

## **Sustainable Thornbury AGM 2010: Secretary's Report**

As last year, we have continued to work on food related topics but this year we have also been doing considerably more public awareness events. This year we have also had a group working towards our first EcoFair which will take place on May 22<sup>nd</sup>, immediately following our AGM. There are two key ongoing groups – Grow Your Own Food and the Orchard Group which have continued to flourish. We have also spawned two other groups this year – an allotment association and Thornbury Community Supported Agriculture which are reported below. Our membership at the end of the year stood at 133 which is an increase of 24 new members during the year, with 3 leavers. Many of our members do not actively participate in all our events and workshops but our active membership has remained steady. In January 2010, we moved to a regular meeting place at the Chantry as numbers attending often exceeded the space in members' living rooms. We offered a chance to meet socially one evening a week for some months but this opportunity was not taken up by many so the formal meetings were discontinued.

The year began with another successful Give it Away – Take it Away Day in June. Thanks again to Bob Dale plus a small group of helpers, 399 car loads of usable goods were off-loaded and mostly taken away to be rehoused. The range was as huge as last time: from prams to padlocks, tools to TVs, books to bicycles. The event was shortened by a substantial downpour which meant that more items were left over as people rushed home & the helpers left were considerably soaked after the clearing up. The atmosphere of the event was not quite as positive as the previous time due to the unfortunate behaviour of some of those attending. Lessons were learned for any future repeat of the event. The Hearts & Minds group attended to give people the opportunity to think about the future by taking time to think & share their thoughts.

Immediately following Give it Away Day, we put on our first filmshow at the Cossham Hall when we showed Age of Stupid. The event was a sellout, with people being turned away at the door. The film was followed by a question & answer session with a distinguished panel. As well as stimulating good discussion, the event also raised approximately £200. Over the Autumn and Winter of 2009-2010 we put on a series of films and talks on climate change and peak oil. We received sponsorship from the Co-operative Bank as well as support from South Gloucestershire Council to put these events on in the villages surrounding Thornbury, rather than in the town itself as previously. These events were unpredictable in numbers attending, with the event at Rangeworthy being the least well attended and Alveston the best attended. We attempted to follow up the events with a workshop which allowed for more discussion of the topics. One event was held in Alveston but it was only poorly attended. A decision was made not to continue with the workshops as they were a lot of work.

A great deal of work has been done by the EcoFair group to prepare for our first venture into a public event of this size. The group has been active since mid-summer 2009, finding suitable traders, issuing invitations, following up activities, talks, demonstrations etc and bringing everything together. Every member of the group was written to individually asking for help on the day. A disappointing number of members did not even respond but there were members who volunteered to help who have not yet been active in the group which is encouraging. We look forward to working with them at the event in May.

The Grow Your Own Food group continues to meet regularly. During 2009 a small number of people met monthly in members homes. We shared plans for our gardens,

looked up pests and diseases in books and on the internet and watched a Forest Garden video. We also enjoyed visiting a variety of member's gardens in Thornbury and Alveston, swapping ideas, seeds, seedlings and excess produce concluding with a social gathering in the Anchor. For 2010 we have produced a mission statement and yearly programme, available on the ST website or as a printed copy from Marian. We have already propagated strawberries, worked in the Orchard, and sown seeds for our stall at the EcoFair. Our friendly group would welcome new members, interested in growing a little food at home, to join us at future meetings including the Sheiling School garden and learning how to make jam.

An inaugural meeting was held at Blend on the 5 September 2009 to discuss the formation of an Allotment Association to take forward the initiatives of ST's EAT Campaign. Volunteers were requested to Chair the meeting, take notes and serve on the committee. A Steering Group was formed to see what needed to be done to set up an Allotments Association. The first meeting of the Steering Committee was held on Tuesday 22 September. The role of the committee was discussed and officer posts allocated to the group. There are now over 50 members on the waiting list who would like to have an allotment in the Thornbury area. Unfortunately the land at Eastwood Park Nursery did not go ahead due to management problems at the nursery. The allotment's association are still in discussion with South Gloucestershire Council regarding the plot of land to the rear of Thornbury Leisure Centre and are actively looking for suitable plots of land for allotments. The first AGM is being held on Saturday 24 April when members will be voting on the Constitution which has been sent out to all members.

The work which began last year to look at the feasibility of a community supported agriculture project has born fruit this year. Several members began working with both the Sheiling School land group and a local landowner to see if a suitable scheme could be devised. All ST members were invited to express interest if such a scheme could be set up and sufficient numbers responded to encourage the group to continue. In March this year, Thornbury CSA was formally established at its inaugural meeting. Although more members are needed, the scheme is now underway in partnership with the Sheiling School and first vegetables are due in July 2010. ST made a successful bid to South Gloucestershire for funding for 2010 to cover some of the setting up costs of the CSA. This money will be transferred once the bank account has been established.

The orchard group has had another productive year. Trees, both those we planted and the older ones are doing well. Fruit bushes are also flourishing. We now have a new signboard at the Orchard which has been provided by South Gloucestershire Council. We recently held a pruning session, when a number of ST members, mostly from the GYO group helped get the plum trees in order ready for the fruiting season. As part of the Council's carbon-offsetting initiative, we have been given 3 walnut trees to plant in the piece of land immediately in front of the Orchard. Planting has been delayed while we waited for a services survey to take place. This has now been carried out and we will, again, be asking members to help with the planting of these trees. Hopefully, 'Mr Fruit' who is providing stakes and ties will join us as his advice and expertise is greatly appreciated.

We have been active in building our relationships with schools this year. This began with several members being involved in Castle School's Action Day in July, where pupils from several primary schools joined with Castle School pupils to undertake a range of environmental activities. Following on from that, Brett Harrison has been working with the school to develop a fruit garden and Chris Carter has worked with a craft teacher on recycling clothing. Elizabeth Vooght went to speak to a group of primary head teachers

about ST and the possibility of members participating within the schools at their request. We have set up a database of members' skills which has been sent to the heads. We have also begun to work with pupils at Marlwood School and two members, Derry Jordan and Diane Barnard, are involved with developing links. Derry and Diane have been liaising with Marlwood School about ways in which ST can be involved. These include an after school cookery club, production of a 'Healthy Eating' leaflet, growing food, and showing some films. Teachers are interested in activities within technology, including textiles (the production of a bag?). Although still in the early planning stage we are going into school to work with 2 groups of year 7s, each of about 100, in their Curriculum Enrichment Week (week beginning 28th June 2010). We are planning to base this on the theme of 'waste'.

We have continued to be invited to take an active part in local activities. Several members represent us on environmental groups: Barbara Day & Elizabeth Vooght on the Town Council Environment Committee, Alan Pinder on South Gloucestershire Environment Partnership and Oldbury Stakeholders Group. Brett Harrison on Castle School Sustainability Group. Several members regularly give up time to represent ST at Thornbury Local Food Fairs and at Christmas Maggie Jeffery arranged for the Community Choir & ST to come together to promote the 10:10 campaign. The food fairs have again given us the opportunity to speak to people who might not come to events and each one has seen some new members joining. A few members also attended the Carnival with a stall devoted to energy-saving in the home. We have given presentations about our activities at South Gloucestershire Environment Forum and at Doynton Village Hall. Given the small numbers of active members in relation to the overall membership, this represents a substantial commitment of time by some members and we are really grateful for their continuing commitment.

Margaret Pinder, April 2010