

Report of the February BA13+ Partnership Meeting

The BA13+ Community Area Partnership's latest full meeting was held on 18th February at the Laverton in Westbury. The theme of the evening was the Environment.

The guest speakers were Anne Dunderdale (on AONB), Aisling Hunt (Wiltshire Wildlife), Andi Whitcomb (NFU) and Eddy Watts and Shirley McCarthy (Melksham Climate Friendly Group)

Anne Dunderdale spoke eloquently regarding protection of our landscape by extending the Cranborne Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty to include the Westbury Escarpment as far as the White Horse, including the Bratton Hill Camp. These areas were well used and much loved by local people. A lot of hard work had gone into putting a case forward for the extension. They have high levels of support from Andrew Murrison MP and Sir Andrew Motion, who had visited the Wellhead Valley and been very supportive; however they do not have the support of Wiltshire Council. Anne said it's something the town wants, it's good for the prestige of the town, it's good for tourism, and all the reports and investigations have been self funded, so it's frustrating not to have the support of Wiltshire Council.

Aisling Hunt then introduced The Recycle for Wiltshire project, a partnership between Wiltshire Council and the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. Westbury was very poor at recycling. Initiatives such as a Repair Café and a clothes swap workshop were to be introduced as well as various cookery courses. They will be working in Westbury for 6 months to a year.

Cllr. Jerry Wickham introduced himself as the portfolio holder for waste on Wiltshire Council. He explained the serious issue is that we need to drive waste down. Every tonne of waste put into the ground costs £80 in tax. The important thing is to use Westbury to develop a toolkit in the coming year to use in other areas as well.

Eddie Watts then spoke about the Melksham Climate Friendly group which was set up in 2006. The five areas they focus on are transport, waste (including the indiscriminate use of plastic bags), energy, food, and wildlife. Eddy spoke briefly about each of these projects.

Shirley McCarthy introduced herself as the Energy lead in the Melksham Climate Friendly group and explained she also leads the Melksham Community Area Partnership's Energy theme group. Shirley firmly believes climate change is the single biggest challenge that the planet faces. Small groups and even individuals can definitely make a difference. Shirley also described the aims of The Wiltshire Clean Energy Alliance.

The BA13+ Partnership are particularly keen to see Westbury area residents coming together to form an environmental group with similar aims to the groups in Melksham and Bradford on Avon. Please contact the Partnership's coordinator, Phil McMullen, for details at ba13plus@outlook.com

Andi Whitcomb closed the meeting by speaking about her work with the NFU, about the challenges the county faces, and with relevance to our Community Plan. 60% of the food we eat in the UK is produced here. Farmers contribute £116 million to the county's economy each year. Around 14% of the county's farmland lies in this district, with 346 farm holdings registered. Farmers protect wildlife, habitats, water quality and natural resources through both regulation and voluntary initiatives such as planting dedicated wild bird seed mixes.

At the subsequent Steering Group meeting, which took place on Tuesday 3rd March at Crosspoint, it was noted that the February Partnership Meeting had been the final one for the Revd. Jonathan Burke, our vice-chair, and Chair for three years before that, who was retiring and leaving the area. Jonathan had been instrumental in working with Kerry Eatwell from the Development Trust (where we got our pot of money for grants) to move our previous group WAAG (Westbury Area Action Group) to a CAP (Community Area Partnership). A sincere vote of thanks was recorded from all of those present. Carole King also mentioned that the BA13 Partnership had also put a lot of work into the Christmas Tree Festival, decorating the Partnership's tree with Safe Places baubles and white ribbons denoting awareness of domestic violence issues.

It was also agreed that since the sum available for grants was dwindling, a new upper rate of £250 was to set with immediate effect.

Phil McMullen, BA13+ Partnership Coordinator

