



Environment

A healthy, vibrant and protected natural environment is key to an individual and community's health and wellbeing

Environment

Introduction

The use of our natural environment for work, leisure, sport and recreation is directly related to the prosperity of both urban and rural areas and has a direct relationship with our overall health and wellbeing. With positive and innovative approaches to protection and enhancement we can create a sustainably managed natural environment and improve access for the benefit of all

Overview

There are many issues for consideration when looking at our understanding of, and the value we place on, our environment. Climate change is continuing to change the nature of our weather and seasons with more incidences of extreme weather such as the catastrophic flooding in the south of England in spring 2014.

Collectively, we are still striving to reduce CO₂ emissions with incentives to use alternatives to cars and reduce the amount of energy we consume. Whilst there is broad agreement that human activity is increasing climate change, we have much less knowledge about how these changes will play out.

Flooding caused widespread damage both to farming communities and national infrastructure. Changes in the quantity and quality of water pose one of the most significant threats to many ecosystems, but management of water catchments can help to maintain water levels at an acceptable level.

Biodiversity is of huge importance to us all and we depend on the natural environment as a source of

many goods, such as food, fuel, building materials etc. Changes in biodiversity can influence the supply of these ecosystem services and impact negatively on our lives. Protecting our species and their habitats can often improve the quality of life and our standard of living. We need to adopt methods of working with our environment to better understand, protect and enhance our ecosystems now and for future generations.

The ACRE Network members aim to work with rural communities to identify local solutions and generate new approaches and opportunities to managing our environment. In this way, all sections of the community are offered the opportunity to become engaged.

In terms of addressing climate change, the ACRE Network embeds carbon reduction measures within its support for community action and encourages local community groups to reduce the use of resources such as energy, fuel and water and plan for a sustainable future.



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Issue: The effects of climate change are unpredictable

Our climate is already becoming more unpredictable and our communities must therefore adapt to cope with a wide range of possible eventualities

Solution: Community climate change adaptation

The Cumbrian floods of November 2009 were devastating for many individuals, communities and businesses. Around 1,300 homes and businesses were destroyed; there was widespread damage to roads, bridges and footpaths, and significant economic costs.

This event has pushed flooding up the agenda for many communities, public agencies and third sector organisations. It has brought with it widespread recognition that climate change is now a reality in Cumbria, with extreme weather events expected to become more frequent and more intense over coming decades.

Efforts to address climate change have so far focused primarily on mitigation - that is, initiatives intended to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases and limiting the extent of climate change. However, it has become increasingly apparent that, even if we do reduce our emissions, we are nevertheless likely to experience a certain amount of climate change from historical emissions. This has led to the recognition that we must begin to adapt, reducing our vulnerability and



increasing our resilience to the unavoidable impacts of climate change. There are two levels of adaptation response required to address climate change:

Preparation: the development of emergency plans that can be initiated when inevitable climate emergencies occur; and

Prevention: the prevention of those emergencies

happening in the first place so that, for example, heavy rainfall does not necessarily result in a flooding emergency, or in water pollution.

ACRE Network member Action with Communities in Cumbria has been commissioned by the Lake District National Park Authority to prepare

a **model for climate change adaptation and community resilience planning** in a rural setting - the Ullswater catchment in Cumbria.

The report identifies a set of 11 priority actions for the Ullswater valley. These are response-focused, highlighting the adaptation and mitigation measures that could be adopted by the community to address the key climate change impacts identified.

Issue: Water management is now a significant issue

Inappropriate development on flood plains combined with obstructed water ways and drainage all contribute to increasing the risk of flooded properties and land. Isolated rural communities and the most vulnerable people can be exposed to significant risk

Solution: Watercare partnerships

Cambridgeshire ACRE is the catchment host for the **Old Bedford and Middle Level catchment** as part of the Catchment Based Approach, which aims to develop a partnership involving local communities and stakeholders making decisions for their local environment. Collaborative working is at the heart of this partnership, sharing data between organisations and allowing for a streamlined process in planning for the **Water Framework Directive**.

Key Aims of the Catchment Based Approach:

- To deliver positive and sustained outcomes for the water environment by promoting a better understanding of the environment at a local level

- To encourage local collaboration and more transparent decision-making when both planning and delivering activities to improve the water environment

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Solution: Watercare partnerships

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■ To contribute to the second River Basin Management Plan and its implementation

Adopting this approach will lead to the development of a more appropriate River Basin Management Plan, which underpins the Water Framework Directive (WFD). The approach will also provide a platform for engagement and discussion with local communities to highlight the main challenges to water management within the local catchment.

The role of the partnership is to allow local

communities and stakeholders to engage with the WFD and ensure that actions are prioritised for the needs of the local water environment. It allows for a greater sharing of data, streamlining activities and planning to ensure that the catchment is managed in an integrated way.

ACRE is also working with the **Farming and Wildlife Action Group** in Gloucestershire to produce a Community Guide on the Water Environment. This guide provides practical information to help communities carry out local projects to identify local pressures and opportunities in the water environment.

Issue: Biodiversity needs protecting and enhancing

The **National Ecosystem Assessment** in 2011 showed that nature is consistently undervalued in decision-making and that many of the services we get from nature are in decline

Solution: Catchment partnerships preserve and increase biodiversity

In 2013, ACRE Network member Bedfordshire Rural Community Council (BRCC) secured funding from the Environment Agency to host the 'Ivel Catchment Partnership'. Catchment Partnerships are a Defra initiative to assist in the delivery of the European Water Framework Directive. Their purpose is to engage with communities and stakeholder organisations to identify issues and solutions relating to water quality within a given catchment.

During March and April 2014, an online questionnaire was distributed to contacts of BRCC and its partner organisations. The findings were conclusive: biodiversity, particularly including trees, birds and fish, was people's Number 1 priority – both for protecting what we have and encouraging more.

The questionnaire was followed up by a series of workshops, including a 'walking workshop' along part of the River Ivel. Issues highlighted by the questionnaire findings were discussed in detail, with threats to our biodiversity, particularly from invasive non-native species, causing significant concern. Another big area of discussion was around the issue

of dredging; balancing the needs of wildlife, angling interests and flood risk within a context of limited resources.

Many of the questionnaire respondents and workshop attendees indicated a desire to become involved in practical tasks to care for the 'their' section of the river. BRCC is collating the information gathered from the questionnaire

and workshops, and that provided by the EA, to draft a Catchment Plan for the Ivel. The plan will have a number of projects and actions for stakeholder organisations and individual residents to sign up to. These actions will include wildlife surveying and monitoring, removal of

invasive plants and habitat creation projects. In May 2014, BRCC was awarded further funding to act as secretariat for the wider Bedford & Upper Ouse Catchment Partnership. Working with other sub-catchment partnership hosts and strategic partners, an umbrella Catchment Plan addressing issues common across the Bedford & Upper Ouse area will be produced.

