

# TRANSITION FREE PRESS

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# Bristol pound held up at the Bank

by Alexis Rowell (Belsize)

With Greece's position in the Euro looking increasingly precarious, and uncertainty stalking the global financial system, many communities in the industrialised world are reported to be exploring forms of localised exchange such as time banks or barter. But an attempt to boost the economy of Bristol by creating a local currency has been put on hold by the UK financial authorities.

The Bristol Pound is set to be the fifth local currency to be launched in the UK by Transition initiatives since the Totnes Pound in 2007 (see box p3). It will be both a physical and an electronic currency following on from Transition Town Brixton's pioneering use of mobile phones for payment with their local money. Bristol Council has also agreed to accept the Bristol Pound as payment for business rates.

The Bristol Pound was due to be launched in May, but was delayed after a meeting in April at the Bank

of England, which was attended by representatives from the Bank, the Treasury, the Financial Services Authority (FSA) and the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS). Bank officials apparently reserved judgement on the wisdom or legality of the Bristol Pound, but the FSA and FSCS asked the organisers to postpone the launch whilst they considered more carefully the involvement of the Bristol Credit Union, which is set to issue the Bristol Pound.

**"97% of the UK's money supply was created by private banks"**

The delay has raised eyebrows in Transition circles given that the Bank of England has virtually no control over the existing UK money supply. Dr Justin Kenrick, a social anthropologist who works for the restoration of the commons in the UK, said: "Around 97% of all money in Britain was created by



Down at the market with Brixton pounds

Photo: Jonathan Goldberg

private banks and is mostly used for unproductive speculation in housing or financial assets. That's dwarfed by the trillions that sit in offshore accounts or sloshes round the world looking for one-way bets."

"The UK financial authorities have no control whatsoever over these private financial interests. It's ironic

therefore that the Bristol Pound, which is about boosting a local, real economy is giving them – perhaps not problems – but certainly pause for thought."

Bristol Pound Director Ciaran Mundy said: "The big banks, and the wealthy individuals who profited through them, created a global

collapse, but they have gone virtually untouched by any regulatory authority and still are calling the shots. Local currencies have started out as small, very localised schemes, but they are growing. The Bristol Pound is more ambitious in its city wide scale, aiming to start with 300 businesses and minimum of

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## Grow Heathrow is up in the air

This summer, when most people will be thinking about their upcoming summer holidays, members of Transition Heathrow and the local community of Sipson, by Heathrow

Airport, are headed for Central London County Court for a two day hearing. After three previous adjournments it is expected a judge will finally rule on whether

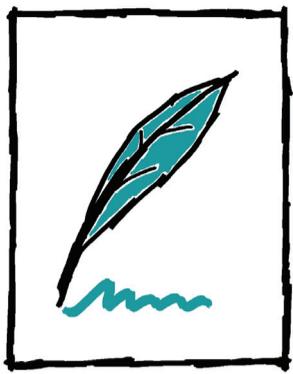


Grow Heathrow tyre wall flowers  
Photo: Pete Rumble

an eviction order should be granted at the community market-garden project 'Grow Heathrow'. Despite widespread support from the surrounding community, including Hillingdon Council, the local MP and even the local Police, the site with three greenhouses (renovated by the group) could be handed back to the land owners who have no

plans for it. The site was squatted over two years ago, as part of the Transition Heathrow project and the No Third Runway campaign. A campaign which appears more relevant each time a politician indicates a change of plans on Heathrow expansion.

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# Welcome



Charlotte Du Cann (East of England)  
Editor-in-Chief

Where are we going? We're heading for the future. We are not afraid to share our views, ask awkward questions, laugh or explore paths other papers don't go down in order to get there. What we want is to capture the real-life experiences of people who are discussing and doing Transition, learning to share skills and resources, starting up social enterprises, thinking hard about alternative ways of organising the way we do energy and economics.

We're looking at the small details in the big picture. We're optimistic in the face of tough times. But we are also real. We're real about the awesome challenges of peak oil and climate change and the economic collapse. We're real about the hard work the projects featured in these pages take (including this paper!) We want to reflect that feet-on-the-ground reality, mixed with the cheerfulness that comes when you're working with your fellows for a common purpose.

Most of all we want to connect the dots. Our old-style, fossil-fuelled culture works by separating out all the important subjects, by keeping everyone separated and alone. We want to connect people

Welcome to the preview issue of the Transition Free Press, which we hope will become a flourishing national newspaper. You could say this the worst and the best of times to be publishing in print. Worst because we are in a recession, at the tail end of an industrialised civilisation, where "growth at all cost" has begun to play out its consequences. Best because there is a whole new narrative out there, the happening story of Transition you might not see covered by mainstream media. That's the story we're aiming to tell.

So this is a taster edition, a blueprint of how the paper will look, and the kinds of subjects we will cover every quarter - news with comment and context, features and reviews.



Activists hold a banner in front of a damaged coral reef in the vulnerable Marshall islands from Connecting the Dots. Photo from 350.org

in Transition, connect campaigners and thinkers and people who never heard of energy descent or alternative currency, open up a dialogue, write another story.

So I'd like to introduce you to our core team: our designers, Trucie Mitchell and Mihnea Damian news editor, Alexis Rowell, food and wellbeing editor, Tamzin Pinkerton, sub-editor Mark Watson our production manager, Mike Grenville who began the enterprise, our business manager, Jay Tompt who will take it forward; and all our contributors, reporting from

the field, within the Transition movement everywhere. Thank you everyone for giving your time – the most precious resource we have in our hands right now.

P.S. If you would like to contribute/ distribute/ advertise or get involved in any way in future editions, please get in touch!

Charlotte Du Cann is a writer and editor and co-ordinates several community blogs, including the Transition Network's Social Reporting Project

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www.transitionfreepress.org

## J20: A Day in the Life of the Future

Imagine instead of flying halfway round the world to the next international climate change conference, world leaders all stayed at home and ate a meal of foraged food or spent the day cycling instead of driving?

That's what the organisers of the Festival of Transition are proposing – rather than creating greenhouse gases by flying to Brazil for the Rio +20 Earth Summit, why not stay at home and celebrate life without fossil fuels?

The Festival of Transition has been organised by the new economics

foundation (nef), the Transition Network and others to coincide with the Rio+20 Earth Summit: "The idea is that rather than flying to Rio, putting nearly 4 tonnes of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, people stay at home, and do stuff that models the kind of world we want to see," explains Rob Hopkins, Transition Network's co-founder. "It is a celebration of change, of practical responses, of community, and we hope that it will be a global event, not just in the UK."

The idea behind the scheme is simple. People are asked to imagine ways in which a post-transition society might also be a better one, and then try them out as a real-life

experiment during a 24 hour period starting at dawn on 20th June 2012. Activities could involve family, friends, work colleagues, fellow students, community groups, the whole town or be entirely personal.

The main focus is to do something different for the day, to taste change and remind ourselves of what is possible. This could be 24 hours

**"a post-transition society might also be a better one"**

of only eating local food, making exchanges without using money, living outdoors, talking with strangers, having a carnival on the street, transforming a derelict site, reading together, installing solar panels or sharing skills.

"To create a world in which we all can thrive while respecting our planetary boundaries is a serious business. Transition involves change, and that can be challenging.

Even contemplating it can make you feel tired, so who wants to get really heavy about it as well?" asks nef director, Andrew Simms. "If you can't make a better world in which the journey can be as enjoyable as the destination, what's the point?

And who is going to want to take the first step?" In the run up to 20th June, the Festival is holding events across the country.

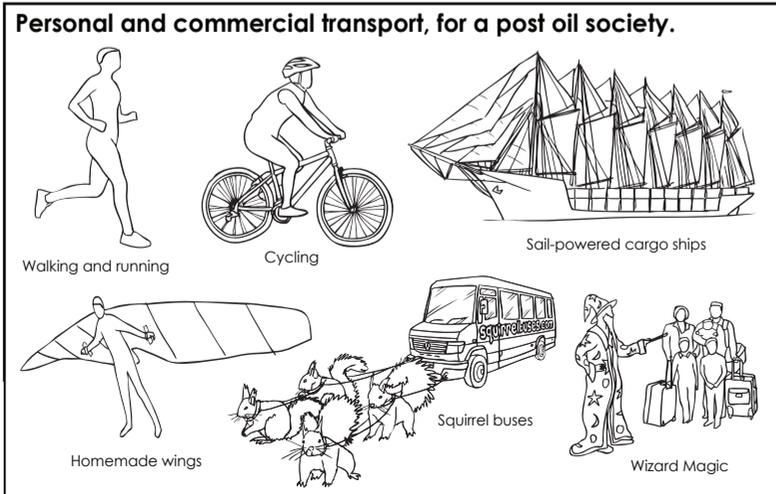
In Bristol there is a series of talks that ask What if...?, that investigates everything from leaving fossil fuels in the ground to creating your own money.

In London there is a series of Transition Walks: a 'deep time' walk along the Thames to experience the evolution of life on Earth, and around the history of the Corporation and the City.

"The Festival is an invitation to think positively about how our lives could change as we adapt to the end of cheap fossil fuels, address the threat of runaway climate change and deal with realities of a failed financial system.

World leaders will be gathering again in Brazil, but we think real leadership is as likely to come from people voting with their feet and imaginations, who ask better questions and imagine better worlds."

The Festival of Transition is a joint project of nef, the Transition Network, the Ramblers Association, Mission Models Money and UKYC. For full details, please visit the site at: www.festivaloftransition.net



**Transitional thoughts** By Simon French www.simonfrench.com

# finance Bristol Pound held up at the Bank

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1000 account holders, plus we are working via a fully regulated Bristol Credit Union.”

One country where the banks have not called the shots in recent years is Iceland where the President, Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, vetoed repayment of international loans and bailing out of local banks.

“Every big financial institution, both in Europe and in my own country was against me,” he later said, “and there were powerful forces, both in Iceland and in Europe that thought my decision was absolutely crazy, [but] it boiled down to the fundamental choice of the interest of the financial market on one and, and the democratic will of the people on the other.”

During the Argentine economic crisis of 1999-2002, community groups and local councils started issuing their own currencies as a way to circumvent the straitjacket being placed on the national government by the IMF and western banks. Eventually Argentina defaulted on its external debt, and the peso was decoupled from the dollar.

A wide variety of alternative forms of exchange circulated alongside the peso until a new government stabilised the economy.

The most widely used local currency in Europe is the Chiemgauer, one of 28 regional currencies (Regiogeld) in Germany. Since 2003, the Chiemgauer has circulated in the Chiemsee region of Bavaria.

It started at one-to-one parity with the Euro, but is devalued by 2% every three months to encourage people to spend it – a process called demurrage. Its founder, Christian Gelleri, claims residents can use it for 90% of their needs and says around 600 businesses and 2,500 residents regularly use the currency.

Peter North, author of “Local Money”, says: “The Chiemgauer in Germany has come closest to acting as a real local currency that a significant number of people are using on a day to day basis - perhaps as a result of Germany’s rich ecosystem of locally owned businesses and banks, as well as food and power production. This suggests that it might make sense to focus on relocalising the economy we have in tandem with setting up new

**“If virtually nothing you need to use every day is produced locally, then a new local currency won’t take you very far”**

forms of money. If virtually nothing that you need to use every day is produced locally, then a new local currency won’t take you very far.”

In Greece, which is suffering the most in the EU, the port city of Volos has created a local system of exchange called the Tems and many others are experimenting. “Crisis is, in some senses, an opportunity,” says Peter North.

Only in Argentina during its exit from the link to the US dollar have alternative currencies acted as critical supports to local communities in times of deep financial crisis. Greece is heading the same way as Argentina. I predict we’ll see a lot more demand for local currencies as times get harder.” As well as the many local currencies around the world, there are also numerous other kinds of alternative exchange (see box). In the UK, councils are often involved in supporting time banks and credit unions.

Following on from its “Peak Money” seminar in April, the Transition Network is planning a briefing paper for all local authorities in the UK explaining alternative forms of exchange and pointing to examples from around the world where councils have got involved.

In Greece local communities seem to be tapping into traditional forms of local exchange and the gift economy (see box), according to Johan van As. Speaking at the Peak Money seminar, Johan said: “There is a network of teachers and other professionals offering their skills for free. And there are also schemes which offer food for free that would otherwise be wasted.”

*Alexis Rowell is News Editor of Transition Free Press. He also runs a climate change and peak oil consultancy called cuttingthecarbon. He is the author of Communities, Councils and Carbon – what we can do if governments won’t (Green Books)*

## Transition currencies in circulation

The Totnes Pound was the first local currency of the Transition era. It was launched in March 2007 and was convertible one-to-one with the pound sterling.

Lewes in East Sussex was next in September 2008 (although they did have a local currency from 1789 to 1895!) The big difference from Totnes was that Lewes had their currency printed on high security paper with watermarks, serial numbers and other hidden security features so Lewes Pounds looked and felt like real money.

Earlier this year the Lewes Pound organisers introduced a cashback scheme whereby those using Lewes Pounds would be given “free”

Lewes Pounds when they spent a minimum amount.

The Stroud Pound was launched in September 2009 and introduced the concept of demurrage, where the currency reduced in value by 3% every six months to encourage people to use it. At the end of a six month period, holders of Stroud Pounds need to buy a special stamp to stick on their notes if they want to use them. In February of this year the directors of the Stroud Pound introduced an additional incentive – when you exchange £10 sterling you get 11 Stroud Pounds. The Brixton Pound, which was also launched in September 2009, was the first urban currency and the first to go electronic.

From September 2011 users could also pay in Brixton Pounds by text message on a mobile phone.



*Second edition of Brixton Pounds*

## What are the alternatives?

### 1. Local Currency

A physical or electronic tender circulating in a particular area or community, to facilitate the circulation of goods and services locally. It is only has value among people, organisations or businesses that have agreed to exchange it. It is not part of the money supply recognised by the central bank - it is a parallel currency. However, to create confidence, it is usually pegged to, and exchangeable for, the national currency.

### 2. Time Banking

A time bank is a way of exchanging services using time as the unit of currency, such that one hour of someone’s time is worth one hour of someone else’s time. Time banking is often used as a way to monetise services undervalued by markets, such as community work, or to value people who struggle to enter markets. Core principles are: everyone is an asset; some work is beyond a monetary price; reciprocity in helping; social networks are necessary; a respect for all human beings.

### 3. Local Exchange Trading Scheme (LETS)

A way of exchanging goods and services at a local level using an internal currency, sometimes called a LETS credit. Unlike a time bank someone has to set exchange rates in a LETS scheme. In most countries there is a tax implication for those offering services that are their primary job. Currently thought to be around 300 schemes in the UK.

### 4. Barter

Method of exchange by which goods or services are directly exchanged for other goods or services without using money. In pre-market economies barter was mostly used for dealing with strangers or enemies. In modern economies barter usually replaces money as the method of exchange in times of monetary crisis, such as when the currency may be either unstable (e.g. hyperinflation or deflationary spiral) or simply unavailable for conducting commerce (e.g. credit crunch or financial collapse).

### 5. Credit Unions

A member-owned financial cooperative, democratically controlled by its members, and operated for the purpose of promoting thrift, providing credit at competitive rates, and providing other financial services to its members. Credit unions lend their members savings – they do not create credit/debt/money out of thin air as commercial banks do. In the UK 88% of the money supply is credit/debt created by private banking interests.

### 6. Gift Economy

A gift economy is a society where goods or services are given without any explicit agreement for immediate or future payment. The gift economy is how human society operated for much of its existence – by contributing what they could and taking what they needed. Unlike modern market economies they operated without money and without formal credit/debt. Making a gift economy work requires a community with clear social rules and a high degree of trust.



**FEELING THE BUZZ: Bees don't just make honey, they are vital to life on earth, pollinating 90% of plant and crop species - over one-third of the food supply in many countries.** Recent years have seen a disturbing global decline in bee populations, due to a possible combination of factors including disease, habitat loss and toxic chemicals (principally neonicotinoid pesticides). In response to this decline many people across the UK have started to keep bees and several Transition groups have formed their own community bee groups. This year Bungay Community Bees in Suffolk have sown their first wildflower meadow and Transition Town Tooting are about to install their first apiary in the local cemetery, assisted by the Capital Bee scheme. Here photographer Jonathan Goldberg (Transition Kensal to Kilburn) captures a recent Introduction to Beekeeping day outside Edible Landscapes London in Finsbury Park. See Jonathan Goldberg's series of LondonTransition initiatives in action [www.jongoldberg.co.uk](http://www.jongoldberg.co.uk)

## Social enterprise: Taking the 13<sup>th</sup> Step

by Hal Gillmore (Totnes)

In 2009 Transition Town Totnes in Devon completed its Energy Descent Action Plan, a framework for removing fossil fuels from the life of their community. According to the Transition Handbook and the "12 Steps of Transition", their job as community activists was complete. However looking around the energy-hungry town, they realised they had hardly started. Exploring where to go next as an organisation they coined the phrase 'The 13th Step'.

"All this low-carbon stuff you are doing is a no brainer; we'll all be doing it sooner or later," said local social action manager, Dave Chapman. "What you are really doing is the

new social enterprise – creating local jobs and businesses in a permanent recession. That's what's going to change things."

The 13th Step was the beginning of what was to become a national and international conversation – the role of social enterprise in addressing the recession or, under the Transition agenda, relocalising our economy. Transition Town Totnes now has a lively Business and Livelihoods network that works with many established businesses, starts new ones and generally stirs up an entrepreneurial buzz around town. The group forms part of the REconomy Project which will soon be providing community initiatives with

a wealth of resources to relocalise their economies. This includes hosting a regular flow of study groups - from businesses, local governments, schools and Universities – who come to Totnes to learn about our work.

In this way they have turned what was a burden on a Transition Initiative into an asset – one that provides an income, employs people and maximises the local economic benefits. It has become clear that if Transition is to realise the compelling vision for the future that has been emerging, it needs to be in the business of creating jobs. Many people in Transition want to get involved on a practical, full time level and derive a living from it.

Having already put a few years of my life into the voluntary sector, I was keen Transition did not get relegated to that league.

The many charities and NGOs that thrived in the 90s and 00s had had their individual successes – saving forests here, providing poverty alleviation there – but the net global indicators had continued on the same trajectory – biodiversity loss, social inequality, carbon emissions etc. What spoke to me about Transition was the systemic and radical nature of its proposition – understood properly it was about stepping out of the rat-race and creating an entirely different economic and social model.

If we were content with Transition being a hobby that we only worked on voluntarily, we would never achieve social change at the depth or on the scale needed. We could not stay within the system and use what little spare time we had to tinker around the edges. We had to propose something far more radical than that.

This is true even more today than it was at the start. Funding opportunities are not what they were so becoming independent of grant funding has to be written into every project plan. Similarly, we are aware of the dangers of burnout from over commitment. This can come from neglecting your personal income, as much as your emotional energy and time spent with friends and family.

Creating innovative social enterprises and making Transition work pay provides exciting ways to address these challenges. It's the most obvious route to make the sustainable sustainable.

The individual activists in the Transition movement now have to step up to that challenge. Five years since the movement began, we have a wealth of experience and expertise to apply. Transition can be the vehicle to shift our professional work from unsustainable jobs within the old system to something new. In the process we build a more resilient local economy, and a happier, healthier community.

Hal Gillmore has been actively involved in Transition Town Totnes since 2008. He is the Director of Big Green Canoe Ltd., a social enterprise that offers programmes of tours, education and personal development around the Transition theme in Totnes [www.biggreencanoe.org](http://www.biggreencanoe.org)

## Grow Heathrow is up in the air

continued from front page 1

Should the Coalition government decide they do want a third runway after all, it would represent one of the biggest government U-turns in the history of British politics. As a recent show of support, activists gathered outside the gate of 'Grow Heathrow' and held up a banner which read: "Return of the killer runway. You resurrect it." We will bury it. Again." This is a threat which thousands of activists all over the country and all over the world are likely to keep should the third runway ever come back on the table.

If all these issues weren't enough to keep the group busy, the government have made their position more tricky by recently passing a law to criminalise squatting in residential properties.

Although Grow Heathrow is exempt from the proposed new law (as commercial property and not residential), many similar projects around the UK will be threatened once the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders bill (LASPO) becomes law in a couple of months time. This law was passed after 96% of respondents to the government's

consultation (who didn't want to see any action taken on squatting) were ignored.

The legislation was added to the LASPO bill only three days before finally being passed in the House of Commons.

2012 could go down as the year autonomous spaces were shut out and closed down - unless we fight back. We know the government (any government) will always take the side of private property over the right to shelter, so we feel it is extremely important at this time to build strong community spaces that can defend themselves.

When we come under attack, self-defence is the only logical option.

Joe Rake is a member of Transition Heathrow and has been involved in the climate movement over the past few years with groups such as Plane Stupid and Climate Camp. This year he has been working on the SQUASH campaign to oppose the criminalisation of squatting. He lives at Grow Heathrow; – a squatted community garden and autonomous community and social space.

[www.transitionheathrow.com](http://www.transitionheathrow.com)

## US Presidential Race an Excuse to Plant a Garden

by Erik Curren

With Mitt Romney chosen as the Republican challenger to President Obama, people who care about the environment and energy have low expectations for the coming campaign. While ice caps melt and oil wars loom, the best we can hope for is that we'll hear fewer right wing politicians talking about divisive social issues like abortion and gay marriage, and more about jobs and the economy.

Energy becomes a campaign issue only when gasoline increases in price. Romney has already started to hammer Obama about high gasoline prices, as if there was anything he or any president could do to bring pump prices down for U.S. drivers, when crude continues to rise on global oil markets.

The Washington establishment has a poor record dealing with energy depletion. Since U.S. oil production peaked in 1970, only one president, Jimmy Carter, has tried to address the issue of energy efficiency and renewables. After Ronald Reagan removed the solar panels from the White House roof it was back to business-as-usual for the fossil fuel industry.

The now-famous "Hirsch Report", warning that the U.S. had only a decade or two to prepare for a world oil peak and avoid the worst economic impact, has been largely ignored by the Departments of Energy, Homeland Security or Agriculture have taken no official positions on oil depletion. Only the U.S. military has shown any foresight on peak oil. All this is to say that you shouldn't expect much sense out of the presidential race on energy. Or much mention of the environment and climate change at all. But rather than getting

**"Only the US military has shown any foresight on peak oil"**

cynical, many Transitioners are instead taking matters into our own hands. Though the movement is still young here, American groups have made a good start, setting up projects and social enterprises across the country, from resilient health projects to food-growing initiatives. Transition has become



Brandon from Whitney Urban Farm, Pittsburgh (as featured in *In Transition 2.0*) Photo: Chris Condello

one of several movements connecting across the United States to help people gain more control over their daily lives, primarily by "going local." The shrinking economy which has put many people out of work, has made it hard for families to keep their homes and pay for food, energy and transportation.

So as many of us start to economise, we discover the pleasures of doing more things ourselves while getting to know the neighbours. Maybe it's not what most of us want. It's certainly not what most of us had

planned. But planting gardens, fixing our own porches and riding bicycles to work is helping more and more of us get back the self-respect, confidence and creativity that we had lost over decades of getting paid well to sit in front of screens in cubicles stacked on top of each other inside glass office towers.

Erik Curren is the publisher of the blog, *Transition Voice*. He co-founded *Transition Staunton Augusta* in December 2009. He is also partner in a solar energy development company.

# Europe in Crisis: Resilience

Resilience, the ability for eco-systems to weather shocks and adapt, is an underlying principle of Transition. But how resilient are our human communities when the storm hits?

The recent *In Transition 2.0* documentary showed how initiatives around the world have responded to crisis, including Japan (nuclear disaster) and New Zealand (earthquakes). Groups who had experience of working together were able to act when the infrastructure of people's lives (and their

wellbeing) were severely compromised.

As countries undergo shocks to their economic systems, the need to forge networks that can hold communities together becomes more pressing.

At the recent Transition Network "Peak Money" event in London, commentators revealed how the recession is playing out in Europe. From the political instability of Greece - where many are experiencing salary cuts of 30-40% - to the depression in Ireland (where the suicide rate has doubled since the banking crisis of 2008):

"There is almost a sense that we're back where we deserve to be," Phoebe Bright reported. "During the Celtic Tiger years we lost the run of ourselves. The thing that no-one really wants to consider is that we might not actually get back to 'normal'."

Filipa Pimentel, co-ordinator of the Transition National Hubs, however told another story. In her native Portugal people are responding to the crisis by pooling resources and "returning to the land". Recent offers by the government for small plots to rent in the peri-urban area of Lisbon were snapped up by many city dwellers. She has found that that people are now more open to new ideas:

"In Portugal the minimum wage is €450 per month and supermarket prices are the same

as in the UK. There has been an 89% rise in unemployment in the last three years and in many regions 25% of families are now below the poverty line. This isn't about whether collapse is going to happen or not, it is already here."

Transition is spreading fast in Portugal, partly due to its being based on the 'gift economy', and has a strong network of around 20 initiatives.

"Sharing experience and storytelling is key when facing an economic crisis. Adaptation can be difficult because it means rethinking and redesigning the basics: looking at the way we organize events, how we engage the community, how we finance ourselves.

"People with extremely low incomes, who are unemployed or pensioned, need to be able to participate. Being creative and experimental can solve limitations."

Filipa puts the Portuguese hub's success down to good communications and a cooperative spirit. When a method or practice works, the information is shared. For example the second Transition Initiation Course was co-organized by each participant.

"We called it Co-Responsibility. Apart from the costs of the trainers, everything had to be provided and set up by volunteers and the organisations involved.

The hostel provided the kitchen. People could camp and the classroom was built outside for free. Chairs were made out of straw bales and wooden pallets, pillows were sewn with old bed sheets and filled with straw. A volunteer "chef" prepared a menu and each participant brought ingredients. No money exchanged hands.

Workshops in poorer regions are now often based on sharing capacities. Films are free of charge. Food is exchanged among the community. Initiatives are creating partnerships with other organizations and sharing resources. In Aldeia das Amoreiras, the small rural village portrayed in the film, activities bring in people from other regions, financing not only the initiative, but also the elders of the village who teach outsiders traditional knowledge.

This mix of ancient skill share and modern communications demonstrates a potent alliance between people - whatever the future holds.

Filipa Pimentel is a Portuguese forester, living in Brussels. A member of *Portalegre em Transição*, she works as the International Coordinator of National Hubs and as the EU Liaison Officer, representing Transition Network.



Name badge at the first Spanish Transition conference, April 2012

Credit: Transición España



Growth monster from the documentary Crisis of Civilisation. Illustration by Lucca Benney.

## Nuclear vs. Community power

More effort is needed to unlock the dominant centralised energy model *by Alexis Rowell (Belsize) and Justin Kenrick (Portobello)*

With the news that Japan, Germany, Italy and Switzerland have either decided to phase out nuclear power or are close to doing so, and that two of Europe's largest power companies have pulled out of the UK nuclear programme, community groups in Britain are asking whether this might herald a new dawn for renewables.

Naresh Giangrande, one of the founders of the Transition movement, said: "This is a golden opportunity for a change of direction. Nuclear is a failed, expensive, centralised, dangerous, non-answer to our energy problems. We need to focus on energy efficiency and community-scale renewables."

"In March E-ON and nPower shocked the UK energy industry by announcing that they were pulling out of their nuclear projects because of difficulties in raising capital and because of the phase-out of nuclear in their home country, Germany. Meanwhile the cost of the two EDF nuclear sites planned for Somerset has already risen by 40% - and that's before building work has even begun! No nuclear power station has ever been built anywhere in the world without public subsidies. The Economist magazine, which had previously been a leading supporter of new nuclear, recently came out against it saying: "In liberalised energy markets, building nuclear power plants is no longer a

commercially feasible option: they are simply too expensive." A month before Chernobyl, The Economist famously described nuclear power as being as "safe as a chocolate factory". Since the Fukushima nuclear accident more than 100,000 people have been evacuated from their homes and may never be allowed to return.

The cost of cleaning up the Fukushima "chocolate factory" accident is now put at more than \$600bn. But the real fear is that another earthquake will hit the site with catastrophic global consequences.

**"building nuclear power plants is no longer a commercially feasible action: they are simply too expensive"**

After a visit to Fukushima, US Senator Ron Wyden, an expert on nuclear waste storage issues, said the situation was "worse than reported," with "spent fuel rods currently being stored in unsound structures" in an area that is "highly susceptible to earthquakes".

Possibly the best example of why new nuclear is neither cheap nor easy to build is the Areva reactor in Finland. The Olkiluoto-3 reactor was at least 37 months behind schedule after 42 months of construction, and some 50% over budget. There are thought to be hundreds of civil servants and energy company employees

on secondment working on new nuclear across multiple UK government departments. By contrast, the community energy team at DECC has been in place for less than a year and numbers fewer than ten people.

Many in the Transition movement believe not enough effort is going into unblocking obstacles to community energy and unlocking the dominant centralised energy model. Basically, central government finds it easier to deal with centralised energy and the Big Six energy companies than with community energy projects.

Transition Ham in south-west London came up with an innovative plan to put mini-hydro turbines on the Thames, but their Ham Hydro project has been stuck in planning for months. A Greener Leith and Transition Portobello scheme for a community wind turbine on Scottish Water land in Edinburgh recently hit a wall over who should pay in the unlikely event that the turbine falls over and hits the sewage plant below. These are the kind of pioneering community energy project where government could unlock doors - if it wanted.

One community group which has successfully picked its way through the minefield of government policy is Transition Town Lewes. Their renewable energy company, Ovesco, has covered the local Harveys brewery with solar panels and is now looking for other opportunities.

"We've just completed a government-funded assessment for a district heating system for the Mountfield Road area of Lewes," said Dirk Campbell, one of Ovesco's directors. "We're also installing 50 solar panels on the roof of Priory School and looking at buying one of the turbines in a wind farm off Newhaven."

Ovesco is a shining example of what can be done. But the scaling back of the Feed-In Tariff has stopped a lot of community PV projects dead in their tracks. And the rules surrounding grants and incentives are huge obstacles for most to cross. Community groups often need grant funding to get to viability. Then they need financial incentives like the FIT to get to generation. Most of all they need consistency and clarity from government over the long-term.

**The Feed-In Tariff has stopped a lot of community PV projects dead in their tracks.**

The Feed-In Tariff has stopped a lot of community PV projects dead in their tracks. And the rules surrounding grants and incentives are huge obstacles for most to cross. Community groups often need grant funding to get to viability. Then they need financial incentives like the FIT to get to generation. Most of all they need consistency and clarity from government over the long-term.

# fracking

The UK government recently gave the fracking industry the green light to drill for gas and oil in Britain. But is fracking a solution to high energy prices or a dangerous symptom of our addiction to growth at all costs? **Alexis Rowell** digs into the facts.

If you want to understand our dependence on oil, and the concept of Peak Oil, then look no further than the queues that built up in the UK just before Easter when a tanker driver strike was threatened. Or the gas fracking frenzy that has spread, like a malignant virus, from the Marcellus Shale in Pennsylvania to Balcombe, the Vale of Glamorgan and Blackpool.

If we were not utterly dependent on oil, drivers would not be prepared to spend hours in queues at the first sign of shortages. Similarly if we were not in desperate straits in terms of fossil fuel supplies, we would not be fracking.

Perhaps the most shocking thing about fracking in the UK context is that, according to the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC), there is probably no more than two years of UK gas supply in our shale rock formations. For that we are prepared to pump a deadly cocktail of chemicals into the ground and risk the contamination of water supplies, to provoke radioactive and methane leaks that threaten homes and make fracking as deadly in climate change terms as coal, and to increase seismic activity and disfigure the landscape. Make no mistake, whatever the players in the UK fracking industry say, those are the consequences of fracking in the US. And some of them – the 2011 earthquakes in Blackpool – have already arrived. All that for two years supply of gas!

The 2010 film *Gasland* powerfully documented the environmental damage done by the fracking industry in the US with graphic images of taps gushing flames because of gas pollution of water supplies. The latest news from the US is that mortgage companies are increasingly arguing that householders who

sign contracts to allow fracking on their land are breaking the terms of their loans.

US research suggests that far from being the environmentally friendly fuel source that the gas industry claims, fracked gas is actually higher carbon than coal because of methane leakage from drilling sites.

In May 2010 the US Council of Scientific Society Presidents wrote to President Obama urging great caution against a national policy of developing shale gas without a better scientific basis for the policy. This umbrella organisation which represents 1.4 million US scientists argued that, because of methane leakage, shale gas might actually aggravate global warming, rather than help to mitigate it.

In January 2011 a report by the UK's Tyndall Centre for Climate Change made the same argument based on research into US drilling sites. They also said there was no evidence of a switch from coal to gas in the US – they found it was being burned in addition to coal. Then came the first peer-reviewed study, by academics at Cornell University, which suggested that, because of methane releases caused during fracking, shale gas had a carbon footprint that could be as much as 20% higher than coal.

Methane is 40 times more lethal than CO<sub>2</sub> as a greenhouse gas. These death throes of the fossil fuel industry, if that is what the shale gas frenzy illustrates, almost certainly have the capacity to provoke runaway climate change many times over.

The regulatory authorities in the US have been left hopelessly flailing around in the wake of what has turned into the biggest minerals boom since the Gold Rush. US Administrations from 1980 onwards allowed fracking companies to claim tax credits. The Bush Administration excluded frackers from clean water legislation. Last year the US Environmental Protection Agency started a review of fracking, but it is not expected to report until 2014!

It may turn out that fracking is nothing but a huge Ponzi or pyramid scheme. In Poland, which was thought to be the most promising gas shale player in Europe because of its geological situation, estimates of reserves were recently downgraded by 85%. Meanwhile in the US, where fracking is most advanced, the industry is seeing high decline rates in drilled wells.

But even if there turns out to be far less shale gas and other unconventional fuels like deep sea oil or tar sands than the industry predicts, the scramble to dig out every last drop is clearly reducing the steepness of the downward slope of the peak oil graph. One of the founders of the Transition movement, Rob Hopkins, says: "I have definitely moved from assuming an impending peak oil-induced meltdown, to seeing a sustained economic crisis and resultant contraction, which also has to manage energy price volatility, while also trying to decarbonise itself with steadily less and less resources to be able to do so."

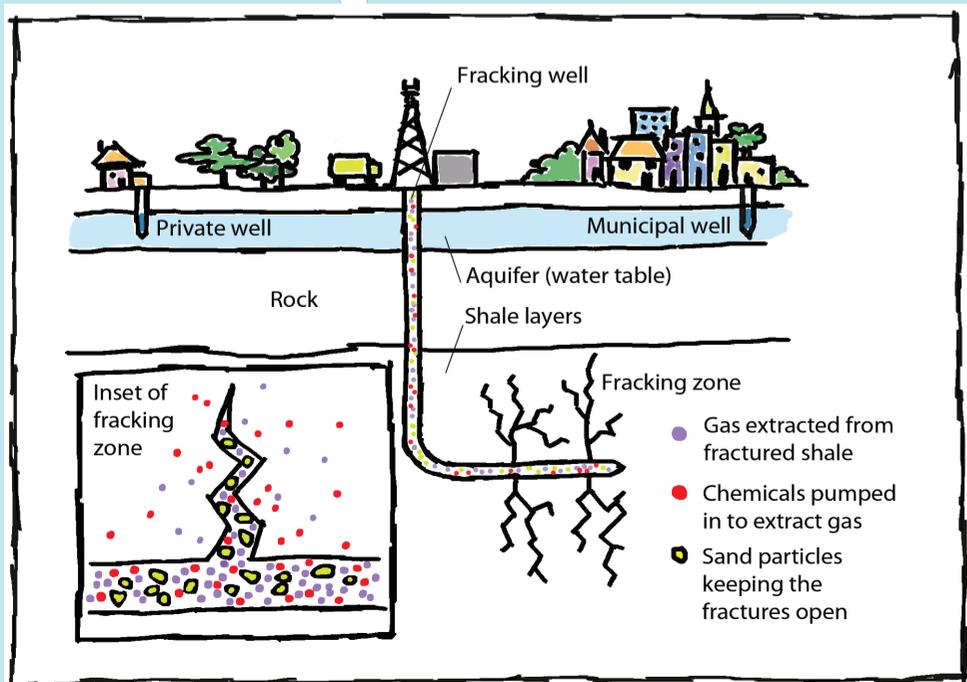
The Transition movement as a whole seems to be in something of a quandary about external threats like fracking. In 2011 Transition Cowbridge stopped fracking in its tracks in the Vale of Glamorgan (see box). But John Robottom of Transition Southport says: "My group is reluctant to get involved as a Transition group since we have always understood that Transition is not a campaigning movement. Furthermore, we do not want to be labelled/dismissed as just another environmental group since transition is much more."

So what do you do if a fracking company, or a Tesco hypermarket, or a motorway, come to your town? Clearly fracking has the potential to reduce the resilience of a local community. What happens next is a personal decision. It is also what Rob Hopkins has described as "the edge of Transition". Edge, in permaculture terms, is the most interesting, most fertile, most diverse part of any system!

## WHAT THE FRACK'S IT ALL ABOUT?

Shale gas is methane produced by blasting a combination of hot water, sand and chemicals several kilometres below ground into sedimentary rock containing organic matter. Hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking", breaks up the rock, floods it with water and releases tiny trapped bubbles of natural gas which are pumped to the surface.

Fracking isn't new – it was invented in the US in the early 20th century. But back then it was a complicated and expensive process by comparison with the extraction of conventional fossil fuels. What's different now is that: a) prices for fossil fuels are much higher; b) industrialised economies use a lot more gas; and c) it's expensive to liquefy someone else's gas and ship it round the world.



## Community 1 - Frackers 0

The campaign to block fracking in the Vale of Glamorgan began when Louise Evans, the owner of a caravan park, started "Vale Says No". Transition Cowbridge and Transition Llanwit got on board to help raise awareness. Coastal Oil & Gas were forced to pull their planning application because they had missed a house within 100m of their planned drill site. By the time the time they came back the community was prepared.

Transition Cowbridge organised a public meeting in the Town Hall, a screening of *Gasland* and protests outside. Councillors spoke against fracking. The coup de grace was delivered by Welsh Water who said they couldn't guarantee remedial work if fracking contaminated the water supply. The application was thrown out and a public inquiry is now underway. (May – check)

In a blog post Michaela, Rob and Dinky of Transition Cowbridge said: "By supporting the Vale Says No campaign, Transition not only helped to quickly spread the issue to a much wider audience but also broaden the argument to one that incorporated the bigger picture of long term community happiness and resilience. And it was this level-headed approach that gave the campaign a real sense of credibility and one that helped convince the local planning committee to vote unanimously against the application."



Shaun Chamberlin at Ways With Words literature festival at Darrington Hall by Maria Elvorth.

# people

In the first in our series of conversations with key thinkers and activists within the Transition movement, Charlotte Du Cann talks with Shaun Chamberlin about cultural stories, collaboration and the future.

In 2000 Shaun Chamberlin, a student of philosophy, received an email from his father out of the blue: By the way that future you were expecting isn't going to happen. Here's a link showing how the next decade is going to be all about resource wars and energy depletion. Just thought you ought to know, hope you're well ...

It was, he says, his 'peak oil moment'. The moment he started to immerse himself in what was then an obscure subject. Six years later, on a course at Schumacher College called *Life After Oil*, he met the environmental and alternative economics thinker, David Fleming, whom he would work alongside until Fleming's death in 2010.

He also met Rob Hopkins, who soon commissioned him to write a report on the UK climate/energy crisis that became the book, *The Transition Timeline*.

"Many communities were finding it difficult to produce their local Energy Descent Action Plan (on which Transition is based)," he told me. "They knew about their local resources and skills, but needed help understanding the big scale things that were likely to affect them, such as climate change or UK food supply or national policy. How

can we plan for our communities if we don't know the context we are moving into? Without the bigger picture how can we know what we are grappling with?"

At the start most Transition initiatives immerse themselves in practical projects or awareness raising. The change few people anticipate is the way we think and speak about the world:

"What ties everything together and makes meaning are our cultural stories. For the book I talked to hundreds of people and found that

**"Don't ask what the world needs, ask what makes you come alive and go do that, because the world needs people who come alive"**

Howard Thurman

the dominant narratives of our future fell into three categories: business as usual (nothing really changes), doom of one kind or another (our time is up) and the myth of progress (we are the most advanced society ever known and our manifest destiny leads to some perfect Star Trek future).

"It's easy to see why people are most drawn to this last story, Technotopia. The problem is the reality doesn't bear it out. This Most Advanced Culture Ever has higher levels of depression and inequality than ever and is destroying the ecological systems that support

everything that is alive on the planet, so it's hard to justify the idea we are moving towards a better future.

"So we thought what we needed was another positive narrative about the future which is just as embedded as the other stories in our everyday culture, but one that reflects scientific evidence and the reality of what is happening in our world. A Transition vision. That's what the book is about."

Much of Shaun's own story is set within this fourth narrative. As well as co-founding Transition Town Kingston (TTK) in south-west London, he has contributed chapters to several books, served as an advisor to the Department of Energy and Climate Change, co-authored the latest report from the All Party Parliamentary Group on Peak Oil and Gas, and helped both to edit Mark Boyle's upcoming *The Moneyless Manifesto* and bring David Fleming's encyclopedic *Lean Logic* into print.

Fleming also invented a system known as Tradable Energy Quotas (TEQs), a rationing scheme that works to ensure energy for all in times of scarcity. Subtle and clever in its design, Shaun explained, but easy to use (much like an Oyster card).

"It would guarantee that we meet our emission reductions and most importantly support the active co-operation of all the energy users in a society in rapidly reducing their reliance on fossil fuels. David once said: large scale problems like climate change and peak oil do not

require large scale solutions; they require small scale solutions within a large scale framework.

Emissions ultimately come from people's lifestyles, so you could have a perfect global agreement, but if no one actually acted on the local level, nothing would happen. What you need is a framework that stimulates and supports that local action in

**"Large scale problems like climate change and peak oil do not require large scale solutions, they require small scale solutions within a large scale framework"**

David Fleming

a fair way. TEQs provides that framework and sense of common purpose."

I'm aware the conversation has shifted radically since I first met Shaun when he was the key speaker at an event organised by our local Transition group in Suffolk. We are now talking far more about the collective picture: the economic system, activist movements that work alongside Transition, like Occupy, and land rights co-operatives. But most of all about how this shift brings us all together as people:

"Rob Newman, the comic, once told me that the worst possible thing is feeling alone with the apocalypse. It causes you to doubt your sanity and slip into a doom mindset. As

soon as you start actually doing something and facing reality, you realise you are not alone and there are people working world-wide for a better future.

"Transition doesn't work in isolation. It's part of an enormous movement that Paul Hawken once described as the earth's immune system rising up to protect itself. What Transition does uniquely well within that is its outreach role, the way it can share that fourth, hopeful, narrative. It meets people where they are at and exposes them to ideas that maybe they haven't come across before.

"One thing we need to challenge is the idealisation of financial independence in our culture. You are never truly independent, because your food and your services are still produced by someone, it's just someone you don't meet or care about. The Green Movement has its own version of this idealised independence, called self-sufficiency.

"What makes us happy though is interdependence, and the loneliness that pervades modern culture is in great part because people are 'financially independent'. If they fall out with someone they can just pay someone else instead. It's why community building often fails: we think if we go along every Tuesday at 7pm and do community it will create one. It doesn't work like that."

So our conversation centred on what interdependence might look like, what TTK has achieved in the last 5 years, but mostly about the

# reviews

future. "What is the ultimate time line?" I asked him. Shaun laughed. "I guess there's a difference between what I see is the most likely scenario and the one I'm working for."

"As Paul Hawken said, 'If you look at the science about what is happening on earth and aren't pessimistic, you don't understand the data. But if you meet the people who are working to restore this earth and the lives of the poor, and you aren't optimistic, you haven't got a pulse. What I see everywhere in the world are ordinary people

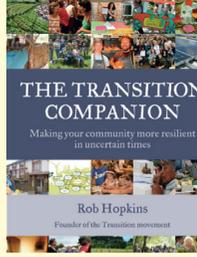
willing to confront despair, power, and incalculable odds in order to restore some semblance of grace, justice and beauty to this world.'

"I think that sums it up: scientifically speaking, it's not pretty, but if you look at the response of that 'immune system' it is deeply inspiring. Spiritually speaking, I believe I chose on some level to come into history at this particular juncture, to be what I believe in, to try and make things better, and be the most loving, hopeful and inspiring I can be and ultimately

none of the stuff that is going on in the world stops me doing that, so in that way it's a wonderful time to be alive."

That's dark optimism for you.

Shaun Chamberlin is the author of *The Transition Timeline* (Green Books) and runs the not-for-profit public interest research blog, [www.DarkOptimism.org](http://www.DarkOptimism.org), working with a wide network of friends and partners nationally and internationally. For more info on TEQs: [www.teqs.net](http://www.teqs.net)



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## Sacred Economics by Charles Eisenstein

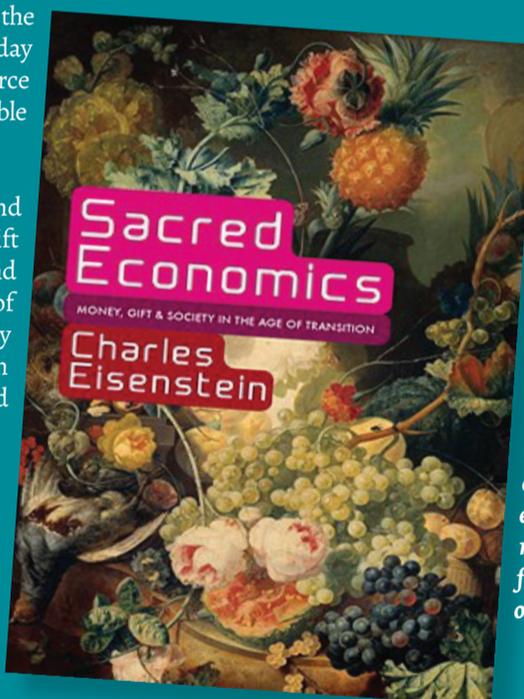
Review by Biff Vernon (Louth)

I was a little wary of the title 'Sacred Economics'; was it to be biblical, mystical or about the financing of rainbow-coloured pyramids? No worries. This book helps construct a solid foundation to the 'New Economics' movement, challenging the conventional orthodoxy, providing practical tools for critical thinking and suggesting realistic approaches to enable the inevitable transition from where we are to where we must be.

Eisenstein sets his scene by reminding us that "Three or four thousand years ago the gods began a migration from the lakes, forests, rivers and mountains into the sky, becoming the imperial overlords of nature rather than its essence. As divinity separated from nature, so also it became unholy to involve oneself too deeply in the affairs of the world." He soon brings us down to earth by showing how "money today is an abstraction, resembling the divine; it is the invisible, immortal force that surrounds and steers all things, omnipotent and limitless, the invisible hand that makes the world go round".

The myth that money is derived from a system of barter is dismissed and we learn rather that money developed to facilitate the long-established gift economy. Money as a medium of exchange was the primary purpose and needs to be re-established, with money's secondary purpose as a store of value being demoted. We may be able to do almost anything with money but do we want it to be the exclusive means, so that without it we can do almost nothing? The trend towards monetising household goods and services that once were given freely needs to be reversed.

Eisenstein asks whether we can create an economic system that liberates, celebrates and rewards the innate urge to give; a system that records flow, not accumulation; creating and not owning; giving and not having. It is the idea of gift which forms a central and recurring theme to the book, from the historical origins of money, the philosophical underpinning of our economic systems, to the practical ways in which gifting becomes the basis of monetary transaction in the future we need.

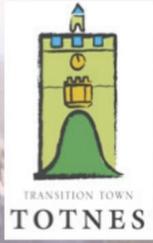


In a series of challenges to the economic orthodoxy he presents policies on negative interest, social and environmental costs, a gift culture, degrowth and localisation. Sacred Economics is an important addition to the growing genre of books whose authors are voicing humanity's predicament but declaring that all is not yet lost. It parallels the late David Fleming's Lean Logic in its intertwining of history, philosophy and practical tools and prescriptions for the necessary transition. Richard Heinberg's End of Growth, Tim Jackson's Prosperity without Growth, the series of books from the Transition Network, the continuing work of the New Economics Foundation, and many other authors and organisations all testify to the recognition that the way humanity orders its economic affairs imperils its very existence, yet there are ways forward to preserve what is best about ourselves.

For sure, there are nits to be picked and some economists will declare that the author was wearing rose-tinted spectacles at times, but Charles Eisenstein has more than earned his place amongst the New Economists. True to form, Sacred Economics is published by Evolver Editions and available free online from The Reality Sandwich under the Creative Commons. This is not a short book, at over 450 pages, but it is eloquently written, full of fascinating insights, not least in the footnotes, balancing skilfully our perilous position with enough hope and ideas to motivate the reader to join in creating a better world.

*Biff Vernon started environmental campaigning in the early 1970s, stood for the Green Party in the 1979 general election, spent the next three decades teaching and now makes nice things from oak and glass, grows vegetables and flowers in Lincolnshire, and is attempting to save the planet one Facebook post at a time.*

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# t a l k b a c k

## Goodbye supermarkets

by Adrienne Campbell (Lewes)

A few years ago, when Transition Town Lewes was just starting up, I had tea with a local historian, Colin Brent. Colin told me that, in Victorian times, almost everything was owned by, and for, Lewes people. As well as the printing presses, bus companies, prisons and cobblers, virtually all the food eaten in Lewes was grown locally.

Documents from that time show that, with a population half the current size, we had fifteen bakers, twenty butchers, a couple of dozen greengrocers and a plethora of corner shops. Far from the meagre diet we imagine, photographs show an abundance of fresh food in season. The fields were well cultivated with a wide range of local grains and vegetables, and the weekly markets and even back gardens heaved with livestock, while fish were brought up from the fishing boats at Newhaven.

Such a rich food economy meant that many people made a living from food, from the farmers, butchers, millers and shopkeepers, to the cheese makers, delivery boys and brewers (20 in Lewes alone!) Life was based on a complex web of relationships between people and the land they inhabited.

I'm not saying that life was necessarily easy, just that it was based on a complex web of relationships between people and the land they inhabited locally.

### The broken web

A century on, and all that web has gone. Today, in Lewes, we spend about fifty million pounds a year on food and drink and most of that – at least forty million – is spent in our three supermarkets: Tesco, Waitrose and Aldi.

In those hundred years - and especially the last fifty years since I was born - we've managed to let all this natural capital be diverted into the hands of a few multinational corporations.

Our local food economies have dried up; local money no longer circulates around and about the town, building wealth and relationships as it goes.

A tenner spent locally multiplies many times over as it circulates. Spent in a supermarket, that tenner goes straight out of town and into the hands of Tesco and co, and its shareholders.

As a direct result, the local economy is struggling. There are no more bakers in Lewes. We have one greengrocer, at the top of town where the rents are affordable, and only two butchers are left. Just in the last five years, according to the new economics foundation, Lewes has gone from being a 'home town' with a wide mix of independent shops supporting a strong local economy, to a borderline clone town. The independent shops we once were so proud of are now either chains or strange chi-chi shops selling expensive string, as the joke goes round here.

### The myths of convenience

My sense is that most people don't realise, or don't want to realise, that shopping in their local supermarket could wreak such havoc on their community. They would rather believe it's more convenient, and cheaper. But that's just one of the myths perpetuated by supermarkets in their relentless marketing.

While individual items are often cheaper in supermarkets than in local shops, once you add in to the shopping basket the convenience food, comfort food and other items we think we need – including cleaning and beauty products – you end up spending far more in supermarkets than elsewhere. I was shocked recently to discover that the average weekly supermarket spend is about £60 a head; I spend half that shopping locally, and we eat only organically.

Additionally, those people who don't much like shopping can design easy ways of avoiding the supermarkets, thus busting the convenience myth. For instance, in

our household, we get wholefoods and minimal toiletries delivered in bulk four times a year, then either buy the fresh stuff in the weekly market, or grow it. Simple!

It's hard to imagine how we can stop supermarkets becoming ever more powerful. A couple of years ago my friend Marina and I tried to prevent our local Tesco from expanding by 50% in size. Despite our planning committee's desire to block the expansion, knowing well that such a move would kill off more local shops, despite a petition of 1,000 people, and several days sifting through papers in the planning department, the committee gave in to Tesco, probably clearly realising

**"In just 5 years Lewes has gone from being a 'home town' to a borderline clone town"**

it would never be able to stand up against Tesco's lawyers.

Supermarkets up and down the country simply landbank when faced with opposition, only to wear down their opponents with fresh waves of documented arguments. Our planning laws, concluded government advisor Mary Portas recently, are simply unable to protect our high streets from such opportunism.

### Extracting from the commons

My biggest gripe about supermarkets is that they monetarise our natural resources and externalise the problems caused by that act. Corporations by their nature seek to maximise profits above all other concerns, even Waitrose, who just make it seem cleaner. That's their job.

They seek to extract as much of our commons as they can get away with – undermining healthy soil with chemical farming methods; eroding the biodiversity that allows our honeybees to live in good health to pollinate our food; blasting our quiet countryside with their noisy machines. We can no longer bank

on a healthy gene pool for our vegetables, fresh river water and full aquifers, or even fresh air for our children to breathe. To add insult, we even have to pay for that loss of health and wellbeing through our taxes.

It's a complex argument made beautifully in an extraordinary new book called Sacred Economics by American philosopher Charles Eisenstein.

Due to this outrageous lack of caretaking by these corporations - our politicians standing by, impotently - a food crisis seems both inevitable and imminent.

At the same time, there are some small, glimmering signs that we are slowly coming to our senses. Food projects are springing up all over the country, often in transition towns.

Here in Transition Town Lewes, we started a food market nearly two years ago, with the help of the District Council. Our weekly market now has 20 regular stallholders, each of them earning a modest living; some of them only exist because of

the market.

And alongside the 'parallel public infrastructure' that transition towns do so well, there is a growing number of people who are just leaving supermarkets behind. I'm in my sixth month of not walking into a supermarket and I'm not alone - a recent survey in Transition Town Lewes shows a number of others doing the same.

Some people say that as fossil fuels become more expensive, the globalised food system will be less affordable, and localisation of food inevitable.

In the meantime, we each have it in our power to hasten the demise of the supermarkets; we have created them through consumer choice, and we can all of us, one meal at a time – simply and joyfully – choose to eat differently!

*Adrienne Campbell helped start Transition Town Lewes in September 2006 and launch the Lewes Pound. She is a trained facilitative leader and a founder of Social Reporter.*

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# Welsh Independence

by Ann Owen (Bro Dyfi)



You cannot live in Wales for any length of time and not be aware of the deep cultural wounds this country has suffered under the occupation of the English.

These hurts turn out to be big obstacles in the path of Transition. The number of native Welsh speakers that come to our events can be counted on one hand, despite all the bilingual posters and leaflets.

There are plenty of Welsh activists, but they are too busy preserving and promoting Welsh culture and campaigning for an independent Wales to be concerning themselves with yet another English incomer thing, such as Transition.

It is more than twenty years ago since I arrived in the green valleys of Wales. I've lived here longer than in my home country of Belgium. I married a Welshman and both my kids were born here, but I will always remain an outsider or *dynes dieithr*. It is not that Welsh people are unfriendly, far from it.

But there is a certain guardedness, a sideways glance from dark eyes under bushy eyebrows and polite words spoken in a soft, gentle voice: "So you like it here?" It is the response of an invaded people, who are having to fight to keep their

language and culture alive.

Welsh might now be the first language in all but a few primary schools across the Welsh speaking parts of Wales, but to achieve that took quite a struggle. We need to look at that history in order to negotiate the present:

In 1847 a parliamentary report was published which concluded that education in Wales was inadequate, that the Welsh were ignorant, lazy and immoral and that the main causes were the widespread use of the Welsh language and Nonconformism.

In some schools the cruel practice of the "Welsh Not" humiliated and punished children overheard speaking their native language.

My husband remembers how his dad told him of his great grandfather, who used to walk up a hill to a large boulder where his nonconformist congregation would have visions of angels (you can still find these boulders, most them broken or destroyed by dynamite, where the Anglican clergy took offence at the "pagan" practices of the Welsh Nonconformist Chapels).

Cultural genocide still takes place all over the world. It happens

by denying people their language, their ethnic identities, their religion. It happens by systematic rape and by forceful removal from ancestral lands. It happens by mass immigration from occupying nations and by dismissal of the native cultural values as "inferior". And even when the wrongs are in the past, it is rare to see any statements of culpability, of regret and apology, even rarer still to see any compensation made to those who have been wronged. Yet this is where healing starts.

Many Welsh people still see themselves as a Socialist country under English Tory occupation. The Welsh Independence movement has certainly been given new hope by the Welsh referendum last spring and recent developments in Scotland.

I think nothing short of independence and a profound apology from the English monarch will bring some form of closure and allow this nation to move forward. In Transition training, we advise people to find out which issues are alive in that community and then see if those can be incorporated in the journey. Maybe it is now time for the Transition movement in

Wales to speak out in favour of Welsh Independence and thus put itself where the people are.

We cannot continue to operate as if politics don't exist, when it is clear that without questioning the political situation in Wales, we are merely re-arranging deckchairs. It would be as if some well meaning people in South Africa had tried to create equality without addressing apartheid.

As the majority of "transitionistas" in Wales are English incomers, this might prove to be a difficult and humbling process, especially because of the lack of awareness regarding the strength of Welsh sentiment.

Sure, it would set us apart from the movement in England, where the choice has been made not to engage in politics. But as the world economic situation worsens and the British coalition government pushes through regressive, ideologically motivated policies that make the poorest bear the biggest burden, at which point do we show our colours?

When we lose our libraries, our Sure Start playgroups and youth clubs, when the quality of education and health provision depends on how much you can pay, when

pensions shrink and unemployment grows and all the while the fat cats purr in their tax havens, at which point do we draw a line? In Wales, we do not need to suffer this downhill slide. Never in a month of Sundays will the conservatives gain enough votes in an independent Wales to be more than a fringe party.

We owe it to the memory of people like Aneurin Bevan, whose vision gave us the NHS, not to allow it to be dismantled in his home country.

With time now running out, we haven't got 10 or 20 years; this is the 11th hour and we desperately need to gather more momentum if we hope to create the necessary resilience to weather the storms we can now see brewing on the horizon. Let's get organised!

*Ann Owen is a Flemish Belgian national living in Wales. She is a market gardener, Transition trainer and activist, and a regular contributor on the Social Reporting project.*

## Love means letting go of flying

by Chris Hull (Norwich)



I fell in love with a City, located 3000 miles from home, and I became addicted. Each time I left my other place, I longed to go back. I felt an immediate sense of aliveness and vibrancy on arriving, and each time I returned home to Norwich I felt empty again. Something was missing.

Over a period of years, this resonance with my other home was so strong that I began to wonder

whether I really belonged there. The thought of upping sticks passed through me more than once, but tugging against it were all my family and friends and campaigning connections in Norwich. After a process of examining what it was that attracted me, I began to realise what was going on.

Not long after this in 2005 I was unexpectedly elected as a Green Party County Councillor, and with it a whole set of new responsibilities and transparency of values kicked in. By this time the awareness of flying in aeroplanes as a destructive pastime had really taken hold - and so now I was faced with another dilemma. Having let go of the idea of moving home and country, and promising myself I could survive and keep my attachment going by annual visits, I was now faced with the shame of knowing how destructive such visits would be, given the necessity of travel by air.

Here I need to digress a little. Volumes have been written on the ifs and buts of flying, some of it sound, and some of it highly misleading. The essence of air travel is speed and distance - that's the whole point of it. Anything travelling at high speed and over a long distance will use extremely large amounts of energy.

Try pushing a car. Then try pushing a jumbo jet. Then imagine this jet being propelled at 500 m.p.h. for hundreds or thousands of miles. Actually in my case, travelling to my special place involves, per person, about 3.5 tons of emitted CO<sub>2</sub>. So getting on this aeroplane and traveling for about 6 hours each way, I, personally would be responsible for emitting the same amount of CO<sub>2</sub> as my house now emits in 7 years. To make matters even worse (for my conscience), there is something called the 'forcing factor' when emissions are made at high altitude

- which roughly translated means that carbon emitted at altitude, has 2.7 times the effect as that same emission would have on the ground. Put another way, this one trip would involve more carbon emissions than an average Tanzanian would emit in their entire lifetime.

And when it is widely regarded that a truly sustainable, long term, per person per year emission rating is 1.1 tons, there really was no way I was going to continue my addiction. So then began the painful process of letting go of my attachment to this place, and of the dear friends I had made there. Actually, I still feel connected with my friends, thanks to the wonders of e-mail and Skype. The whole process has helped me realise just how difficult it is for us as individuals to kick the carbon habit, and how, over time, our lives have become dependent to such a degree on using energy and carbon. It wasn't exactly like

coming off an addiction to ice-cream, more like coming out of a relationship. Sometimes I still feel that pang to impulsively arrange a trip but then I really do get that image of struggling sub-Saharan people in drought areas, partially brought about by our addiction to carbon and guzzling energy (no co-incidence that all the major NGOs working in those areas campaign vigorously on climate change issues).

Oh yes, and I've grown to really appreciate Norwich too!

My special place, by the way, is Boston - that's Massachusetts, not Lincolnshire.

*Chris has been active in development campaigning issues since the age of 15. Elected as a Green Party County Councillor in 2005 and a founder member of Transition Norwich and Norwich Farmshare, he is also a keen cyclist and dance improviser.*



## Our extended spring

by Dorothea Leber (Forest Row)

May has arrived, following a rainy and cold April, and it is amazing to see how little the outdoor vegetables have grown in the past month. As a result, the leafy vegetables are thriving for longer and their flowers appearing later. This extended spring is therefore a great opportunity for us to get our fill of fresh greens, with all the blood cleansing effects they have to offer us.

Edible weeds (which are also nutritious herbs) are in abundance and can be an important part of this season's diet. Nettles are a rich source of iron and are also a great tonic and blood cleanser, and can be used in teas, soups or mixed into spinach. Then there are dandelion leaves, which can make fantastic salads mixed with grated scorzonera or carrots. Cleavers (also known as goose grass, or galium aparine) are a great lymphatic cleanser, and chick weed (or *Stellaria media*) is a wonderful skin herb.

One of my favourite ways to enjoy the green leaves of the spring and early summer weeds is to make a green dressing. If you have a blender, try mixing the following: water, cold pressed oil, (3-4 parts water to 1 part oil), lemon juice (or cider vinegar), a little salt, and lots of chick weed, nettles, dandelion leaves, cleavers, etc. Blend everything together well and enjoy it with your salads.

When the flowers do arrive on these leafy green vegetables, they too can be a delicious addition to the table, not least because as soon as a plant starts to flower, that is where most of its energy will be. Mizuna has very tasty flowering shoots for example; rocket flowers are an exquisite mixture of honey and the flavour of the rocket leaves; and wild garlic flowers are a delicious, (if potent!), salad ingredient.

Elsewhere in the garden, the tomatoes are being planted in the greenhouses, the lettuces (also in the greenhouses) are at their best prior to the full heat of summer, and we are looking forward to harvesting the kohlrabi once it gets a little warmer. I love the sweet flavour of the kohlrabi, which is also often a big hit with children. I have noticed too that our huge stock of dried apple rings from last year's crop has nearly run out – a sure sign that summer isn't far away (and that I may have to dry many more of them this year!).

*Dorothea Leber is the head gardener at the Michael Hall Steiner School in Forest Row, East Sussex. She tends the 2 1/2 acre biodynamic walled garden, selling produce from the garden to staff and families at the school, as well as to local green grocers.*



Dorothea's garden at Michael Hall Steiner School, Forest Row



Feeding the Five Thousand in Trafalgar Square, London, 2011

# Farmers are joining the glean revolution

Millions of tonnes of fresh fruit and vegetables are wasted on UK farms every year, either because they fail to meet the supermarkets' strict cosmetic standards or because of overproduction.

With more than 5.8 million people living in food poverty in the UK, this colossal amount of wasted food is a scandal. At the same time, it is an environmental liability, putting unnecessary pressure on scarce resources and needlessly adding to global greenhouse gas emissions. It is however, also a massive opportunity.

The number of people who live in deep poverty and cannot afford a decent diet is on the rise in the UK and food redistribution charities have been struggling to cope with the massively increased demands on their services. The Trussell Trust,

for example, fed 41,000 people in 2009-10 and expects to feed over 100,000 in 2011-12.

While supermarkets and manufacturers are increasingly aware that donating surplus is better than disposing of it, food redistribution charities like FareShare are still desperate for more fresh fruit and vegetables to supplement the manufactured foods they have traditionally accessed.

The ancient practice of 'gleaning' provides a sensible solution to this problem. Traditionally, the practice consisted of gathering any remaining crop left in the fields after harvest. In the modern version of gleaning, tonnes of unwanted cabbages are saved in a single day and donated to redistribution charities. Extensive gleaning networks already exist in the USA but until recently no one has been

accessing the huge quantities of surplus produce on British farms.

The new initiative, Gleaning Network UK, is now working to plug this gap.

Organised by Tristram Stuart and the food waste campaign Feeding the 5000 ([www.feeding5k.org](http://www.feeding5k.org)), Gleaning Network UK is appealing to farmers across the country to allow volunteer 'gleaners' to harvest their unwanted produce for charity.

The Network is building up a database of hundreds of volunteers and willing farmers keen to participate in the scheme, and has already organised a number of gleaning days. Several tonnes of produce – enough for thousands of meals – have so far been saved in Kent, Sussex, and Lincolnshire, and new gleaning groups are being formed in Manchester and Bristol. Apples, kale, cauliflowers, red, white and savoy cabbages have been



Food pages edited by Tamzin Pinkerton

Photo: Adrian Brooks / Imagewise

among the excellent British produce saved from waste by the Gleaning Network UK since its initiation.

A small part of this gleaned produce was used to cook up a massive curry for the Feeding the 5000 event in London's Trafalgar Square in November 2011, providing a free lunch for five thousand people made entirely out of fresh ingredients that would have otherwise been wasted.

Feeding the 5000 events are now being orchestrated in other cities in the UK and internationally, the most recent of which was staged in Bristol's College Green on the 12th of May 2012, hosted by FareShare SouthWest in collaboration with a range of charities. More Feeding the 5000 events are planned in Manchester and Paris later in 2012 with a range of local organisations. Who said there's no such thing as a free lunch?!

*Tristram Stuart is an environmental campaigner and author of the book Waste: Uncovering the global food scandal (Penguin, 2009).*

*He is the winner of the international environmental award, The Sophie Prize 2011, for his fight against food waste.*



Greg Pilley of the Stroud Brewery racking beer

## Handmade brewery

by Tamzin Pinkerton (Forest Row)

The award-winning Stroud Brewery produces premium cask ale and a range of organic and vegan bottled beers using Cotswald grown malt and whole hops.

Providing support for the local economy is an important part of how the Brewery is run, not just by sourcing local ingredients, but also by working with local suppliers and choosing to sell their products through independent outlets. Greg Pilley, the Brewery's founder, tells us how it grew from an idea to a thriving local business.

### How did the idea emerge?

I have been interested in brewing beer since my University days. After moving to Stroud, my wife and I became actively involved in founding Stroud Community Agriculture, a community supported agriculture farm. One day, whilst weeding on a volunteer work day, I got chatting to a good friend about the potential for a brewery in Stroud. From that moment I was possessed! The vision was set.

### How did you raise funds?

A proportion came from my own savings, some from a local community loan scheme (where I paid 8% interest, and the loan was left in for 3 years), and the remainder came from a shareholder, (a very supportive local business owner), who now owns 25% of the businesses.

### Were there any other food projects that were an important influence for the brewery?

My involvement with local food through the Soil Association, and my continued work as a freelance adviser to community local food projects is always an influence on the brewery. We are committed to local sourcing (ingredients and finance), and we will never sell our products through the supermarkets. We want to see our business thrive on the relationships it builds.

### How is the business structured?

We are a company limited by shares. There are 3 shareholders:

myself, my partner Jade, and the external funder.

### In what ways does the brewery interact with other local businesses?

We supply spent grains to several local farms; we source all our malt from within 15 miles; we use local ingredients for our brewery events (cheese, bread etc); we work with 35-50 local pubs; we work in partnership with several other businesses; and we sell local beer.

### What advice would you pass on to others hoping to set up a similar business?

Really look into the need/demand for your product/service. Draw up a detailed business plan (even if you don't stick to it) and try to build an accurate financial model. Be realistic about the money you need and are likely to make. Think about the worst and the middle case scenarios, and aim somewhere in between. Don't budget on the best possible outcome – if it happens it's a bonus!

*Tamzin Pinkerton is a writer and author of Local Food: How to Make it Happen in Your Community, the first in a series of Transition books. She lives in Forest Row, East Sussex and is a passionate supporter of local, organic food.*



Mark and Dano at the Bungay Library Community Garden. Picture by Charlotte Du Cann

## Getting Medicine Plants into Bed

by Mark Watson (Bungay)

Transition is all about building community resilience through the relocalisation of energy and resources. One of our tasks in this process is to connect with the local plants which provide us with food, drink, textiles and building materials, as well as stabilize soils, capture carbon and provide nectar for essential pollinators. Plants are also peerless companions and healers.

Bungay Library Community Garden was originally designed by the Suffolk initiative, Sustainable Bungay, to inspire this reconnection. It was created in collaboration with local builders, gardeners, librarians and plant lovers. Work began after a permaculture course with Graham Burnett and an unloved, bare space was transformed into a flourishing garden of flowers, herbs and apple trees.

Each year the central bed takes a theme. In 2011 it was plants for bees and butterflies. This year it's plants as medicine. Already the garden is resplendent with foxglove, plantain, vervain, greater celandine, sage, thyme, valerian, elecampane, nettle, dandelion and burdock and more!

Alongside the medicine bed, the initiative runs monthly Plants for Life talks, walks and workshops on topics ranging from Wild 'Weeds' to Hedgerow Medicine. One of the speakers, medical herbalist-in-Transition Dan Wheels, plans to set up a local Community Supported Herbal Medicine scheme "to encourage subscription-based healthcare" where people participate in growing and learning about medicinal herbs.

Transition Belsize in North London has also created a medicine bed in their adopted plot at the Royal Free hospital. They are planting fruit trees and building raised beds, so that the children at the hospital primary school can learn to grow food:

"We want to encourage staff and children in the hospital to visit the garden," explains organiser Sarah Nicholl. "We'll have interesting signs so people can get to know the plants and what they're good for."

"It's all about reconnecting with nature. Let's really look at those thistles, see them pulling up the nitrogen and breaking up that clay ground."

What plants are edible? Medicinal? Food. Medicine. Inspiration. Plants are the multi-taskers par excellence, never doing just one thing, always surprising and mysterious. Let's make friends with them.

*Mark Watson is part of Sustainable Bungay's core group and a Transition Social Reporter. He gives talks, walks and workshops on wild and medicinal plants and organises Plants for Life 2012 events.*

*Mark and Dano at the Bungay Library Community Garden. Picture by Charlotte Du Cann*



# practical

## Draught busting

by Sarah Nicholl (Belsize)

As a member of the Transition Belsize Draught Busting team, Sarah Nicholl helps to run hands-on Draught Busting Workshops to show residents how to inexpensively draught proof their windows and doors. This not only saves energy and CO2 and improves the overall comfort of their homes, it also encourages re-skilling by passing on useful, practical DIY skills.

Some of the people who attend the workshops arrive with a very rusty selection of DIY skills, which simply need a little oiling and reviving by way of hands-on practice.

For others however, holding a hammer is an entirely new experience, and being asked to knock nails through draught proofing strips into window frames, whilst simultaneously trying to avoid smashing or cracking the glass panes, can initially prove to be quite a challenge! By contrast others are far more gung ho and confident, though, as their random swiping at nails and cracking of paintwork betrays, they're not necessarily always as adept or accurate as first appearances might suggest.

With a little practice and encouragement almost everyone finds the process of hammering in nails and fitting the products, fun, liberating and just a little bit addictive. This often makes me

wonder if we recognise the process of using a hammer as an instinctive and primeval skill – a skill that is deeply imprinted within our being. And that by reviving this skill we're not only reconnecting with another aspect of our creativity and dexterity, but also with an innate desire to crash, bang and wallop?

As facilitators we're certainly not experts, we've just had a bit more practice (perhaps about 800 windows, give or take!) and many of the people who attend the workshops have much more DIY experience than we do. In particular though, we are passionate about helping to enable others. It's a reciprocal process because everyone at the workshop has something to offer, something to share – be it useful tips and ideas for saving energy and keeping warm, such as lining curtains with bubble wrap, to experiences of which products work well and which ones don't.

We also encourage everyone attending a workshop to help continue the flow of useful skills and collaboration by sharing newly learnt skills and ideas with their friends and neighbours.

Beyond the benefits of honing basic DIY skills, there's also a huge sense of satisfaction gained from taking the time to do something well, to feel a sense of accomplishment in having completed a task whilst also



Draughtbusting team at work. Original Photo by Sarah Nicholl.

enjoying the journey. And there is something else that often happens, which for me is the part of the workshop I find most uplifting. It's when a sort of mini re-skilling epiphany occurs – an epiphany that ultimately leads to a shift in confidence and possibility – when an individual realises that they are completely able to do something themselves, and in doing so they

can turn perennial problems into satisfying solutions.

*Sarah Nicholl is a Trustee for the Transition Network and a founder member of Transition Belsize, where she co-runs the Arts, Food and Draught Busting groups. She is also a consultant for cutting the carbon, and an enthusiastic collaborator for the Permaculture Picturehouse.*

# Transition

## Tin Village

By Ian Westmoreland (Heathrow)

The Tin Village started off as a vision created by two people – Kath Pasteur and Dan Britton, who were both involved in Transition Leamington. The first Tin Village was built in the Green Futures field at Glastonbury in 2009, and it proved to be a great success, going on to appear at many other events, including Sunrise Celebration and Sunrise Off-Grid

Describing the Tin Village is tricky. It's the signature simple timber-frame buildings, the no-dig garden, the off-grid kitchen, it's the activities that go on within the village during a typical festival – making pizza, workshops, practical demonstrations, and so on – but it's also the micro-community that is created over the whole process of building, running, and taking down the physical aspect of the village that gives the Tin Village its identity and purpose. This core engagement allows many others to experiment with ways to live sustainably.

Everyone who passes through Tin Village is presented with an alternative way of living, and everyone has the opportunity to learn from it. We offer the tools for transition freely, in venues where people have more freedom to consider alternatives than they might otherwise have. Providing space for people to share this experience and interact, inspires, excites and spreads these ideas between a multitude of different communities.

*Ian Westmoreland is this year's Tin Village co-ordinator and has been an active member of Transition Heathrow since moving to Sipson in 2010.*

*His main areas of interest are community energy, local planning, and sustainable housing.*



Children at Tin Village 2011  
Photo by Ed Mitchell

## Re-makery

by Hannah Lewis (Brixton)

The Remakery is a new kind of shared workspace – set to open in September 2012 – designed to support and develop re-use and upcycling enterprises.

It all began with the optimistic vision of the Remade in Brixton group I co-founded in 2009 – foreseeing a post-oil future for this busy, diverse urban community as a place “where there is no such thing as waste.” The vision demanded a home – a physical space to expand the range of materials that could be re-used, repaired or creatively recycled. A simple two-page proposal for a “re-use centre” attracted a local councillor's attention, and in early 2010 we were offered a potential site: a block of 40 disused garages.

During 2010 we gathered a steering group of existing and emerging local re-use businesses, working with bikes, computers, wood, textiles, furniture, pianos, and more. Shortlisted for Lambeth's public voting project “Your Choice”, we received over 3000 votes, and were awarded £100,000 of capital funding to refurbish the garages.

The design process, in partnership with Architecture for Humanity, has involved painstaking consultation, and confronting knotty practical issues of making the garages fit for purpose. Now we are awaiting planning permission, and preparing the site for construction work. Meanwhile our business plan is on its third iteration, as we get to grips with how this hybrid of co-working space, business incubator, and training provider will sustain itself financially. Throughout a journey that's been both exhilarating and exhausting, my determination has been sustained by the enthusiasm the Remakery attracts from people of all backgrounds and ages. People want to see things they no longer need go to a better use. And as the trend for crafts shows, there's a hunger for up-skilling too.

By bringing together wasted resources and neglected skills of repair and re-making, the Remakery demonstrates the permaculture principle that “The problem is the solution”.

*Hannah is a member of Transition Town Brixton and project manager of the Remakery, a shared workspace for re-use, repair and upcycling enterprises, opening later this year. Previously she was a co-founder of the Brixton Pound local currency and spent 6 years curating exhibitions and events on design for sustainability.*

# s p o r t

## Can football be a Transition sport?

by Sophy Banks (Totnes)



The team at Hackney Marshes, 1989 (Sophy is in the first row, second from left)

Football is a bit of a dirty word in Transition. Not to mention a sport that has been corrupted by money, and, at the top, consists of vastly overpaid young men, encouraged to superstar status. Sometimes their behaviour is appalling, drinking, fighting, and having very questionable encounters with women. And is there something about the tribal loyalty and hatred football engenders that the world could do without?

My passion for football came from playing on the mud of Hackney Marshes most Sundays of every winter for nearly twenty years. . My team was joyful, self-organising, and committed to the politics of anti-discrimination. "Our favourites sayings included – "there's no such thing as just playing football" and "even when we lose we win". For me both the teamwork on the pitch, and the meetings, socials, camping trips, love affairs and friendships off the pitch were a vibrant exploration of community – how to work together, find a way through conflict, how to keep coming back to a place of celebration and trust.

Come to think of it, football was probably the thing in my life that

most prepared me for Transition.

I've come across many projects that use football to bring people together who are marginalised, disaffected, bored: a way of uniting groups that are in conflict. Learning to play together, to be connected as a team, can be transformative for anyone who is used to a world of distrust, or having to just look after number one.

There have even been some inspiring moments in this season's footballing fare at the elite level. The most enjoyable has to be seeing Manchester City – one of world's most expensive, international squads – being beaten by what is in effect a "relocalised" club – Atletico Bilbao – who only have players from the Basque region in Spain. And there's something very touching about seeing men publicly displaying emotion in response to incidents such as the collapse of Fabrice Muamba in the Bolton game earlier this year.

There were a few grumbles when a football game was first included at the Cirencester Transition conference back in 2008, but it was a great occasion. I still remember Hide from Japan dribbling past everyone, and Rob's hat trick. Last year in Liverpool we had an influx of young Spanish and Portuguese showing off their delightful skills – as well as us regulars getting increasingly old and incapable, as anyone who saw me and Naresh with our matching limps the next day will know.

And here's a little known footballing fact about the Transition movement: Transition Town Totnes was founded by two long-time, before the hype, passionate supporters of Manchester United. As a Liverpool fan, all I can say is that, in Transition, "you'll never walk alone"!

Sophy Banks helped set up the Heart and Soul group and then the organisation of Transition Town Totnes. She co-founded Transition Training in 2007 and has trained people and Transition trainers in many different countries.

## On The Road Bikes

by Ben Brangwen (Totnes)

The Olympic velodrome in London cost £93 million, and that's not counting its fair share of the rest of the infrastructure needed to support it - roads, security, IT, parking spaces, enhanced traffic control, maintenance, marketing, heat and light.

This is cycling in the narrowest sense possible, catering for an elite (and admittedly highly talented) set of athletes riding bikes that wouldn't last five minutes on the potholed roads of London.

What if that £93 million had been spent on cycling in the broadest sense? What could for example, Sustrans, have done with £93 million?

Well, I have firsthand experience of that. When I was between tech jobs in the 90's in Bristol, I volunteered for the cycling charity, Sustrans. I helped their finance guy put a spreadsheet together to manage their eye-wateringly massive "Millennium Commission" grant.

But it wasn't £93 million, it was around half that - just over £40 million.

In the right hands, that kind of money can go a long long way. 5000 miles to be exact.

Sustrans used that cash to build the first 5000 miles of the National Cycle Network, partnering up with enlightened local authorities. They hit their target, incredibly, and the National Cycle Network has gone from strength to strength, carrying hundreds of millions of people and snaking 13,000 miles around the UK. If you're reading

**"make your bike part of your daily life and we'll give you a whole chunk of road"**

this, you've probably spun a few miles along one or more of them.

Sustrans are developing cycling from the ground up making it accessible to all. It's the exact opposite of the velodrome, which is developing cycling for an elite group



Ben as Doctor Bike in Totnes Market

with an expectation of some future trickle down, which may or may not happen.

Sure, the intention is stated on their website that "after the Olympics, a new mountain bike course and road-cycle circuit will be added to create a VeloPark for the local community, sports clubs and elite athletes. It will include a café, bike hire and cycle workshop facilities, helping to make London the cycling capital of the world." But I'm not going to hold my breath waiting for it to happen.

And even if it does get built, how much difference will it make to London's sustainability and general transportation challenges? And what's the subliminal message for

spending all that money on these facilities? I think it's very car-centric – "keep your bikes in the bike park and off the road".

Give me Sustrans' message any day – "make your bike a part of your daily life and we'll give you a whole chunk of road to move around safely on".

Trickle down vs bottom up? No contest in my opinion.

After his inner eco-warrior wrenched him forcibly from his career in hi-tech industry, Ben Brangwyn co-founded the Transition Network on a wing and a prayer (to Gaia). Since then, he's been on something of a wild ride and is enjoying every minute.



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