

MaxiGreen: Raising Public Awareness Conference

Wednesday 11th June 2014

The conference was officially opened by the Worshipful the Mayor of Southend-on-Sea Cllr Chris Walker.

Chris welcomed everyone to Southend-on-Sea and congratulated the project and partners on the successful three years. The Belfairs Woodland Centre is now open and is used by visitors and schools. The Green Hub that enables sustainable access to the site was input into by our European Partners.

First Speaker

Dries Gorissen, Agency for Nature and Forests, Flemish Government

A copy of the presentation is available

An overview of the Bosland Project was given. Bosland literally means 'Forest Country'. It is 68% openland of which approximately 32% is forest, 24% farmland and 11% heath.

There are also urban and residential areas and business parks

In addition to this there is a Coal Mining history that closed between 60s and 90s. A reconversion fund was set up but up to 2010 none of this was made available to Linburg.

In 2004 the project started up. In the 1990s the site was driven by wood production, was heavily restricted and was policy driven. There was no awareness or responsibility from the locals. There was no link between the nature forest and society.

In 2004 groups came together due to legislation

In 2005 to 2006 there was an extensive community consultation

In 2006 a partnership of 6 groups was set up, uniquely in Flanders, managing the nature and forest for public.

Between 2006 and 2012 was development – nature, conservation, recreation and restoration.

Since 2006 there was a need for a communications strategy. The structure of the project was set up (economic, ecological and social) and this ensured ownership and consolidated local support.

The Communications Strategy was developed: "Bosland: dreaming in the trees" with links shown between people and green heritage. A focus was given to children.

Three key elements were developed through the strategy:

1. Trees: Forest, wood products and foresters (Get in the tree)
2. Sand: Soil, dunes and glass production (Bite in the sand)
3. Heritage: stories and local histories (back to the roots)

In 2011-12 a masterplan was developed to give an integrated approach with 4 key phases:

- 1 Identifying and expressing the heart
- 2 Checking and formulation of mission and objectives
- 3 Integration process, design of an implementation strategy
- 4 Decision process: communication, implementation, engagement

Five key objectives:

- 1 Bosland as cultural and historical heritage
Make heritage visible and identifiable in the landscape
- 2 Bosland as supplier of products and services
Supply of products and services to be sustainable to society
- 3 Bosland as hotspot for biodiversity
Management of resources and biodiversity
- 4 Bosland as open project
Acceptance and involvement of stakeholders
- 5 Bosland as touristic and recreational attraction
High quality recreational networks – tourism for children and families.

In 2014 Ford is closing down a factory, which will result in job losses - 96% of people affected are from Limburg. Key projects are required to tackle the economic decrease in Limburg.

Conclusions

- Raising awareness is a continuous process
- Raising awareness requires a stakeholder specific approach
- Raising awareness requires narrators, with enthusiasm

Second Speaker

Professor Jules Pretty, University of Essex and Vice President for Essex Wildlife Trust

A copy of the presentation is available

Consumption and happiness

It is a finite world – the Earth has limited boundaries

In 1968 the first photo of the earth from space was taken. Since then the population has increased to 7 billion people and CO₂ has increased to 400ppm (the safe level is 350)

Consumption is beyond capacity

There is a change in biodiversity with the 6th great extinction happening

Charts of GDP, wellbeing and development show a consumption cliff. As affluence increases, wellbeing and happiness equals out, however consumption continues and this impacts on the environment.

Crop yields have increased and obesity rates have increased – 35% of people in the USA are overweight.

Currently production rates allow 709 kg of plant food per person per year. After considering biofuels and animal feed there is only 250kg per person per year.

Approximately 1 billion people are hungry yet 650 million people are obese and over 1 billion are over-weight.

Data survey between 1946 and 2011 show that life satisfaction does not increase with GDP. In UK, USA and Japan there has been a 4+ times increase in GDP but this has not changed life satisfaction.

The increase in wealth has had environmental and social costs eroding life satisfaction. There is a greater inequality with declining social and community links. We have been 'betrayed by affluence'.

There is a convergence of consumption patterns with development – car ownership, water use, CO₂ emissions and meat consumption all increase – unless these are other controlling factors e.g. India has not seen an increase in meat consumption for religious reasons.

Create attachments and reduce consumption. There is a consumer culture of waste and decreasing well-being. Need to substitute activities that are non-material consumption.

7 heresies of Asclepius (Greek God of Healing) is scientifically proven

- Natural places
- Physical activity
- Thought alone
- Immune system training
- Social bonds
- Attachments to possessions
- Design of buildings

Conclusions

There needs to be a cultural understanding of how much is enough. Without this, material consumption will continue to grow.

There needs to be new commitments by affluent countries and by all countries.

Commitment of affluent countries:

- To reduce their material consumption by a factor of 10
- To support increased consumption of the poorest so that they can climb the consumption cliff

Commitment of all countries:

- To invest in displacement technologies that improve nature whilst providing the necessary services to improve human well-being
- To limit spending in areas that deplete nature
- To encourage non-material consumption

Third Speaker

Professor Germaine Greer

She is here to talk about her experience of raising public awareness of important issues but is clearly not very good as she is still saying the same things and not being listened to!

People do not understand biodiversity

For example, people do not understand the difference between a plantation and a forest. People were upset when the government tried to sell off Forestry Commission land but this is not valuable woodland – it is not worth anything.

It is important not to increase alarm as this paralyses action – people go into 'doom mode'

The consumer lifestyle begins in childhood and is alien, independent and masturbatory.

Angelina Jolie is good at raising awareness – there is a major focus on important issues but not necessarily action.

Feminism is linked to eco; Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp wanted to protect life on earth.

There has been focus on the selfish gene but Lynn Margulis looked at altruism and gene connection.

There is now a movement to take humans to Mars but we need to take so much with us including gut flora as well as seeds etc.

We are linked to our environment, Professor Greer theorises that we enjoy birdsong because we are linked genetically to them through our DNA so we are cousins.

We need wilderness, to see wild spaces. RHS is too big, too colourful and too forced. This year there was more 'pretend' wild at the Chelsea Flower Show. Mostly by younger people appreciating the need for wilderness.

We need to adopt this approach in parks and gardens. There was a £250k campaign to grow wild flowers and seeds were provided for people, but it is better to stop weeding your gardens to let what wants to be there grow rather than plant species. We need a 'lens adjustment' to see things in nature.

Germaine Greer purchased a degraded farmland in Queensland. Linking back to Professor Jules Pretty's earlier presentation she noted that Australia was not on the charts of CO₂ consumption however the country is sending coal to china and this will have a massive impact.

Locals were attached to the land in the rainforest and need jobs and to maintain self-esteem. In the farmland that she purchased, Germaine took out all the barbed wire so the forest could heal itself but we need to remove some of the obstacles. Money is needed for resources and workers but despite challenges there is joy. She has seen the changes – moss is developing, succession is happening. We understand so little of nature.

It needs to become fashion to allow our gardens and spaces to just grow and become wild to see what happens so we can see what is different. We need to understand and work with, for example, the watershed because of problems with flooding. Grassland is better than a lawn but people complain if it isn't tidy. Brownfield sites are key for biodiversity and wildflowers.

Conclusions

If fashion works then utilise it to change perception

Close

The event was formally closed by Cllr John Jowers from Essex County Council. A thanks was given to all the speakers.

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Workshops

Workshop A: Cross-border Communications

The aim of this workshop was to challenge your thinking

First rule of communication:

- Read the article properly
- Filter out information
- Absorb important points

If people do not understand then they assume a hidden agenda – this is not true

Good listening is important

We communicate on 3 levels:

- Vocabulary
- Voice inflection
- Non verbal

We pay attention to all three levels of communication and this can lead to mixed messages.

Challenges were given to demonstrate how text can be misread, how verbal communication can lose key information when conveyed forward and how an interest in the topic is important for attention.

Workshop B: Wildlife and Environment Promotion in your local area

Focus on how to engage communities, businesses and funders

Communities

- Events
- Promotion
- Word of mouth
- Visitor Centres
- Schools
- Reserves access

Essex Wildlife Trust's unique selling point is that it is the largest 'local' conservation charity

- People become members of the Trust
- More than 2,000 volunteers help with promotion
- Run events for different groups

How does the Trust engage people?

- Cafes
- Playgrounds
- Community groups
- Work parties
- Formal and informal events

Use different tools for different markets – for example the installation of a gruffalo trail has increased visitor numbers. It is very popular with pre-school children.

There is no advertising budget so rely on press releases and media coverage

There is signage and a website with a defined branding and the Trust also uses social media and sends out newsletters.

Businesses

- Provide an accreditation – Investors in Wildlife
- There are 460 companies involved – the largest of any Wildlife Trust
- Corporate days
- Network events
- Corporate Social Responsibility
- Farm for wildlife and make a profit to demonstrate that it is possible to run a business and still make money – lead by example.

Funders

Appeal to the funder. For example the Belfairs Woodland Centre is part of a Living Landscape making it a more holistic project and therefore more attractive. It was not just about the centre but the conservation work.

- Develop relationships with the funder – talk to them
- Give recognition to the funder
- Be realistic about deliverable and fulfil funding requirements
- Develop a reputation for quality projects and the ability to see them through

The group then subdivided into subgroups to discuss different ways to engage communities, funders and businesses.

Workshop C: Raising Awareness of multifunctional sites and green heritage

- Rupel is a site of clay excavation
- Brick production collapsed leading to high unemployment
- The claypits were then used for landfill

- Benefit of tourism and recreation means better management of nature
- There are joint objectives – together we can write our history

Regional Narrative – 3 pillars: clay, landscape, water

Clay

Moulded region and people

Heritage and history

Water

River Rupel

Landscape

Nature quality is high

Poor accessibility

There is the requirement of a mobility plan and future aspiration for a multi-model hub.

Raise public awareness

- Signage, tourism, events
- Media
- Structures – willow
- Digital and audio media
- Artwork and sculptures

Workshop D: Living Seas: How to deliver a successful campaign

Issues

- There are limited protected areas for seas – only 0.001%
- People don't know what is there
- You can't see the damage – therefore government action is needed

How

- Petition Fish I – all 47 Wildlife Trusts got together to set out Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ)
- Legislation via public and MP engagement
- Lead to the Marine Act in 2009 (designating Marine Protected Areas)

- Government changed so needed more action
- Petition Fish II – promotion and more petitioning
- Pledges of support from MPs
- In East of England 6 out of 13 MPs supported the campaign

Four regional projects were established for stakeholder engagement

- 127 MCZ put forward
- Work with Blackwater Oystermen's Association
- Breach sea wall – realignment at Abbots Hall Farm (Essex Wildlife Trust head office) benefitted fishermen as it became a nursery area for fry.
- A relationship of trust had been developed so fishermen supported the campaign and aided in evidence gathering.

Result

- Only 27 MPAs designated so not a coherent network
- However, this included the Blackwater, Colne, Crouch and Roach estuaries
- 37 more are under investigation as more data is required
- Possible citation in 2015

The group discussed fishing, protection and management. A number of concerns and issues were raised concerning fishing, over fishing, legal protection and the rights of different fishermen.

It was noted that there is self policing in the Blackwater by the Oystermen as a result of the relationship built through the campaign and the support that was given.