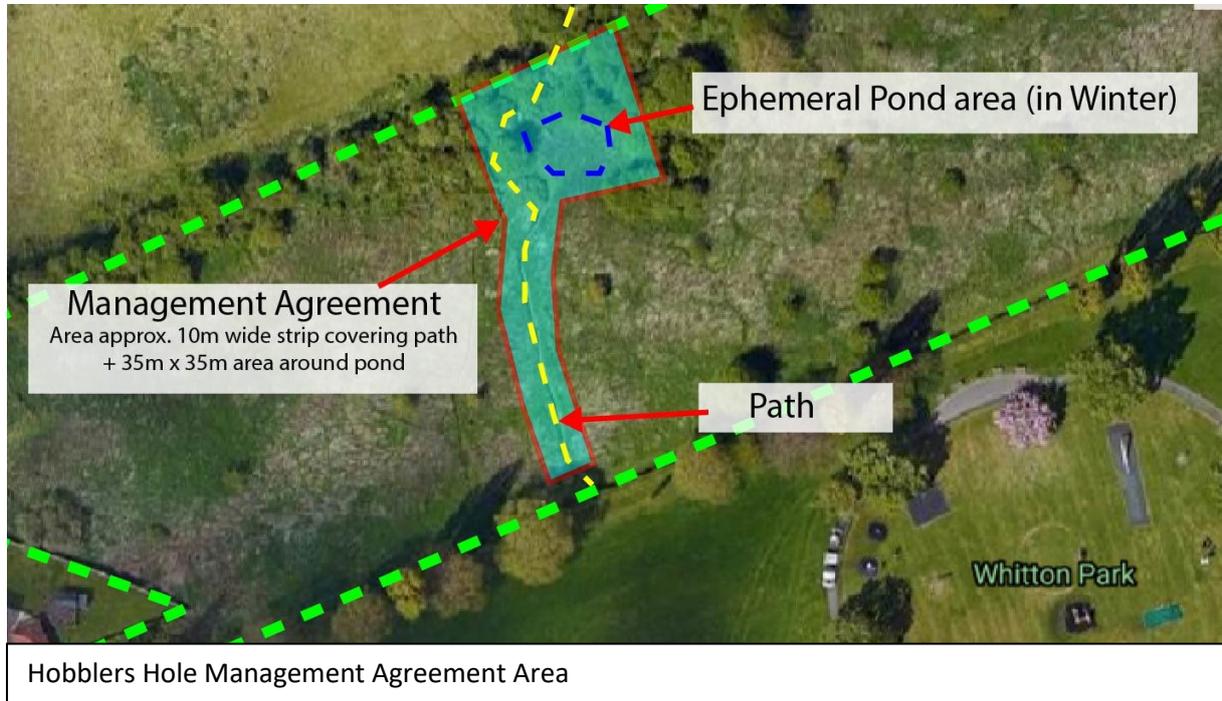


Hobblers Hole Management Agreement Area

LLRA Management Plan



Background

Historically, Hobblers Hole was enclosed for grazing with a stockproof fence and was used by West Common horses during the fallow period up to the 1990s. Lack of grazing and ongoing maintenance since has resulted in overgrown grassland developing to scrub with aggressive common plants such as thistle, nettle and bramble swamping other plants. A variety of bird life is present.

Following a 2019 Habitat Survey¹, undertaken as part of the development of the 2021-2040 Long Leys Neighbourhood Plan, a number of opportunities have been identified to improve the biodiversity of the area and improve access to public open space for residents. To achieve this, LLRA is seeking a Management Agreement with City of Lincoln Council (CoLC) for a small area of land in Hobblers Hole, a public open space to the north of Whittons Park (see above image). The agreement will allow LLRA to undertake the activities described in this document.

LLRA is working with representatives of Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust to ensure that maintenance activities safeguard any protected species of flora and fauna and have regard to the impact on biodiversity and habitat management. LLRA will also consult with the maintenance team at CoLC to ensure activity is in line with good practice.

Overview of LLRA Intended Activities

Within the area covered by the Management Agreement, LLRA plans to work with volunteers from the community of the appropriate skill level to:

- A: Improve the biodiversity in the area, by:
 - Reinstating the Hobblers Hole ephemeral pond as a breeding point for amphibians including Great Crested Newts.
 - Annual mowing of a section of grassland, helping wildflowers to compete with nettle and bramble. The section will be circa 10 metres wide and 50 metres in length.
- B: Make the area more accessible to residents by:
 - Clearing foliage 2 metres away from the path across Hobblers from Newt Hollow to Whitton.
 - Removing a number of overhanging branches which adversely affect passage along the path.
 - In the longer term LLRA would potentially apply for grants to improve accessibility to the area for those with prams or reduced mobility. CoLC will give administrative support where needed, albeit this will be limited and dependent on resources available.
- C: Explore the development of a community nature trail with possible features including:
 - A "bug hotel"
 - A "forest school option" with natural materials in close proximity to allow children to build a wigwam or other den
 - Possibly a small section of wooden boardwalk to allow closer access to the pond area during winter
 - Educational signage on flora and fauna in the area

The following pages describe the maintenance and improvement activity in more detail.

1. Ephemeral Pond Area

The ephemeral pond area is where one female Great Crested Newt (GCN) was found during surveys in 2001 & 2013. If managed effectively the pond could potentially be a suitable habitat for GCN's.

Initial Actions

- As the GCN is a legally protected species, Natural England has been consulted and it has been ascertained that no licence to disturb GCNs is needed provided work is carried out in a manner that minimises risk of disturbance ie work Nov - Jan and all involved are briefed to cease work immediately if a newt is found. Caroline Steel, a representative of Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust, has a licence to handle Great Crested Newts and will be on hand.
 - If GCN found during work, then work must halt until mitigation licence obtained (typically takes 30 days) and a method statement is in place.
- Trim back branches to east of area, to allow creation of compost & soil piles.
- Remove vegetation in a 15-metre diameter circle centred on lowest point.
- Hand dig material to exaggerate the concave hollow, with the lowest point circa 0.5 metres below current depth. When digging ensure that the clay layer is retained, with any breaches repaired.



Ephemeral pond from west in April 2018



Pond area from east in October 2020

2. Path and 10 metre Wide Mown Strip Across Hobblers Hole

Initial

- Annually, at the end of winter, clear a 5-metre strip either side of the path. Foliage will be collected and piled in two compost heaps, one either side of the path (marked on the map in Appendix A at points B and C). In the first year of maintenance an attempt will be made to remove some Willow Herb and other root matter. Cutting will likely be done with either scythe or petrol strimmer depending on the volunteer numbers and skills. Over 3-5 years this should encourage the recovery of wildflowers currently swamped by Willow Herb, nettles and brambles.
- Removing a number of overhanging branches and saplings which adversely affect passage along the path (see images below) and create habitat piles with material.
- Annually, cut back brambles and any low hanging branches where path curves around the pond area.
- Include as part of the LLRA 6-monthly litter picks
- A 3-monthly check will be made, to address any potential fire risk from compost areas or from build-up of litter, as well as any other new hazards identified.

Longer Term

- Establish the best option for a firmer surface across Hobblers Hole. This would be an approx. 2 metre width capable of taking wheelchairs and cycles. An unbound or semi-bound surface could be options, depending on views from LWT and CoLC.
- Identify costs of potential path designs for both community-installed, and contractor-installed options and identify possible funding options.



Current path clearance level



Maintenance: Section of brambles requiring clearance



Maintenance: Lower Hawthorn branch removed



Maintenance: Two Hawthorn side branched removed

3. Nature Trail

These will most likely be progressed longer term

- Develop parent group, possibly linked to Whittons Park playpark upgrade to develop a trail, possibly in collaboration with local junior school. Options could include education and play elements such as:
 - A "bug hotel"
 - A "forest school option" with natural materials in close proximity to allow children to build a wigwam or other den
 - Possibly a small section of wooden boardwalk to allow closer access to the pond area during winter.
 - Educational signage on flora and fauna in the area, which also alerts visitors to the danger of cross contamination and invasive species if pond dipping.
- Help to educate visitors on the wildlife present and how to help by:
 - Organising and supporting guide led nature walks to the area, along the lines of the West Common Nature Walks previously run by LLRA. LLRA will ensure any activities are covered by appropriate licences.
 - Continuing the community wide communication via email and online media, of Nature Notes about Hobblers Hole & West Common. See: long-leys.org.
- Encourage residents to contribute to a survey of birds in the general area (to also include Whittons Park) as well as photograph butterflies and moths encountered.



Example bug hotel

References

1: Long Leys Habitat Survey Summary (2019). Available at <http://long-leys.org/pdf/npag/Habitat-summary-v3.0.pdf>

Appendix A – Plan of Management Agreement Area

