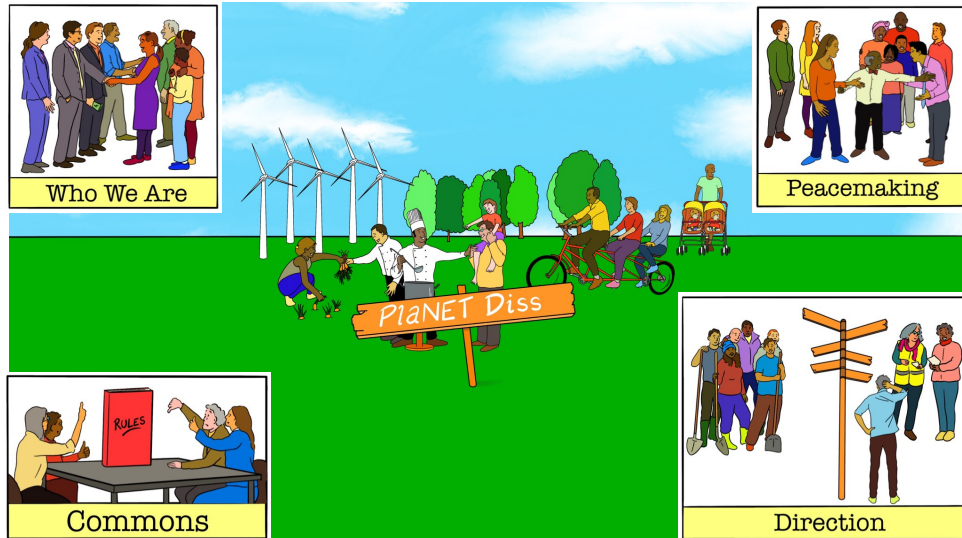


The social model for the PlaNet Diss project

FROM GARY ALEXANDER, DECEMBER 2023



Preface

The picture above gives a graphical summary, to be described below, of PlaNet Diss, a pilot project for a local sustainable and collaborative community, based in Diss, Norfolk, UK. We see this as a contribution to a huge number of practical projects and a growing vision around the world, building a movement to provide solutions to humanity's deepest environmental and social problems. (See [PlaNet Diss History and Background](#) for a short and arbitrary list and for the origins of this project.)

Very many of us see the main economic and political structures around us as literally insane: destructive of people and the natural world, not leading to a 'good life' for most. We are looking for and building the beginnings of a society that actually works: that protects the natural world, provides a modest but comfortable living for all, rather than wasteful throwaway consumption, people doing jobs they like on a basis of trust and integrity, and especially, where people of all backgrounds treat each other well and live in relative harmony.

We see this happening from the bottom up, not the top down. It isn't a matter of waiting until sympathetic governments get elected, and certainly not a matter of overthrowing anything. The early steps, as in this project, will start with a small group of people, perhaps a few per cent of the local population. For them, it will provide a modest improvement in their lives, but mainly will allow us to learn the skills of doing it: how to coordinate a bottom-up, self-governing community, how to organise to provide some of the basics of life and in so doing provide some local employment, how to work on a basis of trust and respect, how to build a community-based exchange system that reduces people's dependence on external money.

'**For people and planet**' are the core unifying values in this emerging vision coming from our deepest sense of identity: we see ourselves as part of the human family which is in turn part of the family of life on Earth, all totally interdependent, all literally related as one family.

Our most recent starting point, in May 2023, was a Fair Green Green Green Fair. See our [report on the results here](#).

The current step, in preparation now, will be a 'Green Living Day', to be held in Spring 2024 in a new 'community space in the heart of Diss': [No 8 Marketplace](#). Its purpose is to "come and get a taster of sustainable living, with local food, entertainment, small group workshops, and more..." Help us map out and start more sustainable living for Diss".

The Green Living Day will include stalls and entertainment, but also planning discussions and prototypes of community infrastructure that form a key part of sustainable living, specifically a) a communication system that incorporates a local social network (PlaNet Diss), b) a Community Fund and Exchange System that allows people to earn and save money by dealing with people they know and trust, and c) a Peacemaking group that offers training in communication skills and support for handling conflicts constructively.

A first look: The New Common Sense Video



A New Common Sense

As a quick introduction to the social vision, have a look at this very short, 3 minute video, that a group of us made in May 2020 during the first Covid lockdown. Although the specific pandemic issues are no longer relevant, the social analysis is still spot on and the video gives a very concise and powerful introduction to it. See <https://earthconnected.net/2020/12/06/a-new-common-sense/> on my website.



It shows people saying that while the Covid lockdown is bad, we shouldn't go back to the old economy/old system, which it describes as "the Global Madness" because it includes: Crazy throwaway consumption, An oppressive economy, insane wars, ethnic cleansing, oppressive governments, destroying the natural world: species, habitats, environments. This is very much more than just trying to stop climate change, which is a symptom, not the root cause – which is our disconnection from each other and the natural world.



Ending the global madness needs deep systemic change to the ways we live. A new vision of what that means is emerging. At its core is 're-inventing communities', building a new society, within the old, based upon people actively working together to provide much of the basics of life for themselves, including food, transport, energy, caring services, and much more.

What would it be like?

How would people get the basics of life? How would they be coordinating their activities? How would they catch problems early and correct them gracefully? What about money, finance, exchange, etc.?

I will summarise this briefly below, but first, I have written about this several times, with short sections giving fictional people and how they would find living in a fictional future sustainable

community. These are easy reads and fuller explanations, for those who want one, but don't include my latest thinking, given below.



My 2010 booklet [Sustainable Diss 2030](#) is particularly relevant to this project in Diss. See Chapter 2 pages 5 - 32. Overall, it is a good summary of my vision, but a little old.

The most concise (pages 13 - 17) is in my [Partnership for People and Planet](#), (2018). The whole 20 page booklet is a good summary of my vision.

Finally, there is [Chapter 3](#) (pages 22 - 45) of my book, [eGaia Growing a peaceful, sustainable Earth through communications](#). The whole book (free [online eBook version here](#)) gives a much fuller version.

Key points from these sections: (Perhaps tick those that you like.)

- People organise to work together within their communities to provide much of the basics of life (local food, shared transport, saving energy, lots of caring services, help of all kinds). The result is that people see themselves as part of a community that is actively working to care for each other.
- This is provided largely by people they know and trust, or people trusted by those they trust, etc. and is on a basis of fair trade/fair prices and wages. There are lots of social and community events so that people get to know each other and build bonds. They generally have much richer social lives than at present. This is NOT the 'free market' where people are all separate and competing with each other, but does retain its freedom.
- Social skills of good communication and handling conflict gracefully are actively taught. There are 'peacemaker' groups that handle conflicts that get more serious. The result is very little crime, bullying and prejudice, which are sensitively handled when they do occur.
- All this is actively organised, and self-governing, with decisions made by those concerned with the issue. This is bottom-up, not top down self-governance coming from the community.
- People generally do several part-time jobs rather than one full time one, choosing to do what appeals to them, and what serves the community. They live modestly comfortable lives, rather than being wasteful high consumers. Prestige comes from a reputation for looking after people and planet, not from having a lot of money.
- They use community trading systems, with local credit so that money circulates among the members. There is a mixture of work for money and as favours or community service. People aren't short of money and don't have to do jobs they dislike.
- They make a lot of use of online systems to help with the exchange, organising, self-governance, and socialising. These use locally-based systems that are safe, controlled by the community, strongly moderated to help people treat each other well. Truth – not manipulation and lies – are actively promoted.
- Food is largely local, but with modest amounts from further away, produced using regenerative techniques that enhance the environment, and using minimal or no packaging. There is a lot of eating out, as cooking for groups uses less energy. Shared meals of local food are very common.
- They use far less energy from all of the above, plus a lot more recycling and reuse, with goods that can be repaired. There is more walking and cycling, using more electric bikes and

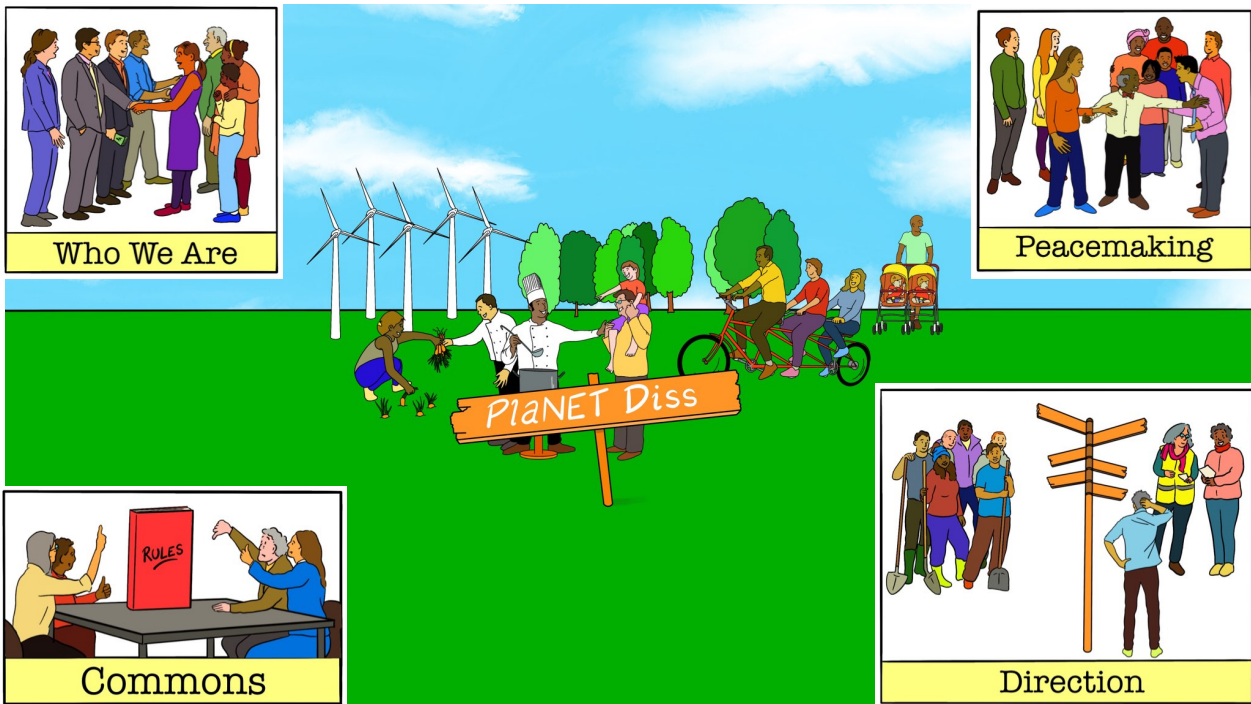
vehicles. There is a lot more local energy from solar panels, smaller local wind turbines, bioenergy, water power, etc. which is locally owned and controlled.

- The overall result is that people generally live happier, healthier, more sociable lives. This is NOT a 'we need to sacrifice to save the planet' vision.

The Current Vision - Recent additions

How to build an 'eco-ethical' society that actually works, that is socially and financially viable, stable, self-correcting and avoids the 'global madness'.

There are a huge number of projects and organisations around the world dedicated to creating a fairer, more peaceful and sustainable world. Why add one more? Partly because this is where I live and I want that to be a starting point for myself and my own community. I need to join with like-minded people to do so. But also, because I think I have a particular approach and contribution that might be very useful to lots of other initiatives as well. Its purpose is to bring them together in a way that creates a society that actually works, in contrast to the present organised as 'the global madness'.



My unique take/contribution, summarised in the picture above, is meant to create a community infrastructure that pulls together lots of different local projects in a way that makes them coherent or viable, and stable. I am basing this on what I have learned from many other projects. Specifically, this is my adaptation or interpretation of a combination of [Elinor Ostrom's Eight principles for managing a commons](#), such as common grazing land, irrigation systems, or fisheries, and also [Stafford Beer's Viable Systems](#).



The core of the vision is 'reinventing communities' where people are actively working together to provide their basic needs in a well-organised way. Basically, this is an organised exchange system, with offers and wants, that are exchanged through payment and as favours. There might be various parts of this, local food, energy, transport, caring services, etc. This is 'synergy': the whole is greater than the parts, creating a new level of social organisation of which people are part.

This needs to 'work': as it is there are various subprojects that need to be well co-ordinated, so that people active in one benefit from the others. But overall it needs to be socially and financially viable, stable, able to handle challenges and conflicts effectively, and it needs to avoid the activities and social structures of 'the global madness'.

To do this it needs four extra areas I refer to as: Who We Are, Peacemaking, Commons, and Direction.

1. **Who We Are:** Most important is that it is not a vague, anonymous collection of people but an active group and groups of groups who know and trust each other, share values and work on a basis of integrity. It needs to be a membership organisation with clear boundaries. This knowing, trusting, and sharing will happen primarily through events (in person and online) where people socialise, discuss and plan. It should be backed up by online resources in which people can easily find out about others and how they are connected to the community. That connection should include an online accounts system that displays people's exchanges and contributions to the community, and their reputation for caring for people and planet.
2. **Peacemaking:** Key to a group working well is that they understand each other, are clear about agreements, and can resolve disagreements gracefully. It needs a Peacemaking group that provides resources for people to learn communication skills, that creates and supports procedures for handling conflicts and that can step in when needed. With this, the community should be able to handle many difficulties long before police and courts are needed.
3. **Commons:** This is about self-governance. A crucial part of the vision is that it is bottom up, not top down organisation. This means decisions are made by those concerned, not some outside authority or an overall vote where a majority can impose its view on a minority. No-one tells anyone else what to do. Working together is voluntary. It means decisions made by going for consensus or near consensus. The commons will include online areas where people can discuss and vote on their values and on the rules and procedures of the community. It will be the custodian of shared resources.
4. **Direction:** Finally, the community needs to be actively planning for the future, monitoring outside developments, connecting with similar groups to create synergy and coordination at larger scales.

Applying this framework to our forthcoming events

I don't think it is realistic to expect that most people who will become part of PlaNet Diss will first have to understand all of the above, although probably the core group of people coordinating it will. For the rest, we need to provide something they find attractive, desirable, and fun, that will enable them to firstly, feel part of a group where people are actively looking after each other, and gradually, come to recognise the framework that makes it work.

So, in events such as our Green Living Day, we need

- social activities in which people enjoy themselves and also come to know one another on a personal basis.
- Activities in which people actively plan and set up structures for local food, shared transport, caring services, or whatever is important to them, and in their own terms, so that they begin to get a taste for and learn the skills of self-governance.
- Activities where people are offering and receiving help from each other, so they get a sense of being part of a group that looks after each other.
- A local exchange system that uses both money and favours, so people can earn a little and save a little, do work they like, and in so doing, get a taste of an economy that isn't so dominated by money.
- To provide training in communication skills and support for handling conflicts gracefully when they arise, to help people build a strong sense of being treated well and treating others well and with integrity.