

TO THE FRIENDS OF THE HARNHAM WATER MEADOWS:

Dear Friends,

I'm writing to you in my capacity as the new Chair of the Harnham Water Meadows Trust to tell you about a few changes that we're making to the structure of the organisation.

The Friends of the Harnham Water Meadows was founded by the indomitable Jennifer Bowen and her stalwart band of helpers nearly 20 years ago, and this year sees a number of special events planned to mark the anniversary. Many of you will have been founder members and, as you will no doubt be aware, the Trust continues to rely heavily on your donations. While we receive some grants from statutory bodies for specific works that we undertake, the generous contribution made annually by the Friends forms a large part of the Trust's regular income.

For a small voluntary organisation the Friends and Trust together have had some notable successes – not least the restoration of the works on the meadows and the purchase and continued maintenance of Rose Cottage. But the fundraising needs are growing : there are always new projects to undertake, and the world of charitable giving is a competitive one.

When the Friends' organisation was established the tools that existed to maximise donations were very different. The Friends' organisation was set up as an Association - a loosely organised group without any real legal status. And in the 21st century, that lack of charitable status has prevented us from exploiting fully the possible financial return on your donations. The Friends have been unable to claim Gift Aid (with the possibility of an additional 20% contribution from the taxman) because the organisation is not a registered charity.

Since I took over the Chairmanship, we've been investigating ways that we could rectify this situation – and there are clearly many long and tortuous routes we could take by changing the constitution of the existing Friends organisation and registering it as a charity. However, it's become clear that there is a simpler route. The Trust itself is a charity, with all the necessary legal apparatus to process donations and make tax reclaims. As the umbrella organisation the Trust is the ultimate recipient of your donations and also makes the direct expenditure that keeps the Meadows going.

So, the proposal from the Trustees is this: that the Friends, after 20 extraordinarily successful years ceases to operate as a separate organisation and is adopted by the Trust. Provision exists within the constitution of the Friends Association for its dissolution and similarly, the Trust Deed allows for

the Trust to manage its own fundraising activity. In fact, the transition is so simple, it can be seamless. You don't even have to change the destination bank details if you pay by standing order or direct debit! But what the change will mean is that the Trust can benefit from a real increase on your generous donation.

In the Spring I'm hoping that we can relaunch the Friends scheme, keeping the basic contribution at the same level as today. We may create a ladder scheme with other levels of membership offering additional benefits in the hope of attracting additional sums for the Trust's on-going work. And it would be wonderful, when you receive the new leaflet, if you would use it amongst your friends and acquaintances to help us in our recruitment campaign.

I hope that you'll view these changes positively – they're only possible because of the dedicated work that's been done over 20 years by Jenny and her indefatigable team. I'd like to pay tribute to her and all of those who give their time to the Meadows to help us preserve this wonderful asset for our community and for future generations.

Yours,

Helen Marriage.