

Friends of the Meadows



Newsletter 224

Autumn 2021

Welcome to our Newsletter for Autumn 2021

In this Newsletter we have details of our Annual General Meeting on Thursday 18th November (see page opposite). This will be the first in-person AGM we will have held since 2019 and it will be good to see as many Friends attend as possible.

Of course we're still aware of the impact of Covid and the implications it still has for indoor gatherings even though many other events are now proceeding without distancing or face coverings. But, we want you to feel as safe as possible at the AGM so will put in place a few requirements which you can read on the next page. If you feel unwell in any way, please do not attend!

We also look forward to a very interesting talk from Mike Shaw of The Sundial Society in which he'll cover gnomonics, time-keeping, all manner of sundials, the Sundial Society and much else. We hope he'll bring some examples to look at!

As we want this event to be attended by as many as possible in the venue space, we're asking that you **let James Holroyd know if you will be coming**. All details on the next page.

We also need to be quorate, which means we need at least 15 Friends to attend!

Rachel Cross, Newsletter Editor
Email: rachelcross789@gmail.com

This edition's cover photo is of a Mute swan on the river taken by Andy Ingham. See more of his photos in the Meadows Log

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Ode to the West Wind

(First canto)

By Percy Bysshe Shelley

*O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,*

*Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
Pestilence-stricken multitudes: O thou,
Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed*

*The winged seeds, where they lie cold and low,
Each like a corpse within its grave, until
Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow*

*Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill
(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)
With living hues and odours plain and hill:*

*Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;
Destroyer and preserver; hear, oh hear!*

Annual General Meeting

Thursday 18th November 2021 at 7.00pm

St Mary's Handbridge Centre,
St Mary Without-the-Walls, Handbridge, CH4 7HL

Our AGM talk and presentation will be by Mike Shaw on Sundials

Mike Shaw is a member of both the British and North American Sundial Societies and has a large collection of unusual sundials. Some of them he will bring to the meeting with him. He's appeared on the Antiques Road Show with a few of them.

Learn what that funny sticking-up bit is called and which direction it's pointing and why. Learn how sundials work, why they're not there to tell the time, and see some very unusual ones from all around the world. Learn the Five Golden Rules to check out before you buy one and see examples of what not to buy.



Two Notable dials: Castle Howard and Greenwich Observatory (Photo: The British Sundial Society)

Attending the AGM - important information

In order to gauge numbers, we should be grateful if those intending to be present would send an email to James Holroyd: jandwholroyd@btinternet.com or phone: 01244 340790 and leave a message.

Please do not attend if you are feeling unwell.

If in doubt, please check your status by using a Lateral Flow Test.

We shall be using the same room as at our last meeting before the onset of Covid. Every effort will be made to space seating. Sanitiser will be provided. Attendees will be encouraged to wear face masks. We aim to keep the room as well-ventilated as possible.

We shall be serving wine only this year, without nibbles, in order to keep to a minimum any risk of infection.

Meadows Site Management

An update from Greenspace Officer Stephanie Hefferan

Cut and collect

Due to concerns about previous standards for the cut and collect, this has been booked with a new contractor. They were running a little late but it was expected that all work would be completed by early October.

We will assess the work once done and feedback to the contractor ready for next year.

Scrub management

This has been booked for the winter period. I am currently awaiting dates from the contractors.

They will use the ditch lines as a focus for management which will make it easier for us to monitor progress across the years.

Rotational Coppicing (opposite Deva Terrace)

An initial day of coppicing has taken place with everyone working incredibly hard.

A second day is planned to achieve the annual rotational target for the area.

This work is under license by Natural England as it is a SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) so all work that took place is following strict guidelines to protect this conservation site.

The cut brash was donated to Chester Zoo for their giraffes, elephants and rhinos.

Mowing

We have been using a new contractor this year and whilst the majority of the work has been good there are a couple of areas that need to be addressed, specifically paths at Elizabeth Crescent and Bottoms Lane. I am liaising with the contractors to ensure that these areas are addressed in future visits

Steph Hefferan, Greenspace Officer

Information and Interpretation Boards

All the design work for the two information panels has now been agreed by the Council's Comms team and been submitted to Shelley Signs for manufacture (see our last newsletter). The exact location of the panels has agreed with Steph Hefferan - one will be below the Lower Park Road entrance on the Meadow and the other will on the Meadow just beyond the Riverside path entrance.

The Black Poplar interpretation board application for planning permission was prepared and submitted by Stephen Savory and approval obtained. Shelley's Signs have provided quotations for the manufacture and delivery of the board and these have been accepted.

Rachel Cross has produced a final design, based on an original design provided by the Chester Zoo Black Poplar Project, which provided the black poplars that have been planted. Subject to final Comms Team approval it will be sent to Shelley Signs for manufacture and we are hoping to see it in place soon!



Global warming, biodiversity and The Meadows

Our Chair, Julie Savory reflects upon the role that The Meadows plays

In November the UK is hosting, in Glasgow, the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 26). It is being seen as a “a pivotal moment in the fight against climate change” and as possibly the “last chance to get runaway climate change under control”.

The conference aims to agree actions by all countries that will limit global warming, secure global net zero carbon emissions by the middle of this century and help to protect communities and natural habitats.

It seems like almost every month there is a disaster somewhere in the world linked to rising temperatures. In 2021 alone we have seen severe flooding in Western Europe and China, a heat dome in Canada and parts of the USA resulting in scorching temperatures and raging wild fires in California.

One of the consequences of global warming and some modern agricultural practices has been a reduction in biodiversity. Biodiversity is so important as all species, including humans, are interconnected. Plants, for example, help humans by giving off oxygen, providing food, construction materials, medicines. The root systems of plants help prevent flooding. Plants, fungi and animals such as worms keep soil fertile and water clean. If, for example, the number of bees reduce, then fewer plants will get pollinated with onward consequences for the food chain.

Here in Chester, we have not faced serious impacts of climate change seen in other parts of the world but nearly every year now

the Meadows play an important role in flood defences by absorbing and storing water that would otherwise flood lower lying areas.

The Meadows, as an area of unspoilt grassland and in their role as flood meadows, are a haven for wildlife and contribute at a local level to reducing biodiversity loss and storing carbon and reducing CO₂ in the atmosphere. When the River Dee floods the Meadows in winter it deposits silt and other organic deposits which increase the fertility of the soil and also provide deeper open-structured soil which can absorb carbon from the atmosphere.

The Meadows are home to a range of plants including herbaceous species such as meadowsweet, common sorrel, meadow vetchling and meadow buttercup amongst others. Rarer plants such as water dropwort are also present. As The Meadows are left unmown for the majority of the growing season this means that they provide a rich seasonal offering of pollen and nectar for many invertebrates including butterflies, sawflies, hoverflies and ground beetles and spiders. The presence of these invertebrates in turn provides a valuable food resource for insectivores such as bats. The grassland and scrub also provides nesting territory for birds.

So thank you to all our members for your support for our work to protect this special area!



Friends of the Meadows and Handbridge Neighbourhood Plan

Keith Dixon provides an update

Neighbourhood Plans are a part of the planning process which enables communities, within the framework of existing local plans, to set out how they want their community to develop.

Handbridge has obtained Council approval to produce a Plan for the area bounded by the River Dee and the Wrexham Road within Chester's Handbridge and Park Ward. A Forum has been established which is open for individuals to join, and a Committee has been set up to progress things.

The Neighbourhood Plan will be able to guide development with regard to the green space and heritage of the area, within the context of the Council's approved local plans. As we said in last Autumn's Newsletter, Friends of the Meadows are keen to be involved in the development of the Plan given the significance of the Meadows to the surrounding area, to Chester, and to the wider natural environment.

A year later and The Neighbourhood Plan Committee have made much progress in preparing the groundwork for producing the Plan, despite the difficulties of Covid, and will soon be leafleting the Neighbourhood with details.

In particular a number of Working Groups have been established, covering Development & Design Standards; Heritage Recognition & Protection; Education &



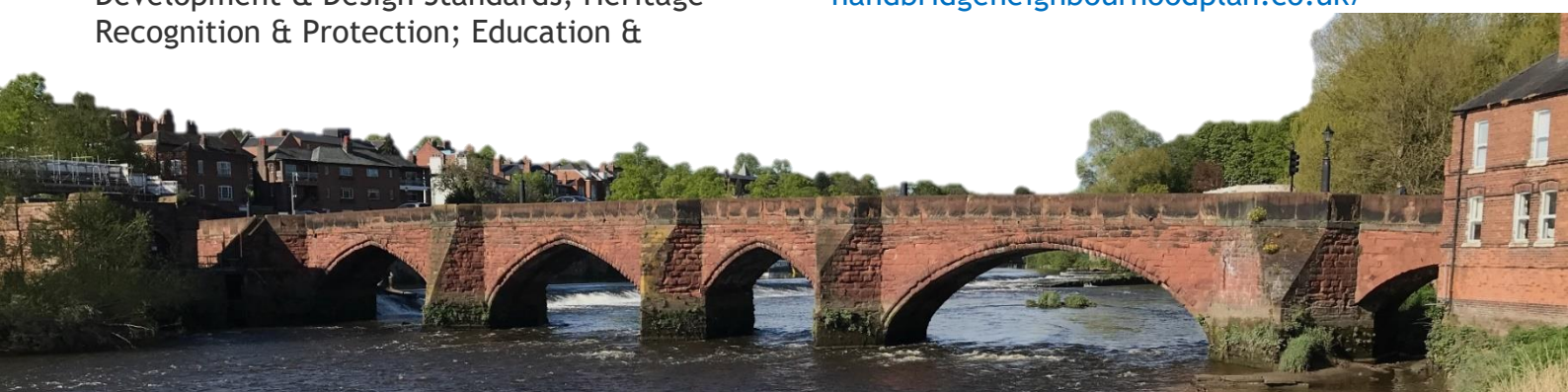
Young People; Commerce & Business Needs; Transport & Parking; and Green Spaces & Conservation.

Of these "Green Spaces and Conservation" is of particular interest to Friends of The Meadows, and we shall be fully involved. As can be seen from the various Groups, however, the natural environment is just one strand in deciding what we want for our Neighbourhood.

There are therefore likely to be many debates ahead for Friends of The Meadows. This is because we will need to try and balance the use of the Meadows (and other green spaces) for "recreation", including personal wellbeing, as well as Conservation; with the changing needs being addressed in the other Working Groups.

We would like to hear your views, and hope you will also be personally engaged in the Neighbourhood Planning Process when that leaflet arrives on your doormat!

Read more at:
handbridgeneighbourhoodplan.co.uk/





August 2021 to October 2021

17th August 2021

A summer of mothing continued from a garden in Cross Hey with this fabulous Poplar Hawk-moth coming to light (see photo below)



Poplar hawk-moth (Laothoe populi)

25th August 2021

A couple of Common Darter dragonflies basked in the late evening sunshine by the river (see photo below). Nearby Small Tortoiseshell and Gatekeeper butterflies were starting to settle down for the evening (see photo opposite)



Common darter (Sympetrum striolatum)

4th September 2021

Two Migrant Hawker dragonflies were a surprising find by the river on the neighbouring Water Company land. Migrant Hawkers are common on freshwater ponds and lakes but not along our stretch of the river.

6th September 2021

A Kingfisher darted low over the river in front of the "Rueben & Joan Wesley" seat on Water Company land.



Gatekeeper (Pyronia tithonus)

3rd October 2021

Kestrels have been less prominent this summer. A possible cause may be due to the territorial Peregrines driving them out of town. It was good to see a female Kestrel hovering over the Meadow again.

Cetti's Warblers continued to call and Water Rails squeal from deep within the neighbouring Handbridge marsh

6th October 2021

Nothing continued from a garden in Cross Hey. One of the most sort after species during autumn is the splendidly named Merveille du Jour (see photo below). These attractive moths are closely associated to Oak trees and had probably flown off the Meadow where there are several Oaks.



Merveille du Jour (Gripesia aprilina)

10th October 2021

Three Buzzards circled above the river.

A pair of wintering Stonechat were back on the Meadow catching flies while a couple of late summer Chiffchaffs were feeding in the Gorse bushes.

12th October 2021

The first flock of winter Redwing were feeding on berries in the hedgerows off Bottoms Lane track.

At dusk, a couple of Pipistrelles flew above the track.

25 Pink footed Geese headed over in the direction of the Dee Estuary and a flock of chattering Jackdaw flew to their roost site below the Handbridge allotments.

15th October 2021

Three Mute Swans were enjoying bread handouts on the Sandy Lane side of the river much to annoyance of the resident pair that swiftly chased them from their territory. (See photo below)



Mute swans being chased off (15th October)

16th October 2021

In the centre of the Meadow within the fenced off area the dominant plant growing this summer is the Trifid Bur-marigold. This has attracted a flock of 8 Reed Bunting to feed on the fallen seed heads.

Andy Ingham, Meadows Log Recorder

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