

# An audience with Jonathon Porritt

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**Sustainable**  
Development Commission

## **An audience with Jonathon Porritt**

Tuesday 7th October 2003 @ The Lowry, Salford Quays.

**In partnership:**

The Mersey Basin Campaign, Sustainability Northwest, Northwest Development Agency, UK Sustainable Development Commission.

**Speakers:**

**Ruth Turner (Chair)**

Ruth Turner is a Director of Vision 21, a non - executive director of Sustainability Northwest and a member of the Labour Party National Executive Committee.

**Steven Broomhead**

Steven Broomhead is Chief Executive of the Northwest Development Agency and a member of the board of the Learning and Skills Development Agency.

**Walter Menzies**

Walter Menzies is Chief Executive of the Mersey Basin Campaign and a member of the UK Sustainable Development Commission.

**Jonathon Porritt CBE**

Jonathon Porritt is Co-director of Forum for the Future and Chair of the UK Sustainable Development Commission.

**Erik Bichard**

Erik Bichard is Chief Executive of Sustainability Northwest and the National Centre for Business and Sustainability.

Good evening everybody and welcome to what promises to be an absolutely fascinating evening. I'm Ruth Turner and I'm one of the Board members of Sustainability Northwest and absolutely delighted to be chairing this evening. We've got a packed agenda and I know that there's a lot of listening today to inspirational speakers and a lot of questions you will want to ask as well. My first job is to introduce two people to you.

The first is Steven Broomhead who is Chief Executive of the Northwest Development Agency, he's responsible for an enormous proportion of the money that is spent in the Northwest. Something like a £400 million budget, 400 staff. An extensive remit which encompasses more or less all of economic development and regeneration in England's Northwest. Now I first came across Steven Broomhead when my organisation Vision 21 was doing some work with Warrington Borough Council and I remember coming into the office one day and somebody saying "Oh, I've got really bad news: Steven Broomhead's leaving Warrington Council" and another colleague said "Don't worry I've got some good news he's joining the Northwest Development Agency". So I think the region is in competent hands. He's got a great commitment to the region and also to the promotion of life long learning. He was recently awarded the BT Life Long Learning Award for his contribution to skills and education and he's been appointed by the Government to the Board of the Learning and Skills Development Agency. He has many achievements and I'm very pleased that he will be welcoming us all to this regional event in just one moment.

But secondly the person who I'd like introduce to you is a man who quite frankly probably does not need much introduction to the people in this room. I first met Walter Menzies a number of years ago when he was the inspirational, challenging and quite frighteningly persuasive Chief Executive of Sustainability Northwest and it took about two seconds to persuade me to get involved in the campaign. He already had a great track record in this field and he has since moved on to take the Mersey Basin Campaign to its next stage of development. So Walter Menzies who is to many people Mr Sustainable Development in the North West, will formerly introduce us to his fellow Sustainability Commissioner shortly but can we now give them both a warm welcome and can I ask Steven Broomhead to say the introduction please.

**Steven Broomhead**

On behalf of the Northwest Development Agency I am delighted to welcome Jonathon to England's Northwest so welcome to you Jonathon. For the Northwest Development Agency sustainability is compelling and is totally convincing. We know the cost of the damage in the



region that unbridled economic development can wreak. There are 57,000 hectares of derelict land in this region and since our inception in 1999 we've done much to make good our sustainability commitment. We also need to ensure that there is an appropriate balance between economic development and sustainability. Our Regional Economic Strategy, I'm sure all of you have read that and can put it to some form of music, was reviewed extensively for its contribution to sustainability and a better quality of life. Our project assessment appraisals ensure that Northwest Development Agency funded initiatives consider impacts on health, diversity, crime, resource efficiency and environmental protection and enhancement. It's central to the way in which we look at our projects. In last year's environmental audit 80% of the projects funded had at least one environmentally beneficial output. The Agency is a major supporter of Sustainability Northwest, the business led think-tank for regional sustainability that has become a model for the English regions. Alongside Sustainability Northwest we also support Renewables Northwest a new business venture with United Utilities designed to bring about a step change in our region's renewable energy industry. We've also established Envirolink Northwest to promote and support and strengthen our 700 companies working in environmental technologies and services. The Agency's also supporting ENWORKS a £20 million investment into Northwest companies to improve environmental and business performance. We've also created the RENEW initiative which will pull together the region's resources and talent to drive forward regeneration excellence in the region. These important initiatives will promote resource efficiency and waste minimisation to businesses which will improve their competitiveness. The United Nations Industrial Development Organisation also known as UNIDO has commissioned a clean development mechanism delegate to work with the UNIDO investment and technology promotion office which is hosted by the Development Agency in Warrington to assist Northwest companies to develop energy efficient programmes.

To restore the environmental deficit across the region, the Agency is backing a wide range of land reclamation programmes including Newlands a £23 million scheme set to economically and socially rejuvenate 435 hectares of derelict land across England's Northwest. Within our own business, the Agency, we have instituted a green office group to steer the Agency towards environmental management system accreditation. So we've much to be proud of and we are putting our money where our mouths are but there are still challenges to be overcome. We are currently undertaking a review of the region's sustainability framework and we must deliver a clear action plan that combines sustainable development, elements of the region's strategies. We must engage with the region's partners in considering the environmental impact of their activities. We will help them to identify and maximise their contribution to the region's economy. And finally we need national Government to provide a clear steer on their commitment to sustainable development.

High speed rail links between the region and the capital will encourage more businesses to relocate here. I also look forward to the Lyons Review Proposals regarding the movement of jobs from London's public sector, civil service jobs to the regions. Some of us in the Northwest see this as a test of the Government's commitment to regionalism in terms of moving resources away from London. A fuel tax revenue that is favourable towards cleaner fuel will encourage businesses to convert their vehicle fleets. National Park Authorities that recognise the need to ensure sustainability proved economic development and priorities as part of their agenda. We want to make sure there is a balance between sustainability and economic development and we are now working very strongly with the Lake District National Park on this agenda. In England's Northwest we recognise we can only grow and develop and build towards a better world if industrial and economic progress is achieved, within a high regard for its long-term consequences.

Sustainability is non-negotiable and the Northwest Development Agency is working hard to ensure England's Northwest will become a leading region for sustainable development. So, Jonathon, you are really welcome here in the Northwest. I know you were a Board Member of a Development Agency at one point. He still is! and I'd like you to know that in the Northwest we are taking this to our heart in terms of the agenda. Thank you very much for listening.

#### **Walter Menzies**

Well thanks very much Steven and to you and the NWDA for supporting this glittering occasion with a fantastic cast of character with ladies and gentlemen and Lords as well: Terry, you are particularly welcome tonight. Maybe other Lords, at least one distinguished Lord. This is part of



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Mersey Basin Week, 170 events going on across the region as we speak involving many different people in many places. Mrs Thatcher said the community's dead - no it's not. A vast amount of activity still goes on.

A brief ad on the region and then I'll welcome Jonathon. The ad is Northwest Business Environment Awards, the region's premier award scheme supported by the NWDA the CBI and our friends in Envirolink, ENWORKS and the Environment Agency. Take a leaflet and win an award. Well worth doing. Massive and exotic ceremony next April which nobody can possibly miss.

Well, welcome Jonathon to England's Northwest, a region about which it has been said on various occasions has more visions than St Theresa, more pilots than the RAF, and increasingly more partnerships than the entire chartered accountancy profession. Important though you are, you're not the first VIP to come here. Queen Victoria opened the Manchester Docks here in 1894 and this where we are now. The Manchester Docks became the third biggest port in the country, in the UK, and the story of what we now know as the Quays has been quite extraordinary. A catastrophic decline of the docks in the 70's, more than 3,000 jobs were lost, in 1982 the docks closed altogether. Leaving serious dereliction, contamination and the water in the Ship Canal heavily polluted. Back at that time Salford City Council could not give away the land to developers, things had reached such a low ebb. I think where we are now demonstrates energy, ambition and vision - we've achieved really quite phenomenal things and a huge transformation in the last 20 years here at the Quays. By the mid 90's, more than £35 millions worth of public money had been spent on land reclamation here. The first £250 million of private investment had been secured and in 1999 the Metrolink linked the Quays to the city centre - sustainable transport link. In 2000 the Lowry opened here and against all the whingeing of the moaning minnies became a huge success from the very beginning. With more than one million people coming through the doors in the first twelve months and continuing success it is a fantastic icon for the North West region. In 2002 a highlight of the Commonwealth Games was the triathlon here. Swimmers out there in the water, 40,000 people came and of course the same year the Imperial War Museum was opened. As we speak, an innovative oxygenation plant is keeping the waters clean and The Campaign will soon be announcing really quite spectacular results in terms of improvements to the biodiversity in the waters out there. So this really is an icon of North West innovation, ambition, regeneration. Hugely improved water quality, new jobs and marvellous facilities for local people and visitors.

But there is no room at all for complacency. The North West, as Steven said, still has huge challenges, economic, social and environmental: within a mile of here there is housing still being abandoned. Something like 400,000 local authority homes are suffering from low demand in the Northwest region. Merseyside's GDP is still such that it is a European Objective 1 area though you'll point out I'm sure, Jonathon, that GDP is not the only intelligent measure it is still a factor to consider. The North West still has derelict land equivalent to nearly 8 cities the size of Preston, a huge amount of derelict land to deal with to turn this region round. One million adults in this region have literacy difficulties and here's a real cracker - the NDA will be spending a staggering sum of £40 billion in this region on nuclear decommissioning. So big challenges, but there are fantastic examples of creativity, of innovation, of ambition amongst all of those working for a sustainable region. We haven't quite got there yet, we haven't quite overpowered the forces of darkness but many things are moving in the correct direction.

Now Jonathon Porritt, you don't need much introduction from me. In fact there are 7,360 Jonathon Porritt references on Google on the Web if you want to find out more about what Jonathon has been up to over recent years and he's been up to a very great deal. He is of course Chair of the Government's Sustainable Development Commission, Advisor to the PM, appointed by the PM and happy to point the Government in the correct direction. As well as that, he is still Co-director of Forum for the Future and an advisor to major companies. The forum's Green Futures is a magazine you should all read. Many other things as well, broadcasting, writing and most important of all I think inspiring people to see that sustainable development is the only sensible way of organising ourselves. So without further waffle from me, a very warm welcome to Jonathon Porritt.

**Jonathon Porritt**



Well Walter thank you very much. I'm absolutely astonished by the number of references on Google. That will get my daughters very excited when they plug in and thank you Steven also for your welcome here to the North West. It is quite a while since I was here, more than a year since I was last here so it's nice to be back again and have a chance to chew the fat about some of the sustainable development issues and how they impact on people in this region.

I ought to mention Forum for the Future's magazine, Green Futures. We've recently brought out a supplement about what's going on in the regions which we've entitled 'Regions to be Cheerful' - slightly unoriginal title but nonetheless it kind of summed up for us something of our sense of excitement about what's going on in the regions at the moment. Something of our optimism about the forces for change that are happening at this level in the UK and a real feeling that if we get these bits and pieces right now we can make changes happen at this level perhaps more effectively that we can at other levels. You do of course have to be an optimist to be a sustainable development activist. There's no good being depressed and unhappy about it because you'll be much better off doing something else. But nonetheless the backdrop for what we're talking about this evening at the international and the national level is still just a little bit gloomy. I don't know what it is that either makes you feel full of beans when you look out at the big wide world out there or makes you feel pretty depressed and gloomy about what's happening but it isn't easy to be overwhelmed with confidence at the speed with which we're addressing some of these issues.

I went to a presentation recently with the Worldwide Fund for Nature of which I am a trustee and it was interesting. They were sort of tossing around some comparative data about what's happening out there in the big wide world and they were doing the usual stuff which is saying, well, if every single human being on planet earth was to live at the same standard of living as people in the UK are living today - so six billion people were living like 55 million people in the UK then we would need approximately three and a half planet earths to provide the wherewithal, the resources, the energy, the food, everything to enable 6 billion people to live like us. They then showed a little bit of a data survey of all these different pieces of research that had tried to calculate how many planet earths we would need. Some people came up with 6, some with 4, some with 3, some with 2. You get the point of course, this is slightly academic really because we are indeed stuck with just the one. This has led to their new catch line that I think we'll be hearing more of from WWF which is the whole notion of 'one planet living' as the overarching imperative that we now have to confront. If you like, a popular way of talking of what sustainability really means in simple terms.

One planet living, you can't really imagine that being taken up as a strap line by any of our political parties today quite can you? Not quite there yet. It was with some difficulty that I read through some of the key speeches of the Labour party conference to take out little nuggets of sustainable development insight and wisdom. It was a bit of a frustrating exercise it has to be said and I came away thinking to myself, Walter, we haven't done our job yet on the Sustainable Development Commission. We're not getting enough mentions of sustainable development in these key speeches. I hardly think it's going to be the strap line for the new Tory party. Although I did hear an astonishing bit of gossip that I'm longing to find out whether it's true or not, that recently George Monbiot and Zac Goldsmith, two of the most radical alumni if you like in the green movement today, have been having meetings with Iain Duncan Smith. Now this opens a very different dimension on the politics of sustainability than any that I've contemplated before. But then I thought afterwards they might actually be advising him on his own personal sustainability rather than anything else. To be fair of course, the Lib Dems have moved a lot further down this road in party political terms than anyone else. Apart from the Green Party of course, we're still allowed to mention them, they're still out there remember. Doing the stuff, telling us what's going on and reminding this Government that even though it has moved this agenda forward a lot further and faster than any preceding Government, we aren't really there yet and it's very frustrating for us on the Commission. We get all these kind of tantalising signs that this is a Government that really is going to start to take this seriously.

So we have a brand new Energy White Paper for instance which is all built around the central pledge to put the UK on a par to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 60% by 2050. Big bold ambition - not many of them will be around of course in 2050 to be held to account for what it is they've done while in office but a really good indication of the scale the nature of change that is required. The Energy White Paper came out nearly seven months ago and since that time we've



hardly heard a peep. We've heard of the new concessions and new licences of course for off shore wind, I'll come back to that. But on the rest we haven't heard much and all we can comment on from the Commission's point of view is the follow up has been extraordinary constipated even for the DTI.

We have a brand new Action Plan for the Department for Education and Skills. Charles Clarke suddenly woke up to the fact that DFES had done sod all about this. Ever since the Labour Government had been elected in 1997 - he thought that's not good enough so we'll do something about it now and we've a glistening new Action Plan with lots of commitments and action points for different parts of the education system to pick up and run with. We've got a new sustainable food and farming strategy of course which is meant to embrace the totality of all of the food producers and land managers in the UK and yet we know particularly in this region in Cumbria. We know that many farmers in this country remain in real trouble and aren't particularly impressed by the new level of rhetoric about what it means to be committed to more sustainable food and farming. You can't sustain farming if farmers don't have sustainable livelihoods and if that reality seems to be absent from a lot of the rhetoric about what this really means.

So we get a sort of sense, if I can describe it like this. A Government that is definitely putting its toe in the water of sustainable development, indeed to be fair, I think we'd have to say its putting its whole foot in the water of sustainable development but we haven't yet got what you might describe as whole body immersion. We haven't yet seen, with the exception of course of Michael Meacher at Blackpool when he went swimming. We haven't yet seen Government taking seriously its own deeper understanding of what sustainable development would mean for it across the piece and Michael of course didn't last long after that did he? They sacked him, on the grounds that he probably knew a great deal too much about the findings that were likely to emerge from the studies about genetically modified food, both economic studies and the scientific studies and the field trials. He'd probably seen all those early findings and decided it was definitely time for him to go as much as it would take a much funnier spirit if you like than Michael Meacher to defend GM in the face of all that evidence and data. I wish Elliott Morley very well with the challenge.

So for those of us who look at the big international picture, with things moving very slowly and for me, Johannesburg last year, was a desperately depressing example of what happens when you convene very large numbers of world leaders, without having really done the footwork before to make sure that something extra really happens. When you look at that and when you look at the movement but still the rather slow movement of the national level it's not surprising that people are beginning to focus much more on what is happening at the regions. And here I feel one hundred percent that this is a glass half full scenario that we look out on. It's like watching a kind of complicated collage coming together with different agencies, different organisations, different individuals, contributing elements of bits and pieces in this emerging understanding of sustainable development at the regional level. It's different of course in each region but the make up is sort of more or less the same. The regional architecture as it's sometimes called is getting clearer by the day. We begin to see how Regional Assemblies really do have a significant contribution to make here, as keepers of these things called the regional sustainable development frameworks and of course you in the Northwest have one of those under the title of Action for Sustainability, but they have brought together large numbers of stakeholders in these kind of multisectoral partnerships to shape a sense of what sustainable development would mean.

The RDA's as you've already heard, very eloquently from Steven in terms of his account of what the North West RDA is doing are really now significantly engaged in this area. As a board member of the South West Regional Development Agency I've come to understand some of the dynamics that lie behind that engagement and it's true of course that some of it is driven by the fact that this Government chose to put a statutory remit to contribute to sustainable development in the RDA's setting up constitution as it were. That helped enormously. Without that I sometimes ask myself whether we would really be seeing the progress that we are today because although there is a rather different way of approaching the sustainable development remit of the RDA's, the main stream economic development aspect still focuses the mind. It still concentrates the attention of both executives and Boards to think creatively about how to make that contribution to sustainable development. And the truth is looking back on it, when the RDA's came into being the large numbers of people convened around the new executive must have



looked at that remit and thought to themselves what the bloody hell is this? What is sustainable development? We are mainstream economic development professionals and now suddenly we are having to pay attention to this rather strange woolly concept called sustainable development.

I'm sure Terry would bear out from his own experience that early on some of the Boards of the RDA's, not here in the Northwest, not under Terry's leadership it has to be said - they didn't have much choice with him there but some of the other Boards of the RDA's were really mystified and what the Dickens this thing was that they were meant to be dealing with at that stage. And of course a lot of them, as mainstream economic Development Agencies, had to deal with bits of the business community for whom this concept is still somewhat alien. So there is a huge amount going on through these regional institutions, assemblies, RDA's, a reconfiguring of the voluntary sector on the basis of regions being places where things get done and you can see how the voluntary sector bit by bit is beginning to reorganise, to marshal its forces so that it can contribute very actively to this whole regional mosaic of different institutions.

Now a lot of this is old hat for you up here in the Northwest, you have historically blazed quite a trail on many of these issues over the last few years. I was just jotting down as I came up here this afternoon the degree to which we in the South West seem to be a little bit on the same track as you in the Northwest. Sustainability Northwest was an inspirational idea which we decided to follow in the South West and we now have something called Sustainability South West, thanks for that Walter. You have and have had for quite some time Envirolink Northwest to support as you heard from Steven, the environmental technologies, environmental businesses in this region. Last year we set up something called Envirolink South West and they're jolly proud of it too, so thanks for that one. You have Renewables Northwest well we thought to ourselves that's a clever little trick, we like that, we'll have a bit of that - slightly decided to change the name of ours, so we couldn't be judged as too much plagiarism we called ours Regen South West, but it's exactly the same set up as you've got here. So please don't think I'm here for any other purpose other than to see what other intellectual capital I can rip off next! And I was quite interested in what Steven was saying about Enworks. That sounded like quite a big deal. Certainly if the price tag that went with it of £20 million was to be associated with it that would certainly stir the South West and the South West RDA as that's roughly one quarter of our total annual budget. Nonetheless, these are all innovations that have been brought to the fore here. That have inspired a lot of other people elsewhere in the English regions and have shown, if you like, that it is possible to bring new creative organisations into being to broker some of this new and exciting territory about economic prosperity through the environment, through sustainability. Now I get a sense that every time I look at the opportunities here.

At the moment, for instance I am particularly fired up about the industrial, economic, political, environmental challenge of making renewables a serious part of the energy mix in this country.

We're not there yet, as I'm sure all of you know, the net contribution of renewables in our economy at the moment is pathetic, there's no other word describing it in all honesty. The investments that have been made to date contribute less than 0.5% of total energy consumption in the UK. A higher percentage of electricity it's true, but we are miles behind other European countries, miles behind Japan. We're even behind the United States in this respect and you never really want to be there. So I look at the opportunities and each region of course has its own set of opportunities in this area. Both for wind power and other sources of renewable energy. That really gives me a buzz. And then of course I think of some of the impediments, the blockages to that and I imagine, I'm hoping to meet with the Chief Executive of Renewables Northwest to share some anecdotes of the horror of the nimby factor that is suddenly in our midst. Opposing each and every wind development that is put forward, whether it's by large scale developers or small scale developers on the grounds that this stuff is somehow inimical to their concerns for the British countryside. I have to admit that I feel nothing but contempt for many of these nimby based organisations. There are cases where developers choose badly, want to build a wind farm in places really where they shouldn't be wanting to build it. But most of this opposition is ill founded, anti-sustainability, whatever they may say about it and causing a major impediment to this very important underpinning of what a sustainable economy needs to look on.



Of course the nimbys when it comes to the offshore stuff, not really the nimbys we're use to, they mostly dwell in the Ministry of Defence. I find it vaguely startling that here we have a Government that it apparently fired up to achieve a target of 10% of our electricity coming from renewable from 2010, we have a Prime Minister who on every available occasions bangs the drum for renewables as their critical element in a campaign to reduce carbon dioxide emissions over time and yet right at the heart of this Government we have a Department that blocks every single proposed offshore wind development on the grounds that it would cause havoc to some of their training programmes for the Air Force. This is joined up Government we are told and why someone hasn't told the Ministry of Defence what it needs to do in this area is to me completely astonishing. But this of course is just one technological development amongst many.

As I look at what's going on now though the whole scale of innovation in the environmental technology sector, when it comes to waste, to water, to food and agriculture, a whole host of new ways of looking at wealth creation it is difficult not to get excited by all of that. There are problems about investment, we're still finding it very difficult in each of the major English regions to get the pattern of new investment into those technologies that is now required. But I think what you really need to take heart from is this isn't any longer a hole in the green ghetto as far as the economy is concerned. There has always been a sense that people would like a bit of the greenery on the side as it were. We'll keep on doing the mainstream stuff and then we'll have some of this nice fancy frilly green stuff as well because that will make it all look good and will help us persuade people that we're really living in the real world. I get a strong sense that that's changing.

I'm very involved at the moment in an initiative with the chemical industry here in the UK. Now for various reasons I seem to have been put forward, I suggest to begin with as a token greeny but I'm hoping not that any longer, put forward as someone who can bring some of the insights of sustainability to bear on a major new DTI supported initiative called the Chemistry Leadership Council. I should just point out on the side that this was once called the Chemicals Leadership Council but the PR wallas in the DTI came to the conclusion that chemicals was a nasty word that everybody hated whereas chemistry is a nice word that everybody liked, even if they weren't very good at it when they were at school. I'm not joking. So the name was changed because they didn't really want to be showing leadership skills about something as nasty as chemicals to something nice and friendly like chemistry. I was the only person, as far as I could tell, on the Chemicals Leadership Council to oppose this cosmetic change, that may have had something to do with my folk memory when I was equally involved in an attempt to stop people at Windscale changing the name to Sellafield. The Chemistry Leadership Council is very involved at the moment working with the industry on three fronts; innovation, skills and training and sustainability. Sustainability is right there now as part of the challenge to the industry to enable it meet some really difficult, rigorous, competitive challenges in terms of Europe and the global industry. To work its way through into a position where instead of being thought of as this massive environmental disaster area, which is how many people continue to see the chemical sector, but to work its way through into a position in which chemicals are seen in a very different light. They are seen essentially as fundamental building blocks in the transition to a genuinely sustainable economy. I'm very struck by the different ways in which people discuss these things.

If you think about the other building blocks, the physical building blocks of sustainability, if you think about energy, food, water, the materials we use, minerals, metals, timber, whatever it might be, you can very quickly conjure up a positive approach to each of those building blocks. So just as I've being doing a minute ago when you think about energy we know that we've got to make the transition out of unsustainable, dependent on fossil fuels and nuclear to a very different energy mix. Essentially based around renewables, conservation, new technologies hydrogen and so on. And more and more people are involved in tracking that transition, working out how long it will take, what the economics are, at shifting an entire economy, indeed an entire planet, off this unsustainable base where we're fixed at the moment, for good reasons on to one that will be genuinely sustainable for all time. It's the same with food, it's the same with water, even true of the debate about our use of minerals although that's a really difficult one. But this debate has only just started. They are not seen in the same light, they are not seen as fundamental building blocks of a sustainable future. So what's in that what I call the mainstreaming effect? The ways in which sustainable development is coming out of the fringes, increasingly into the mainstream of each of these different sectors, each of these different institutions, organisations, really and genuinely inspired and for anyone whose been at this for a very long time, it's difficult not to take heart from that slow transition process.





I think what Walter said in his introductory comments about what's happened here in Manchester in Salford was a really good example of the power of that transformative process. I was amused at the stories about Michael Meacher and his engagement with United Utilities and the bathing water issues up here in the North West, because what of course he was trying to do was to say yes these are critical standards that we've had to meet here and the fact that they've been met is not just good for the environment, not just good for the people who bathe in these waters, although I believe he didn't stay in the water for very long himself, but it is good because it is in itself a driver of economic regeneration. Now it may not sound like much, you may all be completely use to that rhetoric today, but the idea of the environment as a driver of economic prosperity is really quite new and the essence extremely radical. I pay tribute here to what Walter and indeed all his predecessors in the Mersey Basin Campaign have been doing to demonstrate how that commitment to conventional clean up at one level but radical regeneration at another level, what they have achieved over all those difficult years. It has again sent out extraordinary inspiring signals to people, to see how those kind of investments over time, achieve this astonishing win win outcome that they're all involved in.

So I think we can be encouraged by that, I think we can even occasionally be inspired by it. I think we can see how the potential in that combination of the environment and the economy could lead on to much greater things than we currently have available to us today. But I come back in conclusion to the question of whole body immersion. I can't help but note even of the ripples of this potential synergy environment as a driver of economic prosperity, I can't help but note how a lot of people still don't really quite believe it. They've heard the words, they've internalised some of the ideas that lie behind it. They're perfectly prepared to put their name to it in terms of mission statement, grand strategies, plans, glossy documents, whatever it might be but in their heart they still don't really believe it. It is still not common practice, it is best practice.

When we were coming here from the station Walter was pointing out another Urban Splash development on the way. An organisation that I think again blazes a very interesting trail on innovative regeneration on housing schemes. That made me think of all the existing examples that we have in each of our regions where people will point to special new developments that have incorporated the principles of sustainable design and build, higher energy efficiency, better water management, better treatment of waste, recycling of building materials and so on. And yet the extraordinary thing is that even now those icons of sustainable regeneration are still the rare exception rather than the norm. Things that we look at and say that's fantastic without saying so what's special about that? That's what builders should be doing today. Not the rare exception. And if we're really talking about a green industrial revolution as the Prime Minister likes to refer to it or the new industrial evolution, as you like to describe it here in the Northwest, we've kind of got to go to the next stage. We kind of got to get to the point where people not only mouth the words and begin to understand some of the rudimentary practice but actually incorporate it into every single facet of what they are doing. If it makes sense, it makes sense in everything we do.

Now I think the Regional Development Agencies have kind of learnt that when the Government stuck in this commitment to sustainable development. The actual words were "to contribute to the Government's sustainable development strategy where appropriate". Of course it's turned out all sorts of questions about where it would be inappropriate to contribute to sustainable development and that wording on the RDA's has now disappeared. I don't get any reference today on the RDA to the idea that sustainable development is something we do in a little box over here. Special interest theme to keep people like you Jonathon happy. We don't mind doing a bit and spending a bit on it that's OK, that's part of the deal, but it isn't really still the mainstream. It is through all these internalised processes now, these project appraisal processes, the ways in which public money is being spent to generate public benefits over time. That understanding of sustainable development is now much more deeply embedded in the practices of the RDA's.

I know that as soon as I sit down that someone is going to point out to me some of the inconsistencies, the ambivalence, the failures, the things that go wrong, the inadequacies, of course all of these institutions are still extraordinary vulnerable to partial implementation because they are all, if you like, still dependent upon large numbers of people who've only just started to understand what sustainable development really means in practice. Not just on the



margins of what we do but absolutely at the heart of what we do and for me the excitement of coming up here and having a chance to spend a bit of time with yourselves who are all very involved in this locally and in this region was to see the degree to which the Northwest might be the first of the English regions that really achieves that degree of integration. Thank you.

**Ruth Turner**

Jonathon, thank you very much. I have so many questions for you but I'm not allowed to use my position in that way and it's open now to you to start the conversation really as to how do we respond to the optimism that you set out but also many of the challenges as well. Can I see who'd like to start off with questions or comments. If a take a couple at a time and then you can respond. There are roving mikes.

**Joanne Tippett (Researcher, The University of Manchester):**

Thank you. Joanne Tippett from the Centre for Urban and Regional Ecology. I was working a few years ago with the Bay Area Alliance for Sustainable Development in San Francisco and they are doing wonderful stuff, green space plenty of nimbyism, let's keep our parks and one of the questions I asked them on the whole question of body immersion is how do we look at how our region impacts upon the third world and how the businesses that are headquartered in our regions impact on national flows of material? I am interested to hear as you're saying talking about getting a sort of sense of what sustainability is. Is it a global sense of sustainability, is it something that's really looking at our responsibility in industrial evolution or revolution to say well how can we actually help people to think differently instead of following our model?

**Jonathon:**

The first thing to be said is that there is some evidence about a rather unfortunate phenomenon which is that the developed world simply exported the difficulties of heavy industrial manufacturing to other parts of the world. So, as we've cleaned up our act, we've made our economy lighter in resource and energy consumption terms, we've reduced our so called ecological footprint. As we've done all of that, what we've actually done is to ship all those impacts off to other countries. Now, this can be exaggerated actually because the evidence of that movement, is there but it's not actually as large as some people make out but nonetheless it is there. What I'm really interested in and the Northwest and Wales are the two places where I've really seen this working most at a regional level, is a determination not to achieve sustainability by further eroding the industrial base. Because there are bits of the UK that have achieved a higher environmental quality of life simply by moving from industrial base, engineering base, manufacturing base to a service base or whatever else, information communications base. In Wales and here in the North West .... Still appropriate for the region but it isn't simple export driven. Now why is that? Well I hope that part of the rationale for that is that if we can do that then the export potential for those new skills and those new technologies is enormous. I am sometimes not quite sure I believe the figures that are given for the scale of the global environment technology business. There are only so many noughts you can cope with and by the time you've run it up to around \$500 billion or whatever it is by 2020 you begin to think to yourself that's too big. I can't cope with that and I'm not sure I really believe it. But nonetheless the scale of opportunity in developing countries elsewhere in the world off the back of these technologies is huge. Absolutely enormous. So it is right that we should be pursuing this as a mainstream economic opportunity with massive roll out potential in terms of developing countries.

Whatever else we may say this evening about what's going on here in the Northwest our problems in a region like this pale into insignificance when you look at the problems that are already looming in India or China, let alone in some of the world's poorest nations and I start from an extremely simple premise here. I don't believe you can advocate sustainable development on any other basis than the idea that you have to make this available to every single citizen on planet earth. The idea that we can fashion elitist sustainable societies for the rich one billion people and leave the world's other five billion today and eight billion whatever it will be by the middle of this century and leave them to just get on with it and not worry about the sustainability challenges so much is both immoral and entirely insane. Because we share a global environment and it really doesn't make any difference at all to our sustainable future if we just get it right in the UK or Europe and then let every other part of the world go to some ecological hell in an unsustainable handcart or whatever the metaphor would be. So it's got to



work for everybody, that's a huge challenge. That's why one planet living isn't just about 57 million people here, isn't just about Europe or America, actually that might be more problematic than China sometimes I think. It isn't about that, it is about 6.2 billion people now and 9 billion or 8.5 billion, got to be optimistic this evening. 8.5 billion by 2050 and you think of the technological shift that's going to be required to deliver sustainability for humankind at that level and you kind of know that we've made a start, but we've got a very long way to go.

**Sarah Roberts (Business Development Director, Sustainability Northwest):**

One of the biggest challenges we face in sustainability that hasn't been mentioned much in a number of the issues that we've been talking about here is transport. We need to improve both the efficiency of transport in the Northwest and the sustainability as well. And while I agree that there are causes for optimism in quite a lot of the things we've been talking about when I start thinking about how we're going to improve the sustainability of this region is transport. I'm finding it quite hard, it's also one of the things it's very difficult to do as a region. So if you could provide us with a bit of inspiration to how to move forward on that I think we'd all be very grateful.

**Phil Barton:**

I'm very interested in your idea of full body immersion. I was actually on Blackpool beach when I saw it happen. Michael Meacher got into the water and incidentally even then the Sun had to try to trivialise it by having two lovelies in bikinis who they tried to get into the same shot. I'm struck by how much individuals with vision and commitment can actually start. We had for example Michael Heseltine who kicked off the whole Mersey Basin Campaign when he, as I understand it, there may be others in the room who were there, looked over the wall at Liverpool sea front and said this is not acceptable in a civilised society. We must do something about it. We had John Handley and others with Groundwork starting in St Helens and Knowsley. We had the people in Salford who decided something had to be done here. Terry Thomas, I remember going to see him. He pointed me to a map of the Northwest when he was Chairman Elect of the Development Agency he said "look at all that sea. Why can't we put windmills in it?" And it's people with vision who actually decide that they are immersed in this and they want to see something happen. But on the other hand we've also heard how important our direction and requirement is in setting up the RDA's and the Welsh Assembly. Had there not been that requirement to take sustainable development on board is questionable how much would have happened. One of the big frustrations for me in terms of working with small businesses at Groundwork and NCBE was that so much of it is voluntary and a bit of direction would actually over night make it all happen and actually wouldn't put those businesses out but somebody needs to have the courage to do it from the top. So I'm just very interested in how individuals can get it and make things happen and then how we make the institutions follow through both nationally, regionally. There's no answers but I'd be interested in your observations on that.

**Jonathon:**

Right, I'm going to take Phil's first because I think it will lead on to an attempt to answer Sara's. I'm really interested in the balance between the inspirational outcomes from individuals and organisations going way out ahead of legislation, voluntary measures, community support and you have to just stand back and take stock of the hundreds and thousands of individuals in the UK today who make a lot of this happen on the ground. I mean I've been talking very big picture stuff here. A lot of this comes right down to tens of thousands of people in different communities fashioning a more sustainable way of life in the midst of their own lives, in the midst of their own communities. And that is hugely important but we have not got the balance right between the power of that kind of voluntary driven self help if you like and the powers, or the proper use of the enabling powers of the state. I particularly don't think we've got it right here in the UK because we are still, in a way I find quite mysterious, we are still in the wash if you like of the Reagan/Thatcher years, when the very concept of regulation was deemed to be illegitimate. Where the notion of the state as an enabling interventionist force in the lives of people was ideologically suspect and a vast enterprise started at that point, 15 years ago, 20 years ago to persuade people that the best thing the state could do was to disengage from people's lives. As much as it possibly could. We hear of a wash of it still from Iain Duncan Smith at the Tory conference saying that the job of the Tory party is to reduce Government to the lowest possible level that we need today. Well that seems to me to be a bizarre, perverse way of looking at the role of Government.



And here in the UK we've not got it right. We have lots of Government Ministers today who still look on regulation and direct intervention by Government as what they describe as 'The policy instrument of last resort'. So they run through a hierarchy of different ways of getting people to change their lives and their behaviours through exhortation, voluntary measures, bribe, incentives as they're described, physical instruments, all the rest of it. A whole array of fantastically complicated, sophisticated, sort of sophisticated things, but of course the bloody obvious thing to do is just to say this is the deal, this is a no level playing field. No one is going to be disadvantaged competitively. These are the new rules. Just get on and work according to them.

The classic example is building regulations. Not going to get too excited about this or encourage you to get too excited about it but the fact that we still put up the vast majority of speculative office buildings in this country to a level of energy efficiency which would bring shame to any developer in Germany, Scandinavia, whatever else it might be is to me living evidence of the incompetence of Governments of not setting standards at the right level. Are we coming out of that ideological dark age where politicians stop thinking they have to apologise for good effective regulation for being a present, dynamic, progressive force in our lives? Where they actually understand that often it is the quickest way of making things happen. I read that report, I'm sure you did the other day, about school meals and the fact that most of our children today in school are eating meals that are unhealthy, bad for them, predisposing them to all sorts of dietary habits which will lead inevitably to the early onset of diabetes, obesity and a whole array of health problems. Is this a smart thing for a Government really to be presiding over when it's principle concern should be that 10,15,20 years out no Government in the UK, whatever its flavour, will be able to support the health costs of a nation that is inherently driven to unhealthy, unsustainable living patterns from the age of 5 onwards when each child enters into the educational system. Is that clever? It is bloody stupid. So what do you do? Do you mess around with sending all sorts of celebrity chefs into the odd school to give them a bit of a pep talk about nutrition and good diet and the benefits of healthy vegetables? Lloyd Grossman out and about in our schools and hospitals trying to exhort poor hard pressed procurement officers to source more sustainable healthy food? We'll get a good piece of publicity about that won't we? Well, this just drives me insane with frustration when quite clearly a minimum set of dietary and nutritional standards and a minimum price per food per meal should be set as a matter of regulation across the country. We haven't got the balance right and we've still got lots of people only too ready to pick off nanny state politicians as soon as they start saying there's a job to be done here and the job is to get nutrition in our schools sorted out. Whatever the Tory press says about it that's what we're going to do and we're going to do it by the end of the year.

That leads on to transport of course which is a harder question to answer which is why I'm going to be much shorter about it. I don't have a great deal of optimism and inspiration to bring you on the transport front. Certainly not from the Commission's dealings with the Department for Transport it has to be said. We have good relations with lots of Government Departments these days. Finding it very hard to get much traction within the Department for Transport and I think that's for understandable reasons. If you spend two, three, four decades building up an inherently unsustainable transport infrastructure then don't assume it's going to take any less of period of time to move towards a sustainable transport infrastructure and even if you give yourself that time period you've got to be clear and consistent in what you do and the way you drive new investment and we're not there yet. This is a Government vexed by its ambivalence on transport, pathetically cowardly in the face of Mondeo man and all of these dark forces as Walter described them. Who'll tell politicians they will lose elections if they dare to be brave about addressing transport issues in an integrated, coherent, sustainable manner.

The example of Ken Livingstone and the London congestion charge in London at last is a little beacon of hope that says actually politicians that are brave and come up with a solution that people have been talking about for 30 years in London. I was reading the history about this fascinating story. People starting talking about a congestion charge for London about 30 years ago. Politicians that are brave and get in there and do this stuff very often make the solutions happen against the grain of clever pundits in the right wing media and people who seek to knock politicians off their perches when they get a little bit braver. So we've got a long, hard haul here. In the meantime, we make lots of really stupid sub optimal investment decisions. I'm sure you're making a lot of them here in the Northwest. I'm sure that lots of money is going to really naff, stupid, car based, carbon intense, unsustainable transport projects. I bet you're like another region in that respect and some people can't help themselves. They're just in that trap, it's not



just what's going on over there. Their brains are stuck there is a kind of infrastructure in the mind of a lot of transport planners and investment managers and they're just stuck in this model and we need to get in there and re-engineer their brains somehow. I know this sounds really dangerous and frighteningly subversive stuff but I don't know if you've ever met transport planners, traffic managers. They're not really human a lot of them. They are in a line and it's hard to get them out of it. I take that back unreservedly. They're wonderful examples of humankind OK but their brains are just stuck.

**Matthew Green (Environmental Business Advisor, Groundwork Macclesfield and Vale Royal):**

It seems that over the past, well certainly the distant past, we've achieved some sustainability through technological improvements. Do you feel, and it seems to me that we've never actually tackled the issues that on the whole our society encourages increased and unsustainable consumption of resources. Do think the time is going to come when we're going to have to tackle that issue and technology is going to stop bailing us out as it were from these problems that we've created?

**Tayo Aluko (Architect, Aluko Brooks Architects Liverpool):**

My question leads on directly from that one. If I can take you back to the question you received about the third world. In your response you discussed how to change technology to make it more sustainable and then export that to the third world. I think maybe you could have looked at it a different way and embrace or see the opportunity in the more simple technologies that we in the third world actually use right now and support that and actually import that here. Because that is inherently more sustainable, I think.

**Jonathon:**

Fritz Schumacher the great sustainable development guru in many respects, a wonderful man, who set up an organisation called Intermediate Technology Development Group more than 30 years ago now and his premise in setting that up was exactly what you just said: to enable people in developing countries, particularly in rural communities to have access to simple intermediate technologies which is what will bring the most direct benefit to them The second construct he came to and in the process of doing that we will learn so much more about how to secure a more sustainable way of life that we will be able, if you like, to bring a lot of that knowledge back into developed countries so as to learn much more about a lower intensity, more sustainable technology.

The classic example is of course solar cookers. A very simple technology that is already around in many developing countries. Liberating millions of people from the threat to their health caused by the use of firewood as the principal cooking fuel often in very small houses, huts where the health exposures are very high indeed. If you talk to the Intermediate Technology Development Group now what's interesting is that they acknowledge that it still has a very important role to play but of course they're beginning to think about. To give you one example, the power of the technology like photovoltaic cells: a very different kind of technology. Not really available to Fritz Schumacher when he was writing *Small is Beautiful* 30 years ago but which is available now, is becoming much more available. Costs are falling, efficiencies are increasing, new technologies are being brought on and bit by bit there are now an astonishing array of opportunities for rolling out photovoltaic, this is a technology that traps sunlight directly and turns it into electricity. So exporting these stand alone PV arrays to rural communities across the third world. You can't turn your back on that. You can't say no, that's not appropriate. It's very high tech but it's very low maintenance and so for many people in rural communities in the developing world it's very attractive indeed because is a source of liberation. It gives them energy which otherwise they have very little likelihood of getting off grid based systems, off any other form of renewals in many parts of the world.

So for me it isn't really an either/or. The high tech bit is appropriate in different circumstances and may actually be a source of liberation which is bigger than anything else we could do. The alternative is the whole of Africa, the whole of South East Asia, the whole of South America, China, India will be covered by central grid based systems. Massive large power stations, connecting up every single individual wherever they are in that country, to a centralised distribution system of large scale energy generation. That's it, that's the end of the world. If we



think the solution to people's energy needs is connection through mass grid based systems, say bye bye to sustainability in all honesty. Photovoltaics can deliver high quality, reliable, reasonably cost effective energy in the future to very large numbers of people without connection to a grid based system. So for me I think I take issue with the idea that there is a sort of technology that's appropriate for the developing world and some that aren't. I would say that photovoltaics are very appropriate for now for us in this country and very, very appropriate for rural Africa to give one example. So it's a difficult one.

I went to a workshop the other day with a really wonderfully progressive company, a fast moving consumer goods company. They sell millions of tons of stuff every year. Little packages of hygiene products and soaps and detergents and all the rest of it. It was an interesting workshop and the ingenuity being displayed by the technologists, the product formulators, the innovators in this company to reduce the per unit impact of each of these products they send out around the world. Whether it's an aerosol, or a bar of soap or whatever else it might be, the ingenuity is mind boggling. Bit by bit, they are getting down the environmental impact of each and every one of their products. Working it down through eco-efficiency, eco-effectiveness measures, all the rest of it, reformulation packages, astonishing to watch. Towards the end of the workshop some bright spark asked the question: That's amazing you've reduced your ecological impact by 32% at the same time your sales of those particular products have increased by 41% so where do you think we are in the great big sustainability business worldwide? Because if you make each unit more efficient you are still dependent on flogging more of each unit. The question was then asked, is this a company that is ever going to address the distinction between wants or needs or is it a company that will simply go on ensuring profits for shareholders by selling as much as it possibly can or whatever product it is that people want wherever it might be regardless of long term impacts? And that is a question that is unanswerable for that company. Unanswerable. For them the job is to work down the social and environmental impacts, the job is not to revolutionise or transform the nature of the consumer based economy. And there is a clear glass ceiling of engagement in companies today. They will get very engaged about social responsibility, about community investment, about eco-efficiency, about carbon intensity, reducing green house gases. Genuinely there is a huge amount going on and I am really full of admiration for the best practice companies in these sectors. But boy is there a line over which you must not tread and that line is don't challenge the essential driving impulse of a consumer driven growth economy. If you challenge that we don't really want to talk to you any longer, Jonathon, because that gives us the security that we need to go on driving this attempt to be less unsustainable than we are now.

**Mike Callery OBE (Chair, Friends of the River Yarrow):**

Recently appointed as one of the voluntary members of the Mersey Campaign Council so I have some environmental credentials but my real purpose of standing up is to confess to being a transport planner. There are many like me who are insane or with addled brains because for the last 20 years we've been trying very hard to achieve a sustainable transport balance and the Northwest was first in producing a balanced transport strategy. What's happened to it? Well first the rail strategy. I happen to chair both groups but the hard fact is that we've not succeeded in our aims. The sort of aims that Jonathon is talking about and that's why there is so many insane transport planners around, we've tried very hard but Joe Public has decided to vote for its wheels and still for over 90% of trips we love our personal mode of transport. We might as well own up to it but there is a positive element to this and that is something the UK has been desperately slow in taking up. That is the development of friendlier fuels, ultimately hydrogen which is totally emissions free as Jonathon is aware. Other countries, I notice Iceland have a 15 year strategy to convert exclusively to hydrogen. California has opened a hydrogen station. What has Britain done? Absolutely nothing except preach about these things at Kyoto and various other places. There's an intermediate stage where bio-fuels could be introduced. We've got a lot of hard pressed farmers out there who would love to grow rapeseed oil in greater quantity if they had the incentives to do it and there is a lot of scope for positive thinking about transport quite apart from trying to get us all onto buses and planes. I would like to hear Jonathon's comment on that particular point.

**Nichola Zaldy (Co-operative Insurance Society):**

I was wondering what roles.....responsible investment .... In terms of regional development

and working with local companies first and foremost and secondly with national companies and further afield?

**Jonathon:**

Briefly on the transport one. Thank you for being so brave and apologies. I am excited by some of these technological opportunities in the transport field but what I'm about to say might make you think I'm not excited, and I don't want you to think that because I am excited but we have to be excited in a cautious kind of way, because yes, hydrogen is undoubtedly an incredibly important part of the future sustainability fuel mix particularly for transportation. There is one big question that looms very large for hydrogen: how do you make the hydrogen? Where does it come from? Hydrogen has to be made and you need a lot of energy to get hydrogen. So the first big question to be answered is what is your energy source for the manufacture of hydrogen? Coal, solar? You can imagine the scale of the transformation required to get enough solar energy not just to do the job that we need to provide electricity and heating in our homes and offices today but to actually go into hydrogen manufacture at the same time. So this is a complicated energy balance.

For hydrogen to really work in sustainability terms it's got to be manufactured by the use of renewable energy sources. If it comes from hydrocarbons, coal, gas, nuclear of course that's what George Bush is thinking of in America. The new energy plan in America talks about something like 200 new nuclear reactors, the principle function of which would be to manufacture hydrogen because like you have said we're never going to sort out the American consumers' love of the car because this is now part of the American psyche, indeed it is the most expressive embodiment of today's American dream if you like. You don't just have one car but several and they are as big and destructive as they can possibly be. But he has recognised that you can't persuade American consumers to stop loving their cars so what do you do, do you turn on the technology button - hydrogen driven cars generating by nuclear power?

Sustainability is a tricky thing isn't it really? You can see why you've got to be a bit nervous about techno fixing in the transportation field because the techno fixes are not as easy as they look sometimes. I mean I'm with you but I'm probably a bit more cautious about techno fixing our way out than I think you might be.

The role of the SRI (the Socially Responsible Investment community) is a really interesting one. For one thing, take a few more risks and make some proper investments in some of the new transportation technologies. There is a deep sense of frustration amongst the technology base in this country about finding the kind of venture capital, start up capital, they need to drive some of these new technologies. When Brian Wilson was still at the Department of Energy and after the Energy White Paper he was sent off by his officials to do a tour of the City to talk first hand to some of the mainstream investors and some of the loose investors if you like, the socially responsible investment funds, technology funds and so on and came back absolutely horrified at what he'd discovered which was this crabby, cautious, risk averse, nervous, conservative view about what this technological revolution really meant for the UK and for their investors and was genuinely shocked to discover how inadequately briefed the City investors really were when it came to thinking about new investment opportunities. So the SRI community has got a big job to fill some of the gap the mainstream investment institutions aren't likely to be doing. A few exceptions: UBS runs a sustainable technology fund, one or two exceptions but not much.

So I think the role of the SRI community is very important. It's growing as everyone here knows. It's a really important, if you like, but in volume terms it's still tiny and we need to understand that but it's growing very fast from a small base but it is still tiny, vis a vis the total flow of investment through capital markets in the world today. But to a certain extent that doesn't matter because of a symbolic value over and above the actual flow of money through those funds, and the symbolic value is that the mainstream investment institutions, the mainstream financial institutions as Terry knows very well, are beginning to say to themselves this is interesting, this is more than a nice little niche that we can patronise as we've done for the last two decades. God, have they been patronising and offensive about that whole area of ethical and socially responsible investment. I think they better stop patronising this and begin to understand what makes it work and try and incorporate more of that understanding and those practices and those guidelines and those investment criteria into mainstream investment products. Bit by bit, you can see that actually starting to happen. With Morleys with others just beginning to incorporate, take the best of the learning from the community and mainstream it now into the bigger investment



houses. That's interesting, I love it when the subversive radical little things that people have poked fun at if you're terribly sweet you get on and look after that. Very nice to have a few ethical funds around the place, makes us all feel good but it doesn't really make any difference because that's not how the real world works. To watch how that gradually creeps in and suddenly you've got mainstream uptake in a way that is quite encouraging really.

**Bridget Benson (Principal, Global & Ethical Investment Advice):**

I run a business in Manchester which is involved with socially responsible investment and we've got several thousand clients who do invest in wind energy. Unfortunately it does seem the opportunities for investing in the Northwest are very few and talking to somebody from Solar Century recently it doesn't seem as if many of the buildings being commissioned in the Northwest are perhaps using as much of the development money as they could to actually help grow the industry. It may be that there are people involved with this more directly who can give me some more positive news but it doesn't sort of feel that way from where we are sitting. The opportunities to invest in renewable energy are in Europe. I am very glad to hear if there is more going on here but for example the Lowry Centre I think cost over £70 million there is nowhere to park a bicycles, there's a multi story car park. There is no sense that kind of activity is going to form part of the future but like Jonathon I try to remain optimistic and our thousands of clients are too.

**Louise Velish (The University of Leeds):**

I was just wondering what was your opinion of whether there is political will and opportunity to use the review of the sustainable development strategy to actually move away from the foot splashing rhetoric to national action and whether this will trickle down to the regions and may be provide a link to the global as well?

**Brian Gray (Wirral Friends of the Earth):**

I am also involved in many transport organisations so I back what you say about transport. How do you feel about the possible commercial growing of genetically modified crops? Personally I think the prospect is absolutely horrendous and will lead to the end of us all rather like all those power stations out in Africa.

**Will Horsfall (Trafford Borough Council):**

My question follows on from Louise's. You expressed very passionately your feelings on the need for more regulation. I just wondered in your position as appointment of the Prime Minister leading the Commission whether you ever get the chance to have a chat with Tony Blair about these sorts of issue and what his reaction is to them?

**Jim McClelland (Editor, Sustain Magazine):**

To what extent are marketing and the media beginning to sex up sustainability to make it the life style brand of choice for aspirational affluent mainstream consumers?

**Jonathon:**

I'm sure there's a really seamless way of going from one to the next with these but I don't know if I can quite pull that off. The life style brand of choice? It's a funny one this. I went to a brainstorm with marketing people the other day and you sort of have to love marketing people really because they are extraordinary. Their entire lives revolve around selling most extraordinary things to people and many of us don't really want these things. None the less the skill of the marketing person is to persuade them their lives are incomplete without them. So they are kind of using huge amounts of intellectual brain power to persuade people that this is really what they are as a person and what they need and you've just got to stand there and admire the virtuosity of this abuse of the human brain. What we were chewing the fat about: was it possible the marketing profession could be deployed in this new brave dawning of a sustainable future in their massed ranks to market sustainability? To make sustainability just the sexist thing on earth. Just the thing that you have to have above everything else. Could they do the trick with sustainability that they do with deodorants? A lot of them thought this was a pretty radical and a lot of them were so self assured about their own creative genius they said 'of course'. We just need to know that somebody is going to buy it because otherwise we won't get paid to sell it.





That led us into a really interesting discussion and at the end of this one guy came up with this lovely idea that I've shared with colleagues in the Forum. Look, all you need to do is think about this stuff in a lateral way. You need to think about it in terms of something that goes on any product at all, any brand and it's a little mark, something that is globally recognised that tells you that product is more sustainability friendly than anything else. All you need to do is to invent a new sustainable brand and we should call it Not Bad. Everybody laughed. So if you could set up this kind of set of criteria, this threshold as it were and then somehow you had a miraculous but very bureaucratic system where products get the Not Bad label what ever it was they were in. It's not over claiming. It's not saying it's the best. In the Forum at the moment we are convening a group of marketing mangers and directors to help share some of this challenge. The Forum likes to go to places where other sustainability organisations can't reach as it were. The marketing departments of most of our partner companies are certainly in that category. So watch this space. If you see Not Bad popping up all over the place then you'll know where it comes from.

On GM crops I've got to be brief because it's such a complicated question I could go on all night about GM crops. I do feel we've been driven into a cul-de-sac about this obsession about GM. If you are Guardian readers there is a really good piece of journalism by George Monbiot today. It's a serious, well researched bit of journalism. George says what's the bias in a system like this in terms of where all the research money goes? He has tracked out that incredible bias in this system, Government and private sector system. It has poured 80-90% of all the research money in agriculture into this GM cul-de-sac rather than into more sustainable organic forms of agriculture. I really regret the lack of judgement that has persuaded people that this is the only way forward for agriculture. My own judgement is that this particular generation of GM products are going nowhere as far as Europe is concerned. The power of America plus some of these big agro bio companies is so great that they will undoubtedly continue to sell their GM products around the world, but what I think we are seeing in Europe is the emergence of a very different set of responses which is not emotional, it's not irrational, it's actually based on a quite good assessment of whether the benefits genuinely outweigh the risks which is what consumers do day in day out in their lives, and I think that's what we're doing here in the UK. That isn't to say there may not be some use for GM crops at some distance point in the future. I hate the idea that you can rule out forever some technological virtuosity which may become helpful to us in due course, but right now it's pretty much irrelevant.

Again we touched on the frustrations of getting enough funding. The odd thing is that many of these prestige buildings going up here in these big new regeneration development schemes actually if they were savvy about it could perfectly easily have photovoltaics as part and parcel of what it was that made those buildings special. At the moment here in the UK you can get 50% grants for all investment in photovoltaics from the EU as long as they fit within a certain set of categories. Oddly enough I know that sounds a bit zany but when you look at the amount of money some of these buildings spend on cladding. Prestige cladding for high powered corporate headquarters for instance it's a criminally insane waste of shareholders money. They are spending God knows how much money on this vanity cladding exercise like Portcullis House opposite the Houses of Parliament where MP's live. One of the most expensive buildings on God's earth where the cladding cost more than any other building has cost to clad since the invention of time. They could have covered twice over with photovoltaic cells instead of the ghastly rubbish they've got up there at the moment. So it is frustrating. More can be done than is being done at the moment.

Chats with Tony Blair. Well the Sustainable Development Commission does report to Tony Blair and to the First Ministers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and it's a good reporting line for us to have. The meetings I have with Tony Blair are sort of encouraging. He has a passion about climate change, where it comes from I honestly don't know. I am quite flummoxed by it. I can't really track it back in terms of his ideological core. He has a passion about Africa which is even more peculiar because every single one of his political advisors have said to him don't touch Africa. Do somewhere a lot safer and have an instant impact, look good for the Government. He's out there doing Africa all the bloody time. He's off there trying to persuade his colleagues in G8 and the EU that climate change really is the biggest problem the world faces. Admittedly he's still got a bit of a problem with George Bush. He knows these are things he's got a certain amount of leverage if you can make it work with other world leaders but it's limited leverage. So he has his passions here, green technology, climate change, development. This



kind of stuff is at the heart of the sustainable development case that he has. If you ask me whether that means sustainable development is a living, breathing, politically attractive concept that gets him excited I think the honest answer to that is no. I just don't think he's got to that point yet. He might. Part of my job is to make it more exciting. Which is why I am saying can you imagine this really being the centre piece of the next Labour party campaign, can you imagine talking about our kind of approach to industrial revolution, our kind of approach to civic renewal, our kind of approach to rationalisation. All these things we've been touching on today as the unique differentiator about this Government as it goes into the next election. I think you've got to be very optimistic to think we're going to see that. I think you'll see more of the sustainable development framing in the next election manifesto from Labour without a doubt you'll see much more of that. Is it going to be the heart of it? I have to give you a fairly realistic answer to that and I think that's very unlikely.

What shall we do with the sustainable development strategy? We've had this document since 1999. It comes to an end in 2005. Government is just beginning to work out that it now needs to put something else in place of this strategy in 2005. Hasn't given it a great deal of high powered political thought as yet. It's suddenly woken up to the thought that we have independent governments in Scotland and Wales which might make a bit of a difference to a UK strategy. It hasn't really woken up to the fact that we have English regions which might just make a bit of a difference to the new strategy. So there's a huge amount of rethinking to be done about what that actually means. Again I'm trying to get the balance right here between pessimism and optimism.

There are a lot of people in Government today for whom this is not a no go territory whose eyes do light up little bright sparks of excitement at the prospect of harnessing sustainable development to their own political vision. I know for purists like me that's a disgusting form of instrumental exploitation of the concept of sustainable development. How dare they abuse it and exploit it in this way and think that they are going to have a better political career if they get savvy about sustainable development? But don't look these gift horses in the mouth. I'd much rather politicians said I like this stuff, this can do me a few favours in political terms. This can actually make what I'm trying to do as a politician work better, it does better joining up than anything else that anyone has been giving me. Particularly the wretched third wave which is kind of decombusting in front of our eyes now on the pyre of its own failure. I like this stuff because it connects to people in ways that other concepts don't. Naff concept sustainable development, that's really the kind of language politicians don't want to like. It doesn't work for them in sexy terms. It's not so dynamic and catchy but I like it because it frames so many of my concerns about social justice, about efficient economic renewable, about public services, about long-term sustainability. I like that whenever we meet one of those politicians, especially a Minister.

#### **Ruth Turner**

The discussion is almost up and I don't know about you but all of that vigorous debate about sustainable development has made me a little bit hungry. There is going to be some canapés and drinks and a chance to chat informally down in the gallery in just one moment but first I have to say that we are truly lacking in the Northwest in the number of people of genuine stature that we have championing the cause of sustainable development. I find it very exciting working alongside side Erik and his team at SNW and so I can think no better person really to offer the concluding remarks than Erik Bichard, Chief Executive of Sustainability North West.

#### **Erik Bichard**

Thank you very much. I first got to know Jonathon when we were working together on a programme that brought PVC manufacturers and food retailers together. It was an exciting project. It was an attempt to analyse and move forward on the sustainable use of that material and the reuse of that material. The first thing I had to do in the inaugural meeting was stand up in front of him and set out what sustainability meant in terms of this project and I carried on. I was doing the best I could. I just had this feeling of digging a hole and for a man of my stature that's not a good place to be. He had the very good grace to thank me and we got on with the programme and I think we did some very good work together. Every time we got together one thing that always stuck me was his fantastic sense of impatience. He always had this fantastic mix as well of grumpiness and inspiration but grumpy is good because when you look at all the



wonderful things that are happening especially in this region it's easy to forget that there's still some work to do.

If you rattle off the great things that we've already heard from Walter and Steven, Sustainability Northwest, Renewables Northwest, Envirolink, Enworks, the work that UNIDO is doing on screening new partners for developing countries with social and environmental criteria. Absolute first for the United Nations I can tell you that. Newlands, Renew and some of the others we've been associated with that haven't been mentioned yet: Northwest Climate Group the National Centre for Business and Sustainability which has joint forces now with Sustainability Northwest, Mersey Basin Campaign and Groundwork and a few things up and coming which you should keep your eye out for. The Kyoto Club, a new pan regional initiative to get the region into a low carbon economy mode and Responsibility Northwest an idea we're working up now which is going to link all of the CSR initiatives and enhance them right across the region. I've got a kind of men in black flashy mind eraser now in case he runs off with some of these very new ideas.

As I say there is not a lot of room for complacency. We should feel great, justly proud of these initiatives but we should also look at what we are achieving and not really sit back on our laurels because for every great story and great initiative there are the most amazing irritating and grossly frustrating issues. I'll just knock off a couple of them we've come across in the last couple of years. Jonathon will remember that the reason why the tray that sandwiches sit on weren't recycled was because the tint that you might use to tell people how to recycle them the marketing people thought might interfere with the brand and colour and therefore dissuade people from buying the product. This is the essence of where sustainability isn't going forward. The social enterprise that was barred from working in another area because of the "not invented here" mentality. The offshore wind farm that was vetoed by the Ministry of Defence because they thought it might interfere with their radar systems. The way the Treasury is blocking the ability of public procurement people to specify social and environmental criteria in tenders because they argue it's anti-competitive. Anti-competitive? In a region here where potentially up to £15-20 billion could be redirected into poorer areas, raising the economic standards and thus knocking out social exclusion in one fell swoop. But no, it's anti-competitive.

So there's a lot of work to be done. Jonathon used some words which I think bear repeating. When he was talking about Johannesburg he talked about the fact the hard slog wasn't put in, that the foot work wasn't done. He said it's been slow progress but he also said we are getting there. Bit by bit we are drawing them in. Fantastic, and we should never lose sight of the fact that we aren't going to get any easy wins but we must never, ever give up. Sustainability Northwest has been going almost 10 years now and everyone associated with it knows that at times it's very hard to carry on this agenda. You get lots and lots of setbacks. It's deeply frustrating at times. So we need people to inspire us and we need leaders like Jonathon. He has inspired those of us who have devoted our careers to this agenda and he has inspired sceptics and converted them and I'm pretty confident he's inspired you here today. I just wondered if you'd like to join with me again in thanking him very much.

Ladies and gentlemen and Lords, Jonathon Porritt.

Thanks to Walter, Ruth, and Steve Broomhead for their contributions and also Katie Bray.

Thank you very much for attending.