

I would like to talk about biodiversity in Wymondham, and have prepared something which will take just under 9 minutes.

**Letting grass grow and thinking about how hedgehogs travel: are these frivolous matters?** My understanding of habitat and habitat connectivity was really brought home to me by a film I watched as part of a three day conference in February this year called Reforestation for Biodiversity, Carbon Capture and livelihoods, from Royal botanic Gardens Kew. Rainforests in southern India have been broken up into fragments and degraded over time by the development of tea and coffee plantations. Loss of habitat has meant the loss of species and they hadn't seen their native Hornbill for years. In collaboration with plantation owners, and with a vision to see the hornbill thrive once again in the tree canopies, they set out to restore the complex multi-layers that a true rainforest contains, but within the remaining forest fragments. 20 years later they were rewarded with a sighting of a hornbill, sign of restoration success. Now the rainforest fragments provide a habitat connectivity enabling life to travel between them.

Here in Wymondham our habitats have been broken up by housing estates, roads, farming. **For decades now we have attempted to maintain a sense of control over nature. Manicured lawns, blight free roses, tidy borders. We have used pesticides, paved our front and back gardens, cut down our trees to build cheap housing Estates, and insisted on fruit and veg which is both cheap and blotch free. Monoculture in both food and housing has seemed to be the most efficient method of delivering on our demands. The perfectionism we crave is hard to achieve, and leads us to use pesticides damaging to insects and crucially our bees, and then, when unsuccessful or uninterested frankly in gardening, to cover our ground with paving.**

**We have been and may continue to be in a fight for our lives with Covid, but also-with the onslaught of climate change, flooding, drought, and excessive summer heat. As climbing temperatures endanger species through change or loss of habitat, this danger is also to ourselves, the human species.**

**So far in Wymondham we can feel pretty lucky. Our houses are not at risk of falling into the sea, and flooding maps show we are not going to be inundated by the sea as much of Norfolk could be by**

**the end of the century. Nor did we see a lot of the flooding in Norfolk which began December 23 this last year. However, Anglian Water and the fire and rescue service named this flooding a major incident and all Norfolk emergency resources were taken away from normal duty to deal with the consequences for at least three months.**

Scientists tell us that with the loss of species at an alarming rate, we are on a catastrophic path, that our biology is no longer healthy, or in balance, and that perhaps we have already passed the tipping point. Not only do we have to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050, but we have to restore biodiversity too, one will beneficially affect the other. If we have the will to do it, and we must, it will be a virtuous circle.

Actually we are all responsible, and capable of restoring biodiversity in our locality. Perhaps a useful analogy to help us understand why we should do so, according to the Dasgupta report published earlier this year, is to regard our environment as an investment portfolio which at its best is diverse so as to manage risk and in order to keep it and us healthy. The report was commissioned by HM Treasury, and led by Cambridge Emeritus Professor of Economics, Professor Sir Partha Dasgupta. It highlights the importance of valuing and managing the ecosystems on which we all rely, for food, for water, and for the air we breathe, as well as for our homes, recreation, well-being and spiritual renewal. The report says nature underpins our economy and insists our economic system should be changed to reflect this. The former Governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney, agrees with this view.

The Dasgupta report calls for local action when it asks for the “development and design of environmental and education programs which can help to achieve tangible impact, for example by focusing on local issues, and collaborating with scientists and community organisations”.

And so here we are, Greening Wymondham, a community organisation who have been attempting to highlight the importance and relevance to all of us of climate change, and as well, the need for biodiversity restoration locally. We invite your collaboration, cooperation and better still, leadership in the education of our community.

The report says we can have tangible impact. I am asking you to understand why flourishing grasslands and habitat connectivity is important, and to help bring more of it about in Wymondham. That is the least we can do, and an easy win. Trying to figure out how we might all be able to afford to use less energy in our houses, and then as well to change to electric heat pumps, I haven't been able to get my head round. Maybe some of you have connections with people who understand how to do that? Or to insist that new housing estate developers include solar arrays and district heat pumps. How about orientation for natural solar gain and roofs designed to shade the high summer sun. How about asking developers not to cut down existing trees?

Failing all that for the moment, but we cannot fail in the long run, could we at least, please, let grass grow on the verges, for example the environmental stewardship margins on Barnham Broom Rd, and even in our own gardens. Helen Sibley, who works for Norfolk county council says this is the single biggest impact we can have on the restoration of biodiversity. Insect life will return, and the whole food chain will benefit. Moisture is retained at the roots of long grass due to shading, and carbon sequestration will increase. Meadow flowers will thrive, and pollinators will find habitat again. There are ways to do this which make them look maintained and beautiful. If complaints come in, explain.

Please, can we stop using glyphosate and ensure that any substitutes used are safe for wildlife. There are alternatives, for example Foamex which is cleared for use as an organic, non-toxic and safe product by accreditation bodies across the world including the UK Soil Association. So, let grass grow where possible and do not use harmful insecticides. There is good news. According to Ken Thompson, then senior lecturer of the University of Sheffield, writing in the RHS Garden magazine dedicated to the change in climate in January 2008, "it is the total garden network and not any particular garden that is so important for wildlife. No garden is too small to provide some benefit for wildlife even if many animals that visit it are actually resident in neighbouring gardens". Our gardens already provide some habitat connectivity important for the survival of species. But we can do more and there is an appetite in Wymondham to do more. I am happy to announce that Helen Sibley to whom I referred earlier, and works as officer for open spaces and countryside at South Norfolk Council, is working with us now to enhance biodiversity in Wymondham. She has identified three

areas managed by Sth Norfolk where wildflower edges can be established around play areas as well as places to plant trees. Letters will be sent to local residents to explain the importance of this project for biodiversity and for our future.

I will now pass you over to Nicola MAUNDERS who will tell you about other connectivity projects which have gained the enthusiastic interest of many Wymondham residents. Thank you.