

Eynsham Abbey Fish Ponds
Proposed Management Plan
2015 – 2025

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Introduction

The Eynsham Abbey Fishponds is a 2.5 ha site, lying to the south of the village. The area is all that remains of the abbey in situ and is of historical and archaeological interest having remained largely undisturbed since the reformation in the 16th century.

The area, along with the South Playing Field, was partly funded and partly donated to the village for recreation. It is now owned by Fields In Trust and was leased on a 100 year agreement to the Parish Council in 1988. In 2003 the Parish Council took over responsibility for the area known as The Fishponds from the Playing Fields Managers. In 2004, with the aid of a grant from Awards for All, surveys were commissioned from which a management plan was devised. This was approved and supported by the Parish Council and, after consultation in the local community was put into operation. With the aid of further grants and voluntary work by local schools, youth groups and local residents the majority of this plan has now been achieved.

Ten years on, with grants from local councils and Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment the surveys have been re-commissioned from which a future management plan has been drawn up to guide the Parish Council in maintenance and improvement of the biodiversity and preservation of the historic landscape. The following surveys were commissioned and can be found on the Eynsham online website.

Wetland plant species and macro invertebrate species - Freshwater Habitats Trust
Invertebrate survey – Lawrence Bee
Botanical survey – Wychwood Flora Group
Landscape, visual and access review – Nick Mottram, Oxfordshire County Council
Birds survey – Ivor Porter.

Vision Statement

Our vision is that the site continues to be maintained sympathetically and improved appropriately to its ecological and historical nature and is utilised as a public amenity for leisure and education in a manner consistent with its natural character.

Site Description and Assessment

The site is a haven for a rich variety of wildlife and is an important historical feature. The ponds themselves are not discernible to the casual observer due to dense vegetation, but with the aid of the interpretation boards some areas can be defined.

A public right of way runs through the site linking the village with the adjacent playing fields, and additional paths have also been created. Part of the original course of the Chilbrook has been dredged to create a large pond with a dipping platform.

The site has a height restricted car park and a series of interpretation signs to help visitors explore and understand the area, and in the very near future, thanks to Eynsham Rotary

Club, will have a ramp installed to enable wheelchair and pushchair users to cross the old Chilbrook making a circular walk of the site possible for them.

Management Objectives

The management objectives of the site are to:

- protect the archaeological interest and heritage
- increase the diversity of flora and fauna
- provide a natural public green space for recreation, leisure and well-being
- improve knowledge and understanding of the landscape, biodiversity and heritage context of the site.

Management Principles

1. Continue an active maintenance programme to ensure the site remains diverse and suitable for existing recreational use.
2. Seek advice where site works might damage archaeological heritage
3. Comply with legislation e.g. protected species, Wildlife and Countryside Act, tree felling regulations, etc.
4. Monitor key habitats to inform management decisions – e.g. water quality.
5. Encourage use by local schools, community groups and volunteers.

Work Programme

The suggested programme of work is developed from the recommendations and observations within the specialists reports which can be found on the Eynsham Online website and from the experience of the last few years,

1. Monitoring

Monthly risk assessment reporting as recommended by ROSPA, possibly combined with water quality monitoring as recommended by Fresh Water Habitats Trust, should continue with volunteers as it ensures a regular inspection. This should include a general awareness of the condition of the trees including ties and potentially dangerous dead or damaged specimens.

2. On-going Maintenance

The general maintenance programme by the Parish Council is basically in place. However each September this needs to be reassessed and the Council provided with a current schedule. This can include projects for volunteers for the coming winter. It is also the time to decide upon any major works that need funding in the coming financial year so that they can be included in the budget in November.

3. The Pond

The pond has now been dredged twice, initially in 2007 and then again in 2014. This is very destructive and Fresh Water Trust have recommended more regular minor clearance with

their on the spot guidance. Funding for this will need to be considered. The log benches on Monks Green will need replacing in due course too.

4. The Ditches

As recommended by Freshwater Habitats Trust management should take place to maintain a range of successional stages in the ditches, again on a long-term rotation (5-10 years). For example silt, overhanging trees and vegetation could be removed from about a quarter of the ditch bordering the eastern boundary of the site to maintain some areas of open water and enhance plant diversity.

Surveyors' Suggested Improvements

These suggested improvements and others can be found in the specialists' reports referenced earlier and located on the Eynsham Online website.

Creation of wild flower meadow on Monks Green - Wychwood Flora Group

Preparation

Over the spring and summer as the nettles grow they should be cut down and removed from site. This treatment will gradually eliminate the nettles and the other coarse plants and reduce the fertility of the soil which is needed before a meadow can be established. It will *probably take three years* of this treatment before any improvement is noticed.

Introduction of meadow species

As it would take a long time in this situation for desirable species characteristic of a meadow to come in naturally, the next stage would be to introduce them either by scattering seeds into areas of soil from which the original vegetation has been removed or by introducing plug plants into the existing vegetation.

A decision will need to be made whether a spring or a summer meadow is wanted as they need to be treated differently.

Spring meadow:

Leave the meadow uncut from autumn until late June, allowing any plants to flower and set seed. Hand scything or strimming would be the best way to do this.

Summer meadow:

Cut the meadow fortnightly until May, then leave it until September or October. This allows flowering over the summer. Cut the meadow again once all the flowers have seeded. If the grasses become too dominant, introduce a summer cut in June or July

Using plug plants.

The area for planting should be close-mown prior to planting and the cuttings removed. The best planting time is August to October. It is advisable to create bare areas around the spot where the plug is to be introduced to reduce initial competition. Plant 4 or 5 plugs per square metre

During the second and subsequent seasons, cut between March and early May. Cease cutting in June to allow flowering and resume cutting between July and October. The amount of cutting may be reduced as competition from weeds and grasses becomes less. Never cut below a height of 3 inches and always remove all cuttings. This allows light and space for the young plants. This is important as the site is probably still fertile and grass still

growing strongly. Mowing and removal of the cuttings will be vitally important until the inherent fertility falls.

Once the introduced plants are growing strongly and the meadow established, mowing will only be needed once a year in late summer after the seeds have been shed. The cuttings will still need to be raked off and removed from site.

Using seeds.

To prepare the area it should be cultivated and the weeds such as nettles, thistles, docks and vigorous grasses removed. The ground needs to be left bare for several weeks to allow any annual weeds to germinate. These should be removed before sowing your seed mix. Flatten the bare ground before sowing by using a roller or even just walking on it. Seed can be sown in spring or autumn.

Future management

Meadows are usually managed in one of two ways, depending on when most of the plants flower. If you have a meadow with a mixture of summer and spring flowering plants then follow the summer meadow regime.

The most important part of meadow management is raking up the cuttings to prevent the build-up of rotting vegetation, which stifles wild flowers and favours stronger growing grasses.

Some species to consider

Betony, cowslip, cuckooflower, moon daisy and ragged robin. Yarrow is already present. When creating a meadow one species is always recommended – yellow rattle which as it is semi-parasitic on grasses weakens them giving the finer species a better chance of flourishing. It is an annual which, if the option of using plugs is chosen, is introduced by scattering its seed in small areas where the existing vegetation has been removed. If reseeding is chosen it should be included in the seed mix. (See map on page 7 for suggested location)

Creation of more water habitat - Freshwater Habitats Trust

The biological diversity of the site would be further increased by creating other patches of open water in relatively homogenous tall emergent stands, but away from paths to prevent or at least minimise disturbance by dogs. These could be smaller and shallower than the current pond (e.g. 25 m², maximum depth 0.5 m), and could be created on a long-term rotation to maintain a range of successional stages. This is of course subject to the archaeological interest of the site. (See map on page 7 for suggested location)

Invertebrate habitat creation - Lawrence Bee

To encourage solitary bee and wasp activity it would be well worth establishing a few patches of bare ground by simply lifting small patches of turf to expose the underlying soil, particularly in areas open to the sun where there may be the possibility of the bare ground drying out. Ground moving invertebrates will shelter under shaded areas on the ground surface. Artificial shelter areas can be established by laying down small sections of corrugated metal sheeting or old pieces of carpet on the ground in selected locations around the site. These would provide an undisturbed retreat for a range of invertebrates particularly beetles and spiders. The metal sheeting is also a favourite shelter site for slow

worms and grass snakes – particularly if located in areas exposed to direct sunlight. (See map on page 7 for suggested location)

Where grassland mowing is part of the management programme small areas of grassland should not be mown and should be left to die off naturally thereby maintaining some of the vegetation structure required by those invertebrates requiring specific overwintering sites in dead meadow and grassland vegetation. In addition if grass cutting is carried out by scythe, piles of cut grass left on site to dry out can create an attractive habitat for ground moving spiders such as the Lycosidae– wolf spiders.

Tree and shrub management plan – Wychwood Project.

Chilbrook boundary vegetation: coppicing of hazel and elder to create structural diversity along the Chilbrook boundary. There is a badger sett alongside the path and no work should be undertaken within 3 meters of the sett.

Thin out cherry trees in north east corner.

Plant berry bearing shrubs such as hawthorn, holly and crab apple to encourage birds (See map on page 7 for suggested location)

Northern boundary dry-stone wall.

Rebuilding of this wall would be a great asset. Funding for this is unlikely to be obtained although abounding land owners could be approached. There are voluntary groups – particularly The Wychwood Project, who may be prepared to undertake the labour.

Historic interpretation of the site.

In the reconstruction picture of the abbey there is a drawing of a sluice gate in the foreground. If this was recreated it would help visitors to visualise the landscape at the time of the abbey and could be a means of creating more wetland habitat by damming the ditch.

Conclusion

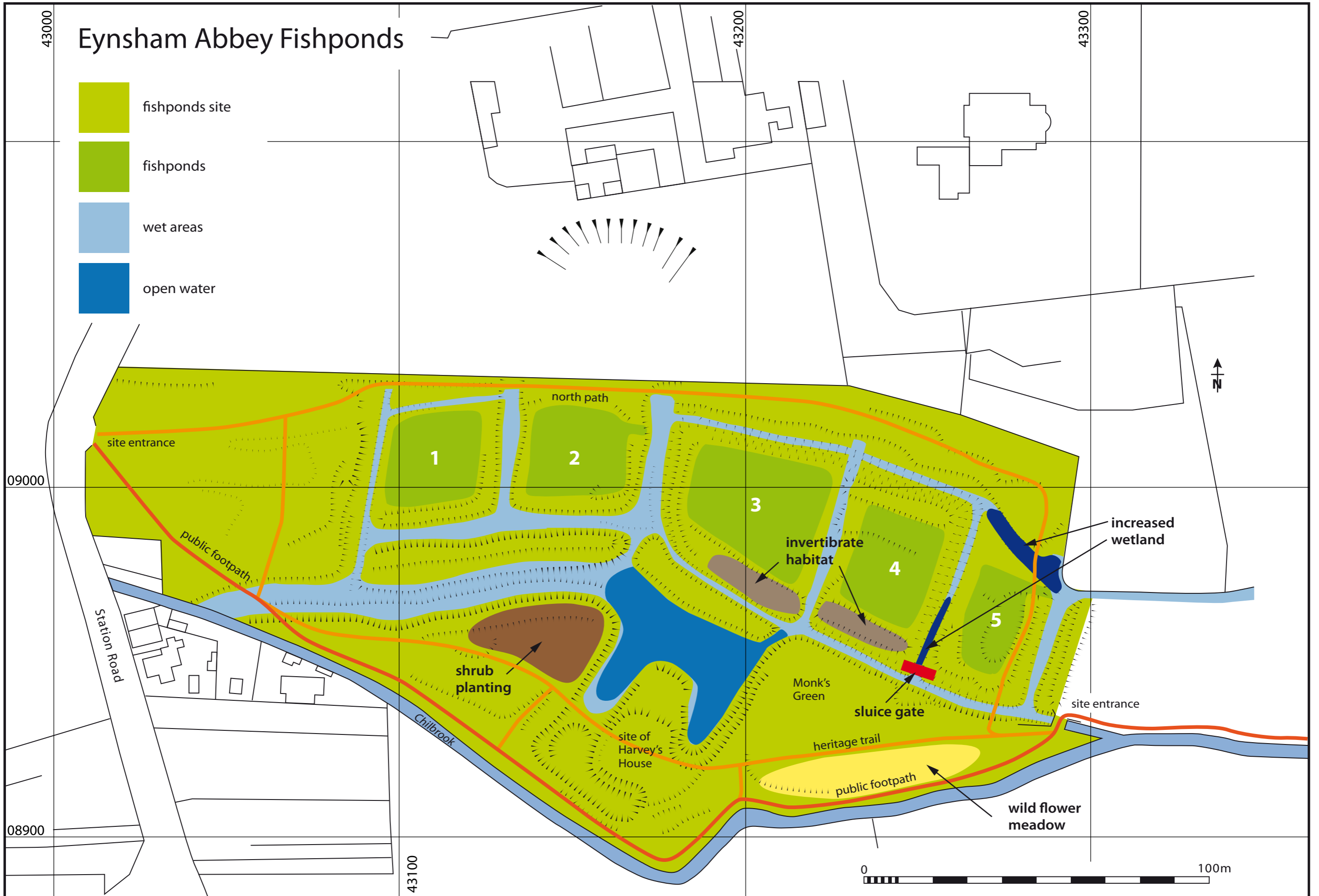
The Parish Council would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the work in surveying the site and in making suggested improvements. Due to financial constraints, it may not be possible to carry out all the recommendations that have been made. However using the guidance in this management plan, it is envisaged that the Abbey Fishponds site will continue to flourish, offering a range of fascinating and biodiverse habitats which will not only encourage even more wildlife (both flora and fauna), but will allow visitors to learn about and enjoy this unique area.

The Parish Council Fishponds Committee will prioritise the suggestions and work towards financing and implementing those which it selects. The Committee welcomes representations and support from members of the public.

Signed

Eynsham Parish Council Fishponds Committee – March 2015
Verity Hughes, Suzanne Osborne, Sue Brown, Paul Wilding.

Wychwood Project – Sharon Williams



Comments from the Specialist Reports

Fresh Water Habitats Trust - Aquatic habitat

“The work carried out over the past 10 years has clearly improved the aquatic biodiversity of the Abbey Fishponds. Overall the aim of the management at the site should be to maintain habitat diversity and investigate potential issues with water quality.” Pascale Nicolet.
Wetland plant species recorded: 34 (22 in 2004). Macro invertebrate species recorded: 72 (30 in 2004).

Wychwood Project - Landscape

“The site has a predominantly semi-natural character. Views are constrained and filtered by trees on the boundaries and within the site. The presence of ‘exotic’ tree species will change the character of the area in the long-term. Views to adjacent farmland and traditional buildings in the north are a strength, glimpsed views of new housing a weakness. There are opportunities to improve the value of the site as a local amenity. There are issues of tree safety”. Nick Mottram.

Wychwood Flora Group - Botanic

“Over most of the site it is difficult to recommend any change to the management that could enhance biodiversity. The one area that could be managed differently is Zone C (see appendix X)...an area dominated by stinging nettles, species-poor offering little to wildlife and could be much improved by being turned into a meadow which would be beneficial to insects, especially bumble bees.” Brenda Betteridge. 195 species were recorded on two visits May and July 2014.

Invertebrates

This is the first invertebrate survey to be carried out on the Fishponds. “During 2 full days surveying it became apparent that the biodiversity of the site was not great either botanically or entomologically....the introduction of some native wildflower mix and native shrub/tree planting could dramatically improve not only the botanical diversity but also, through the introduction of a greater variety of food plants, the invertebrate diversity.”
Lawrence Bee

Birds

“Different birds require different habitats and the variety of birds show that the management of the fishponds is proving successful in developing and maintaining the conditions to encourage wildlife into the area for all visitors to enjoy.” Ivor Porter.