

Summary of PACE Meeting Tues 2 April 2024 at The Crown.

Future of Local Farming in a Changing Climate

Pete Thompson, a farmer from Great Oakley gave a fascinating insight into the *Tendring Farm Cluster*, which was formed in December 2023 and involves about 40 farmers in the Tendring area and about 30,000 hectares of land. The Cluster is a local response to the requirements of the Environment Act 2021 which requires each County to develop a *Local Nature Recovery Strategy*. Essex is well advanced with this and is targeting 30% of Essex to be in “green infrastructure by 2030. The aim is to achieve this partly through the new *Environmental Land Management* grants (ELM) which replace the former subsidies from the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), and partly through *Biodiversity Net Gain*. The principles are that landowners are paid for the good environmental services they provide and not simply for the area of land on which they produce food crops.

Under the ELM farmers are supported to create woodland, grassland, marshland and other habitats and also to engage in more sustainable forms of agriculture such as low till or low pesticide use. The objects behind this are to reduce greenhouse gases, to store carbon in trees and soil, to manage flood water at times of heavy rain and improve the quality of water flowing into our rivers.

Under Biodiversity Net Gain, all new developments for housing, infrastructure etc will be required by Planning Law to deliver a 10% increase in biodiversity. Many developers will not be able to achieve this on their development site so the developer can pay a farmer to provide the necessary biodiversity on the farmer’s land, thus creating a marketplace for biodiversity net gain.

These are early days for ELM which came into effect in November 2023, and for Biodiversity Net Gain which came into force in February 2024. However, they are already resulting in big changes for many farmers who are striving to remain profitable following the loss of the CAP subsidies. Pete Thompson explained that on his 700 acre farm he used to grow vegetables for his box scheme and for supermarkets – but no more – he has sold some land and plans for the rest to be a patchwork of habitats – some in the ELM schemes and some for Biodiversity Net Gain to be paid for by developers. This is a massive shift which involved him selling off all his farm tractors and machinery. In one year, he has gone from being a local veg grower to creator of woodlands, grasslands, ponds and other habitats. Straight forward in principle but complex in detail.

There were a lot of questions for Pete – too many to cover here – three examples:

Q: Creating habitats seems great for nature, biodiversity and carbon reduction but does this mean there will be insufficient farmland to produce local food, and how does this impact on food security?

A: This is an issue, but I was losing money growing vegetables – these are now sourced from places like Egypt and Senegal (the audience found this surprising and concerning).

Q: How will creation of Biodiversity Net Gain, woodlands and other habitats be viewed by the taxman – will this continue to be viewed as “farming”.

A: Yes, the landowner remains a “farmer” in the eyes of the taxman.

Q: Is the situation similar in Suffolk and Essex.

A: Yes, but Suffolk are well behind Essex in addressing their Local Nature Recovery Strategy, ELMs and Biodiversity Net Gain.

Update on other PACE Initiatives

Wildlife Gardens Open Day Saturday 8 June 10.30 to 16.30

Several gardens have agreed to open, and we have booked the Venture Centre as a base for displays, teas, toilets and parking. We are looking for more wildlife-friendly gardens in Lawford Green, Long Road, Hunter Drive, Cavendish Drive, Colchester Road. We have a good team of volunteers planning the event – we need more volunteers for 8 June to help visitors in the gardens – contact Caroline or Email manningtreepace@gmail.com

Field Trips with Local Schools

PACE ran some very successful environmental Field Trips with Primary Schools in 2023 in Lawford, Manningtree, Brantham and Wix – usually about 2 hours such as pond dipping, tree survey, insect studies, mammal traps. These are discussed with the teachers beforehand to ensure they complement work in the classroom. We have the expertise to give the children real live experience which is greatly valued. We can only do this if we have enough volunteers to meet the adult: child ratio of 1:5. Do let Sarah Harrison know if you would like to help or Email manningtreepace@gmail.com. (Thanks to Denis, Margaret and Bob who have offered to help).

PACE Trustees – Review of the priorities for PACE activities.

Being a charity offers significant opportunities for PACE, particularly eligibility for funds: it also brings responsibilities for the Trustees to report to the Charity Commission and apply our resources well. Some PACE projects have been very successful: others not so. Trustees are also mindful that the environmental situation is changing rapidly. Two important recent developments:- Firstly, 2023 was the warmest average global temperature on record, according to the Copernicus Project. The Paris Agreement of 2015 was to keep the average global temperature rise to less than 1.5°C or at worst 2°C. 1.5°C was exceeded on 50% of days in 2023. <https://climate.copernicus.eu/copernicus-2023-hottest-year-record> Secondly The Stockholm Resilience Centre monitors what are called the 9 planetary boundaries, and 6 of these have been crossed. One of these is Climate Change – others include biodiversity, freshwater systems etc. Thankfully, one of the 3 not crossed is the Ozone layer – you will recall concerns about the hole in the Ozone layer and the good news is that, due to international and local cooperation, this hole has been closed and gives us all hope that such major issues can be addressed. [All planetary boundaries mapped out for the first time, six of nine crossed - Stockholm Resilience Centre](#) The Trustees think we need to take account of these two points when reviewing the PACE priorities. With increasing climate disruption, we do need to continue with projects which support nature and reduce carbon emissions, but we also need to consider projects which will enable our local community to become more resilient to the climate changes which we know are coming. (Other groups are at a similar point in reviewing their activities). PACE Trustees meet again on 16 April and by the next PACE meeting on 7 May we hope to share and discuss our suggestions for PACE priorities for the future.

Next PACE Supporters Meeting Tuesday 7 May in The Crown – Jill Bruce.

Jill is the national Climate Ambassador for the Women's Institutes. She lives near Braintree, she 'walks the talk' having made many changes to her own lifestyle to reduce her environmental impact, and she has organised several "Hot Debates" with leading Councillors and MPs. This promises to be an interesting presentation and Q&A on "How we can hold Councillors and MPs to account for their environmental record".