



Newsletter

October 2020



Welcome

Park and Ride planning application revoked

It's fairly old news now, and I imagine that most of you have heard that the council has been forced to withdraw its own planning permission for a £3.6 million expansion of the Wincheap park and ride on to the water meadows opposite Hambrook Marshes. The council's statement, issued on 9th October, reads:

We have been informed by Highways England that their experts cannot sign off the design of the A2 off-slip at Wincheap which was submitted as part of the planning permission for the Thanington Park development.

The developer is in the process of coming up with a series of proposals that it is hoped will address their concerns.

This means our design for an extended Park and Ride site at Wincheap, which was approved by the Planning Committee, cannot be put in place.

We intend to withdraw our plans. Also, the council, in its role as local planning authority, will be revoking the planning permission.

Once the off-slip design is agreed, we will look at the implications for the current Park and Ride site as well as the potential for future expansion.

A formal decision would be needed before any future work can begin on changing the site's layout.

However, while it is encouraging that the council has been forced, somewhat ignominiously, to withdraw its plans, what we have now is not a victory for common sense and the environment, but merely, at this stage, a further delay in what is now a long-running saga. The sentence above that I have highlighted in yellow tells us that the council has withdrawn from the battle, but possibly to regroup and fight again another day. What the council's statement doesn't mention is that the entire social and economic climate in the country has been upturned by the current pandemic: it now looks as though a large part of the workforce will be operating from home permanently, and our shopping habits have been radically altered, all of which can only reduce demand for extra park and ride facilities.

The most amazing point to emerge from this fiasco is that the council should have awarded itself the planning permission before the new road layout had been approved by Highways England. Highways England's bald statement was that the slip road plans "were not compliant with national standards and regulations", presumably referring to the sharp curve, worthy of an Alpine hairpin bend, that would have been needed to link the off-slip to a new roundabout. Mind you, Highways England have been very preoccupied of late, coming up with a new name to rebrand themselves as National Highways, at a cost to the taxpayer of £7 million, only five years after a similar exercise to drop their Highways Agency title.



So, two cheers for a reprieve, but don't relax your vigilance.

Sunday 11th saw a celebration of the reprieve for the Wincheap water meadow (left). Among those present at short notice were our MP Rosie Duffield, and local councillors Pat Edwards, Michael Dixey and Nick Eden-Green. Ratty, the campaign's Wind-in-the-Willows mascot, was delighted.

Kent's Plan Bee

KCC will be launching its action plan for pollinators online from 10.30 to 12.30 on Monday 16th November. The event is free, and all are invited to attend. To receive the link, please register at <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/kents-plan-bee-virtual-summit-2020-tickets-123471523651>. Plan Bee is KCC's attempt to reverse serious declines in suitable bee-foraging habitat, which is harmful, not just to the insects, but also to us, as we rely on pollination for a third of our food, and 80% of wild flowers and trees are dependent on insects for pollination. There will be speakers from Kent's Plan Bee, Buglife, Kent Highways, Loddington Farm, Kent Wildlife Trust, Kent's Children University, and Kent Youth Council.

Over the coming months, Canterbury City Council will be working with KCC and local stakeholders to develop a pollinator action plan that can be applied at the district level, although its frequent radical mowing this year of the meadow which had been earmarked for the park and ride extension doesn't instil great confidence.

Photo competition – open now!

We've started a new photo competition. Each quarter we'll be looking for a stunning seasonal photo of Hambrook Marshes. The first one is open now, so we want lovely photos showing "Autumn on the marshes". Hambrook Marshes is full of interest at this time of year – the landscape, views, river and wildlife all offer plenty of choice for photographers!



The winning entry will feature as the cover image on our website and will also appear on our Facebook page and in our newsletter. Please read the entry rules first, and if you have any questions you can either contact us via photos@lhmcio.org or post on the [LHM facebook group](#). **The closing date is 8th November.**

Entry criteria and judging

- Images must be of Hambrook Marshes, and reflect the competition's current seasonal theme.
- Images that show the nature, wildlife or landscape of Hambrook Marshes are welcome, but must not include identifiable people.
- Photos must be in landscape orientation, minimum 2000 x 1200px
- Please don't submit images that have heavy filters, effects or watermarks applied. Black and white images are acceptable.
- You can submit up to three photos for each competition.
- All photos that you submit must have been taken by you.
- The trustees of Love Hambrook Marshes will decide the winning entry and notify the winner shortly after the closing date.
- Please email your images to photos@lhmcio.org with "Autumn" in the subject line.

Guided walk for Extinction Rebellion

On 17th October three Love Hambrook Marshes trustees gave about 15 members of Extinction Rebellion a tour of Hambrook Marshes. As you can see from the photo, this was made possible by everybody being extremely sensible about social distancing. They learnt a little about the history and wildlife of the site, how it passed from Bretts to Kent Enterprise Trust and then on to Love Hambrook Marshes in 2014, and a point of



particular interest to the audience was a summary of where we are with the council's proposed extension to the Wincheap park and ride. A pleasing diversion was provided by Tom Hunt reading from Gray's "Elegy written in a country churchyard", the tenuous connection being that it has been claimed that the graveyard in question was not at Stoke Poges in Buckinghamshire but St Nicholas church, Thanington. The [famous poem](#) opens with the line "The curfew tolls the knell of parting day", but there was no curfew bell at Stoke Poges, whereas our cathedral's curfew bell tolls at 8.55 every evening. In the second line "the lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea", but there are no cattle near the Buckinghamshire church. I'm sure the dispute will never be resolved, but it is nice to think that part of Thomas Gray's inspiration may have come from just across the river at Thanington.

What's happening on the Marshes?



Perhaps the most significant event of the month was the arrival of tree surgeons on 21st to clear away the windblown poplar on the old railway embankment, and to reduce the height of a second, unhealthy poplar to make it safe. A tree inspection in the winter had identified one tree as potentially hazardous and was marked for surgery to remove a large limb leaning heavily over the path, but before the contractors could do the job a severe summer storm brought the tree down, and the

first photo on the left shows the men clearing up the damage. The large exposed cut limb was then roughly hacked (right) to make it look a little less artificial and speed up the rotting process, so that it would no longer stick out like a sore thumb. That was the easy bit! They



then had to scale the second tree, using a 6' catapult to throw a line over a high branch, so that a weight-bearing rope could then be hauled up, ready for the ascent of the surgeon (left), which is where the real skill comes in. This

particular tree had numerous nest cavities, so we wanted to retain as much of it as possible – if you look closely at the photo below you'll notice at least five old woodpecker holes on two dead limbs to the left of the surgeon. Those two boughs weren't tall enough to reach the path so, even if part of the tree collapsed, there would be no risk to the public. If you're not keen on heights, you would do well not to choose tree surgery as a profession! And if you like everything to be neat and tidy, the end result (below) may not thrill you, but the site is being managed with wildlife in mind, and nature isn't always beautiful. This is further emphasised by the picture of the main trunk on the next page.



The tree had evidently been struck by lightning years ago – not so surprising, given its height and exposed position – resulting in a long, vertical rotting gash down the main trunk, which is contributing to the tree's poor health. But that is where a pair of stock doves nest every year. Two years ago a pair of great spotted

woodpeckers bred successfully in the tree, and the following year starlings nested in one of the old woodpecker holes, so the tree has certainly made its contribution to the biodiversity of the site, and it was felt to be well worth





retaining as much of it as possible, while at the same time ensuring that the embankment path was safe for our visitors. All that remains now is to wait until next spring to see if the stock doves return to their usual tree despite its dramatically different appearance.

The story doesn't quite end there though. We wanted to retain some of the felled material as bug hotels but, knowing that a stack of eminently rollable logs would prove irresistible to some of our visitors, we had to secure them somehow. We had cunningly arranged for the surgery to be carried out the day before a Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership work party, and they were able to bang in stakes and then staple thick wire to the logs, (below left), with the end product on the right. As the logs rot and slump, further retaining wire will be needed.



The KSCP group also burnt some of the smaller material, and cleared some scrub on the embankment to provide sunny spots for basking reptiles. They did attempt to remove reedmace from a pond to create areas of open water, but the summer drought had baked the soil so that, although now replenished with water, the pond bed was still too hard for the plants to be pulled out.

Wildlife Report

After the summer drought, weather of a different sort has been very much to the fore, with 173mm of rain, the third wettest October in my 39 years of recording at Rough Common. One inevitable result is that the fields are getting damper, with pools developing in some areas, and 70 mallard attracted in by 26th. An increase in turbulent weather brought another overnight storm on 24th, littering the ground with broken branches, and bringing with it an awareness of why the brittle trees lining the riverbank are called crack willows.

But there is still some warmth in the sun, and I was delighted one morning to see a large hatch of flies dancing in the light above the embankment slope: ten minutes later there was no sign of them, and it was if it had all been a dream.

Weather apart, there were plenty of other indications of approaching winter, with tufted ducks returning to Tonford lake, the flock building up to 19 by 26th; the first couple of snipe back on 22nd;

and a meadow pipit and skylark the same day. The 12th was interesting, with the first redwings (right), redpoll and goldcrests of the autumn, but, to crown it all, a bustling flock of about a hundred fieldfares (below) briefly descended into the poplars on the old railway embankment.



STOP PRESS

I've just been told that an apparently reliable observer saw a gannet flying downriver at Chartham three days ago (1st November), with the likelihood that it continued along the valley and so flew over Hambrook! What is so remarkable about this record is not so much that it is a seabird miles from the coast – after all, cormorants and gulls are common inland – but that gannets are so well adapted to a life at sea that it is actually hard for them to fly overland. They are essentially gliders, able to fly hundreds of miles with few beats of their long, narrow wings, gaining lift from the updraught caused by waves and oceanic swells, and by dynamic soaring. This not fully-understood process involves taking advantage of the marked gradient in wind speed that can occur in the first few feet above sea level when the wind is blowing steadily. In the absence of such assistance, gannets find sustained flight extremely exhausting, and so avoid land masses at all times, only turning up inland very rarely, and then usually because they have been blown off course by storms.



The big question now is 'can I count this as a Hambrook record?' Given that I didn't see it myself, that it is an unverified record, and that we don't even know if it did fly over the marshes, sadly the answer has to be no.

All bird photos courtesy of Dave Smith

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