

Milton Ernest Riverside Meadow Maintenance Plan ('This Plan')

This Plan was agreed at the Milton Ernest Parish Council ('MEPC') Meeting on 8th February 2024. Any proposed future amendments to this plan must be discussed at a MEPC meeting and any agreed changes recorded in the minutes. The next planned review of this plan shall be February 2026.

1. History

The open space land to the south-west of Riverside View, Milton Ernest, ('The Meadow') was transferred from Bedford Borough Council to MEPC on 5th April 2007 (Land Registry Title Number BD209256).

2. Purpose of the Meadow

A covenant in the deeds states that the owner will *'forever maintain the Property as an open grassed or otherwise landscaped amenity* open space and will not erect or permit to be erected at any time any building or structure.....'*

In the deeds, MEPC, is legally bound to ensure that *'the Property should not be used for any purpose other than as an area of open space for the benefit of the general public'*.

MEPC's intention is to meet its legal responsibilities by ensuring that the Meadow remains as an area that benefits people but is also keen to make the area conducive for wildlife, specifically by protecting and enhancing its biodiversity.

***Amenity** definitions: 'something intended to make life more pleasant or comfortable for people' (Cambridge Dictionary); 'a feature or service that makes a place pleasant, comfortable or easy to live in' (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries); 'a building, piece of equipment, or service that is provided for people's comfort or enjoyment' (Cambridge Learner's Dictionary).

3. Riverside Meadow Rules

3.1 No vehicles shall enter the Meadow apart from those undertaking work as agreed with MEPC.

3.2 No fires, fireworks or barbeques are allowed due to the risk of fire, and disturbance of wildlife.

3.3 Dog owners must clean up after their dog and dispose of any dog faeces either at their home or in the dog waste bins.

3.4 No overnight camping.

4. Objective of This Plan

Following work undertaken between 2007 and 2022 there is no further intention by MEPC to change the look and feel of the Meadow. The objective of this Plan is purely to ensure the Meadow remains at the same standard as it looked at the beginning of 2024, except as provided herein.

Should MEPC decide, in the future, to make any changes above and beyond those listed in this Plan then they are obliged to first obtain advice from the appropriate environmental agencies and wildlife or other experts. MEPC must also consult with all residents of Milton Ernest, giving them the opportunity to voice any concerns and/or make any suggestions. No changes beyond those listed in this Plan, shall commence until MEPC can show it is following the provisions of this paragraph and its decisions are based thereon.

5. Maintenance Plan

Maintenance will only be as follows (please read in conjunction with Appendix 1: Map of Riverside Meadow 'The Map'):

5.1 All pathways (namely 'Entrance Pathway', 'Central Pathway', 'North Pathway', 'East Pathway', 'South Pathway', and 'West Pathway') shall be cut every two weeks, between the end of March and the beginning of October, as per MEPC's grass cutting contract. The pathways shall be cut between a minimum width of 2 metres and a maximum width of 3 metres. In June 2023, for reference, the pathways were generally 2.2 metres wide.

5.2 'Meadow Area A', 'Meadow Area B' and 'Meadow Area C' shall be left as natural areas to encourage wildlife and shall be cut once a year in late August/early September. The cut grass shall be removed from the site.

5.3 'Picnic Bench River View' shall be cut from the lifebuoy westwards for a river frontage width of 35 metres and a depth of 15 metres from the river itself upwards to 'Meadow Area A'. These are the measurements as of June 2023 and should be maintained at that size going forwards. MEPC's grass cutting contract will cover this work and include strimming the grass and nettles down to the river which the mower cannot access.

5.4 'Bench River View' shall be cut from the lifebuoy westwards for a river frontage width of 15 metres and a depth of 15 metres from the river itself upwards to 'Meadow Area C'. These are the measurements as of June 2023 and should be maintained at that size going forwards. MEPC's grass cutting contract will cover this work and include strimming the grass and nettles down to the river which the mower cannot access.

5.5 The unnamed natural areas (coloured yellow on the Map) shall not be cut and will be left to grow naturally to encourage wildlife.

5.6 The unmanaged natural hedgerow (coloured red on the Map) shall not be cut and will be left to grow naturally to encourage wildlife. Should this hedgerow start to encroach onto the West Pathway, then the 'West Pathway' shall be moved further away from the hedgerow by cutting into the edge of 'Meadow Area A'.

5.7 The managed hedgerow known as 'The Shrubby' (coloured brown on the map) shall be cut every February, to a minimum height of 2 metres thus ensuring privacy and minimal light loss for the seven properties which face the meadow. To create a natural appearance the contractor will be requested to cut the top of the hedge so that it varies in height between 2.0m and 2.5m along its length and does not have a uniform appearance. As part of the February cut, the road/drive side face of the hedge shall be pruned back to ensure that growth does not encroach over the road/drive, but the Meadow face shall be left uncut.

- 5.71 The residents of the seven properties (houses numbered 19, 21, 23, 52, 54, 56 & 58) facing the meadow shall have the right to undertake light pruning of 'The Shrubby' hedgerow (coloured brown on the map) and trees within that hedgerow. These residents can only maintain the road/drive facing section of hedge in front of their individual

properties and do so at their own cost and risk. They cannot undertake any work on the meadow face as that is to be left uncut.

- 5.72 The residents of the seven properties (houses numbered 19, 21, 23, 52, 54, 56 & 58) must not cut the height of 'The Shrubbery' hedge below 2.0m and should ideally avoid cutting the hedge during the main breeding season for nesting birds, which usually runs throughout March to August each year. This can be weather dependent, and some birds may nest outside this period, so it is important to always check carefully for active nests prior to cutting. If any of the residents cut back the hedge during the nesting season they must ensure there are no nesting birds before commencing the work as it is an offence under Section 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act of 1981 to intentionally take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built, or to intentionally kill, injure or take chicks or adults, or intentionally take or destroy any eggs.
- 5.73 The dogwoods on the western corner of the shrubbery will be cut every 2 or 3 years to around a foot from the ground to retain the winter stem colour as per the RHS recommendation as follows -
 - Once the plants are established, cut back all shoots to 5-7.5cm (2-3in) from the ground in late winter to mid spring (early to mid April is often the best balance between enjoying the shoots and pruning to produce good colourful stems for next year).
- 5.74 MEPC has the right to rescind permission for any or all the residents to undertake work on 'The Shrubbery' and will notify the residents of the seven properties (houses numbered 19, 21, 23, 52, 54, 56 & 58) in writing should this be necessary.

5.8 Management of all the trees on the Meadow comes under the remit of the Environment Officer of MEPC. The officer will review the trees on an annual basis and propose any maintenance, if required, to MEPC. No work shall be undertaken on any tree without agreement of MEPC.

- 5.81 The term 'Management of the trees' refers to the trees themselves: root, trunk and branches. Work on the ground around the trees, such as the grass at the base of the Queen's canopy trees, the NHS tree and the Woodland Trust donated trees in the southwestern boundary of the Meadow, can be maintained without permission of the Environment Officer of Milton Ernest Parish Council.

5.9 The Milton Ernest Volunteer Group, who report into MEPC, have the authority to undertake work on Riverside Meadow as and when they wish, without permission from MEPC, providing the work they undertake complies with this Plan.

- 5.91 MEPC has the right to rescind permission for the Milton Ernest Volunteer Group to undertake work on the meadow.

6. Riparian Rights

MEPC, as owner of the Meadow with its stretch of the River Great Ouse, has Riparian* Rights and will follow the most up to date GOV.UK** guidance on owning a watercourse which currently is:

6.1 Report an incident – MEPC must call the Environment Agency incident hotline to report:

- 6.11 flooding.
- 6.12 blockages which could cause flooding to main rivers.
- 6.13 pollution.
- 6.14 unusual changes in the flow of water.
- 6.15 collapsed or badly damaged banks.

6.2 Let water flow naturally – MEPC must let water flow naturally.

- 6.21 MEPC may have to remove blockages, fallen trees or overhanging branches from the watercourse, or cut back trees and shrubs on the bank if they could obstruct or affect a public right of navigation; or reduce the flow/cause flooding to other landowners' property. MEPC will only undertake such work where it is an overriding necessity and the Environment Agency have given prior written approval.
- 6.22 MEPC should leave all other trees, branches and shrubs as they can help prevent flooding by varying the shape and flow of the channel and reduce erosion. MEPC will only undertake such work where it is an overriding necessity and the Environment Agency have given prior written approval.

6.3 Prevent Pollution – MEPC and visitors to the Meadow must not pollute the water.

- 6.31 MEPC must apply to use herbicides within one metre from the top of the bank of the watercourse.
- 6.32 MEPC should remove litter and animal carcasses from the riverbank.
- 6.33 MEPC must not put garden waste, including grass cuttings, on the riverbank or into the water.

6.4 Protect Wildlife – MEPC and visitors to the Meadow must protect wildlife by:

- 6.41 not disturbing **any** wildlife species or their habits. A list of species, protected by law, can be found on GOV.UK
- 6.42 not disturbing birds and their nests.
- 6.43 not disturbing the spawning or eggs of fish.
- 6.44 preventing invasive species such as Japanese Knotweed from spreading into the wild or onto neighbour's land.

*The word Riparian is derived from the Latin ripa, meaning "river bank".

** <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/owning-a-watercourse#owners-your-responsibilities>

7. Future Enhancements

The following enhancements are agreed and can be implemented as and when MEPC deem appropriate and financially viable:

7.1 An interpretation panel providing information and context about the surrounding environment and the natural history of the area.

7.2 A seating area close to the NHS tree to be used by the Milton Ernest School's 'Forest School' and residents, when not in use by the school.

7.3 Planting of wildflower plugs to introduce a variety of meadow wildflowers.

Appendix 1 – Map of Riverside Meadow ('The Map')



Key

	Natural Area (long grass, wild flowers & nettles)
	Natural Hedgerow
	Managed Grass Walkway
	Managed Hedgerow (known as The Shrubbery)
	Lifebuoy
	Picnic Bench
	Bench