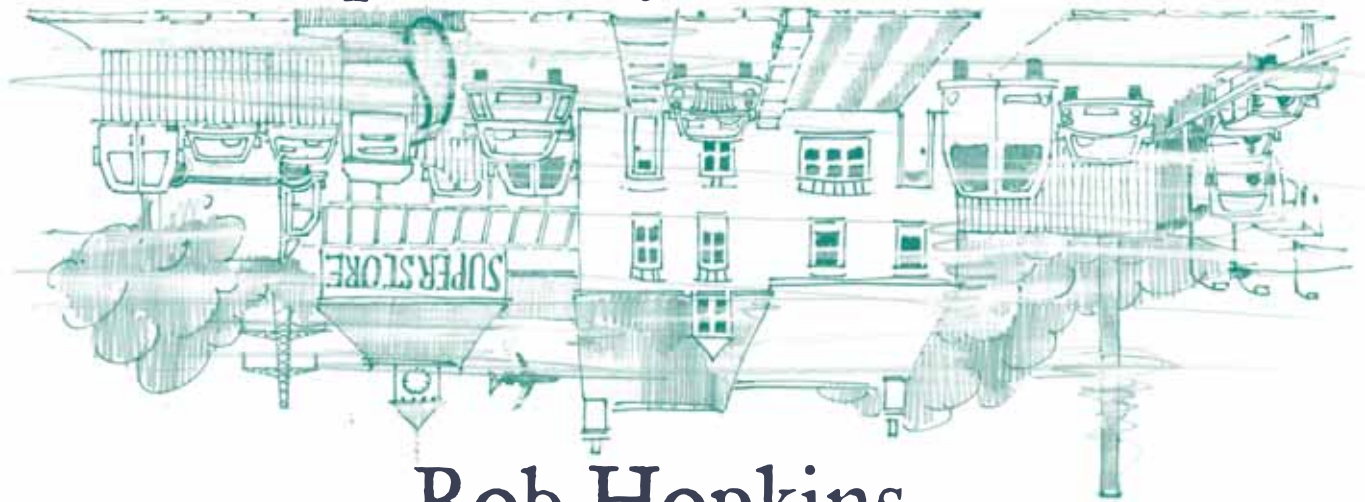




THE TRANSITION HANDBOOK

From oil dependency to local resilience



Rob Hopkins

Founder of the Transition movement

“If your town is not yet a Transition Town, here is the guidance for making it one.
We have little time, and much to accomplish.” — Richard Heinberg, author of *Peak Everything*

The Transition Handbook:

“This book by the visionary architect of the Transition movement is a must-read, labelled ‘immediate’. Growing numbers with their microscopes trained on peak oil are convinced that we have very little time to engineer resilience into our communities before the last energy crisis descends. This issue should be of urgent concern to every person who cares about their children, and all who hope there is a viable future for human civilisation post-petroleum.”
– **Jeremy Leggett, founder of SolarCentury and SolarAid, and author of *The Carbon War* and *Half Gone***

“The Transition concept is one of the big ideas of our time. Peak oil and climate change can so often leave one feeling depressed and disempowered. What I love about the Transition approach is that it is inspirational, harnessing hope instead of guilt, and optimism instead of fear. *The Transition Handbook* will come to be seen as one of the seminal books which emerged at the end of the Oil Age and which offered a gentle helping hand in the transition to a more local, more human and ultimately more nourishing future.”
– **Patrick Holden, director of the Soil Association**

“This is much more than just a book. It is a manual for a movement. And not just any movement, but one which – in avoiding the civilisational collapse threatened by the twin crises of peak oil and climate change – could prove to be the most important social force humanity has ever seen.”
– **Mark Lynas, author of *Six Degrees***

“Rob Hopkins has written the most thorough description so far of how we get from the present chaos of cities and towns that are killing the planet and the people in them, to viable new ecologically sustainable urban and rural systems. This is more than a theoretical how-to manual; it is based on his own team’s ground-breaking work, engaging whole communities in a transformative process that accepts the crucial need to reverse course, and has succeeded in doing so. The book is a great guide for how we must live in a future world where the limits of nature are honoured, but so are the basic comforts and joys of communities coming together in great common cause. There is no more important book than this one for any community seeking change toward ecological sustainability.”
– **Jerry Mander, founder/director of the International Forum on Globalization, author of *In the Absence of the Sacred***

“Rob Hopkins is the Gentle Giant of the green movement, and his timely and hugely important book reveals a fresh and empowering approach that will help us transition into a materially leaner but inwardly richer human experience. Full of reliable, readable, far-reaching scholarship, and warm-hearted practical advice on how to instigate transition culture wherever you are, this book will energize and regenerate your commitment to place, community and simple living. There is no better call to action than this book, and no better guide to the hands-on creation of a liveable future.”
– **Dr Stephan Harding, author of *Animate Earth: Science, Intuition and Gaia***

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“This is not some slow, controlled change we’re talking about. It’s fast, it’s unpredictable, and it’s unprecedented during human civilization.”

– Adam Markham, World Wide Fund for Nature

“What is remarkable is the failure of politicians to start planning in any way for this inevitable transition, or even to start preparing their electorates for its inevitability.”

– Jonathan Porritt, chairman of the UK Sustainable Development Commission

“Peak oil is a turning point in history of unparalleled magnitude, for never before has a resource as critical as oil become headed into decline from natural depletion without sight of a better substitute.”

– Colin Campbell, founder of the Association for the Study of Peak Oil and Gas

“The major oil companies have started making coded announcements indicating that they know the future of the oil business will not match its past. Instead of investing in production and discovery, all of the majors have been shedding staff and consolidating their holdings. None of this bespeaks a growing industry. And insiders know that there is very little excess capacity to be found anywhere.”

– Dale Allen Pfeiffer, *Eating Fossil Fuels*, 2006

What is Peak Oil?

Oil is a remarkable substance, one that is astonishingly energy-dense. It makes us far stronger, faster and more productive than we have ever been, enabling our society to do between 70 and 100 times more work than would be possible without it. We have lived with it for 150 years and have got used to thinking we will always have it – indeed we have designed our living arrangements in such a way as to be entirely dependent on it. The amount of energy needed to maintain our Western lifestyles is eye-watering; for each of us it requires the equivalent of 50 people on bicycles pedalling furiously in our back gardens day and night. Fossil fuels have allowed us to create extraordinary technologies, cultures and discoveries, to set foot on the Moon and to perfect the Pop Tart. But can it go on forever?

Of course not. The key point here is that it is not precisely when we use the last drop that matters. The moment that really matters is the peak, the moment when we realise that from that point onward there will always be less of it, year-on-year, and that because of its increasing scarcity, it will become an increasingly expensive commodity. We find ourselves precariously close to this tipping point. It is clear now that at least 60 out of the 98 oil-producing nations of the world are in decline, and that even mighty oil-producing nations such as Saudi Arabia are experiencing enormous difficulties meeting demand. Given that reaching peak oil will be a tipping point of unprecedented proportions, it seems reasonable then to ask, when might we expect to get there?

In late October 2007, Germany’s Energy Watch Group published a report which reassessed the data and argued very convinc-

ingly that world production had, in fact, already peaked in 2006, and “will start to decline at a rate of several percent per year”. Having said that, the exact date of peak oil is really not so important. What matters is the fact that it is inevitable, it is going to be happening soon, and we haven’t even begun to think what we might do about it.

How seeing the downward side of the mountain stretch away before us will affect our collective psyche remains to be seen. It is often said that new ideas (such as peak oil) go through three stages. First they are ridiculed, then they are ignored, and finally they are accepted as having always been the case. At the Association for the Study of Peak Oil conference in Cork, Ireland, in September 2007, former US Energy Secretary, James Schlesinger, said: “Conceptually the battle is over. The peakists have won. We’re all peakists now.”



What is Resilience?

Central to this book is the concept of resilience. In ecology, the term resilience refers to an ecosystem’s ability to roll with external shocks and attempted enforced changes. Walker et al. define it thus:

“Resilience is 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 the context of communities and settlements, it refers to their ability to not collapse at first sight of oil or food shortages, and to their ability to respond with adaptability to disturbance. The UK truck drivers’ dispute of 2000 offers a valuable lesson here. Within the space of three days, the UK economy was brought to the brink, as it became clear that the country was about a day away from food rationing and civil unrest.

Shortly before the dispute was resolved, Sir Peter Davis, Chairman of Sainsbury’s, sent a letter to Tony Blair saying that food shortages would appear in “days rather than weeks”. The fragility of the illusion that, as DEFRA said in a 2003 statement, “National food security is neither necessary nor is it desirable”, became glaringly obvious. It became clear that we no longer have any resilience left to fall back on, and are in reality three days away from hunger at any moment, evoking the old saying that “civilisation is only three meals deep”. We are completely reliant on the utterly unreliable, and we have no Plan B.

In Figure 12 below I attempt to distinguish how the Transition approach differs from more conventional approaches to environmentalism, having put resilience-building as one of its key objectives. I appreciate that in my ‘conventional environmentalism’ column I have, to an extent, set up a straw horse, so generalised that it

verges on a stereotype, but I think this process is an important one, essential in distinguishing the distinctive ground that the Transition approach stands on.

As I have said, it is principally the concept of resilience that underpins these distinctions. A community might campaign for plastics recycling, where all of its industrial and domestic plastic waste is collected for recycling. While almost certainly being better for the environment as a whole, it adds almost no resilience to the community at all. Perhaps a better solution (alongside the obvious one of producing less plastic waste), would be to develop other uses for waste plastics requiring minimal processing, perhaps producing tightly compressed building blocks or an insulating product for local use. Simply collecting it and sending it away neither leaves the community in a stronger position, nor more able to respond creatively to change and shock. The same is true of some of the strategies put forward by climate change campaigns that don’t take peak oil into consideration. Planting trees to create community woodlands may lock up carbon (though the science is divided on this) and be good for biodiversity, but does little to build resilience, whereas the planting of well-designed agroforestry/food forest plantings does. The Millennium Forests initiative missed a huge opportunity to put in place a key resource; we could by now have food forests up and down the country starting to bear fruit (both metaphorically and literally).

Increased resilience and a stronger local economy do not mean that we put a fence up around our towns and cities and refuse to allow anything in or out. It is not a rejection of commerce or somehow a return to a rose-tinted version of some imagined past. What it does mean is being more prepared for a leaner future, more self-reliant, and prioritising the local over the imported.

Economist David Fleming argues that the benefits for a community with enhanced resilience will be that:

- *If one part is destroyed, the shock will not ripple through the whole system*

- *There is wide diversity of character and solutions developed creatively in response to local circumstances*

- *It can meet its needs despite the substantial absence of travel and transport*

- *The other big infrastructures and bureaucracies of the intermediate economy are replaced by fit-for-purpose local alternatives at drastically reduced cost*

Harnessing the power of a positive vision

The concept of telling new stories was raised at the Official Unleashing of TTT in September 2006:

“Totnes has an opportunity here to be ground breaking internationally. Maybe in 400 years time, if humanity finds a way through, they will look back at this time at the beginning of the 21st century as a crucial time, as the last decade of the Oil Age. Maybe they will tell stories about what happened in Totnes. Maybe this evening will be something that is the beginning of one of those stories. If you look ahead at the future, there are gloomy possibilities, but there are also inspiring possibilities, and you are part of an inspiring possibility by being here tonight.”

– Dr Chris Johnstone,
author of *Find Your Power*

It is one thing to campaign against climate change, for example, and quite another to paint a compelling and engaging vision of a post-carbon world in such a way as to enthuse others to embark on a journey towards it. We are only just beginning to scratch the surface of the power of a positive vision of an abundant future; one which is energy-lean, time-rich, less stressful, healthier and happier. Being able to associate images and a clear vision with how a powered-down future might be is essential.

I like to use the analogy of inviting a reluctant friend to join you on holiday. If you can passionately and poetically paint a mental picture of the beach, the pool and the candle-lit taverna by the sea, they will be more likely to come. Environmentalists have often been guilty of presenting people with a mental image of the world’s least desirable holiday destination – some seedy bed and breakfast near Torquay, with nylon sheets, cold tea and soggy toast – and expecting them to get excited about the prospect of NOT going there. The logic and the psychology are all wrong.

Why visions work

My sense is that creating a vision works in many inter-related ways. Tom Atlee writes of creating what he calls an “alternative story field”. This in essence is creating new myths and stories that begin to formulate what a desirable sustainable world might look like. He talks of the potential power of bringing together activists, creative

writers and journalists to form ‘think tanks’ that create new stories for our times. When we start doing Energy Descent work, we should be looking to draw in the novelists, poets, artists, and storytellers. The telling of new stories is central. In Totnes we have started to do this with our ‘Transition Tales’ initiative, which aims to get people writing stories from different points during Totnes’ transition, as newspaper articles, stories, or agony aunt columns. Some of these appear later in this chapter. Such stories can come in all sorts of forms.

The pilot Totnes Pound that Transition Town Totnes (TTT) ran until June 2007 was also an example of this. People were able to hold in their hands a tangible, beautiful and spendable bank note. It told a new story about money, about its possibilities and about their community.

The tool of visioning offers a powerful new approach for environmental campaigners. We have become so accustomed to campaigning against things that we have lost sight of where it is we want to go. One of the best examples of this recently was provided by Transition Town Lewes, who when confronted by a local developer who wanted to develop a key part of the town, responded not with protests and petitions, but with a vision.

Peter Russell, the physicist and writer, describes a collective vision in terms of a Strange Attractor, as described in chaos theory. In effect, it is like throwing a whirlpool in front of you which then draws you towards it. It has an energy, it is dynamic.

Tools for Transition #1: The Self-Teaching Peak Oil Talk

There are two ways one can deliver a peak oil presentation. The first is to stand up in front of a group of people and speak. The second is to get the group to give itself the presentation. How so, when they know nothing about it you might ask? Aha. This is where the Self-Teaching Peak Oil Talk comes in.

Simply print a good peak oil powerpoint (the Transition Network is producing a generic one which is a good place to start) on to A3 or A4 sheets, and on the back of each sheet put some text (short and to the point) which explains the slide.

Then distribute the cards among the participants and, like guests at a party, invite them to mingle and to tell each other the information on their ‘slides’. As well as being a fun way to start getting people familiar with peak oil issues, it is also a great ice-breaker at an event or at the beginning of a course.

“There’s something deeper which I can’t really explain, but when there is a vision, it’s somehow not just a motivation, but somehow the psyche gets involved in some way that seems to interact with the world in a way that makes it easier for things to actually happen, things seem to fall in place. I can’t explain that rationally, but it’s something that people notice time and time again. If you’ve got a strong vision of where you’re going – it’s as if the world seems to want to support that vision. It just seems to do it.”

– Peter Russell, author of *The Global Brain*, *Waking up in Time*, and *From Science to God*

North-West Evening Mail, March 21st 2021

THE LAST DROP

“I felt like a chip,” says biodiesel producer

MOUNTBARROW SERVICE STATION NEAR ULVERSTON yesterday pumped its last litre of biodiesel. The golden liquid that promised so much in 2009 has struggled to establish itself and the UK biofuels industry recently admitted that, **“Biodiesel, unfortunately, has no future.”**

It had all started so promisingly. Government subsidies led to biodiesel filling stations opening around the country, and by 2016, 30% of UK arable land was under biodiesel production. However, the oil shocks of that same year led to the

Government’s National Food Security Programme, which saw biofuels edged out as food production took priority.

Paul Tuckett, who farms near Swathmoor talks ruefully of the ‘Golden Age’ of biodiesel. “We were producing 40,000 gallons at one point,” he said, “but now we just have a small patch for our own tractors and for the local fire brigade. Other than that we are now a mixed walnut, chicken, pig, myrtle berry, Szechuan pepper, olive and carp farm.” Asked which he preferred, he said there was little he missed about being a monocultural biodiesel

grower. “It got everywhere,” he said, “I felt like a chip for fifteen years.”

Mike Johnson of Mountbarrow’s said that he would miss the fuel. **“I don’t know what we’ll sell at the pump now,” he said. “With oil at \$250 a barrel, selling petrol is now such a limited market that only the aristocracy can afford it.** This isn’t enough to sustain us in a business. With the increase in horse carriage use we are thinking of converting to being a blacksmith and hay-selling business. I suppose we must move with the times, but it isn’t always easy.”

The Transition concept

So what actually is a ‘Transition Initiative’? The initial term used to describe this concept was ‘Transition Towns’, but this has since become largely irrelevant, given that we are now talking about Transition cities, boroughs, valleys, peninsulas, postcodes, villages, hamlets, islands . . . So although none of these alliterate quite as nicely as Transition Towns, Transition Initiatives seems to be the best overall term. Transition Initiatives are an emerging and evolving approach to community-level sustainability which is starting to appear in communities up and down the country. They are, to use a term coined by Jeremy Leggett, “scaleable microcosms of hope”. The idea began, as we have seen in Part Two, with the Kinsale Energy Descent Action Plan, and has since spread to communities around the UK and beyond.

Transition Initiatives are based on four key assumptions:

- 1) That life with dramatically lower energy consumption is inevitable, and that it’s better to plan for it than to be taken by surprise.
- 2) That our settlements and communities presently lack the resilience to enable them to weather the severe energy shocks that will accompany peak oil.
- 3) That we have to act collectively, and we have to act now.
- 4) That by unleashing the collective genius of those around us to creatively and proactively design our energy descent, we



can build ways of living that are more connected, more enriching and that recognize the biological limits of our planet.

The future with less oil could, if enough thinking and design is applied sufficiently in advance, be preferable to the present. There is no reason why a lower-energy, more resilient future needs to have a lower quality of life than the present. Indeed a future with a revitalised local economy would have many advantages over the present, including a happier and less stressed population, an improved environment and increased stability.

The Twelve Steps of Transition

1. Set up a Steering Group and design its demise from the outset

Bill Mollison, the co-ordinator of the permaculture concept, once famously said, “I can’t save the world on my own. It’ll take at least three of us”, or words to that effect. In starting your Transition Initiative you will need to gather some like-minded souls in order to drive forward the first stage of the process. What is essential though, and its importance is becoming increasingly clear to me, is that from its first meeting, that group must design its own demise – set a defined lifespan for its functioning.



The opening circle of TTT’s first Open Space day on food, October 2006.

So many groups get atrophied and stuck with people who cling to their roles in a way that stifles the progress of the project. In the longer term it is important that the project becomes driven by those who are actually doing things. I would suggest that you form your Steering Group of reliable people with the aim of getting through stages 2 – 5, and agree that once a minimum of four sub-groups are formed, your

group disbands and the Steering Group becomes made up of one person from each of the groups. This requires a degree of humility, but is very important in order to put the success of the project above the individuals involved. It is also quite a relief! It means that you aren’t forming a group whose aim is the complete relocalisation of the settlement in question, just to do the first part, a much more manageable task!

2. Raise awareness

You cannot assume that people in your community are familiar with peak oil, climate change, or even with basic environmental concepts and principles that you might take for granted. It is essential before launching an Official Unleashing event (see Step 4 below) that you have prepared the ground. In Totnes we spent nearly a year giving talks, film screenings and networking before we organised the launch. During that time we learnt a great deal about how to most effectively do this.

We screened *The End of Suburbia* three times, and had a full room and a completely different audience each time. Various methods for facilitating film screenings can be read about in Part Four, pp 219.



Attentive audience at Transition Bristol’s BIG Event, November 2007.

The Twelve Steps of Transition

1. Set up a steering group and design its demise from the outset
2. Raise awareness
3. Lay the foundations
4. Organise a Great Unleashing
5. Form groups
6. Use Open Space
7. Develop visible practical manifestations of the project
8. Facilitate the Great Reskilling
9. Build a bridge to local government
10. Honour the elders
11. Let it go where it wants to go
12. Create an Energy Descent Action Plan

The viral spread of the Transition concept

Running alongside the unfolding of the Transition process in Totnes was a rapid take-up of the idea beyond the town itself. Within weeks of the Unleashing other places were getting in touch to ask what we were doing, and soon this had become a viral phenomenon. Some of the key events along the way included:

- “One Planet Agriculture”, the January 2007 Soil Association conference in Cardiff which was focused on peak oil and relocalisation, and proved to be their most popular ever
- a talk in Lampeter in West Wales, organized by the West Wales Soil Association, which raised the idea of Transition Town Lampeter and was attended by over 400 people. It has since gone on to be the catalyst for a lot of the towns surrounding Lampeter to start their own Transition processes, with Lampeter as the hub

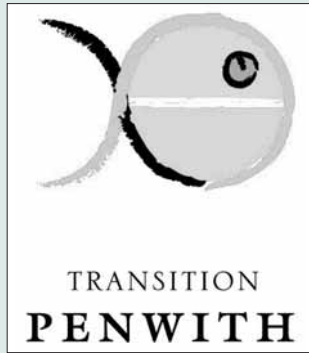
- lots of media coverage, including ITN News, the Guardian, a whole programme on BBC Wales and also an excellent piece on BBC Radio Scotland
- the Official Unleashing of Transition Town Lewes, which took place in the Town Hall, was attended by about 450 people and which as well as Unleashing the Lewes process, triggered other similar projects in surrounding communities
- A meeting with Prince Charles at his Food and Farming Summer School at Highgrove and giving him a Totnes Pound.

Since Transition Town Totnes Unleashed, the Transition model has been taken up by communities all over the UK and increasingly beyond. The demand became such that we set up an organization called The Transition Network to most effectively support them (see pp 194). The Transition model is a simple one, and each community that gets involved is contributing valuable research as to what works and what doesn't, and how the model needs to be adapted for different scales, settings and cultures.

What follows is a snapshot of seven Transition Initiatives on a range of scales, in the order in which they emerged, to give you a feel for how this idea is being interpreted in different places. It is important to remember that at the time of writing, the most advanced of these has only been going for just over 18 months.



The author, brandishing a Totnes Pound, with Patrick Holden of the Soil Association, speaking in Lampeter. Photo credit: Clare Richardson.



Eco hero Rob Hopkins, founder of the Transition movement

Rob Hopkins was delighted to be one of 450 people gathered in Lewes, East Sussex, in April as the town became officially 'unleashed'. This was no triggering of civil disorder as the term suggests. 'Unleash' is the word used by Hopkins, founder of the Transition movement, to describe the occasion that marks when a community begins taking action towards a future without reliance on oil. Lewes is now a 'Transition Town' –



THE SUNDAY TIMES · SEPTEMBER 2, 2007

Home grown apples can save the planet...

An oil crisis is coming, to add to our climate change woes, says **John-Paul Flintoff**. And the only practical solution is in our own back yards

WESTERN MORNING NEWS MONDAY OCTOBER 8 2007

www.thisiswesternmorningnews.co.uk

FLEDGLING TRANSITION GROUP SETS OUT A

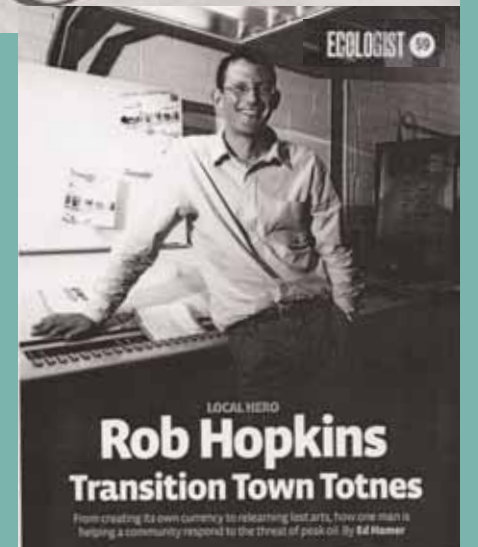
Positive thinking is the key to progress

Ethical living

Guardian 10.04.07

Some towns aren't waiting to see whether there will be alternative energy sources when the oil runs out – they're already trying to do without it, says **Julie Ferry**

You are now entering an oil-free zone



The Transition Handbook is a ground-breaking book which shows how we can move from feeling anxiety and fear in the face of 'peak oil', to developing a positive vision and taking practical action to create a more self-reliant existence.

We live in an oil-dependent world, and have got to this level of dependency in a very short space of time, using vast reserves of oil in the process – without planning for when the supply is not so plentiful. Most of us avoid thinking about what happens when oil runs out (or becomes prohibitively expensive), but ***The Transition Handbook*** shows how the inevitable and profound changes ahead can have a positive outcome. These changes can lead to the rebirth of local communities, which will grow more of their own food, generate

The Author: Rob Hopkins

has long been aware of the implications of our oil-dependent status, and has been energetically campaigning to increase awareness of its impact. Having successfully created an Energy Descent Plan for



Kinsale in Ireland which was later adopted as policy by the town council, Rob moved to Totnes in Devon and initiated the Transition Network, which now networks over 450 communities around the world: see www.transitionculture.org.

their own power, and build their own houses using local materials. They can also encourage the development of local currencies, to keep money in the local area.

There are now over 30 Transition Towns in the UK, with more joining as the idea takes off. With little proactivity at government level, communities are taking matters into their own hands and acting locally. If your town is not a Transition Town, this upbeat guide offers you the tools for starting the process.

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