



BVS Environment Group

Sustainable Blewbury Newsletter

A special interest group of the Blewbury Village Society

This Newsletter covers recent decisions about the future directions of Sustainable Blewbury, events and items of general news.

For the latest news and more information, please see our website at <http://www.sustainable-blewbury.org.uk/>

Projects continue to develop on a number of fronts under our five main themes of Natural Environment & Heritage, Energy and Transport, Food & Farming, Travel & Transportation, and Waste & Recycling.

Current projects with contacts are:

- Blewbury Energy Initiative (Hugh Osborn)
- Blewbury produce stall (Sarah Deco)
- Woodway permaculture project (Sarah Deco)
- Orchards (Mike Edmunds)
- The Millbrook project (Mike Edmunds)
- The Downland project (Peter Cockrell)
- Village skills project (Anita Rendel)
- Restoration of the Blewbury Wagon (Peter Cockrell).

There are more ideas than effort to follow them up. More volunteers would be welcome. If you are interested in getting involved with a project, please make contact with the project leader or one of the two Mikes (Edmunds or Marshall – details at the end of this newsletter).

Blewbury Festival

SB held three events during the festival.

The stall and display on Ticklers Folly field at the beginning of the festival was very successful. Not only was lots of produce sold (thanks to all the contributors) but we recruited a number of new supporters and engaged in interesting conversations.



Colin Tudge, the writer and broadcaster, gave a talk to a capacity audience in the Manor barn on "Good food for everyone forever". His premise was that the maximum number

of people ever likely to be on this planet (estimated at 9.5 billion people by 2050) could be fed to a high standard and that to achieve this we need only to design farming expressly for the purpose.

On the last Saturday we 'interrupted' the Millbrook Walk with an exhibition and demonstration in the garden of Millbrook Cottage. Blewbury Energy Initiative displayed ways of improving home insulation (thanks to Hugh Osborn) while James Morgan demonstrated kick sampling in the stream, collecting a range of different invertebrates that live on and under the stream gravel – this was a big hit with children ... and adults too. Another successful day with lots of interest expressed.

Natural Environment and Heritage

The Natural Environment and Heritage theme aims to raise awareness and promote protection of the landscape of the village of Blewbury and its parish land. Projects within this theme provide a baseline for sustainable development and so focus primarily on the biodiversity and wildlife of Blewbury's downland habitats, together with its water features – springs and streams – trees and village fabric. It also includes those elements of the village that comprise its architectural heritage, fabric and the skills needed to sustain the special local character of the village. It is linked to other village activities such as the Local History Group and the Archaeology Group.

Downland Project

Good news! This summer, with the help of BBOWT (Berkshire Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust) the Chalkpit and Rubble Pit Lane leading up to it has been officially designated as a Local Wildlife Site.

Local Wildlife Sites are special places which have been identified for their wildlife value in a county context. They are an essential part of creating a better connected landscape of wildlife buffers, corridors and stepping stones so that the countryside is more resilient to the pressures of modern living and climate change.

The Chalkpit and Rubble Pit Lane contain a mosaic of rich downland habitats including lowland calcareous grassland, rank grassland, scrub and wooded areas.



The project is the subject of a grant application to the North Wessex Downs Area of Natural Beauty and if successful it will enable the habitats to be better managed and improved, especially with regular tree and scrub management.

There are three current activities (August 2011):

- (i) Rubble Pit lane is being surveyed for preparation of the grant proposal;
- (ii) An area in the south of Ticklers Folly field has been left unmown to see if downland plants still survive there: initial results are encouraging and an opportunity exists to create a wild flower meadow for all to enjoy close to the village recreation area. This model may then be applied to other edge areas within the downland;
- (iii) Downland plants are being grown from wild seed – one part of an experiment to propagate downland plants from seed which will be sown to re-populate areas and corners with downland flowers.

Millbrook Project

Over the summer further background work has continued in conjunction with the Environment Agency. Interest has centred mainly on the Cleve, the main wetland feature in the village, which is generally agreed to be in a rather sorry state. The Millbrook stream starts as a series of springs along the chalk escarpment and gives rise to the special wetland character of the village. We aim to survey the whole stream within the parish boundary for its biodiversity and ecology. This really is an ongoing project since we have been monitoring the hydrology of the springs for some 20 years to understand better the flow characteristics and water quality.

Restoration of the Cleve: The Cleve is a dynamic spring basin fed by over 20 discrete springs and the location of these is important in design of improved flows and as foci for improving ecology. These springs may be seen alongside the main pathway, and during the summer the flow channels from some of the springs through the Cleve have been emphasised as clear areas within the water body.



Over the past 40 years or so the Cleve has been neglected and thick silt has accumulated, greatly reducing its ecological status. Samples of the silt have been taken for analysis.



Plans are currently being drawn up to improve flow through the Cleve focusing on the channel network, capturing the spring flows. There seem to be a number of options for silt removal. Rather than initial plans for complete removal we are considering staged or partial removal along the channels. As far as possible the Cleve will be restored to a near natural state with attention to landscaping and increasing its biodiversity. A grant application is currently being prepared to take the project forward.

Invertebrate surveys: We are beginning a systematic survey of the Millbrook working with the Environment Agency and The Riverfly Partnership – we are now part of their national river invertebrate monitoring programme that records the numbers of insect larvae present and therefore the overall health of river systems. A lecture and practical demonstration was given in June to Blewbury schoolchildren and public demonstrations of the field techniques given at the summer Blewbury Festival.



Water vole surveys and mink eradication: There have been recent village sightings of the water vole! We are establishing a monitoring project for the autumn both for the water vole and its main predator the mink.

Village Trees

The village itself has a diverse landscape with many fine trees. This is an important heritage which we consider should be maintained and where possible the landscape enhanced by additional tree planting and maintenance. We are working with the Parish Council on issues relating to planning and any programmes to plant new trees as well as to remove or prune trees for good reasons. The start of the project was to establish a good database of the tree population. This provides a baseline against which future changes can be measured.

If you have a large or interesting tree in your garden that you would like to be part of the tree survey we would be happy to measure and record it – please contact Mike Marshall on 850360 or Anita Rendel on 850131.

The Great British Elm Experiment by the Conservation Foundation provides saplings from mature elms that appear to have resisted Dutch elm disease (free to schools and community groups). We know of 6 of these saplings being grown in gardens in Blewbury. If you are interested please see <http://www.conservationfoundation.co.uk/>.

Dark Skies and Tranquility

Light pollution is still increasing, leaving less and less countryside where we can enjoy seeing the stars. We are working with the Parish Council towards reducing light pollution, by ensuring that any lights shine downwards, are no brighter than necessary for safety, and only come on where necessary. We actively support the British Astronomical Association's Campaign for Dark Skies – website at: <http://www.britastro.org/dark-skies/>.

Please make sure that your external lights do not illuminate the sky or shine outside your property.

According to CPRE, tranquility is the quality valued most in the English countryside. They have drawn up criteria for tranquil areas and we fully support their work in this area. For tranquil places and dark skies see their website at: <http://www.cpre.org.uk/what-we-do/countryside>.

Food & Farming

Blewbury Produce Stall

After a brief change of venue, the Sustainable Blewbury Produce Stall has settled down again at the Garage from 10 am till noon on Saturday mornings. Home grown and home made produce for sale is welcome from 9.30 am.

We are always looking for helpers so if you have the occasional Saturday morning to spare do contact Sarah Deco. sarah.deco@care4free.net or 851441.

The last stall of the season will be on the 15th October.

Woodway Permaculture Project

Permaculture is based on a philosophy of cooperating with nature and facilitating the development of a system that is self-sustaining and self-supporting. By observing natural systems it is possible to produce an environment that is rich in biodiversity, needs very little maintenance, and which leaves the environment enriched rather than depleted.

The hedge planted in February around two sides of the plot off Woodway Road is thriving. There are plans to plant a variety of fruit trees this autumn. For more information and a photo gallery see:

<http://www.sustainable-blewbury.org.uk/permaculture.htm>.

If you would like to be involved please contact Sarah Deco at sarah.deco@care4free.net or 851441.

Travel & Transportation

Bus services

We are expecting to find out this month if there will be any changes to the 94/95 bus service to Didcot from next January. This is part of a regular review of subsidised bus services by the County Council.

The Friday Wallingford service is to be reviewed shortly with any changes coming into effect in June 2012. If you have any comments about this service you can let Mike Marshall know at mike@twintrees.demon.co.uk or 850360.

Energy & Transport (Blewbury Energy Initiative)

New Grants for Renewable Heating Systems

The Government recently announced Renewable Heat Premium Payments that will provide up to 25,000 households with grants to cover installation of renewable heating, including solar hot water panels, heat pumps, and wood or wood pellet boilers. Grants for solar thermal panels will be available to all houses. However, grants for central heating will only be for houses that use heating sources other than mains gas, including electric heaters, oil and coal.

The scheme started on 1 August 2011 and runs until March 2012, or sooner if the number of grants or the money run out. Participants will be expected to provide feedback on performance of their systems, in order to fine-tune the forthcoming Renewable Heat Incentive.

The scheme will be run by the Energy Saving Trust. Householders must have basic energy efficiency measures in place before applying, and grants will be available on a first-come first-served basis. Approved installers and products must be used. The following technologies are included:

- Solar thermal hot water panels – £300 (all homes)
- Ground-source heat pump – £1250 (homes without mains gas heating)
- Air-source heat pump – £850 (homes without mains gas heating); only air-to-water pumps are eligible
- Biomass boiler – £950 (homes without mains gas heating)

Systems installed under this scheme will also be eligible for long-term support through the Renewable Heat Incentive

(RHI), providing they meet the RHI's criteria when it is introduced in October 2012.

There is more detailed information on the Blewbury Energy Initiative website, at:

www.blewbury.co.uk/energy/renewable.htm#RHPP .

Insulation Grant Scheme

The BEI is giving support to the Vale of White Horse DC in its Cocoon insulation incentive scheme – please see details in the September Blewbury Bulletin. You can contact Cocoon directly at 0800 80 48 777 or www.cocoonyourhome.co.uk .



This is being followed-up with Thermal Imaging surveys during January to March 2012. If you wish your house to be surveyed please contact Hugh Osborn <hugh@appleinter.net> , but remember our volunteer resources are limited, so we will give priority on a first come first served basis.

Stop Press!

Apple Juicing: We will be organising a day of apple juicing towards the end of October. We are borrowing a fruit press this year to assess its use. This will allow us to decide whether to purchase equipment for the village for next season and to familiarise ourselves with its operation and management. More news will be circulated by e-mail.

Permaculture volunteers wanted: The next stage of the Woodway permaculture project will be the planting of fruit trees and bushes sometime in November. To prepare the ground, we will need some volunteers to help us with laying cardboard and mulch over the area to be planted on

Sunday, October 2nd, 2 – 5 pm, Brambles, Woodway Road.

Any spare cardboard will be welcome too, as well as any free sources of horse manure or compost.

We welcome new members and anyone interested in getting involved in the above (or new) projects

Contacts: Chairman – Mike Edmunds (wme@btopenworld.com)
Secretary – Mike Marshall (mike@twintrees.demon.co.uk)

Website: The Sustainable Blewbury website is at <http://www.sustainable-blewbury.org.uk/>
It is frequently updated with news and information