

# Notes of a Biodiversity Open Meeting

with LMPC, National Trust and St George's Church.

St George's Church, 7pm, 5<sup>th</sup> September

There were 52 people present, including representatives of the National Trust, James Mercer (parish priest), church members, other parishioners, LMPC Cllrs, and interested persons from neighbouring parishes. Tea and coffee was served before the meeting.

1. Everyone was warmly welcomed by the Chair, Cllr William Knight, who introduced Tom Clarke and Mark Singleton, National Trust speakers for the evening.

2. Tom Clarke, Engagement Officer for the Trust in Purbeck, briefly outlined the Trust's national 'Land Outdoors and Nature' project, explaining the reasons behind it. Nature is in crisis, and it is not enough to create 'reserves' – habitats need to be joined up in order for species to thrive. The national aim is to create 25,000 hectares of new priority habitat by 2025, and to enrich and enlarge present habitats such as hedges, ponds etc. The Trust in Purbeck have been surveying their land holdings to identify the condition, and are working with tenant farmers on ways to improve land to make it biodiversity-rich, and provide more 'corridors' between these areas. They have already been working for several years to manage Langton West Wood more sustainably and sympathetically, developing low-impact coppicing and wood extraction. 3 ponds have been dug to the south of the Langton Matravers area, and one is already home to Great Crested Newts. However there are still areas that need to be addressed, such as the decline in farmland birds.

Tom is not keen to tell people what they should do, but asked those present to think what they especially love about Langton; what could we work to achieve, either together or as individuals to improve biodiverse habitats ?

3. Cllr Pete Christie spoke about the Council's draft Environmental Strategy. At the August meeting, LMPC adopted its Environmental policy, which looks at ways in which issues related to climate change can be addressed by, for example, tree planting, roadside verge management and flood management. The Strategy aims to set out practical actions which can be carried out by LMPC, individuals and the village community, liaising with wider and neighbouring groups such as other T&PCs, DAPTC and Dorset Council as well as the National Trust and other landowners. Ideas from members of the public are most welcome. There is a lot that has already been done, such as the setting up of the allotments, community orchard and woodland trail, but we can do more. Allotment holders and gardeners might help to nurture plug plants or collect seeds for nectar-rich wild flowers, or provide 'nursery space for the NT's young trees. Above all, we all need to communicate: LMPC are happy to form a hub for ideas and suggestions.

4. Tom and Mark then talked about ways in which members of the community could get involved in helping with the Trust's 'Land, Outdoors and Nature' project. They are presently working with tenant farmers on firming up plans, and from February should have active

projects including wild flowers and beetle banks; they will get back to us with more details then. Members of the community could also volunteer to lead walks, or monitor species.

5. Question and answer session. (Tom Clarke and Mark Singleton)

a) Cllr Loudoun asked for the Trust's official policy on **ash die back**. MS responded that it can be a Health and Safety issue, but is not notifiable. The Trust aim to retain trees with natural immunity. Cllr Knight asked that parishioners inform LMPC of any cases.

b) Sue Spilling asked why the National Trust allowed Perenco to do **seismic testing for oil** on their land; had the Parish Council been informed that this was to go ahead ? The Chair ruled that matters such as this should be raised at a formal Parish Council meeting rather than at an Open Meeting. However, TC was happy to respond to the question, and explained that the Trust had previously fought a legal battle to stop such testing in Derbysire, and lost: they are therefore legally unable to stop it here. He also noted that Trust are reviewing their investments in relation to carbon. The Council had not been informed about the testing. MS said that SSI Heathland in the area was also affected.

c) Colette Drayson asked a further question which the Chairman ruled to be inappropriate for discussion at the meeting.

d) Chris Spilling noted that **rare fairy shrimp** had been seen in one of the local ponds.

e) Julie Baker asked if the Trust have a '**no spray**' policy on its farmland. MS replied that 2 farms are organic, but herbicide is used for day-to-day management on others, to tackle plants such as bracken and rhododendron. It is hoped that a closer working relationship with tenant farmers will encourage less use of herbicide.

f) Bridget Mayes asked the meeting to think about things they could stop doing which would help the environment, and emphasised the importance of **corridors for wildlife**. She suggested nurture of dandelions and ivy, as early and late-season foods for insects.

g) Cllr Christie responded to a question about **pesticide free public spaces**; could LMPC be part of that ? At present Dorset Council is responsible for clearing weeds on the High Street: this year they haven't. Perhaps neighbours who cannot clear their own frontage manually could ask those who can ?

h) John Wootton (Tom's Field Camp Site) asked if the Trust could **help with his trees** at the camp site.

i) Cllr Vaughan-Arbuckle thanked the Trust for all their hard work at **the West Wood**. It was a pity that more local people did not take advantage of such a lovely place. He suggested information boards, though this was not well-received by the meeting. He proposed a 'Friends of the West Wood' group.

j) Chris Meadows spoke on behalf of Rachel Helfer; she is concerned that **Purbeck is losing its hedgerows**, with many dying. TC said that this one of the Trust's key areas of concern; they are looking at ways to restore hedgerows through laying etc, and plant new ones. This is an area where volunteer help would be valuable.

k) Bridget Mayes suggested that the **Eco-Schools programme** should be involved. TC explained that he is working with local schools in an active way. James Mercer announced that St George's School are looking to get training from experts from the **Forest School** movement, and to include that on the school's curriculum.

l) Sarah Bibra asked if parts of some of the **church yards could be used for wildlife areas**. JM responded that the church needs a Conservation Officer to develop these ideas. Chris Spilling noted that the Woodland Trust provide free tree saplings.

m) Jane Hudson has a pond in her garden, and would welcome advice on how to manage it. TC will put together an advice sheet for the LMPC website to advise on 'Wildlife gardening in Langton'. **ACTION: Tom Clarke.**

n) Bridget Mayes proposed a '**Wildlife Working Group**' to move Biodiversity initiatives forward; maybe a 'Wildlife Day' could be organised by them to promote ideas in the village. The suggestion was warmly welcomed. **ACTION: Those interested in serving in the group to give names to the Clerk.**

o) Cllr Christie suggested that people might make eg. **swift nesting boxes**: instructions, including other ideas for creating small wildlife habitats are available on Google.

p) Julie Crabb asked if **LED lights** left on at night outside houses might affect bat populations. Cllr Christie thinks not, as the lights encourage insects.

q) Cllr Knight asked about creating **wildlife corridors**. TC said that the plan is to try to engage neighbouring landowners once the Trust has all its 'plates spinning'.

r) TC is looking forward to future **puffin walks and counts** for Langton next year, as forms of local engagement: perhaps there could be a bluebell day ? He was asked if the puffin walks affected the puffins, but thinks not, though he is aware that boat-bourne parties getting too close to the cliffs can do so. He feels that the exclusion zones for cliff birds are being respected and puffin numbers are slightly up on previous years.

s) MS reminded the meeting that mowing your grass less often, and leaving it longer when you do is a good way to encourage nectar-rich plants.

#### Closing remarks.

The Chair thanked everyone for their attendance and for ideas and queries which will help the Council to develop its Environmental Strategy; particular thanks to Tom and Mark from the National Trust for their presentation and responses to questions.