

## **Update from the Weir Meadow Working Group (WMWG) and Joint Projects Fund Raising Group (JPFRG)**

Since the last update (9<sup>th</sup> May 2023) one additional meeting of the WMWG and JPFRG has taken place (10<sup>th</sup> July) and one WMWG subgroup meeting (1<sup>st</sup> June) to discuss preparation of the sports pitches for Weir Meadow. This update covers the period from mid-May to the 10<sup>th</sup> July (2023).

### **Projects Covered by National Lottery funding**

Contractors to undertake the fencing works along the eastern perimeter of Weir Meadow have been approached. Quotes are being chased.

Initial investigations for the interpretation board have revealed that the sheep dip was actually opposite Weir Meadow (on the other side to the main entrance). David Howe is continuing to source historical information, with the focus now being on the leat and the mill (and potentially the wildlife value of the brook).

Additional tree-planting in and around Weir Meadow and the Northern Fields will be undertaken late autumn early winter once the main works for the sports pitches have been finished (see below).

Bird, bat and dormouse boxes will be installed along the Fordland Brook corridor during the winter.

### **Football and Cricket Pitches**

A specific meeting (1<sup>st</sup> June) was held to discuss creation of the playing surfaces for the sports pitches.

Following discussion of the available options it was decided that the best approach would be for the Parish Council to get the meadow to a condition where it is a smooth grass field that could be used for sport and recreation. Levelling, as opposed to smoothing, is not practical or necessary. The topsoil is only 30 cm deep, making levelling the meadow impossible; and the cost is prohibitive. The prepared area would exclude the northern swale and the meadow perimeter along the brook, and would total 5.3 acres.

Peter Skinner set out the schedule of works that would be required to achieve this. The work would involve spraying with glyphosate (to kill off grass and weeds), topping and flail mowing, subsoiling, ploughing and rolling; then spring tining, power harrowing and drilling, rolling, fertilise and lime and then a second spray. This would produce a seed bed into which a sports pitch grade seed mix could be sown, with the aim of achieving playable surfaces for early summer 2024. It was agreed at the meeting that the works to prepare the field for sowing could be undertaken by an agricultural contractor but that the sowing of the seed mix should be undertaken by a specialist contractor.

Peter has spent considerable effort in finding a contractor willing to undertake the agricultural work. Perseverance has paid off though! Richard Berry (Pennycombe Farm) has mowed and bailed the grass (now removed). Ed Mortimer will undertake the rest of the works to prepare the initial surface for the seed (quoted cost of £1,040), with the spraying to be undertaken by mid-July. Peter is now in the process of getting quotes

from specialist ground maintenance contractors to prepare the final surface and sow the seed mix. The first quote received is for £6,500, the grass seed costing £3,400.

At the meeting on the 1st June it was agreed that grants from the Football Association to help clubs with the costs of creating new sports pitches should be pursued in parallel to the works to produce the playing surfaces. This would involve spending money up front (£3,000 - £5,000) on a specialist ground report from the Grounds Maintenance Association, which would then be used to apply to the FA for funding (but with no guarantee that funding would be given). However, with the likely costs of creating the playing surfaces being in the region of 6-7k (in comparison to the 3-5k for a report, but no works), it has subsequently been decided that this option is unlikely to be pursued at this stage. If, following the creation of the playing surfaces it is found that drainage is required to make the football pitch playable then further studies and grant applications could be made. The football club could still make applications to the FA to fund hardware (e.g. goalposts, corner flags) for the pitch.

### **Meadow Entrance and Car Parking**

As noted in the previous report, creating a new car parking area is not a priority this year. It was decided, subsequent to the 1st June meeting, that it would be best to infill and make good the entrance to the meadow after the playing surfaces have been created. This will enable the contractor to just plough the whole field (except the northern swale) and not have to work around the entrance and any piles of soil that works here would generate.

### **Northern Fields Tenancy**

As reported previously, a two year tenancy agreement (starting September 2022) for the Northern Fields has been agreed with Richard Parr. It was reported at the 10th July meeting that Richard Parr would like to terminate the agreement early on the basis that the crop sown in the Northern Fields has failed. After some discussion, it was agreed that a recommendation should be made to the Parish Council to terminate the agreement, but with the proviso that Richard Parr should ensure that all outstanding rent payments are made.

The question then arose as to what to do with the Northern Fields if no agreement for agricultural production is in place. Given the difficulty previously in finding a tenant, particularly on a short-term lease, the Working Group decided that the best option would be to start implementing the original, long-term vision for the Northern Fields. This would see the area being planted with trees to become a community woodland, with benefits for amenity and wildlife.

Potential grants to undertake woodland planting have been investigated before and the England Woodland Creation Offer looks like a very suitable option that would provide funds equal to or exceeding income that could be generated through an agricultural tenancy agreement. In addition, newly created woodland could provide further income via Carbon Credits and Biodiversity Units (essentially a metric for biodiversity enhancements produced by a landowner that can then be sold to developers to meet mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain requirements when developing a site). Stuart Brooking (along with Richard Cottle) are investigating the feasibility, costs and practicalities of the woodland creation grant and David Howe is looking into the provision of Biodiversity Units. Once this information is to hand the PC can make a decision on how to proceed.

## **Pedestrian Bridge**

Quotes for undertaking the works to the bridge have been obtained. Bob Lowton will be undertaking the works starting w/b 17<sup>th</sup> July.

## **Fundraising and volunteering**

The Police Dog Hogan concert on the 8th July sold out and was a great success raising substantial sums for both the Community Orchard and Weir Meadow. The fashion show on the 18th May raised approximately £900 for Weir Meadow. Thanks to all who have put so much effort in to making these events happen and run so smoothly.

## **Next Meeting**

The next combined meeting of WMWG and JPFRG is scheduled for the 4<sup>th</sup> September.

From Richard Cottle, Chair WMWG – 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2023.