

WEST LONDON NAW
BRANCH ACTIVISTS:
MAISIE CARTER (CHAIR),
NAOMI WIMBORNE-IDRISSI
(BIG CAMPAIGN) AND
ROZ CARTER MBE
(SECRETARY) SEE PAGE 6



JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF WOMEN 50P SPRING 2010

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hope not hate

THE HOPE not Hate campaign started in 2005 to counter the British National Party's politics of hate. But its aim is not only to oppose the BNP. It differs from other anti-BNP campaigns because it presents positive ideas against the BNP's negativity.

HOPE not hate celebrates the diversity of modern Britain, whereas the BNP harks back to some nostalgic "lost" past that never really existed. We believe that communities can improve their lot by working together rather than tearing themselves apart.

We are not aligned to any party and we will work with anyone to defeat the BNP. Over the past few years we believe we have limited the advances of the BNP and in many places, such as Burnley, Bradford and Oldham, reversed them.

Last year the BNP won two seats in the European Parliament. We and many political experts believe that without the work of the HOPE not hate campaign, especially the relentless flow of bad news stories about the BNP that we placed with the media, the BNP could have won several more seats.

Even the BNP recognises this. Its latest email to supporters, which appeals for money to set up a new communications department, states: "The media probably cost us 3 or 4 seats".

The BNP threat in this year's general and local elections is very real, especially for women. The BNP is not only racist, homophobic and xenophobic, it is sexist as well.

Two years ago the BNP had to drop one of its candidates for the London Assembly election when his appalling views on rape were exposed. "Rape is simply sex", he had written on his own blog in 2005. "Women enjoy sex, so rape cannot be such a terrible physical ordeal. To suggest that rape, when conducted without violence, is a serious crime is like suggesting that force feeding a woman chocolate cake is a heinous offence. A woman would be more inconvenienced by having her handbag snatched.

"The demonisation of rape is all part of the feminazi desire to obtain power and mastery over men. Men who go along with the rape myth are either morons or traitors," Eriksen continued.

Incredibly, it was not Eriksen's statement itself that was the problem for the BNP, only that it might "be perceived as trivialising the issue in a manner that many women in particular could have found extremely offensive".

The BNP champions the interests of white men, complaining loudly that any measures to ensure equality of opportunity in employment discriminate against them. Women are a different matter, however. Leading BNP

officers have suggested that one answer to the recession is for women to stay at home. That is why the party's economic policy calls for the re-introduction of the married man's tax allowance.

One prominent BNP member and election candidate is "Reverend" (the title is fake) Robert West, who formed and runs the so-called Christian Council of Britain, the BNP's counter to the Muslim Council of Britain. He claims biblical justification for his view that "women must not intrude themselves into the male headship role or into roles fitted to the male mind and physique".

Research shows that the BNP has far less voting support among women than among men because women reject the party's divisive and aggressive message and the way BNP activity in any area increases tensions and racist crime.

BNP officers, activists and audiences at their meetings are overwhelmingly male, as are the party's election candidates. The party's few prominent women may have got there because they match male members' aggression and hate. One such is Lynne Mozar, who was shown on the Sky TV documentary *BNP Wives* shouting "fat slag" at a passer-by who questioned the BNP view while Mozar was staffing an outdoor stall to oppose a mosque. She also defended use of the terms "Pakis" and "niggers".

The BNP is now hoping to win seats in Westminster and even control of Barking and Dagenham council. Both are a real risk. HOPE not hate is working hard to prevent this.

Our campaign has many strands. We are producing millions of newspapers and leaflets to distribute to homes, workplaces, transport hubs and shopping centres. We use telephone canvassing to identify voters opposed to the BNP and direct mail to remind anti-BNP voters to turn out on polling day.

We have the biggest political email list in the country and have used it to build up a network of new local groups and identify organisers, whom we have trained.

We also do longer term anti-BNP and anti-racist work. Empowering communities to solve their problems without turning to the politics of despair, and challenging racism and racist myths are essential if we are to lessen the reasons people turn to the BNP.

BY SONIA GABLE

**FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO SIGN UP
IN SUPPORT OF HOPE NOT HATE, PLEASE GO
TO WWW.HOPENOTHATE.ORG.UK**

working with

**LOCAL AUTHORITY CO2 TARGETS
WORKING WITH SUSTAINABLE SCHOOLS**

**BY LYDIA MERYLL
SECRETARY, GREATER MANCHESTER SERA
(LABOUR ENVIRONMENT CAMPAIGN)**

THIS is an article written for NAW members, who want to show how recent education policies have the potential to strengthen a positive response to the challenges of Climate Change.

The Government seems to have hidden a major plank of their energy change strategy in the back rooms of local schools. Ed Miliband enjoined Manchester City Council to "persuade" citizens to change their energy use habits and travel preferences (Launch of Climate Change Action Plan 8th Dec 2009). But if the children of Manchester had been there, they would have told him that they already HAVE changed the ways they think about their sustainable use of the resources of the one planet we have. They would have told him about the ways in which whole school communities are planning to live and work differently and beginning to think about how to influence their wider communities and ask for help from parents and grandparents.

By 2020 all schools are encouraged to use the Framework developed four years ago by the DCSF – the Sustainable Schools Strategy. And each Local Authority is auditing the progress they are making to introduce Sustainable Schools as part of their Local Area Agreement to reduce CO2.

Local councillors, school governors and staff who support the practical workings of the schools are not used to consulting Teachernet, the website seen as the province of teachers, but when they do, they see an amazing joined-up process with practical hints and curriculum materials, which can link into the actual use of their school buildings and their travel plans to reduce CO2. www.teachernet.gov.uk/sustainableschools

A shocking 40% to 60% of Local Authority CO2 emissions are generated by education establishments. This is a learning challenge, a built-in laboratory for change, where the goals are clear – reduced electricity bills, more use of public transport and healthier lifestyles. The proportions of pollution from buildings, procurement, travel and waste are surprising. They show that although recycling is a good symbolic measure for raising awareness amongst young people, it is the careless use of heat in school buildings and the whole life energy costs of each purchase, including its transport costs, which are the main culprits.

So if you are a school governor or parent/grandparent, find out which of

sustainable schools

your local schools have used the Teachernet resources to begin to audit their use of energy. Find out which have already achieved the award from ENCAMS of the Green Flag Award. Most of these are Primary Schools, but, if you are the governor of a high school, have a look at the most recent OFSTED report, *Improving Schools, Improving Lives* (December 2009), which shows how children's attainment can be improved if their anxieties about Climate Change are addressed through practical curricula and open discussions about sustainability and the ideas of social justice in terms of Carbon Reduction globally.

Children are our major asset for future thinking and skills. The Government has already built up this massive resource of resilience in each neighbourhood. But local councillors and environmental activists can do more to recognise it for what it is. Parents and grandparents need to see the value of Sustainable Schools. Many already contribute to the efforts of their school, with local food projects linked to allotments, walking busses, Fair Trade stalls and tuck shop initiatives.

The Extended School programmes of After School Clubs are often run by local parents and can support young people's learning in practical skills which can help them to feel more optimistic about how to adapt to Climate Change. These need to be woven back into the mainstream of the school's curriculum so that teachers also value the learning opportunities of adaptation.

Curriculum Governors can help to encourage these ideas in many areas of the curriculum, from Art to Geography, from Science to Technology and make the links with activities

driven by innovators in the school's Catering and Site Services departments. It is usually women who know most about what is happening in the school! Cleaning staff are usually the ones who would recommend how to make savings – if they were asked! It needs to be a "Whole School Approach". And each school needs to recognise the contribution to learning which their skilled parents and grandparents can make.

Sustainability is about inter-generational learning and community cohesion. Even in cities there exists deep knowledge of how to grow food. The recent "Guerrilla Gardening" stories emerging from Transition Towns such as Nottingham City show that grandparents are teaching youngsters about seed sharing and the children are explaining the theories of biodiversity to their relatives. They are planting in unusual places, on derelict land and on the side of the railway lines, even on school playing fields!

These experiments are opportunities to examine how the Commons can be shared and why "Socialism" and social justice are vital to the continuity of our societies. Copenhagen showed this on a global scale, but children also see poverty in their own neighbourhoods and can begin to think about co-operative values. Cuba gives us a positive example of collective responsibility for food production as a response to an embargo on Trade and a lack of basic resources such as oil. NAW members have seen first hand how whole communities contribute to large scale composting schemes and run community gardens in the heart of Havana. We could do that in the UK. Why not!

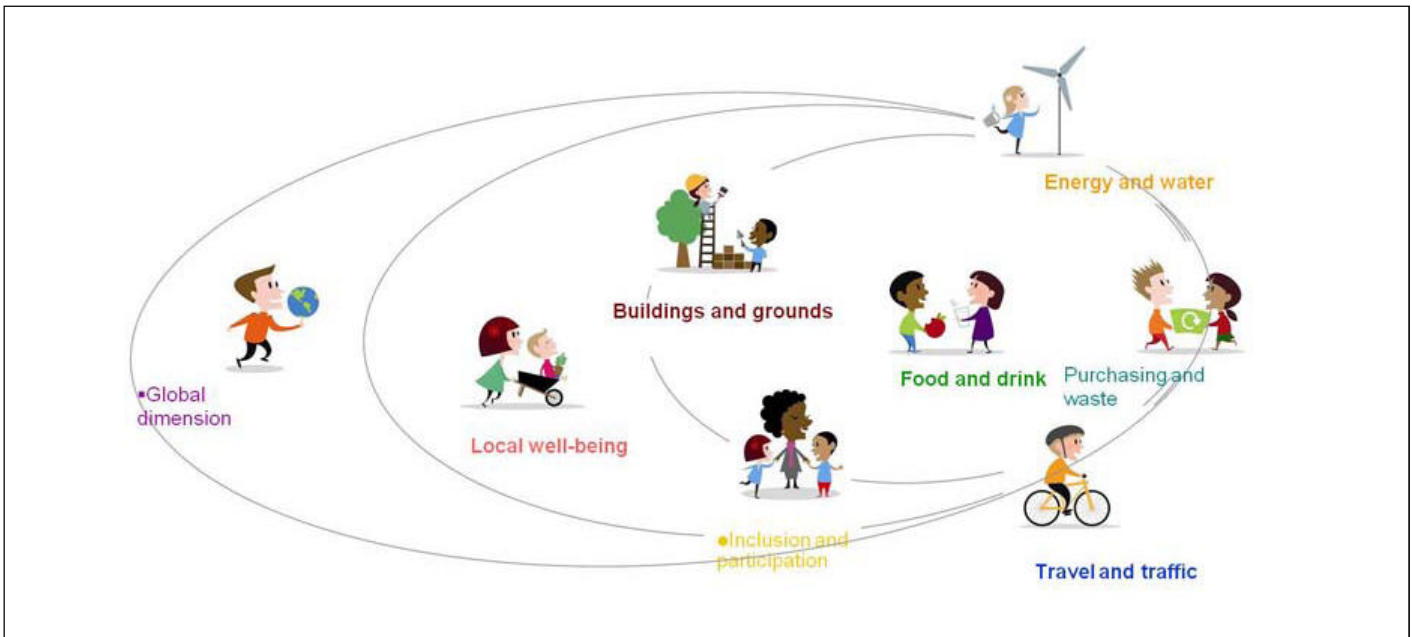
Children are making comparisons with countries already well versed in

the practicality of sustainability. They can appreciate the skills and determination required to square up to Climate Change.

So, when people ask you, "What will you do as a result of Copenhagen?" you can already point to local examples of really innovative practice. CO2 reduction IS possible. We can reduce our use year on year. We can generate new forms of renewable energy. We don't have to eat up so many "food miles". Education is the answer – with practical projects spilling out of the schools and onto the streets, parks and gardens. Persuasion is best tried when there are practical examples of what works. Learners are everywhere.

Find out what sustainability projects your schools are already involved in and help the environmental leaders in each of those schools to get their work recognized as a vital contribution to their sustainable neighbourhood. Remember Ed, many of those leaders are 9 years old. And they have mums and grandmas...

BELOW: THE DCSF 8 DOORWAYS APPROACH TO SUSTAINABILITY



the state of the **state pension**

progress for women

● The government has recognised that the previous system of 40 years uninterrupted working was based on a man's working pattern and had to go. It has reduced the number of contributory years for a full state pension to 30 for both men and women and credited in caring responsibilities from this April. This will increase the proportion of women retiring on a full pension from 30% to 75% in 2010 rising to 90% by 2020. This really is a huge step forward.

● The government has also accepted that poverty among pensioners affects women much more than men, with two thirds of the 2.5 million pensioners living below the official poverty line being women. They haven't done enough about it but nonetheless this is an advance and a useful campaigning tool.

● The government has recognised that the minimum income pensioners need to provide for basic needs is £132.60 for single pensioners and £202.40 for pensioner couples, as against the measly £97.65 and £156.15 of the Basic State Pension (from April 2010). Again, this is an important advance, which tends to be overlooked because the vehicle they have chosen to distribute it is the means tested Pension Credit.

present position

● The Basic State Pension is only linked with RPI, and is eroding in value, as pensioners' living costs are rising more rapidly than inflation.

● The proposed linking of BSP with average earnings was delayed until beyond 2012, and is very likely to be shelved.

● State Pension Age for both men and women will increase to 66 from 2024, to 67 from 2034, and 68 from 2044.

● The introduction of the Pensions Credit has brought a vast proportion of pensioners into means testing.

● About 2.6m receive the Pension Credit, but up to 1.7m pensioners are eligible but do not receive it. 33% of these are over 80. Up to £2.9bn in Pension Credit goes unclaimed.

● Although the reduction in qualifying years to 30 will benefit those retiring after April 2010, women now over 60 have not been helped, and were not even allowed to accrue further rights if they continued to work beyond 60.

● Private sector occupational pension schemes are in rapid decline: final salary schemes have all but disappeared, and employer contributions to money purchase schemes are far too low.

● Public sector final salary schemes are under attack – the race to the bottom is being promoted.

● The cost of tax relief on private pen-

sions is £37bn, with the top 1% of taxpayers receiving a quarter of this.

campaigning priorities

● Expose the myth that means testing works. Pension Credit was introduced seven years ago and despite saturation marketing and massive investment with 1,800 staff employed visiting people at home, £292m in IT systems, and personal backing from ministers, the take up is less than 70%. This leaves 2.5m pensioners living in poverty, two thirds of whom are women, and the same proportion as in 1997-98. Not only does it not work, but it is a scandalous waste of public money, with admin costs estimated at £170m in 2008 and an Audit Commission report showing that each claim costs £114 to administer. Now that all three main political parties seem equally committed to expand means testing across government, this will be one of the biggest battlegrounds of the next few years, so the campaign will have to be creative.

● Basic State Pension to be set at a minimum of £165 per week. This is the demand of the National Pensioners' Convention: 60% of median income based on the latest available figures from 2009. It should continue to be linked to average earnings so that it can be relied on as a solid basis for living a dignified life in retirement. In the middle of a damaging recession, the virtual disappearance of occupational pensions and the collapse of trust in financial institutions, the arguments for the state to provide for its citizens in old age become more compelling. Across the EU the average state pension amounts to 60% of average working pay, but in the UK it is only 30.8% and the NPC report that "only pensioners in Latvia, Spain and Cyprus are more likely to fall into poverty than those in the UK". Why is this acceptable?

● As all political parties soften us up for cuts in services and benefits, the case needs to be made for transferring money from the rich to the poorer for a change. We have long argued that the Upper Earnings Threshold (currently £43,888) mainly benefits higher paid men and its abolition would bring in £10bn in extra revenue, so this combined with the £37bn saved from tax relief to mostly higher earners would give around £75 per week to every pensioner. A Basic State Pension of £165 could then be easily afforded. Just think what could be done with the £100bn uncollected in taxation each year mainly from large institutions and businesses. It is not therefore a question of affordability but of priorities and of benefitting the many not the few in reality not rhetoric.

● Crediting women over state pension

age with extra years who lost out because Home Responsibilities Protection was not in place before 1978.

● No further increases in the state pension age. The rise to 68 from 2044 has been pushed through, with very little debate and we cannot allow this to slide further and further up. 68 is already three years too far and this debate needs to be closed down firmly and permanently for we don't live just to work and we won't work til we drop.

● The May (?) General election gives us an opportunity to push our concerns to the forefront of the agenda and make clear to all political parties that we expect justice for women over state pension age, no further increases in the retirement age, and a minimum state pension of £165, firmly linked to earnings.

The National Assembly of Women has campaigned to improve women's pensions for many years by holding conferences and publishing pensions briefings, as well as responding to government consultations. The fact that in 2010 2.5 million pensioners still live below the official poverty line and that two thirds of them are women is a scandal and the reason why our campaigns carry on.

This is one of a series of NAW briefings on issues relating to women and pensions.

Copies of this and previous briefings can be obtained from Val Duncan, 92 Wansbeck Avenue, Cullercoats, Tyne and Wear NE30 3DJ or naw@sisters.org.uk

diary dates

NAW meetings

Annual General Meeting
■ 17 April, Wortley Hall

Executive Meetings
■ 14 August; Wortley Hall

other events

■ Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Committee annual lecture
Friday 13 August at Wortley Hall

abortion rights agm

LORENE FABIAN, TRADE UNION LIAISON OFFICER ON ABORTION RIGHTS UK EXECUTIVE, AND A STRONG SUPPORTER OF THE NAW AND SISTERS, REPORTS ON ABORTION RIGHTS' UK AGM HELD ON SATURDAY 13 FEBRUARY

THIS year's Annual General Meeting was held at TUC Congress House in London. It was extremely well attended and there were many motions on the agenda which linked into what we know to be an 'election year'.

We again visited the situation in Northern Ireland where there is the continuing denial of a woman's right to choose. Department of Health figures show that at least 1,173 women travelled from Northern Ireland to England for abortion services in 2008, often at considerable cost to themselves, in terms of money and stress. Women in Northern Ireland have been actively campaigning for legal rights to abortion for many years. The dele-

gates unanimously agreed to continue to support the work of our sisters in Northern Ireland.

There was a motion from my union branch (Unite) on public sector spending and abortion services and our concern that a future government could make severe cuts in public sector spending which would have serious repercussions for women's health. The AGM opposed any cuts in reproductive health services or the ability of women to obtain contraception and/or abortion services via the NHS. Already many women have to pay for abortion services and any reduction in services, staffing or other cuts would inevitably lengthen waiting times, resulting in either later abortions than necessary or forced continuation with unwanted pregnancies. Abortion Rights will vigorously campaign along with the relevant trade unions to raise opposition to any attacks on a woman's right to choose.

The third area which featured highly on our agenda this year was education, specifically among younger women and students. We will support grass-roots level campaigns aimed at individual schools and education authorities where individuals have identified a problem.

As you can see from the above, working with other organisations was a theme and a priority, I believe, which was repeatedly spoken of. I am glad to report that both NAW affiliation forms and *Sisters* were distributed at the meeting. I am also happy to report that Megan Dobney, Regional Secretary of the Southern & Eastern Region TUC, and NAW EC member opened the meeting. We also had a speaker from the Spanish Abortion Rights Campaign who spoke of the influence of the church on this issue in Spain. I fear that is a continuing problem in the UK.

developing the **agency** for women

EARLY in February Equalities Minister Harriet Harman co-hosted the European Women in Power summit in Cadiz, where women ministers from across Europe signed a declaration to push for an increase in women's representation at all levels of decision making. On 9 February she hosted an unprecedented meeting of women diplomats in London. Around 30 from 29 countries attended to discuss the new UN Agency for Women. The following day Barbara Switzer representing NAW attended a round table discussion co-hosted by the Minister and International Development Minister Gareth Thomas. This meeting was to consult women's non-governmental organisations (NGOs) about taking forward the Agency for Women in preparation for the annual UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in New York in March.

Fifty plus organisations attended together with Equalities Office Staff and the following summarises the discussion and highlights those issues that were felt a priority.

To some degree we were working in a vacuum as there was little concrete information to work with. To date the UN performance on gender has, to say the least, been sadly wanting and therefore ineffective. The four existing women's agencies, UNIFEM (UN Development Fund for Women), OSAGI (Office of Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women,

INSTRAW (UN International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, and DAWN a training institute working with INSTRAW, will be disbanded in favour of the new single agency.

Gareth Thomas reported some countries were dragging their feet in the negotiations to develop the agency, particularly on finance as they probably had other agendas. At present men have the ultimate authority and deal with all issues in most countries and it is essential that women are empowered to make decisions that stick in their countries.

The Under Secretary General for the Gender Agency as it is known at present must be appointed early and must be a woman (that it would be is not to be taken for granted). The term gender often results in women's issues being sidelined. It is expected that the post holder will be appointed from the South and the body will operate similar to ECOSOC (UN Economic and Social Council). It was felt strongly that the agency should have a title that identifies women specifically. A new structure should be established instead of trying to fit in with a system, which so far, has not worked for women in any meaningful way and is often a stumbling block for progress.

A model of best practice should be developed engaging in supportive activity manage expectations. It must empower women and must make a

clear statement of its intentions in countries worldwide to raise the funds. When people know what it is for and meet their aspirations they will work for it to succeed.

This is by no means the end of the campaign. We must not sit back now the decision is taken and expect it to happen in the way we wish. The campaign must go on and grow and we must be vigilant to ensure the continuity of the positive effort put in by UK organisations and our government.

It is hoped that a clearer position will emerge from New York. In the meantime, a full report of the discussion and progress on the development of the Agency will appear on the equalities website:

www.GovernmentEqualitiesOffice.com

BY BARBARA SWITZER

This issue has been edited by
Janette Ferguson

Opinions expressed in the articles in this journal are not necessarily the views of the
National Assembly of Women.

Sisters is a vehicle through which women can air their views, but they must be in consonance with the aims of the NAW.

MBE for NAW secretary **Roz Carter**

IN January, the West London Branch of the NAW celebrated one of its members, Roz Carter, being awarded the MBE in the New Year's Honour List. Roz Carter is currently Secretary of this active NAW branch. She also plays a full part in her union as the Race Equalities Officer on the Executive Committee of Hounslow Teachers' Association (NUT) and is a Hounslow NUT Past President. Her award came for services to education as she was Head of Hounslow Language Service for 28 years – dedicated to working with newly arrived refugee and asylum seeker EAL children and families.

Under her leadership, the Language Service gained a national and international reputation for supporting refugees and ethnic minority children and families in our local community. Roz received a Lifetime Achievement Award in 2007 for services to Hounslow schools and the borough, where she and her team worked tirelessly to develop and contribute to Equalities Policies and Community Cohesion Policies.

The group's January meeting also hosted a talk by Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi from the BIG (Boycott Israeli Goods) campaign. This group aims to support those Israelis who oppose the growing settlements on Palestinian territory. Their work has resulted in new guidelines, which require clear labelling of goods imported from the illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, as opposed to the Palestinian West Bank. Naomi reported that the boycott is having an effect on the Israeli government.

The settlements have caused environmental destruction, pollution of land and water together with the despoiling of the natural landscape and indigenous way of life. Naomi encouraged members to lobby MPs and talked of the need for a cultural boycott involving academics and musicians as well. She stressed the need for the campaign to raise awareness in all local organisations and unions and to make international links building to a global campaign.

The Branch are holding their annual IWD celebration lunch on 7 March.

Mary Davis

JUST to let you know that our NAW sister Mary Davies is to Chair the 2010 TUC Women's Conference in March. Mary has been a strong supporter of all women's issues and also fairness and equality issues for many years, both as a member of our NAW and also as a trade unionist on the TUC Women's Committee.



This is the ideal way to celebrate the time and commitment she has made over the years and we all wish her the best of luck on the day and hope she can actually relax and enjoy it!

I am sure the Sisters attending this year will do everything they can to make it as painless and enjoyable as possible. Mary has agreed to let us know how it was for her in the next edition of *Sisters*.



MARY DAVIS
SPEAKING AT THE
2007 BURSTON
STRIKE SCHOOL
RALLY

Changes to Wortley Hall Structure:

Wortley Hall is a co-operative and is governed by a Management Board which has 12 members (with 50% being elected in alternate years) and has four reserved seats for women (if sufficient nominations are received). The President is elected every two years as is the Political Secretary in alternate years. The Management Board elects two Vice Presidents one of whom must be a woman and a Membership Committee is elected annually. Barbara Switzer is an individual member of that committee until the AGM on 14 March.

At the AGM last year a rule change was agreed to disband the Membership Committee and replace it with quarterly meetings of shareholders which takes effect after 14 March.

The procedure for calling these meetings will be reported to the NAW AGM as will any other significant decisions.

The maximum number of shares any organisation can hold is 200 irrespective of size. NAW currently holds 13 shares with a total value of £65.

This change will give individual shareholders a greater opportunity to be involved in the development and activities of Wortley Hall.

Various wings are dedicated to the founders of the Hall and the NAW Garden Room is dedicated to former NAW Vice President Celia Pomeroy.

join the NAW now!

*I would like to join the NAW. Here is £15 for the annual subscription (£5 unwaged) which includes my subscription to **sisters**, the journal of the NAW.*

Our organisation would like to affiliate to the NAW. Enclosed is: £15 (local organisation/NAW branch), £30 (regional organisation), £45 (national)

Name

Address

postcode

Organisation

phone email

Send to: NAW, 92 Wansbeck Avenue, Cullercoats, Tyne & Wear NE30 3DJ