



Green Flag Community Award 2024-25

Name of Site: Mowsbury Hillfort

Name of Community Group: Friends of Putnoe Wood and Mowsbury Hillfort

Field Assessment Comments

Criteria	Strengths	Recommendations
A Welcoming Place		
Welcoming	Signage was clean, and site lines into the site clear providing a good view of the hillfort. The 'Welcome' is appropriate for the site.	The entrance gate could do with some attention – the hanging post has come loose, making the gate difficult to open, and the wooden sign 'Welcome to Mowsbury Hillfort' had bowed. Access to the site from the car park is currently not signed, and not visible to people who don't know the site is there. Improved waymarking, and perhaps a new sign visible from the carpark with site map and noticeboard where the Friends can present upcoming events (work parties, walks, Wassailing event), the results of their species monitoring, seasonal interests, etc. would help promote the site to users and celebrate the work of the Friends group.
Good and safe access	Access around the site is on natural paths where vegetation is cut back to allow walkers access. Surfaced paths would not be desirable or appropriate. Benches are provided by the interpretation panel part way up the hill off the PROW and at the top of the hill to admire the view.	
Signage	The Friends group are keen to keep onsite signage to a minimum to preserve the	See recommendations above under 'Welcoming Site'.

	<p>natural aesthetic of the site. There is one interpretation panel sited off the bridleway that runs to the west of the site. This is an appropriate location which provides a view of the hillfort and is in a position that encourages visitors to walk further into the site to admire the views. The interpretation board was clean and provided interesting information about the site.</p>	<p>In addition, improved signage from local rights of way would help visitors to locate the site.</p> <p>We discussed the potential to add additional information about the site via QR codes (potentially on the existing interpretation panel, or on a new post) to provide further information about the orchard and the trees planted there. If desirable, QR codes could also be attached to existing infrastructure such as the wooden sign on entering the Hillfort, and the bench at the top of the hill. This could link visitors to appropriate information pages on the Friends website to help tell the story of the site.</p>
Equal access for all	<p>The site appears to be largely used by dog walkers, with the Friends encouraging other users through their weekly task groups, ad hoc guided walks, autumn Wassailing event, and school visits.</p>	<p>Analysis of the surrounding community and whether this is reflected in the site users has not been undertaken. Visitors with mobility restrictions would struggle due to the terrain. However, as a countryside site and due to the SM it would not be appropriate for surfaced paths / steps to be added.</p>

Healthy, Safe & Secure

Appropriate level of facilities and activities	<p>This is a countryside site and no visitor facilities are present beyond a couple of benches.</p> <p>The Friends encourage visitors to the site through their weekly task groups, ad hoc guided walks, autumn Wassailing event, and school visits. They actively seek to reach all ages, social and cultural groups.</p>	
Safe equipment and facilities	<p>Equipment wasn't seen on the judging visit, but the Friends shared that they receive appropriate training for the equipment they are given, alongside appropriate training in specific habitat management such as fruit tree pruning, and Butterfly surveying.</p>	
Personal security	<p>The Friends described minimal issues with anti-social behaviour onsite. There was no litter or graffiti seen. Evidence of scorched grass from barbeques was present.</p>	<p>The potential hazard of wayward golf balls entering the site is marked with a large Bedford Council sign. This was quite dirty during the judging visit and would be more visible if clean.</p>
Control of Dogs/Dog fouling	<p>The site is used by dog walkers, although no dog mess was seen.</p>	

Well maintained and Clean		
Litter and waste management	No litter was evident. During the judging visit it was explained that the Friends have recently stopped using their burn site, and instead now either chip arisings and leave has habitat piles / use to fill badger / rabbit excavations on site, or arisings are taken off-site.	
Overall standard of maintenance	The site is very well maintained by the Friends group, particularly given the resources available to them. They achieve a very high standard of site management.	
Graffiti and vandalism	None seen other than the damage by barbecues.	
Environmental Management		
Sustainable materials use	The Friends use chippings from onsite materials to lay on paths fill damage by badgers. The meadow is cut and bailed by a contractor who uses the arisings offsite.	
Waste recycling and minimisation	As above.	
Chemical Use	No chemicals are used.	
Peat use	No peat is used.	
Biodiversity Landscape & Heritage		
Conservation of landscape & historic features	The Friends meet every week with Bedfordshire Council operatives to discuss site management. The Friends meeting every few years with	The Friends shared a suggestion by Historic England to create sightlines from the raised walkway on the south side of the SM out to the valley. Creation of such a sightline through coppicing existing

	representatives from Historic England / Natural England and the Council to discuss management of the Scheduled Monument / biodiversity.	scrub would be beneficial and add an opportunity for visitors to better appreciate the historic setting and use of this walkway. In addition, this would diversify the age structure of the scrub on the south-facing bank which will likely further enhance the site for biodiversity.
Conservation of biodiversity	The site is well managed for biodiversity. The Friends undertake weekly transects during the survey season to count butterflies. This has been ongoing for the last 7 years and provides valuable data on change over time.	The Friends have also historically undertaken botanical surveys and have noted an increase in plant diversity since cutting and lifting operations in the meadows began. These surveys have since ceased. If possible, it would be good for the Friends to join forces with other local interest groups to continue to monitor progress in the meadows.

Community Involvement

Promotion of green space / project	The Friends have an active website and Facebook page promoting their twice-weekly work parties and events. Leaflets of the site are shared at local venues and they have a mailing list to promote events.	The installation of a noticeboard would help promote work parties, events, seasonal interests to visitors. In addition, mobile signage such as a blackboard sandwich board could be used to help inform visitors of the work the Friends undertake whilst out on site.
Links to the wider community	The Friends reach out to local schools, the Parish Council, Wildlife Trust and other groups regarding events.	The Friends could also share their leaflet in local doctor's surgeries to promote the site and the practical activities undertaken by the Friends to support green social prescribing. Current community outreach appears to happen on an ad hoc basis. A more structured plan for engaging with the wider community might be beneficial.
Involvement in decision making	The Friends report back on weekly site visits to the site manager at Bedfordshire Borough Council. The Borough's site manager (Jon Bishop) also regularly visits the site and assesses the condition of trees. Joint assessments with the Friends are undertaken periodically to assess interventions and where specialist work might be required. Jon calls in the assistance of specialist arboriculturists and contractors as necessary, within Council budgetary constraints. Recently Jon and Bedfordshire Borough Council have started keeping a log of reported tree issues.	

Involvement in operations	The Friends undertake most management and maintenance onsite. The Council undertakes tree works and removal of large materials.	
Appropriate provision for the community	As a countryside site there is appropriate provision for the local community.	

Management / achievements

Innovation and creativity	The Friends operate on minimal funds and use their knowledge within the group to great effect. They have produced a very clear and concise Vision document. They have an active Facebook account, and use their contacts with other organisations to good effect. The Wassailing event sounds like it is a well-organised and fun event that the community enjoys.	It would be good to see future planning reflected in the Vision document, particularly in regards to addressing some of the opportunities and threats highlighted: succession planning for Ash dieback, identification of future mature trees on site, plans to open views, improve signage, etc. Some new planting has been undertaken alongside the driving range for the golf course. It would be good to see a long-term plan to extend this planting so that it can become the screen that the Friends intend it to be.
Resources secured / used	Funding is received from the Borough for equipment, and brought in by the Wassailing event. No other external funding resources have been secured in 2023.	It sounds like Bedfordshire Borough Council do not have capacity to maximise external funding pots or administer grants on the Friends' behalf. The Friends also do not appear to have had any support in being made aware of potential sources of funding for the site, and how they might be able to access such funds and what might be involved.

Additional Comments

Mowsbury Hillfort is a well-maintained site, with a very active and diligent Friends group. They have achieved some wonderful improvements to the site, particularly with regards to increasing the botanical diversity of the grasslands - they undertake quite substantial cutting and lifting operations with raking by hand which is to be commended. Their weekly butterfly counts during the survey season will also be producing really valuable data on the success of management over time.

Financial support is limited, and conversation during the visit suggested there is not the will nor the time within Bedfordshire County Council to enter into another agri-environment scheme. Whilst the Friends are maintaining the site very well with ad hoc input from Historic England and Natural England, longer-term succession planning is lacking. The Friends raised concerns about succession within the group itself and being able to hand over the reins of the Friends group to new members in time. It seems there is a lot of really valuable knowledge within the group and it is important that this is recorded within a management plan to ensure that future managers can understand the context, how the site is being managed and aspirations for the site.

Equally, succession planning for the site itself is important – planning for future trees, addressing the impact of pests and disease such as ash dieback, mapping the types of fruit trees within the orchard (the trees in the orchard have been plotted,

but the varieties of fruit trees have not been recorded). Management plans can be expensive and time consuming to produce, however, should funding become available it would be beneficial for the site to have one.

CABE Space's A Guide to Producing Park and Green Space Management Plans remains the best guidance to follow. <https://parkscommunity.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/WriteParkManagementPlans.pdf>



Site entrance



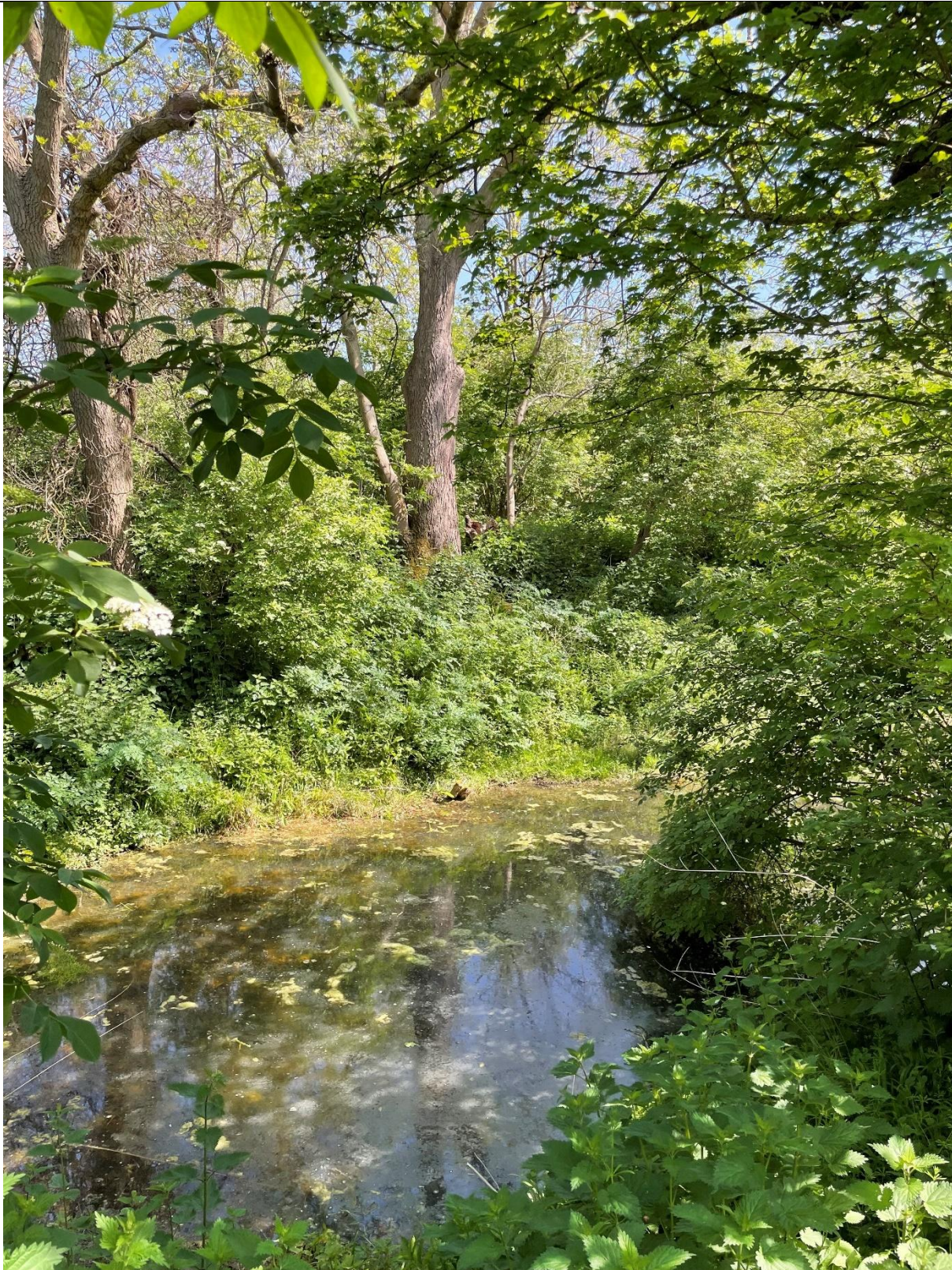
Interpretation panel with hillfort earthworks visible in background.



Courtyard meadow



Courtyard meadow: cowslip, twayblade



Moat



Path along medieval ditch and mound.



Banks of SM



View of driving range from wildflower meadow with line of new planting in front of fence.