

West Farm
Ruckley
Shropshire
SY5 7HR

25 May 2009

JA Wrench
Yeld House
3 Yeld Bank
Church Stretton
Shropshire SY6 6EZ

Dear Mr Wrench

Thank you for your letter of 20 May.

Firstly I must congratulate you on your inventive methods to further the aims and objectives of your worthy organisation.

Turning to the specific areas you are interested to ascertain my views upon I must first emphasise that, in common with all right thinking people, I fully accept the scientific proofs that link human activities with the changes taking place in the global environment. Although there are also no doubt other cyclical factors influencing our climate, the way we have lived in past decades and now undoubtedly plays a significant part in the behaviour of our climate.

That being so it is incumbent on all of us to take great care in how we behave and, in so far as we can, seek to influence others too.

My wife and I have farmed for many years in a low input fashion, avoiding the use of chemicals wherever possible and managing livestock extensively. We are enthusiastic “recyclers” and try to be low input livers but I am sure we can always do better!

I have been a member of the AONB Partnership and Management Board for the past three years and have fully endorsed its stance on climate change issues (which I am sure you will be aware is very much at the heart of its work). I see every reason for its policies to continue and be strengthened in the future.

Now for your specific questions.

Climate change does of course effect the county of Shropshire both directly and through its neighbours, and indeed the rest of the planet. It effects us through the shopping habits of its residents (the importation of foodstuffs and other items many would consider unnecessary), the way we travel increasing distances to work, the large volume (reduced recently due to the economic climate) of over-flying aircraft and many, many other factors.

The Shropshire Council must take climate change issues to its heart in a similar fashion that the AONB partnership has. Only by doing so and by ensuring that climate impact is considered when all decisions are made will we be able to make a positive difference. I don't feel that it is particularly helpful to make a long list of urgent

actions, rather let's simply bring the issue forward as a relevant one for all areas of work and decision.

As for your second question, I rather think that I may have answered it already. The issue is not a simple priority; it is rather an over-arching matter that must be at the forefront of thinking on all issues. For example, when considering school rolls and potential closure programmes the environmental impact of increased travel and new building are relevant to decisions as well as other non-educational factors like the support for and maintenance of rural communities and way of life.

Public awareness of the issue is, I believe, already high for most people. There is of course quite a large group who is either not prepared to accept the issue as relevant or don't feel it's their problem.

As well therefore as continuing the emphasis on recycling and using the schools as a launch point for educating our young, it is necessary to identify those who are not participating in the general move to improve our behaviour and try and change their ways.

In more general terms the Council can and should make it clear that the issue has been taken to the heart of its decision making process by continuously referring to the need for improvement in public statements. It might also consider nominating a member as "Climate Change Champion" charged with keeping the issue to the fore.

The future of our villages and small rural communities is at the heart of the thinking of all of us who live and work in them (amongst whom I am privileged to be). As your question indicates, the pattern of rural life has changed significantly over the last 30 years especially with the drift into the countryside of more and more commuters and the decline in agricultural employment opportunities.

The lack of high speed (or even in some places, any speed) broadband connections seriously restricts home based businesses or other small rural enterprises. This is a serious issue, which must be resolved.

The recent Post Office closure programme has seriously threatened some areas and any re-emergence of a further programme must be resisted.

Plans to close some rural schools also have serious impacts on communities, we need to remember that schools are part of our villages not just places of education – closing them changes for ever the pattern of life in their areas.

One of the most contentious areas is that of planning policy. The current consultation on the Local Development Framework is worthy of careful consideration. Out of it will emerge the future shape of housing and other development in the County. At its heart must be rural issues such as home working and small-scale business encouragement, as well as provision of employment opportunities, high class housing and infrastructure in our towns to minimise commuting.

I am convinced that by a mixture of encouragement and effective policy making we can make a positive difference to life in our County and look forward to continuing to play a part in the process.

Yours sincerely

Tim Barker