

*Letters for the next issue of S&S should be sent to the Editor by
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An Open Letter to AHPB

Dear AHPB

How do we square the circle of human need and human greed?

Prince Charles recently delivered the annual Richard Dimbleby Lecture. It happened to fall on the same evening that I wrote the first draft of this letter. He chose his forum to highlight the impossibility of continuing on our current course with its incessant consumerism and totally insensitive consumption of the world's resources. I feel he is singing from the same hymn sheet as us within the humanistic movement – perhaps we should invite him to be our Honorary President! Whatever we do – it is not a connection to overlook or underplay. It is highly likely that at a time when the nation (and the world) will be in a state of accelerated transition Prince Charles will be entrusted with the reigns of Britain, as King.

Transition and trust are two components in modern day life that seem to be linked. The 'transition' I am referring to is both personal and communal (self and society); we have to learn that life will not be sustainable unless major changes are undertaken by us all, in the way we live our lives. It seems people are understanding this intellectually but having a problem actually doing anything towards making the necessary changes.

I have recently watched two films on the matter of Peak Oil and Climate Change.

'A Crude Awakening' illustrates with terrifying candour how, in the 1950's, America had all the oil it needed. Oil companies sprung up and ravaged the landscape with nodding donkeys to extract the black gold. The film showed the activity – like a 19thC goldrush – with thousands of people working the oil wells across the southern states of America. Then the film cut to show the same landscape today with the donkeys still in place but no longer nodding, the once bustling oil fields completely deserted of humans; a pockmarked and deserted landscape of rusting iron.

The oil men had moved on.

Today, for the most part, they are in the Middle East, and Russia and Africa still have to be fully exploited. But the day will come, as sure as night follows dusk, when the oil will run out in these places also. This is why BP is trying alternative oil mining techniques in Alaska at present. Sadly these new techniques are even more destructive to the local environment and global warming, or global 'heating' as James Lovelock prefers to call it, than the relatively primitive nodding donkeys.

The second film I saw was 'The Age of Stupid'. This gives a broader illustration to the lunacy of our age using the clever ruse of playing real news footage of dire warnings to do with Climate Change and Global Warming and then showing contemporary interviews with business men and women steadfastly pursuing the path of 'progress and growth'.

The Transition Chichester group put on the screening of 'The Age of Stupid' in an attempt to generate more interest in what we are trying to do. We had 9 people attend the showing. Our hearts sank. But then they bobbed up again when we realised that even without the attempts of the Transition Movement to widen the knowledge of our disastrous global direction the world *would* realise, in the end, as it began to find shortages and rationing in areas of its interest, that it had/has no choice but to change direction, and fast.

I don't wish to linger over the pros and cons of oil mining as such but I do want to try and make sense of the nonsense I see when reading about and hearing the justifications put out by those who seek to continue on the same old path of 'progress and growth' in a world so driven that its wheels are beginning to fall off, if they haven't already.

We need a beacon of common sense and reality to floodlight society in general and our local communities in particular with the down to earth realities of the upcoming changes. Perhaps AHPB can play its part in being such a beacon by actively promoting the 'Transition Towns' movement, a movement which is growing and can only grow stronger as each year passes. AHPB can help this positive growth by inviting Transition Towns to report on their progress to Self & Society. AHPB could become a focus for those initiating a Transition Town and by being a liaison between all Transition Towns.

The Transition Handbook (£12.95 - Green Books - www.greenbooks.co.uk) by Rob Hopkins, is a remarkable book. Hopkins is the founder of the Transition movement, and became so when he initiated Totnes into being the first Transition Town. Another time perhaps I could review it for S & S but for now I would recommend anyone remotely interested by what I am saying to get it.

The Transition Movement is attempting to educate people into the stark fact that we have to join together in small(ish) local communities to enact alternative ways of being and living, to replace oil dependency with local resilience, in readiness for the steady energy descent that is inevitable as the oil runs out. 'Peak Oil' - the moment when production has to be cut down to a level that is less than is required to maintain the status quo of the demand worldwide - is upon us. We *have* to prepare for a steady reduction (and possibly not so steady - to quote James Lovelock again - he states that when things start to change the changes could be rapid) of available oil. And of course oil is in everything. This magazine could not be produced without oil. It is in the paper, it is in the ink, it is in the very process of printing. It is in the vehicles that have delivered the magazine to your door. We have to prepare ourselves for a very different way of disseminating our knowledge, views, opinions and feelings.

I can refer anyone interested to www.transitiontowns.org for a far more comprehensive illustration of what I am going on about.

Resilience, however, is a key word in the Transition movement, and resilience is what AHPB has recently shown itself to be full of. In the darkest hours of the early part of this year when the Association looked like it might be going to die I found myself trusting and believing that it wouldn't.

Similarly, I find myself choosing to trust that the world will wake up, will be able to see that in its own interest society has to alter course, become more compact, local and interdependent. Farmers' markets are an example of this. So too is the growing car share movement. The growth in allotment use is explosive. Organic food is not being left to the supermarkets to provide; individuals, families and communities are beginning to provide it for themselves. So while I am aware of an acute anxiety about the future of the planet I also feel this level of trust. A paradox; which is always comforting!

An irony which partly prompted this letter is the singular lack of trust within the straight (as opposed to alternative) society. I was recently telephoned by an estate agent who wanted to ask me something about my mortgage. Before they would proceed with their questioning about the mortgage, however, they insisted on asking me a few questions for 'data protection' reasons.

'But' I said, 'you have just rung *me!*'

'Yes, I know' she replied 'but I must just do this, for data protection.' I threw up my hands, metaphorically, and was obliged to go through the idiotic rigmarole of confirming, through various criteria, that I was the person whom she had rung!

The fact that the default attitude within our society is *not* to trust depresses me more than almost anything else. It flies directly in the face of a real faith we could be nurturing, namely faith in each other. If we don't expect it we won't get it or earn it. It feels that we have gone down this negative path so far in modern society that we even laugh at ourselves when we see how we were back in the 1950's and 60's, when an advertisement was often taken as the gospel truth, when Bisto really did make better gravy and Fairy Liquid really did look after your hands.

By living more in trust I sense we might slip into the transitions we are going to have to make with greater ease, with greater support, with greater resilience and with greater success. Perhaps the most important trust we can have is a trust in ourselves. Without trust in ourselves we are not likely to be able to have trust in others and without trust in others local communities will be still born at worst or dysfunctional at best.

With good wishes to all,

Julian Nangle