

The WICK COUNTRY PARK News

July 2001



Work begins on your new Country Park

It's been a long, wet winter. Since October the meadows at the Country Park have been waterlogged. The normal trickle of the North Benfleet Brook that runs through the Park was transformed into a torrent several times before and after Christmas as it carried flood waters towards the Crouch.

There was certainly no chance of getting any of the heavy work done during this time. Any machinery would have sunk up to its axles in such conditions.

Just when the weather was at its worst another unforeseen crisis threatened to hold up work for far longer than the weather. Foot & Mouth disease struck in late February and the restrictions on access to the countryside affected all of Basildon and persisted in some parts of the district until mid-June.

The farm next to the Country Park has a herd of cattle which inevitably meant that, even when the rain had stopped, there would be further delays to the work.

Yes, it's been a very frustrating seven months since the last newsletter and you can perhaps understand that there has been very little news to report.



The wet winter has helped trees to establish quickly.



Building a Better Basildon

The current situation

The sun has been out for about a month now and at last the ground conditions have improved enough for the heavy machinery to do its work. Basildon, in keeping with most of Essex, has been declared free of Foot & Mouth infection.

The first big job is to create the access road across to the Country Park from the Tresco Way roundabout. This work started last month and machines will be working their way along the two hundred metre route during early July. Once across to the Park boundary there will be a pause of a few weeks before the even bigger machines go through to start excavating the large lake.

At about five acres in area the lake will be the largest fresh water body in the Wickford area and, once established, will attract a very different range of wildlife to the site. This is going to be the single most significant feature of the new Country Park and has received major support funding from Cleanaway Pitsea Marshes Trust.

During August contractors from the power generating company will be changing the familiar landscape even further when they take down the overhead cables running north-south from Tresco Way to put them underground along the length of the access road and across the Park.



The backdrop of old farm buildings and old trees contrasts with a fairly featureless meadow at present.



Wildlife of the Park

During all of the operations to create the features of the Park every care will be taken to minimise the disruption to the animals and plants that already live there. The mature hedgerows along two sides of the area should barely be disturbed and the sides of the brook, with some wonderful old trees, will not be touched. Trees and shrubs have already been planted in some parts, although it will take some time before they grow big enough to be appreciated.

At present it's grass that dominates the landscape, with a few clumps of thistles, yellow oxtongue and mallow flowers to break the monotony. However, the long grass provides just the right conditions for two popular, but now threatened creatures, the skylark with its wonderful ascending song and the harvest mouse with its nest woven into the grass stems. It's very important that when the new Park is established it caters for these species by leaving large areas of undisturbed grass so that they can feed and raise their young successfully. With the right planning it will be possible to create a haven for a greater range of wildlife than exists already, but the loss of these two species would be a high price to pay.



The New Ranger

The Council's Countryside Services has a new member of staff who will be a main point of contact for local people during the development of the Park. Paul Bown is the Ranger responsible for the Wick area and, as well as the day-to-day supervision of the project, he wants to get to know as many interested local people as possible. Paul will be aiming to reach all residents that want to be involved in the future management of the Country Park, either as hands-on volunteers who physically plant, dig and build, or as organisers who will help take the project forward as a full partnership between the community and the Council.

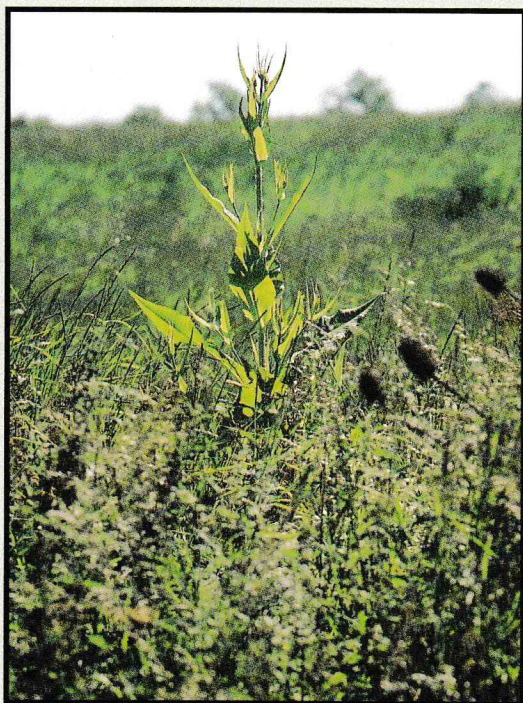
Please contact Paul on 01277 624553 if you want to get involved. He's based at Norsey Wood. Alternatively, get in touch with the Countryside Manager at Wat Tyler Country Park, 01268 550088, with any questions or for a chat about this very exciting project.

Future Work

It's going to be some months before local people can visit the Park. With so much heavy engineering work going on it would not be safe to let people in earlier. The timetable, though put back by the weather and Foot & Mouth closure, is still on track for a Spring 2002 opening for visitors. By that time the site will be gated with a car park and some paths laid. The Education & Information pavilion, with toilets, built and possibly equipped for use by local schoolchildren.

Although there will be a lot of tree planting carried out by contractors, there'll be plenty left for all volunteers to help plant once full access is allowed. This Country Park will not be created quickly, it is an evolving process with endless scope for generations of local people to contribute to the exciting developments ahead.

These Newsletters will be issued at regular intervals keeping residents informed of progress on the Country Park. If you have any ideas for the content of future editions please have a chat with Basildon Council's Countryside Services on 01268 550088.



Teasels - the old seed heads and a fresh young plant. Great food for Goldfinches.

The old hedgerow running along the stream supports a rich variety of wildlife.

