

MY VISION FOR NOTTINGHAM

Nottingham 2020 could be a visionary place to live in or it could be just another urban mess. Ever since I came here and fell in love with the City, I have wanted Nottingham to be bolder than it was willing to be; to think and dream on a bigger scale. By 2020 I would like Nottingham to be Britain's 'Sustainable City' and I would like us to do it with style.

Of course the City could make this leap, but let us not kid ourselves. Nottingham today is hardly a leader in the race. For far too long we have settled for the second rate, the second hand, the unsustainable and the ugly. If I am offending you already, my only apology is that I care passionately about this City. I feel I have been here long enough to have the right to offend.

The big challenges of the 21st century are about how we deal with climate change. At a local level it means thinking about how we meet the energy needs of the area: deal with the twin challenges of flash flooding and drought; how integrated transport systems will work; how we feed our families and harness the creative talents of our kids?

At the beginning of the 20th century, local authorities gave the lead in radical improvements in the quality of life for their citizens. Birmingham led the way, having municipally owned gas and electricity companies to secure the city's energy needs. Other cities followed suit, with massive improvements in public transport, housing and public health. We need a similar vision to meet today's challenges.

If Woking can plan to take itself off the National grid in the next 5 years, Nottingham could do so on a bigger scale in the next 15. If Leicester already has 'intelligent energy metering' across large tranches of the City, and powers some of its council buildings entirely from renewable energy, then Nottingham could do so for the city as a whole.

I recently had a rant at property developers in the city arguing that some of them should be in prison rather than in business for the buildings they have thrown up. With the exception of the Inland Revenue offices and a couple of others, most are instantly forgettable in their design. The Victorians at least left a legacy of grand buildings for future generations. Today's developments are more likely to be seen as a legacy of greed; twisting the planners' arms to get a little extra housing density here, or an extra level on an apartment block there.

Not one of the private developments in the last 10 years generates its own energy or re-cycles its own water. Some are worse, trying to get away with internal rooms without windows or natural ventilation, and depending on mechanical ventilation to make them usable. For such atrocities I would have people applying for bail rather than for planning permission.

I know I am building my own house to generate more energy than it consumes, but the challenge is for this to be a City feature not a personal one. If Leicester can build an estate with its own solar roofs and Croydon a zero-energy estate, where has Nottingham been?

The only application I have seen for a sustainable development in the City is the one at Trent Park, where there is at least an attempt at 21st century thinking. Photo-voltaic roofing will be supplemented by vertical-axis wind turbines above the stair wells and by heat pumps that draw heat from coils sunk

into the adjacent River Trent. Of course the development will incorporate solar reflective glazing and Scandinavian levels of sound and thermal insulation, but there is an extra twist. The Company are trying to do a deal with French manufacturers of 'Minicat' cars that run on compressed air, have zero pollution and can be recharged from the parking bays or from any garage forecourt.

I cite this example, not to champion it, but to challenge everything else that is going through the planning and development system. Japan is building a million homes that are solar powered. Austria is generating 70% of its energy needs from domestic and renewable sources. Britain is going to have to go in the same direction if we are not to be stuffed by spiralling energy prices and energy supply lines that are an invitation to terrorist attacks.

Nationally, Britain is committed to generating 15% of our own energy needs from renewable sources by 2015. Parliament has been told that this will have to be 25% by 2025. So why not say, in Nottingham, that every new development must also generate at least 25% of its own energy needs....and recycle its water use.

I know developers will scream it is unaffordable, but the same developers will have done a runner when tomorrow's environmental costs, from today's cash grabs, come in. Point them to the Cities already planning for a sustainable future. Point them to Cities that require new developments to include reservoirs to replace the soak-away land we would otherwise have used to deal with today's flash flooding. Tell them that by 2020 Nottingham wants to be shaping the future, not clearing up the past.

This 'future' will have to shake up national government as much as local government. I love the tram, but it offends me that City officials had to sit, month after month, on the corridors of Parliament just to get permission for one line (and is still waiting permission for a second). In the same period Porto, in Portugal, has built a whole city tram network. The dead hand of national bureaucracy should be in the same cell as the rogue developers.

And while on this rant just tell me why, when I get off the train, can I not walk across the road into 'Tate Nottingham'? If London can have Tate Modern, Bilbao the Guggenheim, and both Liverpool and Plymouth have their own fantastic futuristic Tate galleries, why does Nottingham think on a lesser scale?

Tell me, too, as I get off the train, what a 2020 waste recycling system should look like...because it won't be Eastcroft. I was Chair of the Waste Disposal Company when today's air filter system was fitted, but I have seen boils on backsides that are more attractive.

In its day, Eastcroft addressed a vision that should not be scoffed at. Turning domestic heat and power will be a feature of this century's environmental accounting. But Eastcroft is now like the original mobile phones – big, ugly and driven by yesterday's technology.

You would never dream of putting a camera attachment on the original phones and trying to sell them as 'modernisation' in today's mobile market. We are moving into an era of micro-generation. It is more likely to need a network of estate-based recycling systems, perhaps even using surplus heat to support temperature controlled crop growing in local farms.

Sustainable cities in 2020 will almost certainly have local food systems that actively promote 'food

accountability' links between local communities and local farmers. The Italian Slow Food Movement has already pioneered this in its network of 'Slow Cities' that work on exactly this basis. Nottingham could pioneer the process in Britain.

I regularly come across really visionary people in this City; kids with fantastic creative, artistic talent; researchers at the Universities and in local business who have the most amazing ideas about low-impact technologies that will transform the future; architects like Julian Marsh with visions of a city it would be a dream to live in.

My plea to the City is this: In today's 'Painting the Picture' consultations, do not be coy. Don't settle for the modest rather than the inspirational. Paint the picture....but make it a big one.

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