



A guide to the management of the site - July 2015

Castle Close contains a variety of wildlife habitats and heritage features. Our aims in managing the site are:

- To improve the natural habitats and thus enhance their ecological value
- To conserve and enhance the heritage features
- To facilitate public access to the site for "quiet enjoyment"

The site was acquired by the Parish Council in 2006 for the benefit of the local and wider community under the terms of a Section 106 Agreement. One of the conditions of this Agreement is that there shall be public access to the site. In managing the site this is balanced with measures to protect and retain its "wild" character.

The initial work to develop the Site and make it accessible to the public was carried out between April 2006 and July 2008 when it was officially launched. A Management Plan was produced in January 2009 by Richard Lawrence, Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity, to guide the ongoing management of the Site and this has been regularly reviewed. At the end of 2014 an updated Management Plan was commissioned.

This document summarises the Objectives for each area of the Site and the recommended Actions, both long-term and ongoing tasks. For a detailed description and evaluation of the features of the site reference should be made to the Management Plan.

A ZONES OF THE SITE

1 Woodland

It is believed that much of the woodland was planted in the middle of the 19th century and presumably managed for its timber products. Little management has taken place in the last half century and when taken over by the Parish Council it contained tangled undergrowth and fallen trees. The area nearest to Lodge Road is a wet woodland, often having areas of standing water in the winter, and that further away is dry woodland.

OBJECTIVE *To enable safe public access*

ACTION **Check regularly for growth overhanging the surfaced path and remove.**

OBJECTIVE *To increase the ground flora both in abundance and diversity*

ACTION **Remove hawthorn and fell some trees in the area between the earthwork and the main path to create more open areas where there is already some evidence of ground flora.**

OBJECTIVE *To ensure there is a constant deadwood resource available for saproxylic invertebrates*

ACTION **Maintain piles of dead wood within the site including some with upright, part buried large logs to provide habitat for saproxylic beetles.** These should be sited on areas of low current botanical interest and should be **Maintain piles of dead wood within the site including some with upright, part buried large logs to provide habitat for saproxylic beetles.** in an assortment of positions with varied sun and shade conditions, preferably in locations less susceptible to vandalism and unwanted fire-lighting. They should

be periodically added to in order to keep a constant supply of deadwood at different stages of decay.

OBJECTIVE *To ensure opportunities for bats and hole-nesting birds are retained on site*

ACTIONS **Check and clean the numbered bird boxes annually in winter.**

Erect bat boxes on suitable trees throughout the site, possibly in conjunction with the Bedfordshire Bat Group.

The edge of the woodland adjacent to the scrub and grassland holds the most potential as a wildlife habitat. There is a good ecotone present showing succession from grassland through scrub and secondary woodland to mature woodland.

OBJECTIVE *To maintain the woodland/scrub/grassland interface and prevent the scrub being replaced with secondary woodland*

ACTION **Coppice small areas of small trees and scrub on a 7 to 10 year rotation to ensure secondary woodland does not replace scrub.** Cut trees at 1.2m height to discourage removal of new growth by muntjacs.

2 Earthwork

The Scheduled part of the site includes the circular island with bank around the edge, plus the moat and extends to 6m outside the moat. The archaeological investigation in 2013, which established that there are archaeological remains on the island, confirms the importance of conserving this area. It is thought to be a ringwork which was occupied for a short period in the early 12th century. There are strict regulations about what is permitted to be done in the Scheduled area without the consent of Heritage England – prohibited activities include digging, inserting anything into the soil, geophysical surveys, metal detecting and use of motorised vehicles.

OBJECTIVE *To conserve and protect the Scheduled Ancient Monument and facilitate public access*

ACTION **Remove more trees from the island to protect the archaeological remains.**

Maintain the causeway.

Strim the island as necessary.

3 Grassland

This area was formerly a cultivated field which was abandoned in the 1970's. The hawthorn scrub gradually encroached on the field and by 2006 only a small area of grass remained. Our aim is to increase the extent of the grassland, whilst retaining some scrub.

OBJECTIVE *To increase area of grassland.*

ACTION **See Scrub below.**

OBJECTIVE *To maintain and enhance the current community of plant species, including a range of turf structures, and halt loss by succession to scrub.*

ACTIONS **Cut the grass with a strimmer in September each year and rake the cuttings into a minimum number of piles in pre-selected areas - leave a different area of the site uncut every year to allow flowers to produce seed and as a refuge for animals.**

Select some areas to be strimmed more frequently one year in four to allow a greater variety in turf structure and to provide opportunities for different plant species.

4 Scrub

OBJECTIVE *To reduce the amount of scrub, but maintain some to provide breeding habitats for birds and maintain an active scrub/grass interface to maximise this rich environment.*

NW OF MAIN PATH – significant progress has been made in reducing the areas of scrub, whilst some areas have been left to provide habitat for birds, invertebrates and mammals, particularly around the edge of the scrub/grass area and near the main path.

ACTION **Continue to extend areas cleared in small linear blocks with scalloped edges, leaving dense belt around edges, patches of scrub and specimen trees. This work must only be carried out between October and February to avoid disturbing breeding birds.**

SE OF MAIN PATH – by 2006 this area already consisted mainly of more mature scrub and secondary woodland. Work has started on making clearings in this area and this will continue. Dense scrub will be left next to the main path, on SE ditch boundary and at NE end.

ACTION **Increase area of clearings, and thin trees in other areas by half, leaving specimen trees.**

5. Pond

The pre-existing shallow excavation in the grassland has been progressively enlarged and deepened but it seems unlikely it will hold water throughout the year. It will therefore be managed at present as a seasonal pond.

OBJECTIVE *To create a wet feature that will provide opportunities for a wide variety of plants and animals, that would otherwise be absent from the site, and will also provide a good source of water for animals to drink and enable birds to collect mud for nesting.*

ACTION **Continue to try to establish suitable plants on the sloping sides of the pond, maybe using plug plants and providing some protection whilst they are established.**

6 Open Area

The open area was created to accommodate the Anglian Water drainage pipe from the Yelow Lane estate, and a 6m wide strip through the centre of this area has to be kept free of trees, etc should access to the pipe be required. This area was also used by the builders for dumping heaps of spoil from the housebuilding operations – the heaps subsequently being roughly levelled. Wildflower seeds present in the soil have been allowed to grow with minimal intervention. No additional planting will be carried out in this area. An "insect hotel" has been created adjacent to the scrub area. This area is to be used as the preferred site for burning of scrub by the Volunteers and as a "safe" area for social bonfires which can only be used by permission of the Parish Council.

OBJECTIVE *To maintain the area with only sufficient interference to enable public access.*

ACTION **Strim the open area as necessary to control the growth of the dominant plants such as thistles, keep the bonfire area and a grass path through the area clear.**

The Open Area is bounded on the SW side by a belt of trees and a ditch which provides another different habitat. The belt of trees and ditch on the SW side of the Open Area adjacent to the SUS boundary provides another different habitat.

OBJECTIVE *To maintain the belt of trees on the SW side*

ACTION **Leave as an informal walking area.**

7 Wildlife Corridor

This area has been transformed from a strip of land, which had become very overgrown before and during the building of the Yelnow Lane estate, into an accessible path with a hedge planted to provide a habitat and screening of the garden fences on the NE side. Some hedge plants have been introduced on the SW side and more needs to be done particularly to screen the recently fenced section of Yelnow Farm.

OBJECTIVES *To maintain as an ecological corridor between the Colworth Estate woodland and the main part of the Castle Close site.*

To provide an attractive public access path from Yelnow Lane to the Castle Close site.

ACTIONS **Tidy the existing growth on the SW side as necessary and add hedge plants where appropriate.**

Lay the hedge on the NE side in 2/3 years.

Weed both hedges and strim the area between hedge and path regularly

8 Yelnow Lane Frontage

Work to date on these two small blocks of woodland has consisted of planting a hedge along the roadside boundary, installing a hard-surfaced path to connect the Yelnow Lane footway with the Castle Close Site and removal of some trees. These areas are to be left as informal areas for wildlife and play.

OBJECTIVES *To increase the ground flora both in abundance and diversity*

To ensure there is a constant deadwood resource available for saproxilic invertebrate

To ensure the area is safe

ACTIONS .

Leave trees and undergrowth as now.

Leave fallen dead wood lying in situ.

B GENERAL

1 Boundaries

OBJECTIVE *To establish and maintain attractive boundaries which are appropriate to the natural character of the Site, allow access at designated points and prevent unauthorised vehicular access*

LODGE ROAD BOUNDARY - The remnant hedge was layed and additional plants introduced, but this has been breached in places and needs reinstating.

ACTION **Add more plants where there are gaps with a view to re-laying the hedge in the future.**

SOUTH EAST BOUNDARY - The western section of this boundary is protected by the dense scrub on the Castle Close side of the ditch. It is planned to leave a substantial belt of scrub alongside the boundary ditch.

The eastern section has recently been fenced by the owner of the adjacent property – the alignment is not believed to be in the correct position on the boundary and the owner is being approached to discuss this.

NORTH WEST BOUNDARY - This runs along the fences of the new Yelnow Lane estate and the garden of 25 Lodge Road. It is planned to leave a belt of dense scrub alongside the estate fences. Although the garden fence of 25 Lodge Road is unsightly, and is believed to encroach

onto our land, no planting is to be undertaken here at present – part of the fence is in the area of the Scheduled Ancient Monument and therefore no planting is permitted here. 25 Lodge Road has recently been sold and when new owners appear to be taking up residence contact needs to be made with them and Historic England (formerly English Heritage) to ensure the SAM is not damaged further.

ACTION Keep these boundaries under review.

ENTRANCE GATES have been erected at the main Lodge Road entrance and in the wildlife corridor to allow pedestrian and wheelchair access whilst preventing unauthorised vehicular access. A field gate at the Lodge Road entrance has been installed to enable occasional vehicular access as required for maintenance.

ACTION Inspect gates and fences annually to identify any necessary maintenance.

2 Paths

OBJECTIVE *To provide a safe path for all users through the Site and to facilitate access to the different habitats and features*

A surfaced path has been constructed through the site from the Lodge Road entrance to Yelow Lane and to the Earthwork.

ACTION Add additional surfacing material as necessary to keep the path in good repair.

The grassed area becomes difficult to access for much of the year for many people because of the waterlogged state of the ground and a boardwalk has been installed as a loop from the surfaced path through the grass area and past the pond.

ACTION Monitor and maintain the boardwalk to provide a safe route.

3 Ditches

OBJECTIVE *To reinstate the various ditches on the Site and maintain them in good working order*

Culverts have been installed under the surfaced path where it crosses ditches. These easily become blocked with leaves and other debris.

ACTIONS Check the culverts during the weekly inspection.
Keep a hollow area in front of the culverts.

In order to retain water in the earthwork moat for as much of the year as possible a barrier is to be maintained between it and the ditch leading from it, but the ditch itself is to be used to drain the area to the SE of the earthwork. Some work has been done to clear the ditch but more needs to be done on a regular basis as this is a well-wooded area with many falling branches, leaves etc.

ACTION Clear the ditch of fallen logs and debris.

The ditch running roughly parallel to the SW boundary drains the adjacent field between SUS and Yelow Farm and the NW part of the Site. The lower part also carries the surface water from the Yelow Lane estate. In winter it can take a lot of water and needs to be kept clear. A bridge over the lower part of the ditch has been installed to discourage objects being placed in the ditch to facilitate crossing.

ACTION Clear debris from the ditch regularly, particularly in autumn.

The ditch on the SE boundary which drains into the pond next to Lodge Road is currently inaccessible because of the fence installed by the neighbouring owner.

ACTION No action at present.

4 Seats

OBJECTIVE *To provide low-maintenance seats that are appropriate to the surroundings in a variety of locations throughout the Site*

Ten rustic seats have been installed to date. As the Site is further developed more seats may be desirable.

ACTIONS **Install more seats as required.**
Check condition of seats annually.

5 Information

OBJECTIVE *To provide interpretation of the Site in a variety of ways and to provide information about volunteer work parties and other events*

Interpretation panels have been installed giving graphic and textual information about the history of the Site, the habitats and wildlife and the earthwork. A wind-up audiopoint has also been installed giving similar information. Graffiti and other damage has been experienced with some of these installations and vandalism is likely to be an ongoing problem.

ACTIONS **Check the condition of panels and audiopoint regularly, clean the windows and repair damage as promptly as possible.**
Label specimen trees
Install an interpretation panel near the insect hotel, when more information about invertebrates on the site is available from future surveys.

Two noticeboards have been installed at the entrances to the Site.

ACTION **Use the noticeboards to post information about volunteer work parties, monthly bird sightings etc.**

Wood sculptures have been installed around the Site. These have proved to be very popular but some are now deteriorating with age.

ACTIONS **Commission more sculptures as funding allows.**

6 Health & Safety

The main natural hazards identified on the Site are those associated with the presence of large trees, prickly scrub and uneven ground. A surfaced path has been provided through the site and this will be maintained. Clearly identifiable informal paths through the trees will be kept clear of trip hazards, such as small tree stumps.

The Site is a natural place for children's play. There is no problem with children making small dens with fallen branches and logs they might find lying around, as long as trees are not damaged, and anything they bring onto site to enhance their dens, such as ground sheets and cushions, are removed. This applies to the small wooded areas near the entrance to the Yelnow Lane estate as well as the main Castle Close Site. What are not acceptable are large structures using tarpaulins, tyres, tables, oil drums etc.

Fires may not be lit anywhere on the Site, unless by permission of the Parish Council. There are clear notices at both entrances to this effect.

OBJECTIVE *To ensure the safety of volunteers and visitors to the Site and residents of nearby properties.*

- ACTIONS**
- Carry out a weekly inspection paying particular attention to trees and other growth near the surfaced paths, and to the condition of the path itself and keep a record of each inspection.**
 - Carry out any immediate remedial work required.**
 - Commission an annual tree inspection by a suitably qualified arboriculturist, particularly of trees near paths and boundaries.**
 - Carry out an annual site risk assessment.**
 - Provide training for all volunteers in the safe use of tools and methods of working.**
 - Carry out risk assessments for all special events.**

7 Survey & Monitoring

OBJECTIVE *To monitor the effects of the management regime*

As well as enabling people to enjoy the site we are aiming to improve habitats and increase the biodiversity of the wildlife.

FIXED-POINT PHOTOGRAPHY was undertaken at various stations around the site so that scrub removal, grassland restoration and coppice re-growth could be easily monitored to ensure the management is meeting its objectives. This record was not maintained for a period but is now being revived.

ACTION **Re-establish the fixed-point photography record.**

WILDLIFE SURVEYS - A bat survey was carried out in May 2006 which indicated the presence of four species of bat. A plant survey is currently been undertaken. Some observations of birds have been recorded on an adhoc basis and nest boxes are being checked annually. Surveys of other wildlife need to be done.

ACTION **Carry out a survey of invertebrates.**