



# low-impact living



## what is it?

We can't prevent the destruction of ecology and democracy if we continue living as we do now. It's got to be different – and we're arguing that it could be more fun, more interesting and healthier too. Lifestyle change is not enough – however, it's still vital. We believe that we need to build a new economy, but that's not going to happen if the majority of people want to consume as much as possible. Our task is both 'micro' (low-impact living) and 'macro' (low-impact economy).

At the micro level, our task is to explain that material wealth doesn't bring happiness and doesn't deserve respect. All the world's religions tell us not to strive for or give respect to wealth. Because so few ordinary people are able to achieve wealth, but so many aspire to it, it encourages a range of socially-undesirable things, like exploitation, crime and gambling – and when that still fails, drug and alcohol addiction and/or mental health problems.

Then at the macro level, our task is to build a new economy that doesn't concentrate wealth and doesn't have to constantly grow – everyone has what they need to be happy, but not so much that their consumption damages nature.

First let's contrast low-impact living with how most people live in the modern world – let's call it...

**High-impact living:** many of you will own property through, and owe interest to, a global bank – or you'll be paying rent to someone who does; most of your food, clothes and energy will be provided by corporations, and you might have credit card debt; you'll have quite a bit of electrical equipment, you'll drive and you'll fly occasionally, to go on holiday; you'll be exposed to a lot of advertising, and your lives will be more or less completely controlled by the corporate sector. Sound familiar? Here's how it could be instead:



*Meanwhile, in high-impact world: earn more, spend more, earn more, spend more...*



*A self-built, natural home - low-impact living isn't about making sacrifices.*

**Low-impact living:** imagine instead being able to walk to a local market, filled with locally-produced, organic vegetables, eggs, meat, honey, fruit, cheese, beer, fish, cakes, breads, jams, pickles, nuts and loads more. Imagine being able to walk or cycle to a local job – towns and villages full of family businesses, self-employed people, independent shops and restaurants; and people making things – clothes, furniture, pottery, kitchenware, jewellery, building materials; and teachers, hairdressers, mechanics, bus drivers, plumbers, builders, electricians – all for small, independent companies, selling their products and services locally. Imagine a strong, diverse, uncontaminated, environment that provides for us, keeps us healthy and provides beauty. Imagine being able to get your energy and heating from small-scale, local renewables, with no need for large, toxic coal and nuclear power plants, or pylons snaking all over the countryside. Imagine living mortgage-free in a beautiful, natural home that you built yourself, or that someone you know and trust built for you.

Low-impact living is about local, organic food, self-employment, independent businesses, co-ops, credit unions, home cooking, open source, craft skills, self-built homes, renewable energy, smallholdings, allotments, sharing, enjoying nature, enjoying life. It's also about authenticity – real friends, real food, useful work, It's an antidote to the power of corporations and banks, supermarkets, pesticides, McFood, identikit shopping centres, housing and industrial estates, credit card debt and stress. The global economy is out of control, but it's only a blip – we'll either live in harmony with nature, or nature will stop providing for us, which would be the worst thing that could possibly happen to our species.



## what are the benefits?

- We can't guarantee you'll be happier – but you won't be crushed into conformity
- You'll help get humanity onto a better path
- You'll be consuming fewer resources and creating less waste
- You'll inspire and inform other people
- You'll meet great people, and make new friends
- You'll be healthier – including mentally
- You'll help build stronger, safer communities

However, as multinational corporations dominate the media, energy, food, transport, housing, and finance sectors and ultimately, the state, this agenda isn't going to be promoted widely - only a small percentage of people will try to live a low-impact life. We need systemic change; but there's still a lot you can do as an individual, to change your own life, and to contribute to wider change.

## what can I do?

Here's a suggestion for a ten-point rolling programme, from easy to more difficult.

1. Become a free thinker – although if you're reading this, you probably already are.
2. Start to decorporatise your life. Go to [Noncorporate.org](http://Noncorporate.org), get your NonCorporate score, and start to make some relatively easy switches – to the Phone Co-op, to Co-op Energy, to free & open source software etc.
3. Downshift: see [lowimpact.org/downshift](http://lowimpact.org/downshift)
4. Have a go at some of our easier topics – maybe get a compost bin; grow some fruit, veg, herbs or sprouts; insulate the house better; switch to LED lighting & natural paints; bake bread; maybe cycle rather than drive?
5. Disengage more from the corporate sector – get food from community-supported agriculture; switch your mortgage to a building society; move to a Linux operating system etc. Get your NonCorporate score close to zero ([noncorporate.org](http://noncorporate.org)).
6. We're working with other organisations, to start to switch to a new kind of economy; help us achieve this at [Lowimpact.org/achieve](http://Lowimpact.org/achieve).
7. Money: read up ([lowimpact.org/collaborative-credit](http://lowimpact.org/collaborative-credit)), and think about joining a mutual credit group, & ultimately a global credit commons.



*We can have the best of all ages – you can't beat a wood stove for cosiness, but you can read this on your solar-powered laptop.*

8. Employment: leave the corporate world – go WWOOFing ([wwwoof.org.uk](http://wwwoof.org.uk)). Explore more low-impact topics – do what you enjoy. Maybe it will result in a job providing a service to your community, rather than being part of a corporation that extracts wealth from it.
9. Accommodation: think about joining, or starting a housing group; share resources, equipment and time with like-minded people, and help houses become homes rather than investments. Cohousing is probably the best umbrella term – [lowimpact.org/cohousing](http://lowimpact.org/cohousing).
10. Land: get a smallholding / build your own home. You can be part of a movement to get the land back into the hands of ordinary people, and you can provide food and other materials for your family and for your local community. See [lowimpact.org/low-impact-living](http://lowimpact.org/low-impact-living) for groups that can help.

Good luck!

## resources

- see [lowimpact.org/low-impact-living](http://lowimpact.org/low-impact-living) for more info, courses, links, books, including:
- J Thackara, *How to Thrive in the Next Economy*
- Alain Saury, *Back to the Wild*
- Tom Hodgkinson, *How to be Free*
- [localfutures.org](http://localfutures.org) – the economics of happiness
- [lowtechmagazine.com](http://lowtechmagazine.com) – low-tech living
- [transitionnetwork.org](http://transitionnetwork.org) - local groups
- [permaculture.org.uk](http://permaculture.org.uk) - ecological living system

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