



ANNUAL REPORT of the
Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust
for the year ending 31st December 2016

1. INTRODUCTION

This is the twelfth Annual Report produced by the Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust and covers the 15-month period from 1st October 2015 to the 31st December 2016.

The Trust's company registration number is 04898996 and is registered with the Charities Commission number 1109424, and has its Registered Office at Ash Lock Cottage, Government Road, Aldershot, Hampshire GU11 2PS.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE TRUST

- To promote the management of the countryside, biodiversity and wildlife habitats and the characteristic landscape of the Blackwater Valley.
- To educate the public on matters connected with countryside management by supporting, promoting and improving public access to the countryside.
- To promote the participation of the public and voluntary groups in all aspects of countryside management within the Blackwater Valley.
- To raise funds where necessary to undertake the above objectives and those detailed in our Memorandum of Association.

3. ORGANISATION

The Trust was greatly saddened by the death of Dr Clive Andrews, its circular walks organiser, in January 2016.

The current Chairman is Mike Swaddling and the Treasurer is Alan Rolfe. Other Trustee Directors at the beginning of the year were Bernard Baverstock, Ken Bigrave, Sue Cload, Chris Smith, Alan Taylor and Colin Wilson, plus David Murr (councillor representative). Maria Guida became a Trustee Director in January 2016. Sue Cload resigned in November 2016.

Steve Bailey, Manager of the BVC Partnership, acts as Company Secretary, Barbara Pilkington and Di Swaddling shared the role of Membership Secretary, and Paul Sanders has taken over as organiser for members' circular walks. Hilary Godber acts as minutes secretary, and Peter Collins took over in January 2016 from Roger Brown to maintain the Trust website. Their assistance and of many others not mentioned is very much appreciated.

4. ACHIEVEMENTS

4.1 Members Events

We have maintained a full program of varied walks and talks, attended local events and fairs, and issued monthly news updates to members. This included the following:

<i>October 2015</i>	- AGM, with presentations by Stuart Croft and Francis Kelly
<i>November 2015</i>	- two talks by Colin Wilson to Berkshire societies
<i>December 2015</i>	- Winter 'Walk Off The Christmas Pudding' Walk led by Colin Wilson
<i>February 2016</i>	- Bird Box Building Day in Swallowfield
<i>March 2016</i>	- Circular Walk round Finchampstead, led by Colin Wilson
<i>April 2016</i>	- Circular Walk along Basingstoke Canal, led by Mike Burns
	- Walk The Path 2016 – a fourth successful year in a row, and almost unanimous positive feedback
	- Sue Cload represented Trust at Tices Meadow BioBlitz in Aldershot
<i>May 2016</i>	- Circular Walk around Deepcut
	- Stand at Yateley Fayre with BVCP
<i>June 2016</i>	- Circular Walk round Sandhurst, led by Alan Taylor
	- talk by Bernard Baverstock at Rowhill
	- talk at Rowhill by Dr Deborah Harvey on Stag Beetles
	- Bernard Baverstock represented Trust at Heritage Open Day in Farnborough
<i>July 2016</i>	- Butterfly Walk, led by David Walton
	- Circular Walk round Minley, led by Paul Sanders
	- Stand at Blackwater & Hawley Fair with BVCP
<i>August 2016</i>	- Circular Walk along Basingstoke Canal, led by Alan Taylor
<i>September 2016</i>	- two of our very popular Bat Walks, led by Steve Bailey, the first at Shepherd Meadows and the second at Camp Farm Road, Aldershot.
<i>October 2016</i>	- Circular Walk through Swinley Forest, led by Sue Cload
<i>November 2016</i>	- Circular Walk round Fleet Pond, led by Mike Burns.
<i>December 2016</i>	- Winter 'Walk Off The Christmas Pudding' Walk led by Colin Wilson

4.2 Projects

The Path Improvement Group formed in 2014 became the Project Review Group, holding separate meetings and reporting back to the monthly Trust meetings. The following is a summary of work completed during the year:

Lynchford Road Footpath Clearance

Overgrown vegetation hampering pedestrian and cycling access along the Lynchford Road to Cumbria Court footpath was cut back along its entire length and 25 fence rails replaced. The path is now wide enough to drive a truck down to make work easier and promote RBC into keeping it mown.

Frimley Hatches

As part of our ongoing project work on the reedbed, more safety work was undertaken with the aid of the Tuesday volunteers, and a stumpery was built.

Grant's Moor

At Grant's Moor South we replanted reeds and created a native hedgerow and scrub area on the spoil heap after pond dredging. We rescued reptiles from the area before further dredging began and set up an exclusion fence to prevent animals from re-entering. We also had a working party to maintain our planted hedgerow in the Northern section.

Bat Project at Farnham Quarry/Tice's Meadow

Working with the owners, Hansen, we supported the creation of a Bat Hibernation Tunnel at Farnham Quarry, including the installation of bat boxes.

Bat Project – Seale Refurbishment

Working with BVCP, we refurbished the Bat Hibernation site at Seale, an old lime kiln within Surrey Wildlife Trust's Seale Chalk Pit reserve.

Wellesley Woodlands Batboxes

We purchased and put up 15 bat boxes in the new Wellesley Woodlands.

Bat Project – New Boxes and Equipment

Throughout the Valley we upgraded existing bat boxes and installed new ones, and upgraded current bat detectors and bought a portable spotlight so bats can be seen in flight.

Benches by the Blackwater- see Appeals below.

4.3 Appeals

2015 Appeal - 'Benches by the Blackwater' – four new benches were installed at selected locations along the Valley path.

2016 Appeal – 'Stag Beetle Stumperies' – BVCT and BVCP worked with local community groups to build log pile habitats for stag beetles around the Valley. A total of nearly 40 had been achieved at the time of writing, from a target of 50.

4.4 Other

Membership – the Trust continued its efforts to increase public awareness, including recruiting new members. A focus on business (formerly corporate) membership, including a presentation at Watchmoor Park in November, resulted in several new companies joining.

BVCP – we continue to actively support the BVCP by partnering them in their program of local events. In January Partnership staff and Trustees held a successful joint open day to aid closer co-operation between the two.

Talks – Trustees gave talks to several local organisations which resulted in donations and new members.

Fairs & Fetes – due to manpower shortages, the Trust cut its participation to just two events, at the Yateley Fayre in May, and Blackwater & Hawley Fair in July. Both featured activities for children and yielded several new members as well maintaining our public profile. We also took part in the BioBlitz at Tice's Meadow in April.

The website – our new webmaster proposed an upgrade to a new design, the implementation of which is close to achievement.

Social media – the Trust's presence on Facebook, Twitter and StreetLife continues to attract public interest and support.

Policies – we continued to review all of our policies against the most recent guidelines and legislation.

Firewood – at Ash Lock a small band of volunteers have continued to cut timber retrieved by BVCP into firewood for sale to the public, with the proceeds going into Trust funds. The total over three years has been £2,273.

Memorial bench – the Trust has been co-ordinating installation of a bench at Tice's Meadow as a memorial to Clive Andrews, funded by donations from some of the groups he belonged to.

5. MEMBERSHIP REGISTER

This is the tenth year that the Trust has had a membership base and at the year end before the renewal process our membership stood at 350. However, due to the need to change ownership of the database for health issues, and technological problems, it was not possible to follow up non-renewals as thoroughly as in previous years. The result is the following membership figures as at the 31st December 2016:

- 254 Households*
- 3 Affiliated members
- 6 Corporate members
- 2 Life members
- 3 Honorary members
- **Total 268**

**Each individual membership is assigned to an address or household which may have more than one person living there, so the number of actual individuals will be materially higher.*

The bulk of the non-renewals appear to be those recruited in the £1 membership recruitment at the last two Walk the Paths, possibly proving that what costs virtually nothing to buy has no lasting value. However, membership recruitment remains at the forefront of all our activities, in order to demonstrate, particularly to funders, that our community is behind us.

6. BUSINESS PLAN

The plan for 2016/7 has been updated and will be presented at the AGM on 16th February 2017. It will then be available for viewing on the website.

7. FUNDRAISING

- Our bank balance remains very healthy, but continual fund-raising activity is needed in order that we can respond swiftly to future projects as required;
- External donations were £283;
- The Trust has been generously supported by its members who, in addition to £1,661 of annual subscriptions, have given £515 in donations.

8. FINANCE

- This year Expenditure £7,199 exceeded Income £5,909, by £1,290
- Our banking facilities with CAF (Charities Aid Foundation) continue to be operated free of charge. We have a (90 day notice) deposit with Scottish Widows of £15,000 which earned interest of £103.44 in the financial year.
- Charitable Gift Aid amounted to £372
- The bank balances currently total £25,912
- We review our insurance cover at the end of the calendar year.

9. PARTNER ORGANISATIONS

- *Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership (BVCP)* provides the time the Company Secretary spends on Trust administration.
- *CAF Bank*, 25 Kings Hill Avenue, Kings Hill, West Malling, Kent ME19 4JQ
- *Aaduki Multimedia* and *Brooks Braithwaite (Sussex) Ltd* are our insurance companies.
- *Rushmoor Borough Council* provides the offices for our monthly meetings free of charge.
- *Sandhurst Town Council* provides the room used for the AGM.

10. THE FUTURE

There is no major change expected next year with regard to the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership but funding pressures are a constant cause of concern.

As mentioned in paragraph 6 above, the Trust's Business Plan for 2016/17 has been produced and a selection of projects listed in the Plan will be undertaken during the next twelve months.

Mike Swaddling

Chairman of Trustee Directors

Dated 16th February 2017