

Reimagining the Levels: Trees for Somerset – Trees for your Parish Conference 2nd August 2019

Summary:

A hugely successful day with **53 interested attendees** at Walton Village Hall on a sunny Friday. Guest speaker Stephen Moss entertained by succinctly identifying the necessity of planting more trees on the Levels and its catchments to increase bio-diversity, resilience to climate change and well-being with examples from his extensive experience.

Paul Sander-Jackson announced the launch of the **Somerset Tree Planting Fund**, (details on a separate blog post) and Phil Stone presented his ideas on drafting a **Tree Planting policy for Parish Councils** to adopt which were developed by groups in the afternoon.

People were asked to commit to **ACTION** on the learning taken from the day and we look forward to accounts of tree planting taking place in our local parishes.

Throughout the day, attendees were refreshed by a copious amounts of locally produced food and drink all sourced from Somerset Local Food Direct

Tree Planting and Management Training days to be offered in September and October – watch this space.

Finally – it was noted that the name Reimagining the Level implied that the work of the organisation only applied to the actual area of the Somerset Levels and Moors – whereas we work on issues and projects for the Somerset Levels **and particularly its catchments** – in other words the whole county of Somerset!

Paul Sander-Jackson from Reimagining the Levels introduced the day.

Why we are here – to celebrate all things trees

Who we are: **Reimagining the Levels** – a small group of Somerset citizens dedicated to a long term and ecologically based approach to the challenges of a fragile landscape; and to the threats posed to that landscape and us all by climate change and human activities – and inactivities.

Remind ourselves of our present situation – here in Somerset – in relations to trees:

- Low level of tree cover – 6 to 7 % against national average – also low – of 12%
- The continuing legacy of Dutch Elm disease
- The threat of Ash dieback and massive loss of tree cover

Why trees are so important – a few of the many many reasons that we need trees:

- They absorb carbon dioxide and produce oxygen – our critical allies in the climate emergency and fight for clean air
- They help reduce the impacts of flooding – by reducing runoff and helping water percolate through the soil
- They create habitat and food for numerous species of wildlife
- They provide us with fruit, nuts, timber and firewood
- They teach us about longevity – and thinking about the future. We enjoy the legacy of natural and planted trees from centuries past

And of course I could spend the rest of the day going onbut I won't!

Why parish and town councils as focus?

Because they are in intimate touch with the local community and the local environment; they know where trees can be planted, and who can plant them.

What we are hoping people will get from the day

- Hearing about **recent local tree planting** schemes
- Hearing about **support** that is available to undertake tree planting projects in your communities

- Hearing about an exciting new development **in funding** tree planting in Somerset
- Jointly working on a **tree policy** which could be adopted by each parish and town council in the county
- A **wonderful lunch** sourced from Somerset growers and food producers cooked with loving devotion by Carrie and Sarah and biscuits from Kim

And, above all, a sense of how tree planting led by the local community can bring people together, involve people of all ages, and empower people so that they can do something practical and positive - in the face of the major problems and threats which our living environment, and we as its occupants, are facing

From Chekhov's play – Uncle Vanya – showing the long view (it was written 120 years ago) http://www.monologuearchive.com/c/chekhov_007.html

Keynote from Stephen Moss

Stephen is President of Somerset Wildlife Trust and a writer and teacher who lives in the heart of the Somerset Levels.

<https://www.stephenmoss.tv/>

New Tree Planting Fund for Somerset

This was announced and is now live. People can give money to support local community led tree planting schemes in Somerset. Once funds are raised money can be applied for directly by legally constituted groups with relevant objectives or accessed in partnership with Reimagining the Levels. Details of how to apply will be posted on the Reimagining the Levels website:

<http://reimaginingthelevels.org.uk/>

Link to tree planting fund page:

- [**Somerset Community Foundation**](#)

Four examples of community led tree planting

Posters of four different projects undertaken last winter planting season were on display in the hall, and a session was held where people met individuals who had led these projects.

The four projects were:

- Wedmore Lime Avenue
- Baltonsborough Community Orchard
- Plotgate CSA, Barton St David
- Land by River Sheppey, Godney

These posters will be on display on the Reimagining the Levels website

A Somerset Lunch

Before lunch Sarah Sander-Jackson explained that Reimagining the Levels have decided to provide lunch themselves for their conferences. This is so that we can support local farmers and producers in Somerset who care for our local land as part of their daily life. All the food provided was freshly delivered by Somerset Local Food Direct.

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

The lunch was prepared by Carrie Skinner and Sarah. Thank you to volunteers who helped.

After lunch one group planted six trees on the edge of Walton Playing Field, and another group visited the studio of local woodcarver Charles Oldham

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

Developing a Tree Policy for Town and Parish Councils

A draft tree policy had been circulated and was discussed at the event. All feedback, together with a document produced by the network of Tree Wardens in South Somerset, will be discussed and a revised specimen document will be circulated in the first week in September.

The link to the original draft policy is here:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/rpra41vjexoep4u/Draft%20tree%20policy%20for%20a%20parish%20or%20town%20council%201.1.docx?dl=0>

Initial summary of feedback:

Turn negatives into positives (why do it rather than why not)

Make the main policy brief (it's too long)

Needs an action plan – could it be part of the parish plan?

Tree warden role – can work – is variable in practice

The following is a suggested statement of intent/resolution by the Town/Parish Council:

This council –

- Accepts there is an urgent need to plant more trees
- Agrees to do all it can to encourage tree planting in the town / parish on its land where possible – and elsewhere
- Commits to work with other organisations – both government and non-government – to promote new tree projects

Community woodlands and orchards. Phil Stone – Parish Councillor, North Curry; and District Councillor, Somerset West and Taunton Council

(Pictures which illustrated this talk are available on this link and will be posted on the Reimagining the Levels website)

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/adq0n1h5d8wpdqx/Trees%20for%20Somerset%20PPT.pptx?dl=0>

- One of Reimagining the Levels's visions is for 'Every Village and Town to have a community woodland and/or community orchard'.**
- Finding a suitable site can be the most difficult thing.
- A site needs to be easily walk-able from the edge of the main residential area, less than a quarter of a mile if possible. An area of between a half an acre and 5 acres, depending on the size of the village or Town and what the community can manage.
- Parish Councillors often have good contacts, know who owns what land and can sometimes appeal to landowners to donate a suitable site or sell it at a reduced rate. The idea of providing a woodland for their local community could appeal to some landowners.
- If an existing wood can become a community woodland then this provides an instant environment for people to enjoy, manage and celebrate. Some could provide an immediate income from thinning, coppicing etc.
- Once you have a site, then planning ahead, getting advice and building support in the community are essential. Planting of a new woodland is an ideal way to involve volunteers and all the family can be involved if the event is well organised. Maintenance of the trees in the first year is particularly important as this is when the trees are most vulnerable to dry weather, vandalism etc.
- An ongoing small group of volunteers is needed so that the community is involved and the work does not fall on the shoulders of just one or two people.
- A plan for management should be put in place. The woodland can be a place to build features which provide interest and educational value to the site and opportunity for

events through the year. Possible features include ponds, seating, picnic area, bird boxes, bug hotels, sculpture and willow arches or tunnels.

- Community orchards are particularly suited to be a location for events such as wassailing, apple day, apple picking and making fruit products.

SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITY LED TREE PLANTING PROJECTS

Phil Stone and Paul Sander-Jackson outlined some of the support which was available to groups wanting to undertake community led tree planting:

Advice:

Reimagining the Levels: <http://reimaginingthelevels.org.uk/>

Woodland Trust: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees/advice/>

Finance and provision of trees:

Woodland Trust <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees/free-trees/>

Urban tree grants – for communities of more than 2000 people. (Note: this scheme is now closed but an application that covers much of Somerset has been submitted)

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/urban-tree-challenge-fund>

Forestry Commission - for planting on farmland of areas more than 3 hectares (or more than 1 hectare in exceptional locations)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/woodland-creation-grant-countryside-stewardship>

Reimagining the Levels – we can contribute locally matched funds and for some schemes introduce free trees from a partner. Contact Phil Stone or Paul Sander-Jackson in the first instance:

phil.stone77@btinternet.com

paulsanderj@gmail.com

Donations towards community led tree planting in Somerset

New RTL fund – this is being launched 2/8/19 and grants will be dependent on donations

into the fund. Donations can be made through this link: <https://cafdonate.cafonline.org/10704>

Visits and Training – advanced booking required.

RTL is co-ordinating an open afternoon of recent community tree planting schemes on **14th September 2019**. Please see RTL website for details.

RTL will also be running a training for community tree planting project leaders on **November 15th 2019**. Please see RTL website for details.

Pledges

We ended the event with asking for pledges for future action on tree planting from those attending. This is the exciting and very reassuring outcome of that request:

- Going to plant 100 trees for my mother's 100th year.
- Help plant 4,500 saplings in Crewkerne
- Dig up saplings in Nephew's wood as it's over-crowded and replant elsewhere
- Become a tree warden for Chiselborough Parish Council
- Attend Parish Council meeting and relay about today's meeting
- Get the parish council to define what land they own / are responsible for
- Come to the training sessions
- Learn to spread the knowledge and help to plant trees
- Will organise the field off Upper Langford Lane to be planted with trees this winter
- Plant hedges around the edge of the allotments
- Lobby the parish council to develop a tree policy
- Offer my clients the option to make a donation to Somerset Community Foundation

- Be observant in our parish for possible planting sites and try to promote more standard trees along existing hedgerows
- Our Parish Council will produce a tree policy
- October meeting to form tree planting group
- Identify suitable tree planting sites
- An on-going commitment
- Continue to nurture my trees and possibly add to them
- Talk to most likely members of Godney Parish Council personally about planting more trees and council committing to climate action
- Form links with other people growing trees or thinking of it
- Pot up more of the self-seeded tree seedlings in our garden and try to find homes for them
- Take my existing local tree planting project in my parish and extend it. Use the parish councils in my ward to push for this. Don't be timid. Get the message across. Get people on board and plant trees.
- Try to get the local community to discuss, agree and write a tree policy and action plan (with review process) or part of review of Coleford parish plan.
- I will bring Brympton Parish Council to adopt a tree policy and an action plan
- Convene Baltonsborough Parish Council to develop a tree policy and have a tree warden
- I'm going to find out who are the landowners in the village. Then construct a proposition and go talk to them
- Become a tree warden
- Lobby Crewkerne to adopt a tree policy
- Guerrilla tree planting
- Keep promoting tree planting and woodland in ?? and Martock
- Acquire land for woodland.
- Plant on existing park to create a wooded area
- Find and appoint a tree warden
- Contact Woodland Trust for free trees and plant with school / community
- Explore the tree warden scheme with Tree Council
- More community planting
- Push our parish meeting into tree policy and planting
- Plant trees in garden
- Trees for my birthday from my kids and they plant them
- Collect 20 saplings
- Attend a parish meeting and share today's themes
- Develop a draft tree policy for consideration by Wells City Council with specific commitments for: tree wardens, tree charter, trees planted
- I'm planting 0.3 – 0.5 acres of trees on my plot and taking your suggestion to both parish councils adjacent
- Green Ilminster plans to plant one tree per person in 'Greater Ilminster' which equals about 7,000 trees by April 1 2020

The day ended with people taking saplings home to plant.....