SHE CARES

'Why I rejected a champagne lifestyle for green living'

Julia Stephenson, 39, heiress to the Vestey beef empire, swapped her sports car for a bike and gave up glamorous parties to be a Green Party campaigner

WORDS BEVERLEY KEMP PHOTOGRAPHS ANDREW MONTGOMERY

"Six years ago I had the good fortune (or misfortune, depending on which way you look at it) to enjoy a brief flourishing as an 'It' girl and then to write a book about the experience (and not even on recycled paper I'm ashamed to say).

Outwardly my life appeared glitzy. My family are well connected and successful, I was dating a rich, handsome aristocrat, I wrote novels and I was pictured in gossip columns with my glamorous socialite friends, apparently having the time of my life. I bumped into an acquaintance from that time recently. 'Oh, how we *envied* you!' she gushed. 'The girl who had everything.' But inside I felt very unhappy.

My relationship wasn't very good and my socialite friends made me feel insecure. In fact, I am quite a private person and I was uncomfortable in that social whirl.

TIME FOR A CHANGE

I went off to Switzerland to write my second novel, *Pandora's Diamond* (Headline Publishing), which is based on my experiences as a hopeless 'It' girl. Writing it was hugely cathartic and I let go of my old life and focused on things closer to my heart.

I didn't have a damascene conversion to green living; it was more a gradual awareness of how our extravagant lifestyles are damaging our environment. This led to a personal desire to live more sustainably.

For several years my idea of living a green life was quite superficial and more for my benefit than the planet's. If I wanted organic blueberries I didn't care that they'd been flown halfway across the world, my only consideration was that I knew they were packed full of health-giving antioxidants. These days I'd rather eat British food in season than exotic fruit and veg with a hefty carbon footprint.

And while I frequented farmers' markets, this was as much about pandering to my middle-class rural fantasy as it was about saving the environment. Indeed my local farmers' market was, and still is, full of corporate wives carrying rugs, which they carefully deposit into the backs of their gas-guzzling Range Rovers before whizzing off to yoga classes.

But over the years I've become much greener. I've drastically cut down on my personal rubbish mountain by recycling packaging, and keeping a worm compost bin on my roof terrace (more on this later). And I found myself replacing my interest in the social whirl with an interest in the political world by representing my local Green Party. Political parties are the parties I'm now most interested in. The imminent global devastation – unless we cut our carbon emissions – makes me keen to do as much as I can.

TAKING ACTION

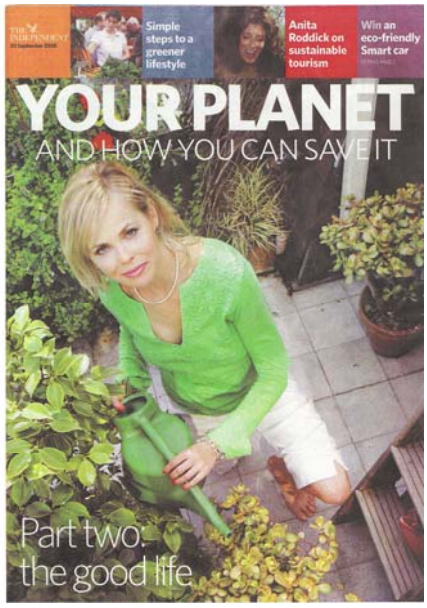
So last year I sold my speedy Mazda MX5 sports car (14 per cent of our carbon emissions are created by driving) and bought a bike. A positive side effect is that I'm saving a fortune and avoiding the hideous bureaucracy and stress that owning a car in London entails, what with parking meters and congestion charges.

I've also installed a water filter at home so I don't have to buy expensive over-packaged mineral water shipped from half way around the world. Leave Fijian water to the Fijians, I say!

My loft is currently being converted into an extra room – the greenest option would be to avoid building work completely but I really need the extra space – so as a compromise I'm doing it in the most eco-friendly way possible, using organic paints and reclaimed materials.

By employing my boyfriend to do the work (conveniently, he's a builder) I'm cutting down further on my energy costs – well, financial energy costs at least – and indoctrinating him into my green ways at the same time. It'll be cold on the roof come the winter, working on that extension, but there'll be no energy-consuming blow heaters in my house – he'll have to make do with a woolly hat covered in clingfilm! I don't think he's looking forward to working for me very much – he insists my initials JS actually stand for Joseph Stalin – but I expect he'll adapt to the Siberian conditions eventually.

I'm also installing solar panels, three wind turbines, the first waterless unisex urinal in the UK, a system that will D-



Going green in Chelsea

Novelist **Julia Stephenson** explains her plans for making her London flat environmentally sound

recycling

Julia advises on what *you* can do

Recycling is a start but keep the emphasis on reusing and reducing. Tick off the following tips and your actions will slash the amount you recycle and throw away by two-thirds

COMPUTER RECYCLING envocare.co.uk/computers and wasteonline.org.uk lists UK charities that will be happy to take your old computer equipment.

JUNK MAIL When you recycle envelopes remember to separate the plastic bit from the paper. Plastic messes up the recycling process. If it's a big package I scribble 'return' on it and send it back to source. Cut down on junk mail by putting a 'no junk mail' sign on your door and registering at mpsonline.org.uk to reduce unwanted advertising.

PLASTIC BAGS Many supermarkets sell durable bags for life' so buy one and reuse it. Keep some in your bag all the time.
- Buy a string bag to reduce your plastic bag mountain from naturalcollection.com. They take up no space in your handbag and are immensely strong and expandable.
- Use the plastic bags that package magazines and newspapers as sandwich bags. Keep a couple in your bag and fill with fruit and vegetables when you're shopping, or use to cover food.

USED PRINTER CARTRIDGES Send to the animal rescue centre (fenplace.co.uk) or the British Heart Foundation (bhf.org.uk)

BATTERIES These should be disposed of safely as they may contain chemicals, which can cause pollution. Buy mercury- and cadmium-free batteries as these are less toxic.

Recycling batteries is difficult as there are no reprocessing facilities for them in the UK. In some areas household batteries are collected and sent to the nearest facility in France for recycling, but this uses up a considerable amount of energy instead.
- use mains electricity where possible.
- use rechargeable batteries and a charger.
- send batteries back to manufacturers, where such a scheme is available.

BOTTLES Don't buy bottled water. The UK's tap water quality is among the best in the world. Alternatively, you can install a water purification system under your sink.

CD RECYCLING Send the CDs and DVDs that are given away with newspapers and magazines to polymer-reprocessors.co.uk and plasticwaste.co.uk. Or give them to a charity shop.

CLOTHES The UK dumps up to 900,000 tons of textiles every year, which if landfilled, produce methane gas. There are many places so recycle old clothes, including jumble sales, charity shops and eBay.

ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT Waste-collection authorities are now obliged to collect unwanted bulky items like fridges, although they can charge a collection fee. They'll then be taken to a fridge-recycling plant where the ozone-depleting substances are extracted and the metal is melted down. EU law holds the manufacturers and retailers responsible for the collection and recycling of waste electronic and electrical equipment. So when your washing machine, TV or stereo finally dies, Curry's will have to come and pick it up. If equipment is still working donate it to the Furniture Reuse Network (frn.org.uk, 087 164 3575). Or if broken, take it to your local dump where it can be added to other scrap for recycling. Don't make a special journey in the car or you'll cancel out the energy you save.

KITCHEN WASTE Buy a worm bin (several types are available from wiggly wigglers.com) and transform your leftovers into fantastic compost. Bins are best kept outside, but if you have no outside space a Bokashi DrPowered Bin, also available from wiggly wigglers, will do the same job kept in your kitchen. Both are completely odourless.

OFFICE FURNITURE Green Works is a not-for-profit social enterprise providing office furniture to schools, charities, community groups and start-up businesses. Contact green-works.co.uk

PAPER AND CARDBOARD Paper is biodegradable, so if it is put into landfill, it will decompose, producing methane, which is a potent greenhouse gas (20 times more potent than carbon dioxide). Fortunately, it's one of the easiest things to recycle. Ask your council if it has a kerbside pick-up scheme, or enquire at your local paper bank.
- Old newspapers can be compressed to make logs (logmakers, £299, naturalcollection.com) then burnt on an eco-friendly carbon-neutral wood-burning stove, from clearviewstoves.com

MOBILE PHONES Hang on to your old one for as long as possible. If you do need to replace it, take your old model to any Oxfam shop or to The Carphone Warehouse who have a recycling facility in every shop.

TELEPHONE DIRECTORIES The dye on the pages means they can't be recycled with other paper and newspaper. To recycle them you should either place them on the compost heap or shred them for animal bedding. Nine out of 10 councils recycle directories; recycle-more.co.uk gives details of what your local council recycles and where.

GLASSES AND SUNGLASSES Every year four million pairs of perfectly good glasses are discarded in the UK, instead of binning them, donate them to the charity Vision Aid Overseas (vao.org.uk, 0121 5350116) who give them to those who need glasses in developing countries. Or give them to your optician who may subscribe to the scheme. C-