

# Mill Field Management Plan - June 2018

**Town Council sub group;** Tony Merry, Peter Kenrick, Nick Potter

**Agreed at the Town Council Meeting 27<sup>th</sup> June 2018**

## Summary

Generally, the current management of the Mill Field is considered to be working well but some minor changes are proposed following investigation and consultation. The recommendations in this plan will be put to the Town Council for their consideration at the June 2018 meeting.

The Mill Field is used in a variety of ways by many groups of people, some formal and some informal and we must ensure that these uses can continue. Informal uses include walking, dog exercising, picnics, paddling, swimming and general recreation for all, especially families and young people. The river and Mill Cut bordering the site are also used by anglers and canoeists. The site is also used for the annual Riverside music festival, subject to a licence from West Oxfordshire District Council following consultation with the Town Council.

There are 4 areas in the field which have different uses. It is convenient to consider whether different management regimes for each area would be an advantage. There is a plan of the field showing these areas at the end of this document.

**Zone 1**, the Lower Field area, is widely used for recreational purposes, especially during the summer months.

**Zones 2 and 3**, the middle and upper field areas are most commonly used for walking, especially with dogs. Zones 1 and 2 are also used as the main arena and support areas for the Riverside Festival whereas Zone 3 is not.

**Zone 4**, Campbell Copse, is a wooded area which was planted in memory of local resident Bill Campbell. This area is subject to a separate management plan and is therefore not discussed further here.

## Canoe Club and Anglers

Both groups require access to the Mill Cut and river. There are currently several access points that are used by anglers and these should be retained. The canoe club require access at a number of points. They have access from their storage shed which they keep maintained. They require access below the weir from the river and use the steps in this location and also access to the Mill Cut opposite to this point downstream from the bridge. The section of zone 3 between these two access points needs to be kept mown throughout the season so that canoes can be transported between these points. The Canoe Club also need to access the Mill Cut just upstream of the sluice gate and the repair of the bank will be constructed to allow access at this point. These access points are marked in the diagram.

## Recommendations

### General

That a 2 metre strip is left uncut on the majority of the banks to the river and mill cut. The current access points to be maintained. Access is needed by canoeists and anglers, but all should be aware that the Mill Cut has a deep silt layer and no one should enter the water there. Parents of young children and dog owners need to be aware of this. Dogs must be kept under control and discouraged from entering the Mill Cut. Signage will be erected to inform parents, dog owners and other users as above.

In Autumn when vegetation has died down, the banks of both the river and mill cut should be cleared by brush cutters to remove overgrowth

The canoe club require access from both the river (the steps after the weir) and to the Mill Cut (access point near bridge as marked on the plan). Members of the club provide valuable assistance by being able to monitor damage to the banks from the water and carry out some clearance of small branches causing obstruction. We ask that the canoe club keeps the Town Council informed of any problems found and actions taken.

The whole field remains available for dogs which can be off lead. However, dogs MUST always be under their owners' control, especially when in the mill cut or the river. Notices should be erected at the sluice and the weir entrances to make sure that owners control their dogs and remain aware of their whereabouts at all times.

### Zone 1

- The current cutting regime should be maintained as appropriate for growth conditions.
- During the Riverside festival the strip of overgrowth should prevent free access to both the river and the Mill Cut but some temporary fencing may be necessary for safety reasons.

### Zone 2

- Retain the current regime allowing grass to grow longer than zone 1 for most of the year but a shorter cut will be required before Riverside
- Access to the Mill Cut and river needs to be restricted for safety reasons, but current access points will be retained.

### Zone 3

- Within this zone, one-year trials will be carried out to assess whether changes to the frequency and area of cutting of this zone may be appropriate to encourage wildlife and wild flowers without causing problems for users.
- During the trials, at least a 2 metre corridor will continue to be mown for the footpath.

## **Background - Location and Uses of the Site**

The Mill field was purchased by the Town Council for the use and enjoyment of all in 1954. Initially some of the land was used for grazing animals but this was discontinued. The whole of the area is open to the public but fires and overnight camping are not allowed. There is access to both the River Evenlode and the Mill Cut at various points in the field. Since the purchase it has been maintained by the Town Council using local contractors who have regularly cut the grass as allowing for seasonal and annual variations in growing conditions.

The site lies to the north-west of Charlbury along the bank of the River Evenlode. It forms an island between the river and the Mill Cut. The site is shaded green on the map. On this map, the site has been divided into four zones to reflect differing usages and consequent differences to the proposed management.

In 2017 some concern was expressed about the effects of the field management on wildlife habitats and the Town Council therefore established a group to look into this which was done by consultation with all users, and commissioning of a number of wildlife surveys by external experts.

## **Investigations**

Surveys were commissioned from BBOWT small mammals group and the Wychwood Flora group of the Wychwood Project. We received suggestions for possible management from Louise Spicer, Christine Elliot and from James Aylward, the Wychwood Project Conservation Officer and from Vaughan Lewis, of the Evenlode Catchment Partnership. We also carried out an on-line survey of young people using the field. These reports and suggestions are all contained in the appendix to this paper and are available from the Town Clerk on request.

The draft plan was made available to the public for comment in a consultation during early 2018 and comments received have been reflected in this revised plan. Our thanks go to the above named people and organisations and to all local residents who have engaged with the consultation and the process of producing this plan. Their input is much appreciated.

*Please see the document Background to the Mill field Management Plan for further information and details of the surveys carried out.*

*Paper copies of both documents are available on request from the Town Clerk - Roger Clarke*

# PLAN OF SITE

