



CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT 12th May 2016

Southall Transition has been in existence for just over two years. In our first year, with financial assistance from Ealing Council's Champion's Fund, we were able to run a good programme of film-based events at several venues across Southall, raising awareness and interest on issues as diverse as 'The Economics of Community' in post-oil Cuba, 'Trashed' – looking at global waste, 'The Economics of Happiness', 'The Story of Stuff', 'Food Inc.', 'Bee Movie' and 'Taking Root' on the inspiring work of Wangari Maathai in Kenya.

All of these led up to our Big Launch slightly over a year ago on 22nd March 2015. At that event we welcomed more than 200 people to the Dominion Centre for a range of workshops, presentations, speeches and an amazing vegetarian dinner. That remains our largest event so far and also marked the end of that funding stream.

So, what has the last year seen, since that Big Launch? Without core funding, has Southall Transition gone into hibernation or retreated into oblivion? Not at all. As I will describe, this has been a year of challenges but also of considerable and very tangible progress.

Firstly, the challenges: We have struggled for capacity in two main areas over the past year, financial and human, and the two are related. We have not managed to get funding to cover our core expenses, things like hall hire, refreshments, transport and copying and printing for publicity. All of us are volunteers who are happy to give our time for free, but volunteers should be able to have their expenses met. There have been kind donations at events, and these have helped – and a particular thanks here to St John's Church for letting us use this hall for free on numerous occasions – but we need to significantly increase our funding capacity over the coming year if we are to reach our objectives.

Perhaps that's a good moment to pause and look at what our objectives are. Why does Southall Transition exist? Well, to put it in a nutshell, and quoting from our proposed revised constitution:

"As an initiative of the Transition Towns movement, our core purpose is to initiate and implement initiatives which seek to build environmental and economic resilience in Southall, leading to greater self-sufficiency and wellbeing for people and the wider environment, particularly in response to the challenges posed by peak oil, climate chaos, and economic instability."

We hope to achieve this by:

- Raising awareness in the Southall area of climate change, peak oil and sustainable economics, through discussions, films and other community events, characterised by sharing healthy, local food and combining fun and serious discussion.*
- Articulating a vision for a sustainable Southall where people and nature flourish.*
- Developing a framework for an effective response to environmental and economic threats.*
- Engaging and building networks with people and groups already active with these issues or wishing to engage with them, including schools, colleges, faith groups, businesses, the voluntary sector and statutory agencies, including working to support local authority initiatives that are in line with our own.*
- Initiating and implementing projects, in cooperation with others wherever possible, that involve local people in food-growing, tree-planting, enjoying nature, sustainable transport and energy, addressing waste and recycling, and other areas that are in line with our aims."*

That purpose and those aims are vital if Southall is to thrive into the future, as a community and as a place. Whilst the dominant narrative from our politicians and business leaders is one of nonstop economic growth without looking at the ecological and social consequences, the Transition Movement recognises that approach to be short-term, unjust, and unsustainable. Around the world and here on the streets of Southall we are reaping the sad results of a way of life that simply cannot go on. That's why talk of resilience and community, of local people growing food and planting trees, as well as discussing macro-economic issues, is so important. Southall Transition is still small, but small is not only beautiful; it's where all real growth - lasting, sustainable growth - starts.

And that brings me back to our challenges. As well as finances, we've struggled with capacity as a Steering Group, and often found ourselves over-stretched. When we began two years ago, the Steering Group was six people. Three of those have moved on in different ways. Pardeep Singh Rai was a wise and passionate voice and we're grateful for his time before moving on to other projects, whilst still staying supportive. Matwinder Randawa always cheered us up, fed us well and helped with her wide network of contacts, but she has been abroad for much of this year. Tim Uthmann was an able, energetic and always friendly Steering Group member, and helped us research possibilities for opening a Bank Account amongst other things, but had to move back to the USA. We miss Pardeep, Matwinder and Tim and thank them for all they gave. However, we've also gained three new members to the Steering Group during this year. Martin Raven has opened his home, printed endless posters and been regular at both indoor meetings and outdoor activities. Amrit Patel has brought her passion for animal welfare, vegan cooking and the great outdoors as well as her cheerfulness. Wendy Ho has only joined the Steering Group recently, as Treasurer, but already been an efficient, effective and warm addition. Thank you so much to each of you for stepping up and joining the Steering Group.

That leaves the three musketeers ... the original remaining Steering Group members, myself, Kailean Khongsai and Mani Dhanda. Kailean and I have both been very stretched with our

different responsibilities to A Rocha, church, family and other things. We've helped where we can both behind the scenes and at meetings, but the burden has fallen mostly on the broad shoulders of Mani. I want us all to acknowledge just how much Mani has put into Southall Transition over this past year. Without him I seriously believe we would have risked the group folding. And, for an organisation that's all about sustainability that is simply not sustainable. If Southall Transition is to continue and to grow, and if it is going to get anywhere here its vision of a sustainable Southall, where people and nature flourish, then we need more people to get involved. Before I come back to how you could get involved, let's look briefly at what we've done over this past year, and what we might do over the next year, with more volunteers involved.

Over the last twelve months:

- We've had film shows and discussions, including a repeat of 'The Power of Community' just over a year ago, 'A Farm for the Future' looking at oil-free farming, and 'No Impact Man' challenging us to reduce our addiction to unsustainable consumption and waste.
- Through the year, volunteers have worked pretty much every week on the Southall Community Garden at Bixley Fields, growing vegetables, weeding and making friendships.
- We've had a Bring & Share event in June 2015 where there was excellent discussion on a strategy for Southall Transition. People signed up for groups on Communications, Recycling, Renewable energy, Active Lifestyles, Education & Young People, Food-growing, fruit-trees and gardening, pollution and community clean-ups, healthy eating and sustainable economy. We appointed leaders for each group from amongst those who'd signed up ... but with a couple of exceptions, nothing has happened. As we've reflected in the Steering Group, we've realised we were simply far too ambitious. We need to start small, choose carefully, stay focussed and grow gradually, not try and do everything that needs doing at once.
- More positively, in October 2015 we had the memorable Bhangra Disco Soup, where we worked with the Rubbish Diet, Slow Food and Disco Soup to create a truly memorable Southall event. With food donated from local stores, a wonderful community feel in preparing and chopping vegetables, some inspired chefs, a real feast, and a time of crazy dancing, it was a very special event, right through to going out onto the streets to find people to help us finish all the food. I hope we can do something like it again!
- However, our biggest project and our most successful one this past year has been the Southall Orchard Project. Under Mani's capable leadership, and with support from Ealing Council, the Tree Council, Southall Community Alliance, Villiers School and many others. We've had VIP involvement from the Leader of Ealing Council, the GLA member, our Southall MP and the Mayor, and hundreds of local people involved at one or other of the planting days. In total, 48 fruit or nut trees and over 2000 hedging plants have been planted in Southall Park, and Phase 1 is complete on time and on budget. As a very local resident, it's wonderful to jog round the park now, not counting the plastic bags and discarded drink cans, but looking at hawthorns, blackcurrants, raspberries, redcurrants, gooseberries, plums and apples. And this is only Phase 1 – the hope,

dependent on funding, is to continue the project in Southall's other parks over the next couple of years.

So, what next? Well there are several other projects also bubbling up, just starting or potentially about to:

- Bixley Triangle: this is a small area next to the canal and near the Bixley Field allotments that had been overgrown and frequented by drug users and others. Southall Transition has been invited to work with Catalyst Housing, the Metropolitan Police, Ealing Park Rangers, Greenfields Children's Centre, Hope for Southall Street Homeless, The Hanwell and Norwood Green Orchard Trail Group and the Canal & River Trust, to help plant and manage it once Catalyst Housing have cleared it. That's just begun, and there will be further opportunities to get involved.
- Fare Share – we took part in a meeting at the Dominion Centre organised by Fare Share along with the Rubbish Diet and others, and as a result have been invited to help Southall become a base for Fare Share. The principle is that supermarkets donate food that is perfectly good but they can't sell (because it's wrongly labelled, misshapen etc). That food is then distributed to any community group that can use it, with a local organisation acting as a host to receive and distribute the food. The community groups pay a small fee to Fare Share to help cover their storage and transport costs, but they get far more back in food. So, Southall Transition have been asked if we could [a] find a venue that's happy to have food dropped off and store it for a few hours whilst its collected, [b] liaise with local community groups to publicise this opportunity, and [c] provide volunteers who can oversee the distribution. It's a great project, and fits with our vision of cutting out waste and greater resilience, but we need volunteers to oversee it if it's going to happen.

I could go on. At each Steering Group meeting there are new opportunities suggested, and nearly all the time we're having to say, 'We'd love to, but we can't!' And that is where our supporters come in. If you're at our AGM or even simply reading this report by email or on the website afterwards, could you get involved? We're not asking for all your time – simply for whatever you can share. Could you help with publicity? Could you design posters? Could you take and distribute posters and flyers for events? Could you help run our Facebook page or website? Or how about helping with an event or a project? Do you have a passion for food – eating it, cooking it, growing it? Do you want to prevent waste? Could you help us coordinate a project to distribute food to community groups in Southall? Do you like getting your hands dirty planting things?

I started talking about capacity – money and people's time – as things that we don't have enough of for all we want to do in Southall Transition. But there's something more important than money and time, and that is relationships. Getting involved in Southall Transition is a way to enrich your life and deepen your roots through relationships with people and place. So my parting words are, what's stopping you? Get involved!

Dave Bookless

Chair, Southall Transition
12th May 2016