

Introduction

The broad aims of the group remain unchanged and were laid out in our 5-year management plan which was updated in June 2017. We wished to restore the biodiversity of the Fen by maintaining a good water flow, reversing the drying-out, creating a pond, increasing the light levels by tree felling and clearing bramble, nettle and scrub from the central area.

2017 has seen a great deal of activity. With the help of local volunteers, our HCC partners and contractors we have:

- Cleared silt and rubble from St Michael's Brook, working with our neighbours to remove waterweed and increase the water flow.
- Removed 5 sycamores from the area around transverse section of St Michael's Brook, letting in light to stimulate aquatic vegetation growth and associated invertebrate life, as well as reducing water loss through the tree canopy.
- Removed invasive plants such as Bamboo, Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam.
- Stripped the central zone 3 area of nettle and bramble, together with some soil. Some ditches were also excavated to help rewet the Fen and the result has been areas of standing water. Exposed soil has been reseeded with a mixture of native grass and wildflower seed, appropriate for a fen meadow. The wetter conditions should discourage nettles and be much more suitable for the re-establishment of fen vegetation.
- Cleared the historic ditch that runs along the west border of zone 3.
- Created a pond in zone 4, and through further tree removal have let more light into this area.

This work has been expensive, although we have been fortunate in obtaining financial support from Winchester City Council, Hampshire County Council the South Downs National Park Authority, and some kind donations from our members for which we are very grateful. This has covered most of the costs but we will need to seek further funding streams. Our budget for the coming year will be more restricted and we will be relying on the help of volunteers to carry out management tasks.

Management in 2018

After a year of activity, 2018 presents an opportunity to monitor the regrowth of vegetation, the effects of increased light levels, water levels and the colonisation of the wet areas in zone 3 and other areas of exposed soil. The Fen is already classed as a SINC (Site of Importance for Nature Conservation) but we are ultimately aiming for Local Nature Reserve status and will need to record and document the plants and animals to demonstrate the growth in biodiversity. Water levels and stream flows will need to be monitored so that we can understand better the hydrology of the Fen and seasonal variation.

- Zones 1 and 2.

No major changes are anticipated, although further clearance of Ground Elder and Nettle is likely to be needed in the SW area, where consideration could be given to the further reintroduction of native Hampshire woodland plants such as Wood Anemone in suitably cleared patches.

It is essential to continue work to maintain a good flow through St Michael's Brook and to liaise with HIWWT over maintaining the spills from the Lockburn Brook that feed the Floodstoc. This is necessary to maintain a pristine habitat for the freshwater life. Further removal of sycamores along St Michaels Brook would be helpful but would be dependent on consent and funding.

We would like to explore intermittent educational use of this area by St Cross community childrens' groups such as Beavers, Rainbows and Brownies.

- Zone 3.

Continued weed management will be needed. The major changes to earth levels provide a new variety of habitats and require specific revegetation to encourage biodiversity. We are currently experimenting with the use of brushwood to narrow and deepen the transverse stream. Other water management proposals include introducing up to the 20m³ /day of water permitted by HCC Watercourse Consent from the bend in St Michaels Brook to the NW corner of zone 3 or into the historic ditch (which St Michael's Brook used to flow into). These options would be dependent on further conservation hydrology advice and significant funding. The old drainage channel from the SE corner to the culvert under the Lockburn that became obstructed by excavations could be further opened and the soil used to partially fill the deep pool in that corner. The height of flow at the Lockburn culvert outflow also effects water levels in Zone 3 and can be adjusted.

Zone 3 is an ecologically sensitive site and we aim to restrict people wandering onto this area, to encourage the recolonisation of flora and fauna, especially birds, mammals and invertebrates. Options include explanatory boards, moving or obstructing the bridge between zones 2 and 3, replanting barrier scrub in the NW corner of zone 3, and filling in gaps in the adjacent hedge. The NE area around the Floodstoc has been left exposed after the recent work and we aim to continue to provide shelter for wildlife by the planting of native species such as goat willow.

- Zone 4.

The bund between zones 3 and 4 is currently bare soil and vegetation can be encouraged by the planting of herbaceous and low-growing woody plants. There are also other large areas of bare soil, and it should be possible to speed up recolonization of these areas by transplanting herbaceous plants and ferns from elsewhere on the Fen. Monitoring of natural pond plant regeneration. Work on pollarding or removing the 2 willows close to the road will be dependent on funding and the views of local residents, who will also take responsibility for hedging. Further light could be introduced by the removal of sycamores between zone 4 and the educational area, again dependent on consent and funding. Consultation would take place with St Faith's School about any changes that might impact on the environmental area.

Volunteer Work

With limited funding, we will be reliant on volunteer work, and hope that members of the group will be able to continue to help. Tasks are likely to include:

- Removal of regrowth of perennial weeds such as nettle and ground elder
- Removal of suckers around the stumps of felled trees and unwanted tree seedlings on zone 3
- Continued work on the removal of invasive plants such as Himalayan Balsam
- Translocation of plants to areas of exposed soil and planting native species in bare areas.
- Work on the clearance and banks of streams
- Monitoring and recording of all flora and fauna
- Photography and posting for Instagram and the website
- Help with fund-raising

Map of Clausentum Fen

