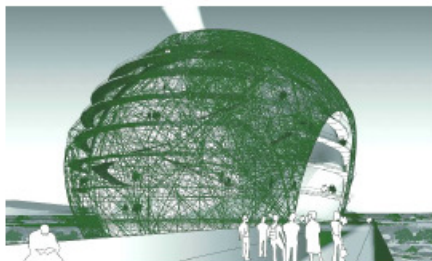


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UTROPIA - A MODEL OF SUSTAINABLE LIVING, WORKING AND BEING

On Tuesday 14th January, Nigel Catterson, Chairman of the Derwent Forest Development Consortium (DFDC), treated over 30 members and friends of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers in West Cumbria to an enlightening talk on the Utopia, the project to redevelop the former Royal Navy Munitions Depot site (aka Broughton Moor Dump) site at Broughton Moor in partnership with Story Construction.



The Utopia concept came into being in 1994 and has since been continually refined by Nigel since. The concept was prompted by the belief that as a society we have to learn to change what we do and how we do it if we are to survive the 21st century. Nigel explained that few would argue against the premise that we have become out of balance with our environment and with our relationship with it. Utopia sets out ways in which we can address this by providing a living example of how we can do better.

The idea of making Derwent Forest (a 1070 acre ex MOD brown-field site overlooking the Northern Fells) the platform on which to develop the Utopia concept occurred in 2001. Since that time and against what seemed like, at times, impossible odds, Nigel has pursued the dream of developing Derwent Forest for the wider benefit. The Derwent Forest Development Company was established in order to achieve this aim. With the support, help and guidance of the Story Group, DFDC signed a 250 year lease for the site in December 2011.

The site will be developed in a number of different stages. Initially, 25 – 30 fully serviced self-build plots will create the funding needed to carry out a site wide Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and will fund the master-planning process. Beyond this initial phase there are a number of inter-related initiatives being explored including a visitor / experiential centre, a hotel and visitor accommodation, a research and innovation centre, a learning centre, a dedicated festival site, an eco hamlet and more. It is the aim for the site to create all of the power that it needs through renewable energy sourcing, take care of all its own waste and ultimately to create its own food supply through leading edge aqua and hydroponics, vertical farming. It is the intention to preserve a large part of the site as wilderness thereby demonstrating how we can maintain the balance between our needs and those of nature.

Underpinning the concept are the Utopian foundation principles. These principles have been established in order to determine how Utopia / Derwent Forest will be developed. The principles will be locked into everything that is done and all activity undertaken will be informed by them. Creating a sense of common ownership around the project will be key to the project's success going forward. In order to preserve the site's future and to make sure that it can't be compromised, a Community Interest Company (or similar vehicle) will be established. It will hold 60% of the Development Consortium's shares thereby ensuring that the site will remain in community ownership.

The project will take many years to develop and is what can be genuinely called a 'legacy project'. It is the intention to avoid debt financing, with each step being funded by the preceding step/s. The journey is only just beginning and it is the hope of all those involved that over time others will want to be a part of this interesting, exciting and vital journey.

David Williamson, IMechE West Cumbria



CURRENT SITE



ARTISTS IMPRESSION



David offers his thanks to Nigel for his presentation.