



# Newsletter

September 2019



## Welcome

It could be said that Love Hambrook Marshes is a shrinking violet, hides its light under a bushel and is backward in coming forward; in other words, we haven't done much to promote this emerald of a jewel on the outskirts of Canterbury. Whether intended as a criticism or not, it is certainly true that we haven't put much effort into putting Hambrook onto the lips of Canterbury's citizens. However, we have now taken one step forward in quite a brazen fashion, splashing photos of the Marshes all over one wall of the revamped Wincheap underpass. Thanks to the initiative of councillor Nick Eden Green, the once-seedy, down-at-heel subway has been transformed with huge photos of the city on one wall, and images of Hambrook on the other. Dave Smith's heron (right), wings spread, is truly magnificent, looking for all the world as if it is about to fly out of the wall! Other photos depict scenes from Hambrook and some of its wildlife, and there is a simple map (below right) indicating its relationship to Canterbury. However, most people aren't very good at using maps, and it may be that we need to consider signposting a route to Hambrook Marshes, if we



want more Canterbury visitors to be able to enjoy some relaxation away from the turmoil of the city centre. Thanks are due to Dave Smith, David Lewis, Josh Carter, Simon Pettman and Michael Walter for allowing their photos to be used without any acknowledgement on the subway wall.



## What's happening on the Marshes?

### Park and ride update

The proposed park and ride extension is still uppermost in our minds, though with the expiry of the deadline for objecting to the application there is less that the public can do to keep the debate going (about 900 objections were submitted to the council in total).



However, more excellent letters have been published this month in the Gazette, and an event on 5<sup>th</sup> on Hambrook Marshes, opposite the proposed car park site, was highly successful, with around 50 people taking part (above), generating another article in our local paper. Large, colourful cutouts of Mr Toad, Ratty, Mole, Badger and Otter had been skilfully produced by a supporter, prompting the paper's headline "Protestors getting Ratty over park and ride plans". A couple of "Save Hambrook Marshes" placards were slightly incorrect, as the Marshes are not directly threatened by the proposal, although enjoyment of the area will undoubtedly be affected if the plan goes ahead.

The council's application may no longer be open for comment, but you can still sign the Facebook petition [here](#). It has over 2300 names, but apparently the council doesn't sit up and take notice until there are more than 3000 objectors, so there is still time to have an impact.

The council's current thinking on alternatives to the present proposal is set out in a report by Richard Moore, Transport Officer, and can be read [here](#). Following this, in the same document, is the original 2009 report on the options for the Wincheap park and ride. These are fairly lengthy

documents, but a very brief summary of some of the main points, with apologies for any omissions, is as follows:

- Conversion to a three-storey car park with 600 spaces, plus a further 200 on the allotments, would meet the council's projected requirement for a total of 800 spaces. This option was rejected on the grounds of:
  - Cost - £15 million\*\* as against £3.7 million for the proposed scheme
  - Loss of £4.4 million grant due to delay entailed in building a multi-storey
  - Almost total loss of use of the present park and ride during construction
- An alternative to a multi-storey would be to use the Serco depot to provide a further 227 or so parking spaces. Objections to this approach are that:
  - existing park and ride and Serco depot combined would not meet the council's 800 space requirement.
  - A new site would have to be found for Serco
  - The land on the depot site is contaminated
  - Having two pick-up points for the buses would create difficulties
  - There would be no toilets and other facilities at the ancillary site
- A second alternative would be to use the former Homebase plot, but:
  - The council is about to reach agreement with a new tenant, bringing in much-needed income to the council
  - The 800-space requirement would not be reached
  - Problems for bus access
  - Lack of facilities
- The Serco and Homebase sites combined would meet the council's 800 space requirement, but is not recommended, for the reasons stated for each alternative individually.

\*\* It's not clear if this price is taken from the 2009 report or from a more recent quotation. In the earlier report £14,440,000 is quoted as the cost of a three-deck car park providing 1,120 spaces, well in excess of the council's target of 800, while a two-deck option would cost £10,080,000 and provide 850 spaces, just above the council's target.

Other sites owned by the council might become available within the Wincheap retail estate but, in addition to the issues outlined above, there was a concern that this would bring the park and ride too close to the centre of Canterbury, destroying some of the benefits of the scheme. Also, the park and ride scheme is subsidised, so the income from it would not match income forgone if valuable retail sites were lost.

If none of the options above are deemed suitable, the fallback would be to return to the original Faulkners Lane proposal for a completely new site.

The 2009 report looked at the possibility of building a new Wincheap park and ride on two other sites:

- One would have involved taking over the Thanington recreation ground, but this was ruled out as there is a presumption in the planning process that sports and recreation areas would not be developed unless the sites could be demonstrated to be redundant.
- The second was for a potentially very large site on Cockerling Farm, but this was rejected on the grounds that:
  - Access would be problematical and there were fears that the relevant agencies would not approve the road layout modifications that would be needed.
  - The present landowner was hoping to develop the site – which is now happening.

For fuller information, please read both reports in their entirety.



## Hay-making

At the end of summer each year the hay meadow is mowed by a contractor, cutting, baling and taking the hay off-site as part of the long-term plan to increase the floristic diversity of that field. Unfortunately, the person who has done this work previously is no longer available, and the mowing had to be done by a new contractor who couldn't bale and remove the hay. What he was able to do was roughly rake up the arisings and dump them rather untidily in heaps in the ungrazed field behind the meadow (right). It will take some years for



those stacks to rot away completely, and this approach obviously isn't a long-term solution to the problem of disposing of large volumes of hay, so we hope to find a contractor for 2020 who will do the whole job for us. Part of the problem is that the hay is of rather poor quality, so not particularly saleable. You may notice raw gashes in the ground where the teeth of the grab have scooped up rather more than just the hay; this doesn't look very pretty, but may prove beneficial, as it is exposing bare

mineral soil, into which plants other than grasses may now have a chance to germinate. A Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership (KSCP) work party hand-raked some of the hay that the contractor missed and carried it over to the piles the contractor had made (above).

## Other tasks

KSCP volunteers also cleared shrubs from the viewpoint on the old railway embankment to give an unobscured sightline up- and down-river. Unfortunately, this also means that visitors will have a clearer view of a car park, if the council gets its way!

Reedmace (bulrushes) in the shallow pool by the pond-dipping platform was pulled by a group of about twelve people from Cummins, a firm based in Manston. The company has a community involvement policy where each employee is required to do a certain number of hours of community work. This will create areas of open water that are currently choked with the reedmace.

The next KSCP work group will be on Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> October. If you'd like to help, meet the team at 10am at the Hambrook entrance off Whitehall Road close to a level crossing.

## Wildlife Report



After a poor summer for martins and swallows, a small flock of twenty house martins (right) were chittering over the river on 7<sup>th</sup>. Eighty starlings were foraging in Tonford field on 8<sup>th</sup>, swelling to 200 on 26<sup>th</sup>. The house martins would have been thinking about moving south, whereas the four little grebes on the river on 26<sup>th</sup> were probably settling in for the winter months. Similarly, five skylarks (left) flying over on 30<sup>th</sup> were another sign of the changing seasons: at this time of year skylarks that bred further north in Britain or Scandinavia are on the move, wandering around the



countryside in search of good feeding grounds until lengthening days once again summon them back north. Grey wagtails haven't been much in evidence this year, so it was encouraging to see three along the river on 9<sup>th</sup>. A group of six crows on the embankment on 8<sup>th</sup> had been attracted there by



the green fruits on a walnut tree (left). Corvids are renowned for stripping these trees of their unripe nuts, and there is a curious string of walnut trees close to the river between Canterbury and Chartham. A fairly grand tree stands right beside the riverside path close to Chartham, but most are quite young and possibly associated with planting schemes around the former gravel diggings.

Amphibious bistort is a plant I am more familiar with as an aquatic with floating leaves (below), but at Hambrook, in keeping with the first part of its

name, it occurs patchily along the riverbank with its roots on dryish land. An attractive flower (below, left), it is no surprise that related species are fairly widely grown as garden plants. An interesting feature is that it can survive well away from water, and there is quite a substantial sward of it in one of the Hambrook fields, but under those conditions all the plants are blind, failing to produce any flowers at all. The patch is therefore a very unremarkable sea of green leaves that the cattle don't touch (below, right).







*Banner photo at the head of this newsletter was taken on the old railway embankment, and shows the fluffy seed heads of traveller's joy, also known rather delightfully as old man's beard!*

*House martin and skylark photos courtesy of Dave Smith*

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