



LOVE HAMBROOK MARSHES CIO

Annual Report 2014-15

Love Hambrook Marshes (LHM) CIO was formed on 31 March 2014. The following note describes aims and achievements for its first year of operation ie for the business year ending 31 March 2015.

Background

Hambrook Marshes is a 50 acre area of wetland situated alongside the Great Stour River near Canterbury city. The Great Stour Way (Canterbury to Chartham), a shared use walking and cycle path opened in May 2011, runs along one edge of the site. The site, which has access points from Canterbury, Wincheap, the London Road housing estate and Thanington, is widely used by local residents for countryside walking, dog walking, pram pushing, shopping, cycling, bird watching, and for general enjoyment of an undeveloped wetland site. For many it provides access to shops, school or work, without the need to resort to road transport.

In August 2013 the owners of Hambrook Marshes, Kent Enterprise Trust (KET), announced that they would put Hambrook Marshes on the market. It emerged that any new owner had the right to close public access to Hambrook, and possibly to seek development of the site in ways that could threaten local wildlife. Denial of public access rights would mean closure of the Great Stour Way. As a result of these threats, the charity 'Love Hambrook Marshes (LHM) CIO' was formed with the aims of acquiring Hambrook Marshes and guaranteeing that the area would remain open, undeveloped, wetland with undiminished public access, thus assuring that the Great Stour Way would remain open for the foreseeable future.

AIMS

The objects of the new CIO, as stated in its constitution lodged with the Charity Commission, are 'to protect, manage and preserve the Hambrook marshes for the benefit of wildlife and for the public benefit'. They have been amplified by the Trustees as follows:

1. to ensure that Hambrook remains open, undeveloped marshland
2. to ensure conservation of the site through effective land management
3. to protect and encourage plant and wildlife

4. to guarantee the existing public access to the site
5. to encourage community involvement in the site through Friends of Hambrook Marshes and others

This review provides a summary of what has been achieved during 2014-15 against each of these aims.

AIM 1 Ensure that Hambrook remains open, undeveloped marshland

- To a large degree, the existence of the new charity, with its stated aims and charitable status (Charitable Incorporated Organisation 1156473 Registered 31 March 2014), ensures that, for the foreseeable future, this aim will be met in full.
- Site insurance has been put in place for basic public liability, and for problems arising from contamination.
- Trustees successfully applied for the annual Natural England Single Payment Scheme Grant for 2014 and through proactive management of the land continued to benefit from the Natural England Entry Level Scheme and Higher Level Scheme Grants which expire in spring 2016. The grant system is being restructured from 2016 and Trustees will be making an application under the new scheme

AIM 2 Ensure conservation of the site through effective land management

Progress on this aim has been achieved in several areas:

- Trustees have given priority to replacement of inadequate fencing, as grazing livestock is a specified requirement, and this can only be met if fencing is secure.
- Trustees were disappointed to learn that the existing Grazier Agreement would not continue (the long horn Highland herd have been sold and moved to Norfolk), but pleased to find a replacement grazier. The new herd, mainly Friesians, will be on site in spring 2015.
- Trustees are also pleased to have resolved the issue of how to manage willow beds on the Middle Field. Under a new ongoing and long term arrangement, the willow beds will be looked after by a contractor (Ben Crosby) who will harvest the willows (to create hurdles and fencing) and generally manage the beds. Clearance of willows previously cut by KET was initiated by volunteers (May 2014) and completed by Ben Crosby.
- Control of ragwort and other unwanted weeds was carried out by volunteers in autumn 2014.
- Limited mowing of the verges of the cycle path was carried out by KSCP volunteers (May 2014) and later by a KCC contractor.
- A wider cut either side of the path was completed by a contractor in August 2014. This included sections heavily affected by beds of nettles, some of which were starting to spread into adjacent fields.

- A scheme of regular monthly mowing for the riverside and cycle path has been agreed for 2015. A strip of land immediately adjacent to the riverbank will be left unmown to provide a varied and protected environment for wildlife.
- With help from KSCP volunteers, we have tidied the site by removal of debris - including tyres and shopping trolleys, and fencing that was redundant and collapsing.



posts for fencing



arrival of long horn cattle



willow maintenance



volunteers clear scrub on the embankment



mowing of cycle path border



Trustees clear accumulation of litter

AIM 3 Protect and encourage plant and wildlife

- KSCP volunteers completed a clearance of scrub areas on the rail embankment (January and February 2015), providing basking sites for reptiles.
- KSCP volunteers also created two hibernacula (refuges for reptiles), using a mixture of wood, rubble and soil, in January 2015.
- Trustees removed a large amount of cans and bottles from the pond at the north of the Boardwalk field, to encourage increased use by mallards etc.

AIM 4 Guarantee the existing public access to the site

- Public access to the Great Stour Way, cycle path and gravel paths has been maintained, although localised flooding problems have restricted access during winter months.
- Evidence of patches in the cycle path which are breaking up due to poor foundations and encroachment of weeds have been noted. Discussions with KCC and Sustrans are ongoing.
- Scrub clearance by volunteers on the rail embankment (see Aim 3 above) has much improved public access to the viewing platform.



flooding by Tonford field



synchronised swans



White campion



Christ Church students with their lecturer

AIM 5 Encourage community involvement in the site through Friends of Hambrook Marshes and others

Activity is ongoing in several areas:

- Discussions with the Friends of Hambrook Marshes on their possible future role have continued. Regular bird reports by Michael Walter appear on the CIO web site (more below).
- A good working relationship has been established with the Kentish Stour Countryside Project (KSCP) volunteer group - the Trustees are grateful for the major contribution being made by the volunteers.
- Progress has been made in combatting the problem of litter. Following discussions with Canterbury City Council and SERCO, two new litter bins are on site and are regularly emptied. Routine litter picking across the site is undertaken by Trustees and others.
- Preparatory work on the financing, design and construction of new information boards is well advanced. Trustees hope to see these installed during the remainder of 2015.
- A web site for the CIO is in place at www.lhmcio.org. This includes pages on news, current developments, birds seen, plants seen, volunteer work, etc. Plans for a *Facebook* presence are in hand.
- A start has been made on organised visits to the site focusing on particular wildlife or environmental issues: a Geography field trip by Christ Church University (February 2015), an Environmental Science field trip by Christ Church University (March 2015), and a visit by the Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group (March 2015).

Trustees express their thanks for financial support during the year from the Beerling Foundation, from Canterbury City Council, and from some private individuals. They also express their thanks to the KSCP volunteers for their much appreciated contributions, in all weathers, during the year.

Trustees of LHM CIO 1 May 2015