Citizen Innovation: DIY Design and the Thames Water Turbine

Ann Light
Northumbria University

Loraine Leeson
artist

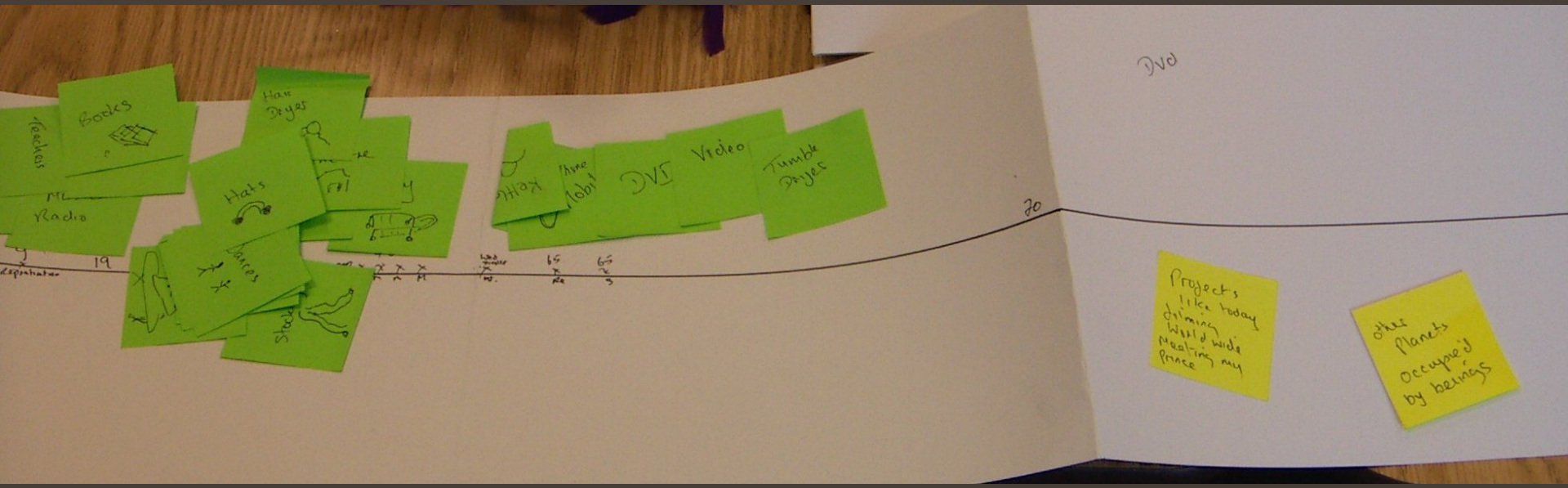
Overview

- The roots of the project in *Democratising Technology*
- Growing ambitions
- Five years doing patchwork projects on patchwork funding
- One water turbine later…
- What we learnt

Democratising Technology

I like your new tablecloth.
Thanks! But in the *future*...
Yeah...??
Well...in the *future*, this tablecloth won't be just a tablecloth; it'll be a cloak of ***invisible information***...
Cor! So what'll it look like then...?

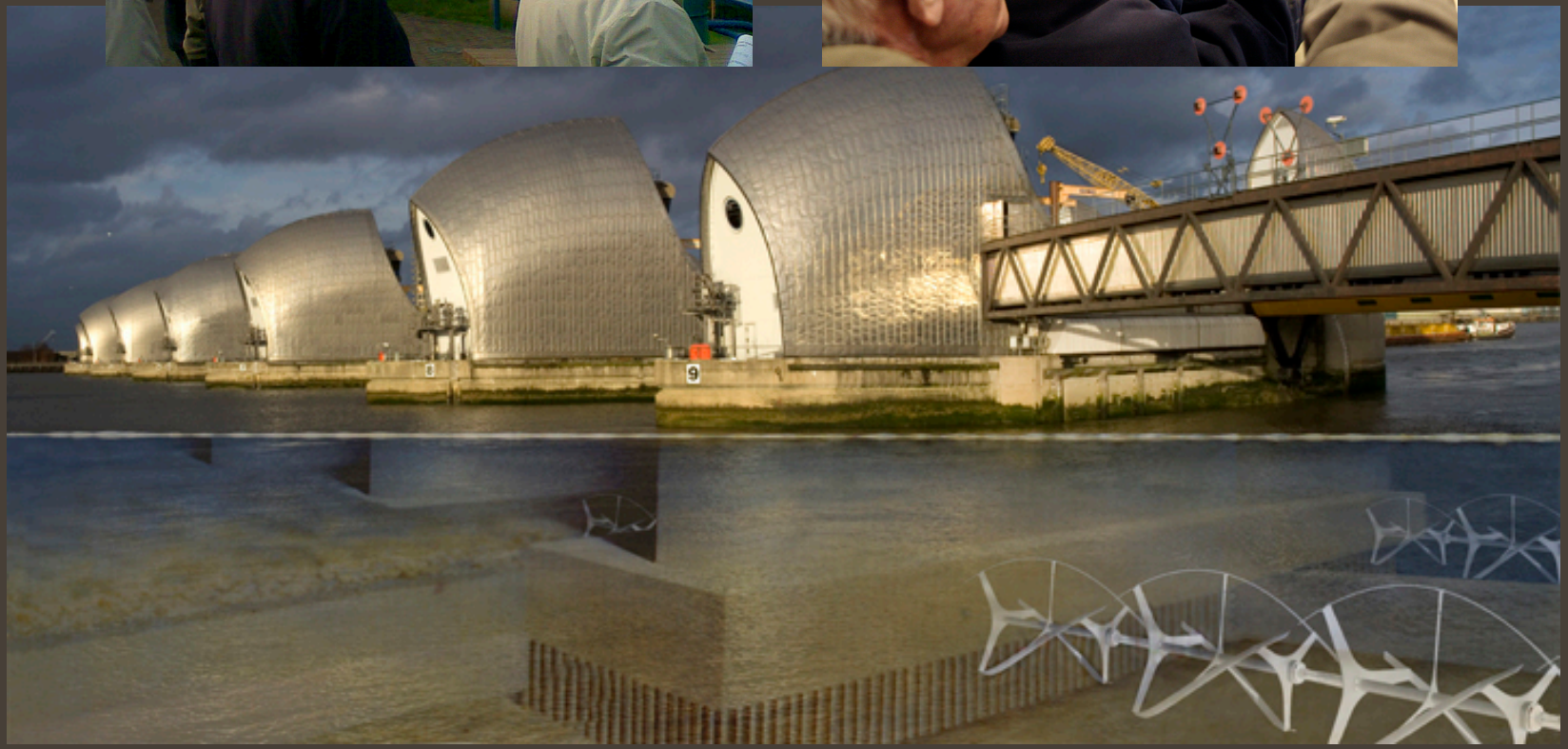
- To devise methods to engage people outside the design world in discussions about the design of digital technology, in particular, networks;
- To help them envision new social arrangements enabled by technology;
- To equip people to deal with the challenges of conceptualising developments that seem both abstract and currently irrelevant to their experience.


Books
Teachers
Radio
Hats
Hair Dryers
Lances
Stock
Kitchen
Home Mobil
DVI
Video
Tumble Dryers
19
70
Dvd
Projects like today
Dining
World wide
Meeting my
Prince
other Planets
occupied
by beings

GeezerPower

The Geezers

- The Geezers Club, one of the 5 groups of older people.
- Fitted brief: older people, little access to formal education when young; typical use of digital technology for age-group.
- Ranged from mid-60s to early 80s in age, varied life experience, left school at 14 skilled manual labour: electricians and engineers, market porter, local Docks.
- Tuesday lunchtimes in a community hall, providing an alternative to “pub and betting shop”.
- Initially gave 3 weekly 2-hour sessions to help us.



EAST LONDON ADVERTISER www.eastlondonadvertiser.co.uk Thursday 31st January 2008

BIT OF A GEEZER: Tom Dixie, 83

GEEZER POWER

Seniors unveil renewable energy plan

By VICTORIA HUNTLEY

COCKNEY geezers who say they know a thing or two about the world are reclaiming the 'innovative thinking' from the younger generation.

A group of senior men at Age Concern Tower Hamlets, who call themselves The Geezers, claim they have the knowledge and experience to solve London's power problems.

They have joined with community artist and University of East London research fellow Loraine Leeson to put together a forward-thinking renewable energy project using the tidal power of the Thames.

The project now on public show at Mare Street's Space gallery in Hackney is being dubbed 'Geezer Power'.

Geezer-in-chief Ray Gipson said: "Older people have more experience of life.

"Yet this knowledge is seldom able to inform technological innovation.

"We may be past our 'sell-by' dates, but we still have a lot to offer – and a special interest in how the world will be for our grandchildren.

The 14 pensioners, based at Age Concern's branch in Russia Street, Bethnal Green, have clubbed together to pour their life experience into the project for the exhibition called Not Quite Yet, which opened on Friday.

The Geezers' innovative, power generating idea would see a string of turbines installed in the lanes of the Thames Barrier, using the tidal movement of the river to produce electricity. They see this as a starting point.

"This isn't new, as ventures ago a water wheel was attached to London Bridge," Geezer Ray added.

"In our living memories, tidal technologies have been developed, but then set aside in favour of wind farms.

"Now the threat of nuclear energy is on the agenda again.

"We think it is time to let the Geezers power London and we, The Geezers, intend to make it happen."

The Geezers' project is part of a show alongside work by other professional artists collaborating with older people at Space Gallery in the programme which aims to 'reconnect' pensioners with current technology.

"Even if we could just provide power for some homes for the elderly, or for the street lighting, that would be an achievement," he continues.

"The world needs as many sustainable resources as it can get. It's time for Geezer Power."

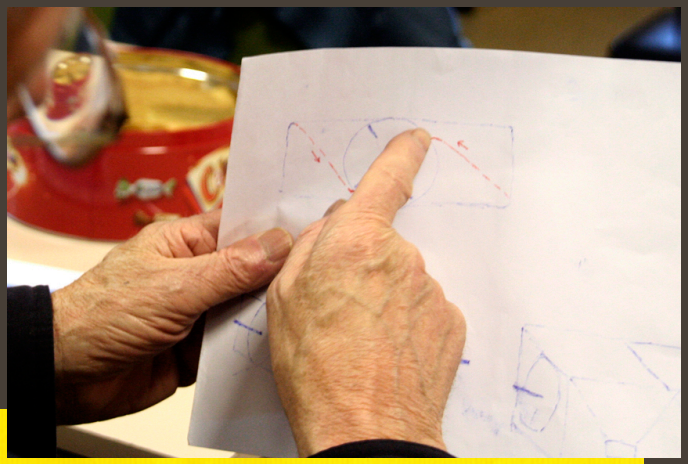
Dennis Banks, 76

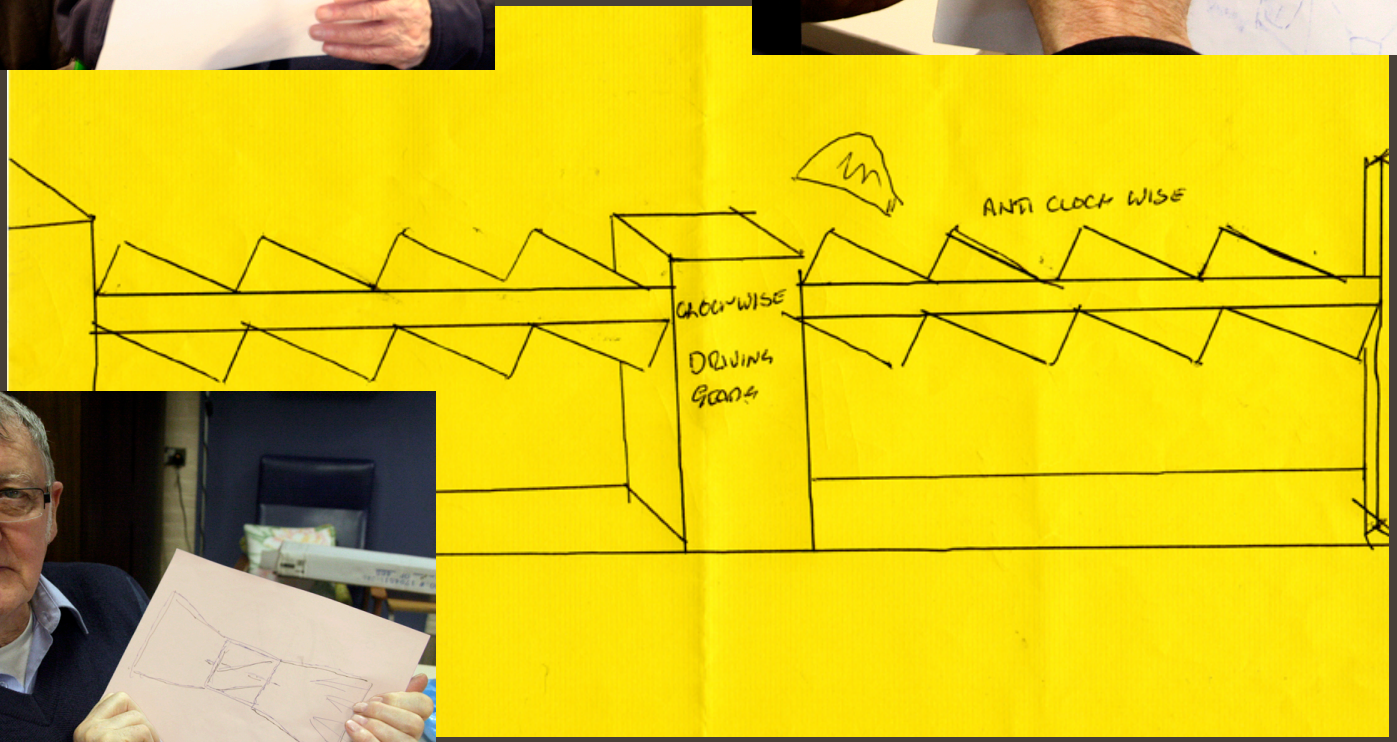
John Day, 76

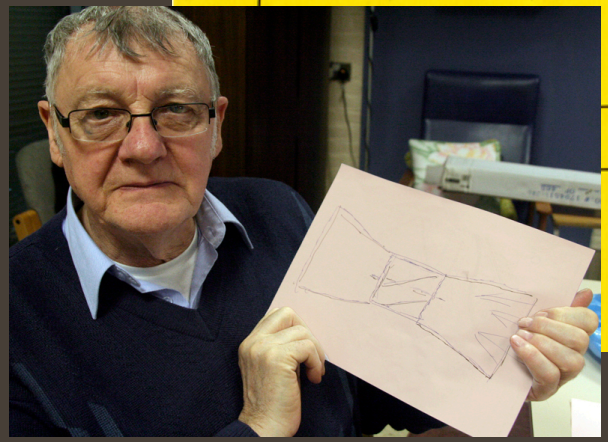
GEEZER'S CLUB

PROJECT WITH QUEEN MARY COLLEGE & SPACE STUDIO'S

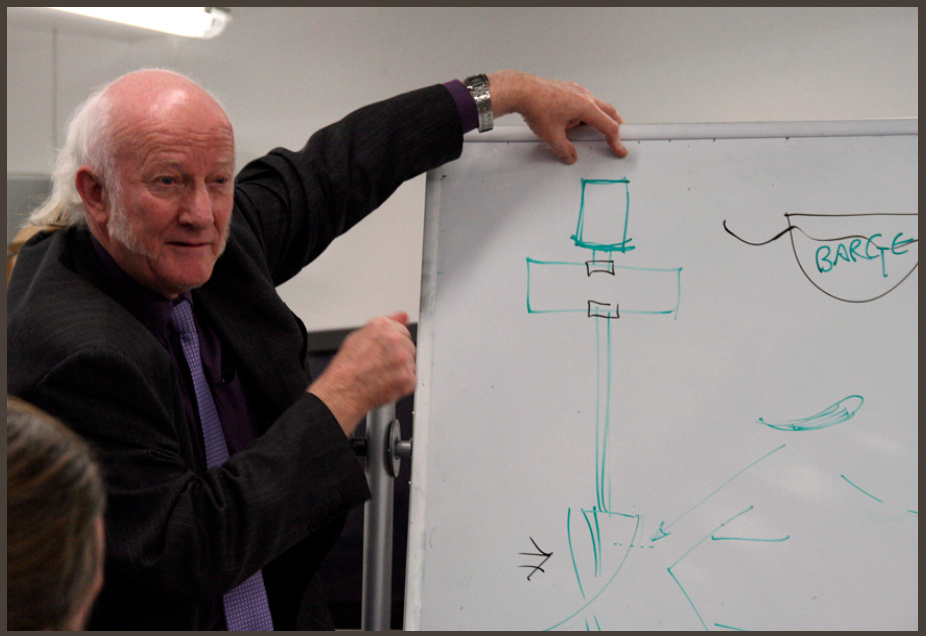
Active Energy

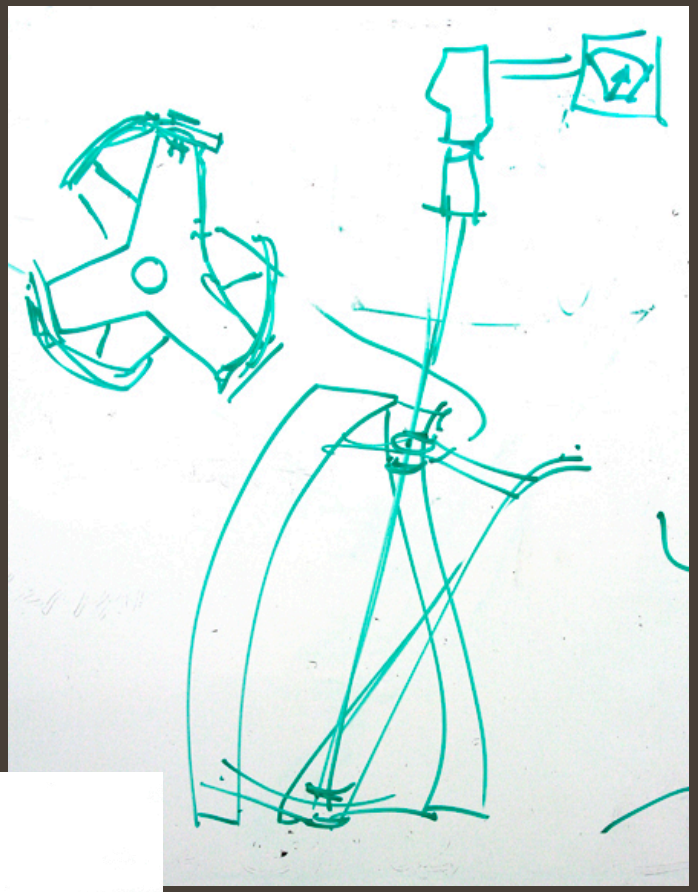


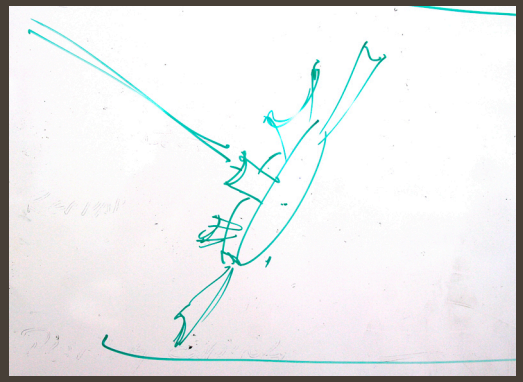

ANTI CLOCK WISE
CLOCKWISE
DRIVING
GOODS

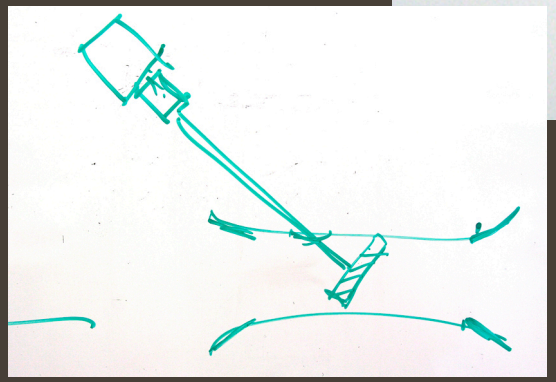


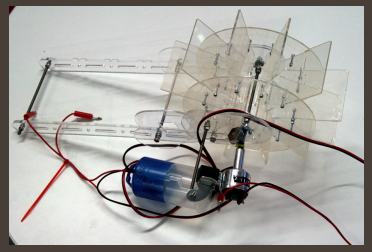
wemoto.com

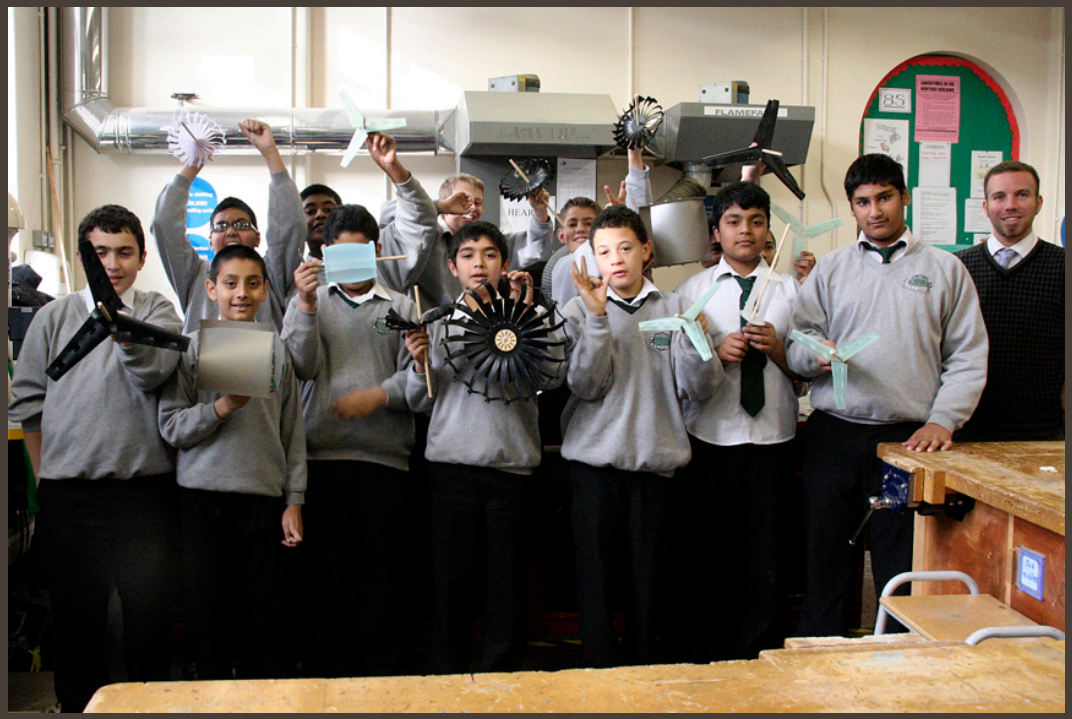

BARGE



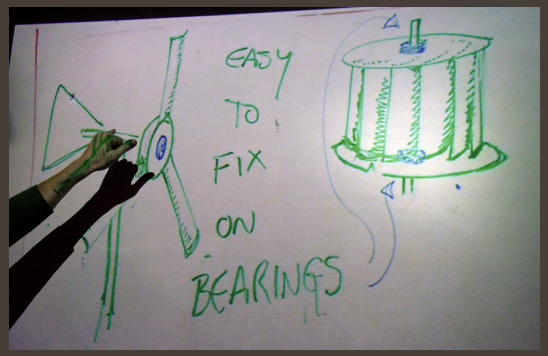


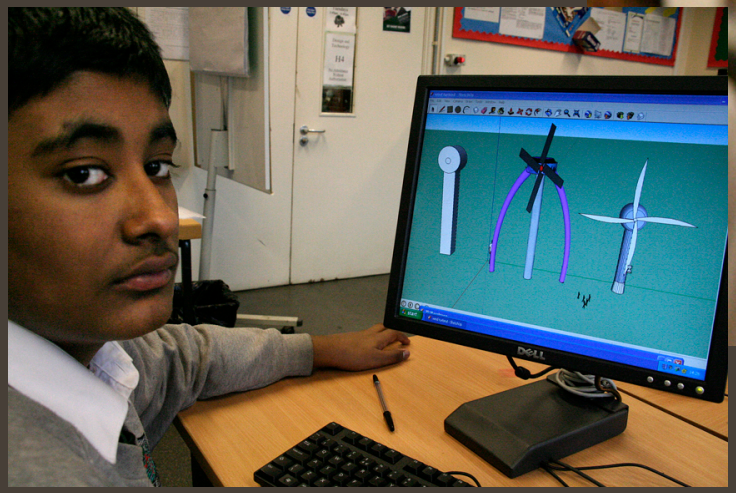




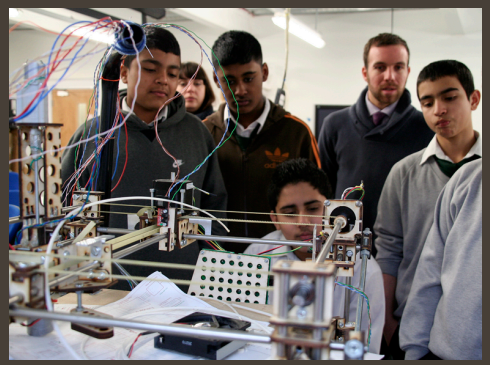


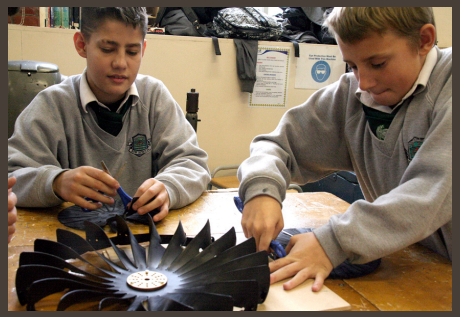
Wind Turbine Applied

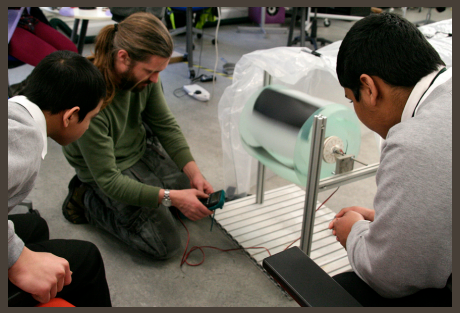

EASY
TO
FIX
ON
BEARINGS

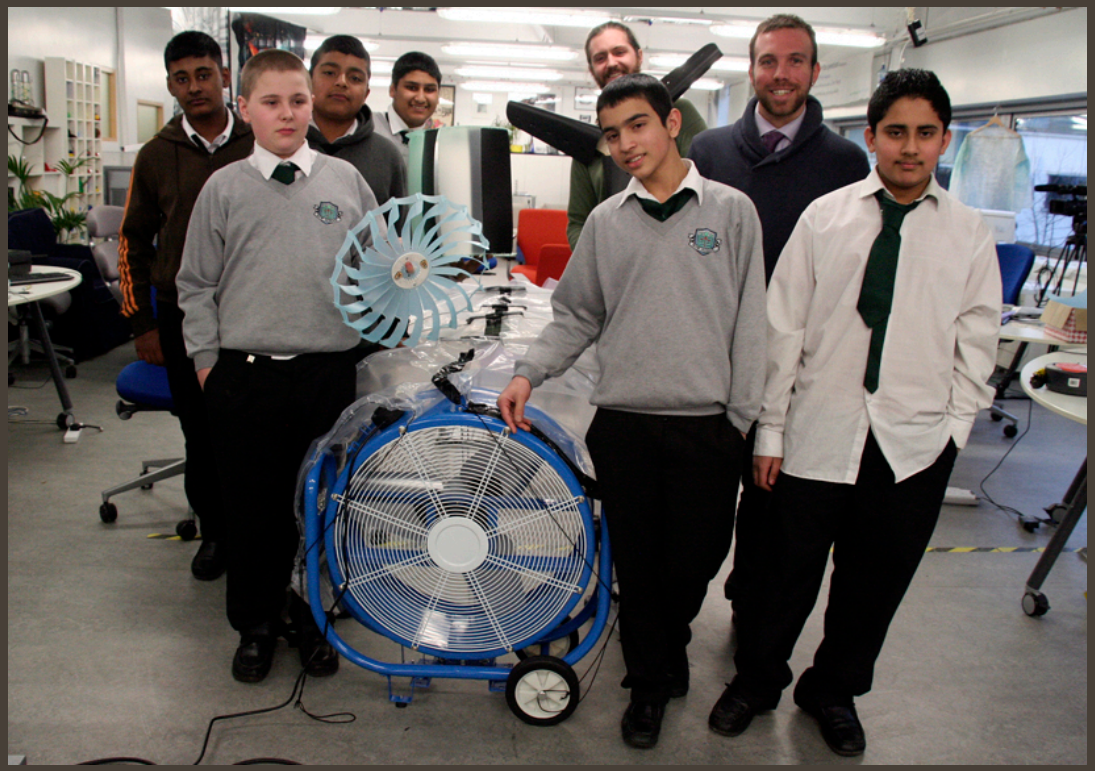


UEL
University of
East London
Docklands Campus
Knowledge
Dock Centre
Main Entrance





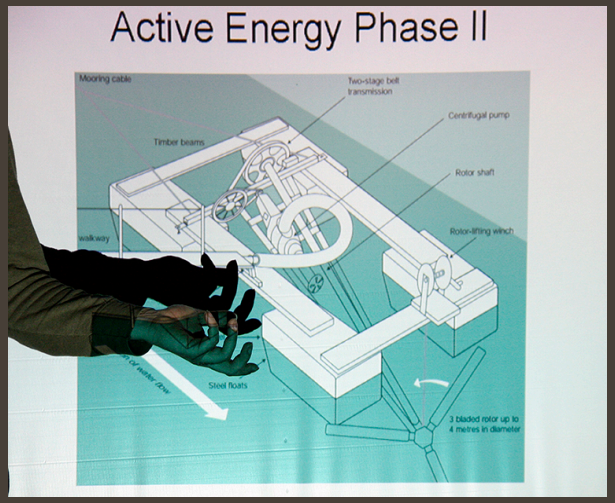


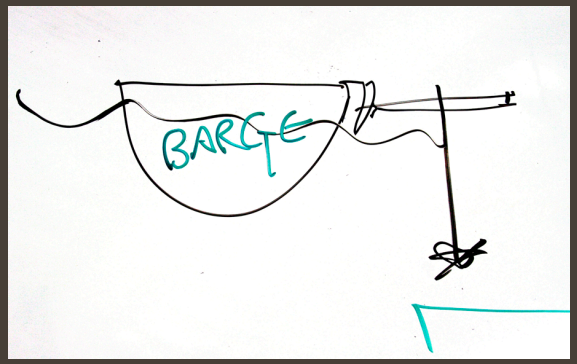


LINKAGE PLUS
ing Services For Older Adults

GEEZER
POWER

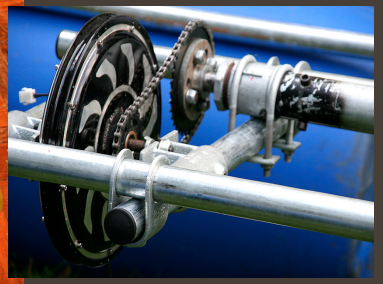
ACTIVE
ENERGY
RESOURCE CENTRE

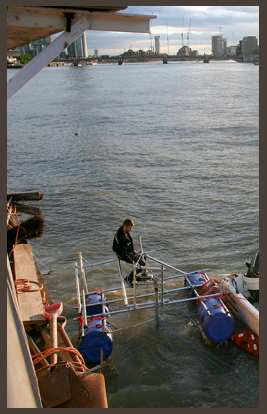

Active Energy Phase II
Mooring cable
Two-stage belt transmission
Centrifugal pump
Timber beams
Rotor shaft
walkway
Rotor-lifting winch
Steel floats
3 bladed rotor up to 4 metres in diameter

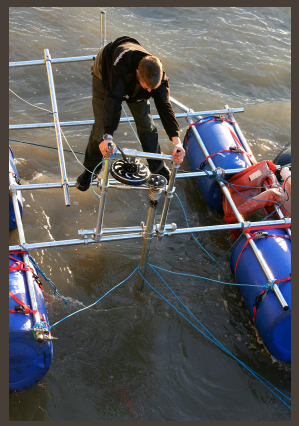

BARGE

200W

East Coast
Fibreglass Supplies
2 Part
Polyurethane
Foam
PART 2







OurBow.com

What can this extraordinary case of going it alone, while doing it with others, teach us about design and the conditions we need to carry it out?

People

- Artist
- Geezers
- Mechanical engineer
- Systems engineer
- School kids
- Barge/restaurant owner
- Geography student
- Drama/computer science/design researcher
- etc

Some issues

- Stewardship/mediation (doing stuff vs making stuff happen) – openings, transfer of ownership, intermediary tiers
- Sustainability of group – funding, shared values, endurance: do we need it?
- Match – locus of relevance, who contributes and arbitrariness of participants, potential to generalise
- Design vs Innovation – making new stuff or changing practices in the wider world?

Funding challenges

- Patchwork funding led to a patchwork of projects
- Good in range and experience
- Broader-based innovation – more people, more contexts, more learning (both ways)
- Design constantly thwarted as losing initiative and forgetting detail of craft through delays in testing, etc

Thanks...

- All our participants, younger and older
- Photo credits: include Loraine Leeson and Jim Prevett of SPACE
- The QMUL team for DemTech: Lois, Pat and Gini.
- Everyone at SPACE
- AHRC/EPSRC funding under the "Designing for the 21st Century" call; AHRC grant: Participants United!
- Active Energy stalwarts, such as Toby Borland of SmartLab, University of East London and, obviously, Loraine Leeson.

Questions:

ann.light@northumbria.ac.uk

l.leeson@cspace.org.uk