



# Newsletter

August 2019



## Welcome

It may seem peaceful on the Marshes, but the slumbering behemoth that is the proposed extension to the Wincheap park and ride has awoken, and once again is proposing to wreak havoc in the Stour Valley. Please read the piece below and see how you can help the campaign to stop the car park being extended onto Wincheap Meadow.

## What's happening on the Marshes?

### **The park and ride extension plan**

As you may be aware from last month's newsletter and articles in the Gazette, the council has resubmitted its planning proposal for an extension to the Wincheap Park and Ride. The scheme is essentially the same, except that the buffer between the car park and the river has been doubled in width to 16 metres. This means that about 50 fewer parking spaces will now be available on the meadow opposite Hambrook, but our objections remain substantially unaltered. The proposal still runs contrary to the council's own policies on maintaining a green corridor along the Stour valley, not building on a floodplain or developing part of a Local Wildlife Site. Fewer trees are to be felled, but the plans are vague on the matter of just how many, and do not spell out what exactly the nature of the buffer will be. We do know that not all 16 metres of its width will be dense shrubs and

trees that would make a relatively effective screen; it will include a pathway for car users to walk along, and a number of openings to facilitate surveillance of the car park from the Marshes side of the river – the screening will be incomplete. Additionally, the council is proposing that the retained riverside willows would be pollarded, not because that was a traditional practice providing firewood and basketry material, and therefore in keeping with the habitat, but in order to improve sightlines out of the car park; if car users can see out, that also means that walkers on Hambrook Marshes will be able to see in to admire the glittering ranks of parked cars. The 16-metre buffer strip also leaves unaddressed the fact that the whole car park will be visible from the Marshes viewpoint on top of the old railway embankment, particularly during the winter months.

We do not feel it is our job to work out what other options are available to the council, but would point out that the District Transport Strategy in the Local Plan gives turning the existing park and ride into a multi-storey car park as an alternative to tarmacking the riverside meadow.

The other development is that the council is now proposing to compensate for the loss of the wet woodland, allotments, pond and meadow by creating a Local Nature Reserve on the land immediately downriver from the scheme, carrying out management that would make it more biodiverse than the areas that are to be lost (mitigation in planning jargon). Initially it was said that this would be a public area, but access is no longer being talked about, though there would doubtless be pressure on the council to open it up to the residents of Wincheap. The Hambrook Marshes side of the river is already very heavily used and, while the Love Hambrook Marshes trustees wish to promote public access, the last thing we want is to see yet more disturbance of natural habitats on the other side of the river as well; what is currently a very quiet wildlife haven could become yet another urban park.

We know that many of you are extremely upset by the proposal and want to help fight it, so how can you get involved? Once again we need you to write to the council and register your comment about the scheme by clicking [here](#). Click on the “Documents” tab to see what other people have put in their comments and to view the various technical documents relating to the plan, or click on the “Comments” tab to submit your own comment. Remember, it doesn’t have to be a long, closely-argued polemic – this is largely a numbers game, and the more people send in their comment the better, but it needs to come from the heart! And don’t delay; you only have until 9<sup>th</sup> September.

You can follow the campaign on Twitter at [@MeadowsSave](#) or on Facebook at [Save Wincheap Water Meadows](#), and watch the recent KMTV video [here](#) to get a better idea of the issues.

Last week (29<sup>th</sup> August) the Gazette gave notice of the campaign’s brilliant publicity stunt, which will involve cut-outs of the much-loved Wind in the Willows characters being paraded by supporters at 10am on Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> September, congregating at the Wincheap footbridge that spans the river and leads to the present park and ride, B & M, and Pets at Home. Please join us then if you can for a photo opportunity that will demonstrate the strength of feeling against the council’s proposals.



But most importantly, spread the word! Get friends, acquaintances and social groups to send in their comments.

The Gazette has given the issue a good airing, kicking off with a half-page article on 15<sup>th</sup> August. The following week a much shorter article announced the setting up of the new campaign group - Save Wincheap Water Meadows - and it was accompanied by a detailed letter from Rick Norman, a trustee of Love Hambrook Marshes. In its latest issue, in addition to reporting on the forthcoming appearance of Mr Toad, Ratty, Mole, Badger and Otter on Thursday (5<sup>th</sup>), the paper published three excellent letters, two from Love Hambrook Marshes trustees, and one from the Wincheap Society.

## Other news



The gale on 9<sup>th</sup> August brought down a willow across the busy riverside path. In order to inconvenience the public as little as possible we started work at 6am the following morning, but there was already a steady stream of runners and dogwalkers, who all had to be controlled to avoid any risk of accidents while we were felling the large limbs.



A party from the Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership (KSCP) spent a day pulling up ragwort from two fields (below left), creating a hefty stack of the plant in the process (below right). A great deal of misinformation is circulating about the danger of ragwort, but when wilted in a hay crop it does



become palatable to livestock, and as we are always hoping to sell the crop taken from the hay field (opposite the Wincheap footbridge), it is in our interests to control this toxic weed.



KSCP will be holding another work party on 26<sup>th</sup> September, so if you would like to help out, meet the team at the entrance off Whitehall Road (near the level crossing) at 10am. Just bring sturdy footwear, old clothing and some lunch.

## Wildlife Report

It's becoming more of a struggle to find new plant species now, but a single red bartsia was noted in the hay meadow last week. This is generally a strongly colonial plant, so further searching might well have revealed more individuals. Rejoicing in belonging to a seven-syllable family, the Scrophulariaceae, which includes such familiar plants as speedwell, foxglove and figwort, it is tolerably widespread in Kent, though its distribution is somewhat patchy. A fairly lowly plant, with smallish pink flowers, it doesn't attract attention when present in ones and twos, but I have seen it growing abundantly in fields being heavily grazed by horses, which evidently dislike it. An interesting feature is that it is semi-parasitic, so that although photosynthesising like other green plants, it obtains some of its nutrition through latching onto the roots of nearby grasses.

Lovers of lazy heatwave days will be disheartened to hear that our summer visitors are voting with their feet – well, wings really – and the scrub on the old railway embankment has regularly seethed with warblers preparing to embark on their exhausting trip back to Africa. The dizzying way they dart backwards and forwards in the hawthorn and rose bushes makes accurate counting impossible, especially since the birds are often mingling with higher than usual numbers of tits. Having reported my sighting of a green sandpiper last month, I saw a further two on 13<sup>th</sup> August, yet another sign of summer slipping away.



Interest along the river picked up, with a mandarin duck present on 26<sup>th</sup>, and three sightings of one or two kingfishers (above) in the first half of the month, although they still fail to give the appearance of settling on our stretch of the river.

Goldfinch flock sizes tend to increase at this time of year, now that there is an abundance of thistle and other seeds, so, with plenty of food to go round for all, they can benefit from the extra vigilance of all those additional pairs of eyes.



Finally, a squirrel on 26<sup>th</sup> was my first for some time.

*Banner photo at the head of this newsletter is of Himalayan balsam*

*Kingfisher and goldfinch photos courtesy of Dave Smith*

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