



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 both internal and external circulation.

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

Several of our projects have now reached the detailed planning and work 'on the ground' stage. This issue contains progress reports on several of them.

Projects running or being developed (with contact) 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).

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).

Climate Change Week

Blewbury was one of many national and local organisations contributing to Climate week (21-26 March). We were privileged to host talented young film maker Ross Harrison for a showing of his recent film "Beyond the Brink" followed by a lively discussion session. The film especially raised the issue of engaging more people in the reality of climate change as well as dealing with the discrediting of the scientific evidence by a handful of powerful companies and individuals. It also showed that facing up to climate change is a moral issue. The main drawback of the evening was the fact that the Red Lion was closed and the discussion could not continue in traditional Blewbury manner!

Travel & Transportation

Bus service: The County Council are reviewing subsidised bus service contracts for the three-and-a-half years from January 2012 to June 2015. with public consultation from April to early June this year. The April Blewbury Bulletin contains a questionnaire about the use of bus services. The information from this will be useful to the County Council, the Oxfordshire Rural Community Council, the Parish Council and Sustainable Blewbury. Please complete the questionnaire and drop it off at Savages, the Garage or the Post Office by the 11th April.

Please contact Mike Edmunds if you have any further comments on the bus service (850337 or wme@btopenworld.com)

Village skills project

Concern for the village fabric has been at the core of Sustainable Blewbury for many years. In 2010 the initiative was taken to start recording unique architectural detail of (mostly) listed buildings and, with the collaboration of the Local History Group and the Artists Group, we are making note of the findings in words, photos and sketches. More than 100 houses and buildings are on the 'list' of which more than 80 have been visited so far. The results are intriguing in their diversity, astounding in their beauty and revealing in their history. To help us understand what we are looking at we invited Charles Brooking for a return visit to Blewbury at the beginning of April. A report will appear in the next newsletter.

Blewbury Produce Stall

The Sustainable Blewbury Produce Stall will be opening again on the 7th May. There has been some discussion about changing the venue, but for the moment at least, it looks as though we will be back outside the Garage on the main road from 10-12 every Saturday until October. We're hoping that now that more people in the village know about the stall we will have a more consistent supply of produce and customers. We're also hoping to improve the presentation of the stall and produce to make it look more appealing.



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

Also please consider bringing along some produce even if it's just a few bunches of herbs or some homemade biscuits.

The Blewbury Wagon

We are delighted to report that the restoration of the wagon is going ahead. The wheels have been collected as the first step in the restoration, which will take many months to complete. On the wagon's return practical and financial help will again be needed to complete the paintwork and to create a suitable shelter for it at Orchard Dene. If you would like to help, please contact Coral or Peter.

Coral Richards: 850218 or coralr.blewbury@gmail.com or
Peter Cockrell: 850052 or peter@cockrell.plus.com

Blewbury Energy Initiative

Microgeneration news

Our initiative to get discounted prices by grouping orders for solar photovoltaic (PV) panels, and so take advantage of the Feed-in Tariff, more than doubled the number of PV systems in Blewbury to 17 (with more on the way). There are also 12 solar thermal systems, 4 ground-source heat pumps and 1 air-source heat pump. Below we mention some recent developments.

Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI)

The government has finally published its proposals for greatly increasing the use of renewable heating. This is a world first, but how to do it is much less clear than with electricity and there are still things that are not yet defined.

The RHI will cover a range of technologies including solid and gaseous biomass, solar thermal, ground- and water-source heat-pumps, on-site biogas, deep geothermal, energy from waste and injection of biomethane into the grid. In the first phase, which will start in 2011, long-term support will be targeted at big, non-domestic emitters – everything from large-scale industrial heating to small business and community heating projects. Domestic tariffs will only start in October 2012, in a second phase of the RHI.

As an interim measure the government will also introduce Renewable Heat Premium payments to subsidise installation of renewable systems such as solar thermal panels, wood-burning stoves and heat pumps. These payments are supposed to start in July, with information about them announced in May.

People in receipt of these payments will be able to receive long term RHI tariff support from 2012, as will anybody who has installed a certified installation since 15 July 2009. The rates are not yet decided.

There is more RHI information on the BEI domestic generation web page: www.blewbury.co.uk/energy/renewable.htm, while full details of the RHI proposals can be found on the DECC website: www.decc.gov.uk.

Solar photovoltaic panels (PV)

The Feed-in Tariff (FIT) for solar electricity generation, as well as other technologies such as wind, has now been in operation for a full year. From April 2011 through March 2012 the tariffs will be increased for inflation by 4.8%. More information and other FIT rates are on our website: www.blewbury.co.uk/energy/renewable.htm.

Our advice if you are considering installing a solar PV system is to do it well before April 2012 in order to get the current rate,

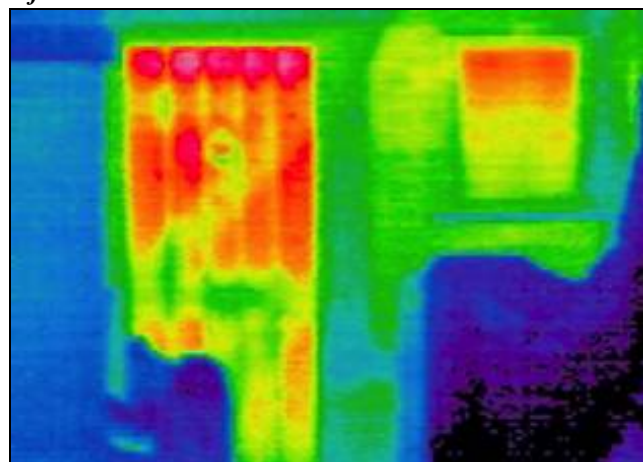
as a review is underway to re-assess the FIT rates from April 2012. The cost of solar PV has fallen and some believe the tariff is too generous, so it seems very likely that the solar PV tariff will be reduced for systems registered after then.

Thermal imaging (TI)

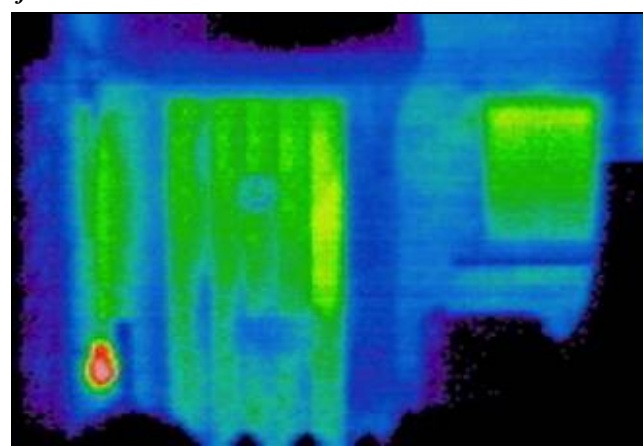
We were very fortunate to be able to borrow a TI camera, and during the cold weather undertook further surveys of houses in Blewbury. These revealed some appallingly inefficient thermal insulation in many properties. In some cases the images were used to check the effectiveness of improved insulation by comparing with images taken in the past.

Effectiveness of low-cost foil sandwiched bubble wrap insulation.

Before



After



It is clear that everyone should review their home insulation and take remedial action – further TI surveys will be offered next winter to monitor progress.

The BEI also evaluated various TI cameras on behalf of the VWHDC, which adopted our recommendation and purchased a good quality, easy to operate camera for use by community groups in the Vale.

Good heat insulation remains our easiest and most effective way of reducing energy costs and CO₂ emissions.

The Woodway Permaculture Project

The Woodway Permaculture Project in Woodway Road is up and running. Eric and Claire Eisenhandler have offered a piece of land adjacent to their property for use in creating a small forest garden.

Permaculture aims to learn from and copy nature, in designing growing systems that are sustainable and highly productive. We've started by planting a hedge to provide wildlife habitats, shelter and produce. We've used edible plants in the hedge as well as more common hedging varieties. We've also planted a small grove of hazel for coppicing.

We had a really enjoyable day planting some 400 plants, with several willing helpers from the village and some members of the Oxford permaculture group. We were lucky enough to have been given a huge pile of compost from Agrivert, which provided a diverting playground for the children as well as a mulch for the plants.



The next phase will involve adding fruit trees underplanted with fruit bushes, perennial vegetables and herbs. If you would like to be involved please contact Sarah Deco. sarah.deco@care4free.net 851441.

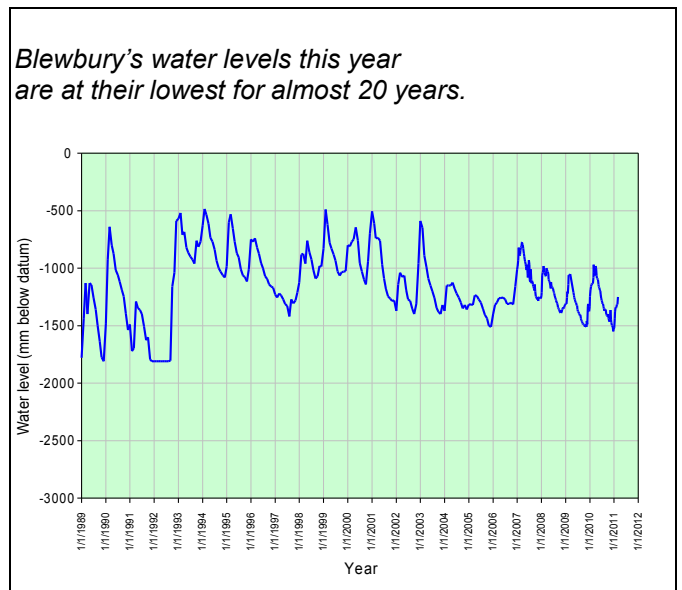
The Millbrook Project

The Cleve and Blewbury's springs and streams

For many years the BVSEG has been involved in activities relating to Blewbury's springs, streams and watercourses. Now that we have the restoration of natural flow conditions following the closure of Blewbury Pumping Station, in conjunction with riparian owners we have decided to take a more active look at the hydrology and biodiversity of the Millbrook catchment within the Parish boundaries.

This year we have undertaken preliminary survey work with the help of the Environment Agency and are now seeking funding to allow us to develop this project. The priority will be the Cleve, which is commonly agreed to be biologically defunct, due mainly to the prolonged influx of silt over the years. The first steps which we hope to take this autumn will be to remove silt from the Cleve using a "gully sucker" and then to create preferred flow channels through the Cleve, stabilise the banks and create more static wetland areas.

We will also be continuing a historical log of the Cleve, monitoring water levels and conducting biodiversity and fish surveys along the Millbrook.



We still (just) have sightings of water voles in the village but also we have mink which prey on them. Eradication of mink will be a priority.

We plan to produce a project document and action plan by the summer for wider discussion.



The Downland Project

We are fortunate to live on the spring line at the foot of the Berkshire Downs. This is a part of the North Wessex Downs (NWD) Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and is classified in their Management Plan as part of “The Downs Plain and Scarp”. Vast arable fields, lack of surface water and a general absence of settlement characterise the Plain. Conversely the dramatic scarp slope (very prominent to the south of Blewbury) is cut by springs, creating a convoluted edge alternately under woodland and pasture, including significant areas of remnant calcareous grassland.

This project is concerned with these diminishing remnants of chalk grassland in and near the village.

Within the village we already have the successful “Living Churchyard” project, conceived and created by Norma Bird. This provides an encouraging example of what can be achieved with patience, perseverance and knowledge. Close to the village we have two other important Local Wildlife Sites: Blewburton Hill to the east and Lyds Bottom to the south. Both have important and varied habitats and a wide, natural diversity of plant and animal life. Two new target areas are discussed below: The “Chalk Pit” and “Tickers Folly Field”.

The NWD Management Plan defines some key requirements for this land type. It states: “The overall management objective is to conserve and enhance the distinctive and contrasting character of the Downs Plain and associated Scarp. This includes areas of chalk grassland and opportunities for habitat recreation to extend and link sites”.

The proposal, to create a new LWS, has received the support of BBOWT (Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust). A suggested Management Plan notes that “Calcareous grassland is one of the richest habitats in Europe able to support a wide diversity [of] wildflowers (such as orchids), specialist butterflies (i.e. Adonis Blue) and birds. However these habitats are in dramatic decline, and thus management that can protect and enhance them is becoming increasingly important”.

The Chalk Pit and Rubble Pit Lane: The Chalk Pit is an old chalk quarry. This and the hollow way leading to it contain a mosaic of habitats including lowland calcareous grassland, rank grassland, scrub and wooded areas. The agreement and support of Blewbury Parish Council is being sought to proceed with the practical measures described below. In addition to the proposed LWS there are opportunities on adjacent land to re-create areas of chalk grassland and to link the sites together. The following actions are proposed for 2011.

The proposal is to cut back some of the scrub on the lane and the Chalk Pit area to encourage the grassland species already growing there as the first stage in managing the scrub over time. This will be in addition to the normal work of the length-

man who routinely keeps the pathway open for walkers. The plan is not to eliminate the hawthorn bushes, which provide food and cover for birds and animals, but to reduce them where they are competing with the more endangered grassland plants.

A part of the Chalk Pit showing both scrub and grassland



The best way to manage the grassland is by grazing with sheep in the autumn to encourage the right species. There are several ways in which sheep could be provided and these are being investigated. Fencing and special gates will be needed since this is both a footpath and bridleway. It is hoped that grant aid can be obtained for this work.

Tickers Folly Field: This is an area of about two and a half hectares of grass owned by the village and currently mown short throughout the summer months. We would like to cease cutting part of it to see whether Downland plants still survive there. If they do then an opportunity exists to create a wild flower meadow for all to enjoy close to the village recreation area and adjacent to a new play area shortly to be constructed. Grazing by sheep would not be practical in this area so strategic cutting and removal of hay would be required to encourage the right flora.

Growing plants from wild seed: An experiment has already started to propagate downland plants from seed to re-populate areas and corners with downland flowers. We already have a small collection of seed (some already germinating) to grow this spring. We hope to involve a number of people including school children with looking after them and planting out in strategic places. These will be used in the existing “Living Churchyard” project, on Tickers Folly Field and possibly in the Permaculture garden.

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