

EASTFIELD PARK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
Reflections on the Conservation Management of Eastfield Park

Opinions shared between Vic Smith (Chair of Friends of Eastfield Park & the Eastfield Park Management Committee) and Matt Johnson (Living Landscape Manager at the The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire & Northamptonshire in Northants) during a site visit to Eastfield Park on Tuesday, 26th January, 2016.

In 2009 the local Wildlife Trust designated Eastfield Park a Local Wildlife Site, mainly because of the presence of an area of species rich neutral grassland located just southwest of the Lake. Previously, the Trust had drawn attention to the importance of the Lake, and especially its reedbed, as an important habitat for birds. The Eastfield Park Management Committee therefore wished the Wildlife Trust to be represented at its meetings. However, because of pressure of other duties on Trust staff, it seems unlikely that this wish can be fulfilled. Nevertheless, the local Trust's Living Landscape Manager, Matt Johnson, offered to inspect the Park, discuss conservation, and offer advice to Vic Smith, the current EPMC Chair. On Tuesday 26th January 2016 these two representatives walked over much of the Park discussing relevant issues. The main conclusions follow:

- 1. Lakeview Spinney:** We agreed that it was sensible to include this area in Eastfield Park's Conservation Zone, partly because of its intrinsic wildlife value and partly to form a continuous belt of conservation relevance from west to east across the northern perimeter of the Park. Many of the pine trees in this area are now diseased and we agreed that, as unsafe trees are removed, they should be replaced with a variety of broadleaved trees and some replacement pines to create a wide range of habitats for animals. It's a fairly dense spinney, therefore as trees are removed the retention of some small glades (probably becoming bramble-shrub, similar to that next to the current play area) would be beneficial to improve lower structure of the spinney.
- 2. The 'Buttermere Scrub':** Matt agreed that 'Scrub' is a suitable designation for this area, the vegetation being rather old and overgrown scrub that is a comparatively recent feature of the landscape. Occasional coppicing to create a less even age structure would be beneficial.
- 3. Proposed creation of small area of artificial 'wildflower meadow' north of the present wildflower border along the north-facing fence separating the Park from Eleonore House:** The Friends of Eastfield Park already have permission from NBC to create the 'wildflower meadow' and the Wildlife Trust would have no objection to the introduction of wildflowers not native to the Park in this area. Depending on soil conditions a good supplier of native wildflower seed is Emorsgate (www.wildseed.co.uk), non-native is pictorial seed (www.pictorialmeadows.co.uk).
- 4. The Eastfield Lake reedbeds:** The reeds provide a valuable habitat for birds and other fauna within the Lake and there is no conservation need to remove any reeds at present. However, we agreed that reeds could be removed selectively (especially from the southern shore of the Lake) to facilitate angling if there was a demand for this. Matt suggested that perhaps we could

map or photograph the current extent of the reeds to help answer any questions over removal/spread in future years. He also stressed the benefits the reeds supply to the fish populations and water quality in the Lake. He also commented favourably on the 'natural' appearance of the lake in Eastfield Park compared to the 'artificial' nature of many lakes and ponds in urban parks.

- 5. The area of species-rich grassland between the MUGA and the Lake:** The conservation value of some of this area has been destroyed by creation of the 'Eastfield Monster' play mound. Further damage should be avoided. The area could be enhanced by some part of it being marked off and mowed less frequently than the rest of the Park. A possible mowing regime would be to leave the area until June and then mow normally for the rest of the year. Another possibility would be to mow up to May and then leave May through July (main flowering season), then start mowing again, it would all need to be discussed with whoever does the mowing. Matt agreed that if such a regime was introduced, subject to him having staff available, he would arrange for the Wildlife Trust to monitor the area.
- 6. The Parkland Area:** We agreed that it is most important to have a tree-replacement policy for this area. However, it is not necessary to replace like-for-like and lime trees could be replaced with oak or beech with advantage. Because of the historical interest in the Bullring, the trees there should be replaced only with lime.
- 7. The Ha-ha:** We agreed that it was acceptable to clear vegetation from an area in front of the ha-ha, particularly as not many parks had such a feature. Clearing an area slightly larger than that already cleared would have a minimal impact on the value of the Conservation Zone as a 'wildlife corridor' across the Park. Matt suggested that if an all-weather pathway is constructed running parallel to the ha-ha but some distance from it, the area between the path and the ha-ha could be subject to a reduced mowing regime, possibly mowing it every other time the Park was mowed.
- 8. The ponds:** Matt agreed with the principles behind the Friends of Eastfield Park's conservation strategy for the ponds. We agreed, however, that the upper middle pond (which is now little more than a boggy area with a stream flowing through it when it rains) could be left as a wet area and not restored back to a pond. The substratum is already covered with vegetation and this probably provides a valuable habitat in its own right. There are three other ponds that can be improved as pond habitats. Matt thought that the ponds are looking good and just now need more water.

There are many other issues still to discuss but these initial comments will help to inform the emerging conservation management plans for Eastfield Park. Vic Smith will continue to liaise with Matt Johnson and seek his advice on other relevant matters.

VGF Smith

01 February 2016