

Hurst Water Meadow News February 2009

The Old Bridge meadow

The appeal is making progress and we now have about £6,000 to raise and hope that our appeals to two funding agencies will be successful. Donations from residents have totalled about £15,000 (with Gift-Aid) for which we are most grateful. However, if you have a windfall, please remember *The Hurst Water Meadow Trust*.

A kissing gate has been installed, large enough to take child buggies, wheelchairs and anglers' gear, while keeping out motorcycles. The galvanized steel looks conspicuous and we could paint it green to tone in with the hedge. Steel is more resistant to damage and lasts longer than wood. The path down from the gate is still a bit steep for wheelchairs. The slope will be lessened to one in fifteen as advised for wheelchairs, then sown with grass and the surface covered with turf reinforcement mesh. The gap in the hedge will be made good.

We have had many expressions of support for what we are doing, and over 100 people signed their approval, but a few are not happy and we will take their concerns seriously. Some do not like any change and would prefer us to 'leave it all to nature' and not clear the nettles. We will leave some nettles for their value to wildlife, but they had almost taken over and this is not good for wildlife or for public enjoyment of this very attractive site. Our aim is to improve the habitat for a wider range of wildlife as well as opening up a former private meadow for people to enjoy.



The causeway down to the river Thames and site of ancient bridge

The fencing is essential to define the boundary, as the meadow has to be registered as a public asset in perpetuity. The car park is entirely independent of the Trust. We could plant a 'Saxon hedge' (as on the Hurst) along the fence between the meadow and the proposed temporary car park which would be good for wildlife. The fencing is plain wire and replaces two barbed wire fences. Altering the line of the upper part of the footpath will not make it more likely to flood – that happens lower down. We will clear ditches of obstructions and do nothing to aggravate flooding.

The Trust will not have the fishing rights which are currently let to the Dorchester Angling Society. They have kindly agreed to allow Dorchester residents (with a permit from the Post Office) to fish on the meadow for free when a match is not being held. They only charge £15 per annum for membership and can fish on both banks of the lower Thames and a stretch of the Thames.

There is an active demand to buy amenity land such as these meadows by people who pay fancy prices and have no connection with the village. This is particularly attractive to buyers abroad with the pound so weak. Twelve years ago, the Hurst was on the open market, but the possibility of a Compulsory Purchase Order deterred the speculators. The Old Bridge meadow is a privately negotiated sale. The Trust is keen that these meadows should be restored to their traditional state and not be used for summer caravans or ravers – or worse!

We welcome ideas and suggestions from everyone, as well as being guided by experts. We have been asked to have a public meeting to discuss our future plans and this could be held when the trustees have purchased the site. Meanwhile, please let me have your views and suggestions – in person, by letter or phone.

Peter Pritchard hon. secretary 340008, 31 Martin's Lane