

Forest Update



Issue 36

The Wychwood Project Newsletter

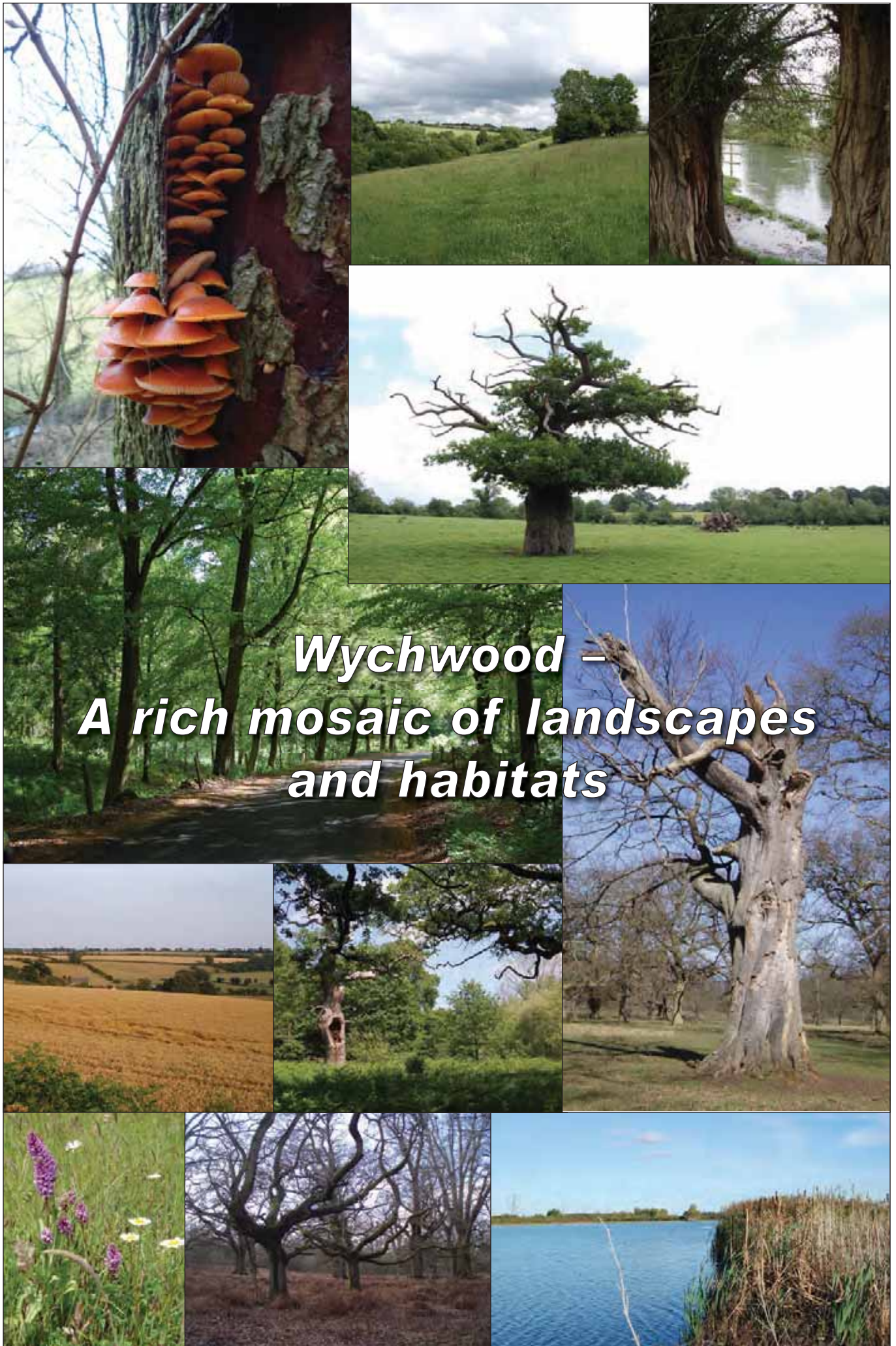
Summer 2011



One of the many outstanding ancient trees that can be found in the Wychwood Forest. This specimen is in Cornbury Park and probably dates from the time of the Norman kings.

Celebrating the United Nations International Year of Forests 2011





***Wychwood =
A rich mosaic of landscapes
and habitats***

Project Update

Nick Mottram, Project Director

United Nations International Year of Forests 2011



2011 is the United Nations International Year of Forests, a global programme to raise awareness on sustainable management, conservation and development of all types of forests and to celebrate people's involvement in this. Here in West Oxfordshire we have our own special Forest: Wychwood – the mosaic of trees, woodlands and open spaces that was important enough to merit special protection by the Norman kings and remains important to us all today. How we respond to the challenges of sustainable management, conservation and development – making the best of what we have – will determine the options that are available to future generations. The Wychwood Project and its supporters and volunteers have their part to play too.

Foxburrow Wood – Update

The weather has been kind to us so far with rain coming to keep our trees growing just when it was needed. An offer of grant aid for tree planting has been confirmed by the Forestry Commission and the Tree Council's Stella Artois 'real hedge fund' has made a helpful contribution to the costs of the boundary hedge. During early June entomologists from the University of Oxford's Department of Biological Sciences did sampling work to establish a baseline of data on insects against which we can monitor changes in future years. Next for our attention is work to the Foxburrow Lane entrance. Dedicate a Tree is still going strong and has raised over £6000 so far. Contact the Project Office if you would like to Dedicate a Tree.

Wychwood Forest Fair 2011

The Forest Fair returns to Foxburrow Wood again this year. Join us on the 4th September between 11am and 5pm. Access to the Fair will be from Crawley Road near Witney.



Fun for all the family at the Wychwood Forest fair

CHANGE AHEAD?

Like all active organisations the Wychwood Project is looking to the future. Increasingly the Friends are taking a central role in funding, long-term planning and day-to-day operations. The distinction between 'Friends' and 'Project' is becoming increasingly blurred and more of a hindrance than a help. The Trustees of the Friends of Wychwood and the Project's Management Board are working to decide the most effective way to bring the two elements together and we hope to have some proposals to consider at the Friends AGM on 18th October.

Moving with the Times

It has taken a while but the Project is slowly getting to grips with online social networking such as Twitter, Blogs, Flickr and Facebook. You can access our e-sites through the Project website www.wychwoodproject.org. We are still learning and there may be a few teething problems along the way but the chance to tell people about what we do in new ways is certainly one to be welcomed.



UNITED INTERNATIONAL

Trees and Forests Matter

Dr Gabriel Hemery, Chief Executive, Sylva Foundation

It may not have escaped your notice that 2011 was declared by the United Nations as International Year of the Forests. It was also the year that the UK Government decided it was time that the public forests in England should be sold off. The public were accused of not understanding the proposals and of being misled, and yet the public responded in their hundreds of thousands by signing online petitions with a simple clarion call "the forests already belong to us".

Following the scrapping of the plans by Government, at least as they stood, an Independent Panel is now hard at work considering the future of the public forest estate, while also thinking deeper about the future of the Forestry Commission itself and of forestry policy making in England. The Panel is due to report in the autumn so if you have an interest in the future of forestry, and the panel is consulting as widely as it should, you may expect to be asked your view before long.

The degree of public interest, which became evident in this debate, was heartening. The essence of the public opinion – that our trees, woods and forests matter – was extremely significant, and something that those of us who care for this resource must capitalise on. There is however, often a significant gap between a love of trees and woodlands and any understanding about their management. Perhaps as Richard Louv¹ suggests, the public at large suffers from a nature deficit disorder? Why else do woodland

managers get letters of complaint when they manage their woods? Timber is the UK's sixth largest import – wouldn't it be good if just some of this came from down the road?

The notion that well-managed woodlands often deliver best for wildlife, landscape and recreation, while also producing home-grown local timber and so cutting down on wood miles and unsustainable timber imports, is not promulgated widely.

This is where the Sylva Foundation aims to make a difference, with our vision for Britain's trees and forests to be thriving ecologically and economically for the benefit of everyone. We have developed a service for woodland owners and wood users called myForest, which was initiated in Oxfordshire but now has several hundred woodland owners using the service across Britain (www.myForest.org.uk). The myForest service provides free mapping and management tools for owners, and supports the selling and sourcing of home-grown woodland products. Sylva's OneOak education project is following the full life story of one oak tree and its timber, in an attempt to revive a wood culture in Britain: see exhibitions at Oxford Botanic Garden during the summer, and at the Museum of Natural History in Oxford during the autumn.

The essence of the public opinion – that our trees, woods and forests matter – was extremely significant



OneOak sculpture sited in the stump of the tree in Blenheim woodland

(www.oneoak.info)

¹ Richard Louv (2008). Last child in the woods. Algonquin Books.



One year after the felling of the OneOak tree, a new oak forest has been planted by 250 children, a memorial sculpture stands proudly on the tree base, and the bluebells have returned. April 2011.

NATIONS YEAR OF FORESTS

TREES, WOODS, FORESTS & THE WYCHWOOD PROJECT – AN ANCIENT FOREST NOW AND FOR THE FUTURE

Nick Mottram, Wychwood Project Director

Given the theme of this issue of Forest Update it seemed appropriate to step back and take a look at what the Wychwood Project has been able to achieve specifically for woodlands and forests in recent years (and I include parklands in this as part of the spectrum of woodland habitats). Quite a lot is the answer. Woodlands and Forests have been a cornerstone of the Project since its first days, as could be read in our very first leaflet “Wychwood Restored” produced in the late 1990s.

“Better management of neglected ancient woodlands will secure their future and that of the flowers and wildlife within them. New woodlands will enhance the landscape. They will be a sustainable source of raw materials for building and industry, and of clean, environmentally friendly fuels. They will help create new habitats for wildlife and new sites for woodland wild flowers. They will provide new and improved opportunities to develop access to the countryside...”

At the side of the page is a list of woodlands that the Project has been involved with. Many readers will be familiar with the community woodlands



Surveying trees within High Park SSSI



A coppice coupe in Pinsley Wood which the Project worked in 2010

which we have helped establish – eleven to date. Less visible but no less valuable is some of our work with private landowners. To date our inputs have included providing not only conservation advice on woodland flora and fauna and woodland management but also practical support with woodland works. The production of building materials and wood fuels has not been a major focus for us so far but times are changing. At this year’s Forest Fair we will be hosting a Woodfuel Expo in association with the Forestry Commission and our plans for the production of coppice-based materials are taking shape. **Much has changed in the 14 years since the Wychwood Project was founded. The importance of trees, woods and forest has not.**

Woodlands in which the Wychwood Project has contributed management and/or practical support

Big Park Wood
Blindwell Wood
Bottom Wood
Boynal Copse
Breach Wood
Centenary Wood
Cokethorpe Park
Dean Common
Dean Grove
Diggers Wood
Fairspear Wood
Faws Grove
Foxburrow Wood
Furzey Leaze
Glympton Heath
Greenhill Copse
Hensgrove
High Park, Blenheim
Leafield Community Woodland
Little Garden Wood
Little Wood
Maggots Grove
Minster Wood
North Leigh Copse
Notteridge Copse
Nutoaks Copse
Over Norton Park
Partridge Covert
Pinsley Wood
Plank Quarry
Pudlicote
Quarry Bank
Singe Wood
Stockley Copse
Stratfield Brake
Smalloaks Copse
Swinford Lock wood
Wastidge Spinney
Widley Copse
William Fowler Allotments
Woodfield Brake

Volunteering in Wychwood Forest

Much of the practical work carried out by the Wychwood Project is done by enthusiastic groups of volunteers. In particular we would like to recognise the sterling efforts made by the Witney Woodland Volunteers who meet on Monday mornings but also help at the Forest Fair and have made a great contribution to our 'Dedicate a Tree for Foxburrow Wood' appeal. You can get some idea of the amount of positive changes that they are making to our local environment in Juliet Curry's article below. We also have fantastic contributions from the Cotswolds Voluntary Wardens and our own Wychwood volunteers in the monthly CAT group, and the hedgelaying and dry stone walling groups. Together with the continuing efforts of Wychwood v volunteers, we make a visible impact in many parts of the Forest and give regular support to local community groups in their conservation activities.

If you would like to get involved with any of these volunteer groups please contact **Jane Bowley** on **01865 815422** or email: jane.bowley@oxfordshire.gov.uk

WITNEY'S DEER PARK WOOD by Juliet Curry,

Witney Woodland Volunteers

You know what it feels like to wait an hour for a Number 19 bus and then two come along together? Well, that's what it has been like for us in the Witney Woodland Volunteers (WWV). Just as the Friends of Wychwood have been wanting their own wood, so have WWV, and we have been pestering local authorities and land owners for the last four years to give us a corner of spare land. And then two came along together: Deer Park Wood and Foxburrow Wood. Last year, after much discussion, West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) gave us a seven acre site on Deer Park Road. It



Tree planting at Deer Park

did not sound prepossessing when it was described as a buffer zone between the industrial estate and the Deer Park Housing Estate, given to WODC fifteen years ago, to be kept as an open space for the enjoyment of the public.

Susan Paice, WWV's in-house conservation gardener, has designed a fluid planting scheme, which allows for views down the length of an existing path and off to each side. She has incorporated a fruit orchard of old Oxford heritage species into the design together with areas sown with wild flower seeds. She also plans to create a scrape to support aquatic species.



Tree planting with scouts at Deer Park

WWV has raised a generous grant from the Oxfordshire Community Foundation Grassroots Trust, for mowing the grass, planting trees, and buying log seats for picnickers and to use as an

outdoor classroom. Additional grants have been given by The Witney Town Council and British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) to buy trees and junior spades and forks, which have proved invaluable in encouraging children to 'get stuck in'. WODC has provided four oak seats for resting walkers. Do pay a visit and see how Deer Park Wood is progressing. It can be found at the northerly end of Deer Park Road, to the West of Witney. You can park opposite one of two pedestrian entrances, in Valence Crescent, or at the Southern end in Range Road.



Witney Woodland Volunteers repairing a dry stone wall on Langal Common and running the Dedicate a Tree stall at the Forest Fair 2010

Wychwood Conservation Action (CAT) Team



Clearing invading clematis off young trees at Ditchley Quarry



Helping to repair a footpath and clearing Harvey's mound at Eynsham Abbey Fish Ponds



Wychwood v



Recycling tree shelters from Blenheim Estate and then putting them on young trees at Swinford Lock.



Wychwood v can offer a variety of volunteering opportunities, ranging from one off activities to part time or full time internships.

Daniel Martin-Thomas is currently a part time volunteer working on a range of projects and writing a blog about them. Here is an extract from Daniel's blog in May.

"I went out with the Tuesday Team today with Verity Hughes ,from Eynsham Parish Council, who came to work with us and show us what needed to be done. We started by clearing away elm saplings next to the car park which were obstructing the sight line of the car park entrance. With so many of us working on it, we didn't take long. After a quick break and some scones kindly provided by a friend of Jane's, we went down to the Chilbrook. Our job here was to clear a way through a mass of brambles, stinging nettles and overgrown willow down a steep bank

to the brook where children come and play. We made short work of this, too, and it was very satisfying to see the bank clear. We then had lunch at one of the picnic benches next to the car park, before a few of us went home. Abigail and I stayed to widen one of the paths. We had a good, fun, destructive time of it, slashing at cow parsley and stinging nettles with our slashing tools. After we'd finished we found a beautiful large moth on Abigail's jumper. We later identified it as a Lime Hawk-moth, which flies from May till July".



Lime Hawk-moth

Lower Windrush Valley Project Update

Alison Hopewell



Rushy Common Nature Reserve and Tar Lakes officially opened The launch event in May was hosted by Smiths Blethington bringing together everyone who has helped develop these new sites for the benefit of local people and wildlife.

Tar Lakes is an area of open space for local people to enjoy. This new 8ha site offers an opportunity to walk around two lakes using footpaths that enable access for all and link to the wider network of public rights of way in the Lower Windrush Valley.

Rushy Common Nature Reserve is a haven for wildlife and so public access is not permitted across the reserve. However, an impressive bird hide constructed by Eynsham Park Sawmill offers good views across the site and is accessible to wheelchair users. Keys for the bird

hide can be purchased direct from the LWVP and enable use of this and other hides in the Lower Windrush Valley at any time.

The car park at Rushy Common also provides a good a good starting point for circular walks in the wider area. A 3 mile circuit to the south offers a gentle walk beside the River Windrush or a 3 mile circuit to the north takes in South Leigh with an opportunity to see the wall paintings in the parish church of St James the Great.

To find out more about Rushy Common Nature Reserve, Tar Lakes or the LWVP contact **Alison Hopewell** on **01865 815426**
www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/lowerwindrushvalleyproject



A bird's eye view of Rushy Common Nature Reserve



Tar Lakes aims to provide access for all

Stoat or Weasel – 'Stoatally' Different?

Ian Anderson

These little UK mammals are both members of the Mustelid family and, although separate species, are very difficult to tell apart. The fact that the most usual sighting we get is of a brown streak dashing across a road or track, adds significantly to the problem! Stoats are slightly larger than weasels. Both



Weasel

have similar long slender bodies with reddish-brown/gingery fur and a white underside. Each also has short legs and tails, but the tip of the tail is bristly black for the stoat, a key identification feature. In northern UK the stoats' coats often turn white as a means of camouflage. This is known as ermine, traditionally used on royal and judicial robes. Found throughout the UK, these fearless little killers frequent a wide range of habitats; from lowland farmland and woodland to high moorland and bogs. They do not hibernate, are carnivorous and prey on voles, mice, rats, birds, eggs etc. with stoats managing larger targets such as rabbits. When searching for prey they will follow a regular route, normally along hedgerows and fences. With their long slim bodies they are suited to life underground and can pursue their prey into tight corners, killing with a bite to the neck. Stoats will often use rabbit burrows as their own dens after having consumed the previous occupants! Weasels can have two litters in a year but the stoats usually only produce one, in spring. Neither stoats nor weasels are in any real danger of extinction in the UK and are not 'protected'. However, their lifestyle tends to bring them into conflict with gamekeepers and poultry farmers in particular, who will take active measures to control them. They are also a menu item for some birds of prey and foxes.



Stoat

Photographs courtesy of Terry Longley www.seeing.co.uk

Bird Aid News

Louise Spicer

The Bird Aid feeding programme has been able to help a new bird, the linnet, thanks to the availability of a gift of linseed and rape seed from Dr. Alan Larkman. It has long been an ambition to try and help these attractive farmland birds and this has at last been realized this winter. The birds were initially attracted in to a Higher Level Stewardship site near Chipping Norton, but would have had to move on once the seeds were exhausted. Hundreds of birds were helped through the lean time of February to April and it is hoped many will stay to breed in the area. The linnet is a very welcome addition to the regular huge flocks of tree sparrows, yellowhammers and several corn buntings. To find out more about this very successful initiative take a look at the Bird Aid page on our website (www.wychwoodproject.org/whatwedo/birdaid). If you would like to sponsor a bag of seed please send your donation to Bird Aid, Friends of Wychwood at the office address. Cheques should be made payable to The Friends of Wychwood and every donation will be acknowledged.



Photo of linnets feeding
courtesy of
Dr. Alan Larkman



The Wychwood Project works within the area that was once the Royal Hunting Forest of Wychwood.

Our Goals:

The Wychwood Project aims to raise awareness of the history and heritage of the Royal Hunting Forest of Wychwood, and to encourage local people to take part in and benefit from restoration, conservation and enhancement of the rich mosaic of landscapes and habitats within the Forest boundaries.

Contact us:

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The Wychwood Project is supported financially by the Friends of Wychwood, Oxfordshire County Council, West Oxfordshire District Council and a range of other community and private donors

