

Backwell Environment Trust

Bulletin 29 - Autumn 2014

www.backwellenvironmenttrust.org



A very warm welcome to our latest autumn bulletin

After nearly two years of extremely hard work, the BET volunteers have finally completed two of the largest projects BET has ever undertaken - the Geology Trail and the restoration of the Cabin.

From the outset, we knew that both projects were going to be both time-consuming and very technically demanding, but BET is so fortunate to have such a loyal and talented group of volunteers that the impossible it seems, just takes that little bit longer!

To help you find your way around our action-packed bulletin the contents are listed below:



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Well, it's that time of year again when BET holds its Annual General Meeting, this time on **November 22nd, 2pm in the Parish Hall**. We hope you will be able to come along if you possibly can as we need at least 10% of our membership to be present to make the AGM 'quorate'.

Also, if you would like to stand for election as a BET trustee, then please let me know (Ian Chambers, 463315, ianann24@yahoo.co.uk) or fill in the form attached to this bulletin.

BET Annual General Meeting

Saturday November 22nd 2014

Backwell Parish Hall

Your trustees will be on hand to serve refreshments and to answer any questions you may have about BET and its activities past, present or future.

The AGM will start at 2pm, and after the short official business there will be a break for tea, coffee and cakes.

After tea, there will be a illustrated talk by Bill Charnock on BET's upcoming 10 year anniversary, as well as presentations on the Geology Trail and the Cabin.



Agenda



- ❖ Minutes of the AGM held on November 9th 2013
- ❖ Treasurer's Report
- ❖ Election of officers and trustees
- ❖ Any other business

The minutes of our last AGM and the annual accounts will be available at the meeting.

Volunteer Activity Mornings - on EVERY MONDAY and the FOURTH SATURDAY of every month starting at 10 am on both days and continuing for about 2 hours or as long as your energy lasts.

The tasks will change as the year progresses and can vary according to your strength and interests. Please wear stout footwear and suitable old clothes.

We always break at about 11am for large amounts of chat, tea and biscuits.

Meet at the lower entrance to Badgers Wood outside the Cabin just before 10am, or telephone in advance to find out where we shall be working (01275 463315).

Woodland Report

This year's summer has been pretty good on the whole, and apart from a dodgy three weeks in August, the warm settled weather has suited our nature reserves very well. We've seen good numbers of butterflies which have been in profusion over our meadows on sunny days and our newly restored wildflower meadows are getting better with each passing year.



The Geology Trail

After much discussion by the trustees about the possibility of a high-level cliff path in Badgers Wood, the project was given the go-ahead in the spring of 2013 and was finally completed in October 2014. In total, the new trail is around 350 metres long and runs along the base of some of the fantastic limestone cliffs to be found in this part of the woodland. The first and last sections have



been relatively straightforward, but it was the bit in the middle, close to the cliff faces, that have required the full engineering skills of the trusty BET volunteers. (We decided to start the trail in the middle, so if we ever felt we couldn't overcome some of the more challenging technical problems, we could always simply walk away and no one would be the wiser!). The problem was that some sections of the trail had to be constructed on a very rocky, steep slope so the only real solution for us was to attach metal cages to the rock faces, fill them up with many tonnes of rock and then put the trail on top. Although this took a long time to do, I'm very pleased with the finished result as it's now quite difficult to see the sections of trail that would once have been in thin air just a couple of years ago.

The Geology Trail branches off the Fern Way close to the start/end of that trail. The trail does have some short, steep sections and you may need a head for heights on the more 'challenging' middle section!



Wildflower Meadow Scything

Every year at the end of the summer, BET's wildflower meadows are cut by our volunteers, using traditional hand scythes. In the short term, the annual grass cut removes invading brambles and tree seedlings which would quickly swamp the grassland if left unchecked. Over the longer term, the removal of the cut material from the meadows will slowly reduce the soil's fertility which is good news for wildflowers because they can survive quite happily, whilst the less welcome plants often struggle to do so. BET has restored something like $1\frac{1}{2}$ acres of wildflower meadows, which now all have to be cut, so we are especially grateful to our loyal band of volunteers, who have been busy swinging their hips scything our wildflower grasslands.



Dormouse Surveys

Dormouse surveys have continued throughout the year, carried out by Gill Brown - a BET member and licensed dormouse handler. The dry, settled summer weather, which continued well into September, will be good news for BET's dormice and should give them plenty of opportunity to fatten up for their long winter hibernation. BET is very grateful to Gill who puts in many hours on the BET reserves each month doing the immensely valuable monitoring of our dormice.



Volunteer Hours

Every year, the BET volunteers freely put in a staggering amount of time, both in the day to day running of the trust, as well as the huge amount of practical work we do on our reserves. Over the last twelve months, the fantastic figure of **1634 volunteer hours** were recorded - so, once again, a BIG BET thank you to you all.

Jan Chambers



The Big Butterfly Count

You may remember that we invited you to take part in the Big Butterfly Count, run in partnership with Marks & Spencer. If you did, you were one of the nearly 45,000 people who took part, recording almost 560,000 during the three week period. The Count is the world's largest annual insect citizen science survey. The results have now been collated and are as follows:

Big Butterfly Count 2014 - Top 10 Species Ranking

1	Peacock	95,551 seen
2	Gatekeeper	79,937
3	Small White	65,549
4	Small Tortoiseshell	63,238
5	Meadow Brown	58,007
6	Large White	49,670
7	Red Admiral	25,606
8	Green-veined White	21,701
9	Common Blue	17,819
10	Speckled Wood	14,420



The Small Tortoiseshell, whose population has declined by 78% since the 1970s, saw numbers rise by almost a quarter compared to last summer, making it the fourth most commonly seen Big Butterfly Count species. This is the highest ever ranking for the Small Tortoiseshell in the Count, and represents an amazing comeback for a species that had recently become scarce in parts of southern England.

Despite a warm July, August was the coldest for more than 20 years according to the Met Office. This drop in temperature had a knock-on effect on the majority of the UK's common summer butterflies, curtailing the flight period of some species and hastening others into early hibernation. The average number of individual butterflies seen per-count dropped from 23 in 2013 to 15 in 2014. In all, 15 out of 21 of the target species decreased compared with 2013, only six species increased year-on-year.

The big winners were the Common Blue (up 55%), Red Admiral (up 43%), Speckled Wood (up 28%) and Small Tortoiseshell (up 22%). The summer was also good for Peacock, which was the most abundant butterfly in this year's Count - its highest ever placing. The common white butterflies all recorded a disappointing summer. The Large White was down by 65%, the Small White by 60% and Green-veined White by 47%. The Count's two migrant species - the Painted Lady and the Silver Y moth also had a lacklustre year.

Although the majority of species declined compared with 2013, most were still well above levels recorded during the washout summer of 2012.



Carrie Riches

BET's Archaeological Walk

On Sunday 13th July 2014, BET held an Archaeology Walk through its woods, and after meeting by St Andrews Church, our group of 12 interested walkers set off up the ancient holloway path through the Jubilee Stone woods. We paused by the 2 big mounds almost touching each other, which local tradition assumes to be mining mounds, but there are no mine shafts nearby, and their shape is not that of a tip. It is just possible they may be 2 intact Bronze Age barrows, similar to the 4 higher up on the hillside, which have almost been ploughed away.

We then walked up the path to the Jubilee Stone, a large granite obelisk built in 1897 to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, which is surrounded by a small meadow of long grasses and wild flowers, and was alive with colourful butterflies. Once over the stile, there in the field were the 4 barrows, possibly up to 4,000 years old, though they are barely visible, apart from the largest one 30 feet in diameter, which was described by Reverend George Masters of Flax Bourton in 1898 as '... a cup or basin inverted in its saucer'. He dug into it looking for grave goods (treasure!), but all he found was a pavement of flat stones 2 feet down, covering modern (19th century) pottery sherds, clay pipes and animal bones, which he called 'a puzzle'.

After admiring the views across the valley, we moved on to the Warrener's Cottage, lived in until 1843, the Warrener being an important person who looked after the 'pillow mounds' or 'rabbit bury' - low grassy mounds from 25 feet to several hundred feet long, and between 6 and 20 feet wide - where rabbits were bred, for both food and fur. He also kept predators like stoats, and badgers away, and the inevitable poachers who were always around. All that remains of the Cottage now are low foundations of stone and soil, and tumbled-down outbuildings, whereas the next site we visited - BET's limekiln, has been excavated and mostly restored.

Small limekilns were once an essential part of life, used to convert limestone (calcium carbonate) into quicklime (calcium oxide), this one being built between 1843 and 1884, the internal part being lined with Nailsea pennant sandstone. Limekilns were so important because they produced lime mortar used in building, whitewash/limewash waterproofing paint for houses and barns, and it was also spread on the fields as slaked lime which not only helped 'sweeten' acid soils, but also enabled better crops to grow. They were not so good for tramps, however, as many were suffocated by noxious fumes when they sought a warm place to spend the night. BET's limekiln went out of use between 1884 and 1902.

Then we crossed Cheston Combe road to our lookout point in Badgers Wood to pause for a very welcome cup of tea/coffee and biscuits, and

admired the spectacular views across the Estuary towards distant Wales. Much refreshed, we made our way down the path towards the Burial Cave at the bottom of the hill. In ancient times a



Badgers Wood Viewpoint

stream flowed over the calcite-covered rock surface of the Cave, giving it an almost mysterious appearance, hence it was thought of as a sacred site.

Back in 1936, when human bones were found by quarrymen digging it out (for calcite for spreading on paths), Professor Tratman excavated what was left, and believed there were 18-30 people buried there, including 3 children. Two skulls were found including one with a large depressed fracture, maybe caused by an axe, and several jawbones still with teeth.

Although most of the bones were lost when the University of Bristol Spelaeological Society Museum was bombed in the War, radio carbon dating on 2 vertebrae shows they are 5,000 years old from the Neolithic period, much older than previously thought.

For photographs and more information about the finds, please see this BET website.

This was the last place we visited on our walk, and then slowly made our way back down to the Church, very pleased that everyone said they had enjoyed themselves, and learned more about Backwell's archaeology, and the people who had lived, worked and been buried on the hillside all those years ago.



Backwell Cave

Jenny Greenslade



THE JACKIE CONDRAN MEMORIAL PLAQUE

Although BET has gratefully received many donations this year from our members, we would like to give a very special thanks to all those people in the community who contributed so generously to the Jackie Condran memorial fund : In total £776.91 has been donated to BET.



A memorial plaque for Jackie, one of BET's original, enthusiastic volunteers in its early years, has now been attached to the seat at the viewpoint at the top of Badger's Wood. With its superb views across to Wales, it is especially apt as her son Nick now lives in Newport. We hope that all those who knew Jackie, will find this a very special place to come to reflect, and remember her.

Anne-Marie Smith

Photographer Wins National Award for Dormice Images

Former filmmaker Nick Upton, from Kingsdown near Box, has been recognised by the 2014 British Wildlife Photography Awards for his collection of photographs of BET's dormice.

"Taking the photos was a lot of fun and a great privilege as Hazel dormice are really endearing little creatures with huge eyes and fluffy tails who really live up to their sleepy reputation, and



I'd never seen them before - but that's true of almost everyone in the UK. They're very shy and only come out of their woodland nests at night, and they're far less common than they used to be.

To get the shots, I followed Gill Brown and Ian Chambers of Backwell Environment Trust on some of the regular Dormouse surveys they do in the coppiced woodland, checking special nest-boxes with entrance holes up against trees, and then snapping

away when they found some dozing Dormice inside. Some didn't even wake up as they were handled, but my favourite shot was of two beady-eyed youngsters peering up at me before they were weighed and put back in their nest box".

- Nick Upton

If you would like to hear more about Nick Upton's collaborative work with conservationists, he will be giving a talk entitled '*A Focus on Nature - from Bats, Cranes and Dormice to Water Voles and more.....*' to the Hawk and Owl Trust at The Star at Tickenham on Monday 17th November at 7.45pm.



Cabin Update

I wrote the first article about the Cabin for BET Bulletin No 24, Summer 2012, and now it is Autumn 2014; the time has flown by so quickly that I must have enjoyed it. And I have; not every single minute, because all projects have problems from time to time, but looking back over more than two years I cannot recall many times (apart from bad weather) when I did not look forward to spending Monday morning working on the project.

My attitude was greatly helped by the energetic input in the earlier days of Don Steadman who built the new front wall, and more recently, of Tony Medland and all the way through, of Andy

Smith. Thanks are also due to many other BET "volunteers" who were enslaved on selected Monday mornings to carry sand, cement, building blocks and roof beams up to the site; a more awkward place to access in Backwell is hard to imagine. Further thanks are also due to David and Jean Glasson for allowing us to use their driveway to minimise the lifting and carrying.

The "good tidy up both inside and outside the Cabin" referred to in the last Bulletin has (sort of) taken place and a well-attended opening ceremony/tea party was held on October 12th.

But what about the rather "tongue-in-cheek" comment I made about stone gate pillars and a dry-stone wall? Well, BET has been donated some old walling stone which is currently dumped behind the Cabin....volunteers, please!

Jerry Wilcox

Two Opening Celebrations

On Sunday 22nd October, BET Members joined in celebrating the completion of two big projects by our volunteers over the past two years.

To start with, 25 members and friends walked along the newly constructed Geology Trail in Badgers Wood. This path was built above the Fern Way with the aim of giving visitors access to the upper slopes and dramatic limestone cliffs along the ridge above Cheston Combe. Tricky sections of the steep terrain had presented some significant engineering challenges for our volunteers, but well-camouflaged ironwork and buttresses have resulted in an exciting yet safe walk through the woods. Everyone enjoyed the excursion and the information provided by BET trustees and local geologist Richard Kefford. Richard is a member of the Avon RIGS Group, and talked about the formation and evolution of the limestone landscape and crags and other features. Gradually we made our way down to the newly refurbished BET Cabin to enjoy ample tea and cakes! A total of 35 people admired the amazing transformation which has been achieved by some very dedicated and skilled volunteers. The result is a dry, light and roomy base for BET events like this one. Photos of BET's work and a display of Richard's fossils helped to make a very informative and enjoyable gathering.

Peter Speight





One Drizzly Morning...

One drizzly morning, the BET Monday volunteers were delighted to encounter Year 3 from Backwell Junior School out on a walk in Badgers Wood with their teacher, Mr Connell. In spite of the conditions they clearly had an 'inspirational' morning! Special thanks to Billy and Eden who have kindly shared some of their lovely descriptive writing.

'All around me I could see the trees were like spegety. I could feel the soggy and buitful leaves. I could hear the fluttering of birds swooping in the wood. I could feel the ruff and bumpy bark. I could taste the brease rushing into my mouth. I could see a bajers burrow rite next to a buljing tree. I saw and heard a squirrel jumping from one tree to a nuther. I could feel the wet and muddy ground.'

Billy, Year 3

'I could hear the russiling of the trees in the wind. Feel the damp floor going into my shoes. The wet, dark trees on my fingers. The trees are like tall buildings. The leaves are as small as the palm of my hand. Trees wider than me and wider than a church. Bark as rough as gravel on the floor. The wind forming a tornado in the air. The leafs were green, orange, yellow and russy brown.'

Eden, Year 3

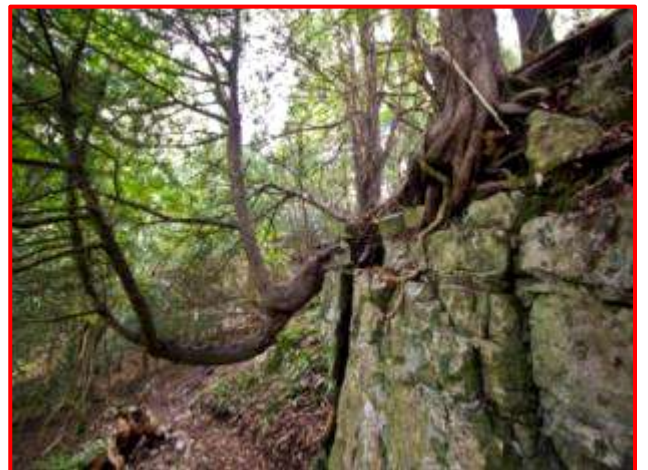


Yew Are Amazing!

I am fascinated by BET's magnificent yew trees - they are so atmospheric, dark and moody. It also amazes me how these impressively large old trees can sprout out of seemingly solid limestone cliffs. Whilst working amongst the yews along the new Geology Trail, I thought I would do some digging!



I came across the website of the Ancient Yew Group (AYG) which has a mass of fascinating facts about yews. Of particular interest is that, in 2005 and 2011, Tim Hills of the AYG surveyed Somerset woods, including BET's, and made special note of three yew trees in Badgers Wood and one on the other side of Cheston Coombe, in Jubilee Stone Wood. The largest of these has a girth of 16 feet and is estimated by AYG to be around 600 years old! Impressive



indeed, but not nearly as old as the Fortingall Yew in Perthshire, and one in St Cynog's in Powys, which are believed to be over 5,000 years old, and may be the oldest living organisms in Britain. Yew trees are very difficult to age. Even if one can count the rings, they can have dormant spells when they stop growing for a while and then restart! Additionally, older trees often develop hollow trunks.

Being slow growing, the wood is very hard and dense. It has beautiful colours ranging from the creamy sapwood to orange and purple heartwood. This makes it very special for wood turning, carving and furniture making.

Traditionally yew was used to make English longbows. The sapwood of the yew is good in tension and the heartwood in compression. The best 'selfbows' were shaped from a single length of yew, using part sapwood and part heartwood, for the back and belly respectively.



Straight lengths from the yew trunk were needed and once English stocks of yew were depleted, longbow staves were imported from Europe - Spain and Italy in particular. In Tudor times, to ensure a regular supply of fine-grained yew, each ton of certain imports, including wine, had to be accompanied by 10 yew staves.

Yew was actually used for bows in Neolithic times. The Meare Heath bow, discovered in the

peat of the Somerset Levels, dates from 2,600 BC.

All parts of the English Yew (*Taxus Baccata*) are highly poisonous, with the exception of the flesh of the red berries (or more correctly arils) of the female tree. In the 1960s, it was discovered that the poisonous taxane alkaloids in yew could be used in the production of cancer treatment drugs, such as Taxol.

In British folklore, yew is associated with immortality and death. Yew is well known for its association with places of burial and is a feature of many churchyards, often pre-dating the church. Many ancient yews are in close proximity to standing stones, stone circles, and pre-Christian burial sites. There was a pagan belief that the roots of the yew, being very fine, would grow through the eyes of the dead to prevent them seeing



their way back to the world of the living. In more recent times, it became a custom for evergreen yew branches to be carried on Palm Sunday and at funerals, as emblems of the resurrection.

All this still leaves me uncertain of the actual origin of BET's yew trees! But, having such great age and majesty, we must admire and continue to look after our wonderful veteran yews, for generations to come. To quote from William Wordsworth's poem, Yew Trees:

*Of vast circumference and gloom profound
This solitary Tree! - a living thing
Produced too slowly ever to decay:
Of form and aspect too magnificent
To be destroyed.*

Peter Speight



Country Diary of an Edwardian Lady

Edith Holden, one of 7 children was born in 1871, and lived with her family in the small village of Olton, Warwickshire. With a talent for painting, she went to art school, worked as an illustrator, then married a sculptor and moved to London. Tragically her life was cut short in 1920, when, aged 49, she drowned in the River Thames at Kew whilst gathering buds from chestnut trees



along the riverbank. However her legacy to us was her Diary from 1906, with observations not only of the changing seasons, but also of flora and fauna of the English countryside, which, along with her brilliant illustrations, brings that particular year so vividly to life. What follows are a few highlights from it including quite a lot about the weather, which was just as changeable then as it is now in 2014!

January 1906 was a mild month with gales of wind and rain, followed by frosts and sunshine. On the 23rd there had been a heavy overnight frost, and Edith wrote that 'twigs on every tree and bush were outlined in silver tracery against the sky'. On her walk she saw great flocks of rooks and starlings in the fields, catkins on the hazel trees, and in her own garden primroses and snowdrops were in flower. The weather dramatically changed in February - wild and stormy - with thunder, rain, hail and sleet, followed by heavy snow. She cleared a space on her lawn, put out bread and rice for the birds, and also a tripod of sticks from which hung half a coconut. There were apparently terrible fights amongst the tits over it, but one brave blackcap took possession, sitting in the middle and 'bidding defiance' to the others, including hissing at the great tit who threatened it with flapping wings and open beak!



The snow thawed out, then was back, then gone again, followed by sharp frosts and bright sunshine. On the 15th, whilst out walking, she surprised two little 'shrew mice', who instantly popped back inside their 'excavated subterranean tunnels' when they saw her. They had been using their long flexible noses to dig out worms and uncover insects from the bright new greenery around them.



Then March arrived - 'in like a lamb with warm wind and rain from the south-west' but also with glorious sunshine. Birds were busy nest-building, woodland violets were flowering, and buds opened up on golden daffodils in the fields. Suddenly it all went quiet with more heavy falls of snow, which luckily soon melted. Edith came across two thrush nests, one of the birds looking at her with 'such brave bright eyes' that she could not disturb her, despite wanting to peep at her speckled blue eggs. By the end of the month there was frogspawn in the pond, and banks and roadsides were now carpeted with flowering primroses, sweet violets and yellow celandine.

April followed on, with sunshine in the first two weeks. Edith travelled down to Dartmoor, and when out walking, gathered the largest primroses she had ever seen. Wild ponies on the Moor were still in their shaggy winter coats, and 'the world seemed to be made up of sky and gorse - such acres of fragrant golden blossom under a sky of cloudless blue'. By the end of month though, there were more hail, sleet and heavy snow showers which continued on into May - a cold and stormy month. The hedgerows were full of young fledglings, mainly thrushes and blackbirds, whom their parents were desperately trying to feed, and Edith watched 'one precocious young robin' trying to capture a worm nearly 3 times as long as itself!

Although June began with heavy thunderstorms, suddenly there were hot sunny days and everything that was late due to the long spell of cold weather, burst into flower - purple foxgloves, pink wild roses, scented honeysuckle and white daisies. However, life was not quite perfect as there were frequent thunderstorms and two days of continuous rain at the end of the month. Earthquake tremors were even recorded on the 27th in some western counties and South Wales, extending from Bristol to the Mumbles. The hot, sticky heat carried on into July, and Edith spent her time in the countryside looking for wild flowers to paint. She was pleased to see a second crop of leaves on the oak trees, the first ones having been devastated by caterpillars in the Spring. Tiny green moths flitted around them, along with small tortoiseshell and Meadow brown butterflies.



In August she travelled up to Scotland, and in one field sketched Highland cattle being closely followed by starlings, a snipe and a curlew, all picking up insects disturbed by the animals. There was continuous rain in Scotland that month although England had one of the sunniest months on record! When Edith returned home at the end of September, hardly any leaves had changed into their autumnal colours, although beeches were bare, their leaves having shrivelled up and fallen off, due to the long drought.



The beginning of October first brought wind and rain, then it turned showery, still feeling quite close. Sparrows, tits and finches enjoyed feeding on thistles and sunflowers gone to seed, which were favourite hiding places of beetles and earwigs (also good to eat!). There were plenty of ripe berries, including blackberries. The mild weather continued until November, which began cold and foggy, shrouding everywhere in purple mist. It was the perfect time of year for mushrooms and toadstools, and in half an hour's walk Edith came across 10 different varieties. Trees were now bare, apart from the oaks, but even their bronze

leaves came 'whirling down in their hundreds, and dancing along the road' after a particularly stormy day.

Finally December arrived, bright and cold, along with all the hungry birds! Edith again put out her coconut tripod, to the great joy of the blue tits whom she thought 'wonderfully bold', although blackbirds and thrushes were more shy, and 'sat watching with their bright eyes from the friendly shelter of a bush' until she moved away, and they dived in. There were several heavy snowfalls which thawed out, with beautifully mild weather in between them, but on Christmas morning there was another heavy fall, and on the 27th, newspapers reported that all of Britain lay under snow from John O'Groats to Lands End, for the first time in 6 years. However on the last day of the old year, with wind from the south-west and a rise in temperature, 'there is every sign of an approaching thaw' - a more optimistic start for the New Year, that of 1907.



Jenny Greenslade



BET & Current Planning Issues

Coles Quarry

Members may know that North Somerset, despite intense local opposition, has given permission for an industrial estate of 15 units to be constructed in Coles Quarry on the footprint of the old drypack plant. The site borders 3 acres of woodland containing Backwell's pre-historic cave which BET tried to buy some years ago from the previous owners of the quarry. We were at the point of exchanging contracts when the new owners bought the quarry and our purchase fell through. The new owners have consistently promised that BET would eventually come into ownership of the cave area which adjoins BET's Badgers Wood Nature Reserve but this has not yet occurred.

In relation to BET's objectives we have called for a comprehensive survey of the quarry covering bats, dormice, snakes and peregrines to be undertaken before any construction work begins. We have also expressed deep reservations about the asbestos issue (see below).

In relation to the community there are many aspects of this planning application which give cause for concern but the two chief worries are traffic and asbestos. On traffic the proposal seems to be based on claiming that the closed quarry still has rights for traffic movements on Dark Lane. Since the quarry closed however there have been significant increases in traffic arising from the opening of the recycling centre and expansion of the airport. Local residents have carried out a number of surveys showing that between 7.00am and 7.00 pm on a typical school day there are 3000 such traffic movements with peaks and congestion at school opening and closing times. Of this total 700 are directly attributable to the Recycling Centre.

Extension of the largely ignored and unenforced 20mph speed limit currently protecting the school to cover Dark Lane inspires little confidence.

On asbestos members may be interested to learn that it is not a planning issue but is covered rather by building regulations. Hence all objections on this basis have not been considered. This has not reassured BET or local residents since the plans for Coles Quarry include demolition of the drypack plant which is constructed of many tons of asbestos cement sheeting.

Farleigh Fields and Backwell's Neighbourhood Plan

BET has helped the village with the Plan by collecting together all the available information on the biodiversity and environmental importance of Farleigh Fields. This was part of the evidence used to support the designation within the Plan of this area as a Local Green Space (LGS). For prime agricultural land Farleigh Fields are exceptionally bio-diverse and provide all important connectivity to Backwell Common and other areas to the east.

The official Examiner of the plan appointed by North Somerset recently held an open meeting in the Parish Hall at which BET was represented to help him with his assessment of the Plan especially in relation to the proposed LGS. His report has just appeared and he has ruled that Farleigh Fields and Moor lane Fields cannot be designated as Local Green Spaces because in his opinion they constitute "an extensive tract of land". The plan had argued that this clause implied a much larger area than was proposed. In addition the examiner considered that the LGS designation was to be used only in very exceptional circumstances.



However he did recognise our extensive work on LGSs and their importance to the community by noting, to quote, "... the two areas of land at Moor lane Fields and Farleigh Fields are valued by the local community for reasons including their character, recreational value and richness of wildlife. Backwell PC will work with North Somerset to establish how recognition of their valuable features may be incorporated into the development plan." With this and many other modifications he has recommended that Backwell proceed to a referendum on the Plan.

At the same time the developer Charles Church, part of the Persimmon Group, has proposed the building of 340 houses on the lower parts of Farleigh Fields. Clearly this proposal conflicts with the aspirations in the original Plan and with the Examiner's comments above. The Plan contains ample development proposals not involving Farleigh Fields so that even without the LGS designation it will provide some protection. However it is not yet gone through the referendum process and is still unapproved as far as the Planning Department is concerned. This gives the developer a window of opportunity to get his plans approved in spite of all the community's efforts.

Bill Charnock (The views expressed here are those of the writer and not necessarily those of BET)



www.backwellenvironmenttrust.org



And finally ... don't forget to check out BET's fabulous website
and keep yourself up to date with all the many activities
we are planning over the coming year.

