



West Berkshire
Countryside Society

UPSTREAM

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Wildflower Headland © Michael Trolove Geograph.org.uk

Another opportunity for Nature Recovery?

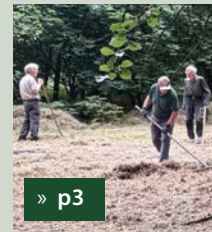
DEFRA announced in July its 30x30 delivery plan designed to fulfil the commitment to protect 30% of England's land for nature by 2030. The plan calls for landowners to voluntarily opt to protect and enhance nature. The government's analysis shows around 32% of England's land either already meets or has the potential to meet the 30x30 criteria. A Delivery Plan aims to address nature recovery through a tiered approach, identifying where land is already delivering for nature, where more can be achieved, and where investment will have the greatest impact. Nearly £40 million will support the

country's 10 National Parks and 34 National Landscapes.

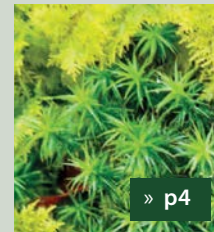
There are 79 actions in the delivery plan. For farmers and landowners, these include to:

- Introduce flexibility for farmers to create agroforestry systems
- **Work with farmers to co-produce an approach that focuses payments for a selection of Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) actions in the areas where they will make the greatest impact**
- Invest in modernising digital farm and land services to give clearer sight of public and private funding opportunities
- **Provide further detail on how farming advice and Environmental**

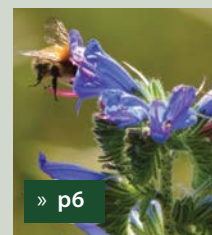
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- Plus lots more...**

Land Management (ELM) schemes are expected to evolve over the next five to ten years

- Require publication of data on nature and carbon market projects, enabling joined-up action with neighbours

30x30 appears aspirational. But many environmentalists think its actions do not allow for change at the scale and pace needed and are yet to be convinced that aspiration would become reality. Achieving it will require action across society, including greater involvement from businesses and volunteers. John Haggerty describes below the latest of the various schemes to become available to farmers.

Margery Slatter

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West Berkshire Countryside Society

Caring for our Countryside – Join Us and Help Make a Difference.

West Berkshire Countryside Society

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

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

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Conservation Volunteers' Task Diary

For outdoor events please wear suitable footwear and clothing. Most practical tasks start at 10am (so arrive earlier) and usually finish around 3pm, unless otherwise stated. However, we are more than happy to accept any time you can spare! All tools are provided but bring a packed lunch and your own drinks. Task locations can be found by using the grid reference shown for that task or by the /// three-word code after each grid reference – the "What Three Words" listing for the task meeting point.

Date/Time	Venue	Details
October 2026		
Tue 6th Oct 10:00	Malt House, West Woodhay	Hedge laying and coppicing. Parking is on the entrance to the field off the W. Woodhay Rd or as directed on the day, SU407639 ///belts.glorified.connects
Tue 13th Oct 10:00	Bucklebury Common	Heathland management. Felling and clearing trees and shrubs to create new haloes around important trees. Meet at SU547686 Byles's Green Cemetery ///code.shredding.dabble.
Tue 20th Oct 10:00	Furze Hill, Hermitage	Woodland and butterfly habitat management on this parish wildlife site. Ample parking at village hall – through double gates off Pinewood Crescent, SU512740 ///simmer.equipping.casual
Tue 27th Oct 10:00	Little Hidden Farm, Hungerford	Continuing conservation management tasks on this organic farm. Access by following the track through the farm until you can go no further. Park opposite the indoor riding school. SU351713 ///crisps.joke.encrusted
November 2026		
Tue 3rd Nov 10:00	Sheepdrove, Lambourn	Task tbd. Park near the red barn SU349816 . Do not use sat nav guidance to locate this site ///connected.ranges.over
Tue 10th Nov 10:00	Streatley Allotments	Hedge laying in conjunction with local volunteers. Parking in Recreation Ground, off A328, signpost Cleve Court (As per old Cleve Water Meadow task) SU592812 ///gazed.intruding.weeds
Tue 17th Nov 10:00	Bowdown Woods	Heathland scrub clearance on part of this BBOWT site. Parking is accessed off Bury's Bank Road on left after the cattle grid coming from Newbury after crossing the Control Tower roundabout at SU505693 (Bomb Site) ///clever.lots.orders
Tue 24th Nov 10:00	Grove Pit Common, Leckhampstead	Scrub clearance on this parish wildlife site. Access the common via the track which leaves the B4494 west at Cotswold Farm. SU440777 Please leave your vehicles at the bottom of the track and walk up to the common. ///bossy.connected.tubes
Fri 27th Nov 10:00	Ashampstead Common	Haloing work on the special trees. Park at the Common entrance just past The Cottage along Sucks Lane, Ashampstead RG8 8QT SU576 751 ///nuzzling.pegs.afford
December 2026		
Tue 1st Dec 10:00	Rushall Manor Farm, off Back Lane, Bradfield	Continuing conservation management tasks. Meet at the Black Barn off Back Lane between Stanford Dingley and Bradfield, SU584723 ///telephone.brink.crate
Tue 8th Dec 10:00	Eling Farm	Conservation management and habitat improvement. From Hermitage head North on B4009, after about a mile turn right towards Eling. Head for farm, take 2nd entrance into the yard. SU522752 ///approvals.wider.plankton
Tue 15th Dec 10:00	Winterbourne Wood	Continuing conservation management tasks. Park on the main woodland entrance track, SU447717 ///headboard.tubes.olive
Tue 22nd Dec	Day Off	
Please Note	Bucklebury Meadows	Planting of Bucklebury Meadows hedge, probably a Friday when plants are available. Please refer to the website for updates and details.

Volunteers: Task Roundup

Raking the Glades, Ashampstead Common
© Andy Hollox

As it is very unusual for the team to cancel, it was unfortunate that this happened twice in this quarter due to successive heatwaves. Our strategy is to start and finish earlier on a hot day, but this is not always possible (path maintenance along the **Eling Way**) and sometimes would make no difference in the dangerously high temperatures we have been experiencing (ragwort pulling at **Sulham Home Farm**).

In mid-May we continued to work in woodland at Rushall Farm, cutting back overgrown hazel coppice and other understorey vegetation to allow more light to penetrate, benefiting mature oaks in the area. A highlight was watching John Bishop using his driving skills to turn the tractor/trailer transport in a very confined space.

The late spring visit to **Furze Hill** saw us maintaining various areas of the butterfly larder and clearing some of the previously felled ash. We also repaired the protection around some hazel coppice stools and removed old tree guards from the recently planted hedge.

Volunteers enjoyed visiting the newly built Anglo-Saxon area at **Ufton Court**. The group worked to improve the maze-like access to the Archery Field by clearing and widening paths and rebuilding dead hedges. Others continued clearing the banks of the main, spring-fed watercourse, building leaky dams to create pools and rills; and carved seats into oak logs using chainsaws.



Lunch – Anglo-Saxon Area, Ufton Court
© Andy Hollox

A breezy hot day in early June brought a second visit to **Eling Farm**. We carried on with mulching the newly planted hedges to protect them from weeds and drought. This is intended to ensure that the new hedging will establish well and become an important wildlife enhancement to the farm.

Controlling bracken along the bank at **Holt Lodge Farm** is one of the society's oldest annual tasks. This year found the bracken height considerably reduced from previous years. Whether this is due to the dry summer or our hard work should become clearer next year. Additionally, in an attempt to discover the best technique to control it, this year we bashed and bruised bracken on one half of the slope and cut it on the other.



Work Party at Sheepdrove Farm © Andy Hollox

A very early start on a hot day took us to Stancombe Hatts, a Bronze Age Barrow (burial mound) on **Sheepdrove Organic Farm**. The main task was cutting nettles so that other flora has a chance to grow, and to clear pathways for the public to enjoy this special site. In addition, dead or dying trees were felled and overhanging branches removed.

In July we raked grass cut by Yattendon Estate on **Ashampstead Common** to keep woodland glades open and to encourage the growth of wildflowers. The continuing heat wave required an early start, but cloud kept us (relatively) cool, and the grass was very dry. We had raked all four glades by lunch time and cleared three large fallen tree branches.

During a second visit to **Rushall Manor**, volunteers cut vegetation and

pollarded willow around the edge of the pond which, due to the weather, was practically dry. We also tried to remove branches that had fallen in, but this proved tricky, given the depth of mud, and resulted in two volunteers having to be pulled out -alive! Other tasks were felling poplars to create a clearing and brushcutting vegetation overgrowing footpaths.



Rushall Pond – Before

© Andy Hollox



Rushall Pond – After

© Margery Slatter

An early start at **Grovepit Common** allowed volunteers to cut back vegetation from the byway and adjoining informal paths, completing the whole length by midday! The trees planted in the autumn/winter were inspected and watered (most seemed still to be alive). It was encouraging that the hazel stools, recently coppiced and protected, had put on a large amount of re-growth.

A further visit to **Furze Hill** in late summer involved 'traditional' mowing and raking of the wildflower meadow – scything the grass and brushcutting bramble in a mosaic of sections to allow the diverse flora to thrive by removing competing coarser vegetation.

Compiled by **Margery Slatter**, with thanks to the Task Leaders

Meandering with Moss in the Chilterns

Prepare to be amazed, writes Linda Seward

Originally published in 'The Chiltern' magazine Autumn 2024, this fascinating article is equally relevant to West Berkshire's habitats. See which mosses you can spot locally or take a trip to the beautiful Chiltern Hills!

Describing the UK as a 'green and pleasant land' is very apt, but you may not realise that one of the reasons it's so green is because of moss. Take a meander in the Chiltern countryside and look closely at the tiny green plants clinging to rocks, trees and logs

in sheltered areas of your local woodlands, or peruse walls, concrete and fences in your own garden. If you have a hand lens, take it with you and prepare to be amazed.

Close relatives of moss were the first plants to grow on the Earth's surface. We're lucky that the UK has a marvellous diversity of moss species (Bryophyta) due to its plentiful rainfall – about 400

different species can be found in the Chilterns alone. While you can find moss all year round, autumn and spring are the best times, when the tiny, thirsty leaves soak up the water that pours down during those seasons.

Mosses require little to survive. They don't flower and have rhizoids (filaments) instead of roots but need moisture and minerals from rainwater and dew for their nourishment. Like a sponge, they absorb water which also helps the surrounding soil retain moisture and humidity.

Small invertebrates depend on moss for protection and some animals find it quite a tasty part of their diet. Birds often use moss for their nests. Because of its

antiseptic qualities, some types of moss can be used to clean and cover wounds, as medics did during WWI. Many moss species require specific habitats, so like the canary in the coal mine, indicate good environmental conditions, as well as pure air and water. Probably the most important impact of mosses on our planet is that they offset more carbon than all the trees on earth – an incredible contribution for such tiny plants!

Here are a few of the most common mosses you'll find in the Chilterns.

Wall screw-moss (*Tortula muralis*) is a beautiful moss with a name inspired by its twisty leaves. It grows in cushions, patches and tufts less than 1cm tall. It rapidly colonises open areas on rock surfaces, because it produces spores all year round. You may see capsules of varying ages emerging from the cluster of twisted leaves, as well as capsules from the previous year.

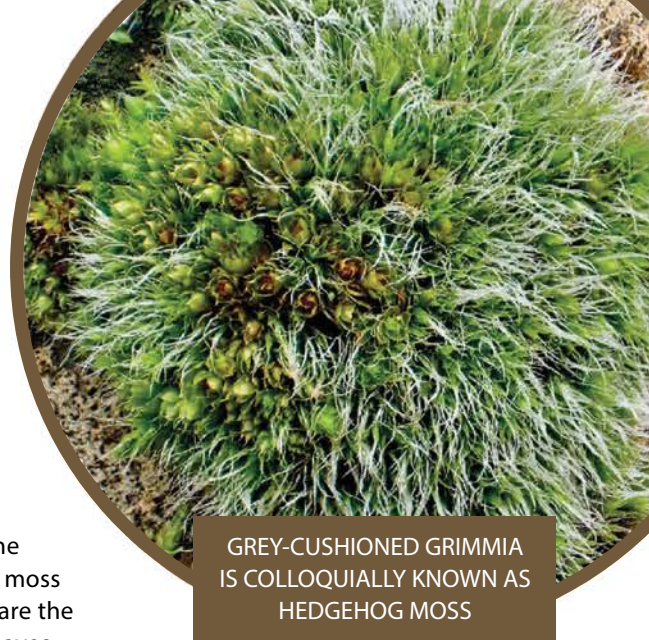
WALL SCREW-MOSS IS A TYPICAL MEMBER OF THE 'WALL COMMUNITY'

Common pincushion (*Dicranoweisia cirrata*) grows in dense tufts or cushions and has simple erect stems that vary in colour from olive- to yellowish green. The wavy leaves taper to a fine tip. Common pincushion moss can be found on exposed rocks, stone walls, tree branches and trunks, thatch and other organic surfaces.

NEAT FEATHER-MOSS CAN BE FOUND ON CALCAREOUS GRASSLAND LIKE WATLINGTON HILL, WHERE THIS BEAUTIFUL MOSS CARPET WAS PHOTOGRAPHED



THE CAPSULES OF COMMON PINCUSHION RESEMBLE PINS STUCK IN A PINCUSHION, HENCE ITS COMMON NAME



GREY-CUSHIONED GRIMMIA IS COLLOQUIALLY KNOWN AS HEDGEHOG MOSS





WOOD BRISTLE-MOSS GROWS ON DECIDUOUS TREES AND FENCES IN AREAS WITH CLEAN AIR, OFTEN SIDE BY SIDE WITH LICHENS



BANK HAIRCAP MOSS CAN BE GROWN IN TERRARIUMS

Grey-cushioned grimmia (*Grimmia pulvinata*) grows on rocks, concrete, walls, tombstones and mortar. The point of each leaf has a long silvery white hair; the hairs of the densely packed leaves trap a layer of air around the dark green cushion so it can retain moisture.

Wood bristle-moss (*Lewinskya affinis*) has narrow leaves about 3mm long arranged in bristly tufts and with abundant capsules.

Neat feather-moss (*Pseudoscleropodium purum*) is physiologically adapted to retain water with its crowded leaves and smooth, swollen stems. The overlapping leaves with round tips set it apart from possible look-alikes.

Bank haircap moss (*Polytrichum formosum*) can form a dense mat in shady deciduous woodlands and is easy to spot because it can be quite tall. This pretty moss is often used by gardeners to add green colour to their beds. The small leaves create a star-shaped pattern.

Capillary thread-moss (*Bryum capillare*) is very common and grows in rounded florets on decaying wood like the top of this fence post. Large cylindrical capsules droop from the ends of long red setae.

Springy turf-moss (*Rhytiadelphus squarrosus*) can be found in large pale green swards in lawns and other unimproved grasslands, unless lawn food and moss killer are used. From above, the shoots have a starry appearance.

When you start studying anything in the natural world, you quickly realise that there are many more species than you imagined. This is particularly true with moss. Don't be discouraged, however, if you can't identify them – I feel it's enough to notice and enjoy them. But if you'd like to take this study further, *A Guide to Finding Mosses in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire* by Peter Creed & Tom Haynes is excellent. Facebook has a number of sites devoted to moss, and the British Bryological Society <https://www.britishbryologicalsociety.org.uk> welcomes new members.

I'd like to thank Dr Oliver Pescott (UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, Wallingford) for checking this article.



CAPILLARY THREAD-MOSS IS DIOECIOUS – IT HAS MALE AND FEMALE REPRODUCTIVE ORGANS ON DIFFERENT INDIVIDUALS



SPRINGY TURF-MOSS HAS RED STEMS AND OFTEN FORCES OUT OTHER SPECIES TO CREATE PURE COLONIES

Visit my website: www.lindaseward.com

Photos: Linda Seward

With thanks to Linda Seward, and The Chiltern Society www.chilternsociety.org.uk

Continued from page 1.

New Environmental Grants for Farmers

Joining any of the existing environmental schemes needs careful thought and involves a large amount of office work. The large range of options is something of a minefield and there is uncertainty about the success of any application. New proposals were announced by DEFRA this summer to allow for payments to promote a wide range of environmental enhancements for us all to enjoy. This scheme, the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI), follows a scheme started in 2022. This scheme had a large uptake which meant



that funding became an issue, and it was withdrawn at short notice. However, even this incentive may change under DEFRA's 30x30 delivery plan, announced shortly after the application window for SFI was opened.

The SFI scheme is aimed at small farmers and those that have not made a previous application for Environmental Land Management support. The payments cover a wide range of options – up to 71 in total – aimed at improving water courses, supporting soil health and encouraging farmland wildlife. This is fewer than in the previous scheme and the payment rates have also been reduced. The SFI runs for a three-year agreement, needing considerable planning, and the various payments are made on a per hectare basis.

Examples of funded options might be to plant a pollen and nectar



flower mix to attract insects; or sowing a winter bird food crop to help farmland birds. Another eligible feature would be buffer strips around arable fields to protect hedgerows or streams and provide wildlife corridors. Even in an intensive farming system where food production is maximised, it allows for field corners to be taken out of production. These and the many other options, such as creating nesting plots for skylarks / lapwing or hedgerow management, all give a huge environmental benefit.

John Haggerty

Tree Tube Dilemma – an Update

Around 16 million plastic tree shelters are used annually in the UK. Tree tube pollution is a legacy issue from decades of use in woodland creation. Many tree guards are left in place well beyond the recommended 7–10 years, ending up abandoned on the forest floor. These plastics fragment into microplastics, contaminating soils and water, and harming wildlife. The solution is two fold: remove and recycle; or adopt sustainable alternatives.

As mentioned in an article in the Autumn 2025 edition of Upstream ("The Tree Tube Dilemma Reduce Reuse Recycle"), a member of the society proposed to start a local collection service to return

discarded tubes to Tubex for recycling. Unfortunately, Tubex has no recycling hubs in our area. So, with a great deal of effort and investigation, a site was found to store bags of tubes and to arrange for collection to take place.

On 11th June, Tubex collected approximately 2,500 tubes in 6 bags and a bag full of wraps (shorter split tubes used to protect hedging plants). Thanks go to Tom at BBOWT who kindly agreed to store tubes at one of their sites; Vicky Trentham for her encouragement and support; Richard from Englefield Estate, Andrew from Sulham Estate and John from Rushall Manor for all their help in getting tubes to the collection point.

The intention is to carry on collecting, but one issue still needs to be resolved – it has not yet been possible to secure funding for the cost of collection which is currently £39 per bag ex VAT (with a minimum order of 6 bags anywhere on the UK mainland). Recent costs have been covered privately. As this is unsustainable, it may be necessary to seek a donation from landowners (11p per tube collected). However, we are still interested in identifying other sites and to secure funding going forward.

If anybody is interested and can help, please contact the society.

Terry Davis

Did you know?

- Currently all recyclable Tubex products contain up to 50% recycled polymer. Their aim is to continue increasing the recycled content of their products up to 100% in the shortest time possible.
- Westonbirt Arboretum is conducting a tree tube trial. They are testing different non-plastic, biodegradable tree guards to establish which perform best.

Duncan Long: a tribute

The members of the Barn Owl Group were saddened by the loss, last autumn, of our 'Lord of the Rings' Duncan Long. The title amused him greatly. For the past 10 years Duncan had not only looked after a group of owl boxes and ringed the bulk of our barn owl chicks, but he also found time to supervise and mentor ringers within the group to obtain their licence endorsement for barn owls. He also co-ordinated the purchase and distribution of rings along with the not inconsiderable associated admin required by the British Trust for Ornithology for both the Barn Owl Group and Newbury Ringing Group.



Duncan with Barn Owl Chick © Barn Owl Group

Duncan started his ringing training with the Newbury Ringing Group in 1987 and first ringed barn owls in 1991. He gained wider experience with other groups including the Cotswold Ringing Group and the Edward Grey Institute where he obtained a Pit Tag qualification. Although fully competent, attaining the highest-level A-permit licence wasn't a priority – his highest priority was his wife, daughters and granddaughters – after some prompting, he qualified in 2009. He also completed annual Breeding Bird surveys for the BTO as well as serving on the Newbury and District Ornithological Club committee helping to produce their annual reports.

Very much a 'people person', Duncan was ideally placed to explain the ringing procedures to landowners, having spent much of his working life in customer service roles, most recently with a local company arranging transportation of Super Yachts. His personality and sense of humour was



Duncan Ringing

© Barn Owl Group

such that the Barn Owl Group members looked forward to meeting with him socially or going out 'owling'. The world was set to rights many times!

He was diagnosed with cancer in 2023 and was treated successfully. However, in spring 2025 he was told it had returned but could be managed. He was still well enough to do some box checking and ringing in July. He went into hospital in October for a round of treatment but died suddenly whilst waiting for a discharge care package to be arranged. He is sorely missed by us all.

Cathy McEwan for the Barn owl Group

New Web Address for the Society www.westberkscountryside.org

We are in the process of rebuilding and expanding the West Berkshire Countryside Society's website.

Our website already receives very many visitors each month. We are hoping that as we expand its content over the coming months, it will become an increasingly useful resource for people interested, not only in the activities of the Society, but also in the various habitats and species to be found in our area.

We will also be increasing the links to websites run by 'kindred spirit' organisations.

For technical reasons, this process will entail adopting a new web address (URL). From early October, we can be found at www.westberkscountryside.org. This is similar to our old address but with the '.uk' suffix removed. We are hopeful that a divert from our old address will be in place for a limited time, but please save the new address to your browser favourites and elsewhere.

West Berkshire
Countryside Society Committee

In Betjeman Country: Catmore to Farnborough

A circular walk of 3.5 miles/5.6k on well used tracks and paths, sometimes muddy in wet weather. Short sections of road walking. Park in the large car park opposite the church in Catmore. SU453802 ///congested.curious.adopt OS Explorer 170. Refreshments in surrounding villages.

1. The village of **Catmore** is characterised by its quaint, traditional architecture, with many of its buildings dating back to the 17th and 18th centuries. There are a number of charming cottages and farmhouses set within the extensive landscapes of the North Wessex Downs.

2. **St Margaret's** is a very interesting small church, with a distinctive flint and stone exterior, dating from the 12C. It is maintained by the Historic Churches Conservation Trust. Access follows the footpath beside the black barn, signed 'Historic Church'.

From the car park, turn left (right, if leaving the church) to walk up the lane to a 5-way junction of tracks. Take the second of the two tracks on the right towards woodland. At the wood, take the bridleway to the left through the edge of the wood eventually crossing two fields to rejoin the lane on a bend. Turn left with Heath Copse nearby on the right. A short distance along the lane it bends sharp right. Take the track (Old Street) straight ahead.

3. **Old Street**, as its name implies, is an ancient route linking Walbury Hill, south of



© AJD – Geograph

Newbury, to the Ridgeway not far to the north of here. It also linked to many drove routes running to and from the river valleys and commons in the south. This would have provided access to markets at Wantage and Oxford and to the sheep fairs of East Ilsley. It also forms part of the modern-day Ilsley Downs Riding Route.

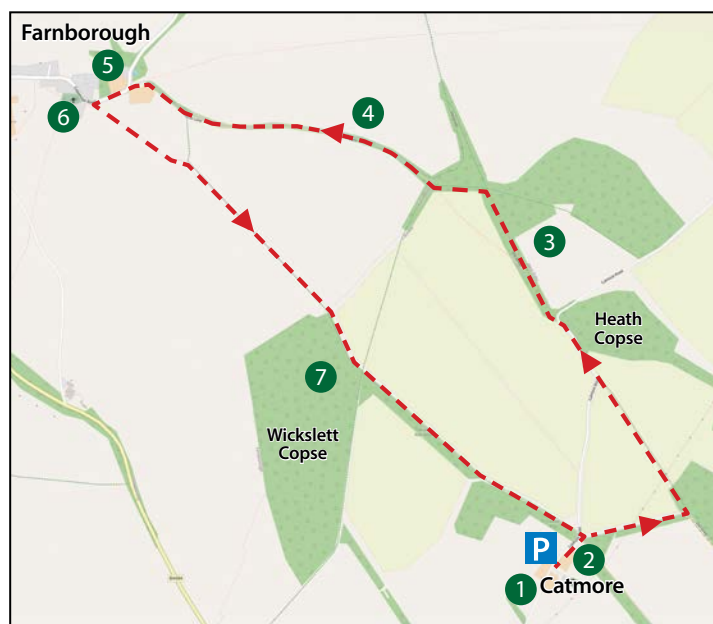
At the next crossroads, take the road used as a public path to the left. This is Furze Lane.



© Oscar Taylor – Geograph

4. **Furze Lane** presumably got its name from serving as the route from Farnborough, which lies ahead, to the higher ground like that around Heath Copse where scrubby plants grew. Gorse or 'furze' was cut from pre-enclosure common land like this and bundled into faggots to provide fuel, especially firing for ovens.

Continue along Furze Lane, with far-reaching downland views, to reach Upper Farm, Farnborough. Join the road, turning left, to pass in front of the Old Rectory with its lawn bounded on the roadside by a ha-ha. At the Church, take the path immediately left on the bend in the road.



5. The village of **Farnborough** is the highest in Berkshire. Its name means 'fern clad hills' in Old English and the records of the village date from 916 AD. More recently, it was home to the Poet Laureate John Betjeman who lived in the Old Rectory from 1945 to 1951. According to his wife, Penelope, the house had no water, no light and was falling down when they moved there.

6. The earliest parts of **Farnborough Church** date from the 11th Century with later additions and restoration. It is notable for the commemorative stained-glass window to John Betjeman designed by the famous artist, John Piper. The window shows a tree of life flanked by fish on one side and butterflies on the other, intended to symbolise the resurrection.

Follow the path from the church across two small fields, then left and right to



© Des Blenkinsopp – Geograph

join a bridleway. Turn right to rise uphill towards the corner of Wickslett Copse.

7. **Wickslett Copse** is a Local Wildlife Site noted for its importance as a corridor for wildlife, forming a key component of the ecological networks formed by the hedgerows, shelterbelts and woodlands of the area.

Follow the bridleway as it passes the copse and Wickslett North Row to reach the 5-way junction of paths. Turn right along the lane to return to Catmore.

Margery Slatter

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