



LOVE HAMBROOK MARSHES CIO

Annual Report 2015-16



cattle on Middle Field August 2015

1. 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.

When the site came on the market in 2013, it became clear that a new owner could, if they wished, close public access to Hambrook, and effectively ban walkers and cyclists from the one mile Hambrook section of the Great Stour way. They could also make changes that would threaten local wildlife. As a result of these threats, the charity 'Love Hambrook Marshes (LHM) CIO' was formed on 31 March 2014 with the aims of acquiring Hambrook Marshes, providing undiminished public access, guaranteeing that the area would remain undeveloped, conserving the site through effective land management, protecting and encouraging plant and wildlife, and encouraging community involvement.

This review provides a summary of what has been achieved during 2015-16.

2. Natural England (NE) grants

LHM relies on grant income from Natural England to cover the day to day running costs of the site. The NE schemes are complicated and have recently undergone major changes. Trustees successfully applied for the new 5 year Natural England Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier grant scheme effective from 1 January 2016. They are committed to running the site in a way that meets the requirements of the scheme.

3. Management



better fences



welcome new Friesian heifers

- LHM are developing a long term partnership with the Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership (KSCP). They provide advice and manage groups of volunteers to work on the land. Members of the public can find out more, or join the volunteer group, via the LHM website.

- The fencing replacement programme to ensure a secure site for cattle has continued and a dairy farmer has been found who grazed 30 heifers from April to October 2015 as required by Natural England grant conditions.
- Litter problems have been a continuing concern. Trustees and other volunteers aim to collect litter twice a week. Co-ordination of work with Serco has improved. A cleaner site benefits both visitors and wildlife.



litter left by campers on the embankment

- Wherever possible, trustees remove graffiti without delay.



cutting willows



mowing verges

- The 5 year contract for willow harvesting to make hurdles and fencing continues successfully.
- Ongoing mowing of the riverside and cycle path margins is proving successful in suppressing nettle and weed growth to prevent their spread to grazing fields and create more space for visitors, particularly dog walkers.
- Plans have been agreed to take hay from one of the fields with the intention of creating a hay meadow over a period of time.

4. Plant and wildlife



banded demoiselle near the boardwalk



common lizard hides by the embankment steps

- In line with our remit to protect and encourage plant and wildlife, we are pleased to welcome the appointment of Michael Walter as an additional LHM trustee. Michael brings with him particular expertise on birds and extensive knowledge and experience of general wildlife and environmental issues.
- Scrub clearance and creation of 'hibernacula' (refuges) by KSCP volunteers on the rail embankment has continued to create a suitable environment for reptiles.
- An improved plant and flower recording scheme has been devised - we hope to launch it later in 2016



common fleabane



black knapweed



meadowsweet



meadow cranesbill



bulrush or reedmace



ragged robin

5. Public access



census enumerators count the visitors



whilst cattle take an interest

- The public continue to enjoy permissive access to Great Stour Way and to other Hambrook paths.
- Agreement has been reached with Kent County Council (KCC) for removal of redundant cattle grids. These are no longer needed now that improved fencing is in place.
- KCC has also agreed action to improve drainage near the cycle path. This will help reduce the risk of flooding on the path. Both KCC projects are scheduled for completion in the summer of 2016.
- A survey of the number and type of visitor to the site was carried out over a weekend in August 2015. Over the two days, 30 volunteer enumerators logged over 2,800 visitors of whom 1826 were on foot, 1023 on bikes, and one Swiss visitor sailed past on his roller-skis! The findings will help the charity in managing Hambrook and making bids for funds needed to improve the site. (Detailed findings are available via our website.)



new paths



information for the public

- On 27 September 2015 the Friends of Hambrook Marshes organised a 'meet the public' day to provide information and answer queries
- Kissing gate surfaces have been improved with gravel to prevent flooding and avoid the nuisance of deep mud.
- Work on removal of redundant fencing from the riverside is continuing.

6. Community involvement



student study group



weaving of the willow maze



pleasure for all!

- Work of the Hambrook volunteers, organised under the auspices of the Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership, has been mentioned above
- Christchurch University Canterbury and Canterbury College continue to use the site for practical field trips for modules within their courses
- Our willow maze, created by local school children some years ago, has been tidied up.

Trustees express their thanks for financial support during the year from the Beerling Foundation, Kent County Council, 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.

7. Information and signage



bird reports

HAMBROOK MARSHES

Wildlife at the marshes

This boardwalk allows you to get really close to a very wet part of Hambrook.

Look out for plants and creatures that thrive on these soggy areas. Here are some examples:

- Tussock sedge grows as distinctive tussocks (or little hills) created from former dead leaves - see them at the field border near Whitehall Road where they have survived over many years.
- The little egret which looks like a small white heron.
- The striking damselflies which shine in sunlight as they flit over the pond.
- The palmarie newt which you're more likely to see at dusk or night time with a torch.

Little egret
Tussock sedge
Palmarie newt
Banded damselfly (male)

For more information, go to www.lhmcio.org or search 'Love Hambrook'

new information boards will soon be erected

- Regular bird reports by Michael Walter appear on the LHM web site.
- New information boards have been designed - they will be installed in summer 2016.
- 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.

Trustees of LHM CIO 11 June 2015