Residential Weekend at The Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT), Machynlleth on 27 Feb to 1 March 2015 – organised by Meeting of Friends in Wales

'Taking the next step in fulfilling our commitment to be a Sustainable Community'

Introduction: At Yearly Meeting Gathering in August 2011, Friends made a 'Corporate Commitment' to become a low carbon, sustainable community.

As a result of that commitment there has been a lot helpful and encouraging work carried out (e.g. Sustainability Workshop, Bangor, September 2013) and in publications, (Sustainability Toolkit, Pam Lunn's lecture (DVD) and book 'Costing Less than Everything' where she emphasises that we can't just blame somebody else for climate change and economic problems, we are part of the problem and we need to 'change our lives in ways that most people have barely glimpsed yet')

...but how are we to be nurtured to continue this work?

Well, we need a bit of regular help, we need reminders and meetings that check how we're doing, learn about new ideas and modify and improve our ways, and that's what the weekend at CAT was about.

Themes of Weekend For some of the sessions we were all together for preparatory discussions: but there were also specific themed sessions at other times that took place concurrently The three principle themes were:

- a) Spiritual and Sustainability
- b) Economic & Environmental Sustainability
- c) Campaigning and Taking Action

My very brief personal notes which follow are from each of the sessions that I attended, they generally encourage further reading and investigation within our own meetings....did I mention that you'd be given 'homework' there's quite a lot of information to absorb and act upon!!

Informal 'settling in session' on Friday evening We were asked to explain what brought us to this gathering and what we hoped to achieve from the weekend.

My response was 'I'm angry and want to change the World!'

This was perhaps a bit of a tabloid style shock headline but was based on my recent viewing of a film Gaslands 2, documentary about the proliferation of fracking/gas wells throughout Central USA, which shows water pollution/unattended methane leaks/stories of gas companies ignoring complaints

Session 1 (All together) Spirituality and Sustainability

- We (hopefully) live in gratitude for the land that sustains us, our family that supports us
- Do we perceive the people who have little regard for the environment as the 'enemy'? Who are 'they'. George Marshalls book 'Don't even think about it' suggests that we should engage in cooperation and finding common ground
- Climate Justice helps campaign for strong international laws to protect the environment.
- Our own feelings (guilt?)
- What is happening to our Earth? How much of it is simply the Earth decaying, how much is the result of human actions?
- Are we remembering Advices & Queries 41 'Try to live simply......'?
- Are we applying a holistic outlook as did early Friends?

Session 2 (All together) What's wrong with our economic system?

- What has happened to the original Quaker Bankers ethos of honesty and integrity?
- GDP measures money not value, soil fertility, our biosphere or human wellbeing
- Global Divestment...asks us to lobby our big spenders (Government, Universities, Financial and Religious) to take away their investments in 'rogue' industries that are destroying our planet
- Shareholders....need more ethical ones!

- Huge imbalance of money, with many of the worlds poorest people and nations in debt (and paying interest) to the rich
- Growth/growth economy has been the driving force in previous economic doctrine. We need to change the paradigm so that growth (consumes Earth's resources) is no longer the watchword
- The 'Positive Money' website explains that 97% of the money in circulation is imaginary, created by lending money that is in bank accounts to a 3rd party(as a debt)....thereby increasing the debt. Positive Money suggests a radical overhaul of the way that money is created....others suggest that we do away with money

Session 3 (All together) Introduction to action and campaigning

- We need to take action to challenge unequal economics & huge differences between rich/poor
- Economic Justice Energy Justice
- Your Faith, Your Finance helps Faith Communities make decisions about where to invest money
- COIN (Climate Outreach and Information Network)
 The Climate Coalition
- 'The New Economy': a title used by a couple of publications. Friends are publishing a document of that title (in draft at the moment) about an economy that is true to Quaker Testimony
- We need to have a voice at the World Climate Meeting in Paris later this year
- Economics Mythbusters
 Watch the video 'Do the Math'

Session 4b Economics What would an alternative economic system look like?

- Local Cooperatives and social enterprises Interest and Inflation free economy
- Create a Quaker Bank? Triodos Bank? Local Credit Union Local Economy
- Social Housing problem: Housing Benefit goes to private landlord rather than to Social Housing
- Citizens Income TED Talks Reform the tax system
- Money, Gift and Society in the age of Transition (Charles Eisenstein)
- Fuel quota's (a basic allowance for all at a lower cost, anything extra at a much higher cost
- More John Lewis type business
 Meeting initiative to promote low carbon food
- Ownership of land vs the 'Common wealth' Civil disobedience (The Occupy Movement)
- Naomi Klein's book 'This Changes Everything'
- Russia Today's television programme, an alternative look at World Economy
- Gift economy/barter/exchange Token money
- Be aware of 'food miles'
 Organic Milk is less intensively farmed than non organic

Session 5 (All together) What is our vision?

- Alternative Lifestyles
 - Letting go of ownership
 - Co Housing (e.g. Lune Co-housing Project)
 - Shared community areas (Washing machine etc.)
 - Car Pool
 - Spare room for guests
- Problems. people not integrating/rules et

Session 6c Action & Campaigning ... Next steps

- Learn about effective campaigns
- Link up with empathetic groups in our area (Friends of the Earth etc)
- Engage with MP's and local government..but have a good case, well prepared
- Invite Councillors and MPs for tea!
 Educate yourself
 Silent vigil
- Community action Outreach and poster/displays Awareness of stunts
- Demonstrations
 Witness with non Q's 9.
 Discernment