

Pensford Field Management Plan 2023

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1. Introduction

It is a requirement under the lease from the Council that the Field is managed in accordance with the Management Plan (Plan) and the charges for rent are abated to £1 in return for the fulfillment of undertakings in this Plan.

1.1 Site description

SINC area - 0.7 ha (the Field). (The whole property is approx. 1.1 ha (2.65 acres) including the tennis club).

The site is a rectangular field surrounded by the houses of Pensford Avenue, Atwood Avenue, Nylands Avenue and North Road. The site was made into a community wildlife area with woodland, dead wood (loggers), a pond, meadow, wildlife corridor and beehives. It is a good example of back land benefiting both local wildlife and the community. The site is visited by schools and other educational establishments.

District and County – Kew, Richmond, Surrey
Grid Reference – TQ 193 763

Freehold owners – London Borough of Richmond upon Thames (LBRuT / the Council)

Nature reserve management – Pensford Field Environment Trust Ltd (PFET / the Trust); formed by a group of local residents, subject to a lease dated 14 March 2007 (the Lease). The Trust manages the Field as a nature reserve for both people and wildlife and raise money for the promotion of nature conservation and environmental education.

The Trust is a company limited by guarantee (Company number 06007255). The secretary and chair are responsible for the completion of the Return required by Companies House and the Charity Commission. The Trust organises public liability insurance for the premises. The Trust will ensure that the conditions of the Lease are being complied with, including pointing out to visitors the limitations on the use of the Field such as no dogs, no fires and no ball games. The treasurer keeps the Accounts and presents them to the AGM, which is held within ten months after the year end. Reports are submitted as required by Companies House and the Charity Commission. Independent audit is not necessary unless the turnover becomes larger.

Designations:

1. London Ecology Unit as a Site of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) (1993 and ongoing)
2. LBRuT UDP in (Nov 2001)
3. Designated Area of Tranquility (TFL)
4. London in Bloom Gold Medal awarded in 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2020 and 2022.
5. Green Flag Award 2016, 2018,2019 and 2022.

Access

Site access is by a coded padlock at the main gate, shared with Pensford Tennis Club, which has a similar lease from the Council. This access is to protect the site, the tennis courts and the neighbouring gardens. The code is shared with tennis club members, friends of the Field and Trustees. A few neighbouring gardens have direct historic access to the Field.

1.2 History of Site

The Field was developed in 1992 from a playing field with cricket pavilion (for Darell and Gainsborough Schools) to a community wildlife area. The site is a remnant of an old orchard and market garden from the late 18th and 19th centuries. The substrate is rich loam for about 18 inches with a layer of mainly sand underneath.

Wildlife corridor. With the proximity of the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, Royal Botanic Gardens and the River Thames, the Field is a substantial part of the local wildlife corridor. Visiting animals include badgers, foxes, small mammals like mice and squirrels. A heron (which is often in the pond), starlings and occasional woodpecker, both green and spotted, (lesser/greater) and various small garden birds all find shelter in the Field. It is hoped that owls and other birds of prey will visit the Field and the overall biodiversity will increase. The more mature the wilderness, the more habitats it will encompass.

1.3 Aims of the Trust

1. To promote nature conservation and enhance the biodiversity value of Pensford Field for future generations through active and sustainable management.
2. To encourage environmental education through local school and community involvement by raising awareness of the site as a community wildlife and nature reserve.

A variety of native tree species have been planted around the boundaries to create a woodland habitat, and a mixed hedgerow was planted along the boundary with the tennis club in September 1993. A wooden fence, gate and stile mark the entrance to the Field.

The pond, which was dug and lined, then backfilled with silt has a variety of wetland flora and fauna, such as soft rush and meadowsweet, frogs, newts and toads. It was encouraging to hear how healthy the pond is from a member of staff at Kew Gardens. It is intended to act on advice from the London Amphibian and Reptile Group to keep the pond healthy and an optimal environment for frogs and newts.

A loggery has been created using decaying wood, which is a valuable habitat for stag beetles and a variety of other invertebrates, fungi & small mammals. It is just south of the western edge of the tennis courts.

The orchard was planted in 2002 on advice from fruit experts at Brogdale Fruit Station. It consists of a variety of apples, pears, plum and greengage, one medlar and one quince. These are trees likely to have been grown in the neighbourhood in previous times. A Cherry was planted in 2007. Two crab apples (one designated the 'Queen's Platinum tree') were planted in 2022 near to the orchard to aid pollination. A list of trees in the Orchard is at Appendix I.

The money raised for this orchard was in memory of Ray Siff and a plaque was put in the Field by his widow. All substantial donations and gifts will be marked in an appropriate manner, either in a newsletter or by a plaque or other means.

Three beekeepers have installed hives to improve the pollination of the orchard with permission from LBRuT.

In 2017 a bug hotel was constructed using a tower of bricks and pipes filled with bamboo canes, straw, sticks, deadwood and shredded newspaper to provide homes for solitary bees, lacewings and other insects. Loggeries were created around the site in 2022.

An area of 20m² of mixed native meadow turf was laid in March 2022 to the central part of the Field, which includes sheep's fescue, and flowers such as common vetch, lady's bedstraw and common knapweed. It is the intention to extend the meadow if the planting proves successful. In Autumn 2023, we will sow yellow rattle to dampen the strong grasses.

A Studio is situated in the area opposite the gate and stile. Created in 2007 on the footprint of an old cricket pavilion and built for all users subject to booking. It includes a ramp and accessible toilets. The Studio provides a comfortable seating area and there is a small kitchen. The drive provides access for maintenance vehicles and the emergency services. Parking of private cars is not allowed under the terms of the Lease.

1.4 Biodiversity value

In line with Richmond's Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) (https://habitatsandheritage.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Biodiversity-Action-Plan-Richmond_compressed.pdf) the Field supports a wide range of flora and fauna, many species of which are of key importance on a local, regional and national scale.

1. Importance at national level: small population of stag beetles. Globally threatened and a LBAP priority species.
2. Characteristics of local area: neutral to acid grassland and supports a variety of wildflowers and invertebrates.
3. The pond area supports a variety of flora and fauna of local importance.

The grassland supports a number of butterflies and surveys have been undertaken to monitor their status. In 2016 and 2017 a total of 16 species of butterflies were recorded: Peacock, Red Admiral, Meadow Brown, Small White, Large White, Holly Blue, Speckled Wood, Small Skipper, Large Skipper, Painted Lady, Gatekeeper, Comma, Brimstone, Green Veined White, Essex Skipper.

The Field supports insects such as stag beetles and rose chafers, and wildflowers such as common storks-bill (cranes-bill), ox-eye daisy, poppy, common ragwort, toadflax and common vetch. It also supports an assorted bird population, with a dawn chorus outing in 2018 recording the following species: Great Tit, Blue Tit, Coal Tit, Wood Pigeon, Rock Pigeon, Goldfinch, Robin, Wren, Blackcap, Blackbird, Dunnock, Song Thrush, Crow, Magpie, Parakeet, Heron, Mallard, Canada Goose, Greater Spotted Woodpecker, Herring Gull, Black Headed Gull, Lesser Black Backed Gull and Cormorant. Sparrow and Starling were not sighted but are regular visitors.

Several mammals are also present, with a litter of 5 fox cubs observed during the spring/summer of 2018. There are active badger setts throughout the Field. It is the intention to plant shrubs around the badger setts to improve cover and food provision if necessary. A camera was installed in the Field by Habitats and Heritage in 2022 and the badgers are extremely active.

A bat survey was undertaken in July 2022 by Habitats and Heritage close to the pond. The vast majority of the sightings over four days were soprano pipistrelle (around 2500) with around 300 sightings of the common pipistrelle. There were infrequent sightings of other species – Noctule, Leisler, Brown Long-eared Bat and Serotine. There are 6 species in the Field and it is a significant site for bats in the borough. The bats are extremely active around the pond.

1.5 Community and Environmental Education Value.

The site is of great value to the local community, as it is used as a community wildlife and nature reserve by local residents and as an environmental education resource for local schools. In previous years Queens and Darell schools have planted trees and bluebells in special areas and one bank of the pond has been strengthened for pond dipping by children with small nets. Several local nursery schools make regular visits to the Field.

Wild Education runs Forest School activities for Darell school on Monday mornings and a parent/toddler group on Friday mornings.

Monty's Nursery and Pre-School use the Field one day a week, morning and afternoon. Casa Montessori uses the Field on two half days.

Dose of Nature use the Field for various activities for three days a week but for half this time, it can be used by other groups with toilet access in the Studio.

Regular events are run by the Trust including an annual Wassail at New Year, a Summer Party and a Friends' Afternoon Tea.

2. General Principles of Management

2.1 Community Access

Events are held in the Field throughout the year and the community is welcomed through the main gates. The events have historic, wildlife & artistic themes to raise awareness of the Field and to fundraise for the upkeep of the site. Working Parties are undertaken monthly during Spring and Summer which attract about 10 volunteers each session. Notice of such days are emailed to Friends.

2.2 School, nursery and scout access

As described above, schools and nurseries are using the site for educational purposes. The Trust is keen to allow regular attendance by local schools and

nurseries in accordance with the principal aim of encouraging environmental education. Given the constraints arising from standing bookings, the Trust is encouraging out of school hours bookings from groups such as scouts and community groups.

2.3 Interpretation

Interpretation boards explain the points of interest to the users of the Field to help them learn understand and enjoy their visit to the Field. A sign is attached to on the main gate on Pensford Avenue to raise awareness about the site. The Trust aims to make a visit to the Field as much of an education as a recreational activity. Details of what lives and thrives in the Field is of interest to visitors as well as to local visitors. Some of these interpretation boards need to be replaced or refurbished and grants are being sought for this purpose.

2.4 Hedging and Fencing

The hedge between the Field and tennis club is maintained on a shared-cost basis when needed. Planted in 1993 it has a mix of native species and includes hawthorn, field maple, hazel, guelder roses, holly, ash spindle. This makes excellent habitat for nesting birds and screens the Field from the lights of the tennis club at night. Plants growing beneath are alkanet, nettles, dandelion, yarrow, germander speedwell, thistles and cleavers. The most recent cut back was done by the Trustees and volunteers in Spring of 2023. Any chippings are retained to help delineate the paths in the Field and control growth under the fruit trees.

The remaining perimeter fencing is the back garden fences of the adjacent properties. The Trust aims to maintain no over-hanging branches or vegetation interfering with neighbouring gardens. Some neighbours allow holes in their fencing so that animals can enter and leave the Field.

2.5 Wooden furniture

Parks and Open Spaces Richmond provided a wooden carved bench, a sign and log table tops. The wooden carved bench adjacent to the pond is showing signs of weathering. The log tables also showed signs of weathering and the tops that were installed to protect them have been removed because they were rotten, The Trust is looking for replacements.

Old benches which were no longer usable have been replaced with new benches. The wood from the old benches was retained on site for the benefit of invertebrates such as the stag beetle or to build a compost heap. Benches are regularly oiled to protect against weathering.

2.6 Gate and Fence

The entrance gate and stile onto the Field was replaced in 2022. The Trust was successful in its application to the Kew Fete 2022 for a grant to assist with the cost of replacement. The fence near the gate needs to be replaced and the Trust is seeking funding.

2.7 Access Drive

An easy-to-maintain, semi-formal, hedgerow, punctuated with small trees, was planted along the access drive. These hedges require a yearly cut, into a semi-formal style. Bulbs were planted along this drive in the winters of 2017, 2018 and 2022.

2.8 Surveys

The Trust encourages surveys of the nature reserve and any findings will be published on the website. The Trust arranged for a bat survey with Habitats and Heritage as described above. We hope to conduct an inventory of the wild flowers and the invertebrates in the Field in the future. The Trust encourages further surveys of wildlife using the Field.

2.9 Records

Records are kept of findings in the Field. There have been butterfly transects made in the Field since 2003. To encourage students to use the Field for project it is important to record mammals, birds, insects and flowers. Specific items like bat records are useful for local societies and students.

2.10 Website

A new website was set up in 2022 and is maintained to inform interested local people about events and workdays. Instagram and Facebook accounts have also been created to advertise events to locals. The Trust has been helped in promoting its online presence by photos taken by Brian Secrett.

2.11 Exchange of knowledge

The Trust has approached Habitats and Heritage and Kew Gardens for advice on future management of the Field. The Trustees have contact with various other local groups and the Council to exchange knowledge and experience.

3. Land Management

3.1 Meadow

This is the area inside the woodchip path which was laid in 2006. The area is rich in invertebrates and has many different species of flora. The meadow is sub-divided into two sections, one being for events and the other for wildlife.

The grass in the central area is cut throughout the summer leaving long grass around the borders to encourage butterflies, amphibians and small mammals. Various paths (such as to the pond and orchard) are also mown to encourage visitors not to tread on the long meadow.

The removal of cut grass to prevent the enrichment of the soil is important. Typically, the time of year would be August or September. Leaving the cut grass for a few days to let the seed disperse and for invertebrates to escape, before the grass is taken away. The Trust is investigating whether continued Ragwort removal is necessary in the summer (previously it was removed leaving a small area adjacent to the mushroom tables to provide a potential home for the cinnabar moth).

3.2 Orchard

Maintenance, such as weeding, pruning and mulching is done on a regular basis and it is the intention to add trees from time to time.

3.3 Pond Area

This was created in 1998. A new pond was created 2012. We were not happy with the original pond despite a lot of work and cost. Works to the pond in January 2017 included undertaking repairs to a leak and new planting. The pond is now in much better shape with well-established lilies, oxygenating plants and clear water. It gets rainwater off the roof of the Studio via a pipe laid under the meadow, and from the rain. In drought conditions it can be topped-up with mains water via the same pipe. The pond was in excellent condition following the 2017 refurbishment with water lilies and abundant oxygenating plants.

In May 2023, volunteers removed significant quantities of non-native plants which were choking the pond.

3.4 Woodland

The woodland was planted in 1992 by school children and local residents. Broadleaved woodlands are LBAP (London Biodiversity Action Plan) priority habitat. It is intended to leave the trees to mature, but control the brambles with regular workdays.

Tree saplings that are newly-planted on site are watered regularly in the early years to promote growth. This includes our Queen's Platinum Jubilee crab apple.

3.5 Stag beetle loggery

This will be maintained once a year to preserve its form and function.

3.6 Bulbs

Any bulbs that are donated are planted along the edge of the entrance drive.

3.7 Bees

Bee keeping is allowed. There are now several well-established hives owned by three beekeepers. The bees aid pollination of the orchard. The honey is available to buy. The beekeepers regularly provide talks about their work, for example at the May 2023 volunteer work day.

A dry hedge is maintained around the bee hives using cuttings from site. This is with the aim of encouraging bees to fly upwards when exiting the hive.

3.8 Bat boxes

It has been a long-term ambition to install bat boxes once the trees on site are of a suitable height and according to guidelines from the Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) - “where bats are known to feed close to hedges and tree lines; ideally at least 4m above the ground and sheltered from strong winds and exposed to the sun for part of the day (usually south or south-west)”.

A bat survey was conducted in July 2022 by Habitats and Heritage to determine the needs of the bats. Subsequently two bat boxes have been erected by Habitats and Heritage in compliance with the above and the Trust is investigating if more are required.

3.9 Willow Circle

The willow circle had become overgrown and difficult to use as a shady area. The Trustees are in the process of restoring it in 2023.

4. Recreational Use

4.1 Events

To encourage local interest in the Field apart from the conservation aspect, events will be organised according to the particular skills of the current Trustees. The Wassail takes place in January. The Summer Party, which has been held near Midsummer’s Day, has been an annual event for several years. In 2018 a Friends’ Afternoon Tea was introduced to encourage people to sign up to or continue their membership of Friends of Pensford Field. A gazebo is available for shelter for such events.

The Trust is approaching a number of other organisations with a view to holding regular talks on wildlife, with three events planned for the summer of 2023.

4.2 Widening Participation

Broadening membership is supported by mailing lists, the website and social media. We have circa 400 people on the e-mailing list, over a 100 of whom are Friends who contribute £5 a year. Leaflets are distributed in the local area for the Wassail and Summer Party.

In Spring 2022 a survey was conducted as to the use of the Field by local schools, including Darrell, Kew Riverside, Queens, and Broomfield; and nurseries including The Barn Nursery and Windham Nursery School. The Trustees are committed, post-COVID-19, to improve access to the Field for educational purposes. The Trust is having to balance competing demands for usage of the Field and intends to prioritise local state schools and nurseries with limited outdoor facilities of their own.

The Trust now allows improved access to the toilet facilities in the Studio to schools and nurseries which was difficult to accommodate during the pandemic. Several users have expressed frustration about their inability to secure bookings in recent months because of existing bookings. The Trustees also intend to facilitate short-term environmental projects requiring intensive access over short periods. In some instances, this may require shared use of the Field.

It is intended to encourage increased usage by scouts and community groups at weekends, in the evenings and in school holidays. The Trust has reinforced links with the Kew Society who are now booking the Field and Studio for events.

4.3 Therapeutic Use

The Field was extensively used by Dose of Nature and Richmond Mencap during the pandemic. The Trustees have been extremely pleased that this usage of the Field was possible when so many facilities were closed and restrictions were in place. Richmond Mencap has now resumed normal activities elsewhere.

The Trustees are keen to promote the use of the Field and the Studio for therapeutic and wellbeing activities such as yoga and Tai Chi. However, the Trustees do not wish to erode further the time available for educational establishments during term time and weekdays.

4.4 Code of Conduct

A code of conduct has been drawn up and will be issued to any group hiring the Studio or booking the Field and to anyone given the code to the main gate. It

sets out activities which can and which cannot take place in the Field. For example: no dogs, ball games, music, fires etc.

5. Short-term priorities

The following activities will be prioritised for completion in the next 12-18 months.

- build on links with Habitats and Heritage, Kew Gardens and other organisations to provide advice on ecological management
- encourage use of the Field for more supervised educational visits by schools, nurseries, scouts etc.
- champion ecological surveys of fungi, bats, butterflies, birds, wild flowers, reptiles and invertebrates
- maintain dry hedges around bee hives
- reinforce the loggery
- maintain the new benches with teak oil as appropriate
- fence next to gate to be repaired/replaced
- consider if more bat boxes and bird boxes should be installed, and purchase if appropriate
- keep a watch on any Ash die-back and take appropriate action
- Seek advice on tree management and consider measures to be taken to ensure the woodlands are safe and disease free
- re-plant some areas by replanting self-seeded trees and shrubs
- second bug hotel to be repaired or dismantled
- continue programme of pruning fruit trees in the Orchard and clearing under the canopies
- ensure badger setts are well protected
- develop an education programme for birds, bees, bats, fungi and trees
- allow the wild meadow to self-seed or extend if required and sow yellow rattle to stop domination of strong grasses
- seek replacements for the mushroom tables' tops
- replace signage as necessary and install a safety sign at the entrance to the Field
- seek advice on pond management from the London Amphibian and Reptile Group

Appendix 1.

Trees in the Orchard

Apples and Pears:

Bramley

Red Devil

Louise Bains

Orleans Reinette

Winter Nelis

Limelight

Rev Wilkes

Blenheim Orange

Oullins golden greengage

Vranja quince

Medlar Nottingham

Opal plum.

Sunburst Cherry

Wild crab apple