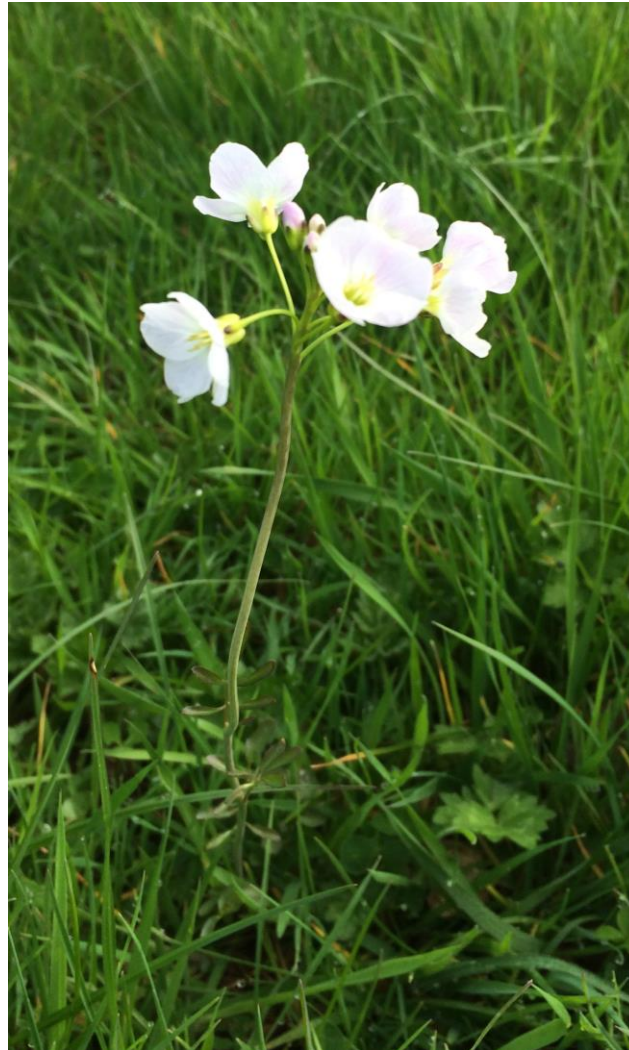


The Bridge Trust Kenwith Valley Land Management Plan



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Introduction

This report will act as a management plan for the Friends of Kenwith Valley and is applicable to land owned by The Bridge Trust and Torridge District Council, located adjacent to Kenwith Local Nature Reserve (LNR) (see figure 1). The aim of this report is to provide independent planning advice with the goal of creating an access route and expansion of habitats adjacent to Kenwith Local Nature Reserve.



Figure 1 shows the location of the Bridge Trust land, Torridge District Council land and Kenwith Local Nature Reserve.

The land to be managed is situated in a prime location for land use changes leading towards a more biodiverse and species rich area.

The primary aim of this project is to enable access from South Bideford to Kenwith Local Nature Reserve.

Secondary aims include the following:

- 1) improving key areas and habitats that are suitable for restoration and wildlife enhancement measures.
- 2) to preserve and expand a 'green park' area for Bideford and its residents to improve societal quality of life.
- 3) to encourage green transport by increasing connectivity by contributing towards creating a walking and cycle path, following the line of the Bideford–Cornborough sewage pipe. This route could potentially run from Bideford to Cornborough Cliffs.

Site Area

At present there is a large contrast between the highly diverse habitat mosaic in Kenwith LNR and the site for proposed improvements.

On site hedgerows act as the only key habitat and enclose the field on three sides. They act as a boundary between the land owners and at present are old but of poor wildlife value. The species composition, though, is varied and consists of elm, elder, willow, blackthorn and local hawthorn (seen in Zone 2 in Figure 2). This local hawthorn is uncommon as much recent planting in the local area is from imported European stock and should be appropriately managed. Dog's mercury was also seen in the hedgerow, highlighting the age of the bank. As these hedges appear not to have been laid in recent times, several tall trees have become established, including blackthorn and English oak. Several species of bats are known from the Kenwith LNR and these trees provide them with prey and potential roost sites.

Improved grassland currently covers the majority of the site and is used to graze cattle and sheep by a local farmer. Rushes near the bottom of the field, seen in Zone 1, are indicative of wetland areas created by hillslope runoff joining the high water table close to the stream. There is currently no significant conservation value and therefore offers scope for key areas to be developed for biodiversity.

Bridge Trust Site Zonation



Figure 2 shows the site area split into three zones: 1, 2 and 3.

Photos of Current Main Habitats

For all numbered photos see Appendix Two for locations and direction of shot.

Zone One (Torridge District Council land)



Zone One currently contains the following main land uses and habitats:

- Improved grassland
- Mixed hedgerow boundary
- Rushes

Zone Two



Zone Two currently contains the following main land uses and habitats:

- Improved grassland
- Mixed hedgerow boundary

Zone Three

3



Zone Three currently contains the following main land uses and habitats:

- Improved grassland
- Mixed hedgerow boundary

Proposals for Conservation Improvement

As the primary aim of this management plan is to create a route linking south Bideford to Kenwith LNR, a functional access point and pathway is critical for this site. It is recommended that a stile be installed at the top of zone three, adjacent to Northdown Road to provide permissive access to the site, and an appropriate 'permissive access' sign displayed here and where the footpath joins the Kenwith LNR. The maintenance and management of this access point should be the responsibility of the Friends of Kenwith Valley. Waymarked for members of the public, this pathway and stile will need to be checked regularly to keep in line with health and safety regulations. Similarly, as this site will still be used for grazing, members of the public should be advised to use the site at their own risk and dogs kept on a lead.

Woodland Planting and Hedgerow Management

Based on the current wildlife value of the site it is proposed that the major conservation effort should be focused on woodland planting, which would also incorporate hedgerow enhancement. This would enable the construction of fenced tree plantation buffer zones between the Trust land and neighbouring land owners. Similarly, dense woodland planting could be used to incorporate the old central hedgerow, effectively dividing the site through zone two (see figure 3). This would create an upslope area and a second more secluded downslope area, which would not be visible from the site access point. It is suggested that planting is only with trees which are native to this site, including field maple, ash, blackthorn, hawthorn and English oak, which would blend into the current landscape and attract more wildlife to the area.



Figure 3 shows both side of the old central hedgerow which has the potential to be surrounded by woodland, shrub and grassland areas.

Shrub planting, for example hawthorn, hazel and gorse, in front of the taller woodland would provide a broader and more diverse area for wildlife to thrive. These new plantings, from taller native trees to smaller scrub and then on to the grassland areas will create a more heterogeneous natural environment for both local residents and wildlife to enjoy (see Appendix one). As sheep grazing will continue on this site, it is recommended that the woodland and shrub areas be fenced off. Coupled with stopping the spread of fertiliser and sowing wildflower seed into the meadow, this could encourage a new type of habitat, allowing wildflowers to become established (see figure 4). Leaving some unplanted space within the edge of the fenced areas will also allow rough grassland to develop and provide a habitat for owl prey, such as rodents and field voles.



Figure 4 shows the possible outcome of establishing a wildflower area. Source: <http://chilternsblog.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Chalk-Grassland-Wildflowers.jpg>

Hedgerows that are not incorporated in the woodland planting could be laid to improve the wildlife corridor between Kenwith LNR and the new proposed woodland planting on the site. It is suggested that the taller more established trees within the hedgerow are preserved to provide a wide variety of habitat for bats and for feeding and nesting birds. The remaining hedgerow trees could be thinned as appropriate. Choosing which areas to lay or thin should be carefully thought about while works constructing the footpath and access points take place, and care should be taken to ensure as little environmental damage as possible is caused.

Pond and Small Wetland Creation

Rushes are at the bottom of the slope in zone one, adjacent to the river. These rushes are characteristic of a high water table, so this area would be an ideal location for the creation of a pond and surrounding wetland habitat because little excavation would be required (see figure 5). Following the contours, the wetland edge vegetation would extend local habitats for amphibians and reptiles increasing biodiversity. Some alder buckthorn shrubs around the wetland would provide a gradation of habitats, similar to that of the woodland, shrub and grassland habitat proposed for the new plantations, and alder buckthorn is a food plant for the brimstone butterfly.

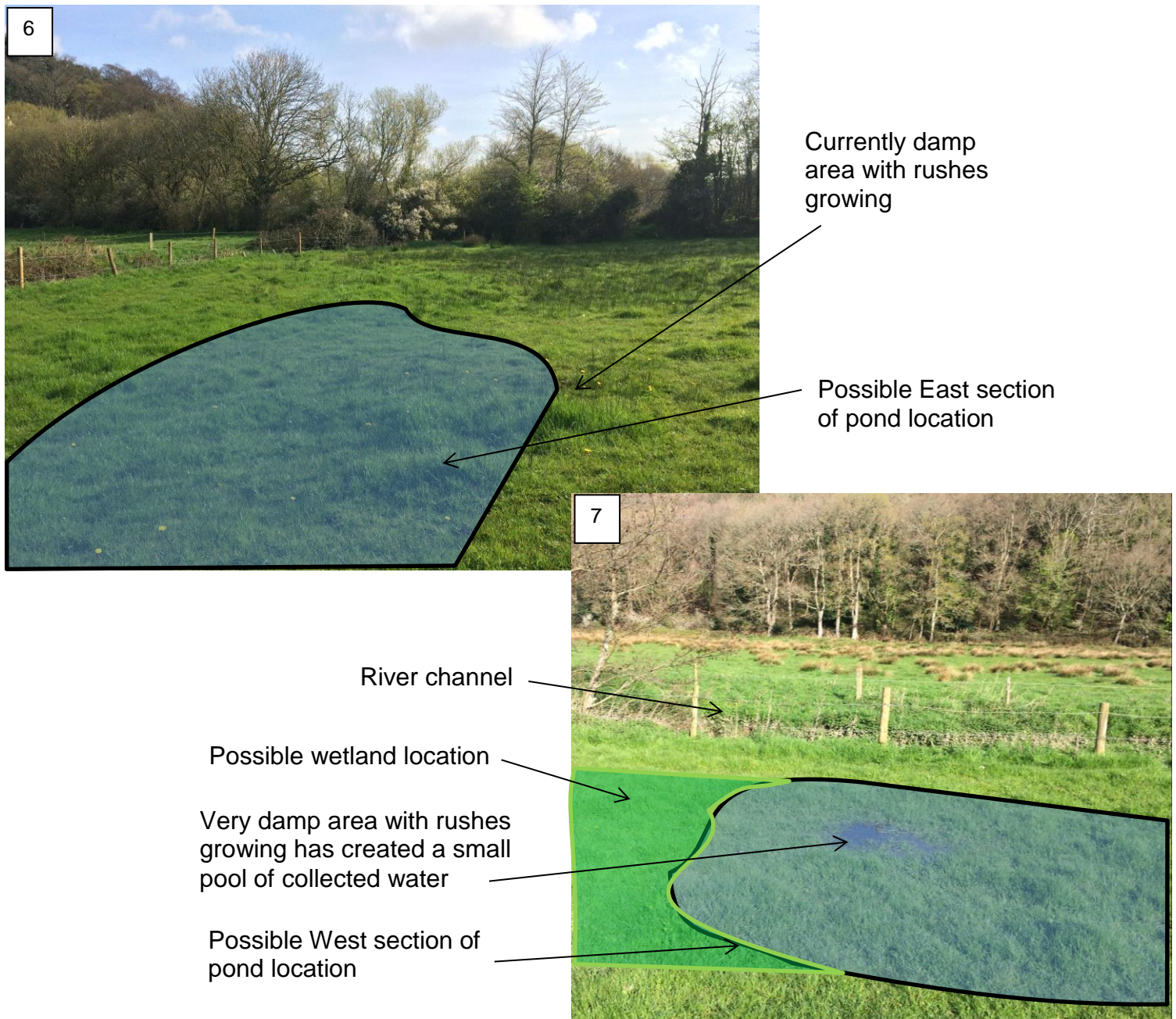


Figure 5 shows the possible location of the pond and accompanying wetland area.

Issues to Consider and Conclusion

Currently access for grazing between both Kingsley School's Bideford and The Bridge Trust's land is not an issue as both areas are managed by the same grazier. However, if changes in land management and grazing arrangements occur then a more robust hedge boundary or fence may be needed to contain grazing stock within a particular area.

Dwellings which overlook the site need to be taken into consideration while planning woodland planting. Currently a neighbouring house has cleared trees from their own land to appreciate the view down into the valley (see figure 6). Therefore it is recommended that any planting in front of the boundary with this dwelling be confined to grassland and shrub, with a gradation outwards north and south of shrubs and then taller trees, which would not block the view from the house (see Figure 8). This gradation of planting will also enable the creation of a variety of different habitats.

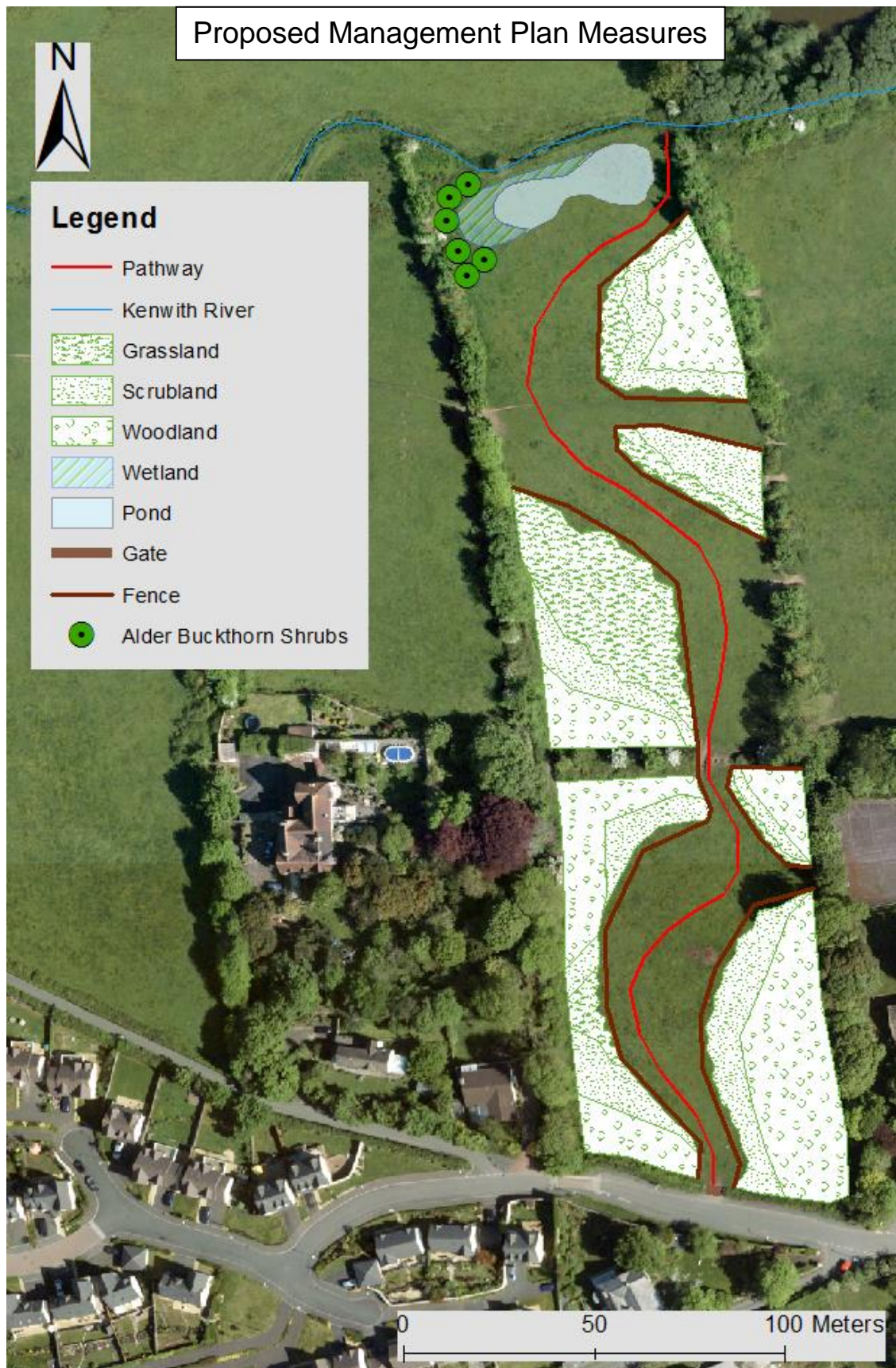


Figure 6 shows the dwelling to take into consideration when planting tall woodland near the neighbouring boundary.

It must be kept in mind that there is a complex stakeholder situation concerning land boundaries between The Bridge Trust, Kingsley School and local neighbouring residents, as outlined above. A similar issue to consider includes public perspective and how visitors and residents will interact with the space created. These matters have been taken into account in constructing this management plan and providing the opportunity for future recreational uses to be developed in this area. For example there is a relatively level strip of land which runs just north of the sewage pipeline which could be used as a picnic and viewing area of Kenwith LNR and the wooded hillside.

Appendix

One: Proposed conservation and management measures.



Two: Photo shot direction and associated zone map.

