

Annual Report, June 2011 – May 2012

Introduction

1. Formed in 2002, The Bourne Conservation Group (BCG) comprises volunteers who undertake practical work in The Bourne area of South Farnham. The emphasis is on the preservation and enhancement of biodiversity through a range of projects carried out either independently or in partnership with the local authorities and the Surrey Wildlife Trust (SWT). The scope of activity continues to be very wide and in the past year the highlights have been:

- Successful completion of the funded part of the Old Churchyard project
- Initiation of new projects in Battings Garden and the Underdown Nature Reserve
- Participation in the Wey Catchment Project and forging the connections between this, the Group's practical work and the Green Infrastructure of Farnham
- Maintenance of all project sites in a satisfactory condition throughout the year including, at the end of the period, an intense effort in support of Farnham's entry in the South East in Bloom Competition 2012.
- Delivery of a number of illustrated presentations on the work of the Group.



Middle Bourne Lane Garden In early summer 2012

Stop Press

Activities that have taken place since the end of this reporting period have included SE in Bloom 2012 and The Bourne Show 2012, both of which were reported on in The Farnham Herald. Work has resumed at the Underdown Nature Reserve and a flight of rustic steps has been built at the top of Old Church Lane. Also, BCG was represented at the first meeting of Farnham volunteer conservation groups in the Town Office in early August 2012.

2. **Membership.** Our members and Friends are our most important asset and we are fortunate to have an active core of loyal volunteers for whose extraordinary efforts no praise is too high. Attempts to recruit new members have achieved mixed results and it remains a priority to increase the number of full members to cope with a steadily increasing workload. On the plus side, two new committee members have contributed greatly to the quality and expertise of our work. The number of Friends of BCG is growing slowly but steadily, and the support they give is invaluable.

3. **Administration.** 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). This now covers use of power tools and property. The current financial

state is sound and a start has been made on the generation of a sustainable fund to cover annual running costs.

4. **Farewell.** We have been greatly saddened in the past year by the deaths of two members. Stan Cockett, the founder and former chairman of our Group died after a short illness in November 2011. Deidre Lecoq, whom we all knew as Dee, passed away in May 2012 after a long battle with illness. We miss them greatly as members and friends and extend our sympathies to their families.

Review of Work Undertaken

5. **General Approach.** Our practical approach to conservation is guided by the Surrey Biodiversity Action Plan. Across the county, the SWT, with whom we keep in close touch, is implementing the Action Plan through Landscape Scale projects based on Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOA). We directly interface with this in two ways:

- Participation in the emerging Wey Catchment Project, the river Wey being one of the identified BOAs
- Helping to develop a Green Infrastructure for Farnham. As an urban area it does not lend itself to landscape scale conservation but its spaces, if suitably managed, can provide important corridors between BOAs.

All the signs are that there is improved biodiversity on the sites we manage, but we recognise that, as a small local Group, our overall impact is limited. We look therefore to widen the effect of what we do in two ways. The first is through publicity to residents on what they can do to support wildlife, and the second is the establishment of stronger links with other local groups such as the Bishop's Meadow Trust with a view to developing a Farnham-wide approach.

6. **Wildlife Recording.** Understanding our local wildlife underpins all that we do. Last year we recognised the need to improve the recording of wildlife sightings and there has been an encouraging trickle of new reports from members. Dr Martin Angel coordinates this and sends on all reports to the Surrey Record Office co-located with SWT at Pirbright, thus improving their database. A Survey Day was held for the fourth year in the Old Churchyard in conjunction with SWT.

7. **Pattern of Work.** The routine work pattern of a main session on a Sunday morning each month is augmented by many mid-week sessions. The published programme was largely adhered to but suffered some interruption in Spring 2012 due to the unusual weather conditions. The number of hours worked has again increased from 809 hours in 2010 - 2011 to 933 hours in the current year. The time spent on essential supporting tasks has shown a big jump from 516 to 767 hours. In part this is due to the introduction of a more detailed recording system on 1st January but chiefly it has resulted from the creation of two new committee posts and it does underline the significant effort required to back up the practical work. The overall total of 1700 hours has only been made possible by the excellent support of the whole membership.

New Projects

8. **Underdown Nature Reserve.** Situated just off Sandrock Hill Road and belonging to the SWT, this interesting site is not formally listed as a reserve and we are investigating whether it can be registered to ensure its future protection. It has somewhat fallen into disrepair and we have been pleased to assist SWT in restoration work which will continue in summer 2012.

9. **Battings Garden.** We had always been aware of this tiny site but had not seen fit to tackle any work there as it is technically outside The Bourne. However, we have teamed up with Jon Austen who lives nearby and who was determined to make it into a more inviting place, in keeping with the original intention of



Jon Austen and Hilary Dickson planning work in Battings Garden with council officers

the Batting family who gave it to the public as “a garden of rest” in 1933. Basic clearance of laurel and litter took place in April, followed by some simple planting. We are grateful to Jon for his vision and pleased to work with him and Waverley BC to begin to improve it as a potentially valuable wildlife site at a busy road junction. In parallel, with the help of Wendy Maddox, good progress has been made in piecing together the background of Walter Batting, after whom the garden is named, and the history of the site.

Middle Bourne Lane (MBL) Community Wildlife Garden.

10. In addition to the routine, seasonal work on this site, further improvements have been made with the general aim of improving wildlife habitats, especially in the summer months. Additional plants have been put in along the lower path and a new bed incorporating both wild flowers and more traditional garden plants opened up in the central area. We hope this latter feature will make a good impression on the Farnham-in-Bloom judges when they visit the site in July 2012.

11. 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 continue to cite its features as an example to visitors of what they might incorporate into their own gardens. We were delighted to give the site wider prominence through an article in the Spring edition of Surrey Nature.

12. 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. Specific work being considered is:

- Continuing to plant more summer flowering species for the benefit of bees and other insects
- Replacing the laurel hedge with native hedging
- Thinning out trees on the site
- Introducing more woodland plants such as anemones and lily of the valley
- Installing cellular blocks along the roadside to foster a greener look despite car parking

The Old Churchyard (OCY) Project

13. In the year under review, thanks to the availability of funding and the work of our volunteers, much new work has been accomplished in OCY including:

- Installation of a 700 litre tank to collect rainwater from the roof of a neighbouring property
- Re-modelling the ruined Sexton’s Hut and creation of a “bug hotel” from recycled materials
- Stripping out a length of laurel hedge along the front side and replacement with native hedge plants protected temporarily by a fence constructed from withies harvested locally
- Planting and seeding further wild flowers
- Installation of a stag beetle loggery complete with larvae
- Erection for visitors as a trial of three discreet boards with information on features of the site



The wildlife pond has greatly increased biodiversity in the Old Churchyard

14. There was a need to complete this work by the end of January 2012 to meet the agreed deadline for the funding generously provided for biodiversity enhancements by the Orchid Trust through the Surrey Community Foundation. This was achieved on time and a comprehensive Final Report submitted. Following this, intense effort was put into continuing to evolve a balanced maintenance regime which meets our aims and ensures an appropriate standard at certain landmark dates including Palm Sunday in April, the Survey Day in June and Farnham-in-Bloom judgement day in July. This balance is far from easy to attain but there are increasing indications that biodiversity is being enhanced, especially by the wildlife pond.

15. There is still work to be done on this site, including tree surgery (for which funding will be required) and further restoration of some monuments.

The Bourne Crossroads.

16. 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 the flower beds outside Café Indigo which has become something of a de facto community centre. Some wild flower plugs planted on the embankment in autumn 2011 contributed to a reasonable showing in early summer 2012.

17. Our modest work and the popular Café Indigo are the only bright spots at these crossroads. Traffic levels seem to increase by the day and the abandoned garage site remains an eyesore. Incredibly also, the battle reported a year ago to have the rogue BT Broadband cabinet removed goes on, reflecting badly on the company and its sub-contractors. It is against this backdrop of increasing urbanisation that Cllr Cockburn has invited The Bourne Residents Association to consider ways in which the semi-rural landscape of The Bourne village can be preserved – a project known as Bourne Beautification. We stand ready to cooperate on that and plan to carry our further biodiversity enhancements on the embankment in autumn 2012.

The Ridgeway School.

18. 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.

Public Open Spaces in the Waverley Estate.

19. In conjunction with Waverley BC Countryside, work was carried out in Burnt Hill Wood in January 2012 and along Sturt Walk in March 2012. Further work is planned for early 2013

Rights-of-Way (ROW).

20. Our regular work on the 12 miles of footpaths and bridleways in The Bourne has continued with sessions in November 2011 and March 2012. Additionally, we undertook a major task on Taylor's Steps which abut onto Gravel Hill. This involved clearing the steps, cutting into the bank on one side and building a low timber wall to prevent further deposition.

21. We are still in the process of adjusting to a new approach to footpath maintenance occasioned by changes in the Countryside Access Department of SCC. They have not only moved to a different site in Guildford but have also had to respond to changes in personalities, loss of staff and reduction of funding. Volunteers across the county, after receiving a few hours training and been given basic equipment, are now empowered to carry out light repair and pruning work on ROW as Footpath Wardens. Seven of our members have so far become "badged" wardens under this scheme and we are examining how this will fit in with our existing system, coordinated by Lisa Malcolm.



"Balsam Bashing" in The Bourne Valley

The Bourne Stream.

22. We have continued the work of pulling the Himalayan Balsam which is clinging on in The Bourne valley especially in the neighbourhood of Redhill House. In this we are encouraged by wider recognition at last of the much larger infestation along the river Wey and that the first steps are being taken to deal with it.

23. Last year we reported our grave concerns about other aspects of maintenance along The Bourne Stream. Some routine work was eventually carried out by the Environment Agency in Spring 2012 but many problems remain. We have now drawn the attention of the Wey Valley Partnership (see below) to our concerns by means of a preliminary photographic record and hope that in some way the problems may be tackled as part of the national remit to improve the quality of watercourses under the EU Water Framework Directive.

Planning Issues

24. We have done our best to keep up with planning policy developments at national and local levels, and to add our voice to many others concerned about preserving the quality of the natural environment both for the human population and our wildlife species. On behalf of members, the committee spent much time responding to the government's draft National Planning Policy Framework and also monitored the progress of the consultation on Waverley's Local Development Framework. At the really local level we have been able to make positive contributions to the emerging Farnham Neighbourhood Plan, especially on the protection and enhancement of the towns Green Infrastructure.



This Dark Arches moth photographed by Martin head-on is one of over 400 identified in The Bourne. These, and our other fascinating wildlife are threatened by over development

25. Charles Fearnley has dealt with a spate of local planning applications in all of which our concerns about environmental impacts have been echoed by other local groups such as The Bourne Residents Association and the Farnham Society. He spoke at the final Planning Committee meeting on development of the Toyota garage site but this was a despairing effort in view of the upholding of the developer's appeal by the Planning Inspectorate.

26. For the longer term we base our hopes of preserving the character of The Bourne, and indeed the rest of Farnham, on a robust Neighbourhood Plan. This is required to be consistent with the Waverley LDF and it is vital in our view that both documents recognise the need to protect the unique nature of the landscape and natural habitats in and around Farnham. This is as much for the health and well-being of the growing population as it is for the survival of local wildlife species many of which are endangered.

Finance and Equipment

27. Our account, which will be circulated to members, shows a closing balance of £5,095.23 compared with £6,320.84 a year ago. This mainly reflects using up the remaining funds granted to us for the OCY project, including the purchase of a motor mower. The overall position remains strong with income broadly balancing running costs because of tight control of expenditure. Some desirable items such as printed leaflets have not been funded and this has perhaps had a detrimental effect on the image of BCG and recruitment. It is hoped to rectify this as measures taken to create a more reliable income stream begin to take effect.

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

Information, Publicity and Liaison

29. **Liaison.** We continue to act in an open manner and can report excellent relations with our three local authorities, the Surrey Wildlife Trust 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 for the enormous help, advice and encouragement they have given us. In turn we are often able to assist other individuals or Groups; we are, for example, acting as facilitators on local and wildlife matters to the new owner of Spire and Sable Woods.

30. **Formal Presentations.** At the beginning of the period we gave a presentation to the Farnham Society and in October a similar one to the Rowhill Nature Reserve Society. We were privileged to be invited by SWT to give presentations to their Living Landscapes Seminar in November 2011 and to their Churchyards Study Day in Godalming parish church in May 2012. A short, after lunch talk was also given to Probus, Farnham, organised by one of our Friends, Dr Ian Wallace. In May 2012 we responded to a request from the Friends of Farnham Park by entertaining them to a very successful evening Heritage and Wildlife walk in the Old Church Lane area. We are keen to engage with children and young people and are pleased that two Beaver Lodges booked evening sessions in OCY in June under our guidance.

31. **Information.** We strive to keep members, partner organisations and the public 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 and is now linked to Twitter and Facebook accounts the potentials of which have hardly been tapped so far but would both benefit from more inputs from members.

32. **The Bourne Show.** In July 2011 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 about Wildlife Reporting. Lisa Malcolm with assistance from other members ran an excellent moth design game for young children.



The “A” Team. Members poised for action at The Bourne Show, July 2011

33. **Publicity.** We have continued to obtain regular coverage in both the Farnham Herald and the monthly Farnham Diary. The Herald has carried two articles on the Old Churchyard: a progress report to mark the end of the grant funded stage of the project, and an account of the rescue of stag beetle larvae by Bryan Snashall and their removal to the loggery in OCY. The Diary carried a very good article about Toad Watch and a letter from our Chairman about Battings Garden which posed questions about its history, generating at least two responses from local residents which have added to our knowledge of the site. At the working level, our Membership Secretary advertises our existence and our work sessions on posters put up in the local area with the aim of increasing membership.

Organisation

34. At the AGM in September 2011 the following committee was elected for 2011-2012:

Chairman	Noel Moss
Secretary	Richard Sandars – also member for Heritage
Treasurer	Fiona Walberton
Membership Secretary	Karen Redman
Biodiversity & Planning Issues	Martin Angel – also Vice Chairman and Newsletter Editor
Footpath Coordinator	Lisa Malcolm
Webmaster & publicity	David Todd

The post of Membership Secretary is new and marks the emphasis to be given to that subject. During the year Charles Fearnley joined the committee as Member for Planning and Hilary Dickson took up a new post as Horticultural Member. The committee is now the largest it has been which is in keeping with the widening activities of the Group.

Future Work and Activities

35. For the year ahead, subject to further deliberation in committee and any guidance received from members at the AGM in September 2012, we shall continue to focus on practical work in The Bourne,

balancing what is attractive to the human community with the enhancement of biodiversity. Some specific tasks for the coming year include:

- Keeping up with the maintenance of all sites
- Continuing to introduce improved planting for the benefit principally of pollinators
- Determining the way ahead for the Battings Garden project
- Modifying our approach to footpath maintenance in line with the new SCC system
- Further landscaping at The Bourne Crossroads as a contribution to “Bourne Beautification”
- Building rustic steps at the top of Old Church Lane
- As a subset of the Wey Valley Project, formulating a project to improve the landscape of The Bourne valley either independently or as part of a wider scheme with other volunteer groups.
- Developing our ideas on the Green Infrastructure of Farnham and making contributions to the Neighbourhood Plan

36. Our most pressing need is to recruit more long-term members to enable us to support the wide range of activities outlined in this report and perhaps to relieve somewhat the pressure on our existing core membership.

Noel Moss
Chairman



February 2012. A churchyard for all seasons

BCG Physical Assets as at 31st May 2011

1. Tools

- 2 x bow saws plus 3 new
- 6 x loppers plus 3 unused
- 3 x small bulb planters
- 4 x long handled bulb planters
- 1 x rubber hammer
- 6 x secateurs plus 7 new in packets
- 1 x sythette
- 1 x detachable broomhead with handle
- 2 x Sickles
- 1 x Machette
- 1 x Lawn rake, plastic
- 3 x Spare bow saw blades
- 3 x Shears (2 new, telescopic)
- 1 x Slasher
- 4 x trowels and forks
- Refurbished tools from prison service:
 - 1 x Fork
 - 2 x Spades
 - 1 x Rakes
 - 1 x Wire rake
 - 1 x 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 (1 unservicable)
- 2 x bow saws
- 2 x pole saws with detachable heads
- 2 x spades
- 1 x lightweight post spade
- 2 x mattocks
- 1 x crow bar
- 1 "shove holer"

3. Refreshment Kit

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

4. Health and Safety Kit

- 2 x First-aid kits in satchels
- 1 x 18 hi-viz jackets
- 4 x safety helmets (on loan from SCC)
- 1 x illustrated first aid book
- 4 x goggles

5. Display Equipment

- 1 x Pop-up Gazebo with walls
- 1 x Old gazebo, 4m x 3m with 4 x wall panels
- 2 x 2m by 1m display panels supported by 3 posts with steel feet
- 'A' frame display panel
- 2 x heavy duty table cloths
- 1 x easel
- 1 x BCG banner

6. Installed

Sundry bat, bird and insect boxes at MBL, Paradise Wood, Sturt Walk etc
Bird feeders in MBL and OCY

7. Miscellaneous

1 x Bat detector
1 x Petrol driven strimmer with mixer bottle
1 x Honda petrol mower
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)
6 Named fingers "Stan Cockett's Path"
2 Hoses on reels (Middle Bourne Lane & Old Churchyard)

8. Expendables

Sundry nails and screws
Post nails and tacks (property of SCC)
Direction arrow discs (property of SCC)