

Brief notes from Loweswater Community meeting held at the Grange Hotel on 14th November 2007

Claire Waterton 15/11/07

Introduction

Claire Waterton and Stephen Maberly outlined the project Understanding and Acting in Loweswater: A community Approach to Catchment management.

Researchers on the project introduced their own contributions to the project:

Lisa Norton – (CEH, Lancaster) vegetation ecology, farm land and land-use, options for land-use and land management within farming

Nigel Watson – (Geography, Lancaster university) community based catchment management, forms of community decision making

Judith Tsouvalis – (Sociology, Lancaster, from Feb 2008) understanding farmers perspectives on the land and land practices and management. Background in forestry and social aspects of forestry, understanding precision farming on lowland English farms.

Claire Waterton- understanding local knowledge that has a bearing on the environment. Trying to get at what is know about the local environment but that cannot be captured by scientific methods (but may be relevant for the ecologists and scientists to know). Looking at the way that different knowledges might be pooled and the implications of putting different kinds of knowledges about the local environment together.

Ken Bell – did not get a chance to introduce his role. But is part-time community researcher on the RELU project. A necessary link to local people and local processes, news, feedback, etc.

Steven Maberly – did not get a chance to introduce his role. But is ecologist working on lakes and algae (ecophysiological of aquatic algae and plants).

Discussion

The discussion included the following topics and issues:

1. What is this idea of a 'collective'?

The idea of a collective was explained to be part of the RELU project. At the moment there is a lot of openness as to what form that collective might take and how people might want to be involved. The researchers want ideas to come forth from the local community as to what a Loweswater Collective might consist of. We will work on gathering ideas for this from now onwards.

Brief notes from discussions:

- The collective may be about **pooling knowledges and working out the contradictions between different (clashing) knowledges and ideas** about Loweswater's environment. (KNOWLEDGE ORIENTED?)
- The collective may also be about creating an **inclusive social/political space** – making all different kinds of (previously excluded?) people feel part of a social group that is addressing the **problems and issues** relating to Loweswater and the local environment. (PROBLEM ORIENTED?)
- The collective may gain strength by thinking of itself as an organisation whose main focus is on brining people together for a simple **positive common goal** – improving the local environment and making more sustainable relationships between people and nature in Loweswater. (OPPORTUNITY ORIENTED?)
- It may be a mixture of the above and more...
- What could be done by/in the collective, and how? People are starting to think about this and we would encourage anyone who wants to share ideas to send them in to Ken, Claire, Judith, Lisa, Nigel and Stephen. A concern is that after three years the project will end and the Collective will not have achieved anything. This seems like a healthy concern to have at this point, focussing thought on what people want to achieve, how, by whom, when etc..

2. Existing institutions

It was suggested that there are already existing institutions that might be, continue to be, need to be involved, these included the Parish council and the NT, LDNPA.

In response the researchers suggested they do not want to displace these institutions, but work alongside them. The importance of communication between the research and these existing bodies (both ways) was stressed. In the context of the Collective, such institutions would need to have a voice, among many other voices and perspectives.

A meeting next week (22nd November) will be held with representatives from the EA, NT, LDNPA, Natural England, Farmers, Parish Councillors. Further meeting will most likely take place under the idea of a 'collective' and will include local residents and the above institutions – the idea is that we work together, but we need to work out how to do this.

3. Farming issues

Interesting discussions arose about:

- Changes in farming in Loweswater
- The risks born by farmers and the benefits they gain
- The relationship of farmers to 'policy' bodies
- Whether framers are in control of the way they manage land
- Feeling of present day farming together with changes in weather 'capping' the land
- The strong perspectives of farmers and ways in which other perspectives other than farming (e.g. those of offcomer residents) can also contribute.

All these issues will be explored through interviews, through ecological fieldwork and through getting to know people in the catchment and the history of the catchment. Much (not all) of this work will be done by Judith when she starts early next year.

4. Local knowledge on environmental issues

- Interesting local perspectives on fish in Loweswater. Past fishing experiences. perspectives on clarity of water in the lake to depth. Changes in water clarity and fishing experiences.
- Local perspectives and history of management of woodland. Past management as opposed to present day management of trees and willow around lake and around streams (e.g. Dub Beck).
- Local perspectives and history of management of gravel, dredging, spawning grounds.
- Local perspectives on changes in farming – less ploughing/cropping, less diversity of farming practices and less ability of farmers to decide what to do on the land they manage/own.

Again, these issues will be explored further through interviews, through ecological fieldwork and through getting to know people in the catchment and the history of the catchment.

5. Website

We detected quite a lot of enthusiasm for the website in the meeting. Some ideas as to what it may look like, what it might enable.

What kinds of data will it display?

Could people put what they want on it?

Is it a place for local voice and input?

Could it be a place for local debate (interactive?)

It will hold an incoming stream of data from the buoy. How to display this?