



Sustainable Blewbury

www.sustainable-blewbury.org.uk

Annual Report of Trustees, year ending 31 December 2023

Sustainable Blewbury was registered as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (number 1203308) in May 2023. The community group had existed for over 30 years before becoming a charity and produced annual reports and accounts. This report details our activities from 30 May 2023 until the end of our financial year, 31 December 2023, the months that we have been a charity.

Charity objectives

Sustainable Blewbury (SB) objectives, to be carried out in Blewbury Village and the surrounding area, are:

- to advance the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment and the prudent use of natural resources for the benefit of the public through promotion, awareness raising and skill sharing to build community resilience to combat climate change and resource scarcity;
- to advance the education of the public in the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment.

Review of Activities and Achievements

Apple Juicing

This activity relates to our objective of making good use of natural resources.

In the recent past we've done all our apple juicing at the Manor in Berry Lane, Blewbury so we didn't have to keep moving the equipment around the village. We ran the 2023 apple juicing in the same way as the last few years but ended up with disappointing results.

We scheduled five public sessions, one in late August, two in September and two in October. In the past, typically the first and last sessions would be relatively quiet, and the middle three very busy and hard work, many thanks to our enthusiastic volunteers.

As usual we had about half a dozen of what we call private hires, which allows people with huge quantities of apples to take the kit for a full day or more and process as much as they want to. This year the regulars in the village did that as usual, in about half a dozen sessions. What was very unusual was the poor attendance at the public sessions. The first, second and fifth public sessions were pretty much deserted, but we do not know why. The third and fourth were better, but much quieter than in the past. Our prices are low to encourage not wasting food. We hope that there will be a better turn out in 2024.

Repair cafes.

We ran three repair cafes: on 25 June, 17 September and 19 November in the village hall. About 15 to 20 volunteers came to use their expertise in repairing bicycles, sharpening tools, mending clothes and household items including electrical goods. Some 30 to 40 people came to get things fixed for free, although we accepted donations towards the cost of hiring the hall and refreshments. By running these cafes, we are helping to reduce the amount of

waste and encouraging people to make better use of resources. We now have a reliable network of people to help and get advice and support from the local Community Action Group (CAG).

Leaf collection.

In conjunction with the Parish Council, we organised the raking up and collection of leaves from the footpaths in Blewbury in early December. This is done for safety reasons, but it also means that the leaves can be made into compost for residents' gardens. About 20 to 25 people came to help with the clear-up and several people took them to make compost.

Blewbury Nature Reserve

This activity relates to our objective of the conservation and protection of the environment and educating the local people about it.

The reserve was closed from May until end July so that the nesting birds were not disturbed. We then held volunteering mornings on five occasions during the months of this report to do a series of tasks:

- Scything and strimming the area just outside the site to make it suitable for sitting.
- Weeding the bark path and replenishing the bark
- Mulching the trees
- Weeding around the hedging plants to give them more space.
- Strimming the grass paths and creating an informal new path through the rough grassland area

A total of over 80 volunteer hours were spent by some 24 individuals.

We invited people to come to the site for educational purposes and ran two bird-watching visits in June. These were attended by 23 individuals, some coming more than once. Thanks to Martin Laytham for his excellent teaching. His son, Alec, did a plant survey of the site so that we can monitor changes in future. The records have been placed on the site's noticeboard for all to see.

We signed a ten-year lease agreement with Thames Water on 11 October 2023. We thank Thames Water for transforming the site into a Nature Reserve for the protection and enhancement of wildlife and for local education.

Woodland Work.

Sustainable Blewbury undertakes the planting and maintenance of new and existing woodlands, copses, hedgerows, and wildlife corridors, either belonging to Sustainable Blewbury, or in co-operation with other landowners. By its nature, it is a long-term project.

Quaker wood. Plans for the Quaker Woodland site continue to progress, and we are very confident that this project will soon be a welcome addition to the Blewbury landscape and amenities. There have been delays in the process and, realistically, we are now looking at planting in Autumn 2024 and will be using the spring and summer of next year to prepare the site. Several surveys of the field have been completed and, to make sure we are compliant with all guidelines, we plan to have a badger survey carried out (there are a number of setts along one boundary) so that we abide by sensible countryside guidelines regarding their disturbance. We shall be applying for grants to cover the costs of the wood and must ensure that we comply with all best advice.

Hans' Copse. This is situated close to the Chalk Pit, an area of approx. ½ acre, belonging to Beeswax Farms, but with a footpath close-by and well used by local residents. In 2019, land was cleared of elder and nettles and agricultural rubbish (corrugated iron, barbed wire, etc). Some 100 or so native hardwood trees and shrubs were planted, with deer-guards. In 2023, we continued our annual maintenance which included strimming nettles regularly and replacing tress that have been damaged by deer or vandals. A further 50 trees were planted in the winter of 2023/24. Sustainable Blewbury put in the voluntary labour of about 30 hours.

Churn Hedge. This is a stretch of about 1500 m hedgerow/wildlife corridor, planted on their land by Beeswax Farms, in 2018, and maintained by Sustainable Blewbury, with the long-term aim of producing a hardwood hedge that can be laid by SB in the traditional manner. The work involves seasonal weed-clearance (by hand) and infilling gaps where plants have perished. We spend about 50 hours' voluntary labour per year on this hedgerow.

Hedge-laying We have a team of volunteers who have developed skills in hedge-laying over the past decade or so. Unfortunately, there were no local hedges in need of laying in 2023 so nothing to report here!

Community Orchard.

This is situated on Tickers Folly, land belonging to Blewbury Parish Council. It comprises about 42 traditional fruit trees (apples, pears, plums, gages, nuts, quince, medlar) which were planted in 2016. It is managed on behalf of the Parish Council by Sustainable Blewbury, using skilled volunteer labour. Management is seasonal, and involves winter pruning, weeding and applying mulch around every tree, summer pruning of excess fruit, control of insect pests, repairing damage to tree-guards, stakes and labels. This takes about 30 hours per year.

Permaculture Project

This is situated on Woodway Road on land leased from the owner. It comprises a mixture of fruit trees and bushes which were planted about 10 years ago. During 2023, fruit was picked and preserved and sold at the local Post Office to fund the maintenance of the site. This was more difficult in 2023 due to the ill-health of the Trustee who leads this project and there are some tenacious weeds such as bindweed which will need to be tackled next year.

Stream Project

This had been set up a few years ago to raise awareness of the conservation value of the many chalk streams which flow through Blewbury. They arise through springs at the foot of the Berkshire Downs. There have been concerns about the quantity of silt and lack of wildlife in the pond, known as the Cleve, which was developed for cress growing in the past. There have been many discussions and reports written over the years about what could be done to improve it. In recent years, a team has liaised with riparian owners to try to increase the light levels around the pond, and to reduce the number of large trees to remove some of the leaf debris entering the water. The Trustee leading this project left the area in 2023 and we are seeking a new lead.

Talks

We organize occasional talks to inform us about matters relevant to our objectives, inviting speakers from the village or close-by. We held two talks between June and December to which about 25 to 30 people came.

Dr Alice Little, writer in residence at Wytham Woods, Oxford came in June to help us celebrate our new nature reserve and Quaker Wood, our planned community woodland. Alice is author of five collections of short stories and has published a new anthology of short fiction as part of her Wytham residency. She described how she approaches her fiction, talked about writing and nature, and facilitated a workshop during which participants began to develop their own creative writing skills.

Luke Waclawek, the founder and CEO of Oxfordshire Wildlife Rescue, who are based in Blewbury, came to tell us about its work. This award-winning charity rescues, cares and recuperates sick, injured and orphaned wild animals throughout Oxfordshire and Berkshire. They employ veterinary professionals to care for and rehabilitate its patients, aiming to release them back into the wild where possible.

Newsletters

In line with our objective to educate the public about conservation and improvement of the local environment, we provided information monthly into the local Blewbury Bulletin which is delivered to all households in Blewbury. Besides information inviting people to events, one of the Trustees wrote 'Nature Notes' each month explaining to people what nature to look out for around the village.

We also sent a newsletter in November to our supporters (over 200) which included several pages of information about what is happening locally and further afield, relevant to our aims.

Administrative information

The Trustees met four times during the period of this report, mainly to develop policies and procedures appropriate to our new charity status. The Trustees were:

John Ogden (Chair)
Moray Inglis (Treasurer)
Jane Kinniburgh (Secretary)
Camilla Burrow (until 26 September)
Professor Eric Eisenhandler
Dr Andrew Evason (from 11 December)
Glen Meadows
Anne Millman
Sean Morris

Financial review

The charity started with a funds transfer of £16,465 from the Sustainable Blewbury community group when it closed and was replaced with this new charity. Activities up to the end of December generated £553 from repair cafes, talks and apple juicing. Expenditure was £1,660 which included £1,071 for insurance, £300 for upkeep of the new Quaker wood site and £148 on space rental (halls) for the various income activities. This resulted in a closing balance of £15,538 in the bank account held by the Co-op Bank.

Sustainable Blewbury, charity number 1203308, financial statements
Part-year from 30 May 2023 (set-up of charity) to 31 December 2023

INCOME	This year: 2023 (£)	Last year: (£) not relevant. This is the first year of the charity.
Transfer from Sustainable Blewbury Community account (note 1)	16,465	
<i>Operating:</i>		
Repair café donations	166	
Talks (ticket sales)	96	
Apple juicing	167	
Other	124	
Grants	Nil	
Total operating:	553	
Total including transfer:	17,018	
EXPENDITURE		
Quaker site maintenance	300	
Nature reserve sign and land registry	64	
Repair café (hall hire)	90	
Talks (hall hire)	58	
Green spaces (tree tags)	54	
Insurance	1,071	
Other	23	
Total expenditure:	1,660	
OPERATING SURPLUS/ (DEFICIT):	(1,107)	
TOTAL OPERATING SURPLUS / (DEFICIT):	15,358	

Note 1. Sustainable Blewbury received the surplus cash balance from the community group of the same name in two tranches, one in September 2023 and the remaining balance in November 2023. This closed the Community Group account.

Cash funds held in current bank account:

Transfers from Sustainable Blewbury Community Account: **£16,465**

Balance at end Dec 2023 **£15,358**

There are no other assets or liabilities.

Approved by Sustainable Blewbury Trustees and signed on their behalf by John Ogden (Chairman) and Moray Inglis (Treasurer) on 4 June 2024

Statement by Trustees

This report shows that we have complied with our legal requirement to carry out our purposes for public benefit.