



FOLKtalk

Issue 64
Autumn 2020

Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common

Conserving and improving the Hill for you



This photograph of the east face of Salterley Quarry was taken in the late afternoon when the warm sunlight gave the Cotswold stone its iconic honey glow. Taking the picture was much easier than normal, thanks to a new set of steps which have been installed by the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens.

To read more about what else the Wardens have been doing to improve the Hill and make it safer to enjoy go to page 14.

FOLK Annual General Meeting 2020

Notice is hereby given of the 21st Annual General Meeting of The Friends of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common.

This postponed meeting will be held by way of Zoom on Wednesday, January 20th 2021, at 7pm.

When COVID-19 restrictions made it impractical to hold a normal AGM in a local venue, the Executive Committee postponed the meeting and explored other options. It selected the widely-used online system Zoom to hold a virtual AGM.

The use of tools such as Zoom for AGMs has been regularised by Government for larger charitable type organisations and is approved by the Charity Commission. The Charity Commission goes further and suggests that members' participation in such meetings can be restricted to being virtually present and being able to vote. Either electronic or postal voting is approved.

January 20th falls within the 14 month gap between AGMs that is allowed by FOLK's Constitution (section Q1).

Guidance on the use of Zoom is available at <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us>

AGM Papers

The major papers for this meeting (Agenda, Minutes of 2019 AGM, Annual Report and Accounts) can be accessed from the e-mail that accompanies this newsletter.

Committee Nominations

An up-to-date **Elections List** showing the names of individuals either already sitting on FOLK's Executive Committee or nominated for election this year can be found at <https://www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk/agm-2020/>

If you are a member of FOLK, you may nominate yourself or any other member.

Acceptance of a nomination implies that the nominee agrees to act in the interests of FOLK.

Should you wish to submit a nomination, please email the Membership Secretary using the contact details given below **by 6th January**.

If no further nominations are received, the election of those presently incumbent or nominated will be assumed.

How To Take Part

Attendance at this meeting will be by invitation only. If you would like join us, please send an email request to The Membership Secretary folk.membership@gmail.com. Attendance will be limited to the first 100 members who apply.

The Committee proposes that there should be no verbal contributions from the audience at this AGM, but that the Officers will answer any questions that have been submitted to the Membership Secretary **by 6th January**.

It may also be possible (time and IT permitting) to accept questions during the meeting using Zoom's *Chat* function.

Apologies for absence should be sent by email to the Membership Secretary at folk.membership@gmail.com

We hope that as many as possible of you will be able to join us for this AGM in January.

John Harvey
Chairman

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The Next Management Plan: Chairman, John Harvey, explores the issues page 10

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FOLK WORK PARTY REPORT

As I write (early November) we have again had to cancel work parties due to the second Covid lockdown. Hopefully this won't last as long as the first lockdown when we were unable to hold work parties from mid-March and into May. We were able to re-start work parties properly again in June, but initially with limited numbers. In August, following easing of the Government Covid guidelines, we were able to remove this restriction on numbers, although still maintaining social distancing and applying other restrictions.

Between the start of June and the end of November we have been able to achieve quite a lot. This has been helped enormously by the high turnout of volunteers, boosted by a significant influx of new volunteers. Most of these new volunteers had been visiting and enjoying the Hill more frequently during lockdown, saw our notice boards advertising the work parties and decided they wanted to join in. Every cloud has a silver lining.

Our initial task on restarting was to finish tidying up the area where we had cut down hawthorn (and gorse) just before the first lockdown. There were still piles of cut hawthorn that needed burning and this took two work parties to clear.





Pulling Hemp Agrimony

Once this was done we could get down to our usual summer tasks which included pulling up Hemp Agrimony (which would otherwise result in dense patches that would damage the grassland) and pulling up and removing Ragwort (which can harm the cattle).

In July we also organised a special work party to do litter picking. One unfortunate outcome of the increased number of visitors to the Hill during the first lockdown was a substantial increase in littering. We removed a large quantity of litter during this session with the bulk of it being drink and snack related, along with a lot of disposable barbecues. Some of the more unusual items removed included two chairs, a galvanised bucket and an umbrella!

In August we spent a couple of work parties on another of our standard summer jobs: mowing and clearing the annual growth from the large clearing above Bridge car park on Daisy Bank Road



A new job that we managed to include at the end of August was to cut back the growth that had been obscuring our magnificent Cotswold stone wall at the top of the Eastern end of the site. The wall is now visible and hopefully being admired by those walking along the Cotswold Way.

We also did some ground clearance work in Brownstone Quarry, around the limekilns and in the sidings area on top of the Hill. This was when our volunteer numbers really picked up with up to 18 attending. With these numbers it's amazing what can be achieved in a single session.



Brownstones Quarry



The Sidings

In late-September we started our usual 'scrub-bashing' winter tasks. This mainly involves removing gorse (to open up areas and views, and to create fire-breaks), hawthorn and invasive Cotoneaster. We usually have a fire to get rid of all the cuttings and we can normally guarantee that, when we do, the Dexter cattle will turn up. They seem to be fascinated by the fires, as you can see!



We always have plenty to do on work parties and hopefully we will be able to re-start again soon. So, if you, or anyone else you know, would like to help, please do join any of our FOLK work parties. We are a friendly, mixed group of male and female

volunteers. You can work at your own pace and take a break as and when you wish. We meet at 9.30am at Tramway Cottage Car Park, Daisy Bank Road, and are on the hill for approximately 3 hours. Tools are provided by FOLK. For your own safety we ask you to wear stout footwear and bring tough gardening gloves.

We usually have three FOLK work parties a month but, with the high turnout recently, we had been intending to add a fourth from November to March during our busy winter period. Subject to Covid constraints the proposed dates for work parties for the next few months are:

| | | | | |
|---------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| December 2020 | | Thursday 10 th | Tuesday 15 th | Sunday 27 th |
| January 2021 | Wednesday 6 th | Thursday 14 th | Tuesday 19 th | Sunday 24 th |
| February 2021 | Wednesday 3 rd | Thursday 11 th | Tuesday 16 th | Sunday 28 th |
| March 2021 | Wednesday 3 rd | Thursday 11 th | Tuesday 16 th | Sunday 28 th |

For further information you can contact Geoff on 01242 244165 or you can look at the ‘Work Party’ page on our website (www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk) or send an email to folk.workparty@gmail.com.

CHELTENHAM’S LOCAL STONE



A few steps along Ewlyn Road from its junction with Leckhampton Road, stands a short length of stone wall. In itself it appears unexceptional. A closer look, though, shows that its material is presented in variety of styles of finish (or “dressing”). Some is smooth, some is roughly hewn apart from smooth edges and some peppered with small pock-marks. The reason for this seemingly confused array of styles takes us back more than a hundred years, for the house belonged to John Weaver, then the manager of the quarries on Leckhampton Hill. His garden wall, which originally stretched all the way to the corner with Leckhampton Road, was literally a “shop window” for the range of dressed stone available from his employer’s quarries and workshops.

Quarrying for stone in Cheltenham got underway properly in the early 17th century, but grew rapidly during the rapid expansion of the town two hundred years later. At that time there was high demand not only for good quality

stone, but also for lime which is used to make mortar and plaster. This in turn saw the extensive development of the quarrying infrastructure on Leckhampton Hill and the eventual links with the wider road and rail networks.

So it is hardly surprising that any casual walk along the streets of Leckhampton, Charlton Kings or central Cheltenham will take you past buildings made wholly or at least partly of local stone. While the finest of stonework may only be found on the grander buildings, simpler stone has commonly been used for more humble workers’



homes for centuries. One well-known example would be the pair of quarrymen’s cottages on the left hand side of the road up Leckhampton Hill towards Ullenwood. This building has been conspicuous for its dangerously tumbledown appearance for years – not helped by the fall of a substantial tree – but if you were not familiar with these cottages, it’s too late to see them. They have just been demolished.

Though the quarries ceased to be viable in the early twentieth century, the town is richer for their legacy. The quarries themselves and the inclines, sidings and limekilns are as tightly woven into the history and character of Leckhampton Hill as the splendour of its landscape and the richness of its natural environment.

* * * * *

To read more about the use of locally quarried stone and the associated industrial archaeology, there is an excellent article by Amy Woolacott in Research Bulletin 5 of the Leckhampton Local History Society.

<http://leckhamptonlhs.weebly.com/>

There is also a good summary on the FOLK website

<https://www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk/site-description/industrial-archaeology/>

GLOUCESTERSHIRE'S STONE STILES

Creating a record of historic gems

Those of you who enjoy walks in Gloucestershire's countryside will come across plenty of stiles. These are usually wood, but from time to time you might see one made of stone. These stone stiles are very characteristic of the historic Cotswold landscape and are well worth preserving. However, there is no definitive list of stone stiles in Gloucestershire and most are unprotected. So CPRE Gloucestershire¹ is appealing for your help in producing a record.



Slab Stile

There are several types of stone stiles. The simplest are solid upright slabs, but they can also be stepping stones set into the wall or slits in a wall too narrow for larger farm animals to pass through but wide enough for humans. Naturally they are usually found on pathways, but not always, as some paths have fallen out of use over the last 200 years. Where they exist they mark ancient pathways and the

lines of the pathways can give a clear indication of where there was human habitation pre-1800, whether it be a long-disappeared farm or hamlet.

Peter Wilson, one of CPRE's volunteers, has set up a project to build a record of all of Gloucestershire's stone stiles, some of which are well over 200 years old. If you'd like to help Peter to form a record of all the stone stiles in Gloucestershire, there's even a special form to use. You can get this from Peter Wilson, using the email address below, or simply enter CPRE Stone stiles in your search engine and download it from there. All you need to do is:

- Photograph the stile
- Make a note of its location (a description and a map reference)
- Jot down anything else which might be of interest, such as the name of the nearest village, where you were walking to and from, name of path if known (e.g., Cotswold Way)
- Complete the form and email it to Peter.Wilson@woodchestervalleyvillage.co.uk

¹ CPRE is the charity formerly known as the Campaign to Protect Rural England.

THE NEXT MANAGEMENT PLAN

In the second of his major articles this year, John Harvey (FOLK Chairman) explores some of the complex issues which must be accommodated when designing the next management plan.

Background Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common contain a significant area of a rare and nationally shrinking environment: unimproved limestone grassland. This led to the site being designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in 1954. So the work which is done on Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common - by Cheltenham Borough Council, FOLK, the Cotswold Wardens and many others - is largely shaped by the expectations which come with this status.

To meet the demands of the SSSI status, a Management Plan was then created and had its last major update in 2003. The existing plan, though, is based on knowledge and thinking which was current in the 1990s. In this article John Harvey considers some of the big issues which must be considered when the new plan is created.

An article in the magazine *British Wildlife* forced me to ask questions about how we should address the ideas in that article in any new plan. *British Wildlife* aims to cover “all aspects of British natural history and conservation”. It does this mainly by factual reports, but, quite appropriately, it sometimes includes challenges to current thinking in biology or conservation, as it did in an article entitled *What is a Tree?*

The answer offered was that a tree is more than just what we can see above ground and the roots below ground, so that a real tree includes many, usually invisible, organisms that are essential for its growth and health. The key organisms are mycorrhizal fungi that form symbiotic relationships with plant roots and extract mineral nutrients, and even water, from the soils and transfer them to the tree. Does this mean, for example, that management plans should include statements regarding these species of fungi, whether as essential components of their symbioses or in their own right, and, if so, how might we do this?

Any new management plan that includes references to fungi would be very different from the present 2003 version, and rightly so. The present plan followed a pattern very common in the 1990s. For example, in the case of the Common it appears to use the SSSI designation as a guide to conclude that plants that make up the Limestone Grassland are the most important things to conserve. This may be right, but means that the plan pays little attention to animal groups such as invertebrates, notably butterflies. There can be good reasons for this emphasis on grassland. The Borough Council's performance as a manager, and its ability to attract government funding, is judged by the statutory nature conservation organisation, now Natural England, on how well the species composition of the grassland compares with what is specified in the SSSI designation.

So why is the current focus of Management Plan so narrow? There are probably two deeper issues. First, the early years of statutory protection for nature in the UK, from 1945, were characterised by an emphasis on plants. This is not entirely surprising, as the early development of biological conservation in the UK was led, indeed dominated by, plant ecologists. Second, in those early years very little was known about the distribution, abundance, rarity or habitat requirements of animal species. A consequence of these factors was that early designation statements for SSSIs, such as the first for our site in 1954, referred hardly at all to animals. Learning more about the habitat needs of animals has resulted in conservationists having to make difficult choices. For example, should limestone grasslands be grazed in late spring and early summer to favour low-growing flowering plants, or allowed to grow taller to favour certain butterflies? It is the role of a management plan to resolve such contrasting positions. The 2003 plan did not do this. Any new plan will have to.

But, even here, we have to be careful. To take an extreme example. We could choose to make the number of butterflies the main target of successful management. This would need us to specify the type of features of the grassland - such as which plant species are present and the height of the vegetation - which would be needed to deliver this objective. Inevitably, though, by increasing vegetation suitable for one group of species may compromise the habitat needed by other groups and lead to their decline. But

these species may also be valued by conservationists, so we could then have even more potential conflicts to resolve.

How could our Management Plan be improved? A vital role for any management plan is to convert decisions about priorities into *objectives*, and subsequently into management *prescriptions*. An objective should be a statement of the hoped-for outcome of management. Then the prescriptions should outline the specific actions needed deliver this outcome. The established view is that objectives should always be SMART, that is, Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Relevant and Time limited. The present plan does not meet this requirement.

Most objectives in the present plan are very general (e.g., “*to maintain the unimproved limestone grassland*”) but should be specific and measurable (e.g., “*there are at least X hectares of unimproved species-rich limestone grassland*”). There is also the matter of the time frame. Five years is the period suggested for many nature conservation sites, especially those where communities and environmental conditions can change rapidly. This contrasts with our nearly 20 year old plan which, in any case, makes no clear statement of a time by which any of its objectives should be achieved. Limiting a management plan’s objectives to a period as short as five years leaves a major gap in both the planning process and the chances of successfully conserving a site. But short-term plans need a longer term goal for a site. Why else are we managing it for conservation?

So what do we want to achieve? As I have suggested above, the existing SSSI cites biology (predominantly plants) and geology, but ignores not only aspects of nature conservation but also issues such as landscape, archaeology and access. Natural England, in its former guises, recognised the need to bring these statements up to date, as in 1989 and 1991 in our case, but these still deal only with wildlife or geology. It is now widely agreed that objectives should be based on a broader formulation that outlines the hoped-for ideal state, appearance or condition of all aspects of a site and its use at an unspecified time in the future.

The overwhelming consensus of conservationists, to which the FOLK Committee and the Borough Council buy in, is that management of sites such as the Hill and the Common needs a sound framework. Such a framework

needs to be based on some long-term goal and to clarify and prioritise SMART objectives. The process of consulting on and then creating the next Management Plan may be neither easy nor quick. But it deserves a structure which should give continuity and consistency of management, help improve the use of scarce resources, allocate responsibility, record activities, allow progress to be monitored, and so much more.

This article presents a summary of the main points of John's paper. To read the full paper follow this link:

<https://www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk/files/2020/12/Management-Planning-Full-Article.pdf>

CHELTENHAM LOTTERY

Supporting Local Good Causes

Thank you to all our loyal supporters who have signed up to play. In the year since this lottery was launched last November, FOLK has already received more than £390.



The income from this lottery is especially important now that we are not charging a membership fee, but still have costs to meet.

Put simply, players choose six numbers per entry at a cost of £1 per week. Prizes range from £25 to £25,000. Of the income generated, 60% goes to local good causes, including FOLK.

Please buy your tickets **via the FOLK webpage within the Cheltenham Lottery** site, by following this link:

<https://www.cheltenhamlottery.co.uk/support/friends-of-leckhampton-hill>

COTWOLDS WARDENS HARD AT WORK

When the first national lockdown was lifted in the summer, the Cotswold Wardens lost no time in getting back to the tasks they had planned for Leckhampton Hill. All their projects here are carefully planned with both FOLK and Cheltenham Borough Council. Indeed, they make a vital contribution everyone's enjoyment of the Hill and so we were delighted when the Wardens were able to get under way once more.



New steps from Bridge Car Park

They have re-started the work on building the Cotswold Stone wall along the Cotswold Way as it rises from Hartley Lane. The completed section of this impressive wall is now very nearly ninety metres long with a further five metres progressing well.

The most conspicuous new projects are the two flights of steps on previously quite treacherous stretches of paths. The largest, is a hugely impressive, winding run of 53 steps on the steep ascent from Bridge Car Park. This takes walkers high up onto the more accessible slopes and will be very welcome for the many people who take this route, especially in wet winter weather.

Equally welcome is a shorter set of steps on the steepest section of the footpath which leads up from the eastern side of Salterley Quarry towards the top of Leckhampton Hill. These steps not only make the route easier to navigate, but also offer walkers the chance safely to pause and gaze across the old quarry and get an up-close view of the rock face which remains.

As well as helping walkers, the Cotswold Wardens have been playing their part in maintaining the Hill's archaeological treasures: on this occasion, mowing The

Ramparts. This extensive structure was constructed by the local Dubonii tribe in the Iron Age (c 800BC-AD43) and offered protection for the hillfort known as Leckhampton Camp. Many people will have climbed the ramparts to stand by the Trig Point, perhaps not realising that they have just mounted a defensive bank created by some of the area's earliest inhabitants. The Cotswold Wardens' work in mowing the Ramparts not only helps preserve them, but also reveals their form to the Hill's many visitors.



Jump forward two thousand years and the Wardens are also involved in experimental work to preserve the long Main Incline. During the height of Leckhampton's stone quarrying days in the nineteenth century, several important "inclines" were constructed, each featuring tracks which carried wagons full of stone down steep lines to the standard gauge railways at the foot of the hill. This one ran beyond Daisy Bank Road, passing under it via the bridge seen in the 1920s photo (left). This is

where Bridge Car Park now stands. The incline is a popular path for walkers, leading as it does straight up to the Devil's Chimney and beyond. Sadly, though, increased footfall and natural erosion caused by rainwater flowing down the track are threatening the structural integrity of this incline.

The Cotswold Wardens are working with Wayne Sedgwick and other experts to try to develop ways of preventing further erosion, stabilising the ground and ensuring the incline's future. At the same time they are trying to solve the considerable inconvenience of water gathering by the gate at the entrance to the incline from Bridge Car Park. We hope to publish more news of this work as the development progresses.

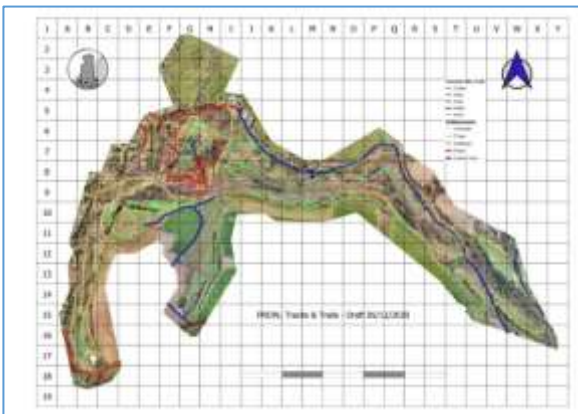


CYCLISTS AND WALKERS IN NEW-FOUND HARMONY

To hear some people talk, this might seem an unlikely headline. Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common cover a huge area – around 165 acres – and one might suppose that there was plenty of room for everyone to enjoy this marvellous space in their own ways. It has become increasingly clear that this is not necessarily true.

The Hill is especially popular with walkers, whether for casual family strolls or organised rambles, but it also offers a great landscape for mountain-bikers and other cyclists to pursue their sports. Unfortunately, when it happens that neither the walkers nor the cyclists are fully aware of each other and are either using or crossing the same paths, it is not hard to imagine the lurking danger of an accident waiting to happen. Add into the mix the fact that, on this terrain, there are many blind spots caused by sharp humps or dips in the paths and the risk becomes even greater.

Human nature being what it is, it would hardly have been surprising to hear that the cyclists, walkers and other users of the Hill simply blamed each other for being thoughtless or even reckless. Instead, thanks to an imaginative approach by Wayne Sedgwick, the Council's Senior Ranger, and a very positive response from local cyclists, a strong consensus is building on a scheme which meets the needs of all users.



Tracks and Trails - Provisional version

that his GPS device could trace his route. This in turn enabled every one of the

Before anything could happen, it was important to have an accurate picture of all the paths and tracks which criss-cross the Hill. FOLK's work party coordinator, Geoff Holt, took on this job – and what a Herculean task it proved to be. Geoff identified and then walked every single track, moving at a painfully slow 1 metre per second so

thirty or more separate and intersecting paths to be plotted on a map – a complicated and ongoing process.

The different colours used on the map opposite indicate the status of each path and whether they are walking routes or designated mountain-bike routes.

In the meantime, Wayne worked patiently to bring together many different interest groups so that each could understand the needs of the others and a positive climate of give-and-take could develop.

A very significant player here was Clive Lewis, Captain of the Mountain Biking section of the Cheltenham & County Cycling Club whose can-do attitude has been crucial to progress. Clive has not only been representing the interests of the mountain biking community, but also organising and chairing the meetings. Throughout the process, his knowledge and experience have enabled other parties to gain a deeper understanding of the sport and of both the needs and the responsibilities of those who take part.

Gloucester Wildlife Trust will also make an important contribution by helping to ensure that important and vulnerable areas are taken into account and that nature is protected during any re-routing of tracks.

The upshot of all this work has been a carefully considered plan to increase safety while enabling everyone to continue to enjoy the Hill in their own special ways. Measures include the removal or re-routing of some of the designated mountain-bike routes and the installation of some signage and general notices to warn those on foot where and when to look out for mountain-bikers.

The proposals will be considered by Cheltenham Borough Council's Health and Safety section before any practical steps are taken. We will keep you posted about developments.

BIRDS' AMAZING BRAINS

By now our summer visitors have left us for their winter grounds and those which come to the UK for the winter have returned. This is such a routine cycle that it is all too easy for us to take it for granted, without thinking how it all works. However, scientists have identified a complex array of “body clocks” which are essential for birds to synchronise their lives with their environment.

Increasingly refined studies of birds have revealed that they have three principal biological clocks. These exist in the retinae of the eye, in the pineal gland in the brain, and in a specific part of the brain called the suprachiasmatic nucleus. They interact with each other resulting in key hormones being sent around the bird's body.



The birds' most obvious biological clock is the one that we also have: the daily (*circadian*) clock, which tells them when to sleep and when to wake. It is no surprise to find that, for most birds, the increased light levels which develop around sunrise trigger activity such as feeding. Similarly, for most, nightfall stimulates a long period of sleep and for nocturnal birds, this is obviously reversed.

Blue tits' brains must calculate when to breed to ensure plentiful caterpillars for their hatchlings.

But then again, nothing is quite that simple. For one thing, that daily cycle can be overridden. After all, many of us have occasionally spotted an owl hunting by day and some diurnal birds, for example warblers and cuckoos, always migrate by flying at night. However, even saying that dusk stimulates diurnal birds to prepare to sleep fails to do justice to the complexity of birds' brains.

Unlike humans who generally rely on one extended period of sleep, we now know that birds sleep quite differently. To start with, their sleep cycles are much shorter than ours so that their sleep is taken in a series of short naps. More significantly, only half of their brain sleeps at any one time. This pattern is called “unihemispheric slow wave sleep” and means that the other half of the brain is always alert to danger. For migratory birds this also means that



Cuckoos are solitary and are completely dependent on their body clock to tell them when to migrate.

they can literally sleep while still flying. So birds like swifts, which also feed on the wing, may stay airborne throughout migration.

As well as the circadian clock, birds also have an annual (*circannual*) clock which tells them when to sing, find a mate, breed or migrate. These clocks have to be very accurate, ensuring for example, that when their offspring hatch there is a good

chance that there will be a plentiful supply of their essential foods. They are also vital for any bird like the cuckoo which never meets its parents and does not have mature cuckoos around to show them when to migrate.

Like all living organisms, of course, birds detect and respond to immediate external factors such as danger, the behaviour of others of their species, the weather or the availability of food. What we now understand far more fully is the sophisticated nature of the various internal “clocks” – the mechanisms which not only enable birds to survive in the here and now, but also govern when they embark on activity which will be crucial in the months ahead.

IN THE NEWS

1,000 NEW TREES FOR CHELTENHAM

Thanks to funding from the Forestry Commission, a Cheltenham project - and eight others across the South West - have been awarded a share of a £10million pot to increase tree numbers in urban areas through small-scale planting projects. The money, for more than 50 projects in England, has been awarded as part of the second and final round of the Forestry Commission's Urban Tree Challenge Fund. More than 84,000 trees will be planted in towns and cities across the country, including 7,800 in the South West. Within this, 1,000 trees will be planted as part of Cheltenham's Urban Tree Challenge.

IN THE NEWS

PEOPLE IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE RELISHING THE OUTDOORS

Since the imposition of the first COVID-19 lockdown eight months ago there has been a growing sense that many people are spending more time outdoors in open green spaces. Many had more time on their hands because their working lives were badly disrupted and so they headed for the countryside seeking fresh air and gentle exercise. Increasingly, though, there grew a realisation that this extra time outdoors also opened their eyes to the rich rewards of getting closer to nature. Maybe the good spring and summer weather helped, with bright sunshine adding a glow to nature's colours. Maybe the lack of traffic noise revealed previously hidden sounds. Whatever the reasons, it just felt as if nature was now more important to more people. Nature went on doing what nature does – we just noticed it more and drew more from it.

Now a survey by Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust – “Life After Lockdown” - has added substance to this impression. More than 1200 people responded and the findings are still being analysed. One headline, though, already stands out: 74% of respondents chose to spend more time in nature, and they believe that this brought improvement in both their mental and physical wellbeing.

Having found such pleasure and solace from nature, in what are very troubling times, the respondents now want change. They are not only more determined to keep seeking time with nature in their own lives, but have also become more aware of the impact of human activity on our natural environment. The outcomes of the “Life After Lockdown” survey add more evidence to the belief that there really is a growing groundswell of opinion in favour of more nature-friendly policies and practices.

THE WORD FROM WAYNE

Wayne Sedgwick, Senior Ranger, Cheltenham Borough Council

Higher Level Stewardship

In their work to conserve and improve the Hill, Cheltenham Borough Council and the voluntary groups like FOLK and the Cotswold Wardens are highly dependent on the national funding which flows through the Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreement. Normally an HLS agreement would last for ten years and by now ours should already have been renewed.

However, the whole scheme is due to be replaced with a new system in 2023 with far greater emphasis on work to preserve and improve the environment - such as tree or hedge planting, river management to mitigate flooding, or creating or restoring habitats for wildlife. Like the current HLS scheme, its planned replacement, the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMs) is set out in three tiers. Tier One would encourage farmers and landowners to adopt environmentally sustainable farming and forestry practices, while farmers, foresters and other land managers in Tier Two would focus on delivering locally-targeted environmental outcomes. The third tier would pay for larger-scale, transformational projects – such as restoring peatland.

For the time being, the government has set up a mechanism for a series of rolling one-year extensions to HLS until the new scheme comes into operation. So we are hopeful that the essential funds which support our work on the Hill will continue for at least the next couple of years until ELMS is in place.

To make the situation even more complicated, the current management of the Hill includes wide-ranging grazing by cattle and, to make this safe, significant lengths of fencing have been installed over the last ten years. Open public ground like Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common would not normally contain fences at all and so permission is required from the Planning Inspectorate, but the current permissions run out in March 2021. Renewal of the right to keep these essential fences involves an application process which itself includes consultation with all interested parties. These include householders, landowners, farmers, parish councils and a wide range of organisations concerned with nature, geology, archaeology, heritage and the enjoyment of open spaces. This consultation is already underway. Given that

the fences are now well-established and that no changes are being proposed, the Borough Council is optimistic of obtaining the Planning Inspectorate's renewal of permission for the fences to remain. We will keep you posted about both of these vital developments as discussions progress.

Brownstones Car Park expansion

With more and more people wanting to enjoy the Hill – especially in these challenging times – it was great to see the expansion of the Brownstones Car Park completed. It was also good to see that the County Council's Highways department had repaired the entrance by tackling the enormous potholes. The work has



doubled the capacity of the car park, with space now for up to 50 vehicles offering ready access to the very top of Leckhampton Hill. Even at 5 o' clock in the evening of a very sunny November day, there were a dozen or so cars parked there and one group of walkers from Malmesbury was enjoying a comforting picnic before setting off for home.

National Grid Funding Application

As readers will probably recall, FOLK was a leading player in a combined venture by Cheltenham Borough Council and Charlton Kings Parish Council to bid for a large sum to help improve key areas of Cheltenham's precious limestone grassland. The funds will be provided by the National Grid following permission for it to make improvements to nearby powerlines.

A wide range of planned works were set out in the detailed and comprehensive application which was submitted last year to The Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (OFGEM) for adjudication. The outcome of all the applications was due to be announced by January 2020. It is regrettable that, as I write, nothing at all has been heard from OFGEM. FOLK and Charlton Kings Parish Council have now been obliged to write to our MP, Alex Chalk, to seek his support in resolving this significant delay.

Success in this application would make a huge difference to our combined efforts to enhance this important land and we are all hoping that an announcement will be forthcoming very soon.

Grazing

The herd of around thirty Dexter cattle which is seen across the Hill will continue to graze on the high ground for a few more weeks before being brought down to more sheltered pastures for the winter.

Ash Dieback

Sadly all the indications are that this disease is continuing to spread. A recent survey concluded that ash dieback is present across around 95% of the wooded areas of the Hill and that, in the worst patches, as much as half of the trees present are showing symptoms of the disease. The Borough Council's Tree Officer is continually reviewing the situation and it is likely that some action will have to take place to reduce the risk to people who visit the Hill. Depending on the severity of the disease in individual trees and their proximity to pathways, this action may involve removing affected branches, a more comprehensive "crown reduction" across the whole canopy of the affected trees, or even the felling of those worst affected.

Rural Skills courses at Hill Farm

The Cotswold Conservation Board is running more and more training events at Hill Farm, just a short walk beyond Brownstones Car Park. The Board provides a wide range of courses located around the Cotswolds. At Hill Farm those on offer include:

- **Woodlands and Green Wood Working** (a day learning about the age old craft of green woodworking and its connection with our native woods)
- **Beginners' Introduction to Lime and Lime Mortaring** (a two-day course gaining "hands-on" experience of repairing and restoring an authentic Cotswold building using traditional lime mortar techniques)

For more information go to <https://www.cotswoldsruralskills.org.uk> or ring 01451 862000

ABOUT FOLK

FOLK is an organisation set up to work with landowners to promote the conservation and management of the ecology, geology and archaeology of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common. We support sustainable recreational and agricultural use of the land. We welcome new members to support and help us in this important work. If you wish to join (either as an individual or as a family) please contact any of the people listed below. ***There is currently no fee for membership.***

Why not have a look at what is new on the FOLK website <http://www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk/> and look us up on Facebook Friends of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common.

Contributions to the FOLK Website are always gratefully received.

Contact: webmaster.leckhamptonhill@gmail.com

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If you have any comments on the Newsletter or would like to contribute an article to the next edition please contact **Martin Wood** on **01242 231230** or email to: martinwood360@gmail.com. Articles of around 500 words, plus a photo if you have one, would be most welcome at any time.

Contact FOLK

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|----------------------------|--------------|
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Find the ***Friends of Leckhampton Hill & Charlton Kings Common*** on www.leckhamptonhill.org.uk and on Facebook

The views expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of FOLK or its Executive Committee.