

Natural Neighbours

Norfolk's first community biodiversity conference



Held on Saturday March 7th, Kings Centre, Norwich. 9.30am – 4.15pm

Post-Conference Report



This event was organised by BTCV on behalf of the Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership and funded by Norfolk County Council, Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership, South Norfolk Council, Norwich City Council, the Brigadier & Mrs Phelps Charitable Settlement, The Courtyard Farm Trust, The Paul Bassham Charitable Trust.



1. Introduction

The idea for 'Natural Neighbours' arose from discussions within the Communities & Nature Group about implementing the Communications Action Plan.

The primary objective of the conference was to provide a way to celebrate and recognise community groups' environmental achievements and the contribution that they are making to the biodiversity agenda for Norfolk, with a secondary aim of attracting media attention and helping bring the priorities and targets to a wider audience and encourage them to take appropriate actions in their locality.

It was hoped that this would lead to a better informed and strengthened community biodiversity sector in the county that is networked, resourced and engaged with the BAP process.

The Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership (and in particular, the Communities and Nature Topic Group) was able to find out what is being done "out there", to add to the network list and find out what other needs there are in this sector. The conference also allowed us to discover if there is support for the organisation of an annual conference of this kind and the production of a directory of groups and projects.

2. Publicity

Generally, the main promotion tool – targeted emailed fliers and invitations, syndicated articles in infrastructure organisations newsletters - was very effective. The Natural Neighbours branding worked well. We would have needed many more posters to send to every library and could have done with an advertising budget for paid for ads in county magazines and newsletters.

What was done:

- Fliers/invitations to Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership, BTCV community group network and Norfolk Biodiversity Award event delegates Norwich City LSP Environment Round Table, all WAN delegates and other contacts except Local Authorities.
- Syndicated article in Norfolk Social Enterprise, North Norfolk, NRCC and NALC newsletters
- Posters sent to all main county libraries
- Fliers to all Parish Councils
- Press release (EDP, BBC Look East, Radio Norfolk etc)
- Invitations to MPs and VIPs
- Postal invitations to non-email BTCV groups with follow up emails to BTCV network
- Photos at conference – workshop activities, display stands speakers

3. Programme



From the feedback, the blend of presentations, workshops and time to network was about right. People always ask for more time to network but won't attend a longer event. The choice of topics was appropriate, albeit with perhaps too great an accent on the funding aspect. The desired, friendly, informal tone of the conference was achieved.

We failed to get a "celebrity" keynote speaker which would have enhanced the event. The most popular presentations were, as anticipated, the "Our Project" contributors who were, by general agreement, really inspiring. They had been given a specific brief which they kept to by and large. Having a short slot each was an advantage. It encouraged reticent speakers, avoided too much detail and left the audience wanting more. Lord Peter Melchett's presentation was also popular and entertaining as well as informative.

Generally the workshop leaders worked very hard in advance to cover a wide range of issues within their topics and the feedback was very positive.



4. Workshops

Delegates were offered a choice of six workshop topics. We chose the most popular and because of the spread of choices, almost everyone got their first and second choice. This meant running three topics on both morning and afternoon slots and two topics just once. Another time the churchyard workshop would be a good way to engage Parochial Parish Councils as well as Parish Councils.

Here are the main issues covered in the workshops:

‘Funding’: Janice Howell (Norfolk Rural Community Council)

- How to choose the right grant/scheme for your project
- Understanding the procedures
- What makes for a successful application?
- Ensuring your project meets the required criteria
- Making the most of your finances
- Where and how to find further help and assistance



‘Volunteers’: Andrew Morter & Nina DuFeu (Voluntary Norfolk)

- Recognising the qualities needed by your volunteers
- Understanding people’s motivations for volunteering
- What to consider when writing a volunteer policy
- How to avoid writing a contract when writing a volunteer policy
- The role of a Volunteer Co-ordinator
- Where to find further help and assistance
- Where to advertise for your volunteers

‘Stock Taking’: Ellen Walford (BTO) & Gemma Walker (NWT)

- Why surveying is so important
- What is a wildlife record?
- Sharing information with other wildlife groups
- What are the main types of wildlife surveys?
- What resources are needed to help surveying?



‘Shouting About it’: Richard Fair (BBC)

- The importance of advertising
- Introduction to different methods of publicity
- How to write an effective press release
- Building relationships with journalists
- Designing effective fliers/posters/letters etc

‘Pond Problems’: Helen Sibley (Thornham Countryside)

- Importance of ponds for biodiversity
- Caring for your pond – Do’s & Dont’s

- Surveying the wildlife in your pond
- Algae prevention – what to/to not use

5. Attendance

There were 90 delegates, including volunteers and speakers, 29 community groups were represented and there were 16 exhibitors. We were delighted with this response to this first event of its kind in Norfolk.

We had to turn down exhibitors as there was limited space. There was a very low no show rate in spite of the conference requiring no booking fee. We would have liked more delegates from Parish Councils but this needs very targeted promotion on parish councillors with environmental interests – knowledge we did not have.

We invited all Norfolk MPs and received apologies and good wishes from most but Dr Ian Gibson MP attended. We also invited the CEOs and appropriate Cabinet Member/Portfolio holder Councillors from both County and City Council, but none attended. We were advised that no press would attend as it wasn't a newsworthy event.

6. Finance

The conference costs of **£5,500** were met as follows:

Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership - £4000

This included contributions from:

- Norfolk County Council
- Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership
- South Norfolk Council
- Norwich City Council

BTCV fundraising - £1500

This included contributions from:

- The Paul Bassham Charitable Trust **£500**
- The Courtyard Farm Trust **£500**
- Brigadier & Mrs Phelps Charitable Settlement **£500**



A temporary project assistant and conference organiser time were included in this costing. BTCV also donated at least 28 staff hours and 38 volunteer hours staff time to set up and help run the day.

None of the speakers or workshop leaders charged a fee for the event, and most did not ask to have expenses covered. Their contribution made this event successful and the organisers would like to acknowledge their generosity.



7. Evaluation of Feedback

Venue:

91% found the location easily

94% found the conference venue satisfactory

97% thought the lunch arrangements satisfactory

Comments: fantastic, no lift to lower ground floor, lack of associated parking, more veggie less meat

Organisation:

97% thought the prior organisation was satisfactory

100% thought the organisation on the day was satisfactory

100% Found the information market useful
92% found the pace about right, [8% too fast]
81% said the event met their needs fully [19% partly]

Comments on content/presentation of conference

Generally very **positive** (e.g. very informative, relevant, interesting, inspiring) There were several mentions of the friendly atmosphere and the friendly and helpful staff and volunteers.

A few **negative**: Not enough time allowed for certain presentations, more on local projects (have less presenters); too much on funding; more time needed for networking; too long spent on introduction; more relevant speakers needed (e.g. RSPB, NWT, Norfolk Records Office); some felt it was event was a little rushed at times.

Likes: Meeting others with similar interests; hearing successes; hearing from local groups; excellent workshops; liked open discussion in certain workshops; Lord Melchett very entertaining and informative; friendly hosts; courteous volunteers; variety of speakers/organisations

Dislikes: Parking arrangements/info could be better; microphone system/projector could have been better; lack of lift to lower floor for disabled people; not enough time for Q&A;

Similar event next year? Yes: 36 (100% of returned forms) **No**: 0

Possible topics: River life; compost making; interpretation boards; small scale funding

Other comments: Change of location (e.g. West Norfolk, or at local community sites); more local groups speaking; some support for biennial rather than annual; some would be happy to pay optional fee to help with costs; asking attendees in advance what they would like to see covered.



Communicating with other community groups

Number of people who would like to see...

New Website: **10**

More pages on existing website: **9**

Email Group: **8**

Online discussion forum: **9**

Contact directory: **21**

None: **0**

8. Recommendations

In summary, Natural Neighbours was very successful, and this is best demonstrated by a 100 percent response (from those who gave feedback) in favour of having an annual event of a similar nature, albeit with different topics (such as river life or compost making) covered and featuring different speakers. A good suggestion was asking potential delegates for topic ideas in advance.

Based upon analysis of the evaluation feedback received, there are some recommendations to be made if the event was to take place again. Whilst the response was overwhelmingly positive, there were some issues with certain aspects of the day. Some people commented that whilst Natural Neighbours was a day for community groups, there were not enough actual presentations from community groups themselves. There was an almost unanimous consensus that the 'Our Project' presentations were the highlight of the day, and more time should have been devoted to these groups – particularly at the expense of the funding presentations, which many felt were too long (though very useful).



Another recommendation is some form of increased communication between community groups. All delegates wanted to see new channels of communication and singled out a new contact directory where groups can locate other groups by type (e.g. woodland, marshland or pond), closely followed by an email group. There were also some calls for a new website containing an online discussion forum which could be worth exploring.

Marya Parker, March 2009

All photographs by Philip Haynes Photography

Appendix 1 Delegates:

Name	Surname	Group/Organisation
Brian	Abbs	Pigney's Wood
Joaquim	Aleluia	Brooke Place Residents Association
Sara	Atchoarena	Draituna Trees
Pat	Chester-Kadwell	Draituna Trees
Leanne	Cobb	BTCV Community Network
Margaret	Cobbold	Veolia Environmental Trust
Steve	Cook	Norfolk Environmental Weekenders
Oliver	Corri	BTCV
Jane	Cort	Wild About Colby
Peter	Croot	Pigneys Wood
Steve	Dalliston	Wensum Valley Trust
Matt	Davies	Norwich Fringe Project
Jackie	Donovan	Magic Garden Project
John	Dowland	South Repps Commons Trust
Nina	DuFeu	Voluntary Norfolk
Chris	England	WNVCA
Mark	Evans	BTCV Volunteer
Michelle	Fielden	Norwich Bat group
Angela	Faherty	Boughton Fen
Richard	Fair	BBC
Geoff	Fletcher	Fakenham Area Conservation Team
Peter	Francis	Kenninghall Lands Trust
Dr Ian	Gibson	MP
Lucie	Glenday	BIG Lottery Fund
Catherine	Greenhough	Norwich Bat Group
Norman	Groves	Kenninghall Lands Trust
Phillip	Hardy	Green Party
Edward	Hickman	BIG Lottery Fund
Phillipa	Hinge	BTCV Volunteer
Paul	Holley	Norwich City Council
Martin	Horlock	Norfolk Biodiversity Information Service
John	Houlgate	South Repps Commons Trust
Liz	Howarth	BTCV Volunteer
Janice	Howell	Norfolk Rural Community Council
Eunice	Hoyles	Brooke Place Residents Association

Paula	Hughes	Norwich Fringe Project
Elizabeth	Jackson	Stalham Town Council
Dilys	Jones	Gardens for Wildlife
Peter	Kaye	Pigney's Wood
Bob	Kerry	Bergh Apton Conservation Trust
Lorie	Lain-Rogers	Bergh Apton Conservation Trust
Reg	Langston	Little Ouse Headwaters Project
Karen	Lee	WNVCA
Dave	Leech	NNNS
Heather	Longman	Thurlton Parish Council
Adam	Loveday	BTCV Volunteer
John	Mann	Tasburgh Parish Council
Katie	Manning	Pigney's Wood
Alan	Marchant	BTCV
Alex	Marchant	BTCV
Andy	Marczewski	Yaxham Woodland Group
Lord	Melchett	Soil Association
Peter		
Barry	Mobbs	Canopy Community Woodland Group
Richard	Morrish	Hardings Pit Community Association
Andrew	Morter	Voluntary Norfolk
Debbie	Murray	BTCV
David	North	Norfolk Wildlife Trust
Marya	Parker	BTCV
Scott	Perkin	Norfolk Biodiversity Partnership
Mark	Pogmore	Boughton Fen
Rupert	Read	Green Party
Philip	Rees	Draituna Trees
Robin	Richardson	Suffolk County Council
Helene	Rinaldo	Every Action Counts Community Champion
Kate	Risley	British Trust for Ornithology
Ann	Roberts	Wymondham Nature Group
David	Ross	Pigney's Wood
Valerie	Sabberton	Draituna Trees
Kate	Scotter	Eastern Daily Press
Mark	Shopland	Friends of the Rosary
Helene	Sibley	Thornham Walks Countryside Officer
Edward	Simmons	Independent
Denver	Slowther	BTCV
David	Spencer	South Repps Commons Trust
Judith	Spicker	Draituna Trees
Teresa	Stevens	Saxlingham Parish
Trevor	Stevens	Saxlingham Parish
Michael	Sutton-Croft	Norfolk Non-Native Species Initiative
Tom	Tomkinson	Brooke Place Residents association
Mr. R.	Townsin	Kettlestone Parish Council
Simone	Trim	Magic Garden Project
Roger	Turff	Hardings Pit Community Association
Ellen	Walford	British Trust for Ornithology
Julie	Walls	Gardens for Wildlife
Gemma	Walker	Norfolk Wildlife Trust
Mark	Webster	BTCV
Susie	White	Educational Centres Association
Lucy	Whittle	Kenninghall Lands Trust
Belle	Wiley	'If Not Now When' Community Woodland
Beth	Williams	Broads Authority
Vivien	Williamson	Wild About Colby

Appendix 2 The Programme

9.30am	Coffee & registration	
10.00	Welcome & Aims of the Day, Keynote: Why bother?	Marya Parker
10.15	BIG Lottery Funding	Ed Hickman & Lucie Glenday
10.40	Coffee	
11.00	Our Project – presentations from community groups: 1. Friends of Rosary Cemetery 2. Norfolk Environmental Weekenders 3. Bergh Apton Conservation Group 4. North Norfolk Community Woodland Trust- Pigney's Wood 5. Kenninghall Lands Trust	Mark Shopland Steve Cook Bob Kerr Peter Croot & Peter Kaye Lucy Whittle & Norman Groves
12.00pm	Workshop* session 1	
1.00	Lunch & information market	
2.15	Workshop* Session 2	
3.15	“Organic growing and biodiversity”	Lord Peter Melchett
3.45	Grants for your project: 1. Norfolk County Council 2. Veolia Environmental Trust-	Scott Perkin Margaret Cobbold
4.00	Summing Up and Next Steps	Marya Parker
4.15	Close	
<p>* Workshop topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding: current schemes and what makes a really good application [red] both am & pm • Stock taking: why and how to survey wildlife on your patch [orange] both am & pm • Finding and keeping volunteers [green] both am and pm • Pond problems- bring your symptoms to the surgery [blue] am only • Shouting about it – publicising your project [yellow] pm only 		