

## Chester World Development Forum

### Minutes of Forum Meeting held on Tuesday September 10<sup>th</sup> 2019 at The Unity Centre

Prior to our regular Agenda we welcomed Andy Scargill and Dr Christian Dunn to speak on “The Role of Wetlands in Climate Change”.

*These notes include a number of slides from Christian’s PowerPoint presentation. With his kind permission a pdf version of the full presentation can be seen on the CWDF website*

**Andy Scargill** spoke about the Countess of Chester Country Park. The site was a landfill site in the 1970’s, then the rubbish was removed and soil added on top. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century it has been owned by the Homes and Communities Association (HCA), who gave 19ha to the Land Trust specifically to become a Country Park.

In the middle of the site is Finchetts Gutter, a watercourse probably formed by the canalization of the River Dee. The Environment Agency re-routed the Gutter and a Green Space was formed including Mollington Golf Course, the canal corridor and Countess of Chester hospital land. Few funds were available from the HCA, so the Friends of the Countess of Chester Country Park was formed, to raise funds to spend on this “blank canvas”. The Hospital and the Land Trust together created the Park, via planning approval, in 2011. It was opened by Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall, on September 12<sup>th</sup> 2014 – so its 5<sup>th</sup> Birthday is this week. Since then it has won multiple awards and attracts many visitors each year. The Friends Group currently has a plan to develop a wetlands area within the Park.

**Dr Christian Dunn**, specialist in Wetland Science and Conservation at the University of Bangor, explained the vital role of wetlands in climate change. He gave lots of examples of wetland habitats worldwide – with brilliant photos – and many definitions. Basically, “to work in them you normally need wellies but you don’t need a boat”! They are very important habitats, for example peatlands store much carbon for the longest periods and sphagnum mosses lock in dead plant material for a glacial time period and can even preserve human bodies, e.g. Lindow Man. Unfortunately, literature gives wetlands a negative connotation, e.g. Tolkien’s swamps. Wetlands are like giant, inefficient compost heaps!

There are encouraging areas of future development, such as Carbon Farming. In Canada, peat extraction must be followed by creating a “peat-forming community” in which conditions for peat to be regenerated are encouraged, but in Britain it is sufficient to flood the area. This situation is the subject of ongoing research. There is also current work in the Peak District and Wales which is seeking to reverse the damage caused by the drainage of peat in the 1970’s. Another ally is the beaver – beavers work the wetlands to produce peatlands. Research is focussing on strengthening the decomposing process for restoration of wetlands.

What have wetlands done for us?




Wetlands are included in the Government’s 25 Year strategy to improve the environment. To this end, there is a Master Plan for the Countess of Chester Country Park. This would transform an area of the Park from its current state, with flooding at times and frequent standing water, into a Wet Meadow.

Wet meadow

23

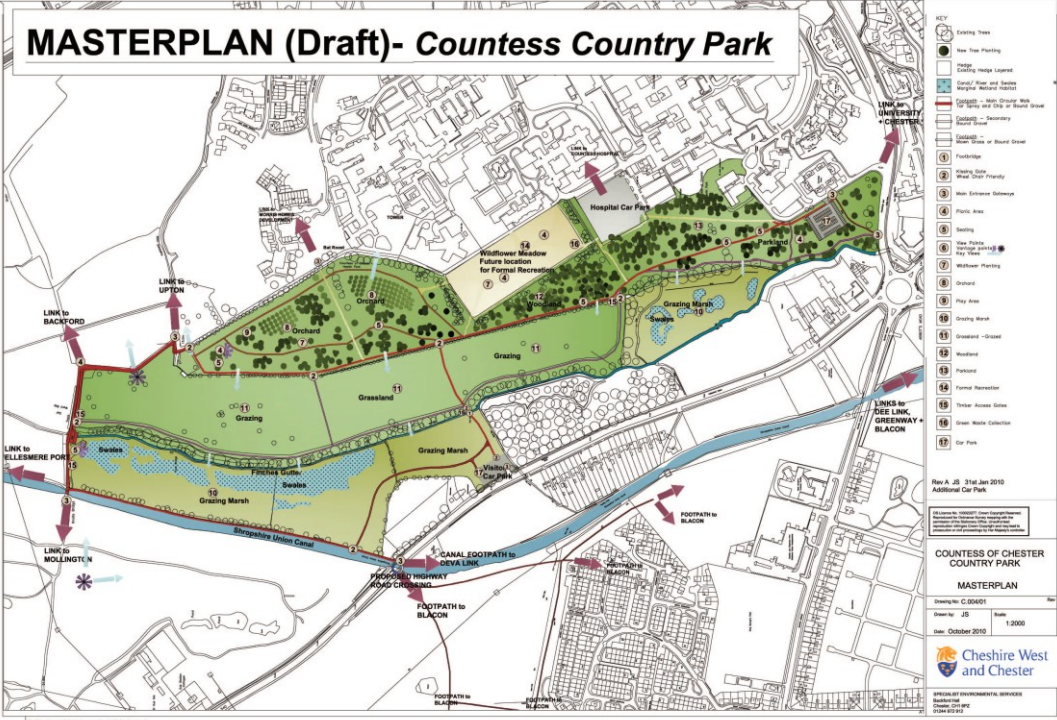
- ▶ Brief periods of flooding and longer periods of saturation
- ▶ Occasional standing water
- ▶ High plant diversity
- ▶ Attract large numbers of birds, small mammals and insects
- ▶ Meadow – regular vegetation removal
- ▶ Becoming rarer in the UK



The Hay Wain. John Constable. 1821

MASTERPLAN (Draft)- Countess Country Park

25



There is currently a multi-agency Advisory Panel and a Project Group working on these plans. Land acquisition has begun, together with surveys and ongoing fundraising. Chester Zoo has been included in this work as it has an ambitious vision for a Green Walking Corridor to the City from the Zoo, although this would require a slice of land from the eventual sale of Dale Barracks.

This Plan is envisaged in 4 steps – firstly, creating a treatment wetland and irrigation channels, followed by a flood water holding area and vegetation management. Board walks and educational resources would then be added, with the final phase being hides and an education centre.

There are many benefits to forming a Wetland Meadow at the Countess of Chester Country Park. The vision would compare it favourably with the London Wetlands Centre!

## The wins

- ▶ Create a rare, beautiful and valued habitat
- ▶ Increase biodiversity
- ▶ Aid flood mitigation
- ▶ Treat water pollutants
- ▶ Educate
- ▶ Research site
- ▶ Wellbeing

