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The UK provided a glimmer of hope recently in the fight against greenhouse gases by reporting an 8.6-percent drop in annual emissions over the previous 12 months. However this was attributed largely to a fall in economic activity, due to the global finance crisis, and a rise in energy prices.

The London ZED Pavilion hopes to present a more realistic alternative. It bills itself as more of an organic living creature with breathing skin, than a building. Solar panels and wind cowls on its roof feed it energy — the cowls start producing power at wind speeds of 3 meters per second — while a slanted “grain roof” catches rainwater to cool its interior. The rest of its energy needs are met by biogas from food waste at its neighboring restaurant, which uses empty bottles to insulate its roof.

In one part of the pavilion, scores of suitcases explain how London is turning its empty spaces into vegetable-growing lots among other green projects. In another, diagrams of prototype “Crystal Houses” built on water show possible future scenarios in the fight against escalating emissions.

Meanwhile, its restaurant offers edible plates made of pastry and cutlery made of biscuit — gimmicks that still require some tinkering as both plastic and paper were needed to keep the plate and cutlery “food” clean when Expo-visited.

What is interesting about the pavilion is that, instead of being empty prophesying, it is also based on a real community project in South London. One of the perks of the BedZED community, named after the company that designed and built it, is that its 2,000 inhabitants no longer have to pay electricity bills.

“This community has been successfully running for nine years in London, so the Expo organizers saw what was possible in terms of achieving their low-carbon goals and picked this model when they visited the city,” said Xu Ling, director of the pavilion.

“Beijing wants to develop itself as a world capital with a focus on the district of New Tongzhou. Because the area is so new they want to involve the zero-carbon theme from the very beginning, so they found us and we came here to hopefully get involved.”

Similar plans are underway to redevelop Shanghai’s Lingang New City, near Pudong Airport, and Huangpu district, one of the oldest parts of the city, she said. Huangpu also houses the UPBA,



Visitors inside the Madrid Pavilion's bamboo housing.

GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY



ZENG YI / XINHUA

A visitor inside the London ZED Pavilion tries out the eco-chairs.



ZENG YI / XINHUA

A zero-carbon restaurant in the London ZED Pavilion.

one of the few parts of the Expo that will not be torn down in November. Xu hopes her pavilion remains as a museum.

Shanghai is also turning its attention to its often-overlooked Chongming Island. Plans are now afoot to turn it into an experimental ecological community boasting a low-carbon footprint. It will also include an 8-square-kilometer commercial district and an international education zone.

The overriding goal, however, is to find antidotes to the current cocktail of burnt fossil fuels, heavy air traffic, chronic deforestation, industrialization and urbanization that is clogging up the atmosphere with GHGs like carbon dioxide and methane.

Otherwise, we can look forward to a slowly cooking planet where earthquakes, tsunamis and other natural disasters become increas-

ingly commonplace, while glacial melt causes sea levels to rise and communities to become submerged forever.

Shanghai Expo organizers have taken this responsibility seriously, in line with China’s new role as one of the world’s biggest emitters of greenhouse gases.

This is a concern as developing countries typically produce only 10 percent as much of these gases as developed countries. Chinese also contribute less than 25 percent as much waste as Americans, Canadians and Australians on a per-capita basis, meaning that as Chinese raise their consumption levels, things will only get worse.

However there are signs that change is the air. The Expo’s streets are full of hydrogen fuel-cell buses and buggies, which are in a beta-phase of testing, while Broad supplies over 200 pavilions

with non-electric air-conditioning units that boast energy savings of 200 percent.

Furthermore, Shanghai Expo organizers and the Environmental Defense Fund have put a Green Commuting Campaign into action featuring the support of movie star Zhou Xun and former US vice-president and environmentalist Al Gore, who used the campaign’s transit card when he visited the Expo.

“China is leading the charge in developing renewable energy technology and should continue to put its efforts towards these endeavors,” said Adina Matisoff of Friends of the Earth — US.

“On the other hand, China should avoid dragging its heels, like the US is doing, to wean itself off fossil fuels like oil and coal,” she said. She was referring to Washington’s provision of huge subsidies to

its national oil and gas industries, and other factors that led to the breakdown of global climate protection talks in Copenhagen.

This hints at one of the shortcomings of the Shanghai Expo. Neither the China Eastern-sponsored Aviation Pavilion nor the Oil Pavilion hint at the damage fossil fuels do to the environment, nor what is being done to address this.

Instead, the former features an amusement park car ride and the latter has the most sophisticated 4D movie within the Expo site.

All of which makes the UPBA a harder sell for cotton candy-munching kids, but essential viewing for adults who want their grandchildren to be born into a planet worth inheriting.

*Li Xinzhu and He Wei contributed to this story.*