

GOAT WALK LAND TRUST

Matthews Hall Fore Street Topsham EXETER EX3 0HF
Registered Charity No 1162973

SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2016

The public exhibition and consultation on the future use of the Goat Walk Land at Matthews Hall on 16th April was a resounding success. More than 400 people visited during the course of the day and the Council Chamber at Matthews Hall was frequently full with residents and visitors viewing the displays and discussing the possible options with the Management Committee and Trustees.



We received more than 360 responses to the questionnaire and most people supported the proposed grassland, woodland, orchard mix of uses. There were also many who said the exhibition was clear and well presented. In addition to the responses on the options set out on the questionnaire there were over one hundred comments and suggestions on possible uses of the land. Many thanks to everyone who took the time to support this event by completing the questionnaire or simply visiting the exhibition.

The Management Committee are now reviewing the data [Please see our web site www.goatwalklandtrust.org for the full results] and putting together proposals based on these responses and the objectives of the Trust as set out in its Charity Registration. Perhaps the most interesting of the results are those on the Guiding Principles. The replies show that people consider that the most important principle is that of access for all. The Committee is pleased that one of the core principles on which the Trust was established remains so important to the community. Some improvements have already been made with four access points into the land but we are looking to start on

[email – info @goatwalklandtrust.org.uk]

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some other minor works to improve the access to the fields without leaving them open to vehicles.

We were also pleased that you were in favour of keeping the land simple to manage. We are already using volunteers to renovate parts of the wall and have had lots of offers of help but the Committee is keen that the land does not require constant maintenance.

Although the Committee is not in favour of starting several major projects at once there are a few proposals which had overall support, which would form the basis for future improvements and which could be undertaken while the overall plans are being developed. The results showed strong support for making areas of enhanced grass meadow. The current fields are infested with perennial weeds despite the valiant efforts of the Ragwort volunteers, and replacing these with meadow grasses and wild flowers will naturally form part of future plans. The fields have a very uneven surface as a result of previous ploughing and the Committee has therefore decided that one of the first steps will be to prepare the fields so that they can be planted with a grassland mix of seeds. Work on this will be starting shortly so that the grasses and flowers can be planted this year.

The one area of major disagreement was over the use of the land by dogs. The Committee has considered the responses to the questionnaire and is proposing that the lower field and the woodland be dog free and the upper field open to dogs, on or off their leads. A Dog Management Group has been set up to manage their use of the land and ensure that owners control their dogs and clean up after them. The Committee is represented on the Dog Management Group and will monitor how this works. We are also investigating the installation of some temporary fencing to secure the gaps in the hedgerows between the upper and lower fields, until proper hedges can be established.

In recent years the hedges have been mechanically flailed to keep them under control. However, properly laid hedges are more attractive, more effective as a barrier and better for wildlife. Chris James, one of the Management Committee has offered to coordinate work on the hedges and he and other volunteers will be going on a course in the autumn to learn how to lay hedges. [Any other offers of help on hedges please contact the Chris James through info@goatwalklandtrust.org.uk].

We are therefore looking forward to proper grass meadows later this year and better access for everyone to enjoy the Goat Walk Land.

Chris Buckingham - Chairman of the Trustees