

**Climate and Nature (CAN) Champion Scheme
Focus Meeting – February 2026**

The CAN Champion Scheme was launched in November 2025. This was the first of a series of meetings with a CAN focus in the County – the intention is for them to be a short and consumable session. Danny Moody, Chief Executive of Northants CALC, opened the meeting and welcomed the attendees and speakers. There were just under 50 CAN Champions in attendance – the audience was engaged and interactive right from the start.

Danny Moody introduced guest speakers, David Garrett and Elaine Goold, from Garden Organic – with a focus on the “Grow, Cook, Eat” Project. Garden Organic is a National Charity championing the ‘organic way’ and helping members to nurture the land at home in a way that has a positive impact on biodiversity – using their 5 key principles of organic gardening and highlighting their Heritage Seed Library.

The “Grow, Cook, Eat” project is an initiative in West Northamptonshire funded by Public Health Northampton – it is in its 4th year and is a collaborative partnership led by the Hope Centre. The project aims to share skills in growing, cooking and eating – helping champions to feel confident and to build networks. Project members can engage with growing and/or cooking projects, can apply for a grant, and can continue to access training and classes on topics such as cooking and food hygiene.

Garden Organic highlighted ways parish councils can get involved – through exploring opportunities, shining a light on what’s already happening in their area, building partnerships and learning from others. Identifying where new projects could start or existing projects could grow is key – they don’t have to be large, expensive projects, as small developments have an impact. A report published a few years ago emphasises this through “Every Garden Matters”. There was a recent tree planting example given – this planting will provide further opportunities for wassailing, harvesting and pruning in the future.

Following the presentation from David Garret and Elaine Goold, a Q&A session was held:

Question	Answer
Who funded the tree planting, in the example given?	The Environment Agency paid for the trees as part of mitigation – as they had to fell some trees.
We have land that is not fulfilling its potential. What would you advise to plant that would support animals (especially birds)?	You want to focus on an environment you could plant up – it’s be recommended to talk to the Wildlife Trust, and also the West Northamptonshire Council Parks Team (dependent on where the land is). Try to stick to native trees and hedgerow plants.

	<p>Hedgerows are in decline, but they are/can be hugely beneficial for nesting and food for wildlife.</p>
<p>Last year our council tried to organise a community allotment, but failed to get enough volunteers to properly maintain it. Do you have a database where local towns and villages could volunteer and look and see who needs help and what's available?</p>	<p>Fear factor (of doing it wrong) can be an element and allotments can ebb and flow with engagement – some struggle more than others. With the community allotment, was there an ownership of space or a community garden? It's difficult when there's an onus left on one person – so need to be mindful of this. It can also be important to enthuse volunteers by growing social networks with them – Garden Organics have recently organised a mystery bus tour around different growing spaces, a seed swap and a visit to “The Green Patch” in Kettering for volunteers.</p> <p>A database is something to explore further – with the CAN Champions and the Sustainable Food Network.</p>
<p>Can Garden Organics attend events with a stall or do they have resources they can provide for CAN Champions to have on a stall?</p>	<p>Yes – Garden Organics try to attend events where possible, and will send resources if/when they can.</p>
<p>Are there any online leaflets or posters that CAN Champions could share on their village Facebook page to introduce Garden Organic and get people to participate please? Something brief yet informative ideally.</p>	<p>Attached a poster titled ‘Make Your Garden Matter’, with 7 ways to boost biodiversity in your garden. Garden Organic are keen to support and add value to community growing activities. We also have monthly tips available on our website which can be shared with residents but please tag @GardenOrganicUK when doing so.</p>
<p>If we want to get trained in these areas to encourage the activity, what is the process?</p>	<p>If you're interested in becoming a Grow, Cook, Eat Champion, please contact Kathleen – there are 3 intakes each year and the next one is scheduled for around June 2026.</p> <p>For informal training look on the Garden Organic website – where there are webinars, formal training and general advice available.</p>

<p>Can Parish Councils join Garden Organic as a group membership or is it restricted to individuals?</p>	<p>Yes. Parish Council can join as 'Group Members' by getting in touch OR you could become a 'Growing Partner' <Garden Organic Growing Partners> We have many community gardens signed up and we can help with advice and support. For membership enquiries please get in touch - membership@gardenorganic.org.uk</p>
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For the second segment, Danny Moody introduced guest speaker, Claire Poulton, from Nene Rivers Trust. Claire spoke about their work on Parish Nature Recovery Plans – a workshop is being held on the 3rd March for councils from North Northamptonshire. The plans will focus on what habitats can be strengthened and how we can support nature. The workshop will guide councils through what a plan is, why it matters, what projects can come under the plan, how to develop one and what support is available.

The concept of plans started in the Rockingham Forest area with 20-ish parishes and has now spread more widely across North Northamptonshire. The Nene Rivers Trust have funding at the minute to support 5 or 6 parishes with their plan – following this pilot, the hope is to then expand it further across North Northamptonshire.

It was asked if North Northamptonshire councils would be willing to share an example of good practice for their biodiversity plans, so the councils in West Northamptonshire can review their plans. The West has recently launched the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for consultation – so more information will be released once the consultation has been completed. Following the pilot in North Northamptonshire, information may be able to be shared.

Danny Moody wrapped up the meeting and thanked all CAN Champions and speakers for their attendance.

Speaker/Useful Contacts:

David Garrett – dgarrett@gardenorganic.org.uk

Elaine Goold – egoold@gardenorganic.org.uk

Kathleen Tanoh – Grow, Cook, Eat – Kathleen@northamptonhopecentre.org.uk

Claire Poulton – Claire@neneriverstrust.org

Ellen Pentland – Wildlife Trust – ellen.pentland@wildlifebcn.org