

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 and Consultation**

2.1 The Friends of Battlemead Common meeting of the 4<sup>th</sup> May 2020 had to be postponed due to the Covid-19 restrictions, however, the situation has not stood still. A consultation was carried out with the Friends group during May to receive comments on the following documents:

- Wintering bird survey: report completed by Austin Foot Ecology.
- Ecological Management Plan: report prepared by Austin Foot Ecology, in collaboration with RBWM officers.

As a result of feedback received from this consultation, plans for the site are now under review with an outcome due sometime in July 2020.

2.2 Feedback received during the consultation included:

“A Way Forward” – Friends of Battlemead Proposal dated 27/05/2020 along with representations from the following groups and individuals:

1	Maidenhead Civic Society
2	Cookham Society
3	Cookham Parish Council
4	East Berks Ramblers
5	Cllr Greg Jones (ward councillor for Maidenhead Riverside)
6	Maidenhead Waterways
7	Wild Maidenhead
8	WildCookham

These representations are available in this document pack for your information.

2.3 Dog Walking Access - a new representative for dog walkers has been asked to join the Accessibility Sub Group.

- 2.4 People and Dog Walking Survey – volunteers and member of the Friends group have been collecting evidence of how the site is used by dog walkers over a 5 week period in May. Some points from the survey are:

Monitoring period: 5 weeks, 23 April to May 28 6 observers filed in total 16 observations; 6 morning, 6 early afternoon, 4 late afternoons	
Ratio Bikers on bikes (cycling)	70%
Ratio Dogs on lead	38%
Ratio Dogs on path	89%
Average dog numbers per visit	4
Average biker number per visit	0.6

- 2.5 Data is also being gathered via the Community Warden visiting the site about dog walkers' behaviour and observance of the rules stated on the signage. New larger more robust signage was erected in early May stating "Dogs must be on lead, wildlife sensitive area and community wardens patrolling".
- 2.6 No Cycling Signs have also be erected at the access points to the site.
- 2.7 Benches at 6 locations were installed in March 2020– see photos

	Location B2 (ref: LAF Accessibility Audit Report) – next to the Maidenhead Boundary stone to allows views across wetlands towards Cliveden and back across West Field
	Location B6 (ref: LAF Accessibility Audit Report) – good view of Cliveden

- 2.8 Field Names – historic names of fields provided as per Battlemead Common Historic Landscape Analysis by Sarah Rutherford were discussed and agreed at the FoB Comms & Information Sub group.  
A plan showing these is available in this document pack for your information.
- 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.

## Battlemead: a Way Forward

This is a third version of the document submitted by the independent group of Friends to the January 2020 Friends meeting. It has been modified to take on board some, though not all, of the comments submitted to them before or after that meeting. The authors stress that compromise will be needed if the Friends are to have a useful on-going role and it is hoped that common ground can be achieved at the RBWM review in May. The authors have taken note of the Terms of Reference for the Friends and believe that their proposals are fully in line with the Terms.

This version of the document is the agreed consensus of the authors, and is presented to the Council as such. The authors are Mike Copland, Ann Darracott, Martin Woolner, Steve Gillions, Ian Rose and Ian Caird.

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### 1. Overview

#### The Friends

- 1.1. accept the Royal Borough's view that public ownership of Battlemead Common will ensure future generations of people and wildlife can continue to enjoy the area as a natural outdoor space (with possible future educational value) and will also allow the completion of a missing link in the Millennium Walk
  - 1.2. confirm that the future plans for Battlemead should embody the need for an appropriate balance between the biodiversity and access considerations
  - 1.3. agree that biodiversity in both terrestrial and aquatic habitats should be protected and enhanced. This can take as its starting point the proposals presented by Austin Foot in their EMMP dated June 2019 and in other reports.
  - 1.4. agree there should be managed public pedestrian access, including disabled access
  - 1.5. agree that a circular walk encompassing the Thames towpath should be available if this is supported by ecology and related investigations
  - 1.6. agree the general principle that visitors to the site will be encouraged to keep to designated paths through the use of maps, signage, fencing, hedges or management regimes (e.g. mowing)
  - 1.7. agree that the White Brook will need to be managed on an on-going basis and monitored but that its route and size will not be significantly altered
  - 1.8. recognise that the White Brook and parts of Battlemead Common form a critical route for the drainage of flood water from the south of Cookham. All management and maintenance decisions should at least maintain and if possible improve the overall flood flows across the site
  - 1.9. recognise that there should be a clear policy on dog access and dogs should be excluded from certain areas.
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**Specific proposals for each of the main areas of Battlemead are:**

## **2. West Field**

- 2.1. The field could be developed and managed as a mosaic of habitats comprising open grassland, scattered new trees, the restoration of the two lines of mature trees - one of oak, one mainly lime/horse chestnut (though the latter may not be sustainable) - and the creation of scrub areas (probably a mix of planting and allowing growth of existing plants)
- 2.2. The marginal woodland should be allowed to drift out into the field to create a more graded habitat suitable for a range of wildlife
- 2.3. The botany should be respected and given time to develop.
- 2.4. Agreement should be reached with the National Trust to prevent cattle encroaching from the adjoining National Trust land onto the bank to the North of the field
- 2.5. The fencing can be retained and the Council should maintain the mowing policy already adopted to encourage visitors to keep to the paths
- 2.6. The Northern Perimeter path can be an all-weather track similar to the track in the North Field to allow service vehicle access
- 2.7. There can be a circular path around the perimeter of the field (far enough into the field to prevent disturbance to the resident badgers), with wheelchair accessibility and benches as resting places
- 2.8. The mown path across the field from the car park to the causeway should be retained to give a short route across the field. However it is recommended that its precise route should be flexible and take into account any future planting plan adopted and that there should be adequate screening of any West Field activity from the wetlands areas in the East Field.

## **3. North Field (including the pond)**

- 3.1. A plan for the future of the pond area should be developed, with consideration given both to some clearance of the existing pond and its immediate surrounds and to the creation of new ponds alongside the existing one to provide a variety of habitats that are at different stages of succession, supporting different species. The Friends' preference is for the current pond to be managed, with some clearance (reeds and other vegetation, as well as over-hanging trees) and, depending on further studies, the possibility of some de-silting.
- 3.2. Consideration should be given to the eventual siting of a hide by the pond (the precise location to be determined based on further study and evidence that the wildlife there merits such a development) and the provision of some basic facilities to allow study visits, including one or more dipping areas. This will need serious consideration of the impact of such visits to avoid any significant damage to the site, including the impact of access infrastructure. Such facilities would need appropriate access, including wheelchair access

*Section 4 is void*

## **5. The Willow Wood**

- 5.1. The Friends consider that it is appropriate and feasible to provide a circular path around the entire site if this can be done sensitively to avoid significant impact on the habitats and their biodiversity. There is an acceptance that access to the East Field should be limited (and only be accessible along a tightly defined route during the dry season) so an additional route is suggested - through the Willow Wood. Whilst this is a habitat of special interest, it is felt that a route can be defined through the Willow Wood, based on the existing (broken) bridge site or a replacement nearby. To ensure that the impact of this is minimised it is suggested that such a route would be over a boardwalk which would keep visitors to a defined path (and would also provide wheelchair access). Such a path would take some of the pressure off the East Field at certain times of the year. Routing would need to avoid disturbance to resident badgers and to birds and other wildlife accessing areas of open water in East Field.
- 5.2. This path should be fully fenced so that dogs on leads may be allowed on it.
- 5.3. Funding will be a major consideration for this to go ahead and so it is unlikely to happen in the very near future. In the short term, therefore, consideration could be given to a longer period of summer opening for the East Field (see below) than might be needed if an additional route can be created.
- 5.4. Trees should be removed as required at a minimal level and other work undertaken, drawing on the Austin Foot proposals.

## 6. **East Field**

- 6.1. The field should be closed to the public during the wet season to ensure no disturbance of wildfowl/waders. The closed season dates should be decided following consideration of the over-wintering bird surveys, also taking into account other proposals, including from Austin Foot, for habitat development to encourage other wildlife into the field
- 6.2. During the dry season access across the causeway could be allowed with the following caveats:
- 6.3. Dogs not to be allowed
- 6.4. The route of the path to be defined to limit access across the field as a whole and made very clear via mowing regime and other means to be agreed (e.g. hedge)
- 6.5. Additional scrapes to be considered (as per Austin Foot and also see Waterways Management below)
- 6.6. Hides and/or screens to be considered giving views onto the wet areas.

## 7. **Waterways Management**

- 7.1. Consideration should be given to managing the White Brook to achieve a balance between adequate flow and biodiversity. The Brook should be managed so as not to exacerbate flood risk and, if possible, minimise it. Further decisions should follow the trial relating to the wetland levels currently permitted by the Environment Agency on a stretch of the stream and consideration should be given to keeping the central 2.5m of the brook clear of major impediments such as fallen trees/branches, dense in-channel growth and silting. Following the wetland levels trial consideration could be given to extending some form of clearance work to

the length of the stream through Battlemead. However it is felt that there should be no major widening of the waterway.

- 7.2. The banks should generally be restored, and stabilised, to address problems of poaching caused by cattle but still allowing for seasonal flood-meadow. These banks can provide nesting sites. Consideration to be given to the possibility of water voles returning and the related issue of control of mink.
- 7.3. The Environment Agency should be asked to consider the creation of an additional winter wetland area to the north of the East Field. The impact on the White Brook needs to be considered.

## 8. Dog access

- 8.1. The Friends agree that control of dogs on site is needed, given the adverse impact they can have on flora and fauna. Indeed, we feel the potential damage that could arise from a lack of effective dog control may be greater than that from human visitors. The policy adopted needs to be clear, to be pragmatic, and to achieve the desired result of a balanced management approach.
- 8.2. We noted the following in coming to our view:
  - There will be considerable pressure from dog walkers to use Battlemead
  - Informal surveys on Battlemead and anecdotal evidence from elsewhere show that 'dogs on lead' notices are observed by less than half of dog walkers
  - Dogs present no significant risk to wildlife when they are in a contained environment such as a fenced path
  - Dog owners are less likely to enter areas clearly marked as 'No Dogs Allowed' if there are areas where dogs can be walked
- 8.3. We do not consider uncontrolled dog access appropriate for any part of Battlemead. Two other policy options remain: to ban dogs entirely; or to introduce a 'dogs on lead' policy. We do not think either suitable for all of Battlemead, but rather that an appropriate policy be adopted for each parcel of the site.
- 8.4. We therefore propose that a 'dogs on lead' policy be adopted for the West Field, the Northern Perimeter path, and the proposed Willow Wood path; and that the East Field be designated a 'no dogs allowed' zone and clearly signed as such. We recognise that a 'dogs on lead' policy will in practice have a limited effect and accordingly those areas where dogs are allowed should be properly fenced in order to prevent escape.
- 8.5. Signage relating to the dogs policy should be very clearly displayed and the policy explained.
- 8.6. Consideration should be given to the use of Dog Control Orders.

## 9. Car park

- 9.1. This document does not address issues relating to the car park since this is currently subject to a planning application.

## 10. Information

- 10.1. There will be information boards at the main entrances to Battlemead. These will set out the history as well as the ecology of the site.
- 10.2. There should be a prominent sign at each entrance making it clear that dogs are either not allowed or that they must be kept on a lead at all times, depending on location. The sign to detail which fields/areas on Battlemead dogs on leads are allowed.
- 10.3. People walking multiple dogs (whether professional dog walkers or groups of dog owners bringing a significant number of dogs) need to be discouraged: research into how this is handled elsewhere should be helpful. There should also be a ban on drones and model aircraft.

## **11. Resourcing**

- 11.1. The viability of any plan for Battlemead, beyond basic maintenance, will require funding not at present allocated. We are confident that an imaginative and well-prepared plan can attract external funding and such a plan is needed urgently.
- 11.2. Consideration also needs to be given from the outset to the day to day management of Battlemead in the medium to long term - both to ensure that the habitats are managed effectively and to resource additional activities (educational, site visitors etc.). It is therefore likely that, in addition to support from RBWM, local residents, through local interest groups, must be able to demonstrate at an early stage that they have the membership, expertise and enthusiasm to support such activities. The Volunteer sub-group of the Friends of Battlemead should investigate this as a priority.

May 2020

**Friends of Battlemead Common: comments on 'Wintering Bird Survey' (Austin Foot ecology, March 2020) and 'Ecological Management Plan' (Austin Foot ecology, March 2020)**

1	Maidenhead Civic Society
2	Cookham Society
3	Cookham Parish Council
4	East Berks Ramblers
5	Cllr Greg Jones (ward councillor for Maidenhead Riverside)
6	Maidenhead Waterways
7	Wild Maidenhead
8	WildCookham

## Comments on the Battlemead Ecological Management Plan March 2020 and the Wintering Bird Survey 2020

The comments of the Civic Society will concentrate on the following:

- 1) How the recommendations in the reports relate to **public access** as one of the reasons given for the purchase of what is now Battlemead Common was to provide the missing link in the Millennium Walk from Widbrook Common to the Thames Path.
- 2) How the recommendations in the reports relate to the **maintenance of flow in the White Brook**, the main source of water in the northern stream system that provides flow into Maidenhead town centre.<sup>1</sup> The success of the regeneration of Maidenhead town centre via the renovation of the waterway depends on adequate flow.
- 3) **Gaps in the reports** relating to the impact of the non-native species, the **Canada Goose** on the aquatic environment, and the absence of any evaluation of the presence of the **American Mink**, a predator on young birds and small mammals.
- 4) **Other comments** on woodland management and dogs.

### 1. PUBLIC ACCESS

The Millennium Walk, a joint project of Maidenhead Civic Society and East Berks Ramblers, is routed from Hurley across country to Maidenhead Riverside, following the 1934 boundary of Maidenhead once it reaches Pinkneys Green. On Battlemead this means skirting the north and east side of the West Field, crossing the gravel haul bridge and then over the causeway and the East Field to reach the Thames Path.

The **Battlemead EMMP March 2020** report on p15 referring to the East Field says:

**4.1.24. This field will remain closed to the public, in order to protect its value to wildlife, in particular nesting and wintering birds, with the exception of the millennial and boundary walks which occur once a year in April and October. During these two days, the causeway will be opened to walkers only (no dogs) and be marshalled in order to ensure the public do not deviate from the designated route.**

**This is totally unacceptable as the Millennium Walk is designed to be used at any time.**

Evidently there was some confusion with an event planned for 24<sup>th</sup> May to celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the inaugural Millennium Walk in the year 2000 that crossed the East Field.

The Millennium Walk will eventually be signed as is the Boundary Walk. In October 2019 the Boundary Walk charity event crossed the East Field even though the Boundary Walk signage put up by the Royal Borough directs walkers away from the boundary along a longer northern perimeter path.

With regard to nesting birds, we appreciate the need to ensure that nesting swans are not disturbed. Most other nesting birds remain largely hidden but swans are more vulnerable. We understand that in Windsor Great Park nesting swans are given protection by closing off

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<sup>1</sup> The stream has failed to reach Maidenhead several times in the recent past because the northern stream system is a man-made construct that is not self-cleansing. Maintenance of this system now relies on the Maidenhead Waterways volunteers.

the area around the nest with temporary fencing. Nesting swans are not usually disturbed by the presence of people at a distance so closing off the causeway path during nesting should not be necessary.

The **Battlemead Wintering Bird Survey March 2020** p4 summary says:

- 1.1.3. In order to maintain (or increase) the wintering bird interest of the site, measures are recommended in terms of restricting access to some areas, particularly the causeway in the south-east and areas adjacent to the brook, whilst wintering bird species are present.

It justified (p21) continued restriction of access to the causeway path to avoid disturbing wetland bird species as regular disturbance could result in the possible abandonment of the site by sensitive species such as teal, gadwall and widgeon.

However, although access to the causeway was restricted during the survey, the report shows that two of these three sensitive birds were only present for a short time on Battlemead. Gadwall (max no 8) were recorded in late autumn and early winter but were later absent whilst widgeon (max no 17) was present only in early winter. Only teal (max no 81) were present in variable numbers, presumably throughout the winter (see pages 12 & 17).

It also notes (p4) that the assemblage of 60 species using the site was dominated by species that are common and widespread in Berkshire as well as nationally, with no evidence of any individual species being present in numbers that are significant at the regional or national level.

**The Battlemead Way Forward** document suggested a closed season for overwintering birds. The data presented in this report suggests the causeway path could be closed for a few months at the beginning of winter when migrant birds arrive and then leave. Starling teal does not seem to be sufficient justification for the permanent closing off access to the causeway path throughout the winter.

## 2. MAINTENANCE OF FLOW IN THE WHITE BROOK

The **Battlemead EMMP March 2020** report says:

### *Standing Water and Wetland Habitats*

#### *Aim*

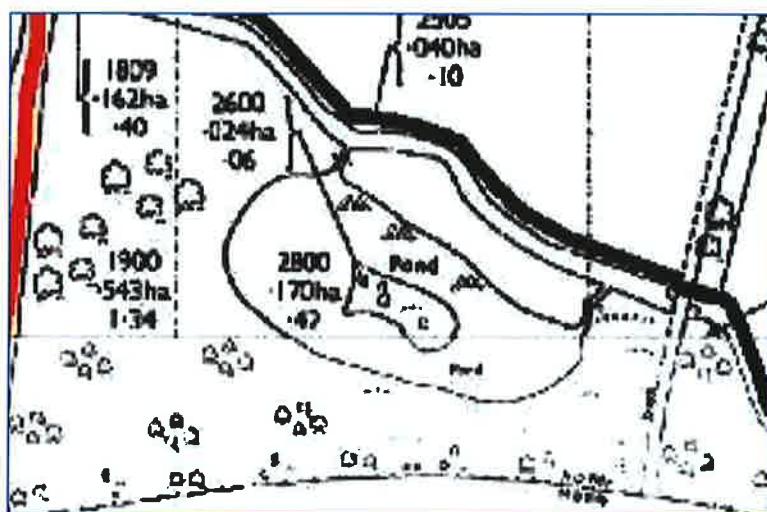
- 1.1.1. To ensure that standing water remains on site year-round with waterbodies to be managed to prevent annual drying and future succession to scrub. Riparian habitat will also be enhanced

#### *Prescriptions*

- 1.1.2. The waterbody SW3 located within woodland BW4 appears highly silted and covered in dense stands of common reed. In order to improve the value of this waterbody the pond will be desilted with stands of reed also removed in order to create areas of deeper open water. Removing silt from the waterbody will also help to ensure that it holds water year-round and would halt succession of the waterbody to scrub habitat. Creating open water habitat would help to increase the botanical diversity of this waterbody as well as providing an improved habitat resource to a range of faunal species including great crested newts and other amphibians which display in open water during the breeding season. Without future

intervention, it is likely that the waterbody will continue to become overrun by emergent vegetation and eventually succeed to scrub or other terrestrial vegetation. Therefore, regular removal of emergent vegetation will be undertaken, in order to maintain a cover of no more than 20% of the surface area of the waterbody. Control of submerged vegetation will be required and coverage of submerged plants will not exceed greater than 50% of the pond area.

This pond was created between 1912 and 1955 so it is not naturally occurring. Certainly as the report notes it is highly silted and covered with dense stands of common reed. What the authors of the report appear not to have been aware of is that it is fed by two connections to the White Brook. These would also need to be desilted for any chance of the pond retaining water over a reasonable period of time.



From Historic OS map 1955<sup>2</sup>

The invasive fern *Azolla*<sup>3</sup> has been recorded in this pond which was treated with weevils in the summer 2019 by Maidenhead Waterways volunteers.

The **Battlemead EMMP report** further says (p8):

**Objective 1: Enhance and maintain the diversity and quality of habitats within the site**

1.1.4. The project presents opportunities for enhancement and positive management to benefit wintering bird species (and overall biodiversity) such as:

- Managing the flooded pools in the south-east of the site (at least in part) to create a more stable pool or scrape.

<sup>2</sup> OS maps in Rutherford S, 2019, *Battlemead Common Berkshire - Historic Landscape Analysis* for RBWM; see p74 for the 1955 map.

<sup>3</sup> The preliminary ecological appraisal of June 2019 reported an absence of invasive species (see Battlemead EMMP March 2020 p17). *Azolla* was present but may not have been observed.

These are the wetlands on either side of the causeway path; deepening them should only be considered if there is proof that it will not influence flow in the White Brook. See remarks about blanket weed below.

In the earlier Ecological Appraisal Report (2019) by Austin Foot it was suggested that these scrapes could provide increased storage for flood water (para 5.2.11, page 33). However, it was found that during the recent near flood event of February 2020 the wetland was drained by the flood so increased storage seems unlikely.

- Managing the pond in the north-west of the site (within woodland) to maintain a mixture of open water and marginal vegetation habitats.

Managing the pond has been commented on above.

- Increasing reed bed habitat along the brook corridor

Reeds spread and collect silt, eventually slowing or stopping flow, accompanied by a deterioration in diversity of the aquatic fauna. The White Brook is already clogged with silt which has helped to create the wetland along with the poaching by cattle and probable damage to the banks by large wildfowl such as the Canada Goose. It is illogical to advocate adding reeds to the brook corridor while removing them from the pond, especially as the pond is fed by the brook.

Given the hoops that Maidenhead Waterways have to go through to remove any silt from the White Brook it is not sensible to make their work harder, work that aims to maintain flow to Maidenhead town centre.

### **3. GAPS IN THE REPORTS** relating to the impact of the non-native species, the Canada Goose, on the aquatic environment, and the absence of any evaluation of the presence of the American Mink, a predator on young birds.

#### **Canada Goose**

The wintering bird report (p4) notes that within the context of the site, the central brook corridor and associated wetland areas in the south-east of the site are likely of greatest value and ecological sensitivity. The woodland and marginal areas also provide conditions for a variety of species, with the open grasslands being typically of lower importance at present, but still of value to introduced and naturalised geese plus low numbers of other species.

I am surprised that there is no discussion in the report of the known environmental impact of the Canada Goose on both grassland and wetland. Data presented in the report shows that the open grassland of the East Field is dominated by the introduced and naturalised Canada Goose (285 counted on one occasion) plus in lower numbers the Greylag Goose (81) also an introduced species. Not surprisingly there are low numbers of other birds.

The Canada Goose on Battlemead was to be discussed at the postponed meeting of the Biodiversity sub group of FOBC. It had previously been raised at the White Brook on Battlemead sub group. This is because, as has been pointed out in the English Heritage report on the Canada Goose.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> English Heritage (2014) *Landscape Advice Note: Canada Geese* 5p.

*"Damage by the Canada Goose to grassland due to trampling and droppings is fairly well known. Possibly less well known is their effect on water bodies. The advice notes these as vegetation damage (affecting dissolved oxygen levels), droppings (increasing nutrient levels and affecting water quality) and physical damage (erosion of banks).*



*Canada Geese on the Causeway wetland in April 2020*

The new wetland next to the causeway was created by erosion of the banks of the White Brook. The cause was poaching by cattle. However, if the English Heritage report is to be believed then the large numbers of Canada Goose on the site also contributed.

Last summer the wetland on Battlemead Common developed a bloom of filamentous algae (blanket weed) that eventually died off leaving in September a white deposit on the wetland (below); evidently the consultancy Austin Foot was not aware of this happening as it is not mentioned in either report.



*The white deposit on the wetland in September 2019*

At a biodiversity sub-group meeting in 2019 it was suggested that the bloom was due to the presence in the soil of agricultural fertiliser. If another bloom occurs in 2020 it will be more likely due to droppings, mostly from the Canada Goose – droppings that put high levels of nutrients in the water. Eutrophication due to increased nutrients can impact on the aquatic fauna.

If as seems likely a further bloom of blanket weed occurs in the wetland this summer then the wetland will, in the autumn as last year, have a dry white deposit of salts on it which reduces the productivity of the land. It is unlikely that deepening the wetland will prevent such blooms

We agree with the report that the central brook corridor and associated wetland areas in the south-east of the site are likely of greatest value and ecological sensitivity. An ongoing survey of the aquatic fauna begun in January 2020 shows that the brook is home to a variety of adult species and is also a nursery ground. It is unfortunate therefore that no evaluation of the impact of the large numbers of Canada Geese was given by the consultants, probably because they were not aware of the blanket weed bloom in the causeway wetland in 2019.

#### **The American Mink**

No reference is made to the presence of the introduced American mink, although in the 2019 report mink paw prints were noted on silt banks on the brook during the survey visit.<sup>5</sup> Similarly the report does not record any evidence of otters on the site. Does this mean that no paw prints were seen, which is somewhat surprising?

The **EMMP March 2020** report (p21) gives as an adverse impact predation by pet dogs visiting the site. However dogs will be passing through with their owners whereas mink and otters are potentially present all the time. Mink and even otters are thought to prey on cygnets and other young birds, water voles and also fish, it would have been helpful to have an idea of their presence on Battlemead.

## **4. OTHER COMMENTS**

#### **Woodland**

We accept the recommendations relating to woodland especially the aim of protecting and maintaining open grown trees particularly in the meadow in the western sector of the site and to providing additional tree planting to maximise biodiversity value and the continuity and restoration of the historical field pattern. However, there seems to have been no comment on trees in woodland parcel BW2, on the west bank of the White Brook. The roots of many of these trees are eroded and they may fall at any time; some have already done so. Willows, especially, root once in water and obstruct the flow in the brook.

Given the large numbers of badgers on the site we suggest the trees be managed to avoid locating standing dead wood/tree stumps/hibernacula near to the brook. Recently badgers targeted the stump of a pollarded tree close to North Town Moor pond in search of stag beetles and their larvae. The resultant woody debris in the pond decayed into a black, probably anoxic, silt and caused a drop in faunal diversity.

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<sup>5</sup> Battlemead Common, Maidenhead Berkshire Ecological Appraisal June 2019 by Austin Foot p29.

## Dogs

There are varying ideas on how to control any impact of dogs on wildlife. We are also aware that there is pressure to allow more access for dog walkers.

The **Battlemead Wintering Bird Survey 2020** (p22) says:

Consideration could be given to prohibiting dogs off the lead, or zoning of the site to allow dogs off the lead in some areas (e.g. parts of the grassland in the west of the site) whilst promoting dogs being on the lead in others. This could also help in managing access for different users of the site; e.g. bird watchers or parents with young children who may prefer some dog-free areas.

The **Battlemead EMMP March 2020** report (p16) says:

The Local Authority are currently considering the use of a dog control order for part or all of the site. Currently there is likely to be a dog control order from the bridge between BW2 and BW4 all the way along the fenced path to the Thames in the east. This will ensure that dogs are kept on leads along this stretch of the site in order to reduce the potential impact on wildlife species, such as disturbance to nesting or wintering birds. This may be extended the entire west field but this is still under consultation and will be discussed with the friends of Battlemead group.

The **Battlemead Way Forward** document (p 4) says:

1. The Friends agree that control of dogs on the site is needed, given the impact that they can have on flora and fauna. It is suggested that a 'dogs on lead' policy should be adopted for the West Field and for the Northern Perimeter Path. Consideration needs to be given to the policy in the North Field depending on decisions about the future of the field and its neighbouring pond(s). Dogs should not be allowed on the East Field nor on the proposed Willow Wood boardwalk and bridge.

Allowing dogs off the lead in the West Field as recommended in the wintering bird report seems more sensible than the implication that dog control orders cover the whole site as in the EMMP report 2020. In practice some walkers already allow their dogs off the lead in the West Field. If they were able to do this legally they should be more likely to abide by the dogs on lead or no dogs policy elsewhere in the site.

With regard to dogs the **Battlemead Way Forward** document also says:

People walking multiple dogs (whether professional dog walkers or groups of dog owners bringing a significant number of dogs) need to be discouraged; research into how this is handled elsewhere should be helpful.

The **Battlemead Wintering Bird Survey March 2020** (p21) gives as an adverse impact predation by pet dogs visiting the site. However, dogs will be passing through with their owners whereas mink and otters are potentially present all the time.

A final comment: it seems likely that the large numbers of Canada Geese, and to a much lesser extent Greylag Geese, both introduced species, are doing more damage to the grassland and aquatic environment of Battlemead than people and their dogs.

## CONCLUSION

The EMMP March 2020 report concludes that:

**"This management plan has been provided in support of a planning application for the change of use of an area of land known as Battlemead Common which is to be opened up to the public. Providing the measures detailed in this document are adhered to the ecological value of the site as a whole will be maintained and enhanced in line with national and local planning policy."**

We understand from RBWM officials that the planning application referred to relates to change of use of an area of land to allow the creation of a car park and does **not** refer to the whole of Battlemead Common.

Because of gaps in the survey, we are unable to comment on whether the ecological value of the site as a whole will be maintained or enhanced. It is evident that the reports are dominated by surveys of the bird life on Battlemead. Little or no attention has been paid to the aquatic environment beyond admitting that the central brook corridor and associated wetland areas in the south-east of the site are likely to be of greatest value and ecological sensitivity,<sup>6</sup> and in June attempting to find out if the Great Crested Newt is present.

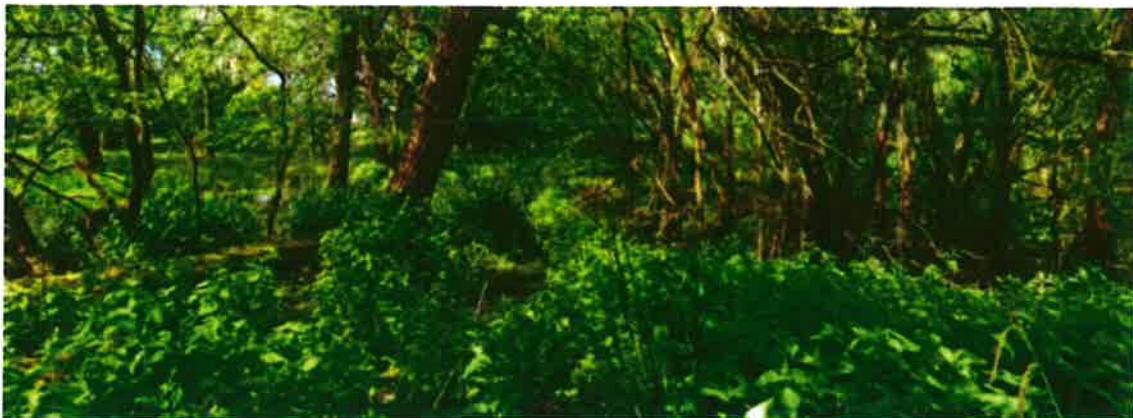
There must be more public access, not least because it was purchased as public open space and to provide the missing link in the Millennium Walk. It would be a pity if, after fifty years of trying, the only route from Widbrook Common to the Thames Path is via the current northern perimeter path. Currently, by preventing access to the causeway path on the East Field and through the willow fields, the two most attractive routes are closed off.



*The causeway path across the East Field May 2020*

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<sup>6</sup> In June Austin Foot will sample the brook for eDNA to see if the Great Crested Newt is present. Maidenhead Civic Society has been sampling sites in the White Brook since January 2020. The only amphibian recorded so far was sampled at the beginning of May when tadpoles of either frog or toad were found. These had no external gills so were not newt larvae.



*The path through the willow field May 2020*

The Civic Society supports the Battlemead Way Forward document that advocates restoring the path through the willow fields to provide another route to the Thames Path when the causeway path needs to be temporarily closed for a few months around the beginning of winter. **This will allow a circular route to be present on Battlemead throughout the year.**

The report *Battlemead Common Historic Landscape Analysis*, commissioned by the Royal Borough in 2019, notes the presence of heritage assets, including the 1934 Boundary Stones (BS) on Battlemead and the Boundary Marker that separated the land of William Waldorf Astor of Cliveden from that of Edward Wagg of Islet Park. The willow field route will also facilitate viewing of BS no26 and the Boundary Marker.

We note that information boards about birds have been recommended.<sup>7</sup> We hope that similar boards and history trails will feature its historic past. Battlemead Common is well named: the *Historic Landscape Analysis* report gives details of its past as common land and describes a history that tracks changes in land ownership that closely reflect changes in the way this country has been governed.

**Battlemead is both an ecological and a heritage asset and we would like to see it used as much as possible in the way that was intended. However, the planning application for the change of use of an area of Battlemead Common for a car park is supported by a management plan which, as outlined above, is flawed. If it is submitted unchanged the Civic Society will object.**

Ann Darracott  
Maidenhead Civic Society  
May 2020

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<sup>7</sup> Wintering Bird Survey March 2020 p23.

## **Battlemead Common - The Cookham Society Perspective**

The present RBWM management documents related to this site are the Masterplan 2020 drawing and the Austin Foot Ecology Management Plan. We understand that the Ecology Management Plan is a draft and may be amended.

The Ecology Management Plan is an extensive document and we support its aims of preserving and enhancing the natural habitat of the area. It provides a vital study from which to develop the management of the whole area for the benefit of residents and visitors whilst protecting and improving the critical areas of habitat for wildlife.

### **Future Management**

With regard to the future management of the site we identify four key objectives:-

1. Public access to as much as of the site as possible whilst protecting the most important areas of habitat from disturbance by people or dogs.
2. Maximising the public enjoyment of the towpath alongside Battlemead Common by establishing a circular walk using the existing northern path and creating a southern link from the West Field to the towpath.
3. Completing the missing link for the Millennium Walk so that it is available throughout the year for walkers (with dogs).
4. Ensuring that flood water that exceeds the in-channel capacity of the White Brook has an unobstructed route across the lowest part of the site to the Thames.

### **Public Access**

We accept the general principle in the Austin Foot report of keeping the public (and dogs) out of the high value woodland and wetland areas, but we can not accept the suggestion that the public should be permanently excluded from the whole of the East Field as most of this field is just rough grazing. Excluding the public from the whole of East Field as well as the other woodland areas would mean public access to significantly less than half of an area which has been purchased as Public Open Space. This restriction would be unacceptable. We believe that the East Field should be divided by additional fencing roughly as sketched on the attached copy of the Masterplan. The public should then have unrestricted access to the north east of this fence.

### **Southern Access route to Towpath**

For the southern access to the towpath, a board walk through the willow plantation was suggested in the Way Forward document.. In our view a better (and probably cheaper) route would be as sketched on the attached copy of Fig. 2b of the Austin Foot plan. This would run from the south east corner of West Field through the narrow neck of woodland and south and east across the grassland (SNG2) down to where the

White Brook crosses the southern boundary of the site. A new footbridge would be provided at this point and the path completed close to the southern boundary of the site in the willow wood. With a relatively small amount of additional fencing this route could be separated from the rest of the woodland areas. At the White Brook bridge the route would have to cross a very narrow piece of land not owned by RBWM. Ideally the owner would give permission for the path but if not could the Borough not use compulsory purchase powers to establish the route?

### **Causeway bridge and central wildlife area.**

With the southern access in place and a large part of the East Field open to the public as outlined above we would not object to the causeway bridge being closed permanently to the public. This would create a central wildlife reserve including the most important habitat areas. The public could walk round but not enter this area. Suitable hides or viewing platforms could be provided at a later date.

### **Flooding**

It is very important for Cookham to keep the A4094 over Widbrook Common open as long as possible during a flood as this is the last access road to the village to become inundated and closed. It is particularly relevant in the minor (but much more frequent) type of flood events.

When the flow of flood water exceeds the capacity of the White Brook channel, additional flow runs across the North and East fields. Because of the very flat gradient in this area even vegetation can constitute a significant impediment to flow. In any adopted management plan for Battlemead, we would like to see a designated route free of above ground obstructions (including vegetation) for this flow to take place all the way into the Thames. Hopefully, advice on the detail of this can be obtained from a flood specialist at EA. As a preliminary guide, we believe that a strip between 10 and 20 meters wide should be adequate and a route close to the proposed additional fencing in East Field would be suitable. Some minor earthworks might be required at the Thames end of this channel in order to optimise its performance. The management plan should include the routine inspection and maintenance of this route.

### **Dogs**

It appears that dogs are a particularly contentious issue. Many residents own dogs and there is no doubt that Battlemead will be an attractive area for residents to exercise them. Many dogs need to run free in order to get sufficient exercise and some residents will probably allow them to do this whatever regulations are put in place. In our view it is better to have one designated area where dogs are kept on leads and other walkers (particularly children) can not be frightened by free running dogs. A second area should then be identified where off lead exercise is permitted. The towpath is not owned by RBWM over most of this length. RBWM therefore do not have

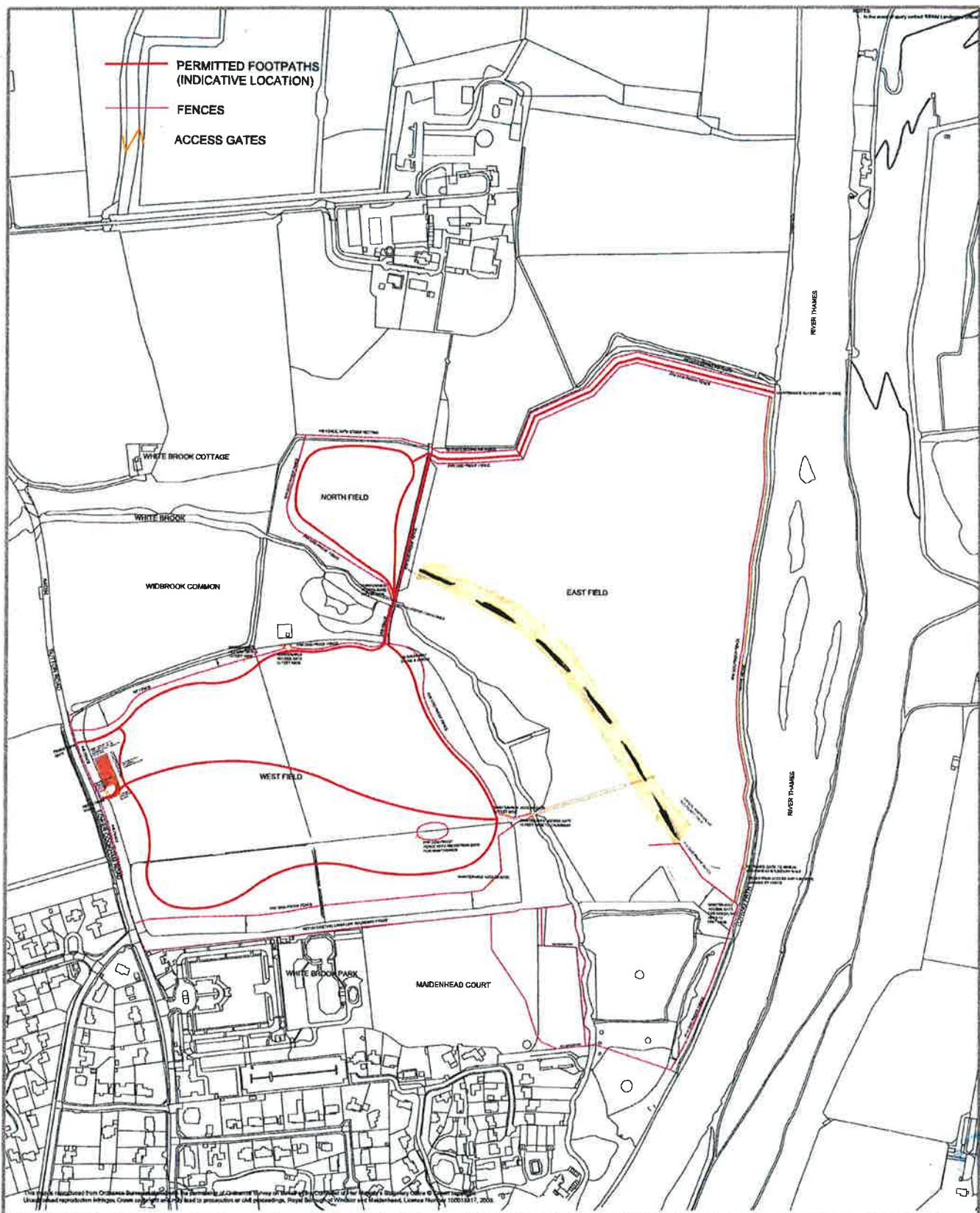
any control over dogs on it. As the East Field abuts the towpath, we would suggest that on the adjoining opened up area of East Field dogs should be “under full control of the owner” whilst on West Field dogs should be kept on a lead.

### **Timing of Improvements**

There has already been significant expenditure on measures to protect wildlife on the site. We suggest that it would be extremely inappropriate for money to be spent on any habitat improvement for wildlife before proper reasonable access for residents (as detailed above) has been provided.

The Cookham Society

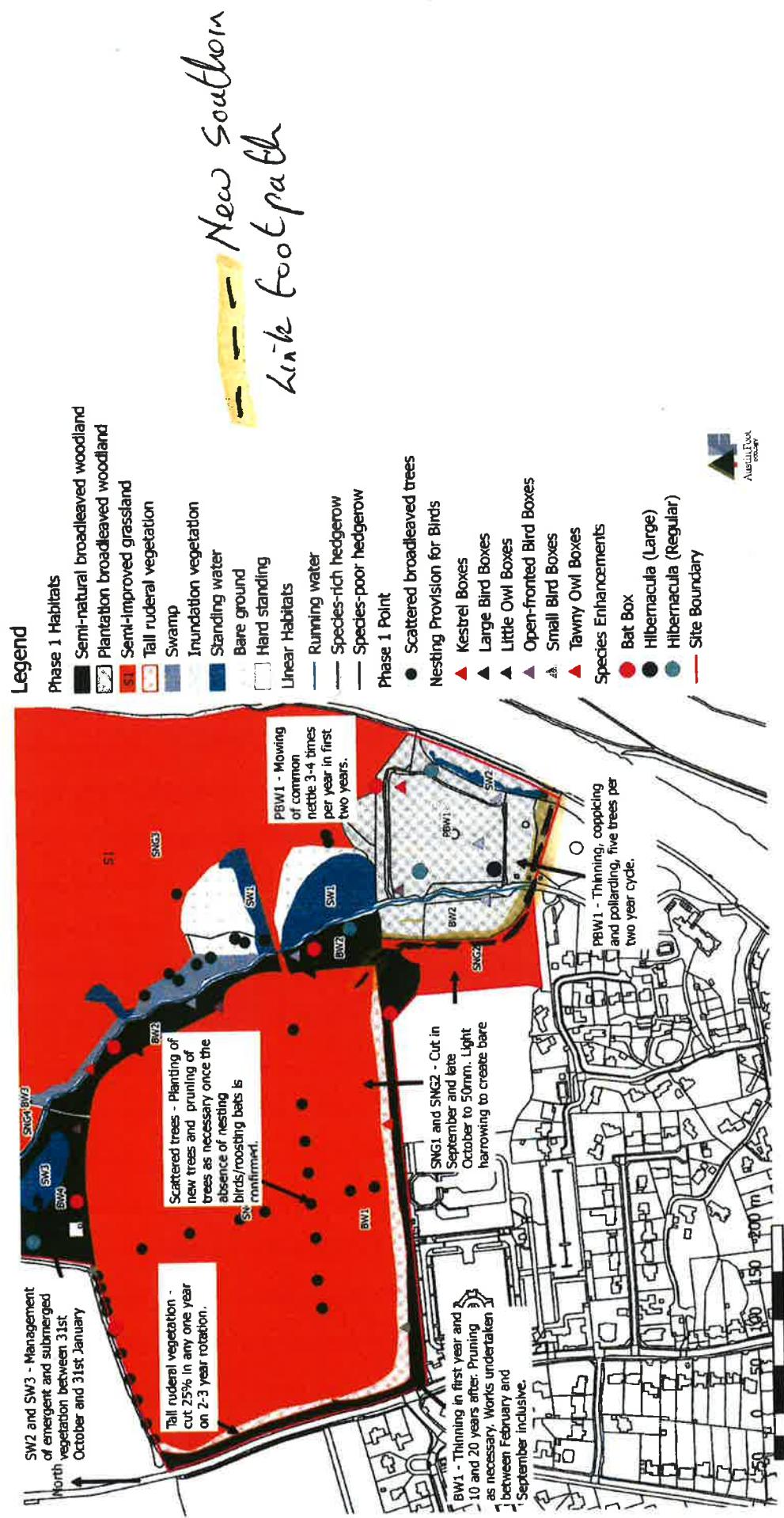
May 2020



The Royal Borough  Windsor & Maidenhead	The Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead  Town Hall St. Ives Road Maidenhead Berkshire SL6 1RF Tel: 01628 796482 Fax: 01628 796738	Project <b>BATTLEMEAD COMMON</b>  Title <b>MASTERPLAN JAN 2020</b>	Date <b>05.06.2019</b>	Scale <b>1:2000 @ A1</b>
		C    Removed diagonal paths B    Replaced bunds with bollards A    Amended as per feedback from FoB Rev Amendments	Drawn <b>AC</b>	CAD <b>AC</b>
			Checked <b>AH</b>	
		Drg No. <b>201810-L-05</b>	Rev. <b>C</b>	Base Ref. <b>Y:\ARCVIEW\LEISURE\LANDSCAPE_Maidenhead\Baths Need Cookham</b>

Proposed additional fencing in East Field — —

*Figure 2b. Management Prescriptions and Enhancements (2 of 2)*



## Anthony Hurst

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**To:** Anthony Hurst  
**Subject:** FW: Battlemead Common Ecological Management Plan

**From:** Jane Perry <janeperry480@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** 25 May 2020 12:56  
**To:** Anthony Hurst <Anthony.Hurst@RBWM.gov.uk>  
**Subject:** Battlemead Common Ecological Management Plan

Dear Anthony,

As you are aware I am one of the representatives of Cookham Parish Council on the Friends of Battlemead. Unsurprisingly we largely agree with the Cookham Society's views on this document.

### East Field Management, SNG3

The issue of flooding of/ across the A4094 Lower Cookham Road/Sutton Road is of particular concern to residents in Cookham, as I have mentioned before at meetings. The A4094 is the last of the roads into Cookham to flood, when this happens Cookham is cut off to all but a few high vehicles and a few 4x4s. Therefore the proposals to allow most of the East Field to grow long grass and for the North Field not to be cut for 5 years are very worrisome. This will impede the flow of water back to the River Thames making flooding of Cookham much more likely. In the floods in 2014 Cookham was cut off for a considerable amount of time with the resulting damage by flood water to homes and businesses and loss of income to many of those businesses. Widbrook common and those fields were underwater for a considerable time.

It would be disappointing if Battlemead which was bought by RBWM as Public Open Space were to have large areas permanently fenced off including all the woodland and the East Field. It would be a pity if there were no public access to the woodlands as children enjoy exploring woodland. I understand the wish to protect wildlife but reasonable access should be possible.

I note the East Field will be open for only 2 days a year to enable residents to walk the Boundary and the Millennium Walks in April and October. What is the reasoning for this? Cllr Simon Dudley said at the time of this purchase of the 112 acres of White Place Farm completed the missing link in the Millennium Walk but it seems for only 2 days a year. I am sure residents of the Royal Borough would like to have the opportunity to do this walk more often. Many people walk the sections of this walk that are accessible and would like to complete it.

### SNG3 The East Field

The East Field has been used for cattle grazing May - October for many years and by geese and other overwintering birds the rest of the year. The field was therefore close cropped and acquired the flora and fauna associated with such fields. I am concerned about the proposal to allow the grass and other vegetation to grow long until late summer when only a third of it will be mown to a height of 50-100mm in August. This will adversely affect the existing flora and fauna of the field allowing thistles, gorse and other plants which will change the natural ecology of the field. To protect the existing flora and fauna the field need to be mown regularly or grazed during the summer months thus giving continuity.

### SNG4 The North Field

This field was also grazed by cattle or horses if nothing is done to this field for 5 years apart from the cutting the margins for paths around the perimeter it will be overrun with gorse and other ruderal vegetation and become impenetrable! It is already becoming overgrown with thistles etc. You only have to look at what happened to land

at Winter Hill overlooking the Thames that the National Trust decided not to manage and are now having to put a lot of effort and are asking for volunteers to assist with clearing gorse and other vegetation!

It will also mean the likelihood of flooding along the A4094 and thus Cookham will be greater especially if the hedges are going to be encouraged to be denser with an 'A' shape thus impeding water flow back to the river.

In conclusion I think RBWM needs to decide whether Battlemead Common is a Nature Reserve with limited public access or a Public Open Space? Many people are enjoying this area but dog owners wonder why dogs must be kept on leads when the vulnerable areas are fenced off. I know the name cannot be changed but that adds to the confusion because there are no such limitations on other commons in the borough.

Kind Regards,

Jane Perry

## Friends of Battlemead Common

### East Berks Ramblers response to Over Wintering Bird Survey and Ecological Management Plan.

#### 1. Context

1.1. Our response to the Over Wintering Bird Survey produced by Austin Foot and the Ecological Management Plan produced collaboratively by Austin Foot and RBWM is based on the following key considerations

- Battlemead Common was purchased by RBWM with the express intention to 'safeguard the open green space and improve access for residents and visitors. Ownership of the site ... will allow the Council to reopen a missing link in the Millennium Walk and ensure future generations and wildlife can continue to enjoy the area as an unspoilt outdoor space, with breath-taking views of Cliveden and the surrounding countryside'. (RBWM News Release published 20.12.2018)
- Battlemead Common is not a Nature Reserve or a public park. Its management and usage will need to strike a balance between the wildlife, access and water management issues.
- The *Way Forward* document produced by a number of individual members of the Friends of Battlemead Common and supported by Cllr Donna Stimson, Lead Member for, inter alia, Parks and Countryside, set out a balanced and proportionate approach to the forward management and development of the site.
- RBWM need to develop an integrated Management Plan for the site that takes proper account of the various interests and pressures involved.

1.2. Battlemead Common has been in Council ownership since December 2018. Since then RBWM has spent considerable sums of money on fencing and other works and external consultants and continues to do so. A new car park is planned at a cost of some tens of thousands of pounds. Yet in spite of this, and the parlous state of its finances, RBWM has still not produced a comprehensive plan for Battlemead's future management and usage that takes account of the balance that needs to be struck between various interests. The *Way Forward* document showed this can be done. The Royal Borough's disconnected approach to forward planning and lack of commitment to working through consensus do not serve Battlemead or the community well.

1.3. East Berks Ramblers main interest - and area of expertise – is in access issues. We do however understand that access is not all, and that a balanced approach is needed. Many of our members have a keen interest in and knowledge of wildlife and are very supportive of efforts to improve and enhance it in the Royal Borough. We therefore feel able to comment on a wide range of matters outside of the access issue.

1.4. The irony of RBWM purchasing Battlemead Common as public open space whilst at the same time being party to a Management Plan proposing (para 4.1.24) that over half of the site should only be open to the public for 2 days a year, and then only under draconian conditions, is not lost on us.

1.5. No supporting evidence is given for this view. The authors of/parties to the report seem to be under the misapprehension that the Boundary and Millennium Walks are only used on two days each year. The Boundary Walk is permanently waymarked and in conjunction with the Maidenhead

Civic Society we hope to waymark the Millennium Walk soon in recognition of its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Leaflets on both walks are produced and people encouraged to walk them at any time of the year

## **2. Comments and Questions on the Over Wintering Bird Survey**

2.1. We studied the report with interest, having already accepted that the hard evidence it delivered would be a key determinant of our position on access to the Causeway Path, the route of the Boundary and Millennium Walks. We did accept that some limited closure over the winter season was probable but did not wish to come to any firm views until we had the facts.

2.2. The report is comprehensive although there are some points on which clarification would be of interest. The survey was carried out between September and March and the overall conclusion is stated to be that “no individual species was present in numbers indicating national or regional significance”. No thresholds for Local Wildlife Sites were met, despite considerable speculation in the report about Water Rail, where a peak count of 1 was recorded.

2.3. We would like to understand a little more about the numbers in the report in order to get a clearer picture of bird levels. Although peak counts - the highest number of the species on the site on one day - are given, is this the highest number seen at one point in time, or total sightings throughout the day? Whilst the report contains some broad comments about bird numbers over the survey period, no details or averages are given: are there any notable trends during the winter period?

2.4. The Causeway Path is of particular interest to us. The ponds to either side of the western end of the path are where most ducks were observed. The numbers for ‘flighty’ species were Gadwall (peak count 8, in small groups and scattered pairs in early winter but not later); Wigeon (peak count 17, a small flock in early winter only) and Teal (peak count 81, ‘regular presence in varying numbers’ but no other data provided). The Breeding Bird Survey undertaken between April and June 2019 reported Teal present only during the early part of the survey but were not noted later, suggesting these were late wintering/passage birds. This would not appear to present a significant issue in winter, and certainly not beyond April. It is our firm view that any issues would be dealt with by closure of the path for some of the over-wintering season; banning of dogs whether on or off lead; and possibly fencing to both sides of the path. To our knowledge the present path closure has been respected and we see no reason at all why a temporary closure, albeit for some months, would not be in future. This approach would be in accord with the *Way Forward* document.

2.5. That document also proposed a year-round route through the Willow Fields. This would provide an alternative circular route for any times when the Causeway Path is closed. We support the development of such a route but for the avoidance of any doubt we see it as an addition to the Causeway Path, not an alternative.

2.6. We would remind the RBWM that Natural England has a programme to secure public access to all its National Nature Reserves (NNR) and similar holdings unless there are compelling reasons not to do so. We have previously pointed this out to you, together with their statement that in order to achieve this they will ‘... use the least restrictive protection for sensitive features on the site. Restrictions or exclusions can be put in place for specific times of the year...’ It is unclear to us why the RBWM will not pursue such a policy, especially when it has already been suggested to them.

2.7. Although the report refers to the access issues it is hard to escape the conclusion that it contains an inbuilt presumption that bird issues have primacy. We do not accept this, any more than we think

that access should have primacy. We think there should be a sensible balance, based on the available facts and on what is currently there at Battlemead not on speculation about what might be. We do not accept that any actions or activity on Battlemead that may on occasion disturb birds should automatically be ruled out. Mitigation of disturbance is possible in a number of ways and we have suggested some in para 2.4. above.

2.8. Section 5 of the report - Outline Impacts and Recommendations – unfortunately seems to have been written with scant regard for the balance needed to bring about a way ahead for Battlemead that all interested parties can sign up to. It focuses almost entirely on management of the site as a de facto nature reserve with the only reference to ‘the public’ being in the very last bullet point in para 5.3. Whilst the report recognises that visitor numbers cannot be predicted it speculates that use of the Causeway Path MAY cause disturbance and refers to the POSSIBLE abandonment of the site and the POSSIBLE reduction in numbers. None of these are givens, but the action we suggest above would most certainly mitigate any such risks to a point that we consider acceptable.

2.9. We agree that information boards and educational programmes are an excellent idea, and indeed some are already in place. But they will mean little if all the public can do is peer over the fence into a very large proportion of the public open space they have paid for.

### **3. Environmental Management Plan**

3.1. The disclaimer on the front page of this report seem at odds with the comment in Anthony Hurst’s email that this report was ‘written in collaboration with RBWM officers’. There is also a reference in the report (para 1.3.1) to the ‘Ecological Mitigation and Measures that WILL be delivered’. This implies that the decisions, including the closure of the East Field, have already been taken and consequently that any comments will have no impact. Would RBWM please clarify whether this report and its contents as they stand have the support of the Council or not? And how any comments will be dealt with.

3.2. We have few comments on the details of this plan as it largely lies outside our expertise. However, we require an assurance that none of the proposals contained in it would affect the pathways already in place, including the cross field path on the West Field. Our comments on the Causeway Path have already been made elsewhere. We can see no evidence in the Summer Breeding Bird survey previously undertaken by Austin Foot to justify refusing access to the East Field.

3.3. There are a number of references in the plan to fauna, for example Great Crested Newts, that ‘are considered to have the potential’ to be present on the site. We will not accept a situation whereby access, either now or in the future, will be limited by such speculation. We would like an assurance that the future management of Battlemead will not in any way be determined by speculation of this nature: it should be determined by hard evidence.

### **4. Key Questions**

4.1. What is the thinking behind the Royal Borough’s decision to reduce access to the East Field so drastically and what evidence has it used in coming to it?

4.2. RBWM has stated that it is ‘inviting comments’ on the Ecological Management Plan although the Plan itself contains numerous references to measures that ‘will’ be used. Does this mean the plan as it stands is already agreed and is Council policy? If not, what is its status?

4.3. We had understood that the Friends of Battlemead Common was a consultative group that would have input into decisions about Battlemead. Can RBWM explain how this squares with the unilateral publication of the Environmental Management Plan with no prior discussion or attempt to seek consensus?

4.4. What status will comments on these reports have and how will they be dealt with?

4.5. What is the RBWM's response to the assurances sought in Section 3 above and the further information requested on the Wintering Bird Survey?

4.6. What is RBWM's position with regard to the proposals in the *Way Forward* report?

## **5. Conclusion**

For RBWM to spend significant amounts of public money on some 110 acres of open space and then propose to ban people from over half of it for all but 2 days a year is risible. We accept and support the need for a balanced management approach. We see no reason why the Causeway Path should not be open for a considerable period of the year to enable people to enjoy the wildlife there; to appreciate the fine views of Cliveden; and to have a direct link to the Thames Path. After all, this is what RBWM originally said were the reasons for the purchase. We hope you will reconsider.

(5)

## Anthony Hurst

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**From:** Anthony Hurst  
**Sent:** 26 May 2020 07:33  
**To:** Anthony Hurst  
**Subject:** FW: Battlemead Reports

**From:** Cllr G Jones <Cllr.G.Jones@RBWM.gov.uk>  
**Sent:** 12 May 2020 12:53  
**To:** Anthony Hurst <Anthony.Hurst@RBWM.gov.uk>  
**Cc:** Cllr Stimson <Cllr.Stimson@RBWM.gov.uk>  
**Subject:** Battlemead Reports

Dear Anthony,

Thank you for the reports and I trust you are keeping well.

The reports have not changed my mind but have strengthened my resolve about dogs on the "public open space" which is Battlemead. This is a public asset, bought with Council Tax money and should have full access given to the public. If large parts are to be closed off to the public we may as well sell it to the RSPB (or Wild Maidenhead/Cookham) and spend our taxpayers money elsewhere.

The birds reported are in the huge majority "common or widespread" and remember we are surrounded by thousands of acres of private green land and a National Trust Nature Reserve directly across the river.

In my view Battlemead should allow dogs in all areas. Some more sensitive areas may require dogs to be kept on a lead but other less sensitive areas should allow off-lead exercise.

I would perhaps agree that the East Field could be closed over the nesting season (3 months maximum) but the payoff would be a circular walk for dogs on leads through the East Field back to the tow path near the wood (where the current five bar gate) is for the rest of the year.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Greg Jones - Riverside Ward

07831 444408

Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead

Town Hall

St Ives Road

Maidenhead

SL6 1RF

## Anthony Hurst

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**From:** Anthony Hurst  
**Sent:** 26 May 2020 07:51  
**To:** Anthony Hurst  
**Subject:** FW: Friends of Battlemead Common - Maidenhead Waterways comments

**From:** irose262@aol.com <irose262@aol.com>  
**Sent:** 22 May 2020 22:57  
**To:** Anthony Hurst <Anthony.Hurst@RBWM.gov.uk>  
**Cc:** ijcaird@outlook.com  
**Subject:** Re: Friends of Battlemead Common - Maidenhead Waterways comments

Dear Anthony,

Hope you are well, and thanks for sending the two Austin Foot documents which Ian Caird and I have looked at.

In our understanding the Wintering Bird report aims to provide information, the actual management being in the "prescription" part of the Ecological Management Plan.

The Ecological Management Plan prescriptions are in 4.1.3 to 4.1.6, 4.1.8 to 4.1.10, 4.1.12 to 4.1.15, 4.1.17 to 4.1.19 (Standing water and Wetland habitats), 4.1.21 to 4.1.25 and 4.1.27 to 4.1.31.

From Maidenhead Waterways viewpoint I read especially **4.1.17 to 4.1.19**, which are about standing water (ponds and scrapes) with little about flowing water (the White Brook). In 4.1.10 under Plantation Broadleaved Woodland there's also a section about strimming nettles on the East bank of White Brook, which would be fine for us.

The aim in 4.1.16 states "To ensure that standing water remains on site year-round with waterbodies to be managed to prevent annual drying and future succession to scrub". From our observation, the amount of standing water is closely related to the Thames river level, whose management is by the EA, and so outside RBWM's control. This is just a comment for information, as the prescription itself doesn't cover it. We're OK with the wording in the prescription.

We believe that the White Brook maintenance plan should be developed from the Friends of Battlemead Way Forward document, and also taking into account the SEW/Jacobs study of which the White Brook is a key part.

The reason for this approach is that the Austin Foot report, good though it is, doesn't consider the whole downstream system and Local Wildlife site, nor the effect of Thames level, the hydraulics, and how it affects the wetland areas. All these, along with maintaining biodiversity and habitat, need to be taken into account to decide how to manage the White Brook.

I hope these inputs help, please feel free to contact me if it isn't clear or if discussion would be useful.

Best regards

Ian Rose  
Maidenhead Waterways  
01628 637908



7

## Comments on Ecological Management Plan and Wintering Bird Survey for circulation to Friends of Battlemead from Wild Maidenhead

Wild Maidenhead is grateful for the opportunity to comment on these documents commissioned by RBWM.

### Documents

**WBS** Wintering Bird Survey by Austin Foot, March 2020

(0286.03 Battlemead Wintering Bird Report 30.03.20easf.pdf)

**EMP** Battlemead Ecological Management Plan, by Austin Foot, March 2020

(Battlemead Common-Ecological Management Plan.docx)

### The balance between biodiversity and public access

The Friends of Battlemead are working together to find ways to manage the often competing needs of biodiversity and access as well as waterways, flood resilience and other uses. We are pleased that the Wintering Bird Survey (WBS) sets out the causes of harm to wintering birds on this site from public access. By understanding them FoB can make better decisions. WBS 5.2.1 states "The used of the site as public open space may lead to a variety of adverse impacts on wintering birds such as:

- Increased disturbance of birds via increased number of visitors (particularly those with dogs).
- Increased predation risk of birds from pet dogs visiting the site.
- Loss or change in quality/amount of suitable foraging or roosting/loafing habitat through changes in management or increased human activity."

It is not correct to say in the WBS (para 5.2.3) that 'promotion of the site as a public open space including the creation of a car park' was the 'primary aim of the project'. It may have been the initial inspiration of the Council, but subsequent observations of the site, lead to a Terms of Reference that also give emphasis to biodiversity.

### **Recommendations**

- 1. RBWM officers and FoB acknowledge the potential adverse impacts on wintering birds and use them in future decision-making**
- 2. RBWM officers and FoB note that the WBS statement of the primary aim is incorrect and reaffirm their support for the FoB Terms of Reference**

### Compliance - national law, local law and Council policy

Any site in Windsor and Maidenhead is subject to local and national planning and wildlife law, including those owned by RBWM. National compliance is required with several acts of parliament concerning wildlife and the National Planning Policy Framework, and locally we have the RBWM Local Plan.

Taking action to protect wildlife and enhance habitats for biodiversity is not only a matter of good judgement for the benefit of residents health and well-being, we would say, but also of compliance with the law.

For example, all wild birds in the UK are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). This legislation protects the birds and their young from killing and injury, and prohibits damage or destruction of their active nests and eggs.

The EMP we are considering here is linked to the planning application for change of use of Battlemead and a car park (19/03103). The Borough ecologist requires a condition on the planning application that an EMP must be approved and implemented. This is because without the EMP, the proposals in the planning application will not comply with the NPPF and the RBWM Local Plan (Submission Version) policies NR3 and SP4.

The EMP has been carefully formulated to try to ensure biodiversity net gain on the site in compliance with the NPPF and RBWM Local Plan (Submission Version) and Wild Maidenhead broadly supports its contents. We make a few recommendations, and note that the EMP process allows for review and amendment as new species are found.

In June 2019, the Council declared an Environment and Climate Emergency, adding the importance and urgency of responding the climate change emergency and the ecological crisis to its policies. Battlemead is by definition governed by this new policy, and failing to adopt ecological management for biodiversity net gain and carbon sequestration would be contrary it.

#### **Recommendations**

##### **3. FoB urge the Council to support adoption and implementation of the EMP**

#### Wintering Bird Survey

Wild Maidenhead surveyors have previously heard Water Rail at the site, and although few were found on the these particular occasions, this is a suitable habitat for them, and improvements such as enhanced reed beds could encourage greater numbers, which would be a strong addition to Battlemead's 'list'.

We agree that this is a habitat suitable for Skylarks and we should aspire to them breeding here as part of the local recovery of nature. Preserving the North Field for wildflowers could add valuable additional habitat for several insect, bird and other species.

The bird survey data is of regional importance and should be shared. This could be achieved by sending the bird counts to the County Recorder.

#### **Recommendations**

- 4. In addition to the WBS recommendations consideration should be given for preserving the North Field for wildflowers**
- 5. The bird count charts should be copied to the County Bird Recorder for the 2019 Bird Report**

#### Ecological Management Plan

We are surprised that there is relatively little to say on the tree-scape and very mature trees. We observe that the site's mature trees are gradually falling down, and there are already many on the

ground. We estimate that the line of trees on the Hitachi side must be near 50% leaning or fallen. Several of the centre Oaks are in poor condition. The large Willows near the NW pond and mast may need a safety inspection. The northern tree-lined edge of the whole has lost very significant trees in recent winters. This creates opportunities for replanting that the tree officer would be able to help advise on.

We feel more biodiversity net gain of bird species, in particular, could be achieved if higher and wider hedgerows were accommodated in suitable locations on the site. Different species need different heights and widths of hedgerows (eg R E Green, P E Osborne & E J Sears 1994)

Botanical survey work should continue so that species that have not emerged on the site in the particular weather and conditions of 2019 can be identified and protected.

We note that the site has some of the markers for Local Nature Reserve status" Habitats and Species of special importance, a mosaic of at least seven habitat types, public access and potential for educational use.

The nettle species in the west Field is not the usual perennial nettle but Annual Nettle which, to our knowledge is poorly represented in the Borough. Therefore less frequent mowing should be applied

#### **Recommendations**

- 6. We suggest that the RBWM Tree Officer is asked to recommend a planting plan for the site to compensate for fallen and falling trees.**
- 7. Hedgerow maintenance should be revised to accommodate a greater variety of heights and widths to meet the needs of a different bird species.**
- 8. Botanical surveys should continue on the site.**
- 9. The potential for Local Nature Reserve status should be kept under review**
- 10. Reduce the proposed mowing frequency in the West Field to protect the Annual Nettle.**

(8)

## Battlemead

### WildCookham response to Austin Foot Winter Bird Survey and Ecological Management Plan

#### Objectives and context

Thank you for circulating the Austin Foot Winter Bird Survey and the Ecological Management Plan. As a general comment WildCookham considers that the two documents, and more specifically the Ecological Management Plan, provide a good basis for the future enhancement of Battlemead's natural capital and its biodiversity. Both were commissioned by the Council to provide a professional, science-based assessment of Battlemead, and to offer prescriptions built on this assessment. We were surprised to read in the Wintering Bird Survey (para 5.2.3) that 'promotion of the site as a public open space including the creation of a car park' was the 'primary aim of the project': this may be a question of interpretation but it suggests a more open access policy than is in the agreed Terms of Reference for the Friends group and might suggest a bias in the commissioning that was misplaced.

Despite this, we believe that the EMP achieves a sensible balance between the varying views and objectives of the Friends of Battlemead (FoB) group. None of us will achieve everything we seek but, after more than a year of discussion, we now need to move forward: and to do that on the basis of professional advice. Indeed, given the perceived primary aim of the commissioned study and reports noted above, the consultants' findings and conclusions pointing towards the need to protect and enhance the environment at Battlemead gain added weight.

We also note that the Council (subsequent to acquiring Battlemead) has declared an Environment and Climate Emergency. The original stated purpose for the acquisition (mainly as a public amenity) has been overtaken by events and, whilst public access must remain a key element in any plans for Battlemead, the focus must now be onto the role of Battlemead in enabling the Council to meet its net biodiversity targets; failure to realise the biodiversity gain from Battlemead would be contrary to the Emergency. Battlemead also represents 'low-hanging fruit'. It is a piece of land that has not had public rights of access for many decades, arguably centuries, so limiting it now takes away no rights from local citizens. Managed in the right way it has the potential to make a very significant contribution to our biodiversity whilst adding to the local natural habitats accessible by the public.

#### Recommendations:

1. That the statement of objectives relating to the purpose of the Austin Foot projects is clarified
2. That the declaration of an Environment and Climate Emergency by the Council is noted and that future decisions concerning the management of Battlemead give precedence to policies and strategies developed to meet the natural capital challenges of the Emergency

### **Visitor numbers assumptions/car park plan**

Whilst not directly an issue for the EMP, the planned car park needs to be viewed alongside it. The Plan was commissioned in the context of the planned car park at Battlemead. This assumes spaces for 26 cars and eight bicycles. Unsurprisingly, the Plan does not attempt any discussion of the relative impact of different sizes of carpark: this is understandable since the scale of the planned car park was a given. But the original decision in favour of 26 spaces was, as far as we can determine, not based on any reasoned view of the size of park that would be appropriate, a point acknowledged in para 5.2.3 of the Winter Bird Survey Report. So there is a danger that any broad agreement with the findings of the Plan will imply agreement with the need for the car park. This is absolutely not the case.

This is not the place to discuss in detail the merits or not of the car park, other than to say that the EMP does not give a sound basis for agreeing to the car park as currently envisaged.

WildCookham, along with other Friends of Battlemead, is totally opposed to a car park of the size proposed. It is not justified by the size of the site and of the type of use envisaged; there is no evidence offered as to the basis for choosing this size of park; it brings with it the significant risk of abuse (professional dog walkers, evening ‘entertainment’ are just two potential problems); and it is our contention that, in proposing such a large car park facility, the Council is effectively saying that Battlemead is no more than a public park with some interesting ecology. In so doing it is in contention with its own Environment and Climate Emergency which places a duty on the Council to address urgently the massive challenges of climate change and the related environmental damage and habitat loss.

We state that the current plan for the car park must now be reviewed. If, for any reason, the current plan is accepted we urge the council to begin by providing a smaller parking area and to review its use for some time. This will, among other benefits, avoid further unnecessary expenditure at a time of severe financial difficulty.

The above comments concerning the car park also raise more general questions about the footfall data used by the consultants as the basis for their recommendations. The consultants state that ‘an exact number of anticipated public visitors....is not known’. So what assumptions were made in order to reach the various conclusions about the impact on biodiversity? Clearly a larger number is likely to have a greater impact: this is one of the issues underlying our concern about the car park, but it also creates uncertainty as we view the EMP proposals.

#### **Recommendations:**

- 1. That the Council clarifies the assumptions as to predicted visitor numbers to Battlemead which underlie the Ecological Management Plan (and, by inference, the carpark proposals)**
- 2. That the Council or its consultants clarifies how the assumptions of possible biodiversity loss were determined if there was no assumed visitor numbers target**
- 3. That the Council reviews its car park proposals, assuming that the data on which it was based is open to doubt and**
- 4. That as a minimum response any car park development should be on a phased basis allowing for extension up to an allowed maximum over time if the need is justified**

## **General comments on the Winter Bird Survey and Ecological Management Plan**

Our overall view is that the work done by Austin Foot in cooperation with the Council's officers provides a good basis for beginning the project to revive the natural capital of the Battlemead site. The steps proposed will allow a process of regeneration to begin and we welcome the statement in para 3.3.1 of the EMP that 'The site supports or is considered to support (now or in the future) a variety of species ....' (our emphasis). The progressive enhancement of the habitats is an important issue and underlines the need for decisions about the use of the land to be based on what it can be as much as what it is. This also means that actions and decisions about the management of the land, and access to it, deemed appropriate today may need reviewing and changing in the future.

As the project proceeds we envisage a continuing process of evaluation with every opportunity taken to build on experience in order to further enhance the site's potential, with the needs of natural restoration and biodiversity enhancement at all times being a prime driver of policy.

### **Recommendations:**

- 1. That the Council/FoB confirms that its policy for all aspects Battlemead should be based on the natural capital and biodiversity potential in the long term and not on the current status**
- 2. That, as indicated at various points in the documents under consideration, all parties are open to discussion about changes to policy and actions where merited to achieve this long-term potential.**

## **Winter Bird Survey**

Paragraph 4.4.3 examines whether Battlemead qualifies for LWS status. Whilst it may be the case that Battlemead does not currently meet the necessary criteria for LWS or other status, we suggest that the Survey , and the previous Summer 2019 survey, downplay the current status. We have current Battlemead records of seven of the UK Birds of Conservation Concern Red Listed species and 16 of the species on the Amber List. Surveys by members of WildCookham and Wild Maidenhead have also found evidence of plants not included in the 2019 Austin Foot study. By confirming that the site does not yet meet the requirements for elevated conservation status, the impression will be given that it is not of significance and that measures to prevent disturbance will be relaxed. Given the legal sanctions behind the protection of species we suggest that i) appropriate steps need to be in place to safeguard the threatened species we know to be there and ii) that ongoing studies, across all categories and in particular of the flora of the site, be carried out and that we should keep under review a future application for LWS or other conservation status.

Under para 5.3 we note an option to expand the reedbed habitat along the White Brook (though this is not taken up in the EMP). This will depend at least on Environment Agency views and is likely to concern those seeking a reasonable water flow along the brook. Whilst we would welcome any moves to create a richer set of habitats along the White Brook we would hope that an open-minded discussion between interested parties can achieve a sensible balanced outcome as suggested in the *Way Forward* document drafted by several Friends of Battlemead.

A general point, relating to the Survey Report and the EMP, is that grassland, hedgerow and reed bed management ideas were included, but rather less is said about the tree-scape. Beyond the trees in the ‘cross’ in the centre of the West Field, some of which are in poor condition, many of the very mature trees are gradually falling down, and there are already many on the ground. The line of trees on the Hitachi side of the West Field are leaning significantly or have fallen. The large Willows near the NW (SW3) pond and mast are in a very bad way with many large branches in need of removal before any pond work could be safely undertaken. The northern tree-lined edge of the whole has lost very significant trees in recent winters. There is little reference to this issue and no real emphasis on the need for a great deal of planting and infilling if we want the long-term nature and scenic value of the site to be retained.

**Recommendations:**

1. **That surveys of the site be continued, in particular of the flora, with a view to building a case for LWS or similar classification and, in the meantime, that appropriate measures are taken to protect the habitats and individual species there in line with the Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA) requirements**
2. **That the issues around the White Brook vegetation be discussed further with a view to addressing the concerns of the different FoB members and achieving a compromise as envisaged in the *Way Forward* document.**
3. **That further consideration be given to the tree-scape, and its maintenance and restoration, across all of Battlemead.**

## **Ecological Management Plan**

As stated above we welcome the overall thrust of the Plan. Specific comments are:

**4.1.12 and 4.1.21 et seq SNG1**

We welcome the move to create a buffer on either side of the two tree lines though we consider these areas of scrub can be increased to provide a denser more protected area for birds nesting, away from any intrusion. It is worth remembering that loss of breeding has already happened on this field, most likely due to the intrusions over the past year or so. Barn Owls nested in the field until 2018, did not breed last year and there is no sign of them breeding this year. Such evidence should continue to inform any decisions made about public access.

For the same reason we continue to query the value in the longer term of the path that cuts across the middle of the field. The circular path has proved itself to be the most popular route for walkers, with benches at two points along the route, both giving excellent views of Cliveden House: the central path adds little and we question its value for the future. At the very least we would like to see this path kept under review and that consideration is given to removing it once the central scrub area develops.

**Recommendations:**

- 1. That the Council/FoB acknowledge that some species are known to have been affected already by increased visitor numbers at Battlemead; that intentional or reckless disturbance of birds is illegal under the WCA; and that great care must be taken to protect against further damage**
- 2. That the size of the scrub area around the trees on the field be kept under review and consideration given to increasing it**
- 3. That the continued use of the path across the West Field from the car park and the causeway be reviewed and either removed now or its route be kept under review to ensure that it does not present any threat to wildlife and that it continues to serve a useful purpose**

#### **4.1.17 Waterbody SW3**

We welcome the proposal to desilt the pond and assume that this has/will have the blessing of the Environment Agency, recognising that the viability of the pond depends on available water flows and ground water. The pond may provide a valuable educational resource in due course: it will also be an excellent opportunity to engage the support of local volunteers, both in the initial work and in on-going maintenance.

#### **4.1.22 SNG2 (Willow wood)**

We understand that the suggestion of a path through this area, put forward in the *Way Forward* document, has been rejected on the grounds of cost and difficulty. Whilst there are obvious challenges with this suggestion (though Council funding was never assumed by those putting this idea forward to be the financial solution) we do suggest that it may still offer a long-term opportunity to create a circular walk around Battlemead. More ecological studies would certainly be needed, as well as other viability studies, but our contention is that, due to the nature of the habitat and the species dwelling there, it is possible that disruption caused by a public path might be minimal and managed.

#### **Recommendation:**

- 1. That the possibility of a path through the Willow Wood is given proper consideration as one approach to creating a circular path around Battlemead**

#### **4.1.23 et seq SNG3 (East Field)**

The proposed mowing regime is welcomed and it is hoped it will encourage a more mixed habitat bringing a wider range of species, and can reduce the preponderance of Greylag and Canada Geese. Given the biodiversity potential which we believe this field has (a view which appears to be endorsed by the EMP) and the risk this creates of illegal damage to wildlife, we also welcome the Plan's commitment to keeping the East Field closed to public access through the year, with the agreed exceptions of specific walks. We suggest that additional guided walks (wildlife/heritage) for small groups might also be considered. We note that the suggestions made in the *Way Forward* document are not reflected in the EMP: discussion of these might offer a means of meeting the wish for a circular path around Battlemead whilst protecting the habitat.

We also believe that this field has the potential to deliver greater biodiversity with a more imaginative plan, especially in the north part of the field. We hope that discussions with the Environment Agency can offer a way forward on this.

**Recommendations:**

- 1. That the Council/FoB consider the possibility of additional managed walks across the East Field**
- 2. That suggestions for a circular walk around Battlemead are considered by the Council/FoB**
- 3. That discussions with the Environment Agency and others be continued to consider habitat changes in the field to encourage greater biodiversity**

**4.1.25 et seq SNG4**

This relates to the North Field. We believe that a more imaginative approach could be taken to this field. It is perhaps too rich at present to support a significantly different regime but we believe that there is scope for this to be developed as a wildflower meadow (suggestions have been made that this could be a 'Coronation Meadow'). Access along the eastern edge of this field is part of the Northern Perimeter Path and, whilst we do not object to the current path round the edge of this field, alternative uses of the land might call for a different approach to the path that currently traverses the field: we query whether this path serves any useful purpose that outweighs the possibility of discouraging nesting birds in the centre of the field.

**Recommendations:**

- 1. That consideration be given to alternatives futures for the North Field**
- 2. That the footpath crossing the field be kept under review and removed if it is thought likely to impact breeding or foraging wildlife**

**4.1.28 et seq Native hedgerows**

We suggest that decisions about the ideal height of hedgerows be considered carefully. There is evidence related to the ideal height to support a range of bird species indicating that the higher the better and likewise for the width to be sufficient to encourage a good understory for breeding, foraging and movement along the natural corridors.

**Recommendation:**

- 1. That the Council considers further the management regime for these hedgerows**

**4.3 Dogs**

We welcome the EMP's intentions concerning dogs at Battlemead and the need for dogs to be on a lead at all times on the permitted access parts of Battlemead. Whilst not part of the Austin Foot remit, we remain concerned about the possible use of Battlemead by professional dog walkers, and others with multiple dogs, who we fear will be attracted by the free car park proposed. Such use

should be prevented at Battlemead, and, as proposed above, a smaller car park will alleviate the problem. The dogs survey currently being undertaken at Battlemead will give further insights on the use of the site.

**Recommendations:**

- 1. That the EMP proposals concerning dogs are accepted**
- 2. That steps should be taken to prevent the use of Battlemead by professional dog walkers**
- 3. That the results of the current survey of dog walkers at Battlemead should be reviewed and note taken of any findings from this.**

**4.5 Litter**

Litter collection must be an-going process. By all means have a big litter pick twice a year but volunteers must be encouraged either formally or informally to collect any litter they see at any time (with suitable equipment) and advise the Council if bigger items need to be removed.

**Recommendation:**

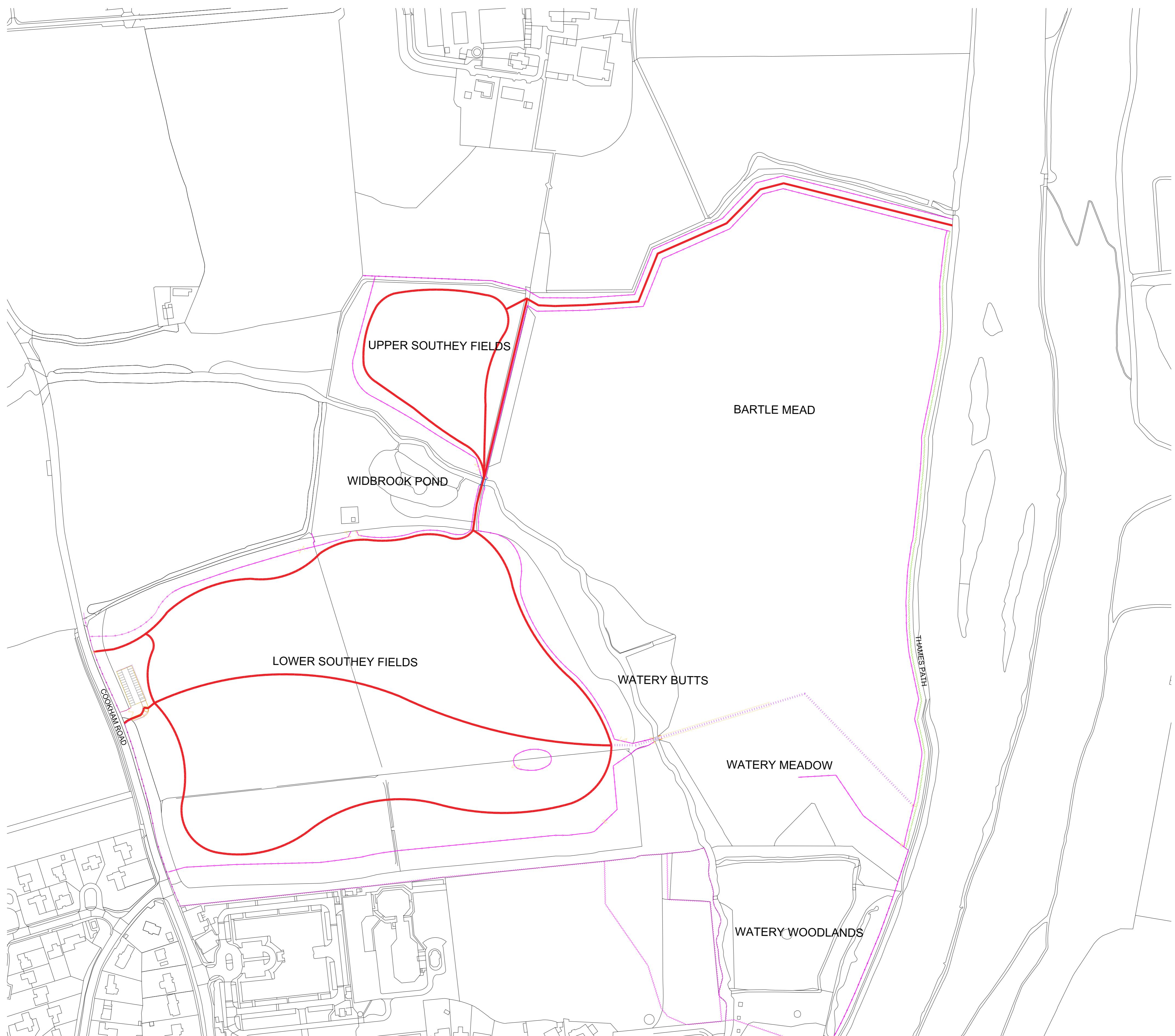
- 1. That litter collection should be a year-round job, with FoB and other volunteers supporting this**

**4.6 Bird and bat boxes**

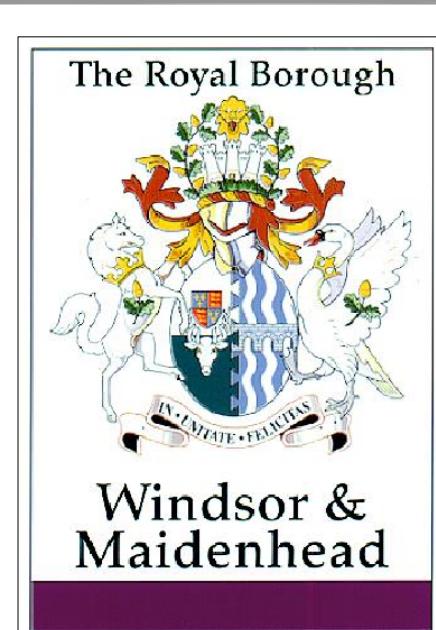
A general observation is that there is likely to be scope for more boxes – for bat and different bird species – than are recommended in the EMP. The local Bisham Nest Box Group is available to facilitate this and can install them with the help of volunteers. This can also be a great opportunity for local people/families to make nest boxes and be involved in installing them. Indeed this should be the default source for any nest boxes.

**Recommendations:**

- 1. That provision should be made for more nest/roost boxes at Battlemead**
- 2. That the Bisham Nest Box Group, as well as local volunteers, should be considered as the default option for their production and installation.**



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Project  
**BATTLEMEAD COMMON**  
  
Title  
**FIELD NAMES  
MARCH 2020**

Date	05.06.2019	Scale	1:2000@A1
Drawn	AC	CAD	Checked
	AC	AC	AH
Drg No.	Rev.		
201810-L-10	-		
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