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The Lake, a week after digging was completed, with water filling the deepest sections. The two islands are clearly visible.

In this, the fourth newsletter produced to keep the local people of Wickford up to date on developments at the country park, there is much more progress to report. But for those that are new to the area, or have not been receiving the previous newsletters, here's a brief resume of the project.

THE PROJECT SO FAR

In June, 2000 the results of a local consultation showed clearly that Basildon District Council had a mandate for developing a country park on this 50 acres of ex-grazing land south of Tresco Way. The project plan was amended, following comments received, and the Wickford Area Committee gave the formal go-ahead for work to begin.

It took some time to get the necessary permissions for certain elements of the work, namely for the excavation of the five acre lake and the abstraction licence from the Environment Agency for its subsequent fill. The weather too, conspired against early progress, and once permissions were granted the sodden conditions further delayed work until well into 2001. Only the shrubs and trees, planted in 1999 around the site boundary, made any headway during this time!

By August work had started on the under-grounding of the overhead electricity cables that would have spoiled the look and use of the park had they remained. Then, by November, with the prospect of another wet winter ahead, the contractors made a start on digging out the lake. Work also began on the construction of the in-line pond and weir, along the stream, that has enabled us to fill this huge hole with 500,000 bathfuls of water!



The Lake site, before digging commenced – a flat field.



The new lake



The large muddy hole, which has been growing over the past four months, has now become a lake. But when does a hole become a lake? When you fill it with water! Fortunately the clay soil is naturally watertight so we have not had to put in an artificial liner or import any material.

Before the lake was completed we needed dry weather to make it easier for the huge excavating machines to work. Then we needed five million gallons of water as soon as possible to fill it. We have installed several ditches to collect and channel water into the lake. The in-line pond that has been created along the North Benfleet Brook (which crosses the site) has had a weir and pump chamber installed and water can be pumped directly into the lake to assist the natural filling. Now almost full, the lake will need a long period of settlement as the pumped water will have carried with it pieces of assorted debris and sediment.

Over the next few years we will allow the lake to develop its own ecosystem with a little help from ourselves and the wildlife that will visit. Wildfowl such as mallard duck will transport fragments and seeds of aquatic plants, insects and their eggs from one lake to another. This will enable the flora and fauna to develop in a natural and sustainable way over the coming years. We will be helping by establishing a reed bed in the shallower area to the south of the lake. This will provide cover for birds like the reed warbler and cuckoo to feed and nest. It will also provide an area where dragonflies, damselflies and other insects can live. Bats, such as the daubenton, also like to hunt in these areas.

The combination of insects and plants will, in turn, provide food and shelter for any fish that we may introduce once the lake ecosystem is sufficiently established. Birds like the heron and cormorant may take advantage of this fishy feast! It is extremely important that we do not add anything to the lake before the natural colonisation has had a chance. The introduction of unwanted plants and fish will seriously harm the future sustainability of the lake.

We would like to remind people not to go onto the site unless on an official, supervised visit. The lake and ponds are a potential hazard. The clay is extremely slippery when wet and if you fall into



the water you may be unable to get out without assistance. We are planning to install fencing at relevant points, create footpaths and place warning notices and safety aids at marked locations. The site is regularly patrolled by the Ranger and security guards, but they may not be there if you get into difficulty.

Recycling power line poles for bridging and nest box sites

As mentioned in the last newsletter, the power lines that ran north south across the site have been installed deep underground. Two of the poles that carried the overhead power lines have been re-positioned on site to serve as perches and nesting sites. Nest boxes fixed high up may attract declining species such as the barn owl.

The remaining poles have been retained for another useful purpose. They will be used as the basis for two pedestrian bridges across the North Benfleet Brook that separates the meadow areas of the park. These, in conjunction with the planned footpaths, will provide an interesting circular trail.



During the next few months you will see several sets of gates appear along the entrance road to the park, off Tresco Way. This will allow us to restrict access to the site while completing construction work. We need to keep the site secure until we have finished the dangerous jobs. There will be three sets of traffic gates with adjacent pedestrian accesses.

A footpath will be constructed by the side of the access track from Tresco Way. Pedestrian gates will incorporate easy access barriers, which allow disabled users and cycle access, whilst excluding motorbikes. The main gates will be impressive in wrought iron, with the park name and an information board attached. The first set of gates were installed at the beginning of May at the Tresco Way entrance. The associated information board will contain the latest news on volunteer work and events, so please check regularly.

Left: A relocated power pole will now be used to mount an owl or hawk nesting box, well out of harms way.

Below: The profile of the land has been altered by the deposition of the spoil from the lake excavation.

To prevent any run-off of excess water moving across to our neighbour's land, a trench has been dug just inside of the fenceline. This will also serve to direct water into the lake from natural run-off.

Opposite top left: Lake site, after excavation and as filling is underway.



Above: The lake excavations have revealed some interesting finds. The whole field had been land drained for many decades, as you might expect of an agricultural area on heavy clay soils, close to a watercourse. Some of these land drains date back a considerable time, perhaps a century. Here you can see the old-style pipe work, laid in a trench of cockle shells. An interesting use of a waste product from a local source - the shellfish industry at Leigh-on-Sea.



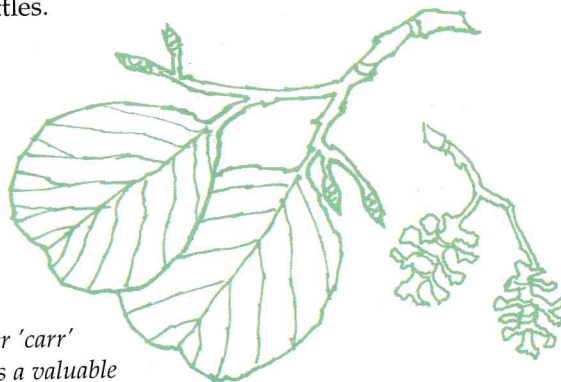
Left: The final stages of the profiling of the spoil mound. The houses to the north of the park, along Tresco Way, can be seen in the distance.

Tree planting

The start of the trail will initially take people across a recently excavated wet area on a raised boardwalk. In the water we will be planting alder trees that will form a wet woodland habitat known as 'carr'. The planting, and construction of the boardwalk and bridges, will be the first opportunity for local people to become involved with the practical management of the site.

For further details please read the section on volunteer work. We were hoping to plant the large woodland area in the northwest corner of the site this winter. However, due to delays in the lake excavation we have had to postpone this until the next autumn/winter period.

As you may be aware the spoil from the lake that forms the woodland site needs time to settle and consolidate before we plant into it. Also the delay in the final topping off of the area with topsoil has taken us out of the optimum time to plant trees. During the autumn and winter period trees develop their root systems so they can take advantage of available water and nutrients in the growing seasons of spring and summer. If we were to plant the trees at the wrong time of year a high proportion of them would not survive. This is especially true in the new woodland site as the movement of soil may disturb the roots as it settles.



An alder 'carr' provides a valuable habitat for unusual wildlife.

Volunteer work

We would like to involve local volunteers in regular work parties. Some of the tasks include construction of boardwalks and bridges, the planting of the alder carr, the planting of the large woodland areas at the end of the year and carrying out surveys of birds and plants. No experience is necessary and there will be activities for all abilities. Training, tools and supervision are all provided, along with fresh air and exercise!

The work parties will begin in the next few weeks and details will be posted on the notice board at Tresco Way. If you would like to be informed of the work party dates and times, then please contact the Countryside Ranger below.

Friends of The Wick Group

We would like a 'Friends of The Wick Group' to become established to help us develop and manage the site. There will be a meeting for anyone interested in being involved in this group on Wednesday 22nd May at 7.00pm, at the Wick Community Centre. Paul Bown, the Countryside Ranger and Steve Prewer, the Countryside Manager will be there to answer any queries and to outline the plans for the park. A committee member from another local group that helps us at one of our other countryside sites will also be on hand to give the benefit of their personal experience of setting up the organisation.

If you would like any further information please contact Paul Bown, the Countryside Ranger on 01277 624553, or Steve Prewer, the Countryside Manager on 01268 550088.



Basildon District Council
Countryside Services