



From Ecotown to Transition Town:

An alternative vision for the proposed Leicestershire Ecotown site



Transition Leicester, September 2008

Executive Summary

The proposals by Cooperative Estates for an “Ecotown” to be built on their land holdings to the east of Leicester have created a great deal of interest and controversy amongst local people.

We see both some merits and some difficulties in the proposals, but rather than joining the ranks of those opposing the Ecotown, we’d like to put forward a positive alternative vision for the use of the land. We think our idea is one that will excite and engage local people, and is thoroughly grounded in a vision for Leicester and the surrounding area that is environmentally and economically sustainable.

The starting point for our proposal is a consideration of two vitally important issues: peak oil and climate change.

“Peak Oil” refers to the impending historic peak in global oil production, which is likely to bring in an era of rapidly increasing fuel prices, unreliable fuel supplies, and economic contraction. These factors will lead to a need to re-localise the economy in Leicester, meeting our core needs – such as energy, transportation and food – largely using local resources. For Leicester to thrive during this period of transition, we need to start developing and improving local infrastructure now.

The latest research on climate change indicates that to avoid disastrous global warming, we need to virtually eliminate our reliance on fossil fuels for energy – not over a century or more but within a few decades.

Taking these issues together, we see our community as entering a period of transition towards a more sustainable local economy, and we’d like to see any development on the proposed Ecotown

site as making a positive contribution towards that transition.

We therefore propose a positive alternative to the Ecotown development — that Cooperative Estates develop their land holdings to provide Leicester and local settlements with resources to support this process of transition, with a focus on growing food for local people.

We suggest using organic growing methods to cut reliance on fossil fuel inputs and developing the site using permaculture principles. We suggest using a Community Supported Agriculture approach, so that local consumers have a direct relationship with growers using the site, enhancing food security for consumers, and income security for producers.

This proposal would provide much-needed skills and local jobs for local people, reduce the need for energy and resource intensive expansion of transport infrastructure and improve the resilience of Leicester’s food supply. The opportunities for innovation and the development of much-needed skills on the site are enormous.

We are keen for our proposal to start a discussion locally about the best possible use for the site. We think any change of use should take into account the aspirations of local people, and the need to respond locally to climate change and peak oil.

We hope that the issues we raise and the suggestions we are putting forward are taken into account as the proposal for use of the Ecotown site is developed. If “Pennbury” is not developed on the site, we hope that the land owners will turn to our alternative proposal, as a sketch of a way forward towards a truly sustainable and inspiring use of the land.

A view from the future?

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PERMBURY CELEBRATES 10 YEARS

by Mavis Happen

Leicestershire's pioneering organic market garden and visitor centre Permbury celebrates its 10th birthday today, with an event promising fun for all the family.

The Gartree Road will be closed this afternoon as a parade makes its way from the Permbury site to Leicester, led by Permbury's now familiar fleet of green cycle-trailers used for vegbox deliveries. The parade will terminate in Victoria Park, where local residents are invited to a locally grown feast – supplied, of course, by food grown on the Permbury site.

Permbury founder Robert Green said "We are so proud to have reached this milestone and to celebrate the success of our project in supplying Leicester with great local food and the skills to get growing over the past 10 years."

In his speech this afternoon, Mr Green intends to remind those at the event how different things could have been. Back in 2008 this newspaper was flooded with stories about the proposed "Ecotown" for the Permbury site – a plan for more than 12,000 homes! After the Ecotown plan fell through, Co-operative Estates gained much local admiration by initiating a popular consultation on what should be done with the land. Opinion soon solidified around the idea that the land be used for local food production and education for sustainable land-use.

With the land soon dubbed Permbury – a pun on the defunct Ecotown's name, "Pennbury", and the new projects Permaculture principles – Co-operative estates set to work with experts in permaculture design, organic growing and natural building and an army of local labour to redevelop the site.

Local resident Jean Parker, 48, will be cutting the 10th birthday cake this afternoon, in recognition of her status as the first customer to sign up for Permbury's pioneering Community Supported Agriculture project. "My friends thought I was crazy at first," said Mrs Parker, "I was supporting the project by paying £10 a week, and taking a risk that if there was a poor harvest, my weekly vegbox would be light, to say the least. But they've always kept me well-supplied with local, organic fruit and veg, and now there's a huge waiting list to even get one of their vegboxes – now all my friends are really jealous!"

Leader of Leicester City Council Jane Potter will be on hand to congratulate the Permbury team this afternoon, and said "When I think of what Permbury has achieved, I'm lost for words. Over a thousand households supplied with sustainably grown food every week, hundreds of people trained through their organic growing apprenticeships, a beautiful transformation of the old airport site, and now the scheme is being replicated around towns and cities all over the country. Thank goodness local people had the foresight to make this happen 10 years ago!"

The Context

The land owned by Cooperative Estates and English Partnerships on the edge of Leicester is a significant resource for local people and the city of Leicester. We think that any change of use should be evaluated with the long term interests of local communities and the impacts on the local and global environment firmly in mind.

The availability of this land presents a great and exciting opportunity to make a substantial contribution to the future environmental and economic wellbeing of the surrounding area. We'd like to see this opportunity seized by involving local people in making the best choice now on the future use of the space.

We believe that the Ecotown proposal as it stands does take into account a number of important environmental issues, such as the need to develop buildings with low in-use carbon emissions and the need to preserve and enhance biodiversity. We also believe that Cooperative Estates have a genuine commitment to environmental principles, and have given serious thought to the design issues involved in creating a settlement where living a way of life with a low environmental impact is made easier.

However, we feel that the proposal lacks a strong consideration of broader sustainability issues, such as the resource intensiveness of creating a large scale development per se, and some of the adverse environmental impacts of the development on the nearby city of Leicester.

We would also suggest that the proposal does not take into account the likely impacts on both the local economy and fuel costs of the coming peak in global oil production, and that when this issue is considered, the priorities for use of the land could be radically changed.

Peak Oil

“Peak Oil” refers to the historic peak in global oil production, after which production begins to decline¹. Evidence from many scholars indicates that we are close to this point now², and the likely implications are of both reductions in available supply for the UK over coming years, and oil prices that are both more unstable and generally considerably higher.

This phenomenon is likely to have a strong economic impact on the UK, due to our heavy reliance on oil and the lack of available low cost, low-carbon alternatives. Economists have argued that it may bring about a series of recessions or even a long-lasting depression³. It will also have a strong impact on the infrastructure that provides the city of Leicester with its core needs, especially transport and food production, which are both highly reliant on oil.

The impact on the security of Leicester's food supply is of particular relevance for the Ecotown proposal, as it proposes changing the use of a significant area of land close to the city, so we focus on it below.

Food Security

The infrastructure that provides the city of Leicester with food is at present highly reliant on fossil fuel inputs. This reliance

¹ We have included a note introducing Peak Oil, taken from our website (<http://www.transitiontowns.org/Leicester>), in an appendix at the end of this document.

² see Hirsch (2007), Peaking of World Oil Production: Recent Forecasts <http://www.netl.doe.gov/energy-analyses/pubs/Peaking%20of%20World%20Oil%20Production%20-%20Recent%20Forecasts%20-%20NETL%20Re.pdf>

³ for example, see FEASTA (2007), Envisioning a sustainable Ireland from an energy availability perspective <http://www.feasta.org/energy.htm>

affects both food distribution, and the growing of food itself, as conventional monoculture agriculture makes substantial use of natural gas derived fertilisers, oil derived pesticides, and oil-fuelled machinery.

Recent increases in oil prices have already led to increased food prices as a result of this relationship, both in the UK and globally. Our reliance on stable oil supplies to maintain supply chains bringing food to the city's supermarkets, through which most people in the city source their food, is another key vulnerability. Disruptions to food deliveries were shown to create the risk of food shortages developing within days during the fuel protests in the UK in 2000. It has been estimated by Leicester city council staff that if deliveries to Leicester stopped, the city has less than one day's supply of food for the city's population on its supermarket shelves.

Our food supply system is therefore highly vulnerable to increases in prices and disruptions to fuel supplies, both of which seem likely to take place given current estimates of available oil for import over coming years⁴, and the lack of action being taken to reduce our reliance on oil.

We suggest that the solution to this problem is to urgently increase the resilience of the food system in Leicester, so that we can provide for our core food needs without relying on fossil fuel energy inputs. This means making a switch towards food sourced locally and produced using organic methods, so that the vulnerabilities associated with fossil fuel-based production and transportation are greatly reduced.

There is currently a lot of evidence emerging that this approach to food production will be necessary. A recently published major piece of research, the

⁴ See Oil Drum Europe, 2008. "World Oil Exports": <http://europe.theoil Drum.com/node/4179>

UN-sponsored "International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development"⁵, advocated a shift away from industrialised agriculture to small scale, agro-ecological methods.⁶

In Cuba, the economic crisis of the early 1990s and the sudden decline in fossil fuels available for use in agriculture led to a shift from a highly industrialised approach to agriculture to an approach combining substantial urban food production and organic farming. For cities, urban food production was maximised, and used in combination with intensive, co-operatively run farms on the edge of urban areas. As a result of this approach, the city of Havana now produces more than 50% of its fruit and vegetables within the city itself⁷. We believe that this approach provides an ideal model to follow in Leicester, and given that it takes many years to establish successful and productive organic farms, we should look to start this process now.

Land suitable for food production within Leicester itself is scarce, so in addition to maximising production within the city, it will be necessary to maximise production on all suitable sites close to the city to have a food supply that is as robust and sustainable as possible.

For this reason, the opportunity presented by a site of over 1500 hectares becoming available for a change of use is an enormous one. If the opportunity is seized to develop local food infrastructure on the site, people in Leicester could have access to a secure, low-carbon, and affordable source of local food for years to come.

⁵ Accessible online at <http://www.agassessment.org>

⁶ See http://www.agassessment.org/docs/Greenpeace_PR_IAASTD_FINAL.doc

⁷ See <http://www.socialistunity.com/?s=coyula>

Housing Need

As we will go on to suggest an alternative use for the Ecotown site with substantially less housing, we should address the question of whether the Ecotown development is necessary to provide an increased supply of housing in the area.

Our thoughts are essentially that even though there could be many benefits from providing increased housing in the area, these benefits are outweighed by the need to use the site to meet the resource needs of existing local settlements.

The current policies driving an increase in housing supply in the UK stem from the Government's 2004 Barker Review, and subsequent central Government imposed targets for increased supply embedded in regional and local plans. Whilst there is undoubtedly high demand for social housing locally, the case for a substantially increased housing supply in general in the local area over future years is not as clear.

Government projections for increased demand for housing are strongly influenced by an assumption of a growing economy over coming years and decades. If resource constraints prevent this from taking place, as appears likely if the issue of peak oil (or indeed the credit crunch) is taken into account, this increased demand may not materialise.

Another important influence is the assumption that household sizes will continue to shrink in coming years, as more people choose to live alone, or in smaller households. Although the social factors behind these trends are challenging for Government to address, we suggest that in an increasingly resource-constrained future, we may not be able to build as many new homes as we may wish, and we will simply need to face up to the challenges this will bring as best as we can.

We would argue that whilst future housing demand is uncertain, the need to shift to a system of local and organic food production is a good deal more certain and much more urgent, and should therefore take priority.

To meet local housing needs, we suggest making the best possible use of existing empty homes⁸, increasing the proportion of social housing in the city's housing stock by releasing funds to buy or let homes currently in other tenures, and developing new homes only on brownfield sites where necessary.

We do recognise that the proposed Ecotown development intends for only part of the new housing to be built on greenfield land, and for the rest to be built on the Leicester Airport site, a previously developed brownfield site. If homes are developed at a density of 50 dwellings a hectare, as put forward in the Ecotown plans, there is potential to develop several thousand homes on that part of the site alone.

For that part of the site, our thoughts are that a useful guiding principle would be that any new households created should have opportunities to work locally, and for numbers to be limited so as not to create a need for new resource-intensive transport infrastructure.

This is likely to mean a development of hundreds of dwellings, rather than thousands, coupled with workplaces and community facilities, with the main focus of development being much broader than providing housing.

The Ecotown vision

We'd also like to comment on the thinking that has led to the idea of a local Ecotown being put forward.

⁸ See Empty Homes Agency website: <http://www.emptyhomes.com>

The main driver for the proposed development is a central-Government driven vision for Ecotowns to be developed in the UK⁹. As well as being driven by the perceived need to increase housing supply, this approach seems to come from the Government's current focus on the task of making new homes zero-carbon.

Whilst this is an important goal to pursue, the much greater and more important challenge, that is being neglected by Government, is that of co-ordinating a massive programme of retrofitting existing housing to reduce energy use and carbon emissions^{10 11}.

If local needs are taken as a starting point, as opposed to a target set by central government, then the much greater need for the city of Leicester (a city with thousands of solid-walled dwellings) is to refurbish existing homes. We'd suggest that "Econighbourhoods", where whole neighbourhoods of existing housing were targetted for comprehensive energy saving refurbishment, would be a far better approach to meeting these needs than an Ecotown.

We'd like to see central government supporting our local council with funding so that this approach can be carried out, and our local council looking to carry out this approach.

⁹ See the Ecotowns Prospectus
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/ecotownspectus>

¹⁰ Boardman (2007): Home Truths
<http://www.eci.ox.ac.uk/research/energy/hometruths.php>

¹¹ See <http://www.existinghomesalliance.org/>

An alternative plan

We'd like to put forward an alternative vision for the use of the proposed Ecotown site – an idea that will allow Cooperative Estates to be at the cutting edge of environmental innovation, and which will excite, engage and involve local people.

We'd suggest that the site should be developed so as to support the process of transition that Leicester will need to go through in coming years to both reduce carbon emissions and reduce our reliance on fossil fuels. We'd like to see it being an exemplar development for land that is sited near an urban area, designed so as to help the nearby city meet its core needs.

We suggest that the bulk of the land on the site is used for food production, aimed at providing for local communities and a significant number of people in Leicester. The approach to production should be both highly productive and require no inputs from fossil fuel derived energy for the ongoing management of the site.

This implies using organic growing methods so that the fertility of the site is maintained and enhanced by maintaining healthy soil and a beneficial inter-relationship between plants and any livestock on the site¹².

We also recommend designing the future use of the site using permaculture principles¹³, so that the design takes full account of sustainable use of resources, is well-matched with the opportunities offered by the specific site, and is as efficient and productive as possible.

¹² See http://www.whyorganic.org/bigissues_climateChange.asp

¹³ see <http://www.permaculture.org.uk/mm.asp?mmfile=whatispermaculture> for an introduction to Permaculture design principles.

The specific choices of crops to cultivate should be based upon the specific qualities of the site, but we suggest a broad mix of both annual vegetables and perennial fruit and nut trees. This will provide a useful supplement to the crops that can be produced within the city itself, which are unlikely to be able to provide entirely for Leicester's needs due to constraints in available land.

We suggest an approach to developing the land that connects growers using the site directly with consumers in the nearby area and the city. The emerging Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) approach would be an ideal model to use¹⁴.

This approach allows consumers to make a direct connection with the growers of their food — such as by buying shares in their local grower's business (thus giving economic security to growers), or assisting directly with work on the farm. Successful projects such as Growing Communities in central London¹⁵ and Stroud Community Agriculture¹⁶ already exist, and the network of CSA projects in the UK is growing rapidly.

Without significant fossil fuel inputs, this type of agriculture will be both design and labour intensive, and will create opportunities for skilled labour for local people in the area.

As a project designed to be at the cutting edge of modern organic growing techniques, there will be significant opportunities for the site to be an example of best practice in the area. Therefore we'd also like to see the site being used to offer training courses and apprenticeships to local people in

¹⁴ See <http://www.soilassociation.org/csa>

¹⁵ See <http://www.btinternet.com/~grow.communities>

¹⁶ See <http://www.stroudcommunityagriculture.org/promoting-CSA.php>

effective organic growing methods, to meet a demand that is likely to increase greatly over coming years.

The potential for the site to contribute to Leicester's food security is massive. To illustrate this, if 1000 hectares of the site was used to grow fruit and vegetables, then assuming an average yield of 25 tonnes per hectare¹⁷ and assuming a UK average consumption of 2.5 kg of fruit and vegetables per week¹⁸, the site could supply more than 190,000 local households — this is approximately the number of households in the Leicester urban area!

However, we are not recommending that the land is used for fruit and vegetable production alone. We'd also like to see new orchards and sustainably managed woodland on the site to provide resources and fuel for local people, and to enhance biodiversity.

We agree with the idea put forward in the Ecotown proposal that the green spaces on the site should be opened up to create better public access to the countryside. However, we'd prefer to see that done so that people can experience the land as an actively used and productive environment, so that visits will be both educational and provide people with a chance to connect with the natural world.

We also see great potential in creating new employment on the site. We think that many hundreds of new skilled jobs could be created if our vision of using the land productively to meet local needs was carried out.

New jobs will create a need for local housing on the site, and we think that the

¹⁷ Based on statistics from Defra
<https://statistics.defra.gov.uk/esg/statnot/fruveg.pdf>

¹⁸ based on the English Household Consumption Survey:
<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/ssdataset.asp?vlnk=6417&Pos=2&ColRank=2&Rank=272>,

brownfield parts of the site would be an ideal location for this. This creates another opportunity for innovation and the development of sustainable technologies on the site. We'd like to see the opportunity being seized to provide housing and new buildings that truly have a low environmental impact, both in terms of construction, and the use and re-use of materials at the end of their useful life.

We suggest building with locally sourced and reclaimed materials to construct any dwellings or buildings required, working with natural materials such as timber, cob, adobe or straw bales, or reclaimed local building materials. We're glad to see that the current Ecotown proposal has such a commitment, although we'd like to see more of a focus on using natural building techniques so that skills can be developed in this important area.

A popular idea

We believe that our proposal overcomes many of the problems with the current Ecotown proposal, which have led to protest from local people and local environmental groups.

Our proposal would not add significantly to the burden on the existing transport links between the site and the city. People working on the site would be largely living on or near the site, and the volume of visitors to the site would be low.

Innovative solutions to transport produce between the site and the city could be introduced, such as load-bearing tricycles (which are already used by many existing UK local food projects) or electric vehicles powered by renewably generated electricity.

Our proposal would not see existing green spaces being built on. Indeed, the diverse use of the land, including new areas of orchards and unique low-impact

buildings is likely to greatly enhance the appearance of the area, and be popular with local residents.

Our proposal would bring new jobs to the area, and enable local people to develop skills that will be of great importance and in great demand over coming years.

If the project is developed using a CSA approach, there is great potential for local people to be actively involved in its funding and development, giving them a sense of ownership of the project, rather than the perception that it is being imposed upon the area. Marketing produce directly to local people through a CSA approach will also greatly increase the food security of people involved in the scheme, and provide a secure income to growers.

Overall, we feel that our proposal meets the future challenges for our area — making a shift to a sustainable way of living and ensuring economic prosperity — and we feel that it will be an approach that local people can feel truly proud of.

An innovative idea

There are many opportunities for innovation in our proposal. We feel that this gives Cooperative Estates the opportunity to both fulfil their environmental aspirations and to be at the cutting edge of the transformation of Leicestershire's economy towards a sustainable, resilient system.

The approach of Community Supported Agriculture that we are recommending has so far been applied on a relatively small scale in the UK. There is therefore great potential to break new ground by developing this approach more fully on the proposed Ecotown site.

Training in organic growing and sustainable land use design is still in its

infancy in the UK, but is likely to be in great demand in the future. By developing a centre of excellence now, Leicester would be taking a pioneering role and truly living up to its name as an "Environment City".

The transportation solutions for the site offer great opportunities to innovate. Load-carrying bicycles are greatly under-used in the UK, and could be demonstrated as an effective and viable technology by use on the site. If electric vehicles are used, this could again enhance the visibility of a technology that is likely to be increasingly important in future years, and would be a useful first step towards developing infrastructure for these vehicles locally.

Low impact natural building techniques have largely been the preserve of self-builders over recent years, so there are great opportunities to bring these methods into the mainstream and to increase the number of installers able to work with natural materials through work on the site.

We also think the process of designing the use for this land offers a great opportunity to innovate. Few communities in the UK have started asking the question of how they will respond to climate change and peak oil over coming years. By involving people in the local area in a decision that could genuinely impact on their wellbeing over coming years, and arriving at a solution that best serves the local community's long term needs, Leicester could create a model that could be successfully replicated in other communities in the UK and around the world.

Conclusion

We think our proposal offers a genuinely exciting vision that local people and the people of Leicester could strongly support, and which fits well with the aims of Cooperative Estates to act with environmental responsibility and be at the cutting edge of climate change mitigation.

We see our proposal as a wholly appropriate use of the land given the need to respond to climate change, and as a well-thought out response to the usually overlooked issue of peak oil.

We hope that our proposal will serve as a catalyst to inspire discussion around our ideas, and any other ideas for the use of the land that meets the aspirations of local people, and that take account of the need to respond locally to climate change and peak oil. We would be very happy to discuss our ideas further with Cooperative Estates, local councils, and any other organisations, groups or individuals that would like to offer suggestions, criticisms or support.

We hope that the issues we raise and the suggestions we are putting forward are taken into account as the proposal for use of the Ecotown site is developed. If “Pennbury” is not developed on the site, we hope that the owners of the land will turn to our alternative proposal, as a sketch of a way forward towards a truly sustainable and inspiring use of the land.

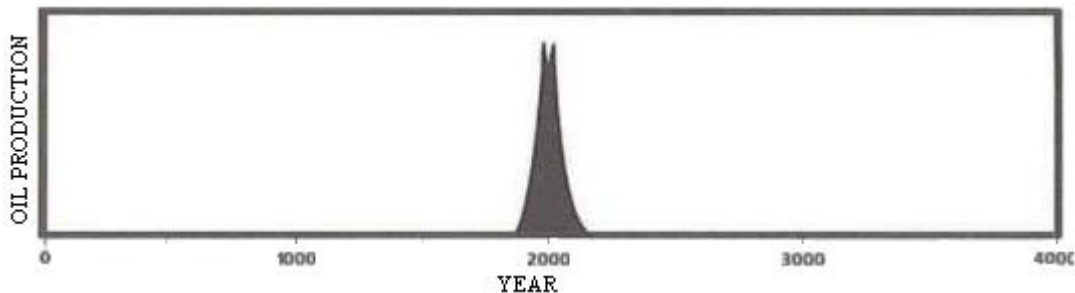
Appendix

What is Peak Oil?

First of all, a note on what Peak Oil is *not*, as there is a common misconception that Peak Oil is about “running out of oil”. This isn't what Peak Oil is about at all – oil will continue to be extracted to some degree for many decades to come. In fact, we'll never run out of oil - there will always be some oil left in the ground because either it's too hard to reach or it takes too much energy to extract.

What Peak Oil is about is the end of cheap and plentiful oil, the recognition that the total volume of oil being pumped into our economies will at some point peak and then inexorably decline. It's also about recognising that our industrialised way of life, and the growth in global economic activity over the past century, has been absolutely dependent on the ever-increasing supply of cheap oil.

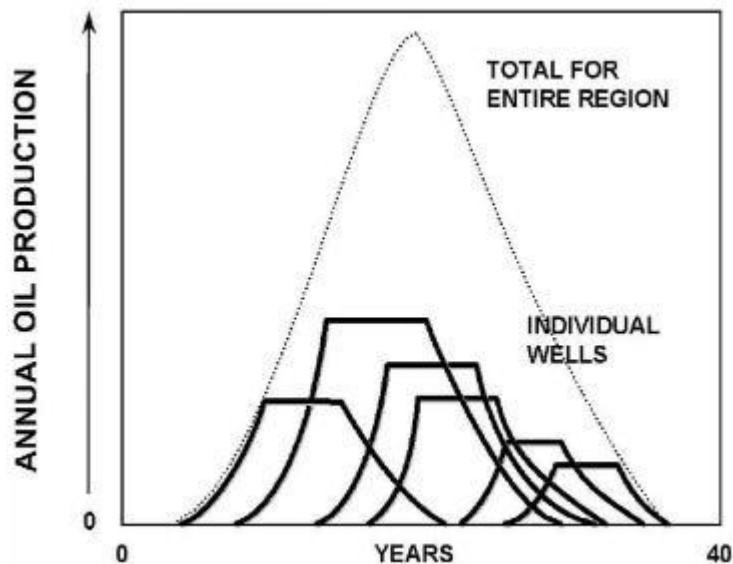
The "Petroleum Interval"



As the graph above illustrates, we are currently living through a relatively short "blip" in history that you could call the "petroleum interval" - a period when large quantities of oil were extracted from the Earth to fuel human activities.

From the start of the 1900s, plentiful oil allowed a coal-based industrialised society to massively accelerate its “development”. From that time, each year there has been more oil brought to the global market (apart from during the two oil shocks in the 1970s, when Middle East crises caused worldwide recessions). Fuelled by increasing oil production, each year society has increased its complexity, its mechanisation, its globalised connectedness and its energy consumption levels.

The problems start when we've extracted around half of the world's recoverable oil. As oil is extracted from each oil field, the oil flows quickly at first and is of a high quality, then generally gets increasingly expensive to extract (in cash and energy terms), is slower flowing and of a lower quality. Eventually a point is reached for each field where peak production occurs, and in the same way, this process happens for whole countries and the world (see graph below). Peak oil production occurred in the USA in 1970, in the UK in 1999, and has already occurred in 33 of the largest 48 oil producing countries.



At the point of global peak production, for the first time in history, we are not able to increase the amount of oil that's coming out of the ground, being refined and reaching the market. Global oil supply plateaus and then declines, with massive ramifications for industrialised societies and the global economy.

For oil importing countries such as the UK, the situation is even worse - as global production declines, oil exporting countries are likely to begin to keep more oil to meet their own needs, reducing the amount of oil available for export markets. This is likely to lead to an earlier peak in energy available to the UK economy from oil, followed by a sharper decline in oil availability.

When will Peak Oil happen?

Unfortunately, nobody is sure of the exact date, as reliable information on oil reserves and plans for new production are not available in the public domain. However, a consensus is forming amongst independent oil experts and oil geologists that the peak will occur between 2006 and 2012, and certainly within the next decade (a few years of hindsight is required in order to confirm the peaking point).

Despite this growing evidence, many governments (including the UK government) still deny that there is a problem. When asked for their estimate of the date of Peak Oil earlier this year, the UK government responded that they didn't have one, and that they felt that supplies of gas and oil to the UK "are sufficient to sustain economic growth for the foreseeable future". Based upon the evidence, we'd disagree.

What does this mean for Leicester?

The principal impact of Peak Oil will be sharply increasing prices for fossil fuels along with increased price volatility. This will seriously challenge the viability of motorised transportation within and serving the city, and have a severe impact on the city's energy-intensive businesses and on the ability of householders to affordably heat and power their homes. Conventional agriculture is also heavily reliant on energy from oil and other fossil fuels, so food prices are likely to increase significantly.

A further key impact is on the stability of our current financial system, which needs a growing economy to remain viable. Economic growth has been shown to be closely

correlated with energy use. Oil shocks in the 1970s triggered recessions in the UK and around the world as the supply of available energy from oil declined. Economists have argued that an impact of Peak Oil could therefore be a profound and long-lasting economic depression.

Images on front cover (clockwise from top left):

- 1: Vegetable beds at the Eden Project in Cornwall. From <http://www.flickr.com/photos/14632275@N04/1496494881/>
- 2: A cordwood and cob amphitheatre, Kinsale, Co. Cork, Ireland, from <http://www.transitionculture.org>
- 3: Used with permission of Tolhurst Organic Produce, Berkshire <http://www.tolhurstorganic.co.uk/>
- 4: Organic vegbox deliveries, VegZed, Beddington. <http://www.vegzed.org.uk>
- 5: Pears picked in Leicester, summer 2008.

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