



Seasonal photo that didn't make it into the EEG calendar.

By Edwin Trout

Another year has flashed by, even though our lives are still dominated by Covid-related news and climate change. We'll try to cheer you up with our end-of-year Newsletter, but I'm afraid there's a fair amount of gloom here as well. For a start, Sheila, who has been producing this Newsletter since its first edition in 2005, has decided to spend more time walking her dog. So this edition is brought to you by a new, temporary team, while we search for a new editor. Volunteers, please contact any committee member!

Sheila tells us "*The EEG August newsletter was my last one as, due to personal reasons, I am giving up the editorship. I have very much enjoyed producing it for the last sixteen years (time flies!), and I look forward to receiving my copy in the future with someone else at the helm.*"

This edition is dominated by environmental concerns. COP26 was a major feature of the year, and we have a report on page 6. Now the conference is over, the worry is that a box has been ticked and we will be expected to move on to the next item.

Moving from climate change to more local issues, we have reports on planning concerns about major new housing developments affecting Earley (page 3), and a proposed all-weather pitch near to the Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve (page 2). On a positive note, EEG proposed the creation of 14 Local Green Spaces in Wokingham Borough, and 11 of these have been recommended for acceptance (more on page 4). Wokingham Borough is also seeking suitable locations for planting more trees, and has their eye on your garden – see page 5. And you can read an update on some trees that have been planted, in the Laurel Park community orchard, on page 5. Last but not least, the EEG community calendar has another successful edition: see the report on page 2.

Finally, our thanks to Sheila for all her work on the Newsletter. You can read all the back issues online on our website, a wonderful memorial to her work for EEG.



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EEG 2022 Calendar - Young Photographer Contributes

Praise and apologies must go to young photographer Ben Twigg whose photographs feature in the EEG's 2022 Calendar. His beautiful Orange Tip butterfly adorns the May page, and his cheery Robin made it onto the December page. Unfortunately, the editor (me) attributed the photos to his father Daniel, who has previously submitted images. Ben is 14 years old and a student at Maiden Erlegh School. He has also been a committed member of the Earley Junior Environmental Group for several years. He clearly has a talent for photographing wildlife. My apologies to Ben for the error, and thank you for submitting such great photos. I look forward to receiving more photos of Earley's natural environment for next year's calendar, both from Ben and other young photographers – as well as older photographers of course!



Thank you to all the contributors and purchasers of the EEG's 2022 calendar. The calendar has again been extremely popular, with nearly 200 sold. We are grateful to the Earley Town Council Help Shop, the Huntley and Palmer Allotment Association, Fad at Silverdale Road shops, and St Nicolas Church for their brilliant support in selling calendars on behalf of the Group. The funds raised will help to support the work of the EEG. Look out for the 2023 edition, and get snapping!



Bob Collis, Calendar Editor

Proposed 3G football pitch in Laurel Park update.

Maiden Erlegh Residents' Association (MERA) has obtained more information from Sports & Leisure at Wokingham Borough Council on their proposal for an all-weather football pitch in Laurel Park. At the time of writing, no planning application has been submitted, but it is believed this will be soon. The lower field has been earmarked for the 3G build. It would have floodlights to allow for evening use, which would grow. Use of the facilities would increase midweek and at weekends. The field behind the play area has been considered for the extra car parking which WBC say will be needed. On flood risk, the assigned contractors would need to put provisions in place to reduce any impact on the surrounding area.



*Laurel Park Lower Field,
site of proposed all-weather pitch*

I think that this is the wrong location and should be opposed for several reasons including:

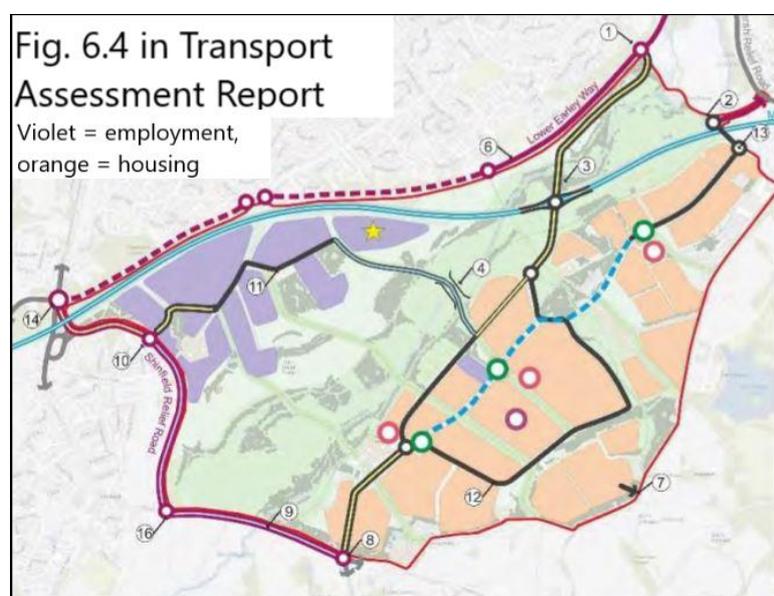
- Light and noise pollution when the pitch is in use, affecting the wildlife of the adjoining Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve and local residents.
- Air and noise pollution from increased car traffic which will extend into the evening.
- Loss of public open green space in the field to be used: the pitch will probably be fenced.
- Loss of the green space behind the play area to car parking.
- The tranquility and visual amenity of the area will be reduced.
- Possible pollution of near-by water courses from run-off of particles of rubber used in the construction of the pitch.

Anne Booth

Hall Farm/Loddon Valley development consultation

A consultation on a full Draft Local Plan, including locations and policies for new development, was held in 2020. The current consultation is on new development locations and plans (but not policies), because the Grazeley Garden Town scheme has been dropped and is largely replaced by Hall Farm/Loddon Valley. A further consultation is to be held in 2022 before the plan is submitted for examination in 2023.

This proposed Strategic Development Location with 4,500 dwellings, of which a minimum of 2,200 dwellings would be completed in the period to 2037/38, would extend into the countryside for about 2km south of Earley between Shinfield and Sindlesham. Landowners Reading University aspire to create an International Employment Hub based around the Four Valleys of Cinema, Heritage, Medical and Nano, including the option of a hospital. Transport modelling is looking at a new bridge over the M4 to join Lower Earley Way with or without a new M4 junction.



This development will: increase local population density and demand for resources and travel; reduce local land available for agriculture, forestry, recreation and wildlife; and entail significant carbon emissions to create new buildings and infrastructure. The long distance from major centres and easy access to the M4 is likely to encourage private car use and discourage active travel. Slow roll-out of development will delay development of new communities and facilities.

Local planning has been called a housing numbers game. Central

government defines policies, and allocates housing numbers to local authorities who then have to find suitable locations for development in their areas. They can then set local policies if they comply with the national policies.

If central government cannot manage to stop England's population growth, it should have policies for higher-density development on well-connected brownfield sites that contribute to the levelling-up agenda, rather than encouraging urban sprawl across remaining rural areas in central Berkshire.

Wokingham should collaborate with other Berkshire authorities to oppose the government's high housing targets and seek well-integrated sustainable development across the County.

This consultation is open until 24th January 2022: Revised Growth Strategy consultation - Wokingham Borough Council, or <https://tinyurl.com/2p836vwr>

An interactive map of all proposed developments can be seen at <https://tinyurl.com/2p899k9h>

The Shinfield-based campaigning group is on Facebook, see <https://tinyurl.com/3sxvmfzk>

John Booth

EEG Local Green Space Success

The EEG has had a welcome success with its proposals for Local Green Space designations in Earley. In June 2020, the EEG submitted 14 proposals for Local Green Space designation under Wokingham Borough Council's (WBC) Draft Local Plan Update consultation. We are pleased to



*Maiden Erlegh LNR
As in the Local Green Space
submission*

London Road, parts of Rushey Way and for the University Campus, including The Wilderness and Harris Gardens, were not recommended for designation.

Earley Town Council had also submitted proposals for Local Green Space designation, many of which reflected our own. Most have been recommended, including Laurel Park which nicely ties in with the Maiden Erlegh Local Nature Reserve recommendation. The small area of land to the east of Maiden Erlegh Lake, behind the Laurel Park sports pavilion, has not been recommended.

All of the recommended sites for Wokingham are included in an Appendix to WBC's revised Local Green Space Topic Paper. This Paper supports the Local Plan and provides the policy and assessment background to WBC's recommendations. Local Green Space designation was newly introduced by the government in 2019. It allows communities to identify and protect green areas of particular importance to them. Most notably, policies for managing development within a Local Green Space are to be consistent with those for Green Belts.

Whilst these recommendations will still need to be approved, this is a great result for the EEG's supporters and the local environment!

find that WBC has recommended 11 of the EEG's proposals for designation, namely; Thames Riverside Green Corridor, Bulmershe Green Corridor, Sol Joel Park, Meadow Park, Maiden Erlegh Lake and Woods, Redhatch Copse, the Thames Water Reservoir off Elm Lane, Chalfont Park and Woods, Pearman's Copse Local Nature Reserve, Lower Earley Meadows and Woodlands (including Riverside Park) and Lower Earley Events Field (off Kilnsea Drive).

Swallows Meadow, which has been subject to a development proposal, is included within the recommended Local Green Space for the Lower Earley Meadows and Woodlands. Areas of land to the south of Rushey Way are not, however, included in the Council's recommendation for this Local Green Space, whereas land to the north of Rushey Way has been included; strengthening the EEG's case for a Lower Earley Local Nature Reserve.

The EEG's proposals for Local Green Spaces along parts of

Did you know?

Look out for a Blackcap in your garden this winter. These are not the birds heard singing in the spring and summer, they have all flown off to Africa. These have come from central Europe, preferring to come to Earley rather than face a long journey south. The wings on these birds are gradually changing shape because they don't need to make the long journey any more – evolution in action!



Bob Collis, EEG Secretary

Community orchard report, October 2021

The orchard's fifth 'birthday' occurred in February, but there was no celebration due to lock-down. Although this has still not been a normal year, there was reasonable success with the orchard, despite a cold spell in May. There was a particularly good display of blossom during the spring, and all the trees bore fruit this year. It's difficult to know who benefitted from the crops, apart from the sponsors of the greengage, but the fruit all seemed to disappear.

There was a small pruning working party in January, and a small group weeded plots in summer. Once lock-down restrictions were removed, a monthly work party was set up to deal with on-going maintenance; this met originally on the first Saturday of the month, but will take place on the second Saturday, from November, from 10 to midday. So far, plots have been weeded again, some new membrane installed, and some damaged or rotten fence posts supported or replaced. In addition, further pruning was done in the summer, to the greengage, the damson and some apple trees.



*Edward VII apple,
one of the varieties in the orchard*

The original damson tree was replanted at the pavilion end of the orchard, in place of the vandalised mulberry tree. The decision was taken to replace the pear and plum trees whose plots have been vacant for some time: new trees have been ordered, and were planted on 4th December.

Once again, there was some vandalism, with some of the fences and fence posts damaged at times during the summer. Our neighbourhood police are patrolling more regularly, but have not been there when the damage occurred.

The AGM was held in person this year, after being postponed last year, at Maiden Place Community Centre, and included apple- and pear-based refreshments, provided by the attendees. Although all the committee members are happy to continue in their position at present, we will be looking for new volunteers to take over the not-very-onerous duties next year: volunteers would be most welcome.

I'm looking forward to even more fruit next year, and hope that the orchard continues to thrive.

Jean Hackett

Chair, Earley Community Orchard Group <http://www.earleyorchard.org.uk/>

YET MORE TREES, PLEASE



As part of their climate emergency plans, Wokingham Borough Council plans to plant 250,000 trees across the borough. They have just launched their "Garden Forest Scheme", which offers a tree (or more than one) for people to plant in their garden (or other green space). You can request a tree by completing an application form on their website:

<https://engage.wokingham.gov.uk/en-GB/projects/the-tree-project-1>

Scroll to the bottom of the page. It might help to know that you need to provide a photo of your garden (image not more than 10MB), and the length and width of your garden in metres.

There is no indication of the size or species you'll be offered: In fact, there's no species list. You are asked if you'd be able to collect it from a garden centre (presumably within the borough), from which it seems as if will fit into a medium-sized car.

Applications have to be in by 30th January 2022.

Bat walk and information evening



As part of Earley Town Council's '26 Steps to COP26' an evening bat walk held at Maiden Erlegh Nature Reserve. The walk was led by two volunteers from the Berkshire and South Buckinghamshire Bat Group.

Participants arrived at dusk and were given information about the reserve and UK and local bats. Did you know that there are 18 species of bat in the UK? 17 of these are known to be breeding here; that's almost a quarter of our total UK mammal species.

First visitor of the evening was a lone Noctule bat that flew high overhead as the group made their way down to the butterfly garden. The International Space Station also made an appearance at that point and caused additional excitement.

As the group made their way along the meadow, the heterodyne detectors captured lots of echolocation calls as common and soprano pipistrelles zipped through the air feeding on tiny insects.

The area along the edge of the lake was initially quiet, but then small groups of common pipistrelles started to forage amongst the Oak and Ash trees, and the group paused for a few minutes to enjoy the sight and 'raspberry' sounds of the feeding! Another noctule passed far overhead.

When the group reached the fishing bays and looked out across the lake, there was delight that another species was present: the Daubenton bat (named in honour of 18th-century French naturalist Louis-Jean-Marie Daubenton) that feeds on insects flying close to the surface of water.

The group stayed at the water's edge for quite a while enjoying the spectacle before heading back up to the Interpretation Centre for a socially-distanced warming drink. It was a wonderful evening and all participants enjoyed getting closer to the magical little mammals that fly our skies unseen for so much of the year and that we rely on for pollination and biting insect population control!

If you would like to find out more about bats, visit www.bats.org.uk or join your local online bat group to find out about local events.

COP26 – some progress but must do better next year!



UN CLIMATE
CHANGE
CONFERENCE
UK 2021

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ITALY

The Conference of Parties on Climate Change in Glasgow made some progress, but disappointed on many levels. While the UK is far from solely responsible for the outcomes, it could have improved access for representatives of less-developed and heavily-impacted countries and reduced the number of fossil-fuel lobby representatives in the decision-making Blue Zone.

Prior to Paris (2015), there was expected global warming of 3.6°C. After Glasgow, the expected temperature rise is around 2.7°C. The aim to keep global average warming below 1.5°C is 'still alive', but talk must turn to action to roughly halve emissions by 2030.

Even with greater efforts to cut emissions, more action will be needed on adaptation to the impacts of climate change, and greater climate finance flows from developed countries (responsible for historical emissions) to developing countries.

Agreement to phase out coal could not be reached, but there is some good news in that countries are requested to revise their commitment to low-carbon futures at COP27 in 2022, instead of waiting another five years. A Global Methane Pledge to reduce emissions of this short-lived but extremely potent greenhouse gas by 2030 is a positive step.

In Reading, about 400 people joined a m`arch on 6th October, and many heard a warning from UoR's Prof. Richard P. Allan: "*Climate indicators from around the globe are documenting a planet warmed by the inexorable increases in greenhouse gas concentrations*



Some of over 400 people on Reading's 'March 4 Climate' on 6th October

Did you know?

Have you seen a gull stamping on the grass in Sol Joel or Palmer parks? It's not trying to keep warm, but is trying to attract worms to come to the surface and be eaten.



caused by human activities. Heat is accumulating in the oceans which, along with melt water from glaciers and ice sheets, is raising sea levels. Where weather patterns generate heatwaves, droughts and flooding, these are now more severe due to the warmer climate, which is intensifying flows of water out of soils and into storms. The science from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is clear that rapid, strong and sustained cuts in greenhouse-gas emissions are essential to limit climate change to tolerable levels"

John Booth

NEWS FROM EARLEY:



*Shovellers on Maiden Erlegh lake.
Note the different body colouration from the Mallards behind.*

It's a sure sign that winter is on its way when the Shovellers arrive on Maiden Erlegh lake. These birds have taken to overwintering in Earley for the last few years: interesting choice! They have this amazing

habit of group swimming in a tight circle: this stirs up sediment at the bottom of the lake and with it their food of choice. It will be a shame to see them disappear again, back north to breed, but that means spring is on the way!

Late news: the planning application for a new Lidl store and more houses at Swallows Meadow, one of the proposed Local Green Spaces in Lower Earley, has been REJECTED by Wokingham Borough Council's Planning Committee.

NEWS FROM NOT FAR BEYOND EARLEY:



A Good News story about Bees for a change. Colonies of wild bees, thought to be long extinct, have been discovered in the woods of the Blenheim estate in Oxfordshire. These bees seem to be descended from ancient stock, being smaller than the domesticated honey bee. Crucially, they also seem to be immune to the varroa mite that has caused such problems with commercial bees. The colonies are found high in the mature trees, and will forage for food at low temperature. They also have up to 9 queens per colony, which aids survival.

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/nov/07/no-one-knew-they-existed-wild-heirs-of-lost-british-honeybee-found-at-blenheim>

or enter "bees Blenheim" into your favourite search engine

LOCAL FORTHCOMING EVENTS December 2021 – April 2022

Covid is still with us. We hope all events can take place as normal, with due regard to any Government rules in place at the time. Any changes to arrangements will be notified on the website, and by email to registered members.

Thursday December 23rd 4pm - 5pm Carols around the lake. Socially-distanced carol singing around the Maiden Erlegh lake. Meet at the Interpretation Centre, Instow Road, and be ready to sing by 4pm. Bring a torch, your best singing voice and dress for the weather! Or be at the feeding station by 4pm.



Monday January 17th 7.30pm - 9.30pm **AGM and members' evening.** If you would like to bring along photos and/or stories with an environmental flavour to share with the group, please e-mail grahamehawker@hotmail.com or phone Charlotte on 07771 605825, to make arrangements for the evening.

Function Room, Maiden Place Community Centre, off Kilnsea Drive.

Monday February 28th 7.30pm - 9.30pm **Bees** A talk on these essential insects by a local expert. Matt McTernan runs Earley Garden Bees and he will be talking about being an urban beekeeper. You can find out more about Earley Garden Bees on their Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/earleygarden>

Function Room, Maiden Place Community Centre, off Kilnsea Drive.

One Sunday in March 10am - 4.30pm **HELP - Huge Earley Litter Pick.** The annual Earley Litter Pick will take place in March to coincide with the Borough-wide event, the date of which has not been decided yet. Watch the website for full details. There will be two sessions: 10am-12.30pm & 2pm-4.30pm. Meet at the Interpretation Centre in Instow Road for each session.

Bits and Pieces

Don't forget: Earley Environmental Group is on **Facebook**. We will be using this in addition to the main website and the newsletter as a to keep you up-to-date with our activities, and to let you know about upcoming events. Members are also welcome to post news stories or any photographs relevant to the group. Search for 'Earley Environmental Group' and we should pop up. Look forward to seeing you there.



EASI (Earley Adopt-a-Street Initiative) would like more volunteers. Help keep your street clear of litter. Everything provided. Phone Brian Hackett (986 1115) or e-mail easilittergroup@gmail.com.

Can you offer active **help to EEG**? If so, phone 0118 962 0004, or go to the website <http://www.earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk>. We would welcome more member involvement. At the moment 'the few' help to keep EEG going.

EEG committee members can be found on www.earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk under Contacts. For **Wildlife Survey Forms**, go to the website, or phone Earley Town Council on 0118 986 8995.

Comments or contributions to the newsletter to: newsletter@earleyenvironmentalgroup.co.uk. We would welcome short contributions from members.

If you know someone who would like to join **EEG**, **membership forms** are available from Earley Town Council, 0118 986 8995, on the website under Downloads, or send an e-mail to the Membership Secretary, Liz Wild at liz@helva.plus.com. **Please inform Liz if you intend to change e-mail or address** at 50 Kenton Rd, Earley RG6 7LG, or e-mail her.

Erleigh Elfins: A pre-school playgroup on Thursdays at the Interpretation Centre in Maiden Erleigh Nature Reserve runs from 10 am to 11:30 am, with a focus on outdoor play and exploration of the natural environment. For more information, please contact erleghelfins@gmail.com or Charlotte on 07771 605825. There is a limit on numbers to ensure safe play. Child-minders are welcome. Adults are responsible for the children they bring with them, so a ratio of 2:1 is recommended.

For information on **Earley Environmental Junior Group**, phone Charlotte as above.

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