

Limpley Stoke Parish Council

St George's Fields, Biodiversity and Plant Management Plan: 2021 -2030

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Review dates	

St George's Fields, Limpley Stoke

Biodiversity and Plant Management Plan: 2021 -2030

Description

Sited within the Limpley Stoke Valley, and park of the Cotswold AONB, visually, the park is nestled into the hillside, with its characteristic wooded, high sided valley, and several vistas across and down the valley. It is a mix of urban amenity areas and natural habitats, including many fine trees, and has a peaceful, rural feel.

The park has three main grassed areas that are usable for play and recreation – the large upper flat level of the park, the central access area with play equipment and path bisecting it, and the more difficult lower level, which has 'adventure style' play equipment. Wheel chair access and prams are best suited on the middle access area.

The upper flat level of the park provides a space for villagers to meet, hosts a weekly boules club plus matches, and leisure facilities (barbeque and oak shelter) which are used privately by families, groups of neighbours and visitors as well as for larger community events. The shelter also provides a covered area for teenagers to meet.

There are three steep slopes joining the grassed areas – the upper, middle and lower slopes. The middle slope, connecting the central access area and the large upper level has two main grassed access paths, one steep set of concrete steps with handrail, and one set of rustic steps across a stream and up through a small glade area.

Objectives of the management plan

- To continue to provide a safe and enjoyable leisure and recreation space for villagers and visitors, adults and children alike
- To retain the distinctive character of the park in its landscape
- To provide a space for wildlife to thrive alongside humans
- To retain and enhance the essential ecosystem services of the park, including carbon sequestration in trees, scrub, hedgerows, grassed areas and soil, soil erosion mitigation and reduction of surface water run off
- To create an economical (cost effective) and environmentally sustainable approach to greenery maintenance.
- To maintain the park without the use of pesticides or herbicides, including that any weed removal for safety reasons is managed by environmentally responsible means.

1. Management of grassed areas

Short open-space grass areas

There are main usable flat areas comprising: area by middle level play equipment, lower level play equipment, upper level area with boules, bbq and oak shelter. Also grass sloped access paths from central level to upper and lower levels.

Aim:

- to maintain short amenity open space grass
- to reduce erosion of short grass on sloped access paths

Maintenance:

- I. Mow grass regularly from April – October – every 2 -3 weeks
- II. Reduce cutting in very dry weather
- III. To prevent soil erosion on grassed path access slopes, reduce number of cuts if necessary to retain soil. Previous intervention to prevent erosion has included laying down geogrid type material.
- IV. Grass clippings can be left on the grass to reduce costs (optional). A compost pile on site would facilitate easy removal.



Figure 1: showing areas for short grass maintenance regime for main amenity areas and access paths

Grass slopes: the slope connecting central to lower level play equipment

As well as grass, this slope has many wildflower species. On the shaded side there are bluebells and wild garlic, and on main, sunnier aspect, daisies, clover, birds foot trefoil, buttercups, vetch, heal all, primrose and many more. Not only beautiful to look at, these are important food sources for insects and birds. Because these are cut frequently during the spring and summer, they have historically not been very apparent. By reducing mowing and mowing at the right time, benefits will also include a reduction in maintenance costs and surface water run-off.

Aim:

- to maintain a safe access path to the lower level play equipment
- to enhance the beauty and ecological diversity of the grassland
- to increase the habitat around the edges bounding the lower park
- to maintain access from the lower Twizzle to the adventure play area

Maintenance of short grass

- I. Mow a grass path from the central to lower level of the park every 2 -3 weeks spring to autumn as per section 1 – open space grass above

Maintenance of medium length grass

- II. For main areas of the slope, mow once every 4-5 weeks to allow flowers to bloom. In very dry weather this level of cutting may be reduced. This mowing regime will allow slightly longer grass length to promote flower diversity and attract pollinators and other wildlife.
- III. Remove grass and cut material after cutting to reduce soil fertility

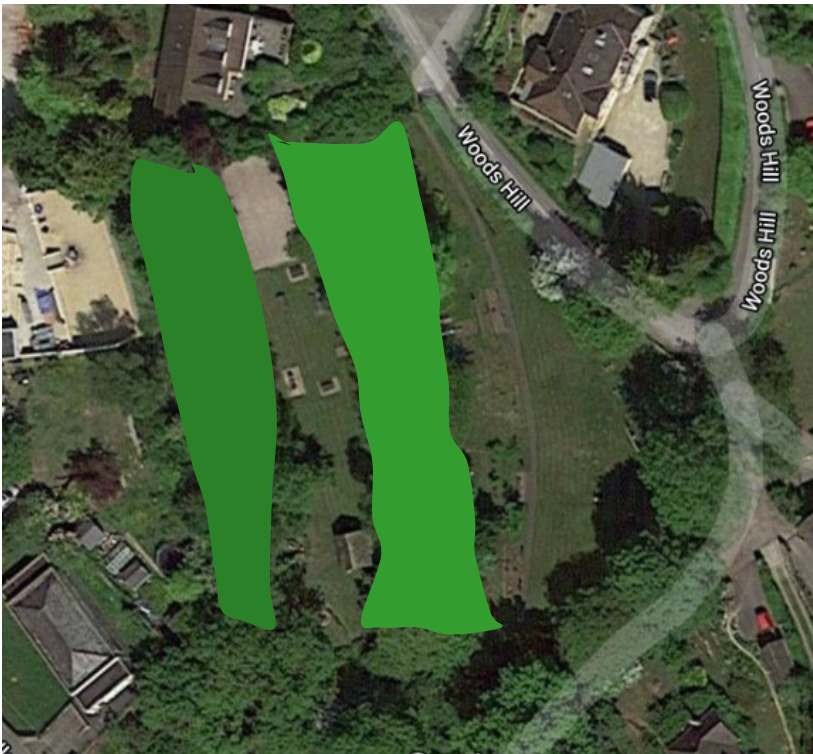
Maintenance of long grass

- IV. For the area bounding the bottom level of the park (approx. 1 metre), mow mid-July (after spring and summer flowers have set seed), and again in late September. In the first year or two this may need an early additional cut after spring flowers have set seed and to discourage brambles and other scrubland plants.
- V. Remove grass and cut material after cutting to reduce soil fertility.
- VI. Mow or strim steps and path from lower twizzle gate to adventure play equipment on an as needed basis –this may be once a year in late September



Figures 2 and 3: 2 showing lower, grassed slope with medium length grass area (mid green) and long grass regime area (dark green). Short access path is in pale green,

3 showing central slope (mid green) and upper slope (dark green)



Management of central and upper slopes

In addition to the grassed slope leading to the adventure play area, there are two more steep slopes in the park. To encourage more wildlife into these spaces, Limpley Stoke Parish Council has paid for, made and installed bat boxes, bird boxes, hedgehog boxes, litter piles, and bee and bug hotels on these two slopes over a period of years. For several years councillors were assisted by students from King Edward's School, Bath.

Aim:

- To continue to enhance this habitat by aiming to attract more species to the park ... can we bring nightingales back to the valley?

Central slope

The first slope above the central access level has a stream at the bottom with a small bridge and rustic steps, two cut grass paths and concrete steps, all leading to the park's upper level. The slope is characterised by its mix of trees, a small copse area and scrub. The trees are a combination of mature standards and young saplings, native and alien species, including may and plum. Native scrub includes species include guelder rose, dog rose, bramble and buddleia.

Habitat piles, and wildlife boxes and hotels have been installed here. In addition, flowers including native snowdrops and bluebells, and garden daffodils provide extra colour and nectar.

Aim:

- to maintain safe access to the top level of the park, via cut paths, maintained concrete steps and the rustic path and steps.
- to continue enhancing wildlife habitats
- to provide a characterful, pleasant environment, maintaining the rural character of the park
- to mitigate surface water run-off and soil erosion
- to maintain the vistas through the trees (as at present levels)

Maintenance:

- I. Maintain access across bridge and up rustic steps by occasional cutting back of brambles and other plants impeding access in late summer
- II. Instigate a rotational cutting regime of the scrub. Cut 1/5 of the scrub cut every 3 years. The objective is to create a small, patchwork of different maturity scrub across the slopes. Cutting should take place January/February to retain berried scrub for birds and mammals, and outside of mating and nesting season.
- III. Leave cut and dead materials in piles on cut areas to provide essential habitats
- IV. Manage and maintain trees for safety (see section below on Trees)

Upper slope

The upper slope above boule and barbeque areas, has a stream at its bottom. The slope is characterised as mostly tree with scrubby undergrowth. The trees are a combination of mature and young trees, both native and alien, including may, plum and damson. Native scrub includes species include guelder rose, dog rose, bramble and buddleia. There are many native herbaceous perennials including the, now rare, Bath asparagus.

Habitat piles, and wildlife boxes and hotels have been installed here. A small path used to lead through a section of the slope, intended for younger children to explore, but this has not been maintained and is now overgrown. The alien invasive hedging plant, *Lonicera nitida*, has spread from the garden above, and is now covering a significant area, smothering the native species.

Aim:

- to maintain the habitat for rare species like Bath Asparagus to thrive
- to maintain the 'edge of woodland' character of the slope
- to reintroduce the 'wildlife' path for children
- to eradicate the invasive *Lonicera nitida*

Maintenance:

- V. Year 1 - winter; cut out all *Lonicera nitida*, and burn or remove from site. In subsequent years, check for new growth each winter and remove if necessary
- VI. Year 1 - early spring ; plant small native trees such as wild service and crab apple (village working party) in bare area
- VII. Year 1 – dormant season; reinstate the old path along the slope by cutting back obstructions and strimming the ground where necessary
- VIII. Manage and maintain trees for safety (see section below on Trees)

Trees and hedgerows

The overall character of the park is that of open spaces framed by trees of all sizes. These provide both an attractive backdrop to all sections of the park. Trees include ash, sycamore, hawthorn, willow, ornamental cherry, crab apple, walnut amongst others. Some of the edges of the park are more like hedgerow, with a mix of small trees, some bramble, ivy, and others.

Aim:

- to retain the present character of the park, whilst maintaining trees for safety
- to follow Cotswold AONB best practise guidelines on tree maintenance, removal and replacement
- to retain a balance of native and garden species for landscape and visual amenity, maintaining current vistas where possible
- to provide a balance of trees for structure and beauty
- to adhere to a 'light touch' approach, ensuring minimal tree maintenance and allowing them to grow to their natural size
- to provide the optimal mix of tree species for wildlife – larger trees for rarer species such as song thrush, and smaller native species for seeds, nuts and berries
- to maintain rather than fell trees where possible, to increase hedgerow where possible

Maintenance:

- I. Annual audit of trees by maintenance provider (Alan Duck) with recommendations as to branches that are in need of removal that year– to be agreed with PC and carried out
- II. Year 1. Remove new growth from the felled sycamore by the central Twizzle side access to the park. This is pushing the wall out, and could undermine the wall.
- III. Unless presenting an immediate danger, all tree maintenance and felling to take place during dormant season, and before bird nesting periods (Beginning March -End August.
- IV. Where felled, replace with 3 saplings (best practise – Cotswold AONB). Ensuring new species maintain the visual structure of the park, the ecosystem services and are suitable for the site and soil. Consult where needed.
- V. Where ash dieback is present, aim first to pollard, then review regularly for signs of improvement or decline, in order to take appropriate action in a timely way. Follow all Cotswold AONB best practise guidelines
- VI. Where branches or trees are taken down, if on the wooded area or scrub slopes, aim to keep as much dead wood on site as possible. In other areas, remove wood (or add some debris to habitat piles in scrub areas).
- VII. Where felling is unavoidable, manage possible soil heave and erosion by leaving stumps, and ensuring no more than 1 tree cut in any one area.
- VIII. Year 1. Working party to install hedgerow species along lower boundary of the park
- IX. Light trim of hedgerow every other year (to allow biennial flowering species to flower and provide berries
- X. Village work party to help with pleaching/plashing after ten years.

Appendices

This biodiversity management plan reflects Wiltshire Council's recommendations on climate change and biodiversity, as well Cotswold AONB, DEFRA and Forestry commission guidance.

The plan has also considered UN Sustainable Development Goals 13 and 15, and is timed to the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration 2021-2030, and in the spirit of UNFCCC and CBD 2019.

Wiltshire Council's statement on biodiversity:

'Biodiversity is at the heart of Wiltshire Council's aim for a more sustainable future. We have a duty to ensure that a diverse and thriving natural environment is maintained for the economic, social and spiritual health and wellbeing of this and future generations.'

Special Area of Conservation

The Limpley Stoke valley's mosaic of scrub and wooded habitat is part of a European Special Area of Conservation (SAC) chosen for its role in providing crucial foraging and roosting habitat for three Annex II¹ mammal species.

The primary reason for the selection of this area as SAC is for providing habitat for the greater horseshoe bat (15% of the total UK population), which relies on sourcing food on the edges of woodland, scrub and hedgerows, and which has an exceptionally large overwintering population in the caves in the valley; and also the Bechsteins' bat, which uses mature, deciduous trees in the valley for roosting. An annex II species presented as a qualifying feature, but not the primary reason for SAC designation is the lesser horseshoe bat. The lesser horseshoe bat prefers sheltered valleys with extensive deciduous woods or dense scrub, close to roost sites for hunting and foraging. Like the greater horseshoe, these bats roost in caves close to their feeding grounds.

With increasing numbers of ash becoming infected with ash dieback, it is more essential than ever to retain as many areas of habitat as possible for these species. The SAC points out that in the area, as tree and scrub habitats are diminishing, hedgerows forming connective corridors between roosts and feeding sites are becoming increasingly important.

¹ Species whose conservation requires the designation of Special Areas of Conservation

Bird species

The park provides a mixed habitat for many bird species. Species observed in the park area, or above it are listed according to their UK Red List status².

Bird	Conservation status*	Bird	Conservation status*	Bird	Conservation status*
Black redstart	red	Blackbird	green	Hooded crow	green
House sparrow	red	Blackcap	green	Jackdaw	green
Lesser spotted woodpecker	red	Blue tit	green	Jay	green
Song thrush	red	Buzzard	green	Long tailed tit	green
Starling	red	Carrion crow	green	Magpie	green
Tree sparrow	red	Coal tit	green	Nuthatch	green
Bullfinch	amber	Goldcrest	green	Peregrine	green
House martin	amber	Goldfinch	green	Robin	green
Kestrel	amber	Great spotted woodpecker	green	Siskin	green
Swift	amber	Great tit	green	Tree creeper	green
Tawny owl	amber	Green woodpecker	green	Wood pigeon	green
				Wren	green

For habitat maps, local endangered species, and more information, including links to useful websites: <https://flewg.weebly.com/our-local-wildlife-species.html>

² Green conservation status does not mean that there are lots of breeding pairs – it means that numbers haven't declined by 50%. Red is the highest conservation priority, with species needing urgent action.

- Red list criteria includes:
- Species is globally threatened.
- Historical population decline in UK during 1800–1995.
- Severe (at least 50%) decline in UK breeding population over last 25 years, or longer-term period (the entire period used for assessments since the first BoCC review, starting in 1969).
- Severe (at least 50%) contraction of UK breeding range over last 25 years, or the longer-term period

Overview map of maintenance scheme



Short grass

Medium length grass

Long grass

Central slope

Upper slope

Streams

Non grass paths and steps