

**SUBJECT: SOUTH COMMON PONDS**

**DIRECTORATE: COMMUNITIES & ENVIRONMENT**

**REPORT AUTHOR: SIMON LAWSON, COMMUNITY CONTRACTS OFFICER**

## **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To advise members of the reasons for proposed pond dredging and works to trees adjacent to the ornamental ponds in the care of the City Council on Lincoln South Common.

## **2. Executive Summary**

- 2.1 South Common is one of three commons in Lincoln. The Council is responsible for the management and care of common land in the city. In accordance with the adopted Management Plan it is necessary to carry out works to the ponds on South Common. These works are necessary for the benefit wildlife and biodiversity.

## **3. Background**

- 3.1 The South Common falls within the city boundary, and Appendix 1 attached shows the site location. Appendix 2 shows the extent of the pond area.

South Common is designated common land, protected by the Lincoln City Council Act. Committee's views are sought in respect of proposed pond dredging and works to trees that are growing within the bounds of the ornamental pond areas on South Common.

- 3.2 The South Common and pond areas are managed by the City of Lincoln Council. The origins of the ponds are uncertain but historically we know that there were developed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as part of the extensive drainage works carried out across the common at that time. They are ornamental and classic late Victorian landscaping. The ponds are supplied by water from drainage channels laid in at the same time of construction. These channels are laid in the southern, rising land behind the ponds.
- 3.3 Although the grounds of the pond area are managed periodically in the form of grass cutting, the ponds themselves have not received any form of management for some years. This has resulted in them becoming silted-up with leaves and other debris from the trees surrounding them, and they are fast becoming overgrown with reed growth.
- 3.4 There are approximately 150 trees of both indigenous and non indigenous species growing within the confines of the pond areas and varying in maturity from young saplings to mature specimens.

With regard to species they include:

Poplar, Willow, Maple, Hawthorn, Sycamore, Robinia, Cherry, Oak, Holly, Yew, Silver Birch and Elm growth that has regenerated from the stumps of former mature specimens that have succumbed to Dutch Elm Disease. Although the trees provide amenity value to the locality some do prevent direct sunlight from reaching the water surface, and contribute to the silting-up of the pond by producing leaf litter.

- 3.5 The trees are not subject to a Tree Preservation Order, nor are they located within a Conservation Area.

#### **4. Proposal**

- 4.1 The formally adopted Commons Management Plan, developed with support from external agencies such as the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust and the Commons Advisory Panel, has identified a need for both the dredging of the ponds and to reduce the tree cover. The latter being not just to reduce future silting problems, but also to improve water quality, and thereby enhance the biodiversity value of the ponds. Appendix 3 includes Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust's site survey and recommendations.
- 4.2 In order to facilitate the dredging operations, the distribution of spoil that is to remain on site and to increase the amount of sunlight afforded the pond area, it is proposed to fell: 11 Hawthorn, 7 Robinia, 2 Holly, 1 Sycamore and 1 Oak tree Appendix 4.

Also removal of the regenerated Elm growth, immature self-set Willows and Hawthorn growing adjacent to the edge of the pond. Also to thin out the immature self-set Sycamore and Poplar on the islands.

Other tree work includes 22 crown lift, 3 crown reductions, 4 coppices and 1 pollard.

To clear other vegetation from the pond edge which is mainly Blackberry.

- 4.3 To off-set the loss of these trees it is proposed to replant 22 indigenous tree species at more suitable locations around the site but away from the ponds so that they will not affect light levels on the water in the future, thus helping with future management.

#### **5. Strategic Priorities**

##### **5.1 Let's Enhance our Remarkable Place**

Lincoln's commons contribute to our 'remarkable place' objectives in significant ways, in terms of the many benefits they bring to the city, its residents and visitors, and their scale and situation as part of Lincoln's landscape. The proper management of the commons is therefore essential.

The Council acknowledges the importance of trees and tree planting to the

environment and its biodiversity objectives. Replacement trees are routinely scheduled wherever a tree has to be removed, in line with Council policy.

## **6. Organisational Impacts**

### **6.1 i) Finance**

The cost of the works is to be met by funds raised from car parking charges made to vehicles on Malandry Close, part of the South Common, and ring-fenced for Commons improvements.

### **6.2 ii) Property/Land/ Accommodation Implications**

The City Council is responsible for the maintenance of the commons under the Lincoln City Council Act.

### **6.3 (iii) Legal / Procurement**

Any approved tree works and pond dredging will be undertaken by the Council's existing grounds contractor.

## **7. Risk Implications**

### **7.1 The risk of not carrying out this work is the continuing degeneration of the pond areas and the wildlife that inhabits them.**

### **7.2 Removal of trees is always a sensitive issue, which could lead to adverse publicity. It is important to assess the value of the trees to the common and its wildlife, and consider this against the wider enjoyment of those using the common for recreational pursuits. In this instance it should be noted that some of the trees are not indigenous species, and the proposal includes for replacement trees for the future. There is a net benefit to wildlife by carrying out these works.**

## **8. Recommendation**

### **8.1 That the works set out in the report be approved.**

**Is this a key decision?** Yes

**Do the exempt information categories apply?** No

**Does Rule 15 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules (call-in and urgency) apply?** No

**How many appendices does the report contain?** Three

**List of Background Papers:** Section File We671

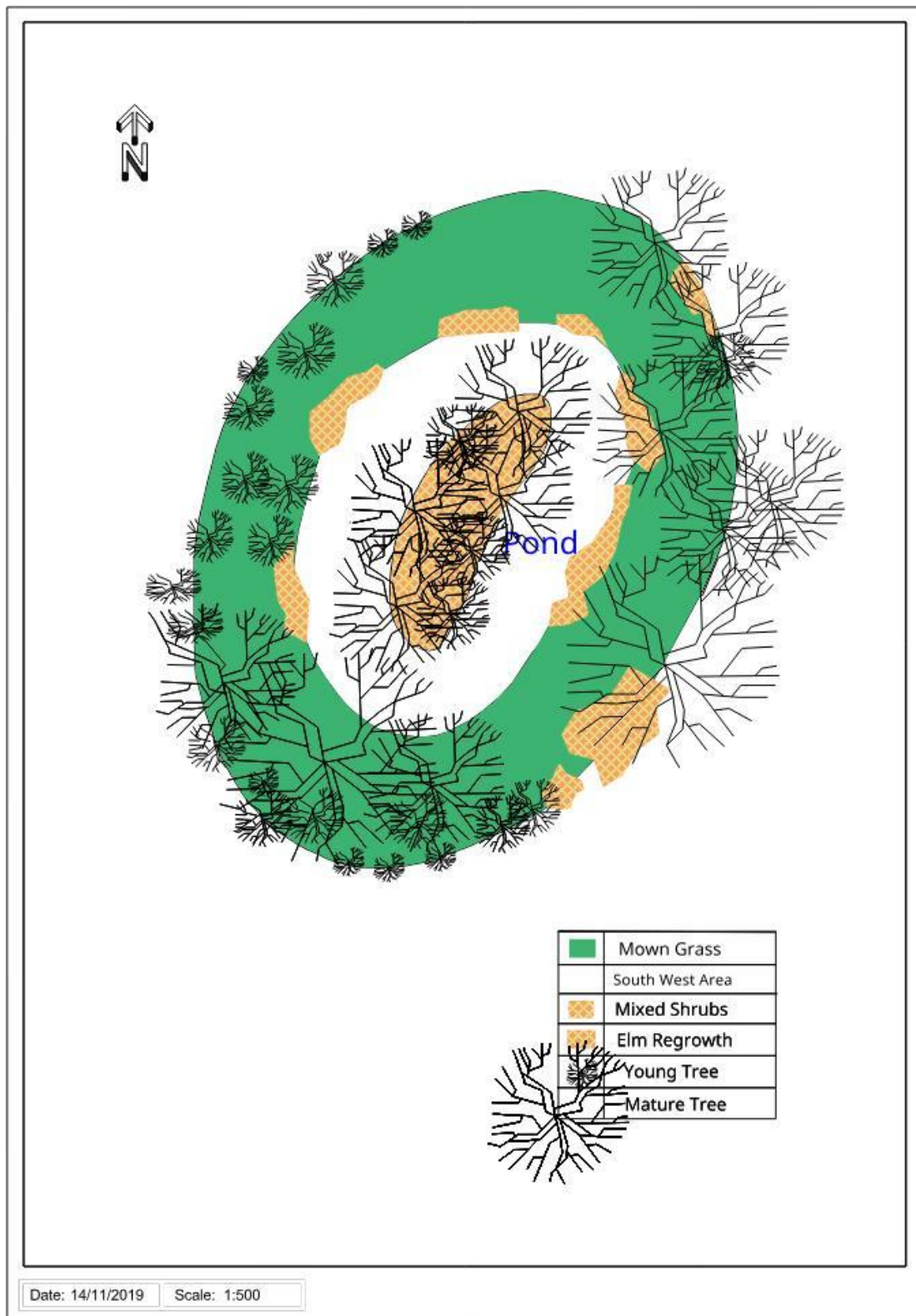
**Lead Officer:** Simon Lawson

## Appendix 1

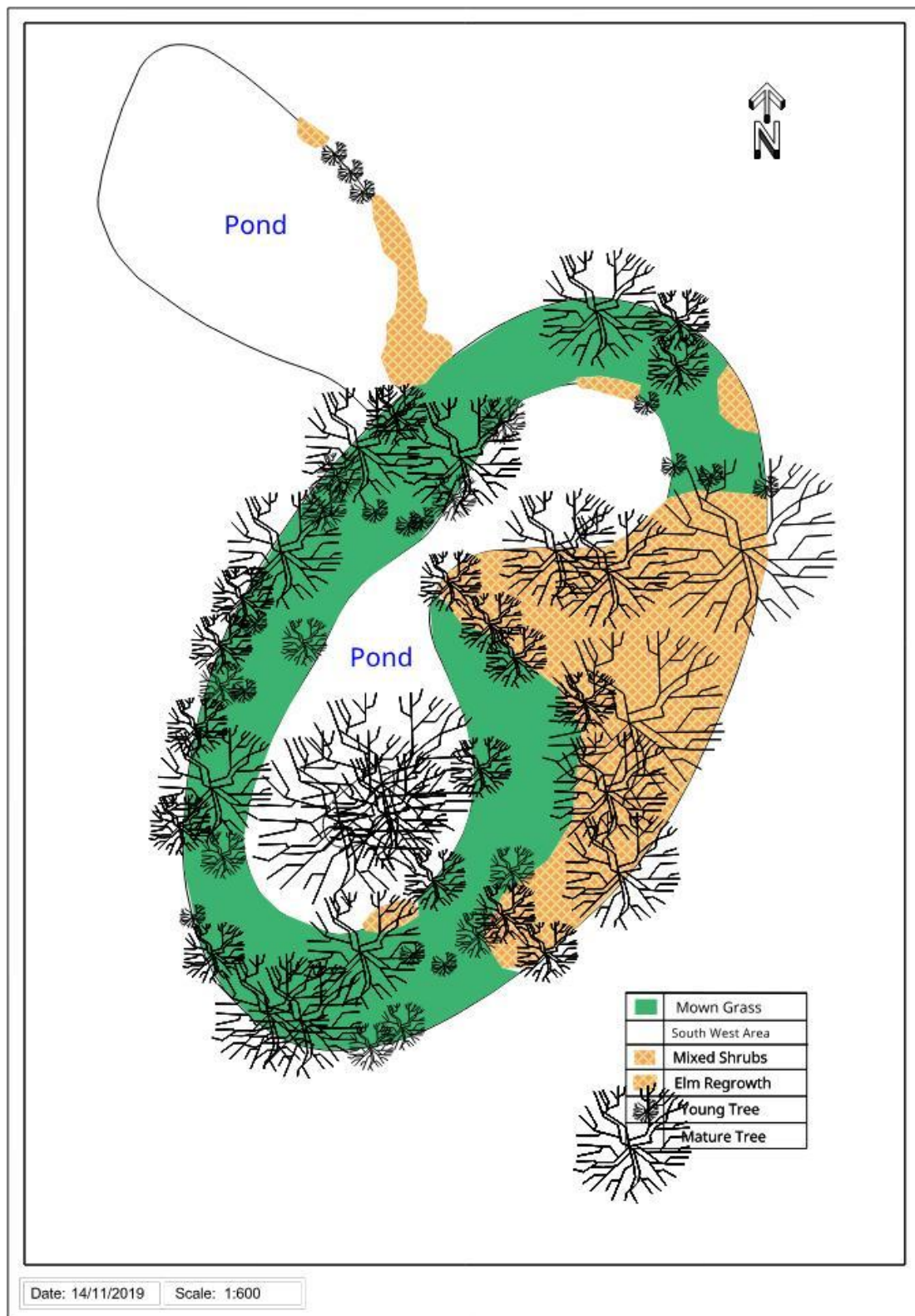


## Appendix 2

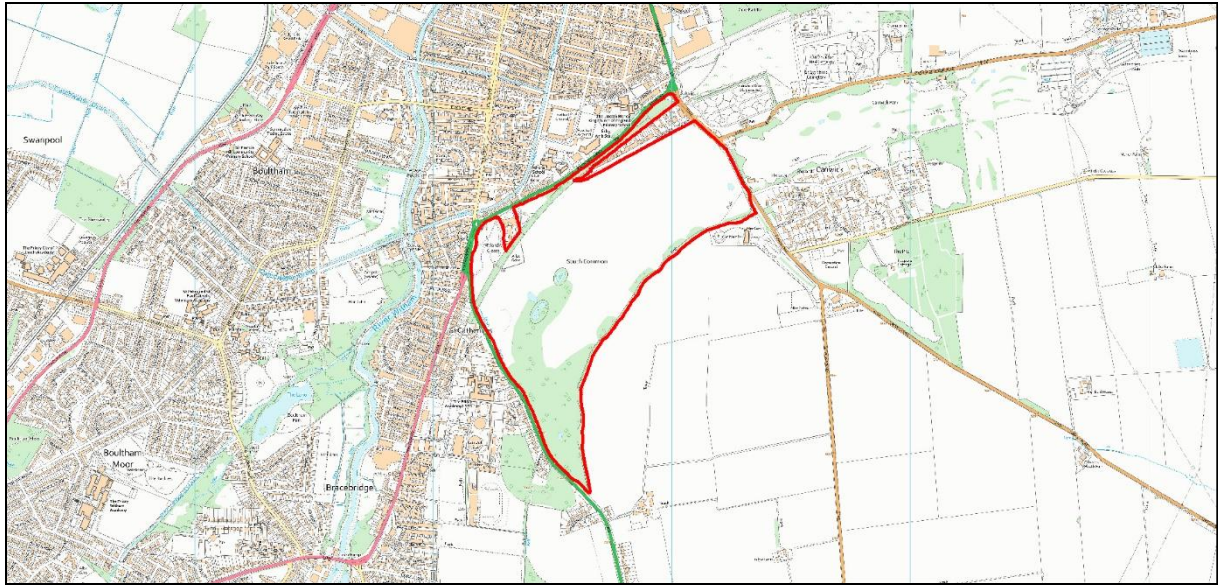
### Pond B



## Pond C



## South Common



© Crown Copyright and Database Rights (2019) Ordnance Survey (100016739)

<b>Grid ref:</b>	SK977693	<b>Last surveyed:</b>	21 June 2019
<b>Area:</b>	76.5ha	<b>Surveyor:</b>	J Fraser

**Main habitats:** Semi-improved acid grassland  
Coarse or rank grassland  
Scattered/dense scrub

<b>Additional habitats:</b>	Wet woodland/Carr	Pond
	Mixed and native plantation	Spring
	Improved grassland	Stream

This large site on the south-eastern edge of the City of Lincoln mostly comprises a north-west facing hillside, supporting grazed grassland, scrub, planted trees, woodland, ponds, other wetland, and a bridleway. To the north-west of this, a disused railway line, some allotments and two areas of amenity grassland complete the site, excluding South Park Road and associated buildings. Boundary features are the A15 to the north-west and south-west, the B1188 to the north-east, and arable land and the International Bomber Command Centre to the south-east. The bridleway follows the outer edge of the site, along the south-eastern and north-eastern boundaries.

### Hillside

Grazed land upslope of the disused railway line is of great value for its flora and fauna and is extensively used by members of the public, especially for outdoor walks and dog exercising. It ascends gradually at first and then more steeply, from below 10m to approximately 60m above sea level, where it reaches the limestone plateau edge. Hummocky terrain is widespread, but more typical of the upper slopes.

Up to 164 horses are allowed to graze here, but the actual number is now usually less than 15, which is insufficient to maintain a botanically-diverse sward over much of the site. Consequently, the vegetation is now very coarse in many places, and includes much false oat-grass, soft brome, cock's-foot, cow parsley, hogweed, rosebay willowherb, spear thistle, creeping thistle, and Turkey oak saplings. Botanically-rich dry grassland currently survives where horses graze preferentially, particularly on infertile sandy soil. Here can be found field wood-rush, sheep's-fescue, mat-grass, heath-grass, early hair-grass, sweet vernal-grass, common bent, and red fescue. More colourful associates are sheep's sorrel, field mouse-ear, sand spurrey, heath and lady's bedstraw, bulbous buttercup, tormentil, wall speedwell, cat's-ear, pignut, mouse-ear-hawkweed, harebell, and gorse.

During droughts there is no running water on the common, but normally springs rise on the upper part of the site and feed a series of depressions downslope. These hold a range of wetland species, such as devil's-bit scabious, lesser spearwort, southern marsh-orchid, marsh-marigold, bog stitchwort, marsh thistle, greater bird's-foot-trefoil, clustered dock, tufted hair-grass, jointed rush, and common sedge. A damp depression near the southern tip of the site is full of great willowherb and bulrush, and partially surrounded by hawthorn scrub.

Standing water occurs in four ponds, providing a variety of water depth, shading, shelter, and management history. Aquatic vegetation comprises curled, broad-leaved and horned pondweed, water-starwort, duckweed, and water-crowfoot. Robust marginal vegetation includes branched bur-reed, bulrush, reed canary-grass and reed sweet-grass, while in places there is much invasive New Zealand pigmyweed. Other wetland species include water-cress, fool's-water-cress, trifid bur-marigold, gypsywort, water figwort, brooklime, water/tufted forget-me-not, water-plantain, and common spike-rush.

Planted trees are inappropriate on this site, but occur over much of the common, including lime, beech, ash, sycamore, alder, turkey oak, pedunculate oak, and Norway maple. The south-eastern margin holds several strips of fenced plantation dominated by ash and some field maple. In the south-west corner some of the naturally developing woodland has also been fenced to keep out grazing animals. Elsewhere at the southern end there is much hawthorn scrub and other coarse vegetation where grazing has clearly been inadequate to maintain grassland for many years.

A number of veteran ash and beech trees occur along the bridleway, as well as the remnants of many large elms. The bridleway is not botanically-rich, but a combination of deadwood habitat, a sheltered environment and some open sunny stretches is likely to be good for invertebrates. Non-native shrubs are common, particularly garden privet and snowberry.

### **Railway Cutting**

In the bottom of the railway cutting, conditions are generally wet and shady, under a canopy of trees such as grey and goat willow, crack-willow, silver birch, sycamore, horse

chestnut, ash, and elm. More open and sunny conditions are restricted to the north-eastern end, where cutting depth is less than elsewhere. The wetland flora includes bulrush, yellow iris, water-cress, fool's-water-cress, square-stalked St John's-wort, marsh bedstraw, wavy bitter-cress, brooklime, gypsywort, water-plantain, false fox-sedge, pendulous and remote sedge, marsh foxtail, and floating/plicate sweet-grass. A few woodland ground flora species occur in the cutting, such as wood-sedge, male-fern, lady fern, sweet violet, hedge garlic, herb-Robert, and wood avens. In addition, the north-east facing side of a railway bridge over the cutting supports an abundance of two ferns that typically occur on shaded walls: wall rue and hart's-tongue fern.

On the South Park Avenue side of the railway line, near the A15 junction, there is a fringe of scrub and long grass beside a wide, frequently mown road verge where maturing specimen trees include lime, silver birch, sycamore, Norway maple, horse chestnut, and ash. Most botanical interest is centred on a sunny, south-facing sandy bank, supporting field madder, little mouse-ear, common bird's-foot-trefoil, knotted and hop clover, bird's-foot, common stork's-bill, lady's bedstraw, common knapweed, perforate St. John 's-wort, and crested dog's-tail.

### **North West**

Malandry Closes supports plenty of marginal trees and stony pathways through semi-improved grassland of moderate length, where fairs and circuses take place. Most of Queen's Park is frequently mown short grassland with scattered trees; there is also a children's play area. These two locations support a good selection of plants typical of thin soils, such as parsley-piert, thyme-leaved sandwort, sheep's sorrel, buck's-horn plantain, common whitlowgrass, wall speedwell, procumbent pearlwort, sand spurrey, and small-flowered crane's-bill. Of further note is the inconspicuous blinks in damper parts.

### **Fauna**

The variety of habitats on South Common are likely to be suitable for feeding and roosting bats. Butterflies seen during surveys were brimstone, small tortoiseshell, speckled wood, peacock, orange tip, and small copper. Some of the many birds recorded were moorhen, swallow, house martin, common buzzard, kestrel, grey partridge, green woodpecker, song and mistle thrush, common and lesser whitethroat, blackcap, garden and willow warbler, chiffchaff, long-tailed tit, bullfinch, and linnet.

**Criteria passed: WD4a, NG1, HE2, FW2, We2, Sup2**

**First recommended as a Local Wildlife Site: 9 November 2007**

**Boundary extended: 29 March 2017**

## LINCOLN COMMONS SURVEYS: SUMMARY REPORT (June 2019)

### Introduction

In 2019, Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust is carrying out surveys (primarily botanical) of Local Wildlife Sites within the City of Lincoln. This work is funded by City of Lincoln Council (CLC) through Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership, in order to check that the sites warrant retention of LWS status.

In addition, we have investigated impacts of proposed underground cabling by Western Power Distribution and liaised at some length with the developers. Further involvement is expected.

Thirdly, we are involved in revision of the Lincoln Commons Management Plan, both as a 'Critical Friend' to the plan revision author and in reporting key findings from this year's commons surveys. The remainder of this document describes for each of the three commons:

- Current site condition;
- Change in site condition since similar surveys in 2004 and 2006;
- Management issues;
- Recommendations.

The recommendations do not address practicalities such as resource availability, but instead concentrate on the best ways to improve habitats, flora and fauna.

### South Common

I initially surveyed the whole common in early August 2006, whereas the 2019 surveys took place on 20 & 21 May. As a result, this year's data are much more comprehensive with regard to early maturing species, whereas in 2004 the emphasis would have been on later maturing species.

In 2006, the sward was a mixture of smaller, well-grazed areas amongst under-grazed habitat that included substantial tree and shrub growth. Today the situation is broadly the same, except that ongoing lack of adequate grazing has allowed a marked deterioration of most of the sward and substantial spread of bramble, other coarse vegetation and young trees. On a positive note, the pond near the A15 is looking great, following major work associated with recent road improvements.

Thirteen horses were present during the 2019 surveys, a number that had been temporarily higher for a 6 week period in April/May when animals were transferred from West Common during the routine closure of that site. However, there is no doubt that major changes are needed to stop further deterioration of South Common habitats and begin the process of improvement. Some suggestions are as follows:

- Encourage more horse owners to bring their animals to graze at all times of year;
- Introduce cattle grazing in sufficient numbers and for long-enough periods;
- Cut and remove substantial areas of coarse vegetation each year in late summer and autumn;
- Control spreading scrub and suckering and seedling trees;
- Stop planting trees, especially non-native species;
- Remove a proportion of non-native trees and shrubs, particularly Turkey oak and grey alder;
- Remove most of the trees and shrubs around the two central ponds to reduce shade and accumulation of fallen leaves.

An additional concern is the abundance of New Zealand pigmyweed in the northern extension of the southernmost pond. Eradication of this invasive, non-native wetland plant would be highly desirable, but is almost certainly impractical.

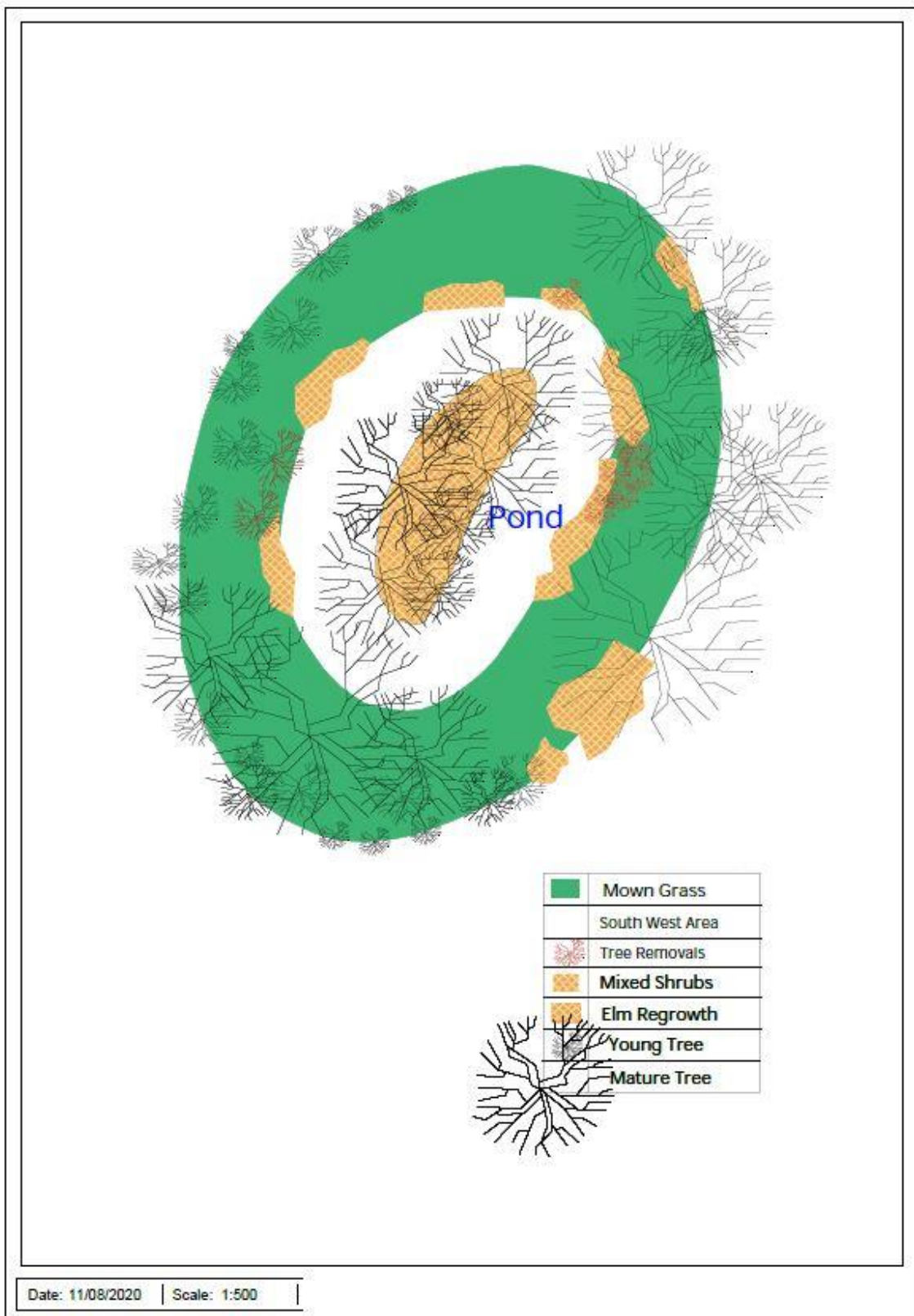
The north-western fringe of the common is not within the grazing area and has no major concerns. Malandry Close and Queen's Park comprise amenity grassland, while the disused railway cutting is largely untouched and will be fine left like that. One positive action that could be carried out is clearance of some tree growth where it casts shade on the north-eastern side of the bridge at the western end of South Park. This would be beneficial to the ferns growing on that side of the bridge.

Jeremy Fraser  
Wildlife Sites Officer

10 June 2019

## Appendix 4

### Tree removals pond B



## Tree removals pond C

