

Hurst Water Meadow Trust

Charity number 1050272. Website: www.hurst-water-meadow.co.uk

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Annual report to 31st March 2009

1. Purchase of Old Bridge Meadow

The site between the sewage works and the river Thames has been bought by Richard Douglas from the Cook Family Trust. A one-acre strip next to the sewage works has been leased to Dorchester Parish Council for use as a temporary car park in a completely separate transaction.

The remaining 3.628 acres between the car park and the river was offered to the Hurst Water Meadow Trust for purchase at less than cost. This gave the trustees the essential time to raise the money. Once the sale was completed, an item was put in the November 2008 Dorchester News and the public appeal for funds started. Full funds were pledged by the middle of March 2009.



Ancient causeway on Old Bridge Meadow

2. Funding the project

The total cost of the project was estimated at £51,722 of which £47,297 was for land purchase, fees and site works and £4,425 for enhancing the wildlife. This was eventually raised by mid-March from the following sources:

Landfill Communities Fund, via Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment £20,000 (less third party contribution of £2,160), and £4,425 from WREN Gift-aid Fund.

Two Charitable Trusts who request anonymity £10,000

The Hurst Trust's Land Purchase Fund (from a local donor) £7,500

South Oxfordshire District Council Capital Grant £3,850

Dorchester Parish Council £1,000.

The balance was contributed by local donors to whom we are very grateful for their generosity in these hard times. The sale can now go ahead and the plan is to sign the contract as soon as the documentation is complete – about mid-May 2009.

3. How will the meadow be managed?

The next stage will be for the trustees to commission expert reports on managing the land and its wildlife and improving public access. A questionnaire to assess public support received over 100 signatures. Three people have objected and these have been taken seriously. When the expert advice has been received, the trustees will make action plans which will be presented to the public at an open meeting, probably in July 2009. The future financing of the Trust's activities will also be discussed.

The site will be very valuable for visiting school parties, as it is more accessible than the Hurst and has shelter from the rain. The work done on fencing and gates was essential for defining and securing the site. It will be a most attractive venue for the public to enjoy in perpetuity.

4. Overseeding project on the Hurst meadow

The second year's work on soil preparation and sowing was completed by White Horse Contractors and Charles Flower in October 2008, in spite of adverse weather conditions. All that remains to do is a spring or autumn cut in 2009 and then wait for wild flowers to flourish in abundance over the next few years.

5. Wild flower project on lower field

This project is now in its 6th year and is proving very successful in establishing yellow rattle and other wild flower species with minimal disturbance of the soil and no grazing. Dr John Metcalfe deserves great credit. It is noteworthy that he was awarded an MBE for his public services, mostly to the Abbey.

6. Entrust audit report

Entrust, the HM Revenue and Customs regulatory body carried out a thorough audit of our management of four projects that had received grants from the Landfill Communities Fund. We received full marks and Andrew Clements' computerized financial records were highly commended.

7. Buck Pool Spinney

This site, including the weir and sluice is owned by a property developer in Cowley.

8. Educational visits to the Hurst

Six schools visited in the year, plus two visits from a youth group from Reading who built coracles and launched them on the river. This was great fun for all and the stretch of river from Buck Pool to Bridge End proved very safe and suitable for coracles, though several of the coracles got wet.



Coracles at Buck Pool

9. Volunteer working parties

These are now organized by Mike Southon and have achieved much on 13 occasions.

10. Tree management

Seven willow trees have been pollarded in the past year as part of long-term management and for public safety.

11. Grazing on Hurst

This has been minimal as the seeding projects did not leave much to graze. However, two polo ponies grazed the uncut areas on two occasions

12. Retirement of hon secretary

Peter has carried out this task for 13 years and thinks that the time has come to hand over to a highly competent team of trustees. The office workload will be shared between Mike Southon, his successor as hon secretary, and Lisbet Clements the Trust's administrator. A new trustee will be appointed. This change will probably take effect after the public meeting scheduled for July 2009.

Peter Pritchard, hon. secretary
on behalf of the trustees