

West Midlands Sustainable Schools Network

NOTES from meeting, Tuesday 25th June

Garden Organic

Present: Ben Ballin (Chair), Philip Brown, Colette Bond, Tony Fox, Barbara Golding, Nina Hatch, Sarah Lardner, Jacqui Staunton.

Apologies: Rupert Brakspear, Julie Brown, Justin Crilly, Juliette Green, Michelle James, Helen Marriott, Sarah Milburn, Deborah Needle, Nigel Rayment, Sue Shanks, Ash Sharma.

The following people have recently joined the group:

- Philip Brown, UNA Coventry
- Tonia Clark, Friends of Handsworth Park
- Barbara Golding, Warwickshire County Council
- Jacqui Staunton, Climate Change Solutions

New members were welcomed. Jacqui outlined how Climate Change Solutions (based at Ryton, alongside Garden Organic) is looking at the potential for running a climate change conference for Coventry schools in partnership with a local councillor. Philip related how UNA Coventry had set up a Climate Action Network in the city, and had been working with adults and students to campaign for action from the city council.

Colette was thanked for hosting this meeting.

Local Authority support

Sarah has been reviewing how LA support for sustainable schools currently stands and reported back as follows (with some inputs from those present).

The big picture appears to be that most LAs still offer a few specific programmes, but that they now operate in a 'mixed economy' alongside charities, social enterprises, universities and other providers. LAs' role in the management of schools has also declined.

- *Birmingham.* Focus on school travel through the government funded Modeshift Stars programme. <https://www.modeshiftstars.org/education/>

School Improvement is now led through Birmingham Education Partnership (BEP).

- *Coventry.* Offers a recycling resource pack, with a focus on litter and antisocial behaviour. (Nina offered feedback on Holy Trinity School's work with the National Savers charity and the Schools Plastic Project. Philip added that Coventry CAN had set up a Plastic Fantastic Initiative).
- *Dudley.* The Environment Zone is still running, led by Guy deSzathmary. <http://ezonemag.net/about-the-ezone/>
- *Herefordshire.* Offering some advice and support on Eco Schools.
- *Sandwell.* Supporting work on school travel.

- *Shropshire*. The LA offers a package of support for schools, although school support services are now run through the University of Chester.
- *Solihull*. Sarah works for three days a week supporting schools, especially through the Greener Schools Programme. There is an annual celebratory event. The LA is in its fifth year of offering the Ashden schools programme. There are projects around wetlands and forestry, and the LA holds events for the Interclimate Project. Schools have done some mapping of links between their planning and the SDGs, which can be shared with others. All this activity taps into the LA's *Green Prospectus*, a road map for sustainability that brings different bodies and departments together. Initiatives on sustainability have been championed by Councillor Ian Courts, the West Midlands Combined Authority's Climate Champion.
- *Staffordshire*
 - *Cannock Chase*. Information on website about Eco Schools and the *Love Where You Live* project.
 - *Stafford MBC*. Have a strong and active Eco Schools Network.
 - Training and professional development in Staffordshire and Stoke are provided through Entrust.
- *Telford & Wrekin*. School services offer support on school travel, outdoor education and healthy living.
- *Walsall*. Vicky Bloor supports the All Stars Travel Programme. The LA also promotes the Food for Life Partnership.
- *Warwickshire*. Barbara now works as an ecologist for the LA, and is sometimes asked to work with local schools. Funding is being sought.
- *Worcestershire*. The LA offers support to Eco Co-ordinators and training on waste management.
 - The Bishop's Wood Centre is now part of the Field Studies Council.
 - Wyre Forest runs a programme for schools called *A Breath of Fresh Air*.

ACTION (1): Sarah to share case study material and presentations from Solihull schools linked to the SDGs.

ACTION (2): Sarah to find out more about the new Climate Champion role at the WM Combined Authority, with a view to future dialogue/advocacy.

(See also <https://www.wmca.org.uk/news/new-west-midlands-combined-authority-board-portfolios-announced/>)

Communications strategy

There are now 71 people on the regular e-mailing list, but only a small proportion of these are on the Members' page of the website. This is a good way of profiling members' work as well as a demonstration of the combined strength and diversity of the Network. For your organisation to be listed on the page, we need:

- Organisation's Name
- Web address and/or email
- Contact name (optional)
- A short paragraph about what the organisation offers to schools

ACTION: ALL who are not already listed on the members' page to email details to wmsussch@gmail.com

The impact of work on SD

Standing item. Nothing to report.

Registers of skills and external connections

ACTION: Ben to request details from members.

Website - blogs

We agreed to adopt the following guidelines, which are based on those used by NAEE. Blog posts should ...

1. relate to WMSSN's interests and say something pertinent and of value to readers
2. usually be between 100 and 500 words (In some instances, we may agree to go over this word count)
3. avoid being overly-promotional of anything
4. be written by the individual and not on behalf of an organisation
5. not be libellous or personally offensive

Process:

- We should aim to have at least one blog each month
- Ben to ask Debbie if she can moderate blogs
- The first audience of all blogs is WMSSN members, though some posts will be of wider interest (e.g. for teachers, policymakers, young people)
- All new posts to be routinely notified to members via Email and Twitter
- Members to be encouraged to retweet, share and forward posts
- Network meeting minutes to be posted as blogs, but with any confidential matters omitted from them.[\[1\]](#)

Initial schedule of blogs:

1. These meeting minutes ASAP
2. Climate change resource list ASAP
3. Sarah Lardner – Spotlight on Solihull JULY
4. Colette – reblogging on schools and organic gardening JULY

ACTION (1): Ben to liaise with Debbie about posting and moderation

ACTION (2): Sarah and Colette to prepare blogs

ACTION (3): Ben to liaise with Sarah Millburn over reblogging S4TP's calendar of events

ACTION (4): ALL offers of future blogs posts to be sent to wmsussch@gmail.com

These can be reviewed via email or at meetings as appropriate

Debbie was thanked for her continuing support to the website.

The climate / environmental crisis

We are now in ongoing contact with the Birmingham school climate strikers, who are holding an event on 29th June which Ben will attend (and others are welcome to). This is one of a series of events coming up in the next few months, including:

- 26th June – Mass lobby of Parliament
- 29th June – Festivals for the future, Birmingham
- <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/festivals-for-future-tickets-61737013068>
- 3rd July – Change the Debate event at UCL (London) including Green Schools Project, NAEE and others. 200 young people will meet with climate scientists, academics etc. to consider what they need from their education in the context of the climate crisis (details have been circulated by email)
- 10th and 13th July – Climate Action Classrooms information sessions. Register for 10th July: <http://bit.ly/CRP-GLBL-ED-CAC-JULY-10-session-1>
- 12th – 14th July – Youth Climate Summit, Miami
- 14th July – Handsworth Climate Action event, Handsworth Park, Birmingham
- 20th - 27th September – Global Week of Action (including school/general strikes on 20th and 27th)
- Autumn – Possible event in Coventry
- 26th November – 1st December – COP 25 in Chile

The coming together of young people and adults reminded us of the importance and value of continuing education and lifelong learning in relation to sustainability and climate change. Perhaps we should consider a university as the venue for a future meeting?

Jacqui is looking for a venue and support for an event in Coventry. She would welcome offers of specialist inputs from Network members. Sarah suggested that Interclimate could be a model/resource: <http://www.interclimate.org>

The recent climate change resource list had been widely welcomed and widely circulated. A second iteration will be created soon, following suggestions from members and others. Suggestions for biodiversity resources, catalysed by a request from a Gambian environmentalist and education, had also been useful. It was agreed that this should be the focus for a second resource list.

It was suggested that the 2021 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham could be a good focus for future activities (e.g. around diversity and biodiversity).

ACTION (1): Ben to continue to develop climate change list and post as a blog.

ACTION (2): Sarah to collect information for a biodiversity resource list.

Joint meeting with East Midlands Network

We have set up a joint meeting in the Autumn with the East Midlands Network. Lee Jowett has booked a room at Leicester City Hall on **Wednesday 25 September 2019, 13.30-16.00**

We felt that the agenda for this should be fairly open:

- An opportunity for people to hear about what others are doing across the whole Midlands region
- A discussion about the potential for collective action

ACTION: Ben to liaise with Lee Jowett, who is hosting the meeting.

(Update: we have spoken since the WMSSN meeting and agreed that the above is a good starting point. There may also be potential for some support via NAEE for a small joint project centred on information-sharing. We can update members about this in due course – BB)

Network updates

Garden Organic. Supporting schools through a range of projects that all include an element of organic gardening. Building up networks in London and the South East. The Learning Garden project has been based on evidence from schools about where they require additional support, and includes training for teachers. Partners in the ‘Move More, eat Well’ project in Birmingham, with Sustrans and ecobirmingham.

The website includes a lot of information on horticultural skills (including child-friendly information). external links and curriculum-linked materials. This includes the use of outdoor space as an extension of the classroom.

Some schools visit the site at Ryton, and use the organic gardening trail and the ‘Go Discover’ space. There are also sessions for young carers from Warwickshire, Solihull and Coventry, supported by Children in Need. Piloting work with Birmingham young carers.

Warwickshire County Council. Barbara’s main work as an ecologist is around planning, including large-scale projects. Warwickshire has the largest ecology team in the country. Their brief includes flagship work on biodiversity offsetting, in partnership with English Nature and DEFRA. It is not well-known that new housing estates, for example, have to demonstrate that there will be a net gain in biodiversity (this can be achieved through the use of far-off sites). It was noted that this would make an excellent case study for schools. Barbara is sometimes released to do some work with Green Flag schools.

ACTION: Barbara to send details of the biodiversity offsetting work to Philip and wmsussch@gmail.com

NAEE-UK. The latest online journal (accessible to members) is on the theme of waste. A key NAEE initiative is the Kenrick Awards, supporting school visits to environmental education sites. NAEE are looking at one possible new venue for such visits.

Friends of Cannon Hill Park. Developing a cycle hub as part of the No Limits to Health project, with links to the Elan Valley. Exploring ways of sustainability being more visible.

UNA Coventry. Philip is supporting the Climate Action Network group in the city, which at this stage is mostly made up of adults. He is interested in how climate change fits in to the National Curriculum.

Tide~ global learning. Several Tide~ teacher resources are being digitised and will soon be available via the Tide~ website. Tide~ is exploring the possibility of offering Global Teachers' Award courses with Beacons DEC, through the new Connecting Classrooms for Global Learning programme. It continues to focus especially on the development of teacher networks in Birmingham.
