



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 www.sustainable-blewbury.org.uk

Welcome to the latest edition of the Sustainable Blewbury newsletter. Progress reports on several projects are given below. We are pleased to report that we have received grants to support both the Millbrook and Downland projects.

But first some advice from the Blewbury Energy Initiative.

Home Insulation Grant – Advice to those considering improving their house insulation. It is rumoured that changes to the Green Deal are being considered which may reduce some subsidies for roof and cavity wall insulation. If you have not already done so, you are strongly advised to take advantage of the Cocoon insulation scheme by going online at www.cocoonyourhome.co.uk or tel: 0800 8048 7770 .

Transition Together - Blewbury

We are developing an exciting new project based on the prize-winning Transition Streets Project. The scheme originated in Transition Town Totnes*, where it brought together groups of neighbours and helped them to save carbon and cash. By April 2011, 56 groups had run in Totnes, involving 468 households and about 1,100 people.

A survey showed that households saved on average £570 per year on their energy bills, shopping, travel etc, as well as saving 1.3 tonnes of carbon and helping the environment.

A member of Sustainable Blewbury heard about the project when it won the £10,000 Behaviour Change Award in the 2011 Ashden Awards for ground breaking sustainable energy projects. We asked if it was open to non-Transition communities, and eventually Blewbury was adopted as the pilot project for the extension of Transition Streets to non-transition communities, at a greatly reduced fee for our training on how to run the project. We get all the material and support, and in return give Transition Town Totnes feedback about our project.

We start in the spring with 2 pilot groups, and after that we will soon be recruiting more Blewbury households to take advantage of this project.

*If you are interested in the original Totnes project, you can find the final report on line at www.ashden.org/winners/tttotnes11 .

How does Transition Together work?



Transition Together will bring together small groups of neighbours to meet and discuss sustainability issues and decide what steps they can take to both make their lifestyles more sustainable, and save money at the same time.

The programme

This is very flexible. The group arranges a number of sessions when they will make their way through a workbook. A member of Sustainable Blewbury comes to the first session to explain the programme and start them on their way.

- The ideal size for a group is 5 – 8 households, meeting about every 2 – 3 weeks for 7 sessions.
- Group members generally take turns to host a meeting at their homes, but other places can be used.
- Each household makes their own action plan.
- At each session they catch up with their group, share trials and tribulations, exchange ideas and drink a lot of tea, coffee, wine.....!

The workbook

Each household gets their own practical workbook which helps them explore practical ways to cut their bills in 5 key areas: Energy; Water; Food; Waste; Transport.

The workbook provides a great range of ideas and actions, each supported with lots of local information, hints and tips.

To find out more, or to register interest in starting or joining a group call Jo Lakeland, the project co-ordinator, on 07466 708030, or email Transition Together – Blewbury at tog@sustainable-blewbury.org.uk . We will soon have our own website, but for now you can check www.sustainable-blewbury.org.uk for further information.

Millbrook Project and Cleve Restoration

The proposed improvements to the Cleve form part of a broader action plan (The Millbrook Project) to enhance the biodiversity of the Millbrook Stream within the Parish of Blewbury. The landscape and ecological status of the Cleve has deteriorated over recent decades and the proposals aim to start a new era of care and conservation for this important village focal point. It is widely considered that apart from neglect, the main reasons for the decline in biodiversity has been the accumulation of silt over many years as well as higher than natural levels of phosphorous and nitrate. The aims are to enhance and sustain aquatic biodiversity, help reverse the decline of key indicator species as well as raising awareness in the village of a sustainable natural environment.

We now have confirmation of a small (£1000) grant from the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment towards the Millbrook project planning. This will be used towards finalising proposals for restoration of the Cleve. The project group will then create a plan, based on the large amount of data, observation and experience already to hand, for comment and support from the Environment Agency. The grant will then mainly be used for independent professional assessment of the proposed plan. This will be completed within next six months during which time we will be seeking the support of riparian owners and the village as a whole, for improving the landscape and biodiversity of this important village focal point.



We have proposed a two stage project – first to provide a landscape and ecological design for the work on the Cleve; this is based on the original ASH report*, but modified in line with the suggestions made by the village working group. This

* This report by ASH Consultants was produced for the BVS Environment Group in 1994 but was not implemented due to lack of funding.

report, which would also include a timescale of activities, will form the basis of Stage 2, dealing with the actual restoration work and include (partial) silt removal, construction of spillways for surface drainage, creation of channels and wetland areas, some tree removal and a planting scheme.

Over the past year it has been possible to improve considerably our understanding of the functioning of the Cleve and data on water quality, hydrology and the silt accumulation. Sufficient information is available on the position of the springs and the stream flows from the Cleve. During the year natural channels related to spring discharge have been identified (these channels can be observed as clear areas in the algal growth – see image) and the current design is based on enhancing this network.



Channels created by spring flows within the Cleve, defined by clearer areas within the green algae.

Preliminary analyses of the silt have kindly been carried out by Reading University and first results are encouraging – both in terms of silt removal (it is non-toxic) or as an impediment to improving biodiversity. Phosphorous and nitrogen in the surface and groundwaters are being extensively tested since these are the likely limiting factors to improving ecological status of the Cleve. This is likely to be exacerbated by the duck population!

The year 2011 has proved to be another dry year – one of five in succession. Stream flows and water levels remain low and unless there is above average flow in the next three months, it is possible the streams will dry up in 2012. The present natural low flows would have ceased completely if Blewbury Pumping station were still in operation.

Downland Project

This project has just received a grant of £6057 from North Wessex Downs AONB. The money will be invested in work, equipment, education and plants to preserve, restore and recreate areas of chalk grassland. This extraordinarily diverse habitat has grown and evolved across the Downs for thousands of years but has, in the last few decades, almost disappeared under the pressure of intensive agriculture. We now have a chance to make a difference in a few precious places, most notably: The Chalkpit, Rubblepit Lane and Tickers Folly Field.



The work will begin by reducing scrub growth around the chalkpit and in the lane. Some scrub is a good thing so a considerable amount will be left alone or coppiced to thicken for the benefit of birds, animals and insects. Where hawthorn and other shrubs are actually invading grassland they will be removed so that the more important grassland plants can flourish. Some of the cut scrub will be stacked compactly under the remaining shrubs and trees to encourage a different range of insects and plants.

On the 27th February at 11am a renowned expert on wildflower propagation, Charles Flower, will visit the site and give a talk and advice to participants. Please contact Peter Cockrell peter@cockrell.plus.com if you would like more information or would like to attend. There will be no charge but numbers may have to be limited. The group will gather on Tickers Folly by the new playground.

Waste & Recycling (or it could be Food & Farming!)

Angela Hoy and Jo Lakeland attended a "DinnerTime" event on Sunday 22nd January, at the Oxford Hub's new social action centre above the Turl Street Kitchen in Oxford. It was arranged jointly by OxGrow, Food Justice and Community Action Groups, with support from the Oxford Food Bank. Here is their report.

Our invitation from Simon Kenton of the Oxford CAG (Community Action Group) described DinnerTime as "a celebration of food, family and friends; the idea is to reclaim food in your community by making and sharing a meal together once a month, reducing the amount of food we throw away and maybe gaining a new skill along the way."

By the time we arrived on the Sunday afternoon, much of the foraging part of the exercise had been completed – there was a pile of fruit and vegetables discarded by restaurants and supermarkets, as well as store cupboard items which were time expired or brought by people because they were unlikely to ever use them.

The 30 or so people, ranging from good cooks to never cooks, then had 2 hours to produce a vegan meal (Health and Safety excluded animal or dairy products). We used perfectly respectable pans and cutlery which had all been rescued from skips. There were only 6 hotplates to cook on, but it was amazing what can be done if there is nothing else available, e.g. a polenta pizza cooked in a frying pan!



We produced over 20 different dishes including soups, risottos, spicy dahl, vegetable curries as well as salads and desserts – a "tropical fruit crumble" was made with cooked bananas and plums, topped with frosted fruit cornflakes! All the dishes were

enthusiastically consumed with no ill effects afterwards, washed down with drinks bought from the restaurant below.

A successful evening, and we got to talk to a lot of people involved in Sustainability Groups (including Sustainable Didcot), but it was also thought provoking – it was so easy to make an enjoyable meal from discarded food – a recent estimate says one in four shopping trolleys of food is wasted – and regulations now make it difficult even to feed food waste to the pigs.

BBC Oxford sent a cameraman who filmed and interviewed the participants; this was due to be screened in the Regional News slot during the following week. Did you miss it?

We wonder if we could do something similar in Blewbury? We don't exactly have a lot of restaurants and shops close by for scavenging, but perhaps we could have a bring, share and cook together meal that uses as much as possible home grown food plus what we have accumulated in the store cupboard over time. Do contact us at Sustainable Blewbury if you like the idea, or have a better idea.

Food & Farming

Blewbury Produce Stall

Plans are afoot to run the Produce Stall again in 2012 at the Garage on London Road, with the enthusiastic support of the proprietor. New equipment is being purchased out of last year's small profit, which it is hoped will be more eye-catching, including advance signage on the approach roads.

More producers are needed, as last year stocks often ran out halfway through the morning and the helpers were left with very little to sell – so if you are interested in selling your gluts, or would like to make preserves, cakes etc. for sale at the stall, please get in touch with Angela Hoy on 851726 (angela.hoy@sky.com).

Permaculture Site, Woodway

It was a relief to see that the vast majority of the windbreak hedge plants had survived last year's mixed weather. A dozen fruit trees and a collection of fruit bushes have now joined them. It is hoped to plant a selection of herbs and perennial vegetables later on, as well as some ground cover plants to help smother the weeds; any contributions will be gratefully accepted; please contact Angela Hoy if you have any spare plants.

Other plans include building a compost bin and a small shelter.

A fond farewell was made to Sarah Deco who has looked after the Food and Farming section for the past two years, having now departed to the Big City; she will be sadly missed. However, an end of season party was held to say goodbye, during which plans were discussed for the next season.

Future events

Bread evening

We are making provisional arrangements for a bread (and thatch, wheat, flour, etc.) evening on Friday 23rd March with John Letts of Oxford Bread Group as a speaker. Please keep this date free but check the next Blewbury Bulletin to confirm.

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

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