

The Hurst Water Meadow

Dorchester on Thames, Oxfordshire
Owned and managed on behalf of local people
Charity Number 1050272



Hurst water meadow news

19 June 1996

Purchase completed!

This took place on 17th May 1996, so the meadow is now in safe hands. Residents raised 90% of the money and will be the main beneficiaries. The Parish Council's donation was £5,000, and a larger sum was refunded by the Inland Revenue under the Gift Aid scheme for gifts over £250.

Planning for the future.

The Conservation Management Plan (CMP) is nearly ready and will be considered at the next trustees' meeting. A summary will be published, and further details will be available on application. A financial forecast and model are being prepared.

The use of the meadow.

For as long as people in the village can remember, the Hurst meadow has been popular, and children have bathed and fished there. To prevent damage and misuse, some by-e-laws are being drawn up and will be published. For example, motor vehicles will not be allowed, nor camping and lighting of fires, as all these can damage the meadow. We hope that the by-e-laws will be acceptable to users, whose comments will be welcome.

The horses have gone as they were seriously damaging the river banks. The grass and wildflowers are growing well (and the nettles and thistles!). After they have seeded, there will be a hay cut. A new gate has been installed. Some barbed wire has been removed, and more will be removed soon (any volunteers to help?). The Environment Agency has pollarded some willows by the river, and will do some work on the bridge abutments.

Mr and Mrs Morrison have kindly made access along the meander easier, and have installed a stile for anglers.

Future work planned.

The full task list will depend on the CMP. However, in cooperation with the Environment Agency, plans are afoot to stabilize the banks near the bridge with willow stakes and weaving (willow spiling). A filter layer of geotextile (a sort of porous nylon fabric) will be applied and the gap backfilled with gravel. This is planned for November to February which gives the willow stakes the best chance of rooting. Along the meander, where

erosion is severe, some willow spiling might help to slow the process. A new stile and fence by the bridge is being constructed and will soon be installed.

How did the Trust come about?

The short answer is that it just happened! The starting point was the meeting of interested parties called by Maurice Day (then Parish Council chairman) on 15th February 1995. There was strong support for the idea of a fund-raising initiative for the Dorchester lagoon and the Hurst Meadow. This was considered a more appropriate course of action than for the Parish Council to make a bid at ratepayers' expense. Considerable support came from the Parish, District and County Councils, and from bodies like the Open Spaces Society and the National Council for Voluntary Organizations (NCVO). An appeal was mailed to all householders on the electoral roll on April 3rd 1995, and the response was brisk and generous. This encouraged the initiators to form a Charitable Trust and this was undertaken by the head of the NCVO legal department, who have enormous experience in this field. Charitable status was granted on 31 October 1995. This was linked to a Trust Deed dated 13 October 1995, which anyone is welcome to see.

The initial seven trustees included the initiators of the appeal and those who had shown a strong commitment to the project. They had, between them, underwritten the cost of purchase, should the appeal have failed to reach its target. The Deed prescribes a maximum of ten trustees, so word was spread and there were six nominations. Three were elected unanimously by the trustees. All are resident in the village.

Parish Council involvement.

As described above, their support has been very strong, including the Compulsory Purchase Order which was a splendid safety net. The trustees have resolved that two trustees shall be Parish Councillors and this is planned to continue throughout changes in the Council. A meeting of three Councillors and three trustees to discuss cooperation and accountability, was held on 6th June 1996 and full agreement was reached. This was endorsed at the Parish Council meeting on 12th June 1996. Measures to ensure a common approach and mutual confidence will be considered at the next trustees' meeting and will be reported in Dorchester News.

Public accountability of trustees.

Though four of the trustees are the legal owners of the meadow, the `beneficial owners' are the users whose interests are safeguarded in Charity legislation. The trustees have no freedom to act outside the objectives and provisions of the Trust Deed and the Charities Acts. Trustees have to conform to strict rules of conduct. Though Dorchester residents will be the main beneficiaries, the trustees' duties extend to conservation and education which affect future generations and a wider public. The trustees will do their best to get the balance right, and will look to all who read this for their views.

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