

### **Stalham December 2025 meeting report**

Three speakers at December meeting.

A total of 16 members and guests joined the chairman, Jonathan Pye for supper at Wroxham Barns on Wednesday, December 10, 2025.

Welcome – The chairman welcomed 35 members and guests including the speakers, Andrea Kelly, environment policy adviser with the Broads Authority, Evan Burdett, of Norfolk FWAG (Norfolk Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group) and Henry Parkinson, of the Langley Abbey Environment Project.

Apologies – Robin Baines, Louis and Fran Baugh, Chris Borrett, Jason Cantrill, vice-chairman, Bob Clabon, Becky Collen, Christopher Deane, George Gay, president, Amanda Sands, Sir William Cubitt, Kevin Starkings, Greg Smith, Finn Will, Guy Willetts, Alistair and Junko Wright.

Secretary's update – Members agreed to donate £250 to Earlham Nursery School following the presentation by the head teacher Carole Jacques at last month's meeting. Members added further cash donations of £167. In total, thanks to matched funding by Aviva, the club has raised a total of £830 for the nursery school and the Earlham Community Shop.

The secretary, Michael Pollitt, explained that copies of the December 2025 edition of The Round Tower, published by the Round Tower Churches Society, included a feature on Norfolk folksinger Harry Cox, who lived opposite High House Farm, Catfield. He died in May 1971 and was buried in Potter Heigham churchyard. Thanks to John Mitchell for providing further background information on his life.

In introducing the speakers, the chairman said there were two speakers at the November meeting. Now, there were three, he added.

Rewarding conservation strategies in Broadland was the theme introduced by Andrea Kelly, who has been with the Broads Authority for 27 years.

Food production and nature faced major challenges especially in Broadland. A combination of evolving Whitehall environment policies (including reductions in farm support), climate change and rising sea levels were immediate concerns.

One leading member, Thomas Love, identified two pressing issues. First, the risk of salt water incursion (overtopping sea defences) at Walcott threatened native plant species including many only found in the Broads. If this salt water spread into the river system, it would have severe consequences not least for fish populations and wildlife.

Further, if strategies sought to encourage farmers to raise water table and levels, ie to reduce emissions by keeping peat wetter, it could impact on villages and communities.

For example, this could lead to more flooding as had happened at Hickling a couple of years ago.

In a stark assessment Andrea recognised the threats and opportunities in the Norfolk and Suffolk Broads. She highlighted the unique nature of Broadland which has some of the country's most valued environmental features – the fens, marshes, wildlife, Broads, and productive farmland. At the same time, it was a working landscape, producing food and was highly valued for its leisure/ tourist destinations.

The long-term drive towards carbon neutrality by mid century could force significant changes to farming. For example, national policy has identified reducing emissions from peat as a key goal, which could impact farming across the Norfolk Broads. With around 2,000 ha (5,000 acres) of peat soils, raising water levels could limit some cropping and pose challenges for livestock on grazing marshes.

Andrea outlined key elements of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, led by Norfolk County Council, with particularly reference to the Broads. Approved in October, it sets targets covering the next five years to 2030.

Broadland has 65pc of the country's key plant biodiversity, including 15 of the 23 key species. But, as was voiced by members, these are all vulnerable to salt water.

So, if Whitehall can't protect areas from saline incursion because of limited funding? Maybe building flood defence barriers, such as at Yarmouth, originally proposed in the 1980s, might be part of the solution.

Maybe too, the farming sector could encourage a more collaborative approach. For example, she said that an initiative in Somerset, involving West Sedgemoor, was trialling a more flexible water table strategy. Instead of just winter and summer limits, results from a spring level had been encouraging.

There was a further challenge too in Broadland, partly because there were many smaller to medium sized family farms. In other regions, large estates were able to encourage a joined-up strategy to model or develop innovative solutions. Could this be adopted in the Broads with possibly the IDBs (internal drainage boards) in river catchments?

There were opportunities too in the LNRS. Almost 90pc of the Broads could be included in the so-called ACB (areas which could be of importance for biodiversity). There were funding possibilities for specific projects, which might help to mitigate the loss of farm support.

There were also a number of other initiatives including the Norfolk Water Fund, and Anglian Water's Thriving Communities Fund.

There were opportunities too – admittedly possibly on a smaller scale. She mentioned the potential to encourage the revival of sedge production, where once Norfolk led the

field. If between 70ha and 100ha of sedge could be revived/ re-started, then it might have sufficient scale to invest in mechanised harvesting, generating gross returns of between £4,593 and £5,343 ha.

Given that 97pc of sedge was currently imported, the possible returns could be worthwhile. Also sedge was potentially made into a highly-efficient noise insulation product, she said.



Henry Parkinson, of the Langey Abbey Environment Project, near Loddon, spoke about the challenge of transforming about 600 acres into more nature-friendly farming operation.

He briefed members on the highly-complicated BNG (biodiversity net gain) scheme, which required developers to ensure a 10pc increase in nature by planting more trees, create wildlife spaces etc.

Alternatively, they could “offset” the development impact by funding nature-friendly schemes. There were about 161 in England including at Langley, he said. For details – [henry@langleyestate.co.uk](mailto:henry@langleyestate.co.uk) or telephone 07912 144847.

Finally, Evan Burdett outlined many of the range of options available. Again, he could be contacted on 07721 817529

The speakers were thanked by Sally Lomax and the meeting closed at 9.20pm.

The chairman wished members a Happy Christmas and New Year.

The next meeting is on Wednesday, January 14 when Emily Norton, chair of the AHDB will be speaking.

Michael Pollitt