



Neighbourhoods Welcome Pack

December 2008

*"To support community-led responses to peak oil
and climate change,
building resilience and happiness"*

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Welcome to the world of Transition

Want to find out how to get a transition initiative started?
Great! That's fantastic!

Bristol was the first City to have a Transition presence. Not surprising given its long history of counter culture and alternative identity. But the real work of transition depends on Transition Initiatives within neighbourhood communities. This welcome pack is designed to help you start something in your locality, and to help you keep it going.

A lot of people want to understand more about what 'Transition Bristol' actually is, so we have put a brief timeline at the back of this pack. Transition Bristol is a registered not-for-profit company whose aims are to promote Transition in Bristol. The Directors are volunteers who have come forward and offered to commit time and energy to Transition Bristol, and all the work for Transition Bristol is done in a voluntary capacity. But – Transition **in** Bristol happens because of the Neighbourhood initiatives.

The Transition Bristol core team;

- helps connect groups and individuals who want to work together
- is building relationships with the huge number of other projects in Bristol that contribute to low-carbon low fossil-fuel living
- hosts events, meetings and training
- organises the newsletters and website, and contributes to regional and national networking.

Transition is a movement not an institution and it's growing fast. We are learning as we go. It is an evolving international process - a social experiment on a massive scale!

How do I start?

- Your first step is to find out who else out there in your local area is thinking along the same lines as you. There are several ways of doing this. The Wells group started when one individual put stickers and posters all over the place asking people to get in touch with her if they were worried about climate change and peak oil and wanted to do more. The Redland group started in the same way – one person did a letter and hand delivered it to 500 households. Once people respond, and it's likely to only be a handful, organise a get together and see what you might do.
- The Transition Bristol team can also help:
 - by helping to put you in touch with others in your locality who are interested in starting something.
 - by enabling you to meet up with someone who has already started a Neighbourhood Initiative somewhere else so that you can talk through their experience
 - By arranging for one of the core team can come to one of your meetings to answer questions and to explain some of the things going on in the Transition Movement.
- Most groups begin with running film showings, talks, discussions, workshops that raise basic awareness in the local community concerning peak oil and climate change.
- As the awareness-raising progresses then projects will emerge and so long as there are people with energy and skills to take these forward then one thing will lead to another. If you pitch things right then existing groups and projects, for example local residents groups, transport campaigners, allotments groups, gardeners, etc, will work with you and may over time start to recognise the challenges of peak oil and climate change in what they are doing.
- Once the group grows then questions will arise about constitutions and democratic processes and funding. When you reach this stage it is probably helpful to agree a simple Constitution, which you can adapt from a standard format – there's lots of model ones around. Most Transition Initiatives choose a loose structure with no membership register or fees, but just enough formality to ensure transparency and proper use of any funds.

Are there any golden rules?

- The key rules are that everything you do must be aimed at achieving community resilience in a low-carbon low fossil-fuel world. Also Transition is an open and inclusive process, dependent on the collective energy and knowledge of all members of a community who are willing to help.
- If your group is going to thrive and grow then you need a critical mass of four or five people who are prepared to commit time and effort, and who are likely to stick around in the area. The core members of any group need to have a good understanding of both climate change and peak oil. You also need to use (if necessary learn) creative and inclusive ways of communicating (avoiding endless dull meetings) and of running projects and events in a way that draws people in and encourages them to stay. It is therefore really helpful if as many people as possible from your group can do the two day Transition Training.
- Some Initiatives struggle because **all** of their meetings are open, and this makes it very hard for real teamwork to evolve. A group with a definite aim and task – like organising the initial awareness-raising events – works best if it can bond as a team. One way of describing the phases that a new group goes through is ‘forming, storming, norming, and performing’. This can happen very quickly but only if there is some stability, so it’s fine to have a closed team for a task, and it’s important not to interpret openness as a recipe for never getting anything done.
- It’s probably also worth remembering that conflict and arguments are inevitable, and the key is to recognise them, understand them, work through them and keep going. It is also inevitable that at times the task will feel impossible. The Transition Training gives some pointers for ways of allowing people to express all kinds of feelings whilst still building inspiration and joy into what you do.
- And don’t forget that old saying ‘the perfect is the enemy of the good’. It’s often better to get on with things, than to wait for everything to be perfect before you dare start. Celebrate what you achieve, do things that you find inspiring, and keep going.

Key Resources

The most important are;

- the Transition Handbook by Rob Hopkins, published by Green Books 2008 (Transition Bristol gives a free copy to all Neighbourhood Initiatives)
- the Transition Primer which is constantly evolving. It is in the form of a pdf file downloadable from the Transition Network website www.transitionnetwork.org
- the two day Transition Training – details on www.transitionnetwork.org
- the Transition Bristol website www.transitionbristol.net
- there are also numerous other books and films but you will find these explained and signposted in the resources above

Contact information for Transition Bristol

Telephone:

Our telephone number at the Hub is **0117 370 1362** Because, like you, we are running Transition Bristol in our spare time this is often an answersphone but we pick up messages regularly.

Email:

As with phone calls we share the task of responding; send messages to team@transitionbristol.net or events@transitionbristol.net

By post:

Our postal address is Transition Bristol c/o The Hub, Bush House, 72 Prince Street, Bristol BS1 4DQ

Meeting up:

On the first Tuesday of the month we have evening (7 for 7.30, usually until 9.30) **open networking meetings** at the Broadmead Baptist Church, see our website for more details.

Also, from January 2009 we will hold **lunchtime ‘sofa sessions’** at the Hub (check the website for dates). This is for anyone who wants more of a one-to-one discussion about a project or setting up a neighbourhood. Telephone or email to let us know you are coming, or just turn up. The Hub is in the top floor of the building that contains the Arnolfini arts centre and café, just by Princes Street Bridge. Press the Hub button by the entrance door facing the road, come all the way up to the fifth floor and then head left.

What does a neighbourhood group look like?

- There is no blueprint for a neighbourhood group and one of the key principles of any transition initiative is that it goes where it wants to go and that it develops according to the energy, skills, resources and challenges that exist in the locality.
- Some Transition Initiatives have evolved from previously existing groups, such as Sustainable Frome or Sustainable Redland. These groups began from local people getting together to understand and reduce their own ecological footprints. They have now expanded their aims to encompass the challenge of peak oil, and have become Transition Initiatives.
- In a City it can be hard to work out what the geographical boundaries are for your neighbourhood. Experience suggests that walking distance is a factor, so a patch will seem workable if everyone can walk to the talks, films and get together. Also, if people bump into each other at local shops, the local farmers market, in the school playground etc then networking is automatically easier. We imagine that as Transition grows, then more groups will spring up for smaller and smaller localities, but there will still be shared projects and events covering larger areas where appropriate.
- It is worth remembering that the initial steps in forming a neighbourhood group can be successful even with only one person or a very small group taking those steps. What matters most is hitting the right tone for your neighbourhood and being clear about the purpose and aims.

What practical guidelines are there?

- **Be clear on the core Purpose and Principles.** And be clear also that your group will contribute to the ongoing development and updating of these principles.
- **Life is Easier if we don't Reinvent the Wheel.** There are now hundreds of initiatives out there who have developed constitutions, projects, websites, structures. Look around and don't be afraid to ask. Most groups are delighted to share what they have learnt which means you can learn from their mistakes rather than your own! Transition Training is extremely helpful for this, as is ensuring that your initiative contains, at the earliest possible opportunity, some people who have long been part of the local community.
- **Start with a short-life Initiating Group, then see how things evolve.** The initiating group exists to navigate the first few steps of the process. It may then transform into something different as more people come on board. Remember that handover is always important in any activity that depends solely on volunteers.
- **Interdependence.** Transition initiatives are far stronger where they work supportively with the initiatives around them. Communication is key. Seek support from others and give support and encouragement also.
- **Openness to Feedback and Learning.** Seek feedback from others and use it to learn and to create a culture of inclusivity. If people criticise what you are doing then try and work out what they really mean, and whether there are things you could do differently. Openness to being challenged is vital, as feedback can enable you to strengthen what you do, and it can be highly affirming and can generate confidence.
- **Start in Your Own Back Yard.** Local Transition Initiatives will identify for themselves the scales that feel most appropriate for them to work at, but this principle encourages them to work at the scale that feels comfortable and over which they can have an influence, rather than leaping straight in to regional scale work. Work with the strengths that you have. Don't bite off more than you can chew.

What we cannot say enough times....

- *It is fantastic that you want to do this*
- *Make sure you are supported by at least three or four other people*
- *There is no blue print – you are becoming part of an evolving seeking guardianship of this beautiful planet*

What can neighbourhood groups do?

The possibilities within a Transition initiative are endless. An 'energy descent plan' for a whole city is a daunting prospect, so local groups are tending to start with activities which raise awareness, build cohesion and demonstrate low carbon local living. Every skill is valuable whether it is listening, or building, or music making, or administration. The key ingredient is commitment and the key emotion is hope. Below is a list of just some of the things that Transition projects in cities have taken on;

- Getting lots of households to improve their home energy efficiency, install solar domestic water, and to start carbon counting
- Initiating local farmers markets and producing and publicising local food directories
- Improving the recycling and re-use facilities and networks in the locality
- Holding open days, no-buy days, street parties, running information stands at local fairs and fetes
- Running workshops and training on carbon counting, on how to be car free and flying free, and on any other topics that people feel are needed
- Helping campaign for better walking, cycling and public transport facilities
- Preparing biodiversity plans and raising awareness of the need for urban trees to be preserved and planted
- Forming and maintaining community orchards, community allotments, fruit and veg growing in gardens, and links with local farms for education and local food production
- Getting to know the local councillors and local MPs and being active participants in local 'Neighbourhood Partnerships'.

"A successful response to peak oil and climate change looks more like a party than a protest march"

Richard Heinberg, author of 'Peak Everything'

Can you give us some examples of how it's been for other groups?

Here are two stories - One from a group in Bristol, and another from a group who didn't know they were part of Transition until they met some of their Transition cousins at a recent event!!

Transition Easton

The Very Beginning

Our first meeting, (in a pub) mostly consisted of us saying... "So... What is Transition? What are we supposed to do? What do we know already? Where do we find out more...?"

Our second meeting (in someone's house – much quieter!) involved reading the 12 steps and a few other downloads off Transition internet sites.

First Steps

Our first activities were:

Inviting others to join the initiating group,

Making a list of local groups, key people, businesses, venues etc

Discussing ideas for events and ways of getting a 'membership' for Transition Easton

Reading more about Transition, Peak Oil & Climate Change
And some of us went on the Transition training

Finding Our Way

After starting off with monthly meetings, we realised that fortnightly meetings were more useful – and it meant that we didn't put actions off for so long or lose momentum on organising events.

Events

Our first outreach exercise was to contact a stack of local groups (environmental and others) and invite them to a Transition Easton launch event.

For this we designed a presentation that we could give to anyone not aware of Peak Oil or Climate Change, and which explained the role and structure of Transition in Bristol and Easton.

We also served food and had an 'open space' activity – this is a way of running a meeting so that people get to talk about and share information on topics they are really interested in.

This was the first of what became monthly networking meetings, which so far, have had themes – ie Gardening, Food, Celebration & Planning, Skills.

We then did a season of film screenings, a couple of months after the first meeting. Some films were better attended than others; in hindsight, we might have waited longer and had more members, or done more publicity to avoid this.

Now

Following our last network meeting on planning, we've just started project groups for people wanting some practical actions. We're aiming to use these activities to raise awareness, as well as making a difference.

So far these include:

- Bike maintenance day.
- Various gardening projects.
- Buying co-op.
- Re-skilling opportunities.
- Community website.

And... we're investigating funding to help us with these projects and continue to put on events and films.

Abby, Transition Easton

Sustainable Thornbury

When Heather Witham attended a 'resourcing' day early in 2006, little did she know that it was to be the inspiration, together with other like-minded people in Thornbury, for starting the group Sustainable Thornbury. We were united in our concerns about climate change and peak oil and the challenges these posed throughout the world, but realising that we could only be really effective working in the area where we lived.

Sustainable Thornbury (ST) charges no membership fee, is run by a core group of passionate committee members, and has an e-mail circulation of over 150 members. ST has carried out several campaigns since its inception, some of which are:

- **The 'Go-MAD' (Make A Difference) campaign**
This encouraged householders and community organisations to improve energy efficiency and to produce energy by alternative means. *** Energy efficient light bulbs were distributed.
- **Activities to promote local and seasonal food, for example:**
 - A campaign to increase the number of allotments in Thornbury and Alveston.
 - Publishing tasty seasonal recipes.
 - Developing Thornbury's community orchard.
 - A **Grow Your Own Food** group (which welcomes beginners).
- **Activities to reduce consumption and waste**
Such as the campaign to reduce plastic bag use – we did this by first conducting a survey of retailers and shoppers; researched ethically made jute shopping bags and commissioned the local secondary school to come up with a design – then had a Thornbury shopping bag made and visited all retailers influencing them to reduce their use of plastic bags, and promoting the use of the Thornbury bag. ST also held a 'Give it Away-Take it Away' event where people could bring unwanted items to a certain location, and take away someone else's unwanted item – keeping much out of landfill.
- **Publicity and awareness**
Stimulating debate and personal reactions to future challenges to our climate and use of diminishing resources (such as oil). ST holds open meetings, showing films and inviting guest speakers (last week Molly Scott Cato, a green economist from Transition Stroud) to speak at relevant events. A 'green fair' is being planned for 2010.
- **Transition Movement**
Following an event when two people from other neighbouring transition towns came to speak to ST, we have made the decision to join the transition movement.

Val Harding, Chair

1 December 2008

Welcome aboard!!

Acknowledgments

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Appendix 1 Some definitions of Transition terms

Transition: An emerging and evolving approach promoting community-led sustainability in response to the threats posed by peak oil and climate change. The building of local community resilience and the preparation of a planned energy descent process are core aspects of Transition.

Transition network: (small n) refers to the broad international community of individuals and groups basing their work on the Transition model. This is often also referred to as “the Transition Movement”.

Transition Initiative is a properly constituted organisation that exists to further the aims of Transition within a locality and that is registered with the Transition Network.

Transition Bristol is one of several city scale initiatives in the Transition movement. It may also be referred to as a Transition Hub, which denotes a recognised Transition Initiative that works at a citywide level to promote awareness and action, and that supports Transition Neighbourhoods across the City.

Within Bristol, a number of **Transition Neighbourhoods** are underway. Transition neighbourhoods are the local **Transition Initiatives** within a City. They tend to be called Neighbourhoods in order to distinguish them from Transition Initiatives that are cities or towns.

Transition Network Ltd refers to the legally constituted body working to promote Transition initiatives across the UK and overseas.

Transition Support Scotland (etc) refers to national Transition fora, usually driven by and arising from a national network of Transition initiatives feeling their work would be better served by having a national network.

Resilience has been defined as “the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganise while undergoing change, so as to still retain essentially the same function, structure, identity and feedbacks”. In Transition, the concept is applied to settlements and their need to be able to withstand shock.

Transition Primer: A detailed written guide for groups starting the Transition process. It is constantly being updated and it can be freely downloaded as a pdf file from www.transitionnetwork.org

Carbon cutting refers to endeavours, which lead to reductions in the emissions of greenhouse gases.

Energy Descent Action Plan or EDAP is a local plan for dealing with Peak Oil. It goes well beyond issues of energy supply, to look at across-the-board creative adaptations in the realms of health, education, economy etc. An EDAP is a way to think ahead, to plan in an integrated, multidisciplinary way, to provide direction to local government, decision makers, groups and individuals with an interest in making the place they live into a thriving community in a post-carbon era.

Appendix 2 Transition Bristol Timeline

- Jan 07** → The Initiators secured Community Champions Funding of £2000
- Feb/Mar 07** → The Initial Steering group met
- April/May** → A Project Team formed to run events
- April 07** → Public events start/Transition Talks/Stalls etc
- Spring 07** → TB became member of 'Bristol Green Capital Momentum Group'
- May 07** → First Transition Leaflets
- May 07** → Rob Hopkins gave a talk to a packed hall at the Trinity Centre
- May 07** → Several neighbourhood groups formed
- May 07** → Hotdesk space for TB volunteers at the Hub
- July 07** → TB Registered as Limited Liability Company
- Sept 07** → First Neighbourhoods Networking meeting
- 25 Nov 07** → 'Big Event' held at Council House, with 400+ people there
- Feb 08** → Transition Fruit Trees project
- Feb 08** → First monthly electronic newsletter
- April 08** → Meeting between Daniel Lerch and Bristol City Council
- April 08** → TB attends Transition Conference Cirencester
- Apr/Jun 08** → Transition exhibition at Architecture Centre
- May 08** → New TB leaflets
- May 08** → Network Southwest Funding £2000
- May 08** → Website relaunched
- 9 June 08** → TB team Away Day, Core Team replaces Steering group
- Jun 08** → Berries n' Beans seasonal food week
- Jul 08** → Starhawk Workshop
- Jul 08** → TB represented on Forum for the Future group
- Sep 08** → TB stands/workshops at Food Festival & Schumacher event
- Sep 08** → Peak Oil Task Force for Bristol with TB as a member
- Oct/Nov 08** → Share the Harvest seasonal food events
- Nov 08** → Soil Assn/TB Community Supported Agriculture workshop
- Dec 08** → TB/Bristol City Council 'call for sites' event at Hamilton House