

Across the UK, visionary citizens are redefining the places they live and creating communities that are kind to the environment and beneficial for their health. *Spirit & Destiny* discovers what it means to live in a 'Transition Town'

A better life for all



Up and down the country a revolution is happening. A new movement that's changing the way we live is gathering pace. From Totnes in Devon to Brixton, South London, the citizens of around 300 towns, villages and city neighbourhoods are moving away from the modern consumer lifestyle that forces people to live as isolated units, shut away in their own home.

Instead, residents are throwing off the shackles of individualism and opting to live in a way that's nurturing to the planet and supportive of local businesses. A number of these communities have even issued their own currency to encourage shoppers to spend locally. In coming together to make decisions and develop their spirituality and wellbeing, they're reigniting a sense of community.



As **Mike Grenville**, one of the founders of the Transition movement and co-author of *Transition Communities* (published 1 June, £4.99, Green Books), says: 'All spiritual traditions believe that everything is connected. When you realise 20 per cent of us consume 80 per cent of the world's resources, and that there's a billion obese but also a billion starving people in the world, you want to make practical and positive changes to make the world a fairer place and treat the planet in a more respectful way.'

'Yet to unpick our current lifestyle is a huge change. We can't do it alone, but if we're more connected as a community, we'll support each other better through whatever difficulties arise.' The energy crunch facing us is another driving force behind this lifestyle revolution. Central to it is the need to move away from our addiction to oil, which permeates every area of our lives, from

plastic packaging to shipping food from abroad. This transition to a low-carbon future is about practical solutions such as car-sharing, insulating homes, and eating local, seasonal produce.

To find out what it's like to live in one of these towns, *Spirit & Destiny* spent a day in Lewes, East Sussex. The Transition initiative in this picturesque market town was officially 'unleashed', as it's known by Transitioners, in April 2007, and it has its own T-shirts, a small office with two part-time communications officers, and an active Food Group (members divide initiatives into groups).



Founder member **Adrienne Campbell** explains how it works: 'Nobody's in charge, nobody's paid, and there are hundreds of people volunteering for free. We form groups to do things we're passionate about and everybody meets up once a month. It's about localisation – reconnecting with our land, our community, each other and ourselves in a deeper way.'

Those in the Transition movement believe that along with practical changes to shopping habits and eco initiatives also comes an inner, spiritual change that improves wellbeing. Most Transition Towns have Heart and Soul groups, which hold counselling or meditation sessions, inspirational

talks and 'connecting with nature' events to help people through any fears they may have about the lifestyle change they're going through.

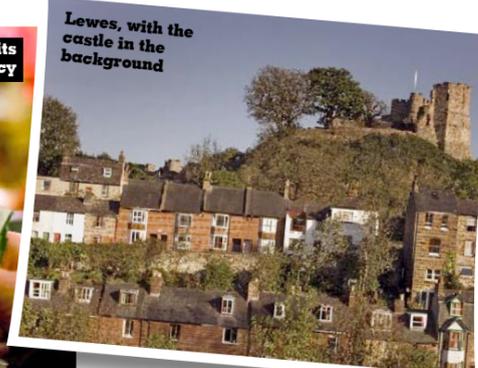


Sue Fleming, from the Heart and Soul group in Lewes, says: 'The inner transition is about being who we really want to be. Then we can create communities we want to live in, which come from a more joyful place, where people are realising their potential. Many people need to work through issues to get to that joyful place, which is where Heart and Soul groups come in.'

First stop on this visit is May's General Store, a quaint grocery shop on the main high street, to change £10 sterling into 10 Lewes pounds. The currency was designed by local students and can only be spent in Lewes.

You can change money at a few places around town, including the butcher's and the Town Hall, and it's accepted in over 120 independent businesses. They can give it back as change, pay their employees with it or convert it back to sterling. Those shopping with it tend to be residents buying weekly groceries, or a regular visitor buying Saturday lunch at a cafe.

'Of course, localising shopping doesn't stop larger supermarkets wanting to expand in the



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area,' says Adrienne. 'But as consumers we need to make choices and I feel we must support our local farmers by eating organic, seasonal food via markets or fruit and veg box schemes. I no longer shop at supermarkets. With four kids to feed, this wasn't easy and it took me about a year to stop, but now I buy all my food and groceries locally.'

This process should be greatly helped by the town's Food Group, which is getting a weekly market going in the town from June.



Polly Senter, a mother of three who has lived in Lewes for 25 years, explains: 'We have a monthly farmers' market, but our latest project is a weekly affordable produce market to reach those who see farmers' markets as a middle-class day out rather than the way to feed their family. We want ours to sell regular goods including fruit, vegetables, meat, eggs, bread and so on, from local, sustainable, mostly organic businesses who can't get into the monthly farmers' market because there's a long waiting list.'

'A local bakery is hopefully going to make a basic market loaf for us, because while it's all right selling artisan bread, it's also expensive. Who's going to spend £2.50 on bread when they can get a loaf for 59p in the supermarket? The idea is, we'll start to compete.'



Other initiatives include Food Upfront, which fellow Food Group member **Ann Link** suggested after she saw it work well in Balham, South London. The scheme aims to get people growing simple things to eat, such as salad leaves, in an old recycling box in their front garden. Then there's Gardenbuddies, a landshare and support group that meets once a month to share advice. Polly



Transition Town
LEWES

Right and far right:
fruit and veg boxes
and market stalls
provide an alternative
to supermarkets



bedroom home, with loft and floor insulation, a wood-burning stove and eco paints. They open it up to the public, along with other eco houses, at the Eco Open House Weekend in June.



Chris Rowland, part of the Energy Group and a director of the Ouse Valley Energy Services Company, says: 'More people are looking to reduce their energy costs as they can see oil prices going up as it starts to run out. In Lewes, we have 200 homes that have been fitted with some sort of renewable energy. Even if you can't afford solar panels, everyone can insulate and draughtproof their homes. Our aim is to generate as much local sustainable power as possible.'

In a Transition Town, it seems, there's something to make everyone happy. As Ann says: 'The great thing about it is that you've got activities that get different people involved, as well as a positive long-term vision, people to talk to and mutual support. Hopefully more and more people will join us when they realise that as energy use goes down, wellbeing and happiness go up.' **SPIRIT & DESTINY**

• For details on the Transition movement, visit www.transitionnetwork.org. For more on eco initiatives in Lewes, go to www.transitiontowns.org/Lewes