



Halesworth Climate Action Conference – a great success/sowing seeds.

“It was fantastic to see so many people - and particularly farmers - engaged in the important subject of food and land and to hear the conversations and debates going on over coffee breaks. Halesworth Town Council are delighted to be able to support the Climate Action Conference as part of the drive to reduce our carbon emissions locally.” Rachel Kellett, Councillor, Halesworth Town Council

St Mary's Church, Halesworth, was packed on the last Friday night of September for the start of a conference focused on Land and Food.

Adrian Ramsay, Green MP for Waveney Valley, opened proceedings, after a moving rendition of the song "Heartwood" by Katherine MacRae, and a welcome from Dominic Doble, Blyth Valley Team Rector and host for the weekend's events.

The Farming Maze (borrowing the format of BBC Radio 4's "Moral Maze") got stuck in to the subject of land use. How can we best minimise and mitigate against carbon emissions, while still feeding a growing population? The panelists - emeritus professor Peter Hobson, NFU Suffolk County Chair Glenn Buckingham, Becky Taylor from Greengrow, Richard Symes from Earlsway Farm, and Stuart Mayhew from Old Hall Farm – were questioned by Josiah Meldrum, co-founder of Hodmedods, who chaired the session.

Handed around the audience were various items brought along by the panelists, such as a huge and heavy jar full of edible seed varieties, a basket of apples, photographs of children visiting a farm, photographs of dung, a bag of soil, “red” diesel fuel, and intriguingly, a shallow circular dish with a ball inside! Their significance became clear in the panel’s closing statements.

Many in the audience were local farmers and food producers as well as consumers, and so much discussion flowed afterwards over wine, cheese and biscuits.

Saturday's programme - introduced by Joyce Moseley, chair of Halesworth Town Council - included a range of presentations drilling down into issues raised by the panelists the night before.

Peter Hobson explained in scientific terms the urgency of addressing the effects of climate change already underway, and the true harms of our entire “food system” – from soil exhaustion, global transportation, and over consumption. Emily Winter (Waveney Farm Cluster) and Richard Symes (Blyth Farm Cluster) spoke about the benefits of clusters, sharing knowledge and know-how across networks of local farmers who are working hard to find sustainable solutions to the challenges they face. Volunteers from Halesworth’s local food larder described the challenges of feeding people more equitably. And John Taylor gave an inspiring overview of community-owned energy.

The groups formed from last year's conference relayed their progress in monitoring rivers and pollution, and developing and conserving open spaces.

Sunday provided an opportunity for reflection, with a service of Thanksgiving at St Mary's addressed by the chaplain for farming.

This was the second Halesworth Climate Action Conference, which as before included a week-long exhibition of the activities of local organisations. A mid-week sold-out screening at The Cut of the film *Wilding* - telling the story of the wilding of the Knepp Estate in Sussex – set the scene for the weekend. As part of a rolling programme of events, on 20 November there will be a screening of the film *Six Inches of Soil*, which the organisers - Halesworth ASH (Area Sustainability Hub) - are expecting to be equally popular!

Full report and photographs here

<https://halesworthash.com/>

<https://halesworthash.com/climate-conference-2024/>

505 words.

Photo 1 shows Adrian Ramsay MP and the Friday night panel

Photo 2 shows interactive display about individual eating habits