

Report from the Environment Working Group

Introduction Our parishes are enveloped in the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (CAONB) and we therefore have a special duty of care for this resource of rural tranquility and heritage. We also take note of the very great value that our community residents place on our rural and natural environment.

We cannot simply trust that things will be protected or that external threats such as climate change or over development will not be realised. Rather we have to be active in our safeguarding and enhancing our special environment. To achieve this we need to be better informed about the complex ecosystem that we have here. We have aimed to develop meaningful, realistic proposals that seek to secure a sustainable tranquil environment for all of us living amid, and those visiting, our stunningly beautiful valleys and villages. We have grouped our proposals under 5 main headings:

1. Environmental mapping and knowledge gathering

1.1 Biodiversity and land use mapping Current knowledge about the land in our parishes, and how it is used, is held by a handful of excellent local farmers and people in our communities with knowledge in areas such as coppicing, wildlife, biodiversity, crops. This link with such vital local knowledge is extremely tenuous when not formally recorded and maintained.

We therefore propose a co-ordinated information gathering and mapping initiative to better understand our rural resource, habitat, and biodiversity. Such an exercise would be subject to regular reviews and guidance by the Wiltshire CC Ecologist working with community volunteers and some fund raising. As a result we would be able to protect and utilise what we have with enhanced sensitivity to the complex ecosystem that surrounds us. This process will start with checking local records and the developing regional and national data bases. The B&NES and Wilts. environment teams are currently preparing Green Infrastructure Strategies and such work at Parish level in both Freshford and Limpley Stoke will be achieved in synergy with this wider work.

1.2 Recording our rural heritage There are various records, memories, books, etc. which our rural history and this information needs to be gathered, logged and formally retained.

1.3 Making information publicly accessible We propose that such mapping and knowledge should be accessible via the internet for current and future generations with links from our Parish websites. Ideally a large map in the Village Hall would help promote knowledge and understanding together with locally positioned information boards and wildlife walk maps.

2. Protecting and promoting a sustainable rural environment

2.1 Creating an internet based film or slide show We proposed filmed or recorded interviews with local farmers, to help us be sensitive to their vital work. Awareness by residents and visitors will go a long way in helping them do their job effectively. We also want to ensure that suitable public walking routes are maintained in a way that allows farming and community to co-exist in mutual respect and understanding.

2.2 Protecting hedges and dry stone walls Retaining our rural character and biodiversity extends to such areas as protecting verge, hedgerows and dry stone walls as these provide vital wildlife migration routes and hibernation habitat.

2.3 Maintaining tranquility and rural darkness These important facets of the COANB are under threat due to increased traffic and road noise. All planning should respect the CAONB Management Plan and Position Statement in this respect. As a community we need to consider reducing use of night time lighting and thus reverse the trend towards orange night skies. Modern less polluting systems can help us where safety is critical. We otherwise lose or diminish the darkness dependant rural ecosystem that supports bats, moths, and a host of other creatures and plants. We also save energy and costs and can enjoy wonderful stargazing!

3. Sustaining and enhancing a thriving, vibrant, community

3.1 Promoting good gardening practice Our research, and feedback from the community suggests that we can use our gardens more thoughtfully and productively. The way we garden can make a big difference in 3 ways: 1)We can enhance community life, 2)We can be more food productive if we wish, 3) We can be sensitive to habitat and wildlife. We are therefore drafting an information sheet along these lines.

3.2 Considerate in tree planting and bonfires Feedback suggests that we need to work together with a community mindset on issues such as tree planting and bonfires. Inappropriate tree planting has removed long standing valley views and vistas, and also blocked natural light from gardens which might otherwise be more productive and enjoyable. We have lost views from the Tynning sitting area down to the valley below. In some areas bonfire smoke is ruining other people's enjoyment and use of their gardens. A little more guidance, thought, and communication by all of us would go a very long way. An annual community gardening award would help. First award to person who this year cut back a very tall hedge to give their neighbour more light as a treat for their birthday!

3.3 Encouraging local food production We need to consider where our food comes from and local reliance is important so that we can obtain fresh locally grown produce at reasonable prices, e.g. via farms and market gardens or grow your own. This can only enhance the work of the excellent Galleries shop initiative. Hopefully we will shortly be able to purchase local 'Limpley Stoke Lamb' following consultation with farmers and the shop. To help maximize local food production we would like to find ways to help people with no gardens, or only a very small plot, be able to grow food e.g. vegetables if they wish. If anyone has land available for public allotments or a community garden, or further ideas, then please let us know.

3.4 Community based business craft and recycling We believe that more can be made of sustainable tourism to our valleys given train and bus links and our location adjacent to Bath and that more can be done to divert visitors to the Cotswolds in general to our area and this would help local pubs, hotels and employment. We would like to encourage local craft and other suitable micro scale businesses to provide local community services and reduce dependence on transport out of the two parishes. In reviewing minimizing waste we are looking into setting up a small inter-village freecycle scheme and will also review the potential for a community composting facility for specific garden waste for local residents only.

3.5 Supporting getting about sustainably We encourage improving walkways and cycle paths in ways achieved in a way that does not diminish important habitats and farming effectiveness or scar the landscape. This helps us be more interconnected and live a healthy lifestyle. We wish to investigate the feasibility of car share scheme for the community - either for people with no car, or for those who want to downscale from 2-3 cars to 1-2 cars.

4. The Freshford Tynning, and Limpley Stoke green space

4.1 The Tynning Our working group has been specifically tasked with considering the Tynning. On such a sensitive issue where the history of ownership is somewhat complicated despite good intent it is essential that our future planning is marked by transparency and clarity.

We therefore propose a four part strategy for the future:

Firstly that the Tynning is purchased following a community fund raising effort. This would be confirmed via legal arrangement wherein the Parish Council become guardians on behalf of the residents and with due respect to it's recognized status in the B&NES Freshford and Sharpstone Conservation Appraisal. Full community ownership helps eliminate any future ownership query.

Secondly in a desire to ensure that the existing natural features and habitat of the Tynning are respected a biodiversity report by the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust was undertaken in early November 2012.

Thirdly we propose a small semi enclosed child friendly natural open ground play area such that school children can play on the Tynning grass and slope for break periods by means of a temporary gate

arrangement within an area adjacent to the school. This would be fenced off by simple post and rail for minimal visual impact. This can also become an area to grow some native grassland flowers for education as proposed by the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust.

This small area of land would remain fully protected in Freshford village community ownership as part of the protection of the whole Tynning, it being essential to ensure that any such sub zones could never be sold off in later years. This measure will also allow other local children and parents to use this same play area outside school break periods.

There is potential to rebuild a drystone wall at the border with the school. We support a proposal that a minimal impact pathway be created just inside the hedge to provide safe passage between the centre of Freshford and the Village hub shop and community Hall.

Fourthly the parish Council have promised a public meeting for Freshford residents on all these points and options for use and management. This will be called if and when a confirmed opportunity to purchase the Tynning land arrives.

4.2 Limpley Stoke green areas

We have commissioned a biodiversity study for Limpley Stoke St Georges Park from the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. They note that the freshwater streams in the park are highly valuable in biodiversity terms.

We are advised that any extending of this area is highly desirable in habitat terms if the opportunity were to arise through further land purchase because to enlarge good habitat areas is more preferable than creating new isolated pockets of habitat. Such an extension has attracted community support in the 'public engagement' sessions.

5. Tackling carbon and spiraling energy costs

5.1 Encouraging carbon emission reduction We can play our part in addressing the pressing international challenges on climate change. Communities in other parts of the world are already under sever threat. Aligned to this is the close to home need to save on our spiraling domestic bills and transport costs. We recommend a parishes focused public information campaign to help us all better understand the key issues that will help us reduce costs and carbon. We have discussed loan of a thermal image camera from a funded project in Bradford on Avon to help individual home owners with a survey of their own property should they wish to better understand where heat is lost through the fabric and thus be well informed before considering paying for any measures to reduce heat loss from their homes.

5.2 Developing appropriate guidance for renewables We are producing a summary of best practice inclusive of the advice and requirements from all relevant protective agencies including e.g. CAONB, English Heritage, etc. It is important to note that such advice asks us to attend to 'insulation before generation' because, in the longer term, this strategy is potentially less damaging both visually and physically to our environment and buildings and it is more cost effective. We propose improved web based access on this and other environment issues, as noted at **1.3 Public Information Accessibility** above.

5.3 How to better utilise our existing buildings We support the facilities working group in their policy of improved utilisation of existing buildings rather than commissioning yet more 'new build' facilities. Thus we are avoiding the reducing of rural land for food production and the high carbon cost of the initial build. Where new build is considered in our communities then a 'whole life' carbon reduction approach should be adopted such that the true carbon cost is accounted for.

Finally if you have feedback points to make or would like to help develop a continuing Environment Group that would aim to focus on safeguarding and enhancing our special surroundings beyond the Neighbourhood Planning process then please contact our Chair Tom Harper tjharper@me.com