

Winning article in EcoStar competition



Lara Clarke (middle) with Emily Wastall (left) and Amelia Newman at Peter Symonds College

Teenagers organise climate strike for governmental change

By Lara Clarke

Peter Symonds College

YOU wouldn't think Amelia Newman and Emily Wastall had the time to organise one climate strike, let alone two.

When asked what it was like to organise their first full-scale protests alongside extra-curricular activities, university applications to Oxford and Cambridge and four A levels apiece, the seventeen-year-olds laughed. "Chaotic," said Amelia, "we were organising our first march at the same time as our end of year exams."

That first strike attracted around eighty protesters, four times the "twenty" Amelia says she expected. Their second strike, held alongside local groups from Winchester University, Friends of the Earth and Extinction Rebellion, involved more than 200.

Emily pointed out they didn't know much at the beginning. "We had no idea how much work it was going to be. [But] because the movement was so globalised, there was a lot of [help] out there."

'The movement' is Fridays for Future, a global initiative encouraging students to strike from school and demand government action against the climate crisis. It is spearheaded by Greta Thunberg, a Swedish 16-year-old activist. But Thunberg can't organise all of the 57,000 strikes in 216 countries that have happened since her first solo strike. That's down to local activists like Emily and Amelia.

"We looked at the map [of strikes] and we saw that there's



Lara Clarke: winner of EcoStar journalism competition open to sixth form students in Hampshire

a big gap in the Southern area between Southampton and Portsmouth," Amelia explained.

Emily jumped in. "We thought, ah, wouldn't it be cool if someone would organise a protest [in Winchester]? ... And then we realised, actually, that we could do it."

Amelia nodded. "[There was] nothing stopping us."

Opponents of the Fridays for Future movement say that these protests aren't doing anything except giving young people an excuse to skip school. But Emily thinks they may have value beyond the climate movement. "Young people being politically involved is really important. And if that's by protesting, then ... it is making change."

They are also keen to point out recent political changes in the local area. One key example is Winchester City Council's new Draft Local Plan, which Cllr Jackie Porter says is "under-

pinned by the need to look at everything we do in the context of our impact on the carbon footprint".

Amelia said: "I don't think the city council would have done so much without the ... pressure that we put on them. We demonstrated the will of the people."

However, Emily acknowledged the importance of action beyond protesting in the future. "It's been about a year of ... protests. And it feels like, while protesting is still really valuable in making sure we don't lose persistence... we need to do more than protest."

"I definitely think we're at a point, environmentally, where individual change - even if everyone makes individual change - is not going to be enough. We need to be targeting big companies and the government and putting pressure on them, which I think is a lot of what the protests are about."