

Thirty Years on the Front Line

Pembrokeshire Friends of the Earth celebrates three decades of successful campaigning and informing.

Pembrokeshire is renowned for its stunning coastal scenery, varied wildlife and other aspects of its superb natural environment. Yet, over the last three decades, it has been in the front line of one environmental controversy after another, not least because of the presence of a large oil and gas industry at the heart of its coastal National Park. Pembrokeshire FoE has taken a lead role throughout, working closely with colleagues at the FoE Cymru and FoE London offices when extra support was needed.

Formed originally as Narberth Friends of the Earth in 1987, one of its first acts was to set up a one-day a week paper recycling trailer in the town. The inadequacies of this soon became clear when, on windy days, local group members received phone calls asking them to collect newspapers blowing around the streets. As a result, it was decided to launch a fund for a bottle bank. This was quickly rewarded when a businessman responded to our press release by donating two – one for Narberth and one for Pembroke Dock.

This was the first of many successes for the group. Some of the others were:

- Supporting complaints by mothers, whose children became ill after bathing on Goodwick beach, by producing scientific evidence that linked illness with the discharge of raw sewage into the sea. This was a local contribution to the successful campaigns throughout Europe for cleaner beaches and seas. *1990*
- Following the appearance of oil and gas exploration rigs in Cardigan Bay, Pembrokeshire FoE and Friends of Cardigan Bay took the UK government to the European Court to force it to compel oil and gas companies to provide environmental impact assessments for all their activities in UK waters. As a result, the rigs disappeared from Cardigan Bay, and have not returned. *1993*

- We helped residents at Cresselly defeat plans for a landfill site near their village. At the same time, we were campaigning for better recycling facilities locally. *1992*
- Gave campaigning and legal support to the Tenby Clean Seas Campaign that ensured that the best treatment was used for the town's new sewerage system. *1995*
- Fought a six-year campaign to prevent a dirty tar-like fuel, orimulsion, being burned with totally inadequate pollution controls at Pembroke power station. This victory ended the planned use of orimulsion globally. *1991 to 1997*
- Responded to the Sea Empress oil spill at Milford Haven by collecting oiled birds from the sea; gathering reliable information by working closely with local marine experts; doing regular media interviews and producing the first report of the impact of the disaster. On the back of this campaign, our head office in London set up a legal team that prepared a case which forced the Environment Agency to successfully prosecute the Milford Haven Port Authority. *1996*
- Supported local people in defeating proposals for a nuclear waste site at the former Royal Navy arms depot at Trecwn in North Pembrokeshire. *1998*
- Played a similar role in seeing off plans for growing GM crops at Mathry. *2001*
- Successfully opposed plans to dual the A40 between St Clears and Haverfordwest. Our alternative proposal for effective upgrading and safety improvements are among the measures that have been implemented by the Welsh Government. *1999 to 2015*
- Actively supported the successful application for the Wear Point windfarm at Milford Haven. *2010*

- Submitted a complaint to the European Commission, which it is supporting, about the use of an out-dated water cooling system at the new gas-fired power station at Pembroke that wastes significant amounts of heat, kills fish and harms the marine ecosystem in the Milford Haven waterway. *2006*
- Campaigned with the UK Tar Sands Network to oppose plans for the importation of oil derived from American tar sands at the Pembroke oil refinery. *2012*
- Opposed proposals for a 25MW biomass-fired electricity generating station, which would rely on large amounts of imported timber, at Trecwn. This proposal has not, to date, been taken forward. *2014*
- Successfully opposed plans for an Oily Sludge & Filter Cake Pyrolysis Incinerator at Pembroke Dock. *2015*
- Supported and invested money in the installation of a small biomass boiler and solar panels at the Narberth Community Swimming Pool. *2015*
- Campaigning, with support from Biofuelwatch UK, against proposals for a 350 MW bio-fuel power station at Blackbridge, Milford Haven. So far, this campaign has been successful. *2015 to present*
- Lobbying local authorities to divest from fossil fuel investments. *2016 to present*
- Supported the successful application for a community wind turbine at Llanfyrnach. *2016*

As well as focusing specifically on local issues, Pembrokeshire FoE has supported many national and international FoE campaigns, such as those aimed at halting rainforest destruction, preserving peat bogs and protecting bees. We have lobbied in support of FoE parliamentary measures, such as the Home Energy Conservation Act, the Traffic Reduction Act and the Climate Change Act.

In addition to campaigning and lobbying, Pembrokeshire FoE has organised numerous activities to improve the local environment, such as, cleaning beaches and rivers of litter and rubbish, erecting bird boxes in woods and planting trees.

The appreciation of the local environment has been enhanced by the group organising numerous guided walks to, for instance, Skomer and Ramsay Islands, the Gwaun Valley and the Marloes Peninsula, and fun(d)-raising events, such as sponsored bike rides and swims, poetry readings and gigs.

Importantly, Pembrokeshire FoE has, over the years, raised public awareness of environmental issues, and gained support for campaigns, by issuing hundreds of press releases and letters; doing numerous radio and TV interviews; organising public meetings; showing films; having stalls at events such as food, children's and pop festivals; holding election hustings meetings; and giving scores of talks and presentations on a wide range of issues.

A small group of volunteers have, for over three decades, ensured that Pembrokeshire FoE has put into practice the founding philosophy of FoE, "*Think Globally, Act Locally*". Past successes will have to be replicated in the future if we are to play our part in protecting and enhancing the natural environment, which is our life support system, at the local and global level.