

THAME GREEN LIVING (TGL)

RYCOTE MEADOW – *Summary proposals for Thame Town Council July 2021*

Where is it?

Rycote Meadow (*edged red on plan on page 3*) covers about 1.6 acres to the north side of Oxford Road (opposite the Cuttle Brook Reserve), bounded by the Cuttle Brook and by 3 and 4 Cuttle Brook Gardens and the open field beyond, (understood to be under option to Bloor Homes.) To the north the land narrows to its junction with land believed to be owned by the Castle family and also under option to Bloor Homes.

What is the current position?

Rycote Meadow is owned freehold by TTC, after a nil cost transfer from Berkeley Homes in 2009 on development of the Renaissance estate. There's an underground gas main (*broken blue line on plan*) near Oxford Road, plus a Thame Water main running diagonally from SW corner to NE corner (*hatched black*). The meadow has for many years not been open to the public. The edges are cut periodically by the TTC maintenance team and a contractor takes a once a year hay crop off the meadow in late summer. In winter, as part of the protected local floodplain, the meadow is liable to flood, sometimes extensively.

What is proposed?

The brief – TGL was asked by TTC to develop plans for a public footpath to connect Oxford Road to Thame Meadows Estate through the site with due regard to the conservation and potential enhancement of the biodiversity of the meadow.

The process - TGL commissioned local conservation expert John Tyler to produce a floral survey report (available on request) in June after some four visits to the site. He identified a priority of protecting existing features of wildlife interest, in particular the floodplain meadow vegetation, and to seek to enhance the diversity of habitats on the site. Rycote Meadow is of considerable vintage and its floodplain meadow is one of our 'botanically richest habitats', of which ever fewer now survive in this country.¹ John Tyler's opinion is echoed by River Thame Conservation Trust, Wild Oxfordshire and Mike Furness of Cuttlebrook Volunteers (CBCV), all of whom we will continue to consult.

The path - We propose a path that runs close to the Cuttle Brook (see pink on the plan) which has several advantages. 1) It's mostly higher and firmer ground; 2) It's less liable (though not immune) to flooding; 3) It gives an attractive route between meadow and river, and 4) It avoids a path close to the houses in Cuttle Brook Gardens.

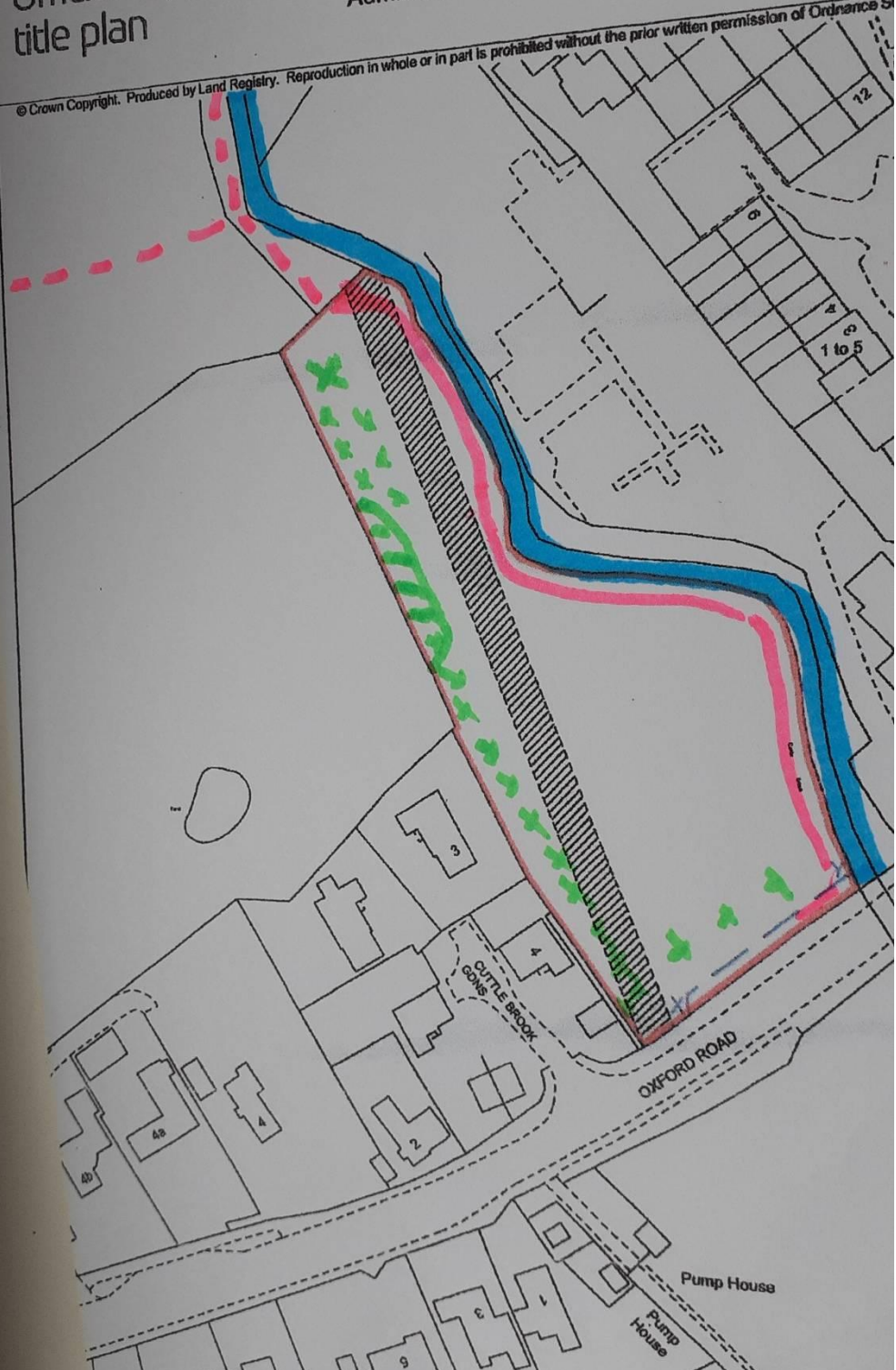
The approach - The special qualities of the meadow and the wish to preserve a hay crop both risk being lost if all the meadow is fully opened up. People and dogs inevitably disturb nesting birds and other wildlife, churn up sediment and dogs introduce chemicals (as in flea powders) which are harmful to insects and plants. Based on advice received we therefore propose a 1.5 metre wide path set 2 metres inside the river bank flanked by an open-mesh post and wire enclosure high enough to forestall access to the meadow but open enough to see it clearly and have the sense of passing through it. To add to this we suggest limited rest areas (perhaps one to start) and space for some log seats leading off the path around the upper part where the site narrows. Access to the river will be discouraged through planting and vegetation.

¹ These provide many other environmental benefits, such as carbon sequestration (capture), flood reduction and water purification by absorbing pollutants.

Land Registry
Official copy of
title plan

Title number **ON288561**
Ordnance Survey map reference **SP7006SW**
Scale **1:1250** enlarged from 1:2500
Administrative area **Oxfordshire: South Oxford**

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Official copy issued on 2 November 2009 shows the state of the land as it was immediately before the date of registration. This plan shows the general arrangement of the land as it was immediately before the date of registration.

Planting – The well-established and wildlife-friendly bramble along part of the western boundary (*hatched green*) would be retained and enhanced on either side through the planting of native hedge species interspersed with modest-size native trees such as crab apple, birch, rowan and alder. The hedge species would comprise many small native species, especially blackthorn and hawthorn. We envisage punctuating the southern perimeter along the Oxford Road wall with a number of modest-size native trees similar to the species along the western perimeter. We also propose a feature oak tree close to the NW corner, subject to assessing flood aspects there. (*See the green crosses.*)

Path access + buggy and mobility scooter use – Path construction would be durable enough to withstand occasional flooding. The existing farm gate will be retained, locked as now, and the new path accessed via a new pedestrian/buggy gate (lockable during flooding) in the low wall to Oxford Road and a sloping ramp into the meadow.

How will this be paid for?

- *s106 funds* – There is an allocation, believed to be £26,471² from Bloor Homes for the creation of a path over the meadow. Bloor/SODC have confirmed that this could cover incidental costs, so that ideally the amount would cover the path, ramp and fence. Bloor will create the path on ‘their’ side leading to Thame Meadows and have already fenced off the main connecting section (*broken pink line.*)³
- *New planting* – TGL is seeking a grant from TOE for planting [and tree work.]
- *Signage* – TGL has a TTC grant of £1200 for signage and publicity. We plan a 3-part panel facing Oxford Road with changing information as the project develops.

When will this happen? – We anticipate a three year project:

Year 1 – finalising new path line, specification and connections – with indicative costings; cutting back some vegetation (e.g. nettles) from November onwards prior to hedge and tree planting along the western and southern perimeters. Begin poplar and willow tree pollarding; clearing some of the coarse vegetation on the bank of the Cuttle Brook to allow more beneficial species to establish themselves.

Year 2 – Laying the (initial or all) path (summer), further work along the river bank and more planting, including some specimens inside road boundary (maintaining full site visibility); further pollarding and clearance where appropriate.

Year 3 – Installing gate and ramp access and opening up the path for general use; possibly extending ‘public’ area in NW corner to less fertile parts of the meadow while restricting access to elsewhere (taking care not to impede the hay cut.)

Who will maintain it?

We hope to form a group called Friends of Rycote Meadow (“FoRM”) to help take the project forward and set up a support group with an occasional newsletter (“inform”). We’d hope that the current third party nil cost hay crop arrangements would continue for most of the site, and TTC work should be lessened by reduced mowing. We aim to discuss with CBCV ultimate absorption of Rycote Meadow into the Cuttle Brook Reserve.

Thame Green Living (ChB/CoB) 14 July 2021



² To be checked. £23,000 was quoted by Bloor.

³ We also hope this access will enable Bloor to open up the footpath down to the River Thame and beyond – as anticipated by their original planning approval – and possibly further biodiversity benefits.