

BEECHFIELD NATURE AREA

Management and Maintenance Plan

1. Policy Statement

The aim is to improve the amenity, recreational and nature conservation value of Beechfield Nature Area, widening its appeal to the people of Corsham, while retaining its original character.

2. Site Description

The site is approximately two hectares of the former grounds of Beechfield House situated along Middlewick Lane, Corsham. The land was transferred into the Council's ownership in 2002. The whole site is within a designated Conservation Area.

An interesting range of birds and mammals have been spotted around the site, including: partridges, green woodpeckers, pheasants, deer, foxes and rabbits.

There is nothing of archeological interest recorded in this area.

3. Objectives

The main objective is to make the open space interesting to local people while retaining, and where possible, enhancing the main features and characteristics without compromising the nature conservation value.

To increase interest in the open space by carrying out improvements to paths, provision of an interpretation board, leaflets and press publicity. This is being done in a controlled way so as to avoid misuse of the site. Visitors will be encouraged to walk to the site rather than travel by car.

4. Main Features

The important features of this site include:

- Open grassland area
- Woodland
- Dry stone walls
- Mature trees
- Hedges
- Pond

Features should, wherever possible, be improved to enhance their conservation and amenity value.

Central area

This consists of approximately 1.5ha mown grass where cuttings are not removed. Plants present include: several grass species, dandelion, buttercup, plantain, ragwort, dock, nettle, meadow cranesbill, birdsfoot trefoil, herb Robert, meadow vetchling, red bartsia, cowslip and common fleabane.

Margin, on west, north and east sides

This is approximately 0.5ha, varying between 10-20m in width from boundary. Grass is left uncut. Mature and young trees present include: birch, sycamore, maple, ash, elm, poplar, cherry, and oak. Some of margin is under sycamore shade, where orchids can be found. Elsewhere bramble, and in places more interesting plants are present such as herb Robert and vetch. There are a few dead elms in the wooded margin, but nothing more than 150mm diameter and seven metres tall.

Woodland

The woodland area consists mainly of sycamore, elm, holly and ash in varying sizes and condition. Ground flora includes bluebell, ground elder, nettles, cow parsley, dogs mercury, celandine and bramble. A dry stone wall runs along the northern boundary. A small glade was created in the Western woodland area following the loss of several elm trees.

Pond

A wildlife pond was created in the western margin of the central area in 2013 and is gradually becoming established. The pond is home to frogs and a range of insects as well as irises and other aquatic species.

5. Access and Public Use

The majority of users live locally and visit the site on foot. There is very limited parking for vehicles in Middlewick Lane. The only vehicles permitted onto the site are those connected with maintenance. The main entrance is secured with a locked gate and bollard.

Generally, use of field is confined to walking, normally around the perimeter.

There are no public footpaths crossing the open space but people generally keep to the perimeter and woodland paths.

Camping, bonfires and barbeques are not permitted.

6. Management and Maintenance

Originally when the site formed part of the grounds of Beechfield House, the central area was maintained as a sports pitch.

No artificial or organic fertilisers have been applied to the site since it ceased to be used for sport. This has reduced the density of Rye grasses in the swards allowing a greater number of less dominant grasses and wildflowers to establish.

Developers took over the site in the early 1990's when they built houses in Academy Drive, and converted some original buildings into flats. The developers carried out minor landscaping of the open space, primarily at the entrance from Middlewick Lane.

Overall management responsibility for the site lies with the Town Council. Local volunteers have had a valuable input into how the site has developed and been involved in practical maintenance tasks. Routine work is organised through Council staff, volunteers or contractors as appropriate.

Volunteers have been involved in caring for the site with tasks such as Ragwort pulling, removal of litter and debris, assisting with path construction and fitting bird and bat boxes. The British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) has also been involved in projects to improve the site.

The Wiltshire Wildlife Trust (WWT) inspected the site in 2002/03 and suggested a number of options for future management and maintenance including: additional parkland trees; addition of pond; new hedging; introduction of wildflower mix to the meadow; new woodland; and glades and rides. Many of these suggestions have been incorporated into the Management Plan.

Routine maintenance consists primarily of monthly mowing of the grass paths, twice yearly mowing of the central area, annual hedge cutting, removal of litter and tackling health and safety issues.

The central area is mown in August and October. The paths and picnic area are mown monthly from April to October.

A hedge was newly planted along the southern boundary in 2003/04.

The route of an informal woodland trail was agreed by volunteers. It has been improved and made more interesting and beneficial for visitors and wildlife. This work involved making the path more level and covering it with a bark surface. The work was originally carried out by the BTCV. Nearby dead elm trees were felled.

It is not planned to increase the woodland area significantly. The dry stone wall to the rear boundary of the woodland was rebuilt in 2006/07.

To avoid any tendency to overcrowd or shade the residential area, the first 30m or so along the southern side has been left unplanted and is managed as a grassland habitat.

The plan is to encourage local people to take an active interest in the improvement of their environment and its wildlife.

A seat was installed in the north-west corner of the meadow in 2003 and a small picnic area was created in 2004 in the north east of the site. It consists of an area of close mown grass and timber seat.

Bird and bat boxes were made and fitted to mature trees by the BTCV in 2004.

7. Maintenance Work

- Low intensity grass cutting over grassland areas to increase variety of the habitat.
- Mowing of grass pathways. This is carried out monthly during the growing season.

- Removal of rubbish from wooded area.
- Emptying of dog/litter bin.
- Maintenance of trees, replacing, or where not required, removing dead trees.
- Removing dead trees within two metres of the woodland walk if they create a safety hazard. Trees that do not pose a health & safety issue are retained and allowed to degenerate naturally.
- Trimming hedges. The development of scrub alongside the hedgerows and woodland boundary needs to be controlled.
- Prevent the spread of Ragwort in accordance with the DEFRA Code of Practice.
- Removal of Ivy from some trees. Ivy does create good habitat and cover for birds and insects, therefore its removal is confined to trees where the Ivy is affecting condition and stability of the tree.
- Inspection of the site to identify repairs and maintenance works required to keep the site in a safe and decent order.
- The breakdown of costs for this work in 2015 is at Appendix 1.

8. Future Projects

- Dealing with exposed and unsightly concrete in the wooded area.
- Surveying and monitoring of flora and fauna. This will be voluntary work with supervision from wildlife and conservation groups or organisations.
- Encourage activities such as Nature Walks run by Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and others.
- Monitor the adjacent Gladman development as plans progress and consider linkages between the sites.

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Appendix 1 - Beechfield Nature Area Costs 2015

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Task		Frequency	Unit Cost	Annual Cost
Path Cutting	Landscape Group	8 per year		£130
Path Strimming	Landscape Group	8 per year		£5
Field Cutting	Landscape Group	2 per year		£390
Hedge Cutting	Landscape Group	1 per year		£75
Contract Costs				£600
General Maintenance	In House	100 hours per year	£10.00	£1000
Litter Collection	In House	100 per year	£3.00	£300
In House Costs				£1300
Total Cost				£1900