

SECTION 3: VISIONING & PLANNING

This section aims to help you:

- * vision for your meeting/local community/Britain Yearly Meeting as a low-carbon, sustainable community
- * plan your next step as a meeting and as individuals

3. VISIONING & PLANNING

Reflection: Visioning

Visions are important. We need to know what we don't like and what we would like to change (to be aware of what is unsustainable and unjust and why); but we also need to know what we do value in our world, what seeds we would like to nurture, and what world we'd like to live in (what does a low-carbon, sustainable world look like?).

Visions of a changed world have long been part of Jewish and Christian spirituality. For example:

- * Micah 4:3: "... they shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they make war anymore."
- * Revelation 21:3–4: "He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more."

Early Quakers took up this heritage, looking forward to an imminent transformation that would bring about the Kingdom (or Republic) of God. The Quaker testimony emerges from a sense of being on the threshold of the Kingdom. By living the life of the Kingdom today we make the transformation possible. Or, in other words, if we live our vision today we make it a reality.

Yet for some reason we, and other groups working on sustainability, have found that people often seem reluctant to talk about their dreams. So it's good to make time and space for Friends to imagine the world they are working for.

Living Witness often ask groups to reflect on their vision for a sustainable world (e.g. see table on page 30). How would it look if these three spheres – of personal life, community, and the Earth – were all flourishing? The responses are broadly similar from group to group. They speak of a world of much stronger communities, where people respect one another and nature, where spiritual values are more important than material values. It is a world where national boundaries are unimportant. It is an egalitarian world.

Often, the vision includes concrete elements – such as people growing and eating local food, being able to live and participate fully in society without a car, using renewable energy sources for heat and electricity. It also includes a more general shift in the infrastructure, markets and technologies that shape our lives, making it easy to live sustainably. These aspirations are common to many groups working for sustainability.

"My advice to other Quakers is to start with whatever seems important locally, to build alliances and networks, and to develop a vision that can be shared by all members of the community."

Gerald Conyngham, Exeter Quakers

*... if we live our vision today
we make it a reality*



Photo: Sunniva Taylor

3. VISIONING & PLANNING

Contrary to the mainstream assumption, the general feeling is that changed lives would be better for us, as well as for our communities and for the natural world.

Snatches from Young Quakers' Visions for an Ideal or Sustainable World

(from a Living Witness Project workshop in August 2002)


Being in a community
In contact with the earth
Practising crafts and trades
Cities with more green spaces
Less rules and regulations – we would dance all night
Streets where people know and love each other and strangers
No car – living close to friends and family – living in a community
Free education
No nations or boundaries
Fitting in
Doing true work (craftsmanship)
Beauty
Schumacher and Gandhi
Fair exchange of values, services and labours

Resolving conflict
Security, trust, safe in our own homes
Fulfilment
Respecting each other
Complement rather than contradict
Meeting needs in a sustainable way
Living in beautiful places
Shifting care from artefacts to people, nature and planet
“I thought I wanted choice but I don't: I want everything to be organic, fairly traded, all systems respecting people and earth.”
Easier to talk to people in the neighbourhood
Less need to go to work
Be in the garden on sunny days



Young Friends' visions of a sustainable future. Drawn at YMG 2011

We have provided two exercises to help you vision. You could use them for visioning your meeting, or your local community, as a low-carbon, sustainable community, or you could use them to ask the same question of Yearly Meeting – what would a low-carbon, sustainable Britain Yearly Meeting be like?

 See Exercise 5 (Vision map) and Exercise 6 (Vision meditation) on pages 71–73.

Sustainability story

'We stepped forward in faith'

With careful analysis, determination, and a concerted effort, 90% reductions in fossil fuel use are possible! Between 2004 and 2010 Cotteridge Quaker Meeting reduced its energy use by more than 70%. In addition, we are now generating 20% of our original usage. Thus, by June 2011, our energy usage should be down to c. 10% of our 2004 starting point.

When Cotteridge Quakers started on this road in 2005, we did not know how far we could travel. We stepped forward in faith. We were driven by a concern for our planet and, more prosaically, by a desire to be comfortably warm in meeting.

As we made improvements, our gradually decreasing meter readings were a source of encouragement and strength. Generous gifts of time and money from members of the meeting, as well as growing fuel savings, enabled projects to continue.

In retrospect we can see that it was not so much that we 'stepped out onto a road'; rather, we climbed onto a cycle. The cycle wheel went round and round, propelling our projects forward. We repeated time and again the same sequence: problem identification and analysis, Premises Committee suggestions, Business Meeting decisions, fundraising, action, feedback. Members of the meeting who consistently volunteered time and practical skills as well as finance were our energy source. Encouraging graphs emerged which drove the cycle forward again and again with new actions identified, analysed, agreed, acted on and tracked by electric meter. Our Quaker community was strengthened, energised and cheered time and again.

As we cycled through the years we added another cog in the wheel gearing: external fundraising through awards and grants from trusts and governmental bodies. The evidence of our graphs and the enthusiastic efforts of volunteering Friends began to give a Midas touch to our application forms. Over six years we have spent about £120,000 (c. £40,000 from the Low Carbon Building Phase 2 Fund and the Veolia Environmental Trust, c. £15,000 from assorted Quaker trusts, with the remainder from Area Meeting or local meeting funds).

Contributed by Harriet Martin, Cotteridge Quaker Meeting



Friends of Cotteridge Meeting stand in front of their new solar array. Photo: Harriet Martin

Sustainability story

'Developing connectedness in our witness'

In April 2008 Laurie Michaelis held a spiritual learning day on the Living Witness Project for our Area Meeting. He inspired us with his knowledge and personal commitment. Laurie showed that Quakers are uniquely placed to make a difference as individuals, in the wider community and at government level.

Many of us already live in a more sustainable way whilst retaining an acceptable standard of living and quality of life. This is in accordance with our testimony to Simplicity and an example of how we can truly "let our lives speak".

We considered how we wanted to work together and decided that we need to develop connectedness in our witness; sharing experiences, gifts and burdens between Quakers locally and centrally, and with others beyond the Society.



Wimbledon Meeting's garden now grows vegetables and fruit as well as flowers.

Photo: Bill Douglas

- * See change as positive – don't give things up but embrace new ways
- * Work as a community on both personal and Meeting issues
- * Build spirituality and support into our work
- * Share knowledge and have fun
- * Be non-judgmental, accept other ideas
- * Accept the world in which we live.

An informal support group met four times. It was a useful starting point but we decided to incorporate it into our monthly speaker sessions.

Mainstreaming sustainability into our meetings and activities and making it the 'norm' made more sense, got better results and reached a wider audience. Sustainability issues are now very much a part of how we work together. Although there was some reluctance to give over part of the garden to vegetable and fruit, we all benefited from the produce.

Providing simple information, messages and specialist speakers from outside helped to stimulate debate. It reinforced the message that we were all starting at different points and it was our individual progression that was important and taking small steps together could make a difference.

Key members of our Meeting spoke enthusiastically about and demonstrated their commitment by how they lived and how this is integral to and not separate from our Quaker values and testimonies.

3. VISIONING & PLANNING

The outcome is that we are more aware of the impact of sustainability on our lives, local community and the planet.

Our advice is to bring people along with you, don't make them feel guilty. Inform and engage them in the debate; encourage others to move at their own pace but move; always keep spiritual issues at the heart of what we do and say.

We plan to review what we have achieved, what worked well, what helped us to move forward and what our next small steps are.

Contributed by Virginia Donovan, Wimbledon Quaker Meeting



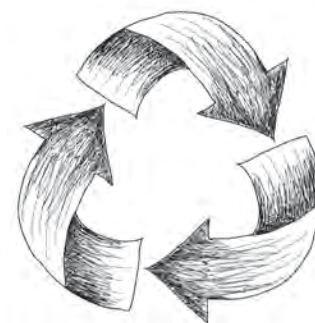
Susanna Riviere in Wimbledon Meeting House garden.


Photo: Bill Douglas

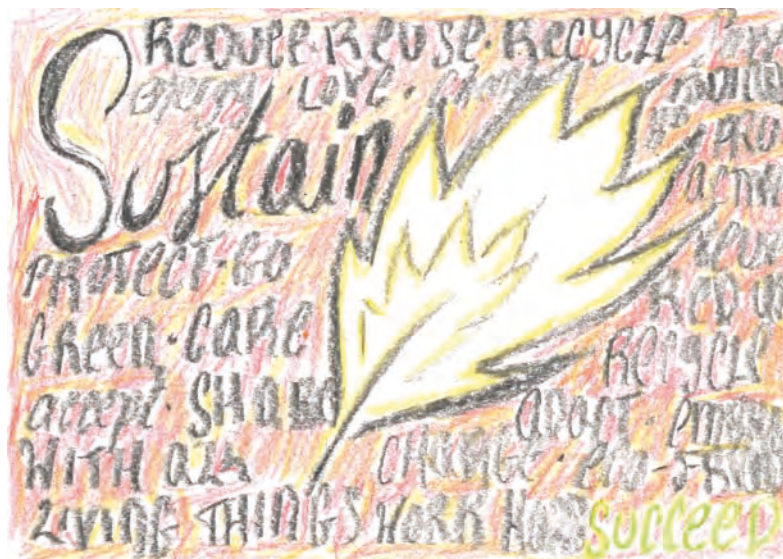
Planning

Meetings have taken many different approaches to planning their sustainability activities. Many have found that what works best is to move forward one step at a time. However, you need, at least, to prioritise the steps you take. The meeting check-up in Section 2 is designed to support you in doing this.

We've found that Friends can often be concerned or confused as to what they can contribute personally. We all have skills to offer, whether as energy experts, scientists, economists, listeners, gardeners, musicians or artists, people who like to make and fix things, facilitators or planners.



 Exercise 7 (Exploring your path, page 74) helps Friends identify their role.



A drawing by a young Friend, YMG 2011.