

SUFFOLK Creating the Greenest County Conference

16 October 2007

400 people from a wide range of organisations come together to discuss what Creating the Greenest County means for us all

The sell-out event covered issues including the likely impact of climate change on Suffolk, its industries and landscape and what we can all do in response. With a wide range of displays, seminars and speeches, there was food for thought for delegates from all sectors.

The conference was chaired by John Gummer, Suffolk Coastal MP and former Environment Secretary. The exciting line-up of high-profile local and national speakers included another former environment minister, Michael Meacher MP and climate change expert Dr Clare Goodess.

1. Creating the greenest communities

Learn how to enable your community to move towards carbon neutrality and being a 'community for the 21st century'. This session will enable you to learn from pioneers in this field and those who can help you get a project off the ground, including experts on community renewable energy, parish planning for sustainability and funding. Panel members included Garry Charnock, project manager for Ashton Hayes's initiative to become England's first carbon-neutral village. Well worth looking at their experience which involves a strong partnership with a University.

2. Sustainable building and development

Buildings directly create over 40% of our carbon emissions – and whether housing, offices, new-build or existing buildings, they could be creating a lot less. This session covered how to commission, renovate and use buildings more sustainably, including housing (private, social, tourist accommodation), community buildings and historic refurbishments.

3. Landscapes and biodiversity

Suffolk is famous for its landscapes, and they also contain important economic resources in agriculture and tourism. Climate change will have a dramatic effect on this and land managers, farmers and businesses need to adapt. This session highlighted some of the initiatives that aim to address this.

4. Waste - beyond recycling

Waste is often not recognised as a key part of the sustainability matrix, but more stringent legislation and increasing consumer awareness is changing this.

5. Greening business

A broad themed seminar about how to implement the greenest county agenda as a positive commercial move within business – covering creating a sustainability strategy, achieving staff buy-in, waste reduction, procurement and sourcing, energy use, community relations and marketing your green credentials.

6. Alternative fuels for Suffolk

Learn about the advantages and disadvantages of alternative fuel sources including fuel crops, biomass and anaerobic digestion; and the use of alternative fuels for business and community schemes, grants and start-up advice.

7. Implementing greener transport use

Transport is responsible for over a quarter of our carbon emissions, yet behavioural change can radically alter this. Learn how to audit your business' travel emissions and how to create green travel plans for businesses and communities, as well as how new technology can help.

8. Sustaining local food

Enabling local food production to be genuinely sustainable has benefits for consumers and the economy, but can be hard to achieve. This session will cover ways to source and procure local food for your business, school or organisations, build partnerships between suppliers and understand the marketing of local and organic food

9. Greening Schools

A greener county will come from involving young people at all levels and creating better environments for learning that exemplify a sustainable approach. This session enabled managers, governors and headteachers to understand how to make greener schools – from case studies of success in the ecoschools initiative, to the Suffolk Building Schools for the Future programme and sustainable school design, how to involve youth in green projects and campaigns, funding and support.

Overall the Conference was highly professional with some of the leading experts in the country making presentations. However, it was in danger of becoming self congratulatory and of being hijacked by business interests who quite clearly saw the day as a marketing exercise. Questions detailing individual businesses in very positive terms had clearly been planted, the panel on nuclear energy had no "anti nukes" representative and the seminars were loaded with business spokesmen. There was serious talk after the event by one of the principle sponsors of withdrawing as "people too thick to enter the argument" had been allowed to make points critical of their company. As ever there was insufficient time for detailed discussion and anyone under the age of 21 was catering staff!

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