

CHELMER BLACKWATER RESERVE

SHAREHOLDER NEWSLETTER # 5 June 2023



BACKGROUND

The Chelmer Blackwater Reserve Community Interest Company (CIC) was formed by a group of residents concerned as to future plans for the land adjacent to the Tesco Supermarket in Maldon. In Feb 2022, the CIC signed a long-term lease with Tesco Stores Ltd to take control of the land and to develop it as a community nature reserve. All members of the CIC are un-paid volunteers and work is funded by a combination of grants and donations. Members of the public are actively encouraged to become shareholders and to participate in activities to support the management of the reserve.

Since the completion of the bridge and boardwalk in early spring, it's been a busy few months getting the reserve ready for the official opening on June 24th.

Bats in boats, revolting dog walker, a rare rhyno, cricket bat willow re-match, a parliamentary knight, and a new logo. There's a lot to cover in this latest newsletter!

NEW LOGO

Sometimes the old ways are the best. We have decided that the original name of the site *Ironworks Meadow* has a catchy ring to it and the name should be preserved. So our new logo above incorporates this with the official name of the CIC, with the plan being to use the good old name more regularly as we move forward. Thanks once again Ollie Wood for the brilliant artwork!

THE OFFICIAL OPENING

Everybody should now have received their invitation to the opening event on the Reserve on 24th June at 4pm. There will be a ribbon-cutting by our County Councillor, a short speech, a libation of Ironworks Meadow Ale, specially brewed for the occasion by Mighty Oak Brewery and smally-eats provided by Tesco.

HELP WITH THE OPENING

It's a bit rude to ask you to work for your invitation but we would like some volunteers to help with preparations, putting up the marquee, tables, beer barrels etc on the morning and removing them after the event (about 6pm). Please will anyone willing to help before/after/in the lead-up please e-mail patrick@ellum.co.uk with their availability.

CRICKET BAT WILLOWS

You will remember the saga of the cricket bat willows which were saved from demolition last year and some of which are now the happy home of our bird boxes. Essex Waterways planted some new saplings along the canal in March. Unfortunately, most of them were planted on our land. We raised this with them immediately and, after a brief stand-off, are now pleased to report that on 17th May they transplanted them over to their side of the boundary.

Kestrel nest box mounted on Willow on the northern edge of the reserve (constructed and donated by Richard Stanley)



VISIT BY OUR MP

Sir John Whittingdale sent his regrets for not being able to attend our opening, but we arranged a site visit on 19th May. He said he was most impressed by what we have managed to achieve and delighted that we have saved the site from development and instead created a real asset for the local community. *“I will certainly be a regular visitor.”*

Sir John with John Buchanan
& Simon Wood



DOG WALKER REVOLT

Despite the replacement of the dog signs with “unscrewable” screws, someone has again removed the signs. We assume this is a protest by a dog owner who believes he/she has a right to walk their dog over the land. We would prefer that they come and talk to us about their views rather than pinching signs which your money has to pay to replace. If anyone knows who the protestor(s) is(are) please will you invite them to telephone Patrick 07768 820165 to arrange such a conversation. (An amnesty is offered in respect of the signs previously taken – although their return would be welcome.)

SEND STUDENTS

You may or may not be aware that one of our objectives is to give opportunities for students with special needs to gain work experience on the site. Our first work party, led by Simon, took place on 17th May with students from CCI Education, and went well, with one student in particular showing great interest and promise.



RARE WEEVIL FOUND ON SITE

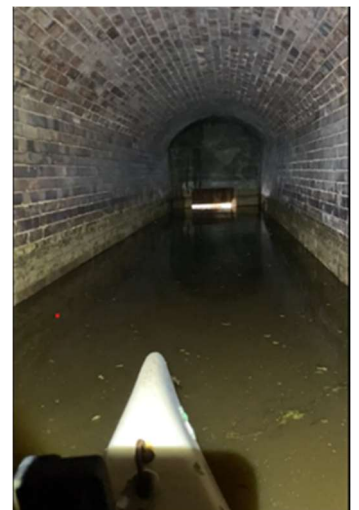
Also on 17th May, Simon discovered this smart little weevil on site on its food plant, Blackthorn. It is *Rhyncytes auratus*, previously found at only four other UK sites, all in Essex. It became extinct in the mid-1800s before being re-found again in 2005 at Abberton Reservoir, then Old Hall, then Chigborough (where Simon found it pre 2012) and more recently, Fingringhoe Wick. Thus it is a very rare species in UK terms.

THE BAT CAVE EXPEDITION



On 15th April, three intrepid board members ventured by canoe through the culvert which carries the King's Mere under the bypass. The purpose of the expedition was to check for a bat colony – reportedly the reason given by Essex Highways for abandoning a plan to dredge the culvert a few years ago – and also to assess the extent of the silting. The outcome was no evidence of any present or past bat colony but a

Victorian railway culvert with brickwork still in exceptionally fine condition. There was at least a foot of siltation which was not affecting the flow at the time, because of recent heavy rainfall, but would do so during dryer periods.



RE-INTRODUCTION OF A RARE PLANT

A few months ago, we were approached by botanist Paul Fletcher regarding the possibility of reintroducing a rare plant to the reserve- Marsh Sow-thistle. It is a tall, yellow-flowered member of the dandelion family that grows amongst reeds, with the flowers standing proud above them. It is believed to have grown among the reedbeds along the River Chelmer in the past but has been extinct locally for a long time. Indeed the nearest current population is Burham Marsh Nature Reserve, on the River Medway. Paul has now planted six individual plants in our reserve, all grown from a 'grandmother' from the Medway population.

Let's hope that some at least manage to survive the challenges of the weather and hungry wildlife!

Marsh Sow-thistle safely
planted on our reserve



WILDLIFE RECORDING

Recent sightings on the reserve have included a range of migrant warblers, no doubt being eyed up by a Cuckoo, that has regularly been calling from the telegraph wires that run across the reserve. Buzzards have also been seen regularly, and there have been several sightings of Red Kite too.

If you do spot anything, please let us know, via the Facebook site or email. In particular, any photos of plants or invertebrates would be very helpful, as we try and build up an inventory of what lives on the reserve.

WORK PARTIES

As previously advised, during the summer months, only lightweight maintenance actions are to be carried out, to avoid disturbance to nesting birds and other animals. Simon Wood is arranging a fortnightly schedule, involving such activities as cutting back vegetation to paths/boardwalks, removing suckers and saplings in areas previously cleared of scrub, checking over paths/boardwalks for damage, litter picking etc.

Future dates for when people can help will be sent out by email as usual.

This newsletter is published by the Chelmer Blackwater Reserve Community Interest Company
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