

CHELMER BLACKWATER RESERVE

SHAREHOLDER NEWSLETTER # 2 October 2022



BACKGROUND

In February 2022, the Chelmer Blackwater Reserve Community Interest Company signed a long-term lease with Tesco Stores Ltd for the land known locally as 'Ironworks Meadow', in order to prevent development on the site and to manage it as a community nature reserve. Members of the public are actively encouraged to become shareholders and to participate in activities to improve the attractiveness of the reserve.

This newsletter provides updates on what has been going on over the past few months.

SITE PROGRESS

The main activities over the summer have been around developing plans for access to the site, obtaining quotations, raising funding and seeking the necessary permissions to proceed. The plans are shown on the map on the right. We plan to have a disabled access ramp running from the sea wall path into the reserve. This will be connected to a board walk through the reed bed and a bridge over the King's Mere leading to a viewing platform that will provide opportunities for school parties and others to learn about the wildlife of the reserve. Running from the access ramp, we will create a solid surface to the existing path crossing from the River to the Canal.



As the planned ramp runs down the existing sea wall flood defence, we have been in active discussion with the Environment Agency since February.

Another issue that has required some engagement is the line of willows along the northern edge of the reserve. When Tesco originally bought the land (which we now lease) from Chelmer & Blackwater Navigation Ltd, the boundary was agreed to be 4 meters from the edge of the canal. But some confusion appears to have arisen when management was taken over by Essex Waterways Ltd. Despite our meeting with them and providing proof of ownership of the land (and therefore the trees), we were surprised to discover them on site in September in the process of felling our trees. We were able to stop them with the loss of only two trees and have now received a formal agreement that the trees are ours and that they will not interfere with them unless they have our prior written consent. There is a case to remove a small number due to the condition and density of the trees, so we have agreed that they should submit a proposal for limited felling for us to review.

We and Essex Waterways jointly positioned a series of blue metal posts to mark the boundary however most of these posts have now disappeared, so we are looking for a better long-term solution.

RESERVE ACCESS

Until the new paths are completed, the best way to view the reserve remains the Sea Wall footpath, easily accessed from Fullbridge (and Tesco's Car Park). We have had some signs produced to replace the generic site signs currently in place- these should be installed in the next couple of weeks.

FUNDING

As explained in the previous newsletter, the materials for the construction of the planned new paths, bridge and platform have been chosen to make them long-lasting. (When the Reserve was last tended over thirty years ago, softwood boarding was used and this rotted and became so dangerous it had to be removed). The good news is that much of the necessary funding has already been raised. To plug the gap, and to provide funds for further actions such as the installation of signs and benches, members of the board have been continuing to apply for grants from various relevant bodies, again with some success. The most recent news is that we have been awarded a grant of £9,959 from the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority. This brings the total money so far awarded from funding bodies to over £45,000.

We have also had further members of the public pay for shares in the company- the total number of shareholders so far stands at 119.

In addition, we have been fortunate to receive significant donations from individual benefactors.

Christopher Foyle OBE

Many of you will have read of the death of Christopher Foyle of Beeleigh Abbey in August. His wife Catherine made a very generous contribution on their joint behalfs to the Chelmer Blackwater Reserve shortly before his death. This support reflected Chris's affection for the local area, dating back to the time he enjoyed at Beeleigh with his grandfather as a boy. Although he had spent his career running an aviation business, he managed to buy the Abbey from his aunt's estate and was keen to protect the surrounding area from overdevelopment. We offer our sincere condolences and best wishes to Catherine and the rest of his family.



Carla Davis hard at work clearing invasive scrub

WORKING PARTIES

Now that the breeding season is over, working parties have started in earnest again. In line with the reserve management plan, the focus on the 2nd October was to continue with clearing some of the Bramble and Blackthorn scrub that has been encroaching into the grassland. Blackthorn saplings will continue to try and regrow so controlling this going forward will be a regular management item.

Extra help was provided by Carla Davis who managed to get hold of a brush-cutter for the day. Luckily the forecast rain failed to materialise.

The next working party is on Sunday 30th October starting at 10 am. Details of future working party opportunities are advertised on the Reserve's Facebook site and by e-mail.

WILDLIFE UPDATE

It was good to see that many of the species encountered on the reserve during the spring stayed to breed. These included Reed Bunting, Common Whitethroat, and Song Thrush, all of which are on the Amber List as species whose populations are of national concern. Other breeding birds recorded were Reed Warbler and Cetti's Warbler. Perhaps the most exciting bird noted was a Kingfisher that was seen fishing along the newly widened King's Mere (the watercourse running through the centre of the reserve). The Kingfisher was seen again after the working party on 2nd October so hopefully he/ she will become a regular visitor.

Another special visitor to the area has been the Common Seal that has been frequenting the River Chelmer over the last few weeks. It has often been seen from the sea wall footpath beside the reserve, hauled out on the muddy banks at low tide. It is likely that it is feeding on Mullet and other fish to be found in the tidal sections of the river at this time of year.



Common Seal, River Chelmer, September 2022



It is always worth keeping an eye out for birds flying over the reserve. There have been increased sightings of Red Kite, in fact we suspect they are breeding to the north-west of Maldon, perhaps around Wickham Bishops. Another raptor that has been seen around Heybridge and Maldon over the summer is Peregrine. Again they may be breeding only a few miles away but we have not been able to find out where!

Red Kite flying over the reserve- photo by Simon Wood

This newsletter has been edited by John Buchanan on behalf of the board of the Chelmer Blackwater Reserve Community Interest Company.

For further information please look at the CBR CIC website: <https://chelmerblackwatercic.uk>

Updates on site news and wildlife notes can be found on the "Chelmer Blackwater Reserve Community Interest Company" Facebook site: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/336060201176650>

Any suggestions for content for future newsletters should be addressed to: john.clanbuchanan@btinternet.com