



NGH Community Event July 20th, 2024

NOTES

What's New in NGH

Liz outlined a new Resources area of the website which will replace the need for members to use Google Drive. There are areas for each of the Special Interest Groups, as well as pages covering local groups, funding, How To Guides, previous editions of the Digest and details of previous NGH events.

A Useful Contacts page is being developed and members were asked to send in ideas for other content they would find useful.

At present only the Biodiversity and Water Quality SIG pages have content – other groups are invited to send material or ideas into the Steering Group.

Lesley then described some of the publicity and outreach work that has been done since the last meeting. These have included an item in the Northumberland Gazette which generated 10 new members taking overall numbers to around 95, and the design of a new event poster currently used with online media, which may be printed in the future for publicity purposes.

Successful networking had taken place with Helen Andrews, Community Connector from Thriving Together Northumberland [part of the CAB] who had made many helpful introductions, and with Michelle Redfern NCC Northumberland Communities Together Locality Coordinator for Cramlington, Seaton Valley and Bedlington. Lesley and Liz will shortly be having an online meeting with East Lothian Climate Action Network [ELCAN] to share our work and look at ways in which both networks might collaborate in future.

Lesley had participated in the NCC Climate Change Champions Team online meeting at the end of May, led by Heather Carlisle, the Partnerships and Engagement Project Officer for the Climate Change Team. The purpose had been to review the progress and explore the future direction of the Climate Change Champions scheme. A useful connection had been formed with CANN (Climate Action Northumberland Network) led by Peter and Pat Fuller who attended today's meeting. The Climate Champions gave feedback to NCC, and an updated iteration of the purpose and objectives of scheme from NCC is pending.

Members Projects – Session 1

The Tipping Point Game – Terry Smith (Alnwick FoE)

Terry described the Tipping Point game he has developed, which is intended to introduce and encourage people of all ages, but especially young people, to think about some of the challenges, and dilemmas around climate change. The game was developed in conjunction with the Duchess High School and works best with the involvement of a facilitator. Terry has now received funding from Friends of the Earth to make more copies of the game.

The game increases awareness of climate change and ecological collapse, promotes discussion about climate and ecological challenges and helps participants think of realistic solutions. Terry's intention was to move the dial away from doom and gloom and introduce the message that small incremental actions count towards major change. The game emphasises that small positive changes create tipping points both for climate action and social engagement. It is intended to promote fun teamwork on an urgent issue.

Rebuilding a Bus Service – Carolyn Letts (Swarland and Newton Action on Climate)

Carolyn outlined why re-establishing a bus service was one of SNAC's priorities when it was formed in early 2022. The project consisted of carrying out a survey of residents to provide evidence of need and then engaging with officers from NCC. The timing was good as temporary funding in the form of the Bus Service Improvement Plan was available – but the project still took much longer than expected with delays in the receipt of government funding and a lack of response from possible service providers.

However, a Saturday service finally began in Easter this year and has been very successful. It provides 3 services on Saturdays running between Alnwick and Morpeth and calling at Felton, Swarland and Newton on the Moor. There have been several unexpected benefits – it's not only people in the villages who use the service but people in Alnwick and Morpeth, it provides social value especially for people who may not be able to drive - and the job opportunity it has provided to Dave the driver who was due to retire but loves the route! All on top of a slightly reduced number of car journeys from the parish.

It's hoped that positive noises from the new government and from the new mayor for the Northeast Combined Authority will mean that the service will continue to be funded – and grow.

Rural Transport – Steven Morrison Cairns

Steven is part of the [Rural Catalyst and Rural Design Centre at Newcastle University](#) and works in the areas of rural transport supply chains and food security. He recently attended a conference that brought together 25 representatives from a number of organisations and groups, including [Wheels to Work](#), the [North East Passenger Transport Users Group](#), [Connected Places Catapult](#), [The Glendale Gateway Trust](#) and [Cycle with Jan](#) - all with an interest in rural transport issues. The aim was to conduct a 3-hour focused 'design sprint' from which 2 potential project ideas emerged. It's hoped that these ideas will be taken forward under the auspices of the Northeast Combined Authority.

Rothbury CAN Groups and the Monitoring Lichen Project – Katie Scott (Rothbury CAN)

Katie outlined the various groups which fall under the umbrella of Rothbury CAN. These include – a Rothbury Rubbish Friends, a litter picking group, Rothbury Tree Wardens, Coquetdale Repair Café, a Coquetdale River Action Group (CRAG) a transport group, a Low Energy Housing group, ROWANS, a Hedgehog group and most recently Rothbury Lichen Group looking at the identification and monitoring of lichens.

Rothbury CAN puts on regular events in Rothbury and their third annual [Great Big Green Event](#) will be on Saturday Sept 14th at the Jubilee Hall with both selling and information stalls. The event includes a screening of the film 'Six Inches of Soil' on the Friday 13th night at 7pm in the Jubilee Hall, followed by a discussion with local organic farmer and NGH member, Judy Fortescue, and Walter Riddell owner of [Hepple Wilds](#), a family-owned estate putting ecological renewal at the heart of its long-term plan. The discussion will be chaired by Mike Pratt, of the Northumberland Wildlife Trust,

The new lichen group have had support from the British Lichen Society who have arranged a 'walk and talk' session as an introduction to the subject. They are happy to help set up other groups if people are interested. Find out more from the website: www.rothburycan.org.

The Strawbale House and Other Projects (Angela Davis, Amble Women's Workshop)

The Women's Workshop is running several projects including an Outdoor Kitchen teaching women to how grow their own food, reduce food waste and save money. A seasonal growing calendar has also been produced which incorporates sowing and harvesting times which includes the festivals and celebrations linked with the seasons.

More than 35 women have been involved in the Strawbale Build to date, learning skills including, dressing straw, woodworking, lime-plastering and fitting recycled windows. Work will start shortly on the plastering of the inside and internal lighting, the creation of a green roof, and the installation of a

wheelchair access ramp.

The Kitchen Garden is to be expanded with the inclusion of a clay oven and funding has been secured for the creation of a Sensory Garden.

One of the attendees of the workshop, and an NGH member, spoke about how important the project is for women, providing a safe environment to talk about both the external and internal environments, for supporting people with anxiety about climate change and for promoting new connections and learning practical skills.

Members Projects – Session 2

Rewilding Fen Letch – David Booth

David described how he and his wife Gillian bought the 35 acres site of Fen Letch approximately 20 years ago. The site was originally part of 135 acres of a ‘restored’ open cast mine near Widdrington, but the ground was left in a poor state. Since then, David and Gillian have planted thousands of trees and created paths, ponds and wetland spaces. As if by magic the area has come back to life and the site has been transformed. David remarked how a wide range of plant species have emerged without them planting them.

David and Gill are part of [Wilder Northumberland](#), a network for people who are involved in similar projects.

They have also found a company who will recycle plastic tree guards – of which they have a lot. Whilst there is a public footpath through part of the site, David and Gillian offered to provide a tour for members – and there are also opportunities for volunteers to get involved in tree guard removal! To contact Gillian and David visit their [Facebook page](#) from which you can Message them directly or send Gillian an email.

Trees for Climate Mitigation and Carbon Capture – Joel Arnstein (Greener Berwick)

Joel spoke about his long-standing passion for trees and the benefits they bring. Joel still looks after a 58-hectare woodland in Kent, and showed several photographs of how he has managed the site, including coppicing some areas.

Joel brought a selection of books from his ‘tree library’ for people to see and is currently writing a series of pamphlets about various aspects of trees. Members can get in touch directly with Joel to receive a copy. joelartist9@gmail.com

Brinkburn & Hesleyhurst Parish Council Biodiversity Projects - Judith Baker (B&H PC)

Judith described the geography and location of the parish, which is bisected by the River Coquet. The PC have established several biodiversity projects, including a nest box scheme for redstarts, pied flycatchers and nuthatches. There is a verge meadow scheme which is identifying areas for wildflowers and working with farmers and NCC. They have run a hedge-laying course to train people to be able to manage local hedgerows and are also carrying out water quality testing as part of the Coquet River Action Group [CRAG].

Judith is particularly involved with carrying out habitat surveys, so that the group has a baseline to work from and can be confident that they are doing the right thing in the right place. They are using an established methodology and using GIS software to map the results. The hope is that farmers and landowners will also use the results in their decision making, for example looking at opportunities to connect habitats.

Northumberland Wildlife Trust – Natasha Hemsley

Natasha is a member of NGH and is also a recently appointed Community Officer for the Trust, based at Hauxley Discovery Centre. Her role is to work with local communities to reduce barriers to nature and improve biodiversity in the Druridge area. The post is funded for 18 months, and Natasha also has two trainees working with her.

Natasha explained that she can support groups in a variety of ways, including advice about governance and funding.

Her colleague Graham Holyoak is also involved in the Wilder Northumberland Network. The Wilder Druridge project is also looking at supporting five specific species as part of a Big Lottery Bid.

Climate Action Network Northumberland – Peter Fuller

CANN was originally formed to petition NCC to declare a climate emergency. They are now one of five community representatives on the NCC Climate Action Steering Group. The group acts as a critical friend to NCC and relies on feedback from communities and groups.

Peter encouraged NGH members to send any feedback or issues via the [CANN Facebook](#) page or by email.

Going Forwards

After thanking the speakers, Liz reminded everyone that NGH will have been established for a year in September. A lot has been achieved in that time, and the Steering Group would like to use the anniversary to take stock and seek feedback from members. This will be an opportunity to review the NGH objectives, look at what works well and what could work better. It will also be an opportunity to look at the structure of NGH and roles within the Steering Group.

The plan is to use some time at the October event to do this, but there will be other opportunities to get involved in the review process for those who aren't able to attend. The Steering Group also welcomes feedback at any time or ideas for future events.

Dates for your Diary

- The next Community Event is Saturday October 19th at 9.30 for a 10.00 start.
- Christmas Social Event – Saturday December 7th.