

WHAT EUROPE CAN DO FOR US

Neil Parish is Conservative Member of the European Parliament for the South West

People I meet in Bristol often ask me what the European Union (EU) does for them individually. Unfortunately, so much of our work on your behalf may seem remote and abstract but - for better or for worse - it really does have an impact on your everyday lives.

As a Conservative MEP, my main focus in Brussels and Strasbourg is to oppose further European integration in areas where it brings little or no benefits to individuals. Of course there are areas where cooperation is needed to overcome common challenges like climate change or the threat of terrorism, but far too often the answer put forward to these problems by the European Commission is 'more Europe' and further integration. I disagree.

There are a few examples of positive work the EU has carried out on your behalf. One such example is the recent ban on cat and dog fur imports into the EU. Did you know that around two million cats and dogs are brutally slaughtered in China, and their fur often appears in shops around the UK - and maybe even in Bristol itself?

Because much of this fur is illegally labelled 'faux fur', we may all unwittingly have bought toys or clothes that actually contain real cat or dog fur. I have been involved in a long-running campaign to see a total EU-wide ban on these imports, and finally we voted for such a ban in June. A similar ban in the USA now hopefully means the bottom will fall out of the market and prevent the needless



abuse and inhumane slaughter of animals many of us consider to be faithful companions.

So, working in cooperation with one another, our governments can bring about real benefits, but far too often the European Union is preoccupied with using our problems as levers to extract more power away from national governments towards

Brussels. Take terrorism as an example. I think we would all agree that there needs to be a high level of coordination between national governments across the world, but the EU has used the threat of terrorism to massively beef up the powers of a European police force, and the Commission now wants to create a central EU DNA database. On climate change, the EU has introduced some of its first criminal laws on environmental crime. The British parliament no longer has an exclusive right to constitute what makes a crime in our country.

So I believe some of what comes from the EU is positive for Bristol, and some of it - the regulation and harmonisation - can be detrimental. Either way, the European Union does influence your lives so please do keep an eye on European news.

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'PAVING THE WAY' WORKSHOPS

A national workshop for Civic Societies was arranged by the Civic Trust at Engineers House, Bristol on 24th and 25th April 2007.

A small number of Civic Societies from the West Country were addressed by ten excellent speakers. The main theme was designed to "take into consideration both civic society and local authority ambitions, and to highlight key work being undertaken by Civic Societies 'as critical friends to local authorities'."

Jerry Hicks chaired the proceedings; Charles Fox together with Roland Harmer explained Bristol Civic Society's role in promoting environmental awards, and the benefits the process brings to all concerned.

The past director of Bristol's Architecture Centre (Mark Pearson) explained the new role of 'design champions' on local authorities and their work in Plymouth; and the last speaker conducted a demonstration of Planning for Real which he invented many years ago. He involved all the conference members which helped to clarify a hands on approach which could contribute to effective community involvement in planning.

Representatives of the Civic Trust promised to represent the concern of workshop members for the perceived failure of English Heritage to provide adequate local support in issues which require a Public Inquiry.