

## Woods Meadow Country Park – News Letter December 2020

A continuously wet Autumn to match and surpass the Autumn of 2019 has meant that the Park land has not been cultivated yet. Because of this we have decided to go ahead with installing the inner fence to the 'hayfield' which will mean that the access gates and other fencing will also be completed this Winter. I say this as the fencing contractor didn't want to install gates and other fencing earlier, preferring to do all the required work in one go. The farmer that will take the hay crop from the field was happy with our decision despite it meaning that eventual cultivations will be a little more difficult on this field.

The step over horse gates that are designed to restrict motorcycle access were not being made this year due to covid19 so we are going for ordinary bridle gates. On the subject of motorcycle access, we are not allowed by Suffolk County Council Rights of Way team to gate any registered footpath entrances to the Park as we had intended. This means motorcycle access can and most probably will continue, at least for a while. It is thought, by the Rights of Way team, that as the building and Park development continue, the problem of motorcycle access will abate. This won't be much of a comfort to visitors being currently annoyed by motorcycles driving at high speeds across the Park, as they have through the Christmas holidays!



*Photo of gate*

Covid19 has unfortunately got in the way of working with volunteers and making any sure plans. Ordering 6000 or so trees to be planted with volunteer help and then not getting this help due to a potential lock-down could make things awkward and certainly more expensive. For anyone that thinks that volunteer help is just a token help thing to tick a box,

couldn't be more wrong. These environmental/conservation projects really do rely on volunteer help whether it is the Wildlife Trusts, National Trust or conservation work on local authority owned sites. Volunteering on a site goes far beyond just getting the job finished, it can foster a sense of ownership and ensure future involvement in the management and maintenance of the site. Other local authority sites around Lowestoft have benefitted greatly from decades of voluntary work.



*Photo at Woods Meadow Country Park 1*



*Photo at Woods Meadow Country Park 2*



*Photo at Woods Meadow Country Park 3*



*Photo at Woods Meadow Country Park 4*

One thousand two hundred hedging trees were planted recently covering National Tree Planting Week. Most of the Voluntary help came from members of the Bonds Meadow Community Group but two of volunteers from another group that I work with came up from south of the county; great to see Ray Oliff and Robin Gilbert. We also had help from two councillors, Letitia Smith and Craig Rivett who both got stuck into the task. In all the eagerness to get on with the task the ceremonial planting spade was forgotten and stayed clean for another day. The trees are all native species such as Hawthorn and Blackthorn and if managed correctly they will provide berries to help birds and other wildlife get through the Autumn and Winter. The hedges will be left uncut for the first six or seven years and then layed which will provide a denser hedge which provides ideal nesting habitat for many birds. Hedges also help to create good wildlife corridors connecting different areas and for small mammals such as Voles and Mice hedges provide an escape from the attentions of predators including Kestrels and Barn Owls. Bats are known to use hedges to navigate by and forage around.

An Interpretation panel of the Park showing how it will develop and to show how different user groups such as dog walkers and horse riders, can help each other by keeping to suggested paths, has been produced and is waiting to go up at the Parks entrances, just as soon as the entrance gates have been installed. As time passes more detailed and accurate interpretation will be needed to show changes to the Park such as access points into the Park from the phase 2 and 3 Persimmon development.





Map of Woods Meadow Country Park 1

A Barn Owl nesting box is due to go up on one of the mature Oaks. Barn Owls have been seen hunting in the Park over the past three years. Vole numbers have almost certainly increased since the last crop was harvested and these are often the Barn Owls staple food. Hopefully our box will be taken up by Owls spreading out from the successful nest boxes on Suffolk Wildlife Trusts, Carlton Marshes. The box will be sited with the opening facing a way from the prevailing south westerly weather.

“The Barn Owl is a cavity nester, favouring large cavities within mature hedgerow trees or the ledges found in old agricultural buildings. The species has adapted well to nest boxes, and it is likely that a significant proportion of the breeding population – probably well in excess of 25% - now uses them for breeding. Incubation begins with the first egg and, since consecutive eggs are laid at intervals of c.2 days, the resulting brood of chicks can vary in age by as much as two weeks. This strategy increases the chances of at least some chicks surviving if prey availability is low during the chick rearing period; the oldest and largest chicks will receive food first, at the expense of the last to hatch.” *British Trust for Ornithology*



*Photo nesting box 1*



*Photo of barn owl 1*

We have installed one bench and others will follow. Last Spring and Summer I suffered with a bad back and although benches were planned to go in, there is nothing like a bit of genuine pain induced empathy to realise just how much a simple bench will be needed and appreciated by many people.



*Photo of newly installed bench 1*

Once the Park has its new entrance gates, fences and interpretation boards in place this Winter it will take on a more purposeful feeling. The Park is being enjoyed by more and more people and this enjoyment will grow alongside the development of the Parks habitats. The planting of the woodland will now progress next Autumn Winter so please let me know in advance if you would like to be added to our Woods Meadow volunteers group so we can hit the ground running when the threat of this awful virus is no longer. Thank you to everyone for posting pictures on the Woods Meadow Facebook Group and letting me know of Park issues. A healthy and happy New Year from the Countryside Team.