



All Somerset Parish and Town Councils  
3<sup>rd</sup> September 2020

## Somerset County Council – Climate Emergency Community Fund – Climate and Nature Networkers and Local Nature Partnership

Hello,

The recently launched £1 million Somerset County Council Climate Fund is an exciting local opportunity to help address the twin emergencies we face, that of climate change and our increasingly threatened natural world.

As you know, any applications to this fund have to be done through our parish and town councils, so this letter is to ask for your support for our proposal for £75,000 funding to pay for the two posts below; a Somerset Climate and Nature Networkers Coordinator and a Somerset Local Nature Partnership Manager.

So what would these two roles be for?

### 1. Somerset Climate and Nature Networkers Coordinator

This co-ordinator would build a movement for change in the county, mobilising, empowering and enabling action so people can help their communities meet the climate targets and restore nature.

The Climate and Nature Networkers Coordinator would;

- Recruit climate and nature volunteers in your town or parish community
- Engage with your parish to help encourage, facilitate and guide positive action
- Help link parishes and communities to organisations and other groups to learn from and support each other
- Help establish local Nature Hubs and Nature Recovery Networks - Nature Hubs are volunteer led community action groups, affiliated to and supported by the Trust to help deliver the Nature Recovery Network for Somerset. Nature Recovery Networks are a way of linking up areas of good natural habitat and creating new natural landscapes to allow nature to recover, move through the landscape and be more resilient to big changes like climate change
- Monitor the progress of networkers and projects, reporting to supporting parishes and celebrating the successes of communities using our extensive media channels
- Establish an interactive online resource to share good practice, facilitate peer support, offer training and signpost to useful information and organisations

### 2. Somerset Local Nature Partnership (SLNP) Coordinator

SLNP is a strong, strategic champion for the county's important and valuable natural environment. The SLNP Board and Forum will together embed the value and importance of the natural environment and implementation of the Nature Recovery Network and strategy into all decision-making processes, planning and policy decisions and provide leadership, coordinating delivery to achieve long-term strategic objectives to:

- Protect and improve the county's unique natural environment through a shared vision and strategy for the county
- Develop natural solutions to climate change identifying carbon sequestration opportunities
- Embed the intrinsic value of Somerset's natural environment into cultural, political and economic agendas

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in the county where you live*

- Show leadership in bringing sectors and people together to realise economic, social, health and environmental benefits from an improved, coherent and resilient ecological network for Somerset
- Communicate and improve the economic, social and health benefits that the natural environment brings for everyone who lives, works or visits Somerset

The SLNP Coordinator would work on behalf of the SLNP and:

- Drive forwards priority actions & embed in decision-making processes
- Develop, manage & support the SLNP to deliver work plan
- Identify & present evidence to support SLNP priorities & influence decision-making
- Advise on natural environment and public policy
- Deliver on the National Planning Policy Framework 'Duty to Cooperate' function regarding planning and policy documents (national and local)
- Deliver communications (internal & external)
- Build relationships within SLNP & externally including the Local Enterprise Partnership to drive Natural Capital investment
- Work with neighbouring LNPs to achieve greater outcomes across Somerset
- Develop projects & funding bids to deliver priority actions

If your local council is keen to join Somerset Wildlife Trust and Somerset Climate Action Network in this exciting application, please email Steve Mewes on [steve.mewes@somersetwildlife.org](mailto:steve.mewes@somersetwildlife.org) by 5pm, Wednesday September 23<sup>rd</sup>.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours Faithfully,



Georgia Stokes  
CEO, Somerset Wildlife Trust and Interim Chair of Somerset Local Nature Partnership



Steve Mewes  
Chair, Somerset Climate Action Network and Policy and Campaigns Manager Somerset Wildlife Trust



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# Letting Nature Help

## Changing the way we think about nature

*“We cannot tackle the climate crisis without similar ambition to meet the nature crisis head on – the two are inseparable. The climate crisis is driving nature’s decline while the loss of wildlife and habitats leaves us ill-equipped to reduce our emissions and adapt to change.” Craig Bennett, CEO, The Wildlife Trusts*

Our nature reserves and green spaces provide vital homes for wildlife, but they're so much more than that. They're the life support function for our lives, our communities and our local businesses. Natural habitats in good health reduce the risk of flooding, help prevent coastal erosion, improve people’s health and ensure thriving ecosystems which provide the pollinators, soils, food and water which sustain us. Restoring nature at scale also happens to be one of our best hopes for storing carbon to mitigate against the effects of the global climate crisis.

Sadly, however, the UK is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world. The 2019 State of Nature report found that 41% of UK species have declined since 1970, and we have lost 97% of our meadows since WW2, 80% of our chalk grasslands, and more than half our ancient woodlands. And with them went all the carbon that they were keeping locked up.

The Wildlife Trusts estimate that putting nature into recovery on land and sea across the UK could result in nature absorbing around a third of the country’s current carbon emissions. We still need to do everything we can to cut emissions from buildings, power stations, industry and transport, but there’s been a blind spot in the climate debate for years about the role nature can play in helping us out. Enter nature-based solutions...

### **What are nature-based solutions?**

The International Union for Conservation of Nature defines nature-based solutions as “actions to protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural or modified ecosystems that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously providing human well-being and biodiversity benefits”.

Put simply, nature-based solutions means recognising that nature can help with some of the problems we face today: climate change, air pollution, flooding and poor soil quality. If you’ve ever heard a politician talking about investing in technology to absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and shouted “it’s called a tree”; you’re talking about a nature-based solution.

Somerset Wildlife Trust, along with other Wildlife Trusts and environmental organisations, is well placed to use our skills and experience to restore nature and deliver nature-based solutions. In fact, this approach aligns neatly with our existing work to protect wildlife and habitats across the county to address catastrophic biodiversity and bioabundance decline. With our long history and unique knowledge of the county we are well placed to support and advise other organisations to achieve greater impacts together.

## **What nature-based solutions do we have in Somerset already?**

Fully understanding what the natural environment of Somerset should be is difficult. Generational amnesia, shifting baselines (the bar being lowered for expectations) and inadequate historical data. Currently, however, around 14% of Somerset's land cover is classified as being in a semi-natural condition.

Looking at things purely from a carbon capture perspective, Somerset's potential is huge. The species-rich grassland reserves managed by the Trust such as Chancellor's Farm and Yoxter Ranges, Lots Grassland and Tealham and Tadham alone have great carbon capture and storage capacity, as well as serving to connect up a larger network of CO<sub>2</sub> absorbing grasslands across the county. And that's over and above providing habitats for a myriad of invertebrates and other wildlife.

Somerset is also home to Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust's Steart Marshes - one of the UK's largest wetland reserves, with hundreds of acres of saltmarsh already buffering homes and businesses from rising sea levels. Peatland reserves, such as the internationally acclaimed, Levels and Moors, are still storing a huge amount of carbon, so it is vital that we keep them wet and healthy allowing them to continue providing this vital service for us all. And given 73% of Somerset is farmed, there is a huge opportunity to support farmers to ensure that hedgerows and field margins are also making an even greater contribution.

Add this to our woodlands and coastal habitats, there is an enormous amount we are contributing to the national effort, simply by ensuring that we keep what we already have in good health and continue to work with others to improve surrounding land too- something that we have been doing across the county for over 50 years.

To meet the challenges of the climate and ecological crises, we need to do more together with landowners, communities, businesses and other organisations. The way we manage land across the county needs to make a seismic shift from where it is currently. We need to put nature-based solutions at the heart of our forward planning and investment programmes. We need to put nature back in charge.

Somerset Wildlife Trust has a key role to play in this work; providing strategic support and practical advice to others to achieve greater impacts for nature, and empowering landowners, communities and others to take action.

### **Bigger, better, more joined up**

Quite conveniently, The Wildlife Trusts have already developed what we think is the most critical blueprint upon which a core set of nature-based solutions can be delivered at the pace and scale required to meet our carbon targets.

Habitats are fragmented, there isn't enough space for wildlife to move around and pockets of disparate species 'cul de sacs' exist - a key reason that many of our plants and animals are declining.

Somerset Wildlife Trust is leading the development of a Nature Recovery Plan working with a wide range of partners and landowners to map out opportunities to invest in and restore nature at scale. We are using cutting-edge science, data and mapping techniques to identify and 'knit' together core areas of ecologically functioning habitats and ecosystems, and buffer and link these across Somerset.

Our nature reserves, local wildlife sites and SSSIs all provide species-rich habitats and, linked to corridors or smaller 'stepping stones' of similarly species-rich habitat, allow plants and animals to

not only thrive and spread, but also be more adaptable to change. These connections create a 'Nature Recovery Network', a key tool and one we have been developing in the last year.

### **Green carbon solutions**

Our habitats on land have a huge role to play in addressing climate change. Plants help remove human-made carbon emissions, whilst our soils contain more carbon than is stored in those plants and the atmosphere combined!

*Green carbon solutions include:*

#### **Peatlands**

UK peatlands store an amazing 3.2 billion tonnes of carbon and globally cover just 3% of the earth's surface. Healthy (wet) peatlands store more carbon than any other habitat but damaged ones (included those drained) are a major source of carbon emissions. Healthy peatlands also help to alleviate flooding by storing and filtering water, making it cleaner taking the pressure off nearby communities.

Currently 80% of the UK's peatlands (94% of UK lowland peatlands, like those found across the Somerset Levels and Moors) are damaged (dry) and hence release 23 million tonnes of carbon dioxide a year.

#### **Woodlands**

Woodlands cover approximately 13% of the UK and are estimated to soak up around 21 million tonnes of carbon dioxide a year. Lesser known is that whilst trees and other plants lock up carbon, nearly three times as much is stored in the woodland soils that support them.

In addition to carbon capture, woodlands root system help open up the soil structure allowing water to percolate slowing the flow of water downstream after extreme rain events helping to reduce flooding.

#### **Grasslands**

UK grasslands store two billion tonnes of carbon in their soils, but disturbance of the soils releases carbon. Between 1990-2006, conversion from grassland to arable production released 14 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> and little 'unimproved' grassland remains.

Species-rich grasslands are huge carbon stores and when managed carefully, as through herb-rich leys and sensitive grazing. We are working with landowners in Mendip to create more herbal leys and our nature reserves at Chancellors Farm are examples of carbon storing 'unimproved' grasslands in Somerset.

#### **Wetlands**

Wetlands can accumulate carbon for centuries, but drainage for agriculture and industrial-scale peat-cutting has reduced or destroyed many wetlands and areas of raised bog, fen and reedbed. Good management is critical - it can take decades for restored wetlands to be able to draw down carbon at the same rate as natural wetlands.

Projects to restore wetlands as in the Avalon Marshes are important nature-based solutions to climate change.

### **Blue carbon solutions**

Oceans absorb 20-35% of human-made carbon emissions every year and 'blue carbon' is stored in ocean plants and animals, and in mud and sediments.

Somerset has fabulously diverse coastal habitats, which we now know a lot more about thanks to SWT completing the first scientific survey of Somerset's coast. We are now working with coastal communities to ensure these special carbon-capturing habitats can continue their work.

*Blue carbon solutions include:*

### **Seagrass**

Seagrass beds are one of our most important natural solutions to the climate crisis. The marine equivalent of grasslands and meadows, they are home to amazing wildlife too. Seagrass captures carbon 35 times faster than tropical rainforests, and accounts for 10% of the ocean's total burial of carbon (despite covering less than 0.2% of the ocean floor). 92% of the UK's seagrass beds have already been lost so we act now to increase them.

### **Ocean sediments**

Ocean sediment habitats are formed over thousands of years when marine animals and phytoplankton die and sink to the seafloor and are incredibly important for marine wildlife. Storing huge amounts of carbon, means they are an important natural habitat in tackling climate change but dredging destroys the sediments, releasing carbon that otherwise may have been locked up for millennia, as well as destroying habitats and wildlife.

### **Saltmarshes**

A hectare of saltmarsh can capture two tonnes of carbon a year and lock it into sediments for centuries. Drainage, development and rising sea levels all result in its loss and damage, releasing CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere and **nationally** we are losing nearly **100** hectares of saltmarsh a year.

Here in Somerset, *WWT Steart Marshes* is one of the UK's largest new working wetlands with hundreds of hectares of saltmarsh and freshwater buffering homes and businesses from rising sea levels and also providing rich habitat for a range of wetland wildlife.