

## HA U3A Sustainability Group

Meeting no. 29  
At Grimsdyke Room, Harrow Arts Centre  
On 5 July 2010  
Present Fran Dickens, Evelyn Donald, Tony Law, Richard Maylan, Fred Mitzman, Jean Murphy, Helen Riley, Matthew Rooum, Brian Tyers  
Apologies Susan Woolf  
cc Rosemary Agg, Mike Allen, Georgina Butcher, Katherine Eames, Jenny Jayamanne, Alan Klein, Brian Murphy, Henry Rockwell, Glenys Tuersley, Gwen Wright

### 1 Kingston project

In July '09 Katherine Eames of Kingston University came to our group meeting as part of a "Partnerships for Public Engagement" project she was doing on Sustainable Living and the Older Community. She has now sent us copies of her resulting booklet *A Guide to Sustainable Living*; Richard gave these out to members present and ran through the contents. We felt it constituted a good matter-of-fact guide for retired people, covering key issues (one-planet living, climate change), Things You Can Do (homes, energy, life style) including useful check lists, funding and benefits. In her letter sent with the booklets Katherine says "I expect most of your members will be aware of much of the information. It may be that it is more useful for them to pass it on to less aware friends." We will keep the wider Harrow U3A community in mind; Fred took an extra copy to discuss with Georgina, Richard will check with Katherine about availability of further copies.

### 2 recent events

2.1 Richard talked briefly about the Population Debate which Helen and he attended in St Pancras Church on 10 June. Despite the world's population heading towards 7 billion at a rate of increase of about 1.5 million a week, the six speakers had several items of good or at least hopeful news:

- currently families worldwide are now averaging 2.6 children compared with >5 a generation ago
- in about half the world, families are now stopping at replacement level or fewer, with some surprises, eg in Iran families are averaging 1.7 children, in Brazil 2 children is now the norm

The speakers emphasized that coercion is not required; couples are having fewer children because they can; readily available free contraception is a key. Another key is empowering women, this doesn't just happen, it needs priority in development programmes and budgets. Governments are aware of the links between rising numbers, poverty, and poor education.

England is the most crowded country in Europe; if all the world consumed resources at the UK's rate we'd need 3.8 planets to support us. Population levels affect every department of government, but they are no department's responsibility. Family planning services here are not particularly good, an estimated 40% of pregnancies here are unplanned.

A speaker from the floor, Sara Parkin of Forum for the Future, said her organization wants to take on these issues, and has just published *Growing Pains: population and sustainability in the UK* to stimulate action. Richard handed copies round, we agreed to study it and discuss it at our September meeting.

For a different (amusing?) view of the debate see <http://www.spiked->

[online.com/index.php/site/article/9000/](http://online.com/index.php/site/article/9000/) . Brian commented that Spiked are wind-up merchants!

2.2 Helen described some things she saw at the Royal Society's Summer Science exhibition at the South Bank including experiments to obtain electricity from growing algae – bio-photovoltaics; see <http://www.bioenergy.cam.ac.uk/abc.html> .

3 forthcoming events

12 July, 9-5.30 Population Day Symposium at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine. Free but probably booked up, enquire at [pop\\_symposium\\_july.po\\_eph2.lshtm@lshtm.ac.uk](mailto:pop_symposium_july.po_eph2.lshtm@lshtm.ac.uk).

15 July Earth Charter event – someone mentioned, details pls?

27 July, 10am Greener Harrow at Harrow Civic Centre. Group members are invited, I'll circulate the agenda when I get it

28 July, 7pm Harrow Agenda 21 AGM, Civic Centre

4 Topic: Materials, energy, and carbon footprints

Brian gave us a stimulating introduction to key concepts in the energy/materials/waste debate. He reminded us about [or introduced us to!] how energy = work, with a dozy human needing 100 Watts just to keep ticking over, and a human brain consuming 20-40W. The energy we use comes from four sources -

- the sun: radiation, for heat, light, growing power for vegetation
- the moon: gravity, tidal energy
- nuclear decay: radio-activity, nuclear fission, geo-thermal
- carbo-hydrates: fossil fuels, crops

When we aim for eco-conscious products and manufacturing, we need to take into account not only the costs of making and using a product, but also

- the full energy costs of extracting and producing the raw materials (their embodied energy)
- the carbon footprint of using the product and disposing of it afterwards. Often our estimates are limited by incomplete or unreliable data.

To illustrate, Brian compared the total energy costs of five alternative drinks containers – cans, bottles and plastics; aluminium cans came out most eco-costly because of the energy required for aluminium processing, steel cans were the least eco-costly. Brian recommended the book *Materials and the Environment* by Michael Ashby and will send us a summary of his talk. Much discussion followed.

5 Discussion: what next for our group?

We had a wide open discussion on the future of the group. Points made:

- our numbers have been static for a while
- we do want to attract and involve more members
- promote our monthly meetings
- we want to be more than a study shop and make a difference to the community – practical outcomes – campaigning? The wider Harrow U3A is our first target, invite them? Visit/speak at other events? Outreach – publicity – display/stall at AGM?
- Involvement in Harrow Council consultations, Greener Harrow etc has been worthwhile, continue
- More visits – need organizing
- Is the word “sustainability” a problem? Not understood, a turn-off? Alternatives? Ideas? Should we re-name the class?

- Get external speakers. How? Expense?
- Do something for the newsletter

6 Future meetings:

- Sept Forum for the Future report *Growing Pains* [see para 2.1]. All group members to read, and feed back and discuss at September meeting; Richard will try to get copies for members who lack them
- Oct carbon – footprints, offsetting, trading Tony
- Nov algae – how might they help? Helen
- Dec sustainable food – eg fishing? survey/comparison by members

Helen and Richard cannot run our October meeting, we'll decide alternatives in September, volunteers please?

Next meeting Monday 6 September

Rm 18 July 2010