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Rye Meadows Newsletter – No. 9

The last Newsletter was in December 2019 just before the world stopped! As it seems to be turning again now, we thought it time to bring all the “Friends” up to date with what’s been happening on Rye Meadows.

Projects

All plans went on “Hold” in 2020 though we did have a brief window of opportunity mid-summer when we asked a specialist company, Aquamaintain, to visit Centenary Field to discuss what could be done. We want to re-establish meanders to the brook as mid last Century this part of the Brook was straightened and aerial maps show a dead straight line from Footpath 596 through to Kestrel Field next door. The idea was to get the water away as quickly as possible which straightening did, but this also potentially caused problems downstream with flooding.

New thinking is to hold the water up in wetland meadows by slowing the flow down in meanders plus storing more water in shallow scrapes next to the brook. Work similar to this was carried out in Winter Meadow and Gullett south fields in 2014 when contractors widened the brook creating shallow sloped banks and inserting deflectors into the stream to create meanders.

In addition to meander work, a large willow tree root has created a deep weir in the brook that has been impeding fish traffic upstream. We can’t just cut away the root as it is near a sewer pipe, so we plan cutting a new course for the river around the obstruction.

Upstream, near Footpath 596 there is a hugely overengineered concrete bridge, plus a collapsing brick arched bridge. Our wish is to remove both though the concrete bridge removal will be an expensive task and this has been put on the “back burner.” Substituting both for a wooden bridge, preferred by Rights of Way, would be aesthetically more pleasing.

Aquamaintain have visited again recently and have now produced initial scoping plans and will be submitting these to the Environment Agency for approval. We know from past experience how long this planning process can take, so don’t expect to see early results.



Pond maintenance

The pond suffers from pollution as it is partly fed by run-off from road drains. What ever goes down the drains ends up in the brook or the pond, and this material contributes to the flourishing weed infestation seen on the surface of the pond.

Aquamaintain have recently cleared a mass of this duckweed from the

eastern end of the pond, but it will sadly return and the volunteers will need to clear this regularly.

Gates and Gate Posts

The area is called a “Wetland” and when you put wooden posts into wet clay the outcome, eventually, is rot. We’ve had two gate posts rot away recently leaving the heavy metal gates leaning precariously. Volunteers had to dig out the remains of the posts and their concrete “overcoat” which was very hard work. We bought metal posts this time and volunteers again set these in the ground with a good concrete base, rehanging the gates.

Bridges

Two sleeper bridges are also showing signs of rot and have part collapsed. We will be buying new sleepers to install and bring the bridges up to a safe standard again.

Pond clearance, gate posts and sleepers all cost money and whilst we have generously had funding for the first of the tasks from Daphne, the other costs have had to come from capital as our actual income is small. We received a Covid Grant from Thames Water as they recognised small organisations such as ours would struggle if sources of income dried up because of the pandemic. This grant covered our annual costs such as insurance, machine servicing, diesel etc but didn’t cover extraordinary expenditure to replace major items, and this is why we also rely on fundraising activities.

Fundraising

We could not survive without a steady income from fundraising or donations. We have moved into merchandising in a modest way and now have Rye Meadows Tea Towels for sale priced at £5 each. The design on these were made by local artist, Cathy Brett (www.cathybrett.co.uk), who, on our behalf, arranged to have her design printed on tea towels. If you want to have one, or some, you can contact us direct and we’ll come and deliver them to you. Just email rmadmin@ryemeadows.org.uk.

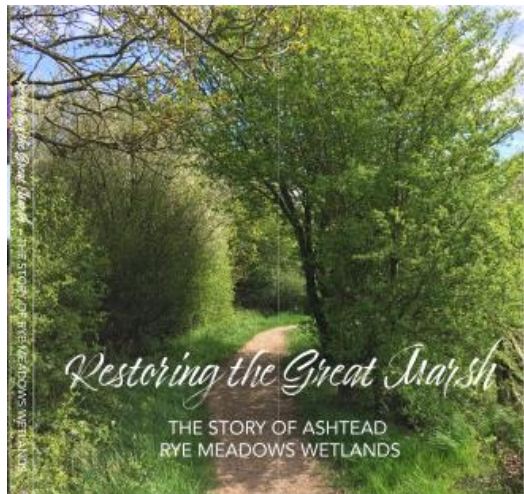


We regularly promote www.easyfundraising.org.uk and via this source we have, over the years, raised over £1,000. It is simplicity itself to join, and all you do when shopping online is to visit www.easyfundraising.org.uk first and from that site transfer to your retailer site. Clicking the following link will take you to our own page to join <https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/ryemeadows/> Lockdown has made more of us buy over the internet so get into the habit of going via Easyfundraising first. This costs you nothing and you end up with the goods you wanted and a virtuous feeling of having helped a good cause.

Mole Valley Council have recently launched the Mole Valley Community Lottery. Rye Meadows has signed up for this, and you can support us by buying a weekly Lottery Ticket. Tickets cost £1, and we receive 50p of that. So far, we have sold 46 tickets towards our target of 50 and this will bring us £1,196 a year in crucial funding. To help us get to the first target of 50 please do sign up by visiting <https://www.molevalleylottery.co.uk/support/ashted-rye-meadows-wetlands>

Rye Meadows Book

Daphne has a long-held ambition to write a book on Rye Meadows outlining her original vision and the progress made over the last ten years. So, on the 10th Anniversary of the inaugural meeting of the Committee we are now nearing the finished article.



Local author, Cathy Brett, was commissioned to ghost write and edit the book and passages were taken from Daphne's extensive files, together with contributions from volunteers and those who have assisted Rye Meadows over the years.

Thanks must go also to James Irvine who has spent hours redrafting and assembling the various texts and pictures into, what we hope, will be a very readable format. It is hoped to publish this year in readiness for Christmas.

Footpaths

This last year of lockdown meant a great many people changed their way of life and in some cases, this will be a permanent state of affairs. "Working from home" became the norm and Ashtead station car park became a bit like an old Western with tumbleweed blowing across the empty spaces. Exercising safely became standard practice and more people discovered Ashtead Common and Rye Meadows than ever before. Whilst this was welcomed, it did have an unexpected consequence. Both on Ashtead Common and Rye Meadows we saw greater wear and tear on footpaths. On the Common, narrow tracks became wide muddy thoroughfares, and across Rye Meadows the two footpaths were damaged with increased footfall pushing the hardcore surface into the underlying clay.

Earlier this year, we were successful in applying to Mole Valley Council for Grants from their Community Infrastructure Levy pool of funds. This grant will enable us to buy hardcore to resurface both Footpaths 24 (from the bridge over the Rye at Preston Grove to Ashtead Woods Road) and Footpath 596 (from Bushey Shaw to Ashtead Woods Road.)

We are fortunate to have as one of our main sponsors, Sunbelt Rentals (previously A-Plant) and they are going to supply a digger, dumper truck and a "Whacker" plate to enable the volunteers to resurface the footpaths. We will start with Footpath 596 and then move onto Footpath 24 once Chris Edge Treecare have been in to cut back the encroaching hedges. This can only take place once bird nesting has finished in September time.

Wildflower Meadows

It has been a long-held part of Daphne's original vision to return the land to wildflower meadows. Rye Meadows is to undertake an experiment to create a wildflower meadow in Fraudings field. This is the field between Centenary Field and Jack Adams Field (Preston Grove).



This summer we have again allowed residents to walk through Fraudings between the two footpaths, but come the Autumn, this route will be closed to allow preparatory work to be undertaken to create a wildflower meadow. It is hoped to open a route north of the Rye in its place still allowing



residents the circular walk. At times, horses do graze these fields and it is imperative that litter is not dropped. Litter which includes thoughtlessly discarded dog poo bags can cause fatal injuries to horses. In the past bales of hay created from the meadows have had to be discarded as they contained the remains of dog poo bags.

We are assured the existing seedbed of wildflowers will not be adversely affected and we will still see the magnificent “Milk Maids” appearing next Spring.

If this one field experiment is successful the scheme will be expanded to other fields. We will then need to ensure any flowers we plant are not harmful to horses that will still graze the areas. Wildflowers such as ragwort, an attractive bright yellow flower, is injurious to horses and that is why the ladies who graze their horses in the fields of Rye Meadows and elsewhere pull up the plants and burn them each year.

Duke of Edinburgh Awards



At the end of last year and the beginning of this year we hosted five young ladies from City of London Freeman’s School doing their Bronze Award. They undertook various tasks on the meadows amongst which were clearing cut blackthorn scrub, mulching around the young trees, clearing the bramble, removing damaged tree guards, coppicing a small copse hear the stream and painting



the barn. The girls were all enthusiastic and cheerful and all appeared to have had an enjoyable time on this part of their Award scheme.

Web Site

Keep a look out for our new web site – coming soon. Same address www.ryemeadows.org.uk

David - Chairman, Friends of Ashtead Rye Meadows Wetlands