

# Leamington *Spark* #3

In this issue (24<sup>th</sup> Jan 2004), the Spark gets all incendiary about - **climate change**: - the forgotten issue in the local airport debates...the development of another community-destroying **supermarket** ...the **festive season** (belatedly)...and **post office closures** (again.) Plus! **Entertainment listings**.

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## The Plane Truth...

Local airport debates overlook devastating planet-warming effects of air travel

The announcement by the government that the construction of a massive airport between Leamington and Rugby will not go ahead, coupled with the planned introduction of budget passenger flights from Coventry airport, is once again stimulating an upsurge of local interest in aviation issues. However, local environmental activists are dismayed that, for the most part, coverage continues to completely overlook fundamental issues in the aviation debate, most notably the causal link between aviation and the catastrophic affects of climate change.

### Climate Change kills

Climate change, the proper name for 'global warming', has been described as a "weapon of mass destruction" by the former head of the UK Met Office, a reference to the catastrophic affects that heightened climatic instability (manifesting itself as more extreme weather, more often) will have, and is already having, on the world.

Indeed, extremely conservative UN figures estimate that 150,000 people per year already die as a direct consequence of climate change. Whilst the world's poor will bear the brunt of this burden, the tens of thousands of heat-wave deaths experienced by Western Europe last summer, and our growing acquaintance with severe storms and flooding, demonstrate the relevance of this issue to our lives. There is near-consensus that if the worst effects of climate change are to be averted, 60%-90% cuts in 'greenhouse gases' (such as carbon dioxide, CO<sub>2</sub>) need to be made, very quickly.

### The need to restrict air travel

Air travel is the fastest-growing source of (man-made) greenhouse gases and may constitute as much as 15% of total emissions by 2050. The UK government's prediction that passenger numbers will almost triple between now and 2030 is, revealingly, founded on the assumption that there will be no intervention to curb rising demand for air travel.



The House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) has argued that accommodation of such expansion is "unsustainable and unacceptable", and will in all likelihood obliterate the UK government's aim of 60% CO<sub>2</sub> reductions by 2050.

Interestingly, 22% of passenger flights are business-related, with the remaining 78% attributable to personal consumption e.g. holidays and short breaks. Thus, before we even tackle the thorny question of how far air travel is necessary to provide for the essential, basic needs of a society – consider the absurdity that importation of vegetables, fruit and flowers is the fastest growing area of air freight (*see next story*) - there is the stark reality that our increasingly insatiable appetite for artificially cheap weekends away (and leisure flights more generally) simply must be curbed through (for example) price mechanisms. Given that poorer citizens are already priced out of excursions abroad by the total cost of the time away, accusations that this constitutes regressive taxation are misplaced.



[ aviation cartoons from [www.biffonline.com](http://www.biffonline.com) ]

Hopefully such issues will gain some recognition in the debates that look set to rage in 2004 regarding budget flights from Coventry.

Story continues overleaf....

## No Rugby airport, but expansion looms elsewhere...

While the decision not to build a new airport at Rugby is welcome, the government nonetheless plans to meet the projected increase in demand by expanding capacity elsewhere in Britain, so the climate change problem remains.

Spark journalists monitoring the local press over the last few months have found little recognition (or, at least, articulation) by media, commentators and anti-airport campaigners of the "Is expansion anywhere actually necessary at all?" question, and essentially zero acknowledgement of the climate change dimension.

Occasionally this indifference has spilled over into hostility, such as in June 2003 when Ron Ravenhall (of Anti Rugby Airport Committee - ARAC) described a united and eminently sensible plea by seven leading environmental and transport organisations (for a more realistic and sustainable aviation policy) as "naive" and "unreasonable".

Fortunately, some local anti-airport campaigners have shown themselves more sympathetic to these crucial issues. Speaking to the Leamington Spark on behalf of the Stretton-on-Dunsmore Anti-Airport Group, Gillian Key-Vice said that while the group was obviously happy about the local outcome, it was "extremely disappointing" that the government had not decided to tackle the more fundamental question of whether the UK's air infrastructure needed to be expanded at all.

Gillian noted that it was not feasible to have "an unlimited, unnatural demand" and that demand needed to be managed, through the imposition of VAT on aviation fuel, for example, and greater investment in high-speed rail. Gillian concurred that there needed to be "a lot more awareness" of both local environmental impacts and more systemic factors such as climate change.

There is much work to be done. Climate change is real, and its devastating effects will become more and more pronounced

over the coming years. The local aviation debates show just how far this issue remains from the mainstream status it deserves. Environmentalists – and indeed anybody that values sustainability and social justice – should feel a responsibility to raise this issue at every opportunity, even if the reality sometimes grates against populist consumerism.

For more info: [www.risingtide.org.uk](http://www.risingtide.org.uk)

**NOTE: Short-haul flights release 3-5 times more CO2 per passenger per kilometre than even high-speed train travel. However, the increased potency of certain pollutants when released at altitude, and the fact that shorter journey times make journeys feasible that might not otherwise have been attempted, means the effective contribution of air travel to climate change is considerably more pronounced than these raw figures suggest.**



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## Deeley Destruction

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### New Supermarket Further Threatens Environment and Local Economy

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It has recently come to light that developer Deeley Properties has applied to build a 'quality' supermarket on the old AL-KO Kober site, near the Shires Retail Park in Leamington. They are in discussion with a major chain but will not reveal its identity. This will come as another huge blow to small retailers in Leamington and Warwick, already struggling to compete with the massive buying power of the supermarket behemoths.

#### Job creation? Job destruction!

Whilst it is claimed that 500 new jobs will be created by the enterprise, this is in reality only part of the story – the giant superstores invading communities across

the country in fact cost far more jobs than they create.

A report published by the National Retail Planning Forum and, embarrassingly, funded by the supermarkets themselves shows that the opening of a superstore costs, on average, a net 276 local jobs as independent village and town shops, grocers, pharmacists and newsagents are forced out of business by the retail giants.

In the five years up to 2000 the UK lost 30,000, or one-fifth, of its independent shops, pubs and post offices, ripping the heart out of town and village economies across the country.

Not only does a new supermarket development reduce the number of jobs available locally, it also reduces the quality of the jobs available – the friendly banter of the village shop is replaced by the uniform, sanitized environment which is found in every supermarket across the country. And even those not dependent on food for their income lose out – whilst money spent in a locally owned village shop remains in the area to benefit the local economy, money spent in a supermarket will more likely end up in the offshore bank accounts of distant shareholders and executives.

#### Abusing power & screwing farmers

So how are the supermarkets getting away with it? One method they use is to convince customers that they offer significantly better value for money than their smaller rivals by stocking certain key products such as bread or beans at little or no profit to themselves – of course, these 'savings' will be subsidized by price rises from other products, but this anti-competitive tactic ensures that they appear to undercut their smaller rivals by more than they actually do.

Another unpleasant aspect of the supermarkets' business practices is the way they treat growers, demanding perfectly uniform produce and using their massive buying power to force farmers into outrageous contracts, sometimes even making them buy back their own produce at retail prices if they cannot be sold in the superstore. They are also in

the process of destroying British farming and the global climate in one go by flying in massive amounts of food from abroad to undercut local prices and boost company profits.

### Climate change culprits

Indeed, supermarkets are major contributors to climate change (*see earlier story*), moving food around both nationally and globally in order to play growers off against one another. In the UK the average vegetable travels 600 miles before it gets to your plate, the supermarkets having successfully persuaded the government to keep down the price of lorry licences and fuel and to make aviation fuel completely tax-free, so that they are not forced to pay for the damage their pollution is doing to our health and our environment.

## IN Sainsbury's

Supermarkets are also able to turn their massive economic clout into political lobbying power, having a massive influence over planning decisions at both a national and local level and managing to bully, bribe and cajole local authorities across the country into giving them special treatment, such as 'business rate holidays' (i.e. having to pay nothing to the council for their first five or ten years in existence), whilst others simply buy planning permission by giving the local council up to £5 million per store.

So what to do? It's time people across the country recognized the supermarkets for the ruthless, exploitative monopolies that they truly are and relied on them as little as possible. By vigorously opposing new developments such as the proposed Deeley-built store and boycotting the supermarkets that already exist we can destroy their stranglehold over our food production and distribution and put the heart back into our local economy.

For more information see:-

[http://www.corporatewatch.org.uk/pages/whats\\_wrong\\_suprmkts.htm](http://www.corporatewatch.org.uk/pages/whats_wrong_suprmkts.htm)

<http://www.monbiot.com> (online archives – click on 'supermarkets')

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# Post Office Closures To Continue

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By Patrick MacLeod Cullen

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As we reported in Spark #1, the local Post Offices for many residents in the Leamington area are being closed. This is seen by the Royal Mail as a necessary financial measure, and by Blair's government as a component of opening up the whole system to competition by 2007.

By the time you read this, two of the Post Offices in Warwick will have been closed for some time already - having shut on the 2nd of January - with two more scheduled for closure on the 2nd of February.

Despite a campaign by local residents to prevent the closures, including a petition concerning the Smith St. branch and letters to James Plaskitt MP, the Post Office's "...comprehensive review" has ignored local inhabitants. Having shut four of the six Post Office branches in Warwick, the Post Office remains convinced that we will, "...continue to use [its] services", even though many elderly and disabled people have been hit hard by this move.

### "We shouldn't be closing"

A Post Office employee I spoke to said that she felt that although the closures were "financially necessary", she was "Sad that we have to close - it's going to affect a lot of people. We're the Post Office, we shouldn't be closing." The fact remains that, rather than improve customer service, the Post Office is making things worse. Rather than wasting millions on a name change to and from Consignia, had the Post Office invested in local branches across Britain, we would not be faced with these closures.

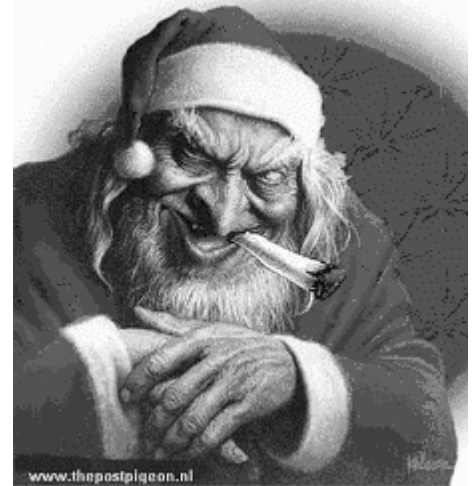
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# The Season To Be Jolly

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(a slightly belated Christmas opinion piece)

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It seems ironic in this so-called "season of peace and good will" that Warwickshire County Council are hoping for the waste produced in Warwickshire to increase over Christmas, in order to get a £750,000 national recycling grant! They will receive the handout in April if Warwickshire is recycling 20% of its waste (currently it is only 19.2%), and their proposed solution – wait for it, people – is not to diversify the types of waste being recycled, or even to promote recycling to more people... but to sit back and hope for an increase in total waste!

This is not limited to Warwickshire – it seems that throughout the Western world Christmas becomes a consumerist orgy of shopping, spending and wasting. Christmas generates 3 million tons of extra household waste in an average year, and 200,000 trees are chopped down each year for Christmas cards alone, while another 50,000 are cut down just for wrapping paper which, as soon as the presents have been opened, is promptly discarded.

The pointlessness and insanity of this is obvious to anyone who stops to think about it, yet like so many other such

examples it is never seriously questioned – because it is in the interests of global corporations to keep us thinking that we ought to buy their products, and that if we do not participate in every aspect of this corporate circus then we are “killjoys” or, most ironically of all, “Scrooges” – when the multitudes of toys that they aggressively market at our children are made in factories in Vietnam, Jamaica or even our own prisons, whose workers are exploited on a greater scale than Dickens’s original corrupt capitalist could dream of achieving.

Meanwhile, of course, that same aggressive marketing causes the average family to be likely to spend £868 on Christmas this year (an increase of 22% on the same figure 6 years ago) – something that many families can ill afford on the meagre incomes they have, causing children to feel inferior and face ridicule from their peers if their parents cannot afford expensive presents, and the same parents to be wracked with guilt at not being able to give their kids what they want. Either that, or the parents end up exploited by brutal loan sharks such as Brighthouse (aka Crazy George’s) who have recently targeted poor families in the West Midlands with seductive marketing campaigns followed up by vicious threats of bailiff action and repossession.

Another poisonous doctrine pushed down people’s throats at Christmas is the concept of “family values”. More than any other time of year, the image is promoted of the “perfect” nuclear family, made up of mother, father and 2 obedient children, and those of us who do not have that kind of family (or have it but are made desperately unhappy by it), believe that such a patriarchal, inflexible system is not the best way to raise a child, or choose to value other, non-genetic relations as “family”, are made to feel as if they are social outcasts and failures. The stress created by the obligation many people feel to have a “happy family Christmas” can be horrific. No wonder the rates of suicide, murder and domestic violence rise over December – the time has come, to borrow a phrase, for Nuclear Family Disarmament.

Of course, the roots of most modern “Christmas traditions” really lie in the pagan festival of the winter solstice in pre-Christian Europe, a culture whose religion was built on sustainability and veneration of the natural cycle. Both Jesus and the ancient priesthoods of those cultures would doubtless be equally horrified at modern capitalism’s perversion of their festivities into this grotesque pantomime of waste, exploitation and worship of the almighty dollar, which people are made to feel like not only social but even moral outcasts for disliking or not participating in.

It seems to me that the only sane response in the face of all this is to boycott Christmas altogether. Have parties if you want to (there is nothing to stop us from doing that at any time of year!), but refuse to participate in the farce of buying one another ridiculously packaged presents which we then have to hypocritically pretend we like. Tell your children there is no such person as Santa Claus (who was in fact invented as an advertising mascot by the Coca-Cola company, quite happy to massacre trade unionists in Colombia). Rise up, and throw off your tinsel chains! ;-)

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## Listings

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**Sunday 25th January** – Warwick Arts Society and Playbox Theatre Company present “Tango from Auschwitz” – performance for Holocaust Memorial Day by Lloica Czarkis and Osacar Acebras. 6.30pm, The Dream Factory, Warwick, tickets £15.50 with Kosher supper or £9.50 without. [www.warwickarts.org.uk](http://www.warwickarts.org.uk)

**Tuesday 27th January** – Discussion: “Peace in the Age of Total War”, Coventry Peace House, Stoney Stanton Road, Coventry, 7-9pm, free, all welcome, call Coventry Peace House on 02476 663031 for further info.

**Tuesday 27th January** – “Joglares: Ballads of Love and Betrayal” – concert to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day with traditional music of the Sephardic Jews. 7.30pm, St Mary’s Church, Warwick, tickets £10 / £14, info from [www.warwickarts.org.uk](http://www.warwickarts.org.uk)

**Wednesday 28th January** - Old Town Issues Meeting, Healthy Living Centre, Shrubland Street, South Leamington, 6pm, free

**Thursday 29th to Saturday 31st January** – Codpiece Theatre presents “Statements After an Arrest Under The Immorality Act” by Athol Fugard, 3pm, The Cooler, Warwick University Students’ Union, tickets £3.50, [www.sunion.warwick.ac.uk](http://www.sunion.warwick.ac.uk)

**Friday 30th January** – Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty demonstration in Rugby, 11am, call Aileen on 07771 547576 for details of meeting point.

**Friday 30th January** – CAW presents “6 of the Best” – performance poetry event featuring 6 national poets with live music and visual projection, 7.30pm, Community Arts Workshop, Avenue Road, Leamington, £5 on door, call CAW on 01926 888333

**Friday 30th January** – Vanilla House Trio gig, 9pm, The Cockhorse, Rowington nr Warwick, free, for info call 01926 770031

**Saturday 31st January** – Demonstration against live exports in Dover in memory of Jill Phipps, coach from Coventry, coach tickets £12/£6, call Aileen on 07771 547576 for details of pickup times.

**Saturday 31st January** – “Acoustic Amnesty” in aid of Amnesty International, Parish Church Hall, Rectory Lane, Allesley Village, Coventry, tickets £5/£3 concs, for info call 02476 269974 or 07968 216980

**Sunday 1st February** – “Potato Day” at Ryton Organic Gardens, Ryton, Coventry, tickets £3.95/£1.50, for details call Sarah Lindsay on 02476 308211 or email [enquiry@hdra.org.uk](mailto:enquiry@hdra.org.uk)

**Monday 2nd February** – Willows Folk – group from Stratford-upon-Avon play blues, folk and bluegrass in support of Aids for Africa, 8pm, Navigation Inn, Wooton Wawen nr Henley-in-Arden, free, [mary@willowsfolk.co.uk](mailto:mary@willowsfolk.co.uk)

**Thurs. 5th February** – “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised” – film about the April 2002 coup in Hugo Chavez’s Venezuela, 6.30pm, Warwick University Arts Centre, tickets £5/£3.75 students/concs, 02476 524524

**Saturday 7th February** – Leamington LETS and Action 21 social featuring music from Loco Mundo and bring and share supper, 7.30pm, St Patrick’s Club, Adelaide Road, Leamington, tickets £4 or £2 and 5 Oaks (must be booked in advance), call Judy Steele on 01926 887119 to book.

**Friday 13th February** – “Have A Heart For Animals” Valentines party at Spencer Sports Club, Earlsdon, Coventry, call Aileen on 07771 547576 for further info.