

Community groups join forces to preserve riverside heritage

A popular riverside beauty spot in Malmesbury, named after a 9th century monk, is being acquired by Malmesbury Town Council, with the aim of restoring and preserving it for local people for generations to come.

Daniel's Well and surrounding farmland bordering the River Avon is being bought by an alliance of local groups comprising Malmesbury Town Council, St Paul Malmesbury Without Parish Council, Malmesbury League of Friends, and Malmesbury River Valleys Trust, with support from Malmesbury Civic Trust.

The 8.5 acre site stretches from Foxley Road, along the river towards the bank opposite St Aldhelm's Mead, and forms part of Malmesbury's scenic river walk. It gets its name from a 9th century monk and disciple of Aldhelm, called Daniel, who had a daily ritual of submerging himself in the cold well water – the well is still present, but is currently capped.

Until now, the land has been part of Daniel's Well Farm, which is also being sold, and negotiations to buy it have been led by Malmesbury town councillor, Cllr Steve D'Arcy.

"We have long wanted to acquire this land, to restore and preserve it for the local people of Malmesbury, so when the farm was put up for sale this was a perfect opportunity," said Cllr D'Arcy. "It's an incredibly popular place for walkers, dog owners and people in general and is a wonderful facility for the town."

Restoration plans will include tree planting, repairing the riverbank, and restoring a stone clapper bridge, which has been damaged by flooding. Longer term, the team hope to make the area accessible for wheelchairs and pushchairs.

Andy Kyte, of Malmesbury River Valleys Trust, said: "Our mission is to protect the natural environment in the Avon Valleys surrounding Malmesbury, and we believe that this purchase secures a great future for flora and fauna. We look forward to working with the team to make this vision real."

The land sits within St Paul Malmesbury Without Parish Council, but Malmesbury Town Council will become the new owner. There are plans to set up a small working group to identify restoration work needed, with local builders and farmers being invited to tender. There will then be a public presentation of plans, and the creation of a voluntary group to manage the area.

Cllr Roger Budgen, on behalf of St Paul Malmesbury Without Parish Council, said: "We wholeheartedly support this initiative, not only for the benefits already mentioned, but as means of preserving the much-loved pedestrian route into town for parish residents living in Foxley and Common Roads."

Keith Maslin, on behalf of Malmesbury League of Friends, added: "Our trustees are delighted to be able to support this exciting project, which is an invaluable area of land,

crucial to the future of accessibility of public open space around the town. There is undoubtedly a lot of work to be done to make this area accessible to all, but we look forward to providing whatever assistance we can to facilitate this.”