

## **Wychwood Restored**

A community woodland on the edge of Shipton-under-Wychwood could be one of the first aims for a local project which hopes to revive the ancient Wychwood. At Domesday, the Royal Forest of Wychwood ran from Cassington to Burford, from near Chipping Norton to Witney. Gradually the forest was cleared, until in the 1300s there were three distinct areas of forest centred on modern Cornbury, Hailey and Blenheim. Between 1857 and 1862 two thirds of the remaining forest were cleared by Act of Parliament.

A working party, set up last year by the Oxfordshire Nature Conservation Forum, and drawn from the wide group of interests involved, has been considering the restoration of the forest within its medieval boundaries, through an independent partnership of local land owners, local authorities and conservation groups. The Oxfordshire Woodland Group and principal local landowners have been consulted throughout. With the help of a grant from the local CPRE, the Wychwood Project has been set up, and hopes to begin making its mark before the Millenium.

The aim is to create a patchwork of woodlands – and certainly not continuous forest cover – linking the existing remnants of the forest with other woodlands within the area. Preservation and maintenance of existing small woodlands will be important, to help create the ‘feeling’ of a forest. The landscape will be improved, nature conservation opportunities will be created and there will be sustainable economic benefits for West Oxfordshire.

The restoration will take place voluntarily, without any compulsory purchase powers. Starting with the area of the late medieval forest, a flexible approach to planting is recommended, which avoids any sensitive places such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) or archaeological sites. The support of farmers and landowners will be vital for the project, which hopes to maximise available grants, and to raise additional new funding for co-ordinated woodland activity within the area of the ancient Wychwood.

Community Woodlands will be an important part of the project. The Woodland Trust, a nationwide charity, has made a successful Millenium bid to create “Woods on your Doorstep”, and is now planning a series of small village woodlands throughout England. A few of these could be within the area of the ancient Wychwood, possibly with one in Shipton.

The field below Matthews’ mill, between the railway and the river, is for sale and with local support could become a wood on our doorstep. The County Ecologist and the Woodland Trust, which has already approved the acquisition in principle, have been to inspect the site. The aim will be to keep a strip of water meadow by the river, with a belt of woodland running parallel with the railway line and forming a backcloth to the village.

If you are interested in the Wychwood Project, and would like to help the Wychwoods get a Community Woodland, please contact Charles Keighley, Carters Barn, Plum Lane, Shipton-under-Wychwood, tel. 01993 831403, or in my absence, Rosemary Salter on 01993 830559.