



West Berkshire
Countryside Society



Barn Crescent Harvest © Growing Newbury Green

Our Community Orchards

Traditional orchards have long been recognised as one of the beauties of our countryside. They make a spectacular impact in full flower and are hotspots for biodiversity. The combination of fruit trees, grassland floor, hedgerow boundaries, and fallen and standing deadwood means that orchards offer a mosaic of different habitats upon which many creatures depend. Unfortunately, these iconic features of our landscape are rapidly disappearing despite designation as a priority habitat in 2007.

The organisation Common Ground initiated the idea of community orchards over 25 years ago as part of a campaign to recognise the value

of this part of our heritage and save it for future generations. Just as traditional orchards were often the centre of village life, community orchards are excellent places for people to come together to cultivate local and unusual varieties of fruit trees and to use as the focal point for community activities. There are now an increasing number of these orchards across West Berkshire. Two examples follow.

A Strong Start for Purley Community Orchard

Saturday 6th December marked an important milestone for Purley on Thames as more than 25 dedicated volunteers came together to begin establishing a new community orchard. After years of planning and preparation, the project finally moved from vision to reality.

Inside this issue



» p3



» p5



» p6



» p7

- 3 Volunteers: Task Roundup
- 4 Spring Blossom Quiz: test your ID skills
- 6 Local Action Group for Nature and Climate
- 7 An Update from the Chair

Plus lots more...

Spirits remained high throughout the day, despite an uncertain weather forecast, as volunteers worked side by side digging holes, planting young trees, and carefully setting the foundations for what will become a long-lasting community asset. The atmosphere was productive, collaborative, and uplifting – an encouraging reflection of the shared commitment that has driven this project forward. Beyond the physical work, the day also offered opportunities for connection and celebration, and a welcome break for cake provided a moment to reflect on what had already been achieved. These simple moments of togetherness reinforced the true purpose of the orchard: not just to grow fruit, but to strengthen community ties.

Continued on page 4 >

West Berkshire Countryside Society

The aim of the West Berkshire Countryside Society is to promote the understanding, appreciation and conservation of the West Berkshire countryside... furthering these objectives through practical conservation work, and guided walks and talks from local experts. It was formed in 2012 by amalgamating the Friends of the Pang, Kennet & Lambourn Valleys; the Bucklebury Heathland Conservation Group; the Pang Valley Conservation Volunteers & the Barn Owl Group.

Upstream is our quarterly publication designed to highlight conservation matters in West Berkshire and beyond and to publicise the activities of the Society.

Chair & Enquiries:	John Haggarty (enquiries@westberkscountryside.org.uk)
Membership Secretary:	Stewart Waight (membership@westberkscountryside.org.uk)
Upstream Editor:	Margery Slatter (editor@westberkscountryside.org.uk)
Hon President:	Dick Greenaway MBE RD

Material published in Upstream is copyright and should not be reproduced in any form, in whole or part, without the permission of West Berkshire Countryside Society.

Conservation Volunteers' Task Diary

For outdoor events please wear suitable footwear and clothing. Most practical tasks start at 10am and usually finish around 3pm, unless otherwise stated, so bring a packed lunch. However, we are more than happy to accept any time you can spare! All tools are provided. A map of each task location can be found on the website diary page by clicking on the grid reference shown for that task. The three-word code after each grid reference is the "What Three Words" listing for the task meeting point.

Date/Time	Venue	Details
April 2026		
Tue 7th April 10:00	Grove Pit Common Leckhampstead	Scrub clearance on this parish wildlife site. Access the common via the track which leaves the B4494 west at Cotswold Farm. SU440 777 Please leave your vehicles at the bottom of the track and walk up to the common. /// bossy.connected.tubes
Tue 14th April 10:00	Little Hidden Farm Hungerford	Wildlife conservation tasks. Access by following the track through the farm until you can go no further. Park opposite the indoor riding school. SU351 713 ///crisps.joke.encrypted
Tue 21st April 10:00	Hosehill Lake Sheffield Bottom	Further footpath construction on this BBOWT site. Park in the car park of the Fox and Hounds pub at Sheffield Bottom. SU650 699 ///noisy.doll.roof
Fri 28th April 10:00	Winterbourne Wood	Continuing conservation management tasks. Park on the main woodland entrance track. SU447 717 ///headboard.tubes.olive
May 2026		
Tue 5th May 10:00	Eling Estate/Grimsbury	Continuing conservation management tasks, See website more for details.
Tue 12th May 10:00	Hosehill Lake Sheffield Bottom	Further footpath construction on this BBOWT site. Park in the car park of the Fox and Hounds pub at Sheffield Bottom. SU650 699 ///noisy.doll.roof
Tue 19th May 10:00	Rushall Manor Farm, off Back Lane, Bradfield	Continuing conservation management tasks. Meet at the Black Barn off Back Lane between Stanford Dingley and Bradfield. SU584 723 ///telephone.brink.crate
Tue 26th May 10:00	Eling Way	Clear invasive vegetation either side of the permissive footpath named Eling Way. Park at Hampstead Norreys village car park. SU527 762 ///singing.during.barrel
June 2026		
Tue 2nd June 10:00	Furze Hill, Hermitage	Woodland and butterfly habitat management on this parish wildlife site. Ample parking at village hall – through double gates off Pinewood Crescent. SU512 740 ///summer.equipping.casua
Tue 9th June 10:00	Ufton Court	Continuing conservation management tasks. Parking will be directed on the day. SU626 666 ///ooze.stall.tubes
Tue 16th June 10:00	Eling Estate/Grimsbury	Continuing conservation management tasks, please see website for further details.
Tue 23rd June 09:00	Sulham Home Farm	Continuing ragwort control on this SSSI. Parking at Sulham Home Farm, SU643 758 . Please bring a fork if you can. ///artist.resist.humans
Tue 30th June 10:00	Holt Lodge Farm, Kintbury	Clearing bracken. Meet at Holt Lodge Farmhouse near Kintbury. SU387 648 ///skid.comments.tripling

Volunteers: Task Roundup

Laid Hedge: Streatley Allotments
© Andy Hollox

The volunteers have experienced some mild weather in this quarter, but unfortunately 'mild' has also meant 'soaking' on many occasions.

Mid-November saw a second visit to **Boxford Meadows** where fallen trees, overhanging branches and bramble were removed to enlarge the area of herb rich sward of the SSSI.



Boxford Before: assessing the task © Andy Hollox



Boxford After: completed work © Andy Hollox

Removing dead elm trees and replacing with new saplings continued at the northern end of **Grove Pit Common**. Rotational coppicing of the larger hazel stools was continued. The elm tree planted in the clearing, proving not to be 'disease resistant', has been replaced with an oak sapling.

A rewarding task in the woods at **Rushall Manor Farm** included cutting older wood from hazel stools to promote vigour in the younger stems, and brush-cutting low bramble to enhance the striking bluebells (see diary dates and the walk on p8) and, in places, early purple orchids.

At **Streatley Allotments**, Volunteers have begun to regenerate a wildlife corridor beside Streatley Meadows. This hedge was 'ripe' for laying and a thoroughly enjoyable day was spent

working with members of Streatley Allotments Society and the Heart of Streatley Trust.



Hedge Layer, Streatley Allotments
© Tony McDonald

The wet weather then set in as we continued conservation work on **Bucklebury Meadows**, clearing encroaching brambles to enable contractors to re-fence the boundary. In addition, a long-term project to lay a hedge was commenced, coppicing old elm to encourage new growth.

A select group went to **Ashampstead Common** to maintain the disabled access path and the haloes around veteran trees. A new halo was created around a large oak. We enjoyed delicious soup for lunch with the Greenaways – thank you!

Our first task with NEWT, who manage the **Northbrook Nature Reserve**, was to tackle an 'overstood' (over-mature) hedge. Since it could not have been laid, we coppiced about 50m and protected it with the brush. It is hoped that the hedgerow will regenerate naturally but, if not, it will be replanted.

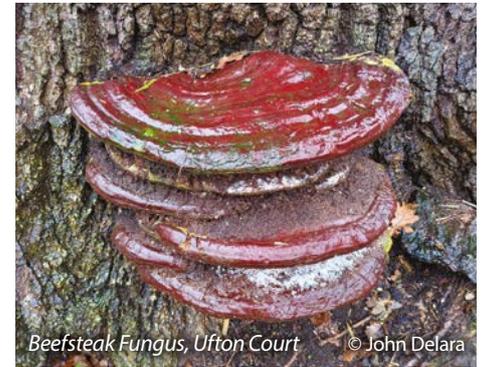
We made two visits to BBOWT sites in this quarter. The first was to **Inkpen Common**, on a cold day which started in a snowstorm, clearing invasive gorse from this important heathland. Our second was to **Moor Copse**, in very wet weather, clearing blackthorn scrub as part of a management rotation, and removing fallen trees from fence lines.

At the **Hockett Field, Bucklebury** the group completed maintenance of the surrounding hedge enabling the Parish

Council to cut this wildlife corridor mechanically for a few years. The team also cleared bramble and blackthorn that were encroaching into the field.

We made our second visit to **East Garston**, this time on a Friday, helping a new community group who have assumed responsibility for a small woodland area. We completed several jobs including the creation of a new scallop to shelter invertebrates.

Our second visit to **Ufton Court** focused on the 'Roman Village' area. We cleared waterways, to help address bogginess, and uncovered a natural spring. We constructed a dead hedge to delineate the 'Roman' from the adjacent 'Anglo-Saxon' area, removed some fallen trees and cleared a meadow for an Archery Range.



Beefsteak Fungus, Ufton Court © John Delara

A dozen stalwarts turned out on a constantly drizzly, soaking morning to cut sedge, willow scrub and trees at **Paices Wood** – and to happily call it a day after a wet lunch! The work goes a long way to maintaining good habitat for the special invertebrates of the Top Park.

And finally, we are almost at the end of a long stretch of roadside hedge at the **Malt House** – 50 yards was laid. Another fantastic effort by everyone involved.

Compiled by **Margery Slatter**, from Task Leaders' Reports

Continued from page 1.

This planting day represents the culmination of years of perseverance and collective effort, and it marks only the beginning of the orchard's future. As the trees take root and grow, so too will the benefits they bring – shared harvests, learning opportunities, and a welcoming green space for the whole community to enjoy. www.purleysustainability.co.uk/orchard



Volunteers
© Purley Sustainability Group

Continuing Success with Growing Newbury Green

Growing Newbury Green was formed in 2012 with the suggestion that fruit trees could be planted in open spaces



Barn Crescent Orchard © Growing Newbury Green

and parks in Newbury to provide free fruit to anyone passing. With the agreement of Newbury Town Council, the first orchard was planted at Barn Crescent that year and there are now 6 sites on land they administer, the latest planted in 2022. The orchards range in size from 5 to 24 trees.

Before each planting, the local community was consulted to make sure an orchard was welcome, and invited to help with planting, pruning and harvesting events. Each site had at least one old Berkshire apple variety and nine Berkshire apples have been introduced across the sites, including the Newbury apple Miller's Seedling. There are 23 different varieties in total – a telling comparison with the 8 -10 that could be named across all the local supermarkets!

After 13 years, the focus is now on harvesting the orchards and making best use of the fruit – it can be quite an effort to persuade people that they



Sayers Close Orchard
© Growing Newbury Green

can pick their own in a public space. So alongside that there are three main ways of distributing the fruit: having harvest days at a site and going door-to-door in the neighbourhood handing out fruit; taking boxes of fruit to local community larders; and keeping some fruit for use at the annual Newbury Apple Day in October of each year. The group also run pruning and grafting workshops and have just celebrated the 5th Newbury Wassail, complete with their own Green Man.

www.growingnewburygreen.org.uk

Further information is available at:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/community-orchards-a-how-to-guide

www.theorchardproject

www.commonground.org.uk

Compiled by Margery Slatter with thanks to Wendy Ribbons, Purley Sustainability Group and Tony Hammond, Growing Newbury Green

News from our National Landscape

The North Wessex Downs National Landscape (NWDNL) covers 668 square miles (1,730 sq. km) of Berkshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire.

You may have seen the recently erected roadside signs on its boundary. It was designated as an AONB in 1972 and renamed as a National Landscape in 2023. In 2023-2024, every £1 contributed by NWDNL local authority partners delivered £22.46 in benefits to the North Wessex Downs.

NWDNL has launched a new five-year statutory Management Plan on behalf of the nine councils of the area.

It implements stronger protection to the landscape, and includes specific targets for nature, with a commitment to increase wildlife-rich habitat by 3,400ha by 2030. West Berkshire Council has already adopted the Plan to build on the value of local authority spending, made higher by the hours spent by volunteers on funded projects, like Bucklebury Common.

More recently, the Government announced a 3-year extension to the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme. This includes £30 million in funding in the next year across

England's National Parks and National Landscapes. The £4.1 million invested through FiPL in the North Wessex Downs over the past four years has had a huge impact. Over 45 sq. km of wildlife-rich habitat has been managed or created; nine threatened species have been targeted; 8,500 metres of hedges have been planted or restored; and 35 projects completed to reduce flood risk. It has involved communities in 500+ volunteer days, and improved access across 5k of new permissive paths.

www.northwessexdowns.org.uk

Spring Blossom Quiz: test your ID skills



1. These creamy blossoms add flavour and fizz.

- a. elder
- b. rowan
- c. dogwood



2. Luscious autumn berries give opulence to a hedge.

- a. dogwood
- b. elder
- c. guelder rose



3. It takes male and female flowers to produce seed.

- a. wild cherry
- b. blackthorn
- c. holly



4. Never bring this into the house! Eat its tasty new leaves.

- a. blackthorn
- b. hawthorn
- c. rowan



5. Acid green bundles of early nectar for bees.

- a. oak
- b. field maple
- c. elm



6. The fruit of this loveliest of trees is very sour.

- a. crab apple
- b. blackthorn
- c. wild cherry



7. Bare branches hold these blossoms in a cold snap.

- a. blackthorn
- b. hawthorn
- c. elm



8. Bare branches, no leaves and pink flowers...

- a. elm
- b. ash
- c. field maple



9. Tart red berries follow this 'ash' blossom.

- a. ash
- b. elder
- c. rowan



10. Pink buds and fragrant flowers – a fruitful small tree.

- a. wild cherry
- b. crab apple
- c. guelder rose

Quiz Answers: 1a, 2c, 3c, 4b, 5b, 6c, 7a, 8a, 9c, 10b

Margery Slatter

Local Action Group for Nature and Climate



The Nature and Climate Network (NCN) is the new name for West Berkshire Green Exchange, which was set up in 2011 by West Berkshire Council and local environmental groups.

It's not just the name that's changed since 2011. More importantly, the clean and efficient technologies needed to stabilise nature and climate have become more affordable and practical during this time.

"We have most of the technology we need to combat the climate crisis – and most people want to see more action." Prof. Mike Berners-Lee, A Climate of Truth, 2025.

Unfortunately, there's a lot of short-term money and power to be made from misinformation and scaremongering – 'bad news sells better than good news'. So NCN's approach is to use the voluntary sector to share local people's experiences, alongside engineering and science-based best practice.

Showcasing positive actions – GreenFest

GreenFest, at St Bartholomew's school in Newbury on Saturday 24 October,



**The independent advisors to the UK government under the Climate Change Act 2008*

aims to bring together 2000 people to do just this. As well as live music and great food and drink, this family-friendly event will have hands-on activities, inspiring speakers and over 50 local groups to talk to, alongside farmer and grower, home energy, and electric vehicle representatives.

The whole event is underpinned by Climate Change Committee* advice:

1. Eat a 'Mediterranean style' diet, with a 1/3 less meat and 1/5 less dairy than now
2. Change end-of-life boilers to more efficient heating systems
3. Reduce the use of petrol and diesel cars, and avoid flying where possible

GreenFest will also have information on adapting to a more extreme climate and protecting our endangered flora and fauna. We are delighted that the West Berkshire Countryside Society will have a stall. Please put the date in your diary and come and say hello on the day.

Carbon Literate® certification

Local experience also unpins our support for Carbon Literacy training. The recently accredited course, 'Positive Actions for People, Nature and Climate', has been developed over 5 years alongside hundreds of local conversations at community events and local council meetings.

Carbon Literacy training helps people from a professional, educational, or community background share experiences of low-carbon actions, and to support their friends/staff/

volunteers to bring about meaningful change. All 45 participants so far agree they feel more confident making sense of conflicting information and having well-informed conversations.

Please email drwatson.eco@gmail.com if you would like to take the course, which is currently free. With thanks to Veolia for funding our trainer's accreditation.

Other Events

Finally, we have a series of events throughout 2026 (funded by the National Lottery), including:

- film showings, eg Future Council, and the National Emergency Briefing
- talks
- taking our stall out and about – look for us at Newbury Show and many other events
- ... and of course, GreenFest West Berkshire 2026.

Like many grassroots environmental groups, NCN is run by a small team of over-stretched volunteers who are deeply worried about the nature and climate crises. We are always happy to hear from others in the same situation so we can support each other. Please visit our website for more information: www.natureandclimatenetwork.co.uk

Dr Pat Watson, Secretary, Nature and Climate Network



Don't forget our website!
www.westberkscountyside.org.uk



An Update from the Chair

As we approach the end of one financial year and the start of another, the Committee has begun to prepare our budget for 2026–27.

In the current financial year, we were pleased to donate £2,500 to the John Simonds Trust at Rushall Farm. We have a close relationship with Rushall and have a huge respect and admiration for the hard work carried out there. Our donation will enable a current programme to continue to help children from a Reading primary school who are struggling with the curriculum and the transition to secondary education. We have made donations to Rushall in previous years which contributed to re-thatching the barn and creating a classroom.

We see that making a donation to an organisation based around the environment and children is a way for the Society to further its work in education and local communities alongside our practical tasks. The committee will be discussing donations for the coming financial year in the next few months.

We are pleased to report that the Society is in a good financial state. This is a great tribute to the Tuesday task group, our thriving Barn Owl Group, and the support we receive from partners for the work we carry out. The next year will see some of our expenditure allocated to tool replacement and training. We are pleased that John De Lara has recently taken responsibility



Tools of the trade

for training and is reviewing and planning for the coming year. The costs for chainsaw and brushcutter training courses are a significant part of the budget, but they are essential to ensure volunteers can carry out work using power tools with the utmost safety for themselves and those working around them.

John Haggerty

Dates for your Diary



Thurs 23rd April 7:30pm

Warbler Walk at Hosehill Lake. Join Cathy McEwen to hear and look for newly returned spring migrants, particularly nightingales, in this nationally important area. Bring binoculars and wear stout footwear. Please car share if possible and consider patronising the pub. Meet and park at the Fox and Hounds, Sheffield Bottom **SU650 699** ///noisy.doll.roof



Thurs 18th June 9:15pm

Nightjars – a short walk on Bucklebury Common. Join Society members to look for and hear these summer visitors to the heathland. Meet in the car park off The Common, closest to Chapel Row **SU560 692** ///runner.rotate.musically



Sat and Sun 18th/19th April and 25th/26th April

Rushall Manor Bluebell Walks – a stunning display in the woods across Rushall; children's activities and plenty of tasty treats in the barn. Donations/entry in aid of the Multiple Sclerosis Society. Rushall Manor Farm, off Back Lane between Stanford Dingley and Bradfield. **SU584 723** ///telephone.brink.crate

Join us for a Members Social Evening

The Victory Room,
Bucklebury Village, RG7 6PR

**Thursday 21st May
2026 at 7:00pm**

**Buffet Supper and
Drinks Provided**

**Reports from
Society Groups**

Talk

A short AGM

Items of Any Other Business –
Please notify the Secretary at least
one week before the meeting at
wbcshonsec@btinternet.com

RSVP
editor@westberkscountyside.org.uk

Bluebells near Bradfield

4.5 miles/7k of tracks and paths around Rushall Manor Farm and Standford Dingley. Park at the Black Barn, Rushall Manor Farm off Back Lane SU584 723 //telephone.brink.crate OS Explorer 159. Refreshments at Standford Dingley.

1. The 18th century Black Barn at **Rushall Manor Farm**, and its associated buildings, forms the base for The John Simonds Trust, set up in 1986, which welcomes over 12,000 children a year to a variety of learning experiences in the Pang valley.

From the **Black Barn** walk north, following the farm track to the left of buildings, up through the bluebell woods to **Miram's Copse**. Where the path divides, take the second, northeasterly path which crosses various wide rides before reaching **Scratchface Lane**.

2. These traditionally managed woods and copses have huge value for all wildlife. They are full of bluebells in spring and mainly consist of hazel coppice with oak standards. The wide rides support a variety of wildflowers alive with butterflies and other insects, including the nationally rare **Drab Looper moth**. **Scratchface Lane** is no longer as narrow and little-used as its name implies, so cross with care.

Cross over through the gate and take the footpath across the field and into the copse, bearing left, until it joins a gravel track (turn right).



3. **Greathouse Wood** is a species rich secondary ancient woodland. Its name derives from the 'great' Bradfield House which stood to the south and

was destroyed in the 1840's. Only some cottages remain.

At the reservoir sign, take the grassy path to the right which runs southeast down to **Owl Pit Copse**. At the junction of crossing paths turn left to follow the field edge towards the modern buildings of **Rushall Farm**.

A shorter route, taking the path ahead, continues through bluebell woods, crossing the lane to follow the farm track back to the Black Barn.

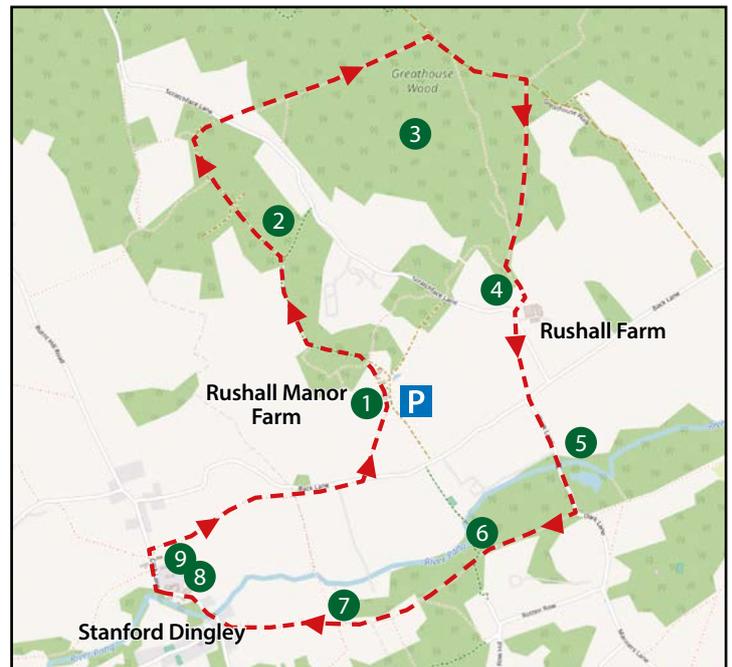
4. The **Owl Pit Geological site** is part of a quarry started in 1830 which provided chalk used to 'sweeten' the acid soils of the surrounding fields. A display board gives an explanation of the features of this local reserve.

After visiting the geological site, return to the footpath, cross the lane and take the path diagonally left to cross the fields, emerging on **Back Lane**. Cross over to walk down **Mariner's Lane**, crossing **Folly Bridge** over the **Pang**. Turn right after the bend to follow the river upstream. Continue to **Standford Dingley**.

5. **Folly Bridge** was rebuilt in 1947 after floods swept away the original hump-backed bridge.

6. The confluence of the **River Pang** with the spring water flowing from the pools upstream constitutes about 50% of the river's water. Here the **Upper Pang** becomes the **Lower Pang** and the doubling of the river width is easily viewed from the path.

7. The **Blue Pool** is formed from artesian springs forced through the porous



chalk between layers of impermeable clay. The blue colour is almost certainly derived from the fine particles of a blue-green mineral called **glauconite** which reflects the light. The water maintains a constant temperature of about 7-9°C all year.

On reaching the village, turn right along the roadside, walking with care past the **Bull pub** to the church.



8. **Standford Dingley** is an ancient settlement. **Standford** means 'stony ford' – usually a Saxon name; **Dingley** is the family name of a 15th century owner of the manor. The village is listed in the **Domesday Survey of 1086**. Today, the village is full of 17th and 18th century houses and has two pubs.



9. The **Church of St Denys**, with relics of its Saxon origin within the interior walls, is **Grade 1 listed**. Today's church still holds a **Norman font** and fragments of medieval wall paintings.

After the church, turn right onto a footpath skirting the northern edge of the churchyard. Cross the fields through 3 hedgerows to a well-defined track. Turn left and then right to follow the path beside the hedgerow to the south of the road. Where the path emerges onto the lane, cross over to follow the route back across the field to the **Black Barn**.

Margery Slatter

Many more interesting local walks are available on our website: www.westberkscountryside.org.uk