

Sustainability minutes from Home Groups: December 2010

1

In considering whether the questions are right, we raised the question “should a worshipping group make sustainability a central concern?” We haven’t been able to get beyond that; nevertheless we value what has been offered to us.

2

- The essence of sustainability is justice, equality and fairness – which will result in a more joyful, flourishing and sustaining community.
- Practicalities
 1. Make public BYM salary differentials
 2. Challenge the economic system to
 - a) Advance loans only against real assets
 - b) Sell only what is owned
 - c) Abandon compound interest
 - d) Create a maximum wage nationally
- We all need to be willing to be less profligate.

3

We voiced our concerns about the dangers of panic reactions, our awareness of the hypocritical.

Let our lives speak and let us be faithful to our discernment.

We feel that prescription is not the way forward.

Our faith is in a right relationship with God, each other and the world.

4

5

We heard an inspiring voice in QFP 25.04 where we human beings are caught up in the network of creation, and our role is to use all our resources to create the Kingdom of God in the present moment. We live in hope, not in despair.

We wonder if the questions as currently phrased are at an appropriate level. We do not hear a radically different level of Quaker understanding from that offered by any forward-looking local authority.

We are not speaking our truth to power. As a small organisation we need to be pattern and example at all levels of our Society. We would welcome practical advice to Area Meetings and Local Meetings of how to become more sustainable: only by going forward experimentally will we learn how to consume less throughout the whole organisation. Electronic communication may well have a role to play. Meeting for Sufferings could be held in a virtual environment in order to become more sustainable. Telephone conferencing could be tried with Home groups, as it is in other parts of the Society. Such experiments will help us learn how we can consume less as an organisation.

But we also need to be able to challenge current mindsets, and those organisations which dominate our economic and political structures, which are not necessarily governments themselves.

6

Are we all complicit in living unsustainably? We must be challenged by each other and the Society to recognise our need to show our deep, loving commitment to the world and the people of the future.

We hope that Friends House and other Meeting Houses will publish their work done already in creating a sustainable environment. We look forward to the production of the “toolkit” and value Friends House and other Friends’ meetings and groups as sources of guidance and information.

We must be tough with ourselves and with each other and examine all our structures and practices for their impact on the environment. Sometimes it seems impossibly difficult and complex. How do we continue to support each other joyfully to sustain this beautiful world?

Note: At Canterbury, we suggest opportunities, workshops for sharing information and good practice. Could we have a trade exhibition about “green buildings” e.g. IIED, where we can see examples of how to “green” our Meeting Houses.

7

We have a sense of unity with an emerging concern by one of our number. Our Friend suggests that it could be a valuable Quaker witness to identify a historic Quaker Meeting House that could benefit from, say, solar roof panels. These might be seen to contravene planning regulations. Testing the legality of those regulations in court might pave the way for an amelioration of the regulations as they apply to the sustainability of buildings.

8

Our facilitator was prevented from attending, but we continued anyway.

1. Personal witness is the first vital step in initiating change – in ourselves, in our Meetings and in the wider community. BUT that both springs from and feeds into
2. the need for a strong public witness with a radical and distinctive Quaker voice on sustainability, peace, justice and community. This will lead us to collaborate with others also concerned about these issues. But we need to focus on what we have to offer as a distinctive voice, and we can be catalysts, bring others together and offering new ways forward.
3. As Quakers we must be patterns and examples, engaging in local, national and international politics so that we can strive to attain a sustainable, peaceful and just world.

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We think the “Questions for Meetings” 2.1 to 2.6 should be disseminated to meetings along with 1.1 to 1.5 “Why should we act” as context – and with the climate change statement. This should be done in a way that releases enthusiasm, discussion and action – in the short term as preparation for YGM, in the long term to be used like Advices and Queries. Simply adding the questions to a business meeting agenda could seem burdensome.

We look forward to the toolkit proposed for next year – perhaps to be developed into a “green book” to complement our red A&Q.

We want to see support for Friends in their workplaces and communities as well as their homes and Meeting Houses.

It's important to inspire and enthuse all Friends whether they are activists already or less engaged – and move us all forward to be better patterns and examples.

We should celebrate what we enjoy e.g. sharing seasonal foods.

10

Given that so much of the problem is due to the obstacles that the present system places in the way of those trying to live sustainably, could YMG make a statement to Government, particularly about reversing the centralisation of services. Such a statement could be more effective if we found a way to join with others.

Do we need to be on the lookout for opportunities to support political campaigns?
We need to make better use of the internet – not least because it saves paper.

Can we support organisations like the Woodland Trust – or persuade our communities to make use of what they have to offer, e.g. for community tree planting?

Note: There were a lot of important things said that didn't make it into the minute – so I'm attaching some notes in case they are helpful.

Notes from group 10

- Government lack of interest – maybe we need a letter to Government, lobby against centralisation of services?
- Quakers have got something to offer on peace-making. What's coming is something broader than living sustainably ourselves.
- Energy conservation is crucial. We need more research on green energy.
- "Letting our lives speak". Could we give up our cars? At present it's impractical.
- Is anyone looking at the real consequences in future, eg what will a 1m. rise in sea level do to seaside roads, railways, homes? We need to acknowledge the power of fear as well as love.
- We need to do something positive. Greening our meeting houses – could we set up a fund to give interest-free loans/green health checks.
- Press Government to help people insulate their homes. Could we support Eco-centre in Birmingham, Llanidloes.
- Can we push the balance towards being part of the solution and away from being part of the problem? We can't solve the problem.

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1. We can use technology more, but not for all purposes. We should be tender about it and have a code of practice.
2. Equality is of over-arching importance in sustainability.
3. Example and working with others rather than preaching. We need to be positive and encouraging.

Capitalism
Over-population
Arms trade, total waste.

Business: Ratios of remuneration
 Long termism
 Affordable housing
 Growth-greed –gratification

Quaker's role to initiate: "Hold in balance the whole witness"

Aid funding real

Caring for the primary producer: question added value

Be examples: Friends House flowers BAD

Friends House restaurant Good

Collaborate

Ecumenicals