

The Ewelme Watercress Beds Local Nature Reserve

REPORT

'A study to investigate local awareness, by community stakeholders, of the conservation work at the Watercress Beds LNR at Ewelme, Oxfordshire (OS Grid Ref. SU636920).'

David Langston, October 2006

‘A study to investigate local awareness, by community stakeholders, of the conservation work at the Watercress Beds LNR at Ewelme, Oxfordshire (OS Grid Ref. SU636920).’

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I am grateful to so many people for their support in the research and production of this report.

First and foremost, the villagers of Ewelme – particularly those who, during a period of a few days which included the hottest July day since records began in 1659, found time not only to complete the questionnaire but also to chat when I called to collect. Some even offered a cold drink as I trudged the village rounds in what seemed like tropical conditions – thank you!

To Sue Cooper and Felix Bloomfield, both of whom saw this as being important enough to allocate some valuable time from their busy District Councillor lives and to offer their contributions (see Appendices 7 & 8).

To Desmond Dix, for his written contribution as Chair of the Friends of Ewelme Watercress Beds (see Appendix 9)

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Remembering Stephen himself, a willing volunteer and a fine companion on work days – I shall miss him.

Thank you all.

Author's Note

The research project set out to serve two purposes. First and foremost, there was a project report submitted for assessment as part of my studies for the Diploma in Environmental Conservation at the University of Oxford Department Of Continuing Education. The course requirements stipulated a maximum word count of 5000, which meant that I had to take some tough decisions regarding what to include in that original, abridged version.

The more comprehensive version here includes all of the content that was submitted for assessment – and more besides. It is hoped that it will be of interest and value to those responsible for, and engaged in, the conservation work at the Ewelme Watercress Beds - and perhaps even to those who are not.

I have included further detail in the Appendices, which are intended to help those readers interested in finding out more about the site (e.g. its conservation status, SODC Councillor's views, some of the legislation relating to the site, extracts from the Site Management Plan, etc.)

Any errors or omissions are my own responsibility.

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October 2006

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To minimise costs, both financial and environmental, please think before you print out this report.

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Introduction and Background

Heritage, Landscape & Wildlife

Ewelme is a small village, estimated population c.800, which sits on the Chilterns scarp spring line. Like many Chiltern villages, it is regarded as unique by some who live there, with some justification. Anglo Saxons settled here, naming it 'Aewhylme', meaning rising (whelming) or strongly-flowing springs. Chaucer's grand-daughter Alice, Duchess of Suffolk, lived here and her generous legacy remains in the form of the church, the adjoining almshouses at the cloisters and the village school. It's said that Henry VIII, during his visits to Ewelme Palace, would bathe his sores in the healing waters of the village pond, now 'The Kings Pool'. Jerome K. Jerome, author of *Three Men in a Boat*, lived and worked at Ewelme and is buried in the churchyard. His gravestone reveals that the 'K' is for 'Klapka'. Those who visit may or may not recall some or all of these special features. What is likely is that, at the mention of the name of the village, their strongest recollection will be of its most distinguishing characteristic, The Ewelme Watercress Beds.

Commercial growing of watercress at Ewelme is said to have started in about 1890 by George Smith, an innkeeper who had bought the site three or four years previously. At that time, the watercourse would have been a narrow chalk stream and the creation of the cress beds was a major piece of engineering. The work had to be done by hand, creating a series of 39 stepped levels, or beds, each about 20 yards long. At the end of each bed was a wooden dam with a series of cutouts forming a simple sluice system; this would help to ensure an even flow of water throughout the site. Where the width of the site allowed, the beds were in parallel pairs, separated by a low 'bund' of chalk, allowing further control of flow and levels. To facilitate this, a canalised stream ran the length of the beds, from which the beds could be recharged, or into which they could be drained at any time, according to the needs of the planting/harvesting cycle (Legh, 1999). Commercial production and its related maintenance activity ceased in 1988 and the watercourse moved into ecological succession. Watercress *Rorippa-nasturtium aquaticum* gave way to other plants such as Water Crowfoot *Ranunculus penicillatus*, Water Forget-me-not *Myosotis scorpioides*, Great Willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum* and Willow carr *Salix spp.* Within three years, some sections had reverted to a terrestrial state, with only a narrow watercourse meandering through the site.

In 1995, villagers established an informal support group, the Friends of Ewelme Watercress Beds ('the Friends'), and set about finding ways to halt the deterioration of the site which, by this time, was owned by one Kenneth Austin. In 1999 the Chiltern Society, supported by 'the Friends' launched a campaign to raise sufficient funds to purchase the site. With support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Onyx Environmental Trust, South Oxfordshire District Council and English Nature, the Chiltern Society acquired the freehold on 29th November, 2000. The society has funded the demolition of two derelict packing sheds and the building of a Volunteer/Visitor Centre also intended as a base for educational activity. Voluntary work parties meet at the site on two days each month.

The system of dams, bund and canalised stream is still in evidence today, although the original chalk bund was replaced with a concrete structure (c.2002) and most of the dams have been renewed over time (the most recent in 2005). Together with artefacts and tools salvaged at the site these structures represent part of Ewelme's **heritage**.

Passing though the village along the main street, The Watercress Beds site is clearly visible for about three quarters of a mile and, together with the meadowland and scrub on the far side of the water, occupies about six acres, 2.5ha in all. Depending upon the time of year and the prevailing weather conditions, the watercourse and its aquatic plants, the meadow and the hedgerows & trees on the far side can be clearly seen. For Ewelme residents and visitors alike, the site offers a varied and ever-changing **landscape**.

The site is designated as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and a County Wildlife Site (CWS), is an important link in the Chilterns AONB Wildlife Corridor Scheme and 'the rarity of the habitats within the county is recognised by the Oxfordshire Alert map designation' (Hunt, B. 2004). Its varied habitats support a diversity of bird, plant and mammal species, some of which are IUCN *Red Data Book* listed. Water Vole *Arvicola terrestris* is resident at the site, although numbers fluctuate year to year. Species recorded at the site include Pipistrelle Bat *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*, Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*, Hobby *Falco subbuteo*, Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*, Grass Snake *Natrix natrix*, Common Frog *Rana temporaria* and Common Toad *Bufo Bufo*. Where a derelict packing shed was removed from the top meadow, there has appeared a patch of Ragged Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, its seed bank probably having lain dormant for fifty years or more. All of which would substantiate the LNR's status as an important site for **wildlife**.

The Chiltern Society, in its Site Management Plan (Hunt, B. 2004) makes specific commitment to these three priorities – **heritage**, **landscape** and **wildlife** – as did their Chair, when asked to identify the society’s priorities for the site (Hunt, H. 2006).

At the time when the Chiltern Society bought the site, it had the support and goodwill of the local community. Over time, relationships appear to have deteriorated. Individuals, and those representing local groups, have expressed concerns both in conversation and in the *Ewelme Village News*, published every two months by the Ewelme Parish Council. Quotes transcribed from the *Village News*, illustrating differing opinions and concerns, are included at Appendix 1. During the early summer of 2006, some residents seemed concerned by a rumour that the Chiltern Society intended to remove Ewelme representatives, including the Site Warden, from the Watercress Beds Site Management Committee and replace them with their own nominees. It was unclear whether there was any substance to these suspicions but, at the time, neighbourhood conversations took on a slightly clandestine nature; there was informal canvassing of local opinion of the matter - even talk of a petition of protest.

Public Awareness and Participation

The 1992 Earth Summit at Rio de Janeiro produced global legislation (the Convention on Biological Diversity, signed by 159 UN member states, including the UK), with provisions on habitat & species conservation as part of Agenda 21 – a commitment to a framework for sustainability in the twenty-first century.

Agenda 21 recognises the importance of public participation in decision-making and goes to some length to highlight the need for the involvement of groups and individuals, acknowledging that ‘Environmental issues are best handled with the participation of all concerned citizens, at the relevant level’ (Rio Declaration on Environment and Development: Principle 10).

‘In many cases, individuals and members of these groups are the best source of knowledge about the causes of and remedies for many environmental problems.

Agenda 21 recommends that education on environment and development should be made available to people of all ages and encourages all sectors of society to train people in the management of the built and natural environment' (UNEP, 2005).

At a local government level, Oxfordshire County Council has published 'Oxfordshire Agenda 21 2000', listing its Agenda 21 priorities with regard to Open Space & Wildlife :

i) The Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) for Oxfordshire, ii). A centralised database to highlight landscape/ecological opportunities & threats, and iii). To survey all known wildlife sites within three years to update species and habitat information (OCC, 2000)

UK & Oxfordshire Biodiversity Action Planning (BAP)

The loss of Biodiversity - habitats and species – has been 'increasing over the last few hundred years. Species that have evolved over millions of years may be lost very quickly and cannot be recreated' (ONCF, 2005).

The BAP framework provided national and local strategies and action plans to reverse the trend of Biodiversity loss. It also established a set of principles for biodiversity conservation in the UK:

- Partnership
- Targets
- Policy Integration
- Information
- Public Awareness

The lead body for the OxonBAP is the Oxfordshire Nature Conservation Forum, ONCF, and the plan, published in February, 2000, was written by a partnership of over 30 key conservation groups working in the county. In reality, **The Oxfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP)** is a suite of Action Plans for 21 Species (SAPs) and 18 Habitats (HAPs), several of which are relevant at Ewelme.

Species Action Plans (SAPS): Most species conservation is assured simply by improving their habitat but, where there is particular concern for a species, an organisation may be allocated specific responsibility to protect and enhance its range (ONCF, 2005). Species

which have been given this special status include the Water Vole, *Arvicola Terrestris* and Bats eg, *Pippistrellus spp.*, both known to be present at Ewelme

Habitat Action Plans (HAPs): The purpose of each of the 18 HAPs is to identify and describe the type of habitat, its status at national and county level, key biodiversity objectives for the habitat, and actions, responsibilities and resources required to meet the objectives. Habitats for which specific action plans are included in the HAPs for Oxfordshire include Rivers and Ditches, Ponds, Fens & Flushes, Hedgerows and Grasslands, each of which could have some degree of relevance at Ewelme.

Some species which will benefit from the HAPs, according to ONCF, and which have also been reported at Ewelme, include:

Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*

Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*

Water Vole *Arvicola terrestris*

Brown Trout *Salmo trutta*

Bullhead *Cottus gobio*

Banded Demoiselle *Calopteryx splendens*

Ragged Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*

The Site's Conservation Status (as a a site within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), a County Wildlife Site (CWS), and as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR))

'An **AONB** is designated by the Countryside Agency for its landscape and scenic beauty. This means that an AONB is not necessarily an area of high nature conservation value, but in practice it often includes many areas that are. AONBs and National Parks are actually of equal importance for landscape and scenic beauty; the difference is that National Park Authorities have special powers to conserve and enhance National Parks. With a few exceptions, no such authorities or powers exist for AONBs at the moment'. (Naturenet, 2006)

'**County Wildlife Sites (CWS)** are special places which have been identified for their local wildlife value. They are an essential part of creating a better connected

landscape of wildlife buffers, corridors and stepping stones so that the countryside is more resilient to the pressures of modern living and climate change. Most sites are in private ownership and their long-term survival depends upon the interest and goodwill of their land managers and owners.

The Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust manages the Oxfordshire Wildlife Sites Project on behalf of the Oxfordshire local authorities. The Oxfordshire Wildlife Sites Project is a partnership between the Trust and the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre. Established in 1988, the project provides free wildlife surveys and information about conservation to owners of County Wildlife Sites throughout Oxfordshire'. (BBOWT, 2006)

Local Nature Reserve (LNR) is a statutory designation made under Section 21 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 by principal local authorities, in consultation with English Nature. LNRs are of local, but not necessarily national, importance. They often have good public access and facilities.

'LNRs are for both people and wildlife. They are places with wildlife or geological features that are of special interest locally, which give local people special opportunities to study and learn about them or simply enjoy and have contact with nature'. (English Nature, 2006)

The Chiltern Society's Project Officer has made explicit their commitment to the UK & Oxfordshire Biodiversity Action Plans (Hunt B., 2006) in support of the site's designation as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and as a County Wildlife Site (CWS).

Ewelme is a small Chiltern village, the historical and cultural aspects of which are valued by many of its residents and visitors. The once commercial Watercress Beds site, its heritage, landscape and wildlife, is a living and ever-changing embodiment of much that is held dear by its community. The site is subject to global, national and local environmental legislation and its status is formally designated as a wildlife conservation area.

Against this background, then, this research study investigates community stakeholders' understanding of, and agreement with, the management aims and conservation work of The Chiltern Society at the Ewelme Watercress Beds Local Nature Reserve.

Research Aims

- 1 Do community stakeholders understand the management aims stated by the site owners?
- 2 Do community stakeholders agree or disagree with the management aims stated by the site owners?
- 3 Do community stakeholders understand the conservation work which is undertaken at the site?
- 4 Do community stakeholders agree or disagree with the conservation work which is undertaken at the site?

Research Methodology

For the purposes of this research, 'Community Stakeholders' are defined as Ewelme residents and those who represent them, either as local councillors or as leaders of community groups and societies.

Data was gathered by...

- i) ...distributing a survey questionnaire to homes within a designated catchment area.
- ii) ...inviting leaders and representatives of community groups to offer contributions in their official capacity

The Survey Questionnaire

(see Appendix 2 - Survey Documentation)

The questionnaire is set out in four sections and individuals' responses remain anonymous.

Section One: This first section aims to find out if the respondent knows who owns the site and their awareness of the owner's management aims and priorities. Respondents were asked to complete this section before looking at Section Two.

Section Two: This section aims to find out the extent to which members of the public agree or disagree with owner's management aims. It also invites the respondent to add their own comments about the Chiltern Society's management aims.

Section Three: This section aims to find out the extent to which the public understands and agrees or disagrees with the conservation work which is planned or has been undertaken at the site. It also invites the respondent to add their own comments.

Section Four: This section aims to find out if the respondent is a member of any one, or more, of the village groups and societies, and there is a final opportunity to add additional information and comments.

Sample Size & Limitations to Survey

Resource and time limitations meant that it would be impossible to include every household in the village. The target was to achieve 30-40 responses and it was considered that a 15-20% returns rate might be reasonably expected. This would require, therefore, distribution of between 150 and 200 households. The catchment area is based around the LNR site with the Watercress Beds as the focal point (see map at Figure 1 on page 13 and also at Appendix 4, for convenience). The area was subdivided into seven 'zones' (A to G), as it might be useful to be able to see if awareness and opinions varied according to location & proximity to the LNR. Questionnaires for each of the zones were distinguishable by the use of a different coloured paper for each zone, eg. Zone 'A' = Amber, Zone 'B' = Pink etc.

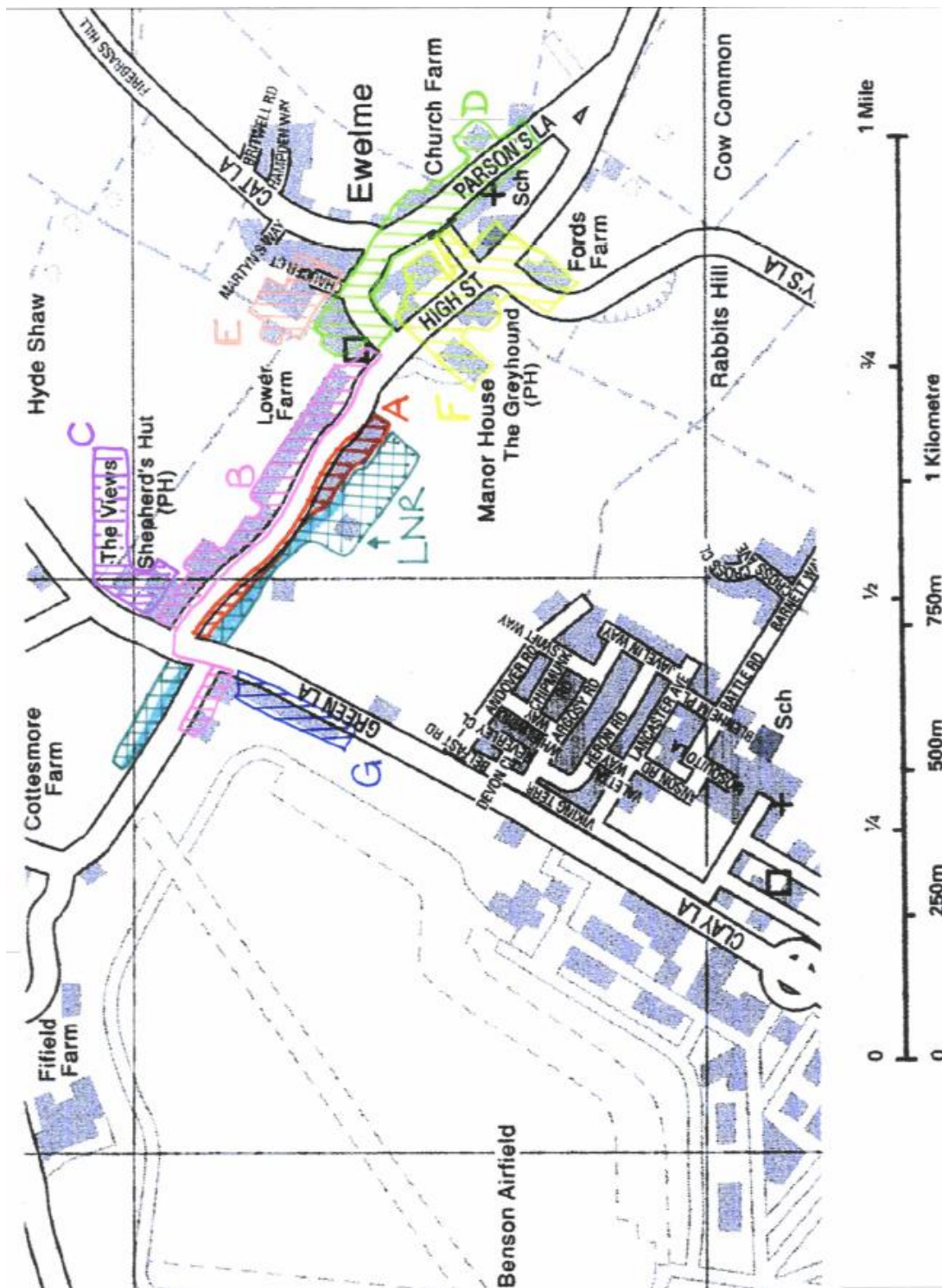
The questionnaire was distributed by hand, to all zones, on the 13th and 14th July 2006, accompanied by an explanatory letter advising of plans to collect the responses.

Completed questionnaires were collected via return visits during the following seven days. Some respondents, usually because they were absent at the time of the visit, returned the completed questionnaire themselves, to the researcher's address.

A total 172 questionnaires was distributed across the seven zones.

98 responses were returned by the target date of 31st July, with one returned on the 16th August. This response (99 of 172) represents a returns rate of 57%.

Figure 1: Map Showing Survey Distribution Zones A to G and LNR (A slightly larger version is at Appendix 4)



Invitations to leaders and representatives of community groups

Five representatives of local community groups were invited, by letter (see Appendix 3) delivered by hand 27th July 2006, to offer their own contribution. Those invited were:

- The Chair of Ewelme Parish Council
- The two District Councillors representing Ewelme on South Oxfordshire District Council
- Chair of the Friends of Ewelme Watercress Beds

All of the above were selected from the 'Parish Directory', a contact list published in each edition of the Ewelme Village News. The Chair of the Ewelme Society (although the society is not listed in the directory) was also invited to contribute.

From the five invitations issued, three responses were received, one each from the two District Councillors and from the Chair of the Friends of Ewelme Watercress Beds.

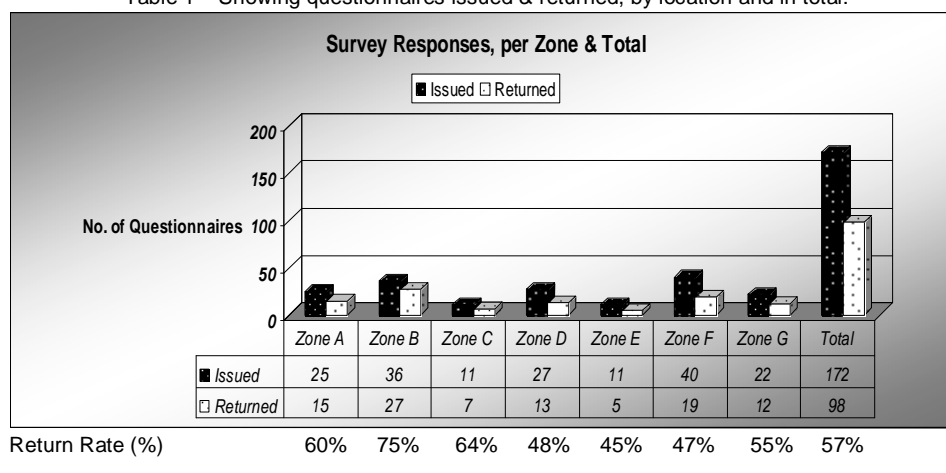
Survey Results

Questionnaires Returned

Of 172 questionnaires distributed, 98 were completed and returned by 31st July 2006; overall, a 57% returns rate, and much higher than the target of 20%.

The use of different coloured paper for each of the seven zones made it possible to group the returns according to location (see Table 1).

Table 1 – Showing questionnaires issued & returned, by location and in total:



- Zone A – Waterside Residences on High Street west (with gardens which go down to the cress beds)
 - Zone B – Opposite side of same stretch of High Street (many with views across to cress beds), plus Suffolk House
 - Zone C – Eyres Lane, The Bank, Eyres Close, The Views
 - Zone D – Parsons Lane, down to Kings Pool
 - Zone E – Chaucer Court, Lower Farm Barns
 - Zone F – High Street east, Wingfield Close, Burrows Hill, Fords Farm
 - Zone G – Green Lane
- (NB: For a map showing the seven zones, see Figure 1, page 13)

Across all zones, the number of questionnaires returned was substantially higher than had been expected. Zone A and B, those nearest to the LNR, returned 60% and 75% respectively, higher than most. Zone C returned 64% which, whilst apparently high, was from a smaller number of homes (11 issued/7 returned). Zone G, Green Lane, which runs at right angles away from the LNR, returned 55%, whilst Zones D, E and F returned 48%, 45% and 47% respectively. Of the seven zones these last three, at the eastern end of the village, are farthest from the cress beds.

Survey Results – by question

This section looks at the ‘tick box’ responses to each of the questions asked. It does not consider the qualitative responses or ‘Comments’ sections – these are dealt with separately.

IMPORTANTLY, and where relevant, the number of responses shown may not always total 98. Where this is the case the ‘deficit’ should be regarded as the number of people who did not offer a response to that particular question.

A). As far as you are aware, who are the owners of the Ewelme Watercress Beds?

(For this question, please tick only ONE box)

Table 2: Survey Questionnaire Responses by Zone – Awareness of Ownership?

Zone	Owned by Ewelme Society?	Owned by Friends of Ewelme Watercress Beds?	Owned by Chiltern Society?	Owned by Ewelme Parish Council?	Owned by Chilterns Conservation Board?	Owned by Oxfordshire County Council?	Owned by BBOWT?	Owned by another?
A	0	1	14	0	0	0	0	0
B	0	3	24	0	0	0	0	0
C	0	1	6	0	0	0	0	0
D	2	2	8	0	1	0	0	0
E	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	0
F	0	1	15	0	1	1	1	0
G	0	0	9	0	2	1	0	0
Totals	3	9	78	0	4	2	1	0

78 people (80%) correctly identified the Chiltern Society as the owners of the site.

B). What do you understand to be the owner’s PRIORITY management aims?

(Please tick no more than THREE boxes)

Table 3: Survey Questionnaire Column ‘A’ Responses, by Zone – Understanding of Owner’s Management Aims

Zone	1. Heritage Preserve heritage & what remains of local trad industry	2. Wildlife Conserve/ enhance range of species & habitats	3. Landscape Improve quality & appearance of landscape	4. Education Offer educational & interpretatio nal facilities	5. Recreation Provide recreational facilities for public to observe & enjoy wildlife	6. Heritage/ Education Establish small museum	7. Landscape/ Heritage Conserve site as cress beds & meadow	8. Wildlife Conserve habitat for endangered species	9. Other Other manage- ment aim
A	8	7	7	6	1	6	5	2	0
B	13	20	4	8	7	3	17	3	0
C	4	6	3	3	0	0	3	0	0
D	9	9	2	5	0	1	10	2	0
E	5	2	0	3	0	1	4	0	0
F	15	12	4	4	2	1	13	5	1
G	7	7	4	3	1	2	6	5	0
Totals	61	63	24	32	11	14	58	17	1

Each respondent is invited to tick up to, but no more than, three boxes to indicate those which they understand to be the Chiltern Society's priority aims. In fact, all eight of the aims shown here in Table 3 are included in the Site Management Plan (Hunt, 2004) (see Appendix 5).

In a meeting with the Society's Chair and Project Officer, in February 2006, the Chair summarised their priorities as being 'Heritage, Wildlife and Landscape' (Hunt, H., 2006).

Later, they revised this response saying that, in priority order, the Society's main aims are:

1. To preserve the heritage and what remains of a localised & traditional industry
2. To conserve and enhance the range of wildlife species & habitats
3. To offer educational opportunities and interpretational facilities for all ages
4. To improve the quality and the appearance of the landscape at the site

(Hunt B., e-mail comm. 12th July, 2006, see Appendix 6)

These are reflected in Table 3 above, columns 1, 2, 3 & 4.

The Chiltern Society's officers acknowledge that there is some ambiguity here, saying *'we have obligations to so many different people, and the statement of aims in the Management Plan is a bit woolley as the aims are vague and not mutually exclusive.'* (Appendix 6)

Do community stakeholders understand the management aims stated by the site owners? The ambiguity, or *woolley-ness*, means that it is difficult to be absolutely clear. What can be seen, from Table 3, is that, 280 ticks in total, 180 (64%) appear in columns A, B, C & D. It might be argued that columns 5, 6, 7 & 8 are either variations upon, or repetitions of, the first four and that therefore there is general agreement.

C). Next, what about your own opinion?

Respondents were asked to review the nine aims (above) and put just one tick in COLUMN 'B', next to the statement which in their opinion is the single MOST important one (See Table 4).

Table 4: Survey Questionnaire Column 'B' Responses, by Zone – Opinion re. Most Important Aim

Zone	Preserve heritage & remains of local trad industry	Conserve /enhance range of species & habitats	Improve quality & appearance of landscape	Offer educational & interpretation al facilities	Provide recreation al facilities for public to observe & enjoy wildlife	Establish small museum	Conserve site as cress beds & meadow	Conserve habitat for endangere d species	Other manage- ment aim
A	5	2	2	0	0	1	4	1	0
B	6	7	3	0	0	0	11	0	0
C	4	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
D	3	2	0	0	0	0	7	1	0
E	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0
F	5	5	1	0	0	1	5	1	0
G	3	3	0	0	1	0	3	2	0
Total	29	21	7	0	1	2	31	6	0

From 98 responses, 57 (57%) appear in columns A, B & C indicating strong support for three of the Chiltern Society's top four priority aims. There are no ticks in column D (Education and interpretational facilities). Interestingly, this was the 'late addition' to the Society's priorities list (Hunt B., e-mail comm. 12th July, 2006, see Appendix 6).

D). Overall, to what extent would you say that you agree or disagree with these aims?

(For this question, please tick only ONE box)

Table 5: Survey Questionnaire Responses, by Zone – Agree or Disagree with Management Aims

Zone	Strongly disagree with management aims	Disagree with management aims	Slightly disagree with management aims	Slightly agree with management aims	Agree with management aims	Strongly agree with management aims
A	2	1	1	2	6	3
B	0	3	0	1	17	5
C	0	0	0	0	7	0
D	0	0	0	3	5	4
E	0	0	1	1	1	1
F	0	0	2	0	12	5
G	0	0	0	1	8	3
Totals	2	4	4	8	56	21

So, do community stakeholders agree or disagree with the management aims stated by the site owners?

Table 5 shows that a total of 77 (77%) 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with the management aims, and only 6 (6%) 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed'.

E). To what extent would you say that you understand the reasons for the conservation work which is planned or has been undertaken at the site?

(For each conservation activity, please put a tick in ONE box to indicate your level of understanding)

Table 6: Survey Questionnaire Responses, by Zone – Understanding of reasons for Conservation Work

Zone	Water course - clear understanding	Water course - unsure	Water course - don't understand		Trees & hedgerows - clear understanding	Trees & hedgerows - unsure	Trees & hedgerows - don't understand		Surveys & recording - clear understanding	Surveys & recording - unsure	Surveys & recording - don't understand
A	11	3	1		5	6	3		10	4	0
B	22	5	0		16	8	2		20	6	0
C	5	2	0		4	3	0		4	3	0
D	9	2	1		7	3	1		9	2	1
E	3	2	0		3	2	0		3	2	0
F	16	1	0		14	2	1		14	3	0
G	10	2	0		7	4	1		8	4	0
Totals	76	17	2		56	28	8		68	24	1
Zone	Public Access, educational visits - clear understanding	Public Access, educational visits - unsure	Public Access, educational visits - don't understand		Ponds - clear understanding of reasons	Ponds - unsure of reasons	Ponds - don't understand reasons		New Centre - clear understanding of reasons	New Centre - unsure of reasons	New Centre - don't understand reasons
A	5	5	4		2	5	6		7	3	3
B	15	7	2		7	13	7		15	6	4
C	3	4	0		1	6	0		3	4	0
D	9	2	1		5	6	1		10	1	1
E	2	3	0		1	2	1		1	3	1
F	13	2	2		9	6	3		13	3	1
G	8	4	0		4	7	1		11	1	0
Totals	55	27	9		29	45	19		60	21	10

So, do community stakeholders understand the conservation work which is undertaken at the site?

Table 6 indicates that, overall, a majority say that they understand the reasons for the conservation work, except with regard to the planned ponds, where only 29 (31%) say that they have clear understanding, 45 (48%) are unsure, and 19 (20%) don't understand the reasons for the planned ponds.

F). Overall, to what extent would you say that you agree or disagree with the conservation work which is planned or has been undertaken at the site?
(For this question, please tick only ONE box)

Table 7: Survey Questionnaire Responses, by Zone – Agree or Disagree with Conservation Work

Zone	Strongly disagree with conservation work	Disagree with conservation work	Slightly disagree with conservation work	Slightly agree with conservation work	Agree with conservation work	Strongly agree with conservation work
A	4	2	3	2	3	1
B	0	2	4	4	13	2
C	0	0	1	0	6	0
D	0	1	0	4	6	1
E	0	1	2	0	2	1
F	1	0	1	2	6	6
G	0	0	0	2	9	1
Totals	5	6	11	14	45	12

So, do community stakeholders agree or disagree with the conservation work which is undertaken at the site?

Table 7 shows that 57 people (61%) ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ with conservation work carried out at the site. 11 people (12%) ‘disagreed’ or ‘strongly disagreed’.

G). Finally, are you a member of any of the following groups?

(OPTIONAL, please tick any/all as appropriate):

Table 8: Survey Questionnaire Responses, by Zone – Membership of Groups

Zone	Member of Chiltern Society	Member of Friends of Ewelme Watercress Beds	Member of Ewelme Society	Member of Ewelme Parish Council	Resident of Suffolk House/Cloisters	Volunteer worker at site	Other groups
A	5	9	2	0	0	3	0
B	5	18	2	2	2	4	0
C	0	3	0	1	0	1	0
D	4	6	4	0	0	1	1
E	0	1	1	1	0	0	0
F	0	13	7	1	3	3	1
G	1	7	1	0	0	1	0
Totals	15	57	17	5	5	13	2

(NB: an individual may be affiliated to two or more groups, or none).

Table 8 shows that, of the 98 respondents, 57 (58%) are members of the Friends of Ewelme Watercress Beds, 17 (17%) belong to the Ewelme Society, 15 (15%) to the Chiltern Society, whilst 13 (13%) are volunteer workers at the site. Five members of the Parish Council responded, and five residents of Suffolk House/The Cloisters. Importantly, it is noted that 35 questionnaires showed no response in this section, suggesting that they are from individuals with no membership or affiliation to any of the named groups.

Review of Survey Results – by group membership

(As indicated at part 'G' in the questionnaire)

Here an attempt is made to review some of the qualitative data submitted as 'Comments' on the questionnaire. To accurately quantify these is less straightforward. It is clear that there are strongly held views and, therefore, it feels important that an attempt should be made here to represent them. In the following, for each group, a brief summary of responses is followed by some sample quotes.

i). Suffolk House/The Cloisters

These are warden-supported residences for retired villagers, and often referred to as 'The Almshouses'. All five respondents here identified the Chiltern Society as the site owners and generally understand the aims to be heritage, landscape and wildlife. Opinions say that main emphasis should be on wildlife & heritage, before landscape, education and recreation. Most agree with the management aims, with one 'slightly disagree'. Generally, there is clear understanding of the conservation work, except with regard to the 'complex of ponds' and the new building (Watercress Beds Centre), opened in 2004, where there is less clarity. There is no disagreement with the conservation work, all 'slightly agree', 'agree' or 'strongly agree'.

'Use the site for homes especially for first time buyers where possible.

Do away with some of the old beds as there is insufficient water now. Build affordable housing on some of it, after it has been pile driven for solid foundations'

'The water situation would have to be much improved for future water-cress growing'

'Pipe the stream from the Kings Pool onwards down the village. This would help with the parking problem at the village hall as the road could then be widened'

ii). Chiltern Society

15 respondents all agree that the Society owns the site. Most understand the aims to be heritage, wildlife and education/interpretation, with landscape less of a priority. Opinions say that the main emphases should be heritage and wildlife. All 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with the management aims, except one. Generally, there is clear understanding of the conservation work, but less clarity regarding public access, ponds and the new building. The majority agree with the conservation work, with some concerns about management control and the appropriateness of some of the work. Of the 15 members of the Chiltern Society, 3 say that they are workday volunteers at the site.

'I was delighted when the Chiltern Society bought the beds and vigorously supported them. At the moment it appears that they cannot control the management of the beds'

'I do not think building a new concrete, very obtrusive, bund fits in with any of the aims. It is an eyesore and does not go back further than the 1950-60s as a historical artefact'

'The new centre is not conservation. Public access is not conservation. Adding new features is not conservation (it changes the entire context).'

iii). Ewelme Parish Council

Of five respondents, three identified the owners as the Chiltern Society; one said that it is the Chiltern Conservation Board, one left the section blank. Members understand the aims to be heritage, wildlife and education/interpretation. They all share the opinion that heritage should be the most important. Most indicate that they 'slightly agree', 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with the management aims, but with some reservations. Understanding of the conservation work is clear, except with regard to the ponds and the new building, and there is general agreement with the work. Comments suggested waning of local support,

over time, and reflected opinions re. access vs. privacy/security. Of these five Parish Councillors, none say that they are volunteers at the site.

'The initial aims of the Chiltern Society as approved by the Parish Council were excellent. Having nearly achieved those aims we appear to be more concerned with providing a money-making venture'

'I firmly believe that people benefits should be part of objectives. After conserving the cultural and natural history interests, an aim should be to promote people enjoyment/appreciation of the site'

'I understand the reasons although I disagree with some of the things planned e.g. Ponds. Also, on days with guided walks, not a lot of thought has been given to parking and to some residents' privacy'

iv). Ewelme Society

Apart from one who said the Chilterns Conservation Board, all 17 respondents said that the owners are the Chiltern Society. They understand the aims to be heritage, wildlife, landscape and education – with less emphasis on recreation – and understanding of the conservation work is said to be clear, except with regard to the ponds. Generally, they share the opinion that the aims should be heritage & landscape. There is broad agreement with the management aims and with the conservation work. Comments said that the management aims may be conflicting, even self defeating. There is also concern about discord between the groups. Of the 17 society members, 4 say that they are volunteers.

'The problem I believe is that items 1 (heritage) and 3 (landscape) are in some way in conflict with 2 (wildlife). To conserve and restore the beds to how they were and to maintain a neat appearance would not be beneficial to attracting wildlife species and habitats. Catch 22!!'

'It is a pity that the Chiltern Society and the Friends of the Ewelme Cress beds cannot sort out their differences and work together rather than against each other'

'The conservation work is much appreciated by the residents, as the watercress beds are part of Ewelme life'

'there does seem to be a disconnect between Chiltern Society & the Friends'

v). Friends of Ewelme Watercress Beds

57 respondents nearly all said ownership is by the Chiltern Society (two said the Chilterns Conservation Board) and, generally, understand the aims to be heritage, wildlife, landscape and education. Most share the opinion that heritage should be the priority aim, with some saying wildlife, and a small minority saying landscape. Generally, there is clear understanding of the conservation work, with some lacking clarity regarding the ponds. Most agreed or strongly agreed with both the management aims and the conservation work, with some reservations about communication, management style and use of the new Centre. Of 57 respondents, 13 say they are volunteers.

'It would be good if there was better communication between the Friends of Ewelme Watercress Beds and the Chiltern Society'

'There is inadequate communication generally – e.g. the unexpected tree removal. Little consideration is given to those of us whose gardens adjoin the cress beds'

'The way the project is now being run appears rather 'high handed'. I would like to see much more consultation/information/input/sensitivity about why decisions are being made'

'...use of facilities on commercial basis leading to congestion in the village... Infrastructure for this is not evident'

'Not very happy about letting the centre for parties etc. as this goes into direct competition with the village hall'

vi). Voluntary Work Parties at Site

All but one (who said Chilterns Conservation Board) said the Chiltern Society owns the site and understand the aims to be wildlife, heritage and landscape. Most share the opinion that heritage should be the main priority. Understanding of the conservation work is clear, except with regard to access and the ponds. All 'agree' or strongly agree' with the management aims and the conservation work, with some reservations about future plans and apparent frustration about ways in which the project work is allocated or carried out.

'The future plans for the Watercress Beds are not clear to me'

'As a volunteer I would appreciate a clearer communication of the aims of the conservation work. The volunteer days would be enhanced if there were a single project for most of the volunteers to work on. More would be achieved and there would be greater satisfaction'

'I support the Chiltern Society's management aims – however one of the problems has been a serious lack of communication about the aims, and about when/where/and why work is taking place'

vii). Non-members (who don't indicate affiliation to any of the above groups)

A total of 35 (36%) respondents did not declare any affiliation to the groups listed. Of these, most (22) thought that the Chiltern Society owned the site, whilst 7 said 'the Friends', 2 each said Ewelme Society and Chilterns Conservation Board, and 1 each for Oxfordshire CC and the local Wildlife Trust (BBOWT). Most understood the priority aims to be heritage and wildlife and, generally, understood the conservation work – although some may need more clarity re. public access, ponds and the new Centre. Most said that, in their opinion, the most important aims are heritage (20 responses) and wildlife (12 responses). The majority (28 or 80%) said that they 'slightly agreed', 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with the management aims. 10 respondents either 'slightly disagreed', 'disagreed', or 'strongly disagreed' with the conservation work. Additional comments were concerned with issues such as conflicting aims, the need for consultation, the value of the site as a focal point, concerns over tree management, residents' security/privacy, the potential value of the educational work and an expression of willingness to help.

'agree with No. 1 (heritage) and to a certain extent No. 2 (wildlife) but wonder what the aims are in terms of "appearance" – this was a wildlife area and has been manicured... thus causing a conflict with aim 2 (wildlife) – the mowing of the grass & continual visitors is threatening wildlife species and habitats driving creatures away'

'Agree with conservation and educational visits but was not aware of the aims to make the centre a "tea room" to raise funds'

'feel this whole situation could have been avoided with more consultation and a more sympathetic and flexible approach to local opinion'

'...used to help but not any more I am afraid'

'So far a great job. The beds have enhanced the feel of the village & are a big focal point of interest'

'Disagree with 1). The tree & hedgerow management... One of the most attractive and rare features of the village was the clear view across the water all the way from the ford to the new centre. I suggest the planting of a hedge on the bank along the road is a mistake

and 2). The creation of a complex of ponds... I sincerely hope the low level observation platform, which is a good idea, will be positioned in such a way that it does not offend the privacy of residents, especially the Suffolk House Almspeople... otherwise it is an excellent project'

'The more I think about the "observation platform" the more worried I become by the prospect of some "Peeping Tom" under guise as an innocent "Bird Watcher" with binoculars!!'

'I think that educational facilities and a museum to encourage participation by the wider community would be of value'

'I'd like to know more about the funding of the project, i.e. is it profit/non-profit making, and what the long term vision for the whole site is'

'I feel I should be a member of some contributing organisation and would be willing if asked'

Local Leaders & Representatives:

Five leaders or representatives of local groups were invited to contribute comments and to be as concise or as expansive as they wished (the letter of invitation is at Appendix 8)

These were:

- South Oxfordshire District Councillor (SODC), Felix Bloomfield
- South Oxfordshire District Councillor (SODC), Sue Cooper
- Chair of Ewelme Parish Council
- Chair of the Friends of Ewelme Watercress Beds
- Chair of the Ewelme Society

Three responses were received:

Felix Bloomfield (SODC) via e-mail (full text is at Appendix 7):

'I am aware of a number of residents that have concerns over the present management, key concerns being a lack of consultation and communication prior to any new work project commencing...It would I believe be prudent to take a fresh look at the question of management, perhaps allowing some areas to go 'wild' or encourage those with property adjoining the brook to manage their own areas. This would I believe be more sustainable'

Sue Cooper (SODC) via e-mail (full text is at Appendix 8):

'As a District Councillor, I participated in the decision taken in January 2003 to designate Ewelme Watercress Beds as a Local Nature Reserve. This designation had the worthy aim of "affording a degree of protection to, and recognition of the

importance of, this site within the District for its nature conservation and historical value” ...The benefits of declaration can include conserving and enhancing habitats or species, educational use, public enjoyment and interpretation and scientific research.

... communications between the Management Committee and other Ewelme residents has not been as good as it might be and I know they are aware of this and are hoping to rectify matters... it would be good to have more local people involved with looking after the Cress Beds’

(NB. Sue Cooper also submitted copies of correspondence and contractual documentation relating to the designation of LNR status, included here as part of Appendix 8)

Chair of the Friends of Ewelme Watercress Beds, note delivered by hand. (full text is at Appendix 9):

‘The legal responsibilities of the Chiltern Society as owners of Ewelme Watercress Beds and associated land and property is to maintain them in perpetuity as an attractive feature in the centre of the village; an example of a once thriving Chilterns industry; and a haven for wildlife – which seems to have been forgotten’

Also included at Appendix 9 is the ‘Friends’ constitution, dated 14th February 2002.

Research Findings

The research questions asked:

- 1 Do community stakeholders understand the management aims as stated by the site owners?
- 2 Do community stakeholders agree or disagree with the management aims as stated by the site owners?
- 3 Do community stakeholders understand the conservation work which is undertaken at the site?
- 4 Do community stakeholders agree or disagree with the conservation work which is undertaken at the site?

According to the *quantitative* data, the answer to each of the research questions is 'Yes'. When the *qualitative* data, respondents' comments, are taken into account, the answer is clearly 'Yes, but...' The research finds that stakeholders say that they understand and support the aims and the reasons for work carried out at the site, although many have concerns over the manner in which the management committee runs the project.

The Site Management Committee's Terms of Reference appear as Appendix 10.

What follows is a discussion of the implications of the research findings.

Discussion

What might be learned from elsewhere?

Little appears to have been written about other conservation projects where there has been local resistance or objection to the project/activity, or how conservationists might have addressed the concerns.

Several lead bodies were contacted, including the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV), English Nature (now Natural England), Field Studies Council, The Wychwood Project, the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), Friends of the Earth, Wildlife Trusts and WWF-UK. All of responded and some offered suggestions for source material, but little emerged that would be of relevance here.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) had a case where there was 'local opposition' to tree cutting, and said that

'the RSPB and wildlife trusts are particularly successful at breaking down objections simply because we tend to draw in local people.' (Ian Peters, response via e-mail, 10th July 2006)

The Woodland Trust had a case at Grappenhall in Cheshire 'where the initial public meeting was very heated and a decision to proceed was split.':

'We decided to run a public vote on the matter with all houses within the locality posted a questionnaire. The result was in favour of the wood, and on this basis we proceeded... We are very keen to involve local communities in planning ... and also in commenting on management plans. That is very much a part of the philosophy... local communities may not always speak with one voice and we have to find ways of dealing with those situations.' (Nick Sandford, response via e-mail, 20th July 2006)

In both cases, there is an emphasis on engagement with local people in ways which go beyond simply telling them what's going to happen. There appears a commitment to

consult, involve & enable local communities to participate in different ways, according to individual and collective interests, needs and willingness to engage.

What are the issues at Ewelme?

Concerns are several and varied, including (in no particular order):

- Security & privacy of properties adjacent to LNR
- No two-way communication
- Lack of clarity regarding strategic aims & objectives
- Who decides what work is to be done, by whom, when and how?
- What's meant by: 'conservation', 'preservation', 'restoring', 'improving', 'enhancing'
- Ineffective leadership of projects & volunteers
- Apparent conflict between aims (heritage, landscape, wildlife & education)
- What wildlife is present?
- Autocratic, pompous management style
- Disconnect between local groups and site management committee
- Personality clashes, and relationships between different 'factions'
- Commercial use of the new Centre, congestion on open days
- How has funding been used, including that raised locally?

What might be the implications of this for the site management committee?

It seems unlikely that the management committee would not want to address at least some, and perhaps all, of the above. It might be useful for them to consider...

- Do any common 'themes' emerge?
- Is there anything that is being done already to address these? (... and if so, is there a need for more of the same to be done, yet more effectively?)
- What activities, behaviours and practices might need to be done differently?

- What activities, behaviours and practices might need to be discontinued?
- What activities, behaviours and practices might need to be introduced?

Some progress has been made of late. On the site itself, levels of work activity have increased, apparently with the aim of establishing demonstration cress beds on sections which are visible from the road. In July, both (outgoing & incoming) Chairs, together with the Project Officer, hosted a meeting at the new Centre to discuss, with near neighbours, the use of the Top Meadow, and plans for the future. The discussion was at times heated, as concerns and different points of view were expressed. The officers may, perhaps, feel slightly encouraged by the expression of willingness, by several neighbours, to tend for 'their own' section of the cress beds (also supported by SODC Councillor, Felix Bloomfield, see Appendix 7). Further, there was some enthusiasm for the suggested reintroduction of a small herd of goats to the Top Meadow, as part of a managed grazing regime.

The Project Officer, having made the commitment that the management committee 'are anxious that we act as good neighbours at all times' went on to speak of the additional responsibility to meet the expectations of funding bodies and to comply with the legal requirements accompanying the site's status as a County Wildlife Site and a Local Nature Reserve.

The challenge of satisfying these differing expectations and requirements can result in tension and, occasionally, conflict. The Project Officer freely acknowledges this, and also that the ambiguous wording of the project aims (see Appendix 5), can lead to difficulties.

How might this complexity be managed differently?

There appears a need for much more clarity at strategic planning level. The differing demands and expectations, and the attendant complexities and tensions, need to be clearly identified and understood. This might then enable the design of a framework of, say, 6-8 strategic level objectives that articulate, unambiguously, why the project exists, how it intends to satisfy the differing stakeholder demands, and what it sets out to achieve over the medium/long term. It is suggested that this could not be done effectively without the facilitated involvement of stakeholder groups and it should take account of relevant legislation and the requirements arising from the site's LNR and CWS status. This

framework would replace the existing 'Aims' and 'Objectives' in the present Site Management Plan (Appendix 5)

Each of the 6-8 strategic level objectives would describe a discrete 'destination', although all are inter-related, contributing to the greater whole. The next part of the exercise would be to understand how to get to each of the destinations. What are the operational activities and projects that must be undertaken to complete each journey?

Each activity or project is then documented in unambiguous terms. Each has a set of objectives using wording that is 'S.M.A.R.T' – **S**pecific in that it can be clearly understood by all concerned, **M**easurable in that it describes the desired outcome in observable terms - **A**greed in that all interested parties feel that, at least, they've been listened to and understood – **R**ealistic, given the resources available (including knowledge, skills and experience) – and **T**ime framed in that there is a target completion date, plus a series of regular dates to review progress against interim goals (and, where appropriate, to agree contingency plans/support).

Finally, each project should have an action plan, showing who has responsibility for the achievement of each objective and by what date.

It may be that key roles should have a Job Description of sorts, if only to clarify where responsibilities and accountability lie.

What could be done to improve communication and relationships?

The Site Management Committee may feel encouraged that some (albeit very few... but there may be more) respondents are willing to engage with activities at the site – but they want to be consulted, to have the opportunity to ask questions and to be listened to.

There may be a need to revise the composition of the committee and its communications strategy; in particular, the way it supports its commitment to *'having regard to the views of*

the people of Ewelme, as expressed by Ewelme Parish Council, The Friends of Ewelme Watercress Beds, and The Ewelme Society' (from Terms of Reference, Appendix 10).

The present Site Management Committee (in addition to the Chair and three others, all of whom are appointed by the Chiltern Society) includes a nominee from each of these three local groups.

Further, at a special meeting held on 24th July, 2006, the Chiltern Society representatives fielded questions from those residents (Watersiders) whose gardens adjoin the water and the Top Meadow, upstream from the Visitor Centre. When asked who is responsible for the communication exchange between local residents and the Site Management Committee, the Project Officer clearly stated that this was the responsibility of the three representatives of the local groups (The Parish Council, The Friends of Ewelme Watercress Beds and The Ewelme Society).

Through the research survey, respondents expressed the view that communications could be improved. This was further reinforced via the contributions received from both District Councillors (see Appendices 7 and 8). Thus, it appears that the existing representation is not meeting the needs and expectations of the community stakeholders. The 'Village Directory' (in the Ewelme Village News) lists contact telephone numbers for the Parish Council and the Friends of Ewelme Watercress Beds, but not for the Ewelme Society, nor the Watercress Beds Site Management Committee. The directory listings do not include any e-mail addresses.

Importantly - and as has been seen from the research, 35% of the respondents are not members of any village group and, therefore, rely solely on the Parish Council member to represent them on, and to communicate feedback from, the Site Management Committee.

The Parish Council has recently announced that...

'The Chairman is to write (*to the Chiltern Society*) expressing the Parish Council's feelings as they are unhappy with the relations between the village/Friends of the Watercress Beds and the Management Committee of the Ewelme Watercress Beds which is organised by the Chiltern Society' (*Ewelme Village News, August/Sept 2006*)

To be clear, the Chair of the Parish Council is to write to the LNR Site Management Committee, one of whom is himself a Parish Council Member representing the interests of the local residents. At the very least, it appears that there is potential for some confusion - possibly even conflict of interest?

How might Community Stakeholders be encouraged to participate more fully?

Use could be made of what's available from others, such as the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV). Their publications, available as free downloads from their website, offer guidance on not only what to do, but how to do it and how to manage it. They run workshops designed to support volunteers' learning. For example, they train people in tool use, hedge laying, coppicing etc. (BTCV, 2006). Relevant courses might be run at Ewelme

Community stakeholders' knowledge and understanding of the LNR's species and habitats maybe mixed, incomplete or sometimes inaccurate. Perhaps the Site Management Committee might raise awareness by making publicly available those species and habitat records already compiled.

Where the records are incomplete or need updating, the offer of training in survey and recording techniques may be of interest to volunteers. Such activities could help to raise interest and understanding whilst promoting participation at the Nature Reserve - at the same time generating data that would contribute to the effective management of the site.

If it does not already exist, a comprehensive habitat survey, systematically mapped in accordance with guidelines published by Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC, 1990) would offer opportunities to share understanding of the site's conservation status. Once again, volunteers might welcome the opportunity to learn through participation, where appropriate, as 'trainee' surveyors.

Agenda 21 and the UK/Oxon Biodiversity Action Plan may offer useful support and ideas on ways to nurture public participation and support (ONCF, 2005). The latter offers a framework of five guiding principles, based upon:

- Partnership
- Targets
- Policy Integration
- Information
- Public Awareness

All of which, to a lesser or greater extent, would appear to have relevance at Ewelme.

BTCV Handbooks Online (BTCV, 2006) which include titles such as ‘Local Action’ and ‘Environments for All’ offer guidelines for managing community projects, developing partnerships, and leading & working with volunteers.

There are several models illustrating ways of building capacity for public participation. Perhaps the best known is Sherry Arnstein’s ‘Ladder of Citizen Participation’, originally published in 1969 in the *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*. More recently, the UK’s Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment has published a pyramid model which clearly illustrates four ‘Levels of Participation’, namely:

- | | | |
|-------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| Level One | - | Education & Information Provision |
| Level Two | - | Information Feedback |
| Level Three | - | Involvement & Consultation |
| Level Four | - | Extended Involvement |

This is supported with a table showing, for each of the four levels, techniques for encouraging participation, each with a description and a review of its advantages and disadvantages (IEMA, 2002).

Where to begin?

In the IEMA model, ‘Level One - Education & Information Provision’ might suggest:

- Regular articles in the Village News, more detailed and written *explicitly and unambiguously* on behalf of the Site Management Committee, with contact

details for villagers to engage, should they wish to do so.

- More use of existing parish notice boards, and some additional boards at the LNR site (appended to existing interpretation boards?). Announce proposals, arrangements for meetings and other activities
- Use of local newspaper, the Wallingford Herald, to announce major events & activities
- Site visits, organised case studies to provide first hand experience – at demonstration cress beds?
- A website and use of the internet and e-mail. At present, a search for 'Ewelme' in the Google search engine produces very little current information about The Ewelme Watercress Beds. By way of contrast, a search on 'Radley Village' provides a much more enlightening response and, perhaps, an aspirational model for any planned website for Ewelme. E-mail bulletins, to which stakeholders may voluntarily subscribe or unsubscribe, could help to ensure that people have access to current news and information.
- Learning opportunities, not just for schools, but for all, including volunteers and other community stakeholders; learning from the flora & fauna at the site, species identification, the nutrient cycle (and why 'nutrient poor' is, actually, quite valuable), the hydrology, geology & more besides. Some visitors may be surprised to find that the fruits on the walnut tree *Juglans regia*, fresh & green in summer, look very different from the gnarled specimens handed around by grandfather at Christmas!
- Involvement of guest speakers or species/habitat specialists (maybe establish a closer link with the Benson Environmental Survey Team and other local groups). For example, the warden from Wallingford Castle Meadows might come and talk on grassland management and grazing regimes. It is known that the SODC/Northmoor Trust warden's job description allows for some time, each year, to be spent at Ewelme. Substantial benefit could be obtained from developing such relationships.

In conclusion

There is no doubt that local support has dwindled over recent years. Only 13 people, 13% of the survey sample, say that they are volunteers at the site. The Friends of Ewelme Watercress Beds, alone, claims membership of over 230. Presently, of those who arrive for monthly workdays, only 22% of that support comes from the village (Hunt B., 2006).

One survey respondent expresses the wish that 'the Chiltern Society must not be allowed to take over!' and yet, without active involvement through voluntary engagement in the project, individuals and local groups disempower themselves. What might it take for them to re-engage?

At the same time, the Chiltern Society and the Site Management Committee are perceived, by some respondents, as 'interfering', 'high handed', 'autocratic' and 'pompous'. Perhaps a more facilitative style, exemplified in a more consultative approach, would help to rebuild some bridges?

It's not too late. Some may say that it's never too late and that nature will run its course - come what may - with or without our involvement.

One survey respondent offered the following:

'It started laudably and simply. It has been allowed to become a personal playground for the 'dirigiste' organisers, playing out their private ambitions. Time to press the 'reset' button'

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