

**New Thinking on Clean Growth: Transforming Sidmouth
Talk by Prof Evan Parker at the Café Scientifique on 31st March 2020**

Feedback from VGS Coordination Team meeting on 8th April

Attendees: Jon Ball, Dave Bramley, Graham Cooper, Robert Crick, Rita Hedley, Peter Murphy, Roger Till, Mary Walden-Till, Jeremy Woodward

The Sid Valley could be a wonderful place to live!

The consensus is that the 'volunteer model' is not adequate:

- The volunteer model often ends up simply being a group of friends having a good time.
- We can only expect so much from volunteers, eg: the Food Bank.
- The Community/Farmers' Market failed due to over-reliance on volunteers.

We need to make use of all sectors:

- We need to be building broader alliances.
- If entrepreneurs, farmers, councillors are not interested, then this project will not happen.
- The STC have been lethargic, but is now younger; the Chamber is active.
- We can employ expertise from other sectors, eg: ED AONB.

Especially now: We are rediscovering opportunities.

- In the current situation, a lot of discovery is happening: we realise that we don't have to drive for our food or to import all our food.
- Bottom-up initiatives are happening: shops have re-opened due to demand.
- Local entrepreneurs are delivering, using the infrastructure which is in place.
- The new delivery network is providing outlets for products.

We can engage the wider community with a VGS project.

- The VGS can be a catalyst for communicating new economic models in a time of change.
- The democratic starting point of any new project should be the Neighbourhood Plan – and its Community Actions.
- We need a breakthrough to persuade people to engage.

If we have good enough a proposition, finance is not a problem:

- The problem with the project is the initial cost: the capital investments are huge.
- Bottom-up approaches are possible, but people need to show initiative, eg: if 100 were to give £250 each for an allotment at Fortesque.

Transport models:

- STC doesn't have the levers: the Hopper Bus continues to have problems.
- See the transport and traffic Policies/CAs in the Neighbourhood Plan.
- Not much can be done re transport – as DCC doesn't have the budget.
- Central government's rethinking about public transport – and everything that moves. We need to put pressure on govt to introduce a Carbon Tax and to subsidise public transport.
- We need to look at other authorities for examples:
 - Bristol and Frome provide model transport plans;
 - Birmingham does not allow through-traffic.
 - The Greater Exeter area is developing its own public transport plan.
- There is general support to increase pedestrian zones.
- Public transport is quite well-used and appreciated in the Sid Valley.
- An alternative model: e-trikes as a mode of transport in the Valley to provide deliveries during the current crisis – and beyond: the thin end of the wedge...
- There will be changes after the Covid crisis: people will be working more from home, so this will remove a lot of the congestion.

Food production and distribution models:

- Risk management: We take a lot for granted:
 - If we stop flying planes, there is a risk that we won't have access to products: we need to build more economic resilience
 - There is a risk of food supplies moving: we need to re-localise food production
- We need to engage growers and entrepreneurs : governments don't produce and distribute food – farmers and supermarkets do.
- The VGS has some experience with food – ie, the Community/Farmers' Market.
 - But the Market had problems with not enough suppliers/businesses.
- The problem for the Sid Valley are the small numbers:
 - Not many farmers actually in food production; not many food consumers.
- We need a Farmers' Coop for the whole of East Devon – after the Riverford business model
 - The problem for Ruth & Mole has always been distribution.
 - Evan's model would allow for more growers, and so better distribution.
- We need to engage local producers and distributors:
 - Ruth & Mole of the Landworkers' Alliance should be contacted to sponsor this project. They have access to up-and-coming young farmers renting their first land plots.
 - Ben Upchurch of Partridge Farm says its a problem of educating the older farmers.
 - We need to contact the estates, eg Clinton, Cave, Coombe, National Trust...
 - We need to look at enterprises/projects working on distribution – eg: the Food Bank.
- Fortesque allotments: Diana East of the Arboretum wants to buy all the land; Ed Harrison is talking to Mike Lavers; perhaps we need to talk to the owner re renting his land.
- We need to bring back the Land Army!

High street models:

- The high street needs to go beyond just retail: we need to get people to spend longer in the centre of town, rather than just nipping in for a few minutes.
- We need to look at the success stories re the high street – eg, The Lighthouse.
- We need to include culture re reenergising the high street:
 - The manager of the Folk Festival wants to reinvent the event – to take it back to what it was, in the form of locals singing.
 - We need to include craft workers.
 - We mustn't forget young people.
- We need to include the Built Environment – reducing carbon; taking on sustainability.
- The starting point of any new project for the high street should be the Neighbourhood Plan.

Next steps:

- The VGS can be a catalyst to a project:
 - Get ideas together through a mind-mapping exercise.
 - Write a scoping document to explore ideas and their delivery.
 - Contact champions of different areas/models; engage with the wider market.
 - Create a 1-page document to be tested with key stakeholders.
 - Prepare for comprehensive community development.
 - Write a brief and an invitation to bid for a project; employ someone to take it on;
- Invite Prof Evan Parker and Cllr Chris Lockyear to the next VGS Zoom meeting.
- Creating Excellence could get involved.

Jeremy Woodward