

Friends – Climate Change

Introduction

Welcome

Thank you for giving me the space and time to do this

This is about Climate change

Check all can hear – or move to where they can hear

What this is all about

- Not science – you've done that already
- Our response to climate change – not just as Quakers but all of us
- Not actions – not yet
- Concern – being clear about our personal concern here and sharing it, without judgement
- Feelings – the keys to motivation, no-one can be motivated do anything without contacting our feelings
- Values or principles that inform action – since values really do drive all our actions, whether we are clear about them or not

Apologies

- A read provocation – not Quakerly – sorry – I'm new and lack confidence
- A personal view – my fears and shortcomings – I know you don't deserve all my problems
- My views on science and scientists and their role in the issue will emerge – I know some of you are scientists – it's not personal honest!

The timing is apt. Don tells me that the meeting must soon take decisions on our connection with the Living Witness project and ways in which we want to take that forward. I hope he will be around at the end of the session to say something more about that.

It also comes just a week after the pump failure at the Seafield sewage plant in Leith. Now you might say that that has little to do with climate change. I say it is a powerful metaphor in several ways.

- For one thing it demonstrates our capacity to have a sudden and catastrophic impact on the natural world – what's more one that was planned and designed into the system. The plant was meant

to discharge into the Forth if the pumps failed and it did. It was a success then!

- The problem of the sewage itself is one to which we have probably all, maybe unwittingly or unwillingly, made a contribution
- Had we known about it in time of course we could have decided to withhold our contribution. Instead of going to the loo, we could spend a penny in a bucket. If we were really green, we could have used some of it as household liquid compost accelerator. However, it is doubtful if by doing so we would have had any measurable impact on the 1,000 litres per second of barely treated sewage being pumped into the Firth of Forth all last weekend.
- And beyond that is the eerie sense that this whole situation has arisen because decisions have been taken here based on false values, by people who did not feel the need to ask our views.

OK - There is paper and pens on the tables – you may want to make some notes as I go along if anything takes your interest or if things I say spark thoughts of your own

The Journey

The temperature is rising. Like a fever in the human body, rising temperature can be accompanied by a wide range of other symptoms. It can be caused by a number of different diseases. Likewise climate change is an indication of fever in planet earth. There are many worrying symptoms and none of them tell us the true cause. We think it's something to do with us. We human beings have become the disease of planet earth.

We have done this by taking out more than we put back in. My family's global footprint is probably about 2 ½ to 3 times what it ought to be. No amount of changing the light bulbs or switching off the tap when I clean my teeth seems to make much difference. What's more we seem to live in a society habituated to debt of all kinds. Everyone can get a loan. If my children go to college, they are likely to take on a large, long term loans. They will learn to live with debt at an early age.

The government thinks mega casinos will provide a good boost to the economy. On January 28 this year (my daughter's birthday), the Sunday Times ran a heading "Dome boss warns: give us super casino or taxpayer loses" on an article claiming that the Millennium Dome can only become profitable with a major casino element. Other cities, Manchester and Glasgow have been eagerly competing for the chance to host this monster. This headline runs above an article headed "Last warning: 10 years to save world" and "Scientists say rising greenhouse gases will make

climate change unstoppable in a decade". Casinos are coming to the UK in spite of concerns that people are addicted to gambling and services to support addicts and their families cannot cope. In parallel, I am finding that I am dependent on a way of living that takes out the life blood of the earth itself. I am addicted to the stuff that causes climate change.

In my work I have had the opportunity to become aware of the importance of corporate values and behaviours in creating successful organisations. If you want an organisation to move smoothly in a particular direction you need everyone in it to be clear, not just where you want to go but to cultivate a shared identity, shared values and a shared approach. This relieves the management from having to tell everyone what to do all the time. People know how to take decisions for themselves. They know where they're supposed to be going have agreed principles and guidelines to help them.

Friends likewise have such principles. It is one of the attractions of the Society. It gives a coherence to our words and actions. It enables Friends to punch above our weight.

But in the world I see around us there is no such coherence. Our collective sense of what is important is confused by mixed messages and actions at odd with the words. What values are really driving our behaviour? What is it that makes us think it is ok to take out 3 x the planet's worth of stuff?

2006 was the year that I really woke up to this idea that the world is going to end, not at some indefinite period in the future but maybe in my lifetime, my children's lifetime or my grandchildren's lifetime. I guess it was the appearance of David Attenborough on the telly, my childhood TV guide to the animal kingdom, now haggard, wild eyed, a passionate octogenarian, predicting that the Amazon will burn this century if we don't respond effectively now. That really hit me. After all, given my sense of the importance of coherent values and behaviours, I feel sure we cannot respond effectively.

For Attenborough, climate change is not just a matter of too much CO₂. He lists five kinds of indicators that our relationship with the planet is out of balance. All of these add up to a scenario for the destruction of life on earth. They are:

1. Pollution – not just CO₂ but all of it
2. Over harvesting – taking out more than the land can sustain
3. Fragmentation of habitats – breaking up the areas of natural vegetation or wet lands that species need for food and migration.

4. Introduced species (e.g. grey squirrels or rhododendrons)
5. Habitat loss – destruction of the rainforest, wetlands and flows

These things are important because life of the planet is a system. We cannot continue to live without the interaction of a multiplicity of life forms. The less of them there are, the more we threaten our own existence.

Taking a deep intake of breath and resolving to face my fears, I started to find out a bit more about this climate change thing. I went to see Al Gore's film "An Inconvenient Truth". This is a man who manages to make the prospect of global destruction as cosy as Franklin Delano Roosevelt's fireside chats! Slowly he builds his case, until his audience, both in the States and in my Edinburgh cinema, are convinced that the rise in carbon in the atmosphere guarantees we will soon be cooked. Then he says, and this bits good! "but don't worry, we can save (Pause....) the economy!" At this point there is an audible sigh of relief, both in Edinburgh and in America. Well thank goodness for that. Life can carry on as usual. It's just like the cfc problem (Chlorofluorocarbons) in our fridges. A wee technical hitch. Like the Gore family who stopped growing tobacco once Al's sister died of lung cancer, we just have to join the dots, cut a few things out, apply some technical solutions, make a fix.

But then I'm thinking about Al's image of the world in the scales, balanced against the gold bars. Wait a minute. Aren't the gold bars the very symbol of "the economy"! Surely the reaction should be "Oh no, not the economy!" Isn't the economy full of all the things that are taking us to our climate change destruction? Planes, trains and automobiles, plastic packaging, synthetic foods and drinks that have to be banned from schools because they are so damaging to kids, loans and casinos....

It seemed to me that the drivers in our society needed a fresh look. Roused to the task I wrote to Ross Finnie, Minister for the Environment, copy to my MP and MSP's, and asked what the government was doing about it. I can tell you Friends the government is doing a lot. In due course I received long replies from Ross Finnie and Alistair Darling, along with a book and a lot of web links. That shut me up for a bit.

One of the unexpected rewards for showing an interest was an invitation to attend a national conference run by SEPA, the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency. This featured a heavyweight line up of climate change experts and even a few of my own colleagues, all there to help launch a report on the state of Scotland's Environment. I was ill equipped to connect with the science in the report, so I attempted to make sense of the proceedings impressionistically. The report uses a traffic light system to tell us that some things in the Scottish natural environment are getting

better. For instance some rivers are cleaner, or were until the Seafield plant failure, and air quality is cleaner, unless you live by the Firth of Forth. Some plant species that had been threatened are recovering. BUT Climate change threatens all the positives in the report. All our successes will be in vain if we don't deal with climate change. What's more we can't control it in Scotland. We can only do our bit.

The illustrious panel gave a mixed emotional message. The disaster was not now. If we get it right, there won't be one. Climate change will happen and we are causing it. There is a delayed response of maybe 40 or 50 years. In other words any climate change we experience now is the result of things happening 40 or 50 years ago. Any changes we make now will impact 40 or 50 years down the line. I felt confused as to what this really added up to. If we get it all wrong now, then in 40 to 50 years time we could know for sure how wrong we got it and there may be nothing we can do to put it right. Us heating up the world now could release natural CO2 releasing mechanisms in nature, that will raise temperatures beyond our wildest fears or dreams. But the scientists are keen to tell us that this doesn't need to happen. We just need to do what is needed now.

In terms of what to do, the scientists varied. Some said they were just scientists; deciding what to do involved moral and ethical issues, so that was someone else's job. Others like Sir James Curran were busy setting up a business to sell climate change kit to the paying public. Some scientists struggled to contain their emotions at times. Professor Mike Hulme from the Centre for Climate Change was keen to assure us that disaster was not just around the corner, but then spoiled the effect when he hissed "Why don't they just turn off the water when they clean their teeth!"

Ross Finnie assured us all that Scotland was well placed to take advantage of the economic opportunities involved in the switch to green consumables. He was the only one who seemed to be excited. I felt he was pretending.

I noticed one of my colleagues in the audience. As head of strategic planning he was responsible for something called strategic environmental assessment for the agency. I thought he should be a knowledgeable and concerned person, so I collared him a few days later. "Ah he said, have you seen Bjorn Lomborg?" "No" I said "Who's he?" He explained that Bjorn Lomborg is a Danish statistician, a very persuasive gentleman, who specialises in questioning the statistics used by climate change scientists to argue that they've got it all wrong. He also argues on the basis of a statistical approach to historical analysis that humanity always responds to disaster just in time, because we have to. He therefore says that the way

for us to make a name for ourselves is to feed the starving millions NOT worry too much about climate change.

My colleague seemed to feel that Lomborg had all the lines. I felt the wind leave my sails. But I also felt wary of a statistician entering the field. How could David Attenborough have got it so wrong? Weren't there lies, damn lies and statistics? What about the historical argument? It didn't matter how many technical innovations he could cite from history, my recollection, from studying for a degree in it, was that people always saw revolutions coming, but always failed to respond with adequate reforms in time. Revolutions require a real shift in values and behaviours. Isn't that what we all need now?

After this encounter I started to pay more attention to the science of climate change. The Stern report came out. It was backed up by over 1,000 scientists. Some commentators were critical of Ross Finnie's decision to use the Al Gore film in school's, to prompt climate change discussion. They thought it was based on bad science. I wondered what constituted good science. Is good science, the science that over 1,000 scientists sign up to? Given the known risks associated with art and architecture designed by committee, didn't the large numbers of scientists involved imply a level of dumbing down? A lowest common denominator in scientific messages? Then again, given my wariness of statistics, should I be convinced of something because a statistically significant number of climate change scientists said it was so? What about paradigm shift? When big changes are coming isn't it often scientists or thinkers in a minority of one, who first see the new pattern emerging? What is the collective noun for a lot of scientists anyway? Would it be an argument? Or maybe in honour of Heisenburg would it be a strangeness? After all finches have a charm already.

This led me to suspect that science may be not just the touchstone of truth in our society (taking over from religion then) but that it retains this pre-eminence because it supports technologies that people can sell and make money from. It's all about the economy. Why take wise decisions, why look at problems we've created and think about unwinding them in the least invasive and most natural way? Isn't that because no-one can make money out of doing it that way?

The idea that we are somehow no longer dependent on the food chain is a symptom of our dangerous divorce from the natural world.

In January the Observer carried an article that starts "Britain faces an ecological catastrophe that could wreak havoc on wildlife populations when the first outbreak of Asian flu hits the country.

Scientists say they fear that tons of the anti-viral agent Tamiflu – taken by Britons trying to combat the disease – would be flushed down sewers into rivers and lakes.

Natural populations of microbes would be killed off by a deluge of water polluted with concentrated amounts of the anti-viral drug. As a result, birds, fish and other creatures that rely on these bacteria and viruses for their survival could be devastated.

In addition, waters containing Tamiflu would provide ideal conditions for the evolution of drug-resistant strains of bird flu virus."

The role of science and technology is equally ambiguous when it comes to issues of energy generation.

James Lovelock, arguably the one scientist who saw climate change coming before anybody else – the lone voice of paradigm shift of 30 years ago – is now leading the field in saying that the energy needs of our world can only be met by nuclear power. I find this hard to take.

Nuclear power is "clean" in carbon terms only if we ignore the manufacturing processes in building nuclear power stations. They generate wastes that are horrendously toxic for 100's or even thousands of years, leaving a legacy of anxious care to our great, great, grandchildren, even though the recorded history of humanity only covers at best, a few thousand years and even Danish statisticians (never mind historians) would struggle to demonstrate a year in which no human society went to war with another. If we cannot manage ourselves in peaceful coexistence and collaboration, how will we manage these risks?

What's more the US clearly has a list of present day countries who are just not supposed to have nuclear power – Iran being one, although Tehran itself must surely be one of the most heavily polluted cities on the planet, with air pollution that claims the lives of 5,000 people every year.

The assumption that there is some kind of "green" energy out there is equally questionable. Bio fuels for instance means creating fuel oil from plants. The Scottish Executive transport strategy – published in Dec 06 – says that our Scottish planes, train and car use will continue to increase. (Car use to rise 22% between 2005 and 2015 and flights by 150% between 2004 and 2030. To reduce our carbon impact we'll need more efficient engines and cleaner fuels – bio fuels included with a target of 5% by 2010.

I am far from clear where the bio fuel crops are going to grow. Richard Branson is already on the bio fuel band wagon with a promise to invest millions of pounds in bio fuels development. Apparently already so many farmers in the United States have switched their crops to bio fuels that 100 developing countries may lose food aid.

In December 2006, just as the SE was unveiling its transport strategy, the Economist ran a front page feature telling us that there isn't enough agricultural land in the world to feed everyone from organic agriculture i.e. we have to have a high tech agri-chemical business to feed everyone. This of course is disingenuous. There is no global policy option, to decide to feed everyone. It simply isn't a priority. So what is the point of the article? Why to make us question the value of organic (low tech) food and assume that an agri chemical business is the common sense solution?

The news that really finished me off appeared in the Sunday Times in February this year. There is a UK wide organisation called National Air Traffic Services or NATS for short, which is the flight path equivalent of rail track. It operates on a licence from the Civil Aviation Authority that requires it to "be capable of meeting, on a continuing basis, any reasonable level of overall demand" and to "permit access to airspace on the part of all users". The news was that the NATS are planning a massive expansion of UK flight paths and airplane stacking areas, complemented by airport expansion schemes. The new runway proposed for Edinburgh is a modest affair compared with plans down south. At present Edinburgh caters for 8.8 million passengers. By 2030 there should be 26 million. Similar expansion is planned for Glasgow and Aberdeen. People who have had new flight paths zoned over their heads complain that they have not been consulted and can claim no compensation. In terms of greenhouse gases the article claims that CO₂ from UK flights is already 5% of Britain's footprint. However, that is probably an underestimate as high altitude emissions have 3 times more impact on global climate than those emitted at ground level. At present this 5% comes from 32 million tons of CO₂ emissions. By 2030 this is planned to rise to 400 million tons. Tony Blair is obviously all in favour of this. His own personal flight footprint has been estimated as being 700 times larger than the rest of us. Well there's no point in not supporting the economy is there?

Friends, when I got to this point I realised that I have been hawing on at you for too long.

I had hoped to tell you of my other concerns in this area

- Of my efforts at recycling, only it costs too much to recycle all the plastic packaging, even the plastic with the recycle triangles and numbers on it is uneconomic to reprocess in Edinburgh
- There are people recycle industrial scale plastic by sailing it in a container to China for reprocessing there
- But then I found that ships release twice as much CO₂ as planes

- And plastic is probably not reprocessed in China, but is turning parts of the country into a wasteland
- And then there's the huge contribution that rubbish tips make to releasing methane – another climate change gas
- I had hoped to talk about carbon offsetting, which seemed like a good idea at the time
- Then I found that the carbon offset from trees takes the life of the tree to work
- Even the G8 carbon offset scheme didn't work
- And £300 million paid to an Indian company to clean up it's act was completely diverted to other purposes
- I couldn't resist telling you about the dangers of organic cattle. Did you know that all the cows in the UK account for 10% of our carbon emissions on account of the methane in their burps and farts? And did you know that Defra (The Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) has worked out that organic cattle fart 15% more than inorganic cattle? So what is the point of this information? Are we now to be mean to cows because of their farts? Will we require all organic cattle to be made inorganic to reduce the gas? And what about us humans? Do we fart more if we eat organic? What is the human burp and fart contribution to the problem?
- Then again some people have expressed concern over the growing human population world wide – not just on account of all our burps and farts, but because the more of us there are the less our global footprint share is going to be. Of course the guaranteed method of stopping population growth within a generation is to give everyone a decent standard of living. This seems hardly likely as the G8 countries renege on their commitments to making poverty history.
- I was hoping to say as well that I suspect many climate change deniers – if there are any left – are simply people who recognise the scale of the changes we need to make. They also maybe fear that this will mean a return to a past marked by our own poverty, which meant that we were also likely to be overworked, under paid, sick, socially isolated and powerless. No wonder it would be fearful.
- Alternatively we all need to learn how to walk more lightly over the good earth. Our progress is limited by politicians playing "I will if you will" at a global level, or should that be "I won't if you don't!". It's no wonder it 2 steps forward and 3 steps back, however busy the government is.

So lets just stop and think about this then.

What values are at stake here?

What is this economy that drives everything?

How can the economy discriminate between the swarming of parasites and the life abundant?

What priorities should be applied to decision making?

What matters most?

Friends say that there is that of God in everyone. Some extend this now to all of creation. There may be many strands of thought as to what this really means. Can there really be anything in the natural creation that is not God? Is a separation between God and the creation a possibility that exists outside the human imagination? Like the possibility in Phillip Pullman's trilogy "His Dark Materials" of a world in which a child's animal spirit might be cut away. An injury leading directly to soul loss and a form of living death.

In the Islamic tradition it is said "There is no God but God" – in other words there is nothing other than God and we suffer from a delusion if we imagine that there is.

Likewise from this tradition there is a saying, as it were in the voice of God "Go from things to me and they will accompany thee, go from Me to things and I will protect thee." That seems to me to be a clear statement of priorities in immanence and transcendence.

Similarly in the Jewish tradition I am told that God tells His people "worship Me as if you see Me" i.e. See Me, that is the Creator, or whatever that means for you, standing before you. Try it now – what do you really see?

There is a unifying, mystical dimension to this way of seeing.

A student asked a Tibetan Lama why there was so much misery in the world. The master responded with a question "Why is there I?" The paper on this conversation goes on to say "The man whose centre is in his first person singular can neither know nor serve, nor can he love." It also says "Beauty is the ultimate aim of love". What does it mean for us when Jesus says "I am love". Look around now, maybe worshipping in the Jewish tradition or as Quakers seeing that of God, whatever or whoever that means for you, as if you see the beauty of the living presence of love here and now.

Could we really take such awful and contradictory decisions about our world if we saw it through the eyes of love?

It has been suggested to me that Friends do not have sufficient helpful testimony on the subject of climate change. I'm going to read you something only slightly edited, and ask you who said it and when – a Quaker quiz if you like

25.01 The produce of the earth is a gift from our gracious creator to the inhabitants, and to impoverish the earth now to support outward greatness appears to be an injury to the succeeding age.

John Woolman, 1772

25.05 I was early convinced in my mind that true religion consisted in an inward life wherein the heart (doth) love(s) and reverence(s) God the Creator and learns to exercise true justice and goodness not only toward all men but also toward the animal (brute) creation; that as the mind was moved on an inward principle to love God as an invisible, incomprehensible being, on the same principle it was moved to love him in all his manifestations in the visible world; that as by his breath the flame of life was kindled in all animal and sensitive creatures, to say we love God ... and at the same time exercise cruelty toward the least creature ... was a contradiction in itself.

John Woolman, 1772

I believe that Friends do have something special to offer the world at this time. I believe it lies in our testimonies, in our process and in our capacity to build our own community and devote the time to elicit the sense of our meetings. It seems to me that we should be less shy about offering these things to the wider world, for I believe that they are more valuable attributes at this time than a fully articulated theology of climate change. This if it existed, might be more damaging by inhibiting our ability to learn together and to make fresh sense of an evolving situation.

Take a piece of paper and a pen or pencil and ask yourself quietly in your heart – never mind all the many things I have said or not said on this subject, - what now is my concern on this topic – and write that down. Maybe just a word or two words – nothing more, - just a word or phrase that captures your concern – maybe your children or grandchildren, maybe rubbish, maybe agriculture and food, maybe transport or this mysterious magical thing we worship called the economy...?

What is my concern?

{Breathing space}

Now what is the feeling I have when I reflect on this concern? How does it affect me emotionally. What is the main emotion that I feel – and write that down too.

{Breathing space}

Now, what positive value is at stake, what positive value is challenged by virtue of the fact that I have this concern? And write that down. If you find this difficult you can try it in reverse. Maybe your emotion when you reflect on your concern is not a happy one. Imagine a situation in which your concern was fully and completely resolved and you felt completely happy and confident about this matter. What positive value needs to be at work in the world in order to bring this situation about?

OK – thank you. On the tables you will find a sheet of flip chart paper and a pen. What I'd like you to do now is just to share those three things that you've written down and record them.

The way I'd like you to do this is this:

First take a round of concerns – just say them briefly – check for understanding – listen to where this concern is coming from – and write it down – you then have a cluster or a list of concerns

Then take a round of feelings – no need to explain these – simply let them be heard – and again write them down.

Third – take the values – try to affirm these in the positive – again check for understanding – and record them.

Then take some time to just reflect, sit in silence, minister as the moment takes you, see what has come out of this.

In a little while I am going to put my hands up. This does not mean I want to pass wind. It means I want your attention.

.....
How was that?

What I'd like to happen is that we gather all our sheets together and see how similar or how different our concerns are

I'd like us to just spend a little time together reflecting on that and particularly thinking about what we'd like to happen next on this subject, as a meeting. I personally would like to feel part of a supportive group of friends on this issue but I'm not volunteering for anything just now.
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Don will hopefully be able to say something to us about things that we need to do.