

ITEM 6 - BATTLEMEAD COMMON UPDATE REPORT

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To inform the Forum on continuing progress concerning the priorities and management of Battlemead Common.

2. SUPPORTING INFORMATION – Friends of Battlemead Common Meetings

2.1 The Friends of Battlemead Common met on 9th Sept 2019 and agreed that four Sub groups would meet before the next meeting of the main group to look in more detail at the following areas:

- Biodiversity/ Volunteers
- White Brook
- Accessibility
- Communication and Information

The main group also agreed that the planning application would be amended to only seek consent for the car park and not for the change of use to Public Open Space. Battlemead Common currently remains agricultural land with public access.

2.2 Each Sub Group has now met and the notes from all these meetings have been circulated to members of the FoBC and to members of the LAF via email and are also included in these LAF papers.

2.3 Due to the general election on the 12th December 2019, the next meeting of the Friends of Battlemead Common has been postponed and will now be held on 13th January 2020. The last date for agenda items for that meeting is now 9th December 2019.

2.4 An overwintering bird survey is currently underway with the results due in Spring. It is hoped this and other ecological information will help the FoBC and Council decide on how to progress with managing the site.

2.5 The FoBC Accessibility Sub Group agreed that accessibility audits would be undertaken at Battlemead to tie in with the work of the LAF's Accessibility Working Group which has chosen to focus resources on auditing The Green Way and Battlemead initially.

2.6 It was agreed at the Sub Group meeting that the accessibility audit at Battlemead Common would include the Thames Path from Islet Road to the Battlemead Common permissive link path.

2.7 The FoBC Accessibility Sub Group also agreed that alterations to the pedestrian access gate need to be undertaken now to improve the gradient if possible and to replace the gate with a swing gate to improve accessibility.

2.8 Temporary site signs are currently being prepared by the Council and will be erected soon. The latest draft of the sign is also an addendum to this report.

2.9 **LAF Response/Recommendations** – Comments from members on this item can be forwarded via the LAF representatives on the Friends of Battlemead group, Lisa Hughes and Dom Lethbridge.

3. **Local Access Forum Site Visit to Battlemead**

3.1 The Local Access Forum site visit to Battlemead took place on 5th September 2019. Members attending were able to see the full extent of the site and the views afforded across to Cliveden from various vantage points including the Causeway.

Photo 1 view across West field



Photo 2 view from the Causeway to Cliveden



Photo 3 wetlands looking north from the Causeway



Photo 4 Looking back westwards along the Causeway



Welcome to Battlemead Common

History

Once part of Waldorf Astor's Cliveden Estate, Battlemead Common extends from Lower Cookham Road to the Thames Path, comprising areas of wetland, meadow and woodland with White Brook dissecting the land from north to south.

Waldorf Astor bought White Place Farm (Battlemead formerly part of) in 1913 and in 1943 placed a covenant on part of his land with the National Trust, which prohibited any act that would 'injury prejudice affect or destroy the natural aspect and condition of the land'. Consequently, the land has remained virtually unchanged to this day with grazing having been the predominate use.

There are several documents relating to the common by different names including: Battilyngemeade, Bartlemead, Battling Mead. In the medieval period the site was used for growing hay and for pasture. In 1611 the Crown seized White Place, Bullocks and meadows including Bartlemead to pay the fine of their owner Edward Manfield, a recusant. In 1650, during the Commonwealth period, Battling Meadow was surveyed, and as it was reputed to be a possession of Charles Stuart, late King of England. It was seized in 1651, by virtue of an Act of Parliament, and sold on. Bartle Mead was one of the open meadows of the Common fields prior to enclosure. However, an earlier translation of a C13th document named it Battlemeade, from which the current naming of the common is derived.

Whilst some maps indicate this as a site of a battle between the 'Saxons and the Danes' and also a battle of the English Civil War, neither are designated as a Registered Battle Field, which reflects the uncertainty of these events at this location.

Archaeology

Cropmarks (in red on map), indicating the presence of buried remains, have been recorded at the common. Circular cropmarks could indicate the presence of a Bronze Age barrow cemetery while linear cropmarks may represent the remains of prehistoric or Roman field systems or settlement enclosures.

Views

The common offers an impressive view of Cliveden House and along with the densely wooded scarp of Cliveden Reach provide a pleasant backdrop. White Place Farm, which the site was recently part of, can be seen to the north.



Wildlife



Variable Damselfly

The site is mainly low-lying and part of the site is subject to flooding during winter months, with much of it being wet woodland which is a "Priority Habitat". The White Brook, also a Priority Habitat, flows through the site which will be used by otters, kingfishers, reptiles and amphibians (including the grass snake). The dominant species are usually alder, willow and birch, although other species may be present. It is an important habitat for many animal and plant groups: bats, including those associated with wet habitats such as the Daubenton's bat; invertebrates such as the very rare variable damselfly; and bryophytes such as lichens, mosses and liverworts. The reedbeds encourage the reed and sedge warblers to visit. The wet meadows benefit wading birds, ducks, geese, gulls and terns in the eastern section of the site.

The meadows and woodland/hedges provide foraging for kestrels, barn owl and badgers. Woodcock and tree creepers have also been recorded. Stock doves and large flocks of finches are winter visitors. The site was previously ploughed up, reseeded,



Reed Warbler

fertilised, and heavily grazed which reduced the number and diversity of wild flowers. Over time, through sensitive site management, the council plans to restore the meadows to their former glory.



Barn Owl

Access

Running through the Common is part of the boundary walk of the old Borough of Maidenhead, along which 3 boundary stones can be found. Battlemead Common completes a missing link in the Millennium Walk, the full route can be found on the Borough's website.



To minimise disturbance to wildlife, we would be grateful if you can keep to the paths.

 As part of your outdoor fitness programme a walk in this park can contribute 3,500 steps to the advised 10,000 steps per day that an average person should take to achieve an improvement in their fitness level	 Please clean up after your dog	 No cycling
 Unauthorised vehicles are not permitted on the park area	 Please ensure that you keep your dog under control or on the lead at all times	 No horse riding
 This open space is provided for your enjoyment, please help us keep it tidy	 No BBGs	 No fishing
	 Use of metal detectors is not allowed	 Please do not play golf

White Brook at Battlemead Common sub-group

Meeting Notes
11th October 2.00pm
May Room, Town Hall

Attended by:

Anthony Hurst (AH) RBWM

Ann Darracott (AD) Maidenhead Civic Society
Gordon Marris (GM) East Berks Ramblers
Graham Scholey (GS) Environment Agency
Lauren Giddings (LG) Environment Agency
Ian Rose (IR) Maidenhead Waterways
Brian Clews (BC) Wild Cookham
Mark Hemmings (MH) Wild Maidenhead
Dick Scarff (DS) The Cookham Society

Apologies/absence:

Ian Caird (IC) Maidenhead Waterways

1. Introductions

All members of the sub-group introduced themselves, and **AH** explained that this was one of four sub-groups established to advise the 'Friends of Battlemead Common' and the Council on the management of the site.

The other three sub-groups (Biodiversity; Accessibility; Communications and Information) will also be meeting during October, and will report back to the full 'Friends of Battlemead Common' at its next meeting on 9th December.

2. Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference of the sub-group were circulated and agreed. **AH** explained that the membership of each sub-group includes a cross-section of interests, and a number of people sit on more than one group; this should help to encourage effective communication between the various sub-groups.

3. Open Discussion

The sub-group discussed a range of issues relating to the future maintenance and management of the White Brook.

IR presented his paper '*Maidenhead Waterways: Technical note on White Brook channel maintenance*' which had previously been shared with the full 'Friends of Battlemead Common' at its inaugural meeting in June 2019.

The paper refers to the White Brook as being the main water supply route for Maidenhead Ditch, and draws upon a report produced by Jacobs in March 2017 for South East Water, which recommends targeted vegetation clearance and de-silting at the White Brook. However, **GS** expressed some reservations about the content and conclusions of this report.

AD presented a series of photographs and maps illustrating the history of the White Brook, its relationship with the surrounding fields and the wider network of watercourses including Maidenhead Ditch, and de-silting works undertaken previously by the EA.

The sub-group then discussed the potential benefits and/or dis-benefits, in terms of water flow, flood risk, and ecology/biodiversity, of removing vegetation and/or silt from the White Brook.

There were differences of opinion within the sub-group on the impact that such interventions would have, in particular in relation to water flow, including onward conveyance of water to Maidenhead Ditch.

GS explained that the EA does not currently require the Council (as riparian landowner) to undertake any maintenance or management of the watercourse, for flood risk or flood control purposes.

AH confirmed that the Council would not be undertaking any maintenance or management works to the White Brook, or permitting any volunteer work parties to carry out such works, without first consulting with and obtaining the consent of the EA.

4. Recommendations

It was agreed that before formulating any recommendations to the 'Friends of Battlemead Common' or the Council, the sub-group would hold a site visit to view the condition of the watercourse and surrounding fields. The site visit is to be held on Monday 11th November at 10.00 am, meeting at the contractor parking area off Lower Cookham Road.

Next Meeting: 11th November 2019 (10:00 am site visit)

Biodiversity at Battlemead Common sub-group

Meeting Notes
14th October 10.30am
Braywick Nature Centre

Attended by:

Jason Mills (JM) RBWM

Ann Darracott (AD) Maidenhead Civic Society
Gordon Marris (GM) East Berks Ramblers
Lauren Giddings (LG) Environment Agency
Martin Woolner (MW) Wild Maidenhead
Sarah Bowden (SB) RBWM Climate Emergency
Hilary Phillips (HP) BBOWT
Ken Cottam (KC) RSPB
Fiona Tattersall (FT) Binfield Badgers
Lars Ahlgren (LA) Wild Cookham

Apologies/absence:

Jane Perry (Cookham Parish Council)

1. Introductions

All members of the sub-group introduced themselves, and **JM** explained that this was one of four sub-groups established to advise the 'Friends of Battlemead Common' and the Council on the management of the site. The other three sub-groups (White Brook; Accessibility; Communications and Information) will also be meeting during October, and will report back to the full 'Friends of Battlemead Common' at its next meeting on 9th December.

2. Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference of the sub-group were circulated and agreed. **JM** explained that the membership of each sub-group includes a cross-section of interests, and a number of people sit on more than one group; this should help to encourage effective communication between the various sub-groups.

3. Open Discussion

The sub-group discussed a range of issues relating to biodiversity management of Battlemead Common. All members agree Battlemead Common is a special place and the wildlife needs to be protected.

KC raised concerns about dog access and the inevitable impact on wildlife. All agree this is a concern that must be addressed.

MW wildlife is a priority and must be the first consideration for the site management.

GM access is important and a circular route is ideal. Disabled access must be provided.

HP some access is required but must not impact on sensitive habitats and wildlife.

Friends of Battlemead Common

FT the site was previously inaccessible so any public access however restrictive is a gain and not a loss.

All discuss the need for an estimate of potential visitor numbers to determine the site capacity and size of car park. Site must be secured from traveller incursions.

AD raised concerns that an unmaintained White Brook will have a negative impact on water levels in the central Maidenhead channels. The recently planted hedge adjacent to the Thames path must not become overgrown and restrict views into the east field.

LG at present the Environment Agency does not consider there to be any essential works required on the White Brook and that any perceived negative impacts on the Maidenhead Waterways scheme should not stop habitat creation schemes i.e. new ponds and scrapes in the fields at Battlemead Common.

AD raised the concern regarding the presence of non-native species e.g. mink and the Canada Goose. The 2018 breeding bird survey considered the Canada Goose bred on the new common. It is the dominant bird on the east field together with the greylag goose. Canada Goose also occurs on the Summerleaze Sailing Lake where in the past their eggs have been blown to cut numbers.

AD pointed out that blanket weed (filamentous algae) developed on the wetland on each side of the causeway in June, gradually dying out to leave a white deposit in September. Wildfowl were absent from the wetland from June as the weed created a hostile environment. **AD** thought that scrapes would also develop blanket weed. It was suggested that as nutrients were used up in the inundated land, that the weed would not develop (N.B. however droppings from wildfowl will continue to fertilise the water).

SB site management must consider carbon sequestration – wetlands and non-ploughed land are good.

LA target species should be considered in the site management – e.g. barn owl, skylark.

Funding was discussed and **JM** informed the group that Battlemead Common will not be allocated a specific budget next year and funding will be provided from the general Parks and Open Spaces budget. Retaining agricultural land designation for Battlemead Common was discussed as a way of maintaining the subsidy entitlements as a means of funding essential work e.g. conservation grass cut & collect. Sheep grazing could replace the spring cut recommended in the management plan. All agree to help with funding ideas.

All agree the need for a 'vision' in order to guide future nature conservation management for Battlemead Common. Basic principles of Protect, Restore, Enhance, and Educate were discussed and agreed.

4. Recommendations

Protect

- better understanding of what we already have (ecology surveys e.g. great crested newt eDNA)
- dogs on leads
- seasonal access a possibility to be explored
- hedge maintained so views not obstructed (10 years off)
- protect the woodland, scrub boundaries
- discourage cycling on site
- maintain agricultural status

Restore

- cut and lift conservation grass areas
- woodland management
- barn owl nesting
- tree planting (Dr Sarah Rutherford's report for the Royal Borough, *Battlemead Common, Berkshire – Historic Landscape Analysis*, currently being finalised, will suggest where trees should be planted)

Friends of Battlemead Common

Enhance

- habitat creation (pond/wetland in the north field, wetlands in east field)
- rewilding (not cutting north field)
- possibility of Skylarks nesting in east field
- aftermath grazing with sheep in east field
- strengthen connectivity into the wider context

Educate

- what is appropriate: need to facilitate different needs at different sites rather than one size fits all
- macro-level guidance online, dedicated webpage.
- on site signage for interpretation and restrictions
- 'permissible footpath' might be more appropriate
- be clear on what is special now and in the future

Next Meeting: tbc

Accessibility at Battlemead Common sub-group

Meeting Notes
14th October 2.00pm
Meeting Room 1, Town Hall

Attended by:

Jacqui Wheeler (JW) RBWM

Mike Copland (MC) Wild Cookham (substitute for Lynne Peperell)
Steve Gillions (SG) East Berks Ramblers
Lisa Hughes (LH) Local Access Forum and Access Advisory Forum
Fiona Tattersall (FT) Binfield Badgers
Cllr John Baldwin (JB) RBWM (substitute for Cllr Brar)
Dick Scarff (DS) The Cookham Society

Apologies/absence:

Deborah Mason (DM) Wild Maidenhead

1. Introductions

All members of the sub-group introduced themselves, and acknowledged the purpose of the meeting as one of four sub-groups established to advise the 'Friends of Battlemead Common' and the Council on the management of the site.

2. Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference of the sub-group were circulated and agreed.

3. Open Discussion

The sub-group discussed a range of issues relating to access to and from Battlemead Common and levels of accessibility within the site.

All agreed there are two different aspects of accessibility that need to be discussed and addressed for Battlemead; the physical mechanics and ease of use of the site and the current and ongoing levels of access for the public to the various parts of the site.

The group agreed that both types of accessibility would be looked at.

LH raised concerns about how information is to be conveyed about the accessibility of the site, including items such as; surfacing and resting places available and length of routes. There are a wide range of mobility issues present with 1 in 5 people in the borough having some kind of mobility problem.

People need access to high quality open space like Battlemead and it is reasonable to expect that more people with disabilities are going to be able to reach Battlemead due to its close proximity to the town.

FT felt that human usage needs to be flexible and based on seasonal wildlife and habitat changes. All agreed with this assessment and the need to be open minded. There is a need to develop the site and

access to it carefully as an understanding of the most sensitive areas becomes clearer so that no lasting damage is done.

However all agreed the need to make some decisions now is important as the site is open and being used. SG raised the questions: How accessible do we make the site? What types of paths are made available bearing in mind the needs of people with disabilities? Should there be some path improvement work to standards that reflects these needs?

LH stated that people need a smaller circular route within the site probably in West Field not just the Northern route to the Thames as for some this is too far. She suggested an accessibility audit of the site is done. All agreed.

Some of the group were also concerned about road safety ingress and egress of the site, both at the pedestrian gate and at the car park entrance. Though the speed limit had been dropped and the access points checked for safety through the Highways Team at the Council, concerns were still expressed by the group about the safety and liability of the Council should there be an incident. JB stated he would look into this issue.

The physical accessibility of the pedestrian gate was discussed with all agreeing that the design was not fit for purpose and that this should be modified to a swing gate to improve accessibility. All agreed that the work to modify this gate should be undertaken now and didn't need to wait until the FoBC meeting on the 9th Dec.

MC took an overview saying that the broad issues of accessibility need to be audited now by looking at the paths available to use on the site currently on the ground but recognising that things could change in the future with more information. All agreed that the Thames Path from Islet Road access to the Battlemead link should be included in the audit.

The issue of dogs was discussed with all seeing this as an issue crossing all subgroups. Worries were expressed about commercial dog walkers and a suggestion made that the car park could be fee charging to discourage it. The possibility of dog bins on site was also raised but no conclusion reached as to whether these should be implemented.

All agreed to look at examples of best practice elsewhere on similar sites such as Otmore, Oxon and share information with the sub group via JW.

LH would share information from her research into National Parks signage/accessibility.

SG described the success of the recent Boundary Walk which saw around 200 people using the Causeway route across Battlemead throughout the day. At any one time only a handful of people were actually on the causeway, but that those who walked across were full of admiration for the site. MC felt that Battlemead was a destination for walking and for enjoying wildlife and nature but was concerned it could also be a transit point for use of various local long distance routes. SG disagreed stating there are far better locations to park for access to these routes.

Security of the car park gate was highlighted by members and there was general agreement that the gate should be locked daily.

A question was raised about what the Environment Agency's restrictions are for alterations/actions on this kind of site due to its habitat/wildlife. JW agreed to find out more detail about this and forward to the subgroup.

The group discussed budgets and the uncertainty surrounding this and agreed that it is vital to find outside funding sources.

4. Recommendations

That visits would be made to the site by LH, JB and SG to undertake accessibility audits. The findings of these audits would be fed back to the subgroup meeting before 26th November 2019.

How information on accessibility within the site is conveyed needs to be carefully considered.

The seasonal aspect of access to the site and the various parts of the site needs to be recognised and therefore will guide to what degree and when certain areas will be accessible.

That the pedestrian gate is modified to improve accessibility in line with current standards as soon as possible.

Next Meeting:

TBC

Information & Communication at Battlemead Common sub-group

Meeting Notes
22th October 10.00 am
Zone C Meeting Room 1, Town Hall

Attended by:

Ambika Chouhan (RBWM)

Cllr Jane Perry (Cookham Parish Council)

Lisa Hughes (Access Advisory Forum/Local Access Forum)

Steve Gillions (East Berks Ramblers/Local Access Forum)

Lars Ahlgren (Wild Cookham)

Jan Stannard (Wild Maidenhead)

Apologies/absence:

None

1. Introductions

All members of the sub-group introduced themselves, and **AC** explained that this was one of four sub-groups established to advise the 'Friends of Battlemead Common' and the Council on the management of the site.

The other three sub-groups (Biodiversity; Accessibility; White brook) will also be meeting during October, and will report back to the full 'Friends of Battlemead Common' at its next meeting on 9th December.

2. Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference of the sub-group were circulated and agreed. **AC** explained that the membership of each sub-group includes a cross-section of interests, and a number of people sit on more than one group; this should help to encourage effective communication between the various sub-groups.

The group discussed at length the ToR and its interpretation as such. **JS** representing Wild Maidenhead and **LA** representing Wild Cookham clarified that the Info & Comms Sub Group ToR suggested that the group does not seek to publicise Battlefield common as a destination as this is an ecologically sensitive site and not just a public open space. **SG** from the ramblers however disagreed and was in favour of positive advertisement and not believed it should not be downplayed. All members however agreed it is not a typical council open space and it should incorporate methods to highlight its ecological value with meaningful human interaction. They also agreed that the current wordings of the ToR do not suggest that it should be publicised but focuses on dissemination of information regarding the open space to the wider community.

3. Open Discussion

SG suggested that there are two elements of this sub group:

- On site communication through a formulated signage strategy
- Offsite communication within the FoB group and to the public

LA pointed out the fact that any communication can only be correct to whatever has been agreed so far till that point of time and hence present communication should focus on current situation until significant decisions are made on the basis of surveys and other site investigations. Comms sub group would then need

to update the information to the general public. **AC** clerking for this sub group will also be responsible for circulating the concise bullet point summary of all the key highlights from all the sub group meetings to all members of FoB through email with the input of all other officers representing sub groups.

Onsite installation of temporary signage was discussed and it was agreed that an A1 sign will be installed at the main entrance and an A2 signs would be installed on the post and rail fence near the two pedestrian entrances. The group raised their concerns of the use of the word 'Common' on information signs as it makes people believe that they have commoner rights to this land. It was recommended that no signs would use the term Common when refereeing to Battlemead and this will be circulated to the FoB group for approval. **JS** went through comments sent by Wild Maidenhead to RBWM some time ago with **AC** who would be responsible to update the temporary sign format and circulate it amongst the sub group for approval. All agreed that a graphic map showing the paths and facilitates should be part the temporary signboard. All agreed the signboard needs to convey the grass cutting and management strategy to the park users to manage expectations.

SG presented some examples from the National Parks Authority signboards and advised our signboards have the same level of graphic legibility. All agreed that signage needed to be easy to understand and attractive. **LH** pointed out that these would need to be legible for people of all abilities.

Managing dog walkers was discussed at length as the group was concerned about the effect of dogs without leads on the ecology of the open space. **AC** suggested that this was an overarching concern for all FoB members and hence 'Dogs on Leads' sign should not only be part of the restrictions section on the signboard but should also form part of the main body of text as a subhead perhaps saying 'This is a dogs on leads park'. This would hopefully help to educate park users about the ecologically sensitive nature of the site and the importance of keeping dogs on leads when using this open space. Concern was raised on the increased number of commercial dog walking activity in local parks and advised that the wording regarding dogs should clearly mention that no more than three dogs per person would should be recommended in the information boards. All agreed that there should be an early explanation of expectations from dog walkers on this site. All agreed that volunteers can go there and politely educated dog walkers about the sensitivity of this site. **Jason Mills** who is in charge of the Volunteering Sub Group can arrange such days on site. **Jason Mills** to circulate information regarding the schedule of volunteering activities to the FoB members. **AC** also suggested some larger A4 type signs along the site reiterating dogs to be kept on leads due to eco sensitive site.

It was agreed that information boards would also be required in future for educating the visitors of the rich ecology of the site. All members felt that information on seasonal flora and fauna should be made available to visitors to help educate them about the ecological sensitivity of Battlemead Common. **AC** suggested that these could be lectern types with the ability to change information.

The use of QR codes was advised by **LH** which would mean that information does not have to be on paper leaflets suitable for the current times. **SG** suggested that the signs should be of two types, informative (paths etc.) and educational (flora & fauna). All agreed that the sub group will devise a comprehensive signage strategy for the Battlemead Common further down the line next year.

All members agreed that it was 'too early' for offsite communication as of now. Whatever has been communicated so far regarding this site to the common public is sufficient.

4. Recommendations

It was recommended that the word 'Common ' be removed from all the signboards for all current and future signs as it causes confusion as it is not a listed common and has no commoners rights.

Friends of Battlemead Common

It was recommended that the council look into the Bylaws regarding dogs and commercial dog walking activity as there are nothing currently which can prevent negative implications of these commercial activities on ecologically sensitive sites like this one.

Next Meeting: TBC