

General Meeting, Saturday, 14th June St. Austell Meeting House

The Meeting was clerked by Ann Davis and attended by 30 Members from Devon and Cornwall Area Meetings.

Prompted by A & Q 41&42, the theme for the day was 'Caring for our World', and Ann introduced the speaker Naresh Giangrande, the co-initiator with Rob Hopkins for the Transition Towns Concept. This was introduced in Totnes in 2005, and has since been adopted by 65 towns across the world, with another 700 + developing. It is about planning for the future with less reliance on oil. We are in what is termed as the 'Peak Oil Phase' and it is expected that within the next few years, as there is reduced oil output and greater demand, there will be potential for more conflict, and all the misery that goes with it. Increased materialism experienced over the last 100 years, has not led to a greater feeling of wellbeing. We need to regain some of the good things we have lost. It is about the vision to rethink the systems we live in, and the transition to a new way of living – a better way.

Different groups have been formed in Totnes to concentrate on various aspects, such as Local food; Local renewable energy; Sustainable businesses; Transport; and a Heart and Soul group.

Some of the initiatives so far are:

- Introduction of a local currency;
 - Looking at different varieties of fruit and vegetables as changes in climate happen; producing a guide to where local food can be obtained;
 - Investigating the possibility of obtaining the old Dairy Crest Creamery site in Totnes, and developing it into a sustainable and green business park;
 - the Heart and Soul group are looking at inner transition that is needed to effect outer transition;
 - an 'Open Space' has been created for open and free dialogue and to generate ideas.
- Devon County Council is in the main, supportive of these initiatives, though at present South Hams Council is more skeptical.

This very interesting and well presented talk was followed by a question session. After a scrumptious and varied shared lunch (eaten to almost the last scrap), we took part in an Environmental Café exercise, whereby 4 tables were set up with white paper table clothes. Each had an enabler with a question for us to consider and either write our comments or endorse comments already on the table clothes. We all visited each table in turn and addressed the following questions:-

- 'What is the most important environmental problem'?
- 'What are the main external responses to environmental problems'?
- 'Could there be a uniquely Quaker contribution to a solution'? (to climate change)?

- ‘Which is more important: peace and social justice, or the environment’?

This exercise proved very stimulating, and was considered a great way of interacting with each other and other people’s opinions and perspectives.

There was a plenary session at the end to draw together some of the ideas. As you may guess, these were very varied.

A very short Business meeting concluded the day, when Ann Davis informed us that the General Meeting Steering Committee had considered the future of General Meeting, and that their findings would be sent to both Area Meetings for consideration.

A very invigorating day, ending with tea and biscuits only. None of the usual leftovers from lunch!!!

Georgina Torabi, Kingsbridge Local Meeting