

# **Bittern Countryside Community Interest Company**

## **Chairman's Report 2010**

Welcome to our second AGM. This is my first, as Chairman and I have to report a busy year for the Board. Looking at some of our remits, we have been active in keeping abreast with land sales in the AONB. Some land, such as Hollins Farm, changes hands without going on the open market. Even though such land may well be of conservation value and of interest to one of the organisations in the area, there is nothing we can do if the owners choose not to have an open sale. Other land that has come up during the year has either not been of conservation value, or has been finally acquired by local landowners with good conservation credentials. It has not been our policy to look for land per se but just to check that any of the conservation grade land is safeguarded either by acquisition by organisations such as the RSPB or the NT or LT or some responsible individual.

Thus in holding a watching brief on land sales in the area, it might be that we need to raise a large sum of money fairly rapidly to purchase land. This being the case we have considered asking shareholders to let us know before hand if they might be willing to loan money to the company that could be repaid after a fund raising initiative. I would be very grateful for any feedback from you on this idea.

The Conservation Cookbook is still selling and is also available on the web. The Web Shop is still under construction. We will have more to report there in the future. There are Company web pages available through a link from the Arnside/Silverdale AONB web site.

Conservation grazing is still on the agenda but again the situation is fluid at the moment. Bill Grayson will, in a couple of years, be retiring after many years of stalwart work in the field and it may be that we can aid those who will follow in his footsteps.

We have been looking at sustainable energy. You may well have noticed the new wood pellet burner that provides the central heating for the AONB office. RSPB is installing a wood chip burner to power its heating system. Anyone who is interested in either of these systems is welcome to come and discuss them with us. There are several low carbon initiatives going at the moment and we will be talking about these in more detail at the open meeting.

One such however is the Cumbria Community Energy Trust. This is trying to set up an energy trust with investors to put in the capital to enable low carbon initiatives to be started and it hopes that after the initial payback time the investors would get a reasonable rate of return for their capital. Although it is Cumbria and we cover Lancashire as well as Cumbria the Board does feel that it might be worthwhile supporting this trust in some way. We ourselves see that Solar photo voltaic energy production, heat pump technology and wood fuel are probably the most applicable to our area. There are leaflets around for anyone who is interested in this initiative personally.

Lastly there is Grantfinder. For a lot of projects there are grants available if you know where to look. This needs expert help to be successful. Grantfinder should provide such help and we, together with the AONB, felt that there was a need for this. More details of the scheme will be given in the meeting but suffice it to say here that the start-up cost of a year's subscription together with a training course for a group of us and the costs of running a series of workshops was covered by a grant of £2,870 from the Sustainable Development Fund, £150 from the AONB Landscape Trust and matched funding from volunteer time. We will need to decide how this work is to be funded in future years. It is not our intention to charge for the use of a workshop session on Grantfinder. This should be free to anyone in the area who shares our aims and objectives. It seems to me that there are 3 possible scenarios:

- a) The AONB and ourselves find sufficient grant money for our own projects to pay for future years' licences;
- b) We could offer further help in applying for grants to those who have used the software with us on the basis of a fee if they are successful or
- c) It is decided that there is not a further need for the use of Grantfinder in which case we will not need to look for further funding.

The Board feels that now is the time to look for further shareholders, both large and small. Those with a shareholding of just £10 are as valued as those with much larger holdings. If you have friends and or relatives who you think would be interested in becoming shareholders please see one of the Board who will give you any information you need.

You will see from further down the agenda that there is an election for 3 directors. Last year, our first AGM, all the directors had to be elected. From now on however our articles state that a third of the Board (two and two thirds of a director) should resign each year.

They are then eligible to stand for re-election. We have decided to round that up to 3. John Webb, Mike Smith and I are therefore retiring. John has decided not to stand for re-election and Michael Smith and I have put ourselves up for re-election. We still have vacancies that we can fill on the Board but we have no new candidates. It would be good to find at least one new director with an interest in renewable energy. If you or anyone you know support our objectives and could give some time to the company please talk to David Askew, Mike Smith or myself. Can I take this opportunity to thank John and the rest of the Board for their work and support over this last year.

Ann Kitchen  
Chairman BCCIC