Neil May

THE GARDEN ORGANIC GARDENING CONFERENCE 2011
Sustainable gardening for sustainable lifestyles – the future

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IF
Lessons from another sector

• Working in sustainable buildings for 20 years
• NBT for 12 years – a successful business at last!
• Also involved with policy/ legislation
• However now fear that much of this has been making things worse not better
• Need to radically re-examine what we are doing
NBT - What we sell

• Woodfibre Insulation
• Lime and clay plasters
• Clay Blocks
• Systems
• Consultancy
• Performance

• 20 staff: turnover £3 million pa: growing fast
Sustainable products success?

• NBT 30% year on year growth since 2007
• Renewable energy lift off
  – PVs
  – Bio mass heating
  – Ground/ Air Source Heat Pumps
• Rainwater harvesting, SUDS etc
• Sustainability consultants everywhere!
UK progress in buildings

• Energy use up by 30% in last 30 years
• Huge resource use and huge waste (100m tonnes per annum – 3 x total domestic waste)
• Massive gap between designed and real performance of buildings. Typically 100% more energy used than designed.
• Replacement of old pathologies by new ones in sick buildings: huge increase in asthma.
• No proper funding for research or training for past 30 years. Knowledge base privatised.
• De-skilled, de-motivated and neglected industry and workforce.
Sustainable building stuff?

• Natural building materials sales still very small. Many barriers. Much of it used inappropriately. Green wash everywhere!
• Renewables often inappropriate.
• Rainwater harvesting is nonsense environmentally.
• More sustainability consultants don’t necessarily lead to more sustainability.
• Sustainability codes and assessment methods work against simplicity, integrity and learning

• Most sustainability stuff has nothing to do with sustainability
Do we just need to try harder?

- More zero carbon buildings
- More renewable energy
- More testing and monitoring
- More policies and more legislation
- More sustainable product marketing

- Or is this all part of the problem?
Problems are not about products

- In the last 40 years, population has increased by 9% and housing units by 38%. This has been part of social breakdown.
- Heating energy has gone up by 20% and appliance energy use by 143%.
- Values analysis: social structure and lifestyle – the manufacturing of dissatisfaction.
- Take back effect – the more energy efficiency, the more energy use: Warm Front and FITS.
Sustainable Horticulture?

• Does it have the same problems as sustainable buildings?
• Green wash?
• Driven by consumerism and actually accelerating a consumer culture/social breakdown?
• Contributing to environmental destruction rather than being part of solution?
We need to get out more

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What kind of sustainable future?

• Continuing economic growth not possible or desirable
  – Tim Jackson: Prosperity without Growth
    • Ehrlich Equation
    • Impossibility of de-coupling

• Debt based, bank created money is driving massive environmental and social destruction
  – Richard Douthwaite (Feasta)
  – Ellen Hodgson Brown
  – The Grip of Death
Visions of sustainability

• Stern
• Brave New World - ecofascism
• nef - The Great Transition
  – No growth or even de-growth economics
  – Sharing work and income
  – Different valuing and measuring of “progress”
  – Craft and small scale local industries
  – Different relationship Man and Nature
Sustainable building/ horticulture impossible outside of sustainable society

- Different aims and values
- Different economics
- Different social organisation
- Different way of working
- Different language and understanding

- It’s not really about technologies or products
Transition?

• Managed politically led?
  – UN programmes
  – Contraction and Convergence
  – Political programmes

• Bottom up approach?
  – Transition Towns
  – Local economies, alternative currencies
  – Education

• Incremental or step change?

• What role for businesses?
Shall we give up and go home now?

• Some people in our sector are trying:
  • Usable Buildings Trust
  • Good Homes Alliance
  • Passivhaus Trust
  • AECB
  • NBT
One Brighton – One Planet Living

• One Brighton: BioRegional Quintain and Crest Nicholson - 172 Flats in 11 storey building
One Brighton

• One Planet inductions
• Local organic site cafe
• Weekly competitions
• Roof top allotments
• Social design – spaces, offices etc
• ESCO energy plan
• Monitoring programmes underway with full feedback loops
• Green building materials and energy systems
• 2 car parking spaces for 172 flats
• Tackling the social and human elements
NBT

• Simplicity
• Learning
• Integrity

• Exploring different business models and aims
Sustainable Gardening – a vital ally

• Has to understand context
• Has to address meaning
• Has vital role to play in changing our culture through hands, head and heart – same as green building, but better!
• However could be part of the problem if it reinforces economic or consumer model.
• Needs to be allied to radical changes as well as incremental changes.
• Must engage with other sectors
Sustainable building/ horticulture means transformation

• Not a product or system. Not a fact.
• A direction of travel
• A human endeavour
• A way to grow