

## Eynsham Fish Ponds: Landscape, Visual and Access Review 2015

The historic abbey fish ponds remain an important and well used area of public open space in Eynsham. Since the preparation of the last management plan in 2003 a significant amount of work has been undertaken by the parish council and volunteers to improve landscape and habitat diversity and opportunities for public access and information.

The main changes are summarised below:

- Improvements to the car park including a height restrictor to control access, bollard/rails around the car park edge to prevent vehicle encroachment, improvements to the car park surfacing and a new interpretation sign
- A limited amount of new tree planting around the site including recent planting of fruit trees close to the car park and individual specimens in gaps
- The creation of a significant new pond on the line of the former Chilbrook in the centre of the site
- A new section of surfaced path on the southern boundary of the site
- A significant change to the grass mowing regime which has opened out the southern section of the site, including the line of the former of Chilbrook, this area now being supplemented with log bench seats and an interpretation board
- A new board walk and steps over the brook and wetter ground in the east of the site which now forms part of a circular walk that is kept clear of encroaching vegetation around the northern and eastern boundaries
- Tree felling in various locations notably pollarding of large willows in the eastern section alongside the boardwalk
- Limited rebuilding of the drystone wall on the northern boundary.

### Landscape and Visual Review

Visually the most significant change has been that to the grass mowing regime. The area of short grass around and to the east of Harvey's House mound - now called Monk's Green - is a departure from the previous rough semi-natural character of this part of the site and has significantly improved opportunities for public access as well as an appreciation of the extent of the fish ponds and the water channel system that used to supply them. The boundaries of individual fish ponds remain largely obscured by dense vegetation.

Growth of vegetation has reduced views from some locations particularly into the centre of the site from the areas to the west of Harvey's House mound. This has the effect of making a more distinct change in character from the relatively enclosed, well treed section west of Pond 2 to the more open section to the east. Outside the site on the other side of Station Road views to the west across the meadows are also increasingly constrained by the growth of trees on the meadow edges.

The poplars that grow in a line between Ponds 1 and 2 are ever more prominent features on the site. The willows to the west of the poplars have continued to grow and also increasingly make their presence felt.

The horse chestnut trees along the northern boundary of the site have mostly survived, despite looking in poor condition at the time of the first management plan. They continue to provide an

effective visual edge to the site and contribute to the tree-lined character of the circular path through the northern section. A group of cherries in the north-eastern most corner continue to generate suckers and will become more prominent over time. The concrete block wall on the northern boundary remains unsightly in close-views, but is now quite well screened by vegetation in longer views.

Redevelopment of the farm buildings to the north of the site has been relatively sympathetic in terms of design retaining the low profile of the original barns. Over time tree and shrub planting in the gardens bordering the fish ponds will further reduce the visibility of the new properties. The spring to the north of the site is now being kept clear and maintained by the new owners of the land.

The trees and scrub alongside the Chilbrook on the southern boundary remain a strong feature and define the site edge. There are dead and dying small elm trees in places.

### **Access Review**

The new boardwalk and steps/bridge in the east has made a circular walking route around the site a realistic proposition. This now forms part of a permissive Heritage Trail. Additional maintenance effort keeps the north path open and useable though the ground remains uneven.

The existing public footpath remains on the southern boundary above the current Chilbrook. The Heritage Trail is complemented by two well designed, illustrated interpretation panels. These are in addition to the original interpretation panel, constructed by the car park entrance on a plinth of stones from the original Abbey, that is one of a set of similar boards forming a village-wide Eynsham Abbey heritage trail.

The new pond has been complemented with a dipping platform on its eastern edge.

The steep slopes from the public path to the Chilbrook remain. In places post and rail fencing has been installed to improve safety for site users. Path improvement works undertaken by volunteers have been effective.

Log bench seats on Monk's Green provide informal seating in keeping with the character of the site. More robust concrete / wood picnic benches in the grassed area by the car park are in regular use in the summer months.

The former children's den area that had the appearance of a rubbish dump between ponds 2 and 3 has been cleared. Dense vegetation has restricted the use of this area.

### **Summary**

A great deal of work has been undertaken since the first management plan was prepared. The change in grassland management to create the more open area of Monk's Green has created a more open character to the eastern half of the site. This now contrasts more noticeably with the relatively enclosed and well-treed western part of the site. The historic boundaries of the ponds remain relatively hard to visualise due to the dense vegetation this area supports.

A range of access improvements have been made including the creation of a boardwalk, interpretation boards and informal seating. A circular heritage trail now exists around the perimeter of the site making for a more varied and interesting visitor experience. Anecdotal information indicates that the site is now more widely used by individuals and groups than was the case before.

**Observations on maintenance needs likely within the course of the next 10 year plan.**

Entrance: Weeding alongside the boundary wall; repainting of the height restrictor; replacement of the Abbey trail interpretation sign; replenishment of car-park gravel.

Chilbrook Boundary Vegetation: coppicing of hazel and elder to create structural diversity and maintain path clearance (note re. badger sett). Removal of dead elms where these pose a hazard; topping up of surface on new path; replacement / introduction of fence sections at top of bank where damaged or unstable; monitoring of tree ties to ensure tree growth is not restricted; monitor fork in pathside maple at eastern end of path and attend to tree if required.

Monk's Green: Grass maintenance: maintain (with amendments if required), renew log benches

Boardwalk and eastern boundary: monitor and renew board walk as required; clear out eastern boundary ditch to maintain habitat diversity

North Walk: monitor tree condition and attend as required. Re-locate large growing trees which are becoming established close to the boundary wall to avoid problems with long-term damage to wall; re-space cherries in north-east corner to favour a smaller number of the better quality specimens; rebuilding of the northern boundary wall (possible volunteer / local training project).

Generally: awareness of the potential to undertake tree works to the large poplars and willows at the western end of the site; installation and maintenance of bird and bat boxes; annual trimming of the boundaries between the fish ponds to improve understanding of the layout of the historic site (possibly volunteers).

N.Mottram

Feb 2015

## Summary of Main Management Recommendations from 2003 and Work Undertaken

### Phase 1. Ongoing maintenance.

1. Car park (Zone A1). Remove low branches from trees and strim the areas boarding the existing car parking area to provide a picnic area. 2 – 3 cuts per year. Tables and benches would encourage use.

*Done. EPC have also provided two woodend picnic benches which have proved popular.*

2. Heritage footpath. Cut or strim a two meter wide pathway. 2 – 3 cuts per year.

*Done.*

3. Brook (Public) footpath. OCC to be asked to keep clear and remove hazardous trees.

*Done. EPC have an informal agreement with OCC Rights of Way that the PC will maintain the path to their desired standard.*

4. Bramble patch near car park (in Zone A). Cut down to ground level 25% each year in rotation. This is a very valuable habitat but needs to be kept under control.

*Done. Included in regular maintenance planning.*

5. Develop a tree management plan and action it in conjunction with Robin Saunders and Dave Russell to include issues of tree safety, species choice and location.

*Done. Agreed that only native trees be planted and only around the outer edge of the area so as not to interfere with the archaeology. EPC budget includes contingency funds for felling dangerous trees.*

6. Harvey's House Mound (Zone D). Late summer grass cut and shrub removal. This is the most interesting area botanically and should be kept clear.

*Done. Included in regular maintenance plan but cut more regularly to provide picnic area.*

7. Harvey's House Moat – Bunny Hollow (Zone D). Cut and clear late autumn/winter and remove arisings.

*Needs to be included in future maintenance planning.*

8. Clear vegetation along banks of the original Chilbrook at the east end. 2 – 3 cuts per year (Zone J).

*Done. Included in regular maintenance planning.*

9. Cut back dying small willows on embankment (Zone E).

*Done.*

### Phase 2. Suggested Improvements/Major Works

This would need to be grant aided but a contribution towards the costs from the Parish Council would be put towards match funding when applying.

*Grants received from Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment with contributions from EPC.*

1. Create a northern pathway to provide a circular walk and views of the whole area. This would involve leveling the existing rough path as well as a board walk over a boggy area and a small bridge to cross the original Chilbrook channel.

*Done. Ongoing volunteer maintenance to improve the surface of the path. A new project is in-hand to create a ramp rather than steps over the Old Chilbrook, with funding from Eynsham Rotary.*

2. Clear the sump stream (Zone J – eastern end) to provide a running water habitat and to improve the drainage of the playing fields.

*Done. Although water levels are such that the water flows will remain sluggish.*

3. Take steps to control the spread of the central clump of blackthorn (Zone G / I).

*In hand. Community payback team programmed to do the work.*

4. Keep the sides of the spring stream clear and remove tall, coarse vegetation from one or two of the pond areas to give definition and to increase the biodiversity (Zone J / I).

*In future plans.*

5. Clear a shallow bank access area to the Chilbrook (Zone B).

*This did not prove popular as a children's play area and has been allowed to re-vegetate.*

6. Regularly mow the level area of grass between the heritage path and the old course of the Chilbrook at the east end of the site (Zone C).

*Done. Now part of EPC maintenance programme.*

7. Put up bat boxes in Queen Mother's clump (Zone A)

*Done. Would merit review to establish condition and whether locations are appropriate.*

8. Install log benches. *Done.*

9. Put up information boards

*Done. Car park board due to be replaced due to deterioration of original along with footpath map, funded by Eynsham Rotary.*

### Phase 3. Long Term Aims (Further grant aid required)

1. Restore the boundary stone wall with Abbey Farm.

*A recent change in ownership now makes access to the other side of the wall possible and restoration – at least of the mid and eastern section a viable option.*

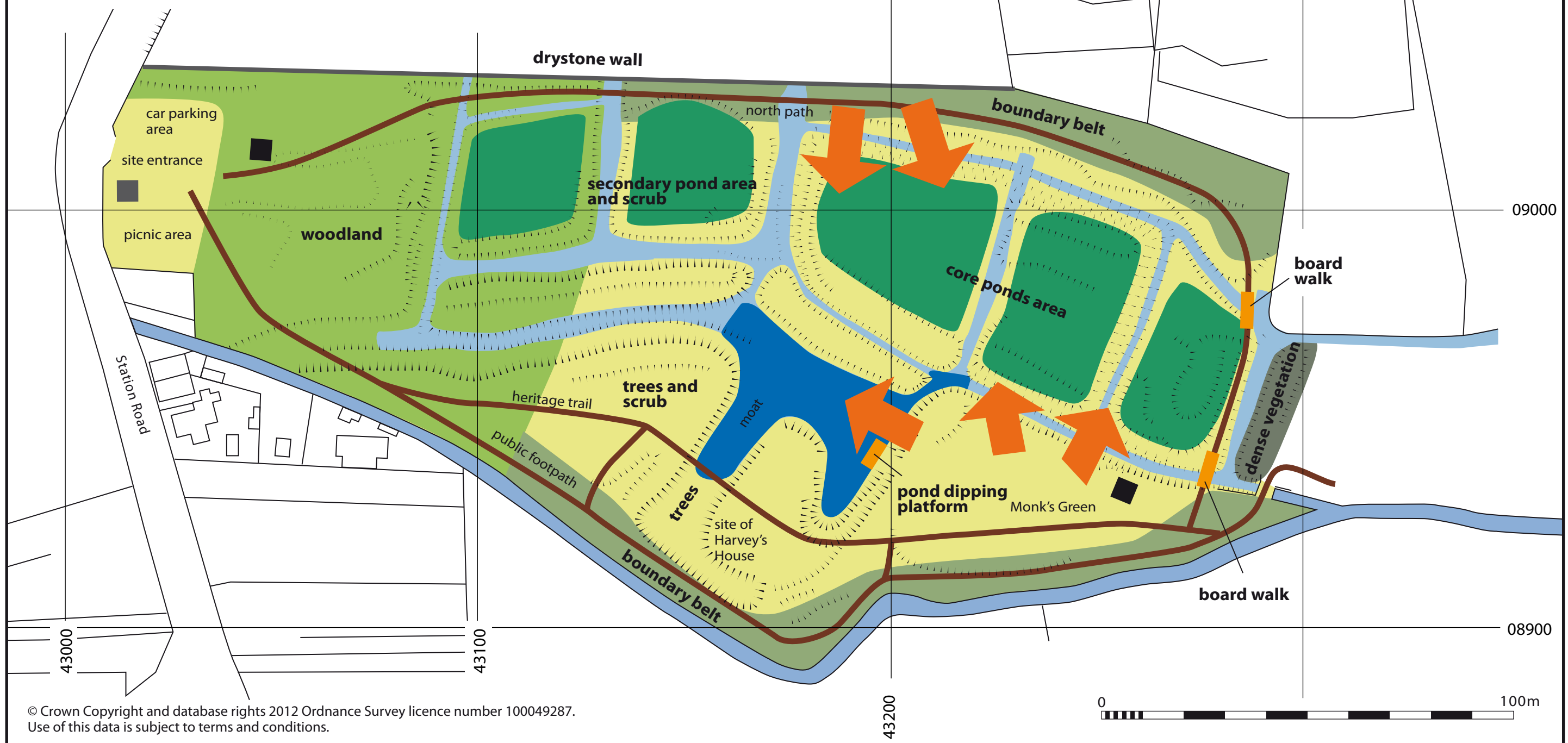
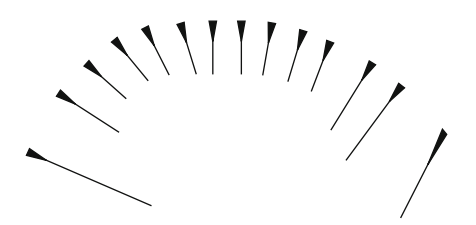
2. Undertake further archaeological investigations with the view to all or partial restoration of one of the ponds.

*The depth of silt (1.4m) in the ponds is likely to make this impractical. It is now known that the ponds are clay lined and fed from a spring line to the north, and were controlled by sluices. There is an option for local excavation of part of one pond and for further work to reinstate one of the sluices to aid site interpretation.*

# Eynsham Abbey Fishponds

## Landscape, visual and access plan

- fishponds
- wet areas
- open water
- older interpretation board
- new interpretation board
- main views



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