



Warneford Meadow—Latest

Warneford Meadow is 18.5 acres of mostly rough grassland behind Warneford Hospital and includes an orchard with a mix of interesting and some rare old apple trees. It was bought in 1918 by the trustees of the hospital to protect it from development and provide outdoor recreation for patients.

In December 2006 local resident and environmental campaigner Paul Deluce applied to Oxfordshire County Council to register the Meadow as a Town Green, because it had been freely used for recreation by local people for at least twenty years. Registration would give the Meadow lasting protection as accessible open space. Following a 15-day public inquiry to which over thirty local residents gave evidence, and in line with a firm recommendation from the Inspector who conducted the inquiry, the County Council decided in April 2009 to register the Meadow.

OBMHT Request for Judicial Review

On 3 June 2009 the Oxon and Bucks Mental Health Trust announced that it planned to seek a judicial review by the High Court of Oxfordshire County Council's decision to register the Meadow as a Town Green.

The Trust says it needs to sell the land to raise money for improving wards at the hospital. Everyone naturally shares a wish to see mental health patients in Oxford benefit from first class facilities, but Britain has a National Health Service, and if wards in Oxfordshire need upgrading, the Trust should obtain necessary finance from NHS central funds.

To build on Warneford Meadow would be over-development, adding to the area's traffic problems besides destroying a beautiful and much-loved open space. And the Meadow is more than just an attractive open space. It hosts a rich variety of wildlife, and is a key link in the wildlife corridor from the Cherwell via Marston, Lye Valley and Cowley Marsh to the Thames.

Expert opinion increasingly recognises the value of access to open space for mental as well as physical well-being. Saving the Meadow wouldn't mean denying resources to the Health Service but would be positively contributing something to it. The Meadow offers a resource not only for residents but also for patients at the Warneford and at the Churchill Hospital on its eastern boundary. The architects of the new Cancer Hospital at the Churchill and of the proposed Maggie Centre for cancer patients have cited the health benefits of the views of and access to green space that the Meadow offers. Promoting the use of the Meadow as a health resource will be no more than restoring its original purpose when it was bought by the hospital nearly a century ago.

Besides the County Council which is legally responsible, the campaign to save the Meadow has attracted cross-party support on the City Council, and is backed by Andrew Smith MP and by the Green, Liberal Democrat and Conservative candidates for East Oxford.

Funding Consequences

It is important that the arguments in favour of upholding the County Council's decision are properly presented to the court hearings on the OBMHT application. In order to do this Paul Deluce has applied to the Legal Services Commission (LSC) for Legal Aid to be represented in court. While accepting Paul's legal interest the LSC have taken the view that because his success in the case may benefit the local community, the community should contribute to the legal costs through a fighting fund.

FoWM are launching a drive to raise the necessary funds and are pleased to announce that £3500 has already been pledged. The full legal process is likely to continue well into next year. The Legal Services Commission has indicated that the community should be prepared to contribute up to £16000 towards the legal costs incurred.

How you can help

A campaign is being planned which will include direct requests for financial help along with a number of fundraising events. In the meantime, donations may be made in the usual way, to David Sutton, at 12 Hill Top Road, Oxford. Cheques for amounts up to £50 should be made out to *Friends of Warneford Meadow*. Remember that donations of £50 or more are eligible for Gift Aid, which will add an extra £2.50 to every £10 donated. Cheques for amounts in excess of £50 should be made out to *CPRE Oxfordshire Branch*. If you would like to make a donation, please complete the donation form and – if appropriate – the Gift Aid Declaration, both of which are available for download from the FoWM website (see below).

Details can also be found on the website of FoWM merchandise – bone china Warneford 'Apple Mugs'; and note cards.

Of course, there are also many other ways of supporting FoWM. We need help fundraising, organising and running events, producing and distributing leaflets as well as carrying out basic maintenance on the Meadow and in the Orchard.

The next FoWM events will be Apple Day 2009, on Sunday 27th September and this year's concert for the Meadow concert on Tuesday November 6th. All are welcome. Look out for more information shortly.

How to get in touch:

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