



Nature Reserve Proposal

on land to the rear of Fremantle Court
Risborough Road, Stoke Mandeville

April 2018

Introduction

This document is intended to explain the context and rationale for a proposal to establish a nature reserve on approximately eight hectares (approximately 20 acres) of land currently in the ownership of Landlink Limited.

The proposal is linked to a plan to create extra care housing on land adjacent to Fremantle Court, a 90-bed care home on Risborough Road, Stoke Mandeville, which was opened in 2014.



The remaining land could be turned into a wildlife asset for the enjoyment of the care home residents, the new extra care residents and nearby residents who can access on foot.

This proposal - which would be achieved as a result of delivering much needed elderly accommodation in a newly created care village integrated with the existing very successful care home – would secure biodiversity benefits for the area in perpetuity.

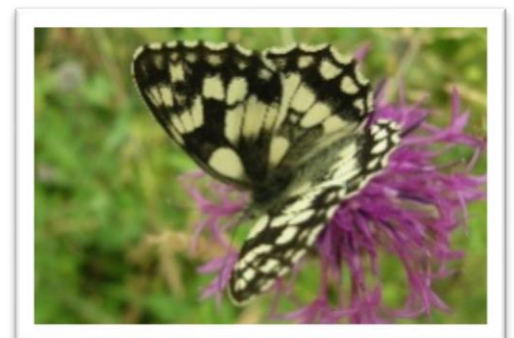
The creation of the nature reserve, and its ongoing maintenance, would be funded through a Section 106 planning obligation linked to a planning permission for the extra care housing. The ownership of the land could be transferred to the Parish Council, if that was felt to be a benefit.

We are a not-for-profit social enterprise which currently manages many Chilterns' habitats, including Ancient Woodlands, in partnership with public, private and third sector organisations.

Current situation

The site is of moderate conservation value in its current state, but this value is enhanced when considered in the wider context of the Chilterns Landscape.

Its value and potential lie in the relatively large area of rough grassland and scrub mosaic – perfect hunting territory for owls and bats. When Chiltern Rangers inspected the site, in March 2018, there was little vegetation of interest visible owing to recent cold weather inhibiting spring growth. The blackthorn scrub, however, is ideal for nesting birds and possibly even the rare Brown and Black Hairstreak butterflies.



Improvements to be made

There is an exciting opportunity to create a nature reserve, a rich grassland and scrub mosaic with pockets of young woodland which can/will develop into the future. This will protect the area and safeguard it for the benefit of future generations.

We will seek to enhance the area by providing water in a dry landscape, through digging a series of ponds, which will be of irregular shapes to maximise the edge habitat. These will be a welcome source of drinking water for migrating birds who will pass through on their annual round trips.

This small network of ponds in a variety of situations will be ideal for the widest range of invertebrate beneficiaries especially Odonata – dragonflies & damselflies. A number of bat and bird boxes will be placed around the nature reserve in the larger yet still young trees which lack the necessary natural cavities for hole nesting species. On the larger, more mature trees that are present, nest boxes for Barn Owls and Kestrels would be installed.



In designing the site from a relatively blank canvas we are able to design out problems and design in solutions for management of the nature reserve from the start to provide a long-term legacy. Once established over the initial 10 years of a management plan, the site will be relatively low maintenance.

For maximum benefit and to reduce maintenance costs, there could be a stock-proof perimeter fence, together with an internal fence, so that two grazing compartments can be created for livestock - most likely cattle and/or sheep.

Field gates would be installed to enable vehicles to access all parts of the reserve for management purposes. Kissing gates would enable pedestrian access whilst restricting unwanted access, especially by motorbikes.

Piped water for troughs could be installed during the extra care construction for maximum efficiency and economy.



Management aims and objectives

Maintain and enhance the quality of this grassland mosaic through a regime of extensive grazing with cattle and/or sheep - working with local farmers. This traditional, sustainable management method will create a much better sward structure, help to manage aggressive, pioneer species such as nettle, dock, thistle and umbellifers and allow wildflowers to flourish.

The dung from the livestock will, in turn, attract another level of invertebrates which provide food up the trophic levels for birds, bats etc.

Grazing also minimises the need for mowing, except for the path network. This would be done a few times during the growing season, depending on growing conditions. The arisings should be collected, and we will identify 'dump areas' for them. These areas will provide habitat for grass snakes, slow worms, hedgehogs and more.

Power line proactive management (possibly in partnership with SSE). We would keep the area within 5m of power lines clear of scrub by annual mow and collect. Ensure tree strike risk is minimised by proactive management: pollarding, felling and selecting smaller tree species, keeping larger tree species in other areas of the reserve.



Manage scrub on rotation by cutting. This will diversify the overall site scrub age structure to ensure that there is always suitable nesting habitat and that the scrub doesn't become too 'leggy'. The details will be given in the management plan.

Tree management. A variety of tasks will be required including surveys and risk management work such as: managing boundary trees, trees within striking distance of new or existing property, removing conifers near power lines, thinning of plantations, planting of new copses, coppicing, pollarding and so on.

Pond creation. One new pond per year over the first 4 years and then ongoing, low-level maintenance.

Access. A 'circular path' will be created following existing desire lines and connecting to public footpaths to ensure easy access for the local community. There will be a hard surfaced (not tarmac), mini route from the care home garden's existing paths to enable elderly residents access - including those with mobility aids/wheelchairs.

Health and well-being. The site is relatively flat, so this is a perfect opportunity to boost residents' health and well-being through regular outdoor exercise.

Horticulture/gardening/mini orchard area – raised beds etc would be provided in the 'tuck away' area, creating a valuable asset for boosting further the health and well-being of residents.

Link to the Fremantle Court area to help to manage this relatively newly planted area so that it thrives, ties in with the nature reserve and blends in. Also provides the opportunity for additional habitat enhancement work, including setting up a couple of bird feeding stations.



Wider Community

There will be opportunities for local volunteers, including those from the proposed new extra care facility, to be involved in a range of activities to contribute to the management plan. The tasks would range from practical hands-on, to less intensive:

- Conservation - stock watching, bat and bird box provision and monitoring, coppicing, tree planting, tree thinning, pond work and more. There is a range of species to survey and monitor depending on interest: butterflies, small mammals, bats, moths, birds and reptiles - the list is almost endless
- Local specialists would be happy to help inspire and train people in surveys and convey their findings to local residents (who may not be able to get out) and the wider conservation network through Bucks & Milton Keynes Environmental Records Centre.
- This site also has the potential to be used and enjoyed by the wider community. With particular emphasis on the all-ability mini trail and relatively easy going, longer route, nearby Booker Park School (for children with Special Educational Needs) could take full advantage for visits to boost their health and well-being and learning. Other local schools could also become involved in helping on site and using it as an educational resource on the doorstep, reducing pressure on transport and making trips into nature more affordable.



Biodiversity improvements to development area

In addition to the nature reserve, there would be other opportunities to enhance the biodiversity of the area.

By working in partnership with the developers of the extra care housing, we could:

- create Suds pond/s, integral bat and bird boxes in the buildings, use of native species of trees and shrubs which reflect the local types (ideally of local provenance), wildflower areas to reduce the formal mown areas in the two areas to keep 'Bucks Buzzing' – a key objective of Bucks & Milton Keynes Natural Environment Partnership.
- Connect the built area with the existing natural green infrastructure

This would enable the whole scheme to be an exemplar of development genuinely and sustainably contributing to the Lawton principles for conservation by making the landscape bigger, better and more joined up for wildlife. These factors (along with many other aspects of this proposal, such as getting young people into nature) are key drivers of the government's new 25-year Environmental Plan.

Chiltern Rangers

Winners of The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service 2017

Chiltern Rangers is a social enterprise working with local communities to provide practical habitat management of the woodlands, chalk grassland, commons, ponds and chalk streams in the Chilterns' area. Find out more about what we do and how our volunteers help us by visiting www.chilternrangers.co.uk

