2016 Conference Transcription

Date	Thursday 31 March, 2016
Session Title	Earth
Session Time	14:15 - 16:30
Moderator	Kate Chappelle
Speakers	Alice Bell
Notes	n/a

Intro	Hello and welcome to FutureEverything 2016 Festival Podcast Series. Over two days, in Manchester's iconic Town Hall, we task designers, artists, scientists and many more to rethink our resources from life, earth and intelligence, to community and uncertainty, our speakers asked what we might need less, and more of, in our near future. How do grass root groups tackle climate change together? In this earth session we heard from Alice Bell, Head of Campaigns at climate change charity 10:10. Alice has written and spoken extensively on science, technology, and the environment for the BBC, The Guardian, The Observer and The Times.
Alice Bell	Thank you for that introduction, Kate. I'm going to talk a lot about Manchester, and I'm going to talk a lot about public engagement with our changing energy system. I hope it will be of interest to Kate and I hope it will be of interest to all of you. This is 'The United States Of Wythenshawe', it looks like a perfectly normal building. It is where, in 2007, this happened. For those of you who have come from abroad, that's our Prime Minister here in the shirt, and that's a chap, being not very respectful to our Prime Minister, behind him. It caused a lot of fuss at the time [laughter]. That area of Wythenshawe has got a particular reputation for guys wearing hoodies acting a bit like that, which is why this community centre 'The United States Of Wythenshawe' was set up as a way of bringing people off the streets, and giving them something to do. It looks like this inside. It's a gym. The building is actually an old church, and they still have services in the chapel on Sundays. You can't see it in this screen, but as well as the gym with the weights, they have a sound recording studio, linking up to Manchester's huge set of musicians and long history of work in music. They have a dance studio. You can take boxing lessons there. You can do cheerleading. They also have a café, and they house space for a lot of local businesses to set up shop. So you can pop in, have a cheerleading class, lift

some weights, have a cup of tea, use the photocopier if you're going for a job, and work out how to get your windows cleaned, and maybe get your fridge fixed and stuff like that. There's a lot of things going on in 'The United States Of Wythenshawe'. This weird and amazing building, as well as being all those things, this year, is planning to become a power station, by which I mean they're going to install some solar panels on their roof.

I took the train up, and I saw loads of solar panels on roofs after I left London. London is rubbish with solar panels, but after I left London, I saw loads of solar panels on roofs, and we're getting more and more used to it. A friend of mine grew up in the first house to have solar panels in the UK, because his mum is an engineering professor and really into it. So she plugged up their house and it was the first one, and that was about twenty years ago. He was saying that when he was at school, he was the weird kid who had solar panels, and he got called 'solar panel boy', but now there are so many solar homes across the UK.

I think the 2014 government statistics said it worked out to be about two on every street, and they're quite focussed. You have one street where nearly everyone has got solar panels, and then large parts of the country with none. But still, a significant number of people now have solar panels. I think we need to acknowledge that that is something quite amazing. It might be coming more and more mundane, but they are power stations. Even small ones are power stations, and 'The United States of Wythenshawe' are working with a group of other community centres across the Greater Manchester area, and together they are going to be installing about seven hundred solar panels, which is a small power station, collectively, just on their roofs.

What they've done is they've setup something called 'Community Energy Greater Manchester'. It's a community benefit society, a co-operative, and they are fundraising to help them buy the solar panels. So you can go the Community Energy Greater Manchester website and you can sponsor a Solar Panel. Also, each of the community groups, and there's a community café, a community garden, several community centres, churches, they're all going to be running fundraisers. In fact, if you're still around Manchester tomorrow, St John's Church in Old Trafford is running a Fossil Fuels… because it's April fools, a Fossil Fuels comedy night, to help them raise money.

In May, one of my favourite ones that's coming up, Disability Stockport is running a Dub Night. I really love the idea of Dub Nights for solar panels. It just seems strange and wonderful. They are going to do all these fundraisers, and then as a community, benefit society. They'll be issuing a share offer, which they will be selling to the local community. People in the area, if they want to invest, maybe have got a hundred pound savings, and they think 'well, rather than leaving it in a bank, and letting it end up just being lent to some oil company, I can give it to this community benefit society, still get a good return on it'. Interest will probably be between three to five percent, you get the money back and it will have gone to help build these solar panels. All the fundraisers, from these Fossil Fuels nights, and the Dub Night, and all the other sponsored runs and everything, will go to buying shares in this too.

	The project is a Hybrid model. It's based on a couple of different things. One of which is the National Network of Solar Schools, these are some kids very excited about raising money to buy solar panels for their roof of their school. We have got about eighty schools that have been signed up to the Solar Schools project in the last five years. Loads of schools all over the world have solar panels. They've got way more than eighty of them. They're everywhere. What's special about the Solar Schools project is that they use this community fundraising project, where people sponsor a solar panel. This is the website, so this is one of the schools that's fundraising at the moment; Fairfield. They're about two thirds of the way through. They want to get 15K and they've already made 10K. They've asked people to donate and sponsor a little solar panel, and they've run events that have collected money. They've had local businesses give money, and gradually over the year they've raised that 15K. The effort that goes into raising all that money, is a way in itself of engaging the school with the idea of the solar panels, and the local community with the school and with the solar panels. So as a result, not only do you end up with solar panels on your roof, which saves the school money, in fact it can make them money, which they can then put into running all sorts of extra things in the school, and it saves carbon. But also the process of getting the solar panels on there is something that everyone's played a role in, even if they've just baked a few cakes for a cake stall, or handed out some leaflets, or helped talk to a local business to give some of their community fund money to the school or something like that. No matter what they've done, they've been involved in that, and so they feel some ownership on those solar panels and they feel proud of it. Then they continue that relationship with the school generating its power. So you have things like the school kids will have a computer in the school which shows how much they're generating, the kids will see it and they'll be like 'oh, we've generated all this electricity today, but, oh, we've used so much more'. They'll think about how they need to decrease how much energy they're using, and they'll also start to talk about where they might get the rest of the energy from. So instead of it just being a switch that they press, they start thinking 'oh well, we're generating electricity from our roof, five percent of it, but where are we getting the rest of it from?' Is it coming from oil, or is it coming from coal, is it coming from wind? It's not just this abstract thing that we get and it puts the lights on. The Community Energy Greater Manchester, like the thing that The United States Of Wythenshawe are involved in, hopes to be able to generate that. The group that are developing it are really keen that the relationships that people build through doing their fundraisers, through doing their Dub Night and their Fossil Fuels comedy night, and all those other things they'll be doing, will help build connections in the community. We found with Solar Schools that one of the reasons that the schools sign up for it, is not just because they get solar panels, but it really helps them to do outreach in their community, and engage more with their parents, and local businesses and people who live nearby. We're hoping that this will be the same for the community groups too, and the Greater Manchester Voluntary Organisation that is behind a lot of this is hoping that as a

consequence of this community energy project they'll be able to build a network of people, who are much more engaged in environmental action and in energy issues. To train them up to deal with things like fuel poverty, and also have some money that they'll generate from these solar panels that they can use to have on going campaigns, ongoing projects, to be able to tackle fuel poverty, keep people warm and think about resilience as climate change starts to become a problem. With issues like the floods affecting Manchester so badly over Christmas, it's very much in people's minds. They want to think about what they can do, how they can meet people to be able to work collaboratively, and projects like this allow them to do that.

The Community Energy Greater Manchester is based on this sponsor a solar panel thing. It's also based on a large network of community energy projects, which already sell shares and ask members of the community to invest some money which they will then get back, and they will become part of the co-op. Basically for doing larger projects, this is a really powerful way of getting money together to be able to have solar projects, or wind projects, or hydro projects, that are owned by the community.

This is a really nice one from Old Trafford. This is St John's Church which is having the Fossil Fuels event tomorrow. They actually got in on this in 2012, and they got thirty nine solar panels. There they are on the side of the church roof. You can just see there. This is them looking very happy with their solar panels. They've used the money that's generated from the spare energy that they sell back to the grid, to produce a network of what they call Sunshine Grants, which is lovely. The project is called St John's Sunshine, and they're sunshine grants. They've used it to help fund a food bank for asylum seekers, and to run an open gardens project, which encourages people to open their gardens up and let people in the community talk to each other. They've also put beehives on local allotments. Not only are they generating electricity, saving energy, saving money, and bringing people together to talk about climate change, but they are also using the profits of that to do so much other amazing bits of community work, and really enrich the community that they are a part of.

The energy business doesn't' just have to be about drilling stuff, and feeling a bit guilty about this oily dirty stuff that we've taken out of the ground, and then burning it, and then worrying about the pollution, and then thinking all the money is going to really rich people. It can be about a group of people in their local church, managing to collect together enough money to put some solar panels on the roof, and then using the profits to help fund a food bank for asylum seekers. That can be a vision of our energy system. That's the kind of thing we want to replicate with Community Energy Greater Manchester. So St John's Sunshine are so pleased with their solar panels, they've joined in with all the other groups that are going to be part of that this year.

There are community energy projects across the UK. Although there are quite a few nice ones in Manchester, they are all over the UK. The first one was in 1995 in Cumbria. It was a wind project, and they're trying to triple their capacity at the moment. They love their wind turbines so much they want to triple how many they've got.

This is a community Hydro scheme, which is a little bit rarer, just because they are harder to do. This is one of the successful ones, not far from here in Lancashire, in a village called Halton. It's a little village that's been by the river for hundreds of years. It's managed to get a lot of its business and a lot of its energy from the river. It's always been a river based community, and they just thought it made sense for them to build a small hydro plant that would generate some of the electricity for the village, and that the villagers would own and would be part of it. It wasn't a big company coming in and saying, 'right we're going to take the energy, and we'll give you a bit of it, and we might give you a donation to help fix the roof on your Town Hall'. It was always owned by the community and very much part of what they do.

This is a solar project, one of my favourites, from Hackney. Some estates in Hackney in North London, near where I live, raised money with a share offer in the local community. If you wanted to buy a share, they're always oversubscribed. If you live locally, you've got preference. They use some of the profits to train interns who are kids who live on the estates around there, and they actually go and install the solar panels, and maintain them, and do other work around keeping the co-operative running. It's quite difficult to set up a co-operative. You have to be quite good at some of the administrative, and business and financial stuff. You learn a lot about running a business by setting up a co-operative. They also do fuel poverty work. They do all sorts of things, and it's brilliant.

So you've got all these kids from the estates in Hackney, that have got their construction licences, because they've had to climb on the roof of their own building to fix the solar panels on it, and know all sorts of complicated things about setting up a co-op. They also run a similar project like that in South London, in Brixton, and I'd like to see that replicated all over the world. It's brilliant.

This is the Island of Tiree up in Scotland. This is their wind turbine, and it's called Tilley the wind turbine. These are the beavers in the local community giving it a hug which is one of the sweetest images of renewable energy I have ever seen. Talk about tree huggers, these are wind turbine huggers. Again, this is owned by the local community.

They are not our usual power stations. It is a power station, and I think we need to accept it as a power station, but it's not our usual power station. If we asked even those kids who were hugging that wind turbine to draw a power station, they wouldn't draw Tilley the wind turbine. Importantly, it's not going to power the whole of these communities. Community Energy Greater Manchester is brilliant, but it's not going to power the whole of Manchester. But it's still a step.

I think it's important that we allow our communities to be part of that step in the new energy system that we're building. It's not just something for Ikea or Zach Goldsmith, or Ed Miliband or Unilever, or the people who own their own houses, that they can do. You don't have to own your own roof to be able to own a bit of the solar power. You could just have bought a share in your local school's

community energy project or something like that. We should all be able to play a role in that kind of energy transition. Moreover, the important thing is the way it engages people. That's the knowledge that we've got from the Solar Schools project, about how much it can really engage people in all sorts of other issues that they kind of care about. They're like, 'yeah, climate change, energy. I should do something about it, but it's difficult and boring and it's not fun, and I keep it at the back of my mind'. It gives you an opportunity to make it fun. To make it something that you hang out with your friends to do, and that you do keep in the front of your mind, because you own a bit of that solar panel.

So when we are talking about that other chunk of energy that we need to power ourselves, we can be clever about it. We can be more engaged about it. Otherwise, it is just that button that that we switch, or it's things like adverts, that's the way that we interact with our energy system. I don't think that's the way we want to interact with our energy system, even though some people do interact with these things quite deeply. One of my favourite odd bits of the internet are people who spend their time knitting the EDF logo. It's been going on for years. There's really active people who share crochet and knitting patterns for the EDF logo. They love the EDF logo and they spend time knitting, whole troops of them, and then giving them to their friends as a sign of their love for them. I quite like the hot water bottle covers that seems to fit with the theme of energy. Fun and interesting and weird, as a knitter who's knitted all sorts of weird things, I don't judge the people who do that, it's fine, but it's not really what we need in terms of public engagement with our energy system.

There's other things like 'Liberate Tate', the protest group that I've had some involvement with in my spare time. A few years ago, they got a wind turbine blade and took it across the River Thames and just left it in the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern. It was partly a protest against the sponsorship of the Tate by some oil companies, and it was also a gift, because art galleries get given gifts by generally very rich people all the time. This was, well, we were just some people who happened to have a wind turbine blade and we're going to give you that. So the museum had to go through the official processes of rejecting it as a gift, which allowed Liberate Tate to learn a lot more about the administrative systems of the Tate which they could use for their activism. Brilliant as that is, I think it reflects, and I think Liberate Tate would probably agree with me on this, that it reflects a slightly dysfunctional public relationship with our energy system. We shouldn't be having to do stuff like that. The Tate should already be talking about renewables. There should already be an interesting, exciting public engagement, things going on in art galleries about renewable energy.

This is another example of something we did as Liberate Tate. That's actually my shoulder. We took over a gallery at Tate Britain, and we turned it into a popup tattooing studio, and we found the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere for the year that we were born, parts per million for the year that we were born, so it's a kind of iconic graph. Anyone who's a bit of a climate geek will be aware of the Keeling Curve, which is a graph which measures the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere every year and they measure it parts per million. It's called the Keeling Curve because it's going up, and it recently went over four hundred parts per million. When I was born, it was three

hundred and forty. We tattooed ourselves with those on our bodies. Again, I think this was a very deep… it was a bit of art. The people who conceived it are artists, so it was a bit of art. It's an amazing bit of art, but I think it reflects quite a dysfunctional place that we're in, in terms of our energy system.

Another thing I haven't got a picture of, but if you're ever in Bristol, there is an amazing thing called the Solar Tree. It's just outside the Science Centre in one of the main squares. It's a sculpture that looks like a tree but the leaves are solar panels. They were made from scrap bits of solar panels that people who are recovering from drug addiction made themselves, by arranging in circuits. There are little solar panels which are the leaves of the tree, and you can sit by it and you can plug your phone in and charge it. It's a bit of interactive public art all about renewable energy. I think that is a very beautiful thing that we should have more of.

We could also have, this is from the Eurostar magazine last summer, and they had a fashion shoot on a solar farm. I don't think this is ideal public engagement with energy, but I think we should be having it around us. We should be having things like the amazing wind project that we just heard about. I don't know if you've seen the Immersion Experience version of it around the corner, we should be having these all over the place. We should have a solar tree on every street. At the same time, we do also need to have things which people aren't just engaging with in a small way, like with adverts, or just walking into an art exhibition, but something that is part of their everyday life.

So back to the Solar Schools. This is St. Luke's school in Brighton. On a very sunny day last year, they were so excited by how much power their school was generating, their teacher bought them ice-lollies and they did an ice-lollies salute to their solar panels. This reflects how emotionally involved and how just part of everyday life, as well, these solar panels have become. I think we can imagine a future where we have lots of these localised community energy projects, that every school has solar panels, that it becomes something like a school has a piano, and a basketball hoop, loads of books, and computers, and at the same time, it also has solar panels. Yes, it generates electricity and that's awesome, but at the same time, it also helps us engage with our energy system, it helps educates us about it. It keeps it in the front of our minds, and it involves us in part of that.

At the same time, we could imagine a future where that is only a very small amount of our energy, and still the bulk of it is coming from things that are owned by large businesses. We might hope that this will still be decarbonised. It's nuclear, it's big hydro, it's big wind, it's big solar, but it's big. I'm not sure if that's a future that I really want. There are ways in which this community model doesn't have to stay small. Already a lot of the community projects in the UK are five, six million. There's a brilliant project in Bristol at the moment. I think you can still buy shares in it if you want to get involved, which is up to five million.

There's this as well, in Denmark. I've never been to Copenhagen, but apparently you can see this from Copenhagen. It's the Middle Gunge Offshore Wind Array. In the UK, we don't have any community offshore wind, it's seen as a little bit too

	big. You have to raise quite a lot of capital to be able to do offshore wind. This community energy group in Denmark, Danes love wind. They really love wind. They have a national wind day. This group managed to raise enough money and they also worked with a commercial developer. It's a hybrid scheme. So this is DONG Energy, but in collaboration with a community energy group, and some of those wind turbines are owned by the community. So the people who live in Copenhagen see the wind turbines, and they're proud to see them because they own them, because they had a role in deciding where they would be and what they would look like. They actually own a stake in them. They financially own a stake in them, even if it's quite small. We could have things like that in the UK. We could have it with community energy products. We could also think about other forms of public finance. There's already pension pots in the UK that invest in community energy. In Lancashire, Lancashire Council pension pots invest in community solar. We could have more of that. Especially as we're seeing these groups targeted by divestment groups. I don't know if any of you are involved in divestment groups, or might have come across them?You may even be a target of one. The City Airport in London, apparently one of the people who want to buy that is a university in Canada. If we've got universities owning airports, they could own wind farms. We could have forms of public partnership. Swindon Council has just launched a green bond just to be able to buy solar. We could have models like that. There are lots of different ways in which we could make these big energy systems, like offshore wind, don't have to be out of reach for the people. There is a lot of ink spilled about this need for a great new industrial revolution to tackle climate change. We hear it a lot in places like Manchester, because everyone likes to talk about the industrial revolution in Manchester, but we hear it all over the place. Industrial revolutions can come in lots of different forms, and they can be ones that leave the people behind, and something that's done to the bulk of the people rather than with them or for them. Projects like Middle Grunge, or Community Greater Manchester, or those kids hugging that wind turbine in Scotland, offer us a blueprint for a vision of the future which is not only decarbonised, but is decentralised in terms of who has the political and financial power too. If you ask me to predict if we're going to decarbonise, I think we will. I don't think we'll do it fast enough, but we will. I really think we'll probably increase inequality with it, but we don't have to, and projects like these are the gateway to not having to do that. So go sponsor a solar panel, whether it's in Manchester, Bristol, or wherever. Go and see the Bristol Energy Tree if you can, and do have a go at the Immersion Experience outside too. Thank you.
Outro	We hope you enjoyed Alice's talk and thanks for listening. You can hear the rest of the talks from 2016 at futureeverything.org/2016podcasts.

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