

Eynsham Abbey Fish Ponds

Proposed Management Report

submitted by

Play Areas Sub-Committee

in conjunction with

Eynsham History Group

and

Wychwood Project.

Introduction

This year, 2004, the Parish Council has taken over responsibility for the abbey fishponds area from the Playing Fields Association. Next year this coincides with the 1000th anniversary of the founding of Eynsham abbey which, in its time, was one of the most influential abbeys in England. The fish ponds, which lie to the south of the village, are all that remain of the abbey in situ and they are of great historical and archaeological interest. They are overgrown and hardly recognizable as ponds but they have remained largely undisturbed since the reformation in the 16th century. The area has deteriorated since the 1960's and is in need of urgent care and maintenance. The abbey millennium provides an opportunity for the Parish Council to mark the anniversary by putting into operation a management plan that will protect the history, improve a popular local amenity, increase the biodiversity and protect our heritage.

Awards for All (a Lottery grants programme) supplied a grant which enabled us to commission specialists to carry out environmental surveys and make suggestions as to how to manage the site without causing harm to the wildlife or the archaeology. The specialists were also asked to make recommendations on how to improve the biodiversity of the area and make best use of the site as a public amenity. A vast number of species were identified and are detailed in their reports from which short extracts are included at the end of this proposal.

It was anticipated that there might be conflicting ideas for future management but in the event all the specialists made similar recommendations and these are compiled into this three phased management plan.

We now have a fantastic opportunity to increase the biodiversity, improve the landscape and enable greater accessibility to the area.

Proposed Management Strategy

All the specialists recommended basic regular operations to stop further deterioration of the site and to increase the biodiversity and amenity value. These are compiled into Phase 1 which is an ongoing maintenance plan.

Further opportunities to enhance the site are outlined as second and third phases.

Phase 1. Ongoing maintenance.

1. Car park. Remove low branches from trees and trim the areas bordering the existing car parking area to provide a picnic area. (2 – 3 cuts per year). Tables and benches would encourage use.
2. Brook (Public) footpath. OCC to be asked to keep clear and remove hazardous trees.
3. Heritage footpath. Cut or trim a two metre wide pathway. (2 – 3 cuts per year).
4. Bramble patch near car park. Cut down to ground level 25% each year in rotation. This is a very valuable habitat but needs to be kept under control.
5. Develop a tree management plan in conjunction with Robin Saunders and Dave Russell to include issues of tree safety, species choice and location and to action it.
6. Harvey's House Mound. Late summer grass cut and shrub removal. This is the most interesting area botanically and it should be kept clear.
7. Harvey's House Moat – Bunny Hollow. Cut and clear during late autumn/winter and remove arisings.
8. Clear vegetation along banks of the original Chilbrook at the east end. (2 – 3 cuts per year).
9. Cut back dying small willows on embankment.

Phase 2. Suggested Improvements/Major Works.

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

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.
2. Phased clearance of the sump stream to provide a running water habitat and to improve the drainage of the playing fields.
3. Take steps to control the spread of the central clump of blackthorn.
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.
5. Clear a shallow bank access area to the Chilbrook.
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.
7. Put up bat boxes in Queen Mother's clump.
8. Install log benches.
9. Put up information panel.

Phase 3. Long Term Aims requiring further grant aid

1. Restore the boundary stone wall with Abbey Farm.
2. Undertake further archaeological investigations with the view to all or partial restoration of one of the ponds.
3. Provision of interpretative boards in keeping with the character of the site.

Conclusion

We propose, in the interests of accessibility and safety, that the Parish Council implements Phase 1 of the Proposed Management Plan over the next twelve months. During this time, subject to the Parish Council's approval, the group will initiate public consultation and subsequently apply for grant aid for the next phase.

Signed

Verity Hughes – Eynsham Parish Councillor

Brian Atkins – Eynsham History Group

Nick Mottram – Wychwood Project

Mapping by Paul Hughes.

19th October 2004.

Comments from the Specialist Reports.

Copies of the full reports are available on request.

Ponds Conservation Trust - Aquatic habitat

“A total of 30 macroinvertebrate species and 23 wetland plant species were recorded during the survey, all widespread and common. Overall the habitat is relatively homogenous and could benefit from management aimed at increasing habitat diversity.” Pascale Nicolet.

Keevill Heritage Consultancy - Archaeology

“The current lack of management and relatively poor physical (but not archaeological) condition is a potential threat to the ponds’ future. Archaeologically I see no reason to oppose an improved management regime, so long as archaeological concerns are taken fully into account. Even a simple programme of annual maintenance should improve matters, while there is some potential for improvement (especially to habitat) and perhaps even partial re-instatement.” Graham Keevill.

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.

Cotswold Rare Plants Group - Botanic

The Cotswold Rare Plants Group provided a very comprehensive report listing the plants they had found and giving specific recommendations for various areas. They conclude by saying “We applaud your vision and are pleased to be associated with this exciting project” Ken Betteridge,

Birds

“A total of thirty-seven species were seen and/or heard of which three were over flying and had no specific connection with the site. Nine species would be considered as breeding residents. In the summer months at least another five species took up breeding territories.” Ray Edwards (local ornithologist)

Oxfordshire Bat Group

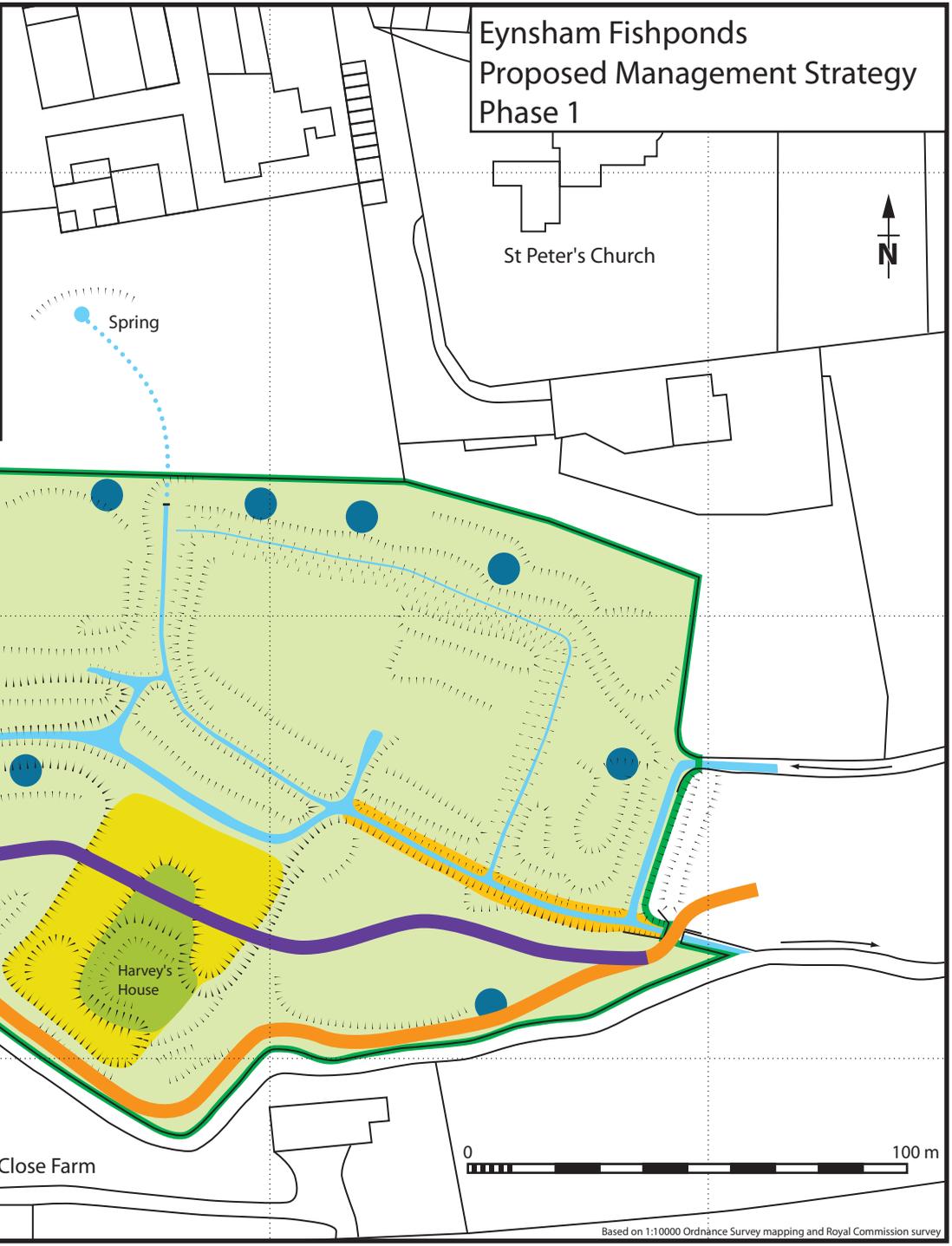
“The Fish Ponds site is being used as foraging habitat by at least three bat species...Improving the site for bats could involve providing roost sites in the form of bat boxes on trees.. otherwise improving the foraging habitat would help, with the aim of increasing the number of insects available. Open water would help, if your plans are ambitious enough to include restoring some of the ponds.” Kathy Warden

Small Mammals

“33 individual animals were captured over the three day period, 19 wood mice, 13 bank voles and one common shrew. Any work which is carried out on the site will, inevitably disturb these animals. However the size of the site and the close proximity of other suitable habitats would act as a refuge for the animals which would then re-colonise the disturbed area once the work was completed and the habitat returns to a suitable state.” Margery Reid, (Oxford Brookes University)

Eynsham Fishponds Proposed Management Strategy Phase 1

-  Remove low branches from trees and trim grass in the car park area 2 - 3 cuts per year. Provide picnic tables.
-  Footpath - OCC responsibility to keep clear
-  Heritage footpath - grass cut 2 metre width. 2-3 cuts per year
-  Bramble - clear 25% of the area each year in winter
-  Annual check on condition of trees and make safe where necessary
-  Harvey's House area - late summer grass cut and shrub removal
-  Harvey's House moat area - cut and clear late autumn/winter and remove arisings
-  Clear vegetation along water channel - 3 cuts per year



Based on 1:10000 Ordnance Survey mapping and Royal Commission survey

Eynsham Fishponds Proposed Management Strategy Phase 2

-  North walkway
-  Stream clearance
-  Control of spreading blackthorn
-  Clear rank vegetation - 3 cuts per year
-  Bank clearance to enable access to stream
-  Cut grass between heritage path and the old Chilbrook - 3 cuts per year
-  Bat boxes
-  Log benches for seating
-  Information panel

St Peter's Church



Spring

63.00m OD

BA044

Station Road

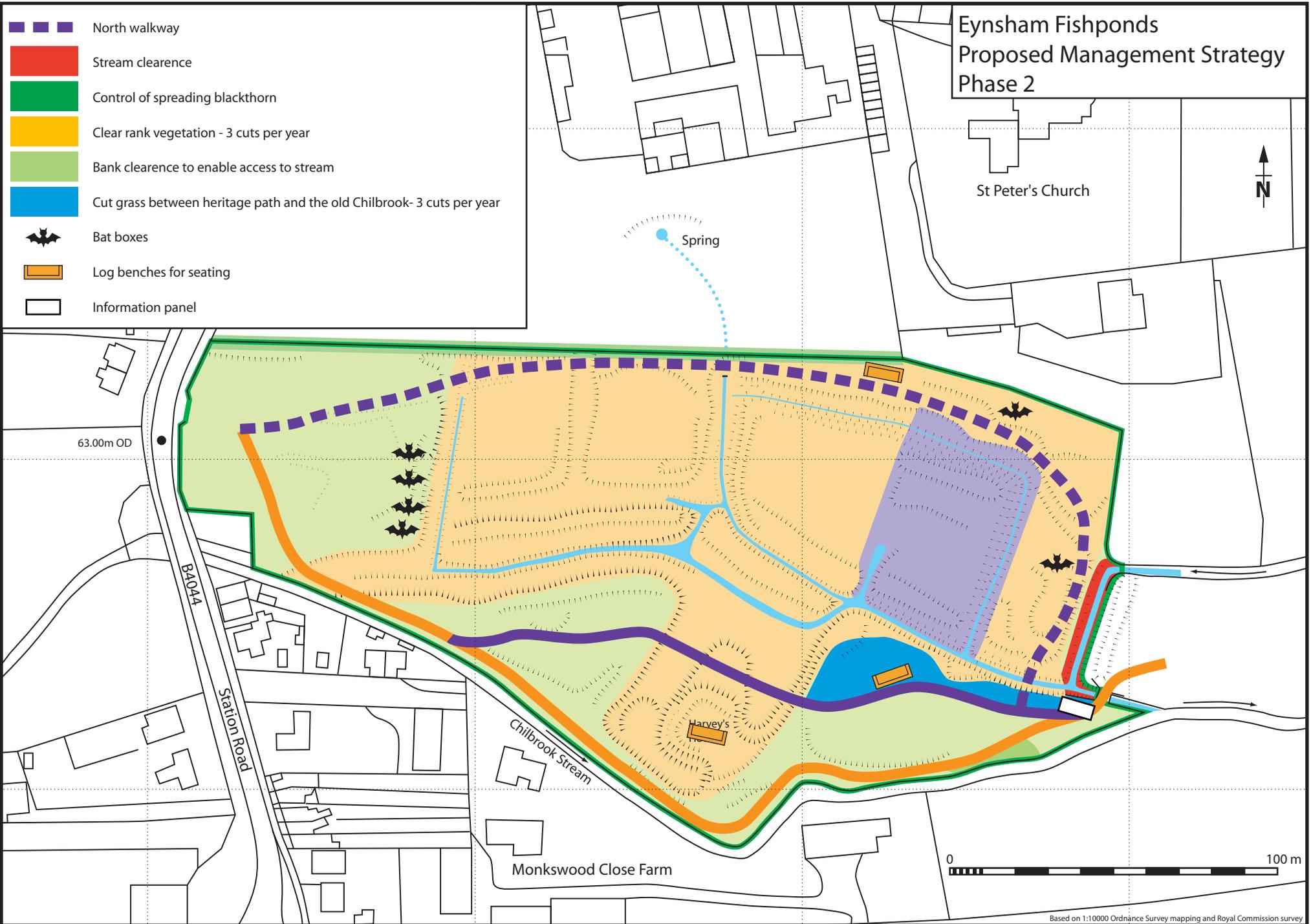
Chilbrook Stream

Harvey's

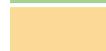
Monkwood Close Farm



Based on 1:10000 Ordnance Survey mapping and Royal Commission survey



Eynsham Fishponds Proposed Management Strategy Phase 3

-  Restoration of dry stone wall on the north boundary
-  Archaeological investigation within the area
-  Restoration of pond and associated water channels
-  Provision of interpretation panels where appropriate

St Peter's Church



Spring

63.00m OD

BA044

Station Road

Chilbrook Stream

Harvey's House

Monkwood Close Farm



Based on 1:10000 Ordnance Survey mapping and Royal Commission survey

