

NEWS AND STORIES FROM ABBHEY FIELDS

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August 2022

As summer draws towards its close the first signs of autumn are starting to become apparent – swifts and breeding cuckoos have left us already, flocks of starlings are gathering in the fields, and the hedgerows are starting to colour up with the berries that will feed our wildlife through the winter. This year the prolonged period of drought in our area means that many trees are showing signs of water stress, and as a result are starting to change colour and lose their leaves earlier than in a ‘normal’ year. It will be interesting to see what longer-term effect this may or may not have on Croft Close Set-aside and Long Meadow.

In this update

Long Meadow has been secured and plans are underway to rejuvenate the Park Lane hedgerow. Visitors to Croft Close Set-aside were dazzled by an array of magical moths. Fundraising efforts have made excellent progress over the last couple of months.



Photo by Guy Richardson

Long Meadow secured

Many of you will know that Sally London recently completed her purchase of Long Meadow.

Simultaneously the land has been leased to Histon & Impington Green Spaces, the local charity which was set up to purchase and manage the Abbey Fields sites.

With all the legal arrangements in place, this hay meadow is secured long-term for the community. We are very grateful for Sally’s magnificent contribution to our community which we are so pleased to enjoy with her.

Will anything change? There are no plans afoot to alter the essential character of the meadow, nor to change the way the community uses the meadow.



Photo by Penny Reeves

Our mowing regime should, over time, reduce the nutrient levels: as a result, the grasses will become less vigorous. The wildflowers should respond to give a more prolific showing.

Our thoughts are now turning towards reinstating, in some form, the magnificent line of trees which border Park Lane, as discussed later in this newsletter.

Read more here: <https://www.hihub.info/news-in-brief/major-step-forward-for-abbey-fields-fundraising/>

High summer turns into autumn

Whilst an annual cycle is a recurring theme in the natural world, geography and a species' specific needs, mean the many such cycles rarely progress in unison.

Many birds are already on their autumn migration. By late July our local breeding cuckoos have already flown south across the Sahara <https://www.bto.org/our-science/projects/cuckoo-tracking-project>.

The eggs of the marbled white butterflies that have graced Abbey Fields this summer will have hatched, and by late August the caterpillars will be hibernating in a grassy tussock, ready to over-winter.



Cuckoo – photo by Penny Reeves



Marbled White – photo by Penny Reeves

The latter in turn are prey for our tawny owls. Typically, from late August on, these will be starting to make preliminary efforts to stake out next year's breeding territory; a good time to listen out for their calls is just after sunset.

Meanwhile, immigration of red admirals continues into August, joining adults that earlier in the year, as caterpillars, were feasting locally on nettles. These adults will take nectar from brambles well into the autumn.

The blackberries not only nourish butterflies but support many other insects, warblers feeding their growing families, as well as mammals such as wood mice.



Comma – photo by Penny Reeves

Hardstanding at Croft Close

Under the sale agreement which gave us the opportunity to buy Croft Close Set-aside we were required to provide a strip of hardstanding at the Croft Close entrance.



Photo by Guy Richardson

Impington-based contractor JP Webster, one of three who provided quotations, was appointed, and completed the work within a fortnight.

To keep costs down, remembering we still must raise sufficient funds to buy Croft Close Set-aside, the material excavated was stockpiled. Some of this will be distributed around the entrance area and some, where suitable, will be used to fill hollows in the main paths, improving their water-shedding.

Visiting Abbey Fields

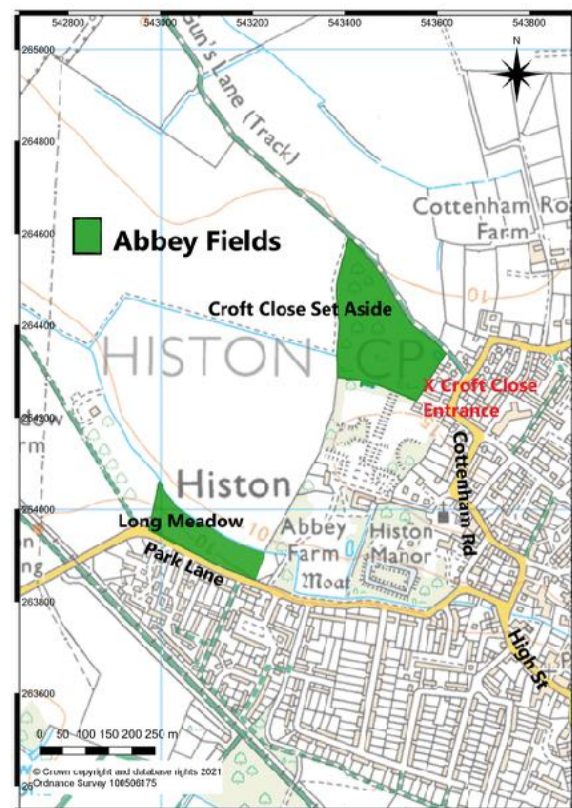
In a further phase of our website development, we have added a visitor section. We appreciate that for many this does little more than state information already known.

However, in feedback from across the community, it is clear that some people are not sure where the access points are and what to expect when visiting. This section of the website addresses this concern.

Currently, the basic information presented includes what people might see at different times of year, complementing the more detailed summary that can be found in the Wildlife section.

This visitor information section is part of a larger "Explore" section currently under development. In the next few weeks, we anticipate adding more pages which we hope will add to your interest when (physically and virtually) visiting Long Meadow and Croft Close Set-aside.

We plan to include more on the history of the two sites, pages on the key features - such as the veteran oak at Croft Close Set-aside - and a selection of the more stunning photos.



Magical moths

On a morning in late June, in the shade of Croft Close Set-aside's oak and willow, a cornucopia of colours was on display as an enthralled audience, young and old, was introduced to some of our most splendid moths. Anyone who thought a moth was a small, brown fluttering creature a few millimetres long was in for a shock!



Photo by Penny Reeves

Weighing in at an impressive 55mm in wing length, the privet hawk moth can nevertheless be easily overlooked when sat on a branch as is it so well-camouflaged. However, when it spreads its wings to fly that all changes, as it reveals black and shocking pink stripes along its body.

The much smaller burnished brass, which sports bright brassy-yellow wings with brown blotches, is equally stunning. Both leopard and peppered moths showed that black and white patterning doesn't mean dull.

Probably most notable for our visitors that day were the elephant hawk moths. To see one is memorable; but to see a tray of these large insects with their salmon-pink and olive-green colours is exquisite.

As the morning wore on and temperatures rose, the moths

decide to leave us for more shady places. Too soon for some! However, before they left many moths were photographed and the pictures can be found here: <https://abbeyfields.online/moth-gallery-202206>.

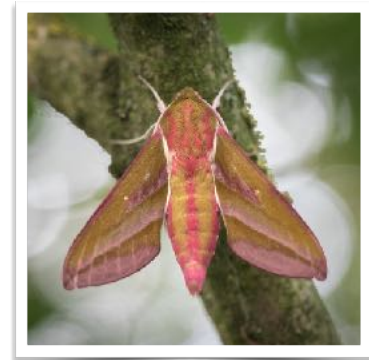


Photo by Penny Reeves



Photo by Penny Reeves

Our thanks go to Malcolm Ausden and Ian Ellis for working hard to make the event the success it was. Thanks also go to Ness Amaral-Rogers who ran the bug safari that took place on the same morning.



Photo by Guy Richardson

Fundraising update

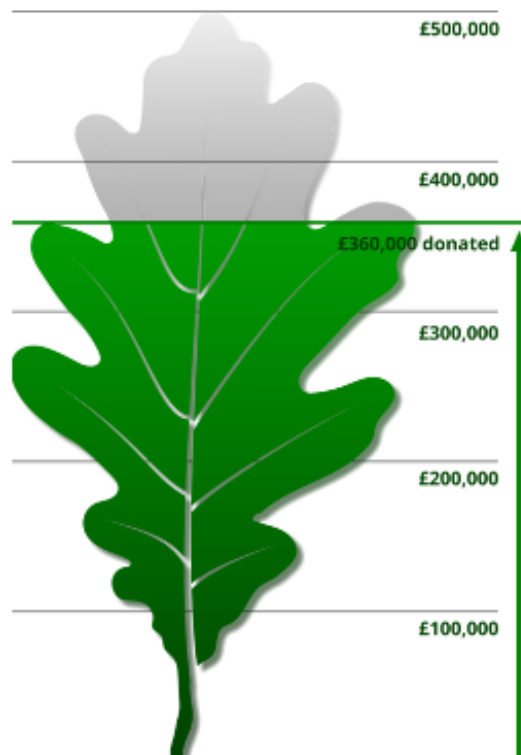
We have made excellent progress with our fundraising over the past couple of months. Through recognising Sally London's purchase of Long Meadow when the transaction was completed (see above) there is a step-change shown in funds raised since our last newsletter.

That significant contribution aside, others have continued to donate to securing Abbey Fields so our income stream has remained steady across the summer.

This has included income raised during the Summer Festival and Jubilee celebrations as well as individual donations in response to our general fundraising campaign.

We now have raised over £370,000 of our £0.5 million target – just about three-quarters done! So, can you help with that last little bit?

There are many ways to do this, but for some the easiest is direct sponsorship. Take a look at our Fundraising Pack at <https://abbeyfields.online/sponsorship> If you would like to discuss opportunities, please contact us at hello@abbeyfields.online



Park Lane hedge and trees

Over the summer the site management team has taken a close look at the hedge along the south side of Long Meadow.

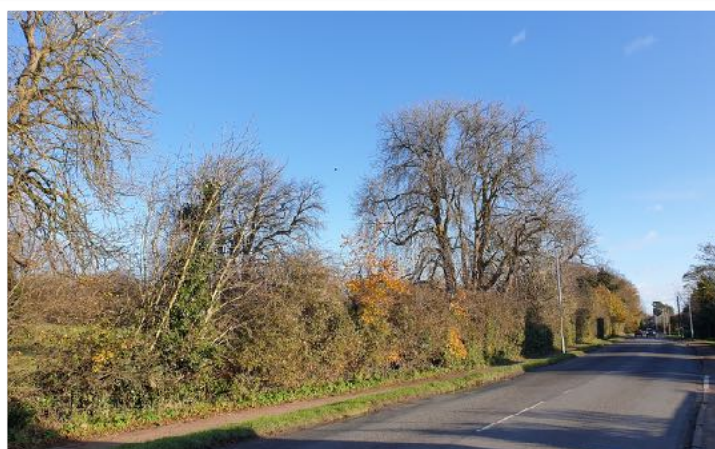


Photo by Jon Pavey

To keep it in a healthy condition, we plan to trim the top and northern side during the coming winter. This will be done as late as possible to give birds and other wildlife opportunity to feast off the berries that are already forming. In a couple of locations, we may replant a section of hedge this year or next.

Long-term we aim to keep the hedge to a height of between 2-4m and a width of around 2-3m. Where the absence of recent trimming has allowed trees within the hedge to escape upwards these will mostly be trimmed back.

We are mindful of the visual impact from

the loss of the horse chestnuts – which have and are continuing to succumb to the bleeding canker bacterium. Whilst this may not always be fatal, experience at Long and Chestnut Meadows suggests our trees could be highly vulnerable.

Consequently, we are considering a programme of planting replacement native specimen trees to rejuvenate the line of majestic trees. We plan to give our interested supporters the opportunity in the coming weeks to contribute to the discussion on which species to plant as replacements. (Unfortunately, the advice is not to replant horse chestnuts.)



Photos by Penny Reeves