

Friends of the Meadows

A background image of a meadow with a castle silhouette at sunset. The sky is a mix of orange, pink, and blue, and the castle is a dark silhouette in the distance.

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Welcome *to our Newsletter for Spring 2017*

The Committee has welcomed two new members: Julie Savory and Keith Dixon who attended recent Committee meetings. Julie also represented Friends of the Meadows at the Love Your Place local Volunteering Conference last month and has written an article about it for this newsletter.

However, recent news indicates the challenges we now face on the Meadows.

The Watersports Centre was put before the Council Planning Committee last week and members unanimously backed the authority's own planning application to demolish the existing Queen's Park High School boathouse, then erect the community watersports hub and a 46-vehicle car park in its place. Some will welcome this as the existing boathouse is no longer fit for purpose. But others, especially local residents, have many concerns around extra noise and increased traffic and possible disruption from social functions at the centre.

Our Committee Member Andy Ingham was present and able to speak and voice those concerns as well as those of

the ecological and environmental impact. Handbridge Park Ward Cllr Razia Daniels also expressed some of these concerns and added "I would like you to add robust and enforceable conditions to safeguard the quality of life of residents living in the neighbourhood".

We now wait to hear when the work will begin but will monitor progress closely and do our best to ensure the conditions of the project are met and the ecological impact is minimized.

Since the planning decision was made, we have also had the news that our Countryside Ranger Amanda Pritchard will be leaving at the end of April to pursue other interests. Amanda has worked closely with us to manage the Meadows with very limited resources and she will be greatly missed. We wish her every success for the future.

The Council are currently undertaking another restructuring of their services and at the time of writing we don't know how this will impact upon our green spaces like the Meadows.

Now is the time when we all must work together and help in the work to save this vital natural space in our City. If you can help in any small part please get in touch with us. Or, indeed, if you know of people who use the Meadows but are not members of Friends of the Meadows, let us know and we can pass on details for them to join.

Thank you for your support!

Rachel Cross, Newsletter Editor

Cover image: Sunrise and mist on the Meadows, March 2017 (Andy Ingham)



Computer generated image of the Chester Community Watersports Centre showing the view from Lower Park Road/Elizabeth Crescent junction to the Meadows access.

Winter Hedgelaying

In early February, on a thankfully dry and sunny day, a group of us went down Bottom's Lane and prepared for another go at hedgelaying after last year's successful event



Kevin Feeney from Cheshire Wildlife Trust was again on hand to organise the work and instruct us in techniques and how to work safely.

The first task was to clear much of the overgrowth to leave the trees which were candidates for laying.



Andy disagrees with Julie about the lay of the new hedge.

(Not really, of course!)

With billhooks and bowsaws, we worked in pairs on our own stretches to chop into the trees and lean them over for weaving through planted stakes.



Love Your Place

**Julie Savory represents
Friends of the Meadows at a
Spring Conference at Trafford
Hall**

The daffodils and crocuses were in bloom as I arrived at Trafford Hall on a bright March morning to join thirty-five other volunteers from across Chester and the Wirral to explore how we as volunteers can support, protect and enhance our 'special places'.

The 'Love your Place' conference was organised by Cheshire Wildlife Trust and Cheshire West and Chester with input from Chester Voluntary Action.

The venue was Trafford Hall, a Georgian country House in the village of Wimbolds near Mickle Trafford. Built in 1756, in 1995 it became the National Communities Resource Centre which is a charity with the aim of supporting communities across the country to drive positive change in the areas in which they live.

The Chairs of Westminster Park Friends Group and Norley Wildlife Group set the scene for the day by setting out the strategies and techniques they have used to gather support both in 'feet and hands' on the ground and in financial sponsorship. This was followed by workshops on: recruiting and retaining volunteers, using social media and press releases, accounts and site management plans.

What did I take away from the event?

- The importance of making and maintaining links with other community groups in the area to broaden sources of support that can be tapped into



- Ideas on places to advertise for volunteers
- Knowledge of how Chester Voluntary Action can provide support for recruitment of volunteers and the development of voluntary groups
- The role a range of social media applications can play in getting information about the Meadows and Friends of the Meadows activities out to the local and wider community.

I also enjoyed meeting people from other 'friends of' groups and in particular making links with Handbridge Community Association.

Julie Savory

If you would like to find out more about Friends of the Meadows and the role the group plays in helping to keep the Meadows as a special place for nature so close to the city centre do get in touch with us.

There are opportunities for volunteering in occasional workgroups or any of the work with the Committee.

Going for Gomphus

Julie Rose wants to take us on a hunt for a rare dragonfly

Did you know we are only 8km away from the most northerly site for one of Britain's rarest dragonflies?

The Club-Tailed Dragonfly, *Gomphus vulgatissimus* is a specialist of wooded riverbanks on slow flowing silty rivers. It's found on the Severn, Thames, Wye and our River Dee. The larvae burrow in silt and hunt, and emerge when mature onto whatever is available on the riverbank to shed their larval skin and emerge as "teneral" adults. They crawl quickly into cover; when their wings are hardened they fly into the canopy and into the surrounding countryside. They only return to mate and lay eggs. Eggs are just laid in the water, not attached to vegetation, hence they cannot cope with fast flowing rivers, as the eggs will be washed away.

Dragonflies are only adults for a few weeks, for most of their lives they are aquatic larvae, hunting in ponds and streams. Larvae take 1-5 years to mature, it is thought *Gomphus* take 3-5 years, hunting in the silt. In 2017 The British Dragonfly Society is organising a countrywide survey for this beautiful insect, at least where it is likely to occur. I've volunteered Friends of the Meadows to survey our two kilometre squares of SJ4165 and SJ4166 and Andy Ingham is taking on another square further upstream.

We probably don't have *Gomphus*, it doesn't like brackish water, and the tide overtops the weir regularly, but if we don't look we won't know. I have helped on the White-faced Darter project in Delamere Forest. We would see maybe 10 adults and find nearly 1000 shed skins (exuvia), which are the definitive proof of breeding.



Common Clubtail female © David Kitching

The survey involves looking for these exuvia because we could easily miss the adults as they disappear into the vegetation so quickly. We may find exuvia of other dragonfly species too. I hope we'll be able to identify them. *Gomphus* exuvia are apparently distinctive. They have a triangular head, and are often horizontal rather than vertical as they emerge onto whatever is available: wood, stones, mud. Most other dragonfly species climb up vertical bank side rushes and grasses and hang there to dry and harden. If we're not sure we can send photos or even the exuvia to experts.

Gomphus emerges late May, early June up here, during the day. We hope to organise exuvia hunts in good weather, probably early evenings so working folk can join in.

Please come along, many eyes make for efficient surveying and short stretches of river bank for all of us. Dates to be arranged, weather dependant because rain washes the exuvia away and also the dragonflies won't emerge, they are too vulnerable to predation before their wings harden.

Julie Rose

Events coming up on the Meadows

Here's a reminder of some of the events taking place on the Meadows in the coming months.

Sunday 4th June

The Deva Triathlon World Qualification Event

This event takes place from Grosvenor Park which is the transition point. The run route will incorporate running over the Old Dee Bridge as well as the Suspension Bridge, along the Groves and in the Meadows with the finish being at the Bandstand in the Groves



Sunday 2nd July

The Rotary Club of Chester Raft Race

The Chester Raft Race is an annual charity event taking place every July on the River Dee and organised by the Rotary Club of Chester. The Meadows is the launch area. This event takes place at 10am



Saturday 15th July

The Deva Divas Triathlon/Quadrathlon

The Deva Divas Triathlon is a short distance ladies only race. It's now a well-known, popular event which, in 2016, won the coveted British Triathlon "Event of the Year".

The Deva Divas Quadrathlon also takes place this year. As well as the 750m Swim, 25k Bike and 5k Run there will also be a 4k Kayak included.





January to March 2017

11th March 2017

A Peregrine flew from its perch on the Lead Shot Tower & sped off over Grosvenor Park. As part of the Tower development, a ledge for the Peregrines is due to be installed.

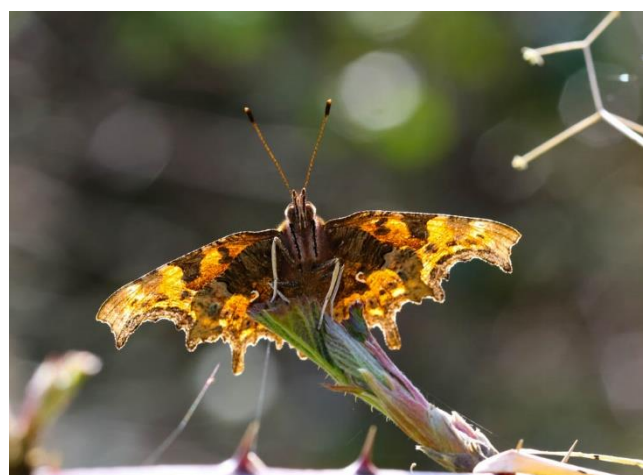
12th March 2017

Four Chiffchaff dotted in trees around the Meadow. These were probably genuine spring migrants unlike the previous two on 18th February as they were all singing.

Lesser Celandine began to flower at the top of Bottoms Lane track.

19th March 2017

A Blackcap singing deep within the hedgerow at the end of Appleyards Lane remained hidden from view.



Please let me know of any wildlife sightings (flora or fauna) in or around the Meadows and I'll include them in the Log. Just get in touch at my email andrewingham@aol.com or via our website or Facebook page.

Andy Ingham, Meadows Log Recorder



17th January 2017

The unmistakable silhouette of a Barn Owl casually drifted over the Bottoms Lane hedgerow and on to the Meadow, for its final appearance of the winter

4th February 2017

Teal continued to be seen on the river at first light. Six were underneath tall Willows that line the river bank. They had obviously found a favourable area to feed at night.

18th February 2017

Two Chiffchaff were feeding in hedgerow on neighbouring Dukes land. Were they the first summer migrants or resident winter birds?

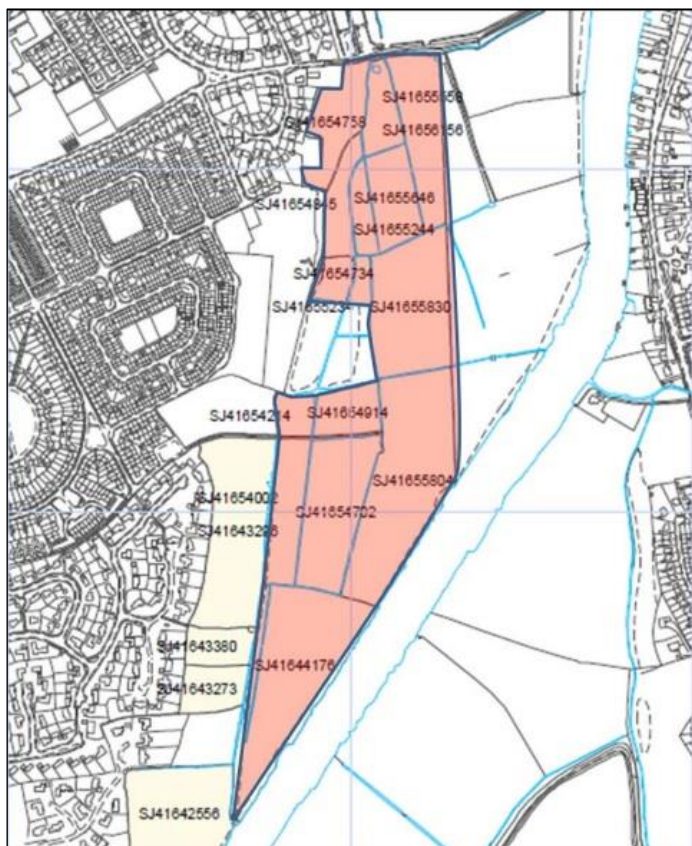
Twelve Meadow Pipits flew into long grass to roost on the Meadow.

25th February 2017

The first frogspawn of the year was noted in some of the ditches.

Wetlands Feasibility Study

A summary of the Grosvenor Wetland Feasibility Study brief for Handbridge Marsh



Recent meetings and site visits between Grosvenor Farms Estate and Natural England have identified four areas of floodplain habitat with high potential for wetland restoration.

The feasibility study sets out the actions needed to restore the hydrology of the floodplain swamp, fen, and wet grassland habitats within these four areas which are: Crook of the Dee, Aldford Bridge, Aldford Flood Meadows and Handbridge.

The Handbridge area covers over 18 hectares of land immediately south of the Meadows with a mix of swamp, fen and grassland on River Dee floodplain (see the map)

The Study notes that the Handbridge area already supports valuable habitat

so the focus should be on enhancement.

The suggested primary objective here is to manage water levels to optimize the existing fen, reedbed and wet grassland habitats with consideration given to different land management requirements such as grazing / cutting of grassland. A constraint to note is an area in the centre of the Handbridge site is not owned by Grosvenor Farms; it is owned by CWAC. The Council has been made aware of the project and will need to be consulted during the design development although it is unlikely that water control structures could be located on council-owned land.

Options for water level and habitat management should include consideration of the location and level of water level control dams and land management involving the balance between fen, reedbed and wet grassland as well as requirements such as grazing/cutting of grassland.

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