

Feedback on the 'Opportunities for improving lives through environmental action' workshops and follow up discussions

Report by Andrew Cassy, ESP Board member and chair of the Greenprint Forum

1. Background

- 1.1 East Suffolk has an excellent, dynamic natural environment. An environment that we need to ensure stays at the forefront of people, business and organisation's minds, as it is critical to our collective prosperity. A need recognised in our Business Plan.
- 1.2 There has, over the years, been a positive investment in time and money into the natural capital of East Suffolk by the private, public and voluntary sectors working alone or in partnership together. We have seen installations of solar panels on the roofs of community buildings, local organisations and households, increased uptake of biomass boilers replacing oil or electricity as a source of heating, as well as communities and organisations gaining planning permission for renewable energy solutions. Measures which not only represent an investment in our natural capital but will help make our communities and businesses more sustainable over the long term.
- 1.3 We have empowered numerous volunteers and visitors to enjoy and look after our precious landscape and the wildlife that relies on it. One example is the Landguard Visitor Centre and the Landguard Partnership's engagement activities around the Nature Reserve. Another is the excellent work of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Unit in drawing in external investment into supporting appropriate tourism and a Coastal Warden and Beachwatch volunteer network. Then there is the vital work of: the Environment Agency, RSPB, Suffolk Wildlife Trust, Community Action Suffolk, Groundwork East of England, the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership, Sustainable Bungay, Wenhasston Energy Support Group, and many other organisations and community groups who are investing in adults' and children's skills to enhance, protect and make the most of this precious place; from growing, preparing and selling food, to creating Networks of Nature.
- 1.4 The Board's recognition that we need to celebrate these achievements and the understanding that this investment in time, materials and money needs to flex and grow to meet our needs and those of future generations informed two workshops and follow up discussions with key organisations.

2. Who has been involved in informing this report?

- BT
- Community Action Suffolk
- Community group representatives
- East Anglia Food Link Community Action Suffolk
- Environment Agency
- Greenprint Forum
- RSPB
- SBP

- SCCP
- Suffolk Coast and Heaths
- Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils
- Suffolk County Council
- SWT
- Wild Anglia

3. Key opportunities identified in East Suffolk

3.1 Reach new communities and support existing ones

The ESP could help to support and develop existing engagement work which is and has recently delivered for the community and the environment such as: Networking Nature, Beachwatch, Suffolk Coast and Heath's Coast and Estuary Wardens. The Greenprint Forum Community Environmental Action, Local Food Suffolk, and Groundwork Suffolk/SCCP/CAS community building energy audits; potentially through community led planning approaches.

3.2 Support beneficial tourism and growth

The ESP could utilise existing networks such as the Destination Management Organisation to ensure that tourism promotion and development fits an East Suffolk value and commission work to explore the feasibility of developing an all year round 'volun-tourism' and eco-tourism package for Suffolk.

3.3 Value our natural capital

Valuing natural capital ensures that natural resources are not judged solely by their contribution to profit margins, offering instead a means of measuring the influence they have on social wellbeing. As well as providing jobs and attracting tourism for the region, studies have demonstrated a positive correlation between access to natural spaces and improved mental health. The emphasis on the phrase 'natural capital' serves to highlight the idea that our resources are a finite commodity, but one that nonetheless has a fundamental role in economic and social prosperity. According to Professor Ian Bateman of the University of East Anglia, "policy-makers have a major role to play in realising the value of nature's services whilst protecting the environment". The key question we need to ask is "could spending be re-directed to both boost the economy and improve environmental sustainability?".

The ESP has an opportunity to seed fund work being led by Suffolk County Council, on behalf of Wild Anglia, to gain a sufficiently detailed East Coast perspective on the value of our natural capital in any work commissioned.

3.4 Explore the link between health and the environment

The link between physical and mental health has been clearly outlined in 'Whole-person care: from rhetoric to reality' (2013). As has the cost: overall, the economic and social costs of mental health problems were estimated at £105 billion in 2010 (Centre for Mental Health, 2010). Mental and physical ill health is, furthermore, an issue which touches all of us at some point in our lives. Now whole person care is recognised as complex, with lots of factors at play, but over the years various theories have emerged about how mental and physical health and the natural environment are linked. Children's ability to concentrate, socialise positively and be more self-disciplined has been associated with contact to nearby nature (poor discipline is linked to crime and poor achievement) (Bird, 2007). One study

indicates that children undertaking outdoor activities in nature appear to improve symptoms of ADHD by three fold compared to the indoor environment (Faber Taylor et al., 2001 cited in Bird, 2007). In addition green space is thought to improve attention functioning and be restorative and has been linked to reduced aggressive behaviour (domestic violence, Alzheimer's sufferers and crime) and increase capacity to recover from illnesses with less reliance on medication (Bird, 2007). Outdoor activity can also be used to increase social relations and therefore well being, particularly for the elderly (Bird, 2007).

The links between health and the environment are recognised in Suffolk and the need to empower communities to utilise, encourage and expand their activity to meet needs that have been locally identified, have been incorporated into the Suffolk Joint Health and Wellbeing strategy. The ESP has an opportunity to shape and support the actions which will underpin this and, if felt appropriate, share relevant information with community groups keen to drive or support action in this area.

3.5 Supporting communities and organisations in appropriate green development

The New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership has adopted *Suffolk's 'Creating the Greenest County' target...of a 60% reduction in emissions by 2025*. This is in recognition not only of the part we all are playing in increasing atmospheric greenhouse gases and the opportunity we have to reduce them but in the economic and social benefits to be gained from so doing. The ESP in its initial terms of reference also supports this ambition and the workshop identified a desire to support the Suffolk Climate Change Partnership in efforts to engage communities and organisations in partnership working to ensure appropriate renewable and low carbon development with maximum gain for local people.

3.6 Access to funding

The ESP could play a role in influencing funding providers to simplify processes and reduce administrative burden, while supporting existing networks in their collaborative efforts to identify and provide resources to carryout activity which will meet the board's priorities.

4. Recommendations

4.1 That the Board discusses the information within this report and within the presentation and identifies where the members of the Board are best placed to exert their knowledge and influence.

4.2 That the Board provides a clear mandate to the extended East Coast Greenprint Steering Group to develop actions and deliver on these issues and to prepare costed outcome proposals to draw down ESP funds, if required.

References

Bailey, S., Thorpe, L. and Smith, G. (2013) 'Whole-person care: from rhetoric to reality – achieving parity between mental and physical health', *Occasional paper*, OP88, [online]. Available at: <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/files/pdfversion/OP88xx.pdf> (Accessed 11 September 2013).

Bird, W. (2007) 'Natural Thinking - Investigating the links between the Natural Environment, Biodiversity and Mental Health', *RSPB*, [online]. Available at: http://www.rspb.org.uk/images/naturalthinking_tcm9-161856.pdf (Accessed 11 September 2013).

Centre for Mental Health (2010) *The economic and social costs of mental health problems in 2009/10*, [online]. Available at:

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