



Valley Conservation Society

5-year

Management Plan

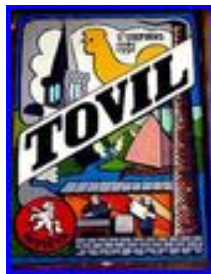
Crisbrook Meadow

Cave Hill - Tovil

2019-2024

In association with

Tovil Parish Council



INDEX

	Page
1 Introduction	
1.1 History	4
1.2 Vision and management strategy	4
1.3 Aims and objectives	4
2 The site	
2.1 Location	5
2.2 Size, topography, geology	5
2.3 Planning constraints	5
2.4 Land ownership and responsibility	5
2.5 Landscape features	5
2.5.1 Infrastructure	6
2.5.2 Facilities	6
2.5.3 Interpretation	6
3 Conservation	
3.1 Sustainability	6
3.2 Trees	6
3.3 Flora	6
3.4 Fauna	7
4 Community involvement	
4.1 Enjoyment	7
4.2 Participation	7
4.3 Education	7
5 Health, safety and security	
5.1 Vehicles	8
5.2 Safety	8
5.3 Boundaries	8
5.4 Prohibitions	8
6 Maintenance	
6.1 Management	8
6.2 Woodland regime	9
6.3 Litter	9
7 Five-year plan	
7.1 Improvement over the first five years	9
7.2 The next five years	10
7.3 The longer term	10

Appendices

Appendix 1: Site Location Plan	11
Appendix 2: Summary of maintenance tasks	12
Appendix 3: Flora species list	13

Introduction

This management plan has been prepared by the Valley Conservation Society as a strategic approach to the management of Crisbrook Meadow. Its purpose is to set out the aims, objectives and priorities for the management of the site and future improvements.

1.1 History

The meadow was created historically by ragstone quarrying in the Loose Valley. The site was used for agricultural purposes in the early half of the 20th century; old photographs show cattle grazing on the land. The site then was known as the Cow Meadow and in the same ownership as the now demolished Lower Crisbrook Mill.

From around 1950, the land was tenanted by a small-holder, George Wright, who kept pigs, chickens and Shetland ponies on the meadow.

Later, the land was acquired by an individual for its potential development value. Several applications were made to Maidstone Borough Council for planning permission for housing but these were rejected. During this time, some 20 years, no maintenance was carried out and the land consequently became over-grown.

In 2013, the land was jointly acquired by Tovil Parish Council and the Valley Conservation Society, with a generous donation by the Maidstone Lions.

1.2 Vision and management strategy

The site was acquired with the principal aim of protecting it from unwelcome development, so that it could remain a “green lung” in the parish of Tovil. The site will be managed so as to protect the natural flora and fauna, improve the visual aspect of the area, maximise opportunities for biodiversity and allow the public such access as is consistent with the other aims.

1.3 Aims and objectives

- To provide a natural amenity for Tovil parishioners and visitors to the Loose Valley
- To provide a safe environment for all users
- To support the existing habitat around the heritage mill ponds
- To improve the opportunities for biodiversity through the restoration of the lowland meadow with wild flowers sowings.
- To enhance the transition of the urban/rural fringe by extending the adjacent Hayle Park Nature Reserve

2 The Site

2.1 Location

Crisbrook Meadow is in the South Ward of Maidstone, approximately two miles south of the town centre. The land is bounded to the north by Mount Ararat and public right of way KB31, to the east by the new Nature Reserve woodland at Hayle Park, separated by public right of way KB32, and to the west and south by land owned by the Valley Conservation Society. The principal access is from a wooden five-bar gate leading from Cave Hill, opposite Crisbrook House. Access can also be made via the pathways leading from Gleneagles Drive, Caernarvon Drive and the Hayle Park Nature Reserve, with wheelchair access via a radar gate by Crisbrook cottages in Cave Hill.

2.2 Size, topography and geology

Crisbrook Meadow is approximately 2.3 acres and steeply undulating in topography down towards the Loose stream/river, and rising dramatically with a sheer rock face to Mount Ararat in the north. The underlying geology is characterised by limestone formations of the Hythe beds, the stone is known locally as Ragstone. Kentish Rag is typically a sandy glauconitic limestone in which quartz grains are set with organic debris in an abundant matrix of calcite. This has been quarried since Roman times and has created the steep slopes of the valley from which many springs appear contributing to the stream/river flow and pond water levels, the stream/river then flowing to the confluence with the River Medway at Tovil. The stream bed is of Atherfield clay and as this erodes it contributes to problems of silting.

2.3 Planning constraints

The land is subject to an Article 4 regulation which removes all normal permitted development rights. It also falls within the Loose Valley Conservation Area.

2.4 Land ownership and responsibility

The land is owned jointly by Tovil Parish Council (58%) and Valley Conservation Ltd (42%). Valley Conservation Limited is the incorporated body of the Valley Conservation Society. The terms of the purchase agreement require Valley Conservation Society to manage the land on behalf of both bodies and states that the land can only be used “for conservation, biodiversity and /or as a nature reserve.”

2.5 Landscape features

The sheer quarried rock face to the north is shrouded in undergrowth, the gentler slopes to the east forming an amphitheatre of woodland and scrub leading down to the more level lowland meadow. The land boundary is delineated by rag stone walling in many areas. Two Maidstone boundary stones have been reinstated in their original positions.

2.5.1 Infrastructure

The land currently has form due to intense groundwork and tree removal and the intention will continue to be to create a well managed and natural in appearance contiguous woodland, linking the woodland edge of Hayle Park Nature Reserve with that of Reeds and Lower Crisbrook ponds. The larger area of the land adjacent to the mill ponds has been returned to lowland meadow - a habitat in decline. The boundary stone work has been mostly restored to its original function of supporting the surrounding public rights of way and enhancing the architectural heritage of this once industrial region of Maidstone.

2.5.2 Facilities

The lowland meadow is becoming rich in native species of wild flowers and grasses to support the many invertebrates, birds, reptiles, bats and small mammals known to inhabit the locality. The area will facilitate people wishing to walk or just to sit and enjoy the surrounding amenity.

2.5.3 Interpretation

An interpretation board has been installed adjacent to KB32 describing the floral and faunal species already present and those we wish to encourage.

3 Conservation

3.1 Sustainability

The land forms part of the southern extension of the Maidstone Borough Council Local Plan defined Green Wedge which contributes to the setting of the town, provides residents with access to open green space, the wider countryside and helps create countryside corridors.

3.2 Trees

There is a contiguous band of woodland with a mixture of native, specimen and invasive tree and shrub species running from the southern edge to the north eastern boundary and the land behind Reeds pond below Mount Ararat. There is a veteran Ash and Oak tree signifying the possibility of Ancient Woodland.

3.3 Flora

There is ground flora within the wooded area also indicating the possibility of its being Ancient Woodland, with Dogs Mercury, Bluebell, Wood Anemone, Celandine and Yellow Archangel present. The importance of safe-guarding Ancient Woodland has now been recognised in the National Planning Policy Framework. The meadow area was previously largely overgrown with bramble and nettle suppressing any chance of any ground flora regenerating. This has now been cleared and the restoration of a lowland meadow is being assisted with wild flowers sowings to transform it into a wildflower meadow.

3.4 Fauna

The habitats of the land and its environs are quite diverse; from rocky cliff, woodland, stream, ponds and grassland and support a diversity of fauna including fox, badger, voles and wood mice.

4 Community Involvement

4.1 Enjoyment

The intention is to encourage the public to use the land as amenity open space to appreciate the value of nature. Wheelchair access has been provided from the entrance at Crisbrook Cottages via footpath KB32.

Certain leisure activities that would be harmful to wildlife, to the land itself or to the quiet enjoyment of the area by others will not be permitted (See Section 5.4)

The Society holds twice yearly guided walks around the meadow (and the adjacent open spaces) to inform the public about the work being carried out.

4.2 Participation

The Valley Conservation Society will provide opportunities for the wider public to become involved in the conservation of the area (under direction). At present regular work parties are held every Tuesday, with additional weekend work parties on an ad-hoc basis. The gathering point is the Conservation Cabin in Cave Hill.

In addition, various local companies have held “volunteer days” in which their staff have been given time off from their usual work to join in with our conservation projects. The Valley Conservation Society will continue to welcome such offers of help.

4.3 Education

Giving young people an appreciation of the outdoors will hopefully encourage them to continue to take an interest in our green spaces when they are adults. To this end, the Society will continue to welcome school visits or visits by other youth organisations such as the Guides or Scouts whenever possible, but only of course if a sufficient degree of supervision can be guaranteed and it is safe to allow such visits.

5 Health, safety and security

5.1 Vehicles

There are to be no vehicles allowed on the site except for the purposes of carrying out conservation work. It may be necessary to exclude the public from all or parts of the site for their own safety, when work is being carried out.

5.2 Safety

A First Aid kit is available at all organised work parties and a Risk Assessment carried out before each session. Potentially dangerous activities (such as the use of a chainsaw) will only be carried out by those qualified to do so.

5.3 Boundaries

The Society has recently replaced the fencing on the northern boundary of the site where there is a steep drop from Mount Ararat to the meadow below. In addition, much of the ragstone wall at the bottom of the slope has been rebuilt to prevent landslip. The Society will continue to maintain the fencing and the wall and other boundaries with a particular view to enhancing safety. It will also utilise the placing of dead wood, tree trunks etc to discourage access at inappropriate points.

5.4 Prohibitions

The following activities will not be permitted:

- The flying of drones or remote-control aircraft
- The launching of Chinese lanterns
- The use of quad bikes or off-road motorbikes
- Hare-coursing or rabbit lamping
- Campfires/barbecues
- The use of catapults or air rifles
- Horse riding
- Anti-social behaviour

6 Maintenance

6.1 Management.

The land will be fully managed by Valley Conservation Society and its members, utilising associate, educational, residents groups and other volunteers where practical, and contractors where necessary.

6.2 Woodland regime

The woodland will be managed in accordance with best practice following Forestry Commission guidelines where appropriate. A transition area of shrub species has been planted around the boundary edges of the meadow using native species of local provenance. The lowland meadow will be enhanced by the cutting and removal of growth to reduce nutrient levels in the soil and the spreading of locally sourced wild flower seed.

6.3 Litter

The site has had some problems with litter and fly tipping. A regular litter pick will be carried out. If it becomes necessary, the temporary use of CCTV cameras may be considered to prevent anti-social behaviour.

7 Five-year plan

7.1 Improvements over the first five years

The first five-year plan period has now ended. When the site was purchased in 2013, there were two planning enforcement notices applicable to the land:

- To remove a block wall of approximately 20 metres erected by a previous owner without planning permission
- To remove the remains of a cabin constructed of wood and white crysotile asbestos sheeting

The wall has been removed and the land regraded.

The cabin remains have been removed and the land re-planted with appropriate shrubs and understory trees.

In addition, as already stated, new metal-rail fencing has been erected along the northern boundary. A large section of the retaining ragstone wall has been rebuilt. The ragstone boundary wall along the southern boundary has been repaired and made safe.

A wildflower meadow has been planted. New native species trees have been planted. Two new vandal-proof public benches have been installed.

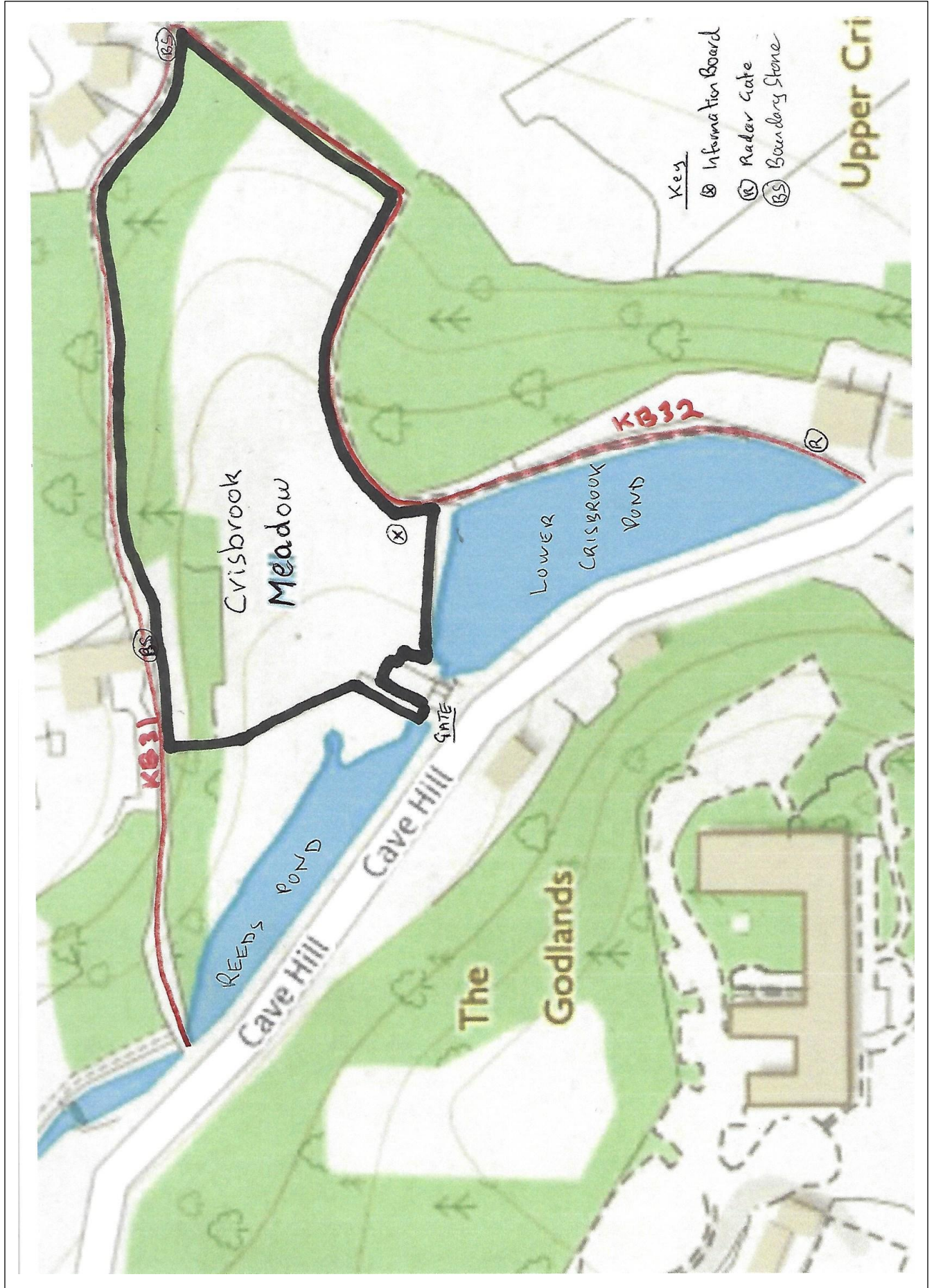
The sand and ballast bins formerly near the main entrance to the meadow have been re-located to the less intrusive area within the remains of the rag-stone barn.

7.2 The next five years

- The trees will be maintained according to the advice of a professional arboriculturist. Any trees or limbs of trees found to be dangerous during survey work will be dealt with. All replacement planting will be with native species.
- The Society will continue to restore/rebuild the ragstone boundary walls below footpath KB31 and supporting the footpath KB32.
- Fencing will be erected to the left of the main entrance opposite Crisbrook House to link with bridge wall for safety reasons.
- The scrub will be cleared from the bank below Mount Ararat, a quarter section at a time, each year, re-planting where necessary.

7.3 The longer term

Clearance work during the first five-year plan revealed the floor and partial walls of an historic ragstone barn. The Society may wish to restore the barn for use either as a storage facility or an education/mess room. However, the land is subject to a restrictive planning covenant that currently makes this unfeasible.



APPENDIX 2 SUMMARY OF REGULAR MAINTENANCE TASKS

Removal of non-native shrubs from within and along the periphery of the woodland copse

Cut down brambles and nettles to ground level; remove arisings from site.

Plant tree and shrub species to ensure successional growth.

Clear and renew surfaces of pathways and access areas

Autumn cut of meadow and remove arisings

Inspect and repair stone walling as and where necessary

Manage woodland bank below Mount Ararat

APPENDIX 3 FLORA SPECIES LIST (non exhaustive)

Tree and Shrub species	
Hornbeam	<i>Carpinus betulus</i>
Oak	<i>Quercus robur</i>
Wild Cherry	<i>Prunus avium</i>
Hazel	<i>Corylus avellana</i>
Sycamore	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>
Elder	<i>Sambucus nigra</i>
Crack Willow	<i>Salix fragilis</i>
Alder	<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>
Ash	<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>
Beech	<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>
Hawthorn	<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>
Herb species	
Bramble	<i>Rubus fruticosus</i>
Bluebells	<i>Hyacinthoides non-scripta</i>
Common Nettle	<i>Urtica dioica</i>
Hogweed	<i>Heracleum sphondylium</i>
Harts Tongue (fern)	<i>Asplenium scolopendrium</i>
Cleavers	<i>Gallium asparine</i>
Pendulous Sedge	<i>Carex pendula</i>
Snowdrop	<i>Galanthus nivalis</i>
Wild primrose	<i>Primrose vulgaris</i>

Approved by the VCS executive committee meeting on December 5, 2018

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