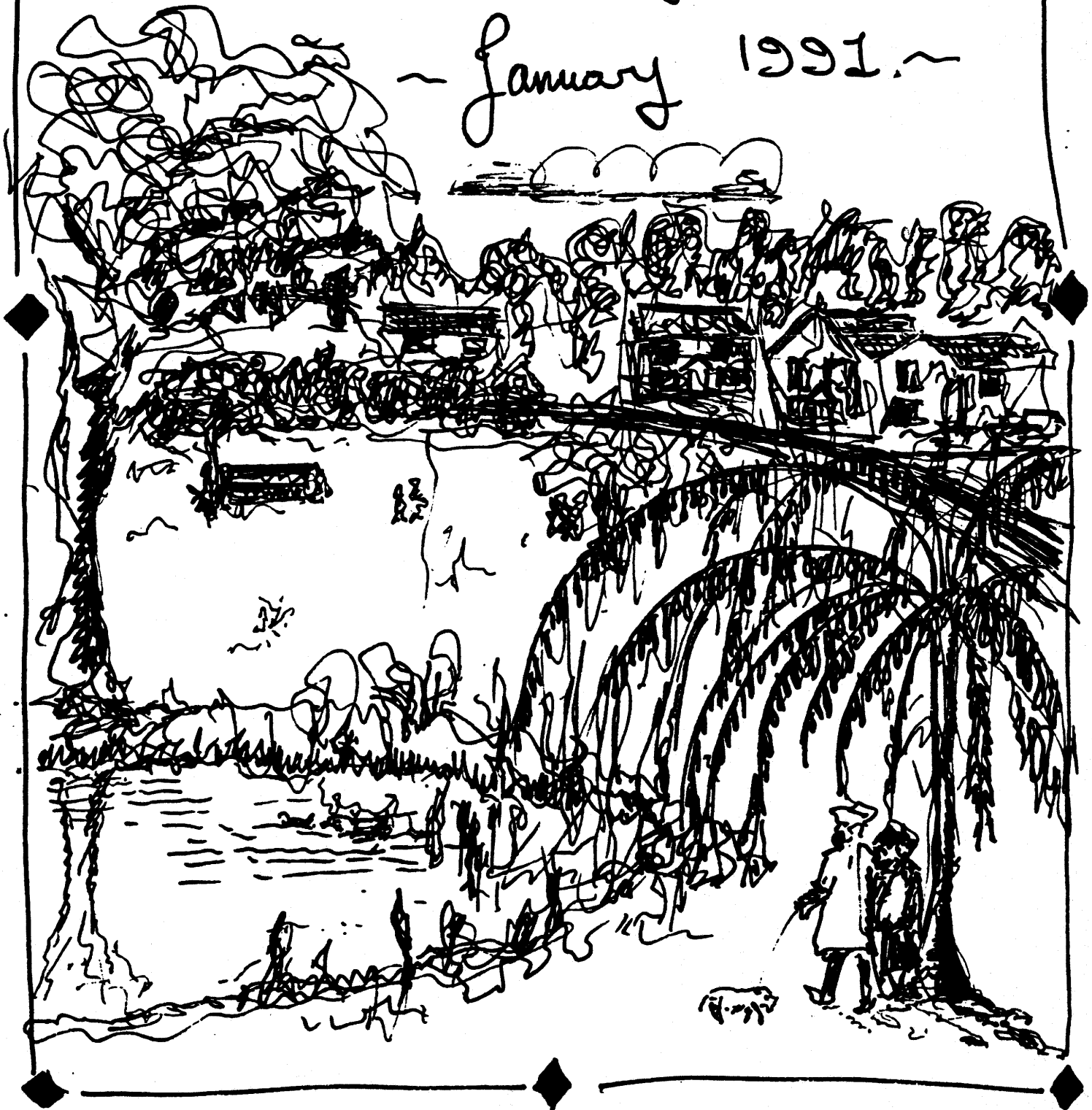


Downley Parish Council.

~ Management plan for
Sandpits Pond and Gosling Grove Green ~

~ January 1991. ~



DOWNLEY PARISH COUNCIL

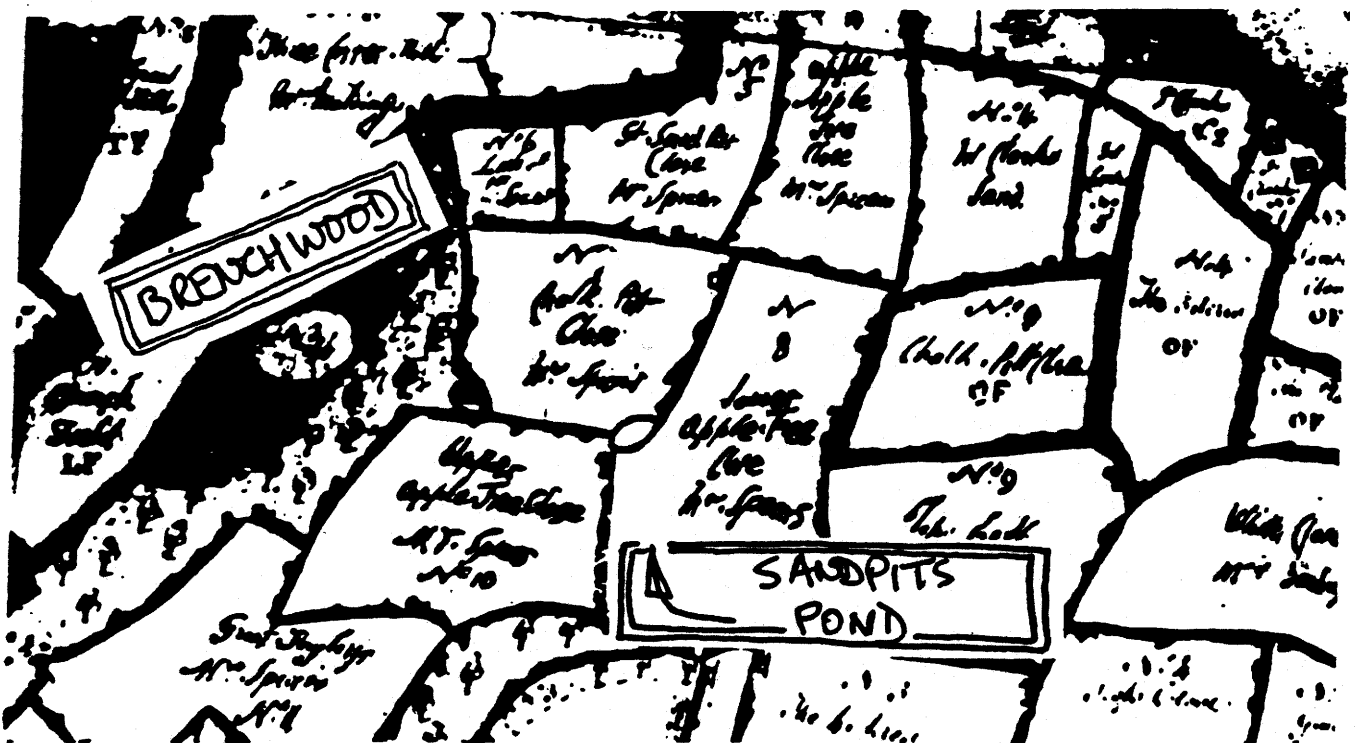
Management proposals for Sandpits Pond and Gosling Grove Green.

This paper relates to the area of land owned by Downley Parish Council, situated adjacent to Gosling Grove. It includes an ancient pond, with about an acre of open space, mainly old pasture land, and an interesting mix of trees - some surviving from farmland days, some newly planted.

Now that the Barratts' development is nearing completion, and the green area now relatively stable, it is relevant to consider the future management of the site.

BACKGROUND

The pond appears on the 1767 West Wycome Estate map, shown at the meeting of a cluster of paddocks, or "closes". These are named, one of them is called "Upper Apple Tree Close", and is approximately where "The Heights" school is situated today. Another interesting point that the map indicates is the name of the woodland to the west. Currently called Branch or Brench Wood, and known as "the Brainch" earlier this century, the name in 1767 was "Breach Wood", probably because of the long field (now "Sunnycroft") which split the wood almost in two. The corruption of the name is typical of language modification over the years. Brench Wood now provides a wooded backdrop to views from Gosling Grove, looking westward.



"Sandpits" pond

The tenants of Downley Farm, now retired, came to the farm in the 1930s. They have always known the pond as "Sandpits". The pastureland to the West, a small Chiltern top plateau, is of stone, clay and sand mix, and probably provided some of the raw material for local building, as did the clay pits on Downley Common. Perhaps then the pond is a clay bottomed sandpit, pre 18th Century, and when flooded, used for watering the grazing animals in the surrounding closes for the past two hundred years, and perhaps much longer than that.

Comben and Wakeling, the original house builders on the "Heights" estate, landscaped the pond area in 1967, the landscaping substantially shrinking the open water pond area.



The trees

The ancient oak trees at the pond side are probably at least two centuries old, the girth of the trees indicates this. Prior to 1970 there were more mature trees, notably seven very fine elms, and two substantial beech trees. Unfortunately the elms were victims of Dutch Elm disease, and were felled in about 1970. One beech tree died and was removed, the other was toppled in a winter storm.

Apart from the five oaks, all other forest trees have been planted during the last twenty years - these include willow, lime, silver birch, hornbeam, ash, hawthorn and holly. Interestingly elm shoots are now growing strongly from the stumps left in 1970.



The pastureland

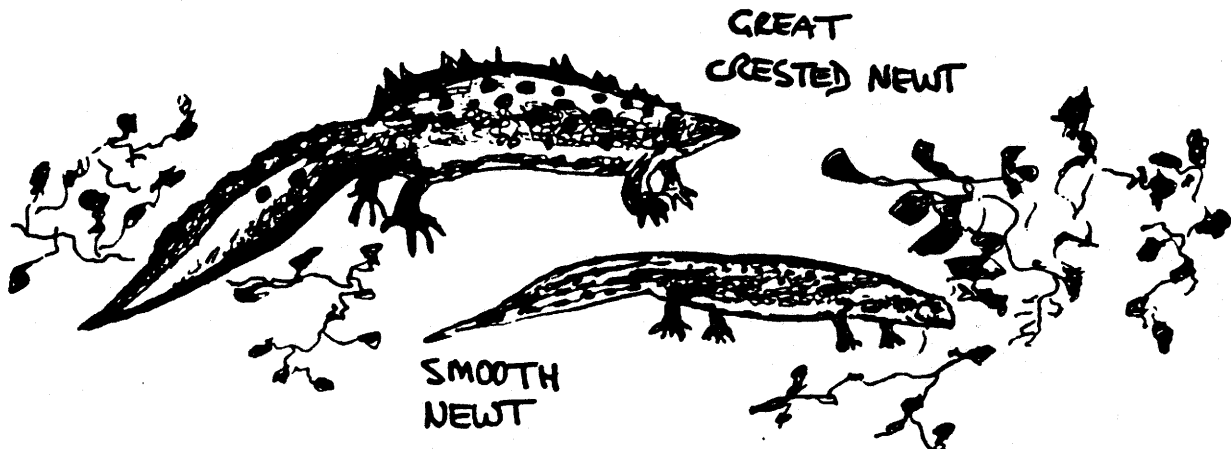
The Downley Farm tenants have indicated that the grass land to the west of the pond has never been treated with herbicides or pesticides, or artificial fertilisers. The area of grass now incorporated in the site as part of the Barratts' estate negotiations can therefore be considered to be, with some confidence, ancient pastureland.



Wildlife

The pond, now regrettably almost dry due to three years of below average rainfall, supports many life forms, from dragon fly larvae to ducks. But perhaps the most interesting and exciting species breeding in the pond is the great crested newt. The lack of water at present is not too disastrous for newts, in winter. They normally hibernate in mud, or adjacent hedgerow bottoms, so should survive the current difficult period.

Squirrels use the trees, and many meadow and woodland birds are seen, including woodpeckers, owls, jays, collared doves and so on. Bats, a protected mammal, are often seen at dusk, probably living in the oaks, and in the roofs of the nearby houses!



MANAGEMENT PROPOSALS

A. GENERAL ENVIRONMENT

It is felt by local people that the present use of the site as a "low key" recreational area is about right. The current rural nature and character should not in any way be formalised, but should remain, or indeed be enhanced as a "natural" green oasis in the village environment.

B. THE POND

Some ponds are large and clean enough to provide a place for water fowl, and even boating and fishing. Others are overgrown with weeds, and fouled with rubbish. All ponds, especially small ones like "Sandpits" fluctuate widely in temperature and water level. Because of this pond life populations are constantly changing. Sandpits pond will almost certainly have water fleas and freshwater shrimps, mosquitoes, midges and horse flies, frogs, and, of course, newts, which have been recorded recently. Water beetles and water boatmen will also be present, with minnows if conditions are particularly suitable. It is probable that the mix of species is much greater than this, though only a full survey will reveal the true situation.

It is recommended that the pond should remain largely as it is, but with annual cleaning of leaves, branches and so on, to avoid silting up. Leaf drop and lack of light from the tree overhangs is a problem, but it is felt that tree removal would affect the visual scheme too much to be acceptable at the moment, though perhaps some branch thinning over the water would be tolerable. Comments from local people will be further sought on this matter.

The newts

It is recommended that further specialist advice is taken regarding the long term management of the pond as a newt breeding area. B.B.O.N.T. and the Nature Conservancy are two advising organisations.

Ducks and their effect on newts

Ducks are a problem to newts. Ducks are fun to see on the pond, and act positively in keeping down some of the weed in the summer. But they do eat newts, and newt larvae, so it can be a disadvantage to actively encourage ducks to visit the pond. It would be very disappointing if the newts stopped using "Sandpits". Their national habitat is shrinking every year, so every effort should be made to help them in Downley.

Pond vegetation

During summer the water plant growth tends to choke the pond to a serious extent. Some summer plant removal is recommended, leaving the plant material at the pond side, thus allowing pond creatures to return to the water.

Pond life survey

It would be desirable to organise a thorough through-the-year survey of the plant and animal life in the pond. Wycombe Urban Wildlife Group (W.U.W.G) is the most obvious organisation to undertake this work, perhaps liaising with local schools.



C. TREES

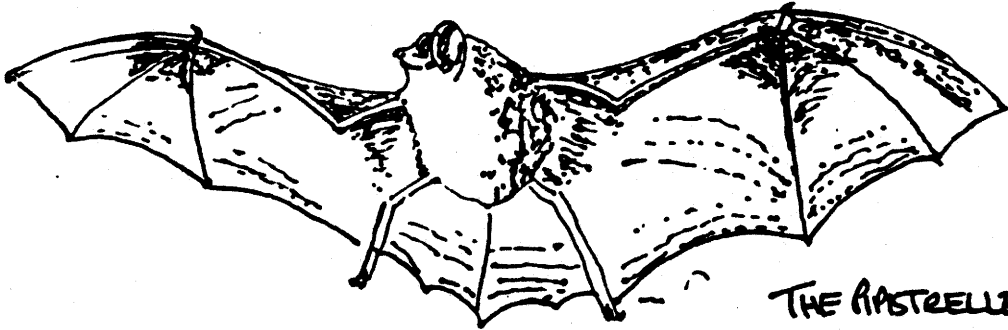
All the existing trees should be retained, coupled with an examination of the oaks and the removal of dead branches, thus helping to prevent branch fall, and improving the general safety of the area.

Some additional trees should be planted, sites to be agreed, with a recommendation that some "standard" trees are placed along the southern hedge boundary, and in the south western corner behind the log seat. Preferred species to be wild cherry, field maple, spindleberry, ash and oak. It is anticipated that the holly groves already in place will consolidate and thicken, future control of these to be decided as necessary.

Trees attract bird, animal and insect life, add colour and character to an area, provide shade and shelter to the public, fix carbon dioxide and give out oxygen, thus replenishing the atmosphere.

It is recommended that some buddleia bushes and other butterfly and insect attracting plants are planted in the south west corner, to increase the species mix on the site. Types of plant to be decided after consultation with W.U.W.G.

It is also recommended that some bird and bat boxes are placed in the oak trees, to encourage this type of wildlife breeding.



THE PASTELLE,
COMMONEST BRITISH BAT

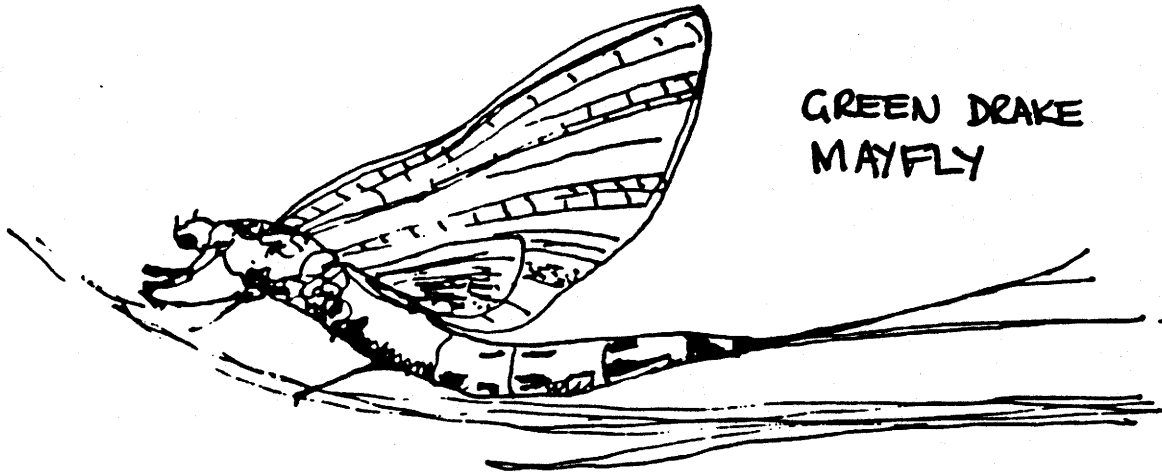
D. THE PASTURELAND

Because of the special nature of the meadow, in that it is "ancient", untouched by agri-chemicals over the years, it is proposed that a "no-chemical" approach is adopted. No artificial fertilisers, no herbicides or pesticides to be applied at any time. Investigation has also revealed that it is probable that the land has never been ploughed - certainly not for the last fifty years. It could have remained grazed and naturally fertilised since the 18th Century, when it existed as a paddock or "Close".

Permanent pastures occupy soils too heavy, waterlogged, inaccessible or stoney to be ploughed and cultivated with other crops. Sometimes good pasture exists permanently for grazing newly born animals, and in the days of horse power (real horse power), for grazing the resting draught animals. Perhaps this was the original use.

Obviously natural grazing is no longer a practicable proposition, but it is quite realistic to simulate this by managed mowing, though an aspect of mowing (or grazing) carried out continuously is that it does not allow plants to reach their flowering stage. In normal agriculture the production of hay for winter feed is the way in which this growth is obtained. An interesting and variable aspect to the grass management would, therefore, be to select an area which would not be mown until the grass flowering season, usually in mid June.

It is recommended then that the majority of the site is mown on a regular basis, allowing normal access to the public, the grass cut leaving the sward about 3" thick after cutting (not park like). Part of the site should not be mown until mid June, simulating a hay-meadow environment, allowing the plants and grasses to flower and seed. The most convenient area for this is the south west corner, a rough arc drawn south to west, behind the central log seat and young oak tree (see map) pp 8.



GREEN DRAKE
MAYFLY

E. DOG CONTROL

It is recommended that a bye-law is established forbidding dog fouling of the whole area. It is well known that a disease endemic in the dog population can cause children to go blind if they catch it. The disease is carried in dog faeces. The pond area is too small for the current dog population to use it without there being a significant risk to the number of children playing there, in addition to the normal problem of walking through dog fouled grass land.

F. MANAGEMENT INFORMATION

It is recommended that a copy of the final management scheme is delivered to all the houses in Gosling Grove and Faulkner Way, and that a temporary notice board is placed at the pond, indicating the main points of the scheme, with a map of the area.

Conclusion

These proposals are all easily obtainable, and will cost no more than the current maintenance expenditure of the site. The long term results will ensure the continuity of this interesting green oasis, with its valuable pond, tree and pasture environment, and will give pleasure to generations of the Downley community to come.

Acknowledgements

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Len and Jack
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map: pp 8

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Downley Parish Council

