

Abbey Ponds Working Group

A MEETING of the ABBEY PONDS WORKING GROUP took place on **Monday 20th April 2026 at 7.30pm** at Bruton Community Hall.

Present: Cllr Jones (EJ), Cllr Coulter (EC), Mike Brownlow (MB), Ross Dixon (RD), Gordon Fry (GF) Roger Gallannaugh (RG).

Officers: Town Clerk.

Meeting started: 7.31 pm.

MEETING NOTES

25/26: Apologies for absence.

Apologies were received from Ed Tickner (ET) and Tricia Rawlingson-Plant (TRP).

25/27: Declarations of interest

Declarations of Interests Members to declare any interests, including disclosable pecuniary interests, they may have in agenda items that accord with the requirements of the Town Council's Code of Conduct and to consider any written requests from members for dispensations that accord with the Localism Act 2011 s33 (b-e) (This does not preclude any later declaration).

None.

25/28: Notes from the previous Working Group meeting, held on 12th January 2026 (LGA 1972 sch 12 para 41 (1))

To agree the Notes from the meeting on 12th January 2026 as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

No comments regarding the notes.

The clerk provided a brief update about the status of the footpath and progress made with Network Rail.

The Working Group notes from the last meeting were agreed.

25/29: Working Group Membership.

- a. To note a recent resignation.

To note that Angus Davies has resigned, which working group members were sorry to hear.

- b. To consider appointments of new members.

TRP is considering joining the working group. EJ asked if there were any other local people who would be interested?

25/30: Level Access: “Connecting Abbey Ponds”

- a. To receive an update on any progress:
 - i To note the installation of Pedestrian wayfinding signage to-and-from Bruton Station, via Abbey Ponds and the Durslade Community Garden.

The clerk updated regarding signage installed.

- ii Information signage on Abbey Ponds. To receive a short oral report regarding the progress of installing the stone signage.

The foundation pad for the stone at position 1 was installed on 20th April. The next phase is to arrange the drilling and the installation of the stone signs.

- b. To review the project progress against budget.

GF queried the need for archaeologist involvement. The clerk pointed out that a watching brief performed by an archaeologist was a condition of the Scheduled Monument Consent from Historic England. The final archaeology report has been circulated to the working group.

25/31: Habitat management

- a. To note recent work parties of King’s Bruton student volunteers, led by Roger Gallannaugh, under Bruton Town Council’s Section 17 Management Agreement for the Scheduled Monument with Historic England.

Noted by working group members and thank you to those who took part. There are no works planned in the summer term, due to exams taking place. The next wave of works will be undertaken in Autumn.

- b. To note recent works at the top pond area by the robot machine.

Noted. This area was also raked and seeded recently, to try to introduce some additional vegetation. The seeds sown had been harvested locally, just 2 to 3 miles away.

- c. To consider hedge laying.

Hedge laying was discussed in the January working group meeting with the decision not to undertake this winter just gone. EJ suggested perhaps applying for a grant to fund some teaching opportunities for hedge laying, which would be ideal in this location.

The working group would be keen in principle to support this, and would like a better idea of how much this activity would cost. GF to speak with a local contractor, and EJ to look at the opportunity for applying for grant funding.

- d. To schedule upcoming habitat management work parties. To note wild seeding event taking place on 12th April.

Noted.

- e. To consider modifications to the Habitat Management Plan.

The meadow areas within the ponds boundary have been scheduled to be mowed in June July time. EJ provided some details about a possible opportunity to work with Forest of Selwood who, as the result of a successful grant funding bid, will have an employee who could assist with some volunteer work in the Abbey Ponds area.

GF asked about equipment, which EJ could provide answers to at this stage, but details will follow in due course.

EJ asked if there is anything that needs to be changed about the habitat management plan. A query was raised about 'Meadow 4' and its location; was considered to be the length of scrub along the bottom of the ponds and the railway line.

Under the Meadow heading, with the Forest of Selwood support, meadows 1,2 and 3 could be addressed this year.

ET was keen to purchase a machine, similar to a scythe, for the ponds area. There was an issue regarding the storage of a machine if purchased. The two options are: a separate part of the community shed at the allotments/Community Gardens; or a separate storage shed bolted to the floor within there. Questions were raised regarding the ownership of the machinery, and also insurance cover.

EJ felt the type of equipment being used for the mowing of the meadows would be an electrical or a hand scythe.

Coppicing around the bottom pond was discussed. EJ thinks this should start next year, and the Kings groups could be involved with that.

RG pointed out that there are dead elms that need to be removed, but the trees at the bottom pond needs to be coppiced. EJ spoke about nightingales, and the coppicing needs to be fairly regularly to create a safer environment.

25/32: Archaeology and Heritage.

To receive any updates on research since meetings.

- a. To agree to schedule a meeting with Historic England on site.

EJ asked if anyone had heard from a Mr Isles (former inspector with English Heritage, has done some personal investigation into the history of the ponds area) regarding the aspirations with Abbey Ponds. A meeting is requested with James Lyttleton at Historic England (Assistant Inspector South West), to discuss Abbey Ponds and extending/reapplying for the SMC for scrub clearance.

RG has suggested meeting in May. LUH to contact him to arrange.

EJ has been pondering about other locations that are managing ponds thought to be historic ponds from an Abbey. EJ has a contact at a ponds area in Abingdon, with a view to discussing further the management approach to a ponds area, and the history behind the ponds.

GF also mentioned Kington Magna (near Gillingham), and the benefits of the landowner (the farmer in this case) driving the maintenance of the area, which is much more straightforward.

EJ shared about a similar area in Portsmouth, managed by English Heritage, which has not been as productive.

25/33: Vision for Habitat and Heritage.

To consider medium and longer-term objectives for ponds restoration, and implications for the negotiation of the next Management Agreement with Historic England.

- a. To discuss proposals for a leaky dam and a footbridge.

The five year Scheduled Monument Consent expires in December 2026. RG wanted to discuss the potential to install a footbridge along the desire line towards the Dovecote, to avoid the stream jumping.

RG has provided a basic design for a metal bridge, and would like to progress the moving the proposal and design forward with a view to the town council approving the design, and sourcing funding with grant funding.

RG would like to see the three ponds, recognised as three separate habitats, being worked upon, not necessarily at the same time. That a feasibility study to be undertaken to consider a dam (leaky or otherwise), and then a proposal taken to the town council to consider in winter 2026. A meeting with Historic England to discuss both the scrub clearance, and the proposed projects is required.

Discussion continued about the need for a footbridge and formalising a perceived desire line. RG has circulated designs previously. The footbridge is more aesthetic, the leaky dam would have a practical aspect to it.

Previous discussions with Historic England resulted in the question being raised of whether the dam would be reinstating an ancient feature, or introducing a new feature. A plan and a justification is required. Research to establish a historic feature to be reinstated could garner access to heritage grant funding, which would be helpful. Introducing a new feature can be considered, but with the appropriate justification.

The research window of timing was discussed, and rather than going back to medieval times, consider a targeted search towards the late 1700's. Access to the archives at Kings Bruton were suggested.

Actions:

RG to contact Mr Isles.

EJ to follow up about Abbey fishponds at Abingdon.

MB & ET to access the Kings archives to investigate further.

25/32: Date of next meeting.

7.30pm **Monday 13th July 2026**, in the Community Hall.

Agenda items to the Chair of the Working Group by Friday 3rd July 2026.

Meeting closed: 8.55pm.

END OF MEETING NOTES