THE WILDS OF WANNIE, THE COQUET AND BEYOND



A Community Conversation About the River, its Catchment and its People

Wingates Institute

11 July 2026

Organised by the **Climate Change & Biodiversity Committee**

Brinkburn & Hesleyhurst Parish Council

"When we speak of the River Coquet, we mean not only the river itself, but its catchment and its people."

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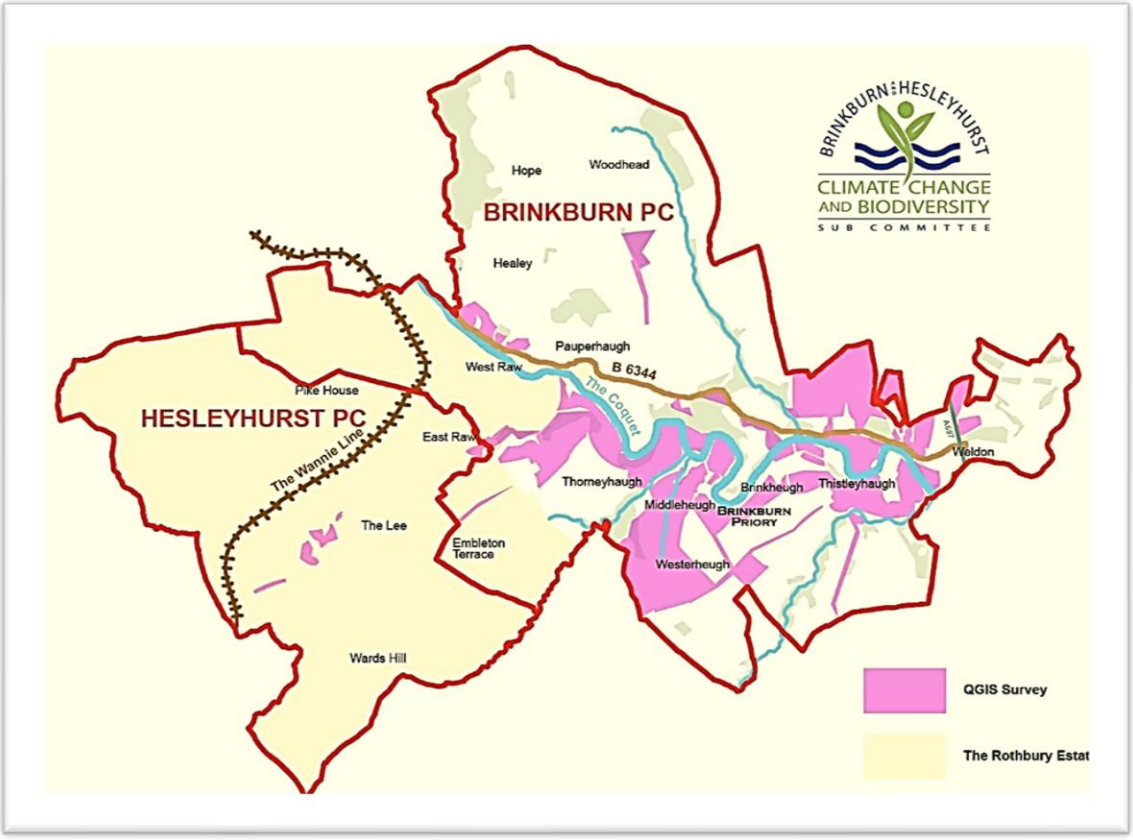
Additional Resources

This report provides a summary of the presentations, discussions and performances that formed part of The Wilds of Wannie, the Coquet and Beyond.

Supporting resources, including presentation slides, audio recordings, photographs and other event materials, are available through the *Wilds of Wannie* resources section of the Brinkburn & Hesleyhurst Parish Council website at https://www.brinkburn-pc.gov.uk

Readers wishing to explore particular topics in greater depth are encouraged to consult these accompanying resources.

The Parish of Brinkburn & Hesleyhurst



Executive Summary



Residents, volunteers, farmers, land managers, historians, conservation organisations, storytellers and community groups came together to explore what makes the landscapes of Brinkburn & Hesleyhurst Parish special and how they might be cared for in the future.

Although the programme ranged widely—from geology and river history to biodiversity, farming, woodland management, peatland restoration, folklore, poetry and song—a common conclusion emerged. Landscape, biodiversity, heritage and community cannot be understood separately. Each depends upon and enriches the others.

The event focused particularly on Brinkburn & Hesleyhurst Parish while recognising that the parish forms part of the wider Coquet catchment. Throughout the day, scientific understanding sat alongside farming experience, historical research, local memory, habitat mapping, storytelling and practical conservation.

The conference highlighted the remarkable contribution already being made by volunteers through habitat surveys, biodiversity monitoring, wildflower meadow creation, hedgerow restoration, tree planting, river stewardship and community events.

Discussions also pointed towards future opportunities, including strengthening biodiversity networks, enhancing river stewardship, improving access, expanding community participation and developing partnerships associated with the proposed acquisition of much of Rothbury Estate by Northumberland Wildlife Trust.

Perhaps the most important outcome of the day was not a single project or recommendation, but the recognition that many people approaching the landscape from different directions were ultimately talking about the same place and sharing many of the same hopes for its future.

Chapter 1

A Community Conversation About Place

The Wilds of Wannie, the Coquet and Beyond was organised by the Climate Change & Biodiversity Committee of Brinkburn & Hesleyhurst Parish Council.

The event brought together residents, volunteers, farmers, land managers, historians, conservation organisations, storytellers, musicians and community groups to explore the relationships between landscape, biodiversity, history, culture and community.



Throughout the day, discussions ranged from Ice Age geology to wildflower meadows, from river monitoring to local song and story. Yet a common theme emerged: the future of the area depends upon understanding these connections and working together to care for them.

The event was as much about listening as speaking. Presentations were complemented by conversations over refreshments, discussions around displays and exchanges of experience between people who might not otherwise have met. This atmosphere of openness proved to be one of the day's greatest strengths.

Scientists, historians, storytellers, landowners, farmers, conservationists and volunteers all contributed different perspectives, but they were united by a shared concern for the future of the landscape they value.

Chapter 2

The River, its Catchment and its People

Throughout this report, the River Coquet should be understood in its broadest sense.

At first glance the phrase appears straightforward. Most people imagine a ribbon of water flowing through the landscape from source to sea. Yet the discussions throughout the conference revealed something much richer.



The Coquet is not simply a river. It is a catchment.

The health of the river depends upon the health of the wider landscape through which its waters move.

The River Coquet has influenced where people settled, how they travelled, where they farmed and how they made a living. It appears in local stories and memories. It shaped routes, crossings, communities and traditions. For many people it remains part of their sense of identity and belonging.

The conference repeatedly demonstrated that river, catchment and community are inseparable.

Mark Fenwick explored how the Coquet shaped thousands of years of human history. Jamie Day described contemporary efforts to understand and protect river health through community monitoring and stewardship. Virginia Kennedy reflected upon the river as a source of memory, imagination and cultural meaning.

Taken together, these contributions suggested a broader understanding of the Coquet. The river is not simply water moving through a landscape. It is a network of relationships.

It links uplands with lowlands, farms with villages, wildlife with habitats, past with present and people with place.

This perspective encourages a different way of thinking about environmental stewardship. Rather than focusing on individual sites, projects or problems in isolation, it invites us to think about

connections. What happens in peatlands affects rivers. What happens along rivers affects habitats. What happens within habitats affects biodiversity. What happens within communities affects all of them.

While many examples came from Brinkburn & Hesleyhurst Parish, the wider context was never forgotten. The parish sits within the larger story of the Coquet catchment, and the future of the parish is linked to the future of the wider landscape through which the river flows.

The Coquet emerged as both a physical reality and a powerful symbol. Just as water connects the many parts of the catchment, the river connects many of the themes explored throughout the day: history, ecology, culture, access, stewardship and community.

Understanding those connections may be one of the most important foundations for future action.

Reflection

A River Running Through the Day

Although presentations explored a wide variety of topics, the River Coquet flowed through almost every conversation.



Mark considered the river through its geological and historical influence. Jamie described contemporary efforts to monitor and safeguard river health. Virginia reflected on the river as a source of inspiration, memory and belonging.

Taken together, these perspectives suggested something larger. The Coquet is not simply part of the landscape. It is one of the threads that binds landscape, history, biodiversity and community together.

Chapter 3

Understanding the Landscape

One of the strongest themes emerging from the conference was the importance of understanding the landscape as a connected whole.

Mark Fenwick's presentation, *The River Coquet: From Ice to Invasion*, provided an ideal starting point. Beginning with the Ice Age, Mark explained how glaciers shaped the valley long before the modern river emerged, leading to the memorable observation that *the valley is older than the river*.



Over thousands of years, the Coquet continued to shape the landscape through erosion, flooding and deposition. These processes influenced the development of habitats, settlement patterns and routes through the valley.

The traces of these processes remain visible today. They can be seen in the shape of the river, in the surrounding landforms and even in local place names. The language of the landscape preserves evidence of its history.

The river also influenced how people moved through and used the area. Ancient crossings became established routes. Roman roads followed favourable terrain. Religious communities settled in strategic locations. Later generations built bridges, farms and settlements that responded to the opportunities and constraints presented by the landscape.

Brinkburn provides a particularly good example of these relationships. Throughout its history, geography repeatedly shaped human choices and opportunities.

Understanding the landscape in this way encourages us to think differently about the present. Today's biodiversity projects, restoration initiatives and community activities are not separate from the history of the valley. They form part of a continuing relationship between people and place.

The conference repeatedly returned to this idea. Successful stewardship begins with understanding. The more people understand the landscapes they inhabit, the better equipped they are to care for them and shape their future.

Chapter 4

Caring for the Coquet

If the River Coquet formed one of the central themes of the conference, stewardship formed another.

Across the day participants heard about the practical measures being taken to understand, protect and restore the health of the river and its wider catchment. These ranged from volunteer monitoring and citizen science to peatland restoration and habitat management. Together they illustrated the importance of informed, long-term care for the landscape.

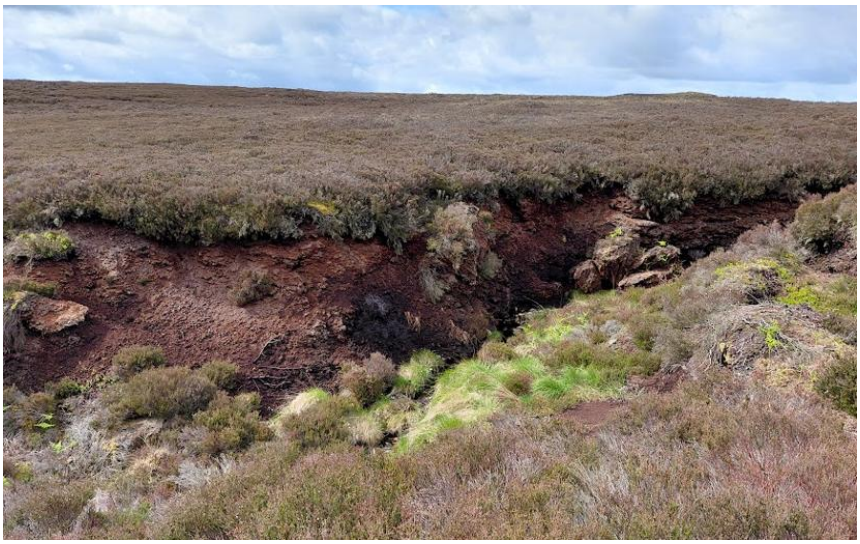


One of the strongest examples came from **Jamie Day**, who described the work of the Coquet River Action Group (CRAG). Jamie explained how community volunteers, supported by environmental organisations and partner agencies, are helping to build a clearer picture of river health across the catchment.

Monitoring has provided valuable insights into water quality, habitat condition and the wider environmental pressures affecting the river system. Community involvement has helped improve understanding while strengthening public engagement with the river's future. A particularly encouraging aspect of CRAG's work is the way it brings together different partners. Volunteers, landowners, researchers, environmental organisations and public agencies all have a role to play. Jamie emphasised that understanding and caring for a river of this scale depends upon cooperation and shared responsibility.

The conference also explored the wider relationship between water and landscape through the work being undertaken at **Caudhole Moss** and elsewhere on Rothbury Estate.

Duncan Hutt explained how historic drainage has affected peatland habitats and outlined proposals for restoration. These projects aim to improve biodiversity, slow water movement through the landscape and strengthen the resilience of the wider catchment.



Healthy peatlands perform many functions. They provide habitat, store carbon and help regulate water. What happens on the moorland and higher ground ultimately affects communities and wildlife downstream. This theme of connection between places, habitats and people surfaced repeatedly throughout the day.

Together, these discussions reinforced a simple but important message: caring for the Coquet requires catchment-scale thinking. Rivers, peatlands, wetlands and tributaries are interconnected, and successful stewardship depends upon understanding those relationships.



Chapter 5

Working with Nature

One of the most encouraging aspects of the conference was the optimism shown by those already working to improve biodiversity and restore ecological resilience across the landscape.

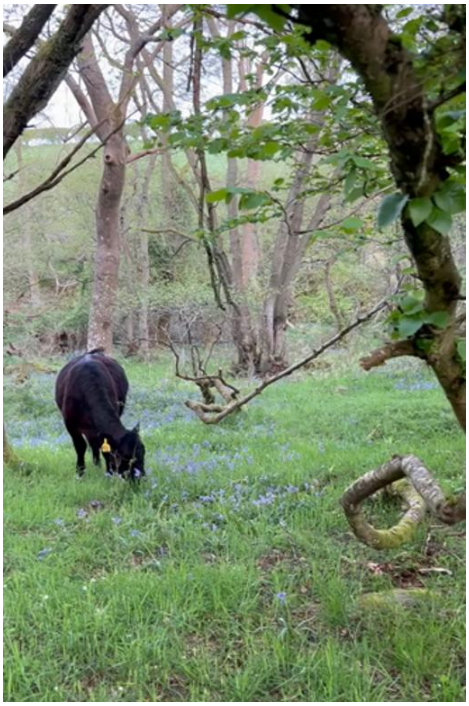
The presentations demonstrated that practical action is already taking place across farms, woodlands, hedgerows, meadows and peatlands. While each initiative has its own objectives, together they form part of a broader movement towards working with natural processes rather than against them.



Angus Nelless described a farming system based upon rotational grazing, long recovery periods and reduced inputs. Angus demonstrated how livestock can be managed in ways that support biodiversity, improve soil health and reduce erosion while continuing to produce food.

Rather than treating environmental objectives as separate from farming, Angus showed how productive agriculture and ecological recovery can support one another. The examples shared challenged assumptions that farming and biodiversity must inevitably be in conflict.

The woodland perspective was provided by **Mark Shipperlee**, who introduced the work of Living Woods and Tod's Place.



Mark described projects focused on creating, restoring and managing woodland habitats while encouraging local participation. Activities include tree planting, coppicing, woodland management, community nurseries and volunteering opportunities.

A recurring theme throughout Mark's presentation was that woodland creation is about more than trees. It is also about people, skills, knowledge and long-term stewardship. Successful woodland projects depend upon lasting relationships between communities and the landscapes they inhabit.

Traditional countryside skills also featured prominently.

David Boyson highlighted the importance of hedgerows as wildlife corridors, nesting habitat, shelter and landscape features. David demonstrated how hedgelaying can improve hedge condition while strengthening biodiversity and preserving traditional countryside skills.

The practical examples shared throughout the session illustrated that conservation is often most successful when it combines ecological objectives with human participation.



At several points during the conference the discussion returned to the importance of practical action. Tree planting, woodland management, grazing systems and hedgerow restoration all demonstrated how relatively small interventions can contribute to larger environmental goals when undertaken consistently and collaboratively.

Taken together, these presentations illustrated an important principle: nature recovery works best when people are actively involved in shaping and supporting it.

Reflection

From Knowledge to Action

One of the strengths of the day was the way different forms of knowledge complemented one another.

Scientific monitoring sat alongside farming experience. Woodland management sat alongside biodiversity surveying. Traditional countryside skills sat alongside environmental science.

These perspectives were not competing interpretations of the landscape. Instead, they helped create a richer understanding of place and suggested practical ways in which people can work together.

Again and again, speakers emphasised that successful stewardship depends not only upon knowledge but also upon participation.

Chapter 6

Biodiversity Connections



If there was one phrase that captured the biodiversity discussions throughout the day, it was **"making connections."**

Habitats do not exist in isolation. Rivers connect to wetlands. Hedgerows connect to woodlands. Meadows support pollinators that move across the wider landscape. Healthy ecosystems depend upon these relationships.

This theme was explored in depth by **Brenda Barker**, who described the biodiversity work being undertaken across Brinkburn & Hesleyhurst Parish.

Brenda explained how volunteers have been working to develop a clearer understanding of local habitats through survey work, mapping and ecological recording. Using habitat classification methods and digital mapping tools, the project is helping to create a baseline picture of biodiversity within the parish.



The mapping work has highlighted the importance of understanding how different habitats connect across the landscape. Meadows, woodlands, river corridors and hedgerows all contribute to a wider ecological network.

Particular attention was given to community wildflower meadow initiatives.

The recreation field project demonstrated how patient management can transform areas dominated by grass into species-rich habitats supporting wildflowers, pollinators and other wildlife. Brenda shared examples showing the development of these meadows over time, emphasising that meaningful change often occurs gradually and requires persistence.

One of the most valuable messages emerging from the biodiversity discussions was that local action matters.

The restoration of a hedge, the planting of a tree, the creation of a meadow or the recording of species may seem small in isolation. However, when these activities occur across a landscape and are linked by shared purpose, their collective impact can be significant.

The discussions also highlighted the importance of partnerships. Work undertaken by local volunteers is strengthened through collaboration with environmental organisations, landowners and partner bodies involved in conservation and land management.



This emphasis on connection extended beyond ecology. The biodiversity work described by Brenda depended upon relationships between people as much as relationships between habitats.

In this sense, biodiversity recovery and community building were shown to be closely related activities. Both require patience, cooperation and a willingness to think beyond immediate boundaries.

The biodiversity projects discussed during the conference provided practical examples of how local action can contribute to wider environmental goals. They also demonstrated that positive change often begins with small groups of people willing to invest time, effort and care in the places they value.

Chapter 7

Connecting People and Place

As the afternoon progressed, attention turned from natural systems and biodiversity towards history, access and the ways in which people experience the landscape.

At the centre of this discussion was the **Wannie Line**, a route that continues to capture the imagination of local people many years after the railway itself disappeared.

Andy Cowan provided a humorous and engaging account of the history of the line and the role it played in connecting communities across rural Northumberland. Built to serve agriculture, industry, local communities and visitors, the railway became part of the social and economic fabric of the area.

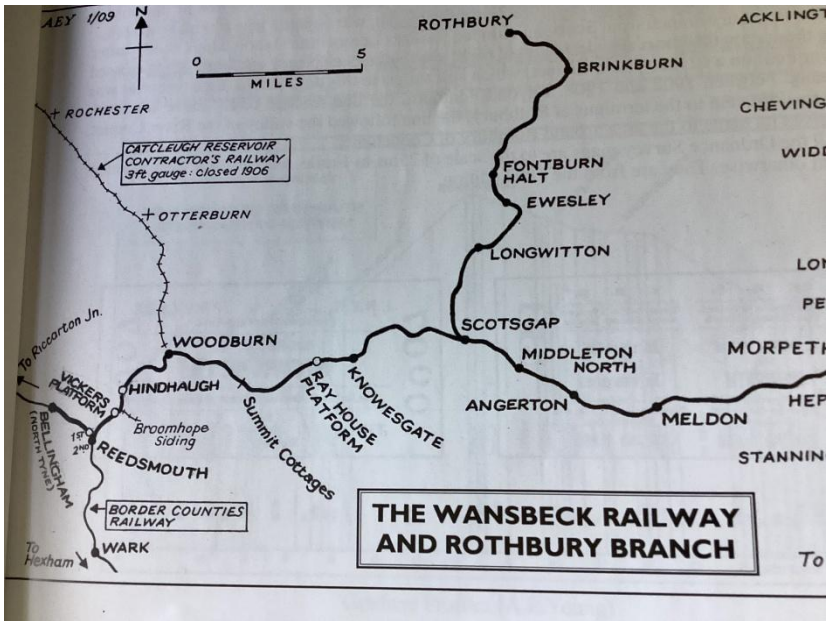


Image courtesy of Andy Cowan

For many residents, memories of the line remain vivid. Although the trains have gone, the route itself continues to exist within the landscape, linking places, stories and memories.

The discussion then moved from the past towards the future.

Duncan Hutt explored the possibility of developing parts of the former railway corridor as a Greenway linking access, recreation, biodiversity and heritage. Participants considered how surviving sections of the route might help reconnect communities while also creating opportunities for wildlife and public enjoyment.

These conversations reflected one of the wider themes of the conference. Heritage is not simply about preserving the past. It can also help shape future possibilities.

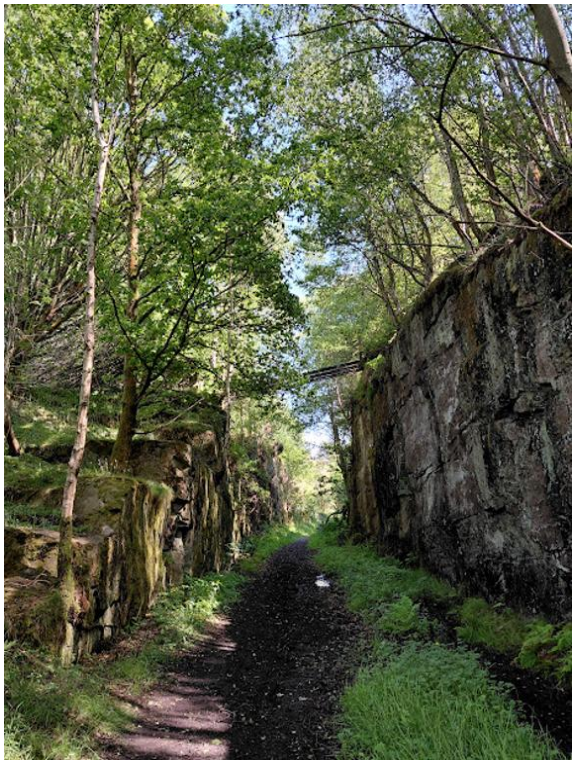


Image Courtesy of Duncan Hutt

The Wannie Line provides a good example. Once a transport corridor, it is now being reimagined as a route for walking, cycling, learning and environmental improvement. The same landscape can serve different purposes across successive generations.

The discussion also highlighted the importance of access. If people are to care for landscapes, they need opportunities to experience and understand them. Walking routes, interpretation, community events and educational activities all have a role to play in strengthening those connections.

Participants repeatedly returned to the idea that access, biodiversity, heritage and wellbeing should not be viewed in isolation. The most successful projects are often those that bring several objectives together.

The Wannie Line therefore became more than a railway story. It emerged as a symbol of the conference itself: a reminder that connections matter, whether between places, habitats, histories or people.

Chapter 8

Stories, Memory and Belonging

As the formal programme drew towards its conclusion, attention shifted from landscape and history towards the stories people tell about the places they inhabit. This proved to be one of the most distinctive parts of the day. Participants were reminded that landscapes are understood not only through facts and data but also through memory, story, imagination and creativity.

Virginia Kennedy explored these themes through *The River's Story*, a reflective journey along the Coquet that wove together history, mythology, wildlife, memory and lived experience.

Virginia invited participants to view the Coquet not simply as a physical feature but as a continuing presence in human experience.

The story moved between ancient springs, local traditions, wildlife encounters and personal reflections. The result was a powerful reminder that rivers are not only geographical features but also sources of meaning, memory and identity.



This perspective complemented the scientific and historical contributions heard earlier in the day. Whereas Mark Fenwick had demonstrated how the river shaped landscape and history, and Jamie Day had described contemporary efforts to understand and protect river health, Virginia explored the relationship between people and place through imagination, memory and story.

The programme also included contributions from **Donald Aynsley** and the **Wannie Choir**, whose songs and performances celebrated aspects of local history, community life and cultural memory.

These contributions demonstrated that heritage is not only preserved in archives, buildings and landscapes. It is also carried through stories, songs, voices and shared experiences.

One of the most striking features of the conference was that these cultural contributions sat comfortably alongside presentations about biodiversity, water quality and land management. Rather than appearing unrelated, they enriched the wider conversation and revealed the depth of people's connections with place.

Chapter 9

So What? Bringing It Together

The final session of the conference asked a simple but important question:

So What?

After an afternoon of presentations, discussion, stories and shared experiences, what had been learned? What connections had emerged? What might happen next?

This session became far more than a summary of earlier presentations. It was the point at which individual topics began to form a larger picture.

What We Heard

Participants approached the Coquet from many different directions.

Mark Fenwick explored geology, history and settlement.

Jamie Day focused on river health and community monitoring.

Angus Nelless described farming systems that work with natural processes.

Mark Shipperlee explored woodland creation and community participation.

Duncan Hutt highlighted peatland restoration and future opportunities associated with the former Wannie Line.

David Boyson demonstrated the importance of hedgerows and traditional countryside skills.

Brenda Barker described habitat mapping, biodiversity monitoring and community wildflower meadows.

Virginia Kennedy reflected on memory, story and belonging.

Yet despite these different perspectives, recurring themes appeared throughout the day.

Landscape, biodiversity, heritage and community were repeatedly shown to be interconnected rather than separate concerns.

What People Care About

Several issues and aspirations surfaced repeatedly during discussions.

Participants expressed concern about:

- river health;
- habitat loss and fragmentation;
- biodiversity decline;
- loss of traditional skills;
- and sustaining community participation.



At the same time, considerable optimism was evident.

There was enthusiasm for:

- habitat restoration;
- woodland creation;
- river stewardship;
- access improvements;
- local history and interpretation;
- volunteering;
- arts and storytelling;
- and stronger partnerships.

What We Learned

Perhaps the most important lesson was that knowledge exists in many forms.

Scientific monitoring, farming experience, historical research, practical conservation, local memory, storytelling and community observation all contributed to a richer understanding of place.

The event demonstrated that these approaches do not compete with one another. Instead, they become most powerful when brought together. Participants recognised the value of creating spaces where different kinds of knowledge can meet and discovered that, despite approaching the landscape from different perspectives, they shared many of the same aspirations for its future.

What Could Be Done

Throughout the day numerous opportunities were identified.

These included:



- strengthening river monitoring;
- restoring peatlands;
- expanding biodiversity surveys;
- creating and connecting habitats;
- supporting woodland creation;
- developing the Wannie Line Greenway;
- improving access;
- celebrating local heritage;
- supporting volunteers;
- and strengthening collaboration between organisations and communities.

Many of these ideas were already being explored in some form. Others remain aspirations for the future.

What united them was a belief that meaningful change is most likely to occur through partnership and shared effort.

A Shared Sense of Possibility

The most important outcome of the day was not a single project or recommendation.

It was the creation of a shared sense of possibility.

Again and again, participants discovered connections between topics often considered separately. Farming connected with biodiversity. Biodiversity connected with water. Water connected with heritage. Heritage connected with story. Story connected with community.

As these connections became clearer, so too did the opportunities.

The conference demonstrated that the future of the Coquet catchment will depend not only upon organisations, projects and funding, but also upon relationships, trust, local knowledge and community participation.

Perhaps that was the most important lesson of all.

Chapter 10

Ten Opportunities for the Future

The final discussions of the day identified a range of opportunities that could help strengthen biodiversity, celebrate heritage, improve access and support community participation across Brinkburn & Hesleyhurst Parish and the wider Coquet catchment.

These opportunities represent areas where local enthusiasm, practical experience and potential partnerships appear to be converging.

1. Develop the Wannie Line Greenway

The former Wannie Line corridor presents an opportunity to connect heritage, recreation, biodiversity and public access. Participants expressed considerable interest in further exploring how sections of the route might become a valuable community asset while protecting and interpreting its historical significance.

2. Strengthen River Stewardship

The work being undertaken by CRAG demonstrates the value of community involvement in understanding and protecting river health. Expanding monitoring activity, participation and public awareness could help build a stronger catchment-wide understanding of environmental conditions.

3. Enhance Habitat Connectivity

A recurring theme throughout the conference was the importance of connections between habitats. Opportunities exist to strengthen links between meadows, hedgerows, woodland, wetlands and river corridors, creating more resilient ecological networks.

4. Support Wildflower Meadows and Pollinators

The success of local meadow projects demonstrates how relatively small initiatives can contribute to biodiversity recovery. Continued support for meadow management, pollinator-friendly planting and habitat enhancement could provide further benefits.

5. Encourage Woodland Creation and Management

Woodland creation, restoration and management offer opportunities for biodiversity enhancement, carbon storage, learning and community engagement. Existing projects provide a strong foundation upon which further activity can be built.

6. Restore and Protect Peatlands

Peatland restoration has the potential to deliver multiple benefits including biodiversity enhancement, carbon capture and improved water management. Continued collaboration in this area is likely to produce both ecological and community benefits.

7. Preserve and Share Traditional Skills

Hedgelaying, woodland management and other countryside skills remain valuable tools for landscape stewardship. Supporting training, volunteering and knowledge sharing can help ensure these traditions continue to contribute to future conservation efforts.

8. Celebrate Heritage and Local Distinctiveness

The stories of the Coquet, Brinkburn, the Wannie Line and the wider landscape provide rich opportunities for interpretation, learning and community engagement. Heritage should be seen not only as something to preserve, but as something that can inspire future action.

9. Build Community Participation

Many of the projects discussed throughout the day depend upon volunteer effort and local involvement. Creating opportunities for people to participate, learn new skills and contribute their knowledge will remain essential.

10. Strengthen Partnerships

Perhaps the strongest message to emerge from the conference was the importance of collaboration. Future progress is likely to depend upon partnerships between communities, landowners, environmental organisations, local authorities, volunteers and educational bodies.

Taken together, these opportunities suggest a positive and ambitious future. None can be achieved by a single organisation working alone, yet all become more achievable when viewed through the lens of partnership and shared stewardship.

A Significant Opportunity for the Future

The Rothbury Estate Opportunity

Several discussions during the conference touched upon a development that may prove highly significant for the future of the parish and the wider Coquet catchment: the proposed acquisition of much of Rothbury Estate by Northumberland Wildlife Trust.

Much of the estate lies within or alongside landscapes that are already familiar to many residents of Brinkburn & Hesleyhurst Parish. These include woodlands, moorland, peatland, farmland, river corridors and areas of considerable ecological importance.

Participants recognised that the proposed change in ownership could create new opportunities for collaboration between Northumberland Wildlife Trust, local communities, volunteers, land managers, educational organisations, conservation bodies and Parish Council initiatives.

Many of the themes explored throughout the conference align closely with opportunities that could emerge through such partnerships. These include:



Opportunities include biodiversity recovery, woodland creation, habitat connectivity, peatland restoration, river stewardship, citizen science, volunteering, education, heritage interpretation and improved access.

Importantly, the opportunity extends beyond environmental objectives alone.

One of the recurring messages of the conference was that successful stewardship depends upon relationships between people and place. Future collaboration offers the possibility of strengthening community involvement in conservation while also expanding opportunities for learning, participation and local engagement.

Participants recognised that much detail remains to be worked through and that future plans will evolve over time. Nevertheless, many viewed the proposed acquisition as a potentially important moment in the continuing story of the Coquet catchment.

The themes explored throughout *The Wilds of Wannie, the Coquet and Beyond* suggest that an opportunity now exists to build stronger links between community aspirations and landscape-scale conservation initiatives. If realised, these partnerships could help create lasting benefits for biodiversity, heritage, education and community involvement across the parish and beyond.

Chapter 11

Contributors

The success of *The Wilds of Wannie, the Coquet and Beyond* depended upon the generosity, knowledge and enthusiasm of a wide range of contributors. The following profiles are intended to acknowledge those who shared their expertise, experience and creativity throughout the day.

Mark Fenwick

Landowner whose family heritage at Brinkburn can be traced back to the time of Henry VIII. Mark has maintained a lifelong interest in the River Coquet, its landscape, history and communities.

Jamie Day

Representative of the Coquet River Action Group (CRAG).

Angus Nelless

Farmer and land manager engaged in regenerative farming.

Mark Shipperlee

Founder of Living Woods and Tod's Place is engaged in woodland creation, management and community engagement.

Duncan Hutt

Director of Conservation at the Northumberland Wildlife Trust.

David Boyson

Hedgelayer and advocate of traditional countryside skills.

Brenda Barker

Member of the Climate Change & Biodiversity Committee and a leading figure in parish biodiversity initiatives.

Virginia Kennedy

Storyteller, writer, speaker, yoga and meditation teacher.

Donald Aynsley

Writer and performer from the local community.

Wannie Liners Choir

The Wannie Choir is made up of people from the community.

Chapter 12

The Many Hands Behind the Day



One of the strongest impressions left by *The Wilds of Wannie, the Coquet and Beyond* was that the event was made possible by an extraordinary number of individual contributions.

The day depended upon far more than speakers and presentations.

It relied upon people who conceived the idea, organised the programme, prepared displays, set up the hall, welcomed participants, coordinated logistics, prepared refreshments, documented the event and ensured that everything ran smoothly from beginning to end.



Photographs taken before and during the event show flower arrangements being prepared, displays assembled, food laid out and tables organised. These scenes remind us that community events are built from many acts of generosity, most of which occur behind the scenes.

The wonderful refreshments prepared by volunteers created opportunities for informal conversation and friendship. Discussions that began during presentations continued around tables and displays, often leading to new ideas, connections and possibilities.

The event also depended upon the willingness of participants to contribute their knowledge and experience. Residents, volunteers, land managers, environmental organisations, historians, artists, storytellers and community groups all played a part.

Indeed, one of the most encouraging aspects of the day was the way different forms of knowledge were welcomed and valued. Expertise took many forms. Scientific understanding, local memory, practical experience, creative expression and personal observation all enriched the conversation.

The organisers, the Climate Change & Biodiversity Committee of Brinkburn & Hesleyhurst Parish Council, deserve particular recognition for creating a space where these conversations could take place.

Most importantly, the event demonstrated that caring for a landscape is ultimately a collective endeavour. The river, the catchment and the parish are not maintained by institutions alone. They are sustained by the efforts of countless individuals who choose to give their time, energy and commitment to the places they value.

Looking Ahead

The Wilds of Wannie, the Coquet and Beyond did not seek to produce a definitive plan. Instead, it created an opportunity for people to come together, share knowledge and explore possibilities.

Throughout the day, participants discovered connections between subjects often considered separately: river stewardship, biodiversity, farming, woodland management, heritage, storytelling and community action.

The conversations recorded in this report represent the continuation of a journey rather than its conclusion.

The future of the Coquet catchment will be shaped not only by organisations, plans and projects, but by the many people who care for it, work within it, learn from it and celebrate it.

That spirit of shared stewardship was perhaps the most important lesson of all.

Further Information

For further information about this report, the Climate Change & Biodiversity Committee, or the Wilds of Wannie initiative, please contact:

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This report was compiled and edited by Garth Rhodes with contributions from speakers, participants and members of the Climate Change & Biodiversity Committee.

Acknowledging Our Volunteers

No account of *The Wilds of Wannie, the Coquet and Beyond* would be complete without recognising the volunteers whose time, skills and enthusiasm made both the event and much of the wider work described in this report possible.



Across the parish and the wider Coquet catchment, volunteers have contributed in many ways: surveying habitats, recording wildlife, restoring hedgerows, planting trees, creating and maintaining wildflower meadows, monitoring rivers, collecting litter, researching local history, organising events, preparing displays, welcoming participants, providing refreshments and sharing local knowledge.

Much of this work takes place quietly, yet its impact is significant. These collective efforts strengthen biodiversity, preserve heritage, build community connections and help care for the landscapes that make Brinkburn & Hesleyhurst Parish such a special place.

The Climate Change & Biodiversity Committee of Brinkburn & Hesleyhurst Parish Council extends its sincere thanks to everyone who has supported the projects, activities and initiatives described in this report, and to all those who helped make the event itself such a success.

Their commitment demonstrates that stewardship grows from communities as well as organisations, and from the willingness of individuals to take an active role in caring for the places that matter to them.

Image Credits

Unless otherwise stated, photographs were provided by contributors, volunteers and members of the Climate Change & Biodiversity Committee.

- Cover image: Generated with Microsoft Copilot.
- Kingfisher photograph – Roger Powell
- Cottle grazing photographs – Angus Nelless
- Caudle Moss & Footpath along the railway – Duncan Hutt
- Habitats map – Brenda Barker: Parish biodiversity survey records mapped in QGIS. Basemap imagery/map data: Google Maps, used in accordance with Google Maps/Geo attribution requirements.
- Railway map – Andy Cowan

This report is dedicated not only to the River Coquet, its catchment and its communities, but also to the volunteers whose continuing efforts help care for them.