



Report to Town Council

Subject:	Walkers are Welcome -interpretation boards
From:	LW
Date:	20/09/2024
For information only	
Summary of decisions or actions requested (including timing): <ul style="list-style-type: none">• to agree content and design of interpretation boards• to agree cost of installation by Evenlode Landscaping• to consider installation of fourth board	
Financial implications:	
Communications:	

Part of our funding agreement with Cotswold National Landscape(CNL) for the Walkers are Welcome project is the installation of 3 interpretation boards. These have been agreed as 2 at Mill Field and 1 at Centenary Wood. Christine Elliott is designing the Centenary Wood one and Frances has designed the 2 for Mill Field.

The Mill Field ones currently focus on the meadow restoration project and the river . There is thought that the history of Mill Field should be displayed as well.

David Green has donated four boards from Blenheim. This means there is one spare.

Proposal: to accept quote from Evenlode Landscaping for installation of three boards at cost of £192 (partly covered by CNL funding)

Proposal: use the fourth board for the history of Mill field. This would result in having three boards at Mill field.

The TC would have to cover the whole cost of printing and installation of the fourth board (installation cost would be £57).

Proposal: spend £50 plus VAT for an Ordnance Survey licence which gives us permission to use their map on the boards

Proposal: to agree content of three interpretation boards

Mill Field: Floodplain Meadow Restoration

Over the last thousand years, traditional management of river valleys for summer hay crops and 'aftermath' grazing created a landscape rich in flowers, insects and birds. The land was highly valued as the diversity of grasses and flowers made for good quality hay, essential for feeding cows, sheep and horses through the winter. With modern farming methods, 97% of species-rich meadows have been lost – including the Mill Field, which was reseeded after the Second World War. Charlbury Town Council, with advice from local ecologists and funding from Sustainable Charlbury, has started a project to restore the floodplain meadow, beginning with a half-acre area at the far end ("Zone 3").



Meadowsweet is flourishing in the damp soils of the meadow area. Its sweet smell, delicate flavour and pain-relieving properties have been valued through the ages



Yellow Rattle is being sown to weaken the vigorous grasses, aiming to reduce competition for other meadow plants



Great Burnet is characteristic of floodplain meadows; plants can live for over a hundred years with roots reaching down 2m

Restoration process

In 2022, a small area by the river was spread with 'green hay' containing fresh seed from the species rich meadow at Fir Farm in Lower Swell, Gloucestershire. Meadow plants are long-lived and can take several years to establish and flower. Early signs of Meadow Vetchling and Meadow Cranesbill are beginning to be seen.

The following year, **Yellow Rattle** was sown, aiming to create more favourable conditions for the more delicate meadow plants to establish.

Annual maintenance aims to mimic traditional hay meadow management (although without livestock grazing because of the difficulties of fencing and conflict with dog walking). A Spring cut removes vigorous grasses, reducing competition for meadow flowers.

Plants are then allowed to flower and set seed before a mid/late Summer hay cut. Cuttings are removed to reduce build-up of nutrients in the soil. In some years, an Autumn cut may also be necessary.



Aerial view of the meadow area



Volunteers sow Yellow Rattle in Autumn



Our meadow in future? The picture shows the ancient floodplain meadow at Fir Farm in Lower Swell in Gloucestershire, which provided our first wildflower seed. By sourcing seed from species-rich meadows nearby, we protect and benefit from local plant diversity.

Challenges

The narrow access on to Mill Field limits the size of farm machinery that we can get on to the meadow for cutting, baling and transporting hay. In the first years of the project, cuttings are therefore being composted on site. In the future, a new bridge or shared use of equipment with other local projects could allow a larger area to be restored, while producing a useful hay crop.

The weather is also a challenge, as we learned in 2024 when the Yellow Rattle the previous Autumn did not appear, probably due to heavy winter flooding. However, the restoration will continue! Further sowing of Yellow Rattle and wildflower seed from ancient floodplain meadows are planned.

Get involved

Please scan the QR code below or visit charlbury-tc.gov.uk/nature-recovery for recent updates and volunteer opportunities.

sustainable
Charlbury
going low carbon locally



Mill Field: River and Riverbanks

The River Evenlode is an important feature of Charlbury and especially for local wildlife, acting as a "blue-green corridor" that connects habitats up- and downstream. The Mill Field is an island bounded by the river along the South and the Mill Leat along the North edge. The flow into the Leat is created by the weir, which raises the river level at the top end. Over the centuries the main river channel has been deepened to more effectively drain the surrounding land.

Look out for:



Riverflies, including **Mayflies**, are monitored by local volunteers and give a good indication of water quality.



The mix of scrub (including Hawthorn, Blackthorn and Buckthorn) and larger riverside trees (mainly Willow, Oak and Ash) provides habitat for bats and small birds, including **kingfishers**.

Black Poplar leaves /seeds

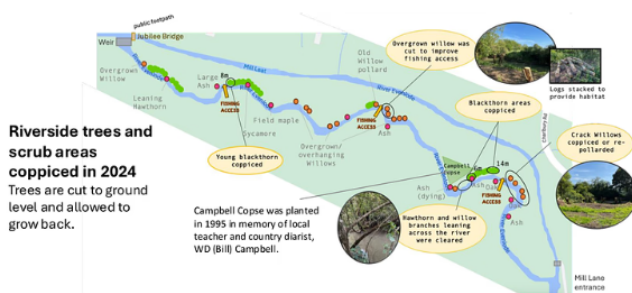
In the middle of the field, three (now rare) **Black Poplars** were planted in the 1990s, supporting several types of moth caterpillars as well as pollinators and birds.



A fish survey in the Mill Leat 2024 found Chub, Roach, Pike, **Brown Trout**, Gudgeon, Dace, Tench and Perch as well as Minnows, Bullheads, Stone Loach, Stickleback and Lamprey.

Challenges to the river and its wildlife include pollution from farm run-off and sewage overflows, as well as from insecticides from flea treatments on dogs. The deepening of the channel has left fewer shallow areas for plants to grow, which in turn limits the opportunity for insects and aquatic animals, while the weir is a barrier to fish migration.

The Town Council looks after the Mill Field for both people and wildlife. Management includes rotational coppicing of willow and scrub, to provide a mix of light and shade beneficial for river plants and insects. The Council is also working with the Environment Agency to explore the possibility of replacing the weir with a fish pass, while future projects might include creating shallower areas in the river for plant growth.



Riverside trees and scrub areas coppiced in 2024
Trees are cut to ground level and allowed to grow back.

Campbell Copse was planted in 1995 in memory of local teacher and country diarist, WD (Bill) Campbell.



QR Code pointing to TC website/nature-recovery

Walkers are Welcome in Charlbury

Walking is a great way to stay healthy and to enjoy the magnificent landscape, views and natural environment of the Cotswolds. The Mill Field connects to the public footpath to Spelsbury over Jubilee Bridge at the far end. There are many great local routes as well as cafes and pubs for well-earned refreshments. You can find out more at "charlbury-tc.gov.uk/walking" or by using the QR code below.

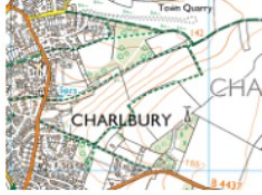
Please enjoy the countryside responsibly especially farmland. Please keep to marked rights of way and permissive paths and keep dogs under control. Many areas, including field margins, which may appear unused are actively managed for wildlife and soil recovery and may include sensitive habitats for ground nesting birds and species in serious decline. Thank you for your consent.

QR Code pointing to charlbury-tc.org.uk/walking;

CNL
WaW



Located between the undisturbed replanted quarry on the north, the BBOWT nature reserve on the south, and the flower-rich meadow cut annually for hay on the west, the woodland consolidates a large area being managed for wildlife very close to the town. With public access throughout Centenary Woodland and meadow, there are several access points to the public footpath network beyond. The ancient Ticknell Piece public footpath runs along the main ride through the woodland to join Quarry Lane - a bridleway for walkers, cyclists, and horse riders, which before 1800 was the old route to Woodstock via The Saltway on the parish boundary.



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Centenary Woodland was planted in the 1990s to commemorate the centenary of Oxfordshire County Council on land originally owned for playing fields for Spendlove Secondary School which closed in 1982.

Mainly an ash woodland on thin limestone soil, it includes areas of oak, wild cherry, and hazel, with a few beech and field maple. Wide flower-rich grassland rides are bordered by flowering and fruiting native trees and shrubs, including walnuts, eating apples, wayfaring tree, guelder rose, spindle, and hawthorn. The ancient Grim's Ditch cutting across the south-east corner was left unplanted.



Spindle in autumn colours



Look out for blue scabious, yellow agrimony, white wild carrot, and purple knapweeds; the day-flying burnet moth, also marbled white, small skipper, and Essex skipper butterflies

Planned as a community wood, local volunteers were trained to carry out formative pruning on the ash, oak, and cherry trees in the first 10 years so that future generations would have choices about using trees for building purposes - without early pruning they would not grow straight enough to be useful. The oaks planted on the deeper clay soil in the valley on the southern edge are doing very well, thinned every 5-10 years to enable the best trees to develop a good canopy.

With original blackthorn hedges on the north/east boundaries and a new one on the west, the encroachment of blackthorn suckers into the woodland and grass rides is a big problem, particularly since the ash trees are severely affected by ash dieback disease. To manage this, the Cotswold Voluntary Wardens are cutting back the blackthorn on a 2/3 year cycle to allow new seedling and planted trees to grow and the flowery grassland to survive.



Guelder rose flowers and autumn berries



Look out for oak seedlings establishing themselves - conspicuous in the winter because they retain their brown leaves

Look out for the lime tree circle south of the main ride - planted to replicate secondary growth from suckers around an imaginary ancient lime tree long gone

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CNL Logo
WaW logo

Centenary Wood