



## The UK Man and the Biosphere Committee Urban Forum

### Minutes of the UK MAB Urban Forum meeting held 6th December 2005 at University College, London.

#### Present

Gerald Dawe	(GD)	Independent consultant, and Chair, Urban Forum
Jane Fisher	(JF)	CEH Wallingford, and Secretary, Urban Forum
Peter Frost	(PF)	Countryside Council for Wales
David Nicholson-Lord	(DNL)	Independent consultant
Peter Cush	(PC)	Environment and Heritage Service, N.Ireland
David Knight	(DK)	English Nature
Alison Millward	(AM)	Alison Millward Associates
Paul Mobbs	(PM)	Speaker
David Goode	(DG)	University College London (DG: formerly Greater London Assembly)
Alan Scott	(AS)	Independent consultant
Penny Angold	(PA)	University of Birmingham
Paul Mobbs	(PM)	Visiting speaker

#### 1. Apologies and Welcome

Apologies have been received from Peter Shirley (PS), Peter Jarvis (PJ), John Box (JB), Julie Procter (JP), Graham Leeks (GL), Judy Ling Wong (JLW), Ian Angus (IA), Grant Luscombe (GL), Peter Morgan (PM) and Richard Sharland (RS).

GD welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially new Urban Forum member Alison Millward, who had carried out valuable stakeholder / community involvement work in urban ecology and nature conservation, dating back over several decades. She is currently involved in a £125M project.

#### 2. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the May 2005 meeting were signed by GD as an accurate record.

#### 3. Matters arising from minutes

Finance: JF needs to see finance staff to invoice CCW for contribution.

#### 4. Presentation and discussion: Paul Mobbs. Author of *Energy Beyond Oil* (ISBN 1-905237-00-6). A description of 'peak oil'. Discussion on the implications for the urban environment.

Paul Mobbs, described his background as an engineer and present employment as a consultant on issues ranging from incinerators, landfill and generators.

Website: <http://www.frow.org.uk/ebo/>

Of the total energy from the sun that powers the globe, 46% goes into wind and currents, 30% is refracted back to space, and 24% powers the hydrological cycle.

Removal of energy from the hydrological cycle has ecosystem effects. The harnessing of all energy that we can from renewable systems will not meet our energy needs. Gas use (21%) is increasing, coal use (22%) is decreasing, nuclear (6%), renewable very minor. Contribution from renewable figures provided by the government does not take account of the renewable energy produced on a domestic scale unless it is fed back into the national grid. The major shifts in energy use in the UK include an increase in gas, and a minor increase in renewables. Power station energy production results in 40% of energy loss as water. Gas energy production is more efficient. Houses consume 30% of energy provided, transport 35%, industry the remaining (35%). Therefore energy conservation cannot simply concentrate on domestic use. UK renewable energy production is mainly from methane, but the value of the resources going to landfill exceeds the value of the energy produced. Incineration of rubbish produces less energy than required in the initial product production. Significantly, individual household renewables (e.g. solar panels etc.) fell outside of the official government statistics on energy. There was, therefore, no way of directly determining how many people had made individual commitments to renewables.

UK carbon emissions are increasing 5% pa and we will reach our Kyoto limit this year 2005-2006; initial DTI predictions were that the UK would reach the Kyoto limit by 2020. Carbon emissions in the UK are 30% from power stations, 33% from industry and the remainder from domestic and transport. Therefore to reduce carbon emissions we need to target industry and power stations. A 1 gigawatt nuclear power station saves 5% of the C emissions and costs £6-8 billion over its life. It would cost less to concentrate on reducing domestic energy use. Ten nuclear power stations will not save as many C emissions as 500 wind-farms. We can exceed this by all-round energy conservation. If we reduce energy production that results in a reduction in our GDP, as a result of the way in which GDP is calculated. This is then counted as a recession and is why solutions tend to focus on buying more and producing more, not saving. Economic growth is one of the main drivers for the increase in energy use.

Oil availability, from oil wells, follows a Gaussian curve and USA and North Sea oil production is now on reducing after a peak. The global peak in oil production is estimated to occur between 2008-2010 and will be followed by a reduction in supply. What are the alternatives to oil? Coal also has a limited life span; uranium is limited as we can only process U238 not U235 and the present estimates of the capacity and cost of energy production from Uranium are based on the use of the highest grade deposits, which are finite. Of the renewable sources, solar can harvest 30% of the energy from the sun and biomass 0.2% of the sun's energy. In order to produce sufficient bio-diesel to run all the cars in the UK we would need to cover the country in oilseed rape. Calculations show that renewable energy can only meet 30-40% of our present energy use and therefore the only true solution is to reduce our energy consumption to this level. This can be achieved through better insulation, solar hot water for heating and local food production.

## **Discussion**

Paul's talk was followed by a general discussion that in order to survive a reduction in traditional energy sources we will need localised, low-energy food production. DNL

said that if the work of PM was correct, it conjured up apocalyptic visions. Food production adjacent to homes seemed to require that we leave the cities and live in houses that are close to areas of food production. This is counter to the current aims to increase housing density.

### **5. Nomination of George Barker for MAB award**

Peter Cush read out the nomination for George Barker. George Barker's invaluable work for English Nature, as a skilled networker in bringing people together and the value of his international work were discussed by GD and DK. GD said that George had brought international urban ecology into the fold at English Nature, and that he had personally benefited from George's publicising of Herbert Sukopp's work, together with other perspectives from Europe and the US. DK also gave an appreciation of George's work in broadening English Nature's approach to the urban environment. John Box had also conveyed his support for the award to George Barker via email prior to the meeting. Discussions were held as to whether to award George Barker the MAB award at a meeting or a special seminar. It was decided to invite George Barker to our next meeting to make the award by giving him a certificate.

**Action 5: JF to make a certificate and add details of the award to the website.**

### **5a. Possibility of holding a seminar.**

#### **5a(I): International Urban Ecology Seminar**

DG suggested that there is a need to hold a major urban ecology seminar, and UCL could host this. The World Conservation Union or the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) can promote the seminar, which could be held in 2007. AS said there was a need include information from more information from long-term data trends, DK suggested including the changing role of green-spaces and AM suggested including a debate on access to green spaces. PF suggested inviting international representatives, especially those involved in green spaces in Chinese and Indian cities. DG suggested the role of political and administrative matters affecting green spaces ought to be a key part of the proceedings, and suggested Santiago in Chile and Cape Town as case studies. DK noted that there is a conference on the *Management of Conflicts Between Wildlife and Human Resource Use* in Leipzig 25-27 January 2006 ([www.frap-project.net](http://www.frap-project.net)).

#### **5a(II) Health and the Urban Environment**

Also discussed was the possibility of holding a small workshop on *Health and the Urban Environment* much sooner than 2007. This would include discussions on IDs excellent paper on mental health and the environment. GD emphasised that this could be potentially a very wide meeting, and it ought ideally to integrate environmental health work (e.g. 'Healthy Cities', post-1986), and possibly epidemiological aspects in relation to greenspace. An additional aspect was: is the greenspace resource (e.g. in terms of actual area and/or accessibility per person) rising or declining in volume? His view was that this has greatly decreased in recent years. It would be important to describe these realities, as well as giving the positive side of the story. DG and DNL agreed. DG said that much had been infilled within the Greater London Assembly (GLA) area in recent years. AS commented that in Islington, figures on greenspace had been skewed. In other words, there was not actually as much greenspace available as had been indicated in the statistics of the borough. PF would like a UK focus for the meeting. AM/DG suggested bringing together National Health Service (NHS)

professionals and sustainable transport experts as well. On the matter of perception, it was noted that urban green spaces can also cause feelings of fear as well as calm and there is a need to debate the difference in perception between intensively managed and natural green spaces (AK, AM, AS). AM stressed that the multi-functionality of urban greenspace was important. DG highlighted the need to build up evidence of the health benefits of green spaces –and this will be needed by the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (RCEP). PF described how there is need to keep any workshop from repeating other conferences and to have a productive outcome.

**Action 5a: JF to send these suggestions round the group in the form of draft content / outlines for the meetings and to collate further expressions of interest.** [First Draft outline is attached, for *Health and the Urban Environment* as well as one-page draft flyers.]

**6. Evidence for Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution Report: Urban Environment. 4 priority themes:** N.B. (1) sustainable urban transport; (2) sustainable urban management (Local Agenda 21, EMAS, indicators); (3) sustainable urban construction (resource and energy efficiency, demolition waste, design issues); and (4) sustainable urban design (land use-regeneration, brown field sites, urban sprawl, land use densities).

DG asked the Forum to note down three things that should be changed e.g. institutionally; economically; and administratively, which would improve the quality of urban greenspace. Suggestions on sources of evidence were given by AM, DK, PF and DNL.

**Action 6.1: Request evidence from UF members via email.** Evidence is needed, on factual or evidential benefits of sympathetically managed urban ecosystems, or simply urban greenspace, to be channelled via DG, to the RCEP, the absolute latest deadline being end of February 2006. DG said that the functional services of ecology and how this will affect urban form were the aspects of central importance to RCEP.

## **7. Diminishing Garden Areas**

GD asked for any thoughts, data or information that could be included in the discussion paper. To summarise, this indicated that the average UK garden size of 270 m<sup>2</sup> had recently declined, in some areas, and as a direct result of Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) 3, to as little as 90 m<sup>2</sup>. The implications for garden wildlife and sustainability – e.g. vegetable-growing, wood-fuel supply (c.f. Agenda item 4: Paul Mobbs) were potentially significant. John Handley (JH) had already suggested (on the phone) that he may be able to help using aerial mapping data collated and will be able to assist GD early in 2006. JH's help was gratefully acknowledged. More evidence and references were suggested by AM, DK and DG. DG said that there was some data on garden infilling available via the GLA and/or Dave Dawson. DK said that the October 2005 issue of *The Garden (journal of the Royal Horticultural Society)* was a good reference plus downloadable papers from Kevin Gaston. PA said there were interesting instances of refusal of planning permission for infilling back gardens with new houses in the Solihull area. These contrasted somewhat with DG's experience. DK said that up to 25 houses / ha biodiversity increases. Above this density, it begins to decline. DG said that Dave Dawson of GLA held useful data on bird populations in gardens. AM said that much research had gone on with 28,000 houses on the south coast of England.

## **8. Discussion on implications of Hurricane Katrina**

Brief discussion. DG mentioned a forthcoming meeting on *Low-Lying Cities and Climate Change*, where there was liaison between London and Houston. This had followed a meeting between the two cities on *Climate Change, Extreme Events and Coastal Cities*

([cohesion.rice.edu/CentersandInst/ShellCenter/emplibrary/CoastalCities.pdf](http://cohesion.rice.edu/CentersandInst/ShellCenter/emplibrary/CoastalCities.pdf))

## **9. Progress on the Work Programme**

PF requires offers of assistance for the MAB yellow book.

GD is progressing work on Street Trees and Sustainability and asks for contributions, especially on ethical issues and the preservation or failure to protect street trees.

Two new items would be put into the work plan as a result of today's meeting:

1. **Health and the Urban Environment:** Workshop itinerary to be drafted up for taking place in 2006 or post-2006.
2. **International Urban Ecology Seminar.** [Provisional title.] Joint IUCN and UK-MAB Urban Forum meeting. To be held 2007. DG and the Forum to begin to organise content.

**Action 9.1: JF to send round outline of the structure for the yellow book to UF members and ask for assistance with chapters.**

## **10. Any Other Business**

GL sent an update on URGENT work via JF and the group would be interested if GL could speak at the next Urban Forum meeting.

PF –Living Landmarks project in Reading, looking for professional help to draw up bid and require funding or endorsement. This project could be a candidate for a future MAB award –but more information would be needed. The forum asked of PF could invite a representative to give a talk at an UF meeting?

PF mentioned a meeting between the UNESCO MAB international Urban Experts Group and the WCPA/IUCN Cities and Protected Areas Task Force. The Task Force's chair, Ted Trzyna is copied in to messages to the urban Group and some of the Group's members have joined the Task Force. PF will be attending 'Urban Nature 2006' in Cape Town and giving a short presentation on Urban Biosphere Reserves.

## **11. Dates of Next Meetings**

Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> March, University of Sheffield - tbc