

Friends of the Meadows



Newsletter 233

Winter 2024

Welcome

to our Newsletter for
Winter 2024

While the Winter can be a fairly quiet time on the Meadows, this newsletter has articles about the talk on the River Dee at last November's AGM and Julie Savory's Chair's Report as well as news about our tree planting project which is currently underway.

And of course, the annual reminder about membership subs!

It's that time of the year when **Membership Renewals** are due, so thank you to all those who are renewing by Standing Orders – you don't need to take any action for renewal.

However, for those who want to renew by cheque (or even cash), please complete and return the Membership Renewal Form enclosed.

Of course you can also set up a new Standing Order using the enclosed form, or change your existing subscription to add a voluntary donation. You can also find and download the form from our website Home Page: friendsofthemeadows.org

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This edition's cover photo is of a snowy Meadows path looking across the river by Mark Carline –see page 7 for the full picture.

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In the Bleak Midwinter

In the bleak mid-winter
Frosty wind made moan
Earth stood hard as iron,
Water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow,
Snow on snow,
In the bleak mid-winter
Long ago.

Christina Rossetti, 1872

This poem was published under the title "A Christmas Carol", in January 1872. There are five verses in total.

The text of this Christmas poem has been set to music many times. Two of the most famous settings were composed by Gustav Holst and Harold Darke in the early 20th century.



Meadows Management

Severn Trent/Costain works compound

In November, the compound was completed and the site has been largely quiet until the start of the next phase. Occasional vehicles will be on site but they will park in the compound. The compound will be removed at the end of the project and reinstated.

Costain (Severn Trent contractors) will be starting their full works on the 29th January. They will be utilising their new (temporary) compound for works, cranes and site parking.

Steph Hefferan, Greenspace Officer

Last autumn, some of the FOM committee members had an insightful meeting with Severn Trent. The group met with Project Manager, Dan Addison, and Community Communications Officer, Catherine Webb to find out more about the replacement of eel screens that is currently underway.

A total of £3.6million is being invested on improvements which will see upgraded, fish friendly, eel screens installed at The Meadows in Chester on the River Dee.

The screens are being installed in raw water intakes where water is taken from before being turned into drinking water and will mean the different types of eels such as adult silver eels, yellow eels, juvenile glass eels and elver, as well as other types of fish and wildlife are protected.

Rachel Cross of FOM, said: "We welcomed this opportunity to meet with the team from Severn Trent and learn more about the eel screens installation. We were impressed at the detail of the project and were able to appreciate the need for the extensive works involved and how it will benefit the river's wildlife. We hope it will be concluded with minimum disruption to Meadows users."

Catherine Webb, from Severn Trent, said: "It was great to meet with the team from the Friends of the Meadows... it was a chance to make sure that they are kept fully informed about the work, its progress and how replacing the screens will have a massive benefit for the wildlife of the River Dee and the area. We hope to continue working with the group as work continues."



From L-R Dan Addison, Andy Ingham, Keith Dixon, Rachel Cross, Julie Savory

Our Drinking Water - The River Dee and Us

James Holroyd reports on the talk given by Time Ackerley at our AGM last November

The River Dee serves two and half million people: in Liverpool, Chester, Crewe, and in times of drought, is pumped further afield.

Cestrians can take pride in having one of the earliest examples of a water company, privately funded, of course, dating from the sixteenth century. At the same time water carriers were selling water from buckets!

During the nineteenth century pollution became a real problem. All the privies along the river at Llangollen, for example, were emptied straight into the Dee. The same was no doubt happening in Chester, as well.

By the late nineteenth century, Cornish tin miners had developed a pump capable of bringing water up to the city from the Dee. In the mound opposite Barrel Well Hill, leaves and other debris were filtered out, and the water was then pumped up to the treatment works at Boughton, along channels cut into the river bed. Up there, ever more sophisticated methods of purifying the water have

been developed. The process has not been helped by Brexit, for there is only one factory manufacturing chlorine in the UK and supply from the Continent is now more difficult.

By the 1980s, pollution was largely caused by farming. The Dee, frequently monitored, is regarded as a clean river but the situation is far from ideal. Sewage management remains the poor relation of the water industry. Most sewers are still Victorian. At the new housing estate (one thousand houses) at Saighton Camp, for example, the Council allowed builders to install sewage pipes which were too narrow - partially responsible for the fact that after heavy rain Caldy Brook, discharging into the Dee, has a distinctly unpleasant smell and is sometimes covered in scum. (Dog owners are asked not to let their pets enter the water, to avoid a visit to the vet).

Yet Tim Ackerley said the pollution was largely dispersed in the Dee. He himself has swum in the Dee at least once every year since his childhood and has been ill only once!

Tim Ackerley is a self-employed Technical Manager and Water consultant and regularly gives talks on the River Dee

Chair's Report to the AGM on 24th November 2023

Our Chair, Julie Savory, gives a summary of her report

We were very pleased to welcome 15 members to our 2022/23 AGM which took place on Friday 24th November at St Mary's Handbridge Centre.

The meeting included the formal AGM business of the Chair's report, Treasurer's report and re-election of officers followed by a talk by our guest speaker, Tim Ackerley a summary of which is included in this newsletter.

In 2022 we were very busy with the projects of installing the Interpretation Boards and the Black Poplar Interpretation Board. This year has been quieter in terms of hands-on practical projects but we are currently developing plans for next year.

Tree planting project

The main project that we are working on is to plant some more trees along the path at the far end of The Meadows, between the water board mound and the ferry and we are setting aside some funds for this work.

We had become concerned that saplings planted in some of the tree guards have not thrived and that there are also a number of empty tree guards.

Keith has mapped out what is currently in that area in terms of existing trees and tree guards and in November some members of the committee met with Stephanie Hefferan, the Council's Greenspace officer, to discuss how best to proceed. We also sought advice from Cheshire Wildlife Trust and Chester Zoo's biodiversity co-ordinator about

which species of trees are more likely to thrive in that area.



Stephen Savory at work on dismantling one of the old tree guards

Possible trees which could be planted include oak, hawthorn and rowan. Although we often refer to that area as 'the avenue', it is not a formal avenue as such and to keep it 'nature friendly' we may keep the dead trees that have fallen on their side as they provide homes and food for insects and other wildlife.

We will be looking for volunteers to help with planting the saplings once we are in a position to proceed. If you are interested in being involved, please do get in touch. *See also next page – Ed.*

Meadows Paths

In the last year, the council funded improvements to the central path and riverside path. Improvements to Bottoms Lane path also took place but unfortunately water run-off has led to deterioration and this is currently being assessed again by the Council's Asset team.

Chester Zoo

We continue to nurture links with Chester Zoo and hope The Meadows will be part of the Networks for Nature Project. The Zoo has been awarded a lottery grant of £318K to help create and restore habitats for local wildlife

Membership

We currently have a membership of approximately 158. Membership costs £5.00 per household and we are very grateful for the additional donations made by Friends which contributes significantly to supporting the various projects and tasks we undertake to look after The Meadows.

Thanks go to Richard for his work as membership secretary, to James Holroyd for his patience and sterling work as secretary and to Keith Dixon for his work as Treasurer.

If any members are interested in becoming more actively involved, either

as a committee member or by helping out with Meadows maintenance working groups, please get in touch.

This winter we will need help with the tree planting project

We are also looking for a volunteer to organise regular (monthly or bi-monthly) meetings on The Meadows to identify tasks that need carrying out and to help with organising working parties

Other matters reported on included:

- **Botany Walks on The Meadows**
- **General Management of The Meadows**
- **Eel Screens**
- **Butterfly Transect Walks**
- **Litter picking**
- **Owl Box installation**
- **Handbridge Neighbourhood Plan**
- **Summit of the Dee**

For the full Chair's Report, go to our website under "News and Events"

Tree Planting Project

On Saturday 13th January, a group met on the Meadows to make progress with our tree guard and tree planting project.

Immediate tasks were removing some of the wooden tree guards which are no longer needed and checking which of the metal ones we can re-use.

Keith has done some more research on where we can source trees. We also discussed at our last site meeting in December the possibility of relocating some of the small oak saplings which have seeded themselves.

We also need to plan in more detail the tasks which will be undertaken on future dates to ensure that we meet our target of sorting out the tree guards and getting new saplings planted before the end of the planting season in March.

If you wish to help with this project please let us know! Our next planned date is Saturday 10th February

If you have spades, saws, clippers or other useful tools, all the better. Gloves and stout boots should be worn!



October 2023 to January 2024

22nd October 2023

A flock of 20 Siskin were feeding in Alder Trees up river from the Meadow.

31st October 2023

A Kingfisher took flight from the riverbank by the east end entrance to the Meadow. A pair of Little Grebe were seen swimming purposefully by the water mound.

17th November 2023

A late Red Admiral was taking advantage of the unseasonal warm weather in a garden Cross Hey (see pic)

5th December 2023

A Kingfisher was seen flying low along the ditch on Bottoms Lane track.

9th December 2023

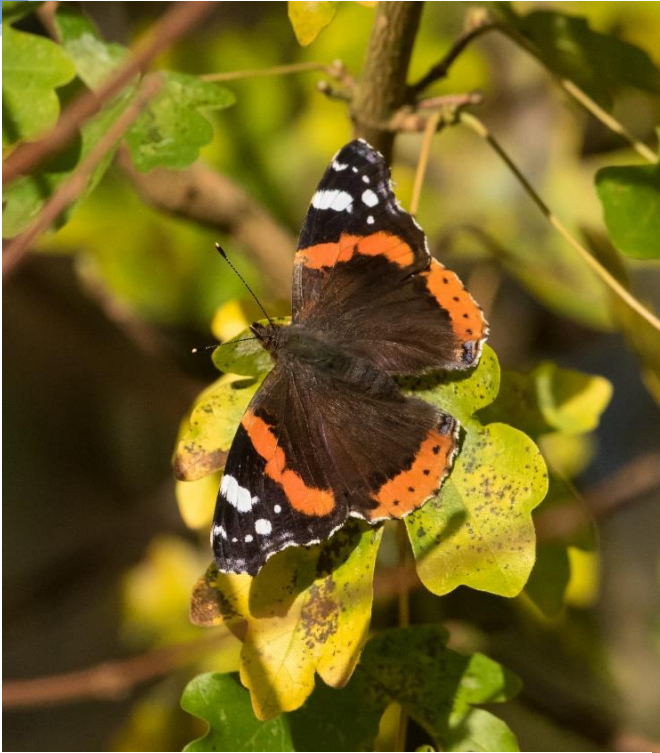
The distinctive silhouette of a Woodcock at dawn flying off the Meadow on to Chatterton's Meadow (horses field).

29th December 2023

Eleven Goosander were on the river by the Old Dee Bridge. A record count at this site.



The full image of our cover photo - taken by Mark Carline after the first January snow this year. Posted as part of a set of photos on his Instagram account



Red Admiral - photo by Andy Ingham taken in December 2022 (This log's sighting on 17th November 2023)

1st January 2024

Twenty Siskin were feeding in alder trees and nearby a Goldcrest was foraging in the hedgerow on Bottoms Lane track (see pic). Another Woodcock was flushed from land below Handbridge allotments.

6th January 2024

A Tawny Owl was heard calling in Handbridge before dawn.

12th January 2024

An unconfirmed report of a Spoonbill by the Weir. A surprise sighting considering the Spoonbill likes feeding in calm shallow water and the river has of late been a raging torrent. (See panel)

16th January 2024

The roosting Linnet flock is well down on numbers from a high count of 190 last year. Only 23 were recorded coming down to roost in Bramble by the Handbridge allotments



Goldcrest - photo by Andy Ingham (see log record on 1st January)

Spoonbills

The spoonbill is a relative of the ibises, a group of long-legged birds with curved bills.

Spoonbills used to nest in Britain in the 16th and 17th centuries, but then faded away to become a rare visitor. But it is now becoming increasingly common in the east and southwest of England, with colonies of breeding birds now established.

Spoonbills were seen at Parkgate last year throughout September and into October, with a peak of 14 on 23rd October.

In winter, most birds migrate to west Africa

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