

# **Vincent's Meadow & Pond Management Plan; 2024-2028 Hughenden Parish Council**



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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Plan Summary

This 5-year management plan provides guidance and a practical framework for the future management of Vincents Meadow and Pond. Site owners, Hughenden Parish Council commissioned Mike Deegan Consulting to develop the plan. It follows the format developed by Mike Alexander which is widely used by conservation organisations such as Natural England and the Wildlife Trusts. It is the second of a number of management plans scheduled as part of the Parish Council's Open Spaces Strategy.

The plan provides an analysis of the wood pasture and pond, reviews management issues and factors, establishes management objectives and provides an action plan for maintaining the site in a favourable condition. The action plan (and supporting information) provides a practical tool to help the Parish Council implement effective future site management for biodiversity & visitors.

### 1.2 Our vision for Vincents Meadow & Pond

To maintain the biodiversity value of the Wood Pasture and Pond; and safeguard this valuable example of local natural heritage for people to enjoy.

## 2. Site Description

### 2.1 Site Details

The site is located at Naphill (off Downley Road) on the edge of Naphill Common. The .... (**size TBD**) ha site is primarily comprised of wood pasture, with associated habits including a pond, scrub and boundary hedgerows.

The site is one of a suite of open-spaces owned and managed by Hughenden Parish Council. It lies immediately adjacent to Naphill Common Site.

### 2.2 Site history

Old Ordnance survey maps show that Vincents Meadow is made up of the remnants of at least two fields that once formed part of Vincent's Farm (to the north of the current site). The main pasture was 5.435 acres and the smaller field, surrounded by a hedge was 1.788 acres. This farmhouse was demolished in the 1960s when Vincent's Way was built and the site is now surrounded on two sides by residential developments and small fields to the south/southeast. The remnant of an old pear tree at the western end suggests that this section of the site may have been part of a farm orchard. Incidentally, Arthur Nicholls of Vincent's Farm was the last farmer to graze his cattle on Naphill Common in 1928 (*Friends of Naphill Common History Timeline*).

It is most likely the site once formed part of Naphill Common, which was formerly twice the current size until the enclosures of the mid-nineteenth century. '*Before enclosure, Main Road had common land on both sides of it*' (from '*A Short History of Naphill and Walter's Ash*' by Rex Leaver). Even before enclosure, piecemeal encroachments onto the Common were increasingly

being made by squatters hoping to gain permanent rights. It is worth noting, that according to the SSSI designation, in the 1890's the common was a still a grazed wood-pasture habitat with pollarded mature trees.

The pond is one of at least seven historic ponds on Naphill and is shown as Pick Up's Pond on past maps provided by the Friends of Naphill Common (FoNC). *"The origin of the ponds on Naphill Common is varied, but most were deliberately constructed with puddled mud and stone rubble bases so as to hold water through the year for watering stock when these were held on the common"* (FoNC History Timeline). This may have been originally excavated for clay extraction.

The site consists of two fields; – the larger, more distinct pasture with mature trees and a pond. While the smaller north eastern corner is the remnant of a smaller field, following a linear pattern of enclosure to the north, lost to the 1960s Vincent's Way development.

The Parish Council acquired the site in (*date yet TBD*).

The site was under a *Countryside Stewardship* agreement (developed through former Hughenden Parish Council Warden, John Moorby) from 1993, though this has lapsed and no record of the scheme remains with the Parish Council.

### **2.3 Status**

The site is one of a suite of open-spaces owned and managed by Hughenden Parish Council. It lies immediately adjacent to Naphill Common SSSI and the Radnage Valley *Biodiversity Opportunity Area (BOA)*. It is not clear why it was omitted from either designated area. The site is also located approximately midway within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

### **2.4 Site Infrastructure**

The site was stock-fenced in 1993 under the Countryside Stewardship scheme, though much of this boundary will require remedial work or replacing if grazing is re-instated. A water supply was also installed with funding from this scheme – with a water trough located near the entrance gate off Downley Road. A bin for public use is also situated just outside the entrance kissing gate.

A permissive circular path was cut by John Moorby in the 1990's and is still used around the main pasture by local walkers. Footpath access to the north eastern corner, however, has become impeded by scrub and tall-herb vegetation encroachment.

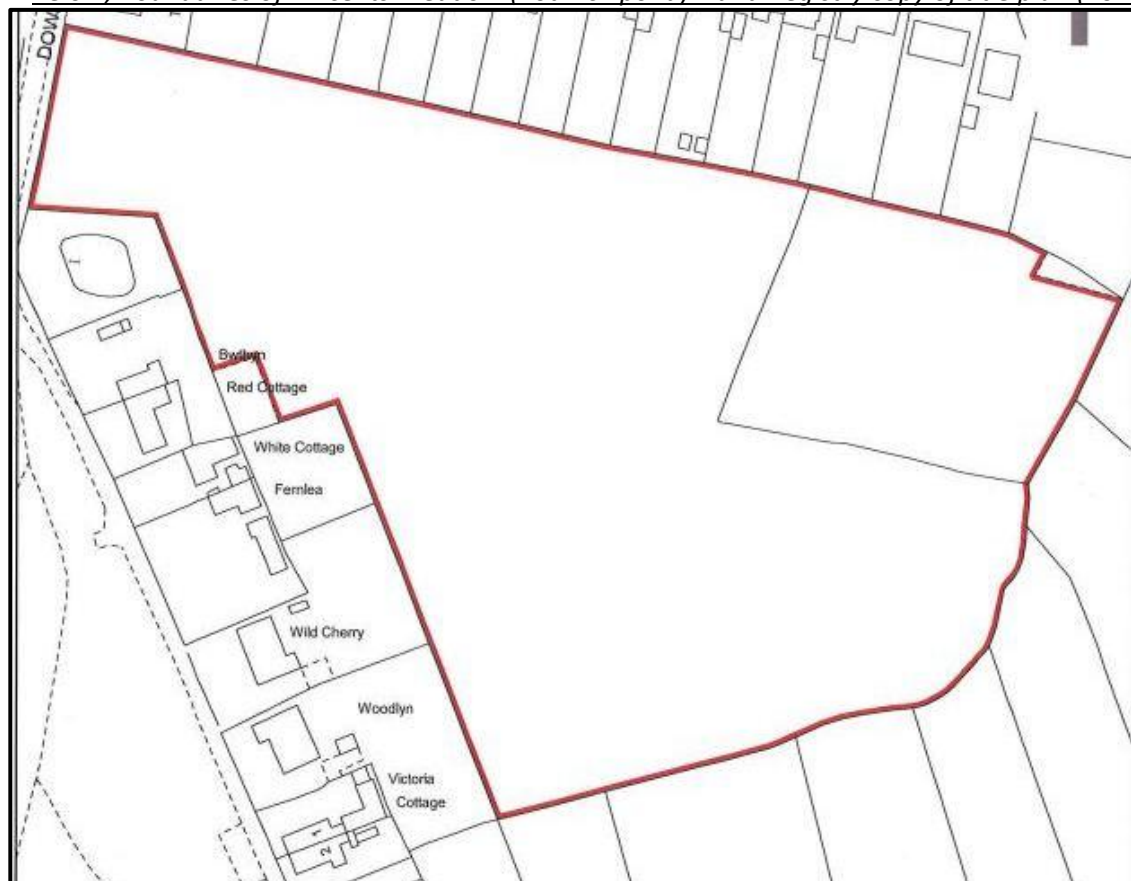
A power line (via wooden poles) runs across the eastern section of the site – dissecting the pasture roughly north to south. The Parish Council should have a wayleave or easement agreement with the power company for this.





*Above; Aerial view of Vincent's Meadow 2023. (Google Maps)*

*Below; Boundaries of Vincent's Meadow (not incl. pond). Land Registry copy of title plan (2010)*



## 2.2 Environmental information

### 2.2.1 Physical characteristics and landscape character

The Landscape character assessments for Walters Ash and Naphill Settled Plateau (number; 16.2) indicates the key characteristic of the local plateau is of chalk overlain by clay with flints, which gives rise to loamy/clayey soils with impeded drainage.

The original description of the site in the Countryside Stewardship agreement apparently referred to Vincent's Meadow as a 'Chiltern clay-cap meadow'. The 2012 Geology and soil survey of Naphill Common (*Dr J Evers with FoNC*) confirms the site does have clay loam soils; "*These soils make poor arable land and hence the hilltop characteristically was put to use as Common land as it is highly suitable for grazing livestock and woodland management such as coppice or pollard*" (*Dr J Evers with FoNC*).

The key feature of the site is the presence of young and developing wood-pasture type of habitat, which includes many relatively mature English oaks (*Quercus robur*). The site effectively forms an enclosed triangular shape, with Downley Road to the east, Vincent's Way to the north and fields to the south (Hogtrough Farm and Hunt's Hill).

The pond is also an important habitat, as indicated by a 2015 Ecological Survey.

### 2.2.2 Flora and main habitats

The main habitat is wood-pasture, which includes a concentration of many mature English oaks (*Quercus robur*) at the centre of the pasture.

There does not appear to have been a vegetation survey of the wood pasture, but the grassland flora appears to be semi-improved (at some time possibly agriculturally treated with fertilizers, drained or reseeded). A Ph test for the site would be beneficial to help determine whether the site can be categorised as either Neutral (with a soil pH in the range 5.0 to 6.5) or slightly Acidic (a pH less than 5). The main part of the Common was characterised by dwarf-shrub heath communities, which indicates more acidic soils, though this may be more neutral away from the plateau.

The pond survey in 2015 identified 15 wetland plants, 1 aquatic alga, 27 terrestrial plants and 2 mosses. The dominant plant was Floating Sweet Grass (*Glyceria fluitans*).

### 2.2.3 Important species (flora and fauna)

There do not appear to be any notable grassland species present of flora present, although the assemblage of mature oak trees are of some interest.

Potentially the greatest biodiversity value of the site could be its invertebrate interest – particularly that afforded by the mature trees and the proximity of grassland habitat.

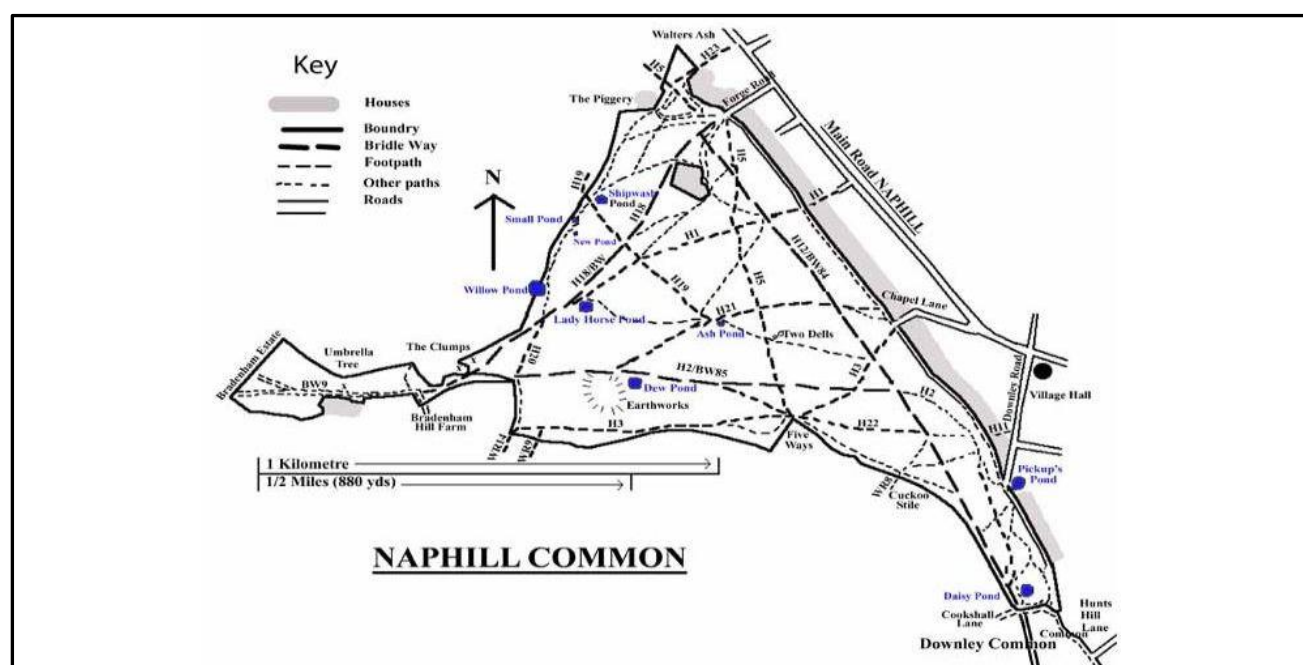
An information search with BMERC showed that a nationally notable Dung Beetle (*Chilothorax distinctus*) had been recorded on site in 2020. Unfortunately it did not reveal any other notable species which suggests there have been no formal ecological surveys. Given the habitat and the proximity to Naphill Common SSSI, it is suggested that this site is likely to provide excellent habitat conditions for many invertebrate species.

With regard to the pond, the 2015 Ecological Survey stated no rare plants were recorded, though three aquatic species of note; 'These species include both Broad Leaved and Curled Pondweed and Hornwort. Their presence suggests a more or less permanent pond'. (Rod d'Ayala, July 2015)

### 2.3 Cultural information

This site is situated at Naphill, adjacent to Naphill Common, a popular countryside destination which is located just a mile north of the outskirts of High Wycombe. As a very attractive open-space, it is well used by local walkers – particularly dog walkers.

Old photographs show a former pub, the Blacksmith's Arms at the end of Downley Road; directly opposite Pick-Ups Pond and next to the Common, so this location must have been a well known part of the Naphill community. The postwar development and growth of nearby villages (Naphill, Hughenden Valley and Walters Ash) means this attractive site is now well used by dog walkers and of considerable recreational value.



Above; Philip's footpath map (from the Friends of Naphill Common website)

Delivery of adequate community engagement is required to help achieve management objectives; for both biodiversity and people. Improved communication with local stakeholders is important; and raising awareness of the wildlife value and management issues is likely to help raise local support for implementing the Parish Council's plan (in particular with dog-walkers). There is also no on-site interpretation or signage indicating the name of the site.

A local public consultation exercise planned for the summer of 2023 (to inform the nearby community of the Parish Council's management objectives and receive feedback on plans to re-introduce grazing) did not take place. A press release was prepared and is being distributed by the Parish Council in December 2023.



### **3. Key Site Features**

The key feature of Vincent's Meadow is the Wood Pasture – both in terms of biodiversity and intrinsic landscape value. Although the habitat does not consist of truly veteran trees (unlike many ancient parklands and wood pastures), the assemblage of mature oaks still provides valuable developing biodiversity and attractive landscape interest. The associated pasture is also of merit, in places appearing to be semi-natural grassland; with great potential to be further enhanced as a wildlife habitat.

Elsewhere on the site, the pond, hedges and scrub are other important features. Pick-ups Pond is a historic body of water that forms one of a chain of small ponds across Naphill Common. It has significant biodiversity value as well as providing an appealing and secluded spot.

The boundary hedges remain significant components of the site – giving landscape value to provide a sense of seclusion and also presenting important wildlife habitat. Meanwhile the scrub on the pasture has also become a particular feature, with some significant patches of bramble and shrubs encroaching onto the grassland.



Above; The wood pasture; looking north west. 2023. (Mike Deegan)



## 4. Key Management Objectives

The Primary objective is to;

1. **Maintain the biodiversity interest of wood pasture and pond in a favourable condition.**

There are two key secondary objectives

2. **Maintain the biodiversity interest of associated wildlife habitats in a favourable condition; - the scrub and hedgerow.**
3. **Maintain access and engage with local stakeholders to ensure an enjoyable, educational and safe visitor experience.**

### 4.1 Maintain the biodiversity interest of the wood pasture and pond in a favourable condition

#### Mature Trees

Wood pasture is grazed land supporting veteran or mature trees. The greatest biodiversity asset of the site is likely to be the presence of many relatively mature oak trees. English or Pedunculate oak trees can support up to 2,300 species of wildlife. These oaks do not yet include any 'Veteran' or ancient oak trees, but the assemblage still provides a valuable habitat asset.

Trees grow and develop features differently in open conditions than in a closed woodland canopy. They develop wider, more complex crowns which support more species than usually found in woodland trees. Wood pasture trees often also live longer in open situations, so provide a greater continuous volume of deadwood habitat.

As the trees age, they produce a wide range of distinct microhabitats particularly important for rare *saproxyllic* invertebrates (those insect species that use dead or decaying wood for egg laying).

#### Age structure/species

Biodiversity-rich Wood Pasture relies on allowing veteran or mature trees to age and die naturally. The habitat also requires a continuous profile of age - including young trees to ensure future generations of mature trees. It is not clear what the origin of the current oak trees is, but it is possible they grew as naturally regenerated saplings during a period of low-grazing intensity. There are numerous self-set oak saplings currently growing from fallen or buried acorns in the pasture. Some of these could be strategically selected and protected with tree boxes to encourage the next generation of oak trees – providing a continuation of oaks with local provenance.



Above; Oak seedling in pasture. (Mike Deegan)



The longstanding presence of dead and decaying wood provides some of the most important habitat niches in wood pastures. This continuity of decaying wood and deadwood conditions includes standing dead trees, stumps, fallen trunks/branches and exposed root plates. These conditions run counter to many modern forestry and park management practices; where dead or decaying wood is seen as unsightly or commercially desirable. *'Encouraging a continuity of decaying wood and deadwood conditions will be the most critical factor for long-term persistence of specialised invertebrates'.* **(Wood pasture and other veteran tree sites – Natural England/Buglife)**

There is evidence that most dead or fallen wood has been removed from site. It is essential that wherever possible, trees are allowed to grow naturally; so fallen and standing deadwood should be left in situ. It might also be feasible to encourage more deadwood habitat on existing trees, as practiced by conservation managers in ancient parkland habitats. It is noticeable that the stand of Ash trees (*Fraxinus sp.*) next to the pond is suffering from Ash Dieback. This is an unfortunate situation, but where it is safe to do so, these should be retained as standing or fallen dead trees.

*Saproxylic* invertebrates typically require a variety of habitats for different stages of their life-cycles. Where possible, this will require a diverse range or mosaic of habitats within the wood pasture. As well as tall and unkempt vegetation, this mosaic can also include areas of short turf and bare ground for specialist invertebrates. Rabbits can often help provide these habitats.

Species diversity is also an important component of such sites. The Parish Council's tree surveyor (Andrew McEwan), has identified at least ten tree species on the site, including Hawthorn (*Crataegus sp.*), whose blossom is one of the most valuable pollen and nectar sources in wood pasture. Other such valuable species include Holly (*Ilex sp.*), Goat Willow (*Salix caprea*), Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) and Wild Cherry (*Prunus avium*). Some of these other locally-native species suited to the site will add diversity if selected as 'standard' trees retained or planted and left to mature on the pasture. Ideally these can come from saplings naturally regenerating on site.



Above: Box tree guards on natural regen.

Unfortunately there appears to be very no recorded invertebrate surveys and very little information for Vincent's Meadow. It is suggested that the Parish Council engages with the *Buckinghamshire Invertebrate Group* or Ecological Consultants (such as *Future Nature WTC*) to commission an entomological survey of the Wood pasture – particularly *saproxylic* species. This will help to establish the current biodiversity status and establish a baseline for future management and monitoring.

### Grassland

Much of the pasture appears to be semi-natural grassland (meaning it has not had significant fertilizer or herbicide applied to it) as there are a number of wildflower species present. This is significant as grassland within wood pastures can support scarce invertebrates as well as a range of flora and fauna. Many invertebrates depend on a mosaic of habitats in combination with mature trees; including species found at Vincent's Meadow, such as Meadow buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*). Other beneficial flowering plants include Lesser stitchwort (*Stellaria graminea*) Common birdsfoot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), Selfheal (*Prunella vulgaris*) and Black knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*).

Where possible, such plants should be encouraged to flower by relaxing grazing during the summer or not cutting between April and September.

### Grazing

To maintain the pasture and achieve a favourable condition it will be necessary to implement a traditional agricultural management regime. This involves re-introducing livestock (ideally cattle, but sheep will suffice) at a low grazing density (less than 0.5 per hectare) during late summer or autumn to ensure the grassland sward is managed and any encroachment of scrub or tall herb vegetation is curtailed. Grazing animals are usually on site for two-three months at relatively low stocking densities.

Cattle may have been the previous livestock on Vincent's Meadow as they are not particularly selective in their grazing. They are larger than sheep and have a greater trampling effect;, poaching ground and creating micro-habitats. Their size also allows them to move through tall, dense bracken stands. They can create an uneven, tussocky sward.

Sheep are more selective grazers; eating more fine-leaved grasses and tender shoots, but less fibrous material. They create a short, tight sward and can strip bark in harsh weather. According to John Moorby, the site only had a handful of horses grazing the pasture in the 1990's. Ponies can also be kept on site much later in the year. *Horses and ponies are selective grazers, but hardy native breeds of pony will eat coarser grasses and less palatable forage, creating a varied sward structure and producing open, herb-rich swards.*(Wood Wise, Woodland Trust, 2012).

One of the aims of grazing management is to maintain low fertility levels (in the soil) and ensure the right growing conditions for grassland wildflowers. Keeping the vegetative sward managed is critical for any pasture and also helps prevent scrub from encroaching. Animal dung is also an important component of these eco-systems. Not only does it act as a natural fertilizer but the dung of livestock supports a high abundance of invertebrates such as dung beetles (such as the *Chilothonax distinctus* species). To ensure healthy dung, it is essential that livestock are not treated with avermectins, which have potential insecticidal properties.



Botanical diversity and low fertility should be strictly maintained by not allowing any use of artificial fertilizers, pesticides or supplementary feeding (except where vital for livestock health). Likewise, a traditional grazing regime should avoid excessive stocking of livestock.

### Infrastructure

Before re-introducing livestock, it will be necessary to ensure the infra-structure of the site is suitable for holding grazing animals. This will include ensuring the current fencing is still stock-proof and provision of a clean water supply available. It is likely that both these aspects will require some forward planning and attention.



*Above; Collapsed fenceline 2023 (Mike Deegan)*

### Cutting

If for any reason grazing is not achievable, cutting the pasture in late summer or early autumn for hay might be considered as a secondary option. All cut vegetation should be tedded and removed from site. This would help towards reducing nutrients and leaving the grassland sward relatively short in time for the following spring. However, cutting cannot replicate the benefits of grazing livestock on site – providing a diverse sward for flora and fauna (not dramatically cut all at once like a meadow) and niche elements of pasture habitats such as dung. If this is carried out, it should be viewed as a temporary measure.

### Dog-walkers

One of the key challenges to re-introducing grazing livestock is the number of dog-walkers that now use the site. Implementing this management will require ongoing community support (to keep dogs under control and on a close lead) if livestock will be able to graze the site without intimidation or dog attacks.



### Pick-ups Pond

The pond was identified in the 2015 Ecological Survey as a habitat of considerable biodiversity value – particularly for plants, amphibians and invertebrates. The chain of ponds across Naphill Common is particularly important as over two thirds of these aquatic habitats have been lost over the past century through drainage and agricultural intensification.

Given the historical use of these ponds as watering points for drover's cattle, it is likely that Pick-ups Pond was an open body of water with little submergent or surrounding vegetation. Photographic evidence from as recently as 2002 and 2005 (provided by John Moorby) shows the pond as a much more open body of water with considerably less vegetation in and around it.



*Above; The pond in 2005 (John Moorby) and in 2023 (Mike Deegan).*

### Loss of open water

The open nature of the pond had already started to change by 2015; *The pond is very well vegetated with more or less the whole of the pond being full of plants. Open water was confined to a small area in the centre of the pond and very shallow.* (Ecological Survey; Rod d'Ayal).

Aquatic pond vegetation (marginal and emergent) provides essential wildlife habitat, but these can be sensitive and dynamic ecosystems. Without management the stages of natural succession will see pioneering plants established and then dominate; quickly reducing the area of open water. Floating Sweet Grass is a perennial grass currently doing this come - forming floating rafts in the shallow water. This plant is normally a valuable element of a managed wetland habitat (especially for invertebrates and amphibians in marshes, swamps and muddy pond margins), but it needs to be managed to maintain a sustainable balance between open water, shallow margins and dense vegetation. Even ash saplings are starting to grow within the edge of the pond, which indicates evidence of advanced natural succession.

Without any significant management since 2005, the pond has become heavily shaded on three sides by trees and shrubs, which can have a detrimental impact on such an aquatic habitat and reduce biodiversity. Proximity to native trees and scrub can be greatly beneficial (especially for many species of amphibians and birds), including the Blackthorn scrub at the back of the pond and overhanging branches from the copse to the north. However, it is equally important to sufficiently open up the pond to reduce the impact of shading and leaf litter accumulation. Without such management the pond will eventually become silted up, vegetate-over and be lost.

### Pond Restoration

In the absence of traditional management, such as grazing, it will be necessary to physically intervene to clear much of the vegetation and accumulated sediment. This clearance operation should include at least 70% of the pond's area and ensure if possible it does not completely remove any single native plant species. The work should restore the pond's former profile; with shallow margins and undulating water's edge. Sensitive clearance with a tracked small mini-digger will be the most practical short-term solution. Given the fencing around the pond from Downley Road, it might be easiest to access the pond from the meadow.

Extracted mud and vegetation should be removed away from the site, but not onto any species-rich habitats. The optimal period for pond clearance is usually in the autumn (September – November) when both pond and ground conditions should be relatively dry. The period from late January to August should be avoided to ensure minimal disturbance to amphibians and birds during the breeding season. Algal blooms may occur following clearance, but should soon clear.

*'In old ponds the colonisation of native wetland plants can be very fast and within two years it can be near impossible to know that any restoration works took place'. (Restoring, creating and managing ponds for wildlife - Freshwater Habitats Trust).*

### Trees and scrub around the pond

Where possible, trees and shrubs should be coppiced (on a regular cycle) from between 50% - 75% of the pond margin. Emphasis should be paid to the southern and western boundaries to allow more light in. Maintaining this lower proportion of tree cover will create an ideal balance as ponds that are both open and a little shaded can be extremely rich and diverse wildlife habitats.

Much of the felled wood can be utilised on site as constructed log-piles. These structures provide excellent habitat for many species of fauna – particularly invertebrates and amphibians. Some larger logs could be part submerged in the pond to provide rotting deadwood, which is a valuable aquatic habitat for egg-laying invertebrates such as Hawker dragonflies.



Above; Mown areas around the pond – 2023 (Mike Deegan



### Grassland around the Pond

The 2015 Ecological Survey outlined that regular short-mowing of grass in front of the pond was impacting its ecological value. Public access could still be maintained, but the size of this mown area reduced; and with fewer cuts to allow vegetation to grow longer and plants to flower. “*The land surrounding a pond should support semi-natural vegetation including tussocky grasses, flowering plants, & scrub*” (Restoring, creating and managing ponds for wildlife - Freshwater Habitats Trust).

### Non-native invasive species

Six non-native species of flora were recorded in the 2015 Ecological Survey. Ponds are particularly susceptible habitats to colonisation by alien flora and fauna which can potentially out-compete native species. The survey emphasised the importance of removing any species not typical of the area or habitat. Within the pond this includes introduced species Water Lily (*Nymphaeaceae spp*) and Nuttall's Waterweed (*Elodea nuttallii*), both of which could be eradicated by systematic weeding (by hand) over 2-3 years.

A number of invasive garden plants, possibly from local houses, are also starting to encroach on the wetland habitat. These include Crocosmia (part of the iris family also known as *Montbretia*) and Dotted Loosestrife (*Lysimachia punctata*) which could both become increasingly invasive if not controlled.

There are two species of non-native tree and shrub that are having a detrimental impact on the pond's biodiversity status. The planted Weeping Willow (*Salix babylonica*) looks attractive, but has limited wildlife value and is starting to cast heavy shade on one side of the pond. It should be felled; with the stump removed or killed. The garden shrub Douglas Spiraea (*Spiraea douglasii*) is becoming extremely invasive around the shallow margins of the pond. This should also be completely dug up and removed.

### Public Access

The pond provides a picturesque and tranquil location for visitors. This site has probably also been an important part of the local landscape and culture on Naphill for some time – especially given its proximity to the former pub, the Blacksmith's. Therefore it is important to strike a balance between maintaining a community amenity and a valuable biodiversity habitat. This includes maintaining public access to the bench (via a mown path from the kissing gate); though the cut areas of grass to the sides of the pond (north and south) should be reduced to once a year in early autumn.

There is no evidence here that dogwalkers allow their pets to enter the water, but dogs frequently using ponds can have a greatly detrimental impact on their biodiversity value. This is where provision of positive and friendly on-site information or interpretation would be greatly beneficial. Enhanced information and ongoing engagement will help the Parish Council achieve both its biodiversity and community aims.

## 4.2 Maintain the biodiversity interest of associated wildlife habitats in a favourable condition; - the scrub and hedgerow.

### Hedgerows

The surrounding hedgerows and boundary trees have considerable biodiversity value and provide an adjoining semi-natural habitat to the wood pasture. This wooded boundary also ensures that Vincent's Meadow aesthetically feels more of a pastoral and secluded location. Much of the hedgerow (including the internal boundary to the small field in the north eastern corner) was laid traditionally by John Moorby in the late 1990's as part of the Countryside Stewardship agreement, but it has not been managed since.

Most of the hedgerow trees and shrubs have been allowed to mature; with fruit & blossom providing biodiversity benefits. This boundary never-the-less requires management to prevent it shading the grassland, impacting neighbouring properties and prevent encroachment of scrub into the meadow (as is already occurring).

Ideally much of this hedgerow can be re-laid, with separate lengths managed on a regular cycle (no more than a third in any given year to ensure a source of fruits and nectar) to maintain a bushy, but relatively low height. If not laid, some sections might be coppiced. As with all woodland and hedgerow maintenance, this work should only be carried out during the winter months.



Above; Hedge laid 1997 (John Moorby)

Some of this boundary maintenance should also include keeping under control encroaching vegetation from neighbouring properties too; especially the intrusive Leyland cypress (*Cupressocyparis leylandii*) hedge.



### Scrub, bracken and nettles

At the time of writing, the meadow has not been managed for at least two years and the vegetation sward has become quite rank. There is also evidence of extensive encroachment by scrub, bracken and nettles – particularly in the north eastern section and around the pond.

This needs to be controlled to ensure that it does not smother and replace the grassland habitat. Whilst some of this habitat can be beneficial for biodiversity, without management it will encroach across the whole pasture. Most of these areas should be cut to ground level (with the vegetation removed) before grazing commences. It may be necessary to do this more than once.



Above; Hawthorn blossom in wood pasture. (Mike Deegan)

Conversely, some tall herb vegetation (such as Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*), and Ivy (*Hedera helix*) growing along hedges and fence lines) provides beneficial food and shelter for many species of fauna, including *saproxylic* insects. Therefore some tall flowery herbs, bramble, Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) and nettle (*Urtica dioica*) can be natural and beneficial components of healthy wood pastures. Their presence within the pasture however should not become over-dominant. Specific areas should be identified or mapped and allowed to continue; protected from grazing and cutting. These can be managed on a cycle by rotational cutting. Fencing off or limiting livestock access to hedges will also help develop flower-rich hedge bottoms. Ivy grows in combination with the scrub and trees on Vincent's Meadow. This woody climbing plant provides shelter to many species of fauna and its flowers are essential in early autumn for many invertebrates. Unless the ivy is causing a clear problem, it should not be cut or cleared from trees.



*Above; Bramble scrub on the pasture. 2023 (Mike Deegan)*

The encroaching scrub also provides a beneficial habitat (not just for invertebrates but many species of birds and mammals) where a balance for biodiversity is required. In particular, the blackthorn and hawthorn scrub provides good wildlife habitat, but without management will dominate the grassland, lose its beneficial structure and eventually lead (through natural succession) to secondary woodland. This needs to be mapped; with the most valuable areas or individual shrubs identified for retention. These can be managed on a cycle by rotational cutting – ideally with limited access afterwards for livestock to eat the coppiced regrowth.

#### Connectivity

There is great scope to co-ordinate management with neighbouring Naphill Common SSSI. This will involve enhancing the ongoing liaison and partnership working with the active FoNC group.

#### **4.3 Maintain access and engage with local stakeholders to ensure an enjoyable, educational and safe visitor experience.**

Vincent's Meadow is an attractive and semi-rural open-space, which is well used by the local community (particularly dog walkers). As a Hughenden Parish Council, it has great potential to be further enhanced for community enjoyment and biodiversity.

#### Education and Interpretation

Given its proximity to Naphill Common (and just a mile north of High Wycombe) the site provides significant educational opportunities to raise awareness of its biodiversity habitats and heritage value with the local community and visitors.

Educational activities and events could be developed in partnership with local community and other organisations. Onsite interpretation would also be beneficial; particularly to highlight the wildlife importance and outline the historical role managing wood pasture and ponds once played on Naphill Common. High quality and user-friendly panels can be commissioned and developed to provide wildlife and cultural heritage information. At the very least the access points should have signage indicating the name of the site/s.



### Community Engagement

Community engagement is key to successful management in helping restore the wildlife habitats and enhance local interaction. The Parish Council can do this first by liaising with and involving relevant local groups and organisations. In the *Friends of Naphill Common*, the Parish Council already has an active and relevant potential partner to work alongside.

Requests for wider public information and feedback can be well received and reap positive results. Keeping the community updated with progress is also beneficial. Naphill and Walter's Ash Community Website provides a useful platform to positively engage with the local population.

The Parish Council has surprisingly little historical information available on Vincent's Meadow and Pond. Almost all the background information for this plan has been kindly provided by John Moorby extracted from the FoNC website. Enhanced community involvement could help gather any more local information about the site's history, management and any anecdotal stories of people's use of the meadows to build a cultural narrative around the site and surrounding area.



Above. Current signage on the access kissing gate. 2023 (Mike Deegan)

Public engagement can also be used to highlight the importance of grazing livestock and clearing the pond to maintaining the site's biodiversity. This will be especially important in gaining the support of dog-walkers - to keep their pets on close leads and clear their faeces. This will require an ongoing campaign of information from the Parish Council; with positive onsite signage and local publicity. It might also be possible to appoint local volunteer wardens to monitor wildlife and ensure the site is being used safely and appropriately.

### Local Advice and Support

Ongoing nature conservation management advice, support and useful contacts (such as contractors & farmers) can be sought from local conservation organisations; such as the Chilterns Conservation Board, the Wildlife Trust's ecological consultancy (*Future Nature WTC*) and Friends of Naphill Common.

## 5. Rationale

### 5.1. Maintain the biodiversity interest of the wood pasture and pond in a favourable condition.

#### The Trees

Wood Pastures are home to some of our rarest or endangered forms of wildlife in the UK, but have faced great losses and challenges in the past 70 years. This includes development, intensive agriculture, commercial forestry and habitat fragmentation. The density of trees in wood pastures varies, but a traditional approximation was up to 50 trees per hectare; with the species present usually reflecting the natural woodland cover typical of the local soils. The SSSI includes mature beech and crab apple tree; perhaps seeds or saplings from these can be planted too.

Although Vincent's Meadow is not an ancient Wood Pasture with veteran trees, it does contain distinct similar habitat characteristics; including an assemblage of maturing and full-crowned oak trees in a pasture of semi-natural grassland. Although the site was most likely carved out of Naphill Common (during the nineteenth century enclosures), there is no evidence any of these trees are old enough to be linked to that period. However, the common at that time included large areas of wood pasture habitat and associated biodiversity. This legacy and the immediate proximity to Naphill Common SSSI (and the relic wood ancient pasture trees and habitats it contains) provides a natural association and characterisation for this site

Encouraging a diverse age structure will ensure a continuous range of trees to mature and provide the ideal decaying or deadwood conditions for *saproxylic* biodiversity. The provision of a mosaic of habitats is essential for many of these and associated species of wildlife. This diversity includes other flowering trees or shrubs, open ground and even micro-habitats such as animal dung.



Above; Fallen deadwood left in situ on wood pasture.

(Mike Deegan)



### The Pasture

The condition of the pasture is also an important element of the site. Such semi-natural grassland provides an important habitat for many species of flora and fauna. This biodiversity value is greatly increased when found in situ with the mature trees as Wood pasture – particularly for the life cycle requirements of some *saproxylic* invertebrates.

A lack of management in recent years has led to encroachment of scrub and an increasingly rank sward on much of the pasture. Without appropriate management the biodiversity interest of this site is threatened. The optimal method of maintaining this pasture is through traditional livestock grazing, which can provide the most varied habitat. Grazing levels should be adjusted according to the climate to avoid over/under-grazing and compaction. Additional manual cutting of scrub and tall vegetation may also be required (in specific areas) to restore the grassland habitat.

Cutting for hay is not as complimentary for biodiversity and should only be considered if all options for grazing have been ruled out. Therefore every effort should be made to ensure dogs are kept under control, a reliable grazier is sourced and the site is made stock-proof.

### The Pond

As one of a series of ponds across Naphill Common, Pick-ups Pond holds an important place in the local and historic landscape. It also has considerable biodiversity value that is currently threatened by a current lack of management. Without intervention it may be lost through natural succession.

Sensitive clearance of part of the pond area will help to restore much of its open water and marginal aquatic habitat. Reducing the tree and shrub canopy around the pond will also increase sunlight and help limit shade or leaf-litter accumulation. Just as importantly invasive and non-native plants should be eradicated as soon as possible to help safeguard the ponds biodiversity.

Regular mowing of the grass around the pond provides a tidy aspect, but nature is not always tidy and this maintenance is damaging the habitat and its biodiversity value. Modifying and limiting mowing around the pond can be achieved without restricting access to the public bench.



Above; Douglas Spiraea growing in the western margins of the pond. 2023 (Mike Deegan)

## **5.2 Maintain the biodiversity interest of associated wildlife habitats in a favourable condition; the scrub and hedgerow.**

### Hedges

The site's hedgerows are not only of historic and biodiversity value, but they provide important complimentary semi-natural habitat to the wood pasture. Where possible, a regular programme of traditional hedgelaying will maintain a favourable hedgerow structure and keep their growth in check.

As outlined, the wooded boundary does provide an enclosed and visually appealing feature to the meadow. However, many of these trees and shrubs do require maintenance, particularly when along neighbouring property boundaries.

### Scrub, bracken and nettles

Maintaining valuable semi-natural grassland habitat with beneficial vegetation such as scrub, bracken and nettles is very much a balancing act of priorities. The main priority is to maintain the grassland pasture in a favourable condition. Without management the grassland will quickly be lost; first to scrub and then through natural succession to secondary woodland. Therefore the scrub and taller herb vegetation should be managed to restore the lost areas of higher-priority grassland. As a compromise and to retain an element of this other habitat type, smaller specific areas will be managed areas of scrub, bracken and nettle-beds to be maintained.



Above; Bracken below the powerline, 2023. Mike Deegan



### **5.3 Maintain access and engage with local stakeholders to ensure an enjoyable, educational and safe visitor experience.**

#### ***Access and awareness***

This site contains valuable wildlife habitats and historical landscape features that have considerable educational value. There is great potential for the Parish Council to enhance onsite interpretation and involve the community in environmental activities. This would be a wonderful way to ensure greater community appreciation and understanding of the biodiversity and habitats present (which many residents may not even be aware of).

The Parish Council also has an ongoing responsibility to maintain safe and enjoyable public site access to both the meadow and pond. Maintaining the circular route around the meadow and the short path to the pond bench is important.

The lack of any on-site interpretation is a missed opportunity to enhance the profile of the Parish Council and provide valuable information to visitors as to why this site is so important. Information on the possible impact of uncontrolled dogs on grazing animals will also be crucial. Greater engagement and raising awareness of the maintenance issues and biodiversity value of Vincent's meadow can only enhance community support to help ensure management objectives are achieved.

#### ***Engagement***

Hughenden Parish Council has a great platform to start effectively engaging with the local stakeholders for this site. It is also fortunate to already have two potential partners to work with in the FoNC and Naphill & Walter's Ash Community Website.

Vincent's Meadow and Pond is a great asset for the Parish Council, but significant management planning and input is required to fulfil its community and biodiversity potential. Positive engagement will help develop community links and support with the site's management

### **5.4 General Points**

It is likely Hughenden Parish Council will require additional funding to implement some of the actions prescribed in this management plan. External funding frees up money otherwise needed for other Council duties. Many grants (such as the *Countryside Stewardship* scheme), also help to keep management focussed on achieving key objectives.

Securing a reliable local grazier or shepherd may prove to be a challenge, but relevant contacts might be sourced via Future Nature WTC, the Bucks & MK Natural Environment Partnership, NFU or Country Land and Business Association.

Many actions have not yet been costed-up in the Action Plan, but it is likely that once good habitat management and community engagement is established, the most effective ongoing work required will cost very little.

## 6. Monitoring and Review

A management plan is only as effective as subsequent management carried out; in most circumstances this requires ongoing monitoring and evaluation. To achieve this it is necessary to identify the data and information required; for evaluating progress towards achieving the key objectives. This requires a set of performance indicators that can be easily recognised, measured or monitored; to provide an indication management is appropriate and working well.

### ***Biodiversity***

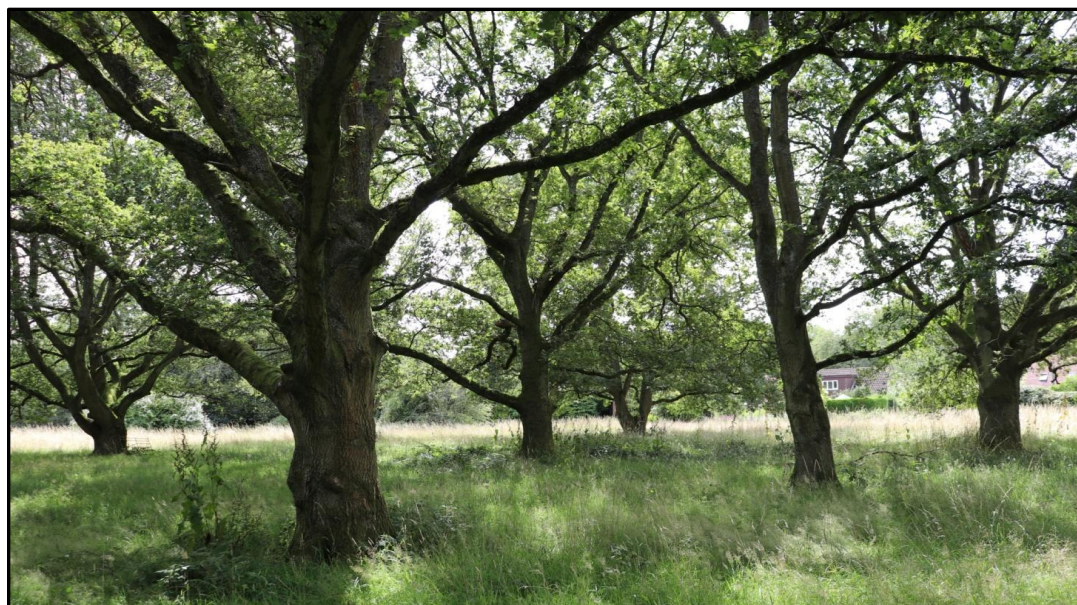
The pond 2015 survey is useful, but there is no similar study for the meadow. A comprehensive survey, particularly of invertebrates and the flora is required for 2024. This is required to establish a reliable baseline of wildlife habitat data to review against during the duration of the plan. A regular schedule of such ecological surveys and monitoring will be necessary to measure the ongoing effect of the Parish Council's management. These will require the identification of key indicators species; particularly *saproxylic* invertebrates for the pasture and aquatic flora for pond.

After a comprehensive survey in the first year, it will be pragmatic to schedule a survey of each main study group every three years; so a subsequent invertebrate survey might be 2027. This will require careful planning to commission specialist support and/or enlist local volunteer expertise.

### ***Access and Engagement***

Monitoring access and stakeholder experience can be a difficult task. To establish a baseline of information, initial consultation could ask the local community and site-users for constructive answers what they think of the habitats, how often they visit (and why), current management and the availability of site information. These same questions could be posed at the end of the plan to test and assess if there has been a positive change.

As with biodiversity, the Parish Council can also evaluate factors such as access & interpretation improvements or efforts to engage/provide information during the plan. With support of partner organisation and establishment of surveys and monitoring, the Parish Council should have a system in place to collect and evaluate this information, with ongoing review procedures.



Above; The main cluster of oak trees – 2023. (Mike Deegan)



## 7. Action Plan

This is the prescriptive section that provides a management programme or work plan to help deliver the identified objectives. This Action Plan should form an integral part of forward planning for both the Open Spaces Committee and main Council. The lead role for implementation (the 'Who' column) has not been included as this will be the responsibility of Hughenden Parish Council to delegate.

Action Plan Objective 1		Maintain the biodiversity interest of wood pasture and pond in a favourable condition.			
Element	Task/Action	Timing, frequency and duration	Year	Estimated Costs	Progress /Update
The wood pasture trees	<b>Do not remove</b> any dead or decaying wood	Ongoing	Each year 2024-28	0	
	Encourage dead or decaying wood where feasible			TBD	
	The only trees/limbs felled or cut should be those identified as a high risk to public safety. These should be made safe and cut wood left in situ or standing trunks left as high as possible.			TBD	
Age structure/species (no more than 50 trees per hectare)	Map and categorise (age/species/condition) the current pasture trees	May-July 2024	2024	TBD	
	Strategically select oak saplings and protect with tree boxes (parkland fencing). Transplant if necessary.	May-December 2024	2024-25	TBD	
	Strategically select hawthorn, blackthorn, wild cherry or holly saplings and protect with tree boxes (fencing). Transplant if necessary.			TBD	
	Consider collecting beech and crab apple seed (to germinate) or saplings from the SSSI (with prior permission) for planting.	May-November 2024	2024	TBD	
Grazing the pasture *	Ensure boundary fencing is adequately stock-proof and access gates in good order	At least two months before grazing	Each year	0	
	Make any fencing repairs well before grazing		As required	TBD	

	Check current status of water supply and trough for livestock.	By Spring	Each year	0	
	Arrange to restore water supply/trough if required.	Plan early to have in place before grazing	2024	TBD	
	Source a suitable owner of; either cattle, sheep or ponies (priority in that order).	By Spring - plan early	Each year	0	
	Arrange <u>formal grazing agreement</u> with livestock owner to provide animals to required density/numbers and timing (approx. less than 0.5 head of livestock per hectare).	Plan early to have agreement in place by spring. Grazing by late summer/early autumn		TBD	
	Ensure no grazing animals are treated with <i>ivermectins</i> .	Before signing agreement and monitor	Each year	0	
	Ensure no use of artificial fertilizers, pesticides or supplementary feeding.				
	* If not possible to graze ensure that grassland is cut for hay, tedded and vegetation removed	* Early autumn. Plan early to have in place	2024	TBD	
Restore Pick-ups Pond	Arrange agreement with a qualified tracked mini-digger contractor.	Plan early summer.	2024	0	
	Clear up to 70% of accumulated mud and emergent/floating vegetation; to restore former profile of shallow margins & undulating edge.	September - October	2024	TBD	
	Remove spoil and vegetation from site to a suitable location.				
	Eradicate invasive introduced species; Water Lily and Nuttalls Waterweed	Summer weeding by hand	2024-26	TBD	
	Cut/Coppice trees/shrubs from 50%-70% of pond periphery - especially on south/west side.	November to February	2024-26	TBD	
	Use cut wood to construct discrete log-piles.				
	Cut down and treat/dig up roots of non-native Weeping Willow and Douglas Spiraea				
	Restrict regular grass mowing to the path from	Spring to autumn	Each year	0	

	the kissing gate to bench.				
	Reduce any other mowing of grassy areas to a single cut on a two year cycle.				
	Eradicate garden plants <i>Crocasmia (Montbretia)</i> and Dotted Loosestrife.	Pull by hand and keep cutting/pulling regrowth.	2024-26	TBD	

Action Plan Objective 2		Maintain the biodiversity interest of associated wildlife habitats - scrub and hedgerow.			
Element	Task/Action	Timing, frequency and duration	Year	Estimated Costs	Progress /Update
Maintain boundary and internal hedges	Assess the hedgerows to consider whether these can be laid again or coppiced.	Early summer	2024	0	
	Appoint hedgelayer or recruit volunteers to lay or coppice hedgerow sections on a rotation.	Plan early to carry out November to February	2024-28	TBD	
	Use cut wood to construct discrete log-piles.				
Manage (and maintain) scrub	Map the areas of scrub and specify priority areas/shrubs for retention.	Late spring/early summer	2024	0	
	Fence (or protect with brash from cut scrub)	Summer - autumn	2024	TBD	
	Cut these target areas on a rotation.	November to February	2024-28	TBD	
	Cut all other areas of scrub and allow for aftermath grazing of regrowth.	Ongoing	2024-26	TBD	
Manage (& maintain) bracken and tall herb vegetation (nettles)	Map main areas and specify priority plots for retention.	Summer	2024	0	
	Fence and cut these target areas on a rotation.	Summer - autumn	2024	TBD	
	Cut all other areas and allow for aftermath grazing.	Late July - August	2024-28	TBD	
	Rake and heap cut vegetation into habitat piles.				



Action Plan Objective 3		Maintain access and engage with local stakeholders to ensure an enjoyable, educational and safe visitor experience.			
Element	Task/Action	Timing, frequency and duration	Year	Estimated Costs	Progress /Update
Maintain safe and easy access	Ensure the permissive circular paths around the meadow and to the pond bench are kept open and access kissing-gates in good order.	Ongoing at all times	Each year	TBD	
Provide onsite signage	Develop and install formal signage for both access points indicating the site's title and Parish Council's name.	Summer	2024	TBD	
	Develop and install temporary notice signage as necessary; including when there is; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grazing animals on site</li> <li>Pond clearance</li> <li>Dogs to be kept on a close lead</li> <li>Tree felling or scrub clearance</li> <li>Events or volunteer activities</li> </ul>	As required	As required	TBD	
Provide on-site interpretation	Consider commissioning, developing and installing interpretation panels for both sites.	Plan early to develop both panels	2024-25	Appr £2.5k per panel	
Engage with the local community	Consult and inform residents and local stakeholders over the management plan	Winter	2024/25	0	
	Provide a request for relevant site information or history				
Engage local groups & partner organisations	Establish regular liaison re-site management; with <i>FoNC, Naphill and Walter's Ash Community Website, Hughenden Valley Climate Group and Bucks &amp; MK Natural Environment Partnership.</i>	From Winter, then ongoing at all times	Ongoing 2023-28	0	
Provide regular updates to local groups/organisations	Reports for both <u>local media</u> and <u>publications</u> on management and positive habitat/species updates; <i>Naphill &amp; Walter's Ash Community Website</i> and <i>Hughenden Valley Climate Group</i> .				

Provide updates via Parish Council's communication platforms	Regular reports on management, habitat & species on council website & local noticeboards	Ongoing at all times	Ongoing 2023-28	0	
	Consider developing a Parish Council social media presence and newsletter – to be utilised for updates on this and other open-spaces	Spring/Summer	2024	TBD	
Consider utilising the site's environmental education potential	Liaise with local organisations and groups to develop a programme of activities and events	Summer 2024 Then ongoing	2024 -28	–	
	Liaise with local educational and youth establishments to promote the site for biodiversity classes and training	Summer/autumn Then ongoing	2024 -28	-	

Action Plan		General Actions relevant all three Objectives			
Element	Task/Action	Timing, frequency and duration	Year	Estimated Costs	Progress
Source external funding	Develop a shortlist of potential funders; such as <i>Landfill Community Funds, Lottery sources, the Countryside Stewardship Scheme and Bucks/MK Nat Env Partnership</i>	Winter - Spring	2024	0	
	Liaise with funding organisation/s and make application	Spring - autumn			
Survey and Monitor	Liaise with <i>Bucks Invertebrate Group</i> or consultants such as <i>Future Nature WTC</i> to commission a series of invertebrate surveys.	Winter - Summer	2024, 2026 and 2028	TBD	
	Liaise with local special interest wildlife groups or organisations to help establish a system of surveys and ongoing monitoring for other key species groups (flora, fungi & mammals)		Ongoing	TBD	