

## Help look after the brook

### Please don't feed the ducks

Many people enjoy feeding ducks but this is harmful to ducks and the environment. Feeding can cause:

- Poor nutrition
- Overcrowding and spread of disease amongst ducks
- Unnatural behaviour
- Pollution and environmental damage
- Increase in rats

If you care about the ducks then please do not feed them – allow them to return to their natural habits.

### Save water

Lifestyle choices, population growth and climate change are placing increasing demands on our water supplies. When we turn on the tap in this area we take water from local aquifers that supply the Letcombe Brook.

To ensure that there is enough water for both us and wildlife in years to come please use water wisely. Contact Thames Water 0845 9200 800 [www.thameswater.co.uk/waterwise](http://www.thameswater.co.uk/waterwise) for free leaflets on saving water.

### Local information

**Grove Parish Council** – 01235 766599

[www.grove-oxon.org.uk](http://www.grove-oxon.org.uk)

**Grove Library** – 01235 763841 [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk)

**Vale and Downland Museum** – 01235 771447

[www.wantage-museum.com](http://www.wantage-museum.com)

**Vale of White Horse District Council** –

01235 520202 [www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk](http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk)

**Environment Agency** – For pollution and flood defence matters call 24-hour emergency hotline 0800 80 70 60.

## Letcombe Brook Project

The Letcombe Brook Project works with local people and organisations to enhance and protect the natural beauty of the brook and to help people appreciate the environment. The project undertakes work to encourage native wildlife, improve the landscape, remove rubbish and alleviate future flooding along the brook. You can learn more by coming on a guided walk or joining a conservation task. Schools can come river dipping as part of their local river study.



School group measuring the brook

### Letcombe Brook Project

C/o Vale and Downland Museum

Church Street

Wantage

OXON

OX12 8BL

01235 771447

[letcombebrook@hotmail.com](mailto:letcombebrook@hotmail.com)

### Partnership

Environment Agency

Wantage Town Council

Grove Parish Council

Letcombe Regis Parish Council

Vale of White Horse District Council



Volunteers

# LETCOMBE BROOK DISCOVERY TRAIL Grove



A 1½ miles (2.4km) walk, 40 minutes return, exploring a section of the brook through Grove

Leaflet sponsored by



## Discovery Trail

The Letcombe Brook flows through the heart of the village of Grove, Oxfordshire. Grove has grown from a settlement recorded in the Domesday Book, to a thriving modern community surrounded by farmland. Through the ages Grove has accommodated differing modes of transport including canal boats on the Wilts and Berks Canal, trams and aircraft. Today it is home to the Williams Formula 1 racing team. During the Second World War Grove Airfield became the busiest and largest airfield in Europe.

Long ago, people chose to settle along the brook as it provided a clean and plentiful supply of fresh water. The character of the brook has been shaped and changed by centuries of human endeavour as the brook was used for water collection, farming and industry.

This short walk helps you discover some of the natural, historic, and interesting features along the brook.

**Distance and time:** The trail through Grove is a linear route. It starts at Kingfishers and finishes just north of the Village Green, where you can either retrace your steps or continue north to East Hanney. It is 1½ miles (2.4km) return, and takes approximately 40 minutes.

**Accessibility:** The walk is on footpaths and level pavements until point ②. At this point you can either walk on the grass or on the paved footpath that runs parallel, but is a few metres away from the brook. Just past point ⑧ there is a stile and the trail is on grass until the finish point at ⑨.

Grove has shops at Millbrook Square and several pubs in the area.

**WC** Toilet in Millbrook Square.

**LB** You can find more information about the brook on the boards at Mary Green and the Village Green.

Our local place names reflect the presence of the brook

Letcombe - lede in the combe  
Wantage - intermittent stream  
Grove - thicket or copse  
East Hanney - island of water fowl

## Letcombe Brook

The brook is a chalk stream and these are globally rare. It is fed from groundwater held in the chalk in the hills above Letcombe Regis and Letcombe Bassett. When it rains the chalk or aquifer, acts like a sponge and soaks up and holds water. Water emerges at ground level in the form of springs which feed the brook. Regular winter rainfall is needed to recharge the aquifer to keep the brook flowing throughout the year.

Chalk streams are a naturally rich habitat, and support many different plants and animals including some of the UK's most endangered species. The brook is home to bullhead and wild brown trout feeding on invertebrates such as mayfly larvae and freshwater shrimps. Kingfishers and bats can be seen above the waters, and water voles and otters have returned to the brook.

The brook flows for 7½ miles (12km) through the Vale of White Horse where it meets the Childrey Brook, which flows into the River Ock and on into the River Thames.



Water vole

Once a common sight but now Britain's most endangered mammal due to loss of habitat and predation by mink.



Otter

## Discover the Letcombe Brook, Grove

Start at the road bridge in Kingfishers, Grove.

### 1 Kingfishers

This area was once part of the grounds of the Manor House. Grove Middle Mill once stood here and was also known as St. Ives or Grove Hemp Mill. It remained in use until at least 1796. Over the years it ground grains, and also made rope and turned hemp into twine for sack cloth. Grove Top Mill still survives in Mill Lane, whilst Lower Mill, once in Old Mill Close, no longer stands.



Bill Fuller's impression of the mill wheel used in the process of making rope

In 1086 there were 10 working mills on the Letcombe Brook. Today surviving mills are often private residences with some generating electricity for domestic use.

**Walk out of Kingfishers to Main Street. Turn left and just before you get to Boseleys Orchard turn left down the public bridleway, St Ives Lane. Go over the bridge crossing the brook onto Mary Green.**

### 2 Wildlife

The brook is a haven for wildlife. Along the walk look for shoals of sticklebacks and wild brown trout in the deeper pools. With luck you may spot a kingfisher on an overhanging branch or a yellow wagtail searching for insects at the waters edge.



Kingfisher

**Follow the brook until you come to an information board LB next to the footbridge by a play area.**



### 3 Water meadows

Standing on the footbridge, look upstream. Over to your left, there are bumps and hollows in the grass area. By the play area is a ditch called Pill Ditch which dates back to Saxon times. All these features were part of an elaborate system to manage water.

Historically, farmers diverted the brook with sluices and ditches to flood the fields. This encouraged the early growth of grass by raising the temperature of the soil, and the silt deposited by water on the fields acted as a natural

fertiliser. Sheep and cattle could then be fattened earlier in the year and fetch a higher price at market.

### 4 Willows

Willows along the brook are regularly managed. Historically they were cut high or 'pollarded' beyond the reach of cattle, which grazed the area when it was farmland. The young willow growth had many uses including baskets, gates and fencing.



Some of the willows along the brook are up to 500 years old and support over 250 species including birds and bats.

**From the footbridge follow the brook until you come to School Lane.**

### 5 Balancing ponds

The depressions in the ground here and across the road are to store surface water runoff from paved areas and flood water from the brook at times of heavy rainfall.

**Option:** When you reach the road turn right for Millbrook Square. Here there are various small shops and places to buy refreshments.

**Cross the road and turn left to the car park. With Old Mill Hall on your right, walk past the hall to the end of the car park. Take the footpath to the left of the seats and basketball court between the wooden fences. At Denchworth Road turn right and walk past the Bay Tree pub and the Thames Water building.**

### 6 Thames Water Pumping Station

The building just past the pub pumps sewage up to Wantage and Grove sewage works.

**Walk to the road bridge crossing the brook. Cross over the road to the Village Green with the brook on your left.**



Millennium Stone

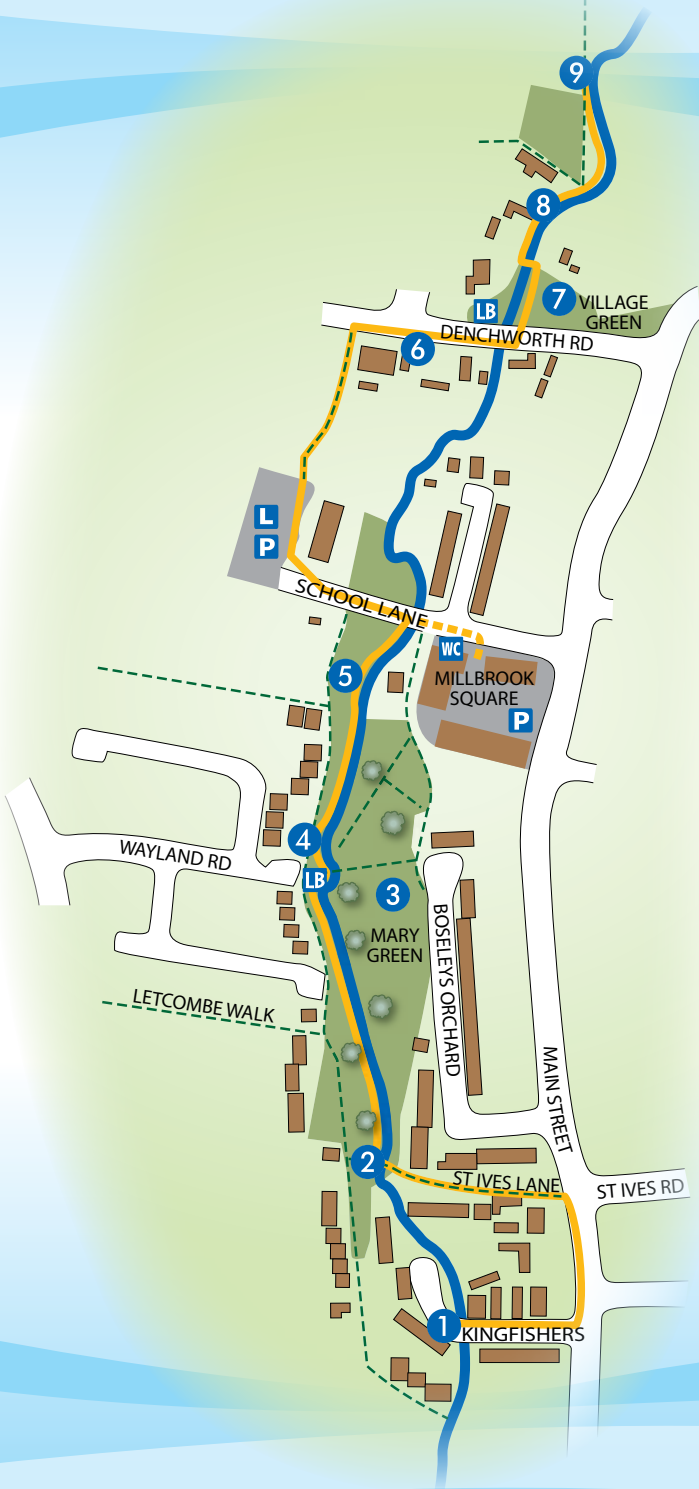
### 7 Village Green

**Sheep dip** – in the past sheep were driven from surrounding areas down to the brook and penned up outside the Bay Tree pub. The sheep were driven through the brook to clean their fleeces of dirt and parasites, and then onto the green to dry off. Cattle also used to graze this area.

This is a **Conservation Area** with several historic buildings. The green is one of the focal points in Grove and is used for the May Fayre and other celebrations.

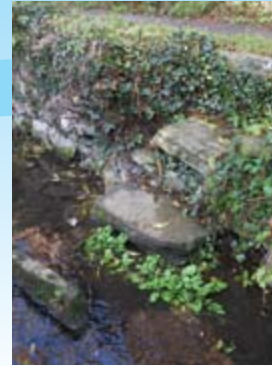
Look for the information board **LB** about the brook and on the green, the Millennium Stone outlining some of the transport history of Grove.

**Follow the brook and cross the old brick footbridge. Turn right up past Brook Barn.**



### 8 Water collection point

At the end of Brook Barn there is a garden gate and on the bank are stone steps descending into the brook. Before the introduction of piped drinking water the occupants of villages had to draw water from the brook, a spring or from wells. These old steps are one of only three water collection points that survive on the brook.



Steps

### Water and sewage

The Letcombe Brook supplied water for domestic and industrial purposes and was a means of getting rid of rubbish and foul water. In 1868 the brook was so polluted that Grove elders complained to Wantage upstream. They claimed that the water was 'so polluted by reason of sewage and refuse matter of your town being discharged into it, that it is injurious to the health of our inhabitants'. The reply came, 'Wantage has acquired by long usage the right to drainage into the brook - the Commissioners do not feel inclined to give up this privilege'.

#### KEY

 Brook	 Information panel
 Route	 Library
 Route option	 Parking
 Footpath	 Toilet
 Green space	

Scale: 0 — 100 metres  
0 — 100 yards



Today Thames Water provides the local water which is abstracted from the aquifer supplying the brook at Childrey Warren. Wantage and Grove sewage plant was built downstream from Grove and the cleaned effluent is discharged back into the brook.

**Follow the brook past the children's play area and and cross the stile.**

### 9 Letcombe Brook

Water is a powerful force and is constantly changing the landscape. Here on the brook there is a bend or meander. On the outside of the brook the water is flowing faster and is eroding the bank. On the inside of the bend the water is travelling more slowly, has less energy and is depositing silt forming a flat area.

**Our trail finishes here. You can continue north using the public footpaths across the fields to East Hanney 1½ miles (2.5km) away.**



Erosion and deposition