

For The Friend

## A Corporate Kick up the Backside

It couldn't be more urgent; it couldn't be more critical to the survival of humanity and many other species on the face of the earth. We've been talking about our commitment to this for decades.

Lis Burch - our Clerk - reminded us of 2011 when, at the Canterbury BYM Gathering, we made that commitment and she described that occasion as a corporate kick up the backside. In some ways, this weekend was another such reminder.

Many of 100 or so Friends and attenders present at this year's sustainability gathering at Swanwick from 18 to 20 March (and arranged by the BYM Sustainability Group) talked about feeling isolated, at times overwhelmed and hopeless, sometimes the only 'green suspect' in their meeting, struggling in a Society that has not yet fully taken ownership of its sustainability commitment. The weekend was a much needed opportunity to connect with others who have embraced the commitment and want to see it becoming part of the DNA of the Yearly Meeting in the way other commitments have. And it worked. As one participant said: 'Somehow the mood I was picking up by the latter part of Saturday morning was one of belief in each other and evidence of joy.'

Gregory Norminton, one of the speakers on Saturday morning, reminded us that we are not motivated to act by facts and figures; we need stories; we need narratives. And many stories were told: of the mother in Bangladesh holding her baby high to keep it out of the rising floodwaters engulfing her home; of the hummingbird trying to put out the forest fire one drop at a time. We sang together; we came up with wild ideas - the wildest of them in my view: a Quaker sailing vessel that can take Friends with far-flung family and friends to their destination without carbon emissions.

Rachel Howell reminded us that early Christians and early Quakers alike lived deliberately counter-cultural lives. This involved real risk: of ridicule, of persecution, of poverty and of death. This echoed with many of those present.

There was much conversation about our lives and how they tell a story about where we are on this journey - a journey likened to a river, which meanders to its end, rarely in a straight line. We ate vegetarian and vegan food all weekend and for some of us it was a pleasant surprise how nice it was. Some of us watched a film - *Cowspiracy*<sup>1</sup> - which put our choices when it comes to food into stark relief.

We heard - via Skype - from Lindsey Fielder Cook, the Representative for Climate Change at the Quaker United Nations Office, about the Paris Climate talks and the outcomes from them. She celebrated the progress made and reminded us that the work on this has only just begun.

On Sunday morning, in a lively session, we came together in regional groupings and talked about how to take this forward. Creating momentum around our commitment to becoming a low carbon sustainable community needs to be local as well as Yearly Meeting-wide; it is an opportunity to foster vibrancy in our local, Area and regional meetings. QPSW and Living Witness are places to go for information and inspiration.

We can take individual action, we can support each other in that, we can take joint action; and above all, we need to find ways to tell our stories - to encourage ourselves and others to

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about this film see: <http://www.cowspiracy.com>

embrace the reality that each of us can only ever do what we can. It may seem futile and paltry in the face of the challenges but if we don't even do that, nothing will change.

We recognize that especially now, in the face of the political and economic obstacles to becoming a low carbon, sustainable world, nothing short of all we can do will be enough.