

Fracking News

Gina joined the local 'protectors' in Blackpool arriving in their official double decker bus (below) on the opening day of the inquiry into the two Lancashire sites, which were refused planning permission by Lancashire County Council last summer. The inquiry finished earlier this month and we wait to hear the planning inspector's decision. However, Government has said that it will make the final decision – so potentially overruling even the recommendation of the appeal inspector. County Councillor Gina Dowding spoke at the appeal along with many local residents and councillors highlighting the damage to the quality of life in our rural communities that the drilling rigs will create - and that all profits for the fracking companies for short term dirty energy supplies, which do not solve our long term energy needs.



After the Floods

Green councillors have been pushing for longer term action to prevent flooding. City Cllr Caroline Jackson has initiated a review of all issues to do with the causes and results of the flooding with a City Council scrutiny committee. City Cllr Nick Wilkinson has asked for action to ensure that the Environment Agency can authorize other organisations closing of the flood gates on St George's Quay. There was a near miss on the night of the floods in December when they were only closed at the last minute. County Cllr Gina Dowding has received confirmation by the County Council that plans for better flood relief in Cockerham will be reviewed in the forthcoming post-flood plans, and to ask the

Labour's Budget Summary

Labour control both the City and County councils. For the city, this is the first time since 1999 that a single party has set the budget. Both City and County councils have had their contributions from central government massively slashed and so cuts are inevitable. However, Labour's approach is to simply 'blame the Tories'. The Green Party's approach is to protest about the loss of funding but also to put energy into innovative ways to preserve services as best we can – for example, by exploring ways that they can be run by community groups.

Community swimming pools in danger

The City Council has given the County Council a year's notice that it is to not continue funding the community pools at Heysham, Carnforth and Hornby. Green councillors successfully moved an amendment for the City Council to help schools or community groups who wish to take over the pools.

Whips allowance continues

Cllr Gina Dowding tried to get the 'Whips' allowance for political parties abolished at county hall, on the basis that this is really political party activity, and each political group gets an allowance for the group leader and secretary. However, none of the political groups would support it. Gina said: "I'm disappointed that at a time of large public spending cuts, councillors wouldn't support a small cut to their own allowances."

Museum closing

The County Council is intending to close the Judges Lodgings Museum in Lancaster. However, local people – with green councillor Nick Wilkinson taking a leading role, are working on a plan to run the museum through a museum's trust – similar to the way museums in York are operated.

Supporting people ending

Ending of funding for housing schemes (previously funded by central government) for vulnerable people, including domestic violence refuges, housing for those who struggle to find tenancies. This means that the future of the new Oak Tree House on West Road for homeless adults is in doubt from April 2017. Greens have proposed earmarking a City Council reserve to help with continued funding.

Weed spraying slashed

The county has cut funding it previously gave to the city. The effects of this will include no weed spraying at all in 2016/17, fewer cuts of rural verges, and potentially less funding for the arts in this district.

Charging for green waste and bin delivery

From April, the City Council will charge £30 per year to collect green bins. The Council will also charge for the delivery of lost or stolen recycling boxes and bins. Green councillors tried to stop charging for bin delivery but were defeated at the City's budget council. Greens argued that it was unfair if bins were stolen through no fault of the householder.

Salt Ayre sports centre investment

The City Council is investing £5m in improving and updating the sports centre. Its aim is to get more people using the centre, to promote healthy lifestyles and to save up to £500,000 a year in revenue costs of the centre. New facilities include: an outside BMX track and with 'high ropes thrill tower'; indoor adventure play facility and expanded fitness suite; spa facility including NHS referrals. Green councillors generally support the proposals but are nervous about the risks of investing such a large amount of money. The plans were originally supported by the Labour cabinet but Green and Conservative councillors were briefed only a week before a decision was needed. Green councillors wanted to delay the decision for 3 weeks until more information on the business case for the scheme was provided.

Environment Agency to look at applying some of the successful 'natural' drainage initiatives being used elsewhere to 'slow the flow' in Lancashire.

Town Hall Tours

Boosted by a suggestion from two local residents, Green mayor Jon Barry wants more Town Hall tours to be a legacy of his term in office – which ends in May. Mayor Barry said: "The Town Hall is historically very interesting and I know that it could be a great tourist attraction – and perhaps make the council a few quid in the process." A report on the tours will be taken to cabinet in the near future.

Less Waste Recycled

The County Council is 'mothballing' its state-of-the-art MBT recycling and waste plants at Thornton and Leyland. Because food waste is required to be composted indoors at high temperatures, food waste will no longer be able to be composted. It will also mean that additional recycling done at the MBT plants will stop – and the plants will no longer generate electricity from anaerobic digestion. The adverse changes have been made easier by recent Government tax changes which now make it cheaper to landfill rubbish. Cllr Jon Barry said: "This is a backwards and very depressing step."

Lancaster Vegan Fair

Saturday August 13, from 10 am to 4 pm
The Gregson Centre. 20 stalls, vegan beer and wine festival, films in small cinema, free food, social event after Fair, see Lancaster Vegan Fair 2016 Facebook for more details.

E-billing Proposal

A Green proposal to save money on printing and postage by inviting (not compelling!) residents and businesses to sign up to receive their bills by email was also voted down at budget council. Ed. "We don't know why either".

Marry at the Council

The County's property review may result in some of its buildings closing in Lancaster. Green councillor Gina Dowding has suggested moving the Registry office to Lancaster Town Hall.



Tim Hamilton-Cox
Caroline Jackson
Andrew Kay
Bulk Ward
City Council



Jon Barry
Rebecca Novell
Marsh Ward
City Council



Abi Mills
Scotforth West
Ward
City Council



Dave Brookes
Nick Wilkinson
Castle Ward
City Council



Gina Dowding
Lancaster Central
Division
County Council