Natural Boxford – report for Boxford PC Annual Parish Meeting May 2024

Natural Boxford is a group of Boxford residents who all have a deep understanding and appreciation of how important the natural world is, for the on-going and future health of the planet, including our own human survival and well-being, and in its own right as a realm of beauty, innovation and abundance. As a species the human has traveled a long way away from living in harmony with nature with disastrous consequences: now we have to stop the destruction and work with nature for its recovery.

Natural Boxford's overall objective is 'working in harmony with nature for the long term' via four main aims which are to: celebrate, enjoy and share Boxford's natural world; re-connect and re-engage with nature to increase knowledge and caring; protect and increase biodiversity and wildlife habitats; and, promote responsible use of resources.

We have several groups already working on a variety of projects, many of which are in conjunction with other organisations such as SWT, Dedham Vale National Landscape and Stour Valley, Suffolk Bird Group, Babergh DC, the Environment Agency, Essex and Suffolk Rivers trust, the local Diocese and HEAT.

We have installed swift nest boxes and call systems to encourage the historic Boxford population of swifts to stay with us, and are planning some more species specific actions such as creating stag beetle pyramids and hedgehog highways. Our wider focus on biodiversity includes working with the PC Environment and Ecology sub-committee to write a Biodiversity Statement and Plan to assist the council fulfill its biodiversity duties: this is now a requirement enshrined in law last year feeding into national nature recovery strategies. We are beginning to establish baseline biodiversity and habitat surveys for key wildlife areas in the village so we know what we have got. This is ably assisted by several experts we have in the group. We also have a working party taking care of the bed at the end of the Causeway to make it more nature friendly, and are working with the PC Churchyard and Cemetary sub-committee to find ways of making those areas more wildlife friendly, as well as more interesting and enjoyable places for people to spend time.

We have a River focus group and are going to be a pilot group for the Rivers' Trust new community groups citizen science projects monitoring water quality, and are also aiming to become River Fly testing trained so we can monitor specific indicator species, along with the possibility of testing for e-coli – relevant as we are downstream from a very over-stretched sewage works at Great Waldingfield. We are investigating current thinking and practice regarding flood risk mitigation and hope the PC will be open to working with us on this area and complement what Reclaim the Rain are doing with pluvial run-off.   We are building relationships with surrounding landowners and farmers and have a visit coming up to a local farm with the highest land stewardship status to see what is being done to support wildlife there in an agricultural environment.

Our energy focus group is underway looking into what can be done to both 'power up' (energy generation with solar and wind) and 'power down' (being more energy efficient) and the first project is coming in the autumn with a focus on reducing heat loss from our houses.

We have some more ideas and potential projects in the pipeline which we will be inviting people to get involved with and really hope to be able to do some activities with the school children and young people of the village. Anyone who loves the natural world, wants to see it thriving again for the good of all and is interested in what we are doing and would like to join in, or volunteer for a particular activity eg gardening, tree planting, maybe even some scything! - please get in touch. We are very grateful for the BRN's support giving us a monthly article space, and are listed in the Community Groups section.

We are having a table in the churchyard for Open Gardens on Sunday 2nd June – do come and say hello.