**Hunsbury Hill Farm – Green Aspirations slides commentary**

**Richard Hollingum, Trustee, Northamptonshire ACRE**

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Introduction

**Slide 2**

Hunsbury Hill Farm covers 13 acres of land which is roughly divided into four unequal sections:

Buildings

New plantation

Old plantation

Scrub

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The site is of historical importance, locally, regionally and, we hope, nationally, in that the buildings form an almost extant early Model Farm dating from the 1790’s when it was originally built as part of the Delapré Abbey estate.

Before that time, indeed in the depths of time, it was probably part of the complex of fortifications that were centred around the Iron Age fort across the road from the Farm. Since that time the land has been farmed, become part of the industrial landscape of iron ore mining, plundered for oak trees to make barrels for local beer and once again returned to grazing land until succumbing to the expansion of Northampton.

It is a green haven that fortunately connects to other green havens with corridors to the Hunsbury Hill Park and the Iron Age fort. The Farm project aims to address a number of challenges that the site and buildings present.

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Some of the buildings are in good repair and serve NACRE and its subsidiary The Barns well. Some of the buildings could do with some refurbishment and many require major renovation.

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To that end we have embarked on the Hunsbury Hill Farm Project to develop the site to make it more useful for the charity and the communities it serves, to enhance the offer that the trading arm offers, to serve the immediate communities of East and West Hunsbury and to act as a beacon for rural communities wishing to explore how to develop and enhance their assets.

It is this last point that I wish to give you a bit more detail about here though Elaine or I will be happy to discuss other aspects of our project with you.

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Two of the major threads through the redevelopment of the site are improving the opportunities for wildlife and ensuring that the site runs as ‘green’ as possible.

We are working with the BCN Wildlife Trust in exploring how we make the site as suitable as possible for nature whilst allowing us to also open it up to the public. Of the three ‘open’ areas, the old plantation has a head start. The trees are established, many dating back almost 100 years. There are a couple of ponds that are to be dredged and a water course that needs to be cleared. Adding water to the asset will increase the opportunities incredibly. There are a variety of woodland plants, flowers and fungi on the ground and the wood provides homes for foxes, badgers, muntjac deer and … a noisy buzzard.

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The new plantation, put in as a buffer between the main road and the houses on the edge of the estate has been left to grow by itself and suffers from a poor understorey due to the closeness of the upper branches when in leaf. The management plan is to reduce the number of trees to encourage plants on the ground so that the right sort of cover is available for insects and thus start producing a good ecosystem.

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The scrub section lies between the two wooded areas. Scrub is a term used to describe patches of land that are typically covered with shrubs and may well be land in transition to becoming colonised by trees. This area is being considered for use as a community orchard and allotments whilst the boundary will be planted with a mixed hedge. There will also be strips of wild flowers to encourage pollinators and other insects as well as creating a substantial green corridor between the two woods.

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The Wildlife Trust have carried out a number of surveys on the site so far and have advised us about both macro and micro management.

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As well as the Wildlife Trust, it is worth contacting the Northamptonshire Biodiversity Records Office to see what records they hold on the flora and fauna in your area. Just because the piece of land in question is not designated as a nature reserve does not mean what is there, is not worth preserving. Often records can stretch back over decades and it can be interesting to see how species have come – or gone.

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The buildings also offer opportunities for wildlife. The last bat survey found roosts in the Farmhouse as well as potential temporary roosts in the open barns. We are awaiting the opportunity to have an up-to-date report done to see what the current situation is. We shall also be looking to encourage swifts to nest on the taller buildings as part of the national push to provide better homes for them. Bat Surveys are not carried out by the Wildlife Trust but by specialists.

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Another resource we have used but would be of greater use in rural settings is the MAGIC map. Accessed via the DEFRA website, you can select various criteria to be displayed to show your assets, in this case habitats, though other aspects of land use and designation are available. This has been particularly useful in Neighbourhood Planning.

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Turning now to how the site will run. It is our intention that the development will make NACRE a beacon of green energy use and environmental sustainability. NACRE is fortunate to own 13 acres and we are going to explore ground source energy possibly supported air source and by energy gained from our own wood stock. Opportunities for electricity will come from solar power and perhaps wind.

We shall also be looking at capturing rainwater (eg: for toilet flushes) and using reed beds to manage waste water.

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There are a number of organisations that can offer advice and guidance in pursuing green energy. An information sheet containing links to these organisations will be sent you. Historic England and the NLHF are both possible contributors to major projects involving buildings of historical importance. How these organisations see these buildings being used is constantly shifting but it is very clear that, by and large, they have to be functional and they must appease the needs of effective carbon reduction.

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Some charitable agencies are definitely worth a visit, if only virtually. The Centre for Sustainable Development works primarily to keep homes warm and efficient whilst reducing the carbon footprint. The Centre for Alternative Technology, a charity that foresaw the issues of climate change long before most people, carries out research into energy solutions and works as an educational charity running courses in environmental issues.

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The Energy Saving Trust work with individuals, businesses, communities and governments, advising on saving energy and reducing carbon emissions. On their website you will see examples of the programmes they have been or are involved in, including Home Energy Scotland and the HACKS Project motivating people to replace old and inefficient heating and cooling equipment.

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If you have a large or important historic building, then the National Trust has a number of good examples of solutions. Whilst we may not have the need for an Archemdian Screw as a solution to providing electricity as at Cragside, there are a number of places that have installed a biomass heating system, as at Dyrham Park in Gloucestershire, or ground source heating at Wimpole in Cambridgeshire.

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NACRE has joined Fit for the Future is an environmental sustainability network of over 100 charities, heritage organisations and public sector bodies.

Fit for the Future facilitates knowledge-sharing and collaboration across organisations and sectors so that they can achieve the rapid and far-reaching changes needed to decarbonise, adapt to climate change and drive positive environmental impacts. The Network links members up in order that they can share ideas and practical experience. It also organises events and enables the sharing of resources. The member organisations are taking action on the climate emergency & lowering their environmental impacts by working together.

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On a broader subject, and one of increasing relevance, we are looking at the value of nature on the estate using two sets of metrics:

Natural Capital

Defined by the UK Natural Capital Committee, Natural Capital are the “*..elements of nature that directly or indirectly produce value or benefits to people, including ecosystems, species, freshwater, land, minerals, the air and oceans, as well as natural processes and functions” .* This stock of natural assets, which includes habitats, soils, water and biodiversity, produces a wide range of ecosystem services that provide benefits to people by providing food, water; by regulating air quality, pollination, climate; and by non-material benefits such as recreation, aesthetic experiences, health & well-being.

Social Impact

Social Impact measures the value of the changes that are made, by an organization, by economic situation, by community and by environment. There are a number of methods of measuring this – the quote on the slide is from the National Themes, Outcomes & Measures Framework – but suffice to say that future funding applications will call for more and more evidence of the value of the impact that the changes and developments will bring about.

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At the moment, the Project is in the very early stage. NACRE have appointed GSS Architecture to work with us and we are about to submit an EOI to the NLHF. From then… well who knows. However, many of the biodiversity-related things need not wait until then. We are already working with organisations planning how to improve the site. We have made contact with the Woodland Trust regarding planting hedgerows; we have started thinning some of the timber in the new plantation; we are discussing with the local authority about access to the old plantation so that we can plan how best to route people through it;

And we are recruiting local people and groups who would like to work with us to create a community orchard (only local heritage fruit!).

It’s a start!