



Sustainability: Donald TRUMP vs Al GORE

Who's going to win the fight
of our lifetime?

Donald Trump famously referred to Climate Change as a hoax invented by the Chinese, providing an umbrella for policies and actions that enable further global degradation. But, this has also inspired many to step up because it's clear that only through millions of us engaging proactively will we collectively shift. Al Gore described as "reckless" the decision to ditch the US commitment to the Paris Accord. When in office, Al Gore did little to affect the balance of probabilities through his role as Vice President, he has since made something of an impact on people's awareness around climate change. His first film, *An Inconvenient Truth* was perhaps most impactful.

But this event wasn't about these two individuals, it was about offering a current look at the work being done as a result of Al Gore's stance, what we might learn or hear, and how we might respond. It was also an opportunity to connect with the work of Shar Olivier, who's own work in New York and the US as an activist is inspiring in its own right. Described after the event by one of community as a "warrior" just about captures it.

The intention was to use the event to catalyse a wider conversation.

Shar provided a frame for the discussion with three simple questions:

- Do we need to change?
- Can we change? and
- Will we change?

The message Gore's organisation provides is powerful and compelling and the answers to the questions are clear and stark as many of us already know from multiple sources and from our own observations.

So what really happened on the 28th September?

A range of people came along, from 6th formers at a local school, to a double glazing salesman, many deep green activists who are active in numerous ways across the borough some activists who've just arrived and are in the process of connecting to what's happening, and some who'd 'fallen off the wagon', lost their inspiration and focus.

Why is it important who was there?

In the last few weeks and months, I've often heard the phrase "*we need action not more talk*" And yes, talk without action is futile, but action without talk, whilst not quite futile, is limited. We need both.

The newcomers, were inspired by the old timers, rehearsing the message inspired those who'd lost focus and energy, some were slightly aware of the situation, but are now very fully aware, and hearing the messages together shone some light into spaces that was appreciated.

The number of people at the event gave the sense of movement, which, being human, is important – some people are happy being the lone dancer at a party where everyone is sitting down. Many of us are much more confident, creative and powerful when we've got a few other people dancing around us. So whilst many have heard it before, their generosity in listening again, and listening with people who haven't listened as much or as deeply before (if ever), is powerful (as long as it doesn't just stop there).

What else happened?

We connected with the devastation and the hope, and had a tiny amount of time to start part of the conversation about what's happening here in Kingston, what might we do? Even with a tiny amount of time, the response was compelling. Given the information, allowed the freedom and space to think, it's not difficult to know what to do, it is difficult at times to think clearly. The output is captured at the end of this article.

The difficulty is how. The compelling answer to the third question that Shar brought to us: Will we change? was "*we've got to*". If we look to the psychologist Albert Ellis, he might say that there is a lot of 'demandingness' in that answer.

A more real and more challenging answer to the question of "will we change?" is "*we don't know*". And, as Joanna Macy, another activist from across the pond, says so eloquently "*It's on the knife edge of uncertainty that we come alive to our truest power*".

What has happened since 28th?

When you bring a slightly different group of people together, a new set of connections are created and through those connections new conversations take place, with new awareness, new actions are possible. I know what has happened for me, and that whilst still in conversation, new possibilities and new actions are starting to come into view.

One thing we do need is a B-HAG, as my colleague Katie Hodgson would say. A Big Hairy Audacious Goal that we can use to focus, to get behind and to really challenge ourselves and others to step up.

One goal to create a sustainable Kingston that emerged from the discussion on the 28th was: Net Zero carbon emissions. If we put that together with a number, say 2025 – then we might just have a B-HAG: Net Zero carbon emissions by 2025.

I don't know if that's the right B-HAG (I do know that many people will tell me it's not, or it can't be done).

But before we slaughter the B-HAG, lets consider an interesting parallel.

On the 28th – we had the tiniest amount of time to get to the important question of what we need to do locally – we literally ran out of time. We had to ditch the plan and jump into the opportunity with direct action.

The recent UN Climate change report says exactly the same thing, that we have quite evidentially, run out of time for deciding whether we need to act and for making the best plan. We have about 12 years to respond globally, before our earth takes both the canoe and the paddle away from us.

We can't do much about the Trumps or anyone else – but we can do something here, now, personally and collectively and that is the only chance we have to bring about global change. As Robin Hutchinson very patiently noted the other day – the phrase from Global to Local looks at things through the wrong end of the telescope, it's from Local to Global where the power lies.

So it doesn't matter if the wording of the B-HAG isn't quite right.

What next?

Just as any organisation is nothing without the people who work there, our borough is nothing without its citizens. We are Kingston and we need to wake up our fellow citizens and galvanise them towards the beauty of metamorphosis. We need to continue to be the imaginal cells for our community.

And here things go full circle - talk is futile without action. Action is critical, but it doesn't matter how small or how big, because in a complex world where everything is connected, you will have an impact. Even words themselves are actions and conversations can create the space for possibilities – so create your own B-HAG and tell people about it. We need to get as many people up and dancing as we can – when we're all dancing, we can put on a new tune and change the dance to one that is more life sustaining.

See you at Green Drinks at Woodys.

Alison Whybrow, October 2019

The output from the consultation on the 28th?

