

## Futures Fair '09: Infrastructure Breakfast Seminar

9 - 11.30 am 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2009

### *Stephen Hills' Presentation Transcript:*

#### **Third Time Lucky?**

For a talk intended to be about Green Infrastructure, there was a real risk that this could have become "A 1001 things to do with Hemp": a plant of extraordinary potential maybe, but not so important in itself...so I am doing something completely different...

If you haven't had time to glance through the Abstract, there are three main points that are really just the starting point for what I'm going to say this morning:

- The first is that Green Belts and notions of Green Infrastructure are about as quaint and useful as Devon Cream Teas
- Secondly that the professions have surrendered their public interest responsibilities, to provide services that are expensive, are often irrelevant, and are an obstacle to sustainable development
- And lastly that just reducing carbon production is already too little, too late.

We need a new investment framework in which carbon sequestration becomes the driver of political, economic and social activity.

#### **This is an imagined look back from 2030 at the key changes of the last 20 years**

The point is not to be comprehensive or entirely consistent, but to raise questions about what the state and the citizen can and must do for themselves and each other. Many of the best ideas for the future assume a quite different set of relationships and possibilities from the ones that exist now.

This is pretty serious stuff, so you might like to think of this as a round of David Mitchell's R4 panel game "The Unbelievable Truth"... one contestant [me] reads a fictitious article, and gets points for any true facts that the other panellists [you] fail to spot. Just to keep you on your toes, there are 14 true facts [highlighted in yellow]...as well as any number of potentially true ones.

#### **Do you remember the long hot summer of 2009?**

The MPs expenses scandal...the rise of the far right and green parties in the EU and local elections...and finally the long delayed UK Climate Information Programme Climate Projections. The Great British public, already nervous and angry, panicked at the prospect of the 2003 heat wave being the mean summer temperature in barely twenty years time, *[due to be released this summer]*.

The main parties decided that a Government of National Unity was their only defence against the growing sense of political and social chaos. The last thing **any** of them wanted was a general election. This gave them some political space to mount a programme of major constitutional, climate change and land ownership reforms.

Inspired by their MPs, many professional firms started returning fees to former clients for services that had been of no value. “We always knew those huge doorstep Sustainability Appraisals were a waste of space, but everyone did them, just the same”, confessed one environmental consultancy. Others were less contrite “Well, it’s a bit hard on us to say **now** that all those masterplans were unsustainable. I mean... we are just architects and urban designers. Why didn’t the client employ a sustainability expert?” [*Comments from conversations with other professionals in the last six months.*]

The “Big 3” professional bodies, that is... the chartered surveyors, accountants and lawyers launched their CO2 Reduction Action Programme [CRAP], with a commitment to bring forward the 2050 CO2 reduction targets to 2030. They appointed Dr. Mayer Hillman, (Emeritus Fellow of the Policy Studies Institute) scourge of the consumption economy and advocate of personal carbon trading accounts for over 25 years, to lead the programme under the slogan “Because we can!”

The Big 3’s “big idea” was enthusiastically taken up by the new Chancellor, Vince Cable. It had two linked elements:

- **the first** was the immediate introduction of Carbon Trading Accounts for every citizen, every business, every public body, civil society organisation, and level of government
- **the second** was a cascading Land Use Management Plan [LUMP], from National, to Personal, for every owner and occupier of land....which defined the carbon carrying capacity of every piece of land **and** the annual rate at which the production of carbon on that land had to be reduced.

The link between Carbon Trading and Land was essential:

- It put all types of land on a similar footing with a carbon value
- It stopped Carbon Credits becoming just another commodity for speculators, and most importantly...
- It reduced the tendency to speculate in land, one of the principal causes and effects of the Great Banking and Housing Collapse of 2008.

And now to give you an idea of some of the things that might happen at different levels of governance and spatial organisation...

### **At National Level**

Central Government sets up the overarching National Land Use Management Plan; but below the National Plan, all tiers and departments of central and local government, businesses, towns, villages, neighbourhoods and individual citizens could interact and trade with each other, as autonomous self-organising bodies, either one-to-one or on a cooperative basis. There were no other top-down targets of any kind.

Cabinet rediscovered the principle of “collective responsibility”, deciding that, in future, their primary purpose was to be the enablers of local government, business and civil society. Top of the list of enabling tasks was the growth of a green infrastructure investment market, to ensure infrastructure delivery **in advance** of development proposed in the National and Local Spatial Plans.

They set up GB<sup>2</sup>, the Green Bank of Great Britain, the national green infrastructure investment bank with Lord Stern as its first Governor, and Will Hutton as its Chief Operating Officer.

### **At local/neighbourhood level**

Urban and rural populations were galvanised into collective citizen action. It took about two years for citizens to run through what they could do on their own. However, people were already noticing that their individual actions on a mass scale had transformed the kind of products and services that were available. The penny dropped; markets would respond to what people needed.

With their new found purchasing power, citizens were freed from the tyranny of being a consumer with too many unnecessary choices. They started to club together on a wide range of carbon reducing programmes; many inspired by the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Breakthrough Ideas programme promoted by the Sustainable Development Commission:

- Self-declared Ecological Innovation Zones to integrate disadvantaged populations with better off areas. [see <http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/the-short-listed-breakthrough-ideas.html>]
- Reorganising land uses within neighbourhoods and settlements
- Selective demolition of obsolete carbon hungry properties
- Creating new areas of more efficient collective food production, tree planting, energy collection and recreation
- Growing hemp for bio-fuels and building products on contract, cleaning contaminated land for organic food production
- Bulk rainwater run-off to local communal storage in streets and under parking areas
- Greater subdivision of larger buildings for co-housing and co-working projects
- Bulk procurement of PV collectors on individual buildings linked to geothermal heat stores in the street...providing localised electricity, heating, domestic hot water and summer cooling. [Product available from Carbon Free Group PV-T <http://www.carbonfreegroup.com/photo-voltaic-thermal-panels.html>]

#### **At the Local Authority level**

These local utilities and services provided the link to the local authority whose role focussed on joining up and promoting the carbon efficiency of citizens and business enterprises.

Councils re-established a strong community and cultural leadership role. They followed the example of municipalities in mainland Europe for a new model of sustainable economic growth [the following is what Freiburg has been doing for about 20 years]:

- Regional and local public investment banks
- Challenging local building codes to harmonise, but also to stimulate innovation
- Local procurement regulations and approved panels of compliant suppliers
- Integrated public movement systems
- Training and skills development in schools and technical colleges for trades and professions
- Supporting new businesses to provide the products and services shaped by local policy objectives and citizen demand
- Setting up citizen owned public utility enterprises
- Enabling citizens as co-producers of space.

There were new areas of public and social enterprise business development, commissioned on a settlement-wide basis:

- Renewable energy production and distribution
- Enhanced remediation of waste to sequester atmospheric carbon. [Another SDC Breakthrough Idea]
- Reforestation for a mix of biomass fuel production, carbon sequestration and urban cooling....and
- Building materials from local hemp harvests [<http://www.limetechology.co.uk/pages/hemcrete.php>] and the carbonated production of masonry from waste and recycled materials, upto 40% carbon by weight [<http://www.c8s.co.uk>]

All of this happened within the redesignation of Green Belts as Sustainable Settlement Support Zones [Triple S Zs] upto 30km radius; not to prevent growth but to develop the capacity to support settlement size. Neighbouring settlements had to cooperate rather than compete, often deciding to coalesce in order to function more efficiently.

### **What happened to the architectural profession...you ask?**

2009 was a bad moment for the profession, temporarily pre-occupied with an irrelevant battle royal over style, and some confusion about which renaissance they were in...not realising it was actually time for a Reformation. There was a schism in which the much missed Ian Martin's [*iconoclastic and foul-mouthed Diary columnist for Building Design's Back Page till 2007*] cruel creation became reality. RIPBA, the Royal Institute for the Prettification of Buildings and Architecture went one way - to the new Palladian Stable Block Annex at Highgrove. The rest dispersed to a variety of other bodies, Engineers, Surveyors and Facility Managers, before finally joining the new Profession for Integrated Sustainable Development, whose motto was inspired by Descartes "I am PISD. Therefore, I am." They had realised that they needed to integrate themselves more effectively into the total supply chain and process of space production.

### **Why call this talk "Third Time Lucky?"**

The Putney Debates in the aftermath of the Civil War was the first attempt in modern times to define the relationship of the state and its citizens, and what it meant to be free. Much was lost through the return of the monarchy and the betrayal by Cromwell, as many see it, of the principles of the Commonwealth of freedoms promised to the autonomous citizen unfettered by the state; what Prof Quentin Skinner calls "The lost freedom of the English Revolution" [*Title of lecture given at British Library Feb 09*].

We had a three hundred year wait for a second attempt at this. The Welfare State was not just about welfare reform. Beveridge, a Liberal not a socialist, had proposed that the role of the state was to enable "private action for social advance". This was his secret weapon in the fight against "the five giants on the road to reconstruction... Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor, and Idleness".

He believed that the spirit and experience of voluntary action was at the heart of what it meant to be free, and that the involvement of the citizen was required to humanise the provision of public services. Well, we all know how successful that was. Beveridge was already complaining in 1947 at the colonisation and control of public services by the civil service.

The centralist conceit and deceit of managerialist politics and the emergence of citizen consumers collapsed a mere 60 years later. The "five giants" returned with the events of 2008 and the subsequent growth of mass unemployment, especially amongst the young. They were the trigger for the current process of democratic renewal and the Green New Deal that continues to this day.

But New Deals are transitional moments, and anyway they lose their currency after a while. Now in 2030, we need something that is both new and enduring. This third time we have to get it right... three strikes and you're out!

We look to the inspiring words of the celebrated business analyst Jeff Eccles. We have come a long way from the spring of 2009, when Jeff complained that "I think that they [that's the new changes to Part L of the Building Regs] are over the top. I see it as just another example of a nanny state forcing me to lag things that I wouldn't otherwise lag by my own choice. It shouldn't be for the government to tell me to do it any more than trim my trees. Pretty soon I'll get a fine if I don't clean my teeth." [*Building Magazine May 22 2009*]

Today, Lord Eccles is standing down from being the first Treasurer of Sequestrations since the Commonwealth (when the Commission for Sequestration was the legitimised robbery of Royalist lands to pay for the setting up of the New Model Army). "Over the past twenty years, we have experienced nothing less than a political and social revolution. It is no longer acceptable to produce more carbon than you sequester.

The state holds the ultimate remedy in dispossessing owners and occupiers of their land if they

fail to adapt to the reality of climate change; but in every other aspect of our daily lives, we, the citizens of this country have transformed our own behaviour, our own work practices, investment decisions and political priorities to take direct action as citizens to meet these shared challenges which confront us all.

To paraphrase my forerunner, in this great public office, *"Truly, I anticipate the great promise of the **Green** Commonwealth with an open mind for our future prospects and common benefits"*

The challenge I leave my successor is...population control"

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