

**Friends of Cherry Hinton Hall meeting, 7.30 pm, Wednesday, 21 March 2012**  
Cherry Hinton Village Church Centre, Colville Road, Cherry Hinton

*Friends of Cherry Hinton Hall is a group that is concerned about the usage, environment, welfare and future of the Cherry Hinton Hall grounds for the benefit of those who use it*

23 people were in attendance at the Village Centre, Cherry Hinton. There were apologies from Sheila Manton, Ian Simmons, Robert Dryden and Bob Daines.

1. In Bob Daines's absence, the Chair was taken by David Taylor who welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2. The minutes of the 18 January meeting were agreed. There were no matters arising.
3. Guest Speaker: Guy Belcher

David Taylor welcomed Guy Belcher as guest speaker. Guy is Cambridge City Council Nature Conservation Projects Officer, and was present to help with questions regarding the recent clearance work for new planting and some other aspects of the Master Plan going forward, particularly in terms of wildlife.

Guy Belcher:

I'm the ecologist for the City Council, and have a broad and varied role including land management of the 9 local nature reserves and partnership working with the Wildlife Trust and the wider Cambridgeshire Biodiversity Networks. I also advise on planning applications including for the new growth areas.

Regarding Cherry Hinton Hall and the Master Plan, from a wider point of view, Cherry Hinton Hall is a key part of a corridor of open countryside running from Wandlebury and beyond, through East Pit, Cherry Hinton Hall, to Barnwell East Nature Reserve and Coldham's Common.

But Cherry Hinton Hall and the adjoining corridor is also special because running through this corridor is a chalk stream. Chalk streams are a globally threatened habitat and are rare – there are only 200 or so in the world, with 50-60 in England. It is because we have a chalk stream that we have done so much clearance work along the banks from the duck pond area. The work is designed to retain ivy, scrub for the birds, and lower trees, and the intention is to be coppicing this area every 5 years so as not to allow the sort of shade we had before the work, which is bad for wildlife, including for fish.

The proposal or vision is to create a 100 m stretch from the lake and along the Daws Lane of a narrow channel of up to 1.2 m width or clearer, faster-flowing water, with a meandering route, using coir rolls staked-in the ground to narrow the banks. This should fish-out the silt and the stream should become self-cleansing. We think it should work well and allow spawning etc. Naturally, we should see fish such as bullhead and stone loach in a stream such as this. We

will also plant native species – and will put together a planting plan so you are able to take a look.

We have already done a trial of using coir in the lake, and it was successful. We intend to use coir in the lake too, around the island and outer bank edges. The intention here, once we have the coir in place, is to pump out the silt from the lake and back-fill behind the coir matting. The result should be much clearer, fresher water. Ideally, this lake should be very clean.

Looking at the bigger system, we will also be working not only with you but the Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook and Coldham's Common to insert lots of reed beds to improve the water areas.

#### Questions and discussion:

Q) David Taylor: What are the distinguishing features of a chalk stream?

A) Guy: Essentially it is water rising out of a chalk aquifer, i.e. it is called a chalk stream because it rises through chalk. They tend to be shallow, with water flowing over chalk or gravel substrates. The water is hard, with a pH over 7. The water is high in quality, with a good supply of plant nutrients. Only certain plant species like it, such as crowfoot. For a really good example, take a look at Fowlmere Nature Reserve.

Q) Gill Palmer: The area where the swans nest is very stagnant; can we create a channel to get the water flowing through here again? When this was discussed at earlier meetings, we decided it was a top priority.

A) Guy: We have discussed this, but the advice from the drainage engineer is that it is very tricky to get this right. The only way would be try creating a channel a bit by bit, because you do not want to change too much of the flow.

Q) Ian Simmons: What is required is a cleansing pipe for the top lake so as to push the water around.

A) Gill Palmer: Years ago there was such a pipe, until it was blocked off.

Q) We have noticed a lot of rubbish has been thrown back in following the clearance. Can something be done?

A) Guy: We will try to address this.

A) Mark Ashton: Councillors have an offer from the City Ranger to bring some people to Cherry Hinton to do community work. I will try and arrange for the Ranger to bring a team to clear the brook from the lake to the grill at Daws Lane.

Q) What is happening for the bird life?

A) Guy: The wider area is also a high value area for small mammals and birds, with new bird boxes having a high occupancy rate. Dr Nancy Harrison, Principal Lecturer at the Department of Life Sciences at Anglia Ruskin University, has been running surveys with her students. Of all the areas they have looked at, Cherry Hinton Hall had the highest take-up of bird boxes at over 90%. The Master Plan also has areas earmarked for new tree planting, and we will need scrub and understory for birds such as warblers e.g. hazel and spindle, and lots of long-grass areas which are good for small mammals e.g. to encourage tawny owls.

Q) Gill Palmer: The removal of the hedge running along the stream has caused a lot of upset. It would also have helped shield rubbish from being blown into the brook.

A) Guy: Yes it has been dramatic, but we will be putting in a lot of replanting efforts – saplings are going in on the inside of the Daws Lane boundary next week, and more hedgerow will be going in.

Q) Sue Reverchon: How satisfied are you with the biodiversity at the moment?

A) Guy: It is pretty good. On tree management, we could do with leaving more dead wood for bats, woodpeckers, etc. Grassland and flora is proving more of a challenge, though.

Q) Mark Ashton: Has the Heritage Lottery bid been submitted yet?

A) Guy: I'm unsure. The work that has been done so far has been funded by developer S106 contributions. But I know that an East Anglia River Catchment Restoration Fund bid has been submitted citywide on behalf of us by the Wildlife Trust.

Q) David Taylor: How are we going to protect all the new planting etc., when the Folk Festival takes place?

a) Guy: You will have to talk to Anthony French about this.

Q) Gill Palmer: What clearance is envisaged in front of the Hall?

A) Guy: I think the conifers behind the Hall will be coming down in August. The sequoias in front of the Hall are giant redwood trees and are not mature and are potentially hazardous to the Hall. These will grow to 3 or 4 times the current height, so they may have to go.

Sue Reverchon: The Police have told us that opening this would be better for security.

Q) What planting can be done to help the bees?

A) Guy: Cornflower and poppy mix would be good, creating meadows. You can also try non-native sowings to extend the season of nectar-rich plants. The Friends could help too by doing occasional weeding.

Q) What could the Friends help with going forward?

A) Guy: We are putting in a Chalk Management Plan. Some work will be done by professionals, but some could be undertaken by you, such as pruning, coppicing, etc. I would suggest the group join the British Trust for Volunteers, who provide insurance cover.

#### 4. Maintenance Issues

- Litter pick

David Brook from the Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook mentioned that their group had received assistance from Keep Britain Tidy, e.g. equipment and insurance. We decided to look into equipment for more effective litter pick work in future.

It was also suggested that we write to St Bede's and Netherhall as children had been spotted discarding litter in the Hall grounds.

- Tennis courts

Bob Daines has contacted Ian Ross about the state of the tennis courts. The committee will try to ensure something is done regarding the net, posts and lining.

#### 5. AOB

Can someone contact the council about the two lovely old benches with green cast iron ends near the Hall grounds; one is opposite the Robin Hood pub, and one nearer the bus stop just outside the entrance to the car park. These are in a terrible condition.

Mark Ashton volunteered to try and get something done.

The next meeting will take place at 7.30 p.m., on Wednesday 16 May 2012, at Cherry Hinton Village Centre. The guest this time will be Mark Buckton, Recycling Champions Coordinator for Cambridge City Council.