



# Monthly Digest

January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2024

## News, Events, Updates



### Membership is on the Up!

9 new members joined in December and early January bringing the Hub's total membership to 60!

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### NGH Meeting Report

#### The 2nd Full Network Meeting – December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2023



On Saturday Dec 2nd, around 30 members of NGH gathered in Alnwick for our second event. It was great to see faces from the first workshop and to welcome new members. As well as time for networking and making new contacts, the morning included small group discussions where people were asked to think about what they want from the Special Interest Groups (WhatsApp groups) and what support or resources they need to make NGH effective. Suggestions included specific training on using Google Drive, a directory of contacts and support for funding applications. Once again, it was a great morning

with loads of energy and positivity. Thanks to every who came along! Members of the Steering Group took away a list of actions to work on for the coming year.

Notes of the meeting content and outcome have been emailed to all members. If you have not seen them, you can download the Notes direct from the Members SHARED folder on the Google Drive using this link:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1CF87ZUCuoeN5vH9e-hVMdcfOo7YK7dkl/view?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1CF87ZUCuoeN5vH9e-hVMdcfOo7YK7dkl/view?usp=drive_link)

## Upcoming Events

**Rothbury CAN** is developing a programme of activities planned for the coming year which you can see on the [Event page of the website](#). Our first community activity of the year is below. Details of the increasingly popular Repair Café are in the following section.



**Rothbury Rubbish Friends - February 24th, 10.00-11.00am**  
Community Litter Pick ([See website for details](#)).

**Rothbury CAN – TALK Trees in Art – March 9th, 2024 - Jubilee Hall, Rothbury 2.00pm.**

This talk follows the Repair Café which is being held earlier at the same venue.

**Tim Smedley - The Last Drop - at Alnwick Story Fest**

**Saturday 17 February 2.30 at Alnwick Playhouse**

**Tickets £9 are selling fast.**

**Alnwick Story Fest** will join forces with **What a Wonderful World Festival** in an exciting new partnership to present the latest book by renowned environment journalist, Tim Smedley. Tim's book, *The Last Drop* looks at the global water crisis, both shortages and excesses, and some encouraging future solutions.

When it comes to water scarcity, the last place on Earth you'd think of is rain-soaked England. Flooding is a growing problem in the UK but strangely the same forces that are driving the increase in torrential downpours are also driving water shortages both here and across the globe.

Tim has travelled the world talking to farmers, householders, engineers and activists and his book is packed with personal stories of the struggles faced by communities as rivers and aquifers dry up and glaciers retreat but also with the ways people adapt and build resilience. Time and again the most effective remedies are nature-based solutions rather than the large-scale dams and river diversion projects of the recent past.

**Book now** at <https://alnwickplayhouse.co.uk/event/the-last-drop/>

**Hold the Date**

What a **Wonderful World Festival** dates **27 - 30 June 2024**

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## Repair Cafes

- 1. Greener Berwick Repair Café – Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> January 2024 in the Salvation Army Hall, Church Street, Berwick. 10.00-1.00pm.** Darning, sewing repairs, toys, phone software, computer software, blade sharpening, general repairs. For more information **07821 402466**
- 2. Felton Repair Café – February 10th, 2024, at Gallery Forty5, Felton 11am – 3.00pm**  
Bring along your sewing, clothes, bicycles, knives, and tools for sharpening – and if you need help with that tricky bit of IT – bring that along too. Join the Repair Revolution! [Find us on Facebook](#)

### 3. Coquetdale Repair Café - March 9<sup>th</sup> 2024, in the Jubilee Hall Rothbury -10.00-2.00pm

Combine fun & learning with reducing waste. Have your broken items repaired or learn to repair them yourself with the help of friendly volunteers. Tea and cakes available!

<https://www.coquetrepair.co.uk/>

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## Training & Learning Opportunities

### 1. Get Sowing Online Training Session

Calling All Tree Growers - the Tree Council are hosting the following FREE online event:

**Get Sowing - An Introduction to Growing Trees from Seed and the Wonderful World of Community Tree Nurseries**

**Tue 30 Jan 2024 1:00 PM - 2:30 PM GMT**

**FREE Online Talk**

To register for this event please click [HERE](#)

Please note that the sessions will be 1-hour long with an optional 30-minute Q&A session at the end for anyone with questions.

#### PROGRAMME

Join us to learn all about the wonderful world of **Growing Trees from Local Seed. Aimed at beginners**, although everyone is welcome, Will Fitzpatrick from The Tree Council will:

- Explore why we need more trees, what are Community Tree Nurseries, and why they are so important.
- Demonstrate the easiest activity you can do at this time of year to grow new trees – taking cuttings, or cloning trees!
- Outline the year-round process of growing trees from seed and how all our online guidance sessions can support you.
- Share a calendar of easy-to-follow steps to growing your own trees on a small scale as well as suggesting what to do with them when they are ready to leave home.
- We will also be joined by Matt Knight, co-founder of an environmental charity and experienced teacher from Shinfield St Mary's Junior School in Reading, who will show us the amazing work he has been doing with his students and how he started off growing trees from seed.

### 2. Seed Gathering – There is Still Time

It's still not too late to collect some seeds now! Go to the [Tree Growers Guide](#) and watch the recording of a [Seed Gathering Masterclass](#) to kickstart your tree growing adventure. Some trees that may still have some seeds to collect near you include hawthorn, oak, walnut, sea buckthorn, Scots pine, hornbeam, alder and the seasonal favourite, holly! Have a look at what you can still collect this weekend but get cracking as the seed gathering season is coming to an end.

### 3. FREE Carbon Literacy Training

The [North East and Yorkshire Net Zero Hub](#) is offering free carbon literacy training to local authorities and community energy groups in our region.

There are 70 spaces available with one reserved for each local authority and approximately 20 spaces for community groups. Places will be allocated first come first served for eligible and appropriate expressions of interest received.

All training must be completed by 21 March 2024 and only one space is available per local authority or community group.

If your organisation is interested, please complete the expression of interest form attached and return to [abbie.raynes@teesvalley-ca.gov.uk](mailto:abbie.raynes@teesvalley-ca.gov.uk) by COP on 12 January 2024. Expression of Interest Form can be downloaded here:

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1D\\_kTcgO0MYPZ98r3\\_M0uBHxgDA2pW2DU/edit?usp=drive\\_link&oid=114434655082367356428&rtpof=true&sd=true](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1D_kTcgO0MYPZ98r3_M0uBHxgDA2pW2DU/edit?usp=drive_link&oid=114434655082367356428&rtpof=true&sd=true)

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## Special Interest Groups – News & Updates



### 1. Biodiversity & Wildlife - SIG

Members have been sharing a wide range of events, articles and podcasts. Discussions have ranged from requests for information about local community orchards, to NCC's policy on maintaining verges (and their seeming lack of knowledge about The Good Verge Guide), and from tips on introducing wildflowers to ensuring green issues are raised through the planning process. More recently, the possibility of arranging a visit to the [Middleton North Estate](#) has been mooted. It's home to

Charlie and Charlotte Bennett, who recently featured on BBC's [Farming Today](#) at the end of December 2023, and who are developing ways of farming with and for wildlife.



### 2. Coquetdale Green Network - SIG

**The Coquetdale Green Network** is a communication and sharing hub for green activists and green groups in the area.

Part of the CGH is Rothbury CAN. Rothbury CAN is an umbrella name for several small groups of climate activists. Each group has a different focus and is dedicated to doing all they can to combat climate change and help nature thrive. We believe that everyone can contribute in their own small way to make a difference and we aim to empower individuals and communities to take action towards a more sustainable future.



**Rothbury CAN comprises several groups:**

- Rothbury Tree Wardens
- Rothbury Rubbish Friends
- ROWANS (Recovering Our Wild and Natural Spaces)
- Low Carbon Housing
- Transport
- Coquetdale Repair Cafe

Our most exciting news is that we now have a new website:  
[www.rothburycan.org](http://www.rothburycan.org).

**The Low Carbon Housing Group** is continuing to monitor developments in sustainable, energy efficient heating and disseminating the information locally. They will soon be adding a dedicated page on the new Rothbury CAN website to facilitate this. The group will also be monitoring all local planning applications and sending in comments to encourage them to be more climate change ready.

Following our article in [Over the Bridges \(Community Magazine\)](#) several people have requested our list of local installers of heat pumps and solar panels etc. This will soon become available on the CAN website. We will also continue to liaise with other local and countywide groups concerned with sustainable low carbon housing. We welcome new members to our group. Just contact the Co-ordinator **Cathy Jacob** via email [cathyjacob@hotmail.com](mailto:cathyjacob@hotmail.com).

**ROWANS** are busy cutting back the willow on the structures by the riverside in Rothbury. They have grown very tall and need strong loppers to cut them back and lots of weaving in to maintain and strengthen the original shapes. Tree and hedge planting work will continue, and we are always grateful for any offers of help. Please contact **Chris Cann** at [chriscann1@hotmail.com](mailto:chriscann1@hotmail.com).

Members of the **Coquetdale Green Network (CGN)** are also part of the **Coquet Rivers Project**.



### 3. Water Quality – SIG

The group has been going since early October with the aim of drawing together people with an interest in water and rivers conservation, monitoring, and quality. There are currently 20 members.

Topics discussed ranged from communities coping with possible flooding (several areas such as Warkworth and Rothbury have flood barriers), reports of sewage and palm oil on the local beaches, accessing sewage alerts, and tick treatment affecting water toxicity.

Positive stories were also shared including from [www.fishlegal.net](http://www.fishlegal.net) about the Pickering Fishery Association winning a judicial review against the EA and Government. Also featured was an innovative filter which will remove microplastics from your washing machine water. The Indi<sup>tm</sup> **Home Microfibre Filter** can be bought directly from <https://www.cleaner-seas.com/> and uses returnable cartridges to remove 90% of plastic microfibres from your wash.

Knowledge and information were shared including about the [Ilkley Clean River Group](#), EA testing points (how to find them), [Rivers Trust Story Maps](#) and NW Drainage Interventions.

[SNACs Ranting About Rivers talk by Steven Lowe](#) was well attended and much appreciated. We are awaiting information on the ongoing development of the **Coquet Rivers Project**. This is being developed by an association of Women's Institutes, Environment Groups, Parish Councils and interested parties. It is currently at the advanced planning stage but isn't yet ready to be shared more widely. As soon as it is, we will be informed.

Finally, Northumbrian Water - Customer Research & Engagement Team are inviting customers to give them feedback. You can register and complete the online form here. <https://haveyoursaynwg.co.uk/login/>



### 4. Transport & Active Travel – SIG

Carolyn Letts, vice-chair of Swarland and Newton Action for Climate (SNAC) has written a useful summary of the group's 2-year '**Journey of Ups and Downs**' to get a bus service to serve the villages of Swarland and Newton on the Moor. She shares the challenges and solutions discovered along the way. And are they there yet? Sadly no – but they are working on it and fingers crossed it comes to fruition in 2024. Members keen to restore public bus

services will find it a helpful read. Carolyn is a member of the NGH – Transport and Active Travel group SIG in the WhatsApp Community. Carolyn's report is saved on the Google Drive, in the **Members SHARED Folder> 01\_Resources>NGH Transport and Active Travel** and can be accessed here:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Frqo2dQVB4QQSC220v1yfFYQkWYHetlq/view?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Frqo2dQVB4QQSC220v1yfFYQkWYHetlq/view?usp=drive_link)



## News from Around the County



**Greener Berwick** is running a Repair Cafe on the last Saturday of each month (see earlier for upcoming dates). Thanks to startup funding from Berwick Town Council and from NCC Climate & Environment Climate Action Fund, a second phase will include a **Tool Library**, secure storage space and **Library of Stuff**. Also planned in the town are **Growing Communities** gardening days.

For more information call: **07791 553114**

Our website: <https://www.greenerberwick.org.uk/>

### Duchess Community High School Climate Club

The Climate Club meets weekly at the High School and has about twenty members mostly aged 12 – 14. Recently we have been on a trip to the Arctic regions. Or rather - we learnt about the Arctic & Antarctica and took a trip via our imaginations. We've also learnt a lot about trees and set up fostering for some tree whips and planted lots of others. We've been on a beach clean and filled 7 bags. We followed this up with a letter to the Fishermen's organisation about the number of nets and fishing equipment we found. We are now focussing our attention on the air we breathe and are very excited about a potential film we hope to make. Watch this space. Submitted by Terry Smith (Volunteer at the Climate Club)

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## Campaigns & Surveys



### RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch 2024.

Please take part if you have a spare hour between **26th and 28th January**. You can sign up to take part in the survey here: <https://rspb.org.uk/whats-happening/big-garden-birdwatch>

It's a very important annual survey and it provides evidence of the serious decline in bird numbers. In 2023 the house sparrow was top of the list, but numbers were down by 57% compared to the first bird count in 1979. We've lost 38 million birds in the UK in the last 60 years, so please take part.



### The Great British Spring Clean

This campaign runs from **15<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024**. Each year in the UK over 3 million small mammals are killed by littered cans and bottles. They are attracted to the sugar, climb inside, get trapped and die. In one bottle alone, Lynne Russell of Warkworth Green Matters, found 4 dead shrews. Please can as many people as possible promote the event and get involved in some way, whether through your parish/town council or individual groups. Full details are on the [Keep Britain Tidy](https://www.keepbraintidy.org/) website.

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## Call to Collaborate on Facebook

**Alnwick Area Friends of the Earth** have a very active [Facebook page](#) on which we regularly post two or three articles, opinion pieces, news items and information/announcements of oncoming events. Our broad theme is the environment - particularly threats to it, nature, and

diversity. Whilst we know that Facebook isn't everybody's choice information source, we would welcome members and supporters of Northumberland Green Hub joining in and maybe contributing. You can find the Facebook page at <https://www.alnwickfoe.org.uk/>

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## NCC Climate Change Team - Updates

### Hazel Scurr - Moving on but Staying in Touch

We were sad to hear that Hazel Scurr, an Assistant Project Manager with the NCC Climate Change Team and key mobiliser of the NCC Climate Champions, the Carbon Literacy training programme and keen supporter / promoter of NGH, is moving on. The good news is that she's moving to work with **GREN**, a district heating startup for the UK, and joining up with Matt Baker – formerly the Service Director at NCC for Climate Change. We wish her the best of luck in her new role AND have extracted a promise from her to stay in contact with us. We hope she will keep us posted on the development and roll out of district heating projects in the UK which we know will interest our Warmer Homes group members. As soon as we have Hazel and Nick's new contact details, Lesley will update the [Useful Contacts for NGH Members](#) spreadsheet which lives on the **SHARED Google Drive** here:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1bKQe6NXjlC8LLA15jgqkGjxrzNF5uMq>

### Achievements in 2023

- The Climate Change team has funded 17 exciting projects tackling climate change from the Northumberland Climate and Environment Fund.
- Another successful year of Free Tree give aways, totalling 15,750 saplings.
- The team held 4 climate events across the year, with a final event for students in December at County Hall
- The team circulated a **Renewables Toolkit for North-East Rural Communities**. You can find this in the SHARED Google Drive at :  
[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1DKmUHCnncP2sXwpRgrQUjfAnh-g09oxR/edit?usp=drive\\_link&oid=114434655082367356428&rtpof=true&sd=true](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1DKmUHCnncP2sXwpRgrQUjfAnh-g09oxR/edit?usp=drive_link&oid=114434655082367356428&rtpof=true&sd=true)

### Current Projects

The Climate Team are busy working on the next **NCC Climate Action Plan 2023 - 2026**, which will be published in early spring 2024.

They also intend to launch the new **NCC Climate Website** at the same time. They will do a soft launch beforehand, to catch any wrinkles that need smoothing out. It will be shared through the Climate Champions network (and wider key stakeholders) to collect feedback and comments.

## Surface Water Flooding Guidance from the Climate Change Team



### Managing surface water flooding

Heavy rainfall can lead to surface water flooding, overwhelming drainage systems. We can help reduce the risk of surface water flooding in different ways. For example:

- **Land managers:** Enhance tree coverage, slow the flow of water through leaky dams, practice agricultural land management, and support peatland

restoration. Noteworthy efforts include [The Northumberland Peat Partnership](#).

- **Property owners:** Install flood resilience measures like flood doors, barriers, valves, and pumps. Explore resources like the [Flood Resilient Garden guide](#) and check flood risk on [GOV.UK](#).
- **Sustainable practices:** Use water butts, rain gardens, green roofs, and permeable paving to ease drainage system strain. Water butts also store water for dry periods.

**Tree planting:** Can increase water infiltration into the soil. The Council's Free Trees initiative aids residents in planting trees. [The Great Northumberland Forest](#) can help communities, landowners and agents to develop tree planting and woodland creation projects and provide free support from an initial plan or idea, through to delivery on the ground. Further Resources can be found at the [Flood Hub](#).

## Reducing Emissions on Northumberland Farms



### Workshops for Farmers

The Climate Change Team is working with the Rural Design Centre and Newcastle University, with support the NFU to run three workshops, all held at [Cockle Park Farm](#), to understand the specific climate challenges facing farms in the county. The events are aimed at farmers and explore how to begin looking at solutions to support change.

There will be guest experts to support the sessions, facilitated exercises to ensure the focus is relevant for your farm, and practical solutions designed with deliverability in mind.

The first session will also include a farm tour to see more of what Newcastle University Farms are trialling, and a chance to ask questions of the farm manager.

All sessions will include lunch and refreshments, and we can reimburse your travel expenses.

The workshops will be run on:

January 18th - 10am - 2pm

February 8th - 10am - 2pm

March 7th - 10am - 2pm

We strongly advice that you try to attend all sessions, as the process has been designed to work through a series of exercises to deliver practical solutions.

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## Book Reviews

### Here Comes Everybody – How change happens when people come together – Clay Shirky

**[Penguin 2008]** Readable and relevant. Shirky explores the effect of the Internet on modern group dynamics and organisation. The author considers examples such as Wikipedia and other social media apps in his analysis. According to Shirky, the book is about "*What happens when people are given the tools to do things together, without needing traditional organisational structures.*" Written in 2008 it is prescient about how communities and groups will come together to instigate change. Shirky has never believed that technology is an end to itself; rather it is our use of technology that matters. "*For the first time, we have the tools to make group action truly a reality. And they are going to change the world.*"

### Soil - The incredible story of what keeps the earth, and us, healthy - Mathew Evans

**[Murdoch Books 2021]** Setting out the links between human health, plant health and soil health, this book illustrates the importance of what's beneath our feet to humanity's future wellbeing. Beginning with the astonishing microbial world of soil, Matthew Evans highlights the damage done by



our use of chemicals, by over grazing and by over ploughing. The consequences include the loss of soil through erosion and the declining nutritional value of our food. But there is hope - by working with nature and not against it - it is possible to produce more and better food - and to fight climate change by using the soil as an effective carbon sink. Matthew Evans is passionate about soil and wants everyone to stop taking it for granted. This is a timely, fascinating, and informative read about a subject that affects us all.

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## Online Articles & Websites

### Northumbrian Water Customers Could Get Payouts if New Legal Claims Succeed.

Spotted on Martin Lewis's Money Saving Expert website in December 2023. Read more here:

<https://www.moneysavingexpert.com/news/2023/12/anglian-yorkshire-northumbrian-severn-trent-united-utilities-wat/>

### The State of Our Rivers

England has an incredible natural river heritage. Our country is home to 85% of the world's chalk streams—some of the most ecologically rare habitats on the planet. Rivers provide two thirds of our water supplies, give us sanctuary and adventure, plus they support a huge variety of wildlife. The public recognise our rivers as the national treasures they are—yet *none* of our rivers are in good overall health. They *all* fail chemical standards, and just 14% pass the bar for good ecological health. This has huge implications for nature and for all of us.

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/collections/6730f10b64184200b171a57750890643>

### GO Local Food

This is a community-run co-operative, based in Northumberland's beautiful Tyne Valley, growing a wide range of amazing vegetables all year round. It is entirely volunteer run and produces and distributes good quality local, seasonal produce, whilst looking after the environment. This alternative model of food production, importantly, also restores the connection between local people and the food they eat and feed their families, creating a food community! Becoming a member not only means you will be supporting the development of the co-operative, but you also have opportunities to join in!

<https://golocalfood.org.uk/>

### Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Becomes Law in January 2024

New mandatory biodiversity net gain (BNG) requirements are due to come into force from January 2024, making a BNG of 10% a mandatory condition of planning permission. Biodiversity net gain (BNG) is an approach to development, and/or land management, that aims to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was beforehand. The website below explains the implications for local authorities when considering planning applications from both large developments and small residential projects. <https://www.local.gov.uk/pas/topics/environment/biodiversity-net-gain-local-authorities/biodiversity-net-gain-faqs>

### How a Community Learned to Go Zero Waste

A pioneering city scheme is putting France's ambitious waste-reduction policies into practice.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/dec/07/its-kind-of-gross-but-we-can-do-it-how-a-community-learned-to-go-zero-waste>

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A huge thank you ALL contributors to this month's Digest.

You know who you are, and your efforts made pulling this edition together so much easier.