

STROUD VALLEYS PROJECT

Enriching lives, transforming places



Our Winter 2020 Newsletter

Welcome to our Newsletter!



Photo Copyright: Deborah Roberts

Over recent months we have been making changes to the way we work. We have all been working hard to keep things going and I'm really pleased that we have been able to get our volunteer teams back and working outside – it's good to be back!

More people are realising nature on our doorsteps is important. Our volunteers create, restore and maintain so many of these outdoor spaces where we can exercise and spend time in nature which is good for our health and well-being. Take a look inside for updates on our current project work from our project officers.

We are starting our tree planting again this season. We were in a lovely article in the Financial Times in September about community tree planting - which included this photo. Gloucestershire Local Nature Partnership has just launched the Gloucestershire Tree Strategy and to achieve targets set for 2030 to combat climate change we need to plant 35 million trees in Gloucestershire and increase tree cover in Stroud district from 11% to 20%, so it's good that we have started planting!

We are looking for people who have land that they would like to plant with trees and we will be organising small groups of volunteer tree-planters - do get in touch if you have some suitable land or would like to join us planting trees.

At the time of writing our eco shop is closed and we are hoping to reopen in early December. Meanwhile some products from our eco shop are available from Stroudco, our local on-line ordering scheme. We can now take email or phone orders and we are setting up a Click and Collect system. Check our website, shop window and social media for up to date information.

Clare Mahdiyone, CEO

"Although lockdown has been a challenge for everyone I am delighted in the way the staff and volunteers have worked together to keep the charity going.

There are good news stories to report especially now people have realised how important their local green spaces are both as a refuge and breathing space both for people and wildlife.

It seems there is more and more research being published highlighting the benefits of working and exercising outside.

This means the work of Stroud Valleys Project is even more important for our local area."

Stella Parkes, Chair of Trustees

PROJECT NEWS

COVID-19 update

With the ever changing coronavirus rules, it has been quite a job to keep up with the latest regulations and guidelines and to work out how to apply these to Stroud Valleys Project and the eco shop. New Project Officer, Sharon, came on board in August to help us to do this.

Whilst keeping the well-being and health of all of our staff, volunteers and customers as a priority we managed to start welcoming customers back into our eco shop, with a new screen, a one-way system and sanitiser at the entrance, started our recycling scheme again (albeit with some changes to make it COVID safe), and changed our offices so that we can socially distance.



We also got our volunteer groups back up to strength, all whilst ensuring we adhere to the latest rules and guidance. Then we had to close the shop again BUT the volunteer groups are still operating!

As the rules will no doubt continue to change over the coming months, we will do everything we can to ensure that we can carry on with 'business as usual'; well, as 'usual' as we can be during these unusual times!

Prinknash Abbey walled garden

It's been an interesting and challenging year at the Prinknash Abbey walled garden. Our team of volunteers worked hard over the winter to get the plot ready for cultivation, with the expectation of providing veg for the cooks to turn into great meals in the café for visitors to enjoy.



The pandemic had other ideas, and with the lockdown in March we were suddenly confronted with a closed café, no visitors, and no volunteers – but lots of plants to plant and ground to cover!



Fortunately it was possible for Seb, the Project Officer to continue to keep things ticking over, thanks to the support of the Monastery Café. The work over the winter wasn't completely wasted, and much of the ground was utilised for growing. Harvests were shared between staff able to carry on working at the site, people living on the Prinknash estate and the monks themselves.

As lockdown restrictions were eased in the early summer, one volunteer could join me each week on a rota system, and individual volunteers popped in on other days to tend the crops. It also allowed the completion of fencing around one long bed, which has provided much-needed protection of crops from hungry rabbits and deer.

A year on from the last newsletter, we're now almost back to full numbers, with five volunteers able to join me on a Wednesday. The garden is looking great and we're supplying veg for the café to make a lovely daily soup as they gradually expand their offering to the visitors, of which there are good numbers again.

Most recently we took delivery of a huge pile of mushroom compost (courtesy of a donation from one of our wonderful volunteers), and spent a very soggy day moving it to the beds. As a result we can tuck all the beds in to rest over the winter. Hopefully next year will bring better fortune for all involved.



ECO SHOP NEWS



Find us at
8 Threadneedle
Street, Stroud, GL5 1AF

It has been an interesting year to say the least. When we opened our doors back in June (albeit limitedly) people were relieved there was somewhere they could come and get their refills once more, myself included. When we were able to open fully in October 2020, customers were enjoying the ability to have a browse and get to know our stock. For autumn, we have been promoting the sale of our volunteers' handmade bird boxes, so you can get them sited before spring. The birds will love having a nosey in these spacious abodes.



We've also been taken part in the Stroud Fiver Fest, which ended in October, with several £5 bargains to be found, making being green even more affordable. Our bamboo toothbrush and tooth tabs have been very popular, ensuring less plastic from toothbrushes and toothpaste tubes ends up in landfill and more happy smiley people with clean teeth.

Sadly the doors are now temporarily closed again but we are managing a call or email and collect service and will be open again as soon as the current lockdown is eased. In for Christmas, we will have lots of great gift ideas, including some amazing new puzzles with designs by Charley Harper.



Our Elephant Box selection has grown too, giving you the choice of various lunchboxes you can use for the rest of your life. As always, we have a stock of Christmas cards so once we're open you can come on down and stock up!

Keep an eye on our website, shop window or social media so you can be the first to know when we re-open.

PROJECT NEWS

A big 'thank you' to our Friends and Supporters

As many of you will know, our eco shop has made a big difference to our charity and so its closure during the lockdown also made a big difference.

We want to say a big thank you to our Friends and Supporters. Thank you for staying with us during these difficult times. It has made a tremendous difference to us. If you do find yourself with less income, do pick up the phone. We want to be Friends with you in all weathers, and we value your support. We could do monthly giving to spread the cost, or you could take a payment holiday and then we could ring you in 3 or 6 months. Just let us know what works best for you.

When we weren't there, our volunteers missed us terribly. We know they did because we called them all. Then we set about helping the ones that needed it most. We used our local networks to get people food parcels. We found people mobile phones and tablets so they could access help online. And we found reading material for people who used to use the libraries. So, this is just some of the things that your support helps us with.

Thank you.

Let us know of any changes

We would be grateful if you could let us know if your Gift Aid status has changed since first registering it with us.

Also, please do let us know if your address has changed in recent years; this is also important if you would like to us to send you our information via the postal system rather than by email.

Our Tree Project

We've always been keen to plant trees for wildlife, people and the climate as part of our projects, but since 2019 we have had a project specifically aimed at planting trees in Gloucestershire.



It aims to link trees to sites and people who'd like to plant them. So far we have planted in schools, public green spaces, farms, parks and gardens.

If you have a piece of land that you think would be perfect for trees or you'd like to come and plant some with us, please get in touch with Tamsin, our Tree Project Officer, at tamsin@stroudvalleysproject.org.

We offer advice and support as well as trees, planting workshops and people to plant them. We are now looking forward to a busy winter of tree planting.



Wild Shed

The Wild Shed group meets on a Thursday at the Beeches Day Centre in Cainscross. There are usually between six and eight volunteers. Between November and March we made bird boxes, cleaned the polytunnel from algae, made a bog garden, cleaned and sharpened tools and prepared hedgerow seeds for our fledgling tree nursery. We also planted two local variety apple trees (Ashmead's Kernel and John Standish) and trained them into espalier trees.

Once a month we tended an allotment plot in Bisley where we filled up raised beds with compost, weeded the plot, planted fruit bushes, heeled in small saplings and prepared the raised beds for further planting.



The Wild Shed Group with hedgerow plants they heeled in

January was one of our highlights, as we visited the Slimbridge Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust. As our funding did not quite stretch to having lunch in the café, we came prepared with our lunchboxes and flasks and were allowed to sit in the Peng Observatory watching geese and ducks while having our lunch. Some of the volunteers mentioned that without this trip they would not have been able to get there, as there is no public transport to get to Slimbridge from Stroud.

By the end of March we were in lockdown. This was a very new situation and with the project officer being furloughed, Tamsin took on looking after the plants we had started to grow and making regular contact with volunteers.



One of the volunteers, Rob Flight, also helped with the watering once a week as well as going to Bisley to make sure that the allotment was kept in good order.

The group started up again in September with new precautions for social distancing in place. We also have successfully applied to Bisley Parish Council who kindly provided us with funding to be able to get up to the Bisley allotment safely, so thank you so much Bisley Parish Council! We will be able to make further use of the allotment in Bisley and are hoping to grow lots of fruit and herbs for next summer.

The Wild Shed Group is funded by Thriving Communities, a fund from Gloucestershire County Council. Oh, by the way, the Thriving Communities funding also runs a website called 'Your Circle'. It is a directory to help you find your way around care and support, and connect with people, places and activities in Gloucestershire, where you can find lots of useful organisations and information. Try it at <https://www.yourcircle.org.uk/>.



Drought at Sarah's Field, Berkeley

The very hot periods in the spring and summer caused water-loss to the ponds on this site. This led to concern, particularly as the field was so well-used as an educational and recreational space during the lockdown period.



Many families were invested in the well-being of newts, nymphs and diving beetles. Eventually, in late July, success was achieved with a water pump.



Sarah's Field pond in October

But a long-term solution is now to be sought with the backing of the town council, to automatically pump ground-water into the ponds using an agricultural solar-powered pump.

In a way, by replacing the water that the modern drainage system is removing, we will be re-wetting the habitat - surely a good thing!



Diving beetle



Emperor dragonfly

Fungi and stones at Capel's Mill, Stroud

Quite a range of fungi has been found at this site this autumn. The woodchips which we bring and put around trees (as a mulch) seem to sprout all sorts of varieties, photographed here by our volunteer, Jean Chatelain.



Fungi found at Capel's Mill Oct20, by Jean Chatelain

Capel's Mill 'Climate Cairn'

Building commenced this summer, of a communal dry-stone structure, involving as many people as possible, who are invited to bring a stone, a rock, or a pebble!

It will form a dry-stone dome with cavities at the base for toads and newts to hide in with wildflowers over the top. Each stone represents a step towards saving the biosphere, e.g.:

- An effective climate agreement at the UN climate conference in November 2021;
- A district-wide 'carbon neutral by 2030' strategy;
- A national renewable energy supply;
- Carbon-zero housing;
- Peat restoration;
- Wildlife-friendly farming;



and many, many more steps that are essential.

The Climate Cairn aims to stimulate long-term planning to secure the future of life on the planet, through awareness of the Earth's great age, and understanding of its processes that sustain us. Both the geology and prehistory of our landscape are relevant. Our local limestone and clay rocks are from the Jurassic age, 200 million years old, and the Neolithic barrows on the Cotswold hills are a mere 5,000 years old!

Thinking with 'Deep Time' in mind will help make long-term species-saving decisions.

PROJECT NEWS

Wild Work

Our inter-generational team of volunteers, Wild Work, started back after the lockdown at the beginning of July. It was so lovely to see everyone again and was great to catch up! Since then it has been non-stop.

We have been back to all our old sites as well as starting off at some new. We have carried on with our work with Cainscross Parish Council at Queen Elizabeth II Field at Dudbridge managing the wildflower areas and pulling out some of the reeds, helping keep Rowcroft Medical Centre's grounds under control and looking after our trees at Arundel Mill Pond. We also helped plant the beds outside Five Valleys Shopping Centre and raked up grass to help maintain wildflower rich grassland at Bisley Road Cemetery. We're looking forward to helping with lots of tree planting this winter!



Raking at Bisley Road Cemetery

Every week is different and full of humour and companionship and it has been great to be back, despite the necessary changes due to social distancing.

Roll on 2021 when hopefully at some point we'll all be able to share tea and biscuits again!



Our Allotment

We have had a plot at Bisley Old Road allotment for the last eight years.

It was a forgotten plot with grass up to our knees and full of discarded bits and pieces. Although now it is by no means a model plot, it is very productive and full of bees, butterflies and crickets!

Although we couldn't take volunteer groups out during the lockdown, Tamsin, the Project Officer, was still able to go up and keep things going until everyone else could join her.



A rainbow of vegetables from the Stroud Valleys Project Allotment

The warm spring meant that lots of produce benefitted early on, although the wet summer set things back and we lost most of our tomatoes to blight.

However, despite it all, we still managed to have a great crop and we're now busy planting our autumn sown crops and already looking forward to next spring.

Keeping your information accurately.

We are currently ensuring we have your current details correctly recorded.

If you find any forms included with this mailing, please do complete any that are relevant to you and return them to us.

You can do this by getting the form back to our office at:

8 Threadneedle Street

or sending via email to:

info@stroudvalleysproject.org

Building Sensory Gardens with local communities

Our work at the Sensory Garden space at Stratford Park has continued at a steady pace with the group now only a few sessions away from completing the magnificent wooden seating in the amphitheatre area.

This piece of the sensory garden project has really tested all of us from the initial pencil drawings put together at the beginning of January 2020 with the first supporting posts of the seating installed in February before the first lockdown.



But since returning to work, the group has enjoyed and endured sun and rain to see the finishing line and complete the main seating area.

Along with general maintenance of the garden area flower-beds and borders we hope to start on the final phase of seating that will top the amphitheatre. We intend to build five low level long seats made from Cedar of Lebanon and oak - timber felled or windblown from the park.



The project's work at our outdoor base at the Beeches Day Care Centre, has continued with volunteers coming in on two shifts, with groups no bigger than six participants. The work, good humour and well-being that everyone on the Tuesday group is encouraged to be involved in really gets to the heart of what our work is all about.

The teams have been involved in several new projects on-site with a new design and build of Little Owl boxes, building a large raised bed to be used as a nursery and temporary home for hedgerow species, propagating Devil's-bit scabious (thanks Sara G) for a Butterfly Conservation Trust project in the Stroud District and up-cycling garden tools donated to us via the eco shop.

Photos by Jon Haughton



Kingswood Newt ponds and greenspaces

Since returning to the newt ponds at Kingswood at the end of August, the group have embarked on the biggest hedge laying project to date at this site.

The section of hedgerow - now 12 to 15 years old - planted as part of the Great Crested Newt mitigation, has in the past been cut by a tractor-driven hedge cutter.

As a result of this the hedge has grown with multi stems at chest height making the work/art of laying the hedge a slow but still positive experience for us all to enjoy.

We hope to finish this hedgerow project by New Year all being well.

Photo by David Richards



I'd like to say a big Thank You to all the volunteers (Julie, Ian, Rob, Jon, Dave and Dan) who have all still attended the Monday sessions through these different times. I would also like to thank the parish council for their continued support of the project.

It has been quite apparent through conversations with people in the local community that they have really valued the green spaces on their doorsteps, and this has been highlighted to them through the lockdowns.



Hedgerow planting with Slimbridge Parish Council

Over the past few Fridays we have been working with Slimbridge Parish Council to plant up a new hedgerow on top of a newly created earth mound (known as a 'bund') around the boundary of a new car park built by the parish council.

The hedgerow planting was made easier by the number of both the parish council's and our own volunteers who attended the two planting sessions.

In total 540 plants!



Photo by David Richards

Thanks to all the people who attended, yes, 540 hedgerow plants were dug-in on top of the car park boundary - six different types of hedgerow species that included Dogwood, Hazel, Spindle Berry and Hawthorn.

In time this hedgerow will offer shelter, diversity and habitat for a wide selection of wildlife to enjoy.

Slimbridge Parish Council

THIS NEWSLETTER is a team effort by all our staff plus volunteers John Ockham and Stephen Gillingham who have designed and proof-read it.

Thanks to everyone!

*Produced using
renewable energy & recycled paper.*

A Long Journey

Don's family moved around a lot when he was young and as a result, every school he went to put him back to the start in maths. Although he had a GCSE in maths, he wanted to do a level 2 maths qualification at Stroud College to fill in the gaps in his knowledge and gain some confidence.

Don is a keen gymnast, and his passion is training and exercise. He decided to do a level 2 in Gym Instruction. Don really enjoys doing gymnastics. He says it helps him to stay focussed and determined in his life and it makes him feel good and happy.

The nearest course was at the WISE campus in Bristol; this meant a four-hour journey to Bristol Parkway and back and then a bike ride to Stonehouse in the dark. He didn't know anyone on the course but fortunately they were all very friendly in Bristol. It was hard going back to college after not being in education for a long time, and there were times halfway through when he worried that he wouldn't pass.

Then coronavirus happened. At first the course continued to run so Don had to travel on public transport during the pandemic. He was very anxious about using public transport but armed with hand sanitiser and a face mask, off he went.

We are pleased to say that Don passed his course. He loves doing body weight training.

Don says that working in the gym helps him to stay well and improves his mental and physical health. As he says, if you are going to exercise your body you need to become comfortable with the uncomfortable, and workout smartly; a balanced diet also helps in order to sustain your energy levels. Working out keeps him healthy in many ways.

His time with GEM has come to an end now, but he is working hard to get a job so he can resume his gym membership. He would love to be an instructor in the fitness world.

Don said, 'My GEM journey has been really successful. I felt listened to and valued as a person. I was given really good support and it has been a very eye opening, inspiring journey.'

Obtaining an instructor qualification has given me a real sense of achievement'.

