

The Pesticide-Free East Devon Planning Meeting

6th December 2025 – Dennings Down Farm, nr. Axminster

Draft Report

Present :

Hamish Bengough	- Dennings Down Farm
Stefan Drew	- Sid Valley Biodiversity Group
Ian Keam	- Chardstock Eco Group
Daniel Lazar	- Chardstock Eco Group
Nicola Westlake	- Whole Health Agriculture
Andrew Rothery	- Green Futures Devon

SUMMARY

The meeting brought together people from 2 East Devon environmental organisations, Dennings Down Farm and Green Futures Devon to identify the key priorities for action in order to help the whole of the East Devon area to reduce its use of pesticides.

The key outcomes of the meeting were :

1. To engage proactively with the wider community of individuals, groups and organisations across East Devon around becoming involved in the Pesticide-Free East Devon process.
2. Identify what is already happening on the ground to encourage pesticide-free / reduced pesticide approaches.
3. Organise a Pesticide-Free East Devon event in Spring 2027 to bring the whole community together to share best practice, be inspired and motivated and build stronger networks and partnerships.

INTRODUCTIONS

Everyone introduced themselves and this produced the following key points:

- Role of community groups
- Farmers question time events
- Helping people to understand and care!
- How can we find the time to support the necessary actions that are needed!
- Involving schools
- ["Rivers Run Through Us Project"](#)

PRESENTATIONS

Is Pesticide-Free Possible? – Stefan Drew

Stefan gave a very informative presentation about the history of pesticide use and some of the current alternatives being used across the world.

- History :
Locust plagues
Invention of DDT
Rachel Carson - Silent Spring.
Integrated Pest Management
- Alternatives to Pesticides
Mechanical robot weeding
Lazer weeding
- Arguments for Farmers and Councils to go Pesticide-Free
Soil health
Reduced production costs
Greater resilience
Enhanced biodiversity
Improved public health

An Introduction to Whole Health Agriculture – Nicola Westlake

Nicola talked about her work with the Whole Health Agriculture organisation.

- Based on herbal and homeopathic preparations for livestock.
- Now branching out to Arable.
- No judgement of farmers who use conventional methods
- Work is being evidenced through peer-reviewed research
- Soil Association Field lab looking at fly-strike in sheep
- British Veterinary Association is advising farmers to use less insecticides

IDENTIFYING THE KEY ISSUES FOR A PESTICIDE-FREE EAST DEVON

- Give people alternatives
- Share information.
- Identifying and solving problems – show where alternatives have worked
- Provide evidence
- Showing on the ground practical examples – E.g. River Axe and River Kit work
- Show how alternates save money
- Tell the story – E.g. The Otter Story - James Williams
- Who are we engaging with?
- Facilitate connection between the different groups
- Linking different groups - Online and through Events
- Organisations to engage with Trill Farm, CAG and Blackdown National Landscape

TOP 3 PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

1. Raising Awareness

- Engaging with local groups and organisations – Councils, Farmers, Land owners, General public, Pet owners, Gardeners, Businesses, Utilities, Schools, Academia / Researchers
- Create a marketing and communications plan
- Telling the Story – E.g. Otters, James Williams and Forever Chemicals Panarama
- Providing evidence
- Providing practical examples

2. Engaging with Councils

- Parish
- Town
- District
- County

3. Organise a Pesticide-Free Devon Event in Spring 2027 (or earlier if this is possible)

NEXT STEPS

- Write up the Meeting Report – AR
- Create a List of Groups, Organisations and Individuals to contact – All
- Choosing a venue for the Pesticide-Free East Devon Event – Offwell Village Hall, Colyton Village Hall, Trill Farm?, Beehive Honiton? – location needs to be central.
- Secure funding – Green Futures Devon, National Landscape and other sources - All
- Core Organisers going forward – DL+AR with SD, NW, IK + HB supporting.

A potential title for the event:

A Pesticide-Free East Devon ?

Conference and Gathering