

## **Climate and Nature (CAN) Champion Scheme**

### **Focus Meeting – May 2026**

Danny Moody, Chief Executive of Northants CALC, opened the meeting and welcomed the attendees and speakers. There were just over 40 CAN Champions in attendance – the audience was engaged and interactive right from the start.

Danny Moody introduced guest speaker Diana Sandon – an environmental professional and facilitator with over 25 years’ experience, specialising in stakeholder engagement on complex issues through her consultancy, Dialogue Matters. Known for helping groups navigate sensitive conversations and build consensus, she has led over 100 dialogue processes and trained more than 2,000 people worldwide.

The session started by looking at the work of Kris De Meyer – exploring the psychology of climate and nature communication, emphasising the need to view both as part of a single, interconnected system rather than separate issues. Climate is often presented in isolation and framed through “doom and gloom,” with an assumption that people lack information – this information deficit then lead to people being blizzarded with data and statistics that does little to inspire action.

Instead, Diana highlighted the importance of fostering a sense of agency, where individuals feel both capable of acting and aware of what meaningful action looks like, whether individually or collectively. This sense of agency is often built through social learning – seeing others take action and thinking, “if they can do it, so can I.” Diana stressed that storytelling is a powerful tool in this regard, particularly when it draws on real, local examples rather than abstract concepts. Sharing relatable stories of people within a community can inspire action more effectively than simply raising concern or providing information.

The “hero’s journey” was also referenced as a familiar narrative structure that resonates with audiences and can be applied to community storytelling. Practical examples, such as identifying local stories and sharing them in community publications were highlighted as effective approaches. Overall, the session called for a shift towards more positive, future-focused communication that motivates action through relatability, inspiration, and shared experience.

Following the presentation from Diana, a Q&A session was held:

<b>Question</b>	<b>Answer</b>
Does this not all depend on the individual's learning style?	From reading Kris’s work, it wouldn’t seem it does. Maybe different stories resonate differently – especially if expressed visually or with using specific language. It’s more about the moder of delivery than the learning style.

<p>What is the neuroscience around how messages can impact us? Thinking about “terrifying” videos (topics such as not going near train tracks) that have stuck with them.</p>	<p>The fear (example with the “buckle up your seatbelt” message) of single moments can land, but it has been found developed stories are much more effective in terms of changing positive behaviour. Old videos may have been more about avoiding negative behaviour and that doesn’t lead to change or action.</p>
<p>The topic of carbon literacy can be quite “doom and gloom”. There seems to be a difference between the information itself and then the action elements – the action elements tend to be more positive. What is the impact of leaning on negatives before going into positives?</p>	<p>Spiral of self-persuasion – you do start looking to strengthen your knowledge (as you do want to understand), but can lead to inertia or avoidance. If you focus on the problem and then the solution, it finds that communities become passive and can disown the topic/work. Focus on questions such as: where would we like to get to, what are we doing well now, what can we build on, or what else could we do – are much more transformative. It’s about switching from the problem-solution approach. We need to be real about the facts and figures, but starting with this is not always the most effective catalyst for change.</p>
<p>I’ve seen storytelling used in different areas, but this is first time in relation to climate and nature work. For communication, we need to 2-way communication process – considering: is this message landing, or the right message for the audience. We have to be sensitive to the audience.</p>	<p>Is it belief that drives action or vice versa? If you’re already in belief, the facts and figures will help, but if not in the action space, it needs a different approach.</p>
<p>Do you need to be an expert storyteller? Can you have a full story but then package and distribute it in different ways?</p>	<p>No, we don’t have to be experts – we tell people stories about ourselves all the time. Stories also don’t have to be complicated. You can grow as the storyteller and the story.</p> <p>Yes – it’s important to package the story in lots of different ways.</p>
<p>Storytelling goes back to caveman/cavewomen days – how we communicated with one another at the time. It’s a relatable element to all ages. Is this being fed into the Unitary Authorities?</p>	<p>Diana: storytelling is transformative work and something we can all relate to. Let’s tell the stories – little stories are just as powerful, as big (it’s getting the story out there).</p>

	<p>Danny Moody: the short answer is no – it has been a struggle to engage with both Unity Authorities. They have been engaged in putting together their Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) – councils have been involved in providing comments, but the LNRS are more of a box-ticking exercise (as by-law the Unitary Authorities have to have a LNRS in place).</p> <p>There are practitioners in Diana’s field in Northamptonshire and it would be brilliant to progress the work with the Unitary Authorities.</p>
<p>How do I motivate the community to do composting? Getting some council motivation now, but this talk has increased motivation on how storytelling can help and engage everyone.</p>	<p>If you can involve children or young people, it is a very powerful element. Start with a seed and they can assist with growing the story and telling it.</p>
<p>You mentioned that stories could even be fictional. If I found a story was fictional I would not trust the creditability of the source. Is that not a danger to using fictional stories</p>	<p>I think this is contextual. People do get inspired by fiction in books and films etc. And there is growing fiction about climate and nature action in books and films. However, if the story is about taking local action in a local place, I think you are absolutely right that real authentic stories of relatable real people taking action is the way to go. The idea of using story is also about looking at how any nature and climate news communication can be framed as a story. Once you start looking at things this way the stories are everywhere.</p>
<p>So I was thinking, I have just given the school 400 sunflower seeds to grow and these will eventually be planted in the cemetery and school grounds. Then I thought I can offer small little packs of sunflower seeds to the residents who would like to also grow sunflowers. So the story starts as the school children can do it so why can't you... then add on social media a couple of months later share you sunflowers photos. Then along the way telling them the reasons why and how it helps climate and nature, like adding to the story what happens to the</p>	<p>This sounds a great opportunity to invite stories from children and local people around why they did this and what it means for them.</p> <p>I see you suggest an ‘if children can do it why can’t you’ kind of messaging. But the research shows it is someone like yourself that helps you think ‘if they can do it so can I’. Also if this could trigger a negative feeling (shame is overstating it but, in that direction,) and that is counterproductive. Negative feelings are poor motivators for sustained action.</p>

<p>We bought Hedgehog Highways and sold them to residents for £3 its has taken us 5 years to sell 100 of them.</p>	<p>That sounds disappointing. Maybe try to get the stories of those who did get one of the hedgehog highways and their motivations, had they done anything like this before, how they worked with a neighbour to get agreement, did they see signs of hedgehogs etc. And then getting the story into the parish mag . It might help a word-of-mouth uptake.</p>
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Participants reflected on the importance of tailoring communication styles to different audiences – highlighting the need to weave together visual, auditory and emotional elements to effectively engage a broader range of people. There was also discussion around the value of targeting stories carefully, with some observing that using people as the focal point—such as in documentaries or videos—helps make issues more relatable; for example, even when addressing topics like deforestation, beginning with a human story can capture attention more effectively.

Others shared practical experiences from their own work, including chairing a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) group and successfully encouraging engagement from North Northamptonshire Council (NNC), with officers showing a willingness to participate. However, there was also recognition of ongoing challenges, particularly in persuading unitary authorities to adopt approaches that are not perceived as top-down or imposed. Attendees emphasised the importance of shifting towards more community-led, bottom-up approaches that better reflect local priorities and encourage wider buy-in.

Danny Moody wrapped up the meeting and thanked all in attendance – adding a thanks to all CAN Champions for taking action in their communities.

The next CAN Champion Focus Meeting will be on Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> August 2026.

Speaker/Useful Contacts:

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