

David Barker MBE presentation to the Creating the Greenest County Conference 2017

Slide 1 Presentation to Greenest County Conference Friday October 20th 2017

Slide 2 Where I come from:

My involvement with the Greenest County project goes back to 2005 when The Suffolk Strategic Partnership were working on a vision and strategy for Suffolk which covered 2007-2017.

I was invited as an Environmental Champion after representation was made by Peter Holburn, Julian Roughton and Richard Rafe, the discussions on the future direction of the county were intense and detailed but I soon found as an environmental representative I was knocking at an open door. Creating the Greenest County became a central theme and has stood the test of time, Clare Countess of Euston asked me to chair the Greenest County Board and this I have done for the past 10 years, The project was launched by Bishop Richard Lewis as the President of the 2007 Suffolk Show.

I had the great privilege to work with Ian Dunnett who as project officer was the inspiration of the early work. Part of the success of the project is that we have managed to keep party politics out of the work, hence we have had people from all political groups working together.

Slide 3 Our Aspirations were significant and now looking back we have achieved much of what we set out to do

- * Achieve the highest possible recycling of waste. **Yes we have**
- * Increase the use of biomass as a source of home produced heating. **Yes but other things have come into play.**
- * Encourage the creation of a biodiesel or bioethanol plant to achieve home produced fuel. **Well bio-fuels have not really taken off but electricity a cleaner form of fuel certainly has.**
- * Obtain a new purpose built abattoir to benefit local grassland, local producers and reduce travel for farm animals. **Achieved and has just won a Queens award for export.**
- * Aim to have the highest uptake of Environmental Stewardship Schemes in the UK. **Suffolk came 2nd nationally and top of the Eastern region.**
- * Encourage locally produced food and drink. **Local food and drink has been a major success story.**

*The proposed flagship `White Tailed Eagle Project` to be a signal for the Wildlife quality of our countryside. **White Tailed Eagles was probably never realistic but we have achieved much more with an iconic local bird the Barn Owl.**

Slide 4 Our challenges... these have not diminished but the last 10 years have illustrated that Suffolk is up for battle. We cannot deny climate change is with us as, a farmer I know full well how the climate has changed. But there are advantages we have to adapt. Protecting and enhancing our environment is really important, I have on occasions caused controversy for not supporting land based wind turbines but my love of the Suffolk countryside is long established, some like those on the Eye Industrial Estate are good but local people with whom I agree like the beauty of the Suffolk countryside.

The countryside is a basis of a local food and drink industry that has become vital to the economy and a great attraction to the vast increase in tourists who are attracted to this special county. The great challenge ahead is managing growth.

Slide 5 Supporting business... The local authorities have done an amazing job in helping local business reduce its carbon footprint by offering advice backed up by grant aid. The Suffolk Carbon Charter has provided accreditation to a large number of business. To date support has been given to 1,500 businesses and delivered £2.3 million in annual savings in energy costs. Over 5,000 homes have received energy efficiency improvements making them warmer and healthier.

Slide 6 Supporting communities... Again advice and grant aid have given a huge boost to local communities in a vast number of ways.

Slide 7 Working on waste... We wanted to increase the % of waste re-cycled well in reality it is now 100% what is not re-cycled is used to provide energy. The Blakenham facility has been a great triumph, sadly our neighbours in Norfolk got into a right muddle but thanks to Suffolk County Council, Mid Suffolk District Council, SITA and very many others this plant is up and running and a flagship for renewable energy and dealing with waste.

Of course waste comes in many areas and litter remains a big problem but thanks to Mark Murphy and Radio Suffolk people are much more engaged and aware, I will never forget the smell when on a Sunday morning Radio Suffolk presenters and listeners tackled the waste beside the A14 at the Spring Wood nature reserve. The campaign has enabled very many local people to become involved in community litter picks on a regular basis.

Slide 8 Supporting green buildings... The Suffolk Green Buildings network not only highlights good design but encourage renewable energy and rain water harvesting, high quality insulation has become the norm in many new buildings but there is still much to be done, too often developers look short term and not to long term sustainability. Many new buildings have become energy generators not energy users. The Greenest County stand at the 2008 Suffolk Show displayed the first solar panels, in my view solar on buildings remains a source with vast potential in 2007 UK Power had just 200 generators feeding into the grid now it is 400,000. 100 people represents just over half those present today compared to 5 times a full Wembley stadium! In your workshops be bold in your aspirations for the next 10 years, in 2007 we could never have imagined the amazing expansion in renewable energy.

Slide 8 Rewarding success..... The Greenest County Awards have been the flagship of the project 9 years of awards have highlighted business, schools, communities and individuals far too many to mention but each and every one received reserved recognition and inspired others, throughout Suffolk you will see evidence of these awards.

Slide 9 Modern farming delivering food and wider benefits post Brexit. I have worked for more than 50 years in farming and witnessed major change and now in 2017 we stand at a cross roads as Brexit looms.

For the past 10 years our farm has been in Natural England's Higher Level Stewardship Scheme, we have changed our farming system to reduce fuel with less ploughing and a determination to farm in an environmental sustainable way, a mixed cropping rotation and a focus on soil fertility, soil structure and good husbandry.

Crop yields have been excellent as costs have been reduced, but this has been achieved with increasing wildlife and determination to look after landscape features. I would love to get Michael Grove out on my farm and show him what can be achieved!

Balancing food production with a sustainable farming system is not rocket science, we need sensible people working with government to provide a post Brexit farm support system that supports food production alongside wildlife and to ensure benefits for people to enjoy the countryside, we must ensure science and not emotion rules for example our farming system requires Glyphosate (Round Up) to control harmful weeds but the fringe greens seek to ban it.

On Wednesday November 15th here at Trinity Park there is a conference where the Suffolk Agricultural Association have joined forces with the Suffolk Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group that examines the environmental benefits that can be obtained from a Post Brexit Agricultural policy.

Slide 10 Farmland birds are probably the best indicator of a healthy countryside and in the last 10 years with the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme the numbers on our farm have shown a very significant increase Grey Partridge have returned in good numbers where there were 3 pairs today we have 40 to 50 birds, due to bird ringing taking place the numbers of native and migrant birds have been monitored, the stewardship scheme has helped with wild bird food crops (Lesley Dolphin named them giant bird tables) which is exactly what they are flocks of linnet will be attracted to the farm as well as Greenfinches, Goldfinches can be seen but the yellow hammer has seen the most remarkable increase.

I started with mention of White Tailed Sea Eagles which was probably not a good idea but substitute the Barn Owl which Suffolk had 350 pairs in 1932 down to 180 pairs in 1987 but today thanks to the Community Barn Owl project has over 400 pairs the only county in the UK to have more today than the 1930's.

Barn Owls I never saw on the farm for many years but today hardly a day goes by without the sight of this iconic bird, we had 3 pairs nesting this year, the Community Barn Owl work is a terrific example of Suffolk people working with landowners to enhance wildlife, long may this continue.

I would also like to thank Matt Hullis, Emma Dixon and Steff Jones for all the work they have done in bringing this conference together.

After 10 years we have come a long way and much has been achieved but there is still a great deal to do.

David Barker 20.10.2017.