

Forest Update



Rivers in the Wychwood area

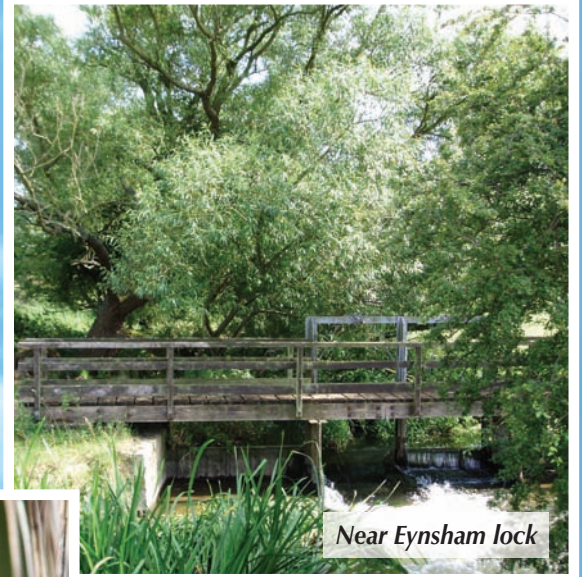
Issue 45 The Wychwood Project Magazine Autumn 2014

Front cover image – Langdale Common, Witney

Life on the river in Wychwood



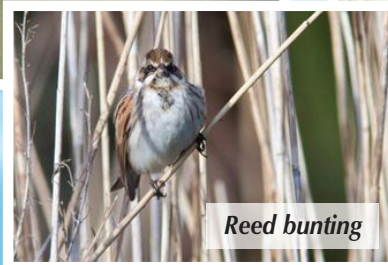
River Windrush in Witney



Near Eynsham lock



River Windrush in Witney



Reed bunting



Banded damoseille © Sherrie New



Water vole



Grimes, Witney



Wychwood volunteers taking lunch by the River Windrush, Widford



Looking for amphibians, Minster Lovell

Introduction

This issue's theme

Following on from Nick Mottram's article in the summer Forest Update about river catchments, the theme of the Autumn Forest Update is Rivers. We are lucky to have the Rivers Evenlode, Windrush and Thames all in the Wychwood area, together with several smaller spring-fed streams, sometimes seasonal. These add to the abundant diversity of habitats. There are many impacts on the water quality, wildlife, plants and hydrology of a river and as an environmental project we are working with other organisations and partners locally and county wide to ensure that our project work supports the conservation of river resources. In this issue we look at the unique characteristics of the River Evenlode and Windrush, the work of the

Environment Agency and Cotswolds River Trust. As you will read, there are many opportunities for you to get involved helping to restore and maintain the rivers in the Wychwood Project area.

Forest Fair

This year's forest fair was a great success thanks in part to the gloriously sunny weather on the day and being held at the spectacular location of Cornbury Park. Takings were well up on previous years.

Particular thanks go to the many volunteers, who make the fair possible every year.

Other news

With the absence of a Director, the last 4 months have been very hectic

for trustees and staff with the Wychwood Forest Fair, recruitment of a new Director, strategic planning exercises by the trustees of Wychwood Project (Oxfordshire), preparing for the Annual General Meeting and many enquiries to the Wychwood Project Office.

Enquiries can be from the Countryfile TV programme for example or walkers wanting information on the Wychwood Way, companies looking for countryside sites for bushcraft and team building activities and interested stallholders for next year's forest fair! The enquiries are very diverse and wide ranging and keep the office busy.

Wychwood Project Office

Woodstock Water Meadows

Woodstock Water Meadows lie in the heart of Woodstock in a valley along the River Glyme between the old and new towns. The Meadows were given to the town in 1453 in a charter from King Henry VI. The Wychwood Project has assisted Woodstock Town Council over several years in their efforts to restore and conserve this historic site and earlier this year completed a management plan for the Meadows to guide their future care.

The Meadows are a unique feature in the heart of Woodstock providing a valuable habitat for birds, small mammals, and plants from small aquatic species to mature trees. The Meadows extend to 5.5 hectares and are easily accessible to the public for quiet recreational use from a path near the Black Prince Public House. The channel on the northern edge of the Meadows once fed a corn mill on the edge of Blenheim Park. The Meadows are frequently flooded in winter, often for long periods. There are drier areas at the eastern end of the site that have in recent years been grazed. Today the Meadows support locally important lowland fen habitat, with large numbers of pollarded and coppiced willows, and poplar and alder contributing to the diversity of the habitat. The management plan covers a range of future activities including the reintroduction of grazing, a programme of clearing trees and scrub where these threaten the lowland fen habitat, maintaining paths and boardwalks and ongoing work to control the extent of invasive plants.

There is a lot of local interest in the Meadows and The Town Council benefits from the support and enthusiasm of a Friends of Woodstock Watermeadows group, the local Green Gym and Oxfordshire Conservation Volunteers. To contact the Friends of Woodstock Watermeadows **Susan Offen, 01993 812171, susanoffen29@gmail.com**. For the Green Gym see www.woodchipgreengym.org.uk/ or ring **Philip, 01993 810820**.

Nick Mottram, Environmental Strategy Officer, Oxfordshire County Council



Access to Meadows from Black Prince PH



Footbridge over secondary channel

The Evenlode

The Evenlode catchment is situated in the Northwest of the Thames River Basin. It covers 430km², a large part of which lies within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The catchment includes the area of land that drains into the river Evenlode and several of its tributaries, the largest being the groundwater fed river Glyme and its main tributary the Dorn. **A large part of the former Royal hunting Forest of Wychwood sits within the Evenlode catchment.** The landscape in this catchment is some of the finest in the county and includes Priority Habitats such as beech woods and limestone grasslands, lowland meadows and fen.

Despite this impressive rural setting **much of the river habitat and fish populations in the catchment are poor.** They have been degraded through a combination of historical channel modification for land drainage, and pollution (sediment and nutrients) from waste water and rural areas. In many places rivers have been over-deepened, widened and straightened, resulting in uniform channels, rivers divorced from their floodplain and with extensive in-channel siltation. Additionally numerous weirs confine the flow and create barriers to fish movement. Invasive non-native species, such as the signal crayfish, have been identified as a key challenge and groundwater in the Evenlode catchment, which we rely on to provide drinking water, is the worst in West Thames for levels of nitrate.

All of this contributes to reduced water quality, biodiversity and fisheries interest, as well as a failure to meet the **Water Framework Directive targets of "Good Ecological Status"**. This is a legal obligation for the UK government and is vital to secure a healthy future for our rivers and the communities they support.



River Glyme, Wootton Jubilee fields wildlife site – this is a beautiful site between the River Glyme and the River Dorn that contains calcareous grassland.



River Glyme, alternative view.



Weir on the River Evenlode at Charlbury.

Catchment partnerships have been formed across England, to bring together a range of organisations, local people and technical experts to develop action plans with the aim of enhancing river catchments. In the Evenlode area we are working with the Environment Agency, Cotswolds Rivers Trust, Cotswolds AONB, Wild Trout Trust, Oxford University, land owners, local authorities and of course the Wychwood Project. Working with these and other existing networks we aim to secure funding for projects that will enhance water quality, biodiversity and other socio-economic benefits for local communities, along with providing a degree of flood attenuation. Projects will range from small in-stream modifications, such as the addition of gravel to enhance areas for fish spawning, through to larger scale interventions to re-instate the natural meanders of the rivers, and prevent soil erosion and run-off from agricultural land.

If you would like to help with any aspect of this work, or receive an **Evenlode newsletter**, please contact hilary@wildoxfordshire.org.uk. For more information on Oxfordshire's river catchments see <http://www.wildoxfordshire.org.uk/biodiversity/river-catchments/>: this website will be updated with maps and further information in the near future.

Hilary Phillips MCIEEM, Wild Oxfordshire tel: 01865 407034

Summer in the Lower Windrush Valley

This summer we have helped many children to discover, and adults to rediscover, the joys of pond dipping. Tar Lakes is the perfect site with gently sloping banks and water buzzing with pond life. It only takes a couple of sweeps of a net for them to discover mini dinosaurs, voracious predators and millions of tiny creatures. Standlake School came one day in June and many others on open days in May and August. I am grateful to Angus Campbell, mayfly enthusiast extraordinaire, for enthusing us all about the mysteries of the deep; also to other volunteers who helped with the pond dipping and opened the bird hide to share their delight in birdwatching with budding young naturalists.



Lots of specimens!

There is something about the lakes, ponds and rivers in the valley that inspires the greatest of enthusiasm.

Dr Pascale Nicolet of the Freshwater Habitats Trust is a great advocate for the water quality and species richness here. She is so interested and knowledgeable about the area that we are delighted to have recruited her to the project steering group.



Pascale hunting for stoneworts.

Work on the strategy for the project is making good progress through consultations with parish councils, residents, visitors and local businesses. We hope to have a draft document widely distributed for further comments by the end of the year. If you are not on the email list to receive general information about the project please email me at lwvp@oxfordshire.gov.uk and I will make sure you get a copy.

Jane Bowley, Lower Windrush Valley Project Officer

Cotswold Rivers Trust



The Cotswolds Rivers Trust was formed in March 2011 by three volunteers who have remained with the Trust since then (and have since been joined by one other). They had become aware of moves to implement the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) and were concerned that there was no lead body representing the Cotswolds rivers. As soon as they formed they affiliated to the national body, the Rivers Trust, who provided start up funding. The Trust is a company limited by guarantee and in January 2013 we became a registered charity.

The stated aim of the Trust is "Conserving & Caring for the Cotswolds Rivers". We define these as the Thames tributaries within the Cotswolds AONB. This includes the rivers Evenlode and Windrush, both of which fall within the Wychwood project area.

The Trust delivered its first major restoration project on the Lower Coln in the summer of 2012. In April 2013 we delivered a landowners' rivers restoration day at Fairford using the Lower Coln works as an example of what could be achieved. In the summer of 2013 we delivered another major project on the Windrush on the National Trust's estate at Sherborne. We also delivered a smaller project in November 2013 on the Upper Coln.

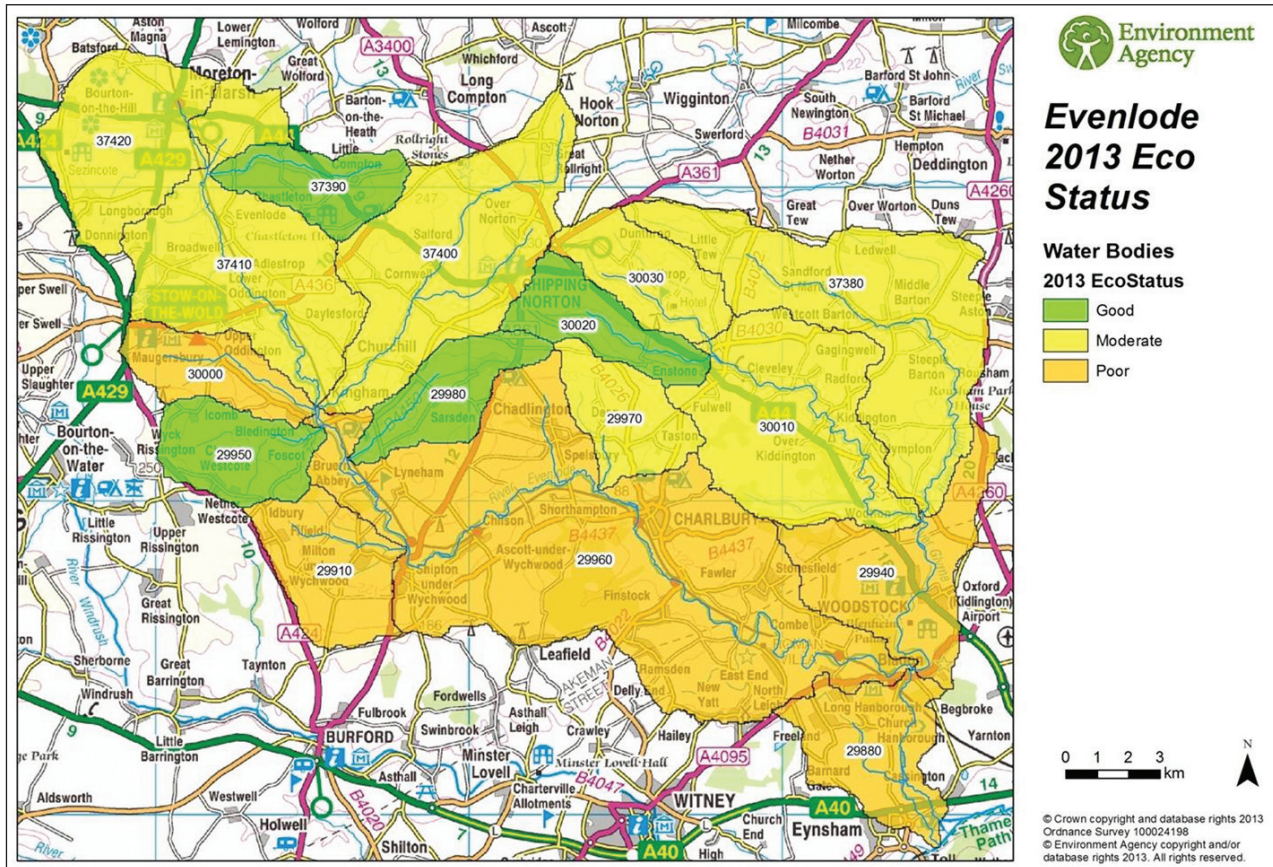
We have just been successful in securing lottery funding for an Evenlode tributaries restoration day and planning for this is currently in hand. This is likely to take place in the Shipton-under-Wychwood area.

In addition to river enhancement works, we regularly lobby for improvements to water quality and attend meetings with Thames Water and the Environment Agency to this end.

Trevor Cramphorn, Cotswold Rivers Trust <http://cotswoldsrivetrust.org>



The River Evenlode Needs Your Help - Environment Agency



Only 27% of our waterbodies in England are currently classified as being of 'good' status under standards set by the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD). Improving water quality in our rivers, streams and other waterbodies has many benefits for people, businesses and wildlife. To make these improvements the Government has initiated the 'Catchment Based Approach (CaBA)', appointing a Catchment Host in every catchment in England. A catchment is the area of land from which rainfall flows into a river, lake or other waterbody. An Environment Agency Catchment Officer has also been assigned to support each of these host organisations. The Catchment Host for the River Evenlode is Wild Oxfordshire, who will lead a partnership of local organisations and people to help resolve the causes of poor river quality.

The River Evenlode is fed by springs from the limestone that underlies the Cotswolds and by surface run-off and flows in a south-easterly direction, mainly over clay, to join the River Thames at Cassington. The map shows the Evenlode Catchment, and several of its tributaries, including the Glyme and Dorn. The catchment has been divided into 16 stretches of river, twelve of which are failing to achieve the 'good' status set by the WFD. The geology of this catchment also means that water below the ground surface (groundwater) is very vulnerable and is largely classified as 'poor' status.

The main reasons for these failures are poor fish habitat and pollution from too much nutrient and silt entering the rivers and groundwater. The causes of these problems are:

- over deepened & over widened river channels (photo right),
- barriers creating impoundments,
- pollution from fertilisers and pesticides coming from farmland,
- high levels of silt from roads and fields,
- waste water from sewage, and
- invasive non-native species.



Measures to address these pressures, including river channel restoration, water friendly farming initiatives, and improvements to sewage treatment works are under way. The Rivers Evenlode, Glyme and Dorn have all received a small amount of restoration in the recent past, carried out by local interest groups, environmental charities, landowners and statutory agencies with some successful results. A start has been made, but much more is needed to restore the rivers in this catchment. This is why the Environment Agency is supporting the partnership of local people and organisations who are keen to work together to improve the quality of the rivers in the Evenlode catchment.

At the Wychwood Forest Fair we thoroughly enjoyed speaking to so many people about the fish we had on display, to demonstrate our river pollution model and to hear memories, concerns and ideas about their local rivers. To get involved please contact hilary@wildoxfordshire.org.uk.

Jo Old, Environment Agency Catchment Coordinator – Evenlode & Ock.

River Basin Management Plan consultations – On Friday 10 October consultations on the draft update to the river basin management plans (RBMP) and the draft flood risk management plans (FRMP) started. The RBMP consultation will run for six months and the FRMP will run for three months. The consultation gives everyone the chance to comment on shaping the water environment throughout England. The consultation documents, response forms and other links can be found as follows:

RBMP: www.consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/portal/ho/wfd/draft_plans/consult?pointId=s1405418030714#section-s1405418030714

FRMP: www.gov.uk/government/consultations/draft-flood-risk-management-plans

The updated plans are due to be published in December 2015. They'll guide us in directing considerable investment and action from 2016 to 2021 and beyond, which will provide benefits to society and the environment.

Windrush Catchment Partnership Beginnings

As you may recall from the summer edition of Forest Update (Summer 2014 Issue), a government initiative called the Catchment Based Approach is beginning to take shape within and around the Wychwood Project area. The initiative involves establishing Catchment Partnerships made up of a wide range of interested parties in order to protect and enhance the water environment and to meet European targets for water quality (EU Water Framework Directive).

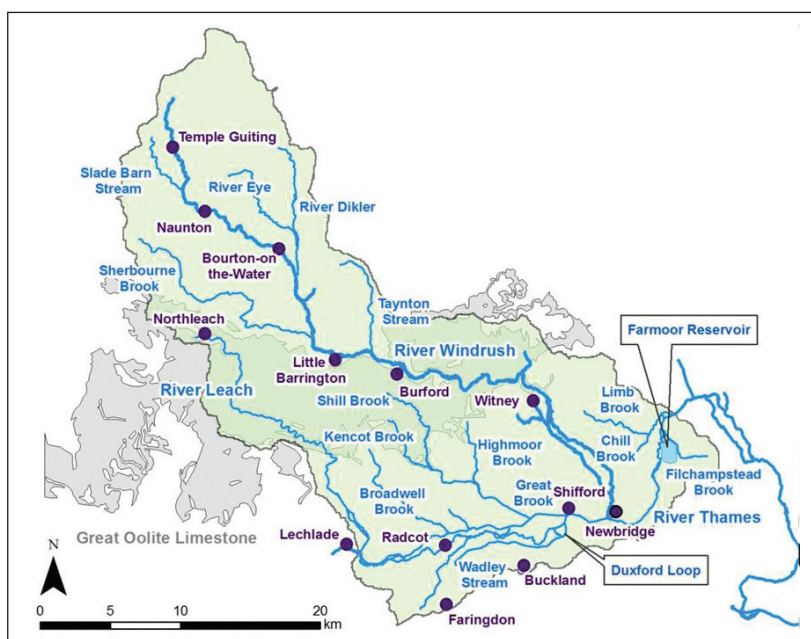
The issues affecting rivers are complex and as such are not easy to manage. While many of our rivers are in much better condition now than they have been in the past, mainly due to tighter legislation on industrial pollution and sewage treatment, a multitude of problems still affect rivers today, linked to agriculture, urbanisation, waste water and a range of other human activities.

The Catchment Partnership for the River Windrush and its tributaries (Figure 1) recently held its first meeting to discuss projects within the catchment area that will bring about improvements to water quality and benefits for wildlife. As well as engaging with the public. We are keen to tackle the underlying causes of problems in the Windrush. A major factor is the trampling and poaching of river banks by cattle. By fencing off watercourses and supplying water in-field instead, using a trough or pasture pump, river banks can be stabilised by plant growth and the

Continued overleaf...



The Thames at Chimney Meadows, flowing through the Windrush catchment.



sediment being washed into the river is lessened. These sediments are often bound up with phosphate, which enriches the water and causes problems of its own. Well-vegetated banks may also become home to water voles, for which the Windrush is a particular stronghold!

Fencing cattle away from river banks may be effective, but it can also be costly, and it is understandable that many farmers feel unable to follow this advice giving rise to a conflict of interest. One of the challenges facing Catchment Partnerships across the country is funding the changes they would like to make and the projects they would like to carry out. Although there are no guarantees, funding from Defra may be on the horizon, and we are hoping to be able to offer free fencing for riparian landowners where there are particular issues with erosion. We would be interested to hear from landowners in the Wychwood Project area if you would like to be part of or work with the catchment partnership (whether the Windrush or the Evenlode partnership). Please get in touch if you would like any more information: judithhartley@bbowt.org.uk or **01865 775476**.

Other news

We had a very successful 2014 forest fair at Cornbury Park. Here are some images of the day.



Follow us on



The Wychwood Project works within the area that was once the Royal Hunting Forest of Wychwood.

Our Goals:

The Wychwood Project aims to raise awareness of the history and heritage of the Royal Hunting Forest of Wychwood, and to encourage local people to take part in and benefit from restoration, conservation and enhancement of the rich mosaic of landscapes and habitats within the Forest boundaries.

Contact us:

Countryside Service
Signal Court, Old Station Way
Eynsham, Oxon OX29 4TL

Tel: 01865 815423

E-mail:

wychwood@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Web: www.wychwoodproject.org



The Wychwood Project is grateful for the continued financial support of Oxfordshire County Council, West Oxfordshire District Council and a range of other community and private donors



Please note that events organised by local projects, groups or societies other than the Wychwood Project may charge a small 'visitors' fee.

You are advised always to confirm details beforehand with the contact telephone number given.

- 2014 -

Tuesday 18th November, 7.30 pm - 10 pm

Wychwood Project (Oxfordshire) AGM

Includes an illustrated presentation by Dr Kate Tiller (Oxford University)
"The Forest of Wychwood – past and present" and the work of the Victoria County Archive.

The Meeting Place – Fulbrook

Thursday 27th November

History of the Wychwood Forest

Tim Shardlow, Forestry Director of Nicholsons Nurseries, will talk about the history of the Wychwood Forest and forestry in this area. Tickets £5, to include a glass of wine.

Time: 7.00 pm

Venue: Village Hall, Churchill

Contact: janie.hexall@btinternet.com tel. 01608 658278
for tickets

Saturday 29th November

Night of a thousand candles

Turn on of Woodstock town's Christmas illuminations with music, candles, mulled wine, chestnuts etc.

Time: 6.00 - 7.00 pm

Venue: Woodstock

Saturday 20th December

Salt and Slates

Moderate walk, 3.5 hours, 6 miles. Walk past Charlbury quarry to Dustfield then along the Saltway to Stonesfield. Take Stonesfield Lane to follow the route of the Oxfordshire Way back to Charlbury.

Time: 10.00 am

Starting point: Spendlove Car Park, Charlbury SP358196

Contact: Cotswold Conservation Board, Tel. 01451 862000

Friday 5th December

The decline of farmland birds

Talk by Alan Luckman

Time: 7.15 pm

Contact: West Oxon Field Club, Tel. 01993 841194,
email info@westoxfordshirefieldclub.org

Witney Woodland Volunteers

We meet every Monday at 10 am under the clock by Waitrose in Witney to do a range of interesting and rewarding conservation projects in the Witney area, finishing at midday.

Further details are on our website at www.witneywood.org.uk

- 2015 -

Saturday 21st February

Crossing a Roman Road

Easy walk, 3 hours, 6 miles. Cross an old Roman road twice on a route near many small settlements, several farms and ancient woodlands.

Time: 10.00 am

Starting point: Finstock School

Contact: Cotswold Conservation Board, Tel. 01451 862000

21st - 22nd February

Hedgelaying - Beginners (Midlands Style).

£109.00 booking essential. This course is suitable for anybody with little or no experience of hedgelaying.

Venue: Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire

Contact: Cotswold Conservation Board, Tel. 01451 862000

Sunday 1st March

Chipping Norton's Geological History

Strenuous walk, 6 hours, 12 miles. Step back in time to explore the geological history of this area.

Time: 10.00 am

Starting point: Chipping Norton Town Hall

Contact: Cotswold Conservation Board, Tel. 01451 862000

Sunday 1st March

Dawn Chorus, Rushey Common, Nr Witney

2.5 miles circular walk to Hardwick and Gill Mill.

Contact: David Rolfe, 01993 773123

Meet: Rushey Common Reserve Car Park, SP381073

Wednesday 11th March

Town, Valley, Village and Vistas

Easy walk, 2.5 hours, 4 miles. Circular walk with a close look at Charlbury before continuing across the countryside where the skyline is dominated by the ancient Wychwood Forest.

Starting point: Spendlove Centre in Charlbury

Contact: Cotswold Conservation Board, Tel. 01451 862000

Tuesday 24th March

Roman Ways, a Deserted Village and a Wedding Mystery

On ancient paths through Fawler, Wilcote and Finstock returning past Cornbury Park.

Contact: Cotswold Conservation Board, Tel. 01451 862000

Starting point: Spendlove Centre, Charlbury.

Chipping Norton Green Gym

Meet on Wednesday or Thursday mornings

Website: www.chippygreengym.org

They carry out practical conservation on sites around West Oxfordshire & everyone is welcome to come along.

Please ring Jenny Harrington on 01608 643269 or mail to: jennyharrington@btinternet.com to let them know you're coming.

CHILDREN: Under 16s accompanied by a guardian are welcome.

Woodstock Green Gym

Meet on a Wednesday morning

Contact Philip Redpath 01993 810820

email: redpath998@aol.com

Website: www.woodchipgreengym.org.uk

Mobile on the day: 07769 500667

They carry out practical conservation on sites around West Oxfordshire & everyone is welcome to come along.

Please ring Jenny Harrington on 01608 643269 or mail to: jennyharrington@btinternet.com to let them know you're coming.

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