

WEG – January 2018

The Work of Earth Trust including the River of Life Project  
a talk by Jenny Crease

In her talk at our AGM in January, Jenny Crease of the Earth Trust lucidly set out the scale and breadth of this ambitious organisation's activities. Formed 50 years ago as the Northmoor Trust (derived from the name of the road where the founding family lived), its first landholding at Little Wittenham was acquired in 1982, steadily expanding ever since, to now include a farm, woodlands, riverside meadows, and the Clumps themselves. It also manages land at a number of other sites around Oxfordshire.

Smart new environmentally friendly offices and visitor centre were opened in 2006/7, and in 2011 the organisation was rebranded as the Earth Trust, a name intended to encapsulate a positive vision connecting people to the environment in all aspects of their life.

The range of activities and features offered is immense: Little Wittenham Wood nature reserve (now a designated Special Area of Conservation), an arboretum of solely native trees, a forestry research area with a current focus on ash dieback, plots of land rented to independent land-based green start-up enterprises, a working farm, a multitude of educational offers for schools and the general public – all of which it sees as forming a business model, bringing together the environmental, social and economic strands of sustainability in a way that secures its own future and that of the land.

An exciting recent project is the River of Life. Through the purchase of additional farmland, the Trust acquired two and a half kilometres of Thames frontage, which it is now well into the process of 're-wilding'. This has involved the restoration / creation of a variety of wetland habitats, digging out backwaters and ponds (partially restoring the former paleochannels), and the planting of appropriate vegetation. The benefits for nature are already clear with fish using the backwaters for spawning, and otters thought to be present. 38K tonnes of spoil removed from the 35ha site was spread across nearby arable fields, partly to avoid landfill costs, but partly in the hope – which has indeed been realised - of it serving as a fertiliser.

The project was undertaken jointly with the Environment Agency because of its dual objective of combating flooding. Much of the River of Life area is accessible to the public via permissive paths, and is best reached from Shillingford Bridge; guided walks are offered from time to time.

For anyone wishing to get more closely involved with the Trust's work, extensive volunteer opportunities exist, complementing the team of around 30 staff. M.C.