

Barnes in Common

SUMMER 2026

Newsletter for the
Barnes Common Friends

- 
- **Fighting Water Pollution**
 - **Spotting Species Sharpens the Mind**
 - **Nest Boxes for Local Swifts**
 - **Nature Books for All Ages**
 - **Year-Round Harvest for the Barnes Food Bank**
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DEAR FRIENDS,

This year is shaping up to be one of the busiest ever for us – as I write, the full planning application for the Vine Road Project has been submitted, after more than eight years gestation! This community led project seeks to make as much use as possible of the park, for recreation, exercise and support for sports, community growing, lifelong outdoor learning and research/citizen science as well as social hub and climate refuge, with a real focus on biodiversity, climate resilience, reduced carbon and water use.

If that were not exciting enough, Community BlueScapes is in the final year of its funding. I am personally delighted to see how the new channel at the Green is already coming along (there are still a few ‘snagging items’ we are sorting out). The new reedbeds are looking gorgeous with the Yellow Flag Iris and Purple Loosestrife in bloom.



Great Spotted Woodpecker. Photo by Andrew Wilson

We are pushing to complete projects to enhance flood resilience at Barn Elms South Side, Queen’s Ride, Vine Road and Leg o’ Mutton, including street schemes to follow the award-winning scheme at Kitson Road, retro-fitting SuDS schemes for schools, housing estates and elsewhere, working with communities to make them more flood resilient and the educational work we have been doing with local schools and teachers.

Our Nature Conservation team continues at the heart of our work – on the Common, but also other sites where our ability to turn policy into action plans and then deliver offers a highly effective solution. The remarkable work done in ecological monitoring is driving this effectiveness, as is the participation of teams of local volunteers.

Like all organisations we would love to do more, but some re-setting will be needed as the BlueScapes funding comes to a close. It is thrilling to have received a significant legacy for the Leg o’Mutton Nature Reserve, where, with the Council and the Lo’M Committee we will be able to enhance the care received by this gem of a site. That legacy is restricted to Lo’M, so presents challenges for BC’s other activities! Consequently we want to build up our unrestricted funding as well as bid for additional grants where these fit with our core aims.

The challenges can be exhausting – but the rewards are fantastic: just pausing by the brook and watching a shoal of more than a hundred Minnows – about half from this year’s hatch – or chatting with people monitoring butterflies; checking how the Tower Mustard trial is going; seeing the propagated Black Poplars flourishing, listening to Blackcaps singing – hearing a nest of Great Spotted Woodpeckers clamouring for food when mum appeared... what’s not to like?

Thank you for your support and encouragement

Mike Hildesley, Chair of Barnes Common

BENEATH THE SURFACE OF BEVERLEY BROOK

By Will Dartnell and Will Scott-Mends

“But it’s clear!” — That’s probably the response I hear most often when I tell people that the Beverley Brook is polluted. It’s an understandable reaction. On a sunny day the brook can look clean and inviting as it winds its way through Barnes. But appearances can be deceiving. Clear water does not necessarily mean clean water, and beneath the surface the Beverley Brook is carrying far more than most people realise.

Our citizen science SmartRivers programme, a national initiative run by the charity WildFish, collects professional grade data on aquatic invertebrates and paints a worrying picture. Out of 122 rivers surveyed across the country, the Beverley Brook ranks amongst the three worst.



Raw sewage flowing into the brook

Alongside this work, E. coli monitoring at a number of locations on the brook helps to build a better picture of water quality. If you would like to see the latest results, please scan the QR code on the next page.

Where it’s coming from

Many people assume pollution must be coming from litter or the occasional sewage spill, but the reality is more complex. In fact, much of the flow in the Beverley Brook is augmented by treated effluent from the Hogsmill Sewage Treatment Works. Without this additional water, particularly during the summer months, there often would not be enough flow for the brook to complete its course.

While the quality of treated water leaving the sewage works has improved dramatically over the last 25 years, pollution remains a chronic problem. And the sewage treatment works is only part of the story.

One of the biggest issues affecting the brook is something called a misconnection. This happens when wastewater from toilets, kitchens, washing machines or other household appliances is mistakenly connected to surface water drains instead of the foul sewer system. Surface water drains discharge directly into local watercourses, meaning that untreated wastewater can end up flowing straight into the Beverley Brook.

These problems can arise in all sorts of ways. A single appliance in a house or garage might be connected incorrectly. Renovations and extensions can result in multiple plumbing errors within one property. In some cases, entire developments have been found to contain misconnections after construction has been completed. Added to this are damaged drainage

chambers, cracked pipes, blockages and missing inspection caps, all of which can allow foul water to enter the surface water network.

If this sounds like a relatively minor issue, the numbers tell a different story.

Between 2020 and 2026, Thames Water's Misconnections and Surface Water Outfall Programme identified more than 500 misconnections within the Beverley Brook catchment. These included over 100 washing machines and more than 50 toilets discharging incorrectly. Although more than 400 of these have now been rectified, many more remain undiscovered.



Outfall with visible pollution

Recent Outfall Safari surveys have revealed the scale of the challenge. Along the stretch of the Beverley Brook from Richmond Park to its tidal confluence at Ashlone Wharf, volunteers have identified 12 polluting outfalls. Many of these are not linked to a single property but often to entire roads or blocks of flats, meaning that hundreds of households can be contributing to a single pollution source without even knowing it. The good news is that action works.

A particularly polluting outfall entering the brook at Palewell Common was identified and reported to Thames Water. Investigations uncovered pollution originating from several houses on Rodean Crescent with a combined 80 appliance misconnections. Following extensive work, the issue has now been largely resolved.



Scan this QR code to access the latest water quality results for the Beverley Brook.

These successes demonstrate that improvements are possible, but they also help explain why restoring the brook remains such a challenge. Our habitat enhancement projects continue to produce positive results, and we often see increases in the abundance of aquatic species. However, there is currently a ceiling on what can be achieved. Species such as mayflies, which are sensitive to pollution, require not only suitable habitat but also significantly cleaner water. Until water quality improves, many of these species simply cannot establish themselves in the Beverley Brook.

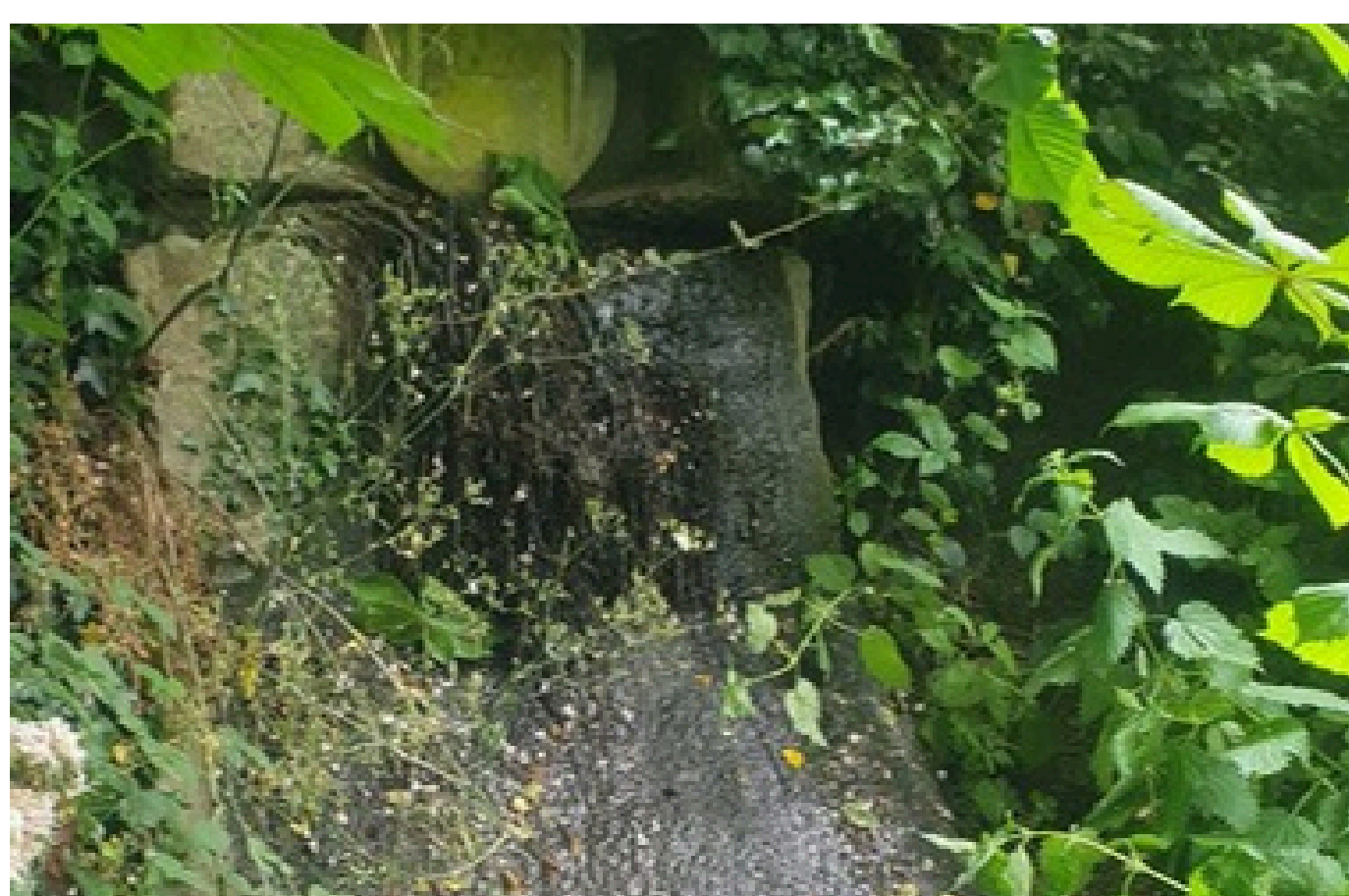


Surface water drains discharge into local watercourses

So what can we do?

The first step is surprisingly simple; check your own home. Water companies provide guidance on how to identify potential misconnections, and if you are planning any building work it is worth ensuring that all drainage connections are correctly installed. Small mistakes on individual properties can have a surprisingly large impact when multiplied across an entire catchment.

Earlier this year, we worked in partnership with the Environment Agency and South East Rivers Trust to deliver a training session for local volunteers on how to collect spot water quality samples. We are now gradually building a small but dedicated team to help monitor water quality at locations along the Beverley Brook. It is not glamorous work. It requires patience, determination and, occasionally, a strong stomach. Collecting samples and building up meaningful datasets takes time, but it is one of the most effective ways to identify pollution sources and drive change.



Misconnected toilets discharge sewage into the brook

This work is currently unfunded. While much of the monitoring is carried out by our fantastic volunteers, there are unavoidable costs. We are particularly keen to develop continuous water quality monitoring, building on technology and designs pioneered by the excellent team working on the River Brent. Any financial support, however modest, helps us continue and expand this work.

Most importantly, please spread the word. The more people understand the challenges facing the Beverley Brook, the greater the pressure for action and the stronger the support for solutions. The Brook is a valued part of our local landscape, but if we want future generations to enjoy a healthier river, we all have a role to play in its recovery.

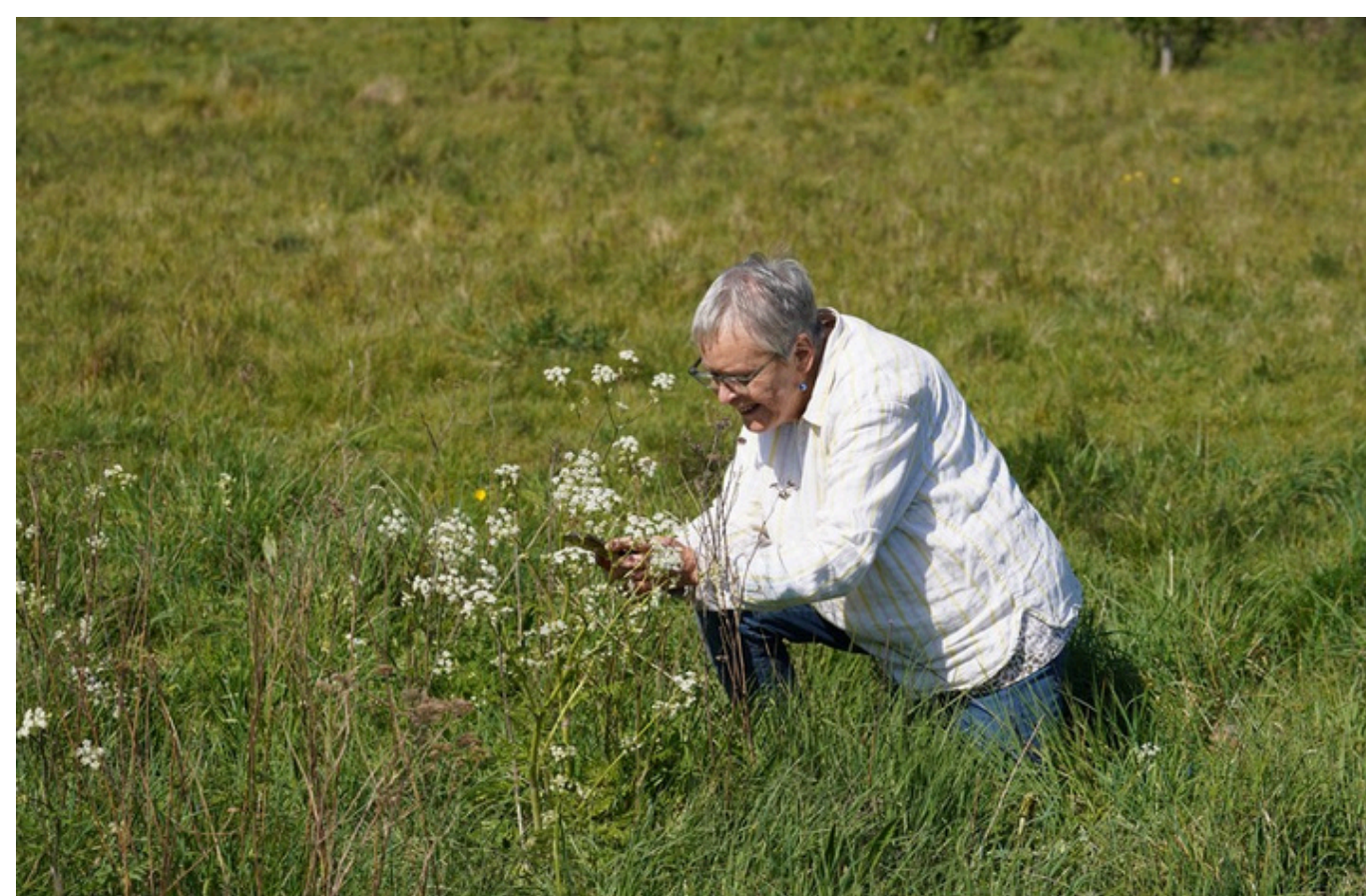
The Beverley Brook may look clear, but there is still a long way to go before it can truly be called clean.

More Than Just Birdwatching: How Spotting Species Sharpens Your Mind

By Dr Rachel Walker

The benefits of spending time in nature for our well-being are widely documented. Even a short walk in a park can noticeably reduce our cortisol (stress) levels. One way to spend more time outdoors, while contributing to conservation, is through citizen science projects. In recent years, participation in these initiatives has grown significantly. Communities are actively contributing to research by collecting vast amounts of data that would be impossible for scientists in universities, government agencies, or charities to gather alone. These valuable activities include a variety of practical tasks such as monitoring habitat quality, classifying imagery and recording wildlife sightings.

Volunteers are involved in several projects to collect data for the conservation team, including a UKBMS Butterfly transect that has been running for ten years to monitor butterfly population trends. Butterflies are an important group of indicator species, which can be used to measure the impact of habitat works and inform conservation actions. Other projects include Riverfly, which records the health of Beverley Brook each month; SmartRivers, which monitors the impact of river restoration works on freshwater invertebrate populations and BioScan, a large-scale biodiversity project to DNA sequence invertebrates. This year we have started two new recording projects, the BSBI Flower Hunt, which is a nationwide monitoring



Our volunteer, Stephanie White taking part in our iRecord scheme

project to understand how climate change is affecting plant life cycles and the National Amphibian Survey, which tracks the population trends of under-recorded frogs, toads and newts. Amphibians are key indicator species for the condition of terrestrial habitats and pond water quality.

Wildlife records can tell us a lot of useful information, including which species are present, what habitats they are found in, whether they are common or rare and how this is changing over time. The conservation team uses this data to help them inform site management decisions, including which habitats need restoring, what species should be protected and to determine if previous activities have been effective. For example, a current project restoring grasslands on the Common was designed based on the results of botanical and invertebrate surveys. These surveys showed that the rare acid grassland habitat is being lost to scrub encroachment and the community of plants and insects is changing.

Volunteers report that taking part in these projects to support conservation work is enjoyable because they spend more time in nature, are part of a local community with similar interests, can see the positive impact of their



Our volunteer, Charlotte Tracey, recording invertebrates

efforts and learn new skills. But what does learning these new skills in wildlife identification do to your brain? A recent study of people who birdwatch showed that it can physically change the brain in a similar way to learning a language or musical instrument. Scientists compared expert birdwatchers with beginners using brain scans and the results indicated that the expert birders had denser and more efficient brain tissue in areas of the brain linked to attention, visual perception and working memory. These brain differences were directly linked to the person's ability to identify bird species accurately. This supports the idea of 'cognitive reserve', which is the brain's ability to resist decline and help to slow age-related cognitive changes. The skills acquired by expert birders are the same for all types of wildlife recording, where you develop an in-depth identification ability for specific species. This includes careful visual discrimination to spot the subtle differences between species, sustained attention and focus, a strong memory and pattern recognition. Wildlife recording not only enables you to spend time outdoors in an active and engaging hobby, but this latest research supports the idea that it's also a workout for your brain.

Reference: Wing et al. (2026). The Tuned Cortex: convergent expertise-related structural and functional remodelling across the adult lifespan. *Journal of Neuroscience*. 46 (12): e1307252026. <https://doi.org/10.1523/JNEUROSCI.1307-25.2026>

INSTALLING NEST BOXES FOR BARNES SWIFTS

By Adrian Podmore

The UK's Swift population has decreased by 66% since 1995, mainly due to the declining insect population and loss of nesting sites resulting from building renovations.

To do our bit to help, two evening walks were arranged last summer to try and see where Swifts were nesting, with the Lonsdale Road and Madrid Road / Boileau Road areas appearing to be hot spots.

There was also clearly interest from local residents, so in autumn 2025, a Barnes Swift Group was set up with funding secured from Richmond Civic Pride to buy and install some swift boxes.



One of the swift nest boxes before installation

In partnership with the Barnes Handyman Station, we have been able to install around 30 new Swift boxes this spring.

Although Swifts had already returned from Africa by late April this year, it is probably unlikely that the boxes will be used this year. However, it is the second wave of Swifts that arrive in late May and early June that we are really interested in. These are the two to three year old birds that are prospecting for nest sites for the following year, so it really is just a case of fingers crossed.

We will be running another couple of evening Swift walks this year on 17th June and 15th July, so if you would like to know more, please do come along.



Jeremy from Handyman Station installing 3 swift boxes

A NATURE CONNECTED READING LIST

By Paddy Hayes

My time in Barnes usually involves lots of time outdoors in nature, but I realise the same may not always be true for the people I'm interacting with. I've found that art and stories can be a great way to communicate novel messages and to bridge the gap between the outdoors and those who might not be so familiar with the natural world around them. I use stories in lots of my sessions with younger learners, but almost all of the activities I do are inspired by or reference things that I've read.

As we head into summer I thought I'd share with you a reading list to inspire outdoor adventures – some of these might be perfect for a rainy day, a cozy evening, or if you can take them outdoors and extend your time in nature! Read on and you'll see that there is no shortage of amazing nature writing for all ages (the age ranges suggested are purely based on my own experience, feel free to experiment!).



0-5 years old

Tree Full of Wonder by Anna Smithers, illustrated by Martyna Nejman – this lovely rhyming love letter to trees is perfect all year round. It has lovely snippets of scientifically accurate information pitched perfectly for curious younger children, and the soft-focus illustration emphasises the sense of magic in the text.



5-8 years old

Once Upon a Raindrop by James Carter, illustrated by Nomoco – a non-fiction book, this really brings the water cycle to life! The illustrations are stunning, and really capture the dynamic life-giving force of water.

Tidy by Emily Gravett – a fun tale of a misguided badger, this book highlights another favourite theme of mine – nature is supposed to be messy! As our attitudes to 'tidy' nature change, this book communicates something vital in a simple and entertaining way.

Super Swifts by Justin Anderson, illustrated by **Clover Robin** – another non-fiction book, this has lots of re-read value as alongside the main narrative there are lots of facts on each page. The collage illustration is beautiful and with our swifts back in Barnes this is a must-read.

8-12 years old

Sky Dancer by Gill Lewis – a coming of age tale about finding identity and companionship in nature. An engaging read for older children, introducing some of the complexities around nature conservation.

I Ate Sunshine for Breakfast by Michael Holland & Philip Giordano – a fact book like nothing you’ve seen before. The 2-D illustration style on this is incredibly eye-catching, and there are endless facts about the incredible plants we depend on. Lots of re-read value and probably suitable for a wide range of ages.



12+ and adults

Land Art by James Brunt – an instruction manual for creating your own natural art. Inspiring and accessible, it includes some simple tips, tricks, and step-by-step instructions. Whilst he regularly admits the book is just a description of how he engages with the natural world, it will no doubt inspire you to consider the story of your own connection with nature.

Land art is perfect for all ages, but I’ve found older young people can appreciate the discipline and focus involved in this practice.



The Lost Words by Robert Macfarlane and Jackie Morris – a large book, with stunning art and timeless poems. Many will be familiar with this book, and though it is ostensibly a children's book, you’d be doing yourself a disservice in believing this book isn’t for you. It’s just as at home on your coffee table as in a school library.

Rewild Yourself by Simon Barnes – another helpful tool in your nature connection toolkit. Want to do something outdoors that isn’t your regular stroll? Spend 10 or 15 minutes reading a chapter of this and start planning your next adventure! It’s based on principles we celebrate here at Barnes Common – slow down and pay attention, you’d be surprised at what you’ll find...

There are so many amazing books out there for adults that can help develop a deeper connection with the natural world, but I’ve just included these 2 as they both inspire action. The concept of Nature Connectedness is based on specific principles – beauty, senses, meaning, emotion, compassion. I think all of these books inspire nature connectedness through at least one of these pathways, and they all encourage us to get out and put these principles into practice when we next can.

P.S. most of the books I’ve included in this list have been sourced second-hand from charity shops all over London, from World of Books, Ebay and Vinted. Almost all of these titles are 4+ years old and should be available second-hand or from your local bookshop or library. Happy reading! And exploring!

NEWS FROM THE GROWING PROJECT

By Nicky Buley

Over the past year, we have welcomed more than 400 people to the growing project. Whilst our aim is of course to grow delicious vegetables, the space is just as much about community – people from all walks of life coming together around a shared interest.

Someone at a recent workshop commented that it was nice to be around other “growing geeks” – she had recently developed an interest in gardening, but there was only so long her friends would entertain a discussion about compost before politely changing the subject! Everyone agreed that being around others with a similar passion was something they greatly valued.

The growing project is volunteer-powered, and we are really grateful to the team of people who tend the space week in, week out to ensure we produce a consistent harvest. We have been able to produce a harvest year-round, delivering produce to the foodbank throughout the winter months. The foodbank has up to 12 guests per



We deliver a weekly harvest year round

week, each one collecting food for a family of up to 6 people, and it was reported that the produce is really well received – particularly by parents who want to feed their children nutritious meals.

This year, we have continued our work with long-standing partners such as Richmond Borough Mind and Age UK Richmond. We have welcomed a new cohort of students from Tram House School (Beyond Autism) and continue to work with the young adults from Complex Autism Team in Hammersmith – everyone has been



Working the compost



Planting out seedlings

growing in confidence, and participants have enjoyed both growing and tasting produce from the garden.

Our growers span all ages – 2-year-olds at the Montessori Nursery recently sowed a bed of radishes and potatoes, and some young siblings at our after-school club who are only just learning to walk have already put their trowels in the soil! Children are naturally curious about the garden, and their participation at a young age can help them develop a life-long love of growing and the outdoors.



Getting creative in the growing area



Planting seeds in soil is a multisensory experience

We have been fortunate to be invited to share the story of the growing project in lots of different ways this year. We were featured in a lovely article on community gardens in Essential Surrey magazine.

We were also invited to take part in a panel discussion at a screening of the film 'Six Inches of Soil' which was a fantastic opportunity to meet and engage with a myriad of people engaged in community gardening and regenerative farming more generally. As we move into summer and the new growing season, we're looking forward to meeting lots more growing enthusiasts!

FLOODING IN LONDON: WHY IT MATTERS MORE THAN EVER

By Shomari Rosalska

Flooding is one of the most significant environmental risks facing London. As climate change brings more intense and frequent rainfall, and as urban development continues to cover natural ground with impermeable surfaces, the city is becoming increasingly vulnerable particularly to surface water flooding. When rain cannot soak into the ground, it quickly runs off into drains and rivers like the Beverley Brook, often overwhelming them.

This type of flooding can happen rapidly and with little warning. Streets, homes, and green spaces can become waterlogged, while polluted runoff containing oil, litter, and chemicals is washed directly into waterways. Beyond the immediate disruption, this places long-term pressure on river health, wildlife, and infrastructure. Managing this risk requires not just traditional engineering, but smarter, more adaptive approaches that give water space to flow and be stored safely.

How Barnes Green Helps Manage Flooding

The completed Beverley Brook Restoration Project at Barnes Green directly addresses these challenges by increasing the area's ability to manage and store floodwater.



Barnes Green before the restoration project

A central feature of the scheme is the creation of a new river channel alongside the existing one. This dual-channel approach is critical for flood resilience. Under normal conditions, water flows through the main channel, but during periods of heavy rainfall, the additional channel provides extra capacity. This allows excess water to spread out and be temporarily stored, reducing pressure on the system and lowering the risk of flooding downstream.



The site just as the project was starting

At the same time, the reshaped, more natural river design featuring meanders, pools, and gravel beds slows the speed of the water. Slower-moving water is less likely to overwhelm the channel and can be absorbed more effectively into the surrounding landscape. The reprofiled riverbanks further support this by allowing water to spill safely into adjacent areas during high flows, rather than surging uncontrollably.



A new bridge connects the island with the Green

Sustainable drainage features across the Green, including swales and French drains, also play an important role. These systems intercept rainfall before it reaches the river, holding and gradually releasing it into the ground. This reduces the volume of water entering the brook during storms, easing peak flow pressure.



The new channel increases capacity

What makes Barnes Green particularly effective is its combination of solutions. The new channel increases capacity, the existing channel now acts as a relief route during peak flows, and the surrounding landscape has been redesigned to absorb and slow water naturally.

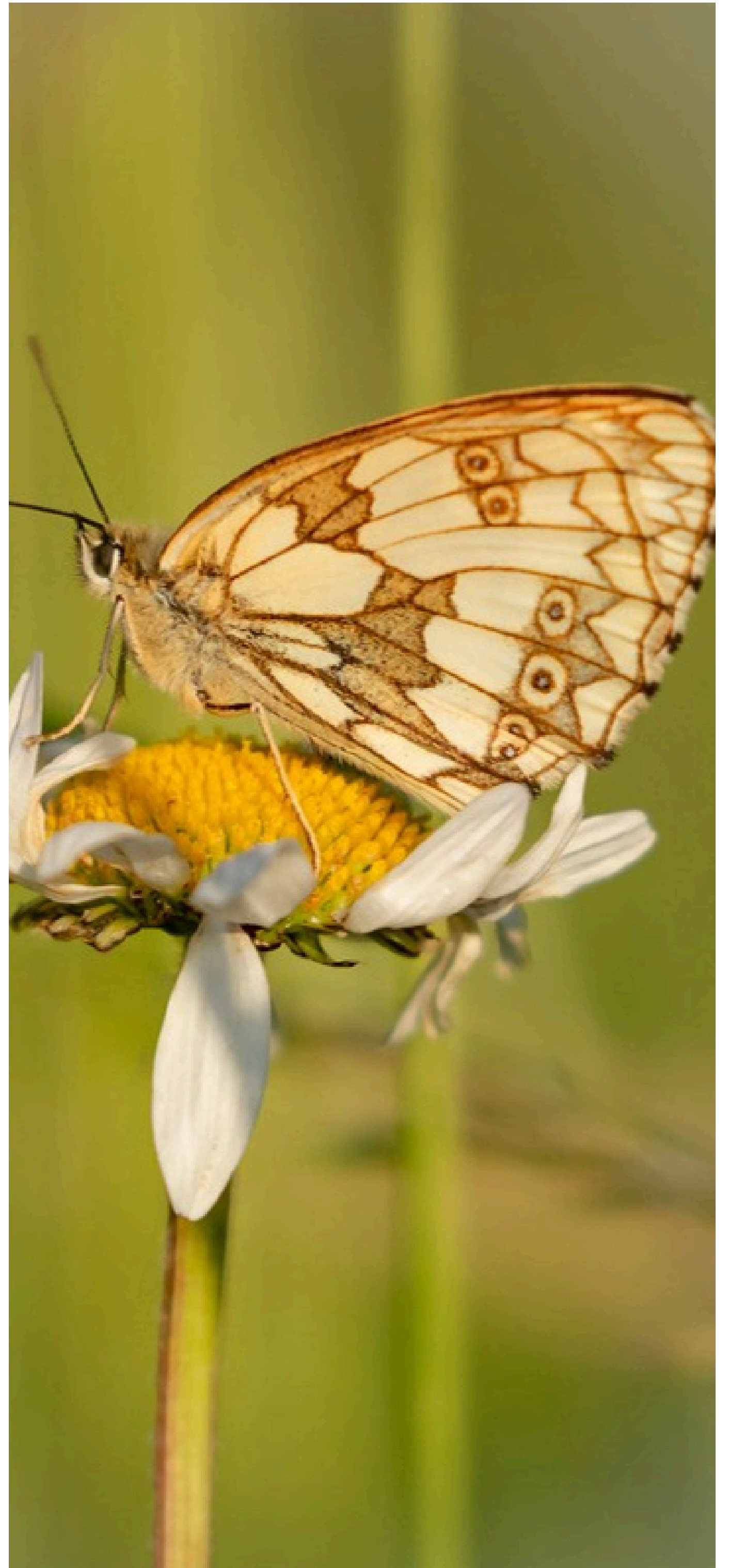
Together, these changes create a more flexible and resilient system, one that works with natural processes rather than against them. As London faces growing flood risks, projects like this demonstrate how thoughtful design can protect communities, improve river health, and create spaces that are better equipped for the future.



WALKS, TALKS AND ACTIVITIES

Join us for our walks and talks this summer and enjoy a healthy dose of nature! Please scan the QR code or visit our website to book your tickets. Booking is required and Eventbrite will add a booking fee.

- Term Time Mondays - After School Growing Club (£5)
- 12th July - Nature Walk: Butterflies of Barnes Common (£5)
- 15th July - Swifts in Barnes Walk (£5)
- 15th July - Creative Workshop: Writing in Bloom (£10)
- 16th July - History Walk on Barnes Common (£10)
- 21-24 July - Eco-Explorers Summer Camp (£120 for 4 days)
- 25th July - Saturday Conservation Volunteering Session
- 25th July - Herbalist Walk: The Healing Herbs of our Land (£10)
- 30th July - Evening Bat Walk at Leg o'Mutton (£5)
- 10th August - Family-friendly Growing Session (£2)
- 9th September - Introduction to Growing (6-week course) £50
- 17th October - Autumn Fayre



Marbled White butterfly by Andrew Wilson

YOUNG VOLUNTEERS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

By Ellis Griffiths

As part of my Gold Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) Award, I volunteer every Saturday at Barnes Common. I have two friends from my school who routinely volunteer with me, but we are part of a bigger group of DofE volunteers who have all got to know each other pretty well. Our work is really varied, and I like that we don't know from one week to the next what we'll be doing. Recent examples of our work include litter picking, gardening, and supporting conservation tasks that help to protect and improve the local environment. We've also worked together to spread awareness of the charity and encourage members of the local community to support the Barnes Common charity.

Through volunteering, I feel I have developed a stronger sense of responsibility and teamwork. Working regularly with friends has improved my communication skills and taught me the importance of being reliable. We have all made a commitment to the charity and the community and know that keeping that commitment is really important. Being outdoors and completing practical tasks has also helped improve my confidence and wellbeing, while giving me a chance to develop leadership skills by taking initiative and helping the younger Silver and Bronze Duke of Edinburgh award volunteers.

Our work supports Barnes Common's aim to conserve and increase biodiversity by maintaining habitats, removing litter that can harm wildlife, and caring for plants and green spaces. Gardening and conservation tasks, not only in their polytunnel and garden space but

also the Common itself, helps protect local species and improve the overall health of the Common. In addition, by volunteering regularly, I help the charity set a positive example for younger generations, showing how individuals can make a difference within their community.

I'm really grateful to have the opportunity to volunteer at Barnes Common. I'm having fun and learning, and it has shown me the importance of community involvement and sustainable action, which I hope to continue beyond my Duke of Edinburgh Award.

Space for All to Learn and Grow By Summer Still

The Vine Road Growing Project has been such a valuable and uplifting space, offering a wide range of activities that bring people together while also encouraging learning and personal growth.

One of the standout experiences for me has been the educational bat walks with Barnes Common. These sessions are not only fascinating but genuinely helpful for my studies in animal management. They provide real insight into local species and their habitats, while also doing a fantastic job of engaging young people and sparking their curiosity about wildlife in the area.

The opportunities to visit different skate parks across London with the Vine Road Park redevelopment project have also been brilliant. It's great to see young people being encouraged to get out, stay active, and make use of the facilities available to them. It builds confidence, social skills, and a sense of independence in a really natural way.

Growing is another core part of what makes the Vine Road Park so special. It teaches young people responsibility and respect for the

environment, while also helping them develop practical life skills. There's something really rewarding about contributing to a shared space and seeing the results of that effort over time.

And of course, the water fights in the park add a whole other layer of fun. They create a relaxed, family-friendly atmosphere where everyone can just enjoy themselves, laugh, and make memories together.

Overall, Barnes Common's Growing Project is a fantastic community hub that blends education, recreation, and connection in a way that truly benefits people of all ages.



We asked some of our young volunteers about their experience. Here is what they've said.

"I have always been interested in nature and giving back to my community and Barnes Common has been amazing to help me do this."

"Barnes is an incredible area filled with diverse wildlife that deserves to be protected and conserved."

"I want to help maintain the area in which I grew up so that more people can enjoy the Common."

Contributors:

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Ellis Griffiths, Duke of Edinburgh volunteer
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Will Scott-Mends, Senior Conservation Officer
Shomari Rosalska, Project Coordinator
Summer Still, young volunteer from the Mortlake PowerStation
Dr Rachel Walker, science volunteer
Andrew Wilson, our friend, publisher and photographer

Get in touch with us!

Have you seen an interesting animal, plant, or fungi on the Common? Would you like to become a volunteer? Are you interested in connecting your garden to the Barnes Hedgehog Highway or put up swift boxes on your house? Please do get in touch: email us at enquiries@barnescommon.org.uk.

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Published by Barnes Common Limited, a registered charity (No 1153079) and a company limited by guarantee in England & Wales (No 08348124).

Barnes Common, Vine Road Pavilion
Vine Road, Barnes SW13 0NE