

Transition Town Kingston looking back and looking forward, January 2012

"It was a funny little path, winding here and there, dashing off in different directions, and sometimes even tying a knot in itself from sheer joy. (You don't get tired of a path like that, and I'm not sure that it doesn't get you home quicker in the end)."

TTK does indeed follow a winding path, and it's sometimes useful to stop and look at the map to see where we are and whether we're still going in the right direction. That's what we did at the open meeting on January 18th and the map-reading was both positive – we seem to have travelled a long way and enjoyed ourselves on the journey in the past year – and negative – there's still a long way to go, some of us are a bit weary, and there never seem to be quite enough people travelling with us.

There were round-ups, oral and written, on project groups, events, and more general on-going activities like outreach, liaison with the Council, and the TTK newsletter – and when it was all put together afterwards much more had been achieved than we had remembered. The Business Action Group had finally published their useful Kingston Green e-Directory and held an enjoyable launch event in December, though they regretted their slow start and the lack of active input from local businesses. There was good news from From the Ground Up of growing professionalism, with a new hub and successful online shop, more local suppliers, an expanding range of products and 170+ registrants. Abundance celebrated getting started and gaining funding for their harvesting and preserving project, while Cambridge Road Estate Diggers were making a visible difference in a community with few previous TTK members. Kingston Kitchen had had very positive feedback with people using the skills they'd learnt afterwards and returning for more. Another hands-on project, Stitch in Time, were happy to have kept up their regular monthly sessions with the support of Kingston Environment Centre, and expanded and reached new users via invitations to run sessions at libraries and with Refugee Action Kingston. These were part of a wider pattern of outreach, which last year had also included TTK displays and stalls at the Cambridge Road Fun Day, John Lewis staff canteen, and All Saints Church.

Despite the slowness and bureaucracy of our Council (probably no worse than others but sometimes frustrating), and the burden of reading and meetings involved, those of us who engage with the Council and other local environmental groups via Kingston Environment Group felt that the effort was well worthwhile and that TTK input was helpful, necessary, and welcomed.

There were several events in summer 2011. The Tricky Time Trial around the Guildhall, highlighting the relative (in)efficiency of various forms of transport was fun, provided a good photo opportunity, and achieved some local press coverage as well as an on-line video. The event was a good example of working with the Council's Sustainable Transport team, and we hope it will lead to the start of a TTK transport group. The Skills Weekend had been a promising project with lots of useful demonstrations assembled at Kingston Environment Centre, as had been the Clothes Swap one summer Saturday. But all these events suffered from low public attendance, and "publicity, publicity, publicity" seems to be a pressing need.

Meanwhile other new or potential projects on Hearts and Minds, Transport and Energy, seek enthusiasts to meet up, plan and make links with other like-minded organisations.

Almost all project coordinators would welcome more support, more active participants and helpers, more time and energy, and better coordination of TTK activities and events. It isn't always easy to engage with the public or with local businesses, or to get people, even TTK supporters, along to events, and most could do with more and better posters, advertising, and local press coverage. The transition message can sometimes be forgotten when busy with practical activities, and we probably all need to do more, with more resources – films, leaflets, newsletters – to get the issues across to a general public who still know little or nothing about transition.

But all projects found much to inspire and support them in TTK: friendship, *"working with wonderful people"*, and the shared vision and philosophy; the openness and ability to think globally and practically and positively in the face of seemingly insurmountable problems; the resilience to keep going and the satisfaction of doing something useful and often enjoyable in and for the community; the commitment of volunteers and the way things usually turn out well with *"with lots of lovely helpers"* rallying round. The impressive TTK website, redesigned newsletter and TTK insurance were considered invaluable shared resources.

These reports of success and difficulty largely confirmed the more general reflective exercise we did together, which also revealed some things that we are not doing at all. We are considered only middling at communicating with the media, other Transition groups and those beyond the transition movement. Our projects and structures may not be quite resilient enough (too many depend on just one or two people), and the long haul on energy (resilience, auditing, descent action plan, local energy projects) is only just beginning. We have not sufficiently explored oral histories or story-telling or the arts in general. Neither have we established community ownership of assets or land access. Our perceived failure to scale up and the danger of losing momentum may be connected with the need for more active volunteers. Also needing improvement, and probably more volunteers including younger ones and some from more diverse backgrounds, were projects like inner transition, changing behaviour street by street, and education. We don't, apparently understand scale or undertake measurement, we don't "backcast", we haven't "become the media", and we don't celebrate failure(!)

But we are good, it seemed to those at the meeting, at all kinds of communicating, including with Kingston Council and local businesses, running effective meetings, brainstorming and reflecting on how we are doing, and speaking up for Transition. We have many practical achievements: building partnerships, social enterprises, projects and working groups, making a start on the "great re-skilling", forming ourselves into a legal entity and getting some funding. And we celebrate and support each other. On balance, that's not a bad record.