



Warneford Meadow seen from Warneford Hospital

FRIENDS OF WARNEFORD MEADOW ANNUAL REPORT 2014

For friends of Warneford Meadow, 2014 and the first few months of 2015 have been a period of progress, frustratingly slow for much of the time, but at least moving in the right direction.

This is the second annual report to members and supporters since Friends of Warneford Meadow became a company limited by guarantee in October 2012. Because the previous Annual Report was published in December 2013, it covers the period from then until the end of April 2015.

Warneford Meadow is seven hectares of grassland and an orchard planted in the 1940s. It is hidden behind the houses of Hill Top Road and the Warneford and Churchill Hospitals and bounded on the east by Boundary Brook and Southfield Golf Course. Public footpaths follow its edges and there's a well-used path across the middle.

The Meadow was bought by Warneford Hospital in 1918 to protect it from development and provide food and therapeutic outdoor recreation for patients. The hospital farm closed in the 1960s, but the Meadow was grazed or a hay crop taken until the 1980s. Local people have long used the Meadow for recreation – walking, blackberry picking, and children's games. In recent years, it was neglected by its owners, the NHS, and began to run wild. It has developed a varied ecology typical of unmanaged grassland, but this is threatened by advancing scrub.

The December 2013 Annual Report gives a fuller account of the setting up of Friends of Warneford Meadow in 2006 and - following a public inquiry, a judicial review and the Department of Health's protracted indecision over whether and how to sell the Meadow - of securing registration of the site as a Town Green in 2010. This status now protects the rights of local residents to use the site for informal recreation, and precludes almost any

building on the land. Eventually, as also recorded in more detail there, the Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust (who run the Warneford Hospital) expressed interest in acquiring the Meadow, as a therapeutic and recreational resource for patients and staff at the Warneford Hospital and – we hope – also for those at the Churchill Hospital and the new Maggie's Centre on the Churchill site. The Trust confirmed their decision in September 2013 (although they did not actually take ownership until August 2014), and, at the time of writing the previous Report, we had just begun to discuss with them their proposals for the future of the Meadow.

At FoWM's AGM in December 2013, Dr Daniel Maughan of the Trust led a presentation describing the work of the Warneford Hospital, along with local voluntary ecological groups, in supporting patients with mental health conditions, and the potential scope to use the Meadow to support their work.

Meanwhile, under a licence from the Department of Health, FoWM volunteers had continued to work on the Meadow and orchard to try to stop them becoming overgrown, reduce the spread of brambles, wild plum and invasive species such as Himalayan Balsam, and more generally to restore their recreational, environmental and aesthetic value. In spring 2013 most of the Meadow was given a top-cut for the first time since the 1980s, and this was repeated in autumn and again in spring 2014.

In January 2014, the Trust sent us a draft "Ecological Management Plan" for the Meadow which they had commissioned, and in February we met to discuss it with Trust representatives and the consultants who wrote it. We broadly welcomed the proposals in the Plan for enhancing the Meadow's environment and biodiversity, though we expressed some concern that it said nothing about recreational use of the Meadow. The Trust said that they would want to terminate FoWM's licence and take full responsibility for management, but that there would still be some scope to involve volunteers.

On 28 March, the Trust held a major event at the Warneford Hospital to mark NHS Sustainability Day. The Prime Minister, David Cameron, planted a tree and spoke in support of the Trust's work. Mr Cameron referred to the NHS tree-planting programme and also a project that helps people affected by mental health issues reap real benefits from the natural environment. More specifically relevant to FoWM is what the Trust's Chief Executive Stuart Bell said: "We... are fortunate to have a large green space, the Warneford Meadow, right next to the hospital site. We look forward to working with partners and neighbours to use this area for the benefit of our patients."

However, progress thereafter seemed slow. We kept in contact with the Trust, but it wasn't until August that they confirmed that they now owned the Meadow, and no progress was being made with the Management Plan. Eventually, we secured their agreement that Mick Ganly would carry out a further cut of the grassland area, at the Trust's expense.

The Apple Day planned for 5th October had to be cancelled, for the second year in succession, this time partly because the apple crop was unusually poor, and partly because Rupert Griffin, who has pressed the apples for us for several years past, had sustained serious injury in a cycling accident, from which we are pleased to learn he is making a good recovery.

In November, representatives of FoWM and DRARA met officers from the County Council, the Health Trust, Oxford University, and Cyclox to discuss proposals for an upgraded cycle track across the Meadow, linking Hill Top Road and Roosevelt Drive, with the particular aim of improving access to the expanded Old Road Campus. We supported this in principle, but stressed that any track should be permeable, to minimise ecological disruption, and have only ground-level lighting if any. We saw some advantage in routing it along the eastern edge of the Meadow rather than taking the direct line.

Finally, in February, work began to implement the Trust's Management Plan. Contractors cleared large areas of scrub in the orchard, which will enhance the survival prospects of the remaining apple trees and improve access for apple-picking. Work was also undertaken to reconstruct the old road through the orchard leading from the Warneford Hospital to the Meadow, together with its old gate. Contractors also started work along Boundary Brook. Much remains to be done, however, both basic maintenance and planned improvement; we would welcome further information and consultation from the Trust about their plans. Currently, FoWM is working with the Trust's estates department to design information boards to be placed at the entrances to the Meadow.

Community groups in Headington are working on a Neighbourhood Plan for their area, which includes on its southernmost boundary the Warneford Hospital site and Warneford Meadow. FoWM has provided a 'character assessment' of the Meadow for the Neighbourhood Plan.

FoWM commented on redevelopment proposals for the Jack Howarth House site, alongside the Hill Top Road entrance to the Meadow. We remain concerned that the open area opposite Jack Howarth House – not part of the Town Green, and now fenced – may also be developed.

FoWM is a company limited by guarantee and a membership organisation. Very few people have however subscribed as members (although we have many recorded supporters), and it is an open question whether company status serves a useful purpose now our licence to work on the Meadow has been terminated and the prospect of having to try to buy the Meadow has receded. The Board will continue to review the status of FoWM, in consultation with Hill Top Road Residents' Association and others. We are clear however that an organisation remains necessary to represent the rights of local residents to use the Meadow for recreation, and to act as a focus for liaison with the Trust.

Meanwhile Friends of Warneford Meadow, the company, has continued to operate much as previously. The Board of Directors (which has now met eight times) consists of: Directors: Sietske Boeles; Andrew Carter; Anne Copley; Chris Dunabin; Graeme Salmon; David Sutton; Andrew Wilkinson; co-opted: Paul Deluce; Joy Hendry; Kate Whitworth-Jones.

We have gone on keeping supporters informed of progress through our e-mail list, and the website - <http://www.friendsofwarnefordmeadow.org.uk>.

FoWM's accounts for the period from 1 October 2013 to 30 September 2014 are included at Appendix 1.

We have come a long way from nine years ago, when it seemed probable that one of east Oxford's last unmanaged green spaces would be lost to the community. There remains much to do, but developments since 2013 let us plan for the Meadow's future on a more secure basis than at any time in recent memory.

The Directors
Friends of Warneford Meadow
(a company limited by guarantee, company number 08235285)

May 2015

Friends of Warneford Meadow Ltd

Accounts for year to 30 September 2014

INCOME		EXPENDITURE	
Subscriptions	238.00	Printing	105.00
Note cards	13.99	Insurance	331.96
Beyond Magdalen Bridge	51.00	Web site	95.00
donations	107.00		
Open gardens	7.00	sunds	13.00
Apple day 2013	8.19		
Lecture fee	30.00		
cash from FoWM	60.75		
Total income	515.93	Total expenses	544.96
		Excess income over expenses	-29.03

Balance Sheet

Bank balance 30/9/2014	880.98	Bank balance 2/10/2013	910.01
	880.98	Excess income over expenses	-29.03
		Assets at 30/9/2014	880.98

G L Salmon, hon. Treasurer,