

# Clarification of some items mentioned in Public Comments on the Draft Westham Village Pond Management Plan.

Westham Pond, Parish Council Pond Working Group. March 2019

**Members of the team have years of experience with leading volunteer conservation groups and maintenance organisations. This includes training in techniques and risk assessment.**

Evan Jones has a BSc Joint Honours Degree in Ecology and has carried out ecological survey contracts locally for ESCC at Newhaven Tidemills, Natural England on Pevensey Levels and on the former Crumbles Shingle Beach for Tarmac. He was Conservation Officer for the South East branch of the Marine Conservation Society and was involved in Sussex marine diving surveys resulting in the setting up of the Seven Sisters Marine Conservation Area and as a diver on ecological surveys in the Mediterranean for the University of Trieste. He is currently a member of the steering group for the Pevensey Farmers Cluster Group and is working on a biological recording/photographic project on the Pevensey Levels. He has also recently been asked to advise Eastbourne Borough Council on aspects of conservation of Eastbourne's grazing levels. He is a published photographer, illustrator and writer on wildlife and conservation topics. He has also worked as a Biology Teacher and Lecturer for ESCC schools, Sussex University, field centres in the UK and an international college in Italy where he was also a diving instructor. As a result explicit risk assessment and management has been a constant in his professional life. He has lived by the village pond and observed it with informed interest for nearly thirty years. He remembers the pond as it was many years ago when it was a wildlife haven where every spring large numbers of Toads and Frogs arrived to breed and he and his daughters helped them safely across the roads.

There have been at least 11 letters from residents which wholeheartedly support the February Draft Management Plan. There is much support for a wildlife area in the pond to compliment the amenity value and increase water quality.

There have been 4 with some small queries about the plan.

There have been 3 with more substantial queries. Including possible high costs,

3 of these asked for the inlet culvert to be investigated again plus advocated de-silting of the western end

One of these was also concerned about the removal of large fish

We will explain some of these queries below :-

## **High cost of plan.**

A key element in this management plan is financial economy.

The organisational and material costs are minimal: Importantly they include the extension of the Parish council's insurance to cover volunteers. (Many organisations do this for their pond volunteers)

The involvement of local people as volunteers will reduce costs of ongoing maintenance very substantially.

There may be some necessary material costs eg for bought plants to reinforce an existing hedge or for protective materials for some plantings of aquatic plants.

The majority of the native plants used in the planting program will be sourced legally at zero cost through strong local contacts. Care will be taken to screen out any non-native species. This is a major saving over using a paid outside ecological contractor.

The cost of tree surgery will initially be substantial but this plan just advises on the bringing forward of this work which will in any case be necessary eventually.

If the cost of doing all advised work at once is daunting it can be phased over time.

Poplar and Willow trees grow very quickly. It is important to note that prompt action in this respect will save a significant sum in the long term.

As soon as trees are pollarded to an easily accessible height they can be pruned by volunteers at no cost.

They will also look more aesthetically pleasing and contribute less leaf litter to the silting of the pond if pruned.

### **Future Silting**

Increase in water quality, native plants (supplying dissolved Oxygen) and native invertebrates increases the natural breakdown of leaves and silt. This should slow the rate of silting. The extraction of nutrients by aquatic plants as well as the reduction of silt disturbance by large fish will reduce the incidence of toxic algal blooms. The reduction of the volume of overhanging deciduous trees will reduce leaf litter input.

### **Trees -**

Managing trees introduces more light to promote native plant growth.

Removing self-seeded saplings opens up views and reduces tree management costs in the future.

There is an emphasis in the plan of creating attractive views. Although pollarded trees look bare when first cut they soon grow back (within a year) to form traditional and very attractive tree shapes.

Augmentation of the hedge in the South West corner: gaps here can be planted with native species the residents nearby are very happy with this idea that will also be attractive and increase biodiversity.

Overgrown area behind garages: this can be discussed with residents in due course

**Wildfowl:** Ducks, Geese and Swans.

These will always be present.

Areas will be left where they can enter and exit the water.

It is now accepted ecological wisdom that, for a number of reasons feeding bread is not advantageous to health of the ducks themselves or to the pond environment and other wildlife and people using the area.

Should any of these birds seek to nest then there will be increased available nesting material and sites around the pond as a result of the management plan's emphasis on rich aquatic plant life.

### **Introduced Carp**

It is generally recognised that large bottom feeding fish especially the non-native Carp

normally have a very damaging effect on a pond of this size especially when they are of a size and number enabled by feeding (of ducks).

They remove aquatic and marginal vegetation and Hoover up smaller animal life to leave a biological desert.

In their search for food they erode the banks. In doing so they put silt and bacteria into suspension contributing to algal blooms.

Most are now gone. However any remaining will breed and grow to again damage the pond environment.

The plan follows the standard recommendation (from the August 2018 Ecologists report and from the Freshwater Habitats Trust amongst others) any remaining fish be removed (following procedure that complies with Environment Agency standards).

Other, smaller, native fish will be introduced to add to biodiversity and to attract birds such as Heron and Kingfisher.

### **Volunteers**

The plan is to begin with a small team of chosen volunteers at least while methods are trialled. Some residents have already put themselves forward. The draft Risk Assessment is being adapted for approval in the March PC meeting. Two members of the Pond working Party have many years' experience of leading teams of conservation volunteers.

### **The Undredged Part of the Pond**

The pond management plan takes maximum advantage of the still shallow western area of the pond as a great opportunity to increase biodiversity by creating a reed bed of several plant species there. Silt will be removed but in a phased, more economical way. In a program of ongoing work, in the future, this reed-bed can be selectively and incrementally excavated using contractors with small machinery and/or volunteers at relatively low cost. This work will be designed to create breeding areas for Toads, Frogs and Newts as well as a rich selection of invertebrates and attractive plants such as Marsh Marigold.

### **The concerns about the pond inlet and flooding in nearby gardens.**

The issues surrounding flooding in nearby gardens and the inlet into the pond have been considered and going forward with this plan does not affect any future decisions taken regarding these issues. The plan can be modified should any actions be recommended in regard to these issues.

### **Monitoring**

The plan includes a monitoring program to inform future action and adaptations of the plan.

### **The Pond Management Plan into the future**

The plan is simply the accepted best available expert advice put into practice. It is a response to the current situation: If and when that changes the plan can be easily adapted.

If any of the pond working group members cease to be involved, advice for the maintenance of management is readily available from bodies such as The Freshwater Habitats Trust, Sussex Wildlife Trust and the RSPB.

