

## A personal story of reducing carbon from Bob Langton, Low Carbon Gordano

After Nikki included the piece by Chris and Jess about their lifestyle changes in her last post, she asked me if I'd write a bit about how Pom (my wife) and I have tackled the problem of reducing our impact on the planet over the last few years.

I suppose for me it started back in the 1970s when I read *The Limits to Growth* – that prescient and much maligned report by The Club of Rome. It got some dates wrong and that has enabled people to rubbish its overall message, which is, of course, only too true: the global belief that ongoing economic growth is both possible and desirable is fundamentally flawed.

Then in the 1990s I gave up my full-time job and became an educational consultant, specialising in international development projects. The air-miles and my guilt about the carbon emissions they entailed rose in tandem, so Pom and I decided to use some of the lucre the work provided to try and 'green' our home: over time we finished double-glazing the house and had most of the walls insulated – some internally and some externally – and, of course, got the loft insulation up to standard. We got a 4kW solar PV roof system in 2005, (and so are very conscious of how prices for solar PV have plummeted.) When fridges etc packed in we got the most energy-efficient replacements we could. In a more recent move, we've replaced our on-its-last legs (though still efficient) gas boiler with an air-source heat pump which should provide both space and water heating and will link with the solar panels. How well that works out remains to be seen.

In a sense, that's the easy bit if you've got available cash. In a different way, some of the other stuff shouldn't be so hard for us either, because we grew up in the austerity of post-war Britain. Food was seasonal, plastic virtually non-existent, choice very limited and travel probably meant a once-a-year camping holiday or a bus-trip to a city to see a play – oh, and hardly anybody had a shower. It didn't seem hard then but how easily we slip into the lure of affluence! Still, we're trying! Some things we've managed:

- We've used a flexitarian approach to move to a nearly meat-free diet. We still eat (usually) one organic or wild (culled venison or boar) meat meal a week, and fish once as well. We'd find giving up dairy a lot harder! We're lucky to have an allotment so grow a lot of fruit and veg, and get a lot of the rest from Riverford. We've recently decided to stop (mostly!) buying fruit out-of-season – now we've got to stick to it!
- We've pretty much given up flying – harder for Pom than for me as I went to all sorts of places for work. (Not exactly tourist destinations but fascinating and wonderful experiences.) We've used the train to get round Europe very successfully – last year a combined trip to Paris and Venice. It takes longer, but it's much more fun than flying.
- We're working hard on plastic – now using Splosh for washing up liquid etc - it seems a really well worked out system; soap nuts ; good old-fashioned soap; Lush shampoo bars; and *The Cheeky Panda* toilet rolls made from bamboo with no wrapping etc; back to leaf tea, too – it makes a much better cup inter alia. Riverford cuts out a lot of plastic wrapping (and is working to reduce more) but the milk still comes in plastic bottles – we may go back to doorstep deliveries in glass now it's available again and does organic milk. Yoghurt is a problem too! Some things would be easier if we lived near e.g. the Bedminster or Gloucester Road shops – we use Bedminster sometimes but it's quite a palaver from Pill.
- We're using public transport much more – there's a good bus service into Bristol. Of course, bus passes make that easier. But we still drive a car (diesel – bought when it seemed like the right thing to do) mainly to visit our families in Leeds and Manchester. When is it right to change a car, with all the embedded carbon in a new one?
- We're buying less stuff but when we do aim for stuff that will last and be low impact.

A final point: we're privileged. We're comfortably off and have the time and energy provided by being in still-healthy retirement. It's much harder for many people with the pressures of work, young families and barely adequate finance to find the space to think about change. Making it easier for most people to do the

right things needs government action and campaigning remains vital.