

Hurst Water Meadow Trust

Registered Charity number 1050272

Securing the future How might you help us?



Buck Pool and black poplar, with the meadow beyond, in May



Dorchester Abbey viewed from the meadow in early spring

1. **The Trust – its aims, mission and vision**
2. **Who we are – the ten trustees and administrator**
3. **Activities and achievements**
4. **Aspirations and plans**
5. **Accountability and financial control**
6. **Help is needed and how this could happen**
7. **Addenda (on request or download from www.hurst-water-meadow.co.uk):**

Annual report and accounts 2008/9
Policy document and By-laws
Proformas for pledges, donations etc



Family using the newly raised footpath during flood on 29 November 2006, previously half-a-metre under water

1. The trust and its aims

The Hurst Water Meadow Trust was set up in 1995 in order to purchase an 18-acre ancient water meadow in the village. The public had been free to use the meadow for decades and its future was uncertain. A public appeal was successful and the meadow was bought for £31,000 in May 1996.

The Trust gained charitable status in 1995 with the following aims:

- to preserve, conserve and protect the meadow, its wildlife (plants and animals) and their habitats, for the benefit of the public;
- to advance public education in and understanding of the ecology of the meadow;
- to provide for the safe enjoyment and recreational use of the meadow by the public.

The Trust's mission

To provide and develop public open spaces, such as the Hurst meadow, in or near the village of Dorchester-on-Thames in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of wildlife and to contribute to the health, well-being, recreation and education of the community.




The trustees' vision of the future





People need open spaces and fresh air for their health and well-being. The beautiful landscape is an added inspiration. Market forces favour commercial development of such open spaces, and the trustees believe that they and the local community must take responsibility for owning and managing their local environment, both for themselves and for future generations. Charitable status ensures long-term ownership and management in the public interest. As suitable land comes on the market, the trustees wish to be able to bid successfully and so provide the local community with adequate environmental space in perpetuity.

2. Who are we – the trustees?

There are ten trustees and a part-time administrator. All but one live in the village.

Name	Position / role	Background
Richard Douglas MCIOB, FICES	Chairman	Engineering surveyor and director, manages major construction projects
Andrew Clements ACA, DIPM, MCIM	Hon. treasurer, webmaster	Management accountant
Michael Southon BA	Hon. secretary	Manager of industrial chemical business
Dr John Metcalfe MA, PhD	Ecologist	Wide experience of habitat development
Janice Balch MA, FRICS	Chartered surveyor, land consultant	Wide experience of land acquisition and commercial market
Michael Brookes MA BSc, Hon LLD, MICE	Civil engineer, project management	Wide experience of major projects and estate management
Cllr Christopher Hill AMIEE, CCNP	Parish Council liaison	Telecommunications engineer
Brian Rogers	Projects and fund-raising	Director of garden and building supplies business
Colin van Roon FIFF, MIL	Legal issues and contracts	Director of international logistics business
Graham Beland	Working parties	Senior software consultant
Lisbet Clements BSc	Administrator (part-time)	Geology graduate

		
<i>Richard Douglas Chairman</i>	<i>Andrew Clements Hon. treasurer</i>	<i>Mike Southon Hon. secretary</i>

		
<i>Dr John Metcalfe Ecologist</i>	<i>Dr Michael Brookes Civil engineer</i>	<i>Graham Beland Working parties</i>
		
<i>Chris Hill Parish councillor</i>	<i>Janice Balch Chartered surveyor</i>	<i>Brian Rogers Company director</i>
		
<i>Colin van Roon Logistics expert</i>	<i>Lisbet Clements Administrator, geologist</i>	

3. Activities and achievements

Since the trustees acquired the 18-acre meadow in 1996, they have opened it up to the public with a kissing gate and mown footpaths. The access bridge over the river Thames had to be replaced in 1998 at a cost of over £25,000. Buck Pool Spinney was brought under management in 2001 requiring widening of the weir bridge and building a footbridge over the 8-metre flood drain at a cost of £20,000, and construction of an otter holt. Old Bridge Meadow was acquired in 2009 at a cost of £42,000.

The Hurst meadow was managed for ten years as part of the DEFRA Countryside Stewardship Scheme. From 1 August 2006 we have benefited from the Natural England 'Higher Level Environmental Stewardship Scheme', to maintain and enhance this ancient landscape and to encourage a more species-rich environment. To achieve this, a hay crop is taken in mid-July, then the pasture is grazed by cattle (if available) until early November. No fertilizers or pesticides are allowed, and only very limited use of weedkillers. Special attention is given to the care and maintenance of the trees on the banks of the river and the old flood drains.

Recent projects include:

- Digging of two 'scrapes' – one left to natural propagation, the other planted with 400 wild flowers by local school children (see below)
- An experimental four-year project of seeding and planting to increase biodiversity and test different methods of soil preparation
- Restoration of an ancient hedge and planting the base with wild flowers
- A major project to overseed 3 hectares with 21 species of wild flowers
- Planting trees and shrubs including two specimen Black Poplar and two English Oak
- Educational visits for local school children to learn about the environment.
- Improving the Old Bridge Meadow site



The open-air classroom of ancient oak logs in use by primary school children



Footpaths are kept mown for easier walking

The Trust has received three Oxfordshire Sustainability and Conservation Awards: in 1999 for conservation, in 2001 for the website built entirely by our Hon Treasurer, and in 2006 for schoolchildren planting the scrape (see pictures below). The Trust was a runner-up for a Henley Business Award 2007 in the 'Corporate Social Responsibility' category.



Primary school children planting 400 wild flowers in scrape, May 2006



The scrape in flower five months later

The meadow is very popular with local residents and the public for dog walking, recreation and angling. About 20,000 visits to the meadow are made each year, and this number of people – and their dogs – is more than the site can reasonably sustain, particularly as dogs and wildlife do not go well together. **More land for public recreation and nature conservation is badly needed**, whilst maintaining the essential function of flood meadows as a reservoir when rainfall is heavy.



Dexter cattle grazing in late summer



Polo ponies grazing in winter

4. Acquiring further land

Land that is suitable for amenity use tends to attract bids from both residential and charity buyers with most residential buyers restricting future public access. Competitive bidding in the open market will often push the price above what the Hurst can afford to pay for amenity land. We prefer to buy direct from the vendor thus maintaining confidentiality until the purchase is completed.

The Hurst does not have financial deposits with which to buy land. It cannot move quickly if land comes on the market. We aim to address this difficulty in a number of ways including purchase by covenant from one of our donors.

5. Accountability and financial control

The stakeholders are the local residents (who largely bought the site), users of the meadow, the Charity Commissioners as agents of the public, Natural England as a guardian of the natural world, the Environment Agency in relation to river maintenance and flood control, and funding bodies including local authorities.

We report regularly to the local community through news items in the monthly Parish News delivered to every household, and by presenting the trustees' annual report at the Annual Parish Meeting. One trustee is a Parish Councillor and all but one live in the parish. We comply with Charity Commission regulations in selection and briefing of trustees and the annual accounts are presented in their recommended format (see addendum), and are subject to external examination by an independent Chartered Accountant. Our business is conducted in compliance with our Trust Deed approved by the Charity Commissioners. All trustees have signed up to the code of conduct of the Nolan Committee on Standards in Public Life (selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership). We work in close partnership with the Environment Agency and the three local Councils. Our reputation with funding and environmental bodies is that we are an efficient and effective organization. We have developed a novel system of organizational audit.

The trustees have set a good example by having personally contributed over £30,000 to Trust funds. Several trustees have pledged substantial sums against future projects and added a codicil to their will in favour of the Trust. Their contribution of enthusiasm, time and skill is very great, but hard to measure.

6. Help is needed and how this could happen

Our first appeal is to benefactors who share our aims and aspirations. Financial help could be in the form of a **donation** (either one-off or by regular direct debit) a **pledge** to contribute to a future project (probably land acquisition), a **gift of shares**, or a **legacy**. They could also help by suggesting other potential donors, and even approaching them personally. Donations and legacies to a registered charity have substantial tax benefits.

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