

# Friends of the Meadows



**Newsletter 211**

**Spring 2018**

# Welcome *to our Newsletter* for Spring 2018

First of all, thank you for the feedback on our last issue which was dedicated to the life of Phyllis Brown. It was a pleasure to have been able to research her life and bring it to you, albeit in our own Newsletter.

In this issue, we turn to matters and activities of the moment and what has been happening recently. Of particular note is our response to Cheshire West and Chester's Consultation exercise on Community Assets, which we've included here on pages 4 and 5.

It's now a year since planning approval was given to demolish the Queen's Park High School boathouse, and erect the community watersports hub with a car park. The planning appeal upheld in December seems to have stalled the whole activity, or maybe issues of funding have become an issue, because we have had little news this year of progress.

A few volunteers have managed to do some much-needed willow clearing on the Meadow but this needs to be continually managed and more volunteers to help out would be very welcome. An update on Meadows management from the Ranger is included on page 8.

Finally, thanks to Andrew Howard for this month's cover photo – taken at 6:30am on a chilly March morning with the mist hanging over the river as his son Dylan and fellow rower Iestyn set out for an early row!

*Rachel Cross, Newsletter Editor*  
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**Save our Swifts!**

# Helping to save the Black Poplar

## *Planting native Black poplars on Chester Meadows*



*Stephen and Julie Savory, Julie Rose and Andy Ingham take a pose while planting the trees*

Black Poplar trees, which were once a familiar part of the British landscape, as epitomised in Constable's 1821 painting 'The Haywain', have been declared by the Forestry Commission as the most endangered native tree in Britain. The tree has been in decline for the past 200 years with now only about 2,500 specimens left in the UK, of which only about 400 are female species. As a rare tree it receives protection under Section 13 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

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*The Black Poplar was formerly used in buildings such as cruck barns and for floorboards.*

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Previously used for many purposes from floorboards and arrows on the Mary Rose, to carts, hedging, matches and rifle butts for WW1, replanting stopped in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in favour of fast growing hybrid species and the decline was compounded by loss of wetland habitats.

Chester Zoo, as part of their project to conserve the Black Poplar, has provided four saplings to be planted on the Chester Earls Eye Meadows. The wet land on the Meadows is ideal as Black Poplars grow best in boggy conditions alongside ditches and on flood plains. As they are dioecious, which means that male and female flowers are found on separate trees, two male and two female saplings have been provided with the plan being that they will cross pollinate and provide new saplings for the Zoo to use in other locations.

The location for the planting of the trees was agreed with Stephanie Hefferan, the Countryside Ranger, and on a damp cold day in early February members of FoM committee and other hardy volunteers planted the four trees including protecting them with tree guards. They are part of our culture, and now here, in the right place, on a flood plain meadow. Once they are established a notice board is to be provided giving information about the trees and the conservation project.

### **Black Poplar facts:**

- Broad leaf deciduous tree native to the UK and Europe
- Scientific name – *Populus nigra*, a member of the Salicaceae family
- Grows to a height of 20-25metres
- "Dioecious" means that male and female flowers are found on separate trees
- Flowers are catkins and are pollinated by wind
- Male catkins are red and female catkins are yellow green
- The leaves have a faint smell of balsam

**Julie Savory**

# Cheshire West and Chester Council's Consultation on Community Assets

## *The response from Friends of the Meadows*

Cheshire West and Chester (CWaC) Council has recently carried out the first stage of a consultation on a 'Draft Community Assets Framework' which focuses on how to ensure a wide range of 'community assets' currently owned by the council are managed efficiently and effectively and continue to make a valuable contribution to quality of life for everyone who lives in the area. Community assets include libraries, community centres, outdoor play and youth areas and also allotments, parks, village greens and other green spaces including the Chester Earls Eye Meadows.

Although the consultation has focused on how to find more innovative ways of managing community assets it is taking

place in a context where local authorities nationally are highlighting that their finances are severely stretched as a result of a fall of nearly 50% in government funding since 2010 (National Audit Office 2018). In some council areas this is leading to a sale of assets from town halls to parks and even art collections to help fund increasing demand for essential statutory services such as social care and children's services. Although there has been no indication that the Meadows or other green spaces in our area are at risk, as Friends of the Meadows Committee we felt it important to respond to the consultation to highlight the value the Meadows provide as a community asset.

Our response is shown here:

**Friends of the Meadows** is a voluntary group which seeks to work with the Council to protect and preserve the Earls Eye Meadows. The voluntary efforts of groups such as ours can only be effective as part of the Council's strategic plan and with the support of the Council in terms of co-ordination and implementation of work beyond our scope. We therefore welcome the opportunity to respond to the consultation document.

Whilst the Draft Community Assets Framework mentions green spaces and acknowledges that they are important to a thriving community "by making a huge contribution towards the health and well-being of local residents and visitors", it is not clear how they will be evaluated and the benefits to the community taken into account. It is not clear what the Council's vision is for green spaces and the natural environment.

We would like to list the reasons why we consider the Meadows should stay in CWaC's control with a clear commitment to preserving them as part of the asset strategy.

1. The Meadows are of unique value to the community as a wild and natural riverside environment close to the city centre and provide a good contrast to Grosvenor Park. There are no other spaces like this in the City of Chester.
2. The area is very low maintenance requiring only occasional mowing and tree work: the cost to the Council is much lower than an equivalent park.

(continued...)

3. The Meadows were donated to the people of Chester by the Brown family in perpetuity and contribute to health and wellbeing of local communities. The benefits of proximity to natural environments and open space for physical and mental health and well-being are well documented. Research has also demonstrated the contribution of open green areas to improving air quality.
4. The Meadows provide a valuable wildlife area encouraging fauna and flora. This includes links with Chester Zoo's conservation initiatives.
5. The Meadows contribute to the city's flood management strategy. The proximity of the Meadows flood plain to the city centre is a valuable feature which also enables it to act as a resource for leisure and as a habitat for fauna and flora.

We feel that the community asset plan should state what value the Council places on open space and we would like to hear what the vision is for the natural environment and support for wildlife and what open spaces can contribute to that vision.

**We need to be vigilant and ensure that our precious green and open spaces remain available as community assets for future generations of humans, wildlife and flora to enjoy and benefit from. This applies equally to other green spaces that may not have the same iconic status as the Chester Meadows.**

## Annual Events on the Meadows

### The Rotary Club Raft Race

This will take place on **Sunday 1st July** at 10:15am and will follow a course from the Meadows downstream to the Groves. There will also be Refreshment facilities and children's entertainment areas on the Meadows.



### Deva Divas Triathlon

This ladies only event will take place on **Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> July** and comprises a swim, bike ride to Marford and back and a two lap run on the Meadows. A Quadrathlon event will also include a kayak course.

### Dee Mile Swim

This classical race will be 96 years old this year! It takes place on **Saturday 4th August** and the race will start soon after 5pm from The Red House and a shorter distance race from the Meadows.



# Winter Twigs

*Julie Rose tells us about twigs and what can be found on the Meadows*

Why not wait till summer? Fungal ID often depends on the tree species, and fungi often appear after leaf fall. Dead buds give good clues to tree ID in summer too, and it's fun, a good excuse to get out and botanise in winter. To learn before leading the Meadows walk I went down to London (visiting relatives too) and joined London Natural History Society and John Poland for their Twig day at Richmond Terrace Gardens. LNHS is a busy society, with many very knowledgeable people, I'd definitely recommend joining them for a natural history day; their calendar is on the web.

John Poland is the author of *The Vegetative Key*, which does give some bud and twig details too. His next book is *Field Key to Winter Twigs*, which he promises out for next winter.

First some definitions: Twigs are only the previous year's growth. All other sprigs are branchlets in second and third year; branches and boughs thereafter. The distance between girdle scars, the scars where the apical bud scales have fallen off, always represents one growing season, but the length depends on how good the growing season was. Leaf scars are where the leaf stalk was attached. They are either arranged in opposite or alternate positions - very useful in identification.

During our field trip to Richmond Terrace Gardens we saw many species there, and John Poland is very knowledgeable. The Meadows is not so diverse, and I am much lower down the skills pyramid, so I brought some twigs in from my garden and surrounding streets to illustrate other species and we used keys, both to ID unknowns and to teach my colleagues



*Detail from cover illustration to The Vegetative Key*

the ID features. On our Meadows Twig Day we started off by the Suspension Bridge with Sycamore, home grown lilac, and cherry, one of the cultivars *Prunus sp.* Then to Wych Elm, *Ulmus glabra* which has lovely corky leaf scars and very asymmetric buds, as you would expect from the asymmetric leaves. Then past several willows, with their neat addressed buds, and Common Alder *Alnus glutinosa*, purple buds on stalks, to the felled Horse-Chestnut, the rotten wood is more obvious now. Then a surprise, Hornbeam, *Carpinus betulus* doing quite well, planted by Friends of the Meadows (20 years ago?) We admired Aspen *Populus tremula* which has round tipped bud scales, then to our newly planted Black Poplars *Populus nigra* which have pointed bud scales. Poplars are closely related to willows but have 5-pointed pith, willows have round pith and smaller buds. We are very proud of these and hope they will grow into charismatic trees like the ones in Ruthin.

**Julie Rose**

# Meadows Site Management

*An update from Coutryside Ranger Stephanie Hefferan*

**Riverside willows:** these have been coppiced by the University's "Welly Wednesday" team. Several successful days have taken place on site both on the Meadows and elsewhere, so we will continue to work with them as an active volunteering group

**Crown lifting:** this has been carried out around the paths, particularly those by the river.

**Horse chestnut felling:** (close to rowing club) – this was identified as potentially dangerous and following an inspection from the Tree Officer, they arranged to have it felled on H&S grounds.

**Grazing:** as yet we have had no firm interest but I am continuing to pursue.

**Green waste tipping:** at the request of Cllr Daniels, this is being handled directly by our Localities officer Jan Walters who is acting in liaison with the Streetscene Officer Kerrie Brice responsible for these matters in Chester.

**The Big Dee Day** is to take place again but as yet we have no dates but is usually around September time. Cheshire West and Chester are to be the hosts this year.

**Volunteering:** Green Health Officer Paul Taylor has been working hard to re-establish the input of groups such as Turning Point and FENWA. Past groups have been so successful that they have all found employment, therefore any new input has to be re-established with new participants who are still in the very early stages of recovery.

Several events have been planned to work on the terraces, however on both occasions the group has cancelled, so this is definitely very early days for them and a process that hopefully will build up over time.

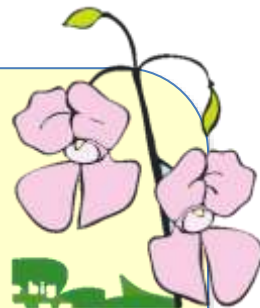
**Cheshire Wildlife Trust:** Kevin Feeney has now left and a new replacement is establishing. Once settled, it is intended to continue the strong relationship between CWaC and the CWT group to re-establish active volunteering on sites.

**Funding:** I have put forward several projects for consideration for *S106* monies and to our capital pot. Only time will tell if we get anything as it is highly competitive and open to all sections of the council. Included in the bids are action for erosion control, path re-surfacing, pond re-establishment, etc.

Everyone has been working hard including siting and planting of the Black poplars that Julie Rose sourced, replanting the 'avenue', bat boxes erected and a very cold and wet *Green Gym* with Keith and Julie amongst other activities. Everyone's input is much appreciated.

## Balsam Bash

**Help us stamp out  
Himalayan balsam**



**Meet at Bottoms Lane**

**6:30pm, Friday 18<sup>th</sup> May  
Wear sturdy footwear!**



# Friends of the Meadows Aims and Objectives

## *A review of the Aims and Objectives of the group*

The Committee recently decided to review the Aims and Objectives of the Friends of the Meadows and a small working party drafted the following which were accepted by the Committee for presentation at the next Annual General Meeting. Your comments and views will be appreciated!

### **THE FRIENDS OF THE MEADOWS**

#### **Aims & Objectives**

##### **AIMS**

Through involvement of local people, to support the management of The Meadows as an important area of local nature conservation, with emphasis on the wildlife and recreation value.

##### **OBJECTIVES**

1. To contribute to the Council's management plan and to the achievement of agreed objectives through the implementation of practical projects, in coordination with the Countryside Ranger.
2. To stimulate interest and involvement in The Meadows by imparting information through notices, activities and a newsletter.
3. To monitor the condition of The Meadows in every respect: the state of notice boards, benches, gates, hedges, trees, and liaise with the Countryside Ranger, as necessary.
4. To work very closely with the Countryside Ranger in raising working parties to clean up and improve The Meadows as a habitat for wildlife.
5. To seek funding for any of the above, where appropriate.
6. To organise occasional social events and an annual lecture and AGM for our members, their families and friends.

Your comments, views, opinions (any feedback!) will be very much appreciated. Just get in touch through Rachel and email her at [rachelcross789@gmail.com](mailto:rachelcross789@gmail.com) and she will pass on to the Committee.

#### **Volunteers!**

We are always looking for people to volunteer, even if just on an ad hoc basis. You can help by getting involved in anything from distributing newsletters to work on the Meadows clearing, planting or bashing balsam!

Get in touch with Andy Ingham (see Meadows Log) or Rachel (see above)



# Pink Poo!



The aim of the Pink Poo campaign is for local communities to highlight exactly how bad the problem of dog fouling is in a particular area and to embarrass irresponsible dog owners by spraying sighted incidents of dog fouling with pink paint. If everyone can see how bad the problem is then dog owners should be encouraged to pick up the poo and not leave it behind in the future.

Unfortunately, the Meadows, including Bottoms Lane, is not immune from this problem.

## Cleaning up after your dog

It is important when cleaning up after your dog to:

- always carry bags to clear up after them - a simple plastic bag will do the trick or get a poop scoop from a local pet shop
- dispose of the bag correctly by either using a dog waste or litter bin or taking it home and placing it, suitably wrapped, in your own bin
- not dump the bag in a hedge or elsewhere as this is littering which carries the same penalty as dog fouling
- encourage the dog to 'go' in your garden, you can then bury the mess or alternatively clean it up and bin it
- never let your dog out alone to 'go to the loo'
- always worm your dog regularly, vets normally advise worming dogs every three to four months.

You can get small quantities of bio-degradable poop-scoop bags, free of charge from one of the Council's customer services centres.

It is every dog owner's duty to clean up after their dog. There are no excuses, fouling is unacceptable



# Snow Scenes on the Meadows

*A selection of photographs taken by Julie Savory on a walk around the Meadows in January.*



A snowy walk through the Avenue of Willows



A lowering sun casts its shadows



The Watcher in the snow



## January to March 2018

### 6<sup>th</sup> January

A Jack Snipe and forty Common Snipe flushed from a walk across the meadow. A wintering Chiffchaff continued its presence feeding in close proximity to a pair of stonechats.

### 7<sup>th</sup> January

The only Goldeneye to be recorded on our stretch of the Dee this winter was a juvenile just up the river from the Meadow. (Trevor Dennis)

### 5<sup>th</sup> February

A Peregrine was seen again above the Meadow and may well have been one of a pair that nested successfully in Chester last year. (Trevor Dennis)

### 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> February

A Barn Owl was observed hunting over the Meadow at dawn. (Rob Sidwell)  
It was spotted again at dusk on the 5<sup>th</sup> March

### 26<sup>th</sup> February

The first recorded butterfly of the year out of hibernation was a Small Tortoiseshell basking in the unseasonal sunshine on Elizabeth Crescent. (Judith Clarke)

### 2<sup>nd</sup> March

A not so familiar sight these days is a flock of Lapwing over the Meadow. Ten flew from a field bordering the Meadow. (Mark Warren)

The field is owned by the Duke of Westminster and part of an area benefitting from Higher Level Stewardship Grants. It will be



*Small Tortoiseshell*

interesting to see if the biodiversity increases as a result of this change.

A pair of Greylag Geese have also found this area to their liking.

### 4<sup>th</sup> March

Two Woodcock flew from the Handbridge Marsh and a further one was seen flying over the river onto Water Co land. (John Wainwright)

A pair of Stonechat continue to reside on the meadow using the Black Poplar tree guards as perches.

### 8<sup>th</sup> March

Two Great Crested Grebes fished the river by the Dee Valley Water mound.

As the sun went down one or two Pipistrelle Bats were hunting up and down Bottoms Lane Track and Overleigh Drive prior to a sharp decline in the Seventies.

### 19<sup>th</sup> March

The *Beast from the East* weather system brought with it a Redshank that alighted on the bank by the landing stage before flying low over the river to Sandy Lane.

A Goosander was observed bathing by the Old Dee Bridge.

### 26<sup>th</sup> March

The first spring migrant to announce its arrival was a Chiffchaff singing on the terraces below Elizabeth Crescent. (Rob Sidwell)

### 5<sup>th</sup> April

Brambling are rare to see on the Meadows so it was a surprise to find three in a Hawthorn bush on Water Company land - two very smart males in summer plumage and a female.



*Brambling*

### Andy Ingham, Meadows Log Recorder

01244 677135 or get in touch via our Facebook page:  
/friends of the meadows-chester

## Save Our Swifts!

The results of the last survey of breeding swift numbers in the Chester area confirmed a fall of 46% since 1995, when the last comprehensive survey was done. The disastrous situation reflects the national picture: swifts are under threat and unless the current trend can be reversed, these birds may start to disappear from parts of Britain in the next 20 years.

In the Chester area, the decline is most apparent in the city centre. Inside the city walls, there is now only one remaining colony, located on the Queens School. The decline is also apparent in Handbridge & Queens Park. The numbers of Swifts has fallen dramatically and if this continues, the sight of screaming Swifts will no longer be a feature of our summer evenings. The reason for the fall in numbers are complex, but part of the problem is renovation of old buildings and construction of new developments which do not afford suitable sites for nests.

The Chester Swift Conservation Group, run by partners including Chester RSPB Group, Chester Zoo, Cheshire West and Chester Council, rECOrd and Cheshire Wildlife Trust, is working with property owners, community groups and schools to raise awareness of the issue and what can be done to improve the situation. The aims of the Group are to build up breeding numbers here and in the city centre by installing nest boxes in readiness for the birds' return in May 2018.

If you have swifts nesting on or near your house, or would like to know more about helping to conserve these birds, the Group would be pleased to hear from you: just e-mail them at [rspbchester@googlegroups.com](mailto:rspbchester@googlegroups.com). [www.swift-conservation.org](http://www.swift-conservation.org) <http://actionforswifts.blogspot.co.uk>.

Alternatively, if you can help Swifts in Handbridge & Queens Park, by installing either a box on your own property or community building then give Andy Ingham a call on 01244 677135.