

## Report to York Area Meeting

Name of event	BYM Sustainability Gathering
Date of event	18 <sup>th</sup> – 20 <sup>th</sup> March 2016
Your name	Camilla Wimberley
Your Meeting	Friargate, York
Why did you accept nomination?	The issue itself is of profound importance to the human race in the world today. I was personally drawn by the draft programme mentioning the importance of stories in how we approach it, which is something of concern and interest to me. I felt it might encourage me with a related project that I and some Friends may hatch. And I suppose I think it is good to take a “why not?” approach to opportunities like this.
Who ran the event?	Britain Yearly Meeting Sustainability Group (Lis Burch, Laurie Michaelis and other group members)
What was its purpose?	To support Friends in deepening and broadening our commitment to become a sustainable, low-carbon community.
How was it structured?	Over the course of a residential weekend in Derbyshire, we approached the topic in various ways – through discussion, worship, participatory activities, three speakers on Saturday morning and a choice of optional workshops on Saturday afternoon. And singing! (or frisbee)
What did you learn?  - Things I took away for myself:	<p>There is a lot I could say in these two boxes... I have a hundred scribblings of notes and thoughts to chew on - challenging, moving, inspiring, thought-provoking.</p> <p>I came to recognise a nascent community that emerged through a process that began by recognising in each other frustrations and fears that we shared. So one of my realisations was about self-compassion. Nurturing our sustainability ministry (the name of a workshop I participated in) means allowing ourselves to find the place we each personally need to be, the ministry that we each personally are called to. Climate change is an urgent issue – the rate of change is unprecedented. “The future is happening now,” and it is easy, and very human, to become paralysed by the enormity, by the breadth and depth of what must be done. But we don't all need to fix everything.</p> <p>Somewhere among my scribblings is written: “don't run away! cf. Jonah.” Hope, we heard, is a dimension of the soul rather than a response to the evidence; nourishing it requires that we hold one another lovingly as we discover what our sustainability ministries are. Perhaps in doing this we can avoid ending up in the belly of the whale before we get to grips with the enormous realities of our time on this planet.</p>

	<p>I also learned about an unexpected interconnectedness between two projects I have been incubating – one directly related to the environment, one around vibrancy and exploration in our worship. It was, surprisingly to me at first, the second of these that I kept finding myself talking with people about. And I learned I ought to do more singing.</p>
<p>What can the Area Meeting learn?</p> <p>- Things I bring to you all from the gathering.</p>	<p><b>A moving call to action</b> The image of a Bangladeshi woman standing in the rising floodwater, holding her baby. Part of our testimonies as living things, our commitment to truth and to the belovedness of each person and all creation, should be to listen harder – to that woman, to the chaffinch whose language we have forgotten. To the scary facts we hide from.</p> <p><b>Strengthening community</b> During the course of the weekend, three people were appointed as “listening friends”, tasked observing and taking the temperature, and finally feeding back what they had witnessed. One of these listening friends spoke of how, at the start of the weekend, there was a sense of isolation, overwhelm, frustration. There was a sense that the commitment made by Quakers together at Canterbury isn't owned by whole meetings. Gradually, our feelings shifted towards belonging, support and acceptance. I think this is a journey that needs to be reflected in our meetings. There is no they, only we. And this is a commitment that we should not feel imposed on us, but that we as an Area meeting, as local meetings, need to grasp and embed as whole communities. We can't become a sustainable, low-carbon community, without becoming a community. We also can't become a sustainable, low-carbon community without transforming society. To be ecologically just, we have to be part of an ecologically just civilisation. So it's all about community.</p> <p><b>Being agents of transformation</b> Many friends at the gathering were particularly struck by the words of Rachel Howell - “never underestimate the power of social norms”. We must consider how we interact with the norms our society lives by. Do we maintain them? Challenge them? Create them? On the afterside of big decisions, it often seems much easier – and making them can change the landscape, make those decisions easier for others. Action as public theology. As Francis of Assisi is said to have put it, “we must preach at all times, and use words where necessary”.</p> <p><b>Tips for grappling with these challenges from the world of professional Quaker frisbee</b> (thanks to Sam Robinson):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- it's no fun on your own</li> <li>- you need to be aware of the world around you or it might end up in the lake</li> <li>- at times it could be dangerous if you approach it head-on</li> <li>- it should be energising, fun and grounded in love.</li> </ul>