

Shipton-under-Wychwood Wild Garden and Woods

Our Statement of Public Benefit to support our Application to the Charity Commission

Objective - Public Access

To improve the conditions of life for the inhabitants of the parish of Shipton under Wychwood and the surrounding villages, in the county of Oxfordshire (the area of benefit) and the public at large, and to provide facilities for recreation and leisure-time occupation for the public in the interests of social welfare, by associating together the local inhabitants (and any such local authorities, voluntary and/or other organisations as the Charity decide to work with from time to time) to acquire, provide and preserve public access to, in particular, The Wild Garden in the parish of Shipton-under-Wychwood and such other areas as the Charity may from time to time decide.

How we will achieve this

The Wild Garden is a five hectare (12.6 acre) prominent woodland and garden close to the centre of Shipton-under-Wychwood (population 1,280, 2001 census), and has a network of paths through woods and around ponds with wild life and local ducks in residence. The Wild Garden adjoins the public footpath to Milton-under-Wychwood (population 1,560, 2001 census). For the last 22 years residents have been allowed to walk in the woods with the owners permission, this permission was widely used by local dog walkers from both Shipton and Milton, mothers and toddlers feeding the ducks and by elderly residents. Permission to access the area was withdrawn by the owner in early 2009 due to damage to the ponds and dog fouling. After discussions between the owner and Shipton Parish Council an agreement was reached for the local community to purchase and manage the Wild Garden. Shipton-under-Wychwood Wild Garden and Woods, a company limited by guarantee, was set up in September 2009 with the active support of and in close co-operation with the local Parish Council to acquire and manage the Wild Garden on behalf of the local residents, residents of adjoining villages and visitors to the locality. At a public consultation meeting held early in October 2009, attended by 130 residents, there was overwhelming support for the project and strong expressions of financial support. These are currently being converted into pledges and further meetings are scheduled with the other local villages. Membership of the company is open to all who offer an annual subscription of more than £20. Membership subscription will create an income for maintenance but there will be no restrictions on non-members accessing the Wild Garden at any time.

Contact is currently being made with Oxfordshire County Council, West Oxfordshire District Council, the Cotswold Conservation Board and Cotswold Wardens, the Shipton Volunteers, the Oxfordshire Garden Trust, The Woodlands Trust, Oxfordshire Woodland Project and The Wychwood Project, seeking their expertise and support. All indications to date are that this support will be available.

The plan is to acquire the Wild Garden during 2010, carry out essential work to improve access and then open the Wild Garden to the public. There will be no restrictions on access at any time, we will only be asking the public to respect the peace and tranquillity of the space and to keep children and dogs under supervision and control. A management committee is being established which will be responsible for managing and maintaining the Wild Garden with the active support of the Parish Council and the local Shipton Volunteers. In addition to the Wild Garden, acquisition of other appropriate sites will be considered in future. There is already the possibility of the company leasing a wood in the village, to provide additional public access.

Acquiring the Wild Garden by way of a locally owned company will result in regaining this important local amenity for the benefit of both residents and visitors to the area. The Wild Garden will be retained in local ownership with open and unrestricted access to all who wish to use the area for peaceful walking, exercising and social activities. All the benefits of this Object are for the public at large. There is no private benefit to anyone involved in the company arising from this application other than as a member of the general public and to the best of our knowledge no detriment to the environment or locality arises as a result of the proposal.

Objective – to maintain, conserve and restore

To promote for the benefit of the public, the conservation, protection, restoration, establishment and management of trees, gardens, lakes, woodlands, wildlife habitats, walkways, characteristic landscapes and historic aspects of, in particular, The Wild Garden in the parish of Shipton-under-Wychwood and such other areas as the Charity may from time to time decide.

How we will achieve this

The Wild Garden in its present form was laid out in the mid 19th century as a pleasure garden adjoining Shipton Court, although the site was used as a recreation garden dating back to the building of Shipton Court in Elizabethan times. The garden is approached by an avenue of approximately fifty mature lime trees leading into a pathed and wooded area. It includes two shallow ornamental ponds feeding a cascade into a further three canal ponds. A central feature of the garden is the last remaining one of three Cedar of Lebanon dating back to the original planting.

Our approach to maintenance, conservation and preservation is to carry out all necessary essential and safety related works but to maintain the informal atmosphere of the gardens with the minimum of general clearance.

Our maintenance plan is to guide visitors through well established paths and to discourage general rambling through the woods. Paths in the upper (southern) area will be maintained with wood chipping to allow for both circular walks around the ponds and for through-walks exiting onto the public footpath, Dog Kennel Lane, which leads to both Diggers Wood, which was created as part of the Millennium Woods initiative, and to Milton-under-Wychwood. The lower (northern) wood areas will be left substantially uncleared to allow sufficient habitat for wildlife and the public will be discouraged from creating new pathways through this area. Routine cutting down of basal shoots on the lime trees and ivy removal from trees will be undertaken together with periodic cleaning of debris from the ponds. The highly successful Shipton Volunteers movement which draws on more than fifty local residents has offered labour support to the project and the Wild Garden budget will provide for some equipment purchases or rental to support the routine maintenance.

Conservation of the woodlands will be assisted by an inventory of specimen shrubs and trees and, with advice from the Woodlands Trust and the Oxfordshire Garden Trust, specific management plans for these will be established. Particular attention will be given to the lime avenue and to the Cedar of Lebanon.

Restoration plans will be considered in the future, subject to availability of funding. Specific projects which have been already identified include restoring the lime avenue with new planting where gaps have occurred, restoring the dry stone ha-ha which separates the Wild Garden from the adjoining cricket pitch, restoring the ditch and hedge to the adjoining land to the west by new planting and hedge laying and restoring the key vistas down the lengths of the upper ponds based on the limited photographic history of the gardens from around 1901.

On average, we assess that some 30 to 50 people a day will use the gardens for walking and exercising. By opening up access to the public footpath in Dog Kennel Lane on the south side of the Wild Garden, we also extend safe walkways to both Diggers Wood and Milton-under-Wychwood. Our approach to maintenance will allow for the full enjoyment of the area while being practical in terms of finance and labour and retaining wildlife habitats. We anticipate considerable local engagement in maintenance, conservation and restoration by the Shipton Volunteers and other local bodies by providing a practical environment to develop craft skills such as dry stone walling and hedge laying.

Objective – to educate

To advance the education of the public in the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment and historic aspects, of in particular, The Wild Garden in the parish of Shipton-under-Wychwood and such other areas as the Charity may from time to time decide.

How we will achieve this

The Wild Garden offers an important environment for local school children and others to learn about the local environment. The Wychwood Primary School in particular has expressed interest in using the gardens and woods for supervised field trips and we will provide information leaflets to assist them with this. These will also be offered to the leadership of other local youth organisations. Welcome notices will be established at the two entrances to the Wild Garden and information boards will be created in a convenient location to explain the three key aspects of the Wild Garden namely the Trees and Shrubs, the Wild Life and the Historic Aspects. We will draw on the experience of the Woodlands Trust and nearby Diggers Wood to create the Trees and Shrubs and the Wild Life panels and work with the Wychwood Local History Society and the Oxfordshire Garden Trust on the historic aspects of the Wild Garden. A programme of talks about the Wild Garden will be developed and offered to local adult organisations including the WI in both Shipton and Milton, the Wychwood Day Centre and the Parent Teachers Association of the local primary school, one aim of which will be to encourage responsible use of the Wild Garden and to explain how the often inadvertent damage to trees, ponds and wildlife can occur when children and dogs are allowed to roam unsupervised.

The key benefit of the education initiatives will be to encourage a responsible attitude towards and a wider appreciation of our local natural and physical environment. This should both allow the wide and peaceful enjoyment of the Wild Garden by all and a positive approach to the environment in general. A secondary benefit will be to encourage the development of the skills required to manage and maintain the Wild Garden. A recent initiative by a local resident to develop dry stone wall skills attracted 18 volunteers and succeeded in restoring a significant length of wall in the locality.