



Cumbria Rural Forum – Rural Briefing

In July 2007, Cumbria Rural Forum, working with Voluntary Action Cumbria, hosted an important conference that explored the potential impact upon rural life of two emerging challenges, **climate change** and **peak oil**. Delegates at the event heard presentations that described the problems ahead, but also provided positive messages about how some communities are already taking local action to meet the challenge. Following workshop sessions, we ended with a clear view of what lies ahead and of the wide range of advice, support and encouragement that communities will need.

What future for the 21st Century Village?

Climate Change

We are becoming increasingly familiar with the concept of climate change and the probability that humans have caused this effect is widely accepted. However, the most key question for Cumbrians is, *what will the effects be?*

It is predicted that over the next 25 – 50 years we will see summer temperatures rise by perhaps 2°C – 3°C. At the same time the pattern of rainfall will change, with more intense rain events in winter but drier summer conditions. This in turn will see flooding increase but a lower moisture content in the soil in summer.

Clearly there will be some practical difficulties such as how to manage flooding. But climate change may also force a significant change in Cumbrian agriculture and food production. It may lead to new possibilities for a wider range of crops including fruit, vegetables and bio-fuel.

Peak Oil

Peak oil is less well known and less widely accepted. This is the prediction that the world production of mineral oil will reach and pass its peak at some point in the next few years. In itself this might not sound too threatening. However we need to appreciate that world demand is continuing to grow and remember just how dependent we are upon oil for the production not only of 95% of goods in the shops but also for 95% of food stuffs.

If production does peak, as many experts say it will, what might happen? The current price for crude oil is around \$75 per barrel. This is predicted to become \$300 by 2010 and \$500 by 2015. The impact will be profound. Much higher fuel prices, rapidly rising costs for food, goods and services, higher interest rates, rapid inflation. Older readers may remember

experiencing this before when, in the early 1970's a 3% shortfall in oil supply saw prices increase 8-fold within a matter of weeks.

If this happens, how might rural life be affected?

People will need to:

- Reduce their need to travel.
- Produce more local food.
- Take local control of community services.
- Work collaboratively both within and between communities to identify and meet local needs.
- Generate energy locally.
- Make best use of local assets, both social and physical.

The conference Speakers were:

- Oliver Baines OBE.
- Phil Davies, Eden LA21.
- Richard Scott, Baywind.
- Mike Downham, Sustainable Brampton.
- Ed Gregg-Robury, UCLAN.
- Richard May, Ashton Hayes Going Carbon Neutral.

You can contact the speakers through VAC and their presentations are available on our website.

~ Pause for Thought ~

- There is a 90% probability that human action is causing earlier springs and shifts in plant ranges.
- Peak oil may occur soon, probably at some point between 2008 and 2015. When it does, oil costs will rise very rapidly.
- 95% of food production is dependent upon oil.
- 95% of retail goods require oil for their production.

Contrary to popular belief countries such as China and India are leading the way in alternative energy:

- China produces 78% of the world's solar thermal energy and India generates 10% of the world's wind energy.
- Residents in Eden have a higher carbon footprint than almost any other community in England.

VAC works with people and communities to improve the quality of life in Rural Cumbria

Local Action

⇒ **Community Energy**

Groups across the UK are already active in generating energy from local renewable resources. **Baywind** is a local co-operative that owns wind turbines in South Cumbria. Its co-operative structure means that local people have an interest in managing the business and that money generated from the scheme can be used to support local social and charitable needs. This model of local ownership delivering local benefit is beginning to be adopted widely, because it offers an income to communities that can be used to support essential services and facilities such as the community shop, village hall, youth club or whatever else the communities think is a priority.

⇒ **Local Food**

Producing and consuming a larger proportion of our food locally will become increasingly important. An exciting example of emerging action is the **Feeding Brampton** project that Sustainable Brampton is developing. Starting by exploring local food needs and production opportunities, the projects supporters then aim to increase the use of local food throughout the community at home, school and work.

⇒ **Bio-fuel**

If the price of oil becomes prohibitive, what can we do locally? **The University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN)**, at its Penrith Campus, is engaged in an exciting experiment to establish the potential for bio-diesel to be produced locally from rape seed oil. The idea is that farmers in north Cumbria will be able to grow oil seed rape, take their crop to Newton Rigg and have this converted into bio-diesel that they can then use to power their machinery. 1 hectare of crop will produce about 1000 litres of diesel.

⇒ **Zero Carbon**

A small number of communities nationally are leading the way in trying to reduce their carbon emissions. **Ashton Hayes** in Cheshire is a shining example of a whole community working towards its aim to be England's first carbon neutral village. People through the community have become involved in recycling, energy generation, energy saving and other initiatives.

Community Support

What help is needed?

At the 21st Century Village conference, working groups agreed that the actions needed to manage the effects of climate change and peak oil are inextricably linked. Together these present a huge and imminent challenge. Although we can't be totally certain what this challenge will look like, and when it will impact, it is likely to be sooner than we think.

Critical to our response will be ensuring that community groups have access to effective long-term support and expert advice. It must be long-term because the challenges will take many years to address. Help will especially be needed with:

- Raising awareness of peak oil.
- Changes in agriculture.
- Local/community action planning.
- Collaborative approaches to meeting local needs.
- Establishing viable locally managed arrangements for transport, services, etc.
- Additional help in those communities with fewer resources of their own.
- Developing new arrangements for the delivery of specialist services, for example, health.

Cumbria Rural Forum and Voluntary Action Cumbria have committed to working together to:

- raise awareness of the issues.
- work with partners on events and projects providing advice and support.

We will also:

- Produce and widely circulate a Rural Briefing on this issue.
- Continue to support community buildings installing renewable technologies such as air source heat pumps.
- Promote the importance of environmental awareness in community planning.
- Make easy-to-use, engaging information available on buying and using local food
- Work with communities to help them keep local services.

For further details about the Cumbria Rural Forum, contact Ruth Evans at VAC on 01768 869510 or e-mail ruth.evans@ruralcumbria.org.uk. The Cumbria Rural Forum pages of the VAC website can be found at www.ruralcumbria.org.uk/cumbriaruralforum.html.

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