

Being a talking shop is not part of the agenda: let's make it work

Take the global view on this new local initiative

A REMARKABLE event took place in Leamington two weeks ago. More than 100 people gathered on a Saturday morning to discuss what kind of life and environment they would like for themselves, their families and for all the people in Warwick District.

This was discussed in the wider context of environmental/developmental concern currently being shown around the world. They gave up their time to work out what each one of them saw as their contribution to ensuring we all have a sustainable future on this planet.

And what happened? The Courier immediately poured cold water on the genuine concern and efforts of these people and the council, and implied it was a talk shop.

What is more the Editor asked how lives would be improved by such an exercise but made no effort to offer any practical ideas himself.

In 1992, the United Nations convened one of the largest gatherings of Heads of Government, including John Major, at the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro. This was to discuss what they were prepared to do to address the environ-

mental/developmental crisis threatening the existence of the planet.

Governments, non government organisations and local authorities fought through all the political intricacies to agree on Agenda 21 (for the 21st century) which they recommended to be taken to local communities everywhere. They recognised that change in the end can only come from action at local level with their support.

Having attended meetings in Europe and southern and eastern Africa as well as Asia, where ordinary people are discussing what Local Agenda 21 means to them and what their communities need to do as their contribution to saving the planet for future generations, I find such a parochial attitude in this town quite incredible.

I am only comforted by the fact that I am sure that many Warwick district people will not share the Courier view.

Is your Editor unaware of how our own streets have become polluted and unsafe, how unclean our air is becoming how our extravagant consumption is weighing the globe down with unnecessary and unman-

ageable rubbish? Is he unaware of the grinding poverty in other parts of the world which is leading to the massacre of forests and to desertification? Is he happy about global warming and the depletion of the ozone layer? After the Rio conference some members of the Warwick district community approached the council and called for our own Local Agenda 21. At that time we were told that they had never heard of UNCED and the initiative was quashed. Now at last, the council has finally recognised the need for action even though it is after more than half the local councils in the UK are well into the Local Agenda 21 process.

So please, Courier and the people of Warwick district - let us join hands and make this initiative work.

Please do not let it be just an exercise in more recycling, new traffic schemes and more bikes on the road (valuable as such action is). Let us recognise the global nature of this crisis and co-operate with local communities in other parts of the world and learn how they are putting Local Agenda 21 into practice.

Warwick district has active links with Sierra Leone and Tanzania and probably many more. So while the people of this district develop their Local Agenda 21 they can also be in solidarity with similar programmes around the globe making the future safe clean and healthy for all of our grandchildren.

This is not about talk shops but about planning and taking meaningful action and enjoying it. Local Agenda 21 can be great fun!