



One Planet Dartmoor: Dartmoor Low Carbon Action Plan

Chapter 9: Prosperous Dartmoor: Supporting Low
Carbon Business

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The Dartmoor Low Carbon Strategy

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Chapter 9 Prosperous Dartmoor: Supporting Low Carbon Business

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9. Prosperous Dartmoor: Supporting Low Carbon Businesses

“Prosperity without growth is no longer a utopian dream. It is a financial and ecological necessity.”¹

9.1 Introduction

There is a fundamental paradox at the heart of our efforts to address climate change. This is that while indiscriminate pursuit of business growth is one of the main causes of climate change, growth of low carbon business and ecologically beneficial business is essential to reducing it. This chapter examines both parts of that proposition. It then proposes a low carbon business objective for the Dartmoor Low Carbon Action Plan, and a set of activities to realise it.

9.2 The Business Growth Paradox

Since the Second World War, Western economies have pursued an economic model which demands continuous business growth. This is because those economies, and the businesses within them, compete to maximise profit, and to do so they have tried to increase labour productivity. This helps them, because fewer people are needed for each unit of output, and so costs fall. The problem with this approach, from an economic point of view, is that it can cause unemployment, reducing the amount of money in the economy, which would cause demand to fall, and create the potential for recession. To counter this danger, demand must be continually stimulated, to absorb increased production.²

A problem with this model is that it is, of course, impossible for growth to be pursued indefinitely. Perpetual growth requires an infinite supply of natural resources, while we only have those of one planet (though the UK consumes resources as though we had three).³ The continuous business growth model is therefore unsustainable.

While the model is flawed in theory, its application in practice has generated rapidly rising carbon emissions (demonstrated by the fact that the rise tracks the growth of

1 Jackson, T. (2009) *Prosperity without Growth - The transition to a sustainable economy* Sustainable Development Commission p.12 at

http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications/downloads/prosperity_without_growth_report.pdf

2 There are different ways to stimulate demand, but one is to promote fashion, which supports planned obsolescence, and another is to expand credit. The recent financial crisis was precipitated when the continuous expansion of credit proved unsustainable. This ignoring of financial reality had consequences which would be dwarfed by ignoring the ecological limits of continuing business growth.

3 And so a country's wealth, measured as the sum of its natural resources, may decline even as its economy grows. See, for example, Dasgupta, P. (2010) *Nature's role in sustaining economic development* Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society *B January 12, 2010 365:5-11* at

<http://rstb.royalsocietypublishing.org/content/365/1537/5.full>

economies from the commencement of the industrial revolution).⁴ That rise in emissions must be stopped within ten years if we are to avoid an increase of temperature of more than 2° compared with the start of the industrial revolution, which would be very likely to lead to runaway climate change.

Despite its theoretical and practical flaws, the continuous growth model remains the core policy of the UK government.⁵ This leads to a form of double-think in which it pursues largely indiscriminate business growth⁶ while preaching carbon reduction.⁷

The present and future ecological damage which has been, and would be, caused by indiscriminate business growth is particularly regrettable since the growth has not achieved the prosperity which is surely its only justification. It has failed for people in developing countries who have become relatively, and in many cases absolutely, poorer than they were 40 years ago. The model has also failed for many people in developed countries, where the gap between rich and poor has widened and where many people are now at increasing risk of losing their jobs, and falling incomes.⁸ In the UK, the gap is now at its greatest since the Second World War.⁹

Despite all the shortcomings of indiscriminate business growth, the growth of ecologically and socially-appropriate business can contribute significantly to reducing the speed of climate change. It can do this by bringing about true prosperity,¹⁰ defined as providing adequate material assets (food, shelter and warmth) and the ability to participate meaningfully in society.¹¹

4 Global carbon emissions have risen 40% since 1990 (t. Jackson, above, p.5). There is evidence that emissions from Europe fell by roughly 9% in the year to April 2010, as a result of the economic slowdown (<http://blogs.ft.com/brusselsblog/2010/04/carbon-dioxide-emissions-plummet-unintended-gift-from-economic-crisis/>). This provides a breathing space, but the avowed intention of government's is to resume traditional business growth as soon as possible. Furthermore, the EU's cap and trade system means that polluters can store credits from polluting less over that period, and use them in the future – negating any gain.

5 In so far as this can be discerned. At the time of writing, The Coalition government has proposed numerous changes to the UK's energy-environment policy framework, but very few of these have been confirmed or set out in any detail." www.camecon.com/UK/UKEnergy/PressRelease-UKEnergy.aspx

6 Some initiatives at the edges of business policy are not indiscriminate. They may promote innovation, for example, or particular business sectors. Overall, however, the lack of discrimination is built into the growth model through its standard measure— Gross Domestic Product. This includes both socially beneficial and socially harmful output.

7 The last UK government has argued that “decoupling” is a solution. This approach argues that it is possible to have continuing economic growth while resource use declines, provided that resources are used in a more and more carbon-efficient way. There is no evidence that this is correct. It may be that relative carbon intensity, per unit of production, might decline, but an absolute decline in carbon intensity is required to reduce overall emissions. This has not taken place, and is highly unlikely to do so, as developing countries try to emulate the lifestyles of the West while using means of production which are less efficient than those in the West. China, for example, explicitly bases its emissions policy on carbon intensity, while promoting rapid growth powered by (largely) coal.

8 And in any event, “all the evidence shows that beyond the sort of standard of living which Britain has now achieved, extra growth does not automatically translate into human welfare and happiness.” Adair Turner, Chairman, Financial Services Authority, quoted at www.guardian.co.uk/business/2010/jan/01/fsa-adair-turner-green-economy

9 Hills, J and others (January 2010) *An Anatomy of Economic Inequality in the UK* National Equality Panel <http://www.equalities.gov.uk/pdf/NEP%20Report%20bookmarked.pdf>

10 The origin of the word “Prosperity” shows its link to well-being. “Prosperity is about things going well for us – in accordance with (pro – in the Latin) our hopes and expectations (speres).” T. Jackson, above, p.14.

11 T. Jackson, above, p.7

Businesses can contribute to prosperity by being carbon efficient (producing comparatively low fossil fuel intensive goods and services), while increasing incomes, jobs and job security, and protecting the environment. Such businesses will often be local, rooted within the communities they serve, and so reducing the carbon costs of transport while responding to the needs of the people in that community.¹²

Businesses which operate in this way are an essential component of a One Planet Economy for Dartmoor.¹³ The next section describes how the Dartmoor Low Carbon Action Plan proposes to support them.

9.3 Prosperous Dartmoor: Supporting Low Carbon Business

All businesses should operate as efficiently as possible, reducing carbon emissions from their activities.¹⁴ Some businesses can go much further, promoting low carbon and ecologically sustainable living. This plan proposes to help both groups.

There are existing specialist agencies which can help make businesses more carbon-efficient. One activity within this plan will help direct businesses to them. There are also businesses in several sectors which promote low carbon and sustainable living. These include:

1. Low food and farming businesses – these will be supported by the activities described in the Food chapter of this plan.
2. Low recycling and waste reduction businesses – this will be supported by the activities in the Waste chapter
3. Renewable energy businesses – supported by the activities in the Renewables chapter.
4. Energy efficiency businesses, such as insulation suppliers and installers, and in particular local businesses developing and supplying low technology ways of reducing energy loss – these will be supported by the chapter called “Warmer Homes, Lower Bills”

¹² There are exceptions to this. Fairtrade provides one way in which trade with distant businesses can provide socially desirable outcomes, though at a carbon cost. It is also true that some products produced at a lower carbon cost in a warmer country, even taking into account transport emissions. Finally, small economies can withstand local shocks, such as crop failure, if they have a diversified economy and external, alternative, sources of supply.

¹³ As described in Chapter 5.

¹⁴ As opposed to justifying carbon emissions by buying carbon offsets. There are very few, if any, forms of offsetting which have been shown to be satisfactory. International offsetting mechanisms have been shown to be subject to abuse (see, for example, Bullock, S. Childs, M and Picken, T.) *A Dangerous Distraction: Why offsetting is failing the climate and people: The Evidence Friends of the Earth at http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/briefing_notes/dangerous_distraction.pdf*. It is possible that an offsetting scheme which supported local renewable energy generation which would not otherwise take place, might be appropriate, both any proposal would need rigorous examination. Furthermore, there is a fundamental problem with offsetting schemes which purport to replace fossil carbon with an equal volume of carbon within the active carbon cycle, which is that they do not cut the net volume of active carbon. For all these reasons, off-setting is not supported by activities in this plan.

If all these measures are implemented Dartmoor will be able to demonstrate how enterprise can promote low carbon economies across the UK. Such local activity will not, however, be sufficient on its own. There will also be a need to undertake lobbying to increase support for sustainable businesses, and also for curbs on consumerism. This is because there is little point in asking people to choose low-carbon alternatives (produced by local businesses) in the face of strong and continuous messages to increase high street consumption.¹⁵ For this reason, this section has a specific action designed to help change lifestyles.

Case Study: The Low Impact Living Initiative

“Low-Impact Living Initiative (LILI) is a non-profit organisation whose mission is to help people reduce their impact on the environment, improve their quality of life, gain new skills, live in a healthier and more satisfying way, have fun and save money”¹⁶

It suggests activities which can be undertaken by individuals, and also models for changing society and government structures, and has factsheets on each of them. One of its initiatives is called “8 Handshakes”. This uses an inverted pyramid networking model – 15 people meet in a neighbourhood, to discuss issues and devise approaches to low impact living, and elect one of their number to attend meetings at the next level – perhaps a town. The levels continue to a national one. This is one of several initiatives designed to help people develop and use parallel structures to overcome the shortcomings of the present electoral model.¹⁷

The next section describes the vision for Prosperous Dartmoor and outlines the objectives and activities to be undertaken to achieve it.

9.4 Prosperous Dartmoor

The Prosperity Objective

To promote carbon reduction in all businesses, and growth of carbon-reducing and ecologically sustainable businesses, and ways to help people consider adopting lower-carbon lifestyles.

The prosperity goal will be achieved by achieving the following actions:

¹⁵ “Simplistic exhortations for people to resist consumerism are destined to failure. Urging people to insulate their homes, turn down the thermostat, put on a jumper, drive a little less, or walk a little more, holiday at home, buy locally produced food (and so on) will either go unheard or be rejected as manipulation for as long as all the messages about high street consumption point in the other direction.” Jackson, T., above p.11.

¹⁶ <http://www.lowimpact.org/index.htm>

¹⁷ Another is Take Back Parliament <http://www.takebackparliament.com/>

9.4.1 Assisting all businesses

1. provide information on its website referring businesses to sources of advice, funding and financial support for carbon-reducing and renewable generation, including carbon calculators¹⁸
2. provide a matching service so that businesses can cooperate to reduce emissions, through, for example, local travel networks or shared distribution systems.
3. work with partners to increase the uptake of programmes which help businesses to reduce emissions and adopt renewables, including those run by Envirowise, and Business Link.¹⁹

9.4.2 Carbon-Reducing and Ecologically Sustainable Businesses

Dartmoor Circle will work with partners to support food, waste reduction, renewables and low technology businesses through the actions described elsewhere in this plan.

9.4.3 Promote non-consumerist lifestyles

Dartmoor Circle will work with partners, potentially including street theatre companies and intentional communities such as Steward Community Woodland,²⁰ to:

- Demonstrate and promote reduced consumption lifestyles
- Produce and promote toolkits and examples which can help people to undertake actions which reduce consumption, such as Somerset County Council's "Buy recycled this Christmas" initiative²¹, and Verdant.net²²
- Promote disinvestment in highly pro-consumption businesses²³

¹⁸ Such as the Envirowise calculator at <http://envirowise.wrap.org.uk/uk/Our-Services/Tools/Envirowise-Indicator-Tool.html?nr=1>

¹⁹ Which has an excellent set of resources at <http://www.businesslink.gov.uk/bdotg/action/layer?site=106&r.s=tl&r.11=1079068363&r.lc=en&topicId=108289940>

²⁰ <http://www.stewardwood.org/woodland/management.ghtml>

²¹ http://www.somersetwaste.gov.uk/pages/news_detail.asp?ID=165

²² <http://www.verdant.net/>

²³ <http://www.matthewtaylorsblog.com/creditcrunch/post-consumerism/>