

Freeconomy Wrexham

Genny Bove

Following the phenomenal success of Wrexham Freecycle, the email-based group which keeps good things out of landfill, local people are now working to explore ways of bringing 'freeconomy' ideas to the wider community, and building links with groups which are already operating for gift rather than exchange.

Landfill - Keep Out!



You only need to spend ten minutes at any of the council household recycling centres to realise how much perfectly good stuff is going into skips from where it will be crushed and sent to landfill, chipped and turned into chipboard, crushed for road building rubble or melted down as scrap metal. The effect of this is to make the community as a whole poorer for two reasons:

1. As soon as an item is put in a skip, its intrinsic usefulness or real 'value' is lost to the local community.
2. The item becomes something which has to be dealt with – recycled or sent to landfill – which usually costs, either financially or environmentally, sometimes both. Even where items are made from material which can be reclaimed and sold, it is always better to prolong the useful life of an item, which can still be sent for recycling later on.

Items that end up in skips include:

- Furniture
- Household items
- Electrical items
- Metal objects such as bicycles, radiators, filing cabinets and many others
- Beams, planks and other wooden building materials
- Sanitary ware, tiles, bricks and other ceramic building materials

If you look hard enough, it is usually possible to find an alternative use or recycling destination for nearly everything and it is in everyone's interests to keep things that still have

useful life out of landfill. Some of the benefits are:

- Helping to meet the waste reduction targets that will help save our planet
- Reducing pressure on scarce landfill sites
- Allowing the redistribution of items from those who no longer need them to those who do, and in particular to those who could not afford to buy these items
- Promoting a culture of re-use and encouraging people to think before they throw
- Fostering a sharing ethic in local communities

There are strong arguments for re-using rather than recycling a range of things including metal, wood and ceramic goods, although some of the workers at the local 'recycling' centres would have you believe otherwise. A bicycle, for instance, will have a certain monetary value as scrap metal, but a very much higher real value to a child who would not otherwise have a bicycle. Eventually the bike will in any case become scrap metal, but only after it has been used to the full extent of its life and can no longer be repaired. Likewise, a wooden plank has a certain monetary value as material for woodchip, but far higher real value to someone who has a use for it as a plank.

Mobilising Freecyclers and others

At the end of January I put a 'wanted' message on Wrexham Freecycle (email group for giving away unwanted items) asking for people who might be interested in working on freeconomy projects in Wrexham to get in touch. These projects could include a 'shop' where stock would be donated/saved from the skips and given away for free; a warehouse running along similar lines; community 'bring and take' events; schemes where volunteers would collect unwanted fruit from people's gardens and distribute it in the community.

The response was overwhelmingly positive. Not only did people volunteer their time and energy; we also had an offer of free storage space in a local industrial unit, which made the whole project instantly more viable.

A free stall at the *Animals, People and Environment Fayre* led to more volunteers signing up, and several local voluntary organisations also expressed an interest in getting involved in one way or another. Some of these groups are already redistributing furniture and other items free of charge to people who need them, while others have teams of volunteers who might be interested in helping with any project we set up.

Getting Together

Freeconomy Wrexham had its first meeting on Monday 18 February. 15 people attended and others sent messages of support.

At this meeting, we looked at how we would work together, listed the resources we have available, discussed ideas for developing the freeconomy in Wrexham, and decided on a first event.

It was agreed that we would kick off with a 'bring and take' day at Acton Community Centre on Saturday 5 April. We have been able to go ahead with this plan thanks to a number of kind donations including: rent for the community centre to be paid by Christchurch Wrexham; loan of a van by ARD at Cefn-y-Bedd, along with their offer of a large storage area; designing and printing of leaflets by James and Jenny; lots of offers of help on the day.

Other areas and communities in Wrexham have already expressed their wish to have a 'bring and take' day locally, so once we have the experience of running this one, we'll know better what's needed to make a successful event, and can plan for future events.

Freeconomy

Some legal considerations

In an increasingly regulated society, there are some issues for freeconomy projects. Whereas Freecycle involves private transactions between individuals, providing a venue for people to do giving and taking could confer some responsibility on the organisers to ensure that certain legal requirements are met.

We have decided that we will not be able to accept foam-filled furniture unless it has a fire safety label, and we will get all electrical goods PAT (portable appliance testing) checked before giving them away.

Thoughts about money

The idea of freeconomy is to work outside of the money/exchange system, to put in our effort for free, to give and take with no money involved. That's the ideal. However, we're trying to do this within a system where money is needed for almost everything, and in order to run even the smallest 'bring and take' event, some cash is going to be needed, for room hire, transport, refreshments and so on.

The question is, how should we raise this money? Might donations freely given by people who come along on the day or who want to support our project be enough? Should we apply for grants? How does the money side of things affect a 'free' project? These aren't questions with easy answers, but it's important for us to be thinking about them. We hope that we'll learn from experience as we go along, and won't allow money to rule us or corrupt the ethos of freeconomy.

How to get involved

Come along on Sat. 5 April to Acton Community Centre, Overton Way, Acton between 9.30 and 12.30 and take part in our 'bring and take' day.

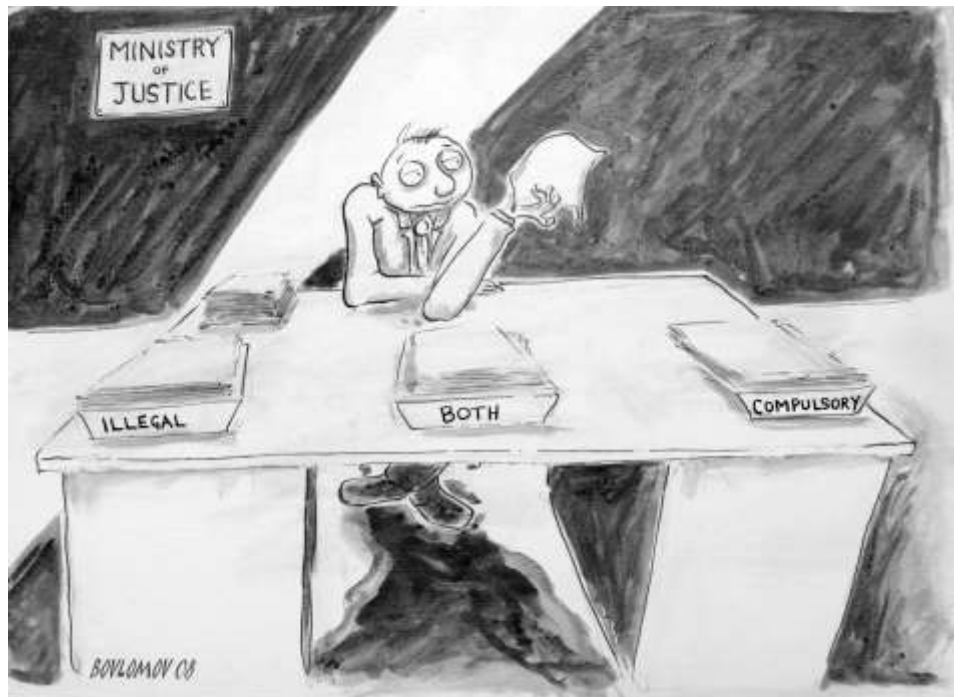
If you're local, then join our email working group at:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/freconomy>

Email us at:

freeconomywrexham@yahoo.co.uk

Or call: **0845 330 4505** for more information.



See more of Bovlomov's work on our cartoon pages: www.wpjf.org.uk
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Hafod case reaches Europe

Plaid Cymru

A group of Wrexham campaigners will be on the way to Brussels in early April to make their submissions to the European Parliament's Petitions Committee in their bid to bring a halt to landfill operations at the Hafod site.

In November 2006 Plaid Cymru MEP Jill Evans handed the petition to the Committee Chair Marcin Libicki in Brussels on behalf of the Hafod Environmental Group campaigners.

Jill said:

The fact that we have reached this next stage is very good news, especially as the Petitions Committee has been faced with an exceptionally high volume of cases in recent months. The perseverance of the Hafod campaigners is greatly to their credit, and, of course, these are the people who have to live with this landfill site. I hope that this petition will equal the success of my own petition dealing with a similar case at the Nantygwyddon landfill site some years ago which certainly helped in closing it down.

Back in November 2006, when I handed over the Hafod petition, I remarked that it was crazy that in the

twenty first century we are still transporting waste for miles and dumping it in holes in the ground when we know that it will affect people's health and the environment. This strengthens my resolve to work in the European Parliament to get stronger laws on reducing waste, increasing recycling and phasing out landfill.

I look forward to welcoming the Hafod campaigners to Brussels on 2 April.

Pauline Smout is Chair of the Hafod Environmental Group. She said:

We are delighted that the Committee is going to hear our submissions, and a number of campaigners will be there for the hearing. It was always clear that the process would not be a speedy one but nevertheless we have reached this point a little sooner than we might have guessed.

Now we have now to get our case across in the time granted to us, and we hope that the Committee will act on our submission over the designated Special Area of Conservation and its immediate surroundings.