

**Wheathampstead Parish Council
Rights of Way & Commons Committee
6 October 2011, 17.45h**

Present	Councillors	T Reason D Davies D Johnston	Chairman
		M Carter	Countryside Management Service
		E Cornell P McNeill	Parish paths Meads Warden
		Julia Warren	Clerk
		Press	0
		Public	0

2229-11 Apologies & Substitutions

Apologies were received and accepted from Cllrs Brewster, Johnston and Woodhams (personal), and Councillor Davies (late arrival because of work commitments).

2230-11 Questions from the Public

None

2231-11 Specific Declarations of Interest

None.

2232-11 Management Plan for open areas managed by the Parish Council

The meeting began in the Memorial Hall car park then progressed to the Meads for the review of the open spaces, as agreed at minute 2030-11. This meeting was a continuation of and followed the format of the meeting on 16 and 22 August. Mr McNeill had previously produced a briefing paper with suggestions and comments which had been circulated. This divided the Meads up into a number of notional zones which would come under the 'responsibility' of the volunteer Meads warden. Members noted that Bridleway 12, on the northern boundary of The Meads, was not part of the warden's responsibility rather that of Hertfordshire County Council.

Zone A The strip of woodland bordering the bridleway on the northern boundary

Recommended that this should be left alone unless there was any risk from falling branches or trees.

Zone B The two plantations on the north side of the river

Members noted that as previously agreed the Warden had removed the guards from all the young trees which he would bring to the Memorial Hall for disposal. It was recommended that both plantations should be thinned by felling selected trees: Mr Carter would help Mr McNeill identify the trees to be felled who would then arrange the felling and stacking of resulting timber etc.

Zone C_ The rough grassland on the north side of the river

Members noted the presence of rabbits, especially at the western end and recommended that

- this zone should be managed as semi-wild grassland.
- the zone should be cut twice a year and the waste removed

that a new path should be cut to run east/west near the two plantations, to follow a 'wavy' rather than straight route.

- a meeting with the Council's contractor would be arranged to discuss the details of this,

It was further noted that the excavation work done early in the year when the sewer was repaired was not properly reinstated, resulting in a mound of disturbed soil and rubble and excess growth of nettles. To avoid future such problems it was recommended that when UK Power Networks bury their cables, the Council's contract with them should include a requirement to reinstate the disturbed ground to its previous condition, to be confirmed by a qualified person, eg from the HMWT.

It was noted that EDF (UK Power Networks) had agreed to bury their cables on the route of the path from the footbridge to the north-east corner and to provide a hard surface for the path. A copy was available in the Parish Council office. This would be discussed when UK Power Networks had a date for the works

Zone D The river and its banks

Members noted that the river and its banks were the responsibility of the Environment Agency (EA). The Council was on good terms with Ian Davies of EA. Mr McNeill had arranged a meeting with him on site on Friday October 7th to clarify and confirm the EA's responsibilities and work in and near the river

Members noted that the watercress in particular was growing vigorously and recommended that the Warden_ monitor the growth of vegetation in the river for a year, particularly in relation to its being reduced naturally in the winter.

It was further noted that the EA had published a 24-page document listing the byelaws that govern what may and may not be done in or near the river in terms of buildings, dredging, drainage etc., and that many fishermen, not always officially licensed, used this stretch of the river. A problem arose when they left litter, including old hooks and line, especially in the bushes in the southwest corner of Zone C.

Zone E The close-mown grass area on the south side of the river, including the footbridge, the area round The

Forge and the two small plantations at the east end

Members recommended that

- the close-mown grass should continue to be maintained as a local picnic/dog-walking/play amenity.
- that the close-mowing should not be taken as close to the trees and plantations as it has been, and that the strip of grass running north/south by the eastern boundary should be mown only to the width of a path
- to discuss these arrangements with the contractor
- the Meads Warden, Mr McNeill
 - to monitor the condition of the two large trees by The Forge and report any further deterioration.
 - to remove the guards from the young trees in the two small plantations.
 - To monitor the state of the undergrowth in the two small plantations for a year.

Zone F Meads Dell (former sewage works)

It was noted that this zone was rich in wild flowers, insects, and (probably) small mammals. Tim Hill of HMWT had suggested that it may be suitable for designation as a County Wildlife Site.

Members recommended that

- it should be mown as soon as possible and annually thereafter. Mowing to be undertaken by the Council's contractor, Mr McNeill to consider possible sources of volunteer labour to help with this and other similar work on The Meads
- the existing paths should be maintained as they are but no more should be made.

Zone G The dense woodland in the south-east corner

Members noted that there was evidence that this zone may have once been an orchard (for example, at least two old and formerly-pollarded crab-apple trees and two prunus). The dense growth of nettles suggested that the ground was very fertile, possibly the result of the broken pipe to/from the old sewage works.

It was agreed that the site had great potential to be developed as a government-funded community orchard.

Recommended that Mr McNeill do more research into funding etc for community orchards and prepare a proposal for the Council.

Litter

Members noted that, inevitably in such a popular area, litter can be a problem despite regular litter picks by the Warden and others to supplement bin emptying., Members recommended put a notice by the bins at the Forge advising that "These bins are emptied every week. If they are full, please take your litter home."

Recommendation to Council

To approve the management plan for the Meads visited on 6 October and to seek a public response to it.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 19.05h.

Dated this day of 2011

Chairman