

Rob Hopkins: talk at the Unleashing of the Totnes EDAP. 5/7/2010.

3, 119 days ago, or 3 years, 8 months and a day ago if you prefer, 400 of us gathered here in this hall to ‘Unleash’ what we had just decided to call ‘Transition Town Totnes’. It was an extraordinary evening which I am sure some of you will remember. Since then, TTT has grown to become a powerful force in this community. The survey done for this Plan found that 75% of households had heard of TTT, 61% felt that the work of TTT reflected their concerns, and over a third have had some degree of practical engagement with it. It has brought over £¾m into Totnes, most notably with its Transition Streets programme which is now underway across Totnes, which will, among other things, turn this very building into a solar power station. At the Unleashing, we committed to work towards the creation of an EDAP for Totnes and district, and today, here it is.

We are launching this plan the day after a General Election during which environmental issues and climate change largely dropped off the agenda. In the rush to tell the population that everything will be alright again soon, climate change and peak oil, and the intimate link between cheap energy and economic growth, became the tiara-ed, tutu-clad elephant dancing wildly in the corner. It now appears that the largest vote went to a party whose candidates rank climate change 19th out of 19 issues, who are committed to reducing on-shore wind, who advocate increased North Sea drilling and many of whom are avowed climate sceptics, and who failed to set out any targets for emissions reductions.

Yet climate change has not gone away. March was the warmest March on record, and scientists around the world are observing feedbacks which were only predicted in the worst case scenarios, and weren’t meant to happen for many years. Arctic ice melting at an alarming rate, oceans warming and becoming more acidic, soils starting to release carbon rather than absorb it, methane being released as the permafrost melts. As Joseph Romm put it, “if we fail to act in time, it will be the single biggest regret any of us has at the end of our lives”.

A slew of recent reports, from organisations as diverse as the US Joint Forces Command, the UKERC and Richard Branson argue that we are close to or at the peak in world oil production. Petrol at the pumps in the UK is now the most expensive it has ever been and the Gulf of Mexico oil slick shows the perils of deep sea oil production, reinforcing the fact that we are only drilling there and unleashing the horror that is Tar Sands production on the world and the climate, because the easier oil is all but gone. Similarly, the global debt bubble is now bursting, Greece being the first nation, but this unravelling of the results of years of reckless partying at future generations’ expense has, it would appear, only just begun.

But in TTT, we do not look at this as a time for gloom and doom, rather as an opportunity for creativity, optimism, entrepreneurship. Our approach is to look these challenges square in the face. We cannot hide, and these times demand our

creativity. Transition is about the application of ‘engaged optimism’ to figuring out where we go from here. We argue that the end of cheap and easy energy means more than just lightbulb changing and recycling. It means a shift of our focus from globalisation to a world which is “intensely and inherently local”. As the recent Icelandic volcano with the unpronounceable name showed, we are highly vulnerable to any disruption to our just-in-time systems. A week of no planes, and Kenyan farmers have no export markets and we have no out-of-season produce.

But rebuilding an economy that can support us here, vibrant local agriculture, renewable energy systems that we own and benefit from, energy efficient housing that utilises local materials, more local and meaningful employment, these are not the things of some Luddite retreat to the caves, but the foundations of a resilient economy more adapted to the times. Totnes is uniquely placed to achieve this. We are big enough for it to work, but small enough to be able to do it quickly, and as TTT has shown, what we start here can spread elsewhere incredibly rapidly and virally. Totnes emerges from the survey as a skilled, optimistic and adaptable community. Totnes as model that inspires the future direction of humanity? Why not?

And so to the EDAP. I am so proud of this document. I am so proud of everyone who brought it into being. It has been an extraordinary process, one, like much of what we do in Transition, that we have had to make up on the hoof. Although it is called a Plan, I see it more and more as a story. After all, who are we to write a step-by-step plan? What we have created here is one story of how we could do this. It is rich with research and data, the facts and figures that we will need. More importantly, it tells a story that starts in the 1950s, the last time this community had less food, less energy, and was more localised. The stories we have drawn together from oral history interviews tell of a more resilient, local world, from which we can learn a great deal. The future may or may not turn out as we have described it, but this is an invitation to make this part of your story.

This must not be a plan that gathers dust on a shelf. TTT is committed to driving this forward and to making it happen. Already Dartington Hall Trust have started a Land Review process into which TTT is inputting, to see if the Estate’s land can be refocused to meeting the diversity of local needs, and Sharpham Estate is also engaging enthusiastically with this process. The ATMOS project is seeking to bring the Dairy Crest site into community ownership. TRESOC is nearly ready to go. The EDAP is not a fantasy, it captures what is already underway. We have new eco-school at Dartington, and KEVICC is moving forward with great enthusiasm. In our survey, 66% of people stated they felt confident in growing food. We have the School for Social Entrepreneurs here now, teaching people the skills they need to turn these ideas into livelihoods. We can do this. This EDAP sets out our vision for Totnes and shows that it is possible.

Finally I want to thank one person. Jacqi Hodgson. The fact that this community’s visions, ideas, inspirations and research have been drawn together into this EDAP

has been due almost entirely to Jacqi. Her dedication has been extraordinary. Her professionalism, and her determination that this would be published, and that it would be wonderful, is entirely down to Jacqi. As we move away from oil, energy such as that which Jacqi has poured into this project is what we need to replace it with.

I want to be able to hand this world, and this beautiful, quirky, stubborn, creative and unique town onto my children with a twinkle in my eye, rather than the deep regret Joseph Romm referred to. This Plan sets out how we can do it, and I hope you take it to your hearts, make it yours, and help us make history here that will be the subject of the songs and stories of the Totnesians of the future. Thank you.