

# Copenhagen 2009:

## 10,000(ish) words to help save the planet

Day ten: What's not to like? Celebrating the up-side of down

*"Along with the pleasure we take in magical transformation is the thrill of rising to a challenge"*  
Wendy Steiner, 'The Joy of Less'

When you've made the changes we're suggesting in pursuit of very low-to-no-carbon places and lives, what will they be like? Perhaps quite a lot better than what we have / endure now? There's a big upside to the down of climate change and global warming embedded in and released by the action we're going to take... This really is a series of "great opportunities disguised as insoluble problems". But will Beyond Green's best be the enemy of your good? Is this a counsel of perfection? And if it needs to be acted upon as a total system who's going to make the first move and then what happens? How can we move literally and definitively beyond green?

Pleasure. Freedom. Health. These are the purposes of sustainable development. Of course it's preposterous, as Wendell Berry has observed, to presume they can exist, still less endure, without a healthy natural environment. But in the debate about how to ensure a stable climate and a thriving biosphere we often fail to talk about the many specific ways in which the actions we urgently must take will improve our lives anyway. Without irony we can gladly say that if climate change didn't exist you wouldn't have to invent it to justify most of the things we know we need to do!

Because of our negligence climate change has become an issue of species survival – and it's our own species this time – in perhaps the 7th great extinction. But put in these terms our predicament can sound and be a bit Promethean or even vulgar, especially from the mouths of politicians in power who, as Greenpeace point out, have failed to act in favour of yet more talk.

'Science', 'climate', 'global', 'targets', '80% cut in greenhouse gas emissions post 1990', '\$100 billion each year for the developing world', 'carbon taxes', 'contraction and convergence'. It all sounds a bit abstract, intimidating and big. Clearly someone else's job. And the risk is that green fatigue soon sits alongside world hunger and poverty fatigue in the box of tiresome good causes.

As we've argued in these 10 Big Ideas papers there's typically an up-side to actions we can take to address the 'down' of climate change. Here's a quick summary of how good it can, should, and will be if we get our act together:

- If we account properly for the cost of pollution, trillions of dollars will be invested in clean power and technology, the cleverest people and most creative businesses will enter the market, the cost of those technologies (e.g. solar) will fall dramatically and all our homes will become mini-power stations. Meanwhile we'll create more than a 100,000 jobs in an urgent 10 year programme to retrofit every home in Britain. This means warmer, more comfortable homes, fewer premature deaths and cheaper fuel bills.
- By 2020 60% of all journeys in British cities will be made by bicycle. We'll have safer more animated streets, fitter people, less childhood obesity, far fewer lethal or serious road accidents, a greater sense of community and collective purpose, cleaner air and a dramatic fall in asthma and other respiratory conditions. Congestion falls beyond the CBI's wildest dreams and business efficiency rises.
- Land use planning will be improved. We'll need to travel shorter distances to fulfil our daily needs, and meet our neighbours on the street. We'll make all *neighbourhoods* a pleasure to walk and cycle in. Plant millions of street trees, green roofs, balconies, ledges, walls, abandoned brown patches and other 'space left after planning'; how lovely it looks! And insect and bird life will abound as urban places become ecological places. Buildings will be built to last, adaptable and resilient, thoughtfully proportioned to human and street scale.

- Food will be seasonal and fresh. Because most of us will eat less wastefully and chow down far less meat, although the quality of our food will improve and perhaps be more expensive per calorie than it once was, overall we'll spend no more on nourishing ourselves than in the bad old days. Our diets and health will improve. The countryside will spring back to life with diversified farms and thousands of new small-holdings and allotments. Green gyms will supplant or complement indoor exercise machines. More of us will have mud under our fingernails on Monday morning.
- The spatial urban geography of Britain will be transformed by a network of sleek, clean speedy trains and ever faster and more accessible internet. Seaside towns will be transformed by the income derived from millions of new visitors and the economy will leak less of its cash to far flung places. We'll spend less of our incomes on ludicrous heavy metal vehicles and the obnoxious internal combustion engine – there'll really be no need as we enjoy the glorious unintended consequence of seeing far less of Jeremy Clarkson.
- Walking and cycling more, sharing public transport, using the ever-improving public realm of our towns and cities, the burgeoning enthusiasm for festivals and markets of all kinds will grow a far greater sense of shared experience, common purpose and community. Gradually income disparities will reduce and we'll be spared the moral and practical indignities of a grossly unfair society. Violence, crime, depression and mental illness will all fall dramatically, educational attainment will improve and life expectancy rise as a direct result.
- With greater global equity and an end of the zero-sum battle for access to finite natural capital international relations will improve. The global community will become just that - a community. Societies and nations will be less insecure; there'll be much less mass migration resulting from drowned, parched or otherwise degraded environments than we'd otherwise have faced and the new cleaner, greener and now cheaper renewable energy technology will bring electricity to all. There'll be fewer wars.

Sounds utopian? Well the choice really is ours. And frankly what's not to like? No, really, what is not to like? So let's stop being so tired, scared and underprepared and get on with it. Happy Christmas.

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A little bit about what we do in the Beyond Green group:

**Beyond Green Consulting:** policy, strategies, plans, place-making and process for authentic sustainable developments which inspire and enable free, pleasurable, healthy and environmentally sustainable living. Offices in London, Newcastle and Auckland

**Beyond Green Living:** advice on sustainable lifestyles, often through brands and communications; TV projects, personal appearances and publications (incl. *Eco-Logical!* (2009), *How to Reduce Your Carbon Footprint* (2008), and *1,001 Ways You Can Save The Planet* (2007), Duncan Baird Publishers)

**BlueLiving:** a portfolio of strategic land and development projects with a view to building, owning and managing seminal sustainable developments across the UK

**Wilderness Wood:** a beautiful ancient woodland, sustaining a woodland economy, demonstrating conservation and providing education, inspiration and outdoor play