



Sustainable Blewbury

www.sustainable-blewbury.org.uk

Annual Report of Trustees and Financial Statement, year ending 31 December 2024

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 for the calendar year 2024.

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

Highlight of the Year: Quaker Wood. We are really pleased to report that we were gifted a 2.5-acre field, alongside the Millbrook, north of Blewbury Village Hall, in the summer of 2024. We were also given a large legacy and received a grant from our District Council, the Vale of White Horse, so that we could plant a wood in November and December 2024.

We are very excited about this project because it is a lasting asset for future generations. Planting trees also contributes to the part we can play in combating climate change, one of our key objectives.

Quaker Wood comprises 800 native trees and shrubs (one-year old plants) and a hedgerow along the western side of the site. It is named Quaker Wood because historically there was a Quaker burial ground on a small part of the site.

The primary school was involved with the planting with each child planting a tree and writing their name on the tree guard so that they will be able to watch it grow. Blewbury residents were also invited to help with the planting of about 150 trees. Twenty-six people came on one morning in December to do this when the field was muddy and wet but we achieved what we set out to do. The rest of the site and the hedgerow were planted by contractors.

We will need to do more work in 2025 to establish the wood and remove weeds from around the trees, develop paths, construct a better entrance and information boards. This is a truly remarkable asset for our charity and for everyone to enjoy.

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 2024 apple juicing in the same way and held six public sessions in late August, September and October. Twenty-eight people came. There were 46 pressings and 102 bottles of apple juice pasteurized. This means the juice remains unfermented and drinkable for at least a year, although most people will drink it before then! We also hired out our equipment to five private hirers and one school for a day.

Each session required four or five volunteers from Sustainable Blewbury to manage the equipment including the pasteurizers.

Repair cafes.

We ran five two-hour repair cafes, in February, April, June, September and November in the village hall. About 15 volunteers came each time to use their expertise to repair bicycles, sharpen tools, mend clothes and household items including electrical goods. This year, we had a new volunteer who came to help people with software problems on their phones or tablets. Some 99 people came to get things fixed for free, although we accepted donations towards the cost of hiring the hall and refreshments. We repaired 75 items and sharpened 58 tools or knives, reducing the amount of waste going to landfill by 348kg in 2024. We couldn't repair everything that was brought but had about an 84% success rate. We now have a reliable network of people to help and get advice and support from the local Community Action Group (CAG).

Litter collection.

As part of the Great British Spring Clean, we organised a litter -picking day in March. Some 13 volunteers came and we picked up 22 sacks of litter. This was mainly from ditches besides the main roads into the village. The village itself is kept free of litter by residents as they walk around. We collected fewer sacks in 2024 than 2023 (by about a half). We still collected all that there was which shows we are making progress with clearing a backlog and hopefully, that people are becoming more responsible.

Blewbury Nature Reserve

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

We held monthly volunteering mornings between January and April and then again from late July until December, to manage the site. This included:

- Scything, strimming and raking the area just outside the site to make it suitable for sitting.
- Replacing dead whips in the hedging that had been planted in the previous year
- Planting a new hedge of 400 whips along the SW boundary to the site
- Weeding the bark path and replenishing the bark
- Mulching the trees
- Weeding around the hedging plants to give them more light and space.
- Strimming the grass paths and creating an informal new path through the rough grassland area
- Scything and raking the scrub to stop it encroaching on the reptile area

- Strimming and raking a quarter of the rough grassland area to vary the length of the sward

A total of about 300 volunteer hours were spent by some 45 individuals. Some 12 volunteers came for more than half the sessions we ran. We thank them all for their commitment.

The reserve was closed from May until end July so that the nesting birds were not disturbed but we invited people to come to the site for educational purposes and ran three bird-watching visits during this time. These were attended by a total of 39 people, some coming more than once. Thanks to Martin Latham for his excellent teaching. His son, Alec, repeated a plant survey of the site. The records have been placed on the site's noticeboard for all to see. Notably, some people have seen lizards and grass snakes this year.

This was our second year of the ten-year lease agreement with Thames Water.

Green spaces, copses and hedgerows.

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's long-term work.

All are actively managed to benefit biodiversity and community enjoyment. The most prominent of these are a Wildflower Strip at Ticker's Folly field, Community Orchard, Hans' Copse, Quaker Wood and Local Hedgerows. All are accessible to the public.

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. Already present are orchids and wildflowers, harvest mice, and lizards. In 2024, management consisted of replacement planting, control of nettles, and maintenance of deer-guards. Sustainable Blewbury puts in the voluntary labour of about 30 hours per year.

The Wildflower Strip, having been planted many years ago, is now mature, with a wide range of grasses, herbs and orchids. It is mown once a year, in the Autumn, and the top hamper removed. No pesticides or herbicides are used. Along one border is a traditional hedgerow, which is managed appropriately. Sustainable Blewbury advises the Parish Council on the management of the Meadow but the work is done by them.

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 2024 so nothing to report here!

Chalk pits. These are accessible by footpath from the village and designated as a Local Wildlife site by the local wildlife trust. They contain a range of chalk grassland species which have been documented by the trust who have suggested managing the sites to enhance the species found. Sustainable Blewbury is currently deciding how to take this forward.

Sensory Green Space at the Primary School. One of the Trustees has helped the school to redesign an existing green space which can no longer be used in its current form. We understand that the school is now seeking funding to progress this worthy project. This has been a way of meeting our objectives of helping with education.

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. The soil is of poor quality, and shallow, on chalk. However, the trees are becoming established and are now beginning to flower and fruit prolifically. Management consists of winter pruning, vigorous fruit-thinning in late spring, weeding around the base of each tree in winter, applying mulch in winter, and 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 owners. It comprises a mixture of fruit trees and bushes which were planted about 11 years ago. One owner of the site died in early 2024 and the other gave six months' notice terminating the lease, but we continued to maintain it in the growing season of 2024.

Stream Project

This was 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. We do not currently have a lead for this project, but we did open-up the Millbrook where it flows through the Quaker Wood by doing some work to the trees. We hope this will improve the ecological quality of the stream here.

Talks

We organize occasional talks to inform us about matters relevant to our objectives, inviting speakers from the village or close-by. We held three talks during the year when about 25 to 30 people attended each.

In January, Martin Soltau, co-CEO of Space Solar, came to talk to us about how his company, in collaboration with others, are developing the technology into harvesting solar energy in space and beaming it back to earth. This would provide us with continuous clean energy day and night and in all weathers, unlike some other renewable energy sources. And there is potential globally, not just nationally. Martin and his colleagues are aiming to get this all up and working in about 10 years with a pilot costing about £10 million. It seems to have potential in helping us to move to zero-carbon.

In March, Jon Davies from Nature Positive and Blewbury resident James Morgan talked on the why, what and how of Rewilding. Topics discussed included reversing the tide of biodiversity loss and our food security as well as the new requirement for 'Biodiversity New Gain' for developments and what this means.

In November, Hayley Snowdon, Senior Ecologist for Thames Water, talked on "Introducing Blewbury's shyest and most secretive residents: reptiles". She showed us the characteristics of the reptiles we could expect to see at the Nature Reserve and how to manage the site to

benefit them, as well as telling us the best time of day to observe them. She is instigating a monitoring programme on our site which our volunteers will run in future.

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 March, June and November to our supporters (over 220) which included progress on our projects and several pages of information about what is happening locally and further afield, relevant to our aims.

We also started the process of modernising our website. We have a structure in place and are migrating relevant content from our old website.

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)
Professor Eric Eisenhandler (until January 2024)
Dr Andrew Evason
Glen Meadows
Anne Millman
Sean Morris
Anthony Stiff (from September 2024)

Financial review

The charity started the year with £15,358. We received two substantial sources of income in 2024; a grant from the Vale of the White Horse towards the planting of Quaker Wood (£10,000), from their climate action fund; and a legacy gift from a late Blewbury resident (£35,000). Activities up to the end of December generated £1,246 from repair cafes, talks apple juicing and others (including book sales). Expenditure was £26,186, most of which was on the planting of Quaker Wood (£24,345) which was paid to a contractor to supply the trees and plant two-thirds of them). We paid £1,071 for insurance, and expenses for various activities including hall hire made up the rest. This resulted in a closing balance of £35,418 in the bank account held by the Co-op Bank. In 2025, we expect to use a substantial amount of this in the continued maintenance and development of Quaker Wood.

Sustainable Blewbury, charity number 1203308, financial statements
1 January 2024 to 31 December 2024

| RECEIPTS | This year: 2024 (£) Unrestricted funds | Last year: 2023 (£) |
|---|---|----------------------------|
| Transfer from Sustainable Blewbury Community account (note 1) | Nil | 16,465 |
| <i>Operating:</i> | | |
| Grants | 10,000 | Nil |
| Legacy | 35,000 | Nil |
| Repair café donations | 471 | 166 |
| Talks (ticket sales) | 473 | 96 |
| Apple juicing | 215 | 167 |
| Other | 87 | 124 |
| | | |
| Total operating: | 46,246 | 553 |
| Total including transfer ('23 only): | | 17,018 |
| | | |
| PAYMENTS | | |
| Quaker site planting and maintenance | 24,345 | 300 |
| Nature reserve | 47 | 64 |
| Repair café (hall hire and refreshments) | 297 | 90 |
| Talks (hall hire and refreshments) | 129 | 58 |
| Green spaces (tree tags etc) | 250 | 54 |
| Insurance | 1,071 | 1,071 |
| Other | 47 | 23 |
| | | |
| Total expenditure: | 26,186 | 1,660 |
| | | |
| OPERATING SURPLUS/ (DEFICIT): | 20,060 | (1,107) |
| TOTAL OPERATING SURPLUS / (DEFICIT): | 20,060 | 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 held by Co-op bank:

| | |
|-------------------------|----------------|
| Opening balance: | £15,358 |
| Balance at end Dec 2024 | £35,418 |

Asset: Land known as Quaker Wood, 2.5 acres
There are no other significant assets and no liabilities.

The accounts were independently examined by Jane Moreton and signed on 28 February 2025.

Approved by Sustainable Blewbury Trustees and signed on their behalf by John Ogden (Chairman) and Moray Inglis (Treasurer) on 17 March 2025

Statement by Trustees

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