

IN BRIEF

Trees are vandalised

DIDCOT: Vandals attacked young trees planted in the verge of Hitchcock Way, Oxfordshire County Council said a contractor would be going out this month to check the damage and see what needs replanting.

Each tree is estimated to cost about £100 to replace. Council spokesman Emma Midgley said: "It's unfortunate that there's an ongoing problem with vandalism of trees at this site."

ONLINE

Pole dancing instructor, student and serial-socialiser Sara Smith is blogging now at

oxfordmail.co.uk

Dining cash

KENNINGTON: The Rose Taylor Memorial Charity Dinner, at Egrove Park, laid on by the Said Business School and attended by 120 senior citizens from the village, raised £1,182 for Kingfisher School and the Abbey Centre in Abingdon.

Rose Taylor was a well-known charity fundraiser who died two years ago.

MP BACKS MILL TOURISM DRIVE

POPULAR: Visitors at Combe Mill on an open day



By David Horne
Witney Reporter

VOLUNTEERS who look after a historic mill, which once provided power for the Blenheim estate, want to turn it into a major tourist attraction.

The Combe Mill Society has already drawn up a business plan for the site, near Woodstock, and are hoping to raise £500,000 for a visitor centre.

The mill used to open on just four Sundays a year but, for 2008, the number of open days has been doubled and arrangements made for school visits.

Visitors can see the old steam mill in action, demonstrations at the blacksmith's forge, examine its old machinery and artefacts — as well as see a display of historic clocks.

Director and trustee Tony Simmons said: "We want to lift it from a little thing where people play with steam engines, to an essential day out for families."

The society, which has 100 members, has given itself a short-term target of raising £30,000, but will ultimately need £500,000 for the visitor centre.

The mill played host on Friday to Witney MP and Conservative Party leader David Cameron, and won his backing.

While there, the MP was

Volunteers want to develop attraction



GIFT: David Cameron is presented with a poker made at the mill

presented with an iron poker with applewood handle, made at the mill by members Bill Keen and Steve Nichols, by society chairman Ron Rutherford.

Mr Cameron said: "I will do my best to help them attract funding from various heritage bodies."

"I'm very enthusiastic about their plans. Combe Mill has a lot

to offer and needs more visitors, including schoolchildren, to get a feel for the past."

Mr Simmons said that to turn it into a proper tourist attraction they would need a manager, which they would hope to pay for through an increased number of visitors.

Plans also include building a new boilerhouse, work on the waterwheel and a lift for the disabled.

Anyone interested in becoming involved can call Mr Simmons on 01863 893551, or email tony@combemill.org

The mill website, located at www.combemill.org, has details of open days. The first this year is Sunday, March 16.

Admission is £4 for adults and £2.50 for children.

tony@combemill.org



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MILL FACTS

- Combe Mill is a Grade-II listed building
- A mill on the site is referred to in the 11th century Domesday Book
- The current mill dates back to 1851, and was used for cutting timber, as well as a workshop

of the estate. Visitors can usually see the blacksmith's forge in action

- Power was originally provided by the River Evenode, but the steam engine, now fuelled by oil, later became the main source of power.

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