



LETSlink WALES

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NEWSLETTER: April 2018



Dear Colleagues

This is an update from LETSlink UK, on our mission to support the development of Local Exchange Trading Schemes in the UK by setting up a dedicated regional hubs to connect longstanding and new organisers in all regions of the UK. This update comes with an invitation to you to participate in the LETSlink hub for Wales.

The first Local Exchange Trading Scheme in the UK was founded in 1985, inspired by presentations about experiments in Canada with Green Dollars and LETS at The Other Economic Summit. With her partner Harry, Liz Shephard founded LETSlink UK in 1991 working from home, producing and distributing copies of a 100-page bound volume called the LETS Info-pack, as well as distributing a small Introductory booklet and list of local LETS contacts to enquirers who sent postage stamps.

LETS became popular throughout the nineties, with a large number of local groups being set up, following the instructions in the Info-pack. This was before the internet and LETS organisers managed to connect members via newsletters and local meetings, which required a great deal of dedicated ongoing work. With more support being needed, external funding was provided by the Big Lottery Fund from 1998 to 2000. To achieve this, LETSlink became incorporated, and as I was involved in coordinating LETSlink London, I was invited to become a trustee representing the London region.

The LETSlink model did not fit in with the Canadian founder's aspirations for a business-oriented project, leading to conflict directed at the other trustees, and in the year 2000, the funding having not been renewed, Liz resigned, and the other trustees withdrew, leaving me managing it, seriously under-resourced. We did appoint more trustees, but we failed to keep the company going.

I had to take over the website (my first) and keep the project afloat as part of my own existing workload, which involved linking a wide range of small enterprises in alternative health as well as activist projects. My main contribution in the early years was to map the local projects, adapting the [LETSlink Regional Map](#) so that automatically refers people looking to join LETS to local organisers, which has worked well for a number of years.

A major breakthrough was software called Local Exchange, designed over ten years ago (2009) by the founder of North London LETS, coded in the USA, and further developed by a few key individuals, which made it possible to build online systems. However, we only managed to make it available to a few established groups, which saved some going over the edge, whilst others were struggling to cope and still did not survive.

Following the problems with our original trustees, it seems that funders have not favored the project, maybe because it's outside the usual voluntary sector paradigm - or perhaps they did not wish to be seen supporting any explicit challenge to the monetary system. All along, there has also been competition with similar schemes, some using hours as a currency, some based on printed pound vouchers, but most just encouraging people to swap or volunteer, sometimes doing deals with local businesses to provide vouchers as rewards. Over this period, many people have also become caught up with the frenzy of social media, whilst others remain isolated.

Our limited capacity has meant we could not combine detailed support of individual groups with UK-wide development, and with gaps in LETS coverage in many areas of the country, all we could do with the continuing influx of enquiries - with fewer groups to refer them to - was to simply file them until we could offer something positive! In the face of this ongoing crisis, we envisaged a strategic UK-wide approach to getting the Local Exchange project back on track.

So the aim of **LETSlink Wales** is to link up groups and individuals all over Wales, including former LETS organisers, new enquirers willing to help set up local groups, and people wanting to join. Where numbers build up sufficiently, the next stage might be more local hubs, with organisers maintaining membership on both the regional and local platforms. Established groups will also be able to join a national hub so that connections for mutual support and advice can continue across the UK, so that a consensus on good practice can be coordinated with evolving methodologies. If you are interested in becoming involved, please use our [Joining Form](#).

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