

# THE WARDS WILDLIFE SITE

## MANAGEMENT PLAN

PREPARED BY THE MORAY COUNCIL

JUNE 2002



### 1 GENERAL INFORMATION

The Wards is located in Elgin, south of the rail track, which separates Elgin from New Elgin, and east of Bilbohall Farm. The southern end of the site is unfenced and there is open access. The road to the north of the site leading to Beechgrove House and Gateside is private and has a padlocked gate and is inaccessible from the Scout Hall. A day care centre has been developed on the south-east corner of the site.

**Status The Council and Scottish Wildlife Trust have designated the site as a non-statutory wildlife site.**

### 2. INTRODUCTION

#### 2.1 SITE HISTORY

The site has been surveyed by the Scottish Wildlife Trust in 1997. A Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) for the site was subsequently prepared by the Moray Council and Scottish Natural Heritage which resulted in the site being designated by the Council and Scottish Wildlife Trust as a non-statutory wildlife site. The majority of the site is presently protected from adverse development proposals by Policy L/ENV2 "Non-Statutory Nature Conservation Sites, Local Designations" of the Moray Local Plan 2000 which states that:

**"Development proposals which will have an adverse effect on Local Nature Reserves, SINS or conflict with the objectives of Local Biodiversity Action Plans will only be permitted if they incorporate specific measures to minimise impact and conserve the sites ecological interest and moreover, where significant adverse effects are involved, a locational need must be clearly established".**

This management plan was drawn up following a public consultation workshop held on 4th June 2001 which was attended by 36 members of the local community. The suggestions made at the

workshop and through consultation on the draft management plan have been incorporated into the proposals set out in this plan. There was a general consensus that the site offered great potential as an educational and community resource but this should include a **"minimum of disruption"** to the habitat and species in the site.

The Wards is a flat area of mostly grassland surrounded by neutral grassland with planted broadleaves in an urban area. The substrate is peaty and the water table is at or above the surface. The drier areas are in the south and under the trees in the southwestern and northwestern corners.

The land has been extensively drained in the past and drains into the burn of Tyock in the south although the drains at present are overgrown. The land was previously grazed as dilapidated barbed wire fences are evident along the drains. The site is enclosed on three sides by housing and commercial development. The Scout Hall and Greenwards Primary School are adjacent to the site.

This management plan has been prepared to raise awareness of the importance of the site and to manage the site in the future for its natural heritage value and community benefit.

### 3. ECOLOGICAL DATA

#### Vegetation Cover

The Wards is a wetland habitat of marshy grassland surrounded by neutral grassland. A site survey was carried out by the Scottish Wildlife Trust in 1997. Moray Field Club have also carried out a survey. The habitats found within the main compartments are as follows (see map 1);

#### Compartment A (4.43 ha)

An unimproved neutral grassland extends around the perimeter of the whole site. The grasses are long, rank and ungrazed. The grassland is drier in the northern extent but the hydrology varies over the whole site and the grassland becomes wetter around the ditches, and towards the marshy grasslands.

#### Compartment B (6ha)

This is an extensive area of marshy grassland dominated by tall, rank Soft Rush. The substrate is wet with the water table above the surface in places, especially around the drainage ditches. The marshy grassland extends over most of the site and is difficult to negotiate, especially in the wetter areas. Where the rushes become less dominant the conspicuous spikes of Northern Marsh Orchid can be observed.



Some limited natural regeneration of Willow has occurred and planting of native broadleaf species has taken place. Some of the species such as Aspen are displaying signs of stress and a few Willow have died.

#### Compartment C (0.37ha)

A small area within the marsh has been planted with native broadleaves and some regeneration of Willow may have occurred. A few Willow species have failed. Most of the trees are still developing and some still have bark protectors.

#### Compartment D (0.37ha)

Some planting of broadleaves and natural regeneration of Willow has occurred around the ditches at the southern end of the site, most of the trees are mature. The substrate was mostly wet. Some disturbance occurs with litter and the area seems to be popular with children as a play den. Plastic sheeting and old mattresses litter the area and need to be cleaned up. The ditches are also polluted with litter

#### Compartment E (0.08ha)

A dense stand of Brambles scrub bordering a ditch and the mown grassland.



Map 1: Habitats

#### Compartment F (0.18ha)

A dense stand of Greater Willowherb and Rosebay Willowherb close to a very wet area of marsh.

#### Compartment G (0.3ha)

A small plantation of broadleaf species which are still developing. Willow is the most mature and dominates the canopy.

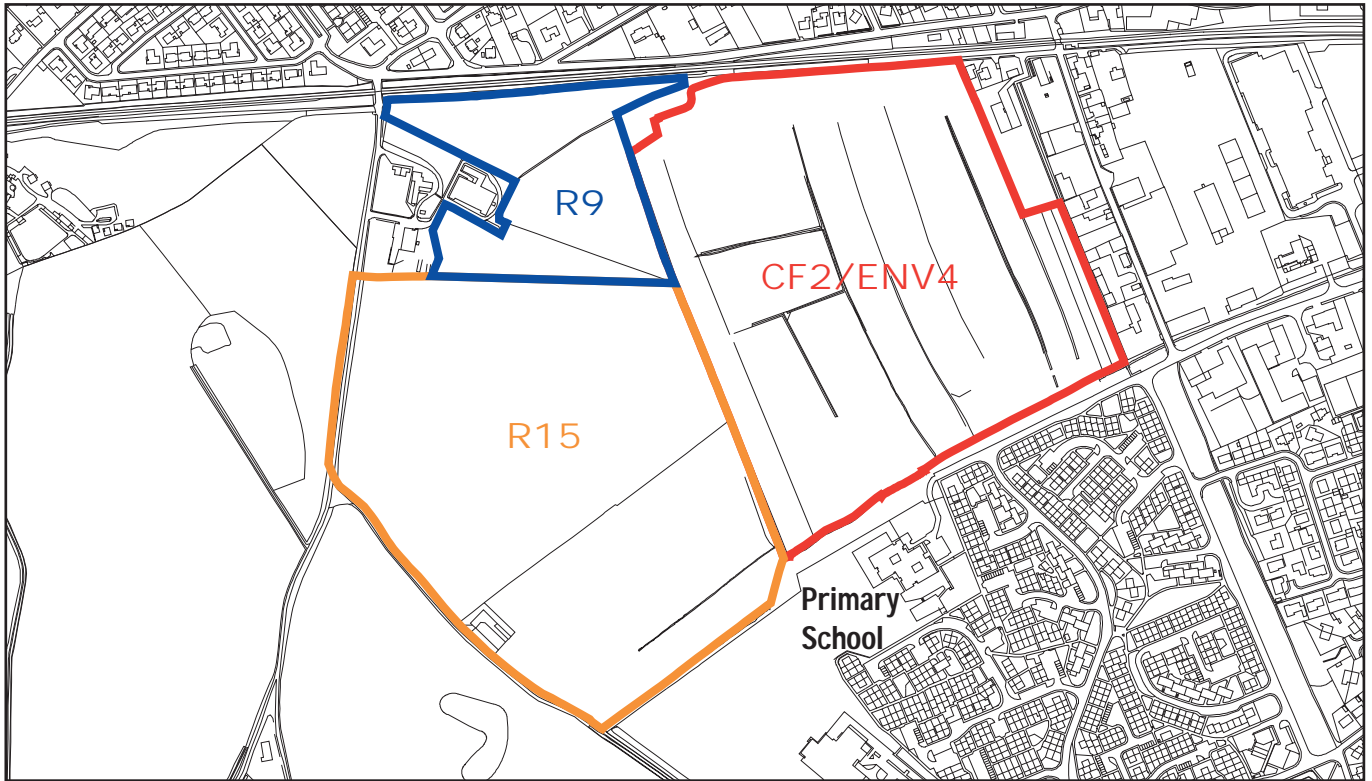
#### Compartment H (2.68ha)

This is a fairly extensive area of marsh dominated by Water Horsetail with marsh Willowherb. The wet ditches in this compartment are rank with horsetails and shorter rushes including Sharp-flowered Rush. A small area of open water occurs in the south of this compartment.

The SWT survey of the site (Holland 1997) included a comprehensive list of vascular plants found during the survey. Probably the most notable species, which occurs on the site, is northern marsh orchid. None of the plant species recorded in the site appear on the UK Biodiversity Action Plan list.

Appendix 1 sets out the range of species, which have been observed on the site and their status in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.





Map 2: Local Plan Designations

#### **4. CURRENT FACTORS AFFECTING THE WARDS**

- Development Plan Designations**

The Moray Development Plan identifies two sites to the west of the Wards for future housing developments (see map 2). Sites R9 Bilbohall North (capacity 40 houses) and R15 Bilbohall South (capacity 320 houses). These sites are constrained by the proposals for a road link from Edgar Road to Wittet Drive, which may cut across the south western corner of the site. It is important that "wildlife corridors" are retained to and from the Wards wildlife site and this should be a key consideration in the future development of the housing sites and the proposed road link between Wittet Drive and Edgar Road.
- Community Day Care Centre**

Planning consent has been granted for the development of a Community Day Care Centre in the south east corner of the site.
- Flytipping/Litter**

There is evidence of flytipping and a significant amount of litter around the boundaries of the site, common with such an urban setting.
- Management**

The site is not currently managed as a nature conservation site. A number of trees have been planted which still have bark protectors fitted and would benefit from improved management, although any trees which are planted in areas which may encourage drying of the wetlands or which are invasive non-native species should be removed.

#### **5. EVALUATION**

The habitat is notable for its size and for supporting a colony of northern marsh orchid in an urban location. The wetland provides a habitat for many wetland birds including Snipe and Red Bunting as well as dragonflies and damselflies. The site also provides a valuable wetland site for migratory and over wintering birds.

#### **6. MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES**

The principal objective is to manage the wildlife site as a community recreational and educational resource while conserving and enhancing the wildlife habitat. The site's wildlife value is not widely recognised and awareness raising is therefore a key objective.

##### **6.1 Objective:**

To secure and enhance the wildlife interest of the marsh.

##### **6.1.1 Hydrological Management**

The water table should be maintained at the surface to prevent the drying out of the marsh. It will benefit the flora by reducing the invasion of rigorous herb and woody species and will maintain invertebrate abundance and variety. A water table close to the surface is also important for foraging wading birds as it increases the amount of food available to them. The Hydrology of the site requires further monitoring.



### 6.1.2 Dip-wells

A Network of 10 dip-wells should be placed across the marsh in the northern and southern ends where the marsh is currently drier. The water table should be monitored at these dip-wells throughout the year.

## 6.2 Objective:

To enhance and maintain flora and fauna of notable conservation value on the marsh.

### 6.2.1 Northern Marsh Orchid

The northern marsh orchid should be located and the health of the population should be ascertained. Orchids do not do well when smothered by rushes. If it is necessary to thin the rushes then this should be done on an annual basis in and around the orchid colony when the orchids have flowered and set seed in the late summer. The cut vegetation should be left for a few days to allow the seeds to fall and then the vegetation removed to a corner of the site. The mound will provide a useful habitat for wintering invertebrates.

## 6.3 Creation of small pond for Amphibians and Invertebrates

The small pond on the south east of the site should be enlarged and a pond dipping platform created next to it for educational use.

## 6.4 To Enhance and Maintain the Tree Cover

Trees have been planted in 3 groups around the edge of the site and 1 group within the marsh. They have been planted with a mixture of native and non-native species. The trees have not been maintained and it is proposed that a separate tree survey is undertaken to identify any tree surgery required and possible additional planting.

Any new trees planted should be native to the local area and suitable for the soil conditions.

## 6.5 Remove Invasive Non-Native Trees

Invasive non-native trees such as Sycamore and Norway Maple should be removed because when they become mature they produce a dense shade and a deep litter layer which prevents the herbs from growing under them. In particular these species were noted in the southwest corner. Any new regeneration can be pulled, whilst more established trees should be cut back in late summer so that any new regrowth is killed by frost. Stumps of more established trees (greater than 7 years) should be treated with a paint brush application of glyphosphate to prevent regrowth. Tree maintenance should be undertaken every two years.

## 6.6 Scrub Planting along the Northern Boundary

At present there are many bramble plants along the northern side of the track. As well as providing a good food source for birds and small mammals it will act as an extra deterrent to stray onto the railway. Further planting of native shrubs especially prickly species such as bramble, dog rose, blackthorn and hawthorn should be carried out in the gaps.

## 6.7 Screening From the Industrial Estate

There are few trees along this boundary; any gaps present should be filled up to screen the site from the industrial estate with native species.

## 6.8 Objective:

Monitor the Site, Particularly the Effects of any new Management

### 6.8.1 Hydrological monitoring

Record depth pole and dip-well readings quarterly for the first three years. This will greatly contribute to the knowledge of the hydrology of the site. Thereafter monitor every third year.

### 6.8.2 Fauna

Amphibian Surveys should be carried out annually to collect baseline information. This could be carried out by the local school when they use the area for pond dipping. Check for larval stages and adults. After the first couple of years repeat at 3-year intervals.

Invertebrates surveys. Ponds and ditches can be swept with an aquatic net for aquatic invertebrates. In particular snipe and reed buntings should be monitored, as these are both amber listed birds.

## 6.9 Objective:

To Encourage Visitor Use and Involvement of the Local Community Through the Provision of Safe Access Facilities

### 6.9.1 Create a path around the marsh

A path should be constructed around the northern edge of the site on the drier areas around the edge of the marsh extending into the central tree copse. This should be constructed using boardwalks where necessary to protect the vegetation from damage and also allow walkers the opportunity to observe the marsh plants.



### 6.9.2 Construct a pond dipping platform adjacent to the amphibian ponds

Construct a pond-dipping platform adjacent to the amphibian/invertebrate pond. The platform should be approximately 10 metres long by 3 meters wide at a level where they will only be submerged by the highest winter water levels. The platform should be constructed from pressure treated timber. Construction will be solid to cope with large groups of children. The platform deck will be 1200mm x 300mm boards with 0.75mm gaps between, on a framework of 1200mm x 600mm timber.

The deck framework will be mounted on a timber framework driven into the marsh beside the amphibian pond. Supporting uprights (at least 1200mm x1200mm and placed at 1 meter centres) need effective cross bracing from side to side and front to back. The platform should be extended by boardwalks from the marsh edge footpath to the ponds to prevent damage to the vegetation and ground.

### 6.9.3 Erect interpretation panels

Interpretative panels will be erected. One at the southern entrance giving a broad overview of the habitats and important species present and one at the western pond showing the water life to be found within it.

### 6.9.4 Encourage the involvement of the local community

Greenwards Primary School is directly opposite the south side of the marsh. The school could be encouraged to take part in amphibian and invertebrate surveys in the ponds.

The community should be encouraged to help manage and monitor the marsh. Bird surveys, depth pole and dip-well readings, and litter clearance could be carried out by volunteers.

### 6.9.5 Removal of old fences

Old fences from the sites previous agricultural use should be removed where they create an obstacle/hazard/eyesore.

## 7. MANAGEMENT

7.1 It is proposed that the ongoing management of the Wards Wildlife Site is undertaken by the Moray Coast Ranger, whose remit could be extended to include the management and interpretation of the site. After the initial phases of supervising works on the site the Ranger would manage the ongoing monitoring of the site and wildlife events on the sites within the Activities Programme.

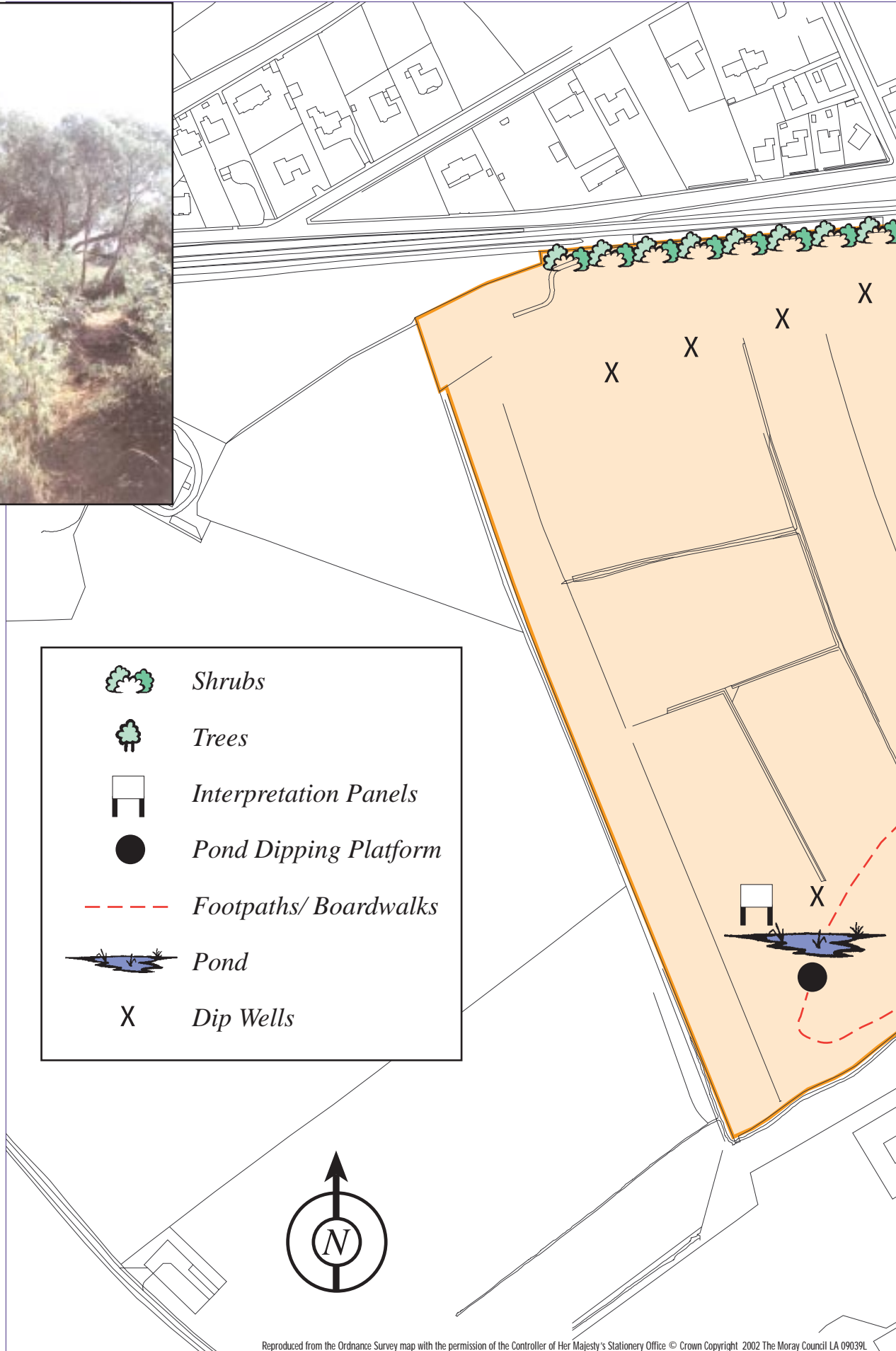
7.2 The Ranger will prepare an annual activity report and will co-ordinate six monthly Management Group meetings. The Management Group consists of community representatives and staff from Scottish Wildlife Trust, Scottish Natural Heritage and The Moray Council.



## 8. FUNDING

8.1 Outline costings are identified in the Action Summary. The Moray Council have allocated £5,000 towards the implementation of this Management Plan. Additional funding will be applied for from external sources.

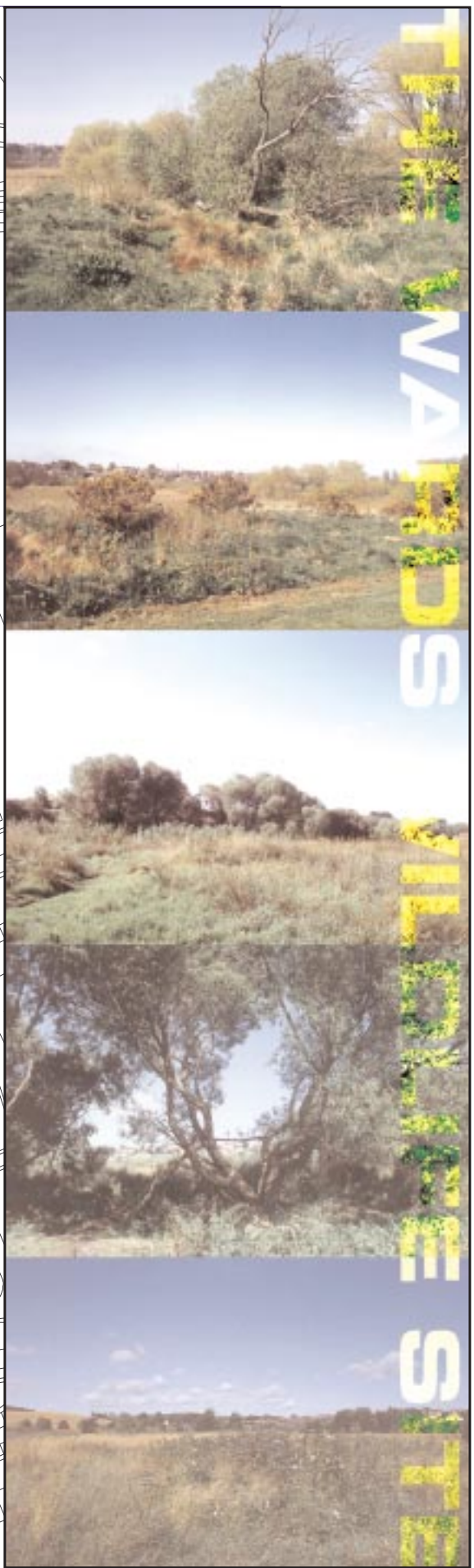
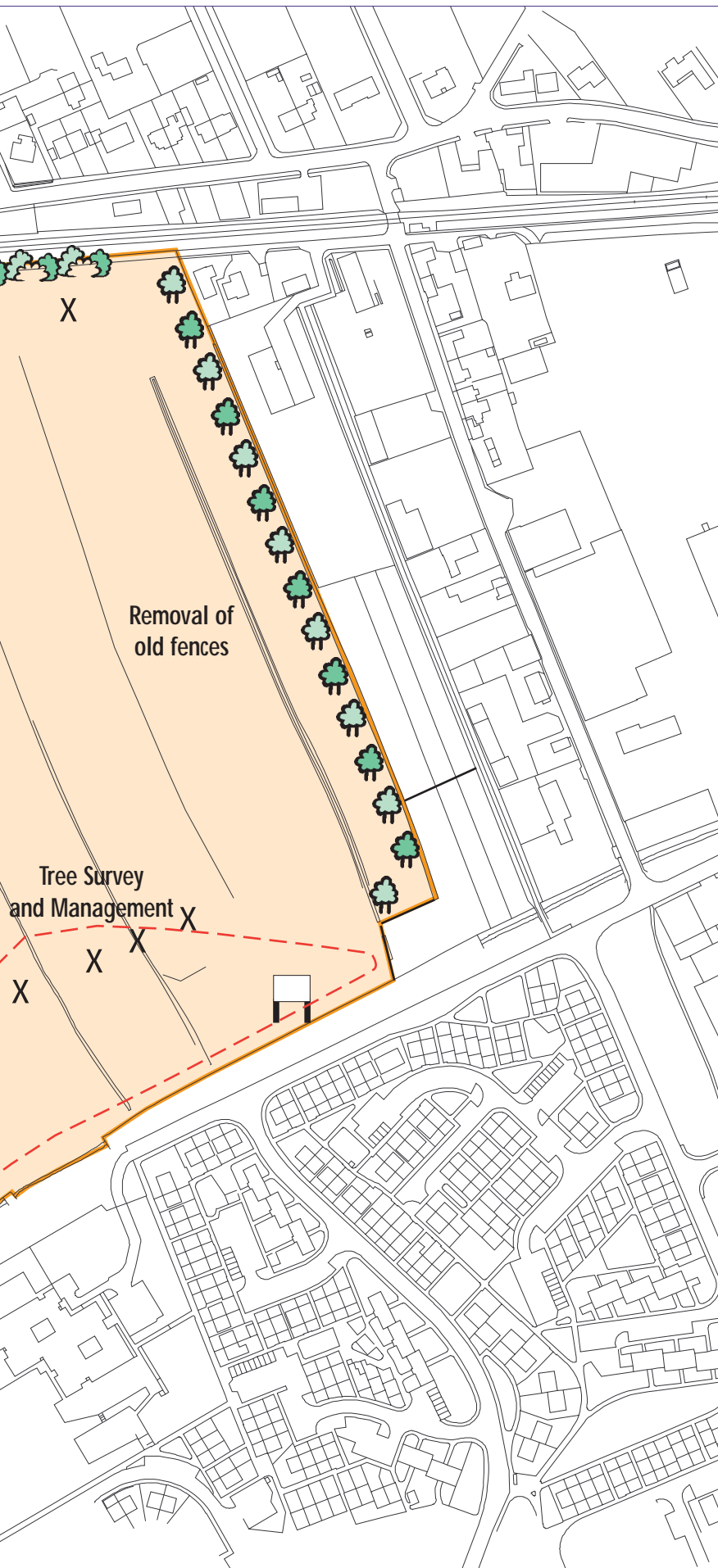




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Map 3: Wildlife Site management Plan

# WILDLIFE SITE



## ACTION SUMMARY

ACTION	COST	TIMESCALE	MONITORING/MAINTENANCE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creation of 10 dip-wells</li> </ul>	£1000	Autumn 2002	Record depth pole and dipwell readings every month for the first three years Monitor orchids annually
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Survey northern marsh orchid and thin rushes</li> </ul>	£1,000	Autumn 2003	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creation/enlarge small ponds for amphibians and invertebrates</li> </ul>	£300.00	Summer 2002	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tree Survey – identify potential surgery and new planting</li> </ul>	£250.00	Autumn 2002	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remove invasive non-native trees.</li> </ul>	£500.00	Autumn 2002	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shrub planting along the northern boundary</li> </ul>	£500.00	Autumn 2002	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tree planting to screen the site from the industrial estate</li> </ul>	£500.00	Summer 2003	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Amphibian surveys annually to collect baseline information</li> </ul>	£500.00	Summer 2003	Annual Survey
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invertebrate surveys, particularly record damselflies and dragonflies</li> </ul>		Summer 2003	Annual Survey
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bird surveys, in particular snipe and reed buntings</li> </ul>	£5,000	Autumn 2002	Annual Survey
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create path/boardwalks into the site</li> </ul>	£1,500	Autumn 2002	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Construct two pond-dipping platforms adjacent to amphibian ponds.</li> </ul>	£4,000	Autumn 2002	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research and install interpretative panels</li> </ul>	£1,000	Winter 2002	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Produce school education pack</li> </ul>	£250	Autumn 2002	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Erect warning and safety signs</li> </ul>	£200	Autumn 2002	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Install nest boxes and bat boxes</li> </ul>		Spring 2003	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remove old fences</li> </ul>		Ongoing	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Involve school/community/scouts in all the above.</li> </ul>			

Costings are indicative and assume that surveys and actions such as tree planting will be undertaken by volunteers

### Appendix 1

Species	UK BAP status	Comments
Brown Hare	Priority Species	Occasional individuals
Roe Deer	Species of conservation concern	

The site appears to provide suitable habitat for water vole but no evidence of this species has been found

### Birds

Species	UK BAP status	Comments
Mallard		
Buzzard	Species of conservation concern	Occasionally forage
Pheasant		Breeds on site
Snipe	Species of conservation concern	Numerous in winter (27 in Nov 99). May also breed
Wood Pigeon		Breeds on site
Wren		
Song Thrush	Priority Species	
Grasshopper Warbler	Species of conservation concern	Recording on at least one occasion
Sedge Warbler	Species of conservation concern	
Whitethroat	Species of conservation concern	
Willow Warbler	Species of conservation concern	
Blue Tit	Species of conservation concern	
Carrion Crow		
Chaffinch		
Goldfinch	Species of concern	
Reed Bunting	Priority Species	Probably breeds
<b>Amphibia</b>		
Common Frog		
Species of conservation concern		
Common Toad	Species of conservation concern	
<b>Insects</b>		
Common Blue Damselfly		
Small Red Damselfly		
Red-tailed Bumblebee		
Orange-tip Butterfly		

Many other species and groups of insects and other invertebrates are known to occur on the site but have not been surveyed.

