

THE FUTURE POST FACILITATION

4 September 2025



BVC - a short history to date



- Originated in 2016 with a small group of neighbouring farms in Bramfield working together for wildlife
- Suffolk Wildlife Trust became facilitators in 2022
- Funded by DEFRA with Facilitation Fund covering SWT fees, website, activities, projects, funding applications
- Facilitation Fund withdrawn 31 May 2025

Cluster objectives



“a long term vision for an environmentally focused collaboration, whilst developing both environmental and economic farm sustainability”

Four Key Aims

- Landscape connectivity
- Community engagement
- Biodiversity & ecological value
- Farming sustainability, both environmental & financial



Ongoing projects

- Water monitoring
- Connectivity
- Priority species
- Engagement with local schools through Natural Habitat or by other means
- Support and encouragement for individual farmers to do environmental work on own farms

Challenges for nature friendly farmers

- Difficult and uncertain economic conditions
- Government policies now more hostile to farmers. Need for nature recovery identified but no plan for funding the work
- Weather and climate change
- Public perception of farming as a major cause of pollution in the environment



Opportunities for cluster members

- Economies of skill and scale
- Sharing of information about habitat management, funding or other opportunities
- No need to comply with DEFRA bureaucracy post facilitation
- Members can still apply for Countryside Stewardship or similar if they are available
- Potential for landscape recovery projects when acting as a cluster



Potential sources of grant funding

- Farming in Protected Landscapes until February 2026? Will it be extended? <https://coastandheaths-nl.org.uk/managing/farming-in-protected-landscapes/>
- Natural Environment Improvement Fund £10m from SZC administered by Suffolk & Essex Coasts & Heaths National Landscape from Autumn 2025 <https://coastandheaths-nl.org.uk/neif/>
- East Suffolk Trust (EaST), a new charity established by SZC, East Suffolk Council and SCC. At least £78m over 70 years. (No website yet)
- Suffolk's Local Nature Recovery Strategy is expected later this year. It will highlight priorities for nature recovery, which are then more likely to attract funding. <https://www.nsnrp.org/local-nature-recovery-strategy-lnrs>



Connectivity

- Connectivity of natural habitats is one of the key areas addressed in the draft LNRS as it is essential for wildlife to move through the landscape
- The value of these natural assets on farms could be enhanced by linking them to other similar habitats
- Connectivity audit started by SWT needs to be completed to see what BVC might have to offer potential funders



Water quality

- Public awareness of poor state of the nation's rivers is high
- BVC carrying out monthly sampling of Blyth tributaries in the catchment
- Potential for funding from water companies for farmers to provide nature-based solutions to reduce pollution and run-off
- Cooperation with community organisations such as Wilder Wenhaston and East Suffolk Council's Four Rivers project



Private finance

- Key objective of cluster to increase farm incomes in the long term
- Replanet project – steep learning curve
- Investors are interested but the markets are still fairly embryonic
- Landscape scale schemes are complex and implementation requires project management, for which funding may be available
- Farmers are reluctant to take productive land out of production for such schemes

Proposals for future management of the cluster

- Governance - steering group of 6-8 members to keep the cluster on track, ensure delivery of objectives and financial management
- Finance – reliance on annual subscriptions of members, currently £50
- Operation – we are asking members to volunteer if they have the skills and the enthusiasm to:
 - join the steering group
 - make their premises available for cluster events
 - organise (preferably free) speakers for meetings / social events
 - help with administration/membership mailing / website & social media
 - participate in cluster sub-groups eg. Private Finance Group



Summary

- There are opportunities for obtaining funding for farming in a more environmentally sustainable way and there will be more as the private markets develop
- The Blyth Valley Cluster can only survive if members are prepared to do some of the administration and some of the research required to identify these opportunities
- There will continue to be some support from SWT
- Funding may be available to work up a scheme once identified