



Climate Strike the largest protest in Steyning for decades

PRESS RELEASE

Five hundred people took to the streets of Steyning on Friday to join global protests calling for urgent climate action. Led by local school children, and backed by residents of all ages, it was the largest protest in Steyning for nearly forty years, bringing the High Street to a standstill.

“Don’t burn our future!” “There is no planet B!” “Act now or swim later!” These were just some of the messages captured in a whole series of colourful handmade posters made by the local Woodcraft Folk group, who organised the strike, along with environmental group Greening Steyning.

Protesters gathered at The Star Inn for the start of the march, packing the car park. Woodcraft leader and Greening member Ronnie Reed set out the reasons they were there: “Today young people, like these here, all over the world are coming out onto the streets in a desperate attempt to wake up the world to the urgency of the climate crisis that is facing us all. They are protesting about what they see as a complete failure of those in power – governments, decision makers and legislators – to limit the effects of climate change. These youngsters have asked for our support, the support of people like you and me.”

Having worked with Woodcraft members in making their posters, she was well placed to sum up their feeling on climate change: “They are frustrated, angry and scared, and we should be too.”

Accompanied by high-spirited chants, the peaceful and good-natured march set off up the High Street, spilling off the pavement and closing the road for while. The numbers attending far exceeded the organisers’ expectations. “We’ve not seen anything like it since the anti cruise missile demos in the 80’s,” according to long-time resident and Steyning Bookshop owner, Sara Bowers.

Marchers headed for the Clock Tower in the centre of town, assembling for a group photo behind a banner summarising the key message of the day: ‘Time is running out’.

Standing on a makeshift platform, youngsters, many of them not yet teenagers, took turns with the megaphone to share their thoughts on climate change. “OK people, we need to stop this so we can stay a live and so all the other animals can survive,” said one. Another had practical advice: “People who are using cars should learn to use their feet.”

Their voices were echoed by other speakers. Karen Murphy, a member of Extinction Rebellion Shoreham, spelt out the urgency of the situation: “We are here because the Arctic is melting, the forests are burning, land is drying out and the seas are rising. The scientists are telling us that if we don’t reduce man made carbon output dramatically, and soon, we could lock in continued global warming with disastrous effects.” Speaking to the crowd of young people gathered, she said: “As an adult, it’s embarrassing to admit that we need your help to fix this problem.” “Your contribution, coming out today, may feel like a small thing but if we all act together it becomes a big thing, and if more people act it becomes a really big thing, and if more people act they won’t be able to ignore us anymore.”

Georgia Saunders, Steyning’s youngest Parish Councillor, caught the mood, saying “By coming out today, and marching on our streets and making your voices heard, you are not only fighting for yourselves, your friends and your families, but you are fighting for the lives of future generations to come.” She urged everyone to lobby their Parish Councillors, their District Councillors, their County Councillors and their MP’s to “make sure that they are doing absolutely everything in their power to make our communities greener.”

Mike Croker, recently elected Green Party District Councillor, said: “Horsham District Council has got the message,” and is starting to formulate a plan of action to assess, and then reduce its carbon footprint. But his message to local people was: “please don’t wait for Horsham to show you how.... The time is now, the clock is ticking and it’s up to all of us to act!”

Local poet, Simon Zec, roused the crowd with a poem entitled ‘They Already Know’, challenging the wilful deafness of those in power in business, the media and politics. One of the verses captured his message: “We’ve been banging our heads against the wall, wearing badges, singing songs, signing petitions, to tell them something, THEY ALREADY KNOW.”

Wrapping up the protest, the assembled crowd joined forces to sing ‘Greta’s sailing’, a song specially written for the event, and celebrating the pioneering role of Swedish schoolgirl, Greta Thunberg, who has inspired the whole School Strike for Climate movement.

Sharing his impressions of the day, Geoff Barnard, from Greening Steyning, said: “The protest was over within an hour but felt like it has had a lasting impact. The turnout was amazing and is a real sign that climate change is no longer a fringe issue; it’s a mainstream public concern – both here in Steyning and all around the world.”

Woodcraft member, Ursula, age 13, who led the march and introduced all the speakers, summed up her feelings: “I think the Steyning march was great and showed the power of the community when we come together. I also think that the diversity of ages was amazing and it just goes to show that it isn’t just the next generation that’s worried, it’s everyone.”

ENDS

Notes:

The Steyning Climate Strike was one of more than 20 similar events held across the Southeast of England on 20th September 2019, according to the [Global Climate Strike website](#). The list of strikes includes: Southampton, Winchester, Portsmouth, Alton, Petersfield, Farnham, Chichester, Guildford, Worthing, Steyning, Horsham, Brighton, Croydon, East Grinstead, Eastbourne, Tonbridge, Maidstone, Medway, Faversham, Whitstable, Canterbury and Folkestone.

For more information:

Greening Steyning website: www.1010steyning.org

Facebook: @greeningsteyning

Photographs and videos from the day, plus the text of Simon Zec's poem can be downloaded from: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/ouwmtbuf3yt6oqn/AADg9ARoOfVrBvR-4gz49a8a?dl=0>

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