

Thank you for inviting me to chair this discussion on *Promoting Community Partnerships: Tackling the Decline of Pollinating Insects in the UK*

I'm Rob Yorke, independent commentator on rural affairs and chartered surveyor. I am very keen to frame this discussion around the Govt's ongoing Pollinator Strategy – focussed on two words.

The first – a word within this organisations name – 'exchange' – as in knowledge sharing - a key part of the gov't's strategy. The second word – 'communities' - as in farming, urban, scientific, local and political communities. We are all part of one society and a small word of warning, I am not mad on references to 'us' and 'them' (such as farmers and conservationists/urban and rural) – as this create tensions that can distract from the bigger picture.

The big picture for me is food production – and I for one, believe it is very hard to discuss pollinators without mention of agriculture – not just in the pollination services provided to some crops, but arguably, the more important issue (in the process of providing us with affordable food) of the impact of farming practices on habitat.

For that, we must go back to 1955, and blame or thank depending on how much you can afford to spend on your groceries, the birth of BBC Radio 4's *The Archers*. Originally a gov't information programme to improve efficiencies in farming after post war fears on food self-sufficiency. Forward wind to the recent **State of Nature** report, we note that we are still suffering collateral damage from poor use of first generation pesticides in the 60s, to loss of habitat in the 70s into early 90s. However, for the last 25years, hedgerows have not been removed and new habitat is being provided, oft unreported, as change for the better slowly gathers momentum.

It's a complex subject covering the huge range of pollinators (from flies and moths to the more iconic media-friendly ones), the **different species of bees** – from commercial bumblebees for all year-round strawberries, to habitat for foraging, nesting and overwintering wild bees, application of pesticides to protect crops from pests (*possibly increasing due to climate change*), to **use of insecticides to control varroa** mites in farmed honey bees and Integrated Pest Management.

Rather than another echo chamber talking event on the same old subject (*that frankly can at times be oversimplified, dumbed down, to appeal to public opinion centred on controversial matters*), let us seek, from our respective communities, **to come together to deliver more public benefit** by enhancing biodiversity while also providing affordable food.

That affordable word is important as we see inflation's effect on today's food prices.

So let's start with **some solutions** - then work backwards looking at some of the challenges and problems that we must overcome in order to promote answers that are sustainable for both humans and pollinators. Speak from your experience, **no mission statements please** and be respectful of everyone's views. **Less about for whom you work;** more about what you know/do

I will be a tough chair - but for all our sakes so we all hopefully get something out of today!