

## **WARP Report to Parish Council 2024**

We would like to begin by thanking the Parish Council for the continued support you have given to the Washpool project over the past year.

### **The Community**

Feedback from the community suggests it continues to be a very popular area of the village and people really seem to appreciate the work of our many enthusiastic volunteers who help us maintain and improve it.

In addition, our “Friends of Washpool” continues to bring in useful amounts of money for contingency spending.

We have ambitions to increase use of the site by holding events.

This has not been easy due to the difficult access and also coping with the extremely wet weather we have been having which impacts the Washpool area particularly heavily due to it being the final destination for much of the storm water from the village.

Those events that have gone ahead have been very well received. Last year’s Easter Egg Hunt went well and when we repeated it this Good Friday, despite the heavy showers, we had more people turn up than we anticipated. This necessitated some pretty nimble footwork by those of us organising the event to re-hide the plastic eggs for people to find. Also, a quick trip to Oakleys was needed for extra Easter eggs as prizes.

However, regrettably some planned events had to be cancelled due to bad weather. We had a very successful Halloween bonfire for our volunteers in 2022. Sadly, our attempt at a repeat in 2023 had to be postponed due to bad weather. We then tried to hold a Wassail as a replacement event but on that occasion it rained so heavily the night before, the Island, where we planned to host the event was several inches underwater.

### **Thames Water**

We are having ongoing issues with Thames Water.

Last April the driver of a contractor’s tanker was given poor instructions and opted to turn left down the track into Washpool instead of continuing to the pumping station further on. In the process the tanker took out part of the fencing to the sheep field. One recovery vehicle attempted to rescue the tanker and also got stuck. In the end both vehicles had to be winched out of the valley back onto the main track, doing further damage to Washpool track which was already in a very poor state. Thames Water’s insurers quickly replaced the fence and regraded the track which meant for a few months the track was in a reasonable state. It was quickly eroded by further heavy rain and is now back, pretty much in the state it was last April before the tanker incident.

As a result we have decided that we need to find a way of directing storm runoff to the stream without the track being eroded. We have got one quote from THWC to install a series of drainage channels to try to achieve this. They are also preparing a quote to regrade the track. When we have a final figure we will seek funding to carry out this work.

We are extremely grateful to the Parish Council for the £500 they awarded us in the last precept as a primer for our "Track Fund".

An additional problem we have with Thames Water is the landslip on the hillside. For some time we were mystified as to the cause of this ongoing problem which showed no signs of stabilising. We now realise that it is caused by storm water overflowing from a manhole during periods of exceptionally heavy rain.

Thames Water contractors have visited a number of times and have admitted that solving the problem is exceptionally challenging. It will involve them building a scaffolding platform on the hillside so that people can work safely. As there is no vehicle access at that point everything will have to be carried to the site by hand. As far as I am aware, they are still debating what will be the best approach.

One reassuring note, Thames Water assure us that the pipe only carries storm water and no sewage.

We will be very relieved when the work is done and the bank stabilised. The last time there was a landslip a large amount of mud and debris was deposited in the stream, causing the stream to alter its course and undermine the field fence in the process. Volunteers had to dig out mud to redirect the stream to its original course and revet the bank opposite.

### **Site Extension**

Our 2022 Annual Report mentioned our hopes to extend the project further downstream to Mill Bottom. As the Council will be aware, Burderop Estates have decided not to extend the area of the lease to include this, stating that they intend to improve the area themselves. We hope that they will do so in the not too distant future. We expressed interest in managing the area because we were concerned about the increasing subsidence of the stream bank and associated footpath and also the prevalence of ash dieback in many of the mature trees on this stretch of the stream.

### **Future Plans**

We would like to develop the Island as a community orchard. At present we have just two heritage apple trees on this part of the site. In addition we would like to plant other species of fruit trees to increase biodiversity. We would still use it for sheep grazing so the public would not generally be allowed access except for special orchard related events.

### **Conclusion**

As has been stated in previous annual reports, being involved in this project is very rewarding and it is gratifying that the project receives so much support from the village. It is a challenging site to work on because of difficulty of access. However, it is these same features that make the area so special and have afforded it protection from being used for more utilitarian purposes.