

Action in Rural Sussex - Lost of the Low Weald and Downs Woods Project – Development Phase NHLF

Pilot Engagement Activity. Case Study: Learning from a Loved Woods

BACKGROUND:

We initially made contact with the Scaynes Hill Sustainability group in May 2021 and discovered in a meeting with one of their volunteers that many of their aims aligned with the aims of the Lost Woods Project. This led to discussions about how we might work together. AirS VA Karen Laver shared a video of a world café event and this inspired the creation of a community engagement event based around Costells Wood. When this volunteer took the idea back to the main group, the feedback about involvement with the Lost Woods Project was that their local woods, “Costells wood” which is mostly owned by the Woodland Trust, wasn’t ‘lost’ and was actually really well used. This changed the direction of the event, and the name, which then became **Learning from a Loved Wood**.

ABOUT THE GROUP:

The Scaynes Hill Sustainability Group is an informal group of local people who explore what it means to be sustainable and try to put sustainability into practice. Projects so far have included the development of a village website to aid communication, a fruit and vegetable share of local produce and a litter pick and bulb planting. The group have led a number of wildlife surveys and nature identification walks.

WHAT WE DID WITH THE GROUP:

Following initial decisions to co-produce the event 2 more volunteers from the group became involved, and contributed and developed ideas. Volunteers and the Village Agent were assigned tasks with the Village Agent taking on marketing, booking venues and risk assessments whilst the volunteers distributed publicity locally, spread the word and developed engagement activities.

Activities on the day aimed to engage a variety of age groups for enjoyment and to spark conversations and included:

- Mapping out our magical woodland moments.
- Costells Collage including how we feel in the woods.
- Storyteller sharing nature and woodland related stories and supporting story creation.
- Woodland crafts.
- Guessing the age of a tree.
- Games - woodlice or wood lie - guessing whether colloquial names for woodlice are real.
- Making woodland creatures from clay.
- Information boards about the Lost Woods Project and volunteering opportunities with the Leaky Dams project.
- Short questionnaires including KNOW, TEACH, LEARN tool.
- Refreshments including homemade cake.

OUTCOMES:

- 25 people engaged with - 4 children and 21 adults. 90% were local.
- 3 volunteers signed up for Leaky dams project
- One local woodland owner engaged in the project
- One potential volunteer for forest school, family activities, and social events in the woods.

Comments from people who attended:

- 100% said they enjoyed the event and said they felt better after attending the event and enjoyed the activities and the community
- 4 visited Costells wood regularly, 1 rarely and one for the first time
- People would like to learn or do: woodland conservation, woodland history, green jobs, Family activities, Woodland wellbeing activities, woodland art and photography, led woodland walks.
- 1 Person said they would be willing to lead family activities, forest school, bushcraft and foraging and social activities in the wood.

“We need to have activities in the woods that will really interest young people, maybe a designated area for camping or bmx biking. They might also be interested in forest skills such as charcoal making, chopping, coppicing”

“It took 3 years before I discovered there was another entrance to Costells Wood. The restrictions on the path from the rec were very offputting, especially when I found out about the CCTV cameras and a sign went up saying there would be a large fine for cutting holly at Christmas. A map of the paths would be very helpful, with little ones you dont want to get lost and have to walk miles”

“My feedback is how well used the wood is, I walk there regularly, go foraging, make dens or go to the swing in the wood. We are incredibly lucky to have such beautiful woods on our doorstep. I think it would be lovely to maintain the swing in the wood, rather than cutting it down. Lots of children and families use the swings and often we queue to get our turn. Cutting the swing is no solution. It is off-putting to children who might go to the woods solely for that purpose”

DEBRIEF: with Scaynes Hill Sustainability Group and AirS Village Agent.

We met a month after the event to reflect on how it went, what we had learnt and next steps. The general feeling was that the group was really pleased with the activities on offer but frustrated that more people hadn't engaged and this led to a discussion about a decline in whole village activities,

“Getting it more out there needs to be a long term plan - irrespective of where we publicise it I don't think it will make much difference. We want to be drawing people in and building the relationships - we need to build community feeling through events”

Volunteer from Scaynes Hill Sustainability group.

LEARNING IDEAS and NEXT STEPS:

- Practical jobs such as blub planting and raking the common, are good engagement activities, they bring people out and people are less wary.
- There is still some tension about the look at feel of the privately owned woodland at the entrance to the wood and young people feel frustrated that their swing if often cut down.
- Try to find a time when our events don't compete with other local events.
- Try to engage other groups in the community to have a wider village event eg community stalls in the playground.
- Led walks or maps for families to get to know the woods Information about what's going on in the wood helps you enjoy it more

DATE: 3/2/21

AUTHOR: Karen Laver AirS Village Agent.

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