

CHESTER WETLAND PROJECT

Dr Christian Dunn

Bangor University

E: c.dunn@bangor.ac.uk

M: 07801 729708



Friends of the
Countess of Chester
Country Park

This project will turn an area of Chester parkland into a rare wet meadow habitat. Biodiversity will be increased, flooding and pollution in the area will be minimised, it will act as a carbon store and visitors will be able to learn about, and experience, this once iconic part of the British landscape. Being adjacent to a hospital and large housing estates it will give a wide section of the community the opportunity to benefit from being in a natural environment in a peri-urban setting.



The Friends of the Countess of Chester Countryside Park is an active community group that helps look after nearly 100 acres of parkland adjacent to the city's hospital. The Park which is managed by The Land Trust, opened in 2014 and is now a popular, well-known local green space in Chester visited by over 30,000 people a year for a range of informal and organised outdoor recreation activities. The continuing success of the Park has been recognised with the award of a prestigious Green Flag, which it has retained for the second year running. Receiving Green Flag status means the site continues to be internationally recognised as a quality, well-managed green space.

The Chester Wetland Centre project aims to create a wet meadow in an underused area of the park. Around eight acres in size, this wetland will provide a habitat that is becoming increasingly rare in the UK. Once completed the site will increase biodiversity, clean a polluted river, help store storm water, thus helping prevent the flooding which often occurs downstream and even has the potential to act as a carbon sink, preventing the release of harmful greenhouse gases. It will be used as an educational and research resource for the local community; hospital patients, staff and users; schools; youth groups and visitors. It will act as a focal point in bringing local conservation and environmental groups together.

Support for the initial plans of the Chester Wetland Centre have so far come from Chester Zoo, Cheshire Wildlife Trust, The Land Trust, TCV, Bangor University, The University of Chester, The Environment Agency, Chris Matheson MP for Chester, and all local Cheshire West and Chester councillors.

It is expected that, once built, the Chester Wetland Centre will act as the central piece of a unique green corridor linking the very centre of Chester to one of the region's largest council-property based estates and onwards to an established nature reserve on the grounds of Chester Zoo. This will encourage people from the local area, and visitors to walk through the area and experience a wet meadow habitat.

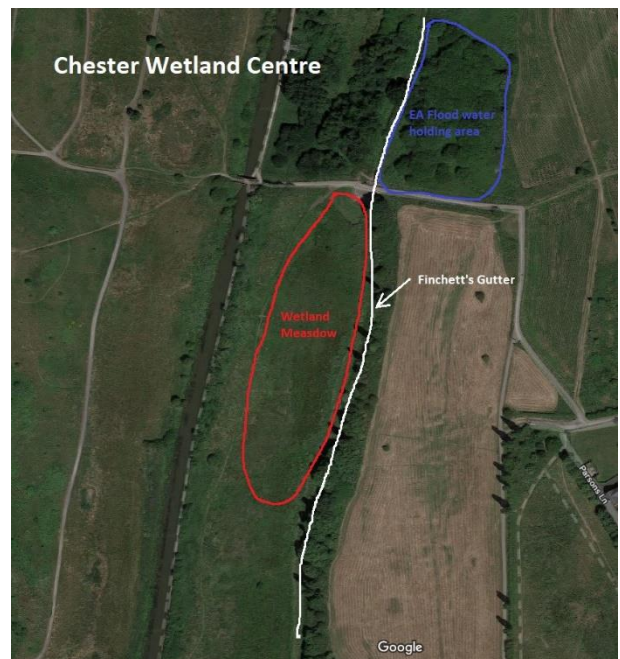
The project will develop in phases with the first being the planning and preparing of the ground, the construction of a reedbed treatment-wetland and irrigation channels. Future phases will involve the incorporation of board walks, interpretation boards, establishment of school and public education courses, bird watching hides and ultimately a carbon-neutral visitor and education centre.



The Environment Agency and local authority have already given their full support for the Chester Wetland Centre. Funding is now required to undertake environmental screening and surveys, licences and permissions, planning documentation and implementation of Phase 1 of the project. A steering committee is also being established requiring basic administrative costs, alongside regular publicity materials to ensure the local community is kept fully informed of developments.

To cover the full, and ongoing, costs of this project the steering committee – consisting of the project's key partners – will ensure further grants are secured and an environmental economic assessment, quantifying natural capital and ecosystem services, will attain monies from neighbouring and interested private businesses.

It is hoped that once completed the Chester Wetland Centre will act as a blueprint for other organisations wishing to develop similar wetland projects – helping to bring back wet meadows to our countryside and into peri-urban environments and even into the hearts of our cities.



In Spring 2020 Cheshire West and Chester Council funding enabled an initial professional report on the project to be prepared by environmental consultants Black & Veatch and in Autumn 2020 work began on a phase one habitat study, carried out by a Bangor University Post Graduate student as part of his PhD dissertation.