

The Close Management Annual Report

Background

January 2024 saw the commencement of a seven year management agreement between Pitton and Farley Parish Council and Pitton Nature Trust (PNT). This report provides the Parish Council with an update of the progress during 2024 and outlines plans for 2025. Appended to this report is the recently updated Management Plan for the Close.

Activities during 2024

For some years prior to 2024 the Parish Council had adopted a mow-free policy but did not actively manage The Close to enhance biodiversity.

Soon after signing the management agreement PNT undertook soil sampling, it was discovered the land was high in phosphates and would need careful management to create the right environment for wildflowers.

A management plan was created, this included stripping an area of grass and planting wildflower plugs to see if they flourished. This was labour intensive and clearly not practical for a wider area.

The first year of stewardship by PNT was used as a period to establish a baseline of the flora and fauna in The Close. Much of the area was left un-mown with paths cut through to enable easy access. Surveys of grasses, wildflowers and butterflies were undertaken and the results published on the PNT website.

The long grass and wild flowers were a rich habitat for many species, providing refuge, food and pollen. The surveys identified 21 species of wildflowers, 6 varieties of grasses and 11 species of butterflies.

The charity was successful in a grant application and received £1,900 from the Wessex Water Environmental Fund, this enabled the purchase of maintenance equipment, wild flower plugs, seeds, native bulbs and signage.

In late autumn most of the long grass was cut, with some areas of Knapp Weed left for birds to feed on the seed, this will be cut in the coming weeks. Native bulbs were planted in October, including daffodils, snowdrops and cyclamen and some Yellow Rattle seed.

With the assistance of Pitton Guides a bughouse has been constructed and some bird boxes will soon be erected.

Plans for 2025

During 2024 PNT made a successful application to the Coronation Heritage Living Orchard fund for five fruit trees to be planted in The Close. This fund commemorating the Coronation of King Charles III is administered by Wiltshire Council.

Landford Trees provided specialist advice on the selection of varieties most suited to the area. In the coming weeks a crab apple, eating apple, pear and two cherry trees will be planted. The aim is to involve members of the community in the planting including some children from the village playgroup.

During the year further surveys will be undertaken and there will be additional wildflower planting. The area will continue to be actively managed, with most of the area being left with paths weaving through.

Work is well advanced on the design of a notice board, a local design expert has provided pro-bono support and this will result in a high quality product in keeping with the natural environment being created.

Associated activities

The trustees of PNT are pleased to be working in collaboration with the Parish Council over the creation of a community orchard and nature reserve on an acre of land which will soon be transferred from Wiltshire Council to the Parish Council on a 125 year lease.

PNT has been successful in gaining grant funding for this project from the Coronation Heritage Living Orchard fund. The funding will enable the creation of an information shelter which will also serve as a water capture feature and the planting of eight fruit trees.

A successful application has been made to the Woodland Trust Communities and Schools initiative for 420 hedgerow trees, this will provide approximately 100 metres of hedging for the perimeter of the site.

It is understood that Wiltshire Council do not intend to fence both sides of the five metre wide permissive bridleway which will run along two sides of the site. PNT are exploring funding options for the cost of the materials for the fencing. The erection of the fencing will be undertaken by experienced volunteers.

The area of land is currently dormant arable land and will need seeding with a grass and wildflower mix. PNT has limited financial resources so is currently exploring options for funding this aspect of the project.

A long-term management plan is currently being prepared and will be shared with the Parish Council as part of the discussions over a long term management agreement for the Community Orchard and Nature Reserve.

Paul (Fred) Fredericks
Chair - Pitton Nature Trust
19th January 2025

Pitton Nature Trust - Registered Charity No. 1203375

Attachments:

- i) The Close Management Plan
- ii) Image of proposed Notice Board for The Close

Links:

- i) Pitton Nature Trust Website pittonnaturetrust.org.uk
- ii) Pitton Nature Trust entry on the Charity Commission Register - includes access to the PNT 2023/24 Trustees Annual Report and Accounts <https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/en/charity-search/-/charity-details/5214992/charity-overview>