

Help look after the brook

- **Take your litter home and clear up after your dog.**
- **If you would like to help on volunteer tasks to manage the brook contact The Hanneys Flood Group.**

Lifestyle choices, population growth and climate change are placing increasing demands on our water supplies. In this area the domestic supply comes from aquifers which feed the Letcombe Brook. Thinking about how we use water and reducing usage will help us to ensure that there is enough water for us and wildlife. Thames Water can supply information on saving water: www.thameswater.co.uk/save



Please don't feed the ducks as it can be harmful to them and cause:

- Poor nutrition
- Overcrowding and spread of disease amongst ducks
- Unnatural behaviour
- Pollution and environmental damage
- An increase in rats in the area



If you care about the ducks then please do not feed them – allow them to return to their natural habits.

Local information

Letcombe Brook Project 01235 771447
East Hanney Parish Council
www.easthanneyparishcouncil.org.uk
The Hanneys Flood Group
www.thehanneysfloodgroup.org.uk
Vale and Downland Museum
01235 771447 / www.wantage-museum.com

Environment Agency

If you see any pollution call the 24-hour emergency hotline on 0800 80 70 60.

Letcombe Brook Project

The Letcombe Brook Project is a charity which works with local people and organisations to enhance and protect the natural beauty of the brook and to help people appreciate the environment. The project undertakes work to encourage native wildlife, improve the landscape, remove rubbish and alleviate future flooding along the brook. You can learn more by coming on a guided walk/talk or join in a conservation task. The project offers educational opportunities for local schools including river dipping.



River dipping

Letcombe Brook Project

C/o Vale and Downland Museum
Church Street
Wantage
OXON
OX12 8BL
01235 771447
letcombebrook@hotmail.com



The Hanneys Flood Group volunteers

Partnership

Letcombe Regis Parish Council
Wantage Town Council
Grove Parish Council
East Hanney Parish Council

Leaflet sponsored by



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The Letcombe Brook Project, registered charity 1172111*

LETCOMBE BROOK

DISCOVERY TRAIL

East Hanney



A 2.5 mile walk exploring the brook through the village and farmland

Discovery Trail

The Letcombe Brook flows through the attractive village of East Hanney. Along with neighbouring West Hanney, the settlements are often referred to as 'The Hanneys'. They have previously been known as 'island villages' and historically they were surrounded by marshland connected by a causeway.

People settled along the brook here as it provided a clean and plentiful source of fresh water. They used water power to drive mills, two of which, Dandridges Mill and Lower Mill can be seen on this trail.

Thames Water abstracts from the aquifers via a borehole at Childrey Warren and supplies the local area with drinking water. The character of the brook has been shaped and changed by centuries of human endeavour as the brook was used for water collection, farming and milling.

This trail helps you to explore and discover the brook, which is sometimes hidden, as it weaves its way through the village, and highlights natural, historic and landscape features along the route.

Distance: The trail is 2.5 miles long. It starts from East Hanney Memorial Hall and follows the brook upstream to Ebbs Lane, then loops through the village, back past Lower Mill to Dandridges Mill and through Weir Farm. From here you retrace your steps back to the start.

Accessibility: The trail is on surfaced paths and rural footpaths. It is flat and there are stiles and kissing gates. Boots are a must in winter as the paths get muddy.

P Parking is available at East Hanney Memorial Hall car park.

Our local place names reflect the presence of the brook

Letcombe Brook

The Letcombe Brook is a chalk stream which is a globally rare habitat: 85% of all the chalk streams on our planet are found in England.

The brook is fed from springs issuing from the chalk rock at Letcombe Regis and Letcombe Bassett. It exhibits the classic chalk stream characteristics of crystal clear oxygenated water, a year round temperature of around 11°C and a consistent flow of water flowing over a clean gravel bed.

The brook flows northwards through the Vale of the White Horse in Oxfordshire for 12 km where it meets the Childrey Brook, which runs into the River Ock and on into the River Thames.

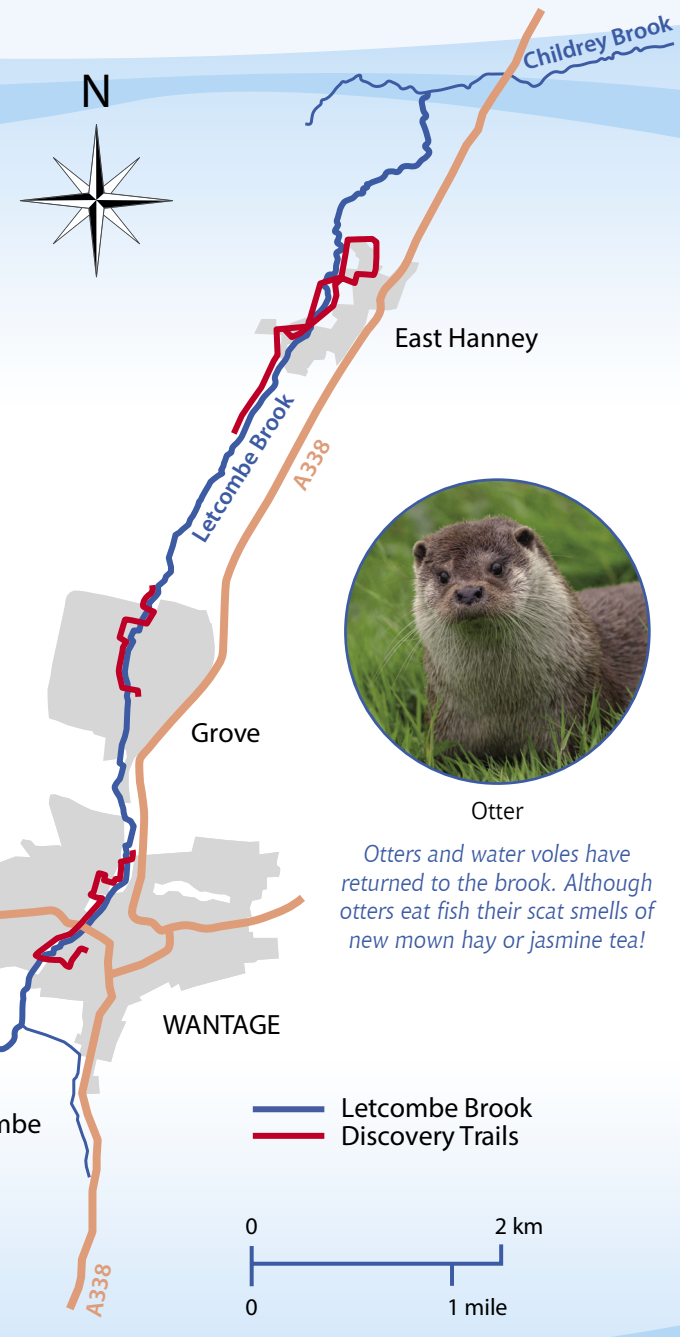
There are over 170 riparian owners of the brook. Rights generally extend to the middle of the brook so there are usually two owners on any stretch.

Other walks: To explore other sections of the brook download three other leaflets from Wantage, Grove and Letcombe Regis parish council websites.



Kingfisher

The Kingfisher is an expert angler, its diet consists of small fish such as minnows, sticklebacks and bullheads as well as insects.



Otter

Otters and water voles have returned to the brook. Although otters eat fish their scat smells of new mown hay or jasmine tea!

Letcombe – lede in the combe Wantage – intermittent stream East Hanney – island of waterfowl

Discover the Letcombe Brook

Starting at East Hanney War Memorial Hall car park, turn left out of the car park and take the tarmac path past the allotments to reach the ironbridge across the Letcombe Brook.

1 Standing on the bridge is a good point to get acquainted with this chalk stream which is a globally rare habitat and a haven for wildlife. Wild brown trout and bullhead feed on invertebrates such as freshwater shrimp and caddis fly larvae. Kingfishers dart along the clear water and water voles and otters have returned to the brook as the habitat has improved.



Caddis Fly Larva

Across the bridge there is the first of three interpretation boards about the brook by East Hanney Parish Council.

Cross the bridge and turn left down the grass path beside the brook. Carry on over the stile and where the path forks take the left path to follow the brook downstream.

2 Bathing place – In the late 19th century, a small bathing place was constructed on the brook, comprising a corrugated iron enclosure, changing rooms and a veranda, whilst the stream was widened and provided with a concrete base. The local mill downstream was able to maintain the level of water to allow swimming. This bathing place was popular before it was finally destroyed by a flood in the 1940s. The site is now overgrown with nettles and brambles.

3 Overflow channel – Just after a section of wooden fence and on the opposite side of the brook there are large pipes in the bank. These now take flood waters around the island. In the past the old channel around the island used to be the overflow channel for Lower Mill. It was a man-made feature which was used by the mill owner to manage water levels.

Go through the kissing gate where you will find a second interpretation board. Continue and pause just before another kissing gate.

4 Old Orchard – In the field on the right are a few old apple trees. Orchards and walnut trees used to be a very common feature in the area.

Continue through the kissing gate by the mill.

5 Lower Mill was built in the late 19th century as a corn mill and is one of seven surviving mills on the brook. Ten working mills were recorded in the Domesday Book in 1086. Some were fulling mills which cleaned woollen cloth, others corn mills which ground cereal grain into flour and Dandridges Mill, which we will see later was a silk mill. Water levels were once much higher but are lower now due to water abstraction to supply homes, agriculture and industries.



Continue straight ahead to rejoin the footpath between the brook and a high wall. At the next kissing gate, keep to the left-hand side of the field, and head towards a tall magnificent tree.

6 Black Poplar – a huge magnificent tree thought to be Britain's most endangered native timber tree. The male and female flowers are found on separate trees and are pollinated by the wind. This tree is male and has reddish catkins in spring. Female trees have green catkins followed by fluffy seeds.



Go through the gate under the tree and after a short distance veer right across the field to a kissing gate and continue down Ebbs Lane.

7 This part of the trail leads you past attractive historic buildings of various architectural styles and construction including timber framed, thatched and red brick.

Continue past Kings Farm Cottages on the right (with a very fine walnut tree). At the end of the road on the left is the Old Bakery. Carry straight on and take the next right into Halls Lane with some old converted farm barns.

8 Philberds Manor – A manor house has been recorded here since the 14th century that was once home to Kings Edward III and Richard II. The house here today dates back to 1750.

At the end of Halls Lane ignore the byway and bridge on your right and just in front of Lower Mill turn right and take the footpath over the brook and past Mill Cottage. Go through the kissing gate into a meadow.

9 Overflow channel – upstream of the mill the brook was modified to provide a head of water to drive the mill wheel. An overflow channel was built to take water off the brook to enable the mill owner to manage water levels. It is derelict, but you can still see a shallow ditch on your left in this field which is bordered by veteran willow trees which were once pollarded.

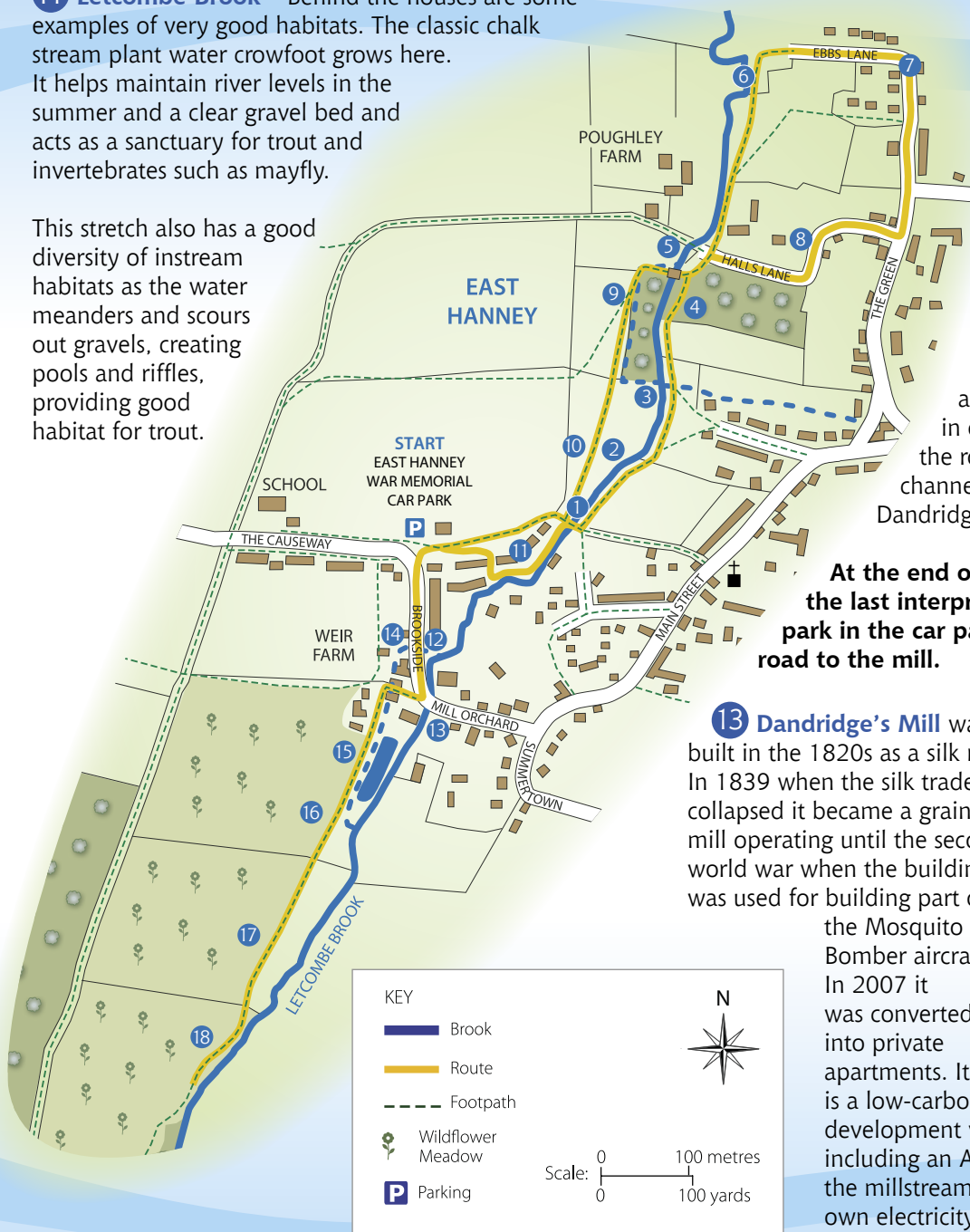
Follow the footpath along the ditch and into the field immediately below (not into the recreation field), keeping the hedge on your right. Continue down to a stile in a post and rail fence.

10 Field archaeology – In this field you can see humps and bumps which may include the original line of the brook before the channel was modified to supply the mill with water.

Cross the stile, turn left and immediately before the iron bridge turn right through a gap and follow the brook upstream at the back of some gardens.

11 Letcombe Brook – Behind the houses are some examples of very good habitats. The classic chalk stream plant water crowfoot grows here. It helps maintain river levels in the summer and a clear gravel bed and acts as a sanctuary for trout and invertebrates such as mayfly.

This stretch also has a good diversity of instream habitats as the water meanders and scours out gravels, creating pools and riffles, providing good habitat for trout.



Keep along the tarmac path to a wooden fence directly in front of you and take the tarmac path to the right between the houses and back to the road. Turn left and go past the car park and turn left again along Brookside and down to Dandridge's Mill.

12 Where you see the brook again there is a stream coming in on the left under the road. This is the overflow channel from the mill race for Dandridge's Mill.

At the end of the road have a look at the last interpretation board in the car park in the car park on your left. Cross the road to the mill.

13 Dandridge's Mill was built in the 1820s as a silk mill. In 1839 when the silk trade collapsed it became a grain mill operating until the second world war when the building was used for building part of the Mosquito Bomber aircraft. In 2007 it was converted into private apartments. It is a low-carbon development with renewable energy, including an Archimedean Hydro Screw on the millstream that powers the properties own electricity generator.



Archimedean Hydro Screw

With your back to the mill turn left and just past Old Mill House take the footpath on your left signed to West Hanney. Cross the foot bridge over a stream and turn left by a white cottage into Weir Farm.

14 Weir Farm – A farm with cattle, a horse livery, a collection of historic farm buildings and traditional wildflower hay meadows. Please keep dogs under close control and stay on the footpath.

Turn left and go through a gate into the stable yard, then through another gate and straight on following a small stream.

15 Mill pond and overflow channel – on the left through the trees is the mill pond that fed the mill particularly at times of low flow. The small stream is the overflow channel from the pond and the brook.

Go past the horse exercise area next to the brook and stay on footpath through another gate until you see the brook again. If there is temporary electric fencing across the path please reattach it after passing.

16 Upstream of the mill the brook was widened to create a head of water to power the mill. The flow is much slower here, and silt drops out and smothers the bed. Further upstream the effect of the mill lessens, and the brook narrows again, with a clear gravel bed.

17 Cowslip Meadows, Weir Farm – There are three wildflower meadows designated as County Wildlife Sites traditionally managed as hay meadows. Grasses include quaking grass, meadow barley and foxtail. In the spring they are covered in cowslips and through the summer you can see yellow rattle, meadow crane's-bill, lady's bedstraw, knapweed, broomrape and many other wildflowers. Please keep to the footpath.

18 After this final stop by the brook retrace your steps back to the start. Alternatively, you can carry on the footpath to the village of Grove 1.5 miles away.