coverage across the county.

The Council must also revise its planning policies so that housing and job creation are considered together. Redevelopments of mediaeval market town centres will need to give greater priority to pedestrians and to cycling, possibly with charging stations for electric cars.

Climate change is already starting to bring more extreme spells of weather – heavier rainfall and more prolonged periods of hot or cold weather. These pose threats both to our failing Victorian infra-structure of drainage and sewage and to the health of our ageing population. The Council will need to evaluate and prioritise strategic investments on these infra-structure issues and will need to promote more comprehensive emergency planning with the NHS and social care services to care for frail, vulnerable adults with little or no family support.

Climate change and peak oil in combination will impact of food supply, so dialogue needs to be started with the farming and horticultural community on a programme of diversification that will increase the range and supply of local foods.

The Council also needs a Visitor Strategy to ensure and prepare for capitalising on the increased number of visitors, no longer flying away on foreign holidays. The Council needs to be more pro-active in co-ordinating the marketing (especially e-marketing) of tourism providers of all kinds and in investing in the transport infra-structure and services to process the increasing number of visitors in eco-friendly ways around the Shropshire Hills to the economic benefit of both towns and villages.

**2. If elected, will you vote to include climate change issues in the list of the Council's top ten priorities?**

"Ten top priorities" are probably too many, having regard to the financial constraints within which the new Council will have to operate. It is probably also to over-simplify to state that climate change is an issue, it is rather the context that should inform the way in which every issue is tackled by the Council e.g. promoting energy conservation and re-cycling in all of its services, ensuring energy efficiency is integral to the planning process, investing in eco-friendly transport systems, examining options for creating more renewable energy etc.

Its first priority will be to win the "hearts and minds" exercise of persuading a majority of citizens each to accept their own individual responsibility for contributing to this agenda and persuading them that there is a "green road to recovery" out of the present recession.

**3. What further steps should the Council take to raise public awareness and educate people about environmental issues so that they can achieve sustainable lifestyles?**

The Council has to make this agenda real for people. This means emphasising the positives (rather than the negatives) in adapting personal behaviour e.g. the savings to be made by becoming more energy efficient. This may, in due course, have also to involve financial incentives (reduced council tax on energy efficient homes).

Financial support to voluntary organisations providing appropriately validated energy assessments of people's homes is probably what will bring the agenda home to many. The Council should be estimating the present carbon footprint and be setting targets at local community level for improvement. This will ultimately mean that the Council will have to risk local unpopularity in championing schemes for renewable energy, if those targets are to be met.

Above all, the "hearts and minds" exercise has to be won in schools, all of which should be supported in becoming increasingly involved in developing the Transition agendas of their own towns and parishes. It is vital that young people are empowered to influence the circumstances in which they will live out their adult lives. As Church Stretton Town Mayor, I am already in dialogue locally with schools about how we can implement such a programme.

**4. What ideas do you have to help people in villages to live, work and stay there so that they are not merely dormitory or commuting satellites?**

The Church Stretton Area Partnership, which I chair, is already in dialogue with the local farming community about what needs to be done in the recession to help the town and country to be more supportive of one another e.g. involving the farming community in the visitor economy e.g. Farm Days: more promotion of local/organic produce: local diversification of supply.

The recent response of Church Stretton Town Council to the consultation on the Core Strategy for the county strongly supported the adoption of a "core and cluster" model of housing development in South Shropshire, as advocated in Matthew Taylor's recent national study "*A Thriving, Working Countryside*" providing judicious amounts of affordable housing in

villages both for the next generation of those working the land but also for young professional families, able to work from home, courtesy of IT technology, who want the rural quality of life. Such an injection will make village shops and post offices more viable but only if it is complemented by more reliable group transport systems to the local market town “hub”, which has the fuller range of services.

Housing developments also have to include more “live/work” units with office accommodation incorporated into the housing for this remote type of working. Such accommodation will attract higher earners to drive up the current low wage economy. As visitor numbers increase, there will also be more opportunities for B&B and self-catering accommodation to boost the local economies of villages. The other required initiative is to develop a more comprehensive shuttle service around the Shropshire Hills, so that revenue from visitors, based in the market towns, is more widely distributed.

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