Sustainable Blewbury

www.sustainable-blewbury.org.uk

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For the latest news and more information, please see our website

IN THIS NEWSLETTER

Sustainable Blewbury news

Green drinks – Monday 5th August, from 7.30pm at The Blueberry

Green drinks are a friendly chat over a drink, to ask questions or tell us what you think about green topics. At this session, as well as general discussion we'd like to talk about what Sustainable Blewbury and the Parish Council can encourage people to do locally about the climate emergency and biodiversity loss. Everyone is welcome and we'd really like to hear what you think. It's completely informal, there's no agenda, just come and chat.

Blewbury Garden Market – Saturday mornings at Blewbury Service Station

We've passed the halfway mark for this year and so far it's been our best yet! Thanks to everyone for bringing and buying lovely local fruit and veg, baked goods, honey, preserves, flowers, etc. The stall is **open from 9.15 to 11.15 am** (unless we sell out earlier) until the end of September.
Producers: Please bring items to sell **from 9.00 am**. You set your own prices, we only take 10% commission. For sales forms see www.sustainable-blewbury.org.uk/food.htm.
For more information send an email to bgm@sustainable-blewbury.org.uk or phone 07935 232 296.

A sample of produce from Blewbury School Gardening Club

Apple juicing 2019 – Sunday afternoons at Blewbury Manor Stable

We will have six public sessions, at two-week intervals, to make some of the best apple juice you have ever tasted:

- 18 August, 2–4 pm
- 1 September, 2–4 pm
- 15 September, 2–4 pm
- 29 September, 2–4 pm
- 13 October, 2–4 pm
- 27 October, 11 am to 1 pm (if sufficient demand; note time)

Bring washed apples (especially if they are windfalls) with bad bits removed, and screw-top wine or drink bottles. To preserve the juice we can ***pasteurise*** it so it will keep for up to a year, or you can freeze it in a plastic container. Pasteurising the juice takes quite a while so ***please arrive early in the session*** if you want to do it.

PTO

Our ***prices*** are very reasonable: £1 per pressing (bucket or large basket), and 30p per bottle to pasteurise.

If you have huge quantities of apples we can't do them all in our public sessions, but **the *equipment can be hired*** at low cost: £10 for 24 hours in Blewbury or Upton, £15 elsewhere. For bookings or more information please email us at info@sustainable-blewbury.org.uk or phone 07935 232 296.

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Interesting and useful items

Green social housing in Norwich

Local councils used to build council houses to provide secure, low-cost, long-term rental. And many of them were well designed and spacious. But ever since 'right-to-buy' sales of council houses started in the 1980s, councils have been prevented from using funds from the sales to build new housing. Instead of council houses, there is now much less 'social housing' (with low rents or shared ownership) available. And so-called 'affordable' houses are anything but.

Councils have not had the resources to build new housing themselves but, like a growing number of local authorities, Norwich has found a way, using a mix of borrowing, funds from its housing revenue account, some right-to-buy receipts and council reserves. The first result, with a promise of much more, is a striking new development of about 100 homes called Goldsmith Street. The houses are both attractively designed and meet the demanding German Passivhaus standard that should guarantee energy bills that are about 70% lower than the current UK norm. That means heating bills should be just £150 per year, a boon when fuel poverty is a major issue.

One of the architects said: "Most existing [Passivhaus] examples are pretty ugly: rendered boxes with small north-facing windows." But Goldsmith Street shows that it doesn't have to be so grim.

The architects won the original competition because they were one of the few firms to propose streets, rather than slabs of apartment blocks. A planted alley runs between the backs of the terraced houses, dotted with communal tables and benches. With generous windows and handsome brick details, the homes are an attractive arrival to an area of mostly postwar blocks of flats. There are many clever details, for example their rooftops are precisely angled to ensure that, even in winter, each terrace will not block sunlight from the windows of the adjacent row.

You can read more about this development at tiny.cc/ew2maz, with detailed information and many photos at www.mikhailriches.com/project/goldsmith-street.

The National Trust is divesting from all fossil fuels

The National Trust has announced that it will sell off the shares it holds in fossil fuel companies. At present, 4% of its £1bn stock market investment is in such firms. Until now, the Trust had been prepared to invest in fossil-fuel firms if less than 10% of their turnover is from the dirtiest fossil fuels: thermal coal (i.e. used for electricity generation) or the production of oil from tar sands.

But this is about to change. Hilary McGrady, the Trust's Director General, said: "The impacts of climate change pose the biggest long-term threat to the land and properties we care for and tackling this is a huge challenge for the whole nation." The National Trust is the biggest conservation charity in Europe, and it now wants to "invest in green start-up businesses and other suitable portfolios that deliver benefits for the environment, nature and people". The timescale for the change is three years, but most shares should be sold within a year.

The Trust's chief financial officer, Peter Vermeulen, said: "As a conservation charity [we] believe that after decades' worth of lobbying not enough has been done by the oil and gas companies." He acknowledged that oil giants such as BP and Shell were investing in renewable energy, but even now "less than 10% of the oil majors' investment is on low-carbon technologies and we believe that's not sufficient."

National Trust's Archimedes screw micro-hydropower at Cragside, Northumbria

He concluded: "We want to protect the environment by becoming more energy efficient. In the last four years we've created our own green heat and power through the design and build of heat pumps, hydro schemes, solar PV and wood fuel boilers."

"We're also exploring farming and land management methods that reduce flooding, help clean water supplies and restore wildlife, while at the same time offering innovative ways to deliver new revenues into farm businesses. We also have a plan to phase out single-use plastics from our shops and to substantially reduce it in our cafes by 2022. These are part of our commitment to a healthy and thriving natural environment."

The National Trust has demonstrated its awareness of the importance of tackling climate change before. It owns 29,000 buildings, most of which are historic and have listed status, and so cannot be modified in ways that significantly alter their visible appearance. It had been previously been assumed that nothing could be done, but the National Trust has managed to upgrade buildings together with changing staff culture to improve efficiency, proving it is possible to look after and cherish old buildings while making them more efficient at the same time. This initiative won the National Trust a prestigious Ashden Award in 2012, for "conserving energy and our heritage".

Specially designed LED bulbs at Llanerchaeron

For more information see bbc.in/2JG1MTI and bit.ly/2JkY1TI.

European Investment Bank to stop funding fossil fuel projects

The European Investment Bank (EIB), the world's biggest public bank, plans to end its multibillion-euro financing for fossil fuel projects by the end of next year in order to align its strategy with climate targets. This is really good news.

The EIB provided €11.8 bn in direct support to fossil fuels between 2013 and 2017, and €2.4 bn in 2018.

In July the EIB, which is the EU's lending arm, drafted plans which propose cutting support for energy infrastructure projects which rely on oil, gas or coal by barring companies from applying for loans beyond the end of 2020. The EIB said its focus on long-term investments means that it must align with the Paris Agreement, which aims to cap global heating at 1.5C by cutting greenhouse gas emissions. Read more at bit.ly/2KcHLo5 or bit.ly/2K7JKeR.

In contrast, the UK has come under criticism for *increasing* its support for fossil fuel projects eleven-fold to almost £2bn last year through the UK Export Finance Agency. The agency's funding for renewable energy developers fell at the same time.

The government's actions don't match its words

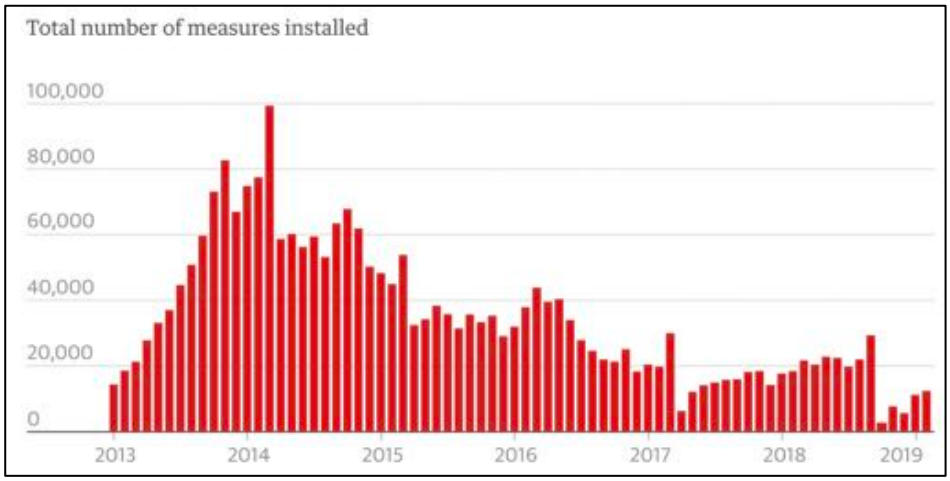
In our previous newsletter (no. 33, May/June 2019) we had an article about the UK Committee on Climate Change's proposals to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. Their goals have now been largely adopted by the government. But despite that, in the past few years we've seen a wide range

of government actions completely at odds with these aims. For example, the feed-in tariff, which among other things supported installations of solar panels, ended for new installations last April.

It is crucial to transform the energy efficiency of the UK's huge number of older houses, both by the improving their heating systems and by upgrading their insulation, especially for solid-wall buildings. But the government's flagship policy to do this, the Green Deal, was a badly designed fiasco and was terminated in 2015 after just a few years.

Installing external insulation on a solid wall

As shown in the chart below, from December 2018 through May 2019 the number of energy efficiency upgrades to houses (such as loft insulation, boiler upgrades and solid-wall insulation) undertaken each month has fallen to 10,000 on average. This compares with an average of 65,000 per month in 2014, and about 30,000 per month in 2015 and 2016.



At this rate it would take 96 years for the government to reach its own targets to reduce fuel poverty and waste, according to the charity National Energy Action. For more information see bit.ly/2XNM6YF. And for a quick overview of what the Committee on Climate Change says is required for both new and existing housing see the graphic at the bottom of this web page: www.theccc.org.uk/publication/uk-housing-fit-for-the-future.

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Just how much food do we waste, and why is it important?

Jo Lakeland

This article is based on an investigation in the printed version of Which? magazine for July 2019. You can access a much shorter online version at bit.ly/2MfjKiT. All diagrams are either from the magazine or their website.

Food waste is a major source of damage to our planet because of the energy and resources used to produce it. If global food waste was a country it would be the third biggest emitter of greenhouse gases after the USA and China, which makes it *tremendously* important.

This happens because if food waste is put into closed black bags it cannot break down harmlessly, so when it ends up in landfill it rots and releases methane, a greenhouse gas 25 times more damaging to the environment than carbon dioxide.

Are we all able to recycle food waste?

We are very lucky in the Vale to have our green food-recycling bins. It is a shocking fact that although it is mandatory for ***all*** Welsh, Northern Irish and Scottish councils to collect food waste, only about ***half*** of English councils collect food waste. The map below shows that this ranges from over 80% of councils in the south-west of England to none of the councils in the north-east! Overall, only 29% of

English councils provide separate food bins. The other 20% that do collect food waste collect it in the same bin as garden waste, so it is shredded and composted at very high temperatures that kill off harmful microbes.

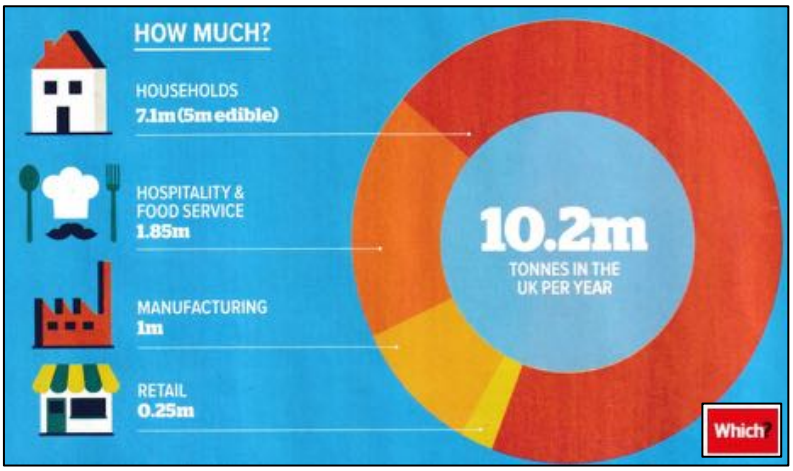
Food waste recycling can generate electricity

There are two ways to recycle food waste: anaerobic digestion and composting.

If your food waste recycling is collected in a separate food bin, it's recycled using anaerobic digestion in sealed tanks. As the waste breaks down it produces methane, which is collected in giant balloon-like plastic cones (as by Agrivert near Benson) and burned to generate electricity. In the UK, the energy we get from recycling 1.3 million tonnes of food waste in this way creates enough electricity to power 200,000 homes each year and is worth more than £220M to the economy (so all 7.1 million tonnes of household food waste could power 1.1 million homes). The process also produces a residue, called 'digestate', which is sold to farmers as a soil conditioner.

Food waste that is collected mixed with garden waste is not as environmentally beneficient: it is only composted to create a soil conditioner. It cannot be separated and used to generate electricity.

Most food waste comes from our homes



The diagram above shows that of the 10.2 Mt (million tonnes) of food we throw away in England every year, 7.1 Mt comes from households, and *5 Mt of this is food is perfectly edible.*

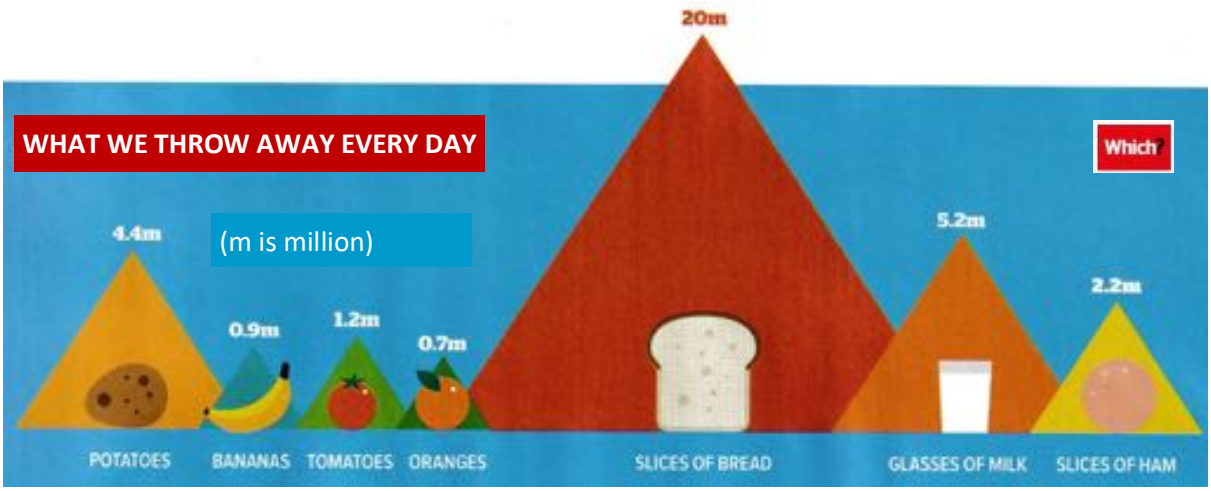
Calculations show that the 5 Mt of edible food thrown away means that ***an average family of four wastes £70 every month or £840 every year***.

Why don't we recycle our food waste even if we have a bin?

The results of a survey of 2100 adults showed that nearly half of us say we don't have enough food waste to be worthwhile, Other reasons for not recycling are shown to the right.

People also mentioned maggots, the result of flies laying eggs on food. But if the lids of bins are kept closed, food is cooled before being put into bins and the bins are kept out of direct sunlight and cleaned regularly the risk is minimised.

What we throw away every day



The diagram above really shocks me, and we have to do something about it.

- If you do have food waste, recycle it. It has been shown that people who think they don't create any food waste actually create around 3 kg a week: tea leaves, coffee grounds, bones, vegetable peelings, eggshells, etc.
- Make use of your food waste caddy. If your council offers a food waste collection service, use it. If people don't use food waste collections they can become financially unviable and your council might stop them (as happened in the north-east of England).
- If your council doesn't offer a food waste collection, compost at home to prevent your food waste going to landfill; ***ask*** your council to do it, and ***campaign*** to get them to do it.
- And best of all, don't waste food!

Based on personal experience, I have two more tips to offer:

- Check your fridge thoroughly, right to the back, before making your shopping list.
- If you decide to surprise your partner by buying something they really like, do tell them you have done so!

The Which? Food Waste feature at bit.ly/2MfjKiT starts with a short video, "Food waste is as toxic as plastic", that is worth watching. It also includes some very useful "Easy tips to reduce food waste".

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Come on, UK weather forecasters – tell it like it is on climate change

Jo Lakeland

"People have a right to know what's behind their flooding or heatwave. The UK is lagging behind other countries."

This article was triggered by one with the same title by Adam Corner, Research Director at Climate Outreach, in the Guardian, 20 March 2019, at bit.ly/2LLGo2R. I suggest also reading the original article by Bill Giles in the Radio Times, on 19 March 2019, at bit.ly/2Zj4y8a).

I worked for the Meteorological Office for five years and am married to someone who was a weather forecaster for 45 years, so we do tend to watch TV weather forecasts more carefully than most people. I have to confess that this has been almost entirely BBC weather because for us naturally that was the best! And so it was interesting to read that Bill Giles, former head of BBC weather presenters, was calling for the BBC and other major broadcasters to overhaul their approach to forecasting by including information about climate change in their forecasts about the daily weather.

How long have we been aware of global warming/climate change and its causes?

Scientists were aware in the 1980s that the amount of carbon dioxide in our atmosphere was increasing and that it was having an effect on our climate, but they were still building the computer models that would prove it, so weather forecasters did not mention global warming (as it was referred to then). By the end of the 1980s Prof. James Hanson was testifying to a US Senate committee that "it was time to stop waffling: he declared with 99% confidence that the Earth was being affected by human-made greenhouse gases and had entered a long-term period of warming". (From *Storms of my Grandchildren*, by James Hanson, 2009)

The National Curriculum came into schools in 1988, and the science curriculum included the concept of global warming. This meant that from 1989 all children learned that our climate is changing, so if you were born after the early 80s you have had 30 years to get used to the idea! In contrast, Met Office staff were warned in the 80s to use the phrases *global warming* and *climate change* "with discretion", which I think meant they were OK to use with colleagues, but not in public utterances.

How do today's media deliver the weather differently to the 80s?

In 2018 the Met Office lost the contract to provide weather data and present the BBC forecasts. BBC Weather now present the forecasts, using data and graphics from the Meteogroup. It is still the same weather and many of the same forecasters and presenters, just different graphics. But now we have "sound-bite" TV, and more programmes delighting in extremes, particularly if there are good library pictures to use: the 1950s East coast floods, record snowfall, hottest ever, etc., and broadcasting is now much more obviously commercial.

Flooding in Carlisle after Storm Desmond in 2015

Bill Giles is absolutely right: information about climate change should be available on the full range of broadcast media for the public to see and to read, presented in a comprehensible, jargon-free manner by people we are used to. He says: "While the weather can't always straightforwardly be equated with a changing climate, the impacts of climate change are no longer a hypothetical concern, or a discussion for the future. Climate change is with us now, and is manifesting through rising temperatures, more violent and unpredictable storms, and heavier rainfall." And "it is now possible to say with confidence how much more likely (or how much more intense) a storm or a heatwave was made by climate change".

There is also a tendency in the UK to celebrate unusually warm, sunny weather since our temperatures are not as extreme as elsewhere. Even when a news story or forecast points out that it is dangerously hot in another country – last week well over 42°C just across the Channel – the images tend to show cheerful beach scenes and the like.

Broadstairs, Kent on 25 July 2019, Britain's hottest day on record at 38.7°C in Cambridge. That's hot, but it was 42.6°C in Paris

But how should this be done?

The weather forecast does have a slot at the end of almost every main TV and radio news bulletin, morning, noon and night, but have you ever timed them? The time allowed for national prime-time forecasts is usually 2–3 minutes, and the local weather slot is all of 30–45 seconds, which is why forecasters have to gabble if the weather is complicated or if their earpiece suddenly tells them to finish quickly because there is an extra news item!

People do have a right to know how their climate is changing, but are the scheduled weather forecasts the best place for considered and unhurried climate change information? I think not. The content of news bulletins is decided at the last minute, so it would never be certain the climate change piece would appear.

So it would need to be outside the news bulletin, and I suggest the best place would be as an item in the early morning programmes (Breakfast on BBC; Good morning Britain on ITV) followed by a repeat directly after the early evening news slot (in the One Show on BBC; before Emmerdale on ITV), and of course in BBC 1's Country File on Sunday evenings, and similarly for BBC Radio. And a weekly programme, also appearing on BBC Radio, online on iPlayer and all the commercial equivalents, with a blog, Twitter feed, etc.

This is not going to happen without pressure from people like us! And the pressure should not be solely on the weather forecasters: it should be on the media companies that limit their time, and on politicians.

The Thirlmere Reservoir in Cumbria during the summer drought of 2018

Extinction Rebellion's first demand is: "Tell the Truth. Government must tell the truth by declaring a climate and ecological emergency, working with other institutions to communicate the urgency for change."

So write to or email your MP, county and district councillors, etc. Ask them why they are not doing more. They have all declared a climate emergency, so should be receptive to your questions.

Finally, I suggest the Guardian's heading for their article should have been:
"Come on, UK broadcasting companies – allow the UK forecasters time to tell it like it is on climate change"

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Wildflowers in Tickers Folly Field

Peter Cockrell

Chalk grassland is one of the most biodiverse and beautiful of our natural habitats. The North Wessex Downs (formerly called the Berkshire Downs) used to be a superb example. Sadly, our human activities have almost eliminated this extraordinary resource from our doorstep. This project shows that, with time and patience, it can be recreated on an appreciable scale.

Part of Tickers Folly Field in 2019

In 2011 a two-part plan was implemented. After many years of close-cut mowing, about half an acre of ground, on the south side of Tickers Folly Field in Blewbury, was allowed to grow freely. As predicted, over a twelve-month period, a mix of daisies, dandelions, docks, thistles, and plantains grew amongst a dense growth of high, coarse grasses which formed a wet mat in winter, underlain with moss. A few brave, interesting plants did appear – including just two pyramidal orchids, the first of many.

Pyramidal orchid

The pyramidal orchid has been a good indicator of progress. Numbers counted over eight years were 2, 0, 8, 10, 15, 19, 64 and 153, respectively.

In the same year, about 150 seedlings of different species were planted in Tickers Folly. These were grown from wild seed gathered on the downs. A few survived till the spring of 2012.

Early planting in 2012. Over nine years, volunteers have helped to introduce over 5000 plants in this way

The results in the first year were sufficiently encouraging to justify further work. Help and advice was obtained from the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT), North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (NWDAONB) and Charles Flower, a wildflower seed specialist.

In 2012 a grant was obtained from NWDAONB. This covered the purchase of tools and materials for

propagating and encouraging chalkland plants in Tickers Folly and nearby. Seed was purchased and more was gathered on the downs from lanes, verges and corners where wildflowers still grow. Some of the seeds were germinated in trays, pricked out and, when big enough, were planted in the field.

Diary entry – Saturday 3rd March 2012: *The seeds arrived from Charles Flower – lovely clean samples – thousands of tiny seeds in small plastic bags looking absolutely beautiful – such potential!*

The table below shows the number of plantings in each year.

Year	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**2014**	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**
Plants	150	1350	1787	864	500*	12	50**	300**	30**

* Mainly cowslips, ** Mainly snowdrops with a few primroses.

The seeds of different species germinated readily but survival after planting, even with careful tending and watering, was sporadic at best. Rabbits accounted for many of the failures; liking to dig them up rather than eat them.



Scarifying, plants in trays, Mike Edmunds planting

Yellow rattle

Seeds were also broadcast after scarifying the ground by hand and with a machine. The idea was to allow the seeds to find bare soil in which to germinate and grow. It scarcely worked at all and the grass still dominated, but with one very important exception. A plant called yellow rattle germinated successfully. Yellow rattle is a prolifically seeding annual, partially parasitic on grass. It has the effect of weakening the grass and creating a lighter and better habitat for wildflowers. With several applications over three years it started to take significant effect in 2014 and, year by year, has gradually spread throughout the half acre, allowing many other plants to grow and do well. It has been the single most important part of the project.

In 2013 a further grant was approved by the AONB for a mixed hedge of common shrubs. The hedge was planted along the south side of the area in February. It was heavily mulched with local wood chippings, and has thickened and grown providing shelter and habitat for an increasing number of birds and small mammals. Insects, notably butterflies, bees and ants, have all increased steadily over the years since that time.

Marbled White butterfly

We were advised that cutting and removing the grass and other plants every autumn, after they had seeded, was very important. This has been done selectively with a scythe and then overall by machine before the winter. The waste has been raked off and used conveniently as a mulch for the new hedge.

By 2015 the spring flowers had also been introduced and were doing well. Cowslips were by far the best; almost five hundred new plants were grown. However, rabbits again did severe damage to the new plants, but by the summer things were looking better than at any time before. The yellow rattle was covering approximately 15% of the area. Other plants showing definite increases were pink

campion, sainfoin, dropwort, oxeye daisy, and birds foot trefoil. The new hedge, now entering its third year, was also looking very healthy.

In 2016 a decision was made to try a different method in order to try and increase the success rate of scattered seed. This time, wild seed and more yellow rattle were spread on a number of metre square bare patches which were created by first treating the ground with weedkiller. Unfortunately, the bare soil also attracted unwanted weeds like dandelion and ragwort (removed on sight). However, the numbers of flowers generally increased, with different species tending to favour different areas. The yellow rattle also continued to spread, extending the areas suited to wildflowers.

2017 and 2018 both saw successive increases in the number of cowslips in the spring and further marked increases in many other flowers over the summer. Also, during this time about three hundred snowdrop bulbs were added and seemed to grow readily. Yellow rattle now covered the entire patch.

For the first time, passers-by were commenting on the beauty of the flowers – praise indeed!

The eastern end of the wildflower meadow in May 2019, showing cowslips and part of the community orchard

Dropwort, found only on chalk and limestone grassland

Bee orchid, quite rare

Star of Bethlehem or Bath asparagus, rare in this area

This exciting trend has continued until the time of writing in July 2019. There were well over two thousand cowslip flowers from the few hundred planted over the last four years, many of the original plants sporting a dozen or more flowers. This June and July 153 pyramidal orchids have been flowering. Field scabious are just coming out, along with a great number of other common flowers like red clover, dropwort, toadflax, knapweed and kidney vetch. It is thought that many of the seeds sown in previous years have lain dormant, awaiting the right conditions to flourish. Even some quite rare species are established, including bee orchid, star of Bethlehem, and broomrape.

I hope that the wildflowers of Tickers Folly will continue to be enjoyed by butterflies, birds and humans for many years to come. Many thanks indeed to all our volunteers and supporters.

Ladies bedstraw (yellow) and greater knapweed

Tall broomrape, parasitic on greater knapweed (large leaves at left). It doesn't need leaves or to be green, it gets everything it needs from its host. Right photo shows broomrape in flower

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The Sustainable Blewbury newsletter is edited by Jo Lakeland and Eric Eisenhandler

We have a substantial programme of activities in and around the village. Getting involved is fun and can make a very positive contribution to village life and local environment. If you'd like to get involved in what we do, or to receive our free Newsletter, email us at info@sustainable-blewbury.org.uk or phone Eric Eisenhandler at 01235 850558.