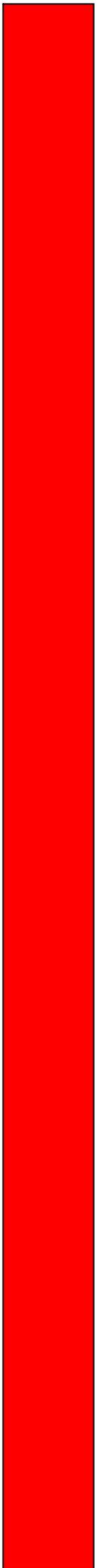


Louie Memorial Playing Fields
Habitats and Management
Supplementary Report
May 2009

A report for
North Hinksey Parish Council

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Introduction

This report is a supplement to a report that describes and maps the habitats at the Louie Memorial Playing Fields which was produced in October 2008. That survey was carried out very late in the season and it was considered valuable to carry out an additional survey to obtain a full picture of the habitats on the site. This report summaries this additional information and makes further recommendations concerning the management of these habitats.

The survey was carried out on May 21st 2009.

The original report described the following habitats:

- Fen: on the valley slopes in the small western valley. The most important habitat on the site.
- Ash dominated woodland: on the slopes of the southern spur.
- Scrubby woodland: Hawthorn dominated tall scrub with scattered oak and ash trees.
- Rough grassland: fringing the fen and along the edge of the recreational grassland.
- Tall herb: nettle dominated areas on drier land fringing the fen.
- Pond: a small depression that is probably the remains of an old pond in the north-west.

Additional Habitat Information from May 2009

A revised habitat map is included in this report (Map 1).

Woodland

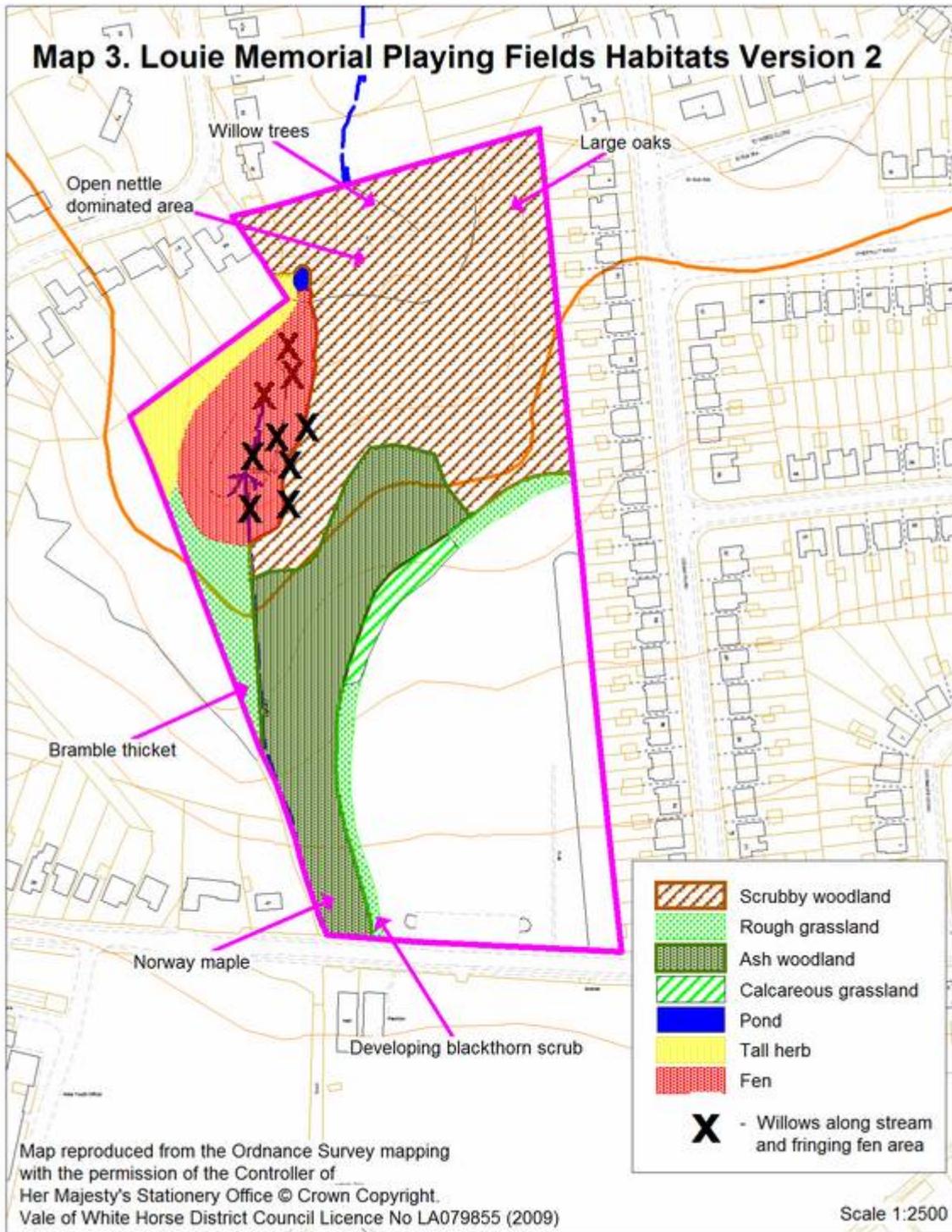
The original survey mentioned the presence of sycamore at the southern end of the site. This is incorrect. The trees are the similar Norway maple. This species does not have the invasive nature of sycamore. However the small amount of young sycamore within the site will need to controlled as described in the original report.

There three outlying badger setts in the woodland. At the time of the survey two of these were active and one was inactive. Fresh diggings and paths indicate that the site is well used by badgers. There was a main sett present in the centre of the site in the past. This area is now a focus for children using the site.

Ground flora

- The most obvious difference in the ground flora is the abundance of cow parsley. This is dominant on the southern slopes and there are frequent patches elsewhere.
- In the north of the site enchanter's nightshade is frequent. This species is typical of long established woodland but it is not unusual to find it more recent woodland sites.
- Along the base of the southern slopes, and extending to the fen edge, yellow archangel is present. This species is an indicator of ancient and long established woodland. This perhaps illustrates that there has been a wooded line along the stream for a significant time, along with the presence of a greater range of typical woodland species in this area such as dog's mercury, giant fescue and male fern.
- Garden escapes: there are a few bluebells in the site but these are the introduced Spanish variety. Other garden escapes recorded include tutsan and stinking iris. Both of these are rarely seen indicators of ancient woodland but in this location, recent secondary woodland close to housing, these are clearly just garden escapes.

Map 3. Louie Memorial Playing Fields Habitats Version 2



Fen

The fen is very much as originally described. The most abundant large sedge is slender tufted sedge. Lesser pond sedge is also present. The main change to the habitat has been the removal of collapsed willow that has opened up a significant area of fen. This management has been a great success. The fen is very wet in places and is in a very good condition. The shaded area is unchanged. The presence of woodland species such as yellow archangel and giant fescue at the woodland edge suggests this area along the valley bottom has been wooded for many years.

Grassland along the recreation field edge

This was described as rough grassland in the original report. However it is more interesting and varied than that. The geology of this area is limestone and this is reflected by the presence of a strip of calcareous grassland. Here, the grass, upright brome dominates. This is a typical dominant grass of calcareous grassland communities. This habitat, which is particularly associated with the chalk Downs and limestone Cotswolds, is found in scattered locations on the Corallian limestone of the Oxfordshire Heights. On Cumnor Hill it is found in one site towards the top of the western slopes. Lowland calcareous grassland is a UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitat.

This strip adjacent to the woodland is a tiny remnant of this type of habitat and lacks the diversity of species typically associated with it. The common, tall and colourful greater knapweed and field scabious are present, along with the shorter, colourful, common bird's-foot trefoil and the less common, though widespread, restharrow. It is probable that this habitat extends further into the mown grassland where restharrow was also seen. To the east of this area there is some tor grass, another typical grass of this habitat type. Upright brome can also be seen amongst the rough grassland near the eastern edge of the site.

Management

Fen

As identified in the previous report this is most important, sensitive and fragile habitat on the site. The main priority of clearing collapsed willow has already been achieved with excellent results. In the previous report, management for the shaded area was recommended. This included the removal of small ash and horse chestnut from the edge and removal of the small invading willow. This is still recommended and is the next priority.

The removal of two willow trees in this area was also recommended. However considering the good extent of open fen, this area provides variation in habitat due to its partly shaded state and this nature should be retained. The willows should not be removed but pollarding could be considered. One of these willows is growing at quite an extreme angle and may not be suitable for pollarding and can be left to collapse naturally, which seems likely considering the angle.

Some garden waste has been dumped in the tall herb area next to the fen. This behavior needs to be discouraged.

Pond

It is important to stress that the pond should only cover the existing relatively small water filled depression which is perhaps 5 metres long and 5 metres wide. It must not increase drainage from the fen and access to the edge should only be easily possible from the eastern, woodland side.

Woodland

Badgers

Badgers and their setts are protected by law. The outlying setts are closely monitored by Julia Hammett of the Oxfordshire Badger Group. If problems are identified then the advice of the Group should be followed.

Ivy

It is clear that many of the hawthorn and some of the trees, including an ash and a old coppiced field maple have ivy growing on them. The amount of ivy growth was underestimated in the original report.

As described in that report ivy is sometimes accused of strangling trees and shrubs. This is not true but when ivy gets into the canopy of trees and shrubs it can affect bud and leaf development and thus food supply from photosynthesis is reduced. However ivy on trees and shrubs can provide a valuable habitat for invertebrates and on larger trees may provide roosting sites for bats.

It is recommended that a good balance is sought. Cut the stems of ivy and clear it from the base from perhaps one third and no more than one half of the hawthorns. For larger trees it is recommended that the ivy is left until it is really getting into the canopy in order to retain the value of the micro habitat it provides for as long as possible. It could be argued that nature could be left to run its course. In the long term, if the ivy does affect the tree and even if the tree dies it does mean the creation of very valuable standing dead wood and other trees will grow up to take its place. A sensible compromise would be to leave ivy on any trees where there is a good canopy, especially on the slopes on the southern spur, where in the long term thinning will be needed, but to remove it from larger trees in the north of the site.

Nest Boxes: additional information

The number of nest boxes depends on the type (large or small hole) and the total area of the woodland. Many species are fiercely territorial and there must be sufficient food resources to allow the young to be raised successfully. There are opportunities for natural nesting sites already. There are about 2 hectares (5 acres) of woodland. A maximum of four small hole nest boxes, for smaller birds, per acre and one large hole nest box per acre is recommended. This gives a total of 25 bird boxes.

Paths

It was previously recommended that the paths could be upgraded to encourage people to follow obvious routes, to reduce disturbance. However the main paths are already obvious, especially at this time of year (spring and early summer) when there is a good cover of ground flora, and when disturbance might affect nesting birds. Therefore upgrading the paths to reduce disturbance does not apply. As long as there is no re-routing of paths there are no nature conservation implications for any work on the existing main paths.

Recreational field edge

If possible extend the area of unmown grassland next to the calcareous grassland to increase its size. Do not plant any shrubs here. It was originally suggested that additional shrub planting along the edge to strengthen the woodland edge would be appropriate but here this is not the case. Mow half of this area every year. For the other areas further shrub planting would be suitable, especially to block ad hoc small access points and to strengthen the woodland edge. Mow half of this grassland every year.

Additional Species recorded May 2009

Scientific Name	Common name	Comments
<i>Acer platanoides</i>	Norway maple	Woodland – southern corner
<i>Alopecurus pratensis</i>	Meadow foxtail	Rough grassland – recreation field edge
<i>Arrhenatherum elatius</i>	False oat grass	Rough grassland – recreation field edge
<i>Arum maculatum</i>	Lords and ladies	Woodland
<i>Bellis perennis</i>	Daisy	Rough grassland – recreation field edge
<i>Brachypodium pinnatum</i>	Tor grass	Calcareous grassland
<i>Bromopsis erecta</i>	Upright brome	Calcareous grassland
<i>Carex acuta</i>	Slender tufted sedge	Fen
<i>Carex acutiformis</i>	Lesser pond sedge	Fen
<i>Centaurea gigantia</i>	Greater knapweed	Calcareous grassland
<i>Circaea lutetiana</i>	Enchanter's nightshade	Woodland
<i>Glyceria</i> sp.	A sweet grass	Fen
<i>Hyacinthoides hispanicus</i>	Spanish bluebell	Woodland
<i>Hypericum androsaemum</i>	Tutsan	Woodland
<i>Iris foetidissima</i>	Stinking iris	Woodland
<i>Knautia arvensis</i>	Field scabious	Calcareous grassland
<i>Lamiastrum galeobdolon</i>	Yellow archangel	Woodland
<i>Leontodon hispidus</i>	Rough hawkbit	Rough grassland – recreation field edge
<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>	Common bird's-foot trefoil	Calcareous grassland
<i>Ononis repens</i>	Restharrow	Calcareous grassland
<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>	Ribwort plantain	Calcareous grassland
<i>Poa trivialis</i>	Rough meadow-grass	Woodland and rough grassland
<i>Pulicaria dysenterica</i>	Common fleabane	Fen
<i>Ranunculus acris</i>	Meadow buttercup	Calcareous grassland
<i>Ranunculus bulbosus</i>	Bulbous buttercup	Rough grassland – recreation field edge
<i>Ranunculus ficaria</i>	Lesser celandine	Woodland and fen
<i>Trifolium pratense</i>	Red clover	Calcareous grassland
<i>Veronica montana</i>	Wood speedwell	Woodland