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Locally 'Green': Does it Make a Difference? Transcript

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Locally 'Green': Does it make a difference?

Professor Carolyn Roberts

Good evening everyone, and welcome to the fifth of my lectures this year on environmental themes. In today's talk, I want to explore some of the characteristics of environmental pressure groups that operate at local and national level in the UK, identify some of their discrete and shared aspirations, and reflect on whether they are actually effective in securing environmental improvements. I will also touch on some 'voluntary' organisations (and I will review the definition of those in a moment) that were initiated in the UK, but now operate internationally as well. Later on in the lecture, I will take a few specific examples, but I am going to start with a story drawn from thirty years of my own experience as an environmental consultant, assisting on one way or another with proposals that affect the water environment.

Back in the 1990s, I was asked to undertake some analysis of the impact of a development proposal in Midland England, at Wasperton Hill Farm, Barford, near Warwick. This is a few miles north of Stratford-upon-Avon, formerly William Shakespeare's home country. It is very pleasant, unexceptional lowland English scenery, rolling farmland cut through by meandering loops of the River Avon. There are fields, ditches and small areas of woodland, the last degraded elements of the former Forest of Arden. Geologically, this is the second terrace of the Warwickshire Avon, underlain by 1-4 metres of sandy and silty gravels that were laid down in the declining phases of the Ice Age, perhaps some ten thousand years ago or more, as the ice generally retreated from this region. Currently it is farmland, but it is also dog walking and horse riding country: a land, at least in part, of large four wheel drives, half timbered houses, and wealth.

In 1987, there was a proposal by Pioneer Aggregates to extract and process sand and gravel, then return the reinstated land to a mixture of agricultural land and recreational lakes. The better agricultural land, with the best soil and slope characteristics was to be restored, and the remainder left as a series of lakes which could be developed for recreational purposes, or left wild; the developers preferred the former - recreation and fishing lakes. The site was some 90 ha in size, with two villages roughly 250 and 430 metres away, and with four farms lying rather closer. You can see this on the images. In fact, this was also an unexceptional proposal to generate sand and gravel for such uses as road construction, railway embankments, and construction.

The pictures show the typical scenery of the area. Much of the agricultural land is rather degraded, as in this image, with large fields generally under a monoculture, poor quality hedging, limited uncultivated headland and hence overall of limited ecological value for wildlife - plants and animals.

What developed subsequently, I have referred to as 'The Battle of Barford'. St John's College Oxford, who own mineral rights across huge swathes of England, had sold a 21-year option for the right to quarry in the area, which they had owned for centuries. The proposal by Pioneer Aggregates in 1987 was to extract and process 2.7 million tonnes of sand and gravel, overlain by 1.1 m tonnes of topsoil which would also have to be removed, stored and replaced. The soils are classified as 'alluvial', developed on the river terraces. For agricultural purposes, the land had achieved varying classification grades of 2, 3a and 3b and c. This implied that most of it was not top class for agriculture, but was nevertheless fair to good, with relatively few restrictions arising, for example, by virtue of its stoniness, steepness or poor drainage. The situation perhaps mirrored what would have been encountered at the nearby quarrying site of Charlcote, in use for sand and gravel since 1966. We have an insatiable appetite for this stuff, it seems.

My scientific analysis showed that the environmental implications of quarrying for the gravel (other than the scenic and traffic matters, which were obviously of significance), were that it was dust prone when machinery ran over it in dry conditions, and that there would be a reduction in groundwater levels locally by 2-3 metres, potentially influencing trees and well levels. This situation arises because the area would have to be pumped dry of groundwater during the extraction phase, and was calculated after exploration of the characteristics of the surrounding sand and gravel materials, and their ability to transmit water. What is called a 'cone of depression' develops around the site. In addition, there was some possibility of contamination by fertilisers and pesticides from the surrounding intensively used agricultural area being drawn into the workings, and later on into the restored lakes. It was also possible that the recreated 'lakes' would be dry for some parts of the year, and hence rather unattractive. But in reality it was quite difficult to make a case for protecting the area, as I was being asked to do by the local authority. Economic impacts were limited as few people in the area were using wells, and the groundwater quality was already impacted by other uses. In addition, the dewatering was going to be progressive, so neither dust nor groundwater impacts were likely to be exceptionally severe at any one time. Moreover, the lakes would potentially generate enhanced ecological conditions (for example for wading birds and amphibians) than the intensively-used agricultural land currently present on the site. The better Class 2

agricultural land was to be replaced, which at the time reflected the national interest in food production and imports; interest in that has waxed and waned over the years. There were no proposals at the time for using the holes for landfill, though of course that might have been a legitimate fear of the local residents, concerned about large numbers of waste trucks passing through the adjacent villages.

The next side shows a typical scene after twenty years of sand and gravel extraction a few miles further down the Avon valley, in Salford Priors. Many of the same issues were raised at the time of the proposal to develop this area: hydrological damage, road traffic, noise and dust, ecological damage and (in this case) damage to archaeological remains from the Bronze Age. The objections did not, however, hold sway for this site although some concessions were secured, and some money was brought into the village to develop specific infrastructure, through a so-called Section 109 agreement with the sand and gravel operators. The outcome for site is not, however, ecologically positive thirty years after it started, and one cannot imagine recreational uses taking place, at least for the time being.

After a lengthy series of public Inquiries, in January 1994 the company, Pioneer Aggregates, finally appeared to have lost its six year battle to extract the gravels. They were originally refused planning permission by Warwickshire County Council in 1987. They appealed, and after a Public Inquiry and a further referral to the Court of Appeal in 1995 it was again turned down on the basis of loss of high grade agricultural land, and potential food production, visual intrusion and unacceptable levels of noise and dust for local residents. The tenant of Wasperton Hill Farm, whose family had farmed the land for 60 years, led a sustained campaign of opposition in conjunction with a local residents' action group, Barford Residents' Association. The well-organised campaign was powerfully driven home by running 40 tonne trucks repeatedly past the Public Inquiry venue in Leamington, whilst the Inquiry was in progress, and by mobilising reportage from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), a senior editor of which was apparently a local resident.

The Barford sand and gravel proposals resurfaced in 2009 when the Minerals Core Strategy for Warwickshire was the subject of formal consultation, and was being discussed by the Parish Council. Parish Councils are the smallest administrative areas that make up the local government arrangements in the UK. It was suggested that the Residents' Association that had successfully fought off the first application for sand and gravel extraction in the area, should be resurrected. This is the Barford Residents' Association website today, showing the very pretty village. We can see that most of the campaigning on the website is saying 'no' to any change locally. Although gravel is not an issue on the site currently, the construction of more housing is another issue to which residents appear opposed.

Amongst the new points raised in 2009 by the local group, were that existing sand and gravel sites elsewhere should be extended or a site at Greys Mallory some distance away should be used instead. In their view, sustainability and carbon reduction targets required the retention of high grade agricultural land locally, local flood risk from the Avon would be enhanced by any gravel extraction, and that the potential river traffic to transport materials away from the site by water would not be feasible. Nothing has happened yet, at least as far as I am aware, and the village looks very similar to how it appeared in the 1980s, with the exception of a new bypass. We can speculate as to the source of the gravel for that, of course.

This example prompts a series of questions in my mind. Do residents' action groups actually make a positive difference to the environment? Or are most local environmental organisations made up of white, middle class, middle aged NIMBYs, who simply say 'NO' to any proposed change in their area? After all, most of the gravel still has to be secured if we want construction of roads, housing and railways to continue, even if we recycle some aggregate from road repairs. So is this way of proceeding, justifiable? And where are the vibrant multicultural environmental organisations who actively seek improvements to their localities, perhaps inner cities, rather than preservation of a glorious *status quo* in the countryside?

I hope that you will forgive a small but topical digression. Some of our rights to a healthy local environment, clean air and clean drinking water reflect the principles established in Magna Carta, eight hundred years ago. Magna Carta is one of the oldest original documents enshrining human rights, anywhere in the world. The text in the picture here is only one of the many different translations of Magna Carta, originally written in Latin probably by Stephen Langton who was then the Archbishop of Canterbury, on behalf of a collection of rebel Barons. It was in force for only a few months, when it was violated by King John. Just over a year later the King died, being succeeded by his young son, Henry III. This created national turmoil. The Charter (Carta) was reissued again, with some revisions in 1216, then again in 1217 and 1225, but the basic ideas were the same. The document

covered a range of matters, including legal protection for some citizens.

With restricted time, I will just focus on a couple of matters. The text I have illustrated emphasizes that the natural environment, more or less, was to be protected and the 'natural capital' as we would say today, not to be drawn upon or damaged for local interests.

You will also see in the text a few of the provisions on general stewardship of the land, and some specific rights in relation to maintenance of fish preserves, pond and mills. There is provision for removing fish weirs from rivers, and removing restrictions of access to river banks. The 'evil customs' relating to forests and warrens, and river banks, whatever they were, are to be investigated. Sadly, it was widely ignored in practice, as the depredations of the nineteenth century, if nothing else, would illustrate. It also became a less central part of English Law as time progressed. However, local groups are following in rather distinguished footsteps when they seek to protect their rights to a pleasant and productive environment.

Some longstanding 'rights' included in Magna Carta are periodically reflected in statements from political leaders today. Here is a twentieth century example:

'We are not merely friends of the Earth – we are its guardians and trustees for generations to come. The core of Tory (Conservative Party) philosophy and the case for protecting the environment are the same. No generation has a freehold on this Earth. All we have is a life tenancy – with a full repairing lease. And this Government intends to meet the terms of the lease in full.'

The quotation from former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher is rather surprising, I feel, as environmental protection in the UK is traditionally associated with left-of-centre party politics. It is perhaps worth noting however, that only a couple of years earlier, she had referred to environmentalists operating at a variety of levels from local to national as 'the enemy within'.

There are hundreds of organisations operating in the UK at local level through to national scale. Most are run by unpaid volunteers, though quite a few employ professional staff. Most have good intentions, and they inspire local passions. It is consequently very difficult to avoid casting aspersions on specific local organisations when exploring local and voluntary groups, but let us take away some of the potential heat by reflecting on a different case – the planned bypass for the fictitious village of Ambridge, in Dorsetshire. Some of the UK audience will no doubt know about this one, from the longest standing radio 'soap' in the UK, broadcast on BBC Radio 4. It is of little matter if you are not familiar with it, actually. Dorsetshire County Council is planning to build a bypass road, and the selected route cuts through farmland owned by the upstanding and hardworking Archer family. Their farm will be severed, although they will receive some financial compensation. A campaigning local group led by one of the Archer family (white, retired, female, wealthy), has sought reasons for selecting an alternative route, for example through the rather less well-favoured village of Darrington, by looking for adverse scenic, ecological, noise and pollution impacts, reduction in agricultural land values and food production, and other reasons not to progress it. A website has apparently been established to marshal the supporters and promote the cause (I have Googled it, but sadly cannot find it), parish meetings are being held, funds raised, lobbying of individual decision makers initiated, and radio appeals made. It is a familiar scenario not dissimilar to Barford, very emotional at times, and playing to the stereotypes of the white, middle class and middle aged NIMBYs that such groups are commonly thought to comprise. In fact, activity on this has recently been rather overwhelmed by the sudden catastrophic flooding of the River Am, now fortunately (and very suddenly) receded, but no doubt the anti-bypass campaign will gain momentum again shortly.

However this situation is viewed, we are looking at reaction to a local perceived threat, rather than a proactive approach to an environmental opportunity, or a wider response to a global issue. This is a group who might possibly be viewed as having a positive attitude to development *per se*, (indeed one of the characters in this 'soap' is a member of a company that develops properties and land). But they have an aversion to it being located close to home, and that is quite a common situation for local environmental groups. We might assume that these local groups are really of no consequence, or even negative, in their overall influence on the quality of the wider environment. Clare Sanders makes the point in her text on social movement theory and environmental networks in 2013, however, that it is dangerous to fall into the trap of assuming that all local campaigns are NIMBY – Not In My Back Yard, and/or inconsequential. She suggests that through NIMBY campaigns relating to unwanted development, people may theoretically learn about other broader issues and controversies, may potentially move towards becoming NIABYs – Not In Anyone's Back Yard – and may begin to network more widely with other organisations. Attitudes may be changed, perhaps for the better.

Let us hear what Isabel Carlisle, a proponent of the Transition Town Movement, and Peter Jones, someone with experience of developing local energy initiatives in the UK, have to say about local initiatives. Both suggest that there can be very positive impacts.

The UK has one of the most active and well-developed environmental networks in the world, and it is these that I want to look at particularly this evening. What do we mean by a voluntary body, Non-Governmental Organisation or charity, or a 'pressure group'? This classification has to be set in the wider territory of organisations with environmental remits, as the picture is confusing and contested. I am positioning the group of organisations as I did in my last lecture, in the space occupied by the broader sets of professional bodies, trade associations, learned societies and City livery companies, whose areas of interest overlap to a considerable extent. Each set nevertheless has its general purposes, which I have summarised very briefly on the diagram here. The groups to which I particularly am referring today are in the final category, to the right of the diagram and labeled 'NGO or Charity' in shorthand. We could potentially call them 'pressure groups', acting as an implied part of a wider 'green movement', although that might not be the way the fictitious members of the Ambridge group see themselves at the moment. They tend not to see themselves as part of a 'movement', and their activities do not currently encompass making common cause with other groups or networks in other sets, and indeed quite often there is suspicion or even hostility amongst local groups, or between local and national groups. That is widely true of actual groups, as well as fictitious ones.

Despite these very blurred boundaries and definitions, I have attempted to delimit the spheres of activity of the different sets of organisations on this rather beautiful 5-set Venn Diagram, which perhaps needs a little interpreting. The five sets of organisations are shown as overlapping ovals, which although they have blurred boundaries, can be more or less distinguished. However, individual organization may appear in the range of more than one 'set', since they have overlapping remits. The Trade Associations, for example, are mainly concerned with selling goods and services, and represent companies. Professional bodies are uniquely focused on setting standards for individual performance of those professing certain roles – for example, Chartered Engineer, or Chartered Environmentalist. 'research' by contrast, appears in the area of overlap of most of the sets – perhaps only Livery Companies do not do any research. So we see that charities and NGOs have similar roles in some regards, to the other organisations.

As something of an aside, the numbers of individual British people involved in such groups (as opposed to the numbers of organisations) is obviously even larger. Nearly or one in 10 UK adults, maybe 6 or 7 million people, are now a member or supporter of Britain's voluntary environment and conservation groups, according to a report produced by the Environmental Funders' Network just before Christmas 2014. Membership of huge groups such as the National Trust and Oxfam were excluded from the count, but I am not certain if the total is simply a summation of the memberships of the relevant organisations, which would over-represent the number significantly; many individuals are members of more than one group. However, this is a major group, even if not a 'movement'. Interestingly, of the groups' estimated combined income of some £984m a year (almost £1 billion, at a time of recession), only 7% of the money they spend goes to tackle high-profile issues like climate change, with 44% going to traditional biodiversity and nature protection locally. It is local, rather than national or international issues such as climate change, or urban environment deterioration, that motivate most people it seems.

Back in 1997, researchers Jordan and Maloney felt that the actors in what they termed 'the Protest Business, the 'NGOs and Charities' set, had more variability than they had in common. The shades of 'greenness' were very variable, and there was little coherence. It is the same today. Groups can be formally constituted, or informal. Some of the groups are local, essentially single issue organisations such as the Barford Resident's Association, and some have national scope. (Of those that have a national scope but a single issue focus, I particularly like the Ugly Animal Preservation Society.) Although it is difficult to put a boundary around these voluntary-type or 'pressure groups', I think they nevertheless do share some common characteristics, and make up a 'set'. All of them have a concern to protect, or preserve unchanged, some element of the 'living environment' on behalf of a local community; it could be an area, or a species, for instance. Most, but not all, undertake charitable fundraising and link this to practical action. They promote works such as building restoration, litter picking, river cleansing, or (unlike the peasants and slaves, and their lords to whom reference is made in Magna Carta and who were apparently forbidden from doing it), tree planting.

Martin Ross describes, for the Canal and Rivers Trust, how their activity emerged, what they do and do not do, and how there have been shifts in patterns of activity over time. He describes the extension from practical local

activity towards an increased focus on policymaking. He also comments on how to involve different groups of the population in partnerships; you may have noted that he uses the word 'coerced', albeit somewhat wryly. And he talks about the need for partnerships; partnerships, at least amongst environmental groups, do not happen very easily. I will return to this issue later.

As we move towards the centre of the Venn diagram, we encounter organisations, including pressure groups, which to some extent provide space for public discussion of wider environmental themes, although the range of that may be limited. Sanders describes this as a remit only to engage with the 'attentive public' on such issues – people who are already sympathetic to the specific cause. Climate change, water, energy and food are amongst the most important areas for national concern, with resources and population close behind. Most voluntary groups do not engage significantly with these issues, except tangentially. How many pressure groups, even at national level, routinely discuss climate change, or the other major issues affecting local and global environment, for example? Relatively few, I think. Typically, pressure groups and others occupying part of this central territory also stage friendly (usually) media stunts, they lobby decision makers, and sometimes take direct action involving confrontation. That has been sidestepped in the Archers, of course, although perhaps it might spice up the storyline. In Barford in 1987 it did happen, and as the lorries trundled past Leamington Town Hall, there were minor scuffles. Some operate through sabotage, or the maintenance of eco-communes, although there seem to have been fewer of those in recent years.

Some pressure groups operate entirely outside the current UK social norms. Deep Green Resistance is an example of a radical environmental pressure group, who have a fundamental social agenda that they believe can only be delivered through confrontation, and even violence. It lies at the far end of a spectrum, but there are other groups with similar views. By radical, I mean that they seek direct change, through legal or illegal actions, whereas reformist groups tend to seek incremental change without upset to the prevailing social order. What the radical groups tend to share with more moderate groups, the Ambridge Residents for instance, is a belief in practical projects undertaken at local level. Unlikely bedfellows, perhaps. But the members of these radical groups often adopt a common identity vested in shared beliefs, diets, lifestyles, and transgressive styles of dress and hairstyles. Indeed perhaps those are also characteristic of the local groups of Midland England! However, members of more radical groups sometimes chose to share lifestyles beyond that, by living in benders or yurts, very close to nature, for example.

The social agendas of members of most environmental organisations, including for example the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Wildlife Trusts, and the National Trust, would be a long way from that; deliberate damage to property is not very commonly seen in Borsetshire environmental meetings, nor indeed elsewhere in Midland England. But one of the things we need to remember is that crowds of people with some common purpose may respond differently to the way individuals behave. They might shift suddenly, for example, from peaceful protest about an issue, to civil disobedience or riot, even if the underlying philosophy does not shift radically. I am minded of the lovely story of the Pedestrian Association (UK), since 2001 called 'Living Streets', who having spent almost seventy years talking to government about the challenges facing people attempting to walk on obstacle-strewn pavements, finally reached a tipping point. Infuriated by the fact that change was coming insufficiently speedily, in 1995 they seized the agenda, recruited some younger protesters and initiated direct action in a North London street by bouncing three or four illegally-parked cars off the pavement. That dramatic incidence of disobedience aside, they now coordinate the 'Walk to School' campaign.

Let us look at another single issue groups, on a different part of the spectrum from conservative to radical. I have spoken about the Tortoise Trust before. Conversely Earth First! is another organisation with an ideological opposition to the state, branding themselves as 'a non-hierarchical organisation promoting direct action to confront, stop and eventually reverse the forces that are responsible for the destruction of the Earth and its inhabitants. EF! is a convenient banner for people who share similar philosophies...'. Their website provides information on blockading, CCTV destruction, coax cable cutting, genetic crop decontamination, office occupations, sabotage, squatting, tunneling and similar activities.

Clare Sanders points out that some of the 203 national organisations she identified (you will see I found 212 or more environmental groups, although there is not time today to engage fully with the limits to what an 'environmental' theme might be), operating at broadly national level, and innumerable local groups. Some are gentle reformists, and some are radical, as we have seen. I might add that some, particularly at local level, appear to be rather reactionary – against any change at all. The cake can be cut in different ways, and 'local' action does incorporate distinctly different possibilities and outcomes, from rescuing tortoises, to wrecking bulldozers.

In the areas closer to the centre of the diagram, pressure group aspirations are shared with all of the other sets, and lobbying government becomes a major activity. The impact that these organisations have will naturally

depend on the resources they can mobilise, the contacts they have, and on the information that they share, and in many cases that will be very modest.

In a previous lecture, I suggested that this excessive overlap of interests and types of activity was, in part, responsible for the difficulty in ensuring that environmental issues receive an appropriate hearing by government. Many of these organisations are busy competing for members, and their time and energy. They tend to make their own case to government, usually directly and separately, without any significant consultation with other groups. Sander's research (and she prefers the term 'social movement networks' rather than 'pressure groups') also shows that despite the limited research that has been undertaken, the different environmental networks in the UK rarely appear to collaborate, even when there is a common threat, let alone when there is common cause. In theory, 'collective action might create a common culture in which leadership, mobilisation and concerted action can take place', Sander says. What we therefore have is a cacophony of voices arising from the overlapping fiefdoms occupied by different organisations. I also suggested that the confused situation was more static than has been the case in other disciplines in the past, where they had more readily and enthusiastically embraced change, mergers and so on. Why this may be the case, I will need to reserve for another talk, as I want to keep a focus on the local and national debate here.

I want you to hear one view of the purpose of Friends of the Earth, a major UK player, in their own words.

Friends of the Earth are a well-known national and international pressure group founded in 1971, and currently employing about 160 staff. Their strapline is around thinking globally and acting locally, and a recent emphasis is on 'futurity, equity and change' – for example in relation to 'fixing' the food chain, warm houses, and 'getting serious about CO2'. As has been described by Paul de Sylva, they exist mainly to galvanise the public, but like the Canal and Rivers Trust, progressively they are appealing directly to decision makers, and they undertake tactical lobbying of MPs for new legislation; they claim some direct success in influencing the radical (internationally) UK Climate Change Act 2008, for example. Increasingly too, they are working with business, although there has been caution over this, and a lot of debate over what might constitute an 'ethical business'. However, the agenda has moved over time, again an issue to which I will return at the end of the talk.

I want to look now at a couple of other organisations, before returning to the issue of whether pressure groups 'work' in any real sense to improve the environment. The diagram on the screen is drawn from work I undertook for the Higher Education Academy in 2007, attempting to put some order onto the wide variety of environmentally-related educational programmes run in UK universities. You will observe an interlocking set of different disciplines and sub disciplines, ranging from hard sciences, through to softer social sciences of environmental studies. As you will realise, I believe that Venn diagrams are an effective way of simplifying complexity.

We can try to position our different organisations in this landscape of different subjects, and the diagram shows where an environmentally-focused organisation such as NISP, the National Industrial Symbiosis Programme, might sit. I have located it on the diagram. Industrial Symbiosis is the practice of bringing together companies from different sectors to identify business opportunities that keep resources in the economy in a perpetual productive cycle that avoids waste - in other words, the Circular Economy of producing things, using them, recovering and recycling them, or dismantling them so that their component parts or materials can be reused, in action. Simplifying, the NISP network identifies links between companies, so that under-utilised resources (materials, energy, water, logistics and so on) can be reused by others. It has a strong technical element, and indeed some mathematics, but is associated with the management of waste. It is currently funded by subscription, and EU grants, so perhaps is on the margins of what we might call a conventional pressure group.

The Transition Town movement, however, is firmly in the territory of a 'pressure group'. The now-international Transition Town movement sits, as many pressure groups do, in that subject area concerning environmental policy, and social values. There are allegedly over 1000 autonomous Transition Towns internationally, spread across some forty countries. Since 2007, the UK element of this has been the charity 'Transition Network', which now coordinates over 400 quasi-independent Transition Towns. These have been established by volunteers as grass root community projects which try to build resilience in the face of perceived threats from peak oil (the point at which additional unexploited oil reserves appear to be falling), climate damage, and the associated economic instability that supporters believe will follow. Some members of the group are not 'towns', as the late Maureen Martin's reference to Transition Evesham Vale shows, in the recording. Evesham Vale is a rural area, with a focus on vegetable production through conventional horticulture.

Recapping, the Transition Network model really embodies a shared philosophy of self sufficiency and small steps towards ecological resilience, with a focus on a set of key activities following from the three principal drivers of climate change, peak oil, and economic crisis. There are a series of overarching elements, enshrined in a text by author and quasi-leader Rob Hopkins, relating to transportation, food production, waste and recycling, and energy descent action plans for specific communities. These are underpinned by a philosophy suggesting that "... the outer work of transition needs to be matched by inner transition. That is, in order to move down the energy descent pathways effectively we need to rebuild our relations with ourselves, with each other and with the natural world". The philosophy is very much one of optimism, and local entrepreneurial action. In the biggest, most successful Transition groups, every effort is made to avoid being seen as too worthy; the Totnes group started a brewery, for instance, which sounds pretty persuasive.

One more radical element of the Transition Towns movement is the local currency issue. Rob Hopkins, author of the Transition handbook, talks specifically about the financial aspects of resilience, and about local currencies, which many people regard as controversial. In support of local currencies, he suggested 'If Tesco wants to open a branch in my town, they can say it will bring jobs and so on. The localisation movement never tends to do that, they just say localisation is a great idea, it's sustainable, and it's good for the community. So we tried to map the local economy and put a value on it. Here in Totnes (a small town in south west England) we spend £30m on food every year, of which £22m goes through two supermarkets. It is like water running through our fingers, going to banks and offshore investors. But it could be staying local. If we spent just 10% of that locally, we would have £2.2m staying in the local economy to be spent again. Could a hospital that buys four tonnes of lettuce every year get that locally? If it uses energy, could it use a local energy company? We're looking at different ways of investing internally.' The development of a local currency, a local and paper manifestation of 'bitcoin', is seen as important.

Stephen Sterling, an academic also based in the south west of England, has been very much influenced by the Transition Town movement, and makes a strong case that local action now is essential, as problems are too complex for central governments to act effectively at local level. The local is very important, in his view, in driving wider agendas. And he also makes a case for local currencies, based on reducing the length of supply chains, and hence increasing local resilience to the forthcoming shocks.

Despite the power of the Transition Town message, there have been detractors. The science behind permaculture-based agricultural systems has been subject to critique, because there are concerns about the ability of such systems to feed populations in densely populated areas. Totnes is perhaps an easier target for permaculture than central London, even though much research shows that metropolitan areas (New York is the one that has been explored in detail) can generate the most sustainable lifestyles because of the energy-saving impact of living in close proximity, and the availability of efficient public transport. I wonder too about some of the wider issues of the local currency, and whether there are literally boundary conditions that could prevent this working effectively if every community chose to try to use one.

There have also been critics alleging that Transition Towns is insufficiently radical. When the Transition movement started, it was largely driven by green politics, and its later critics tended to be 'deep greens'. One, the author Ted Trainer, threw the movement into mild existential crisis in 2009, when he accused Transition of being merely reformist, and too 'easily accommodated within consumer-capitalist society without threatening it'. Hopkins pleaded guilty, but insisted that people who would not normally be part of the movement, including business and religious leaders, community organisations, and busy 'ordinary' families, needed to be engaged. It is a firmly reformist organization, but making traction.

Keeping this in mind, I want to turn to a second example of an environmental 'pressure group', perhaps less typical in the way it operates. It is a prize. The Mayor's Low Carbon Entrepreneur Award has been sponsored for the last three years by the large multinational corporation Siemens, and is administered from the Mayor of London's office, with some dedicated staff. It has a sharply focused environmental objective, relating to carbon emission reduction, and the stimulation of students to think about future city living. As part-justification for classing this as a 'pressure group', I would add that it also receives contributions in kind from a range of celebrities, including designer Dame Vivienne Westwood, Dragon Deborah Meaden, Yachtswoman Dame Ellen McCarthy, Richard Reed (CEO of Innocent Smoothies), Zac Goldsmith MP, and others who will probably not forgive me from not mentioning them by name.

Matthew Pencharz, Senior Advisor to Boris Johnson, describes the philosophy behind the Award in my sound recording, and again makes reference to the fact that a local initiative, in this case in London, might also provide an exemplar of change more widely. It is designed from the start to influence beyond the local, but to start with

that focus. It is clearly rooted in developing a commercial approach to sustainability and the environment, rather than stimulating voluntary action, which differs from some other initiatives. Some entries nevertheless do embrace social enterprises, at least in part.

Entries for the prize now come in from about 200 London-based teams per year, and amongst the very quirky, and the seriously inane (and every year there are entries from young people who suggest technologies that violate either the laws of thermodynamics, or infringe basic human rights. I am repeatedly amused by designs for wind turbines that could be placed on car wheels, 'because then there is always a wind to turn them', or large turbines in the London underground tunnels, to be driven by the wind from tube trains passing through, both of which would simply reduce in inefficient 'harvesting' of energy from one stakeholder to another). Other entries suggest that 'people MUST do x and y. However, alongside those there are many ideas that have genuine merit, or the germs of excellent ideas.

Here is one that you may have seen starting its trial in Tottenham Court Road – Solarbox, which takes a classic element of London's heritage and reuses it, converting redundant telephone kiosks into solar-powered charging places for mobile phones. Free at the point of use, users watch adverts for a few minutes whilst their phone is part-charged. There has been interest from around the world.

Arthur Kay was one of the first Mayor's Low Carbon Entrepreneur prize winners, and his company Biobean has now started to gain some traction with investors, and customers. Biobean is now seeking funding for major development, is exploring subsidiary products beyond bioenergy, and is shaking up attitudes locally, and in this case nationally and internationally – here Arthur is speaking at the Excel Centre a fortnight or so ago. It is a positive and concrete story, from a local environmental initiative, the Mayor of London's Prize, and the competition is of some wider value to all of those students who participate and who are stimulated to think about their future environment. And, I hope, it also benefits those whose grasp of science is very tenuous.

Now, the Transition Towns movement, and the Mayor's Low Carbon Entrepreneur Award, are examples of 'pressure group organisations' which may or may not be typical but alongside the Residents Action Groups, Greenpeace, and the radical organisations, they illustrate the range and the complexity of the landscape. I want to conclude my talk by reflecting on the 'success' or otherwise of different types of group.

Whilst individual groups almost inevitably claim successes of some sort, there are criticisms. The Daily Telegraph newspaper concluded twenty years ago that the main aim of large modern pressure groups was their own perpetuation, and that what they regarded as 'stunts' to raise membership were principally concerned with increasing income to ensure continued flow of cash. The Telegraph also concluded that many large pressure groups had become bureaucratized and hierarchically-controlled. There was a suggestion that whilst volunteers sold raffle tickets, the employees of these organisations sauntered indolently around the corridors of Westminster. It is true that at around about this time, Greenpeace, for instance, was under pressure and responding to falling membership, but it now has 28 regional offices in 45 countries, about 90 employees in its London office, and still mounts national campaigns. Total staffing worldwide is about 2400. It does not look like a failing organisation, at least at face value. And it may be more aligned to societal conventions than it was, but it does still seem to be performing useful purposes.

Like Greenpeace, many other national (or even 'global' organisations) seem to be moving to occupy the centre ground of our Venn diagram, in terms of the balance of their activities. We heard this from the Canal and Rivers Trust, earlier, too. They focus more strongly now on influencing policy than they did, and less on campaigning and local practical action such as removing rubbish from watercourses.

My sense is that the best outcomes environmentally come when local and global issues are explicitly connected, and the different groups feed from one another's enthusiasms. Perhaps that is a commonplace statement, but actually that has not been the situation in many organisations previously. But this is a subjective view, and I want to conclude by suggesting a framework against which the activities of all environmental organisations can be tested.

My list identifies a number of characteristics that need to be met for environmental organisations to embody good governance, and to be productive enterprises. I do not think it matters whether the organisations are, for example, hierarchical and managerialist, rather than decentralised, though it is easier to keep away from chaos, and to be efficient, if they have strong leadership. Some environmental organisations have been described in the past as 'Xerocracies', that is led by photocopies rather than human leaders, which may be good for Xerox, and good to start a debate, but possibly does not facilitate the final decision making that precedes effective action.

There are six criteria.

Inclusive- can anyone join the organisation, or are some groups excluded by design, or unconsciously? I draw your attention to the Ambridge Residents Association, which perhaps understandably (and leaving aside the number of available radio voices) is explicitly limited to certain Ambridge Residents, and not those of adjacent villages that might be affected if the bypass follows a different route. The carefully selected but unusual appearances of some radical activists can be equally off putting to potential new members of their campaigns, again effectively rendering the organisation exclusive, rather than inclusive.

Transparent- is it obvious to everyone what the organisation does? Are they fully accountable, afterwards? One might ask whether the aims of some groups are clear, either before or after campaigns, and for them to work well this is a prerequisite.

Learning- do they learn from experience? Do they evaluate the actions they have taken, to see if they have achieved the desired outcomes, and adjust future action accordingly? The Transition Towns movement, for instance, has learned more about the significance of finance, and acted to extend the number of underpinning ideas, by including action on local currencies alongside renewable energy, and permaculture. Are they willing to engage with, and learn from, other organisations with related ideas and aspirations? Will they partner? This requires a shared language for communication, again quite a challenge.

Efficient- are they well-organised and business-like, making maximum use of the available resources? Is money and time used wisely, or are excessive amounts of time spent in unproductive chatter, ineffectual lobbying, or on promotion of activities in the media perhaps, rather than on front-line activity. This is a difficult area to engage, as our current debate on the National Health Service testifies. We need an appropriate balance between reflection and action.

Efficacious- are they successful in producing the desired environmental outcome in their area of activity? That, of course, is dependent upon having a clear intended outcome in the first place.

Legitimate- are they well-founded, valid and justifiable, in terms of stimulating genuine environmental improvement that does not simply export an environmental problem to a different area or a later time?

All environmental organisations should be subject, in my view, to this type of scrutiny. If they meet the criteria, then we should support them as they will be beneficial. I am going to end by allowing Julie Hill, now the Chair of the Government agency, the Waste and Resources Action Plan (WRAP) to have the last word on the potential benefits of local environmental action.

Thank you for listening.