Programme A

A1 – Ground Disturbance

This project has been developing well at a local level and a third coordination meeting has been held this quarter. The team discussed progress so far and also strategies for baseline and long term surveying. The team has begun to plan for the production of a final technical report and land manager guidance document that will be produced, including how to incorporate experience gained from past works as well as current projects.

The Weeting Heath site contract specification has been finalised for plant survey work to begin on the site in April-May 2015 before any ground work commences. There have also been discussions with an invertebrate specialist to survey using pitfall traps across the site, in addition to the vegetation surveys, which will increase the overall knowledge of taxonomic groups. It is felt that the areas of disturbed ground may be more important for invertebrates in the early years of disturbance than any other group.

Progress on the Brecks Heath Partnership sites was pending the archaeological surveys which have now all been completed and a report produced. Following this report a detailed plan of the ground disturbance works has been completed and submitted to Natural England for consent. Planning for the pre-work plant survey work is also underway.

The historic environment assessments for the Norfolk sites have been completed and a final report has been produced. The historic environment assessments for sites in Suffolk are almost complete; one report has been prepared and a second and final report is due to be finished shortly. Work has also commenced on the brief for work to be carried out by an archaeological contracting company.

The Forestry Commission site at Santon Street has been actively clearing scrub and stripping turf by hand with the help of 19 volunteers at three work party days. The Forestry Commission has also completed 22 hours of diking to create bare ground at several locations. The volunteer work party days also incorporated training on health and safety, tool use, working methodology, bare ground ecology and conservation background relevance to The Brecks.

A2 – Conserving the Brecks Wildlife Sites

Work has continued on writing management plans for existing County Wildlife Sites (CWS), using information from CWS surveys and CWS condition assessments, including plans for 6 CWS in Norfolk. In order to maximise the effectiveness of plans this has necessitated liaison with landowners and managers so that effective and realistic management options can be considered for the sites. The process of engaging with landowners has taken longer than anticipated and some of this work has been moved to future quarters.

Further meetings have been held with BNG staff, Suffolk Wildlife Trust and Suffolk County Council Ecologist, to discuss writing of management plans, along with discussion on which CWS within
Norfolk and Suffolk may be suitable for management work that is scheduled to take place, later in 2015 and in 2016.

A3 – Pingo Project

Management work has continued at Thompson Common to clear scrub and trees at the northern site. A group of five volunteers from Aviva were once again working hard to complete this work and stack any winched trees for drying and burning after the breeding bird season.

Two major pingos in the north and several in the south have also been cleared of *Typha sp.*, (Bulrush), using an excavator fitted with a weed basket. The excavator worked from mats to minimise ground damage. Debris was stacked up and will be removed later in the summer when ground conditions permit. Water levels were reduced in the larger pingo by pumping to help facilitate the removal of all the *Typha sp.* by machine. The remaining small areas of *Typha sp.* will be removed by volunteers using a purpose built fabricated rake.

In addition to the site management another significant achievement of the project this quarter has been the completion of a detailed Reintroduction Plan for the pool frog. This incorporates all of the necessary steps from project initiation to completion. Includes plans for: assessment of impacts of reintroduction on existing interests at the site; habitat restoration and management; legal and procedural steps; communications; practical translocation work; and monitoring. The Pool Frog Expert Group has been instrumental to the development of this document. The members are all volunteers and include scientists, students and amphibian experts.
Discussions with Natural England (NE) are ongoing to assist with the regulatory issues of re-introduction and to obtain the necessary licences to carry out the proposal. There is a small chance that the NE licensing process may take longer than anticipated to complete, which could delay the reintroduction plans, potentially meaning that the first release happens later than intended this year or possibly delayed until 2016. There is also a chance that additional disease risk assessment work may be required by NE.

Survey work began in March at the re-introduction area of Thompson Common to establish a baseline for common frog, common toad, smooth newt and great crested newt.

**A4 – Pine Lines and Pine Connections**

This quarter saw the launch of the new leaflet “Pine Lines in The Brecks – Creation and Management” for which a press release was issued to mark the event. The leaflet has made contacting the farmers and landowners easier to try to engage them in the project to restore and re-create the pine lines.

The first commitment to the project has come from the Euston Estate where a proposal to restore/establish 1350m of pine lines has been agreed. The Elveden Estate is also drawing up a proposal for a similar scale of work. These two estates are the main private landowners within the Breaking New Ground project area and beyond, and are instrumental in creating a legacy of partnership working with other private landowners in the area.

The pine trees themselves have been ordered from Barcham Trees for use from next winter. Barcham Trees are supporting the project with a significant discount and have given a considerable amount of advice and expertise throughout the process.

Twitter activity has increased this quarter and has proved to be a valuable tool in engaging with farmers. The website has also been improved to include a designated project page and twitter feed. A volunteer has been supporting the Breaking New Ground project during this quarter has spent a significant amount of time contacting landowners and working to produce maps.

Webpage for the project: [http://www.norfolkfwag.co.uk/pine-lines-and-pine-connections/](http://www.norfolkfwag.co.uk/pine-lines-and-pine-connections/)
A5 Brandon Engine House Restoration
A lease agreement has been successfully negotiated between the Forestry Commission as owners and Suffolk County Council which will be managing the building as part of Brandon Country Park. Archaeological contractors have been engaged to undertake Heritage Building Recording and planning application will be submitted in early May.

As part of the skills training element a design competition was set up for Students from West Suffolk College who submitted and pitched ideas for the link building to a panel of experts. The competition provided a ‘real-life’ opportunity for learning and gaining practical experience for 10 students. Feedback from the College and students was extremely positive.

A6 – Breaking New Ground Grant Fund

The closing date for the next round of Grant Applications is 31st March 2015. A Grant Committee meeting is planned in the next quarter (22nd April), to discuss applications and award the next round of funding.

A6. 01 – Sandlines

The Sandlines project has been busy developing the project this quarter in preparation for delivery of the creative writing workshops in the spring and summer of 2015. Dates have all been set and promotional material produced. There has been promotion through a leaflet, social media, press releases, BNG website and through contacts with writing groups. The locations for the workshops are distributed across the BNG area and are in rooms available through project partner contacts:

- **Forests and Flints** - Santon Downham - 22nd April
- **Bringing the Spring - Birds & Migration** - BTO Reserve, Thetford - 18th May
- **Ancient Communities and Rivers** - West Stow Anglo Saxon Village - 13th June
- **Heaths, Warrens, Gardens** - Brandon Country Park - 15th July

Join writers Melinda Appleby and Lois Williams for an inspiring day of poetry and nature writing.

Sandlines workshops are friendly, inspiring places in which to develop your writing. Small groups mean you’ll have plenty of time to try out new ideas, with supportive feedback. You don’t need previous creative writing experience to join us.

Workshops themed around one of four fascinating Brecks sites:
- **Forests and Flints** - Santon Downham - 22nd April
- **Bringing the Spring - Birds & Migration** - BTO Reserve, Thetford - 18th May
- **Ancient Communities and Rivers** - West Stow Anglo Saxon Village - 13th June
- **Heaths, Warrens, Gardens** - Brandon Country Park - 15th July

Thanks to lottery funding tickets are just £5 per workshop, per person. Each workshop is limited to 10 participants, so booking is essential. For more information visit [www.breakingnewground.org.uk](http://www.breakingnewground.org.uk) or phone 01442 864543.
A6. 02 - Landscape Patterns

This project has been actively planning during this quarter for the delivery of a number of workshops engaging different community groups with landscape art. The project has been introduced to a number of community groups including Keystone Development Trust, West Stow Anglo Saxon Village, Suffolk Mind, West Suffolk Hospital and Julian Support (mental health), to engage the members of the community living with mental health conditions. Ten social workers have also been contacted as well as three occupational therapists all willing to promote the walks to patients and colleagues. Another element of the project is to engage with families and the general public through artist led walks at Brandon Country Park These are being booked and delivered as part of the Suffolk Walking Festival in May 2015. A number of schools have been given leaflets to promote this to families and the events are listed in the full walking festival programme and on the website: www.suffolkwalkingfestival.co.uk

Groups and dates have been set for the following workshops to be delivered:

2x ‘Riverwalk’ special needs workshops
2x primary school workshops
2x walking festival events
2x general public events
TBC:
2 x mental health artist led workshops

B1 – People’s history of Thetford Forest & B2 – Enchanted Forest

There is no activity due on these projects for this quarter.

B3 – Family Fun

The first of the Family Fun events was held at Brandon Country Park on 20th February 2015 in half term. The event was aimed at ‘hard to reach’ families who may not visit outdoor spaces and families were approached through the children’s centre in Brandon.

The event was split into mini workshops and attendees got the opportunity to try fire lighting around a controlled fire, toasting marshmallows and bread over the open fire, woodland arts and crafts, den building and bird box building. The workshops were led by West Suffolk rangers and by the company Wild4. A total of 16 families, (19 adults and 29 young people) attended the event which included a lunch at the visitor centre café. Most of the children ranged between the ages of 2-7 years old, with 3 under 2’s and 2 over 10’s. All were fully engaged with the activities which catered well for the age range of participants.
The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, some of the quotes from the feedback forms were:

“It was amazing my little girl loved it”

“Please arrange some more”

“I never knew this place existed so I will be back”

“Staff were very kind, knowledgeable and helpful, would love another day like this great for kids and adults”

A risk has been identified for this project which is meeting the target numbers for the events. There is a balance between narrow advertising to reach ‘hard to reach families’ and getting the numbers required for the sessions. A meeting has been planned to discuss the potential risks and how the District Council’s marketing department may offer support on this.

B4 – Wildlife Recorders of Tomorrow

Work continues on the development of this project. A Brecks specific species guide and protocols are being written for monitoring techniques and volunteers are being recruited to carry out the survey work. A series of training workshops are also being developed with experts in various taxa being booked to deliver them. This project is also looking at ways to tie into other projects, particularly those working with the schools to promote recording on a basic level by children.
C1 – Brecks Forest Way

This project has been working hard on the planning and development phase and has been engaging heavily with landowners and town and Parish Councils. The route for the Thetford to Brandon footpath and 5 associated circular walks have been scoped and mapped for circulation to relevant parties. The signage is currently being developed for these routes which will include distance/destination at access points and signage from the centre of Thetford. Consultation meetings have been carried out with local Parishes and stakeholders to discuss the proposals in further detail.

New links have been established with the Environment Agency in relation to a joined up approach to the Thetford to Brandon Route which is due to have EA river restoration works carried out by the on the section between Santon Downham and Brandon. The river restoration work will commence in late September or October and the bridleway improvements will now follow this. It has been agreed by all parties that access improvement along this stretch, i.e. tree removal and re-surfacing, will be subject to a co-ordinated approach and planned for the autumn (September/October) after the bird nesting season. Path closure will be sought from the Highway Authority for a period of time to allow for works.

The re-surfacing works will include replacing steps with a ramp to British Horse Society (BHS) standard, tree removal, building up the surface at certain low points to resolve flooding issues and replacing the existing bridge at Brandon with a structure to BHS standard. Further east at Croxton Staunch, works are proposed to install a section of boardwalk either side of the existing bridge. This will also improve the surface by alleviating flooding issues. Norfolk County Council Bridges Section has carried out an assessment of Croxton Staunch footbridge, detailing costs for remedial works.

Quotes for surfacing and replacement of steps have been requested from 5 contractors. The contract is due to be awarded. Landowners have been consulted and agreement obtained and all Habitat Assessment Regulations have been undertaken.

C2 – Brecks Earth Heritage

There is no activity due on this project for this quarter.

C3 – Brecks Rides

This project has been concerned with the planning and development stage during this quarter with the 20 mile linear route being scoped and additional circular loops are now being investigated. Habitat Regs. Assessments are being undertaken by the Suffolk County Council Ecologist and meetings with the Forestry Commission, Elveden Estate, West Stow Country Park and Wideham Farm have been held to discuss the proposed route and the wider project with them. Quotes are also being sought for the design and production of the way markers to be used along the route.
During this quarter the project has been active placing nest cameras on Goshawk nests by the Forestry Commission in Thetford Forest. Hobby nest activity video footage has been also been secured from the trial nest camera set on a Hobby nest site in 2015. This footage is now displayed at High Lodge Visitor Centre alongside an interpretation panel for the project. The nests have been located by three skilled volunteers who have contributed significant time to the project. A professional tree climber has also given in-kind time to place the cameras on the nests. Unfortunately the placement of the camera on a Goshawk nest, known to have been used last year, has not been returned to so re-deployment of the camera to the now used site will have to wait until May. Work is also ongoing to locate other nests including woodlark, nightjar and tree pipit.

Equipment is currently being installed at the Weeting Heath Norfolk Wildlife Trust site to go onto a stone curlew nest. This equipment will also record in the dark to provide footage of previously unmonitored hours and will provide valuable information for predator management.

The RSPB have been busy designing and producing interpretation for the project. The roaming display is in draft format as well as the display panels to be installed at Weeting Heath visitor centre. A project leaflet is also being developed to go alongside the display panels and to be given out at events. A number of events have also been delivered by the RSPB this quarter. Stands were present during the whole of February half term offering nest box building, nature trail worksheets, crafts and bird ringing demonstrations engaging with 220 adults and 190 children. A stargazing event was also held on 20th March to coincide with excitement of the solar eclipse. The next year of events have been booked into the calendar with planning now underway for the official launch event for the project on 25th May 2015.

Publicity for the project has been very active this quarter including an interview on Radio Suffolk, a large article in the EADT, a feature in ‘Nature’s Home (RSPB magazine), ongoing social media exposure and pitches to Countryfile and Springwatch. Talks have also been given to Brandon Town Council and Brandon Photography Club.

Volunteer interest is still very keen with five new volunteers being signed up this quarter. A total of ten volunteers helped with the preparation and delivery of the events.
This quarter has seen the addition of a new partner to the project – The British Trust for Ornithology (BTO). They will be a great asset to the already strong partnership for this project adding guidance and practical assistance to the delivery.

C5 – Brecks Heritage Trail

There is no activity due on this project for this quarter.

C6 – Lidar

The LiDAR flight has been completed this quarter and the data is now starting to be processed. Contractors should have this available by the summer of 2015 to feed into other projects awaiting the information such as ‘Flint in the Brecks’.

C7 – Brecks Digital Access

The BNG Website continues to be developed and grow. All active projects have dedicated pages and all relevant project information is available on-line. Further briefs for specific interpretative Apps are in development. An on-line booking and payment system is under development as an in-kind contribution by SCC to help manage the booking process for BNG events, activities and workshops etc.

C8 – Brecks from Above

Preparatory work has been ongoing for this project including liaison with partners and starting to set dates for outreach events to be held in 2015 and 2016.

C9 – Connecting the Landscape with its Archives

Preparatory work has started for the first of two year-long Breaking New Ground exhibitions to be held at Ancient House Museum, Thetford. Planning meetings have been held with designers and partners and volunteers have started assessing collections in preparation of a display object list. This first exhibition will be all about Flint, aptly named ‘Flint Rocks: Everything you wanted to find out about flint but were afraid to ask’, and will run from 21st November 2015 to 29th October 2016. The opening event will be held on the afternoon of Friday 20th November 2015. Contact has been made with Anne Mason of the Brecks Society to connect this exhibition with the work of the ‘Flint in the Brecks’ project. An object loan request has also been agreed to for a flint necklace from Moyses Hall Museum, Bury St Edmunds.

An unusual aspect of the exhibition plans is to include a few exhibits of prehistoric Japanese obsidian from ‘museum twin’ the museum of obsidian in Nagawa machi, Japan. This connection is building and the people of Nagawa are planning to ship over 200kg of Brecks flint to build into a new civic building in the town, due to open in the autumn of 2015.
Three sessions have been held with the Museum’s after-school Teenage History Club including demonstration of flint knapping, use of gunflints with a replica flintlock musket, and drawing flints using wax resist technique.

Two regular museum volunteers have been working on object research and catalogue enhancement. One of these, a local artist, also delivered the flint drawing workshop for the workshop with teenagers.

C10 – Journal of Brecks Studies, C11 – Beastly Brecks, C12 – Upon This Rock

There is no activity due on these projects for this quarter.

C13 – Brecks Vernacular Materials and Craft Skills

This project has now been taken on by West Stow Anglo Saxon Village as the delivery partner after the withdrawal of the original delivery partner Jack Rolfe. The event will be delivered on the Easter Weekend (5th & 6th April 2015). The heritage skills craftspeople has all been contacted and signed up for the event, including Orchard Barn, a local willow weaver, a thatcher and a blacksmith. The bookings for the event are being advertised and administered through the West Suffolk Diary which has a large local following. The BNG team will also be promoting the event through social media and the main website.

C14 – Flint in the Brecks

There was an opportunity for the Flint in the Brecks project to involve a group of special needs students from Eastern and Otley College in the creation of a short footpath to enable walkers to view some newly discovered flint mines within Thetford forest. So on the 2nd March 16 budding volunteers, with 5 members of staff, made their way to Elms Plantation to tackle the task in hand.

Project lead Anne Mason gave the group and introduction to the site and the work being done by the Breckland Society to discover the old Flint mines in the area. The day was also supervised by Tom Hyde from the Forestry Commission and Dan King from Brandon Country Park to ensure safe tool use and manual handling safety. Some interpretation will be put up on the main ride so people will be able to find out more about the fascinating history of the Brecks flint and they will then be able to follow the new footpath in for a closer look. A few keen eyes found some bits of flint as they were working which they eagerly showed to Anne.

After the morning work party it was back to Brandon Country Park (BCP) for a well-earned lunch break followed by a guided walk around the site by Dan King as a thanks for all the effort put into the morning session.

This was additional output for the project and included a group with a keen interest in getting out into the Brecks. It is hoped they will be engaged with other projects as opportunities arise.
This quarter has seen the launch of the Brecks Warrens and Lodges project with the delivery of two training sessions by project officer Anne Mason of the Breckland Society. The first of these was held at Oak Lodge at High Lodge on 22 November 2014 and was a field work session to train volunteers how to measure and recognise warren banks in the landscape. The day included talks and practical sessions led by the Forestry Commission archaeologist and staff from the Norfolk Historic Service. This session was attended by 25 participants who have committed to researching 14 warren sites in the area.

A visit to the Norfolk Record Office (NRO) took place on 16 January 2015 where volunteers learnt how to access records and view warrenning maps and other supporting documents. This session was attended by 15 participants. The NRO Education Officer showed participants how to access and use the NROCT online catalogue and how to access and handle documents in the ‘Searchroom’. A tour of the storage and required storage environment was also given as well as a look in the conservation department at medieval documents.

A lack of hard frosts and snow over the winter of 2014-2015 has made it more difficult for volunteers to see outline of banks as the vegetation did not die back as much as expected. However, volunteers have persevered and a significant number of new sites are being surveyed and details collated. The project timeline has been extended to enable the incorporation of results from the LiDAR flight which it is hoped will uncover some previously unknown Warren Banks within the forested parts of the BNG scheme area.

There is no activity due on these projects for this quarter.
C18 – Creatively Interpreting the Brecks

There have been two exhibitions during this quarter to showcase the artwork produced in the botanical art workshops. These were not part of the original project plan but the result of local interest and new opportunities. The first was held at Brandon country Park followed by another at West Stow Anglo Saxon Village. These exhibitions have been very well received and have generated a lot of interest in the workshops being held in 2015 which are all now fully booked with healthy waiting lists.

C19 – Landscape Revolution

There is no activity due on this project for this quarter.

D1 – Discovering the Archaeological Landscape of the Brecks Training Programme

This quarter saw the delivery of three workshops entitled ‘Revealing Records: Discovering the Archaeological Records of the Brecks’. The initial session was held in Norfolk at the Norfolk Historic Environment office at Gressenhall in January. Interest in the course was so high, being over-subscribed for the day that a repeat session was held in March. A parallel session concerning Suffolk’s records was held at West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village in February, the larger venue meant that it was possible to accommodate all of the interested participants in one session. All three sessions have resulted in considerable follow-up interest from the participants, many of whom have begun to provide additional information about archaeological sites and monuments with which they are familiar. Several photographs and stories previously unknown to the Norfolk and Suffolk Historic Environment Records have been forthcoming.

Preparations continue for the next round of workshops, which are to be on the subject of historic building recording and analysis.

Participation and promotion in this quarter centred on publicising the Revealing Records workshops via mailing lists, social media, local media appearances and press releases. This was especially
relevant to the second of the Norfolk sessions, which was run at relatively short notice and needed to be publicised quickly in order to fill it.

A short project newsletter was produced and circulated electronically and a write-up of the first Norfolk session by one of the attendees was featured in the February BNG newsletter and on the BNG website.

The two Norfolk sessions took the form of a PowerPoint presentation by Heather Hamilton on the subject of the Norfolk Historic Environment Record, complemented by a handbook giving further details. This was then followed by a look at the extensive secondary files held by the Norfolk HER. Claire Bradshaw then delivered a presentation about the Norfolk Air Photo Library, and the session finished with a demonstration of how to access the Norfolk Historic Environment Record online via the Norfolk Heritage Explorer website. The first session was attended by 18 participants and the second by 9.

The Suffolk session took the form of three PowerPoint presentations delivered by Richard Hoggett. The first concerned Suffolk’s archaeological records and the archaeology of the Brecks in particular, and was followed by presentation on the holdings of the Suffolk Records Office which had been prepared by archivist Victoria Goodwin for delivery by Richard Hoggett. This latter session was supported by a series of parish packs for the BNG parishes specifically prepared for the day by the Bury Record Office. The final session of the day concerned how to access the Suffolk Historic Environment Record online via the Suffolk Heritage Explorer website. This session was attended by 26 participants.

All three sessions have resulted in considerable follow-up interest from the participants, many of whom have begun to provide additional information about archaeological sites and monuments with which they are familiar. Several photographs and stories previously unknown to the Norfolk and Suffolk Historic Environment Records have been forthcoming.

We will continue to review the capacity for delivery within the Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service due to staff changes but full priority will continue to be given to the BNG projects.

D2 – Caring for the Built Heritage of the Brecks

Orchard Barn Environmental Education, (OBee) CIC, has successfully planned and delivered a further two day schools during this quarter hosted by West Stow Anglo Saxon Village. Both of the day schools, ‘Batten Down’ and ‘Wattle be the Future’ were fully booked with 53 places on each. Great progress has been made on the noticeboard/seat and the sixth and final day school, ‘From the
Ground Up’ has been fully booked for weeks and will see the completion of the structure in the next quarter.

‘Batten Down’ took place on 10th January 2015. There were 53 people booked for the day school and 39 attended, the weather had probably put some people off on the day. This day school was all about the history of coppicing and the use of woodland material in construction. Demonstrations were given for shingle and batten making, dressing and fitting with lots of opportunity to have a go. There was a wide range of traditional green wood working tools available to try out – froes, draw knives, side axes and shave horses. A quantity of battens and shingles were made and some fitted to the round wood rafters on the sign structure. To conclude the day Sarah Partridge (O Bee) gave a presentation about Green wood roof projects. Most of the attendees indicated a general interest in heritage buildings/ traditional skills. In addition five participants are professionally involved in building restoration/conservation with a further two being owner/occupier/manager of a listed building.

Feedback from the day was overwhelmingly positive with high praise given to the tutors for their knowledge of the subject matter. The highlight for most of the participants was the chance to have a go and contribute to the structure of the sign board and many intend to take the skills away to develop projects at home such as the renovation of a woodshed and the repair of a summer house. A few quotes from the participants:

‘Excellent as usual – thanks’
‘Great day - please try to get funding for more day schools’
‘A thoroughly enjoyable day, interesting & knowledgeable teachers and helpers. Thank you very much’
The second day school for this quarter took place on 14th March 2015, ‘Wattle be the Future’. Again the workshop was fully booked at 53 but 40 attended on the day. This day school was about the historical use of earth as a building material and looking at its contemporary uses. There was the opportunity to fit hazel wattle and to tread local clay to make both daub and clay lump blocks. A practical introduction to applying the daub was greatly enjoyed as was making and using clay render. There was also a guided tour of various local aggregates that have been used in construction. Participants were invited to ‘test’ the strength of the clay and make an assessment of the proportions of the various sub soils. The day was concluded by a presentation by Sarah Partridge about various uses that earth had been applied to in the renovation of Orchard Barn.

Participants gave an impressive list of some of the projects they may use their newly learnt skills on including: Chicken coop construction, clay lump house renovation, eco-pod housing, pizza oven, sustainable living project in Portugal and heritage building projects with children. The feedback from participants was again very positive with high praise for Mike McConnell’s presentation. In addition 88% of the participants said the day enhanced their knowledge of the Brecks by learning about soils types and local geology as well as thinking about local resources. Some quotes from the day:

‘I found it so inspiring, thank you for sharing these skills, really impressed by the stress you placed on empowering everyone to take part’

‘One of the best workshops in the series, really enjoyed it’

‘I came from Worthing for this course. I am now on a mission to get Sussex (Weald & Downland) to make this kind of knowledge more accessible and cheaper!’

Sarah Partridge from Orchard Barn came to deliver a presentation to the BNG board in February to give the board members an idea of the success of the project. The board were very impressed with the interest the public have shown in these workshops and also the level of commitment to the delivery by Orchard Barn. There has been a considerable amount of in-kind and volunteer time given to the project over the delivery period of the project. Another development of the project has been the desire for participants to stay in touch with each other and potentially help with ongoing personal projects. Orchard Barn and BNG will be working on how to facilitate this to provide a lasting legacy for this very successful project.

Three Orchard Barn volunteers supported participants on the Batten Down day school by helping with the practical aspects of the day. They also helped prepare the materials need for the day and clearing up at the end, unloading etc. In between the 2 day schools six participants from the day
schools volunteered to progress the shingle making and spent an extra day at West Stow working with Orchard Barn volunteers cleaving and dressing shingles. There was a lovely sense of camaraderie as volunteers worked together with this common goal. Skills developed alongside friendships. A further three OBee Volunteers helped with Wattle be the Future supporting the learning of the participants and the general running of the day.

The noticeboard will need a small amount of seasonal maintenance which has been taken on by several of the participants who are also ‘Friends of West Stow’. They now have the skills and confidence to enable them to undertake the maintenance into the future.

D3 – Heritage Skills Work Placements

Partners have been approached to submit an expression of interest to take work placements. BCP, RSPB and NBIS are particularly keen to take on work placements starting in the summer of 2015.

D4 – Geological Landscapes – the Brecks for Land Managers

There is no activity due on this project for this quarter.

D5 – Communicating the Ice Age of the Brecks

This project has been planning the delivery of the day school due to take place in the next quarter. Bookings are being taken and places have been filling up well.

D6 – Breaking New Ground in the School Ground

The focus for this project during this quarter has been to establish formal agreements and run information events at all five schools to officially launch ‘Breaking New Ground in the School Ground’. There has also been a lot of work around preparation of materials for the different elements of delivery and a twilight session for all school staff involved in the project has also taken place.

Four schools have been officially recruited; IES Breckland, Barnham Primary School, Drake Nursery and Infant School and Bishop’s Primary School. Information events with children, staff and parents have been held at all schools and one tree celebration event has been held at Bishop’s Primary. All events were very successful with many parents also signing up to get involved bringing a real community feel to the project.

Unfortunately a fifth school had to pull out of the project last minute due to circumstances beyond their control. There is keen interest from another school in the project area and there is every confidence the five school commitment will be delivered.
The information events at the school included an assembly to introduce the project to the pupils and parents and also put the programme in the context of the wider Brecks landscape. A tree dressing ceremony event was held at Bishop’s Primary where the children made tree decorations and planted a pine tree in the school grounds to launch the project. This ceremony will take place in the other four schools during the next quarter.

The first twilight event for school staff involved in the project was held at Forestry Commission’s conference room Oak Lodge, Thetford Forest. Two members of staff from three schools attended the seed propagation session along with the CEO of Greenlight Trust and two members from the BNG team. The session involved hands on practice of sowing Scots Pine and the opportunity to discuss the build of the tree nurseries, which is the next phase of the project. Each school were given a folder with relevant project paperwork, which will be kept at the schools and added to as the project evolves.

D7 – Brecks Uncovered

This quarter Norfolk Wildlife Trust delivered the fifth and final session to the pupils of Redcastle Family School, including a twilight session for teaching staff. The morning assembly engaged with every child in the school (219) before individual sessions were run for each class in years 1-4. The twilight session was delivered to five teaching staff to encourage the use of the outdoor Brecks environment to cover aspects of their curriculum and discuss Year 2 and 3 of the project. Teachers have benefited from these training events with positive, verbal feedback. Teachers have gained a greater understanding of the ‘Brecks Uncovered’ and further learning opportunities. A Volunteer Education Officer assisted the Education Officer in the delivery and preparation of this final delivery session.

Suffolk Wildlife Trust also delivered successful sessions to four schools this quarter; Drake Infants, St Christopher’s, Elveden and Forest Academy. The twilight sessions will be delivered collaboratively with all of the schools but has been postponed to the next quarter to fit in with schedules. Again the whole school has been involved in the assembly, with role play, to learn about the Brecks and the species that make it so special. Then there were sessions for individual classes, who will be involved in the project across the three years, discovering more about the flora, fauna as well as sights, smells and sounds of the Brecks. 600 children primary school children (reception, Key stage 1 and Key stage 2) were involved in the assemblies, 248 of these children then took part in hands on workshops in their School grounds. Four volunteers have also assisted with the delivery and preparation of these sessions.
D8 – Barnham Cross Common: Skills for the Future

The planning is ongoing for this project. SWT are making contact with schools with easy access to Barnham Cross Common to deliver the educational workshops. The dates for the Photographic workshops are all in place and bookings are coming in fast, the first workshop being fully booked. Project B4 (Wildlife Recorders of Tomorrow) is expected to tie in with these workshops and attend with experts in order to promote photography as an aid to monitoring and identifying of wildlife. The family events are also in place, one of which will be a drop in session so bookings will not be taken.

Conclusion

Despite some delays in project development and issues relating to delivery partner staffing and capacity, the general feeling within the scheme is that BNG has now really taken off. The winter has enabled a considerable amount of on-the-ground work to take place and events to be planned and promoted for delivery in the spring.

The Project newsletter has proved to be a great success in keeping participants informed of project progress as well as a vehicle for promoting events and activities to local communities. This promotion activity has been further enhanced by the continued interest from local newspapers and radio who are continuing to run articles on Breaking New Ground and the various project. The BNG team is now also writing a regular column in the Environment section of the East Anglian Daily Times.

The BNG Project Officer, Rebekah O’Driscoll, will be going on Maternity leave in early May and the BNG team will need to re-adjust to this diminishment in staffing and seek to fill the post as soon as possible. This presents an opportunity for the team to re-asses staffing budgets and delivery roles and responsibilities to further improve the team’s ability to maximise administrative effectiveness and our ability to develop new opportunities coming to light as the scheme progresses.