

Bishopstone Pond & Island Briefing Note

History

The pond was initially constructed in early 1800's to form a working head of water, in effect a power bank, for the mill building situated to the north of the pond area with the main village highway bisecting the pond from the mill.

The village road is actually a causeway running over the man made dam which forms the head of the pond against the mill building.

The mill building when operational, was unusual in its design, having 2 water powered wheels on either side. Each wheel had its own water supply fed from the mill pond via separate culverts under the road.

Since the closure of the working mill in the 1960's, both wheels were removed, and it was converted into a domestic dwelling. During the conversion, the eastern culvert was closed due to its poor state of repair. The western culvert remains open, with the sluice gate placed into a closed position allowing overflow to maintain the level of the pond at a constant.

The pond is fed from an active spring head approx. 1,000m to the south, situated at the foot of the Lynchetts Valley. From where the spring rises, the natural watercourse runs freely until meeting the footbridge adjacent to The City. From here, the water flow divides either side of the island.

There is much speculation that the island was formed from the regular dredgings of silt that accumulated during the pond's life as a working power reserve for the mill wheels. In reality, the silt would have been spread on the surrounding land as a valuable natural fertilizer and the island would have been there in the first place with the 2 streams feeding the pond bordering it.

Since the closure of the mill, the pond has naturally silted up over time, although the level of silt has not increased over the past 20 – 30 years as it has found its natural level.

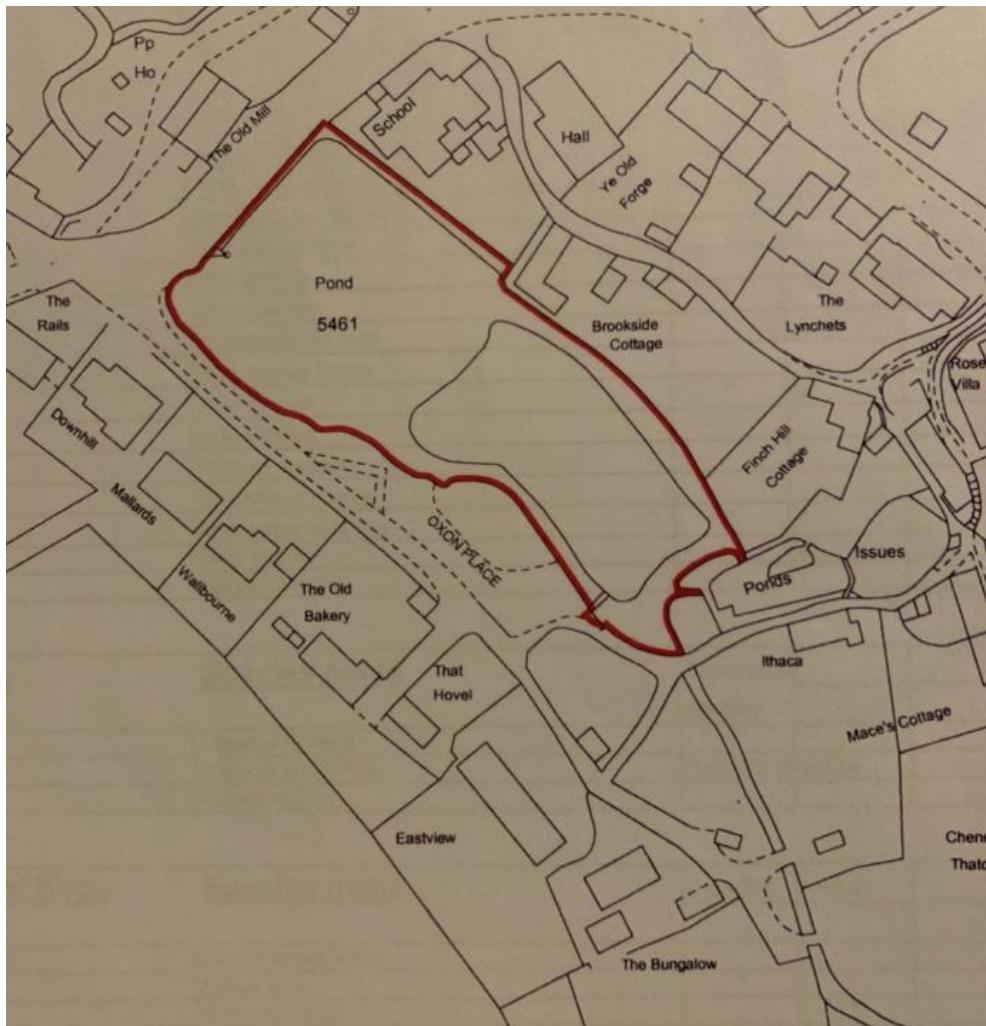
Purchase History & Restricted Covenants

The pond and island were offered for sale by the Church Commissioners on 21st December 2004 for the sum of £100 plus legal costs of the sale. The sale included the freehold of the surface area of the pond, the island, a narrow strip of land to the east against the boundary of the school and the turfed strip between the surface of the village road and the pond headwall. The grassed area of land to the west, running along Oxon Place is owned by SBC and to this day continues to be managed by them. The sale also included the responsibility of any liabilities the former owners maintained. The main being the responsibility to maintain the pond's headwall and culverts that run underneath the village road.

The Church Commissioners placed restricted covenants to the freehold to ensure the island would never be developed for housing and they retain ownership of the air space above 1 metre in height of the surface of the pond & island. They also reserved to themselves all rights of mining and mineral and extraction from beneath the pond and island, including sand and gravel.

The parish council is not allowed to permit anything to be done on the property that may be a nuisance or annoyance to occupiers of any property in the neighbourhood.

The responsibility to maintain 3rd party liability insurance lies with the Parish Council. Insurance cover prohibits any use of the pond by watercraft, swimming, or fishing; requirements to maintain railings along the edge of the pond near the road; lifebuoys and signs indicating no swimming or fishing to be provided; no watercraft to be used at all and no provision of any recreational equipment. The area is to be inspected and maintained on a regular basis, with no rubbish to be allowed to accumulate. The pond must have a clearly defined edge and the perimeter is not to become boggy.



Initial Management

The Parish Council handed management of the pond and island to a sub-committee which was formed in March 2005. It was named "Bishopstone Pond & Island Management Committee" and made up of 9 Bishopstone residents nominated to join the committee by the Parish Council.

The purpose of the committee was to maintain, protect and preserve the pond and island with full responsibility for the day to day management of the area on behalf of the Parish Council. Funding of the management was under the watchful eye of the PC.

The initial task of the committee was to establish an informed method of managing the area taking in the general consensus of Bishopstone residents and professional advice of how to manage such an asset. To that end, the villagers were surveyed to determine their thoughts for a number of options ranging from, leaving the whole area in the poor condition it was purchased, turning the island into a formal lawned area, or managing the area with professional advice to enhance native flora and fauna. The survey returned a unanimous decision to enhance the native flora and fauna and clear the unsightly debris from the island when it was last used as an allotment

Professional advice was sought from Swindon Borough Council, The Pond Conservation Trust and Wiltshire Wildlife Trust. WWT were commissioned to undertake a survey of the whole area to establish what plant and animal species were present. The detailed survey took 12 months to complete, so that all seasons were experienced. The significant finding of the survey was the discovery of Water Vole (*Aricola Amphibus*) activity and habitat on both banks of the feeder streams either side of the island. As the Water Vole is fully protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and is a priority conservation species, this steered low key cleanup activities on the island.

Both WWT and the Pond Conservation Trust were consulted regarding the question of dredging the pond. Their clear conclusion was to leave the pond as it was and not to dredge it. This was based on a number of factors. Firstly, that as the pond was no longer being used as a power source for the mill, there was no need to increase its capacity to hold more water. Secondly, dredging is an invasive activity that would need permission from Natural England as by the nature of the process, there would be good chance that dredging would disturb the Water Vole habitat and that of other species present. Finally, the cost of dredging would be prohibitive. Several dredging contractors were approached to estimate the costs of such an exercise which ranged from £80-100,000.

Algae blooms are often experienced at certain times of the year and indicate that healthy natural and seasonal processes are taking place in the water.

A new bridge was built to connect the island to the ‘mainland’ in 2005 – this has since been repaired, maintained, and restored over the years at the PC’s expense

The committee was disbanded in July 2008 as its members had either moved from the village or had lost interest. Managerial control returned to the Parish Council.

Current Management

Bishopstone Primary School used part of the island for a teaching and growing area, under an informal usage agreement with the PC. They erected a store shed to comply with the restrictive covenant only to construct a single temporary structure no more than 1.8m high, plus a series of raised beds for fruit and vegetable cultivation. Due to resource challenges, the school surrendered its occupancy and in January 2020, a small group of village volunteers removed most of the school’s infrastructure they had placed on the island as it had fallen into disrepair.

A circular path on the island is maintained by the lengthman and infrequent seasonal work parties are organized to limit vegetative growth.