

Earth Matters Copy for October 2023 CVG

Earth Matters:

The last of our regular columns from Chew Valley Area Forum Climate & Nature Emergency Working Group, which has been collaborating with local people to reduce the carbon footprint of the Chew Valley for the last 3 years.

On Tuesday 26th September a cross section of people from the Chew Valley attended a public meeting celebrate the work of the Chew Valley Area Forum Climate and Nature Emergency Working Group, after 3 years of exploration, research and community action.

A presentation was given by Nick Baker and Jackie Head, the two people who have jointly chaired and administered the group, followed by an interactive activity where people were asked to reflect on what they had heard and consider what needs to happen next in the Chew Valley to mitigate the impacts of the climate emergency and protect nature. There were a range of good ideas including planting trees, retrofitting houses and installing solar panels, cycling more, using WESTlink, lobbying for its improvement and for more buses, reducing meat consumption, rewilding gardens, growing food orchards and choosing who to vote for in the next election by their record and promises on these measures.

Asked to reflect on the work of the group there was a heartening response: 'inspiring', 'very well connected' 'connecting people', 'collaboration', 'something positive that came out of covid', 'diverse group working together', 'fab work on buses', 'calm and reasoned approach', 'action focused', 'something I want to build on in my village'.

The Sustainable Transport subgroup then outlined the work they have completed, the ongoing work of the present and the forward strategy. They would like to continue as an independent community interest group but to do this they need to recruit new members to the core team, who can volunteer for an hour a week, to ensure ongoing viability. As the speaker pointed out 'we are unique in B&NES in that we have a seat at the table with officers and politicians from B&NES & WECA. We have earned this through community engagement and research which has provided a clear evidence base to present to politicians and decision makers. It would be a shame to stop now when there is the opportunity to build on this reputation.'

This was followed by an interactive activity where people were asked to debate whether every village in the Chew Valley should have a bus service, and then invited to show when they last travelled by bus by placing themselves on a continuum from today to never, and then have a conversation with another person who had travelled more or less than they had. It was hard to then bring this lively discussion to an end, but people then were able to hear from a member of a new Chew Valley Nature Recovery Network incubated within the Nature Protection subgroup, which will be launching as an independent group later in the year. Their aim is to connect different projects in the area and ensure their voices are heard within the new B&NES initiative: Chew Valley Reconnected, that is being headed up by Victoria Prescott.

The final part of the evening was a discussion between John Chew, a trustee of Avon Needs Trees and Ben Moss a founder member of Chew Valley Plants Trees who talked about the work of their organisations, the importance of stewarding landscapes with trees planted sensitively within them to enhance nature, capture carbon and return natural spaces to pre-industrial landscapes where forests and orchards were much more commonplace and a key part of the agricultural landscape of the Chew Valley. Their top tips? Lean into nature and build a relationship with trees over time, looking after them throughout the year, and making sure they have plenty of mulch to suppress invasive grasses and retain moisture.

There was a touching moment at the end of the evening when Nick Baker paid tribute to Jackie Head for her leadership and hard work throughout the 3 years 'she's a force of nature' he said. Surprised and moved by this all she was able to do was point to Nick and say 'ditto'.

All in all the evening a fitting way to end the group that has been so active and engaged with the community, and it also served as a very useful networking event for people to consider future action.

If you would like more information about the Sustainable Transport Group or the Nature Recovery Network please contact Jackie at jch.221@gmail.com