

MOWSBURY HILLFORT VISION

Vision

1. This plan encompasses the Friends vision for the Scheduled Mowsbury Hillfort, associated meadow and public footpaths. The purpose of the plan is to guide the actions required to help preserve, maintain and enhance the archaeological features, wildlife and habitats of the plan area. The plan sets out the activities to be undertaken over the period 2016-2021 by Bedford Borough Council and the Friends of Putnoe Wood and Mowsbury Hillfort. The activities contained in the plan are guided by the Mowsbury Hillfort Higher Level Stewardship Agreement, wildlife and habitat survey data and best practice.

Site location, features and characteristics

2. The site is located to the north-east of Mowsbury Golf and Squash Complex, Cleat Hill, Ravensden (TL06610 53189) and measures approximately 4ha in area. The Hillfort is a scheduled monument (list entry no.1015588) and county wildlife site in the ownership of Bedford Borough Council and is managed as a public amenity area. The monument is situated on a spur of chalky boulder clay overlooking the Ouse Valley. It comprises an early Iron Age slight univallate hillfort, within which a Medieval Moated Site was constructed in the Middle Ages. The habitat on site includes lowland wildflower meadow on boulder clay, broadleaf woodland, traditional orchards, scrub areas and ephemeral ponds.
3. The main remaining archaeological features are Iron Age ramparts on the south and the west of the monument; a Medieval ditch some 2 metres deep and 10 metres wide within the Iron Age ramparts which encloses an inner island and partially encloses an outer island; medieval fishponds north of the islands and north of the traditional orchard (east); and a leat stream north of Mowsbury Hill Meadow.
4. A public footpath runs west of Mowsbury Hill Meadow and turns east to run along part of the monument's northern boundary.

Habitat and wildlife

5. The site contains a wide variety of habitats including semi-improved and species rich neutral grassland, traditional orchards, lowland mixed deciduous woodland and a series of moats and ponds. The courtyard meadow especially contains a good diversity of herbs including common spotted orchid, wild liquorice, and yellow rattle. The orchard contains a mix of fruit trees including apple, pear, plum and medlar. There is also a wild service tree. In summer there is a wide variety of butterflies, bumblebees and other invertebrates. Mammals include rabbits, badgers and muntjac deer.

Mission statement/Overall Objectives

6. Objectives:

- Preserve archaeological features
- Maintain the visibility of the archaeological features
- Encourage diversity of wildlife
- Promote the amenity value of the site
- Carry out surveys, with assistance of County Recorders, to monitor biodiversity
- Assist in the management of the site under Natural England Higher Level Stewardship Agreement (HLS)
- Review the protections available for the site

Analysis of key issues

7. A SWOT analysis has been undertaken for the plan area. This highlights the following issues:

Strengths

- Scheduled Monument incorporating an Iron Age Hillfort and Medieval Moated Site
- County Wildlife Site and Local Nature Reserve
- Attractive and atmospheric site
- Wide variety of habitats and wildlife
- Accessible by the public
- Active Friend's group
- A Higher Level Stewardship agreement for the site is in place
- Regular monitoring of the site by the Friends and Borough Council

Weaknesses

- Limited analysis of archaeology
- Limited survey information for wildlife
- Limited public awareness
- Lack of interpretation on site

Opportunities

- Improve visibility of archaeological features
- Improve archaeological interpretation of the site
- Encourage a wider diversity of wildlife
- Strike an appropriate balance between the archaeology and wildlife requirements
- Promote public awareness

Threats

- Damage to earthworks by encroaching trees and scrub
- Damage to earthworks by rabbits and badgers
- Members of the public leaving rubbish, dog mess, cultivating the site, digging, metal detecting and lighting fires
- Budget limitations
- Inability to remove or burn material generated from site
- Diseases such as Ash dieback
- Encroaching urban development

Strategic approach

8. The Borough Council and Friend's Group have agreed that the most appropriate strategic approach to maintaining the plan area's features and habitats; is to identify key areas of shared characteristics and overlay these onto specific management zones. These zones are more particularly identified on the attached plan (Plan A). They also form the basis of the table below which sets out the proposed actions by the Friends to manage the site. The areas of shared characteristics (consistent with the HLS agreement) are as follows:
 1. Archaeology (Inner Island; Medieval moats and raised walkway, west and east ponds and leat; Iron age ramparts)
 2. Wildflower meadow (Courtyard; Mowsbury Hill meadow)
 3. Shaded meadow (Inner Island)
 4. Traditional orchard (south and east)
 5. Woodland and scrub (Courtyard meadow fringe; Woodlands east of old orchards; Hedgerow and boundary strip; Western tree belt)
 6. Public footpath

Strategic management issues

9. From practical experience, and taking into account the advice of Natural England, Historic England and the local Wildlife Trust, we have identified three particular critical management issues. These can only be resolved through a partnership approach between the Friends and the Borough Council. We note that funding appears to be available under the HLS agreement until 2023 for the first two areas of activity (see Resources section below). The issues identified for discussion are:
 - the need for an annual arrangement for cutting and collecting (for disposal off-site) of grass on the Mowsbury Hill meadow.
 - the need to establish on-going arrangements for dealing with brush, scrub and tree branches etc generated from within the site, by establishing a contract for removing materials from the site; burning of materials (away from the Schedule Monument); and, where appropriate, dead hedging on the perimeter boundaries.
 - The need to eradicate rabbits on the site, allowing for appropriate back-filling of burrows to stabilise and protect archaeological features.

General management issues

10. Bedford Borough Council will continue to lead in monitoring the health of major trees within the site and take any necessary action to maintain their health, including any work required to make them safe or, where appropriate, their felling.
11. The Borough Council and Friends will also work together, to monitor wear on footpaths, where this threatens to damage any archaeological features.

Reviewing the protections available for the site

12. There is an ongoing need to identify suitable sites for future housing development within the Borough. Land near to the northern edge of the site has already been identified for

potential future housing development, and the golf course running south and east of the site must be considered, in the longer-term, as potentially under threat of development.

13. In this context, the Friends would wish to work in partnership with the Borough Council and Historic England to investigate the possibility of extending the scheduled area around the Hillfort, to ensure future protection in terms of its historic landscape importance. The order of priority would be as follows:
 - Ask Historic England to redraw the scheduling boundary to include the entire length of the leat; the outer northern ditch; the small pond north of the old orchard east; the woodland on the east of the site and the historic hedge boundary.
 - Ask Historic England to consider extending the scheduling to include the Old Butts.
 - Ask Historic England to consider adding Mowsbury Hill Meadow to the scheduling as part of the historic landscape and context for the Iron Age Hillfort and Medieval site.
14. We might also review with Bedford Borough the possibility of adding the leat, as a likely part of the medieval construction, to the Historic Environment Record (HER). The proposed coring may shed light on the construction of the leat and support to the case. In addition, the Borough might be asked to consider adding Mowsbury Hill Meadow to the HER as an integral part of the setting of the scheduled monument. We note that the Old Butts are already listed in the HER.
15. We note that Mowsbury Hill Meadow, which supports a wide range of wildflowers, was assessed in 2012, by Laura Downton of the BCN Wildlife Trust, for possible inclusion within the Hillfort County Wildlife Site (CWS). A number of the criteria were met, but not quite enough to merit a positive recommendation. However, since then, the Friends have acted upon a number of the measures proposed in the report and consider that it might be worth requesting a further assessment. In addition, as the Old Butts (HER 3013) is a likely habitat for lizards, this might also be considered, as part of any new assessment, for inclusion within the CWS.
16. Should progress be made on expanding the CWS, the Friends could then ask the Borough Council to consider extending coverage of the Local Nature Reserve to encompass the whole site. This would afford the site a greater level of statutory protection.

Resources

17. Bedford Borough Council employees and Friends of Putnoe Woods and Mowsbury Hillfort. The Friends Group has access to a wide range of hand tools. The Borough Council has a range of power tools (including strimmers), vehicles and equipment (such as mowers). The Council also has a general budget for countryside sites which we may be able to draw upon. The HLS agreement has a capital budget of £34k over the period to 2023 (including the costs of hydrological and archaeological surveys, the management plan and three interpretation boards). It also provides for revenue funding for ongoing

maintenance tasks, such as grass cutting, scrub clearance and tree maintenance, of some £972.50 per annum.

Performance measures/monitoring progress

18. We intend to use fixed point photography to assist in monitoring change, on a seasonal basis, over the plan period.
19. The BCN Wildlife Trust Survey of wildlife and habitats conducted in 2012 will provide a useful baseline against which work within the plan area can be measured. The Friend's own survey data will also be relevant to monitoring change over the site. The HLS agreement for the Scheduled Mowsbury Hillfort provides baselines against which work affecting the archaeological features can be monitored. In addition, a management plan, to deliver the HLS agreement, is to be commissioned for the site by Natural England.
20. Site visits and discussion with Historic England, Natural England and the Borough Council will inform progress against the HLS agreement for the Scheduled Mowsbury Hillfort.
21. Friends Meetings, enable bi-monthly review of progress with the Borough Council.

Acknowledgements

22. This plan draws on information contained within the Mowsbury Hillfort Scoping Study - Albion Archaeology (31 March 2009), the HLS agreement (2013) and the BCN survey report on Mowsbury Hill by Laura Downton (2012).
23. The plan has been drawn up by a Friends working group, comprising: Chris Wedge, John Wilkie, Lynn Caudrey, Helen Miller and Dave Parratt. We are also grateful for the helpful input from Bedford Borough employee, Danny Fellman.

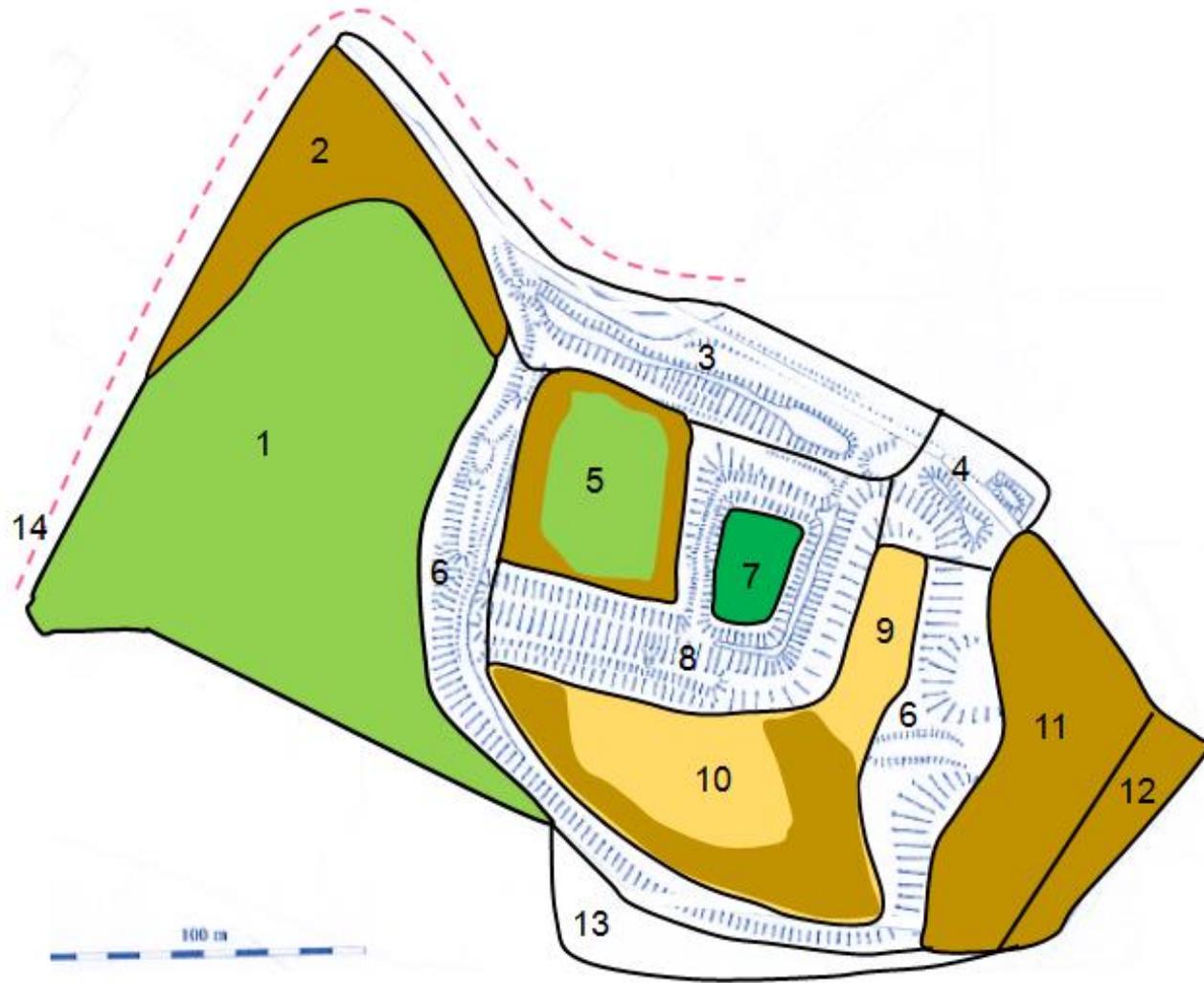
Zone	Vision from 2016 to 2021	Tasks to be undertaken by the Friends (F) with support from Bedford Borough (BB)	Outcome at 2021
1. Mowsbury Hill Meadow	<p><u>Priority 1. Biodiversity</u> Manage as a wild flower meadow.</p> <p>Aim to meet the County Wildlife Site selection criteria.</p> <p><u>Priority 2. Interpretation of site</u> Consider installing two interpretation boards – possibly one at the site entrance at bottom of meadow and one at the top near the seat. (Note: there is funding for 3 boards; avoid placing them where people may be hit by golf balls.)</p>	<p>Pull ragwort during spring and summer (F). (BB) to remove material from site for destruction.</p> <p>Obtain advice from Natural England (NE) on control of other undesirable species (creeping thistle; spear thistle; curled and broad-leaved dock and common nettle) (F)</p> <p>Arrange the cut, collect and removal of grass in the autumn. (BB)</p> <p>Set up working group in 2016 to take forward the interpretation boards. (F)</p>	<p>Reduction of ragwort and other undesirable species to no more than 5%.</p> <p>Increased, naturally occurring, diversity of the herb layer.</p> <p>Interpretation boards erected.</p>
2. Western tree belt	<p><u>Priority 1. Biodiversity</u> Maintain as screening from housing on Cleat Hill.</p> <p>Develop graduated woodland edge by allowing some scrub to grow 0.5m from edge and periodically cutting it back.</p>	<p>Cut back scrub annually (if required) to encourage a graduated woodland edge and prevent encroachment onto Mowsbury Hill meadow. (F)</p>	<p>Woodland retained.</p> <p>No scrub encroachment onto meadow.</p>
3. West ponds and leat	<p><u>Priority 1. Archaeology</u> Keep clear of scrub and debris to aid visibility of features.</p> <p>Avoid dead hedging around these areas.</p> <p>Remove trees liable to damage the earthworks and cut down the stumps level with the ground surface to discourage regrowth.</p> <p>Discourage rabbit burrowing.</p> <p><u>Priority 2. Biodiversity</u> NE have proposed improving pond habitat by deepening. We believe this needs further investigation and to be informed by the core sampling and the hydrology survey.</p>	<p>Clear leat (F) and cut down stumps to ground level (BB)</p> <p>Clear 10 metre length of hedge north of the fishpond to aid visibility of outer ditch. (F)</p> <p>Clear around ponds to maintain no more than 25% shade. (F)</p> <p>Clear debris annually (if and when required) (F)</p>	<p>Ponds clear of scrub with no more than 25% shade on the southern banks.</p> <p>Features maintained by annual light clearing.</p>
4. East ponds	<p><u>Priority 1. Archaeology</u> Consider clearing these ponds so that they are more visible, but leaving the existing pond shaded. Include the small outer pond into the site.</p>		

<p>5. Courtyard Meadow and Courtyard meadow fringe</p>	<p><u>Priority 1. Biodiversity</u> Maintain as a wildflower meadow.</p> <p>Protect the anthills.</p> <p>Maintain trees between Mowsbury Hill meadow and the courtyard to discourage spread of ragwort, create shelter from wind and provide biodiversity.</p> <p>Maintain healthy trees on the other edges of the courtyard, which do not interfere with the archaeology, to maintain biodiversity and the ambience of the site.</p> <p>Prevent scrub from encroaching onto the meadow.</p> <p><u>Priority 2. Archaeology</u> Avoid damage to ground</p> <p>Avoid dead hedging around top of moat</p>	<p>Mow and rake in the autumn. (F) – with strimmers provided by BB)</p> <p>Reduce encroaching bramble by targeted poisoning or cutting. (F)</p> <p>Cut back scrub as and when required to prevent it from encroaching on the courtyard meadow. On the western aspect a graduated woodland edge could be encouraged. (F)</p>	<p>No degradation in wildflower numbers.</p> <p>Reduction of bramble to no more than 5%.</p> <p>Mature, healthy trees retained.</p> <p>Encroachment of scrub onto the meadow controlled by annual cutting back.</p> <p>Area looking much the same as at 2016.</p>
<p>6. Iron age ramparts</p>	<p><u>Priority 1. Archaeology</u> Keep ramparts clear of scrub to aid visibility and allow herb layer to develop.</p> <p>Discourage rabbit burrowing.</p>	<p>Strim ramparts in autumn (F) – with strimmers provided by BB)</p> <p>Control bramble (F)</p> <p>Discuss with BB how best to control rabbits. (F and BB)</p>	<p>Grass covered, but still ringed at the top with cherry plum, hawthorn, and some blackthorn.</p> <p>Rabbits being controlled.</p>
<p>7. Inner island</p>	<p><u>Priority 1 – Archaeology</u> Keep scrub down to aid visibility of the island and facilitate possible non-invasive geophysical investigation.</p> <p>Remove dead hedging to aid visibility and interpretation.</p> <p><u>Priority 2 – Biodiversity</u> Allow ground flora to regenerate.</p> <p>Maintain trees around and within the island which do not pose a threat to the archaeology.</p>	<p>Strim in spring and autumn (F) - with strimmers provided by BB)</p>	<p>Island clear so that feature is clearly visible.</p> <p>Mature, healthy trees retained.</p> <p>Increased diversity of ground flora.</p>

<p>8. Medieval moats and raised walkway</p>	<p><u>Priority 1. Archaeology</u> Keep clear of scrub and debris to aid visibility of the features.</p> <p>Avoid dead hedging around these areas.</p> <p>Remove trees liable to damage the earthworks and cut down the stumps level with the ground surface to discourage regrowth.</p> <p>Discourage rabbit burrowing.</p>	<p>Remove felled trees from moat (BB to reduce by chain saw and then removed by F). Agree where to deposit logs before removal.</p> <p>Clear northern arm of moat. (F)</p>	<p>Moats clear of scrub and clearly visible with some mature, healthy trees retained.</p> <p>Brush removed from site.</p> <p>Features maintained by annual light clearing.</p>
<p>9. Traditional orchard (east)</p>	<p><u>Priority 1. Maintain fruit trees</u> Manage as orchard</p> <p><u>Priority 2. Biodiversity</u> Encourage incidental wildflowers between the trees.</p> <p><u>Priority 3. Archaeology</u> Avoid digging or damage to ground.</p>	<p>Prune apples, pears and medlars in winter. (F) Prune cherry plums in summer. (F)</p> <p>Clear vegetation from around base of trees. (F)</p> <p>Mow and rake in autumn (F) – with strimmers provided by (BB)</p> <p>Consider ways of dealing with cut grass. (F)</p>	<p>90% of fruit trees thriving.</p> <p>Cover of pernicious weeds less than 10%.</p> <p>Area looking much as it does in 2016.</p>
<p>10. Traditional orchard (south)</p>	<p><u>Priority 1. Biodiversity</u> Retain old cherry plums and encourage new growth by coppicing or pollarding back to new stems on selected trees.</p> <p>Retain cherry plums and scrub on the southern edge, where it abuts the ramparts, to provide shelter from south westerly wind, but selectively coppice some of the large trees to encourage lower bushy growth and give the grass on the rampart more light.</p> <p>Coppice some areas of the woodland and scrub around the edge of the south orchard to give ground cover more light.</p> <p><u>Priority 2. Archaeology</u> Avoid digging or damage to ground.</p> <p>Consider the practicalities of Historic England's proposal to create a viewpoint from the walkway, looking south.</p>	<p>Selectively cut cherry plums – those on the rampart to be coppiced over a rolling 3 year period. (F)</p> <p>Create some low scrub on the eastern side to let more light into the traditional orchard (east) and provide habitat for nesting birds. (F)</p> <p>Create 5-6 metre glades within the trees between the orchards to let in more light. (F)</p> <p>Coppice triangular area in south west corner, removing trees up to 90mm diameter. (F)</p>	<p>Central area looking like an old orchard with trees at various heights.</p> <p>Woodland and scrub around the orchard retained giving a woodland feel, but with some cleared glades.</p> <p>Area maintained by annual nettle clearance.</p> <p>Fallen deadwood remaining in situ.</p>

11. Woodland east of orchards	<u>Priority 1. Biodiversity</u> Maintain the woodland to act as a screen from the golf course. Consider making a composting site for grass here.		Retained as in 2016
12. Hedgerow and boundary strip	<u>Priority 1. Biodiversity</u> Retain hedgerow as part of former field boundary	Cut back bramble and scrub as necessary to allow vehicular access. (F)	Retained as in 2016
13. Southern Hillside	Manage for site access Possibly mark the scheduling boundary by dead hedging	Cut back bramble and scrub as necessary to allow vehicular access. (F)	Path clear for access.
14. Public footpath	<u>Priority 1. Keep footpath clear for public</u>	Cut back bramble and scrub as necessary. (F)	Path clear for access.
Whole site	Maintain a record of the flora and fauna on site.	Ask Bedfordshire Recorders for advice on surveying the site. (F) Take up offer of advice from the Wildlife Trust on: Monitoring the Courtyard to prevent courser species becoming more prevalent; and monitoring for deer damage. (F) Record flora and fauna throughout the year. (F) Decide on fixed points from which regular photos could be taken. (F)	Records reflect a general increase in diversity.

Plan A



Management Zones

1. Mowsbury hill meadow
2. Western tree belt
3. West ponds and leat
4. East ponds
5. Courtyard meadow and fringe
6. Iron Age ramparts
7. Inner island
8. Medieval moats and raised walkway
9. Traditional orchard (east)
10. Traditional orchard (south)
11. Woodland east of orchards
12. Hedgerow and boundary strip
13. Southern hillside
14. Public footpath

Areas of shared characteristics

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| Archaeology |  |
| Wildflower meadows |  |
| Shaded meadow |  |
| Traditional Orchards |  |
| Woodland and scrub |  |
| Public footpath |  |

Map areas indicative only

Zones and habitats