

North Lane Pond Survey Results and Next Steps

1. Executive summary

The North Lane Pond is a much loved feature of our village, it is also a registered asset of community interest. A recent survey of residents indicates that villagers would like to see it preserved, tended regularly and enhanced in small ways to maximise its natural beauty. Whilst our survey only covered 1 pond, we do have 2 ponds in North Lane and therefore it seems sensible to consider the second pond when we are looking at how best to manage these features for the benefit of the whole village.

Following receipt of the survey results discussions amongst the PC have led to the following conclusions -

- a) We should develop a Management Plan for the North Lane and Oak Tree Ponds to establish future works required annually and annual costs associated with the upkeep from the ponds. To help us do this the Clerk has already been in touch with Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust and a private company to try and get some further professional advice on sound pond management techniques. Further advice will help us to better understand if/how to test water quality and indeed to help us establish any further improvements we can make to the pond to help it thrive.
- b) We should hold a socially distanced volunteer half day to conduct some immediate maintenance work on both ponds. Work would include:
 - Removal of the bulrush reeds which are not beneficial, see image 1
 - Cut back a substantial area of native reeds that has become overgrown, see image 2&3
 - Prune the overgrown tree/shrub at the back of the North Lane pond, see image 4
 - Cutting back of overgrown shrubbery to the sides of the North Lane pond, see image 5&6
 - Bagging up and removing reed waste from both ponds
 - Planting additional bulbs around the sides of the North Lane pond
 - Top up the grass edge to the North Lane pond with topsoil and re-seed (this may be best considered when we improve the wooden edging)
- c) There is also some work required by a contractor to repair the broken wooden retaining wall of the pond, and to run the wooden retaining wall around the width of the pond to make a safer edge to the pond (see image 7). A defined edge to the pond will also have the benefit of making it easier and safe to cut the grass. This work for a contractor could also be grouped together with a small piece of work to create a step to improve access to the footpath on North Lane which is currently difficult for more elderly residents to navigate. See image 8&9.
- d) Finally, the survey results indicated that residents of the lane were keen to see another bench at the pond, some small activities for children and some other amenities, whilst acknowledging that people do not want to adversely impact the beauty of the pond.

Motion: To commission the clerk to investigate further professional advice that can help us draw together a future management plan for both ponds in North Lane.

Motion: It is proposed that we nominate a half day to ask volunteers to help us do this work, allocating £500 of the funds left in the North Lane pond maintenance budget line to cover any costs.

Motion: It is proposed that we request the Clerk to investigate quotes for carpentry work, with the aim to pay for it from general village maintenance and North Lane pond maintenance budget lines in due course.

2. Context setting

In recent years villagers have raised queries about the best way to manage the North Lane Pond. Each year the Parish Council has sought to take steps to manage the pond. With the recent very hot summers the pond, and the fish, have been subject to further discussions. The Parish Council sought the views of residents via an online survey to establish the views of the majority. The Clerk and Councillors have also engaged with experts from the Environment Agency, BBWOT and KVAS. This summary explains the results of the survey and how it is suggested that we move forward with expert advice.

3. North Lane Survey Results

A short 10 question survey was crafted with the objective of understanding village views on the North Lane pond. The survey was sent electronically to 21 households in North Lane, with paper copies to those whose emails were unavailable. North Lane residents were keen to hear the views of other villagers, so the survey was made available to the whole village via the village Facebook group.

The response rate was good

- The response rate from North Lane was 20 replies from 21 households emailed. In addition to this we received extra responses when we opened the survey to the wider village (via Facebook). The total number of responses received was 30.

The key message was that residents were keen for the pond to be a little more actively managed, with a few enhancements, but this must be done sensitively to preserve the current rural nature of the pond.

- 63% of respondents wanted the pond to be actively managed, 36% wanted it left as a natural pool.
- 24/30 people responded to say that they were attached to one or many of the key features of the pond: the island, the fish and the bulbs (in order of popularity).
- 20 people wanted more amphibious life in the pond, 14 people wanted more fish. 3 people wanted no or less fish.
- Other suggestions included ducks, a nicer duck sign and anything that would encourage more Moorhens!
- Appetite was spread amongst the ideas proposed for extra amenities – 36% of responses would like another bench, 33% of responses wanted some activities for the kids to do, 27% more flowers. But it is important to note that 27% of responses said it was perfect just the way it was.

There was a willingness to help out to maintain the pond going forward.

- 69% of respondents said Yes or Maybe to offering to help manage the pond. With 19 adults and 1 child offering to go on a list of volunteers.
- 9 people were willing to help top up pond with water, should it be required. Some may need help with hoses etc.
- 21 people were willing to help with a pond works day, 5 people said they'd happily pay for someone to do the work instead.

There was a willingness to financially contribute to work required in the pond

- 7 people said they would contribute to paying for the lining of the pond, 11 said they'd need more info before they decided, this accounts for 59% of respondents.

In summary I believe we have a really clear message that people care about the pond and would like to see it looked after in a sensitive way.

4. Proposed Next Steps

Following discussions amongst councillors it is proposed that the PC work towards developing a Management Plan for the North Lane and Oak Tree Ponds. This will enable us to have a clear view on future annual costs and work required. To help us do this the Clerk has been in touch with Berkshire, Buckinghamshire & Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust and a private company to try and get some further professional advice on pond management. This work will mean that next year's budget can clearly estimate PC funds needed to maintain the pond.

In the meantime, following consultation with the pond's neighbours it is proposed that there are some clear and tactical works that can be undertaken on the pond by a small, socially distant group of volunteers.

- Removal of the 'bull rush' reeds which are not beneficial, see image 1
- Cut back a substantial area of native reeds that has become overgrown, see image 2&3
- Prune the overgrown tree/shrub at the back of the North Lane pond, see image 4
- Cutting back of overgrown shrubbery to the sides of the North Lane pond, see image 5&6
- Bagging up and removing reed waste from both ponds
- Planting additional bulbs around the sides of the North Lane pond
- Top up the grass edge to the North Lane pond with topsoil and re-seed (this may be best considered when we improve the wooden edging)

It is proposed that we nominate a half day to ask volunteers to help us do this work, allocating £500 of the funds left in the North Lane pond maintenance budget line to cover any costs.

There is also some work required by a contractor to repair the broken wooden retaining wall of the pond, and to run the wooden retaining wall around the width of the pond to make a safer edge to the pond (see image 7). A defined edge to the pond will also have the benefit of making it easier and safe to cut the grass. This work for a contractor could also be grouped together with a piece of work to improve access to the footpath on North Lane which is currently difficult for more elderly residents to navigate (potentially by building a step).. See image 8&9.

It is proposed that we request the Clerk to investigate quotes for carpentry work, with the aim to pay for it from general village maintenance and North Lane pond maintenance budget lines in due course.

Finally, the survey results indicated that residents of the lane were keen to see another bench at the pond, some small activities for children and some other amenities, whilst acknowledging that people do not want to adversely impact the beauty of the pond.

Reference Photos

Image 1 : Not beneficial bulrush reeds



Image 2 & 3 : Good native reeds overgrown



Image 4 : Overgrown tree requiring pruning



Images 5 & 6 : Shrubs requiring cutting back



Image 7 : Edging



Image 8 & 9 : Path potentially requiring stepped access

