

Transition Town Totnes – a world first



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Based in Totnes (population c. 7700) in Devon, England, Transition Town Totnes (TTT) was the world's first Transition initiative. It began in 2006 when local people came together to tackle the combined threats of diminishing oil reserves, climate change and economic uncertainty.



TTT is a community-driven process of creating a new infrastructure of businesses and initiatives that are more suited to a lower-carbon, more resilient world. It integrates the creation of a new physical infrastructure (energy, food production, construction), economic structures that enable a community to spend money locally and strengthen its local economy, and social systems, designed to ensure social justice and fairness.

Ownership

In practice, this works by inviting people to take ownership of the process, encouraging creativity and by building networks. The last eight years has seen an empowering community-building process, engaging a significant proportion of the community, generating a diversity of projects – in the fields of food, building and housing, energy and the economy – which have yielded some extraordinary results for the mainly volunteer-led organisation.

TTT does not receive any funds from the state; rather it has a diverse funding base (private donations, a range of trusts, events and workshops etc) which enables it to be financially independent and sustainable.

SME Blueprint

Among several very successful initiatives, TTT carried out a study into the potential of what the food, renewable energy and retrofitting sectors could be worth to the local SME economy, if more demand was developed for local products and services, delivered by local, independent businesses. Its result indicated that developing just 10% of this opportunity could be worth over £5m over the next 1-2 years – and could be even higher with the local multiplier. This work led to networking and information events for each of the sectors to show the potential to existing and fledgling SME businesses.

Another noteworthy example is the Totnes Food-Link project that is working to strengthen the links between local food producers and its retailers and restaurants. Since its inception in 2011, trade links have grown, new producers have emerged and new plans to develop the local food economy are in under way. Some 400 businesses are on the mailing list and producers report an average 30% increase in their supplies to local retailers/restaurateurs. Moreover, all of the town's seven restaurants have one or more locally sourced 'specials' on their menus.

And on a more practical level, Transition Streets is a scheme whereby groups of friends and neighbours meet every few weeks with a practical workbook to make simple changes in how they use energy, water, food, packaging and transport. So far, 63 groups involving over 550 households have participated with each household saving on average £570 pa off their household bills and 1.2 tonnes of carbon overall.

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