

Letcombe Brook Project

Charitable Incorporated Organisation

Business Plan 2019-2022



Produced 30.12.2018

Contents

1. Executive Summary	<u>3</u>
2. Mission Statement and Aims	<u>5</u>
3. Operational Plan	<u>6</u>
4. Business Context	<u>12</u>
5. Financial Information	<u>14</u>
Appendix 1 Feedback	<u>18</u>
Appendix 2 Background	<u>25</u>
Appendix 3 Summary of Achievements	<u>31</u>
Appendix 4 Administrative Info	<u>39</u>
Appendix 5 Partners and Stakeholders	<u>40</u>

1. Executive Summary

Letcombe Brook is a chalk stream, internationally rare and of considerable value to both people and wildlife. Flowing for 12km through the major settlements of both Wantage and Grove it contributes greatly to valuable green space and as a source of water for both business and communities.

The LBP was set up in 2003 in response to concerns from public bodies that Letcombe Brook was a declining and undervalued community asset. Since then the Project has raised over £200,000 in funding for habitat and access improvements, flood alleviation measures and community engagement projects. It has raised the profile of Letcombe Brook within local communities and galvanised action to secure a reduced flood risk and increase its value at the heart of many community green spaces.

Increased pressure due to large scale housing developments, the expectation of more regular severe weather events and potential for flooding alongside sustained cuts to local government services only increase the demand on, and relevance of, the Letcombe Brook Project.

This business plan sets out the aims and objectives for the Letcombe Brook Project for the period 2019-2022.

We have quite rightly, and purposefully, set wide charitable objectives. We want to make progress on all our objectives but clearly, we need to prioritise and ensure our scarce resources are targeted where they can make the greatest impact.

Our central objectives are:

Increase the length of Letcombe Brook under appropriate management regimes.

Letcombe Brook, like many other chalk streams, suffered from a history of neglect. Most of the brook is privately owned flowing through either farmland or residential properties with some owned by parish, town or district councils. There are 140 different riparian owners!

Little appropriate management has taken place regardless of ownership resulting in heavily shaded banks, sediment build up, accumulations of litter and debris and a resulting increase in flood risk. This is often as a result of a lack of funds, motivation or a lack of specialist knowledge.

Letcombe Brook Project has been able to implement projects to improve several stretches of the brook and in these areas its recovery has been remarkable, but much further work is needed. A key aim is to get more of the brook and its corridor into appropriate management by influencing landowners to undertake appropriate habitat management, partnership working to secure funding for major projects and by taking direct action with volunteer work parties. We will focus on high profile areas of community green space to maximise public awareness and participation and use those sections to show others what can be achieved. Appropriate management will result in a brook that is a valuable community asset and will at the same time reduce flood risk.

Inspiring People (Engagement)

We will encourage the local community to enjoy and appreciate this rare and valuable asset. There is a growing realisation that the potential of the natural environment to improve people's quality of life has still to be fully realised. Our passion is to further encourage

people to care for and appreciate Letcombe Brook. We will do this by working at a local level to educate and engage, to encourage positive actions whilst demonstrating that Letcombe Brook has an important part to play in the lives, wellbeing and economy of local people.

Letcombe Brook can also play a valuable role in increasing awareness of wider environmental issues whilst contributing to the health and wellbeing of those visiting and living alongside it.

By increasing volunteering input and educational output, by raising our profile with an effective communication strategy, we will inspire more people to help LBP in achieving a healthy, functioning Letcombe Brook for all.

Protecting Letcombe Brook

Feedback shows the Letcombe Brook Project is a well-established, respected guardian of the brook with widespread support from key agencies and partners, local communities and other stakeholders. Accessible green space has been highlighted as a scarce and important resource to local communities and we are ideally placed to help manage many key areas. We have championed the Letcombe Brook in the Wantage Neighbourhood Plan and influenced many large landowners to "do the right thing". We can help VWHDC in achieving the aims and objectives of its Local Plan for 2031.

We know that we will not have sufficient resources to meet the expectations of all stakeholders. We also know that some expectations are often in conflict with others. We will sometimes have to make difficult decisions but will do so in a well informed and transparent way. We will seek to obtain the greatest value out of each pound we spend and always do so with our charitable objectives in mind of preserving, protecting and managing the Letcombe Brook for the benefit of local communities and wildlife alike.

Cost Effective Delivery

Funding from existing sources allows the LBP to work in an extremely cost-effective manner with the Project Officer (PO) able to prioritise raising funds for specific enhancement projects. It also enables the PO to give timely, expert advice to the many riparian owners without having to charge a fee. The LBP is seen as local, neutral and approachable which enables us to deal with potential conflicts quickly and effectively. We can act as the eyes and ears of larger more remote regulatory bodies.

LBP needs to ensure we grow as a resilient, independent organisation, free to best meet the needs of our core users both now and in the future. This plan is ambitious, wide-ranging and of great importance to many. This plan is a call to action for our staff, trustees and funders. Letcombe Brook Project have made real improvements to both the brook and its communities but pressure on this valuable resource and concern over flood risk and habitat loss only increases. Implementation of this plan can achieve real cost-effective gains whilst reducing the risk of flooding and its associated costs.

2. Mission Statement and Aims

Our mission statement is

To provide and maintain an environmentally rich green corridor, along all the Brook reaches, as a Community resource, whilst maximising the length with natural flow and minimising flooding.

Our aims are to:

- ! Conserve and enhance the biodiversity and landscape of the Letcombe Brook corridor
- ! Seek opportunities to reduce flood risk, implementing natural flood management measures where appropriate
- ! Promote environmentally responsible land management practices amongst land owners and land managers
- ! Increase awareness of countryside and environmental issues through education and interpretation
- ! Involve all sectors of the community in caring for and appreciating the Letcombe Brook

The above aims will be delivered through the following Operational Plan for 2019-2022.

3. Operational Plan 2019 – 2022

Organisational Aims	Objectives	Actions	Milestones	Timescale
Conserve and enhance the biodiversity and landscape value of the Letcombe Brook Corridor	Seek Protection of Letcombe Brook through Planning Process	Develop relationships with Planning Authorities, Developers and other Interested Parties to be able to comment and advise at pre-application stage. Responding to planning applications that have potential to impact the brook	Comments supplied by Project Officer to all planning applications that have potential to impact the Letcombe Brook Corridor	Ongoing
		Support developments in fulfilling current planning obligations by contacting managers on regular basis and providing suitable advice and encouragement	Richmond Care Home complying with enforcement notice and managing area appropriately	Review Mar 2020
			Willow Grange, Wantage complying with enforcement notice and managing area appropriately	Review Mar 2020
	Carry out Habitat Assessment and Habitat Enhancement work where possible	Identify invasive fauna and flora and apply targeted removal where possible	Reduction in number and size of stands of balsam along the length of the brook. Decrease in amount of time spent hand pulling balsam.	Review Sept 2021
			6 landowners identified to accept mink rafts and supported in monitoring for presence of	Review Apr 2020

			mink plus despatch of mink by PO.	
		Regular in-stream litter picks along hotspot areas as part of work parties and ad hoc by volunteers.	Key areas such as Willow Walk, Bosley's Orchard, Limborough Road and Letcombe Valley not suffering from a build-up of litter	Ongoing
		Rapid Assessments of key stretches of brook to obtain baseline data on current condition	Carry out rapid assessment to at least 3 sections of brook per year to build up data on present condition and identify areas for improvement	Revue Apr 2021
		Identify key areas of the brook corridor that can be improved through practical habitat management work	Work with landowners and key partners to gain permission and funding to carry out improvement work e.g. Willow Walk, Wantage and Bosley's Orchard, Grove	Ongoing
	Identify projects to improve brook and prioritise those meeting Water Framework Directive Objectives	Identify and seek to remove blockages to fish movement	Obtain info from EA and add to this by conducting walk over surveys during winter to compile complete list of barriers to fish movement	Review Apr 2019
Prioritise structures then contact landowners to discuss options for removal or modification			Review Apr 2020	
Submit project to EA for consideration of Environment Programme Funding			Mar 2020	
Identify other projects to		2 projects designed and submitted to EA	Apr 2019	

		improve biodiversity and landscape value of the brook in partnership with Ock Catchment Partnership and EA	Environment Programme for funding consideration	
			Funding obtained and delivery complete	Apr 2021
			Identify further projects and write up ready for any available funding becoming available	Oct 2019
	Monitor and seek to improve Water Quality of Letcombe Brook and its tributaries	Seek opportunities to supplement water quality monitoring	Take part in annual WaterBlitz programme to collect additional water samples	Annual in October
			Identify sources of diffuse pollution and work with landowners to reduce	Wet walks during winter period to identify sources of diffuse pollution
			Once identified contact landowners to seek improvement, link into Catchment Project	Review April 2019 Ongoing
Seek opportunities to reduce flood risk, implementing natural flood management measures wherever appropriate	Ensure flow control structures operated correctly and in good order	Check trash screens on regular basis	Trash screens operating as intended	Monthly
		Identify and regularly communicate with landowners in control of sluices and other similar structures	All structures identified and contact details of landowners obtained	Apr 2019
			Communicate with owners of structures to ensure proper use	Annual
	Removal of obstructions to natural flow	Respond to reports of blockages to stream, either remove or ensure landowner deals with appropriately	Brook free from temporary blockages due to fallen trees and other debris	Ongoing
		Identify and seek to remove structures	Identify all structures in the brook and prioritise for removal	Apr 2020

		impounding flow and causing silt build up	Seek funding and any consent needed to remove structures	Ongoing
	Develop "Catchment Vision" whilst seeking opportunities for Natural Flood Management	Continue to gather information on how the Brook functions at a catchment level.	Walk over surveys completed. All tributaries, blockages, major erosion features and sediment transportation regime described	March 2022
		Look for opportunities to apply NFM objectives and to identify sites to improve link between brook and its natural floodplain	Develop opportunities as they arise in conjunction with partners	Ongoing
Promote environmentally responsible land management practices amongst land owners and land managers	Partnership Working	Work with Thames Water and Environment Agency in the lead up to a halt in abstraction and augmentation in effort to deal with many concerns this is likely to raise with local community	Public kept informed at all stages up to and after end of abstraction and augmentation due in 2020.	Review Apr 2021
		Play full role in Ock Catchment Partnership	Attend meetings and submit projects for consideration/support	Ongoing
		Regular contact with Parish, Town and District Councils (key partners)	Joint working or provision of advice as appropriate	Ongoing
			Attendance at Council meetings as requested	Ongoing
		Identify potential partners and collaborations and	Develop as and when opportunities arise	Ongoing

		progress as appropriate		
	Promote Good Practice	Links to relevant guidance on website	Website launched with relevant content	Jan 2020
		Follow up when new guidance launched with key partners and key riparian owners	Review and action as necessary	Ongoing
		Discuss best practice during site visits	Opportunities taken as they arise	Ongoing
	Remain informed on and promote good practice	Attend seminars and training as appropriate to keep up to date	PO up to date with guidance, any training needs met	Ongoing
	Provision of expert advice	Provide expert advice in line with service requests from partners, riparian landowners and statutory bodies	Requests met in timely fashion	Ongoing
Increase awareness of the countryside and environmental issues through education and interpretation	Delivery of education package to local schools	Continue to develop and provide education package to local schools	Deliver package to 4 primary schools during 2019/2020	Mar 2020
			Increase to 6 during 2020/2021	Mar 2021
			Seek engagement opportunities with King Alfred's Academy	Apr 2019
		Develop communications strategy	Create and launch website. Provide seasonal blog articles and volunteer updates on website	Revue Apr 2020

			Develop use of Twitter account to promote work of the LBP and relevant content	Ongoing
	Engage with local community on as broad a front as possible		Develop relationship with local press and provide relevant content	Ongoing
		Produce and maintain interpretation material at relevant sites	Existing interpretation identified and maintained	Review 6 monthly
			Additional pieces of interpretation installed as and when opportunity occurs	Ongoing
		Provide events and talks	Minimum of 2 events and 2 talks given during 2019/2020. Seek to increase this in subsequent years, revue annually.	Apr 2020
Involve all sectors of the community in caring for and appreciating the Letcombe Brook and its corridor	Develop volunteering package	Increase number and range of tasks available for volunteers to take part in	200 volunteer hours/yr completed 300 volunteer hours/yr completed	Apr 2019 Apr 2020
		Broaden sector of community involved in volunteering	New "Youth Group" work party set up and volunteering regularly	Apr 2020
	Promote the Letcombe Brook corridor as a green space for health and wellbeing	Supply Letcombe Brook Walk leaflets to relevant outlets	Complete series of walks in print and available	Apr 2019
			Stocks available at all identified outlets	Ongoing
		Increase interest in Letcombe Brook by publishing seasonal articles on what to see and do along the brook	Quarterly articles on website and provided to relevant publications	Quarterly

4. Context

Local communities – the population of Wantage, Grove and the surrounding villages located in the Letcombe Brook corridor continues to grow. Several of these new developments are being built very close to the banks of Letcombe Brook and have required complex consultation to resolve flood risk concerns and corridor management issues. LBP are ideally placed to engage these new communities and deal with the conflicting priorities that arise.

Increased flood risk – with the Met Office predicting global warming could make heavy summer downpours five times more likely concerns over flooding only grow. Wantage, Grove and East Hanney have a history of flooding as does Abingdon and it remains of high concern for many residents. Abingdon Flood Alleviation Scheme is under development and action lead by the LBP in the Ock Catchment can help it achieve its aims.

Nature Deficit – evidence suggests young people are becoming disconnected from nature. The education work of the Letcombe Brook Project provides local school children with a safe opportunity to learn to value the brook and the wildlife that depends on it. It also helps them build confidence in exploring and enjoying green space.

Health and Wellbeing – the benefits of time spent outside in nature are only now being widely recognised. The green corridor of Letcombe Brook provides a valuable green space through several major communities. The Project helps people engage with the brook through volunteering, walking along its banks or learning about its wildlife.

Cuts to Local Government – budgets for grounds maintenance, monitoring and enforcement work have become stretched. The LBP can act as the eyes and ears of such organisations and carry out habitat management work with its team of volunteers. It can also provide the specialist advice needed to protect and care for a chalk stream.

Habitat Loss – development pressure in Oxfordshire continues to grow with many developments taking place in the Letcombe Brook corridor right now. This will inevitably lead to some habitat loss but will also create new community green space. LBP are ideally placed to advise where suitable development can take place but also to help plan and care for these new community green spaces to ensure they do not decline through inappropriate management regimes.

Financial Risks to Project Continuity

We rely on the annual grants generously given by our project partners - The Vale of the White Horse District Council, Wantage Town Council, Letcombe Regis Parish Council and East Hanney Parish Council – to provide the core funding to enable the Letcombe Brook Project to continue. Together, the annual amount received funds the Project Officer's time for 75 hours each month.

Although we can raise additional funds from other sources to enable delivery of specific project work, we are not yet able to raise money to cover core costs -the Project Officer's fees.

If the annual amount of funding received from project partners was to reduce, the weekly input from the Project Officer would have to reduce accordingly. This would put at risk all the benefits achieved to date. It is likely that incidents of pollution in the brook would increase, litter and debris would mount up and flood risk to residents living in the catchment area would be increased. Habitats and the wildlife dependent on them would decline.

5. Financial Information

Accounts

YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH 2018

INCOME	2018 UNRESTRICTED ED £	£	2018 RESTRICTED TED £	2017 UNRESTRICTED ED £
Vale of White Horse D.C.				5,719.47
Grove Parish Council	7,000.00			7,000.00
Wantage Town Council	7,000.00			7,000.00
Lectcombe Parish Council	700.00			600.00
Letcombe Conservation				
Vale of White Horse D.C.	7,000.00			7,000.00
Thames Water				
East Hanney Parish Council	800.00			800.00
Talks	40.00			80.00
Sale of Equipment	194.00			
Barett Homes Management Plan	1,092.00			
Donations	100.00			
Bank refund	16.20			
	23,942.20			28,199.47
EXPENDITURE				
Project Officers Fees	5,668.64			21,600.00
Project Officers Expenses	108.67			1,001.03
Assistant Officers Fees	1,792.00			
Assistant Officers Expenses	39.87			
Sally Wallington Consultants Fees	7,001.46			
Leaflet Design and Printing	nil			
Fly monitoring equipment	nil			
Letcombe Brook Volunteer Group Insurance	111.72			109.23
Work Party Refreshments	38.78			
Logo Design	30.00			
Job Adverts	204.00			
Hotmail Account	14.99			
Presentation gift	100.00			
	15,110.13			22,710.26
SURPLUS FOR THE YEAR	8,832.07			5,489.21
TOTAL FUNDS AS AT 31st MARCH 2017	5,489.21		2,822.88	

TOTAL FUNDS AS AT 31st MARCH 2018	14,321.28	2,822.80
-----------------------------------	-----------	----------

Represented by:

Balance at Nat West Bank 31st March 2018	17,144.08
--	-----------

**Letcombe
Brook Project
Year ended
31st March
2018
General
Account**

	UNRESTRICTED £	RESTRICTED £
CURRENT ASSETS		
NatWest Bank as at 1.4.2017	5,489.21	2,822.88
Money in	23,942.20	
Money out	15,110.13	
	8,832.07	
Total Funds at 31.3.2018	14,321.28	2,822.88
Balance at NatWest Bank	17,144.16	
Balance per bank statements	18,764.74	
Less: Uncleared cheques	1,620.58	
	17,144.16	

Letcombe Brook Project
STATEMENT OF
ACCOUNTS
YEAR ENDED 31 March 2018

Accountants' Certificate

I have examined the books and records of the Management Committee together with the attached Income and Expenditure Account and I certify that it is in accordance therewith.

William Jestico
FCA
Wantag
e

Appendix 1

Feedback from Core Users of Letcombe Brook Project

Environment Agency

The Environment Agency has supported the Letcombe Brook Project for over 15 years, initially by part-funding the Project Officer post, and has been an active member of the steering group during that time. We offer technical help and guidance in addition to working in partnership on projects such as habitat creation and enhancement schemes. We have provided training on in-river enhancements to improve habitats for aquatic and wetland species and worked with the project officer in responding to the many planning applications along the brook.

By working collaboratively, the Project Officer has been able to proactively influence planning officers and developers in the early stages of the planning process, and train local volunteers in habitat management, with the resulting habitat improvements contributing to Water Framework Directive objectives as well as improving the access to and the landscape of the river corridor for people to enjoy. An example & notable success includes the Richmond Care Home development in Letcombe Regis, which restored the river channel and lakes, approved the landscape plans with enhanced features for biodiversity and improved footpaths and access for residents of the Care Home and local people. The Project used its connections to broker an agreement between the developers and BBOWT to secure the long-term management of the Letcombe Regis nature reserve, which now has an established group of willing volunteers managing the site.

The Letcombe Brook Project has played a key role over the years in educating and influencing others about the brook and how to manage it. To this end the Project Officer

has worked closely with local schools, community groups such as local flood groups, and with riparian landowners, offering advice on how to sensitively manage the stream to protect and enhance the wildlife and in-stream and riparian habitats, while also reducing flood risk. We have worked with the Project on identifying locations for, and advising on different methods of, sustainable flood risk management measures such as Natural Flood Management (NFM). The Project Officer's local knowledge and connection with community groups therefore plays an important role in communicating our flood risk and biodiversity remits to an extent that we would not otherwise have the resources to carry out.

There are many pressures affecting the Letcombe Brook and its wildlife, from development, pollution, urbanisation and agriculture. Having a local person 'on the ground' is of great benefit to the Environment Agency and local community as the Project Officer is often the first to observe incidents such as pollution events or unconsented works adjacent to the brook and report them. In addition, when local people are unsure of who to contact regarding an incident or for advice, they are more likely to contact the Project Officer as a known face. This makes them a vital conduit between local people and the Authorities, enabling quicker action to be taken to avert a potentially more serious impact on the brook.

In conclusion, the Letcombe Brook Project is well established in the locality. It has played, and continues to play, an important role in raising awareness to local communities along the brook and the Environment Agency values the contribution the Project has made over the years. We will continue to support the Project by offering technical advice and working in partnership on habitat creation and enhancement schemes.

Debbie Cousins, Fisheries and Biodiversity Technical Team, Thames Area
Debbie.cousins@environment-agency.gov.uk

Hanney Flood Group

The Hanneys Flood Group have been the beneficiaries of support from the Letcombe Brook Project Officers throughout the past three years of the project. The support has taken the form of advice, theoretical and practical knowledge dissemination and a great deal of hands on practical support to our working parties. Sally Wallington passed on her expertise of stream management to reduce flood risk and improve biodiversity including advice on cutting down and coppicing self-sown trees and cutting back blackthorn that overshadowed stretches of Letcombe Brook developing lightly shaded areas which subsequently allowed some weed growth and fresh shrub development. Arising from this were areas where more light shone through on to the banks which became more stable and areas along the Brook where insect populations increased and consequently an increase in the number and varieties of fish. Karen Davies continued the advice to open up areas of the Brook to more light to increase the biodiversity of the banks and in the Brook itself. Importantly Karen identified a number of wildlife sensitive areas along the Brook through East Hanney which have led to more focussed and more timely activities of the monthly working parties. With Mark Bradfield's guidance The Hanneys Flood Group have continued the clearing of overgrown vegetation and removal of swathes of Himalayan Balsam from the areas between the railway line in Grove to the northern boundaries of the village, opening up areas of the bank to daylight to encourage other bank stabilising plant species to become more established. At the same time habitats for water voles, otters and other protected species have been recognised and enhanced. Mark identified a rare Stone Loach, also protected, and the first one seen in this stretch of Letcombe Brook.

The Project has been instrumental in directing activities to limit the widening of the Brook and to focus on increasing the flow rates throughout the length of the Brook, which has resulted in some areas now being free from silt and the characteristic gravel beds of this unique chalk stream becoming more visible in many more stretches. Silt remains a serious issue for the Brook and more developments and practical solutions are needed to deal with this. Through the involvement of successive Letcombe Brook Project Officers, the Hanney's stretch of Letcombe Brook's biodiversity and quality has significantly improved with the gravel beds becoming more and more prominent as the water now flows faster removing the silt in the process.

The Hanneys Flood Group, through the Letcombe Brook Project, have also been participating in the River Fly Monitoring initiative over the past eighteen months and have recently also undertaken some nitrate and phosphate sampling under the Freshwater Habitats project.

Clive Manvell
The Hanneys Flood Group
c/o Tamarisk, Main Street, East Hanney, OXON, OX12 0JE. Tel: 01235
868216; clive@manvell216.plus.com
www.thehanneysfloodgroup.org.uk

Williams F1, Grove

Williams land holding spans approximately 500m of the Letcombe Brook in north Grove. We have a mutually beneficial working relationship with the Letcombe Brook Project in order to preserve and enhance this valuable asset which is enjoyed by a great many of our staff.

The inputs and guidance available from the project officer has and continues to be invaluable to Williams, not only the regarding the Letcombe Brook but the wider ecological corridor it encompasses.

As a rapidly expanding hi-tech local employer specialising in motorsport and automotive it is reassuring to have the Letcombe Brook Team on hand to advise upon matters relating to 'our' stretch of the Brook. We have several exciting and mutually beneficial projects being planned with our Project Officer which we look forwards to delivering during 2019 and beyond.

Marcus Didcock Marcus.didcock@williamsf1.com
Project Manager (Strategy & Operations)
Williams Grand Prix Engineering
T. 01235 777700

Countryside Officer, Vale of White Horse District Council

The Letcombe Brook Project has been a great asset over a number of years helping both the Vale of White Horse DC and local voluntary groups I have been involved in.

The Vale has benefitted from a partnership approach with the project to major development projects that have the potential to impact the Brook or its catchment and to seek opportunities for enhancements off of the back of development proposals. We have worked together on a number of development sites, notably the Monks Farm developments in Grove where we have secured significant enhancements through the planning process to the Brook and its corridor.

On a more personal note I have worked with the LBP project officer at the Letcombe Valley Nature Reserve to implement significant enhancements to the brook through the reserve. This has involved the use of 'green engineering' techniques to speed flow and produce a more natural channel morphology.

Regards,

Dominic

Dominic Lamb MCIEEM
Countryside Officer
Direct dial: 07801 203590
Customer Service: 01235 422600
Email: dominic.lamb@southandvale.gov.uk

Letcombe Regis Parish Council

Letcombe Regis Parish Council and villagers, have had exceptional help from the Letcombe Brook Project Officer, both in relation to the Letcombe Brook and its tributary from Spring Lake on Warborough Road and also the Millennium Green which borders the brook, on Bassett Road, and can impact on the stream as it flows past the Millennium Green. Mark has a group of volunteers from outside the village who carry out maintenance on the area between the stream and the Millennium Green, by its nature residents of the village are elderly and less able to do the heavier work needed on this stretch of land.

Mark is knowledgeable and always ready to give advice to Riparian owners when faced with problems in and alongside the stream. There have recently been problems with the water flow on the Spring Lake tributary which has caused excessive silting in the stream, he is quick to visit and discuss problems and earlier this year identified an invasive non-native plant urgently in need of control and removal alongside the tributary.

The Parish Council support the Letcombe Brook Project and urge Vale District Council to continue giving support to this valuable asset.

*Elizabeth Jenkins (Mrs) letregispc@gmail.com
Letcombe Regis Parish Clerk
4 The Old Stables
Warborough Road
Letcombe Regis
Oxfordshire
OX12 9LD*

Tel: 07491000305

Grove Flood Group

Over the years, following the 2007 flooding, the Letcombe Brook Officer has helped considerably and supported the formation of the Flood Group. We have now tried to put together a list of main things she did, as follows:-

Immediately after the 2007 flood helped with looking at the causes of the flooding and preventative ideas and actions for the future..

Drainage expert, Chris Booth, was employed for advice on possible future flood alleviation measures. Unfortunately there was not the money to actually use much of his advice. However the balance ponds were cleared and a plan established for their future maintenance with the help of Thames Water. Unfortunately the ideas for increasing the balance pond size and improving the brook outflow to the north of Grove have not been possible – so far.

Liaised with the County Council to dredge the accumulated silt from under The Green road bridge every couple of years. (It is due for another clearance now, having silted up with the recently very low water levels).

Installed the bullnoses and groynes to smooth the water flow into the road bridge arches.

Some years ago, employed contractors to widen the brook across The Green by digging out the invasive waterweed. This is now re-grown and lately a volunteer group has been organised to cut it down.

Contacting riparian owners, making them aware of their responsibilities and giving practical advice and assistance.

In particular establishing contact with the MOD dept. responsible for drainage and brook maintenance along Old Mill Close. (This problem is currently arising again).

Helped with flood risk insurance problems.

River dipping with local school children, making them aware of the brook the life it supports and our responsibility to look after it.

For the future with all the new developments along the brook there will be a need for help and advice to safely preserve its natural state.

Regards

John Divall john.divall@ntlworld.com
Grove Green Flood Group

Riparian Owner, Letcombe Bassett

Early on we had a meeting for riparian owners in the Civic Hall.

We had a waternote survey course at the village hall and then here in the afternoon for a practical session. We have a mink trap which the Project Officer sourced.

We have had advice on suitable planting on the margins and help with managing the muddy run off from the road. We were given contact names for suitable suppliers of plants and flowers.

Project Officer organised surveys with the environment agency for phosphate and run off and more recently riverfly monitoring. Other work has involved providing information at our open gardens events, advising on management of the brook and helped physically dig out accumulated silt.

Sheila Bailey (Riparian Owner), Delamere, Letcombe Bassett sheilamargaret777@gmail.com

1st Beaver Group, Wantage

Mark lead first King Alfred's Beavers in two excellent sessions, leading a river dipping session near Betjeman park and a bat walk around Letcombe nature reserve. The beavers really enjoyed the sessions, and Mark's obvious expertise was really engaging for the beavers. The activities that Mark led helped the beavers to appreciate the brook and the nature reserve. Several of the parents approached me afterwards to say how much they had learnt as well!

Chris Rogers, King Alfreds Beavers Group
chris.rogers@stfc.ac.uk

Stockham Primary School, Wantage

I am the Year 4 teacher at Stockham school in Wantage and as part of the geography curriculum the class carry out a study of the local river. For the past three years I have contacted the Letcombe Brook project, who have always been more than happy to run some sessions for the class. This year, Mark came into school and gave the class a talk all about the brook, before carrying two sessions at the brook with the children. During these sessions the children learned about how to measure the brook, wildlife in the brook and how to help look after it. The children gained lots from the visits, it helped to bring their learning to life. They were not only able to complete geography work linked to the visits, but also maths work (working out the flow) and English work (making leaflets about the brook). I found Mark (and previously Sally) to have an excellent manner with the children and they were very knowledgeable. I feel the sessions were really worthwhile and would not hesitate in contacting them again in the future.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need any further information
Claire Lovegrove clairelovegrove@googlemail.com

Millbrook Primary School, Grove

We were delighted with the support provided by our river officer and our ongoing relationship with the Letcombe Brook project.

Before meeting mark our year 3 pupils were unaware of the importance of the brook so close to their homes and lacked knowledge about ecosystems.

Mark kindly arranged a talk for each class that was very well organised and had pictures children could relate to. We then organised a stream dipping trip where a total of 61 children worked during the day in small groups looking at different creatures. They identified them and learnt about their role in the brook.

Following the trip Mark came for a final visit to hear from the children all about their learning and to find out how they (as tomorrow's citizens) will look after the brook.

Without Mark we would not have had the expertise or equipment to lead such an engaging activity. Invaluable!

Best wishes Myfanwy Jones (year 3 teacher) mjones@millbrook.vale-academy.org

East Hanney Parish Council

The East Hanney parish council are very grateful for the work of the letcombe brook project.

The letcombe brook forms an essential part of the village of East Hanney from many points of view.

1. historically the brook is very much part of the history of the village with the two water mills, old iron footbridge, victorian bathing pond and network of ditches as well as more ancient archaeological features.

2. The letcombe brook is an area of tranquillity, with in many places open views of farmland, copses, ancient orchards and hedgerows. the brook is in many places accessible by public footpaths and the brook creates a sense of place for East Hanney residents that is unique.

3. The brook is an important ecological corridor which supports a wide variety of wildlife including endangered water voles.

4. The brook is an important part of the drainage system for not only East Hanney, but Grove, Wantage and Letcombe Regis.

The brook needs looking after and the problem is that not only who does it but what should be done.

A lot of damage could be done by either doing the wrong type of maintenance or not by doing any. Leaving the brook to nature is not an option as it would turn into a mud filled ditch with a monoculture of stinging nettles with over hanging trees cutting out essential light.

The Letcombe brook project enables the parish council to have a single source of advice that is based upon not only expertise but also local knowledge. This has been very helpful in deciding on such issues as tree maintenance but also more importantly on housing and development planning.

like many villages there is a continued demand for more houses and some developers have proposed development that would affect the Letcombe brook. The Letcombe brook project have been very helpful in giving advice on these issues to the parish council.

The East Hanney Parish Council do provide some financial support for the Letcombe brook Project and would request that funding by the District Council is maintained.

Regards

Stewart Scott stewart.scott4@btinternet.com
Vice Chairman, East Hanney Parish Council.

Comments from Volunteers

"Volunteering for the Letcombe Brook Project provides a good workout physically with the option to work at your own pace and for as long as you feel comfortable. It also provides the opportunity to meet other like-minded people and usually develops into a lot of light hearted banter with plenty of laughter."

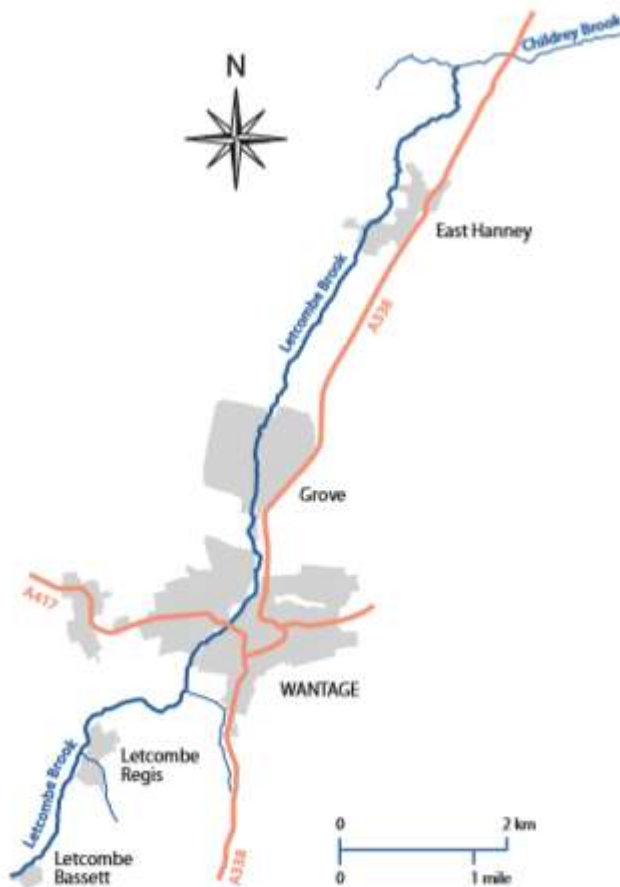
"Working parties are great fun, working with like-minded people and a great deal of satisfaction is received in the working sessions."

Appendix 2

Background to the Letcombe Brook Project

Letcombe Brook

The Letcombe Brook is a chalk stream that rises in Letcombe Regis and Letcombe Bassett and flows for 12 kms through Wantage and Grove where it meets the Childrey Brook to the north of East Hanney. before joining the River Ock, a tributary of the Thames.



Chalk streams are important habitats, as they are rich in biodiversity and globally rare and have been declared a Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Habitat. The UK has 85% of the world's chalk streams, most are concentrated in the SE of England. Letcombe Brook supports a diverse and specialised range of wildlife, some of which are endangered. The brook contains three County Wildlife Sites, along with protected species such as brown trout, bullhead, otter and water voles.

There are diverse habitats along the Letcombe Brook corridor including farmland, chalk-down land, cress beds, reedbeds, small copses, veteran willow trees, urban gardens and amenity grassland.

The Environment Agency's '*River Corridor Survey of 1999*' noted that in places the Letcombe Brook was no longer a chalk stream in character, that there had been much realignment over the years to accommodate housing, industry, roads and the railway, and it had been over-widened and deepened. Aquatic and marginal vegetation was extremely sparse with some stretches devoid of any plants. They noted numerous negative changes including reinforced banks, numerous low weirs and impoundments. It was heavily silt-laden in places and over shaded with trees, with much rubbish in the brook. Other problems included urbanisation of the environment along with over-tidying of banks and compost heaps and garden waste dumped immediately adjacent to the brook.

The Letcombe Brook is a prominent feature running through both urban and rural landscapes in the Vale of the White Horse. Long ago, people chose to settle alongside the brook, as it provided a clean and plentiful supply of fresh water and its importance is reflected in local place names. In 1086 there were 10 mills operating on the brook, providing power and prosperity to the area.

The brook would have been intensively managed, unlike today. The brook still provides water for local use today for domestic, industrial and agricultural use. It is also an attractive feature much loved by local people. It does also contribute to localised flooding and Letcombe, Wantage, Grove and East Hanney have all been flooded in recent years.

Formation and Development of Letcombe Brook Project

It was partly in response to the worrying findings of the Environment Agency's 1999 report that the Letcombe Brook Project was set up.

Initially the VOWDC promoted Environmental Trusts in Grove and Wantage to fund applications for conservation measures particularly aimed at building conservation. These Trusts noted local concerns for the health of the Letcombe Brook and initiated the formation of the Letcombe Brook Project in 2003. The LBP was initially funded by the Environment Agency, the VOWHDC and the Grove and Wantage Councils. These bodies provided representatives of a Steering Group to manage the Project. Subsequently the Environment Agency stopped funding the LBP but remained on the Steering Group. Later Both Letcombe and Hanney Councils joined the Project as funders with seats on the Steering Group. The LBP was very successfully implemented through a contracted part time Project Officer who both ran the Project and brought in significant funds for remedial and improvement works.

By working in partnership with local people, riparian owners, the district council and parish and town councils along with other agencies, the LBP has been able to bring about positive environmental benefits for both wildlife and the people living along the Brook (see Appendix 3 Summary of Achievements). In recent years LBP has been faced with extensive housing development adjacent to the Brook in addition to the ongoing concerns of maintenance and Brook corridor improvement. The VOWHDC has appeared seriously stretched in managing planning proposals and enforcement which led the LBP to consider roles entering into long term management of sections of the corridor. In this respect LBP might need to consider taking on ownership of parts of the Brook corridor. Whilst this is still under discussion, the LBP was converted to a Charity, in 2017, enabling it to own land should the need arise.

Project Organisation and Management

The affairs of the LBP are controlled by a Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees, together with representatives from all the project partners, are members of LBP's Steering Group, which meets quarterly.

The Project Officer is responsible to the Board and the Steering Group for the operational management of the project on a day to day basis. The Project Officer is employed as a consultant on a part-time contract for 75 hours each month. The Project Officer is assisted by a Project Assistant for 12 hours each month.

The Project Officer's role is to identify and resolve issues along the Brook, design and implement environmental improvements, provide advice to riparian owners on riverside management, raise the awareness of the public through education and interpretation, report to partners and the Steering Group and to seek funding for projects and the continuation of the Project Officer's post.

Letcombe Brook Project Organisational Chart

Premises

The LBP is provided with office space and facilities at the Vale and Downland Museum, in Church Street, Wantage. The Project Officer is also able to work from home.

Marketing and publicity

We will develop a marketing/PR strategy and will continue to promote the project in a number of ways, including:

- ! A project website. We have applied for funding to set up a project website, which will enable us to communicate with a huge audience, including all local residents, schools, community groups, volunteers and potential volunteers and riparian owners living in the Letcombe Brook catchment area. In this way, we will be able to involve more local adults and children in our project activities. The website will provide information about dates and details of project volunteer tasks and how to get involved; dates and details of project talks; specific information for riparian owners; advice about causes of flooding, flood prevention and pollution control; information for schools; copies of area maps; information about walks in the catchment area; links to other associated groups and FAQs. It will also provide opportunities for the local community to give feedback and enter into dialogue with LBP project staff.
- ! Social media – the Project Officer is developing a twitter account which in future will be linked to the website.
- ! Talks to local community groups. We will aim to give talks and presentations to 4 local community groups each year.
- ! Information boards about the history and ecology of the brook – boards are in place but need to be maintained and replaced when necessary.
- ! Discovery trail leaflets – a series of these has now been completed with trails in Letcombe, Wantage, Grove and Hanney. These will be distributed more widely and will be included as a pdf on the website.

- ! Local radio and press - details about events and activities will be promoted via local radio stations, BBC Radio Oxford, 106 Jack FM and Destiny Radio. Articles will be submitted to the Herald newspaper series
- ! Posters promoting project events and activities will be displayed in public buildings such as the Vale and Downland Museum in Wantage, Wantage Library, the Beacon, village halls and community stores.
- ! A permanent exhibition about the project and its flora and fauna is under development at the Vale and Downland Museum.

Community Action

We have a motivated, faithful group of volunteers, the Friends of Letcombe Brook. Until recently an average of four volunteers met about 10 times/yr to undertake tasks such as clearing scrub, fallen limbs and other blockages and litter picking in and around the river. However, there is so much work that needs to be done that the Project Officer is working to increase the number of volunteers and frequency of volunteering. Our aim is to increase volunteering to 200 hours/yr in 2019 and then on to 300 hours/yr during 2020.

In addition, we are working to set up a youth group to carry out conservation volunteering activities, in conjunction with King Alfred's School, Wantage and the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. We are in early discussions with the school but understand from students there is a lack of opportunity in the conservation sector.

Our popular education package will be delivered to four local primary schools in 2019/2020. We will look to increase this to 6 schools by March 2021 but ideally would like to deliver the package in all 8 local primaries.

In addition to the environmental benefits of the LBP volunteer and education activities, other important local needs will be addressed, including:

- ! Tackling feelings of loneliness, social isolation and depression, especially among older age groups. The Oxfordshire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment Annual Report 2018 states that Isolation and loneliness have been found to be a significant health risk and a cause of increased use of health services in the county. The report adds that areas rated as "high risk" for isolation and loneliness in Oxfordshire are mainly in urban centres, including Wantage and Grove.
- ! Tackling poor physical health. Many recent government studies have highlighted the serious problems associated with obesity, poor diet and lack of exercise.
- ! Tackling 'Nature Deficit Disorder'. This is a recent term, used to describe the psychological, physical and cognitive costs of human alienation from nature, particularly for children in their vulnerable developing years.

Fundraising

The work of the project to protect the brook and its flora and fauna has become even more important in recent years because of the intense pressure put upon it by further development in the catchment area. The Letcombe Brook and its environment is at particular risk from greater levels of disturbance, pollution, litter and unsuitable/lack of management.

To meet these challenges, we need to expand the work of the project and we are seeking additional sources of funding to pay for the resulting increase in revenue and capital costs.

The project has set up a fundraising database and a fundraising plan and has sought the assistance of an experienced charity fundraiser, who works for the project on a part-time, self-employed basis, for 12 hours each month. The fundraiser specialises in raising funds from charitable trusts, statutory bodies and lottery sources.

We have been accepted onto the Environment Agency's "Environment Programme" from which we can bid for funding for habitat improvement work. We also plan to strengthen our links to the Oxford Community Foundation and Oxford Community and Voluntary Action, as both are excellent sources of information about charity funding available for projects in Oxfordshire. We will also strengthen our links with local commercial organisations, in particular Williams F1, whose site in Grove adjoins the brook.

Using information from our fundraising database, a fundraising plan has been produced for the financial year 2018/19 and will be produced for each subsequent financial year.

Financial Risks to Project Continuity

We rely on the annual grants generously given by our project partners - The Vale of the White Horse District Council, Wantage Town Council, Letcombe Regis Parish Council and East Hanney Parish Council – to provide the core funding to enable the Letcombe Brook Project to continue. Together, the annual amount received funds the Project Officer's time for 75 hours each month.

As described above, we are hoping to raise additional funds from a range of other sources, to enable the work of the project to grow over the next three years to meet the increasing demands.

If the annual amount of funding received from project partners was to reduce, the weekly input from the Project Officer would have to reduce accordingly, which of course, would have serious knock-on effects for the work of the project. This would put at risk all the benefits achieved to date in terms of conserving and enhancing biodiversity, promoting environmentally responsible land management practices, increasing awareness of environmental issues and involving local children and adults in caring for the Letcombe Brook and its environs. It is likely that incidents of pollution in the brook would increase; litter and debris would mount up in and around the brook; habitats of wildlife, including otters and water voles, which are returning to the brook, would suffer and flood risk to residents living in the catchment area would be greatly increased.

Appendix 3

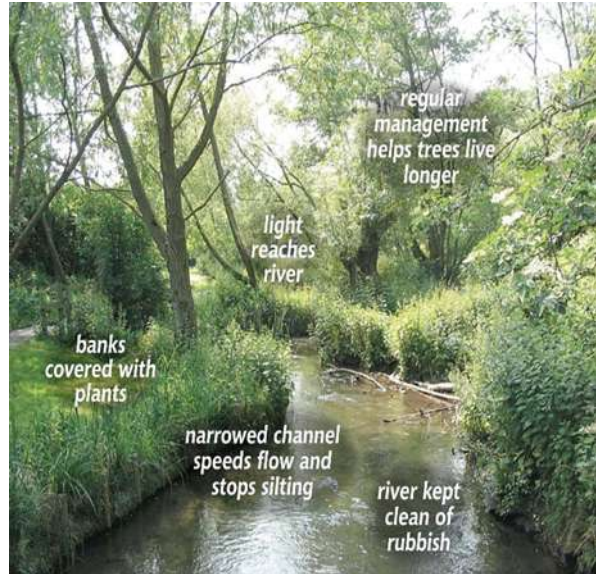
Summary of Achievements

The Letcombe Brook Project has achieved much over the past 15 years. Between the period 2003 – 2017 just over £200,000 was raised by the project officer for capital works and enhancements.

Some of its major achievements are highlighted below and have been split into distinct sections.

1) Environmental Improvements

Willow Walk Project, Wantage - £31,000 of funding secured. Project achieved a major clean-up, tree management, revetment work and associated planting plus improvements to access with installation of new boardwalk, interpretation and fencing.



Willow Walk - Before

After

Letcombe Park, Barratt Homes, Wantage - £32,000 secured from Barratt Homes to re-instate failed planting scheme following planning enforcement action driven by LBP Project Officer

The Wharf, Wantage - £14,000 funding secured. Bank revetment installed, canopy reduction, planting and interpretation alongside access improvements and infrastructure. Associated duck welfare awareness campaign to reduce rat and duck population.



The Wharf, Wantage

Partnership work with BBOWT at Letcombe Valley Nature Reserve – funding obtained from River and Wetlands Community Days to improve the brook (2014) using Natural Flood Management Techniques (NFM)



Installing flow deflector at Letcombe

Alfred's Bath, Wantage – improvement scheme delivered for £6,100 (2011)

SEEDA Grant £30,000 Education, interpretation and biodiversity enhancement works, (2011)
Included biodiversity work at Mary Green, Grove



Mary Green, Grove - Before

After

£5,000 received from Thames Water for walking trail leaflets and setting up of riverfly monitoring scheme (2016).

2) Environmental Protection

Letcombe Brook Project provide consultation advice on any development requiring planning consent taking place within the Letcombe corridor. The expert advice of the Project Officer can be critical in ensuring development alongside the is sympathetic and that ongoing management schemes are appropriate and successfully implemented for the duration of the scheme. Several past schemes have been poorly thought out and badly implemented.

Richmond Care Village, Letcombe Regis – PO worked with VWHDC officers to secure enforcement action in respect of planning breaches. Work on-going to help site managers create wildflower meadow and restore bankside nature area.

Willow Grange

Poor maintenance of the bankside area created problems for the brook and local residents. Management plans were provided by the project Officer and replanting and management work was carried out under their supervision.

Sainsburys, Wantage

This development impacted heavily on the Letcombe Brook. The PO has worked hard to get the banks replanted and a management regime adopted and implemented.



Sainsburys Development, Wantage

Monks Farm Development, Grove

The LBP continues to provide advice and guidance on both the development phase and ongoing management of community green space created within the new developments.

LBP set up a Riverfly Monitoring Network to monitor invertebrate populations on the brook to act as additional pollution control monitoring in conjunction with Riverfly Partnership and the EA.

Practical maintenance work - Friends of Letcombe Brook carry out practical work to help manage land owned by VWHDC, Wantage TC and Grove PC in high profile green space areas such as Willow Walk and Limborough Road. Group trained, supported, equipped and led by PO.

3) Flood Protection

Flood Groups - Pivotal in formation of Flood Action Groups in Wantage, Grove and Hanney following flooding of 2007. Ongoing support of groups including practical work, leading work parties, provision of expert advice and help with securing funding.

Wantage Old Mill - £8,000+ secured and project managed to remove silt from this high flood risk area and install groynes to limit future silt build up.



Groynes at Wantage Old Mill

Balancing Ponds - £10,000 secured from Thames Water to pay for ongoing management of balancing ponds at Grove (2013)



Balancing Ponds, Grove

Co-ordination of projects to reduce flood risk. Work completed in Grove at both Kingfishers (bridge removal) and Grove Green Bridge (bullnose and groynes)



Flood prevention work at Grove

4) **Education and Interpretation**

Raising awareness of countryside and local environmental issues is an important role of the project. This has been achieved in several ways, including:

- ! Environmental education for school children. The LBP has worked with a number of local schools, including Wantage Primary School, Millbrook Primary School, King Alfred's Academy, Stockham Primary School, Charlton Primary School, St James C of E Primary School and Ridgeway C of E Primary School. The project has produced an educational package linked to the National Curriculum, which includes classroom activities such as investigating food chains and learning about the history of the brook, field visits to the brook and its corridor, river dipping to identify aquatic creatures, litter picking and measuring water flow.



- ! Talks to local community groups. Over the past five years, these have included the U3A, Chaddleworth Gardening Club, Wantage Trefoil Guides, the Wantage Wildlife and Archaeology Group, Childrey Tuesday Club, the Marcham Society, Probus and Grove Methodist Church. Regular talks to the general public have also been given at The Vale and Downland Museum in Wantage. Community Groups usually make a voluntary £40 donation to project funds.
- ! Information boards about the history and ecology of the brook, which are located at various public open spaces along the brook corridor, including Willow Walk in Wantage, Village and Mary Green in Grove and Mably Way in Grove



Interpretation Panel at The Wharf, Wantage

- ! Discovery trail leaflets designed and produced for Letcombe, Wantage, Grove and Hanney. These explore the history, ecology and landscape of the areas and were designed to encourage people to get out and explore and engage with the brook.
- ! Exhibitions and workshops. Display at Mill Hall in Grove, for the Wilthire and Berkshire Canal Trust AGM in 2014; an exhibition about the Project was held at Vale and Downland Museum in 2015 for four weeks and two workshops were held in February half term the same year for families on what to look for on the river bank and the field signs of watervoles and otters.

5) Community Action

The project has set up a volunteer group, the Friends of Letcombe Brook, with the aim of inspiring local people to value and care for their local river. The volunteer group is affiliated to The Conservation Volunteers (formerly known as the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers) which enables volunteers to be fully insured whilst helping with conservation tasks.



Volunteers making a difference

Volunteers help the project with practical tasks such as major litter clear ups in and around the river, restoring river banks by planting and managing marginal vegetation, coppicing trees to allow more light to reach the river, removal of obstructions to flow, footpath clearance and carrying out wildlife surveys. With a growing population there is a lot of scope to increase opportunity for the local community to get involved in caring for Letcombe

Brook. The Project Officer is ideally placed to ensure such work is appropriate, cost effective and carried out in a safe manner.

Appendix 4

Administrative Information

Charity Name: The Letcombe Brook Project Charitable Incorporated Organisation

Working Name: The Letcombe Brook Project

Charity Number: 1172111

Date of Registration: 16 March 2017

Registered Office: C/o Vale and Downland Museum
19 Church Street
Wantage
OX12 8BL

Telephone: 07737 639253

Email: letcombebrook@hotmail.com

Website: www.letcombebrook.org.uk (under construction)

Board of Trustees: Anthony Harker (Chair)
Alison Futter
Michael Stead
David Parry

Project Team: Mark Bradfield, Project Officer
Lesley Atkinson, Project Assistant/Fundraiser

Project Partners: The Vale of the White Horse District Council, Wantage Town Council,
Letcombe Regis Parish Council,
East Hanney Parish Council
Environment Agency

Bankers: Natwest Bank, 11 Market Place, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 3HH

Auditor: Bill Jestico
Appendix 5

Letcombe Brook Project Partners and Stakeholders

Partners

LBP has no current business Partners

Internal Stakeholders

These comprise the Charity Trustees, Project Staff, Volunteers and the Project Steering Group each of which influence decisions and actions of the LBP.

The Steering Group is made up of those organisations which initiated the Letcombe Brook Project together with Local Authorities which joined subsequently. These comprise:

- ! The Vale of the White Horse District Council
- ! Grove Parish Council
- ! Wantage Town Council
- ! East Hanney Parish Council
- ! Letcombe Regis Parish Council
- ! The Environment Agency

The first five of the above are the current funders of the running costs of the LBP, principally the contracting of the Project Officer and Assistant Project Officer.

External Stakeholders

Stakeholders principally affected by the policies and actions of the LBP are

- ! Riparian owners
 - o Householders
 - o Farmers

- Developers
- Bodies providing services and operating infrastructure

- ! Flood Groups

- ! Conservation Groups

- ! The population of the District adjoining the Brook for whom the river corridor is a Community Asset