

News from Southwold Town Council's Leisure and Environment Committee

The Committee met via Zoom on Friday April 24th, with three members of the public attending. Present were Cllrs Rowan-Robinson (Chair), Bradbury, Ladd, Jeans, Beavan, Goldsmith, with the Town Clerk and Secretary in attendance. In the public section, Bill Hancock reported that in the 'Splash' area on the southern Buss Creek Marshes, a pair of rare ducks had been sighted. Only 100 nesting pairs were seen in the UK last year. He expressed concern about the drainage of the dike at the northern edge of the golf practice area and about the state of the footpath along Buss Creek south of Botany marsh.

The Chair reported that our contractor had done a good job of clearing the dikes on the Buss Creek Marshes to the west of Mights Road (known as the 'Pony Marshes'). In particular the contractor had cleared the two dikes adjoining the allotments and installed a new pipe to connect the two dikes. All the dikes are now draining smoothly and this will benefit not only the allotments but also the Millenium Car Park and the proposed Fire Station development.

The Committee discussed the problem of the highly invasive Alexanders (or Horse Parsley) weed in verges and hedgerows around the town. This is driving out native wildflowers and needs to be cut back before it goes to seed. Several volunteers, including members of the Committee, are working on this, and we encourage residents to cut down any Alexanders near their houses. The cut plants can be just left on the ground. The Committee agreed a budget of up to £2000 to employ someone to cut the weeds in less accessible parts of the town.

The raised footpath along Buss Creek south of Botany marsh was discussed. A Reydon Councillor had emailed to ask whether cattle could be kept off the marsh below this path (the 'Banana' marsh) to allow dog walkers free access. The Chair, Michael Rowan-Robinson, had responded that this marsh was part of the SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) and was the subject of a High Level Management Agreement with Natural England, with the purpose of enhancing the SSSI for wintering and breeding wildfowl. The grazing cattle in the summer were a key part of the ecology of the marshes, as explained in our new information boards on the Town Marshes. Dogs need to be kept on a lead under close control. We accepted that there may have been some damage to the path and also that a fence should be provided at marsh level below the path, to keep the cattle off the path. This could be part of our general plan to enhance the 'Splash' area, as proposed by the Suffolk Wildlife Trust report commissioned by the Committee. Currently the culvert connecting the southern Buss Creek marshes to the Townsend marshes (under the old railway line, near the Bailey bridge) appears to be blocked and we will need to monitor the impact of this.

The Committee received reports on progress at the Ferry Road garden, on the rewilding project on Hospital Green/St Edmunds Green, and on our tree-planting scheme. Obviously many of our projects are on hold during the COVID-19 lockdown.