

# **Go Green 'stuff to know'**

## ***Green Energy: How the Forum Won and Where It Got Us***

*An article that was in Spark & the Daily Telegraph, by Tom Chance and Ed Griffith-Jones*

Two years of petitions, meetings, letters and lobbying have finally paid off: The University of Reading is now using 100% green electricity. Every light bulb, photocopier and computer on campus is now being powered by clean, renewable energy sources (such as wind and hydroelectric) dramatically reducing our impact on the environment. Student activism won, but how, and was it worth it?

Our strategy was simple: we identified the people in the University who had the power to make the switch and over a long period of time we lobbied them by various methods. However, to get our foot in the door we first needed to show wide support and viability - that much was made clear in an initial meeting with the Vice Chancellor (VC) in January 2003.

So we began with a petition, collecting over a thousand signatures on stalls, in halls and by staging fun events around campus. Keen to put our campaign into context, we also won the support of local MPs Jane Griffiths and Martin Salter, and South East MEP Caroline Lucas. With a bag full of signed windmills, letters from supportive politicians and a declaration of our demands and rationale, we scheduled another meeting with the VC and the Director of Facilities Management (the University department in charge of energy) at the time, Patrick Hackett.

From November 2003 through to May 2004 we regularly met with staff from the Facilities Management Department to convince them of our case. We wrote a report on the viability and importance of a switch and gained the additional support of Reading Borough Council. In February 2004 we secured a new university energy policy that would ensure the hall contract would always go green, and that the business contract would go green depending on the market.

This term all our effort finally paid off: the University staff did their research and moved both contracts to 100% renewable without any significant increase in cost. And thanks to our energy policy, when they renew the contract in two years time they will most likely stay green.

You may ask, was it worth the effort? Well if you consider that universities in the UK account for 9% of all office space, and that Reading University uses almost 40 million kilo-watt hours of electricity per year, the impact is significant. That's equivalent to over 12,000 homes, according to DTI figures (the average British household uses 3,000kwhs per year). It reduces our ecological footprint, meaning that you needn't worry about the impact of your campus energy use on the environment (though you should still try hard to conserve energy).

The switch also puts more pressure on other universities to make the switch. Currently seven universities are 100% green, and over 60 use at least 2% of green. Highlighting this

move to renewables helped us convince Reading to get ahead of the game.

Crucially, the switch also puts pressure on the Government. The Department for Trade and Industry is committed to meeting 10% of the UK's energy needs from renewable sources by 2010. But under pressure from the influential nuclear lobby, from industries that are reluctant to invest in environmentally sustainable practices, and from misguided anti-wind lobbyists, a lack of government commitment may mean we miss the targets.

With large public institutions like Reading University - with our large meteorology and renewable engineering departments - making the switch, we move the UK closer to meeting its targets.

Our victory is a clear example of how students working together can make significant changes for the better. However, not content with this, we're now pressing the University on recycling and energy efficiency.

Working with University staff, officers in the Students' Union, Reading Borough Council, politicians and environmental organisations, we want to put similarly progressive policies in place for these issues. The more students we have involved, the more we can do to improve the recycling facilities and reduce wasteful electricity usage in the Union, in departments and in halls.

### ***Basic strategy***

1. Work out one or more policies that you want to push
2. Start getting student support with a petition, stalls and stunts
3. Draft a policy (get help from People & Planet and Fiona Perry)
4. Meet the RUSU President and get his support
5. Write to local MPs and Caroline Lucas and ask them to send you a letter of support, though it should be addressed to the Vice-Chancellor
6. Meet the Vice-Chancellor (arrange it with June Hattrick, make the topic clear to her, ask Spark to come along). Ask him to commit to support the campaign in principle.
7. Start meeting University staff about it all (fun fun fun...)
8. Keep building on the petition, running stunts, doing fun things throughout!
9. Profit! Alternatively, get the policy passed through the relevant university bodies

## ***What to do, resources***

Lots of stuff on our web site, including a “go green” report we wrote that outlines lots of suggested policies and example targets, and lots of random things from the council and other universities: <http://green.acrewoods.net/documents/green>

Recycling information from Reading Borough Council:

<http://www.reading.gov.uk/environmentplanning/wasteandrecycling>

## ***University contacts***

Dave Lewis, RUSU President ([d.c.lewis@rdg.ac.uk](mailto:d.c.lewis@rdg.ac.uk), 0118 986 5130, 07973 503 401)

June Hattrick, Vice Chanellor's PA ([j.v.hattrick@reading.ac.uk](mailto:j.v.hattrick@reading.ac.uk) , ext. 8001)

Martin Westacott, Head of Estates Services ([mkwestacott@reading.ac.uk](mailto:mkwestacott@reading.ac.uk) 0118 378 8958)

## ***Non-University contacts***

With all of these, mention that you're from the Campaigns Forum, and for Fiona & Martin mention my name (Tom Chance).

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Fiona Perry, RBC Environmental Auditor ([fiona.perry@reading.gov.uk](mailto:fiona.perry@reading.gov.uk))

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Martin Salter, Reading West MP ([salter@martinsalter.com](mailto:salter@martinsalter.com) , 0118 9546782)

Oliver Burt, RBC recycling ([oliver.burt@reading.gov.uk](mailto:oliver.burt@reading.gov.uk))

People & Planet ([gogreen@peopleandplanet.org](mailto:gogreen@peopleandplanet.org), 01865 245678)

Reading Borough Council (RBC): [www.reading.gov.uk](http://www.reading.gov.uk) , 0118 939 0900

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