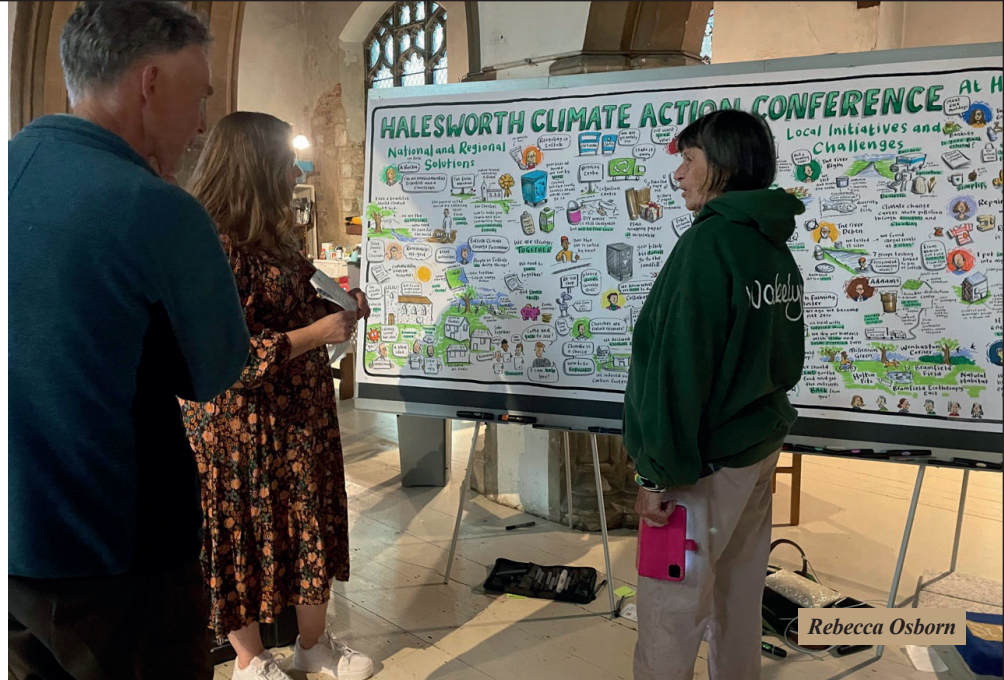




Panel audience



Rebecca Osborn

Halesworth Climate Action Conference review

Halesworth's first ever Climate Action Conference took place from September 29th to October 1st, with enormous success.

Unusual for a climate gathering, one of its four parts was a sell out. It comprised of a week-long exhibition showcasing local groups either mitigating climate change or scrutinising development that challenged climate change, to which local schools were invited to for a day; a panel discussion in the 'Any Questions' format; a day-long conference with experts in diverse fields sharing their experience; and finally, a 'What next' meeting on Sunday, in which a committed group of people proposed three future strategies.

If it's about numbers, over 200 people came to the Friday Night Panel discussion, which was covered by Look East early evening news so was seen by many more. Over 300 people have watched the live recording on YouTube. Over 100 people came to the Saturday Conference and our website had over 2,000 hits over the weekend.

We had no idea that climate would be so upper most in peoples minds. Both the Town Council and Blyth Valley Churches (*the joint organisers*) were delighted with the response, and are already planning a follow up series of events.

www.halesworthash.com

An Exhibition:

Under the church arches, running for a week, there were 25 individual exhibitors, showcasing local projects and a science corner. Some groups met up for the first time and connected. It was creative, with information displayed on bicycle wheels (*by the Millennium Green which encompasses Sustrans Route 1*), and an exhibition of photographs together with a looped film by Bill Jackson. A White Elephant encompassed Sizewell development, and LionLink's map displayed the potential effect of diverse energy developments along the Suffolk Coast. Swift calls could be heard echoing around the space.

Free trees were given away by Halesworth Town Council, who were also creatively promoting 're-used banners turned into bags'. The Repair Café mended and sewed throughout the week.

Schools came on Friday:

Over 100 school children and staff were creatively entertained and challenged by Reverend Alison Alder for a day. They contributed to a Tree of Hope, with desires such as: "I hope the polar bears can stay where they belong", and "I hope the sycamore grows back and people stop chopping down trees."

The star of the show was a display by Banham

Zoo, who brought along lion poo and great snake skins. This is the generation who will feel the effects of our actions today.

The 'Any Questions Panel' on Friday night was a sell out:

Aided by much media attention, the church was full, standing room only. It was a lively discussion with "an august and impressive panel" as described by Bishop of Edmondsbury, who chaired with grace and knowledge. As he said at the end, the audience had made their feelings felt in many different ways.

The panel included the Secretary of State for Environment and our local MP, Dr Thérèse Coffey and Adrian Ramsay, co-leader of the Green Party and standing as the Green Party candidate for the new Waveney Valley constituency. These two enjoyed a few spats particularly over high e-coli count in the Blyth river water.

Thérèse Coffey (*who had earlier visited the nearby Holton Pits as she'd been supportive of their successful bid for Community Ownership Funding*) praised the local community for their work to save this open space.

Reverend Dominic Doble opened the conference, setting the tone, urging us to agree to disagree with an open mind and kindness and learn from each other's diverse views.

BBC Look East covered the build up in the 6pm news.

Professor Peter Hobson was replaced at the last minute by Darren Tansley from Essex Wildlife Trust, fresh from discussing climate change with farmers along the Stour Valley.

Eight questions were distilled from many submitted. The panel included:

- Dr Thérèse Coffey (*Secretary of State for Environment, Conservative MP for Suffolk Coastal*).
- Darren Tansley (*Essex Wildlife Trust*).
- Adrian Ramsay (*Co-leader of the Green Party*). Adrian currently leads MCS Charitable Foundation which advocates for renewable energy and green homes.
- Professor Catherine Rowett (*County Councillor for West Depwade, former Member of the European Parliament for East of England and campaigner for solar on Churches and community energy schemes*).
- David Kemp (*Environment Agency*), Coastal Team Leader (*coastal flood warning and resilience*) "The Eastern Front of Climate Change".

• Richard Rout (*Suffolk County Council Deputy Leader & Cabinet Member for Finance & Environment*).

• Josiah Meldrum (*Co-founder of Hodmedods, a business that supports farmers as they bring diversity to their arable crop rotations*).

The Conference - All day, September 30th:

After the theatre, this was the meat of the weekend. With over 25 practitioners, describing a wide range of projects ongoing to mitigate climate change, from individual solar panels on homes, to county-wide initiatives. Over 100 people attended, a remarkable feat in itself. This shows the community were keen to learn and understand this often complex effect on us.

Joyce Moseley (*Chair of Halesworth Town Council*) opened the conference, emphasising that this was for the local community. What can we do to mitigate climate change, in our own homes and our lives?

Claire Ling from Suffolk Climate Change Partnership became known as 'Ask me Claire', passionately urging us to tap into the range of opportunities offered by the Partnership. We learned what support was available and what councils can do.

East Suffolk Environment Councillors past and present (*James Malinder and Rachel Smith-Lyte*) co-hosted a session outlining past and present initiatives. Who knew James had set up the Environment department, and successfully initiated "Pardon the Weeds", called a climate emergency, and started to introduce electric Council vehicles? Rachel Smith-Lyte outlined her focus for the future... Saving and planting trees, retrofitting insulation to council houses, to walking cycling strategy.

Catherine Rowett (*who is campaigning for solar panels on churches*) asked "Who will take up this baton?" We learned about solar on sports clubs and on Kings College Cambridge.

A highlight was Professor Peter Hobson, who was live-streaming, talking from his home as he was suffering from Covid. He shocked us with photographs of this years di-back in German forests. A land ethic, he concluded, depends on our view, quoting Aldo Leopold: "When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect."

Wil Harvey and Eamonn O'Nolan revealed the results of their recent water sampling along the Rivers Deben and Blyth. (*Something perhaps we'd rather not know about, especially if we are wild swimmers?*)

An impressive gaggle of groups protecting open spaces (*Halesworth Millennium Green, Holton Pits, many groups from Wenhaston, and two groups from Bramfield*) described their successful projects to increase biodiversity and increase tree and hedge cover.

Isabel Losada woke us up after tea with a dynamic call for us to "CHANGE YOUR BANK", and stop buying clothes, among many other practical ways we could ourselves have a positive impact on climate change. Phil Bull described in useful detail how he installed solar on his own home, Peter Miller challenged some of the misconceptions over air source heat pumps.

The conference ended with Eamonn O'Nolan, describing the journey Woodbridge had taken since their conference, two years ago, its successes and failures. "First start with a conference" he said. We did.

On Sunday, a group met to discuss 'What Next?' Fired up with the ideas from Saturday, people met on Sunday to reflect on the conference and say what

sparked them, and what they'd like to happen next.

• **Reduce carbon out:** Home energy was the area we were most at sea. Could we join individual to a community cluster? Perhaps Peter Miller and 'Ask Me Claire' could help?

• **Increase carbon in:** How to encourage greater carbon sequestration/protect open spaces.

• **Motivate:** How can we continue to be motivated and move forward?

Conclusion:

The whole conference was captured graphically by Rebecca Osbourne. Concentrating for over six hours, she captured each speaker's message (*with their portrait*), in remarkable drawings. This is reminder of what was said, as well as a spring-board to what we will do; it is a remarkable testament and our legacy.

It was an inspiring event for Halesworth Town Council and Blyth Valley Churches. It was important for the community to hear these options, to engage in this vital and life changing conversation, to feel a part and to be informed.

Present at the conference were two representatives from Wymondham, who relayed that they're planning just such a conference for their town. It was the Climate Action conference in Woodbridge which inspired us to have this. So, the baton is passed.

For now, and following in Woodbridges footsteps, we have plans to keep up the momentum with regular events, sub groups and continued connection.

What next?

Out of the conference, three distinct groups have formed.

1. **Halesworth Ash** (*An umbrella group*), coordinated by Halesworth Town Council and Blyth Valley Churches to oversee future events and distribute information.

2. **Halesworth Community Energy Group Steering Group** has formed. Our aims would be to engage the community in measuring the thermal efficiency of our homes, developing plans to de-carbonise housing stock. We would work with existing groups in the area and take forward the environmental aspects of the neighbourhood plan. We are talking thermal imaging, insulation, air-source heat pumps. Interested? Please contact Chris. Details on: www.halesworthash.com

3. **An Open Space Group** is to meet with Alan Miller to link the open spaces initiatives together and share knowledge and expertise.

If anyone is interested in joining these groups or wish to start other initiatives, please let us know. We have work to do!



ASH Conference Panel



Isabel Losada