

## **A new vision for Kingston – a Climate Emergency Centre**

*In August 2021, the late Alison Whybrow, chair of Transition Town Kingston, facilitated two visioning workshops with a group interested in exploring and creating a vision for the next stage of Transition, a Climate Emergency Centre in Kingston. Seed funding from the Transition Network to enable Transition Groups across England to bounce forward from Covid-19 and create an impact in their communities helped to facilitate these workshops and subsequent progress towards the Climate Emergency Centre, now called the [Kingston Hive](#).*

*Below is Alison's narrative summary of the contributions of about 25 people in the two sessions, the first one face-to-face at Kingston Environment Centre and the second online*

### **Creating the Climate Emergency Centre: Output from the two visioning sessions**

#### **1. What's the story we want to be written?**

Once upon a time the earth was getting warmer and the climate more changeable, in Kingston we were experiencing bigger floods, colder springs – and it was so humid. Young and old were dying from diseases related to air pollution. That was just the beginning for us.

Every day, the environment, the people and our diverse cultures were losing out.

One day a whole range of people across our community, young, old, mothers, fathers, activists, professionals, retired, all sorts decided to take action by setting up a Climate Emergency Centre right in the middle of town. It was central to local and national political change. They told the truth with compassion. They made a beautiful and attractive hub. And people started to trust them. COP26 marked a turning point.

And they showed people how to upcycle, repair, sew and grow with love, compassion and determination. They were irresistible and shaped new, climate-safe practices and behaviours. Some people found they didn't need to and didn't want to buy new. Some people found they didn't have to work so hard to earn money for things that they didn't need and discovered joy in their creativity and hands on skills. Everyone had ideas that were nurtured by others. Word spread quickly.

And soon they worked with everyone, the local council, all the businesses – absolutely everyone was welcome – they really went out of their way. They were compassionate but not pushovers, they rattled some cages and ruffled some feathers. They were fierce in their love for life and courageous. Radical changes happened in policy, actions and in people.

And because of that, everyone wanted to be part of the solution, they just needed to know how. People had more fun together. There was a swell of collective action. People were confident again.

And it just happened that people started to take more care of the planet and nature around them. People remembered ancient ways. People were proud of Kingston and everyone here. It no longer mattered where you came from or what part of society you represented.

Until finally, this rolled out throughout the whole borough and across generations. Carbon was somehow cut in half in 10 years. One CEC started, but others followed. That first CEC was seen as the catalyst that prevented Kingston collapsing.

And ever since those people have been a BEACON of HOPE and communities of people around the UK, and over the world are united by a common cause and we have finally learned how to live with our planet, creating the conditions for life, rather than destroying it.

*This story structure follows an example from Brendon Marshall, an Across Schools Lead Teacher at Te iti Kahurangi Kahui Ako, Auckland, NZ. He works with 16 and 17 year olds. It's super simple and powerful*

## **2. What's our legacy going to be?**

What's the difference we can uniquely make for people, for our shared ecology and biodiversity, for our local economy.

Looking back from the future, this is what future generations can see as a result of what was started through the CEC

### **Environment**

- We **prevented further destruction**, and there has been a marked **growth in the care and responsibility we take for our planet and each other**. We have learned to **respect trees as brothers and sisters, not letting our elder siblings be killed**. In fact, Kingston is now known as the **tree city** of the south **for its beautiful tall trees that literally blanket the streets**
- We **nourished and grew what was distinctive in the locality of Kingston, creating strong connections** across the community and with the ground under our feet. We integrate the local environment into our lives, **it is no longer seen as something separate**. Our natural environment was central in **fighting against isolation**, we connected people up – through their engagement with places, soil and nature around them
- We remember **Kingston's rapid emissions reduction started here**, with the formation of the CEC. We quickly had **cleaner air**
- We **improved local biodiversity**. We created more **wild habitats** as well as lots more **places for children to play creatively outdoors** – to do their own experimenting, freely. We now notice that the **butterfly and insect species are thriving** in a way we haven't seen before – it's true, we've nurtured the biodiversity of Kingston – it's grown.

- The **soil has been regenerated** in so many places where it was exhausted. Gardeners new and old across the borough have taken on board **permaculture principles**, it was a slow start at first, but as the benefits started to be realised, more joined and then it was a wave. I would say check out the products now being sold at the garden centre – you don't see Glyphosate or roundup and slug pellets are a thing of the past – the number of garden centres has reduced as people have learned to harvest seeds and swap seeds and plants. There's a real abundance.
- Kingston council **stopped funding fossil fuels** years ago through the pension schemes, in fact, we started a campaign almost immediately to talk to all businesses – helped by Kingston Chamber of Commerce to encourage pension divestment for those that hadn't yet taken that step. We were the **first town in the UK to completely divest**
- The CEC was a great ideas hub. **Lots of people took ideas away from the CEC and adopted them** in their lives.

## People

- We **taught people in Kingston how to hold power accountable** and as a result, we are playing our part in **saving the human race** and many other species **from extinction**. A pivotal point was when **we brought the issue of flights to the table of local government**.
- We've **learned the skills that we need to face the future positively**. There are no guarantees though, yet **people now have hope** as we **shifted purposefully to realign with the context** we are in. We taught people about Climate Change and how it was linked to everything that we do – joining the dots really helped people's understanding. We had a great space to run community meetings and workshops.
- Remember when neighbourhood face book groups were full of 'them and us' type posts and warring factions? Looking back, you'd be amazed at the **development of community togetherness**. All parts of our community feel **included**. Life isn't that easy, and we don't always get on or see eye to eye, but everyone knows they are valued, it really is a **connected community that helps each other**.
- It's clear **we care**, we know where we are going and **take direct action** to get there, **influencing others to achieve a good outcome**. We **supported people to change their behaviour, healing people**.
- Right away, **people felt ownership over the CEC, they were and still are proud of it being in the centre of Kingston**. It always looked really good, really smart, as if it was a place that was loved. The CEC created '**bumping spaces**' for people to **develop and share ideas and then to action them**

- People everywhere have a **better level of practical skills such as carpentry, knitting, cooking (vegan especially)** and so much more. We ran some classes in the first Climate emergency centre bringing in teachers already working to build practical skills across the borough. I remember those first knitting circles – and the singing and banter – didn't know knitting could be such good fun.
- It was intergenerational, we had a **human library project**, and **youth were at the forefront**.
- We really did begin to **change our relationship with our shared natural world** and each other. **Kingston is now a fairer place**. People take care of each other regardless of circumstances. We are all kingstonians – even when some of us are simply passing through. As a result, we are fairer to others across the world.

### Economy

- We started to **move away from consuming to a different type of economy** – of course Des and the Save the World Club, with the circulatory, grew people's awareness.
- There was a lot of local **support for start-up local businesses** – we filled large empty **store spaces with lots of small unique businesses – keeping money and skills in the local economy**. In some ways it reminds us of those really old market space – but more purposeful and with great awareness of the value. **We helped several net zero and even carbon negative businesses get established**.
- There was a real physical **market for locally produced goods and services**. In the beginning **we helped to relocalise our economy by starting up community workshops and collective food growing spaces**
- **The circular economy, bartering, coops and a community farm** are all features of what is now established and seen as a basic normal way of doing business. **Local food production is encouraged and developed** and prized actually. It wasn't like that when we started. We look back on **consumerism as something historical** – an ecocidal trend. **We now have recoverism, protectionism, naturism** and more.
- Kingston now is part of a thriving local, national and even international **circular economy**. The **Kingston pound** thrives and is pretty much used to some extent by everyone. **Repair hubs** are everywhere. These feed into some great design networks, **repurposing** things that are no longer repairable.
- You should see the size of the old bins that people used to have that went to landfill. Now, landfill bins are the size of the old food waste bins and only collected once a fortnight. Nothing really goes to landfill anymore. It seems that once people got the hang of it – a zero waste mentality really embedded.

- We soon **transitioned from meanwhile to permanent – we grew like a big flourishing banyan tree**. We were often **featured in PR about Kingston**, the town was proud of their CEC. At the beginning the CEC really **started to bring more people into Kingston**, people who didn't often come because, before the CEC, Kingston hadn't offered what they needed. Just look at our city centre now, it is vibrant and alive.
- Our high streets have really transformed into being **community hubs**, people find support, it's all **repair and rebuild** with a few select shops where you can buy pristine new goods. The **pop up art and culture** workshops are great fun – well worth going into town for.
- The **vision** for Kingston **was reshaped to** be one of **regeneration**. Our economy is now based on **health and regeneration**

### 3. What are the values that are going to get us there?

**Ways of being:** Community, Love, Diversity, Inclusivity, Kindness, Compassion, Empathy, Humility, Patience, Respect, Sharing, Collaboration, 7 generational thinking, Hope and Joyful engagement, Irresistible, interspecies perspective.

**Ways of doing:** Can do, helpful, belief, determined, perseverance, courage, bravery, flexibility, optimism, focus, Open, building confidence, courage. Holding “the uncomfortable truth and move forward or sit with it”

**Ways of learning:** Communication, transparency, openness, respect, honesty, playful, humility, listening, experimental and emergent, giving people a voice (especially people who are new to it). Celebration in relationship to each other and environment. Knowing you are not alone, nurture. Building and learning from scientific evidence