

Annual Report, June 2010 – May 2011

Introduction

1. Formed in 2002, The Bourne Conservation Group (BCG) comprises volunteers who work in The Bourne area of South Farnham.

2. The emphasis of work is now on local biodiversity projects but the Group's traditional tasks of supporting Waverley Borough Council (WBC) in the management of open spaces, and Surrey County Council (SCC) in the maintenance of the 10 miles of local footpaths and bridleways are continued. The overall scope of activities continues to be very wide and in the past year the highlights have been:



- Steady progress with the rejuvenation of the Old Churchyard (OCY) including the installation of a wildlife pond and restoration of most of the damaged monuments
- Further developing the connection between wildlife conservation and local heritage through a Heritage Day in June 2010 as part of our Historical Project
- Maintenance of all project sites in a satisfactory condition throughout the year including, at the end of the period, a special effort in support of Farnham's entry in the South East in Bloom Competition
- Planning and implementing maintenance and improvement of The Bourne's named footpath network

3. Close attention continues to be paid to Health and Safety aspects of the work, and Public Liability and Personal Accident insurance cover is obtained through the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV). The current financial state is sound but, in common with much of the voluntary sector in the current economic climate, there is some uncertainty about future funding for day to day expenses.

4. **Membership.** Our members and friends are our most important asset and we are fortunate to have an active core of very loyal volunteers, some of whom have been with the Group since its earliest years. In the past year numbers have remained steady and there are now 41 members of which over 30 have actively participated in work sessions for which the average attendance is eight. This has been adequate to carry out current tasks but not to take on new work and we have reluctantly had to resist getting involved in some additional activities. While it is encouraging to report a steady influx of new members to replace those leaving, there is a continuing need for more recruits to cover the range of tasks now undertaken. More young members to reinforce the aging workforce would be especially welcome.

5. **The Friends of BCG.** This scheme launched in 2008 has continued successfully, resulting in a welcome widening of support as well as generating a modest income to help with running costs. Currently there are 20 Friends and this number is steadily rising.

Review of Work Undertaken

6. **General Approach.** Our practical approach to conservation is to endeavour to enhance the diversity of wildlife in The Bourne using the Surrey Biodiversity Action Plan as a guide. This is in tune with other professional and volunteer groups in the county and more widely throughout the UK. There are continuing signs locally that the desired effect is being achieved but on a wider scale there is great concern about the decline of many common species including such favourites as the cuckoo. We are monitoring developments in this field and are keeping in touch with a potential “landscape scale” conservation project for the whole of the river Wey catchment under consideration at the Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT).



7. **Wildlife Recording.** Understanding our local wildlife underpins all that we do. We are now somewhat better at recording the wildlife species we see on our own sites but we recognise the need to expand our efforts by reporting all interesting or unusual sightings, and we are launching a project to involve more people in this. This will give us a better insight into our own area and a firmer basis on which to comment on planning applications. Since we feed all confirmed reports into the Surrey Record Office co-

located with SWT at Pirbright, our work also improves their database.

8. **Pattern of Work.** The routine work pattern of a main session on a Sunday morning each month has been augmented by many mid-week sessions organised as and when required. The number of hours worked has significantly increased in the past year from 692 hours in 2009 - 2010 to 809 hours in the current year. The time spent on essential supporting tasks (including wildlife surveys and educational activities) has shown a corresponding increase to 516 hours, giving an overall total for the year of 1325 hours. Although on the conservative side, these figures are the highest figure recorded so far and have only been made possible by the excellent support of the membership.

9. A steady number of favourable comments about BCG are received both verbally and in writing but it is probably true that the scale of planning and organisation required to support the public face of our work is not fully realised. In this context tribute must be paid to the outstanding work of the 7 committee members and to additional members who have taken on specific tasks ranging from historical research to keeping bird feeders filled throughout the year.

Middle Bourne Lane (MBL) Community Wildlife Garden.

10. After the intense effort put into the MBL garden in 2009 which culminated in winning the prestigious Biffaward prize for Small Projects, work initially proceeded on a more routine basis. At the start of 2011, however, we were informed that Farnham would for the first time be entering the Large Town category of the SE in Bloom competition and would like to include MBL on the itinerary. We suggested that some of our other sites would also be worth including and on 6th July the judges stopped at MBL and OCY as well as driving past The Bourne Crossroads. We also put up display panels in the Farnham Council Chamber for the meeting with the judges at the end of the afternoon. The results of the competition will not be known until 7th September but, along with the other volunteer groups involved, we have been

warmly thanked by the Town Council for our participation. In turn we thank Kevin Taitt for his unswerving help to us during the year.

11. In addition to introducing some new plants into the MBL garden, a number of improvements have been made. As forecast in last year's report, the lower path has been modified including the introduction of trellis panels with a view to creating a green screen to disguise the rather ugly close boarded boundary fence. The site entrance has been given a more permanent look with an area of hard standing comprising granite sets to overcome the erosion that was taking place. The compost area has also been tidied and re-vamped.



12. Increasingly, MBL is now a true haven for wildlife in the urban landscape. It is enjoyed by more people than in the past and we have been delighted to learn of the way in which The Bourne Nursery School incorporates the site and the stream footpath leading to it into the environmental studies section of the National Curriculum they follow. Increased usage brings some problems in terms of disturbance to the wildlife habitats and this needs managing as we strive to balance human and wildlife requirements. Importantly, we believe the site does serve as an example to visitors who take away ideas to incorporate into their own gardens.

13. For the future we aim to maintain MBL to a high standard appropriate to a wildlife garden, hopefully involving more local residents in the work. The wildflower meadow needs more attention and the time is ripe for some further thinning out of the laurel bushes. Thought is also being given to improving the verge along the roadside so as to give a better outward appearance to the site.

The Old Churchyard (OCY) Project.

14. The substantial progress with this project reported last year has continued as follows:

- The gradual evolution of a rational maintenance regime which balances the conflicting aspirations for a nature reserve and a neat and tidy graveyard.
- The installation of a wildlife pond which, as far as we have ascertained, is a unique feature for a churchyard in England.
- Restoration of most of the badly damaged monuments.

The funding provided by the Orchid Trust under the auspices of the Surrey Community Foundation has been instrumental in allowing us to make progress with the biodiversity enhancements and we are extremely grateful for their generous support. For the repair of the monuments money was raised at the Heritage Day in June 2010 and we are especially grateful to the Overwood Trust for their generous donation.



15. The Wildlife Pond. When we started work in OCY we believe we made a rapid improvement to biodiversity by opening up the space previously occupied by the old church. From our favourable experience in MBL we knew that this would at least be equalled by the introduction of a wildlife pond and this was included in the Project Plan from the outset. With clearance of a mass of laurel bushes it became apparent that the south east corner which had been used as a tip for many years was the most

suitable site for a pond for which the digging took place over the weekend of 11-12th September 2010. As shown, this was a significant event for BCG because of use of a mechanical digger for the first time. It was an extremely efficient operation thanks to the organisation of Bryan Snashall and a willing team of members equipped with spades and wheelbarrows. Ten tons of spoil were removed from the roadway before 8.00am on Monday morning. Bryan also engineered the pipework which allows the pond to be kept topped up with rainwater from the nearby roof of Mary and John Egan's property to whom we are grateful. The pond was lined and filled in early December and landscaped in January 2011. The final stage was building a small dead hedge of withies to define the pond area. We obtained the withies by pollarding willow trees along the Wey at Godalming thanks to Ian Baldwin the Waverley ranger there who also kindly transported them to OCY for us.

16. Heritage Day, 27th June 2010. Our growing interest in the lives of the 750+ people buried in OCY has given a new dimension to our project. It was appropriate therefore that Richard Sandars arranged a Heritage Day in which we offered to the public one hour tours of the site covering its history and wildlife, together with an exposition of the lives and exploits of a cross section of the permanent residents there. Wendy Maddox, Jenny Mukerji and Mike Spurrier were on hand to answer queries on family and local history and Edelgard Moss served refreshments. It was a beautiful summer's day and each of the 6 tours was well attended despite the counter attraction in the afternoon of England playing Germany at soccer! Many new interesting facts and reminiscences came to light as our guides talked to the visitors, and the donations received paid for the restoration of 12 more monuments.

17. Wildlife Survey and Training Day, 20th June 2010. For the second year in succession, in conjunction with the Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT), we ran a survey day in OCY for our own members and members of the public from all over Surrey. Thanks to the organisation and expertise of Frances Halstead, Martin Angel and Jane Still the event was a resounding success which furthered our knowledge of species present on the site. A similar event is planned for 2011 and will already have taken place by the time this report is circulated.

18. Biodiversity. The measures previously taken to enhance biodiversity in OCY include a range of new plants, nest boxes, bird feeders and improved management of trees and hedges. To these has now been added the wildlife pond and a small bog garden with a starter array of aquatic plants. We were delighted with the speedy appearance of tadpoles and newts in



A whole dynasty of slow worms in OCY

March 2011 together with other insects such as pond skaters and whirligig beetles. Some 350 species of flora and fauna have now been recorded on this site including a large number of moths some of which are unusual. Further biodiversity enhancement measures will be introduced later in 2011.

The Bourne Crossroads.

19. The flower bed on the corner has as usual provided a splash of colour throughout the year at this busy junction thanks largely to the dedicated efforts of Sheila Musson, Jill McIntosh and Pat King. They have also looked after the small raised bed at the foot of Granny Cook's Steps and this year, for the first time, the flower beds outside the new Café Indigo as illustrated. The embankment and grass verge has also provided welcome seasonal colours and the reasonable showing of wildflowers in early summer 2011 will encourage us to plant more in the coming months.



20. There are continuing threats to this site from increased traffic levels, the prospect of a second BT box to provide faster broadband services and the possibility of a pedestrian crossing to serve whatever development is eventually permitted on the old garage site. Our attitude is that we need to fight very hard to retain what we can of this green space because of the pleasure it gives many passers by and the birds, bees, moths, grass hoppers and other insects for which it provides habitats.

The Ridgeway School.

21. The original aim of this project to hide the rather ugly pedestrian entrance to the school has been achieved through some attractive planting on this difficult embankment. We continue to do maintenance and have put in a few replacement plants this year. These have been watered in the dry spells.

Bulb Planting.

22. More bulbs were planted on Gravel Hill in autumn 2010 and gave an excellent showing. These spring flowers once again gave a real lift to the travelling public on the A287 after the severe winter. We would like to progress to include some wildflowers on the embankment knowing from experience that we shall have to be patient to get these established. This would be a small contribution to Surrey's Road Verge Habitat Plan.

Public Open Spaces in the Waverley Estate.



23. A year ago we noted that, after spending less time in support of Waverley Borough Council (WBC) on the patches of land they manage, there was now a backlog of work. In the past year, working with ranger Vicky Booth, we have made some progress in rectifying this situation. Two full sessions and one mid-week session were held in Paradise Wood and succeeded in dramatically thinning out the holly under-storey. More remains to be done there and in Burnt Hill Wood.

Rights-of-Way.

24. Maintenance of The Bourne's very distinctive footpaths and bridleways is never ending. And it is good to report that the network is in reasonably good order thanks to the continuous scrutiny of our Footpath Wardens orchestrated by Lisa Malcolm, and to work sessions in September 2010 and March 2011. We are grateful for the excellent support we get from Nicky Scott, of the Countryside Access Department. However, the lack of resources allocated in our area by the County Council continues to hold back any significant improvement to the standard of the network.

25. One area where we have made a noticeable difference is the signage of the named paths in The Bourne. This was originally a project by The Bourne Residents Association (TBRA) in association with The Ramblers to mark the Millennium and they had the foresight at that time to set aside a small budget for maintenance. However, no maintenance had been done since that time and Lisa Malcolm reported a whole series of incorrect or missing fingers and other inconsistencies. Therefore, as a joint project between ourselves, SCC and TBRA (who paid the bill) we were able in March 2011 to restore and improve the named network signs.



The Bourne Stream.

26. Patient work over several years eradicating Himalayan Balsam along the stream is definitely paying off. There is now very little left to pull except in the valley below Redhill House plus one or two isolated patches on higher ground in that area. This will be tackled in August 2011. The plant is still rife all along the Wey valley through Farnham and Tilford and there are some signs that the Environment Agency has at last recognised what a problem it has become.

27. We are concerned about The Bourne Stream in other ways. The maintenance by the Environment Agency seems almost non-existent and there is much litter of all types along the river bed. Additionally, we feel that this seasonal stream is drier for longer each year than in the past with a consequent detrimental effect on wildlife. This we understand is the subject of a study ordered by OFWAT and we are trying to get hold of a copy of the report. We will consider the possibility of a litter collecting exercise along the stream.

Planning Issues

28. Judged by comments received and news items and letters in the local press there is generally much unease about the planning and enforcement process. It is not our business to become involved in the politics of these issues but we feel that we can make a valid contribution locally by drawing attention to probable environmental impacts in the hope that these will be taken seriously by the planning authority and planning inspectors. Unfortunately in the past year we have been unable to devote all the time and effort this subject deserves. Nevertheless we have commented on several



planning applications in The Bourne and also on the proposal for a road bridge across the Wey as part of the East Street project. We have also kept in touch with the Surrey Wildlife Trust to make sure they are fully aware of any sensitive proposals.

29. There are many potential changes to the planning process in the wind both nationally and locally and there is no doubt we need to keep in touch with these. We believe we understand the critical position of Farnham occupies in the provision of wildlife corridors and what wildlife we have in our area or is likely to pass through it. As previously mentioned we are reinforcing our understanding by maintaining contact with the river Wey Landscape Project, and by stepping up our efforts to report wildlife sightings. There is then a need to convince the planning authorities to take these matters seriously.

Health and Safety

30. Our aim continues to be to carry out our work safely. To that end we believe we have developed effective practices without spoiling the enjoyment of members. We worked with the Vicar to ensure our risk assessment for OCY fully covered the introduction of a pond and that the proposed mitigation measures were satisfactory to him as the owner, and his insurers. We still have 5 trained first aiders on our active list of volunteers.

Finance and Equipment

31. Our account, which will be circulated to members, shows a closing balance of £6320.84 compared with £9045.89 a year ago. This reflects our spending of grant funds on materials, contracts and plants for our projects, especially in OCY. Apart from routine running costs to support these activities there have been no other major items of expenditure. Except for donations of £595 received at the Heritage Day there have been no major sources of income this year.

32. Our financial position therefore remains strong and the only cause for concern is the lack of substantial regular income to support essential running costs such as insurance which for the three previous years had been funded by a Grassroots grant. This issue will be addressed by the branch committee.

33. **Physical Assets.** A complete list of our tools and other assets appears at **Annex A.**

Information, Publicity and Liaison

34. We continue to act in an open manner and believe that we enjoy excellent relations with our three local authorities and all relevant local groups. Much of this depends on good personal relations and in that context we are pleased to record our thanks to a large number of individuals representing those organisations for the enormous help, advice and support they have given us. In return we have assisted some other groups. We were privileged to be invited by SWT to give a presentation to their Study Day for conservation groups in November 2010. Martin Angel has assisted the newly formed Friends of Farnham Cemeteries by running moth traps for them. We have also maintained contact with Jon Austen who is breathing new life into Battings Garden. In 2011 we have established contact with The Farnham Society with whom we share many common interests and have given them a presentation on our work. Later in 2011 we are scheduled to present to the Rowhill Nature Reserve Society.

35. Last year we reported that we had contributed to the Bourne School PTAs feasibility study for a wildlife project in the school grounds. Although a group of willing parents carried out some much needed maintenance on existing assets, any hope of a more far reaching programme was overtaken by a reorganisation of the school. We were also approached by St Polycarps School and signified our willingness to help but heard nothing further from them.

36. We strive to keep members and partner organisations well informed on our activities. To this end we maintain a website, publish a newsletter three times a year and issue occasional updates on specific issues. The website is essentially a database and remains probably the best single source of information about The Bourne. In our efforts to keep up with the times we have now linked the website to Facebook and Twitter accounts thanks to the initiatives of



David Todd and Lisa Malcolm respectively. These have not yet been fully exploited but they do offer potential for the future, for example for wildlife reporting and making contact with potential new members.



37. In July 2010 we once again put considerable effort into our stand at The Bourne Show, an event which best meets our requirements to engage with local residents and to recruit new members. The stand featured a pictorial display of "Moths for All Seasons" as well as a display of live aquatic creatures by Martin Angel. Lisa Malcolm with assistance from other members ran an excellent moth design exercise for young children.

39. We have received a number of mentions in The Farnham Herald and the Farnham Diary and we have contributed a good section on OCY to

the new book "Commemorating a Century" about the present church of St Thomas-on-The Bourne.

Organisation

40. The following committee was elected for 2010-2011:

Chairman	Noel Moss
Secretary	Stan Cockett
Treasurer	Karen Redman
Biodiversity & Planning Issues	Martin Angel
Footpath Coordinator	Lisa Malcolm
Heritage Officer	Richard Sandars
Webmaster & publicity	David Todd

There were no changes during the period.

Future Work and Activities

38. This report reflects another very active and successful year, June 2010 – May 2011, in which the number of hours put in by our volunteers has once again significantly increased. Despite this it has been difficult to keep abreast of all our projects and activities and it has not been possible to approach everything as thoroughly as we would ideally like, scrutiny of planning applications being a prime example.

39. For the year ahead, subject to further deliberation in committee and any guidance received from members at the AGM in September 2011, we shall continue to focus on practical work in The Bourne with a view to balancing what is attractive to the human community with the enhancement of biodiversity. This means continuing with all current practical tasks but resisting calls to work outside The Bourne or to take on major new, long term tasks. Priority will be given to completing the OCY project by the end of 2011. The detailed programme for monthly sessions will be published at The Bourne Show 2011 and in the Summer Newsletter. Some specific tasks for the coming year include:

- Introducing more wildflowers on our sites and along roadside verges
- Clearing The Bourne Stream of litter
- Improving Taylor's Steps in the footpath network
- Continuing to assist WBC in Paradise Wood and Burnt Hill Wood
- Keeping up to date on developments in the planning world and devoting more effort to scrutinising local applications

40. If all goes according to plan, by the end of 2011 our four biodiversity projects will all be in the maintenance phase ie, there will be few new tasks but plenty of grass cutting, pruning, leaf collection, tending ponds and watering. We would very much like to enlist the help of local residents in these jobs and a further effort to achieve this will be launched. This is associated with our continuing need for new members, young and old, and we will continue with our recruiting efforts. Ideally we need a sufficient pool of volunteers to be able to field an average attendance of 10 at our main Sunday work sessions. To this end we will endeavour to exploit our website and social networking opportunities for the benefit of the Group.

41. As far as we can tell, our efforts to provide habitats for existing wildlife and improve biodiversity are working. We have good records of the wildlife on our own sites but now need to improve reporting of sightings more widely throughout the area. On a more strategic level we will keep up to date on developments in conservation and maintain contact with the potential Wey Valley landscape project to see how best we can contribute.

42. Efforts will be made to achieve a sustainable funding base to cover our essential running costs.

Noel Moss
Chairman

BCG Physical Assets as at 31st May 2011

1. Tools

- 2 x bow saws
- 8 loppers (2 unused)
- 3 x small bulb planters
- 4 long handled bulb planters
- 1 x rubber hammer
- 4 x secateurs
- 1 x sythette
- 1 x Broomhead with handle
- 2 Hoses on reels (Middle Bourne Lane & Old Churchyard)
- 2 x Sickles
- 1 Machette
- 1 x Lawn rake
- 7 Spare bow saw blades
- 1 Shears
- Refurbished tools from prison service:
 - Fork
 - 2 x Spades
 - 2 x Rakes
 - Wire rake
 - Edge trimmer
 - 2 x hoes

2. On Loan from SCC ROW

- 2 x tool bags
- 2 x secateurs
- 1 x signpost level
- 4 shears
- 4 x loppers
- 2 x rip saws
- 4 x bow saws (2 unused)
- 2 x pole saws
- 2 x spades
- 1 x post spade
- 2 x mattocks
- 1 x crow bar
- 1 "shove holer"

3. Refreshment Kit

- 12 enamel mugs
- 3-litre metal thermos jug
- Thermos flask

4. Health and Safety Kit

- 2 x First-aid kits in satchels
- 20 hi-viz jackets
- 4 x safety helmets (on loan from SCC)
- 1 x illustrated first aid book
- 6 x goggles

5. Display Equipment

- 1 Pop-up Gazebo with walls
- 1 Old gazebo, 4m x 3m with 4 x wall panels

2x 2m x 1m display panels supported by 3 posts with steel feet
'A' frame display panel
2 x heavy duty table cloths
1 x easel

6. Installed

Sundry bat, bird and insect boxes at MBL, Paradise Wood, Sturt Walk etc
Bird feeders in MBL and OCY plus 2 hoppers (with neighbours)

7. Miscellaneous

1 x Bat detector
1 x Petrol driven strimmer with mixer bottle
2 x Stand up clearance bags
1 x Rake and scoop device
1 Warning sign on tripod
7 Named fingers for finger posts (property of TBRA)