

WYCHWOOD PROJECT

The Parish Conservation Challenge 2005-2007

FINAL REPORT





PARISH CONSERVATION
CHALLENGE

OCTOBER 2005 – SEPTEMBER 2007

With grateful thanks to everyone who helped to make the Parish Conservation such an enjoyable and successful project. Many people contributed large amounts of their time, others supported through funding and their encouragement and support to get activities up and running. Many thanks as well to all the people who joined in with our activities with such enthusiasm and enjoyment, sometimes in foul weather and difficult circumstances. The results of their efforts will be with us for many years to come.

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**PARISH CONSERVATION CHALLENGE ACTIVITIES
OCTOBER 2005-SEPTEMBER 2007**

CONSULTATION EVENTS	PCC	Ascott under Wychwood
		Enstone
		Fulbrook
		Ramsden
	Parish council	Chadlington
		Crawley
	Fete/fun day/village meeting	Asthall
		Enstone
		Fawler
		Fifield
		Fifield-Idbury (2)
		Finstock
		Ramsden (2)
DRYSTONE WALLING	Training	Fulbrook (2)
		Witney-Langel Common
		Shakenoak Farm, North Leigh
	Group	Fulbrook
	Contractor	Ascott u Wychwood
TREE/HEDGE PLANTING AND HABITAT MANAGEMENT		Dean Grove tree planting- Witney hobbits
		Langlands tree planting- Finstock school
		Asthall Manor tree planting- Cotswold warden and Asthall residents
		Enstone playing field hedge planting
		Finstock Dark Lane footpath clearance
		Ramsden pond clearance
		Enstone flying club scrub clearance/coppicing and hedge laying
THE BIG DRAW		Hailey school
		Kingham school
		Oxfordshire museum Woodstock
THE WYCHWOOD TAPESTRY 2007		Chadlington school
		Finstock school

		Leaffield school
		Stonesfield school
		Wychwoods school
CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES	Beavers	Dean Common
	Cubs	North Leigh Common
		Fifield- Wildlife detectives
		Oxfordshire museum Kid's club
		Oxfordshire museum Drop-ins
		Cogges rural craft day Nest boxes
WALKS		Ascott bat walk
		Crawley landscape history walk
		Fawler history walk
		Finstock tree walk
		Heythrop bat walk
		Idbury farm walk
		Kiddington/Ditchley tree walk
TALKS	Friends of Wychwood Barn Owl Group	Enstone/Ascott/Witney
	RSPB/PCC joint talk	Ascott/Burford/Enstone
	BBOWT/PCC joint talk	Fulbrook
	Alan Holmes/ONCF/PCC	Witney-black poplars and community talk
FRIENDS OF WYCHWOOD FOREST FAIR		PCC display stand 2006 Wychwood tapestry tent 2007
SURVEYS		Astall road verge surveys
		Crawley road verge survey
		Crawley brown hare survey day
		Shipton road verge survey
Other activities		South Leigh farm open day
	Bridewell Organic Garden	Wychwood Project/Bridewell calendar
	FACE	Farmer and landowner training for public access
		Ramsden Little Garden Wood group

THE WYCHWOOD PROJECT PARISH CONSERVATION CHALLENGE 2005-2007

ABSTRACT

The Wychwood Project Parish Conservation Challenge was set up as a two year project to work with 21 of the smaller parishes and 1100 people in the Wychwood Project area. Targets for the number of parishes and the number of individuals engaged in conservation related activities were met or exceeded with over two thousand people taking part in activities in twenty parishes. The project was promoted through specifically organised PCC consultation events and attendance at village functions. The PCC moved from an initial information gathering phase to delivering innovative and creative activities covering a wide range of interests. Many activities were set up ranging from practical conservation work to walks and talks and two large art projects with primary schools. Participants in PCC activities met up with other like minded people and took part in training or social activities that helped to extend their knowledge and appreciation of their local environment. Many have joined the Friends of Wychwood to enable them to keep informed about future activities and others are now volunteering with Wychwood Project conservation programmes. In addition to anticipated conservation activities there were also unexpected outputs that developed as the project progressed, the most significant of these being the Wychwood Tapestry 2007.

THE WYCHWOOD PROJECT

The Wychwood Project has been working in the area of West Oxfordshire that lies within the former Royal Hunting Forest of Wychwood, for several years encouraging local people to understand, conserve and restore its rich mosaic of landscapes and wildlife habitats. The Project embraces every aspect of the Forest: its social and economic history; its ecology and land use; its interpretation and its possibilities for the future. Supported and part funded by the Friends of Wychwood the Project works with land owners, farmers and local communities on a wide range of activities that seek to enhance public participation and understanding of the issues and practicalities of conservation in the Wychwood area. The ability of the core Wychwood Project team to deliver the aims of the project is enhanced by applications to grant awarding bodies to fulfil specific aspects that are identified through the course of the ongoing work of the project. The application to the West Oxfordshire Network Leader+ 2000-2006 programme was made to develop the work with communities in some of the smaller parishes in the Wychwood area. The application was successful in 2005 and resulted in the appointment of Jane Bowley as the Parish Conservation Challenge project officer for two years.

BACKGROUND TO THE PARISH CONSERVATION CHALLENGE PROJECT

The Parish Conservation Challenge (PCC) was devised to create new opportunities for twenty of the smaller parishes in the area of the former Royal hunting Forest of Wychwood to play an active and effective part in countryside conservation. The Wychwood Project works across an area covering 41 parishes with a population of approximately 10,000 people; many of whom live in rural and somewhat isolated locations. The Wychwood Project had been in existence for seven years and had a proven track record of engaging with many of the other 21 parishes in the Wychwood Project area but had so far been unable to generate much activity in these smaller parishes (appendix 1).

The concept of the PCC had three special elements that jointly contributed to a unique approach. The fundamental principle was that the communities should be invited through a consultation process to identify their priorities for conservation action. This consultation was supported by a small start up fund available to stimulate ideas about possible activities, and the services of a project officer for two years, to provide information and support to help generate and develop action plans. In addition to the active conservation work there was a strong emphasis on developing the capacity and understanding of individuals and communities for dealing with environmental issues; in particular specific attention was to be given to engaging with children and young people through schools and youth groups. The information sharing element of the project would be supported by collating some of the dispersed information that is available into more readily accessible formats for each parish.

Funding for the project was granted from the European Community West Oxfordshire Network Leader+ 2000-2006 programme together with contributions from The Friends of Wychwood, The Wills Trust and the CHK Charitable Trust. During the course of the Challenge the Friends of Wychwood actively sought funds from other charities to support the programme. This core funding was partly used to provide seed corn money for individual projects. In one parish, Ascott under Wychwood, this seed corn money was used as match funding to secure additional grants from the Cotswolds AONB and the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE) for rebuilding the village pound. Additional funding for a specific part of the programme came from the Friends of Wychwood, Helen Roll Charitable Trust and the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Sustainable Development Fund.

REVIEW OF THE PROJECT

The two core targets were to undertake new conservation activities in 20 parishes and to involve 1100 people in those activities.

Targets for the Parish Conservation Challenge were set to guide the overall direction and to evaluate the achievement of the project. The targets were based on the Leader+ format and are used as topic headings in this report. The terminology does not always match with the activities of the PCC. It is quite difficult therefore, in some cases, to identify which target best describes a particular activity. Similarly, there is a significant overlap between some targets and some activities fit into several target categories. However, it is a useful framework to identify where the project has been

most successful and areas where any future work along similar lines could focus attention more effectively.

1. SUPPORTING CULTURAL/ HERITAGE EVENTS

1.1

The Leader+ definition of cultural/heritage events does not fit very precisely for some of the activities of the PCC. However, fourteen different events had a strong cultural or heritage theme and were supported by the PCC in a variety of different ways; from taking a display and talking to people about the Parish Conservation Challenge at Cogges Farm Museum Rural Crafts Day to local history walks and rebuilding dry stone walls. The role of the PCC ranged from a supporting role at events organised by partner organisations to leading the delivery at others. It was particularly rewarding when the delivery of the project developed in this way over the two years. For example, in the first year the PCC attended the Friends of Wychwood Forest Fair as a contributor to the conservation tent but in the second year the project ran its own marquee that exhibited the Wychwood Tapestry 2007 and hosted drawing activities and a clay modelling 'Make a Forest' activity. This is a good example of how the PCC developed from the initial information gathering phase into an innovative and developmental project that generated new ideas and attracted new volunteers and partners.

The activities related to the Big Draw (appendix 2) and the creation of the Wychwood Tapestry 2007 (appendix 3) made a significant contribution to the cultural and heritage aspect of the project, especially for children, by providing the participants with resources, and information about the Wychwood Forest and the surrounding area, that they would not normally come across in their day to day lives. Two local artists, Sally Howkins and Tom Ralphs Laman, were central to the development and delivery of these two projects with the PCC project officer; they were joined by landscape historian Amanda Hopkins to increase the level of information about the history of the area for the Wychwood Tapestry 2007 project. Seven primary schools

and over one thousand children and adults took part in these two projects. For the Big Draw the artists worked with children at Kingham and Hailey primary schools, over two days, to create 1.5 metre square panels, drawn in black and white, to show their impressions of the Wychwood Forest. To stimulate the children's imagination they used resources from the museum service resource centre and material gathered from the forest as well as photographs and a sound track recorded locally in the forest. The panels for the Big Draw were displayed at the Brewhouse Gallery at the Oxfordshire Museum at Woodstock and visitors to the museum were invited to



make their own drawings which were displayed alongside the work from the schools.

For the Wychwood Tapestry 2007 the focus concentrated more on the relationship between the Wychwood Forest and the villages of the five schools of Chadlington, Finstock, Leafield, Stonesfield and the Wychwoods. In order to develop one of the key concepts of the PCC Amanda Hopwood, landscape historian joined the tapestry project team, to provide more detailed information about the landscape, how it had influenced life in the villages and how people had influenced changes in the landscape. A selection of the resulting panels were photographed and printed onto a vinyl material so that the Tapestry, thirty metres in length in total, will provide a permanent record that can be displayed at a variety of venues.



A chance for a quiet look at the Wychwood Tapestry 2007 on display at the Friends of Wychwood Forest Fair, before the crowds arrived.

The Tapestry was unveiled at the Friends of Wychwood Forest Fair in September 2007 and attracted many favourable responses and requests to display the tapestry at future events such as the Game Fair at Blenheim Palace in 2008 and Leafield village arts festival.

The creative blending of information gathering and translation into two major art projects gave many children an introduction to the history and development of their own landscape in a format that was accessible to all and enabled every child to take part regardless of their ability. The two projects also provided a great format for children to use and display their own thoughts and impressions of their lives today which meant that they engaged with the work with great enthusiasm and energy.

1.2

The PCC far exceeded the target for the number of people participating in local events. Over 2000 people attended one or more of the PCC activities. A large proportion of these were involved in the Big Draw and the Wychwood Tapestry 2007 projects with over one thousand children and adults taking part in these two projects. Children living in rural areas can be disadvantaged by transport and access problems, but these projects were particularly successful in delivering accessible

opportunities for the children and their parents to take part in activities that raised their awareness and engagement in issues affecting their local environment. Joint talks with other organisations, especially the RSPB, helped to generate good audiences and talks by local experts on subjects of local interest were also very popular. A farm open day at Springhill Farm at South Leigh attracted over one hundred visitors to look at a working farm and talk to the conservation organisations that were set up at various points around the farm. This was very much a pilot project, with minimal publicity and promotion but it showed that there is a high level of interest in farming and there is the potential for a more ambitious programme of farm visits in the future. Another outstanding feature of the PCC project was the involvement of all age groups; ranging from a two year old child discovering spiders on a nature walk to parishioners in their eighties attending talks.

2. INCREASING THE RANGE AND USE OF COMMUNITY FACILITIES

The concept of community facilities in respect of the PCC project refers mainly to places and spaces that have been used in a new or additional way, or community infrastructure that has fallen into disrepair. A good example has been the use of Dean Common with the Chipping Norton beaver group. The common, owned by Oxfordshire County Council, was created from a landfill site and was planted with native species woodland ten years ago. Although a delightful site to visit it remains largely unknown due to access and parking problems. However, the beavers have visited on three occasions, together with their parents, opening up the potential for the future use of the site for recreation and education. North Leigh Common was also a successful venue for a nature walk with a Witney cub group and a joint session with an Oxford Brookes project developing electronic ID keys which worked very well there.

Access to existing woods and footpaths has been encouraged through walks with local experts. These have been incredibly popular with frequent requests for more. Numbers of participants on each walk could have been increased, but, if the group is too large, it can make it difficult to manage the walk and ensure that everyone hears the input from the walk leader.

Ascott pound is an example of a community facility that has been improved as a direct result of the PCC.



Ascott pound wall... before



....and after

A proposal to rebuild the wall around the pound was made at the first consultation session in the village. With the impetus of the seed corn funding the parish council approached other organisations and secured grants that covered the costs for a local contractor to rebuild the wall. It was decided not to use volunteers in this instance as the site was too close to the road and the work would need to be completed in as short a period of time as possible. A further development to this initial action is that standing stones from Ascott barrow are to be returned from the Standlake Museum Resource Centre and installed inside the pound together with an interpretation board.

Enstone Playing Field Committee joined with the PCC to replant a hedge to screen the field from the road (appendix 4). There had been a previous attempt to plant a hedge there but it had not been very successful. A good turn out of village residents together with better preparation of the planting site appears to have got the new hedge off to a good start. In the process we attracted a lot of interest from local people passing by and one or two came back to join in later in the morning. The project brought a range of different people from the village together who only knew each other by sight before they worked together on the hedge.

3. CREATING STRONGER MORE INCLUSIVE AND MORE SUSTAINABLE RURAL COMMUNITIES

Nineteen groups were assisted in extending their interest in conservation issues and activities. The PCC was very successful in helping these groups to organise individual events but still had a limited influence on the creation of conservation groups during the two year life of the project as only one new group was formally set up during this time. However, many people went on to join the Friends of Wychwood to enable them to keep informed about future activities and some of them are now volunteering with a variety of Wychwood Project conservation programmes.

One new group has been formally established with support and advice from the PCC project. A group of residents in Ramsden have come together to create a company limited by guarantee to take over the day to day management of a small area of woodland called Little Garden Wood. This woodland, established thirty years ago, was left to The Woodland Trust to manage for the benefit of the village when the landowner died. Local people felt that the wood was not being managed in the way that they would like and have negotiated with the Trust to take on a 99 year lease to manage the woodland more effectively. This project was able to come to fruition through the advice and support provided through the PCC project in partnership with the Oxfordshire Woodland Group.

A group of people in Crawley have provided a nucleus of interest, in conjunction with Crawley parish council. The interest of the group stimulated the organisation of a variety of events in the parish and their continuing interest looks promising for the establishment of an independent conservation group.

Amanda Hopwood, a local landscape historian, led a guided walk complete with maps and information that she had researched and prepared. This event was very well attended and amongst other developments in the village it has led to links with a village resident who has written memoirs about her childhood in the village. Her personal records, together with the resources generated through the PCC will create the basis for a more extensive collection of village history and information.



Amanda describing the changes in the landscape around Crawley

The group are now working with ecologists, the Friends of Wychwood road verge surveying group and the county council highways department to better manage their road verges for biodiversity. An initial survey by a local ecologist was funded jointly by the PCC and the Oxfordshire Nature Conservation Forum through a scheme to re-energise the Parish Conservation Plan programme in Oxfordshire. As a result of this survey the group have arranged

a meeting with the county ecologist, the highways department and the Friends of Wychwood road verge surveying group to prepare management plans for some of the road verges in the parish. If they are able to develop a successful model they will be able to promote it to other parishes in the area.

Similarly, at Enstone, a group of people are very interested in the concept of establishing a conservation group but have not yet formalised their interest. Several events have been arranged in the parish and they have been well attended by local people. Several of these people have also attended events in other parishes broadening their knowledge of local experts and networks. The impetus of the PCC also stimulated the parish council to revive a planting and maintenance programme with West Oxfordshire District Council. The work is now complete and they are working with the newly established Chipping Norton Green Gym who will carry out habitat maintenance on the site.

The PCC has been instrumental in recruiting volunteers for programmes running across the whole of the Wychwood area which are helping to develop new networks and strengthen existing ones. For example, one person who first became involved with the project after a PCC meeting in his parish is now fully committed as the co-ordinator of the ancient and veteran tree surveyors in the Wychwood Project Ancient Habitats Programme. This involves him in keeping contact with people all over the project area and organising meetings and training in conjunction with the project office.

4. INCREASING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LOCAL LEADERSHIP AND PARTNER ORGANISATIONS IN ADDRESSING LOCAL NEEDS

4.1

A variety of methods were used to establish parish contacts and to gather ideas about the conservation priorities for each parish. With a target of working with twenty parishes the PCC was successful in engaging with twenty one parishes. Some of these were not in the original target group but someone heard about the PCC and asked if they could take part e.g. Enstone and it was thought to be a valuable extension to the programme to work with communities in the project area that specifically expressed an interest. It was only in four of the original target parishes that it proved difficult to develop a discussion about possible activities. The method chosen depended on the venues available for consultation, suggestions from contacts and the people who were interested. For example, Crawley does not have a village hall so meetings were held in homes; followed by an invitation to the project officer to speak at the parish council AGM and social event held in the village hall of a neighbouring parish a few months later. Similarly, Fawler does not have a village hall so meetings in people's houses were followed by taking the PCC display to the village fun day resulting in a lot of interest and conversations about possible conservation activities. In villages where there is a village hall there were specific PCC display events organised and publicised by posters, flyers and parish newsletter. This technique was very successful in Ascott, Enstone and Ramsden generating much interest in the project and several suggestions. In other parishes a special display was taken along to village events such as village or church fetes, garden society meetings and local history meetings.



The dedicated consultation sessions organised by the PCC felt, initially, as if they would generate more discussion and lead to better group formation and follow up action. This was the case at Ascott where the suggestion made at the PCC consultation meeting, to rebuild the pound wall, gave new impetus to a plan that had lain dormant for a few years. Combined with the support of members of the parish council this project then moved forward and was completed within the time scale of the project. It was very interesting to find, in other parishes, projects that were suggested at fetes and other events were also set up and completed within the two year life of the project; suggesting that a successful outcome was more a question of who got involved than how and where the project was proposed.

Sometimes an invitation to an event might not have initially appeared to be of immediate relevance but invariably attendance led to contacts with at least one person, or agency, that led on to an opportunity for action within the PCC project. For example, a district councillor in Chipping Norton invited the PCC to take a display to a youth service forum. Contact was made with a group from the Oxfordshire Playbus and also with local scouting leaders. These contacts resulted in a tree planting event (appendix 5) with a group of disadvantaged young people from Witney at Dean Grove; and an ongoing relationship with the Chipping Norton beaver group who are enjoying exploring the site and learning some species identification at Dean Common.

Sometimes contacts made at these events lay dormant for several months but then an event or another meeting would enable a project to develop. For example, the first contact with Jenifer Wates, from Finstock, was made at the Friends of Wychwood AGM in October 2005 where there was a brief discussion about her conservation measures designed to preserve a rare limestone grassland plant on her land. Over the following months there were discussions with other residents at Finstock about various suggestions for conservation activities in the parish. But it was several months later that Jenifer rang to see if the PCC could help with planting some trees to create a small copse at the far end of her fields.



Finstock tree planters hard at work

By this time work was underway with Finstock school on the art project that was creating a drawn Wychwood Tapestry. Jenifer, as an artist herself and very involved in education about conservation, was very enthusiastic about the art project and welcomed the children to plant the trees in a little copse near a footpath so they will be able to watch them grow.

This experience helped the children to generate ideas for their art work back at school and has resulted in continuing contact as the children went to visit the trees in the autumn to measure their progress and carry out any necessary maintenance. The children found that there has already been a lot of encroachment by blackthorn which is threatening to overwhelm some of the trees planted near the hedge. The Chipping Norton Green Gym group has agreed to cut back the blackthorn on one of their work days in 2008 as it was felt to be too difficult for young children to undertake. Local



Drawing trees back at school

people will be invited to join the work party that day and this may result in more recruits to the Green Gym group. This is a good example of co-operation between land owner, specialist advice and support organisations and the local community in a continuing dialogue about local environmental issues.

4.2

The target to work with eleven hundred participants was almost doubled with over two thousand people taking part in a wide variety of events. Participation ranged from one or two people taking part in tree planting or species surveying to over seven hundred children and their parents/carers contributing to the Big Draw art event. Some of the comments about the impact of these projects can be seen in appendices 2 and 13. The PCC was extremely successful in working with people of all ages. It was encouraging for the future of conservation to see two year olds making nest boxes and delighting in finding spiders on nature walks and heartening to see people in their eighties attending talks and art events, maintaining their lifelong interest and dedication to environmental issues.

4.3

The project was particularly successful in working with other organisations and achieved a variety of results beyond the concept of the initial talk or activity. The target was set to work with four partner organisations engaged in community activities and the project actually worked with twenty eight. Primarily these partner organisations were involved in conservation related activities but others were involved in education and social welfare activities. In some cases talks were arranged with other agencies which have expertise in specific issues that are relevant to the Wychwood area. These invitations to other agencies provided many opportunities for attracting larger audiences where the PCC project could be promoted to a larger audience. For example, the talks with Drew McVey of the RSPB about their Lapwing Landscapes project attracted an audience of fifty people to both the talk at Burford and the one at Ascott under Wychwood. As a result of the talk at Ascott, Richard Strange, a farmer at South Leigh, offered his farm as the venue for a

farm open day. He felt that the questions that people asked the speakers showed that they had very little knowledge about farming today and he wanted to be able to demonstrate how a commercially run farm can put environmental good practice into operation.

Other talks were arranged as a direct result of consultation with village residents, for example the BBOWT Water Vole Recovery Project officer came to Fulbrook where people said that they used to see water voles in the village and there are currently sightings of them further down the river at Burford. Similarly, the talks from the Friends of Wychwood barn owl group were organized as a direct result of interest shown in these birds at consultation meetings or other events. Several opportunities to place nest boxes at new locations have arisen from the barn owl talks.

In other cases the subject for a talk arose from a PCC practical activity and other organisations were invited to work with the PCC to promote their work. An example of this was the request to source and plant some native black poplar trees at Asthall alongside three existing old trees beside the River Windrush (appendix 6). In the course of investigations to find native species trees contact was made with Alan Holmes, chairman of the British Black Poplar Group and he agreed to give a talk on these fascinating trees. This talk provided a good opportunity for Cynth Napper, the community development officer for the Oxfordshire Nature Conservation Forum, to talk about her work on the Oxfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan and her work in the Windrush valley in particular. Following this meeting ONCF and the PCC were able to jointly fund a visit from an ecologist to work with residents to collect information on selected sites in the Crawley. This will help them to plan conservation action in the future and might also encourage them to create a parish conservation plan.

Links made with Cogges Farm Museum resulted in the PCC running a session making bird nest boxes for the summer holiday activities programme. Through the Friends of Wychwood barn owl group contact was made with Ralph True who offered to make fantastic nest boxes from recycled wood. He then dismantled and flat packed them so that the children could just screw them together. The parents were delighted to be able to make such good products with their children and the quality of the product was a very good reflection on the PCC project to people who would not have come across it in their usual daily lives. The session worked so well that the Museum has asked the Wychwood Project to repeat the activity in 2008.

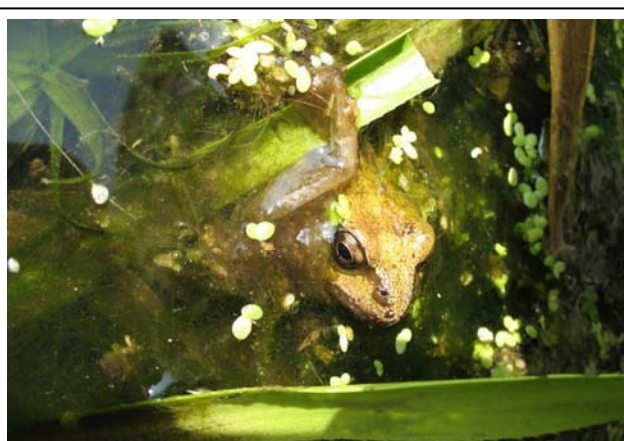


This day was also an opportunity for the Wychwood Wildlife and Countryside group to bring displays about their group, based at Milton under Wychwood, and a range of fun children's activities to Cogges. This group is affiliated to the Friends of

Wychwood and provided valuable children's activities at PCC events such as the farm open day at Springhill Farm.

The work with social welfare organizations gave some opportunities for young people in particular to be involved in conservation activities and also to experience unfamiliar surroundings and activities. The young people who came out with the Oxfordshire Playbus had no idea how to plant trees but threw themselves into it with great energy and enthusiasm. As they were leaving one girl said to her friend, 'One day we will be able to bring our children out to see this'. Similarly, the young people from the Pupil Referral Unit, who came out on various activities, were totally unfamiliar with a rural environment and some were very hesitant about the location and the work proposed. However, without exception, once they had grasped the concept of what they were doing and started to use the tools they became enthusiastic pruners and scrub clearers. Engagement in new activities away from the familiar pressures and expectations of their lives enabled some of the young people to show a different aspect of their personality. It was later reported by the staff who accompanied one group of young people that it was the first time in several weeks of working with one girl that they had seen her smile.

Positive links were made with the Bridewell Organic Garden at Wilcote with unexpected results. Following a visit to the garden to talk to staff and clients to see if we could generate any joint projects, one client, Val Lee, expressed an interest in photography and showed a great talent for catching unusual pictures. Over a few months we worked together visiting several locations and discussing her photographs with a view to creating a calendar for 2008. This calendar is now printed and on sale with her name on the front cover; a tremendous achievement for someone suffering from considerable mental health difficulties over many years (appendix 7). Another rewarding result from the contact with Bridewell has been the recruitment of a volunteer to work with the PCC project Liz Brandom has not been able to work for several years but has now worked in the office for a year, one day a week, and is a well respected and valued member of the Wychwood Project team. Liz works primarily on PCC work but is also happy to help out wherever necessary (for Liz's view of her work with the project see appendix 8).



Val's photo for August

Through Liz's interest in rabbits we developed a Brown Hare survey day with the Thames Valley Environmental Recording Centre. Liz created a survey leaflet and helped with all aspects of the organisation for the 'Wild Hare Day' that enabled thirty five adults and children to record a total of forty two brown hares (appendix 9). Another client of Bridewell is an experienced dry stone waller and helped to run drop in sessions for people wanting to try their hand at walling on an informal basis. He proved to be an excellent trainer in a very relaxed and informal way and everyone appreciated his attention to detail and desire to pass on his knowledge to others.

Seven other major partners were the schools that worked with us on the Big Draw and the Wychwood Tapestry art projects. These art projects required the schools to collapse their timetables for two days and to make staff and space available for the children to work with the project artists. Wherever the resulting art work has been shown the response has reflected the vibrancy and energy of the children's drawings with comments about the Big Draw including: 'Fantastic exhibition and a great way to get us to visit the museum – which we have really enjoyed' and 'Magical woodland – love the detail and the humour and the sound'. Comments about the tapestry include: 'What fantastic drawings, I particularly love the owls and the bodies in the graveyard' and 'They are such fun I wish I could have had a go at this'.



The Big Draw at Hailey School



The Wychwood Tapestry at the Wychwoods School

The creation of the tapestry has provided a great promotional opportunity for the Wychwood Project as a whole and a way to initiate conversations with people about their knowledge and experience of their local area. The ways in which parents and other village residents helped to support these projects has also broadened the scope of the project and brought it to the attention of a wider audience; many of whom did not previously know about the Wychwood Project and who might not usually engage with a conservation organisation in their daily lives.

4.4

The number of joint initiatives undertaken are recorded where an activity resulted from an interaction between two or more partners rather than those where the PCC commissioned a partner to deliver an activity or was commissioned by a partner to deliver an activity. The target for this activity was one but a total of twelve joint initiatives were undertaken as a result of the PCC programme. One example is the work with the education officer at the Oxfordshire Museum which began when she commissioned the PCC to deliver some conservation related activities for the 2006 summer Kid's Club programme at the museum. This then developed into a plan to jointly deliver an art project that would fit into the 2006 national Big Draw campaign.

Another example of a joint initiative is where the PCC jointly funded an ecologist's survey with ONCF. They had funds to pay for fifty percent of an ecologist's fees for a parish survey of key sites of conservation interest in Oxfordshire parishes and were looking for parishes to take up the offer. The PCC had established good links with a

group of people at Crawley who are committed to developing the conservation knowledge in the village so was able to make a joint approach with ONCF to provide this valuable contribution to the community group. They now have the report from the ecologist and are working on plans with the Wychwood Project to develop their parish conservation strategy.

Work with Bridewell Organic Garden was a joint operation as the PCC offered new and diverse opportunities to clients at Bridewell. These gave new challenges to people who have been experiencing difficulties in their lives and need a considerable amount of support to take on new challenges; this was provided through a supportive working relationship with the PCC project officer and backed up by the interest and support from the staff at Bridewell.

5. INCREASING THE RANGE OF PEOPLE INVOLVED IN COMMUNITY ACTION AND LOCAL ISSUES

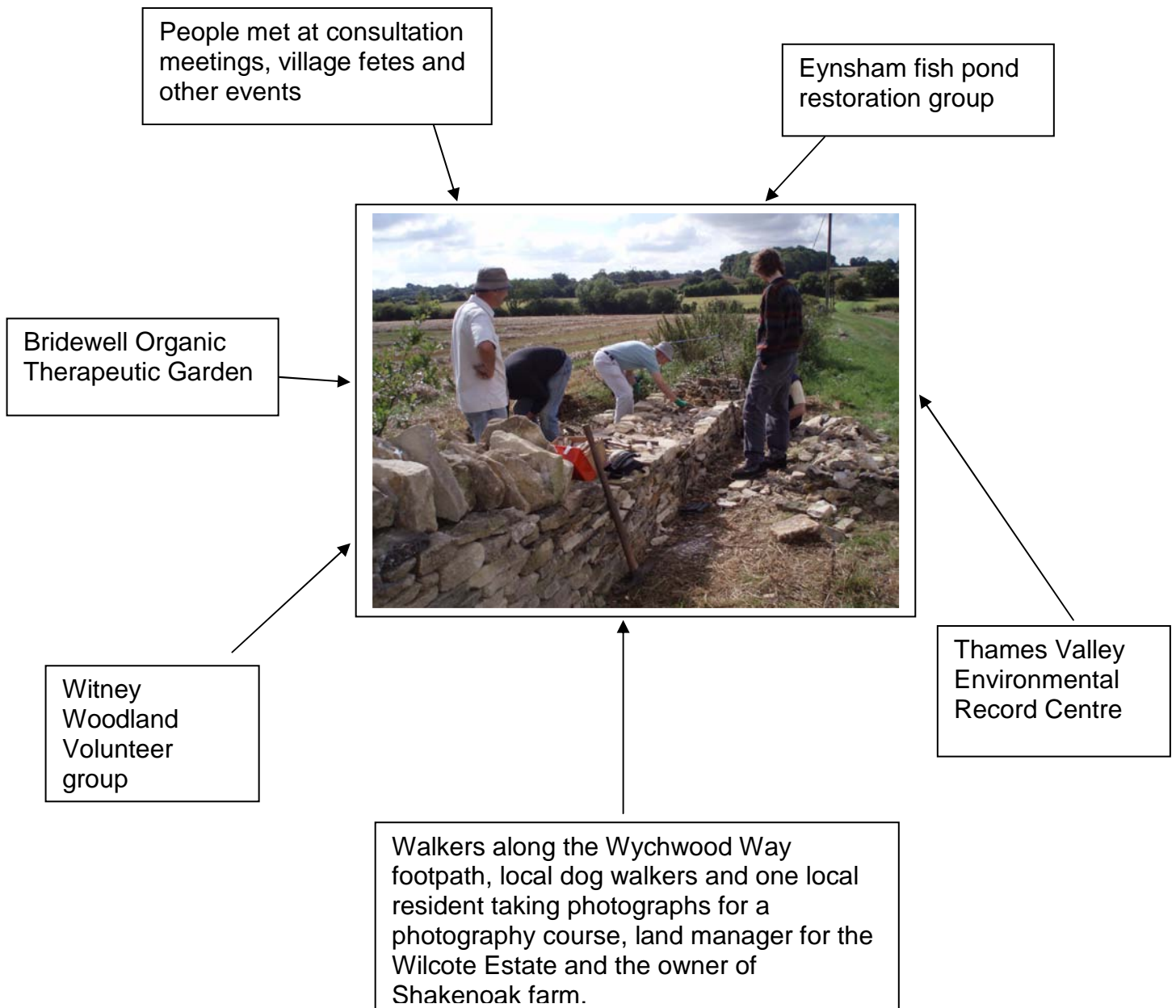
5.1

A primary focus of the PCC was to meet with people who might not attend an event specifically described as a conservation event. A mixture of specific PCC events and attendance, with a display, at village fetes and fun days, introduced the project to a wide range of people in eleven parishes. Some of the most active members of a community are often those on the parish councils, school governing bodies and church councils. Talking to these groups was an essential part of promoting the project and they gave a lot of support and encouragement to the project. However, if there were differences of opinion between other groups or individuals and the parish council it dampened creativity and momentum. In Finstock the energy of an active group of people, who might have been expected to contribute time and energy to PCC activities in their parish, was totally absorbed, just as the PCC was getting underway, by a planning application for a substantial holiday property development on the neighbouring Cornbury Estate. It would appear that the potential energy for involvement with the PCC of both the group and the parish council was absorbed by their protest activities.

Eleven events and consultation meetings as described in 4.1 established some conservation priorities in those parishes but it was not possible to establish the need for even the first stage of consultation in the other parishes. Every parish council was contacted by letter or telephone if there were already established contacts as identified through the Wychwood Project, Friends of Wychwood or other sources. In almost all of the parishes there was at least a conversation with someone about the project but in some cases we were just not able to find a suitable project. For example, at Combe, a request to help rebuild a dry stone wall proved, on inspection of the wall, to be too large an undertaking and the location beside a road too dangerous for volunteers to work on. As most of the village is under the ownership of Blenheim estate there was not any scope for any other activity at this time although the parish council would have liked to work with the project in one way or another.

An example of networking opportunities provided by one Parish Conservation Challenge activity.

People came together from a wide range of groups and organisations to learn the art of dry stone walling. They were then able to learn more about different conservation activities at the same time.



5.2

The PCC was very successful at linking people, and therefore their communities, with well established networks in the area, for example, with the specialist groups in the Friends of Wychwood; the Oxfordshire Nature Conservation Forum (ONCF) and the Thames Valley Environmental Recording Centre (TVERC). This was a two way process both informing the community groups about the networks and putting the networks in contact with the key people in the communities. Several activities resulted from these new links, for example, the talks by the Friends of Wychwood barn owl group provided information and expertise for the communities through their talks but also revealed new sites where the group could locate barn owl nest boxes. Links were also made between communities and a range of other organisations including the Wychwood History Society and the Finstock History Society. Information sharing became a two way process for the communities as they were able receive information and to contribute information to existing records.

Talks arranged with other partner organisations enabled people to link into their programmes, some of which are working at a regional scale and others at a national scale. For example, following the joint talks with the RSPB, where they were introducing their Lapwing Landscape project, four landowners made contact with the project officer to gather advice on how to manage their land more effectively for breeding waders.

6. INCREASING THE RANGE OF SUPPORT MECHANISMS TO BUILD CAPACITY AND EMPOWER LOCAL COMMUNITIES.

The role of the PCC project officer was to facilitate the development of networks and practical activities that would establish a framework within which local people would be encouraged to take on the role of conservation facilitators for their own community. It proved to be very difficult to recruit facilitators, in what was actually a very short time scale for community development projects. Chris Atkinson at Fawler was very enthusiastic about setting up some activities. He put in a huge amount of effort to arrange and publicise meetings and produced an excellent leaflet about the PCC (appendix 10), but due to work and personal commitments he became unable to give any more time to the project at that time. However, he gave a very good example of what is possible. Tremendous support was given to the PCC by parish council clerks in several villages but they were inevitably very busy with parish council business and were not able to take on the role of conservation group facilitator, even though they were very interested.

Generally, it would appear that it is when issues arise within a parish that the energy is generated that will encourage someone with a particular interest in that issue to become a facilitator. This may focus around a particular area of land or a particular species or habitat and only occur for that particular area of interest. In Fawler one person asked for advice and information about setting up toad patrols; she encouraged friends and neighbours to get involved and they were able to help about a hundred toads safely over the road in the spring of 2007. This activity has not yet resulted in a dedicated village conservation group even though they had expressed an interest in setting one up in their first consultation meeting. The idea is there and future activities in the parish such as a dry stone walling training courses, to be run in the parish in 2008, may yet encourage people into further action to set up a group.

At Enstone several people met together with the intention of setting up a conservation group and although people offered to take on supporting roles such as putting up posters to advertise events, no one was prepared to take on the role of group co-ordinator that would enable them to formally constitute themselves as a conservation group. Following the end of the project another group of people in Enstone have approached the Wychwood Project asking for support to further their conservation aims in the parish; so there is a real possibility that the two groups of people will merge their interests to create a dedicated conservation group for the parish.

Some individual people did express an interest and help to start the PCC initiative in their parish. These were usually people already heavily involved in parish matters such as the clerk or chairman of the parish council and they hoped to devolve the work involved to someone else at a later stage. Mostly this hope was not fulfilled and they either kept doing the best they could or the PCC project slipped low down on their priority list. In other parishes people were very interested initially but due to personal issues such as changing jobs or increased family demands they found they had less time available and became unable to pursue their interest and develop their involvement.

Although limited in its ability to establish many new facilitators the PCC was very successful in giving support to existing facilitators as in the case of the Ascott pound. Following the PCC consultation meeting and the agreement for an allocation of funding from the PCC project, Stuart Fox on the parish council worked very hard to take their proposals to rebuild the pound forward. He raised sufficient funds from other organisations to pay for the wall to be rebuilt by a professional dry stone waller. Similarly in Ramsden the initial support from the chair of the parish council generated enough interest for the Little Garden Wood management group to develop and the playing field committee to take their plans forward. She has not yet managed to establish a parish conservation facilitator with an overview of all conservation related matters in the parish but a member of the parish council is their dedicated person to oversee conservation related matters.

The role of the PCC co-ordinator as facilitator also enabled concentration of effort into training for specific skills, in particular dry stone walling. This is one of the most popular skills that people want to try for many reasons; partly because the walls are such a visible feature of the landscape and many are obviously in need of repair but also because many people have them in their own gardens or farms and want to develop a skill that will be directly useful for themselves. People are also very interested in all rural crafts and this is the most challenging of all to combine the spatial awareness of selecting the right stones and the hand eye co-ordination required to lay them successfully. Due to the input through the PCC there is now an embryonic Friends of Wychwood dry stone walling group that will, hopefully, develop to take on specific projects of its own in years to come. There are also further training courses planned for 2008 that will recruit new trainees and members for the group.

7. INCREASING THE DISTINCTIVE LOCAL COUNTRYSIDE, WILDLIFE, LANDSCAPE AND CULTURAL AND ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES ENJOYING PROTECTION AND ENHANCEMENT.

Although not every target parish was able to participate in the PCC twenty one environmental activities were established or assisted during the two years of the project. These were all activities that were suggested at consultation meetings or through contacts with organisations or individuals in the communities. In many cases the activity supported by the PCC will provide the basis for future activity in the community that the Wychwood Project will help to support if required. For example, the tree planting at Finstock will require maintenance for a few years until the trees are fully established. The project will work with the school and the landowner to keep the relationship going so that the children will learn about the maintenance required even if they are not able to do it all themselves. This will ensure that the children have a real understanding of the care that is required by newly planted trees and they will feel a continuing sense of responsibility that will help to keep the trees protected.

Rebuilding or repairing some of the dry stone walls has had a double benefit for the communities. The training involved has given people the opportunity to learn new skills and become involved with the Wychwood Project so they have often then attended other project activities as well. Also the communities have benefitted from the improvement of the parish infrastructure. When things are damaged or run down a general air of neglect can set in and less and less care is taken of the surrounding area. There was great appreciation of the work to rebuild the walls at Langel Common and Fulbrook, with several people saying how much the improvements had contributed to the improved appearance of the area. Additional walling projects were suggested but it was not possible to start them within the time frame of the PCC project.



Repairs complete on Langel Common

Another example of how the PCC generated activities will promote the involvement of more people in the future is at Little Garden Wood (appendix 11) where, although the management group is small in number, there will be opportunities for the wider village community to get involved in practical conservation work and recreation in the wood.

8. INCREASING THE RANGE AND LEVEL OF ENVIRONMENTAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS OF PEOPLE LIVING IN RURAL AREAS; AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE COUNTRYSIDE AMONG PEOPLE WHO VISIT IT.

8.1

Twenty seven businesses or community groups have been advised or assisted through the work of the PCC ranging from parish councils to individual farmers. Working with parish councils resulted both in the development of projects that had been under consideration for some time and in the generation of totally new ideas in some places. Generally the introduction of the PCC to a village led to a renewed impetus that encouraged people who may have been interested in general terms previously, to get more involved and to contribute ideas about specific projects. For example, at Ramsden, a member of the playing field committee used his draughtsman's expertise to draw plans for redesigning the playing field to make better use of an area that was totally overgrown, so that children could experience a wilder space than the football pitch area. The plans stimulated a very heated debate in the village which was eventually resolved with plans to alter some parts of the field while leaving other areas available for existing users.

A completely different group of people in Ramsden became interested in becoming more active in the management of a small woodland called Little Garden Wood that was owned by the Woodland Trust. Through the PCC the group was linked with the Oxfordshire Woodland Project and the Wychwood Project. They provided expert advice on assessing the current state of the wood, future management plans and appropriate legal structures so that the group could broach the idea of managing the wood to the Woodland Trust. This advice ensured that the group was well briefed for their negotiations and able to give the wider community good information about the potential appearance and use of the wood in the future.

Another new development enabled ten farmers or members of local nature trusts responsible for managing special habitats to attend the Farming and Countryside Education (FACE) training course arranged to assist them in developing visits from schools and community groups. The course was set up jointly by the PCC and FACE with the FACE trainer delivering the course. This was the first time that they had run a course in Oxfordshire and although there was only a limited number of attendees from the Wychwood area it proved to be a good course for networking and sharing of knowledge and expertise for farmers and landowners in Oxfordshire..

In some instances groups were assisted where they had a particular problem to solve. For example, Idbury church wardens are struggling with a problem with bats flying in the church depositing droppings and urine that requires continual housekeeping. A talk by the director of the Thames Valley Environmental Recording Centre (TVERC), Philippa Burrell who is an expert on bats and small mammals, was arranged. A sizeable group of people attended and were fascinated to find out more about bats in general, and their bats in particular. They all said that they really enjoyed the talk and now that they felt better informed about the life cycles and habits of bats, and the legal requirements for their protection, they felt more inclined to find ways to co-exist with the bats. However, they do have some essential repairs to carry out on the church roof and they have been put in touch with local experts

who will advise them on the licensing procedure and when and how they can carry out their essential building works.

8.2

There is a vast amount of information about the Wychwood Project held by the many history and natural history societies in the area. These have well established networks and lecture and activity programmes and it would not be possible or desirable to replicate the information that they hold. However, new records have been generated from surveys of particular habitats and species and from information provided by speakers and researchers. The best example of this type of information was created by landscape historian Amanda Hopwood who researched the history of Crawley and then took a group of residents on a guided walk, around the village, illustrated with annotated maps. Copies of these maps and the research information were then given to the parish. New species records were gathered through individual events including the 'Wild Hare Day' at Chasewood Farm, Crawley and passed on to TVERC. In other cases people who undertake surveys on a regular basis for other organisations agreed to pass their records to TVERC as well, thus increasing the knowledge base locally as well as nationally.

In some cases previously available information has been reworked into a different format for talks or projects. For example, TVERC prepared habitat maps and lists of key species for every parish that hosted a consultation or display event. They also provided detailed information for the schools that took part in the Big Draw and the Wychwood Tapestry projects. For the remaining parishes they have provided baseline information. Liz Brandom, a volunteer with the PCC has done a fantastic job to collate all available information into folders together with records of any PCC activities that took place in the parish and they will be given to the parish council and to the schools that took part in the art projects. All other parishes will receive a summary of the wildlife and habitat information provided by TVERC together with any additional information gathered through the PCC. These folders will act as a basis for a new collection of parish information with an environmental focus and will provide a tool to sustain the PCC outcomes in the longer term.



Liz and Jane with completed folders ready for distribution

In other examples work has only just started on projects that will deliver important information in the future. A group of expert botanists from the Friends of Wychwood are working with four of the PCC parishes to survey road verges with a potential for increasing biodiversity through improved mowing regimes. The surveys are at an early stage and will provide better information for the managements of these selected sites in the years to come. This work will help parish councils in their responsibilities under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 that requires them to consider the impact on the environment of any decisions they make. The surveying will also act as an educational opportunity for local people to work with expert botanists to develop their botanical knowledge.

The project met the aims to work with children and to increase the knowledge of the environment through a major art project in primary schools in five of the parishes. The project to create the Wychwood Tapestry 2007 grew out of the Wychwood Forest mural created as part of the Big Draw activities set up in October 2006 with the education officer at the Oxfordshire Museum at Woodstock. The Big Draw and then the tapestry projects combined awareness raising and education about their local environment with the opportunity to take part in an art project at a giant scale. The Big Draw was particularly special in that every child in the two schools, Hailey and Kingham, regardless of artistic ability or age was able to contribute to the finished mural. Similarly, with the tapestry project all children in the selected age group could take part but we restricted the age group to the older children so that we could give a greater educational input to accompany the art work. Approximately 700 people were involved in the Big Draw programme through the schools and visitors to events at the museum. A smaller number of children were involved in the tapestry project but worked much more intensively with the project team and had longer to work on their drawings to achieve a higher standard of work.

8.3

Through the work of the PCC thirty two people have been assisted in developing their skills on an individual basis or through group activities. Two people led their first guided walks; one led a walk and talked about the industrial archaeology in Fawler and another led a bat walk with bat detectors round Ascott under Wychwood. Liz developed her administration skills and environmental knowledge through volunteering at the PCC office and Val made great progress with her photographic skills taking photographs in the Wychwood Forest that were then compiled into a project calendar.



James demonstrating where to lay a through stone

Dry stone walling has been one of the most requested activities throughout the PCC project. Two courses were led by James Bent, an accredited trainer, to rebuild a wall on the land of Jill North-Lewis (appendix 12). This project was proposed as a potential PCC activity at the initial consultation meeting for Fulbrook. The wall met the essential criteria for a PCC project in that it was a safe place for volunteers to work on and easily accessible. It was also clearly visible to the community; many people pass by the wall on a public footpath through Jill's land and they also use the adjacent field for car parking for village functions. All participants agreed that James gave an excellent grounding in the basic techniques of dry stone walling and even a very experienced waller said that he had learnt a lot from James. Some of the trainees came back over a few weeks to

complete the work on the wall and all agreed that although they still have a lot to learn they had made a good enough job to expect the wall to stand for a few more years. Jill said that she was delighted with the result as she would not have been able to afford to rebuild the wall herself and would have had to put up a fence instead.

Other opportunities for dry stone walling were led by Trevor Townsend a volunteer and experienced dry stone waller. Twelve people came along to work on an old farm wall at Shakenoak beside a public footpath, on an informal drop in basis. This proved very popular over eight weeks with some people coming back on several days. The footpath is a very popular local walk and some of the older villagers out for a stroll would stop and talk to us and tell us about their lives in the area over many years. Trevor also led the work to repair a wall at Langley Common in Witney. Again many people stopped to tell us how much they appreciated us doing the repair work as the wall had been falling into disrepair over several years. Members of the Witney Woodland Volunteers carried out the work and enjoyed learning new skills with Trevor.

In addition to the more intensive training session many people attended taster sessions. Seven young people, together with four staff members, from Oxfordshire's Pupil Referral Unit and Integration Service (PRUIS) took part in pruning and scrub clearance activities that they would not usually entertain the thought of and all seemed to enjoy themselves. Similarly the twenty children from Finstock school all had a go at tree planting and were delighted with the results of their efforts.

CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE IMPACT OF THE PARISH CONSERVATION CHALLENGE

The results of the Parish Conservation Challenge reflected the findings well known and frequently recorded in relation to other community and volunteer projects. They show a combination of challenges that may be overcome by hard work and access to resources but in some cases purely by good luck in meeting the right people at the right time or finding a project that was just waiting for some more input to make it happen. It is not easy to identify any one factor that will ensure success in future undertakings but the summary of positive outcomes below will illustrate the key ingredients of a successful project.

CHALLENGES TO THE SUCCESS OF THE PROJECT

- There was a temptation to follow too many leads and therefore diminish impact. A key strength of the project was the range of possibilities but it meant that sometimes there was a lack of focus on the core features of the project. Other community workers were surprised at the number of communities targeted and thought that it was a huge challenge to spread the effort required to mobilise communities across so many different places and so many different possible activities.
- The concentration on working with individual parishes was a clear concept but may have led to reduced, or missed, opportunities for the development of better networking across the Wychwood Project area. It may also have missed opportunities for people to attend events from other parishes where they were only advertised in the parish concerned.

- It proved quite difficult to find sites for the more practical activities for several reasons. Much of the land of the Wychwood Forest area is owned and managed as large estates which have no need of volunteer work on their land. In other places where suggestions were made the site was not suitable for volunteers to work on or the plans were too ambitious to be able to take forward in a short time span requiring lengthy planning permission or very expensive materials etc. This made it difficult to make full use of the seed corn funding for practical conservation activities, although it did allow for funding of the Big Draw and Wychwood Tapestry art projects which were so successful in engaging with children and their families.
- The organisation of village activities is usually in the hands of a few people who are involved with many aspects of village life. If these people take an interest in a new project it will make progress but if they are engaged in more pressing matters or they are not particularly interested it is hard to mobilise the village community. Where people did express an interest they sometimes changed jobs, moved house, suffered bereavements etc that reduced their ability or desire to take part even though they were very interested in the concept of the project.
- It is very difficult to find new people to take responsibility for new initiatives unless they generated the idea themselves or it is a topic that is of significant importance or interest to the local community. But where a new community champion does appear they will flourish with appropriate support.
- Timely and appropriate support and advice is required to keep the momentum going. There is a fine balance between giving support and taking control to make something move forward.
- Ideas can take a long time to germinate so time limited projects may miss out on potential activities. But without the constraints of a time limit there is a danger that some ideas would never move forward.
- It is very difficult to engage with the 16-50 age group in any regular activities, they may be very interested but life commitments are often more pressing at this stage of life.

POSITIVE FACTORS

Availability of a project officer with dedicated time

- This gave the opportunity to attend a wide variety of events giving a greater potential to make at least one contact that could lead to other contacts or activities. The secret was to make the effort to talk to as many people as possible, even if they didn't appear initially to be linked in to the project, they might join in later or talk to others who will want to take part.
- Some conversations and ideas took many months to crystallise and develop to the next stage of action but once started they could have long term benefits. With the time available to follow up a wide range of enquiries it was possible to wait for a project to develop at the pace of the volunteers.
- New volunteers were recruited to work with the PCC project officer, helping with developing specific activities and helping to complete the information collation and presentation part of the project. This benefited the project with the extra staffing and also helped the volunteers to develop new skills and confidence in the work place.

- Other volunteers started to work with other Wychwood Project programmes after meeting the PCC project officer at special events.
- New contacts with local farmers have led to offers of locations for surveys, new conservation activities, farm visits and even a site for the Wychwood Forest Fair in 2008

The availability of support in the form of money and expertise

- The availability of 'start up' funding encouraged groups to raise additional funds to tackle projects or to carry out small scale projects on their own. Although not a huge amount of money, it undoubtedly helped to overcome psychological barriers or excuses that had been preventing the starting up of some projects.
- The availability of a range of experts in conservation matters in the Wychwood Project team and the Friends of Wychwood helped to enable a wider impact than would have been possible with one person working alone.
- The willingness of partner organisations to work with the PCC made a great contribution to the success of the project.
- There is a lot of interest in taking part in training in rural crafts and habitat management and when people see it happening on the ground they are encouraged to join in and have a go.

A flexible approach

- Many events had unexpected outcomes. For example, the initial collaboration with the education officer at the Oxfordshire Museum on relatively small scale Kid's Club activities developed into the Big Draw which involved over 700 children and adults which then led to the creation of the Wychwood Tapestry 2007.
- It was possible to provide a range of new opportunities for young people to experience unfamiliar territory and learn new skills.
- The Wychwood Tapestry/ Big Draw gave the opportunity to deliver a different approach to environmental studies to many children from rural areas that often have difficulty in accessing extra curricular activities.
- Where people were identified to have appropriate skills and/or enthusiasm they were encouraged to contribute or even to take charge of different activities

An existing network of committed and interested people

- Working with the parish council was generally a very good place to start and was much more successful where one of the members was actively interested in the concept of the project and was willing to take practical action to help get it started.
- The recognition that there is a lot of interest in the environment amongst the general public and they do like to focus on their own locality in particular but also to be informed about how local issues relate to national and global issues as well.
- It was clearly identified that there is a sense of community not only for individual parishes but also for the wider area of the Forest of Wychwood and this made it easier to engage people in activities in a variety of locations. However, in order to establish a regular group of participants it would appear

from other projects e.g. the Abbey Fishpond restoration project at Eynsham that it helps to have a local site or species on which people can focus their efforts, it certainly helps with publicity for particular activities and for recruiting participants

CONTINUING CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES ARISING FROM THE PARISH CONSERVATION CHALLENGE

The Parish Conservation Challenge was based on the already successful work of the Wychwood Project and was fortunate to be able to draw on existing expertise within the Project and the Friends of Wychwood. Many new people have been made aware of the Wychwood Project and joined in with their work through their involvement with the PCC. Local publicity (appendix 14) has reinforced the impact of the PCC on the ground and sometimes resulted in new people contacting the project to join in with activities or to suggest suitable locations and projects. In some cases where projects initiated with the PCC have not been completed the participants will be able to get advice and support from the Wychwood Project and the Friends, for example, the Little Garden Wood management group will be supported to develop and implement their management plans by the Wychwood Project.

Some projects were completed according to the original request from the parish but have then led on to developments in other parishes. The planting of black poplars at Asthall led to others being planted further down the River Windrush at Crawley and a general raising of awareness about the value of these trees as a nationally and locally rare species. Consequently, on a site visit to discuss laying a hedge with the Friends of Wychwood hedgelaying group, a rare example of a female black poplar was found at Burford. This tree has now provided cuttings for a landowner along a small tributary of the Windrush, in Crawley, and may be a source of further cuttings in the future.

The PCC demonstrated that there is a great and growing enthusiasm amongst the general public for more opportunities to take part in conservation activities. There is a desire to take part in activities to learn more about the environment as well as to make a difference through direct action. The success of the farm open day was a very good example of this and there are plans to arrange similar events in 2008 with other farmers who have now expressed an interest. The Friends of Wychwood events committee are developing plans with more farmers as well as discussing plans to hold the Wychwood Forest Fair on a site belonging to Richard Strainge who was the initiator and host of the 2007 farm open day.

The development of new practical groups such as the dry stone walling group that were given added impetus through the PCC will be supported through the existing team at the Wychwood Project and absorbed into the core work of the Project. The Wychwood Project has been successful in attracting funding to employ a project officer, for three years, to develop volunteering opportunities for young people aged 16-25. It is expected that this work will complement, and further develop, some of the projects and networks started through the PCC.

The Wychwood Tapestry will be a great asset to promote the Wychwood Project. It will create a unique backdrop for a wide variety of events put on by the Wychwood

Project and other organisations. The schools have booked some, or all, of the tapestry for displays at their school fetes and art weeks; the organisers of the Game Fair want it to form the back drop for one of their dedicated activity areas and Leafield want it to be included in their village art week display. The smaller edition is on display in all of the participating schools and is a fantastic resource for showing to groups of children, e.g. brownies, to engage them in discussions about their local environment.

SUMMARY OF THE PARISH CONSERVATION CHALLENGE

Over two thousand people took part in the Parish Conservation Challenge which shows that this project has been very successful in the key target of increasing the involvement of local people in conservation related activities. People have gained from their involvement with the PCC in many ways as shown in the comments in appendix 13. Some have benefited through developing their own knowledge and skills and others have valued the benefits for their community. In retrospect the targets were very challenging for the time available and colleagues running community projects in partner organisations were amazed at the ambitiousness of working with so many communities at the same time on such a wide ranging variety of potential projects. Many of the conclusions arrived at when summing up the project are not new or specific to this project but they do illustrate the value of this type of focused and targeted work in developing community involvement. It is difficult to identify individual factors that would be guaranteed to make a difference in any new project but the provision of a dedicated project officer with time and seed corn money, even if only in small measures, must be the single most significant factor in starting up new activities or providing fresh momentum to projects that have got stuck.

In many respects the quantitative measures used to evaluate the project do not capture the full impact of the work carried out. This may be revealed in an overheard comment that shows that new links have been made between people and groups, or that a piece of work has been noticed and valued; or it may be the link between a community and another partner organisation that you don't hear about until many months after the event or the child who planted a tree and then goes on to become a botanist. However, the number of comments from people and the enquiries that continue to come into the project office some months after the official end of the project and the evidence out on the ground continue to demonstrate the success of the Parish Conservation Challenge to one and all.

APPENDIX 1

PARISHES DESIGNATED FOR THE PARISH CONSERVATION CHALLENGE

Activities were carried out in 16 of the twenty original target parishes

ASTHALL
ASCOTT UNDER WYCHWOOD
CHADLINGTON
CRAWLEY
FAWLER
FIFIELD
FINSTOCK
FULBROOK
HEYTHROP
IDBURY
KIDDINGTON WITH ASTERLEIGH
LEAFIELD
RAMSDEN
SOUTH LEIGH
SPELSBURY
STONESFIELD

Activities were carried out in four additional parishes

ENSTONE
HAILEY
KINGHAM
NORTH LEIGH

Parishes unable to develop a suitable project during the lifetime of the PCC

COMBE
NORTHMOOR
STANTON HARCOURT
SWINBROOK AND WIDFORD

APPENDIX 2

THE BIG DRAW

The Wychwood Project and The Oxfordshire Museum at Woodstock Big Draw Art Project October 2006. Draw the Forest: Wildlife Art

During the month of October two local artists, Sally Howkins and Tom Ralphs Laman, worked with 300 children in Hailey and Kingham primary schools in the former Royal Hunting Forest of Wychwood to create a black and white Wychwood Forest mural. The artists played an audio-visual display and used posters, books, stuffed animals and birds from the museum's collection and materials collected from local woods to stimulate discussion and detailed drawings. The children then worked in small groups to create large panels that were later assembled and displayed as a 30 metre long mural in the Brewhouse Gallery at The Oxfordshire Museum, Woodstock. Vivienne Claxton, head teacher at Hailey School said, "The children concentrated for a long time because they were so involved with the artwork and adults, such as myself, couldn't help getting drawn in and making our own contributions. Thank you very much for giving us this opportunity. Sally and Tom were great to work with".

In addition to the work in schools the museum offered drawing materials for the general public to make their own drawings and Sally and Tom led two drop in sessions for families during the half term holiday. Another local artist, Davina Chapman, also ran a museum Kids' Club session with 25 children to study drawing leaves in greater detail. Approximately 275 people joined in with the museum based part of the project and their drawings were then added to the display in the gallery. Several families had never visited the museum before joining in with the Big Draw and for others having their drawings displayed helped to strengthen their perceptions of the museum as part of their community.

This project clearly showed how the activity of teaching drawing can develop the powers of observation and inquiry in a fun and easily accessible way for people of all ages. The enthusiasm for this project was so great that we are planning to run a similar project in 2007 to create a more durable digital tapestry. We will aim to spend more time in preparation with the schools and to work in more depth with the children on their local landscape history as a background to contemporary issues for the forest area.

The project was devised by Jane Bowley, Project Officer with the Wychwood Project Parish Conservation Challenge and Christina Parker, The Oxfordshire Museum Education Officer. Funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, LEADER+, DEFRA and local charities.



THE BIG DRAW 2006

With The Wychwood Project and The Oxfordshire Museum Woodstock



Sally and Tom set the scene with a soundtrack and slide show of the Wychwood Forest



Individual studies in preparation



Working in small groups to create their own panel



Individual panels combine to create the Wychwood Forest mural displayed at the Brewhouse gallery



APPENDIX 3

THE WYCHWOOD TAPESTRY 2007



INTRODUCTION

Created by the children from five schools, in total, the Wychwood Tapestry 2007 was displayed for the first time at the Wychwood Forest Fair at Capp's Lodge on the 2nd September. The 30 metre long drawn tapestry is a unique creation and is probably the largest continuous work of children's art in the county and possibly in the country. Throughout the project we have received fantastic support and appreciation from the staff and children at the schools and from local councillors, landowners and residents of the villages. Local newsletters have carried items about the tapestry and Roy Noble from the Friends of Wychwood made a video record of the work at Chadlington School that was played at the Forest Fair in the Tapestry Marquee.

The same techniques were used at each school but the project team worked with the staff and children to identify the special characteristics of their own village. I started with a talk to the children about the Wychwood Forest and local wildlife and habitats then Amanda Hopwood, local landscape historian talked about landscape, land use and local employment related to the landscape. Local artists Sally Howkins and Tom Ralphs Laman then worked with the children for two days in school to create the art work. The children started with pencil drawings on large panels of paper and when they were satisfied with their work they went over it with felt pens. The children were encouraged to stop to review their work and to discuss with each other how they could add to and improve their piece. It was most encouraging to see how a brief suggestion was picked up and developed with great rapidity and enthusiasm.

FINSTOCK SCHOOL

At Finstock I talked to the children about the specific wildlife habitats and species that give a special character to Finstock with a strong focus on the woodland species that are still found locally. They completed a school wildlife survey form for homework and revealed a good knowledge of species in their locality. Amanda showed them photographs and maps of Finstock that illustrated changes in the village over the centuries. The children were particularly entranced by the maps from the 18th and 19th centuries as there were so many changes that they could relate to. They were particularly fascinated that the housing estate that many now live on was not shown on

the maps at all. The children were also interested in the glove making that at one time employed most of the women in the village.

Between the initial presentations and the art sessions the children and some of their parents were able to help a local landowner plant trees in a field near the school and a well used footpath, so they will be able to watch the progress of their work over the years to come. This opportunity arose out of discussions around the art project with the school and the local community.

Sally and Tom prepared an audio-visual tour of the village to stimulate the children into thinking about how they were going to translate their knowledge about the village into artistic work. The presentation also shows some of the Bayeux tapestry to show the children what we think the final piece might resemble. The art work reflected the interest in the maps and their completed pieces evolved into a style reminiscent of the aerial photographs giving a very clear view of the village as if from the air. The key features for the children were the things with which they are familiar, especially the very distinctive and unusual playground and the football field but their representations of the forest and the wildlife are visually stunning and the detail of the completed art work is remarkable. The children worked together in a very focussed way which was quite remarkable to see as their ages crossed three year groups so there was a wide variation in ability and aptitude. It was very interesting to see the older children helping the younger children in a way that encouraged their ideas and contributions.

STONESFIELD SCHOOL

At Stonesfield school Amanda and I worked together on the same afternoon talking to the seventy children in years 4 and 5 (year 6 were away on a field trip) to set the scene. I was able to tell the children about the special nature of the limestone grassland habitat of Stonesfield Common and the ancient woodlands at Wootton Wood and King's Wood. Amanda showed them old photographs of slate miners, fossils and dinosaur remains and told them about the roman remains from the villa that was discovered at Stonesfield. But it was the fossils and slate that really fired their imagination and they talked at length about fossils they had found at Stonesfield and other places. We then spent time with small groups looking at the old maps and again they were very involved in working out where changes had occurred and what buildings were shown on all of the maps.

As this was such a large group of children Sally and Tom split them into two working groups. The year 4s worked on the tapestry on the first day and the year 5s on the second day. The younger children worked more slowly so some of them carried on during the second day and were so enthusiastic it was difficult to get them to stop at the end of the day. The fossils and stony nature of the area is definitely reflected in the images that the children have created. They were also fascinated by the concept of layers of life underground and the burrowing of animals through the layers. One piece shows a huge number of stars and they said this was because they are very aware of the night sky due to the hilltop location of much of the village. As the children had been promised two days of art work they worked with related art techniques with the school art co-ordinator when they were not working on the tapestry and created some fabulous pictures of animals using pastels.

During the course of researching the local history we met a local landowner who has a slate mine on his land that he occasionally opens up for public visits if a safety ladder is hired. There are plans to work with geologists who know the history of the slate mining industry to offer visits to the school and local residents later in the summer.

CHADLINGTON SCHOOL

At Chadlington I introduced the project and talked to the children about their local wildlife and environment. We identified that a key feature in the area is the number of springs and small streams arising along the junction of the limestone and underlying clay; so I demonstrated the water retention properties of limestone with a model made of sponge. It illustrated the way in which a large quantity of water can be absorbed before it suddenly bursts out, as in a spring, to the great amusement of the children. Amanda talked to the children about the use of water power in mills and showed them photographs of old mill buildings and remains that are still standing today. They were also delighted to see how an old water powered mill from Saxon times worked from the model supplied by the Museum Resource Centre.

In the morning of the first art day, as the result of a special request to a local landowner, we were able to take the children to visit a waterfall and mill pond on land that is now usually closed to public access. We were accompanied by two teachers and two parent helpers and they contributed a lot of local knowledge about changes in land use and access as we walked along. The children took great delight in the insects and pond life in particular and finding a robin's nest, complete with eggs, caused great excitement. On our return to school local artist's Sally Howkins and Tom Ralphs Laman presented their audio-visual tour of the village. The waterfall obviously made a great impression on the children and featured in most of their drawings together with the pond and the houses around that part of the village. We were joined on the second day by County Councillor Sue Haffenden who thoroughly enjoyed working with the children on one of the tapestry panels.

An interesting addition to the project arose at Chadlington in that Roy Noble, from the Friends of Wychwood, offered to make a film of the production of the tapestry at the school. Roy accompanied the children on the walk and for the rest of the two art days and also filmed some of the work of the printer in assembling the finished panels. He has produced two versions of the film, one about 12 minutes in length that would mainly be of interest to Chadlington School and will be on sale to parents and a shorter version for public information and display. The Screen on the Square in Witney has already agreed to show the short version of the film.

THE WYCHWOOD SCHOOL

At the Wychwood School we identified that modern agricultural practices have made a dramatic impact on the landscape. I talked to the children about the impact of modern farming methods on local wildlife and was able to show them maps created from the records of the Thames Valley Environmental Recording Centre that show that there are far fewer species records in this area than in the other areas. Amanda showed the children historic maps that showed the changes in field sizes and loss of woodland and orchards. We also used examples of old farm workers' clothing and the working model of the old Saxon mill that fascinated the children as there is still a modern working mill in the village.

Sally and Tom showed their audio-visual tour of the village which included several examples of the local farm buildings some of which are huge industrial style silos etc. However, they found that when they started their drawings very few of the children wanted to draw these buildings as they were far more interested in the wildlife. The children's drawings reflect the open panoramas of the area and they contain noticeably less creatures and objects in the skies giving a very distinctive and open outlook to their finished drawings. The level of enthusiasm for this project from the school is shown in the article included in their website as part of their celebration week activities.

LEAFIELD SCHOOL

With Leafield School we identified that it is the influence of the woodland that remains in the nearby Wychwood Forest in Cornbury Estate that is a significant feature of the landscape. I talked to the children about the local wildlife and the woodland species and habitats in particular. Amanda showed them maps and photographs that showed how there has been a great reduction in woodland coverage and the accompanying changes in local industries. Several of the children come from families who have lived in the village for many generations and were able to talk to Amanda about their grandparents and even parents working in some of the traditional industries such as glove making. Some of the children's parents still work on the land and there was a significantly greater understanding and knowledge of local wildlife and landscape features than in the other schools.

To start the art work we took the children into the Leafield Community Wood and they delighted in showing us their dens and trees that they had planted giving a real sense of belonging in 'their' wood. They made some excellent sketches which they transferred into their drawings. Their drawings also showed distinctive characteristics of the village featuring the church which is a landmark feature for miles around. One boy drew Didcot power station as he can see it from his bedroom window so it is a strong feature of his view of life in Leafield. The generally wooded feel of the village is reflected in their drawings with beautifully observed trees and woodland animals and birds.

THE COMPLETED TAPESTRY

The completed drawings from all schools were then digitally photographed and selections made to create the tapestry. Unfortunately, it was not possible to use all of the drawings due to the number created and the need to create a visually coherent panorama for the tapestry. Sally and Tom made some small adjustments to ensure the flow and continuity of the work but always used the art work of the children. The selected drawings were then printed on to a vinyl material and hung with a newly designed hanging system devised by Sally with Pierre Macke from ampm Technical Services.

The tapestry was unveiled at the Forest Fair at Capp's Lodge on Sunday 2nd September and received great approval from everyone. People were amazed at the detail and energy in the drawings and entertained by the humour of the individual details. Great favourites are the owls in the trees and the bodies under the tombstones in the churchyards. Similarly, the intricacy of the designs and the painstaking detail, for example in the bark of some of the trees and the pebbles on paths, amazed us all.

The tapestry was taken to Stonesfield School on Friday 28th September for a school open day. It was a great pleasure to see the delight of the children and their parents and to be able to talk to the parents about the impact that the work had on their children. All parents said that their children had come home and talked about what they had done and what they had learnt about their village and the surrounding area. Each school is going to purchase a smaller specially printed copy of the tapestry for permanent display in their school.

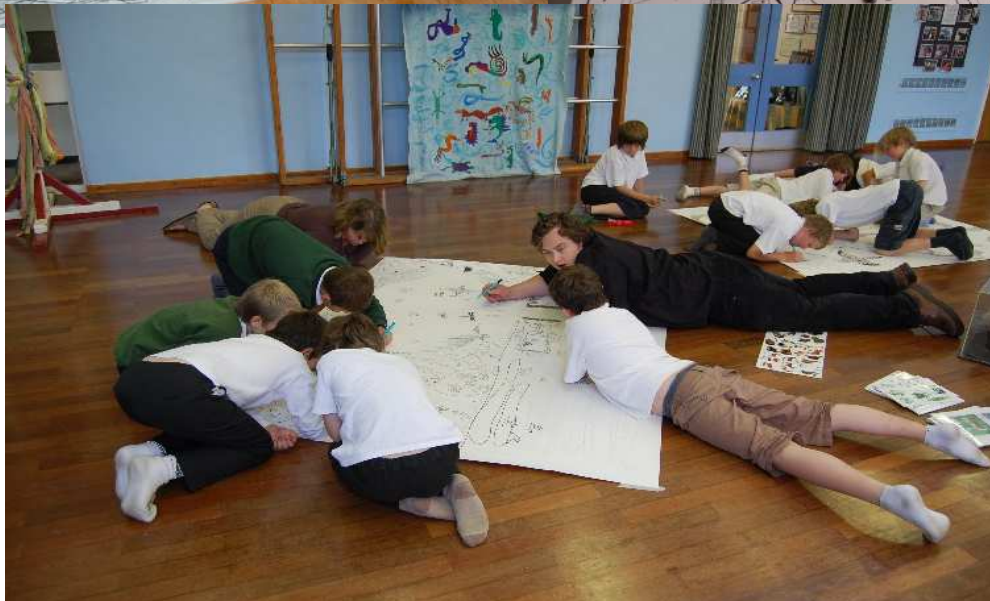
The enthusiasm of the teachers for this project was unanimous and we are very grateful to them for their flexibility and support. They all welcomed the opportunity to work on an intensive piece of work where the children had to sustain their interest and commitment over an extended period of time. They also commented on the challenge that working at this large scale gave to the children's creativity giving them some difficult technical challenges to make their piece work in terms of scale and perspective. It was also a challenge to their social skills to work together on the planning, design and completion of their group's drawings. As can be seen in the photographs of the children at work they were totally absorbed in the subject matter and technical challenges of creating their drawings.

The tapestry is now complete and available for display at suitable venues either in smaller sections or preferably in its entirety. Contacts are being made with gallery owners, county and district council officers and schools in the first instance. For more photographs and information about the Wychwood Tapestry you can also look on the Wychwood Project website at www.wychwoodproject.org. If you would like to book the tapestry for a local event or you can suggest a venue that would be interested in displaying the tapestry please contact me on 01993 814131 or email jane.bowley@oxfordshire.gov.uk.

JANE BOWLEY
PROJECT OFFICER
WYCHWOOD PROJECT PARISH CONSERVATION CHALLENGE
10TH OCTOBER 2007

WYCHWOOD PROJECT

THE WYCHWOOD TAPESTRY 2007



THE WYCHWOOD TAPESTRY 2007 TEAM



Jane Bowley, Wychwood Project

Tel: 01993 814131 email: jane.bowley@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Coordinate work with named person in school and project team
Provide information about the Wychwood Project and local conservation activities, aerial photographs and maps of wildlife sites and habitats
To look out for and develop extension activities in school or the local community.

Publicity

Amanda Hopwood, Landscape Historian

Tel: 01993 868728 email: amanda.hopwood@ukonline.co.uk

Work with teachers to establish the main theme and to collect suitable resources and information to support the chosen theme e.g. maps, books, historical records and artefacts

Preparation of resources for use in school and liaison with a named person over the detail of materials to be provided; what is already available in school or what has been covered by the school in recent times.

Sally Howkins and Tom Ralphs Laman, Artists

Tel: 01993 831550 email: sally@foxholes.fsworld.co.uk

Create audio-visual work that will be an initial stimulus for the children to respond to. Collect materials from locality, books, leaflets etc as stimuli
Work in school to create art work-ideally over two consecutive days, with a maximum of 60 children from key stage 2 (this may be flexible depending on the size of the school)

Provide all resources and materials required

Collate the art work from all schools, photograph and create the Wychwood Tapestry 2007.

APPENDIX 4

REPLANTING THE HEDGE AT ENSTONE PLAYING FIELDS MARCH 2007



A hedge had been planted to provide a screen between the playing field and Lidstone Road but the plants had not had a chance to get well established due to road works and over shadowing by trees. With the help of the Parish Conservation Challenge it was possible to have another go at planting the site with new plants.

Some old trees were removed from the site and the planting line was rotavated to give the new hedging plants a better chance to get established. Then local residents planted three hundred hedging plants of mixed native species, including field maple, holly, hazel and spindle.



The plants were protected with rabbit guards and will hopefully grow into a sturdy hedge.

APPENDIX 5

WITNEY HOBBITS PLANT A NEW WOOD WITH THE WYCHWOOD PROJECT

Oxfordshire Playbus workers Tym Soper and Ruth Hulme took six Hobbits from their Witney group to work with the Wychwood Project, to plant 50 native species trees at Dean Grove on Tuesday 21st March 2006. The Hobbits were very enthusiastic about the opportunity to create a new wood which was granted with the kind permission of local farmer Simon Strong. Like all Hobbits they showed great energy and enthusiasm for digging holes and a concern for the future of their environment.



The Oxfordshire Playbus offers opportunities for children, young people and adults to have fun through play activities. At the beginning some of the Hobbits were not sure if planting trees was going to be as much fun as they usually have on their play sessions, but once they got going they agreed that they had all had a great time. They looked back at their efforts with great satisfaction and one Hobbit proudly said, 'We can bring our children here one day'. They all agreed that they would like to plant some more trees next year.



The Wychwood Project manager Nick Mottram and Parish Conservation Challenge Project officer Jane Bowley helped the Hobbits to dig holes and plant the trees together with members of the Friends of Wychwood Ian Anderson and Charles Keighley

APPENDIX 6

PLANTING BLACK POPLARS AT ASTHALL MANOR

Volunteers from the Friends of Wychwood, the Cotswold Wardens and Asthall village had a very wet and muddy time planting native species black poplars beside the Windrush River at Asthall Manor. There were three existing old trees, thought to be over 150 years old, on the edge of the river and we planted another 12 cuttings, two by the river and ten in the Manor land where it is still very wet but there is not the need for cattle proof fencing. Rosie Taylor, owner of the Manor, shared her expertise with the hammer to help construct the cattle proof fencing and welcomed everyone's effort to conserve one of Britain's most endangered species of tree.

A thousand years ago the native black poplar *populus nigra subs.betulifolia* was common across the floodplains of lowland Britain and it's splendour was captured in many classic paintings of the English countryside such as John Constable's 'The Hay Wain'. But now it is Britain's rarest timber tree. The decline has been due to several factors with the loss of habitat due to changing farming practices and housing development in floodplains making the most significant impacts. In 1993 environmental scientists predicted that the species would be extinct within twenty years but several regional groups are working to preserve and promote knowledge about black poplar trees in their area. Black poplars hybridise very readily so it is a skilful task to identify true examples of the native species and cuttings from proven native stock are in great demand. The cuttings planted by the Wychwood Project have been provided through the Buckinghamshire Countryside Service which is in the forefront of protecting this most endangered species.

The properties of the timber created a great demand for building and domestic purposes. It is light and strong so used for a range of products from clogs to arrows and scaffolding. It is also fire and shock resistant so used for flooring, especially fireplace surrounds and wagon construction. Material from pollards was used in basket making and for stakes, rails, scaffold poles and rafters. Smaller material was used for faggots for burning in ovens. As the need for these products declined so the cultivation and propagation of the trees has declined as well.

Further cuttings were planted at Crawley, Eynsham and Over Norton and more trees have been identified along the Windrush which will enable some more cuttings to be taken and planted at other sites along the river.

Planting black poplars at Asthall Manor 22nd February 2007



Working with the Cotswold Wardens and people from Asthall.

Rosie Taylor in action with the hammer to create a stock proof cage.



Old and new black poplars beside the River Windrush.

Appendix 7



This calendar is the result of a joint project between Bridewell Organic Therapeutic Garden and the Wychwood Project Parish Conservation Challenge. The Parish Conservation Challenge works to find ways to engage people in conservation and environmental activities. Bridewell supports people who are finding it difficult to cope with life and helps them to find new ways to develop their confidence and enjoyment of life. Jane Bowley (Wychwood Project Officer) and Val Lee (Bridewell client) found a common purpose and shared enjoyment in the delights of the natural world based on Val's beautiful and original photographs. Val has an uncanny eye for catching the unusual pictures in nature that the rest of us might overlook. We hope that you share our enjoyment as this calendar accompanies you through 2008.

All profits from the sale of the calendar will go to the Bridewell Organic Therapeutic Garden.

With thanks to Bridewell Organic Therapeutic Garden staff and clients for their continuing support and encouragement and to the Wychwood Project for seeing the calendar through to production.

Val Lee, photographer
Jane Bowley, Wychwood Parish Conservation Challenge Project Officer



APPENDIX 8

VOLUNTEERING WITH THE PARISH CONSERVATION CHALLENGE

When Jane Bowley visited Bridewell Organic Gardens and offered to support anyone who wanted to get involved with wildlife and its conservation I saw an opportunity to get involved with rabbits! After some thought we went on a hare surveying trip at Chasewood Farm. This was the first time I had attempted wildlife recording and although we did not see any hares, I had an informative and enjoyable time. Shortly after this Jane asked if I would like to volunteer at the Wychwood Project Office. On my first day with some trepidation I helped put up a children's art display in Woodstock Museum as part of the Big Draw. Since then I have been involved in pursuits which range from photocopying to developing a brown hare and rabbit leaflet and survey form. I have also helped out in the Wychwood Tapestry Tent at the Wychwood Forest Fair and learnt how to access and add text to maps on the computer. The culmination of my desire to do something with rabbits was a Wild Hare Day on Chasewood Farm which was attended by families from the area and during which we saw 41 hares.

Before coming to the Wychwood Project I had little office experience and had not accessed mainstream activities for a few years. Being treated as part of the Wychwood Project team has done wonders for my self confidence and given me new skills which I hope to utilise in the future, perhaps as part of a return to work. The opportunity given to me by Jane has helped me turn my life around. I hope that the ethos of the Parish Conservation Challenge which helped me will be permanently absorbed into the Wychwood Project so that others will benefit in the future.

Liz Brandom
21.9.07

APPENDIX 9

Wild Hare Day in Wychwood

Jane Bowley, Parish Conservation Challenge Officer, came to Bridewell Organic Gardens last year and said that if anyone wanted to do anything with wildlife or conservation in the Wychwood area she would help. I have a house rabbit so asked if I could do anything with rabbits. The first thing we did, after some thought and a discussion over tea in Woodstock, was to visit Chasewood Farm near Crawley. One afternoon we surveyed for hares and saw....nothing, (apart from a few rabbit droppings).



Hares are a Biodiversity Action Plan priority species, as their numbers may be declining and they are also an indicator of biodiversity. This, in addition to the fact that Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre, TVERC, have few records of hare and rabbit sightings, led Jane to decide to have a Wild Hare Day on Chasewood farm where hares had been seen by the landowner, Frank Taylor, and eventually us. For this we produced a leaflet entitled 'Brown Hares and Rabbits in Wychwood' and a survey form which we hope people will fill in and return when they see hares and rabbits in the future.

Philippa Burrell, of TVERC, produced maps of the fields in Chasewood Farm with route directions on them, on which people could mark the hares they saw. After a leaflet drop of 150 in the villages around Crawley and putting up posters in village shops, libraries and notice boards, (pewh!), we were ready to go.

We rendezvoused at 7.15am on 20th May on Chasewood Farm to erect an argumentative marquee in preparation for the arrival of the hare surveyors. At 8.00am 20 adults and 15 children were assembled for the briefing – greeted by the sight of 3 hares sitting or moving across the runway about 100 metres away. This guaranteed that everyone had a sighting of a hare and started the day off well. During the briefing we also saw a roe deer which watched us from nearby for a few minutes before retreating.



During the survey 42 hares were seen in all – some chasing and boxing, others lying up with ears, faces or bodies sticking out from behind tussocks and hummocks. The biggest count was 17 on one route. Other wildlife spotted included rabbits, birds such as buzzards and lapwings, and butterflies and the very striking cinnabar moths. The day was pleasant and sunny – ideal for a walk.

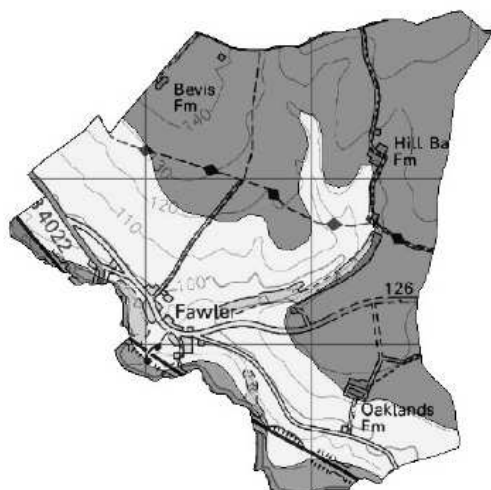


After the survey we had drinks and cakes/biscuits and discussed our findings. Then we dismantled the dreaded marquee and went home. My niece Clare, aged 9 years, said it was the best weekend she'd had in ages. Philippa Burrell, County Mammal Recorder, said 'It was a fantastic day. We saw far more hares than I thought we would and the density of hares was very similar to Otmoor Nature Reserve, where 50 hares were seen on a similar survey. I was surprised!'

The Wychwood Project took an acorn of an idea in my head and made it a woodland of oaks in reality – working with me with skill and good humour and so giving me confidence on the way. I hope that others will benefit in the same way, working with and building on their ideas to achieve a worthwhile result for both themselves, the Wychwood Project and the environment.

Liz Brandom Wychwood Project Volunteer

APPENDIX 10



On Tuesday 24th of January Jane Bowley (Project Officer for the Parish Conservation Challenge) and Nick Mottram (Wychwood Project Manager) kindly came to Fawler to talk about 'The Parish Conservation Challenge' - a new initiative within The Wychwood Project that focuses on smaller communities with the aim of getting local people involved in the conservation of the wildlife and landscape within their Parish.

Funding is available from The Wychwood Project and the Friends of Wychwood. The Parish of Fawler can be awarded up to £500 towards the cost of any conservation work we undertake. This funding, in turn, could be used to match funds awarded by other grant awarding bodies should we decide to make further applications. The funds could also be used to pay for a survey, materials and equipment, or training depending upon the action plan. The Wychwood Project will be able to give us advice and support on environmental matters, and contribute expertise in fundraising for specific projects.

The initial phases will involve:

- gathering information about landscape features, history and wildlife
- then deciding what we would like to do
- carrying out the practical work

Anyone can get involved in the project. You could help in many ways. You may:

- have practical skills such as dry stone walling or hedgelaying
- be a keen birdwatcher

The Fawler Conservation Challenge

- want to learn some new skills
- have a knowledge of wild flowers or butterflies
- want to learn more about Fawler and its wildlife and landscape
- have experience of fundraising
- know about Fawler's archaeology
- be able to use a chainsaw
- want to lead guided walks around the Parish
- be able to share your local knowledge with others for future generations
- want to create a Parish plan

Everyone in the Parish has the opportunity to take part and help decide what they would like to do to look after Fawler's landscape and wildlife. Here are some of the ideas that people came up with at the first meeting:

- put up some barn owl nest boxes
- renovate the village pump
- build some nesting boxes for birds and mammals
- build an otter holt
- plant a community woodland
- create a limestone grassland
- find out about the history of the Charlbury lock-up
- produce a historical record of Roman Fawler
- ever wondered what kind of fish are in the river? we could find out by doing a fish survey
- improve the footpath past the railway bridge by building a boardwalk
- do some hedgelaying to improve wildlife habitat and biodiversity
- carry out a wildflower survey
- regenerate woodland by coppicing hazel
- do some fundraising at the Fawler Fun Day
- have a village walk with an archaeologist
- compile a natural history of Fawler by collecting records and carrying out surveys
- remove the fallen trees from the river to prevent bank erosion, and loss of footpath
- get the council to install kerbs to prevent erosion of the grass verges through the village

Feel free to add your ideas to the slip on this form. (I'll call 'round and collect them soon).



I'll be at the next Parish meeting in April where we will be able to discuss people's ideas and suggestions and move things forward,

In the mean time if you want to know more about the project feel free to get in touch,

All the best



For more information on The Parish Conservation Challenge you can also contact:

Jane Bowley
Project Officer
The Wychwood Project
Countryside Service
Fletcher's House
Park Street
Woodstock
Oxon
OX20 1SN



tel: 01993 814131
email: jane.bowley@oxfordshire.gov.uk
www.wychwoodproject.org



Name:
Address:

Tel:
Email:

Yes, I'd love to take part. I have some interest / experience in...

Good ideas! how about...



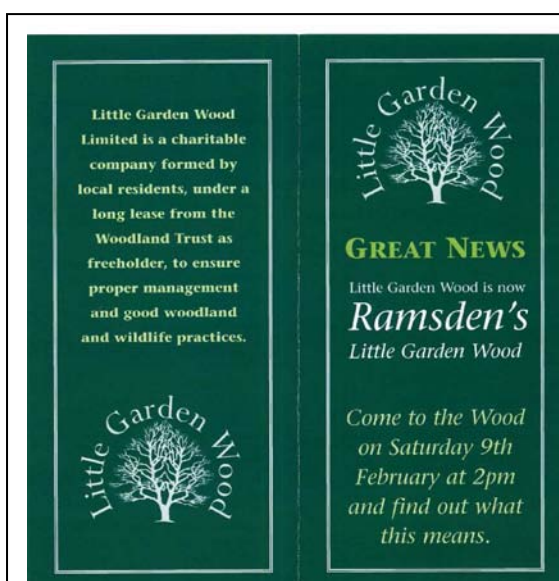
Want to add to Fawlers biological record? I'm starting a list of flora and fauna in the Parish. If you have any notes or sightings on our wildlife I'd be glad to hear from you.

APPENDIX 11

LITTLE GARDEN WOOD, RAMSDEN

Little Garden Wood was planted in the late 1960s by Lady Reilly on land next door to her home at Hampden Cottage; it was intended as an amenity wood for the village. In 1975 Lady Reilly gave the wood to the Woodland Trust to manage on behalf of the village. This is a very small area of woodland in the context of the overall operations of the Trust and they carried out a minimum of maintenance work. The wood was used by village residents for dog walking and an occasional picnic but otherwise was starting to have a rather neglected appearance, some trees were overgrown or dying and clearings were becoming overgrown with blackthorn, brambles and nettles.

A group of residents contacted the Parish Conservation Challenge (PCC) to examine the possibility of taking a lease on the wood so that they could undertake regular management of the wood to restore its amenity value for the community. Jane Bowley, the PCC project officer met with the group and arranged for further support from Nick Mottram of the Wychwood Project and David Rees of the Oxfordshire Woodland Project. There were many details to be considered apart from the forestry aspect of managing the wood. The expectations of the village community had to be taken into account together with questions about what access and usage would be desirable; how was the maintenance work to be continued, how much would the local community have to contribute in terms of time or money to keep the wood well managed etc. The group hope to be able to restore the wood as a model of good conservation practice as well as a site for village events and activities.



Over several months these issues were discussed at a variety of meetings. Nick and David were able to help the group prepare detailed management proposals and to work with them and the Woodland Trust to complete the terms of a leasing agreement. Little Garden Wood Limited is now a company limited by guarantee with a 99 year lease on the wood and a committee of people organising the maintenance of the wood. Essential felling work has been carried out and further work will be undertaken according to the management plan. The Wychwood Project and the Oxfordshire

Woodland Project will support the management group with advice and training on maintenance work that is suitable for volunteers in the future. It will be a good venue for training opportunities in woodland management for volunteers from the village and from the Friends of Wychwood.

APPENDIX 12

DRY STONE WALLING AT FULBROOK 2007

One of the suggestions made to the Parish Conservation Challenge for conservation activity in the parish was to repair some of the dry stone walls. As one of the project's primary aims was to work with volunteers it was necessary to find a wall that was safe to work on. Jill North Lewis was able to provide the perfect wall. It satisfied the criteria for being a feature in the village as it is visible to passing people both from the pavement and the public footpath. It also needed to be safe for volunteers to work on. Two training sessions, each run over two days, were set up with James Bent, an experienced dry stone walling trainer, and twenty people attended one or other of the sessions. The Cotswold Wardens spent a day helping to clear the site ready for the first training session and some of them attended a training session as well to improve their walling skills.



Jill wondering how this will ever look like a wall again.

James was a very popular trainer and even people with some experience of walling said that they had learnt a lot from him.



First course completed



Through stones and galf stones in place

The wall gradually took shape during the two training sessions and was completed over some additional days by a small group of keen wallers who are hoping to become the core of a group who will undertake regular dry stone walling for the Wychwood Project in years to come. Other people were satisfied that they had tried their hand at learning a new skill and some felt confident enough to go home to tackle walls in their own garden.



Jill was delighted with the repairs to the wall and said that if the PCC had not been able to help she would have had no option but to replace it with a fence as walling is now so expensive. From the PCC point of view we were very grateful to Jill for giving us such an excellent training venue.

APPENDIX 13

COMMENTS ON THE PROJECT FROM USERS OR COMMUNITY GROUPS

Ashley Rogers, Chairman Enstone Playing Field Committee

The PCC replanted a roadside hedge between the road and the Enstone playing field with local residents

Jane,

I would on behalf of my committee like to thank you for your help in completing our project.

The knowledge, expertise and support from The Wychwood Project enabled us to complete Enstone Playing Field hedge on time and to budget.

Not only to assist us in the planning and procurement ensuring that we obtained good quality hedging plants at a great price but with Jane, Nick and Tony assisting our volunteer work party, on the day we had a great time completing the hedge.

Once again thanks and sorry for the delay in putting together a few words to reflect a great deal of effort.

Regards,

Jill North-Lewis, Fulbrook. The PCC rebuilt an old farm wall through two dry stone walling courses and a group of trainees who returned to complete the job and tidy up afterwards.

'You have done a fantastic job. I am so grateful to the Wychwood Project I would not have been able to repair the wall myself. I would have had to put up a fence. Lots of people in the village have been very interested in what you have been doing and really admire the work.'

Victoria Fricker, churchwarden at Idbury church.

The PCC arranged a talk by Philippa Burrell the director of the Thames Valley Recording Centre and Oxfordshire mammal recorder.

Dear Jane

A big thank you to you and Philippa for giving us such an informative evening on Wednesday. I think everyone was fascinated by the talk and had a really enjoyable evening even though the bats proved to be rather elusive!

We look forward to seeing you at the fete and also to getting your advice on whether or not we need to apply for a licence. It seems to me that it might be quite sensible, but we await Philippa's considered opinion.

Best wishes,

Victoria

Jenifer Wates, Finstock. The PCC arranged for children from Finstock School to plant eighty native species trees on Jenifer's land in conjunction with the Wychwood Tapestry 2007 art project.

'It was very exciting to benefit from the Parish Conservation Challenge and to have a large gaggle of children from Finstock School coming to plant trees at the bottom of my field. I had been thinking about the idea of strengthening the tree cover there, linking a small copse with another little patch of woodland on the other side of Dark Lane, but without Jane Bowley's work it would not have come about. We all had great fun on the day, and it was obviously a project approved by heaven, as the weather was beautifully sunny as we worked, and was then followed by a number of wet days, efficiently watering in the young saplings. So far they are thriving.'

Best wishes
Jenifer

Catherine Dawson, Chipping Norton Beavers. The PCC organized a bug hunting and tree identification walk across Dean Common

Thanks Jane,
I was amazed by what the children managed to find in their bug jars, I had never seen a spider with an egg before. We will keep practising our trees as well so we don't forget our oaks from our ash. Thanks for showing us such a lovely place to visit I had no idea that it was there. Catherine

Vivienne Claxton, head teacher at Hailey School said about their involvement in the Big Draw
, "The children concentrated for a long time because they were so involved with the artwork and adults, such as myself, couldn't help getting drawn in and making our own contributions. Thank you very much for giving us this opportunity. Sally and Tom were great to work with".

Stuart Fox, Ascott under Wychwood Parish Council. The PCC gave advice and helped to fund the rebuilding of the wall around the village pound.

" Ascott residents are delighted with the new traditional Cotswold dry stone wall that has replaced the crumbling ruin that formerly surrounded the animal pound in the centre of the village. This historic site will now be developed to include a "quite area" adjacent to the church for the enjoyment of the village and will eventually include a display of the Ascott Neolithic Barrow Stones. These stones are being donated by the Oxford Museum Service. Without the help and guidance of the Parish Conservation Challenge and some initial funding from them, this project would not have been started."

APPENDIX 14

PARISH CONSERVATION CHALLENGE PUBLICITY

Some examples of newspaper and village newsletter reports and advertisements for future events.

Wychwood Parish Conservation Challenge - Update *by Jane Bowley*

The Parish Conservation Challenge is a new initiative in the Wychwood Project area which started on 1st October 2005. The aim of the project is to work with the smaller communities in the area, at a parish level, to identify their conservation priorities and to help them put their ideas into action.

I have been busy meeting people at parish council meetings, parish meetings, in kitchens and out on walks and talks. In some parishes I have worked with the parish council to put on specific meetings to advertise the project. These have been particularly well attended and generated a lot of interest in all aspects of life in the parish from the history of families, farms and buildings to whether frogs have been seen in the village recently. There have been many suggestions for conservation activities put forward and it has been very encouraging to meet people with such a wide range of interests and enthusiasm for conservation projects.

There is a small fund of money available for each parish and the challenge now is to help the parishes decide on the conservation activities that they wish to take forward. Some of the suggestions made cover a wide variety of activities to suit different people's interests and activity levels from rebuilding drystone walls, to arranging walks and talks, to planting trees.

Ramsden is the first parish to have put a plan into action and a small group of residents met one Sunday morning to clear overgrown brambles away from the front of a pond. This has enabled people to see the pond again after several years and they are looking forward to watching for signs of wildlife activity around the pond. An area of brambles was left beside the pond to continue to provide shelter and food for small animals and birds. The group were surprised to see how much they were able to achieve in a short space of time and are busy planning their next conservation activity.

The Wychwood Parish Conservation Challenge initiative is being funded from a range of sources including local charities, the Friends of Wychwood and the West Oxfordshire Network's European Community Leader+ 2000-2006 programme.




If you have a potential conservation project in mind for your local area or would like any more information about the Parish Conservation Challenge please call me at the project office on 01993 814131 or email me at jane.bowley@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Please write to:
Rural Development
West Oxfordshire District Council
Woodgreen
Witney OX28 1NB

am
the Manager
Belanger
1483
ellanger@westoxon.gov.uk

Assistant
ony
1484
ony@westoxon.gov.uk

Bridewell Organic Gardens
Are open to the general public on the 25 June 1pm - 6pm.

West Oxfordshire Network
News spring 2006

The Witney Gazette June 2007

TE, Wednesday, June 27, 2007 - 15

Gazette newsround

Historic wall repaired

VOLUNTEERS teamed up with members of the Wychwood Project to carry out repairs to the dry stone wall at Langel Common, Witney.

Members of the Witney Woodland Volunteers group were led by Trevor Townsend, an experienced dry stone-waller.

The Wychwood Project will be running dry stone-walling training courses on Friday and Saturday at Fulbrook. For more information, call 01993 814131.

Minister Lovell, is raising mums with a summer bingo session on Thursday. The action starts at 7pm.

witneygazette.net
news updated daily

By DAVID HORNE

ACTUALLY all employers have ready brought in the smokefree workplace, but from Sunday, it usually becomes law.

And the people who have to enforce new legislation locally, West Oxfordshire District Council has been busy and about checking that businesses know exactly what they have to do.

It is mainly a matter of putting up a correct signs and ensuring that signs are set aside outside buildings for smokers.

A 'health bus', kitted out with information, has been touring small and larger firms throughout the district, including one of the bigger employers, Stewart Milne Timber Systems, west Witney, which has more than 170 staff.

It is setting up a new smoking shelter away from its building, and putting no-smoking stickers in the cabs of its forklift trucks.

Rachel Whitehall, the firm's assistant health and safety manager, said: "We already have a shelter, but the new legislation states that shelters must be at least 50 per cent open, so our current one won't comply."

Other businesses who need to put up shelters are advised to contact the council's planning services to check if planning permission is required.

David Harvey, the council's cabinet member for the environment, said this week: "Our environmental health officers are working hard to communicate with businesses, and can give important information."

Those wanting advice or help should contact the council's community services on 01993 861060, or email community.services@westoxon.gov.uk

Learning 'old tricks'

VOLUNTEERS learned the old rural craft of drystone walling when they set to work on Witney's Langel Common, writes David Horne.

The Witney Woodland Volunteers group was carrying out much-needed repairs to an old wall under a scheme taken up by the Wychwood Project.

Volunteer Derek Gorman said: "Not only did we have to battle with pieces of stone of all shapes and sizes to get them into some sort of order, but we also encountered interest from a colony of bees and two resident longhorn cows."

The work was carried out after West Oxfordshire District Council sought help to repair the wall.

Despite initial difficulties, the volunteers received expert advice from Trevor Townsend, an experienced drystone-waller.



The Ascott Grapevine Summer 2006

Have you noticed the loss of Lapwing, Redshank and Snipe along the Evenlode?

Would you like to help stop the decline?

Drew McVey, RSPB Lapwing Landscapes project officer and Jane Bowley, Parish Conservation Challenge (PCC) project officer with the Wychwood Project will be talking at the Tiddy Hall on Tuesday 19th September at 7.30 pm about the new RSPB Lapwing Landscapes project. The RSPB Lapwing Landscapes project is being funded through

the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty's (AONB) and aims to work alongside farmers and communities to increase the numbers of stunning wading birds such as lapwings, redshanks and snipe. The project will focus on restoring suitable habitats around the rivers Windrush and Evenlode for these birds which are all on local and national priority conservation lists.

Joining forces with the Wychwood Project PCC, which is funded by LEADER+, Friends of Wychwood and other local charities, will provide volunteers for the Lapwing Project and additional opportunities for the participants in the PCC to make a difference through conservation work in their own parishes. Free farm conservation advice, school and community awareness talks and farm visits, farmer workshops and the restoration of water meadows will be carried out over the next three years.

If you would like more information about how you can join in with the project in your parish please contact Drew McVey, RSPB Lapwing Landscapes, on 01865 352035 or drew.mcvey@rspb.org.uk or Jane Bowley, Wychwood Project Officer, on 01993 814131 or janebowley@nichkings.co.uk

Jane Bowley

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Cotswold View, Ascott Road, Leaffield

For Free Estimate or Further Details

The Ascott Grapevine - Page 8

Don't forget about the Ascott website:

Summer 2006

VILLAGE OF

When some 30 people turned up for a meeting on environmental issues in a village one Saturday the organisers knew they were in business. The gathering in Eastons was just one of several held to launch the Wychwood Project's new Parish Conservation Challenge.

Similar responses were achieved in Finstock, Ascott-under-Wychwood and Farnham near Charlbury.

Jane Bowley, project officer for the parish challenge, said: "We found people wanting to tackle all sorts of tasks in their villages, such as restoring a wetland, planting out wild-flower meadows, and even wanting to know what to do about bats in the tower of a church. Everyone was aware bats are a protected species but there was concern about the bats' droppings."

The parish conservation challenge began last year and initially runs until 2007, involving the smaller parishes in the area. It was funded independently from the Wychwood Project, of which it forms a part. The European Union contributed funds.

It is an illustration of the grassroots ethos of the Wychwood Project, which was set up in 1977 by the Friends of Wychwood. Two members of the Friends, Alan Spicer and Charles Reigley, felt more could be achieved if there was an organisation to give a more professional approach to what was needed to enhance the environment.

Funding for the Wychwood Project came from West Oxfordshire District Council and Oxfordshire County Council, the Countryside Agency and the Keme Fairbairns Foundation.

The project's remit has been to look at the whole area covered by the ancient royal hunting forest of Wychwood, which dates from Norman times, rather than just the Wychwood Forest outlined on Ordnance Survey maps and is largely owned by the Cornbury Park estate.

Nick Mottram, project manager, said: "The Wychwood Forest everyone thinks of these days is about two square miles, while the original forest - and the area we cover - is some 120 to 130 square miles."

The original forest, which included heath, downland, meadows as well as woodland, stretched in the north from the Sarn brook, near Sarsden, to Burford in the south-west, including the River Windrush.

The forest skirted Witney and went as far south as the confluence of the Windrush and the Thames around Northcote. The western side was bounded by the River Glyme, taking in Woodstock Park (Blenheim), to the River Thames around Eynsham.

Nick said: "We work closely with the landowners as there are quite a number of large privately-owned park estates in the area, in addition to Cornbury and Blenheim. For example, Heythrop, Ditchley, Brayers and Sarsden. We also work with the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens Service."

While much of the work does take in the perennial dry-stone walling and cropping, the project has become active in the delving into the history of the forest. Enthusiasts such as Beryl Schuster have studied maps to identify the ancient names of woods and copes, many of which are still used today.

While much of the area is in the hands of parkland owners, there is a new breed of landowner.

There are still many farmers, whose families have been farming for centuries, but more recently, there has been an influx of people from, say the London area, buying up

COUNTRY Matters

Address: Country Matters, The Oxford Times, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0EL
e-mail: countrymatters@oxpa.com



Education... members of the Wychwood Pond Group study the diversity of creatures in a pond at Minster Lovell

small farms with land - hobby farmers is a term sometimes used," said Nick.

"While they can do a lot of research to find out how to manage their land, we can advise them on how to make the link-ups between different aspects of agriculture."

Project staff are often consulted on house building in the area, though most new homes have been part of an infill policy, with the large-scale housing going to Witney as part of the county council's plan to take pressure off Oxford.

Since its foundation, the project has become involved in a wide range of activities, from working with schools, to advising on managing medieval fish ponds at Eynsham Abbey, from joint-community schemes to plant copes and woodlands, to giving landscape advice at sites in Ramsden, Wootton, Fildes, Shipton-under-Wychwood, Leafeld and Chadlington.

Members of the public can show an interest in the work of the project at two events. First, there is a sponsored walk by the Friends of Wychwood in partnership with

the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust, at Blenheim Park on Sunday, May 14. Contact Kim Bettridge on 01993 878615 for further information.

Secondly, the popular annual Wychwood Forest Fair takes place on Sunday, August 27, between Leaffield and Ascott-under-Wychwood. Last year, the fair attracted more than 3,000 people and is organised by the Friends of Wychwood. It covers a wide variety of conservation and countryside interests, but also offers entertainment for all the family.

To become a Friend of Wychwood, contact Stuart Fox-Tresser, The Friends of Wychwood, 27 London Lane, Ascott-under-Wychwood, OX7 5AN or e-mail stuart@wychwood.msk.uk To join practical projects contact Nick Mottram, Wychwood Project manager, Fletcher's House, Park Street, Woodstock, OX20 1SN, or call 01993 851041.

The project's website is www.wychwoodproject.org

The Oxford Times Summer 2006