

## Newcastle Green Party Green Economics Conference, 6 May 2017

### Short report for website on “Sustainable Newcastle – what does this really mean?”

The idea of exploring what sustainability in the economic sense really means for planet and people came out of a series of discussions that took place at Newcastle Green Party meetings last year. It was decided that the time was more than overdue to hold a conference that directly challenged the economic growth orthodoxy.

The in-built, main stream assumption of most economists, politicians and by extension the public, that economic growth is a given good has become extremely problematic in a world of climate change, finite resources, major biodiversity loss and stressed planetary systems that sustain all life-forms, human and non- human.

Human-kind has continually created, invented and explored to unimaginable lengths for good and for ill, but in the name of progress our hubris has overshadowed an inescapable truth. That is, we are only capable of being who we are and doing what we do because we are sustained by a planet that provides what we need in order to live and thrive. We are part of the web of life – one strand of it – or in other words we belong to the earth, the earth does not belong to us. Post- growth or ecological economics recognises this fundamental premise, mainstream economics does not. In fact it treats the planets resources as externalities, as having no reciprocal connection to our “human world”.

The conference opened with a presentation and talk from Mark Burton called “Living within limits to growth -how do we do it?”. Mark Burton is part of the collective, Steady State Manchester which explores and promotes alternatives to GDP growth at the scale of the city region. The work of **Steady State Manchester** can be found at <https://steadystatemanchester.net/> including details of the **Viable Economy** framework, promoting an economy that is sustainable ecologically, socially and economically.

Mark’s presentation was followed by two workshops led by Alistair Ford and Dr. Helen Jarvis. Alistair facilitated a session exploring future challenges and solutions for a sustainable city and Helen focused on community -led housing in a sustainable context.

Lunch was provided by a Newcastle based community interest community called Ugly Duckling. They provided a buffet from food which was deemed “waste”, but they turned it into delicious dishes. The rationale of the company is to use positive and creative approaches to reduce food waste and drive behaviour change. It was an eye- opener to hear of the amount of edible food that is discarded, especially by fruit and veg. wholesalers.

The afternoon brought a more party political tone to the Conference with Andrew Gray , Green Party, and Chi Onwurah, Labour Party, debating the question “Sustainable Growth – Is this a contradiction in terms?”. Chi at the time was Parliamentary Labour Party candidate for Newcastle Central (the snap General Election had been called on 18<sup>th</sup> April) and Andrew, a long-time local Green Party activist in

Heaton had stood in the very recent South Heaton ward by-election. In the interests of balance Chi gave a presentation called "Growing a sustainable future" and then a lively debate ensued, ably chaired by Rev. Tom Birch, curate at Gosforth Parish church.

After closing remarks and thanks from the Conference chair, Shehla Naqvi, we finished with a film from the USA, called "Growthbusters". Made in 2011 the film follows filmmaker Dave Gardner's attempts to wake up his community of Colorado Springs to the negative side of the unexamined growth imperative. His efforts lead him to campaign for a seat on the city council, which he chronicles in the film. Through his story we see in microcosm the forces at work in our larger economy and its perverse consequences.

The purpose of this conference was to challenge the mainstream orthodoxy about never-ending growth. The latter is bound up with the biggest challenges our society faces - inequality and climate change. We wanted to demonstrate that to tackle both, our underlying economic assumptions have to be challenged. Furthermore, we also wanted to show that producing and implementing ideas at a local level is vital to do. In order to live in a more authentically sustainable way we have to understand the communities we live in, empower them and sustainable solutions will be more acceptable and enduring.

We are hoping therefore that the Conference is the beginning of further conversation and activity. To facilitate this, we plan to develop a Sustainable Newcastle website.

Please check the Newcastle Green Party website at <https://newcastleupontyne.greenparty.org.uk/> and get in touch if you want to find out more or to help us take this forward.

*"This we know: the earth does not belong to humankind; humankind belongs to the earth...All things are connected..... Whatever befalls the earth, befalls the people of the earth. Humans did not weave the web of life; we are merely a strand in it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves....."*

*Chief Seattle of the Duwamish Indians to President Franklin Pierce, 1854.*

**Mark Burton** is part of the collective, Steady State Manchester which explores and promotes alternatives to GDP growth at the scale of the city region. The work of *Steady State Manchester* can be found at <https://steadystatemanchester.net/> including details of the **Viable Economy** framework, promoting an economy that is sustainable ecologically, socially and economically. Mark has a social science background and has been a visiting professor at Manchester Metropolitan and Northumbria Universities. He is active in the international De growth network and the New Economy Organisers Network.

**Dr Helen Jarvis** is Reader in Urban Social Geography at Newcastle University. Her current research considers intentional communities of collaborative housing, civic engagement, geographies of inequality from a household perspective and work-life reconciliation. She is internationally regarded for advancing new paradigms of sustainable de-growth and social architectures that support a green sharing economy. She is on the board of directors of the UK Cohousing Network and a core participant of Tyne and Wear Citizens (a branch of Citizens UK).

**Alistair Ford** is Research Associate at the School of Civil Engineering and Geosciences Newcastle University and a member of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research. He has worked on the Tyndall Cities programme conducting urban integrated assessment of climate change adaptation and mitigation in London. He is the Newcastle representative on the Tyndall Council. He also takes a keen interest in local transport issues. He is a member of SPACE – Safe Cycling And Pedestrian Environment in Gosforth and chair of the Newcastle branch of the Tyne and Wear Transport Users Group.

## **FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO FIND OUT MORE .....**

### **LINKS**

<https://steadystatemanchester.net/>

Treading lightly for shared prosperity: policies for Greater Manchester

[http://www.greenhousethinktank.org/uploads/4/8/3/2/48324387/iow\\_green\\_transition\\_final.pdf](http://www.greenhousethinktank.org/uploads/4/8/3/2/48324387/iow_green_transition_final.pdf)

A Green Transition for the Isle of Wight: A sustainable local economic strategy realised through more Green Enterprises and Employment.

[http://www.greenhousethinktank.org/uploads/4/8/3/2/48324387/beyond\\_inclusive\\_growth\\_final.pdf](http://www.greenhousethinktank.org/uploads/4/8/3/2/48324387/beyond_inclusive_growth_final.pdf)

A Critique of the RSA's Inclusive Growth Commission

<http://neweconomics.org/> Researching and making policies for a new economy for people and planet.

<http://timjackson.org.uk/ecological-economics/pwg/>

<https://www.kateraworth.com/doughnut/> Exploring the concept of "doughnut" economics

<http://www.steadystate.org/> Centre for the Advancement of Steady State Economics (CASSE)

<https://degrowth.org/> Research and actions to consume less and share more.

### **BOOKS**

Limits to Growth: Donella H Meadows Jorgen Randers Dennis L Meadows 1972, updated 2004.

Small is Beautiful : E.F. Schumacher 1973

Toward a Steady State Economy: Herman Daly 1973

Prosperity Without Growth Economics for a Finite Planet: Tim Jackson 2009

The New Economics A Bigger Picture David Boyle and Andrew Simms 2009

Sustainability A cultural history: Ulrich Grober 2012

The Big Flatline Oil and the No-Growth Economy: Jeff Rubin 2012

Enough is enough: Rob Dietz and Dan O'Neill 2013

Supply Shock Economic Growth At The Crossroads and The Steady State Solution : Brian Czech 2013

The No- Nonsense Guide to De- Growth and Sustainability: Wayne Ellwood 2014

The Post – Growth Project How the End of Economic Growth Could Bring a Fairer and Happier Society: edited by John Blewitt and Ray Cunningham 2014

Why Things Are Going To Get Worse And Why We Should Be Glad: Michael Roscoe 2014

This Changes Everything Capitalism vs The Climate: Naomi Klein 2014