



The Last Word:

THE AGE OF OIL IS OVER!

Award winning garden designer David Keegan works from a dedicated design studio in Manchester on commissions for both private and commercial clients. This month he discusses the future of oil useage. Will its value to society be superseded by an ultimately more valuable commodity?

The age of oil is over. Now that may seem a funny statement to make, but it is I believe one that is apt. How can it be over, you may say? We are still driving cars, taking planes and filling machinery with diesel and petrol. Is he mad, blind, and stupid? However, like any true dictator it will go kicking and screaming and refusing to believe its days are numbered and nearing an end. Oil has dictated our lives for going on a hundred years - empires do not collapse overnight. I believe we are starting to witness the early rumblings of a new type of society and order trying to squeeze itself into birth.

The end of the age of oil will raise fundamental questions as to how our society and world are shaped and run. As we have not prepared ourselves for this eventuality wars will be fought and whole countries and economies brought to their knees. It is also my belief that the old ideologies of capitalism and communism will prove obsolete in this new age.

I would label this new age, the age of water.

We are in the peculiar situation where the last two years' summers have been a wash out. Given this, it would be easy to believe we will never face water shortages again. Nevertheless, this new monsoon-style summer weather brings its own problems, such as localized flooding and overstretched drainage. The vast majority of our drainage having been built in the Victorian era was not built to cope with today's demands. Agriculture is also badly affected through crop loss

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and failure. There is also the added issue of increased pollution and damage to wildlife habitat and damage to the environment.

Water run-off from urban areas very often contains pollutants, which further along the line are not easily treated. This in turn leads to problems with the consumable water table.

In my humble opinion, these wet summers are a glitch and could soon be followed by scorching hot summers. In fact in a recent year long computer model study of global warming the UK is shown and forecast to become a lot warmer in the not too distant future.

The problem with a lot of precipitation lies in rainwater run off which merely ends up back in the sea or is so polluted as to be untreatable and unusable. Our water management strategies are sadly lacking with the use of non-permeable roads and particularly paved over front drives being a major contributor. This is not a new problem but one that has been discussed for many years now.

The government has made some progress in this area with the introduction of SUDS (sustainable drainage systems) but it is my opinion that this still does not go far enough. If we are to become more water efficient then we need legislation to make water recycling compulsory for all new developments, whether they are commercial or residential.

Water will become the new oil and as such I can foresee a situation where the high seas are filled with container ships carrying tanks of water around the world and sold as a commodity. In fact, this has already happened this year in Barcelona Spain, which is experiencing its worst drought in over forty years. Water tankers sent to Barcelona caused friction within other parts of Spain who claimed their need was greater. Perhaps a precursor of the problems to come? Large areas of Australia and China have already become uninhabitable due to prolonged periods of drought.

Our current climate should place us in an enviable position to harness this precious resource and sell it on to the rest of the world. The reality is that as global warming advances, more and more parts of the globe will become uninhabitable without an external water supply, whilst some areas will be uninhabitable even with the availability of an external water supply. In order to take advantage of this it is my belief that we need to start a programme of building vast underground water reservoirs coupled with widespread water recycling in order to cut down on main supply demands.

We do seem to be sleep walking into the future with little concern for the effects which will be caused by the advancement of global warming. Already we only seem to react when we face disaster.

The age of oil is over; the age of water is upon us. Now is the time when we should be preparing for how our future world will be shaped.

Instead we are all more or less focused on daily issues of home, finances, the cost of food, the rising cost of fuel and inflation. Whereas now should be the time when we start a public dialogue about how our world is going to change and how we are going to adapt to meet our needs. Ultimately we need to decide whether we will sleep walk into the future or take control. ■



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