

Leading Edge Voices No. 1
Robin Nicholson for Dave Hampton's Marlow Radio programme
21st Jan 2013

I will briefly discuss 3 areas of concern to the Edge:

- The depletion of our natural Resources
- Performance Measurement and
- What we can begin to do individually and collectively

1. Resource Depletion and its corollary, Waste

It can be no surprise that we are running out of that gorgeous, ever so valuable, trapped sunshine that we spend so freely ...oil. But globally the lack of water is more important, for us and our fellow animals and for the food that we need to grow.

Investors and of course speculators have long gambled on the future price of everything from wheat to copper, pushing up the price we pay as consumers. The more depleted the supply the higher the price for the materials and minerals, upon which we have become dependent for getting to work, going on holiday and for making our mobile phones.

Business as usual is just not a plausible prospect and yet we have only recently begun to recycle some of our discarded goods; recycling is seen as 'a good thing to do' rather than being the last resort only after having **reused** it and then **renewed** it, as the advocates of the Circular Economy rightly propose.

I will refer to a number of ideas that will be developed by later Edge speakers.

So why do we waste so much that the earth and the sun has given us? 6 examples:

- **Sun** - every hour every day our special planet, full of so much life, receives enough energy to satisfy our global demands for a whole yearand yet with all our great technologies we only collect 1/10th of 1% of it!
- **Food** – we throw away getting on for 40% of the food we, in UK and US, buy – 50% of salads, 53% bread, 25% fruit and 20% veg and that is not counting the veg left rotting in the fields because a cold snap changes our demand.
- **Buildings** are responsible for at least 40% of the CO² we emit; In London it is more like 70% and yet the Treasury adds 20% VAT to the cost of work to existing buildings to reduce this waste of energy. One of the core Edge messages is that we need to make much better use of the buildings we, in the so-called developed world, already have – both operationally and environmentally.

- **Oil** is far too valuable to waste driving large quantities of steel and aluminium around with us in cars **or** heating our houses, just because we don't value it properly – I am sure you know that oil is cheaper than bottled water!
- **Nuclear energy** was promoted in 1954 as going to be 'too cheap to meter' but we are still waiting; it has always been subsidised and we will have to pay for clearing up and storing the resultant waste when anyone can work out what to do with it. How can UK continue investing in such uncertainty?

The Japanese got a hell of a fright at Fukushima and are desperate to find where to export their nuclear expertise – surely not UK? Meanwhile Germany just got on with building up proper renewable energy supplies.

- We are in a triple dip recession and we need a lot of **Jobs**; so why are we investing in High Speed II just so we can get to Birmingham 10 minutes earlier? This will only provide serious construction jobs way in the future. If instead we invested the money in reducing the need to heat our homes we would create skilled jobs, reduce our carbon emissions and eliminate fuel poverty - surely a disgrace for the 8th richest country in the world.

When we were advising the last Government on how to ensure that all new schools would be zero carbon, rather than start with the new technologies, we advocated that we “Halve the demand, Double the efficiency and Halve the carbon in the supply to reduce our emissions to one eighth”. And halving the demand and doubling the efficiency is entirely do-able for little or no money - so why aren't we all doing it, Mr Gove?

2. Performance Measurement

As every athlete knows you cannot improve your performance unless you measure it and it is just the same with buildings. Edge member Bill Bordass, whose sheer determination has just been recognised with an OBE in the New Year Honours, developed with colleagues the Display Energy Certificate (DEC) that the EU requires all public buildings over 1,000m² to display by their front door.

When Chancellor Osborne announced his first Spending Review it had all been set up that the DEC's would apply to commercial buildings, as progressive major developers wanted, but someone had got to him and it was pulled at the last minute, thereby removing the incentive for England to retain our global leadership in this field.

I am sure that Dave has got you all measuring your personal and household footprints; unfortunately mine has got a bit worse this year as a result of flying (one way only) to see our son in Berlin. I would like to believe that your

workplace measures its footprint although I fear that may not be the case, as there is neither incentive nor requirement.

We just moved our office into the next door building, a partially listed 3-storey warehouse; we converted it to be BREEAM Excellent, which means we are lovely and warm thanks to the thick insulation and yet we are using little energy to be so; it is too early to know how well it is working but I did just work out that if we had paid VAT at even 5% instead of 20%, we could have afforded to be self-sufficient in electricity. On a more modest scale at home, we generate a third of our electricity on part of the back roof of our terrace house.

3. So what can you do?

Clearly we can improve the performance of our homes but we need to find the money to do that and then get good advice and do it simply and well. We insulated our house on the inside 33 years ago which means that for all that time we have wasted less heat and money; then 2 years ago we changed the boiler and the cylinder and halved the gas we were using and the money we were wasting.

But wouldn't we achieve more if we worked collectively? In Marlow you have a Transition Town group which is great but if it is like my local one the real challenge is how to get from being a group of enthusiasts to articulating our collective need on a larger community scale?

When it comes to energy generation then I am certain that this needs to be community owned, just like it used to be and, furthermore, I think that we need to own our own water and waste management systems. There are brilliant examples like the 4,500 Danish islanders of Samsø who are net exporters of energy and the West Mill Cooperative in Oxfordshire that owns 5 large turbines.

So my concluding thought for the day is - let's all start by measuring and then sharing that information so we can stop pouring precious oil down the drain and have more fun in the process.

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