

Local Groups Tour, Summer 2009: Andy's record of questions and answers.

I really enjoyed meeting and talking with all of you who made it to these meetings. I was deeply encouraged by your sense of support and care for the organisation and by your ideas for the future. I also acknowledge though, that we have some important challenges to work through and respond to in the coming months. I look forward to us engaging further in some of these ideas and challenges at our annual Conference in just a few weeks.

The following table summarises all of the questions I've been asked on the tour so far (I won't be visiting Northern Ireland until September). I've summarised my answers and in some cases I've added in *italics* other points I've thought of since but didn't make at the time, or further information I can now supply but did not have available at the meeting. If you can't see your question or recognise my answer, apologies – I've done my best to recap both. Where identical questions arose at different meetings I have covered these just once but I've generally avoided compositing similar questions to keep the record as close to the discussions as possible. I've also grouped questions from all the meetings by what seemed to be similar themes, so they don't follow in the order they were asked at any particular meeting. No doubt some could have been put under different headings but I hope this at least helps you to find your way through them.

Finally, in a number of areas I undertook to feed ideas back to the organisation for further consideration. I have already had informal discussions on some matters with key staff. But my plan is to combine the ideas that came out of this tour with those that emerge from the Local Groups Conference in mid-September, so that we can consider them all together. In terms of next steps, Conference is the next big one and we'll then want to talk to groups over the autumn as we look at what ideas and questions we can respond to from our dialogue of recent months.

Best wishes.

Andy

Theme, question and answer and <i>additional thoughts afterwards</i>
Clarifications on situation
In response to the briefing doc, people may have questions. Where do they send them to? Please send them to questions@foe.co.uk . This was mainly intended as a channel to send questions to in advance of my tour and obviously the time has rather passed now. Going forwards however, we expect Conference to be a key time for further discussion and we'll then try to respond to emerging ideas and questions.
What percentage of staff will you have to lose? Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland (EWNI) has the equivalent of 150 full-time staff (FTE), but more staff than that as many work part time. It currently looks as though we will lose around 24 FTE, but that includes posts that were planned in the 2008-2012 Strategic Plan but never recruited to and current vacancies, as well as presently filled posts. However, it is impossible at present to know the exact number of staff who will leave, as this depends on a range of variables including the number of voluntary redundancies.
Where does Friends of the Earth's income come from? What are the income streams? And what is the trend in supporter numbers? Our income comes primarily from committed giving by a financial supporter base of around 97,000.

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This has accounted for around 80% in recent years. The rest is made up of giving from high value donors and trusts; and then legacies. We get a very small amount from trading and events. While our committed giving has held up reasonably well so far in the recession, the number of supporters has in fact been slowly declining for a couple of years and the recession is likely to exacerbate this, based on past evidence, unless we take action. But the immediate impact of the recession was felt through a rapid fall in high value donor giving after the September 2008 financial crash. While this may only account for a relatively small percentage of our overall income, it has become more and more significant over the years in giving us the cash for higher profile, high impact campaigns.

What is Friends of the Earth's projected income in 4 years, compared to now and the original plans?

Last year's income was something over £10m. The original strategy saw our income rising by 40% in 5 years. We no longer think this is at all likely or even possible. We expect income to potentially fall somewhat from the current position, with the effect of the recession, but to pick up to something above the current income by the end of Year 4, but we would be doing very well – given evidence about the impact of past recessions – if we achieved 15% growth on the current position.

What do we mean by the term 'activist'? In the current briefing to local groups the term seems to not to apply to groups but to some other category. What do we mean?

I think it's being used to refer to local group members and very active individuals on issue networks as well, potentially, as other individual activists. However, I will have the document checked to make the meaning clear.

This is the case. Where activists rather than local groups is used, it refers to the wider range of Friends of the Earth activists. This has been clarified in the document now online.

To what degree are other organisations being affected in this way?

Very many charities are having to adjust to the recession by making significant savings, including laying off staff. For example, WWF and CPRE have recently laid off staff. Greenpeace has a recruitment freeze. And in the development sector, Oxfam, Christian Aid and Tearfund have laid off staff or are about to. The development NGO sector, where many organisations having been increasingly investing in campaigning on climate change in recent years, has the additional hit that the value of sterling has plummeted so the local value of the grants they make to overseas partners has also fallen dramatically, so many are having to make steep cuts to UK expenditure on staff and operations in order to try to maintain the real value of partner grants. So, very painful though it is, Friends of the Earth is absolutely not alone in having to make significant savings.

Fundraising and supporter development**Why did we not ask local groups to help as this may have avoided as many cuts?**

We did consider this but believed the change process needed to be rapid because of our low reserves and that there was no way we could get a reliable response from groups in time to make a difference. We also felt that against a background of recent tension about the service provided to local groups this might simply have inflamed passions. In any case we feel we should in the future explore how we can engage local groups more in contributing financially to Friends of the Earth nationally, where they wish. But this needs to be part of a wider package including the consideration of what 'national', meaning Underwood Street or potentially the Cymru and Northern Ireland Offices, provides local groups with – so we would be exploring other parts of the relationship between us.

Could we not do more to steer financial supporters towards local groups like, say, an annual piece in Earthmatters informing readers about their local groups

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I'm not aware of what happens at the moment and what may already have been tried in the past. But that seems sensible to me. I will pass this back to staff.

I can imagine a value in, say, a regular 'local group focus' within Earthmatters, showcasing particular achievements and solutions that have been achieved on the ground, as a way of giving Friends of the Earth supporters a sense of the achievements of FOE collectively, and regularly flagging the option of joining a local group.

Having checked this with our publications team, I can confirm that we promote local groups a lot more than a few years ago through our publications. For example in Earthmatters throughout the year, to give financial supporters a rounded and inspiring narrative about how we win campaigns and how their support is making a difference, we include specific local groups stories where we think they'll work well, and give more general coverage on an ongoing basis. Examples of coverage in recent issues:

- *an issue focusing on the Earthmovers winners in 2007 – cover shot and full page portraits and stories of the individuals*
- *a feature on local groups members who had a green wedding*
- *frequent mentions in news section where local groups have been instrumental in local campaign wins*
- *ad hoc stories about outstanding LG achievements (eg Manchester Love Your Bike work)*
- *standing copy (ie every issue) explaining numbers and spread of local groups*
- *standing item on Friends of the Earth wins – we update this each issue and some of the wins are local campaigns.*

There's further relevant information on this in my next but one answer.

Some groups are more financially dependent on Friends of the Earth than others. Could we not help them to be more financially independent?

Possibly. This could be explored as part of discussion of the 'contract' between local groups and Friends of the Earth – by which I mean what are our mutual expectations, and how might they need to be modified over time.

If we are keen to pursue supporter development, what are we going to do to encourage Friends of the Earth EWNI supporters to join local groups? Will groups be able to contact supporters in their area?

I'm not sure what mechanisms we currently use but I believe we do point supporters towards a local group where there is one. I'll look into whether this can be improved and what plans there are to do so. *For all new recruits, the welcome that we send them on paper offers them a range of ways they can become involved, including joining a local group. We also sometimes feature local groups in appeal mailings, for example the Rights and Justice appeal in November 2008. These mailings reach well over 100,000 people every year.*

My understanding is that there have been data protection issues about giving out details of these supporters directly to local groups, but that we are seeking to overcome them so that in the future we more easily connect local groups with supporters in their area.

Others have raised the difficulty that some local groups have in retaining the engagement of new members who may come once or twice then drift away again. From what I've heard it would appear that this is quite a common problem.

We need to be clear that not all Friends of the Earth supporters want to be connected to a local group. However, we do now promote more widely the opportunity of joining a local group. We feature local group stories in Earthmatters and our other supporter publications and the increasing role of local groups in nationwide activities (like festivals) also gives prospective supporters more awareness of the network. Our street fundraisers are also briefed on the work of local groups so that they can include this

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when they talk to people; we are starting to build closer links between our street teams and some local groups. Work to strengthen the online presence of local groups with the new microsites is also helping to increase supporter and public awareness of local groups. Alongside the job of continuing to support groups to think through how they can be optimally attractive to newcomers, we will also look in more detail at how we can integrate more of our data between the local and national levels.

If we have a process exploring the above, can we let local groups know where we are up to?

Yes. I will investigate what the plans are and have them communicated. *Staff will look into how the points above can be communicated more clearly to local groups so that they are aware of the efforts already being made.*

Lots of people join local groups and think they're Friends of the Earth EWNI supporters or alternatively join Friends of the Earth EWNI and then are surprised to find e.g. by accident, that there is a local group. Can we not do more to help local groups recruit people to Friends of the Earth EWNI – like have a good general leaflet explaining who we are and how to get involved? Can we not do more to flag the existence of local groups to new supporters? Are we able to pass the names of new supporters to relevant local groups?

Plans are afoot to have a new general leaflet. They were held up, in part, because of the change process. We need to make sure that this leaflet works for local groups – or has a variant that does.

I know that there have been data protection issues about giving out the names of Friends of the Earth supporters to local groups. There is a process to get round this – but I also know that this is cumbersome (having our Luton office mail local supporters on the local group's behalf, as I understand it).

People think they're a member of Friends of the Earth EWNI because they've joined a local group or are surprised to find there is a local group when they've joined Friends of the Earth EWNI. Would it not be better to have one single membership?

I'd be interested in investigating that. I can imagine – from what I've heard from groups themselves – that some might be happy with this, but understandably not if it meant a loss of income for their important local campaigning. We certainly need to do more, if we can, to cross-sell membership of local groups and Friends of the Earth. This is a task that fits within our supporter development work which will be a key approach and priority for us in the new strategy.

More could be done to enable local groups to support Friends of the Earth fundraising efforts – e.g. alerting local groups when street fundraisers are in the area. Can we look at this?

This sounds sensible and attractive – though we're keen that local groups don't feel overburdened and want them to prioritise their activism on local or national issues. However, I will look into what might be done in general and into giving more warning about the impending presence of street recruiters. *There is a notice period for local groups regarding street fundraisers visiting their area of one week. Potential for involving groups more fully in this particular tactic at present doesn't really exist as the street teams have to work to targets and are carefully trained to give them the best chance of meeting these.*

Perhaps of more interest is that in the coming year we hope to start exploring the potential for local groups, where they wish, to help Friends of the Earth with other forms of fundraising at the community level. This needs careful thought though and we'll talk more with local groups in due course about it, probably for the first time in OpenSpace at Conference.

Can we not help do more events to boost the finances, and help local groups to do so? Events are attractive, fun and could be profitable?

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As part of the change process we have taken the decision to focus more of our events capacity precisely on fundraising. There is one – a comedy event – planned around Food Chain for October.

However, I'd be interested in sounding out the needs of local groups who might wish to raise more money either for local activities or Friends of the Earth EWNI, to see how we might support them to do fundraising events. We are looking at more community fundraising, and events and other initiatives by local groups could certainly be a part of that.

What is the age profile of Friends of the Earth supporters?

I believe the typical financial supporter is probably mid 40s onwards. There seems to be trend of people joining Friends of the Earth in their youth or young adulthood, dropping out in their late 20's and 30's, with the pressure of careers, families etc, and then reengaging in their forties, This is not so different from other organisations I am aware of. However, I'm not happy with this and think we have to broaden our profile, doing more to retain more people. We do have some relatively new and highly regarded youth and education work. We expect this to make an important contribution to changing our age profile over time.

Support for local campaigning and groups

How can local groups be a 'top priority' if we are slashing half the Regional Campaign Coordinators' time, when they are the resource most useful to local groups?

Local groups remain very important to us. But it is impossible to save 2.5 million pounds a year without affecting key stakeholders in some way. Our work with Friends of the Earth International will also be affected for example. We understand that Regional Campaign Coordinators are very important to local groups. But local groups are diverse and also need other forms of assistance too. So we've had to look at it in the round. We are keeping a high level of capacity building resources. We've kept considerable issue expertise – which if we don't have, can't be made available to local groups. And we will be improving our knowledge management systems to provide groups with better access to information and to enable groups to better access each other's expertise and experience.

How will the new structure support local groups better?

First of all, we need to look at how the local groups can be better served drawing on a range of resources and skills across the organisation. So these will never be all in one team or department, but we have to ensure they are well coordinated. However, we will be putting the current functions of the Capacity Building Team, which is dedicated to supporting local groups, in a new department focused on engaging the public – through communications, fundraising and activism.

We believe that this will allow us to reap maximum synergies between these functions and allow us to treat people who come into contact with Friends of the Earth more as whole people, not as people who are only interested in activism, say, or giving. However, we will need to ensure very close working between this department and the new Policy and Campaigns department which will contain the issues expertise that many local groups will want access to. We will be monitoring closely how these work together in supporting Local Groups within our available resources and strategy. It's worth saying that the decision on where to place capacity building functions and activism, within the structure, was one of the most finely balanced. One could also make a very strong case for putting Activism in with Policy and Campaigns. There are pros and cons whichever way we do it. But we decided that at this stage in the organisation's development, when we want to have a big push on supporter development, then the optimum for now would be to put Activism in with Communications and Fundraising while ensuring a very close link with Policy and Campaigns.

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Friends of the Earth EWNI is hardly supporting local groups. What percentage of the budget is spent on groups and local campaigning? Friends of the Earth is seriously underestimating the value of groups, which are critical for delivering our agenda. The organisation used to have a Local Groups Department, but this was abolished. Now it doesn't have anything. Isn't it time to turn the organisation inside out and devote much more to supporting the local groups to deliver that agenda?

While Friends of the Earth doesn't have a department with Local Groups in the title, it's not at all true that it has nothing dedicated to local groups. This is the core work of the Capacity Building team. And many other parts of the organisation also contribute to local groups in different ways. It is true, however, that over recent years there has been an increasing strategic focus on large campaigns. We need to continue these for major impact, while recognising the vital importance of local groups in actually delivering them as well as their equally vital role in campaigning on local issues. Local issues matter not only in their own right, but also as a means by which many people first engage with environmental issues.

I can't say exactly how much is devoted to local groups and how much to Friends of the Earth EWNI – not least because it's very difficult to calculate realistically and precisely. For example, there is a considerable expenditure that could legitimately be counted as a contribution to both. So, the Capacity Building Team, for example, helps local groups with generic skills that can be used for both local and national campaigning. Regional Campaign Coordinators campaign on regional issues, which contribute to both local and national objectives.

My feeling is that we are going to have to be much smarter with the resources we have – make much more efficient use of them – to support campaigning by local groups. So, for example, the Get Serious About CO2 team is working towards providing regular phone-in surgeries for local group members with the staff experts on different technical issues. We're also about to launch a dedicated website for local groups working on Get Serious, to improve knowledge sharing from one group to another. We have also made strides in the last year to ensure that the Friends of the Earth campaigns offer more by way not just of variety, but of actions that can be taken at the local level. Again, Get Serious is a good example of this. More flexible local activism is also being developed for Food Chain.

A Conservative government, which is also talking a lot about decentralising and 'de-bureaucratising' the state, is likely to increase the importance of local action to delivering Friends of the Earth's agenda. So, with the very real resource constraints we will face for the next couple of years, we will have to work hard and creatively to improve the service to local groups in some respects. We must remember, however, that we are also trying to increase our numbers of individual activists, to give us more flexibility and potentially more income. While the resources we will be dedicating initially to individual activism are small compared to those devoted to local group activism, it is vital to the long term health of the organisation, and to our strategy of engaging larger numbers of people to deliver bigger political impact, that we expand individual activism.

A previous director toured local groups upon taking up the role and returned saying local groups were vital, must be strengthened etc. But Friends of the Earth EWNI wouldn't tolerate this and he left after not too long. Will staff tolerate giving better service and more rights to local groups?

I can assure you that there is great commitment to groups among the staff body. I am very unlikely to be ejected from Friends of the Earth for wanting to strengthen the local groups! Strategically we have got to do two things. Achieve impact at the UK and international level, for the long-term sustainability of the planet. We have also got to see real, practical change at a local level – for the same reason. I don't believe we can achieve either without strong linkage between work at the national and local level. That doesn't necessarily mean that Friends of the Earth has to do both. However, we do, and are very well placed to so, with our local groups network being a major part of our USP and vital in

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delivering our UK campaign successes.

In the last few years there have been tensions around this – not just around the balance between the local and the national, but around the way the links between them have operated. So, we've got to work together to refresh this relationship, and get it as mutually reinforcing and effective as we can within the resources we have. We will not be able to keep all happy all the time – but I'm sure that plans we already have in train will improve things.

There is a psychological problem where Friends of the Earth is not valuing the contribution of local groups. Do we not need to identify more clearly what local groups contribute and then allocate resources accordingly?

I believe local groups make a massive contribution. But I also think this is not necessarily seen clearly by everyone or broken down into its constituent parts. I think we need to look at the relationship between Friends of the Earth and local groups afresh, re-imagine how we want it to be, redefining the psychological contract in a way.

We need to see the relationship with local groups much more as a partnership. Groups could possibly contribute much more to Friends of the Earth. But to do so we would need to be very clear what you can/ will provide for local groups

I agree we want it to be seen as a partnership – indeed the agreement is called a 'partnership agreement' I believe. I can think of several areas where groups could probably play a bigger and more important role – whether through contributing more to our research and policy development, or contributing to our recruitment of Friends of the Earth supporters.

Do we have any data that confirms that more people engage in Friends of the Earth for the first time through big campaigns than through local group work?

We need people to engage in Friends of the Earth through both. We know that major campaigns like the Big Ask, (and from my experience elsewhere, such as when I was at Tearfund, campaigns like Make Poverty History), get a profile that makes it much easier to attract larger numbers of new people relatively quickly. This is why, for political impact and financial reasons, we need to have at least a couple of high-profile campaigns on the go at any one time. However, I believe we've also got more to do to support local groups in attracting as many local members as they can, and to help locally-recruited supporters support Friends of the Earth EWN as well as vice-versa. We also want to invest more in helping financial supporters take up activism, and helping activists who currently make no financial contribution commit to financial support too. This is all included in 'supporter development' which will be a key approach and priority for us in the new strategy.

This quick bit of analysis I can offer retrospectively illustrates a further perspective on this question. Over 100,000 people took action on the Big Ask in 12 months of its peak, many of whom are now on our database. From our 2008 co-ordinator survey we know that somewhere between 1000-2000 new people came to groups in the 12 months of 2008 and that somewhere between 300-600 of those became active. While these may not be highly accurate figures, it illustrates the sort of scale of reach we can achieve with different tactics. It doesn't mean the lower numbers in LG engagement has less value of course – in most cases those 300-600 active group members will be hugely valuable to our work and much closer to us than those who have joined us through taking action on the Big Ask.

Our model of activism seems to ignore what local activists can achieve on their own, and what they can offer to the national level, when evidently local activists can achieve major wins on local issues that contribute to national strategy (airports, roads etc). Some parts of our strategy could properly be devolved to this level and still be regarded as something integral to Friends of the Earth, rather than being cut from staff objectives and then being labelled as 'not something Friends of the Earth does'. Can we not see what LGs and activists do as another layer of Friends of the Earth, all part of the strategy, and be relaxed about devolving some issues to this layer to work on, while still

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regarding them as very much part of our collective strategy?

I know there have been various cycles in Friends of the Earth's history. I know we do value what local groups do but we perhaps don't give that work – its breadth and totality – the visibility it deserves in strategies and other publications. It's worth thinking about how we articulate this better.

Groups are fed up with Friends of the Earth campaigns involving so many post cards. We have got to provide other activities.

Yes, we've heard this. We've been trying to provide a greater variety of campaigning tactics – as well as specifically local actions in Friends of the Earth campaigns. I hope this will be picked up by local groups soon, if it hasn't been already. Yet it remains the truth that asking people to sign a postcard on a stall, say, is one of the easiest ways to engage them. It's also true that sending postcards is a highly effective way of expressing public opinion to policy makers.

Within Get Serious About CO2, how free are local groups to advocate other options in relation, say, transport, from those listed in the brochure? The local transport coalition in Bristol is aiming at a much more radical transformation than would be achieved by the items in the policy document - electric cars and traffic reduction. It wants to focus on public transport, cycling etc. Can we be part of Get Serious and do this?

Totally, I believe. The options in the Get Serious policy document were designed as examples to begin with. However, our common objective must be to reduce emissions and we would encourage groups to pursue those avenues that seem most appropriate to their local circumstances and their own experience and expertise. I know that we plan to develop a greater range of options and, via the Get Serious dedicated website, to enable local groups to exchange ideas and advice on how to put them forward.

So much about Get Serious About CO2 is unclear, and information about the local situation needs to be exchanged. At the same time, groups will have so much experience that they could share with others. Can we have greater discussion with staff about Get Serious? Can you facilitate groups talking to each other more – e.g. through encouraging telephone conferencing including staff, or between groups?

We are about to launch a dedicated Get Serious website. And there will be periodic phone surgeries with staff. However, we could certainly investigate enabling regional or local level conference calls to encourage more rapid and agile exchange between local groups. I will take this up with the Get Serious team.

As part of the Campaign Networks Review, staff are running a trial now of three different networking tools to help local groups working on Get Serious with exactly this outcome in mind. We will update local groups of progress with these trials and will roll out successful approaches after that.

Too much management?

In a situation of financial downturn is it justified to have an Executive Director (ED), Managing Director (MD) and Organisational Development Director – is this top heavy management?

The Board decided (not the ED) that there should be an ED and MD. This was because it had become impossible for the ED to sustain such a high degree of high-level external work as well as to effectively manage the organisation and staff on a day to day basis. If FOE wishes to retain the influence it has, its presence in national and international policy arenas and its media profile, then it must plan for this: and this means having an ED and MD. The Organisational Development Director is necessary because, to get out of the situation we are in, we will need to drive forward on a number of major cross-organisational projects where success is more likely if the person doing the driving is on the same level

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as the departmental heads. Something I know from my own experience is how hard it is to bring about major cultural and systems change rapidly, if one does not have sufficient authority or voice. Friends of the Earth's financial situation is such that we simply cannot afford for some aspects of organisational change to go anything other than well and rapidly. An Organisational Development Director increases our chances. It should be born in mind that these posts are happening in a context where we are reducing the size of the Senior Management Team from 12 to 6, making the organisation less 'top heavy' at the most senior management level and simplifying management, particularly in the campaigns area.

Very concerned at growth in over managerial, over processed ethos at Friends of the Earth. This has been going on since the end of the last strategic plan, and the battle was lost with the current 2008-2012 plan. The change process suggests that things will get worse.

Clearly there are and have been tensions in the network about what has been perceived as too much central control, big campaigns that allow little variety to local groups etc. However, I don't accept that the change process will make this worse. Rather, through the change process and other work that was already going on, we are trying to avoid some of the problems that have contributed to the financial situation. For example, the breakdown in campaign planning that left a vacuum when the Big Ask came to an end; the internal communication breakdowns and inefficiencies because we don't have sufficient capacity for effective coordination; or the failure to take rapid decisions at the top of the organisation because there are too many players to move with agility (with 12 members on the Senior Management Team).

In relation to the campaigns themselves, we have to combine a smooth flow of Friends of the Earth campaigns with a greater diversity of local activism opportunities, with smarter support to local groups to pursue local issues too. While resource constraints will restrict the range of expertise we can offer, we will still have considerable know-how. I'm convinced we can make much better use of these resources, in (our staff but also the network) to deliver both more engaging campaigns and smarter support to local groups generally.

Given that it's a campaigning organisation isn't it a bit skewed to have only one campaigning director on the SMT?

We have tried to accomplish two things with the structure in relation to this issue: greater coherence between policy and campaigns, and a single overview of the area (hence a Policy and Campaigns Director), and to integrate our supporter-facing work better (hence Activism being included with Communications and Fundraising in a single department). We think this is the priority right now, to get the best from our supporter base in terms of expanding both income and activism. However, this is one of a number of dilemmas in the change process, where there are quite considerable pros and cons whatever way we go. So we are aware of the risk of Activism becoming too detached from campaigns if it is included in a department with Fundraising and Communications and we will need to guard against this. People should remember that I, as Executive Director, am also a campaigner and will be wanting to ensure that teams fulfil their core function wherever they are located in the structure. So, while I think there is great potential to increase the income from activists, and the activism from financial supporters, I won't allow activism to be taken over by income demands.

In terms of the representation of Campaigning on the Senior Management Team, the fact that I have been appointed as head of a campaigning organisation, with considerable campaign experience, is no coincidence. While I will need to ensure the right strategic balance between all parts of the organisation, I have been tasked with leading a campaigning organisation, I am a campaigner, and without successful campaigns we are nothing. So it is not true to say that there will only be one 'campaigning' director.

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Other ideas and suggestions (there are many elsewhere too)

Can we not do more to link up our campaigns? Ordinary people know that so many of our campaign issues are connected but we don't say so. We could afford to show the connections more without fear of confusing people.

I agree that normal people often have an inkling or more that issues link. It has frequently been proved less effective to cram too many messages and issues into postcards, but at a level below (or above) we are trying to show the linkages more. E.g. We are trying to link the current campaigns through a climate change narrative.

Do we provide anything for local groups to help them do practical work? Many group members are wanting to complement their political action with the practical – whether being on the board of a community Combined Heat & Power (CHP) plant or whatever.

We have decided that our main focus should be on political action. But we do provide green living tips etc on the website, have produced books – so I will take this away for consideration.

It occurs to me after the event that collecting studies of what practical action local groups and their members are doing, to encourage others, may not be too difficult to explore at least. Also, potentially, a working group of local members could take it on? Hopefully ideas around this will emerge at Conference and we could then look again at whether anything is possible.

Could we provide a list of 20 things local groups could do on the practical side?

As above, I think we should look at how we could easily make information available to groups on what they could do, or what some may already be doing. While this cannot be an area of priority for us, we accept that there is interest out there and a potential opportunity to help local groups develop skills to follow the implementation of policy as well as the policy development/change itself.

Local groups need highly visual materials to encourage and attract others: e.g. a poster of 20 things they could/do/are doing. Or a visionary poster setting out what towns could look like in 2020.

I agree that we need to stimulate thought and preferably excite people about the benefits of a low carbon economy. Some engaging written and visual material is needed for this. It may be planned as part of Get Serious – I think it would logically be a part of that. I will pass the request back to the Get Serious team.

The Get Serious About CO₂ leaflet, and the Get Serious About Climate Change report and summary are already in groups' hands and we hear they are going down well. Further research showing that 40% cuts are possible at local level is now available to groups, plus a briefing on transport, with further briefings to come on energy and housing. We have more research in the pipeline, one piece on case studies of local carbon reduction projects, and one on how local authorities can secure the finance needed for local authority action. We are keen to hear from groups on what other materials they would find useful and will be asking this at local groups conference. We are thinking for example of a DVD they can show at community meetings.

Some local groups and activist organisations seem very diffident, indeed, poor at engaging people who pass their stalls in the street while others (e.g. Manchester group) are very bold and successful. Do we not need to arrange skill-shares to allow groups to mentor each other?

The Capacity Building team do provide skill shares on approaches like this. However I recognise that people often are inspired by the successes and testimony of others in the same position – like other local groups in this case. I expect the Capacity Building Team would be pleased to involve local groups in providing training and skill-shares, if they don't already. I'll feed this back.

Rather than lose work we are cutting completely from Friends of the Earth, could we not tell local groups what is under threat and see if experts and others within the network, are prepared to take

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some of it on? Are there not major opportunities here, both to continue more work than we otherwise might think, and to make the network feel more valued?

I'm sympathetic to the notion though want to be sensitive to the appeals we have heard from some expert activists who already feel overburdened by requests from elsewhere in the network. I certainly think it is well worth investigating the appetite in the network for taking on some significant issues we might have to cease work on at national level. I'll feed this back.

I'd imagine this might be an idea that is discussed further in OpenSpace at Conference, during and after which we can then consider further what might be possible in this regard.

If staff capacity is being reduced, can we not set up advisory committees for our issues to allow experts in the network to augment our capacity by advising and even taking on, for example, some research where feasible? This used to exist in terms of advising on how specific campaigns were being received by local groups. But you could use advisory groups to augment policy and research capacity. And it would also help the network to feel valued.

This is a very attractive idea, with big potential benefits for all in my view. I'll feed it back. *See above.*

Could not some of the intermittent administrative tasks also be done by some local groups (maybe big ones like Manchester) with a bit of coordination? For example, inputting data from big batches of post cards. Sometimes local groups have people asking to volunteer and it can be difficult to find things they can really do. It might be helpful to be able to offer them something like this.

I'm grateful for the offer. It's worth investigating. But I think there could be some practical and potentially even legal issues about bundling out such tasks. But let's look into it.

The Strategy

Observation from local group member: There is massive public awareness of environment and climate change now, compared to a few years ago. This public awareness should be a massive opportunity for Friends of the Earth. Yet our supporter numbers are declining; and people are leaving local groups to join other organisations that are mushrooming in towns and rural areas. People are attracted by the practical action offered by other groups. They're not convinced by Friends of the Earth's continuing apparent sole focus on parliamentary bills, and working just with politicians (who are increasingly discredited with the expenses scandal etc). We need to change our approach urgently or we will decline further and be seen by many as increasingly outdated and irrelevant.

I think this a very significant observation. It raises really important issues that we are aware of and are trying to respond to. For example, looking at how we best engage and retain supporters is a key task for the year ahead. So too is providing a greater variety of mechanisms for engaging in activism on national level policy change. But I also think we must consider how we most effectively, with limited resources, meet the increasing demand from the public for help with 'practical' action without losing our strong focus on what we do best - political action.

Shouldn't we review the 2008-2012 strategic plan?

There's no need to review the strategic plan immediately. The savings have been made within the framework of the existing strategy by prioritising between existing aims and objectives, while retaining the main goals of the strategy. However, we will be asking teams to review our assumptions about what work they can or cannot do with the resources that will be available to them and then urgently get on and implement work for which we have got resources. But we will carry out a mid-term review

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of the strategy as was always planned.

The Strategic Plan is not widely known among local groups. Can we not have it up on the website, with a link to it from Community, for example?

Yes. Can't see why this would be a problem – at least it should be available within the Community section.

We've made a lot of progress on people's understanding of sustainability over the last few decades, if one compares with public understanding say 40 years ago. But it's really important that we educate the next generation about sustainability issues. Organisations like CAFOD and Christian Aid provide material but it may have a Christian slant. Some teachers will want 'neutral' material and Friends of the Earth is seen as neutral. There is a real opportunity with the Sustainable Communities Act. Are we making the most of this? What is FOE doing to educate the next generation?

Relatively recently Friends of the Earth has set up its Youth and Education network. This has made a good start and it's something we will be continuing, while linking it more closely to fundraising.

Even if we have to cut some work on some issues, can we not play an important role in directing our supporter base and others to organisations which are working on these issues? E.g. a link on our website. That would allow continuity and be a very helpful service.

I think that's well worth investigating – particularly during a transition from the current resourcing levels to the new. I can also see that it would be an asset to have us seen as a 'one stop shop' where our supporters and other enquirers could be confident that they'll find something of relevance on a broader range of environmental issues than we are working on at any time. I know the website is being redesigned. I'll feed the idea into the process.

Financial

Friends of the Earth has been in this kind of financial pickle before. And last time part of the problem was also low reserves. When will Friends of the Earth learn? Will you be changing the reserves policy?

The senior management team is very conscious of the implications of Friends of the Earth's traditional low reserves policy at the moment – though we must remember that it has provided the organisation with cash for campaigns at a relatively high level these last few years which would not have been the case if we had been attempting to keep higher reserves. Nevertheless, we have proposed that the Board revise the reserves policy. It has just been agreed that this should be done using risk analysis as a main criteria for setting the amount. That exercise has still to be gone through. My own view is that we do need higher reserves, but we've also got to differentiate between kinds of reserves – between short term contingency for responding in an agile fashion to relatively small blips in income or brilliant opportunities to achieve change, defined and known major projects – such as moving premises, that may take several years to save for – and wind-up funds, which is the legal obligation to have sufficient funds to wind up the business and meet obligations to staff and creditors if necessary.

Could we not save costs by burden-sharing with Friends of the Earth Europe?

We can explore this further. But there is a difficulty that Friends of the Earth EWNI has more resources than most, if not all, of our sister organisations in Friends of the Earth Europe. So while we can and should look to make the most efficient use of our combined resources in joint work, it's also true that our contribution cannot be matched by others, and others are also suffering financial difficulties. However, there may be opportunities for more burden sharing. I'll pass that on to the International Coordinator and our Head of Climate who is also on the Executive Committee of Friends of the Earth Europe.

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Concerns over particular losses

Is it true that we have made bigger cuts to campaigners than any other area?

This needs explaining carefully as the simple numbers hide some important realities. In the original version of the change proposal the campaign teams were sustaining the biggest absolute cuts. But one must remember that they were by far the biggest single group – logically, as we’re a campaigning organisation. Its also important to understand that modern political campaigning also requires the tools of mass communications and activism. The original change proposal made less cuts to these areas and therefore changed the balance slightly. Subsequently, in the revised change proposal, following consultation with the union when more savings were identified from operations budgets, we were able to restore some of the formal campaign capacity that we had originally proposed to cut – something we were very pleased to be able to do. It is currently not possible to confirm the final precise balance. Although we don’t expect it to shift much, we have offered staff the possibility of volunteering to reduce their hours somewhat when offered a position and we will need to take a decision on where to re-allocate those hours.

Very concerned about the loss of organisational ability to work on the areas of corporates, trade, and economics, which are at the root of much of the problem of climate change?

We are deliberately retaining economic expertise to underpin our wider work with sound economic analysis. But it is true that we don’t think we’ll be able to continue the explicit, separate campaigns around corporates with the resources we will have.

Very concerned at the loss of work on rights and justice, though acknowledge that the cuts are now not so deep as initially proposed.

We have cut expertise in most areas, including rights and justice. But we’re committed to retaining a core of work in this area, for its own sake and because it is another of the distinguishing features of Friends of the Earth that we take a justice perspective on the issues we campaign about. So the Legal Centre will continue, and so will work to embed rights and justice in our high level campaigns. However, there will be less capacity in the foreseeable future for project work with disproportionately affected communities in this country. We will be retaining support for work with disproportionately affected communities abroad – for example working with Friends of the Earth Paraguay, helping them protect the rights of indigenous people to their traditional forest lands.

Regional campaigning is very important. What capacity will there be for Regional Campaign Coordinators to campaign on issues other than Get Serious About CO2? And will things like aviation and transport be regarded as part of Get Serious or not?

We have decided that for the next two years or so, to make the best of more limited capacity, Regional Campaign Coordinators will need to focus about 80% on Get Serious. However, two questions arise – as the questioner has indicated: what, precisely, is regarded as Get Serious? And how do they spend the rest of their time? On the first question, I have asked this myself, and am looking to my campaign staff to define the boundaries. I can’t tell you exactly what they are at present. There are naturally some grey areas. On the question of what staff do with the rest of the time – they are going to have to prioritise rigorously. But I want them to have the flexibility to dedicate this to work that will have the most impact in their region without us predefining what that would be. One thing we need to consider is that in order to retain the relationships and credibility that Regional Campaign Coordinators need to make progress with Get Serious, they will need to retain good links with individuals, coalitions, and issues that may lie outside of work that is explicitly part of the campaign. We need to discuss this further in house but my feeling is that we need to allow some latitude for this while ensuring that the job that needs to be done explicitly on Get Serious is done, so as not to erode links for the long term.

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Very concerned at loss of regional campaign capacity.

It's true that we will be reducing the hours of the Regional Campaign Coordinators whilst attempting to retain a presence in each region. Again, few areas of the organisation have escaped without some cut to actual capacity or the capacity projected in the 2008-2012 Strategic Plan.

On what basis do we justify cutting (regional) campaigners much more than the Capacity Building Team? Should we not be saving them by preference because they are, generally, much more experienced than the Network Developers? Have we carried out a rigorous review of the effectiveness of the Capacity Building team to match that carried out on the Regional Campaign Coordinators?

We had to consider a complex range of factors including the need to deliver Friends of the Earth campaigns well to increase our profile and finances, and the relative strategic importance of influence at international, national, regional and local levels. We are keen to preserve experience and have chosen to ensure continuing coverage of each existing region, while reducing the Regional Campaign Coordinators' hours. But, balancing the factors mentioned above, we felt we had to maintain the Capacity Building Team capacity relatively unchanged from the current position (although it will still be less than envisioned in SP2).

I'm not aware of any in depth review of the Capacity Building Team to parallel that undertaken for the regional campaigns work. We had to make relatively swift decisions on the basis of the information available to us, and this included discussions with the Board, senior staff and the management team. There was not time to commission a new review of other teams specifically to shape the change proposal. Only in the case of the financial projections did we have time and resources to bring in independent advisers to have them probe our thinking and test our assumptions – and I suspect most would agree that this would be the most important area to research further if we only had limited time and resources.

I should add that the review I think the questioner was referring to did actually also include looking at the work of Capacity Building. More generally, we scrutinise the progress of all our work through our quarterly reporting systems and the monitoring of that by senior management and the Board.

Collaboration with other orgs

How much do we collaborate with others? Is there not a need for this more in times like these? If we are in alliances, why don't we make more of it?

We collaborate extensively with others, both behind the scenes in informal coordination and in formal public alliances, such as Stop Climate Chaos. This collaboration goes on at the level of campaigners, but also at my level. I'm on the board of Stop Climate Chaos, for example – an alliance of major (and smaller) environment and development NGOs, but now also involving faith groups, the Women's Institute etc.

We do now advertise our membership of Stop Climate Chaos, with the logo appearing on our website and on any material we produce about climate policy in the UK. But I don't think we have a page on the website, or in the annual review listing the alliances we are in. I'll look at this. *This is correct.*

Collaboration at the local level is sometimes difficult with some organisations giving their local groups little freedom and flexibility. Friends of the Earth is known for its flexibility and collaboration. Could we not reach a co-operation agreement with some big organisations – e.g. Oxfam – to encourage and empower greater collaboration at the grass roots?

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First I would want Friends of the Earth certainly to retain its own flexibility here – to be, and be known as, an organisation that convenes, collaborates with and supports others is great in its own right. But it also makes it more likely that others will support our causes when we ask them.

I'd certainly consider trying to reach a protocol – say around a particular issue or campaign – if there was a feeling that an alliance with a particular organisation would be critical to our success. Interestingly, perhaps, the CEO's of the major environmental NGOs meet regularly for a meal to share analysis and agree joint initiatives. Collaboration is very good at this level, and CEO's certainly do raise issues where the actions by the staff or supporters of one organisation are proving problematic to another.

Observation from a local group member: Friends of the Earth needs to encourage much greater alliance building at local level, and not think it has all answers or can deliver all on its own. The attitude to Transition Towns has been symbolic of a particular strand of Friends of the Earth EWNI thinking that has been really damaging to perceptions of Friends of the Earth at a local level and our impact and ability to engage people.

My understanding has been that Friends of the Earth is often at the centre of alliances locally, but maybe this is patchy? However, if your particular concern is in relation to Transition Towns, then I am aware of more ambivalence in our response. But even here, I know a number of cases where local group members are also deeply involved in the local transition town movement and I would certainly support collaboration where our agendas coincide. I agree that we are going to have to work and continue to work in coalitions locally, on very many issues, to achieve the outcomes we want. So long as local groups feel these coalitions are productive, I'd certainly want to encourage this!

What is our relationship with the Campaign for Better Transport?

Good. We regard them as the experts and have worked closely with them on a number of campaigns. The Campaign for Better Transport is one of the 8 or so NGOs who are regular participants in the informal dinners between CEO's of environmental NGOs, so I meet Stephen Joseph regularly.

In Liverpool faith groups are doing good work together on environmental issues and climate change. Islam also has a lot to offer, particularly around safeguarding water, for example. Can we not ally more with faith groups or do more to help faith groups take up the banner in other areas? Without necessarily agreeing with their positions on other issues, there's no doubt that they could be an increasingly powerful force on the environment.

We agree that faith groups are doing good work and we are in alliance with the development agencies of many of the Christian denominations through Stop Climate Chaos. It's certainly worth considering what role we might play in bringing faith groups more on board with other environmental issues. However, I think different faith communities are more likely to be reached by organisations that they regard as 'of them', so our influence is possibly best exerted on those organisations not towards the communities directly. While at Tearfund I was able to be part of an initiative to bring US evangelical Christians more on board with climate change. They were open to Tearfund – an avowedly Christian organisation. But they would not have been so open to, say, Friends of the Earth.

If we're losing our capacity to participate in wider coalitions on some issues, e.g. the Trade Justice Movement, does this mean we won't even tell our supporters about their activities – e.g. trade justice rallies etc?

In many cases it's not yet absolutely clear exactly what level of engagement we will/will not be able to have. But we will be asking staff to prepare exit or transition plans for work where we'll not have the resources to carry on exactly as before. Among the options will be handing over work to other

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organisations and potentially signposting our supporters towards coalitions and other joint initiatives even if we can't contribute much centrally. But I don't want to prejudge what will happen with specific alliances like the Trade Justice Movement at this point.

Various

Previous Local Groups' Conferences have exhibited an iron fist of central control over local group independence, and their ability to discuss the issues they want. I'll judge changes in organisation by the conference. Can we expect changes?

We are deliberately designing this year's Local Groups' Conference to provide more space for local groups to talk about whatever they want. Separately, we've also moved to try to address some of the so-called 'gate-keeping' issues (though a variety of different things have been lumped together under this banner). So, for example, we are trying to be very clear with local groups that they have a choice of which Friends of the Earth campaigns they sign up to. We are also trying to improve the visibility of information on other campaigns and how groups can engage with them – while being clear about what our priority campaigns are at any one moment.

The Campaigner Network survey appears based on campaigns from the previous Strategic Plan. The paper that accompanies the survey is not clear about the objectives. Would it be better to ask what networks do we need? (e.g. network for local groups in the South East engaged in Get Serious)

I'm not familiar with the details of the network survey myself. But I know there is work going on precisely on what networks we need for the 2008-2012 Strategic Plan – so if this is not coming through in the survey I'm surprised. I will pass this back to those managing the survey.

There is a frequent problem that campaigns, and materials for them, designed in England, don't work without adaptation to Wales, never mind translation into Welsh. This causes extra work in Wales and stressful relations. Often it could be avoided by a bit more forethought. What will you do to address this?

I'm aware of this. I think we need to make it a responsibility of the new major campaign coordinators roles to ensure that suitable liaison has gone on with Wales and Northern Ireland, and that representatives from both are involved as mandatory stakeholders in the development of Friends of the Earth EWNl campaigns. I know there is a checklist system, but I also know this appears to break down on occasions.

But I also think this problem will be helped by more frequent interaction between staff in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, so that it becomes more part of the mindset to ask 'and how might this work in Wales?', and to make it one's business to find out early enough to affect content and design.

I'm personally contemplating a more regular meeting of the Directors of Northern Ireland and Wales, the Heads of Campaign issues, the Director of Policy and Campaigns and I to jointly analyse the political context, brainstorm the wider strategy at a high level etc. I'm proposing such a meeting be quarterly – and could perhaps rotate round the offices.