

Hurst Water Meadow News – November 2007

The meadow

In spite of the disturbance of the surface needed for last year's overseeding of wild flowers, the meadow is in good heart. The weather has been most unusual, with quite severe flooding in July. It was deep enough to shift the massive logs which make up the open-air classroom, but volunteers have put them back and anchored them in place (see picture). The flooding delayed the hay cut, but it was successfully completed at the end of August and the hay removed.



The open-air classroom restored and anchored

The wild flowers in the scrape continue to thrive, and Charles Flower plans to include a picture of them in his forthcoming book. The overseeding was moderately successful, with seven of the 21 planted species appearing. We hope to see more next spring. Re-establishing wild flowers in a meadow with so much coarse grass is not easy and we just have to see what works best, with expert advice. On 11 October, children from form 3 of Dorchester Primary School planted 100 wild flowers along the line of the restored hedge, with help from volunteers. John Metcalfe has undertaken further seeding and will shortly be planting 600 wild flowers in the lower field.

Trees

Timber from the trees which fell across the millstream from Overy Barn is being removed, apart from the trunks which volunteers have rearranged to make a seat (see picture). A small cluster of our trees fell across the millstream at the end of August, but the Environment Agency team kindly cut the trunks to about two metres and righted them again. They should thrive and a working party has secured them to the bank. Other trees along the millstream could well be reduced in height this winter, as they are poorly rooted.



Volunteers moving tree trunks to make seat

Tractor/mower replacement

This has served us well for nine years and is feeling its age. A new one will cost over £4,000 and the trustees would welcome contributions, as it is essential for maintenance of the meadow. We plan to get another Countax mower which is made at Great Haseley in Oxfordshire.

Volunteers

We have a dedicated band of volunteers of all ages. The working parties, usually on a Saturday morning, are enjoyable. We could do with a few more able-bodied volunteers for work on weekdays.

School visits

Visits by primary school children have been a great success, particularly with the help of Julia Sargent, the environmental education consultant. We hope that this will help them to understand the natural world and give them a stake in its preservation. We have had less luck with visits by secondary school geography students, but we are optimistic, as we can offer them a safe site for interesting fieldwork.

Have we won an award?

We were invited to put in for a Henley Business Award 2007. These are sponsored by the Henley Management College and others. The most appropriate category seemed to be 'Corporate social responsibility' which we take seriously. We have been selected as one of three finalists, with the awards to be made at Henley Management College on 25 October. These awards are prestigious and may impress potential benefactors.

Looking to the past

The brief story of the meadow published in the May and June Dorchester News has been well received, and plans are afoot to publish an illustrated version which could be available in the Museum and Post Office. The past history of the meadow is scanty, and a benefactor has offered to sponsor some research. Contributions and pictures from residents will be welcomed.

Looking to the future

In the short term, we will continue to maintain the meadow for public access as before and to increase the number of school visits. The trees and river banks will be maintained. Several projects are under way for increasing the range of wildlife. More wild flowers lead to more birds, insects and so on.

In the longer term we need to consider how the use of the meadow might alter, as well as the effects of climate change and future finance requirements. These are all difficult to predict, and the trustees are giving them much thought, with valuable expert advice from many sources. Your views on future directions for the meadow and the Trust are welcome

Peter Pritchard, Hon. secretary, 340008