

From the Campaign Group "Save Gavray Wild-Life Meadows"

We are a group of Bicester residents campaigning to save the designated local wildlife site to the north of Gavray Drive. Bicester has surpassed its 6 year target for the number of new houses to be built. The proposed Gavray housing estate of 400 to 500 homes is now redundant and presents us with a chance to change direction. The planned 500 homes, if built, will increase frequency of flooding of Langford Brook while lowering the water pressure in our homes during the summer. It will also contribute another 800 cars all trying to get out onto the ringroad during the morning rush hour.

The land (about 23 hectares) is unsuitable for housing as it is a flood plain. We need to think again about its potential as a wild-life site. The meadows are a relic of ancient unimproved grazing-land. The hedges are very old and demark the field boundaries as seen on the 1885 ordnance survey map. The blackthorn provides food for caterpillars of the rare brown and of the even rarer black hairstreak butterflies. These hedges cannot be cut frequently because either the eggs, pupae or caterpillars will be cut off and will die. There is also a large area (some 2.5 hectares) containing rare devil's-bit scabious plants which are the sole food of the caterpillars of the Red List (very rare) marsh fritillary butterfly. Their caterpillars are voracious and will eat themselves out of house and home. The plants are loved by sheep, so we think that their field was grazed by horses only, allowing the plant's survival.

As we can see, there is a delicate ecological balance here, which is dependent on old farming methods. The meadows can be destroyed in an instant, never to return. It is a lesson in country side management of the environment and also in our agricultural history. It is a living outdoor museum. The flora and fauna have every right to enjoy their habitat. It is now very small, but the developers had plans to cut it down further, from 23 to 3.5 hectares which is plainly ridiculous with respect to survival of this ecosystem. Small farmers have made our beautiful English countryside over generations of hard work which is now rapidly being lost.

We have lots of digital photographs of the flora and fauna found on Gavray meadows, taken there in the summer of 2013 (date and time documented) and also old maps of the site showing hedgerows and cattle lanes, (which are still there). You can help us to save the Gavray site for wildlife by visiting our community Facebook page and "liking it" if you are a member www.facebook.com/savegavraywildlifemeadows and/or by signing our paper petition.

We are holding a campaign walk with the Bicester and Kidlington Ramblers on Sunday 1st December. We will leave Homebase carpark at 10 am for a 2.5 mile circular walk past Gavray, some of it on the footpath (129/3). You can join in here if you have small children (at a layby near the footpath sign). The petition will be available for you to sign at the carpark or during the walk.