

Roncombe residents meet at Sand

Matt and Gertrude Coman, the new owners of Sand, invited residents of the Roncombe Valley to meet over coffee and cake to seek support for their plans and ideas for the property. The meeting was well attended by farmers and neighbours along the Roncombe. Attendees also included Chris Lockyear, leader of Sidmouth Town Council, Chris Woodruff from East Devon National Landscape, Ed Dolphin from Sidmouth Civic Arboretum, members of Sid Valley Biodiversity Group's River Catchment Project and Stella Huyshe-Shires. Stella is the former long standing resident of Sand with a deep knowledge and understanding of the land, and she is also a key member in the River Sid Catchment Group.

In this beautiful, imposing medieval setting neighbours listened to Simon Browning, the Sid Valley Biodiversity Group's catchment advisor, talking about possibilities for retaining water in the landscape and slowing its flow after torrential rain. This can benefit both individual landowners and those living downstream. Many small interventions across the valley could have an impact reducing soil erosion, improving climate resilience and reducing flooding downstream. Matt and Gertrude's plans were outlined and neighbours were given the opportunity to discuss their watery problems with the possibility of site visits and advice from Simon.



We walked through the garden in brilliant sunshine to view the idyllic location of a potential lake and wetland at Sand which would be fed by small streams and springs. This would not only create an opportunity to increase biodiversity but could provide a focus for exciting educational and community activities including therapy for those with mental health issues.



The possibility of a series of leaky dams on the Roncombe to raise the river bed and enable the river to reconnect with its old flood plain were also discussed. This is a national initiative; local similar projects include one on National Trust land at Killerton and the Lower Otter Restoration Project. Rivers often react badly to being straightened and used as conduits to channel water swiftly to the sea. This project gives the landscape the chance to hold back some of the runoff and people opportunities to reconnect with their natural world. Matt and Gertrude have the vision, expertise and energy to bring a positive contribution to our environment and community.