



LWM Newsletter: Autumn 2011

Local Economic Solutions for Sustainability

Welcome to Localise WM’s Autumn newsletter

Some items of recent news that have made a big impression on me: food banks have opened in Birmingham and Sandwell to provide for those too poor to feed themselves. 60% of the Alum Rock population are below the poverty line. Politicians contemplate abolishing the higher tax rate. The IMF say the world economy is entering a 'new and dangerous phase'. Kids without prospects came out looting in August for new trainers and a laugh. Researchers have found strong evidence for a causal link between inequality and the incidence of health and social problems right across the societal spectrum.

A striking quote from Deborah Orr in the Guardian: *“It is simply practical to organise society so that everyone feels that they can attain some kind of stake in it, achieve some sense of responsible agency, however modest.”* Less predictably, Gary Hemel, described as “the world’s most influential business thinker” by the Wall Street Journal - *“Capitalism has become more and more centralised...and as power becomes centralised, ordinary individuals feel as if they have less and less influence over critical decisions...and that when decisions are made, they are not responsive to local situations and local needs”*

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In a more diverse and localised economy, a far greater number of people would have a stake. LWM are planning a research project to identify from local experience how community economic development can more closely be integrated with the mainstream economy, redistributing economic power and creating better connected and more equal societies. There are also a larger than usual number of ‘take action’ requests within this newsletter – some more small ways of making a difference.

Solving fuel poverty – opportunities from Green Deal and localisation

- New report from LWM

The government’s Green Deal scheme is more than a golden opportunity to achieve our carbon emissions reduction targets; it could make the difference between a cold, damp, unhealthy home and a warm, affordable home that enhances quality of life.

Yet there are serious doubts about whether Green Deal will work for the fuel-poor. Phil Beardmore and Jon Morris have been researching the pitfalls and the potentials of Green Deal to solve fuel poverty, informed in part by their work on Birmingham Energy Savers, and funded by Scottish Power Energy People Trust.

Report Launch & Discussion 11th October 2011 5pm for 5.30 at the Midlands Co-operative Society
All welcome

The resulting report is now published on our website and will be launched at our Annual General Meeting discussion event – all welcome (see below) where we will also be discussing how ‘green new deal’ schemes can maximise local benefit in terms of local economic development and locally sensitive and justice-orientated delivery.

How the Green Deal solves fuel poverty is a matter of justice as well as public interest. The funding for subsidising the Green Deal and related programmes to promote renewable energy is to be from charges on energy bills. These charges will take a disproportionately large part of the income of the fuel-poor. If the fuel poor do not benefit to an equivalently high level from these schemes they will be worse off.

The ‘Golden Rule’ for Green Deal interventions is that work can be paid for by the savings made on fuel bills. The risk of getting this wrong is much more serious for those in fuel poverty – hence the need for more rigorous household assessment.

Fundamental problems specifically around fuel poverty identified in the report include accuracy of assessment to ensure measures will help and will work financially for poorer occupiers; the inadequacy of ‘one size fits all’ approaches, and issues of lack of trust.

A range of more complex recommendations can be found in the report for resolving these problems so that the Green Deal can help solve rather than



exacerbate fuel poverty and economic injustice.

The report can be found on our website http://localisewestmidlands.org.uk/activities/fuelpoverty_greendeal/ - or come to our AGM to hear it presented and ask questions of its researchers.

Community Land Trusts training course: - 19th Oct, Birmingham

The [National CLT Network](#) and the National Housing Federation are working with Localise WM

to organise a training day on Community Land Trusts on 19th October 2011 in Birmingham.

CLTs are community-driven and controlled organisations that provide land and buildings that meet the needs and aspirations of their communities. They range in size, can be rural or urban, and provide a variety of housing tenures as well as other community facilities, including workspaces, energy generation, community food and farming. CLTs provide an innovative and community-led approach to meeting local housing and other needs for long-term community benefit.

The course is suitable for communities wanting to set up a CLT as well as local authorities, housing associations, developers, enablers and consultants who are working with communities.

To book, please visit

<http://www.communitylandtrusts.org.uk/Events>.

Meanwhile our plans for a Digbeth community land trust remain shelved due to council housing policy and the proximity of the proposed high speed rail terminal blighting our chosen site, but we continue to look for opportunities to set up CLTs or more generally promote the CLT model in the West Midlands region.

National planning policy – ‘sustainable development’ means ‘growth’...

The draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is currently out for consultation, ending on 17th October 2011. This is an attempt to turn hundreds of pages of guidance into a “planning policy that fits into the stringent requirements of Ryanair hand luggage specifications” as a colleague recently put it.

Contrary to the impression you might get from the media, David Cameron and certain organisations, this is not all about the countryside. Some issues with the NPPF include:

- a presumption in favour of [sustainable] development;
- the lack of a workable definition of sustainable development;
- emphasis on economic growth as an overriding factor in decisions;

- reduced ability for local authorities to impose planning conditions if the developer feels these might make a development unviable;
- the underlying belief reflected throughout the document that allocating land for housing indiscriminately and with less ability to impose conditions will meet our needs for affordable, accessible and sustainable housing;
- weakened policies on retail and protection of local services including markets;
- the abolition of spatial policy for 'reducing the need to travel' and weaker sustainable transport policies.
- No requirement to take impacts on the community and particularly its more vulnerable members into account.
- Very weak on issues of participation and community involvement – an issue also muddled by greater opportunities for developers to 'buy off' opposition.

"Weak planning exacerbates economic problems because capital is diverted from productive uses into speculative ventures; cities decline as they hollow out; and badly sited businesses, disaggregated settlements and long travel times drag down economic efficiency." – George Monbiot, *Terra Nullius*

Contrary again to the stereotype of planning reform opponents, LWM loves good economic development and wants a planning system that enables and strengthens it. But it should strengthen the "biodiversity" rather than offering the "Japanese Knotweed" model of economic development: a model that delivers quality of life, revitalised places, job creation, economic diversity, local multiplier and environmental protection. The consultation is a crucial opportunity to make these points.

To make your own contribution, email planningframework@communities.gsi.gov.uk and copy in your MP - or if you have little time there are online email actions provided at www.foe.co.uk, www.livingstreets.org.uk and various other organisation websites.

The NPPF itself can be found at www.communities.gov.uk/ along with an optional online form for responses.

Energy Saving Co-op – co-operating across the UK for a fair green deal

The **Energy Saving Co-operative** had its Birmingham launch event last week co-hosted by Midlands Co-operative Society and LWM. The Co-op has recently been established to provide homeowners and communities with a Fair Green Deal. Its roles are to: provide a one-stop energy saving service and to reduce or eliminate the upfront costs of energy saving

The co-op's ethos and ways of working fit well with the recommendations made in our Green Deal and Fuel Poverty report: its stated purpose is to "do what the government's *Green Deal* proposals should do - put power in the hands of homeowners, communities and local businesses to help everyone to capture the benefits from energy savings, instead of handing these benefits over to the Big Six energy supply companies and the financial markets".

It also plans to work with local delivery partners such as low carbon organisations, providing the local trust, sensitivity and autonomy of 'small' along with the promotion, finance and standards advantages of 'big'.

be the market-leading provider of one-stop energy-saving solutions for homes and small/medium enterprises within five years in the effort to retrofit 1 million homes per year over the next 25 years. It says that "the scale of this opportunity, and the challenge, can only be successfully addressed by organisations whose primary focus is energy saving, not selling more energy" and takes as inspiration the original 18th Century building societies, growing out of the coffee houses and taverns of newly industrial Birmingham.



The co-op will redeploy a £30+ billion annual energy saving opportunity to fund the necessary upfront investment. It The Energy Saving Co-op needs support from individuals and organisations. You can join the co-op or find out more about partnership with them at their website www.energysaving.coop.

Birmingham markets under threat

LWM has been supporting the campaign to protect the Birmingham markets from proposals to sell off the current wholesale markets site with little or no clear commitment to finding an alternative site – particularly one which remains in very close proximity to the retail markets.

The current co-location of wholesale and retail markets benefits both, and there is plentiful evidence that markets have enormous benefits for cities' economies. Redevelopment plans look to be the predictable, sanitised, exclusive, blank-slate type of development that ignores existing economic functions and strengths. The hope is that a solution can be found that allows the council to develop the site positively and to sufficient financial benefit whilst retaining the wholesale market function on that site. This would prevent otherwise inevitable damage to the viability of the retail markets as essential providers of fresh, affordable food for people from all income levels and backgrounds in the city.

Policies protecting markets are some of the many protective policies that have *not* made it into the draft slimline National Planning Policy Framework (see **page 2**) – something we are hoping will change.

A petition for the markets can be signed online at the Birmingham Mail website <http://s.coop/5lfi> or on paper at The Warehouse reception on Allison Street or at a stall at the markets on market days.



Campaigners are seeking 10,000 signatures to get the issue raised at a full council meeting.

The Leiston Proposal

- the most enticing thing to come out of Suffolk since St Peters' organic ale?

Through the Sustainable Communities Act process has come a very interesting proposal on local planning from Leiston-cum-Sizewell Town Council, which, if agreed by the government, could be a new power for councils across the UK.

Local Works say this proposal addresses exactly the issues for which the campaign for the Sustainable Communities Act was originally started – 'ending 'Ghost Town Britain' and empowering local people.' As the Local Works website says: "In summary, the proposal is to require applicants of major developments to:

- attend a meeting of the local Town or Parish Council, or of a duly called Town Meeting, to answer questions on the application for development; and
- fund the council or duly called town meeting to commission an independent report on the application and critique of any reports that the applicant has submitted in support of the application for development.

The rationale is that local elected representatives and local people should be making their decision on whether an application should go ahead based on the best evidence, and this would help ensure that evidence was available.

Over 1,100 Parish and Town Councils across England have already resolved to support the proposal.

From LWM's experiences both with the proposed Heart of Shirley Asda development in Shirley (later called Parkgate, though why they chose a name that is immediately suggestive of scandal and sleaze is beyond me) and with Meteor Ford, the difficulty in getting legitimate and well-reasoned planning arguments into the local decision-making process in a way in which they can be taken seriously is deeply frustrating.

It remains to be seen how this can be combined with the government's current planning reforms, but this proposal would create a strengthening of objectivity in the planning process, meaning both

developer power and 'nimby' concerns should play a lesser role and lead to a better outcome.

More about Leiston's proposal is on the Local Works website – follow the 'take action' link to support the proposal.

<http://www.localworks.org/node/135>

Sustainability and Resilience for Herefordshire pursued...

Following on from the planning workshop we organised with sustainability and community activists in Herefordshire in February, a second workshop was held in July.

The second workshop featured presentations on inspirational low impact living developments such as Lammas Eco-village in Wales and led to discussion of how low-impact developments could be initiated in the county; and what planning policies are needed to encourage them. Herefordshire communities are continuing to work together on both strands.

The former farmland land occupied by [Lammas Eco-village](#) used to bring the farmer between £2,500 and £5,000 a year through sale of lamb. That same land now provides nine families with £60,000 worth of food, fuel and other goods and is predicted to be bringing in a surplus income of £40,000 by Year 5. The development is also beautiful, creative and empowering.

Lammas and similar developments are enabled and encouraged by the exemplary [Technical Advisory Note 6](#) on low impact development in Welsh planning policy. This permits housing in rural areas provided very tight criteria are met on live-work patterns and low impact design.

Low-impact housing policy is one thing we would



like to see in revised national planning policy for England (see page 2).

Lammas site model

Supporting community renewables

LWM associates Phil Beardmore, Paul Cobbing and Pat Conaty in partnership with MEA (Marches Energy Agency) are currently delivering the communities strand of the West Midlands Low Carbon Economy Programme for Sustainability West Midlands. This provides bespoke support for the region's community renewable energy projects.

This includes:

- A baseline survey of community based low carbon and renewable energy projects in the West Midlands, led by LWM
- Case studies on about 10 community renewable energy projects to identify challenges, barriers and how these have been overcome, or otherwise, led by LWM
- Identification of "up to 12" community renewable initiatives, led by MEA
- Providing practical, tailored support to help these projects move on to the next stage of the 'Wheel of Fortune', led by MEA
- The identification and training of mentors and their use to support community groups, led by LWM.

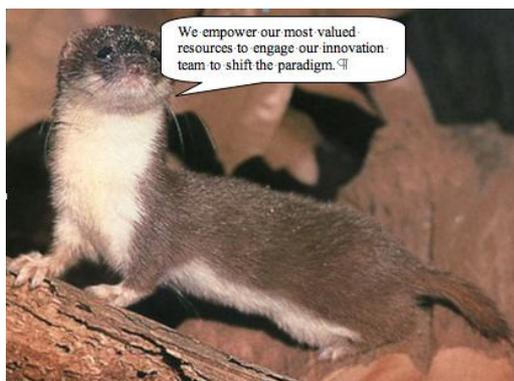
So far we have undertaken the baseline survey and are currently putting together a report identifying trends and issues. It has been interesting to note that energy-saving activity has been sidelined in the dash for solar PV while the Feed-in Tariff remains high, although the balance is likely to return as the rate drops.

We are also currently interviewing for the case studies, have recruited 23 mentors and held the first of the mentoring training sessions.

Fair Deal for UK farmers

Fair Deal Food UK [FDF], supported by LWM, advocates a fair price for farmers which covers production costs and overheads for fruit, arable crops, dairy produce, vegetables and meat, rather than routine subsidies.

Food production is vitally important. Retaining fertile land and farming skills will ensure that



staples can be provided, avoiding dependence on imports. Effectively the subsidy paid by the EU to farmers is a contribution to supermarket profits as they pay prices that are below the cost of production.

The EU proposes to allow member states to introduce compulsory contracts to improve producers' conditions - but at the Dairy Event recently farm minister Jim Paice said the UK government would not support this legislation.

Nevertheless he then went on to say "I very much want to see improvement in the bargaining power, the contractual relations and the share of the revenue for dairy farmers as part of enhancing the whole industry." He has given dairy producer and processor organisations until November to come up with a voluntary code of practice to create better milk contracts. This at a time when DairyCo's 2011 Farmer Intentions Survey shows 13% planning to leave the industry in the next two years, compared with 9% in the 2010 survey.

LWM intend to hold an event on fair trade for UK farming in the next few months.

<http://fairdealfooduk.wordpress.com/>

About LWM

Localise West Midlands is a not-for-profit think-tank, campaign group and consultancy, which promotes local trade, money flow and decision-making for social, environmental and economic benefit.

We undertake research and projects to change policy and practice in line with this approach, and raise awareness of the benefits of developing strong local economies amongst decision makers and the general public.

LWM offers ISO 14001 accreditation

– strengthening organisations by better environmental management

As part of its consultancy offer, aimed at helping to strengthen the role of small organisations in the economy, LWM now offers environmental management consultancy. Our associates Phil Beardmore and Rajeev Prakash can help businesses and other organisations to achieve the internationally recognised standard for environmental management, ISO 14001, useful in winning business. The standard is designed to address the delicate balance between improving profitability and reducing environmental impact.

If this could be useful to your organisation please see <http://lwm-ems.co.uk/>.

Invitation

Green Deal and Fuel Poverty report launch & discussion event

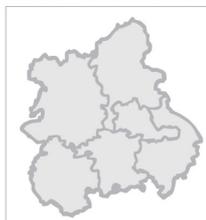
- **Presentation** of the findings of LWM's report "Solving Fuel Poverty – opportunities from Green Deal and localisation" (Phil Beardmore & Jon Morris)
- **Discussion** – how can the region's Green Deal schemes maximise local benefits and address fuel poverty?

Tuesday 11th October 2011, 5pm for 5.30 at the Midlands Co-operative Society, top floor of the BMI, Margaret Street, Birmingham.

Please let us know if you plan to attend.

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Localise



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