

Steve Plater – Transition Town Sevenoaks (core group)

Steve took early retirement from HM Diplomatic Service in April 2008 having entered the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in 1976 from Cambridge (MA, French & Spanish). He served in Tokyo twice, took part in conventional arms control negotiations in Vienna and was HM Consul-General for Southern Germany and Councillor for Science and Innovation.

Steve graduated from the Open University in 2001 with a BSc (Hons) and since 2005, has been undertaking a part time PhD with the Open University on the topic of the growth of solar photovoltaics in Germany and is due to submit his thesis by September 2011. He has a long-standing personal interest in renewable energy and wider sustainability issues, including food, waste and transport and is an active core member of the Sevenoaks Transition Town group. He retains membership of the Soil Association, Friends of the Earth, and is a shareholder in Fordhall Farm, Shropshire.

Steve's wife Keiko is Japanese and his daughter Marisa is on a gap year before going to Durham University to read Geography. In his spare time Steve grows vegetables on a local allotment in Sevenoaks, follows Newcastle United FC and has a passion for cryptic crosswords.

Ian Smith – Transition Town Sevenoaks (Core Group)

Ian is a core group member of Transition Town Sevenoaks. He has carried out water resources and development/relief work in Nigeria and worked for over 30 years in the electricity industry on operations and power generation project development including wind farms. He has been a Director of a CHP/district heating company for over 14 years.

He has a BSc Degree in Engineering and a Masters Degree in Renewable Energy Systems and the Built Environment from the Centre for Alternative Technology, which included a thesis on anaerobic digestion. He has now been resident in Sevenoaks for 12 years

Suggested Themes and Questions

1. Could you tell us briefly about the Transition Towns movement and its ethos? How do local groups function and how are their aims (using 'energy' as an example) communicated/integrated into the wider community and shared with other groups and organizations, including local authorities?
2. Could you tell us about 'Energy Descent Action Plans'?
3. Climate Change and Peak Oil are usually perceived at best as 'challenges' – could you tell us about Transition Towns' more positive view of the future. Do you believe a focus on the more positive aspects would bring about a smoother transition to a de-carbonised society and if so, how could the public sector play a role in this?

4. What do local authorities do now, and what more could they do in your view, to support Transition Towns and other community groups working towards more sustainable and low carbon lifestyles?
5. In written evidence to the review (Steve) you spoke of the need for a 'Planning Lite' system for conservation areas. Could you expand on this idea and how you envisage it might work?
6. With your knowledge of anaerobic digestion (Ian) and using examples of AD elsewhere – what in your view is the capacity for its use in Kent and how best do you believe the technology could be utilised in Kent?
7. With your knowledge and experience of the development of PV in Germany (Steve) – do you believe the Feed-in Tariffs will help the take up of this and other renewable technologies – what are the key lessons to be drawn with regard to the business community/suppliers and meeting the, sometimes high, capital costs?
8. We have heard from Thamesway Woking about their gas CHP plant and energy services company operations – what in your view is the role to be played by CHP plants (whether gas or renewably powered) in the UK.