



**Friends of
the Earth**

March 5th 2008, Statement to Cabinet

Throughout history the mood of the era has led to a predominant language: the language of piety dominated the middle ages, a language of nation building the 19th century. The 2nd half of the 20th century was dominated by economic language: the optimistic vision of the 50s and early 60s, which later blended into the neo-liberal language of markets and global expansion.

But each language has been a response to specific crisis or need. We are now facing an unparalleled moment in history and our language has begun to shift again. This new vocabulary talks about low carbon communities, plans for energy descent, zero waste, resource sharing and a lifestyle that doesn't have consumption as the indicator of economic success.

But this council is still faced with directives from London and Exeter using outdated vocabulary focussing on growth: economic growth, population growth, growth in housing, jobs, and urban extensions. Growth should be a neutral term--in itself neither good nor bad. My son was a baby; he grew into a child; he is now 5'9" tall. Growing to 7'6" would not make his life better; he would be unable to fit in, be an actor, find clothes, or find a partner. Furthermore, his impact on the world would be excessive.

In this evening's agenda we hear of sustainable growth, a term that implies our society is capable of continuous economic expansion. I would substitute the phrase "sustainable development"—which I define as to continue to improve our community, not to expand it. The older vocabulary and thinking can't imagine a solution that isn't bigger, but that is precisely what we must plan for.

The Core Strategy calls for local economic forecasts. I would urge that this analysis should consult with experts on the potential effects of fossil fuel depletion. The impact of this, coupled with climate change, will be fundamental to our future plans. Continuing to plan as if resources and soil and water are inexhaustible will not lead to a necessary plan of systematic energy and resource reduction. Developing a sustainable society recognises that we have limits and that restraint is a prime ingredient in delivering such a society. What is asked in the RSS, the forecasts for growth and the ability of the housing industry to actually deliver what is asked, are more than suspect, I maintain they are unattainable.

Local authorities are therefore in the position of needing to react to the great changes ahead, while paying lip service to the impossible and inconsistent demands of Government. We need to carry on planning for a sustainable society with a significantly lower carbon footprint and energy use, while all the while remembering that the imposed growth scenarios are not achievable or useful.

Bath Local group

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