

BOXFORD PARISH COUNCIL

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Boxford Parish Council Extra Ordinary Meeting
Held on Tuesday 22nd June 2021 7.00pm St Andrew's Church

Present:

Cllr. P. Thompson (Chair)
Cllr. M. Hayes-Newington (Vice Chair)
Cllr. J. Wilcox
Cllr. J. Minchin
Cllr. P. Kilding
S. Youldon (Clerk)
5 Parishioners
Cllr. J. Cole (Hungerford & Kintbury Ward)
Cllr. C. Rowles (Hungerford & Kintbury Ward)
Cllr. D. Benneyworth (Hungerford & Kintbury Ward)

Absent:

Cllr. P. Harris

Declaration of Interests: Cllr Hayes-Newington declared an interest as the neighbouring landowner and abstained from the vote. Cllr. Rowles also declared an interest as a neighbouring landowner.

MATTERS ARISING

Proposal to Create Local Nature Reserve:

The Parish Council received a proposal on the 9th June asking if it would support in principle the proposition to be part of a syndicate of organisations, to secure and preserve a site known as Houlders Meadow, in Boxford as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) of exceptional ecological value.

M Hayes-Newington and M Webb outlined their proposal to the Parish Council, Ward Councillors and Parishioner audience. Having discovered that this land was being sold, they explained that they had met with the agent handling the sale to confirm the intentions and had an initial conversation with BBOWT (Berks, Bucks, Oxon Wildlife Trust) who were very enthusiastic about the site. It was reported BBOWT successfully manage many other nature reserves across the district, on behalf of WBC and would be able to provide the knowledge, expertise and resources to help with the project.

The proposers gave an overview of the site, as it is currently:

Approximately 23 acres, split into 3 sections –

- The East Part- with footpath, providing public access and amenity, water meadows, scrub land and river bank.
- The River Part - The River Lambourn cutting through the site
- The West Part – On the opposite side to the footpath, provides a protected, undisturbed space for wildlife

They also stated that there are already a number of bat boxes on the site - all occupied, plus owl boxes, and some exceptional examples of marsh plants had been seen along with the protected species, the Desmoulin's snails, plus the Brook Lamprey and Bullhead fish. Not only would the current footpath be maintained to a higher standard, it was proposed that the area on the other side of the river could be used to help local schools and universities with research projects. Long term they agreed it would be great if the community could be involved in the management with working parties and hoped to improve the site further, perhaps providing bird hides for bird watching.

It was explained that the site was acquired by the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH) for its hydrological scientific interest and is protected as: a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), and A Biodiversity Opportunity Area (BOA). CEH had recently withdrawn from the site and the

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ownership of the land is now in the sole control of National Environmental Research Council (NERC), it was NERC that had announced they are looking to dispose of the site.

The proposers explained that it was all at very early stages of an idea, all they were looking for at this point in time was confirmation of support from the Parish Council. Without gaining initial support at local and district level it would not be viable to have the first conversation needed with NERC and the agents to establish if they would even be willing to lease the site on a long-term basis, for a peppercorn rent or indeed sell at a much reduced price.

Parish Councillors all voted in favour to support the idea in principle and agreed to discuss further once the conversations had been held with NERC. If following these discussions, it looked possible that the site could be secured, a full proposal with syndicate formation and details on how it would be managed and funded could then be provided. Councillors agreed at that stage it would then be beneficial to hold a village meeting to get input from the village and to make this a community project.

In addition to how the initial funding would work, several other concerns were raised: Impact of management strategy on flooding in the parish - it was confirmed that this would be part of the conversations with BBOWT to ensure no detrimental impact. Ongoing costs and lack of parish funds available – the PC confirmed it had very limited funds to contribute and funding would need to be looked at in the full proposal. It was hoped that if WBC, BBOWT and potentially Greenham Common Trust came on board the syndicate they would be able to cover this off. Ongoing annual costs were thought to be low with the majority of maintenance work being taken on by volunteers from the community and local organisations.

With an interest declared by Cllr Hayes-Newington, it was agreed that Cllr Minchin would join the team and represent the Parish Council. Clerk would be copied on all correspondence for PC files.

The Ward Councillors requested a site visit so they could take the proposal forward to WBC. M Webb agreed to organise. Actions: MH-N, MW, JM

The 2021 meetings will be held: 6th July; 7th September; 2nd November.

Meeting Closed at 8.00pm

Signed: *S Youldon* – Clerk, 24th June 2021