

LISTENING TO THE LAND

DREAMING THE FUTURE OF OUR ECOVILLAGE

In the last issue of Network News, Bill Henderson, Managing Director of the Duneland Board told us about an intriguing process that was to serve as a precursor to land development in the area of The Park behind the Universal Hall known as The Magic Triangle (see Issue 40 for a map of the area). Here Bill awakens our senses as he shares with us his direct experience of that process of 'listening to the land'.

Close your eyes. Imagine a landscape, a piece of Gaia giving birth to its own future, giving birth from the imprint, the memory and experience of its own past and present. Imagine the seeds and sprouts of its future being nurtured by the spirit and ethos of those living on and around this piece of Gaia now. What could such a place become? How would it differ from other ways that we change a landscape?

This image and these thoughts are with me now because of the Listening to the Land workshop held on The Magic Triangle this past summer, led by Margaret Colquhoun of the Life Sciences Trust.

Twenty-one representatives of our community spent two days dreaming the future by studying the past and present. Our journey started in silence with a walk around The Park, imagining that this was our first visit and pretending to be somebody else. Many emotions came up: hope, despair, anger, excitement, happiness, anticipation, appreciation, peace, fear and wonder.

Past and present came richly alive through a study of the whole geological and human history of this land. We met the Landscape Angel impulse, and I imagined it meeting and reconnecting with the Angel of Findhorn. We reminded ourselves of the spiritual impulses of this community. From these, some recurring and repeating patterns which imprint this land emerged like letters in a stick of seaside rock. For me these were:

*We asked ourselves,
"If I were this place, what
would I feel, and what would
I want to happen to make
me more myself?"*

- This is a place of metamorphosis, of transience, change and impermanence.

- Positive change is always possible. The intention behind that change is critical to ensuring positive futures.

- On this peninsula, collective ownership has been the norm for centuries.

- We must be wary of neglect that can creep up unawares. We spent much time working alone on our own piece of

land, each area like a room distinct from, but

connected to, its neighbour; then the whole piece in its connection with the

rest of the community and beyond; seeing its present by

understanding its past and only then looking gently and with

care into its future. A mixture of gentle rain and clear skies

gave us different insights into the character of these spaces. Sleepless nights and vivid dreams,

for some, became part of our journey.

We also had heard the wishes and desires expressed for this land by 50 or more people who had

responded to the open invitation to tell us how they could see the future of this land.

As time went by we all got stronger feelings about our 'rooms'. We were looking for the 'genius loci' or 'spirit of the

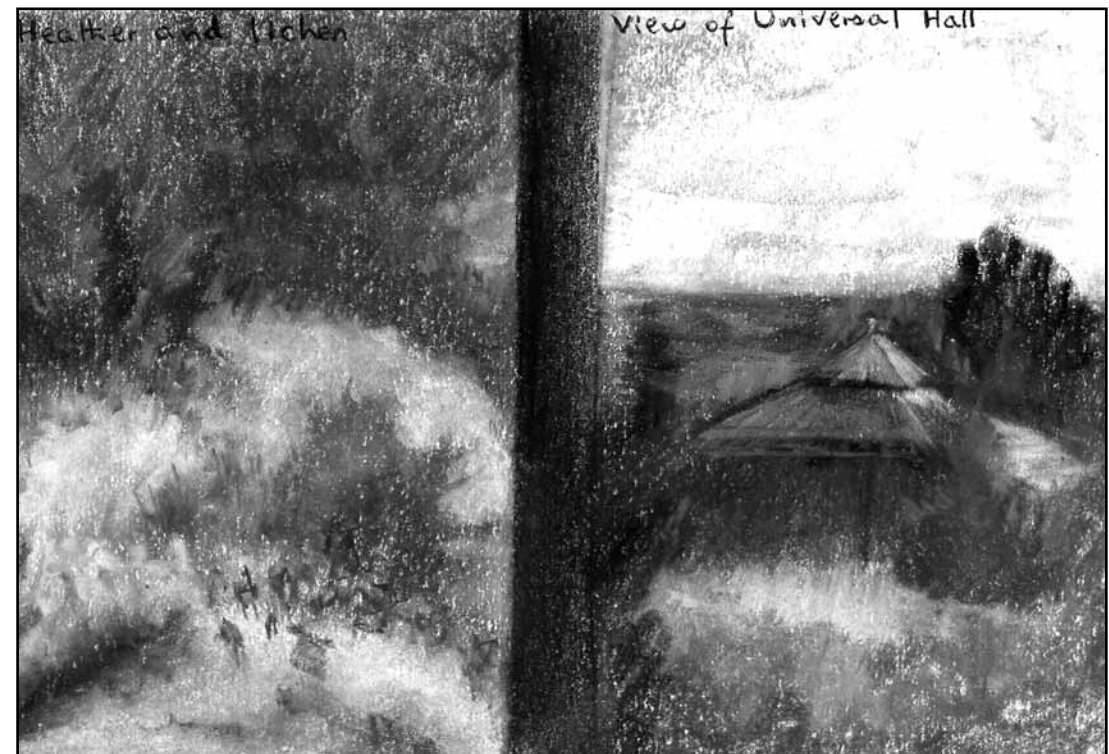
place'. We drew pictures of our room as it is and how it might be. We asked ourselves, "If I were this place what

would I feel, and what would I want to happen to make me more myself?" Some of us were screamed at by our room.

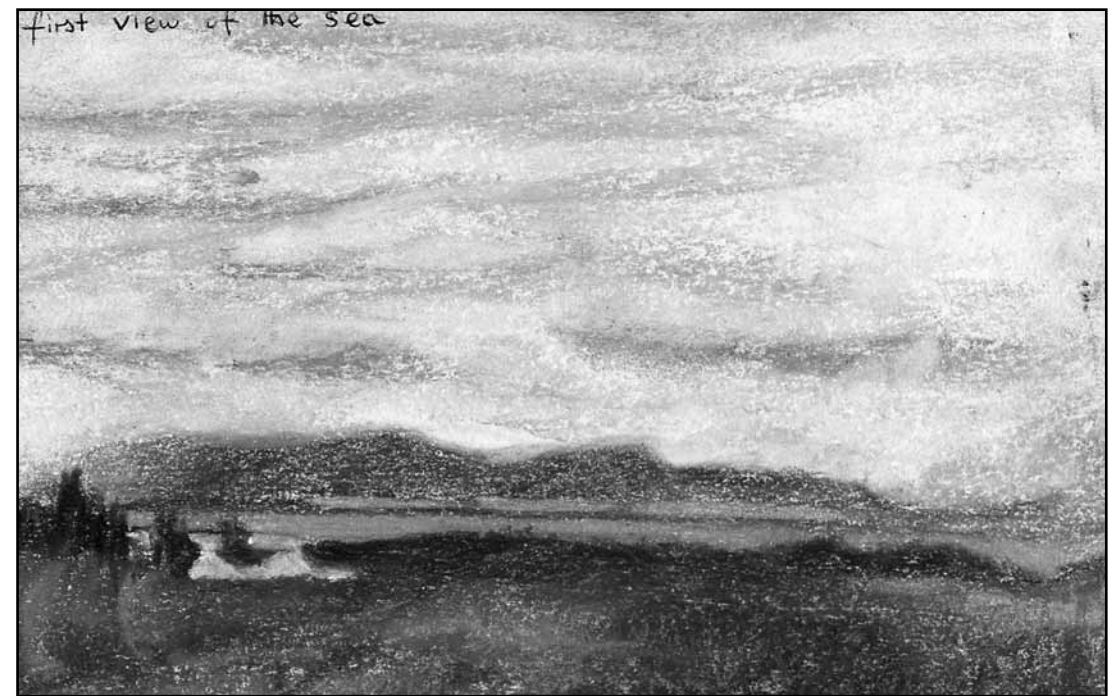
"Leave me alone!" In these spaces we saw natural areas — a sanctuary, a natural healing space, a healing heart for the



Bill gathers community members to dream the future



'Rooms with a view' - renderings by workshop participant



community. For others it was like a virgin with a first lover. "You are welcome, but be gentle with me." These were areas where we could envisage development, but creating low impact, organic forms, and working with the land. At the other extreme some heard "Yes! Please use me. Put me again to better use. Be with me and let us thrive." These were the areas around the old RAF runways — 'brownfield land' in the jargon parlance.

Only at the end of the workshop when time was too short did we start to imagine collectively the possible future of this area, and while there were some unresolved differences, there was nevertheless much consensus. The brownfield land needs much help, and development can do this, around the west and east of the site (adjacent to Cullerne and Pineridge) where development seems possible, even desirable, but needs to respect the land much more. In the centre and northern parts of the site the mood was (mostly) one of 'leave me alone, use me as a heart of the community, as a natural sanctuary space'.

For myself, arriving before the others on the last morning, I felt such an at-one-ness with the land. This workshop has

totally changed my relationship with this part of the Earth. No doubt it has for all of us.

Since then the Permaculture Training course has used The Magic Triangle as a main case study and we have had extremely good news from the local planning authority who has supported us in our request to include the whole area in the new draft development plan.

So these are exciting times at Findhorn. If you are inspired to engage with this project in any way, do please get in touch with me. Meanwhile please hold this land in your hearts and souls and see a beautiful future for it and for the ecovillage as it continues its development.

Bill Henderson

If you would like to find out more or want to support this work in any way, please contact Bill Henderson, Duneland, Ecovillage Office, 434 The Park, Findhorn, IV36 3TZ or email bill.catherine@virgin.net or phone +44 (0)1309 692074. website: www.duneland.co.uk

Photographs courtesy of Bill Henderson