



Notes of 2nd meeting of Northumberland Green Hub, held at St James Community Centre, Alnwick, 2nd December 2023.

Updates Since Last Meeting

The 'Planning' group renamed itself as the Steering Group and was joined by Colin Elliot from Greener Berwick and Carmel Adamson from Amble WI. It has met several times on Zoom.

A vote was taken on possible new names for the network and Northumberland Green Hub was chosen. A logo (see above) was designed with help from Jack Ellul of Mojoco Design.

Membership of the network had risen to 51 on the date of the meeting.

In late November, an NGH Member's Guide detailing the purpose of the network, the role of the Steering Group, key policies, its component parts, and a WhatsApp Etiquette Guide, with advice on how best to contribute within the Special Interest Groups (SIGs) was circulated to all members. Following the Meeting, Lesley undertook to email all members link to an online form to ask them to confirm that they have read the NGH Members Guide and are happy to accept the essential policies and procedures within it.

The Northumberland Green Hub WhatsApp Community has been created. The Community offers an Announcement facility enabling the WA Community Administrators; currently Lesley Long and Liz Clark to send messages to the entire membership. Announcements include requests for items for the NGH News Digest, requests or information from the Steering Group as well as the opportunity for members to broadcast information to, or a call for help from the full membership. Not all members of the network are members of the WhatsApp Community; either because they do not have the App or prefer not to use it. To ensure they are kept in the loop regular emails are sent to all members.

Within the WA Community there are 10 groups. These are:

1. Steering Group
2. Introduce Yourself

In addition, there are seven interactive Special Interest Groups (SIGs) established on thematic issues.

3. Biodiversity and Wildlife
4. Climate Crisis Resources
5. Community Food
6. Transport and Active Travel
7. Live Well with Less
8. Warmer Homes
9. Water Quality

10. Finally, the Coquetdale Green Network is a geographically focussed group with its members being drawn from various groups in that locality.

Email Communication

The Hub has started sending out regular-monthly News Digests by e-mail from its northumberlandgreenhub@gmail.com address to all members, including those who are not in the WhatsApp Community. Each mailing attaches the latest edition of giving details of: Members' events, projects, appeals, campaigns, calls for volunteers, book reviews and links to videos and online articles of interest and relevance to the SIGs and to members.

Going forward, Lesley will send out monthly calls for items for the upcoming edition and Members can use the same e-mail address to send her details of the activities they want included.

Members' Shared Google Drive & Resources

The News Digest, together with documents relating to the running of the Hub, and issues with which hub members are engaged, have been organised in resource folders. This is still work in progress. These are accessible to members on the shared Google Drive which can be found via this link.

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1tdWmu6-8_GTBz3D70MWCAidWnO2RfQ2

Structure of the Network

Lesley Long and Julia Chambers explained the rationale behind the communications choices made by the Steering Group and gave examples of how they might be used.

It was made clear that choices to date have been made on the basis that they are free to use and relatively easy to set up, not because we believe that these social media tools are necessarily the best long-term solutions for the network. Better solutions may emerge in the future.

WhatsApp groups are great for instant messaging. However, content can rapidly become hard to find as new messages are added to the chain. There is very little capacity, other than wading back through all the messages for retrospective search. When people join a group, they only see messages from that point on - they can't see what has already been posted.

This is the logic of complementing this instant messaging app with a separate system for organising and storing documents or information which has a longer shelf life. Hence the Google Drive. Going forward, this will allow members to upload material of value so that it can be linked to and accessed in the longer term.

The Google Drive Resource could in time become a valuable resource on environmental and sustainability issues in our region, making it possible to access relevant reports, local data collection, seeing who has done what where. For this to happen though, members will need to get in the habit both of uploading relevant material and of providing enough detail of what it's about for it to be properly filed, searched for and retrieved.

Julia Chambers then gave an example of how Members of a Special Interest Group (SIG) might develop ideas and plans for an event using a WhatsApp Chat group. They could then use the Community Announcement function and the Digest to publicise it, whilst putting up more formal documentation about the event – the agenda, how to get there, any subsequent write up of what happened – on the Google Drive.

Feedback from Breakout Groups

The meeting then split into four breakout groups which were invited to discuss the following questions:

1. What do you want from the WhatsApp Groups you are a member of?
2. What support/ resources do you want from the Steering Group?

The answers from two questions and from the different groups overlapped considerably. The main points were

- The value of meeting like-minded people both in itself and as an opportunity to do things together
- The opportunity to learn from other people's experience/ of how to do certain things/ of what works and what doesn't
- The importance of trust in sorting out/ filtering information
- The continuing importance of face to face meetings
- The potential dangers of overload from too many messages. The value (and permissibility) of one-to-one chat messages outside the SIG where conversations are of limited /wider interest
- The need to 'feed' the Google Drive – possible summaries of important SIG conversations, a place of record, the need for good organisation of and referencing of the files stored on the Drive.
- The possible use of the Drive as a directory of members, including their Introduce Yourself messages.
- The possible value of 'curators' for each SIG to ensure material is sent to the Drive, to the Digest and newsletters and to link with the SG and for the Drive to ensure it is well-organised.
- The need for IT training and demonstration to enable Members to get the most from the App and the Google Drive
- The potential for on-line training videos for members to access in their own time
- The value of a peer group learning workshop
- Help with / collaboration on funding bids

Networking Over Coffee

Members had the opportunity to network after the group activity and to read the information board posters with details of the background and experiences of members who have written in the Introduce Yourself Group. Lesley confirmed these NGH Member Introductions would be available in the Shared Google Drive so members can find out more about each other.

<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1tdWmu6-8 GTBz3D70MWCAidWnO2RfQ2>

Session Review

Colin Elliot reflected on the first three months of the network's life, encouraging members to offer continuous feedback on the network and on their experience of using its communication tools.

Responding to the group feedback and discussions it was noted that:

- There was a strong interest in further technical support, including on a 1 to1 basis, perhaps as an aside to Hub meetings rather than as part of the main agenda.
- There was interest in some form of facilitation/ curation of the WhatsApp Groups to record key discussions, gather resources and liaise with the Hub as a whole
- That one purpose of the Hub was to be supportive of and facilitating *network members* lobbying NCC and other organisations.

Closing Comments

Liz Clark then wrapped up the meeting; thanking everyone for coming and for their contributions, and looking ahead to the coming year.

- It is intended to hold three or four face-to-face meetings in the coming year, perhaps having a different format – with external and internal speakers – at some events.
- For the time being, these would need to be self-financing as the Hub's application for support to the NCC Environment and Climate Fund, made to support such events, was not successful. We will seek feedback as to why.
- The SG will send notes from the event to all members and take forward recommendations in the new year.

January 10th, 2024