Management Plan 2012

Louie Memorial Copse, Fen and Playing Fields

Compiled by North Hinksey Parish Council R&A Committee.
Last revised October 2012.



Executive Summary

- This plan aims to provide a framework for an ongoing programme of activities to manage the areas known as Louie Memorial Copse, Fen and Playing Fields.
- The plan seeks to safeguard and preserve the recreational value, natural beauty and biodiversity of the areas and has as its inspiration the guidance and recommendations flowing from the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC).
 The key thrust of the plan is to maintain the area in much the same shape as it is now.
- Whilst expert advice will be carefully considered, it must be stressed that the wishes of the local community, particularly those who know the areas well and use them regularly, will be given due weight in consideration of any new project or major initiative beyond normal care and maintenance.
- The management plan does not consider in any detail the children's play area, or the other issues of sports and recreational facilities, except insofar as they impact the natural environment.

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Introduction

The areas covered by this Management Plan are the Louie Memorial Copse, Fen and Playing Fields to the South West of the parish.



Louie Memorial Copse (also known as "Hutchcomb's Copse"), Fen and Playing Fields

The objective of this document is to provide a framework for an ongoing action plan to manage these areas, seeking to promote their recreational value whilst safeguarding and preserving their natural beauty and biodiversity.

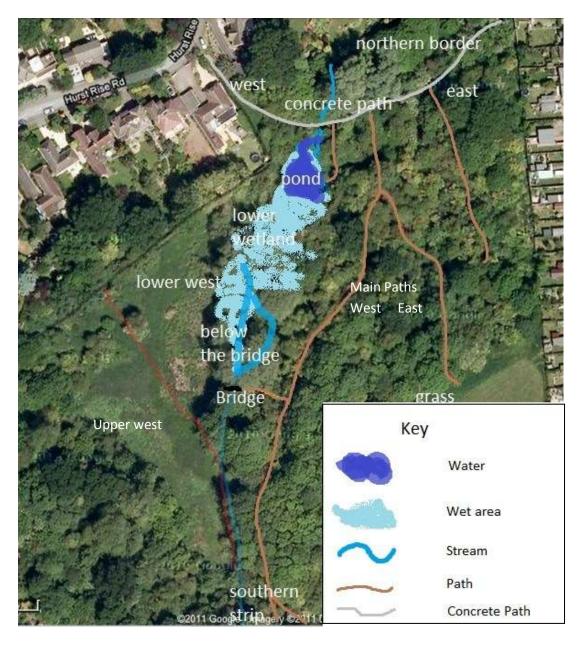
This document is a replacement for a previous Management Plan.

This plan does not consider in any detail the children's play area, or the other issues of sports and recreational facilities on the site, except insofar as they impact the natural environment.

Louie Memorial Copse and Fen

Louie Memorial Copse and Fen consists of an area of woodland, a wet fenland area and a pond occupying land bounded by housing to the north, Hurst Rise Road to the West, Cedar Road and the Lower Louie Memorial Field to the East and Arnold's Way to the South. The woodland lies on a northward facing slope surrounding a valley-head fen. In the drier parts of the wood there is a variety of medium sized species, such as Norway Maple, Sycamore, Ash, Hawthorn and there is Willow in the wetter areas. The fenland lies in a shallow valley sloping down towards the north and west of the area. This is kept wet from numerous springs fed by the water draining from the high ground to the South. A stream coming from a concrete drainage pipe under Arnolds Way is normally empty except at times of high rainfall, suggesting that the fen and pond continue to be fed by subterranean water flows even in periods of dry weather.

Louie Memorial Copse and Fen



Views of main areas of the Copse, Pond and Fen.

Concrete Path

From Hurst Rise Road looking east



From the centre towards Cedar Road



Pond

Pond to south of concrete path, looking south.



Below the Bridge

Below the bridge and diverted stream. Looking down west to the Bridge



Some pollarding and clearance in 2011. Looking north-east across the area



East, Lower and Upper

Wooded areas in the east of the Copse below the houses along Cedar Road





The Lower Field

Area on north side of Arnold's Way containing the children's play area



General view of lower field looking north.







Margin at the western edge looking north



Longer grass at the lower edge looking south-west



The Upper Field

Area to the South of Arnold's Way, containing the Louie Memorial Pavilion and the Teenage Shelter. Since this image appeared on Google Maps, there have been added a MUGA (Multi-Games Area), Trim Trail and mound covering former Skate bowl, approximate locations shown below. (Note. Items of the trim trail may lie outside the indicated area.)



The MUGA













Background

The land was originally given to North Hinksey Parish Council by the Kingerlee family in 1939. Parts of the northern area were used as a dump for builders' rubble when the houses on Cedar Road and Hurst Rise Road were built. Later, the area was split into upper and northern sections by Arnold's Way. The upper field and lower fields were then maintained as playing fields with short-mown grass, whilst the north and west had become mostly wooded and were left without further attention until the last few years.

Copse and Fenland - a landscape in transition

The Copse and Fenland is an area in transition owing to a combination of natural evolution and human activity. Man has made significant changes to this landscape, either deliberately, by planting trees, or as a by-product of other activities, such as grazing livestock (or not), or, for instance, dumping builders' waste near the northern end of the area. In the last 70 years Nature has largely taken over the Copse and Fenland and shaped the area into the remarkable space that it is today. The current plan seeks to find the right balance in this partnership with natural evolution, on the one hand attempting to halt the overdominance of a single species to the detriment of the whole, but on the other, keeping outside interference to a minimum in order to preserve this unique area for the enjoyment of current and future generations.

Recent developments

From 2009 onwards North Hinksey Parish Council engaged a number of consultants to provide specialist reports, particularly on the copse area. On the basis of these reports and recommendations, a consultation exercise in the Seacourt Hall in February 2010, and an opinion survey amongst pupils of Matthew Arnold School, the Council embarked on a number of projects. The main actions and projects were:

- Provision of a MUGA (Multi-Use Games Area). This resembles a small hardsurfaced volleyball pitch located close to the pavilion.
- Provision of a "Trim Trail" in the upper field, a selection of open-air exercise equipment such as steps and parallel bars. These pieces are situated towards the south-east corner of the upper field.
- Hydrology works below the bridge in the Copse, aimed at reducing flooding in gardens further down the hill. With the stated aim of reducing possible erosion of the fen by the speed of water flow at times of high rainfall, the stream was diverted into a more indirect course just below the "bridge" in the centre of the copse. Also, a pond next to the concrete path was enlarged in order to act as a temporary catchment for sudden flood-waters. (See aerial view above). The level of the water was to be controlled by means of blocking or unblocking drainage holes in a concrete structure at the exit from the pond.
- Creation of a "dipping platform" at the side of the pond, also a limestonechip surfaced path leading from the concrete path to the platform. The dipping platform has been removed as a consequence of an arson incident.

- Pollarding and clearing of trees and vegetation in the central area just below the bridge. The aims were to increase the amount of light penetrating to the lower levels of the fen, to stop the fen turning into dry woodland and promote biodiversity in ground-level plants and insects.
- Erection of an "interpretation board" overlooking the cleared area north of the bridge explaining the geology of the lower copse and fen, its flora and something about the intended management policy.

General Principles of Management

The aim of the Management Plan is to conserve and preserve the areas under management in much the same form as they can be seen today. In Hutchcomb's Copse the clear principle is minimum intervention consistent with public safety and the preservation of the site as a wooded area with a valley-head fen and pond.

General Recommendations

- Control invasive species like ivy, sycamore, nettles, brambles and willow where these are over-dominant and currently reducing biodiversity.
- Plant native species of trees, shrubs and wild flowers to maintain and promote biodiversity and density of woodland areas. Introduce a small number of bird-boxes.
- On the large fields, reduce the areas of short-mown grass where practicable, but having regard to existing users of the short-mown areas (sports, trim-trail, leisure users, dogwalkers etc.).
- Fallen trees, branches and brash should be left. Fallen trees may be cut into smaller pieces to speed up the natural process of decay and the brash may be tidied where it constitutes a particular hazard or there is an excessive accumulation in an area.
 No petrol-powered tools may be used in the Copse and Fen without the express permission of the Chair or Vice-Chair of the R&A Committee.
- Keep paths, entrances to fields and other areas popular with walkers clear of fallen trees.
 Occasional distribution of wood-shavings, light gravel or other suitable material may be performed to improve main paths if they become unacceptably muddy.
- Prevent new paths from developing in areas which may threaten wildlife habitats.
 Maintain access only to a level that is appropriate to the nature of the woodland, wetland and long vegetation.
- Clear litter from the Louie Memorial Fields, copse and fen.
- Refrain from activities and projects that unduly disturb wildlife or reduce biodiversity.
- Refrain from disposing of brash or waste by means of burning.
- Ensure safe practices at all times when working with volunteers.
- Work towards reduction of litter and graffiti.

Recommendations by area - Copse and Fen

Note: These and other plans and recommendations show the management and maintenance activities that may take place providing resources allow and on a "best efforts and goodwill" basis. They are not to be seen as actions to which the Council or volunteer groups are in all circumstances committed.

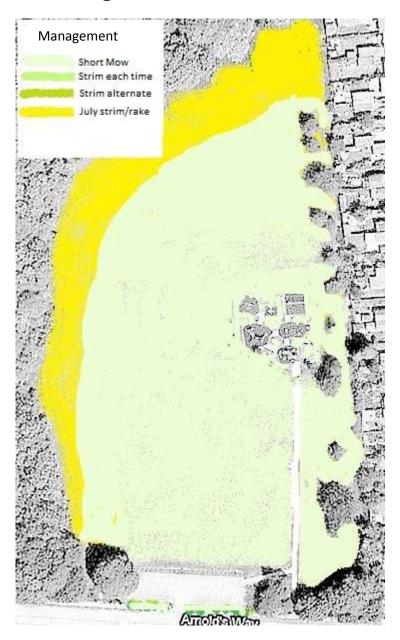
Area	Recommendations
Pond	Tidy vegetation round pond particularly reed mace on bank by
	outlet.
	Periodically rake out excess weed growing in the pond.
	Remove any logs which may cause new sprouting of willow.
Concrete Path	Periodically cut back nettles that crowd the edges of the path.
	At western end plant buddleia, dog-rose, guelder rose
	Remove ivy from some threatened trees.
Main Path South from	Plant Rowan, crab-apple, dog-rose, guelder rose, native bluebells
Concrete Path	and snowdrops.
	Clear ivy from some trees. Chop up and clear brash where this
	appears excessive.
Far upper West	Reduction of over-dominant brambles to far west.
	Planting native trees and shrubs to increase cover for the fen to
	the west may be considered.
Lower West and	Plant yellow rattle, wild flowers on drier areas.
Wetland. "Fen".	Cut back vegetation and willows if necessary, subject to further
	independent expert advice.
Central area below the	Reduce brash as necessary.
bridge	Create and erect nest-boxes.
C	When necessary, cut back growth of willow and other vegetation.
Southern Strip	Plant wild flowers in glading.
And Eastern Wooded slopes	Plant native trees and shrubs to thicken vegetation where there is excessive glading

Lower Field - management

The Lower Field has a magnificent view to the north and also contains a popular children's play area. At the south end of the field is a car park which is well used by those who live beyond comfortable walking distance from the fields.

Recommendations

- The basic maintenance and the short-mow of the main area is covered by arrangement with contractors.
- Leave areas coloured yellow to grow long and manage as wild-flower and long-grass meadow. Yearly mow and rake of grass in August-October. Plant wild flowers.

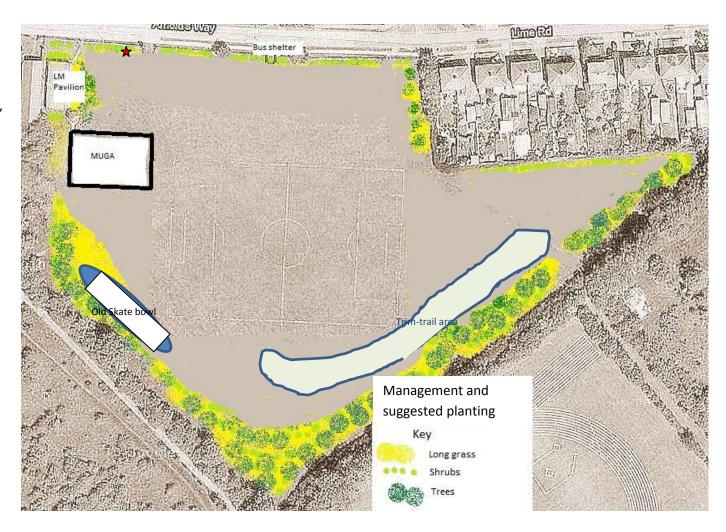


Upper Field - management

The Upper Field is currently mostly shortmown grass. On the northern edge it is bounded by a metal fence along Arnold's Way. In the north-west corner there is the Louie Memorial Pavilion, containing a meeting room, kitchen area, bar, changing and showering facilities. Next to that to the south is a Multi-Use-Games area (MUGA), a small combination volley-ball/football pitch. To the south-east there is the Trim-trail area containing assorted keep-fit equipment, such as steps and parallel bars. To the south-west there used to be a Skatebowl, which was filled in following a serious arson incident.

Recommendations

- The basic maintenance and the shortmow of the main area is covered by arrangement with contractors.
- Leave areas coloured yellow to grow long and manage as wildflower and long-grass meadow, but ensure short mow round trim trail items to retain visibility and safety.
- Promote removal of graffiti from Pavilion and bus-shelter.



If planting hedging or vegetation in this area, use low-growing plants or leave gaps to ensure the clear view towards Wytham northwards is preserved. NB. Planting around the pavilion should only be with the agreement of the Pavilion Management Committee.

The Old Skatebowl

Below is a picture of the old skatebowl.



In 2009 the old skatebowl was damaged in an arson attack when a van was driven into it and set on fire. Owing to complications with insurance it was not possible to have it repaired, whilst totally digging it out and rebuilding it was not seen as a feasible option. Instead it was filled in with spoil from the creation of the Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) in 2010 and indeed there was so much spoil that a mound was created (as can be seen in one of the general views of the Upper Field above).

General Management Issues (Litter, Graffiti, Anti-Social Behaviour, Wildlife Protection).

Litter and Fly-tipping

Paid help and District Council assistance is employed to counter these problems. Volunteers are also encouraged to help out with litter-picking where they can.

Anti-Social Behaviour

In the past there have been incidents of anti-social behaviour in the area. This has taken the form of:

- Groups of young people late at night consuming alcohol and making noise late at night including playing loud music or letting off fire-works.
- Vandalism of property and sporadic intimidation of householders on Cedar Road backing onto the lower playing field.
- Riding bicycles and occasionally mopeds through the Copse.
- Lighting fires in the Copse.

Recommendations on anti-social behaviour:

- Continue to liaise with and encourage the work of the local Neighbourhood Watch Scheme and the activities of the PCSOs and others.
- Liaise with Matthew Arnold School if necessary.

There is signage near the car park asking users to refrain from a range of anti-social behaviours.

Closing the main car-park gates to the Lower Louie Memorial Field

To improve the overnight management of the Lower Field, a policy of closing the main car-park gates night and morning is currently operated by a group of volunteers with the approval of the Council. The time for closing the gates in the evening is in principle at or soon after dusk, but is open to informal negotiation to ensure that local users (such as at evening meetings at the Scout Hut) are not inconvenienced. Pedestrian access to the Lower Field, Copse and Fenland is via two smaller gates next to the main gates, and these are not locked at any time.

Graffiti

The Pavilion, teenagers' shelter and bus shelter on Arnold's Way have been targets for graffiti from time to time. Removing or over-painting graffiti as soon as possible may discourage further attacks.

Protection of wildlife

There is at least one large badger-sett in the Copse. Concern has been expressed and attention will be given to measures that could reduce disturbance to this sett or other wildlife habitats. There is also a nature corridor for wildlife between the Louie Memorial Fields and the higher open ground to the south towards Cumnor Hill and beyond.

North Hinksey Conservation Volunteers

The North Hinksey Conservation Volunteers is a group of volunteers approved by the Council to carry out care and maintenance work in the Louie Memorial Copse, Fen and Playing Fields. This group is constituted with a Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer. The group was set up as a result of a project run with BTCV (British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, - now renamed, TCV – "The Conservation Trust".) In 2011 and 2012 TCV ran a series of practical training sessions together with specialised courses on Tool Management, First Aid, Project Leadership and Risk Assessment. Many of the current members of the NHCV have attended these sessions. The current management plan has been compiled with input from this group. Where work lies outside the capacity of volunteers, (such as heavy lifting, high-level tree work or use of power tools), it is recognised that professional services will need to be brought in.

Activities to date (May 2012)

 Bluebells and snowdrops in copse.
Mixed wild flowers in lower field.
Holly in areas needing more vegetation.
Cutting back nettles, overhanging branches and aggressive weeds in copse,
upper field, lower field, concrete path and car park.
 Attending to fallen trees and branches - mostly moving them to safe areas and allowing them to decay.
 Removing brash which may constitute a fire hazard/temptation to arson.
 Putting wood chippings/log sections and sawdust on muddy sections of copse path to improve surface for walkers after heavy rain.
 Removal of sprouting willow logs near pond/fen.
 Removal of ivy in places where it is stopping trees from getting light – (there is still plenty left to provide insect habitats).
Removal of unsightly concrete pipes near pond.
 Tidying of area and removal of burnt remains of dipping platform.
 Sloping edge to pond created from spare stone.
Regular removal of cans, bottles etc. from pond.
Litter removed from fields and copse on a regular basis.
Bird-boxes made and installed.
 Significant decline in canine faeces in copse - perhaps due to increase of volunteer
activity there and dog owners becoming more aware that people need to be able to work
in areas safe from excrement.
 All work has been done with respect to natural habitats and where possible we have sought to preserve these - e.g. by planting holly.
 New growth visible in fen. Cutting/raking off to be done as necessary.

Appendix A. NHCV Outline Plan (In consultation with TCV)

Copse, Fen and LM Fields

May-August	Cutting back vegetation and weeds in all pathways, tidying fallen wood, litter clearing nb. <i>Bird nesting season April-June</i> Cutback nettles in public areas and shaded areas within copse. Remove some ivy where light is excessively blocked or trees threatened. Check erosion of stream bed beneath bridge. Use larger logs to strengthen area if needed.
September	Mowing of long grass in field. Raking and planting of wild flower seeds
October	Cutting and raking off fen if practical and clearly shown to be necessary. Cutting back overgrown trees and shrubs, keeping aggressive species such as bramble, bur-reed, sedges and greater horsetail in check.
November	Woodland Management. Clearing and tidying excessive brash. Remove invasive saplings where excessive shading and drying is occurring. Plant native trees and shrubs in gaps in woodland. Leave entire trunks where they fall (if safe) Remove ivy from small number of trees which have no light Remove some ivy carpeting in areas where flowers could flourish. Flowers which have been suggested: native bluebell, primrose and snowdrops, yellow rattle, sweet woodruff, yellow archangel and wood speedwell, wood anemone, ramsons, red campion, greater stitchwort and pignut Tidy pond areas, preventing pond from becoming excessively choked.
December	Gradually remove dying hawthorn and elder. Leave entire trunks where they fall. Cut back scrub and weed. Continue to plant young replacement shrubs and trees. Some brash can be added to stream bed. Replacement trees suggested: small-leaved lime, pedunculate oak, alder, rowan, birch and wild cherry. Shrubs suggested: spindle, wayfaring tree, guelder rose and purging buckthorn. Blackthorn can also be transplanted to other sunny sites within copse.
January/February	Planting of shrubs and trees /tools maintenance Woodland management. Opening up glades where trees are in danger of collapse and planting to increase diversity.
March	First mowing of the season for lower field should leave an edge of at least 8m uncut from the scrub at the exit into the field from copse Planting at pond margins, check stream. Continue tidying in copse.
April	Copse maintenance - cut back weeds and overhanging branches in all public pathways, protect wildlife areas by planting/transplanting (e.g.) holly, trim back weeds in car parks and upper field.

Appendix B. Copse, Fen and LM Fields Survey

By John Thompson, Forests of Oxford 27/06/11

Oxford City Landscape Architect. For 28 years, founder of "Forests of Oxford".

Consultant to Oxford County Council.

John Thompson's work is supported by Oxford Preservation Trust, Oxford Woodland Group, Oxford Woodland Project and other environmental charities. (NB. The ideas and advice of experts and consultants below are shown for reference but not necessarily adopted in this plan.)

Recommendations by John Thompson

Pond

The pond is likely to silt up and be taken over by vegetation in a few years.

Concrete Path

Nice large cherry tree. Could plant more cherry.

Plant buddleia and dog-rose at western end of path.

Main Path up to Fen

Plant rowan, crab-apple, dog-rose, guelder rose, native bluebells.

Ivy should be left.

No change to existing pathing.

Fen Area

Plant alder, oak, rowan, native bluebells, blackthorn, flag iris.

Leave most of the brash.

Might need to trim back pollarded willow if it gets too thick and big.

Consider putting up a barn-owl box on large tree overlooking interpretation board.

Western Fen Area

Plant yellow rattle, wild flowers.

Keep clear of trees. Could be cut back occasionally. Might it be possible to graze it?

Fen Concept

John Thompson was sceptical about whether it was worth taking special measures to conserve the fen and would recommend leaving nature to take its course. The area should be compared with the Lye Valley in Headington which is a genuine wetland area.

Lower LM Field

Recommended considering giving upper and lower fields a more "natural" appearance.

Reducing the area under short grass mow.

Planting trees, shrubs and wild flowers.

Increasing the hedge-planting round the children's playground.

Upper LM Field

Create ash copse or plant other vegetation round LM Pavilion.

Muga – compare with that in Alexandra Park – it is used all the time.

Replace the fencing with bollards, or at least disguise the fencing with hedging.

Do not put off the dog-walkers, they are probably the people who use it most.

Don't do anything very much until November – ideal time for planting trees, esp. oak. John said he could get us oak. Also pointed to Internet site selling large numbers of

native species very cheaply, like £1 per tree.

Appendix C. Survey of Pond

By Rod d'Ayala, Ecological Consultant and Pond Expert. 3.30pm 21st July. 2011

The non-standard shape of the pond is excellent because it is not a simple "round" pond. It has an extended curved arm, which provides a long length of bank, particularly rich and varied in plant-life and habitat. The fact that it varies from the "classic" model of an ornamental pond is an advantage.

The level of water in the pond is impressive given the amount of recent dry weather. The pond does not have to be deep to be effective. Shallow water is particularly valuable. 10cm is often sufficient. There is no need to take any other steps to raise the level of the water. Indeed, artificially raising the level could be detrimental for biodiversity. From a biodiversity point of view it does not matter if a pond dries out occasionally as the vast majority of species have ways of surviving dry periods.

The pond has an excellent area of open water, and the green weeds are fine as they are not choking it. The water underneath the weed is quite free and open and will harbour copious amounts of life.

The quality of the water coming into the pond appears to be excellent and free of silt. The reason could be that there is no distinct stream feeding the pond and that the water seeps in through the soil. This has the effect of filtering out the silt.

On the far side of the pond there are signs of iron deposits leached out from deeper layers up the hill. The deposits are entirely harmless.

The pond possesses an excellent variety of habitats for different types of species. Because the banks are shallow there is a large area of ground that is sometimes covered with water and sometimes not. This area is known as the "draw-down" zone and is particularly rich in life. This pond has an excellent draw-down zone.

The presence of old wood in the pond is not harmful. It is better if the wood is dead as it will decay naturally and provide a wealth of habitat and nutrients. However we may want to remove the willow log next to the old dipping platform as we probably don't want a willow to grow just there.

Removal of the dipping platform posts and other structures would be ideal but leave the stone. Rod suggested that in fact it could be dug back a bit to provide a very gently sloping ramp into the pond. This would provide spectators with shallow water to inspect at a wide range of water-levels.

Watch may need to be kept on a couple of species and removed if they become a problem. The yellow water lilies (actually they look deep russet in colour) could constitute a problem if they become invasive. Also there is some reed-mace growing on the bank on the arm that bends towards the concrete exit. They look very picturesque but could become invasive after seeding. Advice to remove a couple from time to time.

Do not introduce fish into the pond. This is a hazard of public ponds that the public might introduce goldfish into it. The goldfish will eat everything and reduce the biodiversity, and will also cause a certain amount of pollution.

Species observed

Starwort
Water Cress
"Float" grass
Water mint
Brook lime
Speedwell
Yellow flag
Milfoil

The pond was found to have an abundance of invertebrates.

Whirligig beetles
Pond skaters
Water boatmen, also lesser water boatmen
Baby newts
Freshwater shrimps
Dragonfly larvae

Conclusion

The pond is in excellent shape and needs almost no attention to maintain it in a reasonable state for many years.

Appendix D. Comments on Management Plan

David Millin, Msc (Countryside Recreation Management)

Selected comments and suggestions relating to this report -

- As the top site is quite exposed the woodland edge to the southern park could be selectively thinned to scallop the edge and thus provide a greater number of small areas of shelter for butterflies and birds alike.
- 2. The mowing/strimming mentioned in the new rough grass areas should be retained on site as habitat piles to benefit invertebrates, reptiles and small mammals alike. If the mowings were small and not haylike they would rapidly compost and not pose a fire hazard only a benefit for biodiversity. As with brash piles, if they were placed in areas of half shade and half-light they would remain moist for longer and thus rot more quickly. Habitat piles like these are also great for survey work as they pose a likely spot to find the target species mentioned.
- 3. Close mow paths through the new rough grass to channel walkers through the new flower rich meadows and reduce trampling. These meadows can seem a barrier to those with pushchairs or small children who cannot see over the long grass but would love to explore meandering paths through a 'grass forest'. Maybe a temporary sign-posted trail would help at the right time of year.
- 4. Additions to the trim trail. Look at Cumnor Park and the new items installed there. They have proved very popular and have increased usage considerably. They do not all have to be added at once. They could be sponsored by the various personal trainers who take their members to the park?
- 5. Look at each site's surrounding landscape and how the sites woodland, hedges and wetland habitats are linked to similar habitats locally. Do wildlife corridors exist for species to move into or out of the site or do these corridors need creating? Here is an excellent opportunity for partnership working with neighbouring landowners such as Brookes or the allotments etc. This work could be part of a 50+ year plan to prevent the site becoming an isolated oasis amidst unplanned urban sprawl.
- 6. Encourage the local community to plant similar species as those recommended in the plan. This would encourage the community to actively participate in making their gardens part of the 'nature reserve'. Again this would act to reduce the risk of the reserve becoming an oasis.
- 7. Encourage the wider community to participate in survey work in their own gardens bordering the reserve to increase their perception of the reserves importance but also in their own gardens as valuable surrounding habitat that can help in increasing the reserves biodiversity by sensitive wildlife friendly gardening practices.

Reports and Sources

Botanical and Invertebrate Surveys on Louie Memorial Fields	Dr Judith A Webb	Nov 2009
Supplement to the Botanical and Invertebrate Survey	Dr Judith A Webb	Jan 2011
Louie Memorial Playing Fields Habitats and Management	Dr Graham Hawker	Oct 2008
Louie Memorial Playing Fields Habitats and Management Supplementary Report	Dr Graham Hawker	May 2009
Investigation of the hydrology and surface water flows of Louie Memorial Park	Dr Curt Lamberth	Oct 2009
Louie Memorial Fields Draft Management Plan	Dr J A Webb, Dr Curt Lamberth	Aug/Sept 2010
<u>Verbal summary survey of LM Fields</u>	John Thompson, Forests of Oxford	July 2011
Verbal survey of pond.	Rod d'Ayala	July 2011
NERC 2006 Guidance for Local Authorities on Implementing Biodiversity Duty	NERC	2006
Comments and suggestions relating to this report	David Millin Msc.	July 2012