

# Friends of Priory Fields

## Management Plan – 2022

### **GENERAL**

The purpose of Priory Fields is to provide an amenity for all local residents and any visitors who choose to visit the site and all actions taken on the fields must be taken with this aim in mind.

This document is designed to provide a comprehensive plan for the foreseeable future of Priory Fields and will replace all previous management plans. Previous versions of the management plan must be kept as part of the group's archives as they will assist in the understanding of this management plan.

This document recognises that previous versions of the management plan were entirely appropriate for the circumstances at that time and that most of the aims identified in that plan have been met. The few that have not been met are either included in this new plan or are now considered inappropriate.

The committee of the Friends of Priory Fields is empowered to consider and, if necessary, to change this management plan, at any time, in consultation with the Parish Council. Whenever this happens the new plan must be published to the residents of the Parish via the Parish Council newsletter, the 'In Touch' magazine and PC and FoPF websites. The plan must be reviewed if 5 years have elapsed since the last published amendments.

The attached field plan shows the fields and their individual names and the existing sites for memorial trees and the orchard.

The Woodham Ferrers & Bicknacre Parish Council (hereinafter referred to as 'the Parish Council') must be kept informed of all field activities via the reporting mechanism currently agreed between the two bodies.

An on-going aim of the Management of the Fields is to encourage use of the Fields by as many people as possible. To this aim 'advertising' the existence and purpose of the Fields should be considered in any form and organised events on the Fields should be arranged as often as reasonably possible.

The committee is empowered to raise funds for the work of the group by organising events, seeking grants from any appropriate body and/or seeking donations from any appropriate organisations or individuals. It is also empowered to make small donations to the funds of any voluntary organisations assisting in meeting the aims of this plan.

The committee must at all times ensure that the fields and any associated equipment are adequately insured. The current use of the insurance policy of the Parish Council will continue so long as the committee considers it to be fulfilling the requirements.

## THE FIELDS

The Fields will continue to be managed primarily as unimproved meadowland with mown paths around and across the fields to ensure reasonable access to all potential users of the Fields, particularly to the Priory Arch, at all times of year. A hay crop will be taken annually as soon as possible after July 1. The committee must ensure that this work is contracted out to a suitable provider. Areas will continue to be set aside for picnic benches and other seating and for a memorial tree area and an orchard. The committee is empowered to set aside small parcels of land for similar activities in the future.

Trees within the site will continue to be managed in accordance with the agreement reached with the Tree Officer of Chelmsford City Council. That agreement must be reaffirmed/reconsidered as necessary. The condition of the trees will continue to be monitored in conjunction with the Parish Council's plan to monitor all trees in the Parish. Insurance of the trees will continue to be provided by the Parish Council's insurance policy. Long term planning for the replacement of the many old oaks around the fields should be undertaken by planting new oaks, and other standard English varieties of trees at suitable sites around the fields.

Surveys are to be carried out during growing seasons to identify species of plants that could be used for the basis of establishing a wild flower meadow and a management plan implemented to assist if any rare or unusual species are found. Consideration should be given to assisting the establishment of wild flower meadows by importing suitable and relevant species of plants. Bluebells and Snowdrops should be introduced into appropriate areas of the Fields. Specialist advisers may be called in to support these activities.

The following items will be monitored on a regular basis and corrective action or replacement organised as required:-

- Signs and notice boards
- Benches
- Bridges
- Hedges, ditches and fencing
- Tools and vehicles
- Fallen trees, overhanging branches and trip hazards that could cause a danger to the public

The committee is empowered to consider any other facilities on the fields that might enhance the fields for the general benefit of all users and are in line with the general policy of the Fields.

The memorial tree area may be extended into other suitable areas or individual memorial trees may be planted in suitable locations around the fields. The Orchard may be extended on its existing site in the East Meadow (EM).

Where necessary, in overly wet areas, materials such as crushed concrete may be imported to improve public access.

Lists of all species of birds, mammals, bats, butterflies, moths and wild flowers seen on the Fields will continue to be maintained and published via the FoPF

website - a specific committee member should be appointed to this role. Any action required to maintain and improve the habitat for the species listed and any new species identified may be taken with the approval of the FoPF committee. Surveys of particular species may be carried out by experts at appropriate times and the results published.

The existing badger sett must be protected, specifically by allowing scrub and undergrowth to grow up around the sett, by the planting of native shrub species around the sett and by keeping pathways away from the area.

Priory Arch should be monitored on a regular basis and the services of Bakers of Danbury, or other specialised contractor, be used to provide a professional check of the Arch and carry out repairs as necessary, in conjunction with the Parish Council and English Heritage.

## **ADDITIONS TO MANAGEMENT PLAN 2016**

### **Bicknacre Brook**

As water voles are present management should be kept to a minimum to maintain the present habitat i.e. keep water course clear of debris, cut back overgrowing brambles and branches etc. and not trimming back past existing path lines.

### **Hedges in Water Meadows**

Hedgerows on the northern side of the water meadows are very overgrown and are encroaching on to the grassland. Permission was obtained in 2015 from CCC to reduce the width on the northern side of E & W water meadows to reduce the hedges back to the original ditch line. This work to be carried out over the next five years and then maintain the new hedge line to encourage the flora on the meadows and the ditch banks.

PJN  
FOPF  
18 May 2016

## **ADDITIONS TO MANAGEMENT PLAN 2019**

### **Jogging Track**

The markers of the jogging track have been removed as it was found that runners preferred to use their own chosen route around the fields. Various routes could be introduced in future if there is found to be a demand.

### **Priory Arch**

The Arch was surveyed in March 2018 by Bakers of Danbury and found to be in a sound condition and is due to be inspected again in 2023.

### **Hedges in Water Meadows**

The hedges on the North sides of the East and West Water Meadows have been reduced back to the original ditch line creating a wider meadow and new path in the EWM and a sparsely wooded strip with a new path in the WWM that has been planted with bluebells and snowdrops. These areas will be monitored and enhanced with new planting as appropriate.

### **New Trees**

Many new trees were planted in 2019 to add variety and colour to the field boundaries, with plans to add further trees in the coming years.

## **ADDITIONS TO MANAGEMENT PLAN 2022**

In 2022 it is planned that we should plant more trees and thicken hedgerows.

We also plan to add more wood chippings to the wettest areas on the paths to improve accessibility in the winter months. It has been found that wood chippings, which we can obtain for free from a local tree surgeon, is a more eco friendly and economical alternative to crushed concrete which we do not wish to use on or around the meadows.

More bluebell bulbs will be planted this year to add to those planted some years ago.

A new Welcome notice is planned for erection by the Moor Hall Lane entrance.