

HARTING PARISH COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of **Play and Open Spaces Advisory Committee (POSAC)** held on **Tuesday 25 October 2022** at **6.00 pm** in Harting Congregational Church Hall.

Present: Mr Shaxson (Chair) (AS), Mr Bonner (TB), Mrs Bramley (SBr), Dr Bowman (SB), Mrs Martin (JM) and Mr Olphert (AO).

In attendance: Mrs Walker (Parish Clerk) (TW).

1. Apologies for absence: Mrs Dawson and Mr Palmer.

2. Declarations of interest: None.

3. Minutes from Meeting held on 8 June 2021

The minutes were approved and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

4. Matters arising

No Further action had been taken regarding the photo stations in the Warren and it was felt it may not be appropriate now. The clerk does take regular photos for the records.

5. Co-option

Sheridan Bowman was co-opted as a member of POSAC until the new Council is elected in 2023.

6. Annual closure of gate leading from South Gardens to Kennels Cottage

The subject of whether or not to lock the gate leading from South Gardens to Kennels Cottage for one day per year to prevent a right of access being claimed was considered. This had been previously addressed by the Council but no date had been set for the closure.

It was agreed that a date suitable to both parties should be agreed and the Clerk will contact the occupants of Kennels Cottage and Church Farm. It is hoped the last Sunday in November will be suitable. A notice would be displayed ahead of the closure.

7. Woodland update

Volunteer sessions had been arranged for the following Saturday and Thursday to carry out general weeding in the Warren. The response had been very encouraging.

Despite the period of extremely dry weather in the summer the saplings have survived very well, although perhaps they have not grown as much as would otherwise have been expected. It was noted that the wayfarers had not had such a good survival rate and this was due to the large size of the saplings supplied by the nursery and the difficulty this posed when they were planted.

It was noted that some saplings had been removed from alongside the paths in The Warren, as well as from the west side of the northernmost pond in South Gardens.

It had been suggested that contractors might be needed to help with some of the weeding in the Warren, it was felt the situation was manageable at the moment, but this may be a consideration in the future.

Mr Shaxson was thanked for all the time and work he puts into the management of the Warren.

8. Flora and fauna report

It was noted that the 2021 & 2022 flora survey of the Warren, led by Dawn Nelson and assisted by Sheridan Bowman, found 152 species. The survey was carried out to give an indication of the species that may have benefitted from the reduced canopy and the increased light. Any new species found in the future will be added to the list.

9. South Gardens ecology report

Mr Shaxson thanked Dr Bowman for taking a critical look at the Ecology report and for providing an extremely helpful summary (see appendix A). It was noted that the original version of the report was not good and numerous amendments had been suggested. The second version has taken account of these changes.

There was some discussion on how the various recommendations may or may not be carried forward given the need to consider the balance of ecology versus leisure in South Gardens.

The major considerations were the question of whether or not to dredge the ponds, allow fishing and if a management plan should be commissioned to ensure a plan was in place for the next 3-5 years. It was noted that it would be good to involve community groups, including Harting CAN (Climate Action Network, in the implementation of a Plan and that Petra Billings, a chartered ecologist previously involved in the Warren Management Plan, might be able to give a view on the situation.

Further to these main recommendations the committee considered some short- and long-term recommendations, the former of which could be implemented reasonably quickly independent of a Management Plan.

The short-term recommendations were:

- i. install bird and hazel dormouse nesting boxes
- ii. remove the willow trees growing from the west bank of the northern pond
- iii. relocate three compost heaps
- iv. erect a sign, or signs, to discourage feeding of the fish with the aim of reducing the rat population
- v. plant honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum*, dog rose *Rosa canina*, and traveller's joy *Clematis vitalba* within the existing hedgerow.
- vi. install bat boxes

It was agreed that items (i) and (vi) could be carried out reasonably quickly and advice would be sought from the Rangers at SDNPA on the likelihood of dormice on the site.

Item (iv) could be arranged now but there would need to be some thought given to the wording. There was discussion on the wisdom of planting of plant honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum* and traveller's joy *Clematis vitalba* (see item v) as these two species when mature can be detrimental to hedges.

It was felt that items (ii), (iii) and perhaps (v) could be carried forward with further advice and these could be covered as part of a potential Management Plan.

The long-term recommendations were:

- i. close access to the north and west banks of both ponds or use temporary cordons to restrict access to the west side of the two ponds during the bird nesting season
- ii. develop a long sward of grasses and herbs on the west bank of both ponds
- iii. reduce the more dominant or aggressive macrophyte flora within the ponds
- iv. leave a 4m monolith whenever a mature tree is removed
- v. plant native wildflower bulbs beneath some of the mature trees

- vi. do not install artificial lighting
- vii. establish long grassland with wildflowers to the S & N of the site
- viii. place log-piles and introduce long grass areas beside hedges, ponds and amenity areas

It was felt that these long-term items would be possible with the exception of items (iv) and (viii) which would pose health and safety risks in an area used frequently by the public. Also, it was noted that establishing a wild flower 'meadow' (item vii) is not straightforward and requires significant on-going maintenance

The other items would need consideration as part of the Management Plan and again with careful consideration to the balance of ecology versus leisure.

As a result of the discussions the following recommendations were agreed:

To recommend to the Council meeting on 17 November 2022 that the Council agree

- i. not to dredge the ponds**
- ii. not to allow fishing**
- iii. to commission a Management Plan for South Gardens**
- iv. if a Management Plan is agreed, that POSAC's Woodland & Tree Sub-Committee be tasked with drafting its aims and with bringing forward a proposal to a future Council meeting on the commissioning of the Plan**
- v. to investigate the installation of bird, dormouse and bat boxes in South Gardens**
- vi. to erect a sign, or signs, to discourage feeding of the fish with the aim of reducing the rat population**

10. Items for future meetings

Updates for the ponds.

11. Dates of next meeting - Tuesday 10 January 2023, venue to be confirmed

The meeting closed at 7.05pm

Appendix A

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of South Gardens by Gray's Ecology

Briefing Note

The Preliminary Ecological Appraisal is a long document in part because it cites a great deal of legislation.

It is suggested that councillors read the summary (p.4). To make the rest of the report easier to assimilate, the relevant sections have been extracted (two have been abbreviated): see below.

All text in *blue* is part of this briefing note (all other text is from the original report).

6 Ecological Constraints, Mitigation and Opportunities Assessment

6.1 Dredging (abbreviated)

Unless there is an overriding need to dredge the ponds for environmental or flood remediation, dredging should be avoided, as it is financially very costly and can be both ecologically and environmentally damaging. [Page 22 of the report lists the negative effects of dredging.](#)

6.2 Fishing (abbreviated)

Fishing activities will add very little ecological benefit to the site and can lead to problems: [see the full report for the negative effects \(p.23\).](#)

However, it is recognized that fishing [may provide some benefits: see the full report for possible benefits \(p.23\).](#)

Note: The southernmost pond is not owned by the Council. There have been no large fish in that pond for some time, but fry have been seen recently. The owner of that pond should be informed of the Council's decision on fishing.

8 Summary of Recommendations

This section has not been abbreviated.

The recommendations broadly fall into two categories:

- (a) medium- to long-term improvement measures plus maintenance recommendations all of which, if the Council agrees to commission a Management Plan for South Gardens, should form the basis of that Plan, and
- (b) recommendations which are short-term and largely one-off and, if agreed, could be progressed now or in the near future, independent of whether a Plan is commissioned; equally some could be written into the Plan.

The recommendations which could be implemented in the short-term are flagged by the letter S and a number (for example (S8)). Eight medium- to long-term recommendations more aimed towards ecological improvement rather than basic maintenance are flagged by the letter L and a number: some of these recommendations could impact on the use of South Gardens as an amenity area.

Recommended actions and the rationale behind these are presented in Table 3, below.

Table 3. Summary of the actions recommended to enhance the ecology within the site.

Action	Rationale
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<p>Great care should be taken to maintain habitat connectivity of the hedges and tree canopy within the site and to retain their connectivity to the wider landscape.</p> <p>Infill planting, using locally grown native hedge species such as hawthorn, hazel, field maple, willow, ash and blackthorn is recommended for the western boundary hedge. This work should be undertaken between October and February. Biodegradable stem guards should be used to protect the new plants from browsing deer, rabbits and mice.</p> <p>Further improvements to this habitat can be achieved by installing bird and hazel dormouse nesting boxes, such as those available from https://www.nestbox.co.uk/. (S1)</p>	<p>The hedgerows and ditches within and adjacent to the site function as a wildlife corridor that is geographically linked to Harting Down SSSI.</p> <p>Note: Infilling was done in February 2022 using excess saplings from the Warren planting</p>
<p>It is recommended that public access to the north and west banks of both ponds is prevented, If this is not possible, the practice of employing temporary cordons to restrict access to the west side of the two ponds during the bird nesting season between 01 March and 31 August would be highly beneficial. (L1)</p>	<p>To allow this area to develop as a wildlife haven.</p>
<p>The removal of the willow trees growing from the west bank of the northern pond is desirable. This work should be carried out between November and February only. (S2)</p>	<p>To allow more light to the pond surface and the western hedgerow, as well as reducing the amount of leaf-litter entering the water.</p>
<p>It is recommended that the west bank of both ponds is encouraged to develop a long sward of grasses and herbs, The arisings should be cut back to a sward height of approximately 100 mm during late October and these should be removed well away from the waterside. (L2)</p>	<p>To encourage invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles and small mammals.</p>
<p>Any maintenance within the ponds should take place during the winter between October and February.</p> <p>Bank disturbance, repairs and stabilisation work should only be conducted under the guidance of an ecologist who has first checked the site for the presence of protected species and evaluated the potential impact on them.</p>	<p>To minimize disturbance to wildlife, which will be least active during this period.</p>

Action	Rationale
Reduction of the more dominant or aggressive macrophyte flora within the ponds should be carried out between 01 November and 01 February (as a guide, it is desirable to retain reeds and rushes at around 30% - 50% of the existing pond area. However, water lily and other macrophyte species may also be reduced slightly, to achieve an open-water area of approximately 25%, if desired). (L3)	To ensure that a balanced ecology is maintained within the pond, and to minimize potential for harm to protected species during the process.
The three compost heaps (TN2) and a bonfire site located behind spilling (TN3) on the south bank of the south pond (Photo 6 and Figure 2, Appendix 2) should be relocated to the eastern side of the site, away from the water, (S3)	To avoid nutrient seepage into the ponds. This can lead to the formation of an un-natural eutrophic environment and excessive algal growth, blocking light and removing oxygen, which is harmful to the ecology of the ponds.
<p>The supplementary feeding of fish and wildfowl should be strongly discouraged.</p> <p>It is recommended that an information sign is erected next to the pond to highlight the wildlife and any ecological enhancements and explaining how observing this request will help. (S4)</p>	<p>To correct the damaging effect this is having on the water quality and the ecology within the pond.</p> <p>The site also has an elevated rat population, which has occurred due to the presence of uneaten fish and bird food. Rats are known to predate a wide variety of species and will significantly reduce the biodiversity potential within the locality of the ponds.</p>
Precautions should be taken when working close to open water to mitigate the risk of biological and chemical damage that may result from this activity, e.g., introducing invasive non-native species that might be present on uncleaned equipment, fuel spillages etc.	To protect the ecology of the ponds and to avoid polluting the Elsted Stream.
Any trees planned for removal or reduction should be considered for nesting birds and roosting bats before works proceed.	To prevent accidental disturbance to nesting birds and roosting bats.
<p>Where possible and safe to do so, any mature trees due for removal on safety grounds should be reduced to approximately 4 m in height and left to stand as monolith structure. (L4)</p> <p>Where this is not possible, timber should be formed into log piles and retained within the site, close to the boundary hedge</p>	<p>This will provide important standing deadwood habitat for invertebrates, birds and bats.</p> <p>This will offer shelter for invertebrates, reptiles and small mammals.</p>

Action	Rationale
Planting of native wildflower bulbs, such as wild daffodil <i>Narcissus pseudonarcissus</i> beneath some of the mature scattered trees. A selection of suitable bulbs is available from (L5) https://www.wildflower.co.uk/products/wildflower-bulbs/autumnplanted-wildflower-bulbs/woodland-wildflower-bulb-collection.html or www.wildflowershop.co.uk .	Ecological enhancement of the amenity grassland within the site to provide increased biodiversity and a source of nectar for early insect pollinators.
Any INNS found within the site should be removed where possible and the site monitored regularly to ensure that they don't proliferate. Vigilance will be required to identify and deal with the occurrence of any INNS, especially aquatic or riparian species. Site users and maintenance personnel should be encouraged to become familiar with these species and to report their sightings to Harting PC.	To prevent INNS from becoming established within the site and from spreading beyond the site, especially within the water.
Artificial lighting must be avoided within the site. (L6) This recommendation appeared twice in table 8; one version has been removed	Artificial lighting can disturb bats and disrupt other wildlife, such as roosting birds and nocturnal insects and should be avoided.
Invertebrates should be encouraged within the site through the introduction of additional native pollinator plant species, such as those found to occur naturally within the surrounding landscape.	More invertebrates mean more wildlife in general, including birds and bats.

Action	Rationale
A margin of long grassland should be established in the southern and northern areas of the site. This should include a mix of locally appropriate pollinator species, for example cornflower <i>Centaurea cyanus</i> , chicory <i>Cichorium intybus</i> , bluebell <i>Hyacinthoides nonscripta</i> , field scabious <i>Knautia arvensis</i> , wild carrot <i>Daucus carota</i> , common knapweed <i>Centaurea nigra</i> , yarrow <i>Achillea millefolium</i> , field woundwort <i>Stachys arvensis</i> and musk mallow <i>Malva moschata</i> . (L7) If sowing is required, appropriate seed mixtures can be sown from March until October. Seedstock is available from most major farm seed suppliers, such as https://www.farmseeds.co.uk/products/environmental/stewardshipmixtures/grass-buffers-and-field-margins/ . It is also recommended that honeysuckle <i>Lonicera periclymenum</i> , dog rose <i>Rosa canina</i> , and traveller's joy <i>Clematis vitalba</i> are planted within the existing hedgerow. (S5) 50% of the long grassland habitat should be cut back to a sward height of approximately 100 mm every October on an alternating biennial rotation. Arisings should be removed and composted well away from the waterside.	The site has great potential to provide areas of unimproved native rank grassland, which will encourage and benefit wildlife such as invertebrates, native grassland plants, reptiles, amphibians and small mammals. To enhance the diversity and to benefit birds and hazel dormouse.

	<p>To ensure that some habitat is always present and to maintain the necessary low nutrient levels within the soil.</p> <p>To avoid nutrient seepage into the ponds.</p>
<p>Placement of log-piles and introduction of long grass areas beside the hedges, ponds and amenity areas. (L8)</p>	<p>The site had moderate potential to support widespread native reptile species, such as common lizard, grass snake and slow worm within the hedgerow and denser habitat.</p>
<p>The placement of bat boxes, such as the Vincent Pro Bat Box available at https://www.wildcare.co.uk/vincent-pro-bat-box10651.html within some of the mature trees within the site would help to encourage and support roosting bats. (S6)</p>	<p>The hedgerows adjacent to the site are likely to support a high invertebrate food supply for foraging and commuting bats.</p>
Action	Rationale
<p>Care must be taken to retain and encourage the mature hedge/tree canopy to bridge any gaps within the hedgerows</p>	<p>To help to improve the habitat connectivity for this arboreal species.</p> <p>With enhancement to the western site boundary, this species could be encouraged into the site.</p>
<p>Future surveys for hazel dormouse within the locality of the site would be useful.</p>	<p>To establish if this species is currently present nearby and if so where, and to evaluate the potential for encouraging it within the site.</p>

<p>Any hedge or scrub management should be preceded by a thorough search for hibernating hedgehog and hazel dormouse, to ensure that they are not harmed during any works. The western boundary hedge should be managed to create/maintain a dense base of approximately >1 m in width to provide cover for this species.</p>	<p>The site supports good habitat for European hedgehog.</p>
<p>Unattended trenches should always have a plank of wood placed within the trench in such a manner as to act as a ramp for trapped animals to escape.</p>	<p>Should any construction or engineering works take place within the site, there will be potential to cause entrapment within unattended trenches and crush injuries to sheltering animals when moving construction materials.</p>

Summary of short-term and medium- to long-term recommendations (excluding general maintenance recommendations)

Short-term recommendations:

- S1) install bird and hazel dormouse nesting boxes
- S2) remove the willow trees growing from the west bank of the northern pond
- S3) relocate three compost heaps
- S4) erect a sign, or signs, to discourage feeding of the fish with the aim of reducing the rat population
- S5) plant honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum*, dog rose *Rosa canina*, and traveller's joy *Clematis vitalba* within the existing hedgerow.
- S6) install bat boxes

Medium to long-term recommendations:

- L1) close access to the north and west banks of both ponds or use temporary cordons to restrict access to the west side of the two ponds during the bird nesting season
- L2) develop a long sward of grasses and herbs on the west bank of both ponds
- L3) reduce the more dominant or aggressive macrophyte flora within the ponds
- L4) leave a 4m monolith whenever a mature tree is removed
- L5) plant native wildflower bulbs beneath some of the mature trees
- L6) do not install artificial lighting
- L7) establish long grassland with wildflowers to the S & N of the site
- L8) place log-piles and introduce long grass areas beside hedges, ponds and amenity areas