



Cambridge Past, Present & Future  
Wandlebury Country Park  
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## **Cambridge Past, Present & Future / Wandlebury Country Park Review of 2020-21 for Stapleford Parish Council**

Wandlebury Country Park is situated in the parish, serving the local community as well as those from the wider Cambridge area. It is also the office and operating base of the charity, which employs 13 people.

The pandemic had a significant impact on the charity and the Park, which was something of a rollercoaster of a year.

### **1. Wandlebury Country Park**

The first lockdown in the spring was traumatic, resulting in the closure of the car park and a significant loss of income. Overnight we also lost the essential capacity of volunteers. The park provides an important green space for the community and we have cattle and other facilities to care for, so we remained operational which turned our Estate Team front-line workers without PPE or any other protection. This risk was highlighted when a visitor fell and broke their leg and required assistance. We received no support from local or national government at this time of crisis, thankfully the Lottery Heritage Fund gave an emergency grant and one of the local biomedical businesses supplied some PPE.

We had already planned a fantastic summer programme of events and had lots of school bookings for our outdoor education programme. These were all cancelled, and we have not had a school visit in over 18 months. Our cultural programme has been significantly impacted and we are struggling to resuscitate it as restrictions continue. This has impacted on the small local organisations that work with us to offer events at the park.

However, once lockdown restrictions were lifted things went into overdrive and the park was overwhelmed with visitors for the remainder of the year. This brought with it additional challenges in dealing with large numbers of visitors, many of whom were not familiar with the countryside code or rules of the park. As an example, we could not cope with the amount of additional rubbish being generated and we needed to clean the toilets daily. Fortunately, the car park at Wandlebury is small in relation to the size of the park and so the park itself was never over-crowded.

Our decision to remain open was justified by the many heartfelt messages of thanks we received from the community, some referring to the park being a lifesaver at a time of personal crisis.

Despite the challenges, our small estate team with (eventually) some volunteer support has been able to carry out a huge amount of work to improve the habitats and estate at Wandlebury, including:

- We have completed the construction of a new 50m<sup>2</sup> pond and planted it with native species. The pond has a bridge which will enable people to get close to pond life and double up for pond-dipping activities for schools. The area around the pond that was disturbed during construction has been seeded with chalk meadow species.
- We have continued our woodland management work by thinning out trees planted in the early noughties, this has created new glades and rides to benefit butterflies and plants and will allow the remaining trees space to flourish.
- Thanks to a generous donation we have installed two new cattle troughs in the meadows, which gives us more options for grazing going forward and frees up staff time for other activity.
- Installing a "Dinky Door", which has proved very popular with young people.

- Thanks to a donation we have installed a new log burning stove in the education centre so that it can be used throughout the year, for example by our healthy walking group or schools.
- Thanks to donations we have installed two new bespoke benches in the inner Ring.
- Installed new bins.

This is all on top of our regular work of grazing and cutting the meadows, mowing paths, pruning orchards, picking litter, emptying bins, cleaning toilets, etc etc.

The wet winter weather, combined with lots of visitors did take its toll on some of the paths, although the dry spring seems to be helping them to recover. Nevertheless, some remedial works will be required.

Amongst all this chaos two parcels of land adjacent to the park came onto the market during the year. The charity aspires to increase the amount of land for nature and people and so took the opportunity to acquire the land for this purpose, in total around 5 acres. This was done using financial reserves and we are launching a fundraising appeal to try and recoup some of the money and to pay for the ecological restoration works that will come next.

## **2. Protecting the Gog Magog Hills**

The charity has been very active during the year protecting the landscapes around Cambridge from inappropriate development proposals, including those in and around Stapleford. In particular, we are trying to influence the next Local Plan for the area, we have been campaigning against the proposed Cambridge South East Busway (providing support to the Parish Council with fundraising, etc) and we have also responded to individual planning applications.

## **3. Cambridge Nature Network**

The charity has been working in partnership with the local Wildlife Trust and other organisations to describe a nature recovery network for the Cambridge area. This has identified that the Gog Magog Hills and the River Cam Valley (including the Granta) are priority areas for nature recovery. We hope that this work will help to focus efforts to encourage habitats in these areas to expand and connect. This will involve the efforts of landowners, charities such as CambridgePPF and Magog Trust but also local parishes and communities and we would be keen to talk to the Parish about this initiative in due course.

James Littlewood  
Chief Executive  
April 2021.