

THE FRIENDS OF ASTON'S EYOT

England & Wales · Charity number 1185744

Details

Status Registered

Legal form CIO

Registered 2019-10-10

Register [View on the Charity Commission register](#)

Contact

Address 139 Hurst Street
Oxford
OX4 1HE

Phone 01865248344

Email info@friendsofastonseyot.org

Website <https://friendsofastonseyot.org>

Activities

Objects: 1) TO PROMOTE THE CONSERVATION, PROTECTION AND IMPROVEMENT OF THE PHYSICAL AND NATURAL ENVIRONMENT, INCLUDING BIODIVERSITY, OF ASTON'S EYOT, THE AREA OF OXFORD BOUNDED BY THE RIVERS THAMES AND CHERWELL AND THE SHIRELAKE DITCH, IN PARTICULAR BUT NOT EXCLUSIVELY BY: A) CARRYING OUT WORK TO PROTECT, CARE FOR AND MANAGE OR ASSIST IN MANAGING THE SITE AS A HABITAT FOR WILDLIFE AND AS A WILD AREA. B) SURVEYING AND RECORDING SPECIES OF FAUNA AND FLORA PRESENT, DISSEMINATING THE USEFUL RESULTS OF THE SURVEYS FOR THE PUBLIC BENEFIT. C) INVOLVING THE WIDER PUBLIC IN ACTIVITIES SUCH AS WORKING PARTIES, WILDLIFE EVENTS, PATH MAINTENANCE AND OTHER EVENTS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE OBJECTS OR OTHER EVENTS ACCEPTABLE TO THE LANDOWNERS WITH THEIR PERMISSION AND IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE OBJECTS. 2) TO PROMOTE FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE INHABITANTS OF OXFORD AND THE SURROUNDING AREA THE PROVISION OF FACILITIES FOR RECREATION OR OTHER LEISURE TIME OCCUPATION IN THE INTERESTS OF SOCIAL WELFARE AND WITH THE OBJECT OF IMPROVING THE CONDITION OF LIFE OF THE SAID INHABITANTS.

Activities: Promoting wildlife and public access to Aston's Eyot, a former rubbish tip turned nature reserve in East Oxford, through increasing biodiversity (habitat management) and path maintenance. Also involving local residents in wildlife events - dawn chorus and plant identification walks, moth trapping, bat detecting and volunteer work parties involving planting, scything, litter picking etc.

Classification

- **How:** Other Charitable Activities
- **What:** General Charitable Purposes, Education/training, Environment/conservation/heritage, Recreation
- **Who:** The General Public/mankind

Geography

- **Area of benefit:** LOCAL
- Oxfordshire

Finances

Period end	Income	Expenditure	Assets	Employees
2025-09-26	£10,854	£8,826	-	-
2024-09-26	£3,534	£15,638	-	-
2023-09-26	£16,040	£7,129	-	-
2022-09-26	£7,750	£7,326	-	-
2021-09-26	£3,274	£1,400	-	-
2020-09-26	£2,146	£1,608	-	-

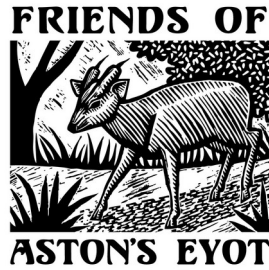
Trustees

Name	Role	Appointed
Dr Anthony Stephen Cheke	Chair	2024-11-13
Ashok Stally-Chudasama		2025-11-11
Charlotte Ellis		2024-11-13
Dr Ruth Elizabeth Ashcroft		2025-11-11
Laurence White Burrell		2025-11-11
Susanna Jakobsson Thomas		2025-11-11
Thelma Lynne Martin		2024-11-13

THE FRIENDS OF ASTON'S EYOT

England & Wales - Charity number 1185744

Accounts



The Friends of Aston's Eyot

*Charitable Incorporated Organisation
Registered Charity No. 1185744*

Trustees' Annual Report and Financial Statement

for the accounting year ending 26 September 2024

Report date: July 2025

1. Reference and administration details

1.1 Charity name and Registration

The Friends of Aston's Eyot. Also known as: Friends of Aston's Eyot
The charity is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation , registration number 1185744,
registered with the Charity Commission on 10 October 2019.

1.2 Charity's address

c/o 139 Hurst Street, Oxford, OX4 1HE
email: info@friendsofastonseyot.org
website: <https://friendsofastonseyot.org>

1.3 Names of the Trustees who manage the Charity

	Role	Date appointed	Date retired
Anthony Cheke	Chair	13 November 2024	Re-elected
Ruth Ashcroft	Co-chair	23 November 2023	
Laurence Burrell	Treasurer	23 November 2023	
Charlotte Ellis		13 November 2024	Re-elected
Susie Jakobsson		23 November 2023	
Thelma Martin	Secretary	13 November 2024	Re-elected
Ashok Stally-Chudasama		23 November 2023	

1.4 Names of advisors and senior members of staff

None. There are no paid staff.

1.5 Bank

The Co-operative Bank, PO Box 250, Skelmersdale WN8 6WT

2 Structure, governance & management

2.1 Type of governing document

Constitution based on Charity Commission's model for a CIO with members

2.2 Charitable Objectives

1. To promote the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment, including biodiversity, of Aston's Eyot, the area of Oxford bounded by the rivers Thames and Cherwell and the Shire Lake ditch, in particular but not exclusively by:

a) carrying out work to protect, care for and manage or assist in managing the site as a habitat for wildlife and as a wild area.

b) surveying and recording species of fauna and flora present, disseminating the useful results of the surveys for the public benefit.

c) involving the wider public in activities such as working parties, wildlife events, path maintenance and other events in accordance with the objects or other events acceptable to the Landowners with their permission and in accordance with the objects.

2. To promote for the benefit of the inhabitants of Oxford and the surrounding area the provision of facilities for recreation or other leisure time occupation in the interests of social welfare and with the object of improving the life of the said inhabitants.

2.3 Trustee selection methods

There must be at least 3 trustees. The maximum number is 12. Trustees are elected according to the Constitution at the Annual General Meeting of members. At the first AGM all the trustees must retire, and in subsequent years half must retire by rotation. Those retired may stand for re-election.

2.4 Committees

The day to day management of the Friends is organised by a committee consisting of the trustees, and from time to time other committee members (one this year) who are not a trustee.

3. Public benefit

3.1 The trustees of The Friends of Aston's Eyot confirm that they have paid due regard to the guidance issued by the Charity Commission on public benefit in deciding what activities the charity should undertake.

4. Executive summary of activities and achievements

There were 91 paid up members. 8-20 people attended monthly work parties, and there were 4 further sessions with other conservation volunteer groups each attended by around 20 people. Up to 60 people volunteered individually and in smaller ad hoc volunteering sessions.

Core conservation management and survey work, supporting public access and volunteering, and maintaining good communication with members and visitors, were all continued. A

scythe course was run successfully to encourage scything on Aston's Eyot, especially for path maintenance. A second shed was installed for tools and kit.

The main conservation achievement was the creation of a new complex of three large ponds and a boggy area, with surrounding plantings, all protected by perimeter fencing against deer and dogs.

The project to improve the water quality and aquatic habitats of the Shire Lake ditch was developed further to improve water flow and let more light into the ditch.

The pollinator patch project on the Kidneys was extended with further patches stripped of turf and sown with meadow flower species. Similar patches were also stripped or had nettles dug out and then resown on the Aston's Eyot meadows

5. Activities, achievements and performance – full report

5.1. Main aims this year. In addition to keeping key conservation management and survey work going, supporting public access and volunteering, and maintaining good communications with members and visitors, our **specific aims for the year** were to:

- a) Install a second shed for improved tool and kit storage
- b) Run a scything course with the aim of establishing a scythe team
- c) Deliver the ponds project near Jackdaw Lane
- d) Begin a project to restore water quality and flow in the Shire Lake Ditch
- e) Further improve deer enclosure fencing.
- f) Make more scrapes for establishing meadow flowers on both the Kidneys and Aston's Eyot
- g) Continue plans to zone Aston's Eyot for areas of more or less human and dog access, and with more and less active management interventions

5.2 Public access, volunteering and communications

a) Public access and paths. Aston's Eyot continues to be very well used by a wide variety of people walking, running, walking dogs, and enjoying the rivers. With so much rain this year the nettles grew taller than usual, making it harder to keep up with the mowing and scything of the smaller paths in summer.

Oxford City Council assisted by mowing main paths, continuing a previous agreement with the landowner to do this.

b) Membership numbered 91 by the end of the Sept 2023-4 year, a similar figure to the previous year. Membership subscriptions had remained unchanged at £5 pa since 2010, and a policy of encouraging people to give more had some limited success. At the AGM in November 2023 it was agreed to raise the annual subscription to £8 minimum.

c) Anti-social behaviour. Perhaps because of the wet weather, there were few problems this year, with fewer fires and problematic parties.

d). Volunteering. Work parties on the last Sunday afternoon of every month were well attended with 10-20 people attending each time. Smaller extra volunteer sessions were also held on a more ad hoc basis for nettle pulling, the scything, and pond creation work. Many

people put in individual effort as wildflower patch champions, nettle pullers and diggers, and litter pickers. The general community effort to keep an eye on things and deal with problems had a significant effect on keeping the site litter free and calm.

A whole day scything course took place in July, led by professional scyther Nicole Clough, with the aim of kick-starting a new scythe team for the Eyot. Those who attended learnt a lot especially about scythe maintenance – but we are still looking for an effective scythe team.

We had 4 sessions with groups of around 15-30 people from Oxford Conservation Volunteers to help with pond creation, pollard waterside willows, and woodland work. Good Gym teams of around 20 people came 3 times to scythe nettles and clear branches overhanging paths.

We also had two days of mowing and some gravel shifting from the City Council (via Oxford Direct Services) countryside team.

A second shed was installed to store the increasing quantities of tools and kit required for projects and larger volunteer groups.

e) Website, calendar, newsletters and social media. Work continued on the website, particularly to improve function on smartphones and for visitors on site. Ability to take donations and membership subscriptions through it via Paypal was developed. Digital illustrated newsletters were sent out to members twice during the year. Posts were placed regularly to the Facebook page to advertise news, events, and sightings. WhatsApp groups are now being used for some volunteer communications and to share observations and sightings. The calendar was produced as usual, yielding useful income; it is illustrated with photos taken on Aston's Eyot sent in by visitors and members; these are valuable not only aesthetically but for the record of species seen and the current habitats and landscapes of the Eyot.

5.3 Habitat restoration and creation.

Ponds project. This is a project to create a group of clean water ponds for wildlife, to complement the more polluted habitat of the Shire Lake Ditch and the large seasonal pond on the adjacent Long Meadow. These new ponds (North Ponds), like the trial ponds made in 2022 (South Ponds), were designed to be mainly very shallow, fish-free, and rain filled so that they have clean water. Oxford Conservation Volunteers (OCV) first cleared the new ponds site of nettles and brambles in November 2022. Work began in September 2023 to level the site then dig out the basic pond shapes with a mini-digger operated by an experienced volunteer. There were further volunteer sessions to line and fill a bog area, fine tune pond shapes and edges, remove sharp bits, and line the first of the ponds. OCV came again in November 2023 with a large team to finish fine-tuning the shapes and lining the last two of the three new ponds, and shifting over 15 tons of sand to cover the liners. The whole site was then fenced against deer (to prevent water edge plants being eaten out) and dogs (to avoid damage, disturbance, and pollution from flea treatments). In March 2024, water edge plants were seeded round the edges, in part with locally collected seed. With a rainy winter and spring the ponds filled rapidly and new sowings grew away well. The new ponds were sampled in July 2024 and a variety of aquatic invertebrate species were recorded.

The South (trial) Ponds dug in spring 2022 have continued to be successful, with water levels remaining high, and with the vegetation developing further. They have been much frequented

by birds (including a pair of mallards in spring), dragonflies, water beetles and other wildlife including frogs and common newts.

Shire Lake Ditch project. The ditch has been subject to serious sewage pollution coming from misconnected foul water pipes in a number of local properties and a restaurant, which was feeding into the surface drainage system emptying into the ditch at Jackdaw Lane. Thames Water corrected this in spring 2022, but with poor water through flow, the pollution has been slow to clear and there are still episodes of very poor water quality. A project has been started to a) improve flow, and b) let more light onto the water to promote natural breakdown of the pollutants and help aquatic vegetation begin to return. This has involved a series of volunteer sessions to remove branches and other blockages in the ditch, and to cut back overshadowing vegetation. We begin to see growth of more aquatic plants, more fish, and kingfishers successfully fishing along stretches of the ditch.

Deer exclosures. Muntjac numbers in particular have grown very high reaching a peak in the 2024-5 winter. The impact on ground flora has been dramatic with very few plant species not eaten. Deer exclosures made over the last few years have made a very noticeable difference to plant diversity, but it has proved harder to keep the deer out despite regular maintenance. More robust fencing is planned.

Conservation areas. To help keep a large central area free of human and dog disturbance, dead hedges were made to help limit access. One section of this area is mowed plus other management interventions; the rest is left untouched. This is part of a plan in progress to zone the Eyot into areas with more or less management intervention, and with and without human and dog access.

Trees. We undertake an annual tree safety check following Forestry Commission guidelines for land managers. The ash dieback situation has not become much worse this year – probably the trees were helped by a wetter summer, and a number of affected trees have shown good signs of recovery. Tree surgeons were employed to remove 3 unsafe trees.

The Kidneys Nature Park is the City Council owned adjacent site, where Friends of Aston's Eyot are also involved with management since the two sites are physically connected and act as a single unit both ecologically and for human visitors. The pollinator patches created in previous years to add meadow plant diversity continue to do well on the Kidneys meadow – the deer have a much lower impact here compared to Aston's Eyot, and the plants are spreading very gradually outwards from the patches. To help the project along, the City Council made five more patches by stripping the turf in late summer 2023, to augment the ones we already have. These have been seeded with meadow flowers, which are now growing well. Noticeably more butterflies and bees are seen in pollinator patches than in the rest of the meadow.

Aston's Eyot meadows. In addition to routine management we stripped the turf from small patches on two meadow areas, and dug out nettles on further areas, then sowed with meadow flower species to increase floral diversity here.

5.4 Wildlife surveys and sightings

Badgers. 56 active badger sett entrances were counted in February 2024, up from 49 last year, but remaining lower than previous years. Entrances are dug and abandoned all the time, and it is always hard to interpret these counts. It may be that adult numbers went down perhaps due to the 2022 summer's drought making feeding more difficult, and are now recovering again. The Oxfordshire Badger Group returned in May 2024 for the fourth and final round of vaccination against TB – they caught and vaccinated 7 adults. No white badgers were caught by them or seen on the trail cams, whereas in 2022 there were two.

Camera trapping continued as usual with two volunteer teams, and with a variety of mammals and birds recorded, making a useful insight into the wildlife less often seen. It has confirmed the continuing presence of rabbits, and visiting otter.

Deer. A single survey in February 2024 resulted in 12 Muntjac seen – up from the 8 seen in March 2023. By February 2025 there were 13 live animals and 2 very recently dead ones, adding to the view that population numbers have risen to a very high level. The Muntjac in particular were very visible and numerous through the 2024-5 winter, and were eating plants they never normally do, such as snowdrop. Up to 4 Roe were seen, which suggests a steady population.

Other mammals. Foxes were very regularly seen. Rabbits seem to be doing better, judging by droppings seen and trail cam footage recording them in more parts of the Eyot.

Birds. The tit nest-boxes normally have a very high occupancy and success rate, but this summer (2024), like last year, there were more boxes unused or with nests started but abandoned before completion. The birds which did lay eggs had a significantly lower success rate with at least 35% failing to rear young. This may have been due to rain making feeding more difficult; there were also signs of sparrowhawk activity. Bird sightings of note included woodcock, common sandpiper passing through, grey wagtail regularly seen, and a cuckoo heard on site.

Frogs and toads had a better year judging by the numbers seen.

Butterflies. The overcast rainy weather had an impact on butterfly numbers once again. 17 species were seen; Small Tortoiseshell hardly at all. Cinnabar moth caterpillars were abundant on ragwort.

Plants. No surveys this year except for Japanese Knotweed. One small plant found on the Old Knotweed Patch – none on Claire's Patch and the Elsevier Patch. In general it was noted that the number of species being eaten by deer has increased again, with very little teasel, burdock, hogweed, mallow and hedge cranesbill surviving compared to recent years – leaving very few ground flora species untouched.

6. Financial Review

6.1 Sources of income and outgoings

During the financial year to 26.9.24:

Income came from membership subscriptions, donations, sale of calendars, and the first 4 years of claimed Gift Aid. We still had in hand most of the two grants received at the end of the last financial year: an Awards for All grant from the National Lottery Community Fund, and a River and Wetlands Community Days grant funded by Thames Water via the Wild Trout Trust. The balance from these carried forward was £9411.06.

Sales of calendars produced a net profit of £355.76, and Gift Aid for the first 4 years amounted to £1333.68.

Outgoings were for standard running costs including removal of dangerous trees, and grant-funded projects of which the key one was the ponds project. Both grants were spent within the time periods specified (mainly by the end of the 2023-4 winter).

The **balance** carried forward at 26 Sept 2024 was £1509.35, and this was all unrestricted funds. This is a lower figure than the previous September when the unrestricted part of the balance carried forward was £4203, so efforts were made subsequently to increase the balance – since achieved through general fundraising.

6.2 Reserves policy

There is no formal reserves policy, as basic running costs have been low. Informally, reserves have been kept for a year's essential running costs such as public liability insurance and tree safety work. We aim for this to be around £4000 to allow for the predicted increase in essential tree surgeon costs with increasing likelihood of storm damage, riverbank erosion, and the need to fell as a result of Ash Dieback which is beginning to affect ash trees on Aston's Eyot.

6.3 Financial status

The charity currently has resources from unrestricted donations and subscriptions that are sufficient to meet its essential outgoings for at least another year, and it is expected that that will continue to be the case.

6.4 Restricted Funds

The grants received (£12,340) from the National Lottery and RCCD were awarded for specific projects, to be spent by end June 2024. This is now spent as agreed.

6.5 Details of any funds materially in deficit

The charity has no funds materially in deficit.

6.6 Remuneration of trustees

All trustees act in a voluntary capacity and receive no remuneration or other material benefits from their services to the charity. Out of pocket expenses necessarily and reasonably incurred by trustees in promoting the purposes of the charity are reimbursed at cost.

6.7 Statutory statements on liabilities

The trustees declare that

- a) The charity has given no guarantees where potential liability under the guarantee is outstanding at the date of this statement

b) The charity has no outstanding debts which are secured by an express charge on any of the assets of the charity at the date of this statement.

Approved by the Trustees and signed on their behalf,

Ruth Ashcroft, Co-chair

15 July 2025

7. Receipts and payments accounts for financial year to 26.09.24

RECEIPTS	This year	Last year
	£	£
Subscriptions & donations	1517.83	1472.40
Sale of calendars	682.20	710.50
Gift Aid	1333.68	
Art auction		1517.00
Grants		12340.00
Total receipts	3533.71	16039.90
Opening balance at start of year	13614.00	4703.50
	17147.71	20743.40
 PAYMENTS		
Insurance	212.86	155.94
AGM room hire	20.00	20.00
Solicitors' fee re lease	586.00	
Printing calendars	326.44	353.40
Tree work	2990.00	550.00
Tools & small kit	121.60	184.89
Fencing & tree guards	1271.53	596.17
Seeds and plants	351.11	
Trail cameras & batteries	212.97	152.49
Pond construction materials	8364.37	329.56
Scything Course	390.00	
Mower repair & service	260.34	
Path materials		398.33
Lottery grant Feb 2022 (tools & fencing)		851.88
Lottery Grant July 2023 (shed & bog materials)		2982.94
Oxford Conservation Volunteers	440.00	600.00
Wild Oxfordshire subs	35.00	35.00
Website costs		304.57
Sundries	56.14	218.65
 Total payments	15638.36	7129.40
 Closing balance at end of year	1509.35	13614.00
	17147.71	20743.40

The accounts were prepared by Hon. Treasurer Laurence Burrell.

8. Approval of the Trustees

The Trustees declare that they have approved the above Annual Report and Statement of financial activity.

Signed on behalf of the trustees

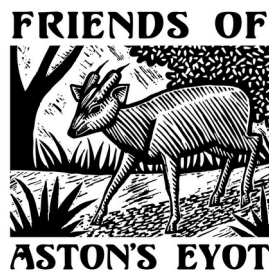
Name: Anthony Cheke

Role: Chair

THE FRIENDS OF ASTON'S EYOT

England & Wales - Charity number 1185744

Accounts



The Friends of Aston's Eyot

Charitable Incorporated Organisation

Registered Charity No. 1185744

Trustees' Annual Report and Financial Statement

for the accounting year ending 26 September 2023

Report date: June 2024

1. Reference and administration details

1.1 Charity name and Registration

The Friends of Aston's Eyot. Also known as: Friends of Aston's Eyot

The charity is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, registration number 1185744, registered with the Charity Commission on 10 October 2019.

1.2 Charity's address

c/o 139 Hurst Street, Oxford, OX4 1HE

email: info@friendsofastonseyot.org

website: <https://friendsofastonseyot.org>

1.3 Names of the Trustees who manage the Charity

	Role	Date appointed	Date retired
Anthony Cheke	Chair	24 November 2022	Re-elected Nov 22
Ruth Ashcroft	Co-chair	18 November 2021	Re-elected Nov 23
Laurence Burrell	Treasurer	18 November 2021	Re-elected Nov 23
Charlotte Ellis		24 November 2022	Re-elected Nov 22
Adam Gibbon		10 November 2020	24 November 2022
Susie Jakobsson-Thomas		18 November 2021	Re-elected Nov 23
Thelma Martin	Secretary	24 November 2022	Re-elected Nov 22
Ashok Stally-Chudasama		18 November 2021	Re-elected Nov 23

1.4 Names of advisors and senior members of staff

None. There are no paid staff.

1.5 Bank

The Co-operative Bank, PO Box 250, Skelmersdale WN8 6WT

2 Structure, governance & management

2.1 Type of governing document

Constitution based on Charity Commission's model for a CIO with members

2.2 Charitable Objectives

1. To promote the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment, including biodiversity, of Aston's Eyot, the area of Oxford bounded by the rivers Thames and Cherwell and the Shire Lake ditch, in particular but not exclusively by:

a) carrying out work to protect, care for and manage or assist in managing the site as a habitat for wildlife and as a wild area.

b) surveying and recording species of fauna and flora present, disseminating the useful results of the surveys for the public benefit.

c) involving the wider public in activities such as working parties, wildlife events, path maintenance and other events in accordance with the objects or other events acceptable to the Landowners with their permission and in accordance with the objects.

2. To promote for the benefit of the inhabitants of Oxford and the surrounding area the provision of facilities for recreation or other leisure time occupation in the interests of social welfare and with the object of improving the life of the said inhabitants.

2.3 Trustee selection methods

There must be at least 3 trustees. The maximum number is 12. Trustees are elected according to the Constitution at the Annual General Meeting of members. At the first AGM all the trustees must retire, and in subsequent years half must retire by rotation. Those retired may stand for re-election.

2.4 Committees

The day to day management of the Friends is organised by a committee consisting of the trustees plus currently one other committee members who is not a trustee.

3. Public benefit

3.1 The trustees of The Friends of Aston's Eyot confirm that they have paid due regard to the guidance issued by the Charity Commission on public benefit in deciding what activities the charity should undertake.

4. Executive summary of activities and achievements

Terms of a 21-year lease at peppercorn rent were agreed with landowner Christ Church and the lease finally signed in November 2022, though the lease runs from December 2020.

There were 95 paid up members. 8-20 people attended monthly work parties, and there were 4 further sessions with other conservation volunteer groups each attended by around 20 people. Up to 60 people volunteered individually and in smaller ad hoc volunteering sessions.

Core conservation management and survey work, supporting public access and volunteering, and maintaining good communication with members and visitors, were all continued.

Further riverside path improvements were made.

Woodland habitats were improved with some selective felling. Deer exclosures protecting new plantings and ground flora were significantly upgraded. Gaps in hedging were planted up on sister site The Kidneys, and scrapes for new pollinator patches made. Dead hedges were made with cut branches to maintain the protection of conservation areas from disturbance by people and dogs.

A new complex of three large ponds were created, and fenced against deer and dogs.

Serious sewage pollution in the Shire Lake Ditch arising from contaminated surface drainage inlets was monitored and tackled by persuading Thames Water to act so that seven properties found to have misconnected foul water pipes were corrected in 2022. Overgrowth round the most polluted inlet was cut back to help this habitat recover.

5. Activities, achievements and performance – full report

5.1. Main aims this year. In addition to keeping key conservation management and survey work going, supporting public access and volunteering, and maintaining good communications with members and visitors, our **specific aims for the year** were to:

- a) Finalise lease of Aston's Eyot from the landowner Christ Church
- b) Continue path improvement especially along Thames path
- c) Develop a ponds creation project near Jackdaw Lane
- d) Raise funds for the ponds project, a needed second tool-shed, more tools, tree work and general maintenance
- e) Tackle aftermath of pollution incidents in the Shire Lake Ditch
- f) Further improve deer exclosure fencing and enlarge some exclosures
- g) Make more scrapes for establishing meadow flowers

5.2 Lease from Christ Church. After 4 years of negotiation, the trustees agreed with the College acceptable terms for a 21 lease for Aston's Eyot at a rent of £1 per year (if demanded). This lease was signed at the end of November 2022; the term of the lease starts on 25 December 2020. As Aston's Eyot is not registered with the Land Registry, but the ownership of the land is not in doubt, it was decided to register this lease as a "Good Leasehold". To date this has not been completed due to delays at the Land Registry.

The idea of leasing Aston's Eyot arose five years ago when the College made it clear that it wished to spend no more money on managing Aston's Eyot, and were looking for a sustainable solution for the site. Leasing the site to the Friends was seen on both sides as a positive and constructive way forward. The advantages of a lease for FoAE include the longer term security of tenure, and advantages for fund-raising and for getting help from the City Council and other organisations. The Friends had anyway become responsible for almost all the maintenance. The lease brings somewhat greater liabilities, but it transpired that the insurance required to cover this did not lead to an increase in insurance costs.

5.3 Public access, volunteering and communications

a) Public access and paths. Oxford Conservation Volunteers made further improvements to the path along the Thames bank by levelling and protecting the bank with a willow picket fence.

Oxford City Council assisted by mowing main paths, continuing a previous agreement with the landowner to do this. Smaller paths were kept clear by volunteer scything.

b) Membership numbered 95 by the end of the Sept 2022-3 year, showing a slight decrease from the previous year. While membership subscriptions remained unchanged at £5 during

this year, the policy of encouraging people to give more had continued with some limited success. At the AGM in November it was agreed to raise the annual subscription to £8 minimum.

c) Anti-social behaviour. Perhaps because of the wet weather, there were few problems this year, with fewer fires and problematic parties.

d). Volunteering. Work parties on the last Sunday afternoon of every month were well attended with 10-20 people attending each time. Smaller extra volunteer sessions were also held on a more ad hoc basis for nettle pulling, the scything, and pond creation work. Many people put in individual effort as wildflower patch champions, nettle pullers and diggers, and litter pickers. The general community effort to keep an eye on things and deal with problems had a significant effect on keeping the site litter free and calm.

We also had two days of mowing and some gravel shifting from the City Council (via Oxford Direct Services) countryside team, 2 sessions with groups of around 20 people from Oxford Conservation Volunteers and 2 sessions with Good Gym teams also of around 20 people.

e) Art auction. An inaugural art auction was held on 26 April 2023 at the James Street Tavern. Local artists very kindly donated pieces, and £1517 was raised.

f) Website, calendar, newsletters and social media. Work continued on the website, particularly to improve function on smartphones, and ability to take donations through it was developed. Digital illustrated newsletters were sent out to members three times during the year. Posts were placed regularly to the Facebook page to advertise news, events, and sightings. WhatsApp groups are now being used for some volunteer communications. The calendar was produced as usual and sold out, yielding useful income. It uses photos taken on Aston's Eyot sent in by visitors and members; these are valuable not only aesthetically but for the record of species seen and the current habitats and landscapes of the Eyot.

5.4 Habitat improvements.

Ponds project. This project was to create a group of clean water ponds for wildlife, to complement the more polluted habitat of the Shire Lake Ditch and the large seasonal pond on the adjacent Long Meadow. These new ponds (North Ponds), like the trial ponds made 18 months ago (South Ponds), were designed to be mainly very shallow, fish-free, and rain filled so that they have clean water. Oxford Conservation Volunteers (OCV) first cleared the new ponds site of nettles and brambles in November 2022. Through the following summer we had volunteer sessions to scythe down the regrown nettles ready for work in September 2023 to level the site then dig out the basic pond shapes with a mini-digger. There were further volunteer sessions to line and fill a bog area, fine tune pond shapes and edges, remove sharp bits, and line the first of the ponds. OCV came again in November 2023 with a large team to finish fine-tuning the shapes and lining the last two of the three new ponds, and shifting over 15 tons of sand to cover the liners. Water edge plants were seeded round the edges, in part with locally collected seed. With a rainy winter and spring the ponds filled rapidly and new sowings grew away well.

The South (trial) Ponds dug in spring 2022 have been successful, with water levels not dropping below half full, and with the vegetation developing look much less raw. They have been much frequented by birds (including a pair of mallards in spring), dragonflies, water beetles and other wildlife. There is at least one adult frog in residence.

Shire Lake Ditch. The ditch has been subject to serious sewage pollution coming from misconnected foul water pipes in a number of local properties and a restaurant, which was feeding into the surface drainage system emptying into the ditch at Jackdaw Lane. Thames

Water corrected this in spring 2022, but with poor water through flow, the pollution has been slow to clear. To help the process, a few trees and other overhanging vegetation was cleared by volunteers to let light in to the area to promote natural breakdown of the pollutants and help aquatic vegetation begin to return.

Deer exclosures. In summer 2022, both the muntjac and roe deer learned to either jump or push underneath our 4ft fences on deer exclosures, and ate large quantities of the meadow, riverside and woodland flowers inside. Over last winter and this spring, we made all the fencing on deer exclosures more effective by increasing the height to at least 5ft and having a flange at the bottom to prevent squeezing underneath. This has worked well so far, and the impact on the vegetation has been very noticeable with all the flower species bouncing back quickly. On unprotected areas we found that teasel and burdock are now also being eaten, making the list of plant species not much eaten by the deer smaller still. A snap deer census in February 2024 showed that the numbers of Muntjac in particular have increased to record levels, explaining the increasing grazing pressure on the ground flora. A large Thames-side exclosure was cleared of thistle and sedge to allow return of diverse riverbank vegetation previously lost to deer grazing.

Conservation areas. To help keep a large central area free of human and dog disturbance, dead hedges were made to help limit access. One section of this area is mowed plus other management interventions; the rest is left untouched.

Trees. We undertake an annual tree safety check following Forestry Commission guidelines for land managers. The ash dieback situation has not become much worse this year – probably the trees were helped by a wetter summer. Tree surgeons were employed to remove an alder leaning dangerously low over the Cherwell, and to remove a few unsafe trees and branches. We also have a new volunteer who is a licensed chainsaw user who has done occasional smaller jobs.

The Kidneys Nature Park is the City Council owned adjacent site, where Friends of Aston's Eyot are also involved with management since the two sites are physically connected and act as a single unit both ecologically and for human visitors. The pollinator patches created in previous years to add meadow plant diversity continue to do well on the Kidneys meadow – the deer have a much lower impact here compared to Aston's Eyot, and the plants are spreading very gradually outwards from the patches. To help the project along, the City Council made five more patches by stripping the turf, to augment the ones we already have. These have been seeded with meadow flowers. Noticeably more butterflies and bees are seen in pollinator patches than in the rest of the meadow. We also used the mini-digger while we had it to dig out two patches on the main meadow on Aston's Eyot for re-seeding.

5.4 Wildlife surveys and sightings

Badgers. 49 active badger sett entrances were counted in February, down from 75 last year. Entrances are dug and abandoned all the time, and it is always hard to interpret these counts. It may be that adult numbers are down, perhaps due to dispersal out to other sites, perhaps due to last summer's drought making feeding more difficult. The Oxfordshire Badger Group returned in May 2023 for the third round of vaccination against TB – they caught and vaccinated 5 adults and 3 cubs (10 adults and 1 cub last year). No white badgers were caught by them or seen on the trail cams, whereas last year there were two.

Camera trapping continued as usual, with a variety of mammals and birds recorded, making a useful insight into the wildlife less often seen.

Deer. A single survey in February 2024 resulted in 12 Muntjac seen – up from the 8 seen in March 2023, adding to the view that population numbers have risen to a very high level. Up to 4 Roe were seen, which suggests a steady population.

Other mammals. Foxes were very regularly seen. Rabbits seem to be doing better, judging by droppings seen and trail cam footage recording them in more parts of the Eyot. A pair of otters were seen swimming the length of the Shire Lake Ditch in early January. Water voles were seen at both Kingfisher Point and in the ditch near Muntjac Point.

Birds. The tit nest-boxes normally have a very high occupancy and success rate, but this summer there were more boxes unused or with nests started but abandoned before completion. The birds which did lay eggs had a significantly lower success rate with at least 36% failing to rear young. This may have been due to rain making feeding more difficult; there were also signs of sparrowhawk activity. The Cowley cubs group kindly made us 8 nestboxes which will go up this winter to augment numbers and replace damaged ones.

Bird sightings of note included Water Rail and Snipe in the ditch in December, Grey and Pied Wagtail, Willow Warbler, Firecrest, Redpoll, Bullfinch, Nuthatch, Tufted Duck, Coot, Little Egret, and (overhead) Hobby, Woodcock, Oystercatcher, Lapwing, Raven, Meadow Pipit, Common tern, Skylark, and a cuckoo heard several times at a distance. Ring-neck Parakeets are now regularly seen flying in groups. The Plantation Tawny owl is regularly seen and heard

Butterflies. 19 species were recorded. Marbled White were seen again on the Kidneys and the Eyot, and Small Coppers also seen. Red Admirals were very numerous this year, but Small Tortoiseshells were hardly seen at all.

Plants. No surveys this year except for Japanese Knotweed. One small plant found on the Old Knotweed Patch – none on Claire's Patch and the Elsevier Patch. In general it was noted that the number of species being eaten by deer has increased again, with very little teasel, burdock, hogweed, mallow and hedge cranesbill surviving compared to recent years – leaving very few ground flora species untouched.

6. Financial Review

6.1 Sources of income and outgoings

During the financial year to 26.9.23:

Income came from membership subscriptions, donations, sale of calendars, an art auction, and two grants: an Awards for All grant from the National Lottery Community Fund, and a River and Wetlands Community Days grant funded by Thames Water via the Wild Trout Trust.

Subscriptions and donations at £1472.40 were lower than last year as that year included £2340 donated specifically to cover solicitor's fees incurred during lease negotiations. Sales of calendars produced a net profit of £357.10. We are now registered for Gift Aid, and in the process of collecting Gift Aid declarations from donors. (The first claim was later made successfully in February 2024).

The National Lottery Community Fund kindly awarded us a second Awards for All grant of £7345 in June 2023, for a second shed, tree work, pond creation, fencing and tools. The River

and Wetlands Community Days grant was for £4995 for ponds and bog creation, and ditch habitat improvements.

Outgoings were for standard running costs and grant-funded projects such as the second shed, the ponds project, fence improvements and tree work. Both grants were spent within the time periods specified (mainly by the end of the 2023-4 winter).

The **balance** carried forward at 26 Sept 2022 was £13,614, higher than usual as it included £9411 as yet unspent grant funds (ring-fenced for specific projects). Thus the unrestricted part of the balance carried forward was £4203.

6.2 Reserves policy

There is no formal reserves policy, as basic running costs have been low. Informally, reserves have been kept for a year's essential running costs such as public liability insurance and tree safety work. We are now aiming for this to be around £4000 to allow for the predicted increase in essential tree surgeon costs with increasing likelihood of storm damage, riverbank erosion, and the need to fell as a result of Ash Dieback which is beginning to affect ash trees on Aston's Eyot.

6.3 Financial status

The charity currently has resources from unrestricted donations and subscriptions that are sufficient to meet its essential outgoings for at least another year, and it is expected that that will continue to be the case.

6.4 Restricted Funds

The grants received (£12,340) from the National Lottery and RCCD were awarded for specific projects, to be spent by end June 2024. This is now spent as agreed.

6.5 Details of any funds materially in deficit

The charity has no funds materially in deficit.

6.6 Remuneration of trustees

All trustees act in a voluntary capacity and receive no remuneration or other material benefits from their services to the charity. Out of pocket expenses necessarily and reasonably incurred by trustees in promoting the purposes of the charity are reimbursed at cost.

6.7 Statutory statements on liabilities

The trustees declare that

- a) The charity has given no guarantees where potential liability under the guarantee is outstanding at the date of this statement
- b) The charity has no outstanding debts which are secured by an express charge on any of the assets of the charity at the date of this statement.

Approved by the Trustees and signed on their behalf,

Ruth Ashcroft, Co-chair

10 July 2024

7. Receipts and payments accounts for financial year to 26.09.23

RECEIPTS	This year	Last year
	£	£
Subscriptions & donations	1472.40	3338.80
Sale of calendars	710.50	586.50
Art auction	1517.00	
Grants	12340.00	3825.00
Total receipts	16039.90	7750.30
Opening balance at 27 September 2021	4703.50	4278.79
	20743.40	12029.09
PAYMENTS		
Insurance	155.94	157.99
AGM room hire	20.00	20.00
Solicitor's fees (re lease)		2340.00
Printing calendars	353.40	234.10
Tree work	550.00	1776.00
Tools & small kit	184.89	827.85
Fencing & tree guards	596.17	339.42
Seeds and plants		140.82
Trail cameras & batteries		152.49
Pond construction materials	329.56	803.78
Path materials		398.33
Lottery grant Feb 2022 (tools & fencing)	851.88	
Lottery Grant July 2023 (shed & bog materials)	2982.94	
Oxford Conservation Volunteers	600.00	
Wild Oxfordshire subs	35.00	35.00
Website costs	304.97	45.98
Sundries	218.65	53.74
Total payments	7129.40	7325.59
Closing balance at 26 September 2021	13614.00	4703.50
	20743.40	12029.09

The accounts were prepared by Hon. Treasurer Laurence Burrell.

8. Approval of the Trustees

The Trustees declare that they have approved the above Annual Report and Statement of financial activity.
Signed on behalf of the trustees

Name: Anthony Cheke
Role: Chair

THE FRIENDS OF ASTON'S EYOT

England & Wales - Charity number 1185744

Accounts



The Friends of Aston's Eyot

*Charitable Incorporated Organisation
Registered Charity No. 1185744*

Trustees' Annual Report and Financial Statement

for the accounting year ending 26 September 2022

Report date: June 2023

1. Reference and administration details

1.1 Charity name and Registration

The Friends of Aston's Eyot. Also known as: Friends of Aston's Eyot
The charity is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, registration number 1185744, registered with the Charity Commission on 10 October 2019.

1.2 Charity's address

c/o 139 Hurst Street, Oxford, OX4 1HE
email: info@friendsofastonseyt.org
website: <https://friendsofastonseyt.org>

1.3 Names of the Trustees who manage the Charity

	Role	Date appointed	Date retired
Anthony Cheke elected	Chair	24 November 2022	Re-
Ruth Ashcroft	Co-chair	18 November 2021	
Laurence Burrell	Treasurer	18 November 2021	
Charlotte Ellis elected		24 November 2022	Re-
Adam Gibbon November 2022		10 November 2020	24
Susie Jakobsson-Thomas		18 November 2021	

Thelma Martin
elected

Ashok Stally-Chudasama

Secretary 24 November 2022 Re-

18 November 2021

1.4 Names of advisors and senior members of staff

None. There are no paid staff.

1.5 Bank

The Co-operative Bank, PO Box 250, Skelmersdale WN8 6WT

2 Structure, governance & management

2.1 Type of governing document

Constitution based on Charity Commission's model for a CIO with members

2.2 Charitable Objectives

1. To promote the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment, including biodiversity, of Aston's Eyot, the area of Oxford bounded by the rivers Thames and Cherwell and the Shire Lake ditch, in particular but not exclusively by:

- a) carrying out work to protect, care for and manage or assist in managing the site as a habitat for wildlife and as a wild area.
- b) surveying and recording species of fauna and flora present, disseminating the useful results of the surveys for the public benefit.
- c) involving the wider public in activities such as working parties, wildlife events, path maintenance and other events in accordance with the objects or other events acceptable to the Landowners with their permission and in accordance with the objects.

2. To promote for the benefit of the inhabitants of Oxford and the surrounding area the provision of facilities for recreation or other leisure time occupation in the interests of social welfare and with the object of improving the life of the said inhabitants.

2.3 Trustee selection methods

There must be at least 3 trustees. The maximum number is 12. Trustees are elected according to the Constitution at the Annual General Meeting of members. At the first AGM all the trustees must retire, and in subsequent years half must retire by rotation. Those retired may stand for re-election.

2.4 Committees

The day to day management of the Friends is organised by a committee consisting of the trustees plus currently one other committee members who is not a trustee.

3. Public benefit

3.1 The trustees of The Friends of Aston's Eyot confirm that they have paid due regard to the guidance issued by the Charity Commission on public benefit in deciding what activities the charity should undertake.

4. Executive summary of activities and achievements

Terms of a 21-year lease at peppercorn rent were agreed with landowner Christ Church and the lease signed on November 2022.

Core conservation management and survey work, supporting public access and volunteering, and maintaining good communication with members and visitors, were all continued.

There were 115 paid up members. 12-20 people attended monthly work parties, and there were 8 further sessions with other conservation volunteer groups each attended by around 20 people. Up to 60 people volunteered individually and in smaller ad hoc volunteering sessions.

We had one Duke of Edinburgh Award student volunteer, and three PhD/ MSc students used Aston's Eyot for data collection.

Three wildlife events were held, all well-attended.

Footpaths damaged during greatly increased footfall during Covid-19 lockdowns were repaired and improved.

Woodland habitats were improved with some selective felling, and deer exclosures protecting new plantings and ground flora were upgraded. New hedging and trees were planted on sister site The Kidneys.

A trial pond was dug to test construction methods for a future ponds project. Planning and fund-raising for this future project were begun.

Serious sewage pollution in the Shire Lake Ditch arising from contaminated surface drainage inlets was monitored and tackled by persuading Thames Water to act so that seven properties found to have misconnected foul water pipes were corrected. Overgrowth round the most polluted inlet was cut back to help this habitat recover.

5. Activities, achievements and performance - full report

5.1. Main aims this year. In addition to keeping key conservation management and survey work going, supporting public access and volunteering, and maintaining good communications with members and visitors, our **specific aims for the year** were to:

a) Agree terms for a lease of Aston's Eyot from the landowner Christ Church

- b) Repair and improve footpaths which had become very muddy and damaged in wet winter weather partly as a result of the greatly increased footfall during Covid-19 lockdowns
- c) Improve some of the woodland habitat in particular
- d) Improve the deer fencing on exclosures protecting ground flora
- e) Tackle serious ongoing pollution in the Shire Lake Ditch
- f) Build a trial pond to test methods for a future ponds project
- g) Return to running wildlife events

5.2 Lease from Christ Church. After 4 years of negotiation, the trustees agreed with the College acceptable terms for a 21 lease for Aston's Eyot at a rent of £1 per year (if demanded). This lease was signed at the end of November 2022; the term of the lease starts on 25 December 2020.

The idea of leasing Aston's Eyot arose five years ago when the College made it clear that it wished to spend no more money on managing Aston's Eyot, and were looking for a sustainable solution for the site. Leasing the site to the Friends was seen on both sides as a positive and constructive way forward. The advantages of a lease for FoAE include the longer term security of tenure, and advantages for fund-raising and for getting help from the City Council and other organisations. The Friends had anyway become responsible for almost all the maintenance. The lease brings somewhat greater liabilities, but it transpired that the insurance required to cover this did not lead to an increase in insurance costs.

5.3 Public access, volunteering and communications

a) Public access and paths. To combat the muddiness of paths in winter, we spread 7 jumbo bags of gravel, trialling different sizes (10mm best!). This was effective, but more will be needed in the future. Oxford Conservation Volunteers very successfully reprofiled two sections of the path along the Thames bank where it was falling into the river. Willow branches cut when pollarding Thames bank willows were used to make picket fences to support the new path edge and protect the bank. We also started work re-profiling path sections alongside the ditch by Kingfisher Point, to make them less slippery and easier to walk. This work was funded from an Awards for All grant from the National Lottery Community Fund.

Oxford City Council assisted by mowing main paths, continuing a previous agreement with the landowner to do this. Smaller paths were kept clear by volunteer scything.

b) Membership numbered 115 by the end of the Sept 2021-2 year, showing a slight decrease once the era of lockdowns was over. Visitor numbers also went back to pre pandemic levels – very well used but no longer at numbers that were causing damage.

c) Anti-social behaviour. The year was relatively calm. The hot dry summer weather unsurprisingly resulted in riverside gatherings (sometimes noisy) but the bigger worry was the number of fires being lit

when the vegetation was tinder dry. The Fire service had to be called on one occasion. There were a couple of instances of bottle-digging, one problematic because it cut into a badger sett, the other dangerous because of deep tunnelling. Drug dealing has been observed but not a major problem currently. We have had three rough sleeper tents – two short-lived, and one at Kingfisher Point for several weeks. Thanks to St Mungo's outreach team for offering help and alternatives to the occupants, and to the Oxford City Council's Community Response Team for coordinating.

d). Volunteering. Work parties on the last Sunday afternoon of every month were well attended with 12-20 people attending each time. Smaller extra volunteer sessions were also held on a more ad hoc basis for nettle pulling, the scything, and pond digging. Many people put in individual effort as wildflower patch champions, nettle pullers and diggers, and litter pickers. The general community effort to keep an eye on things and deal with problems had a significant effect on keeping the site litter free and calm.

We also had two days of mowing and some gravel shifting from the City Council (via Oxford Direct Services) countryside team, 4 sessions with groups of around 20 people from Oxford Conservation Volunteers and 3 sessions with Good Gym teams also of around 20 people. Elsevier gave us a day of workplace volunteering, and we had a Duke of Edinburgh Award student volunteering with us.

e) Wildlife events. We held a dawn chorus (bird song) walk in early May 2022, a bees & butterflies event in July with wild bee expert Ivan Wright, and a bat and moth night in late August – all well attended. There were also small scale events led by others such as Forest Bathing.

f) Website, calendar, newsletters and social media. Work continued on the website – mostly still behind the scenes as yet. Digital newsletters were sent out to members twice during the year. Posts were placed regularly to the Facebook page to advertise news, events, and sightings. . The calendar was produced as usual and sold out, yielding useful income. It uses photos taken on Aston's Eyot sent in by visitors and members; these are valuable not only aesthetically but for the record of species seen and the current habitats and landscapes of the Eyot.

5.4 Habitat improvements.

Woodland. Some of the ash trees at the southern end of the Plantation were felled to give more light and space to non ash tree species, following out 2021 tree survey to assess the impact of potentially losing most of the trees here to Ash Die-back. The aim was also to promote understorey shrubs and woodland ground flora within the pre-existing large deer enclosure. This was also funded by the Lottery grant. Other tree work was to remove a small number of fallen or dangerous trees. Trees near paths were inspected for safety, and in general Ash trees were monitored for Ash Die-back – by late summer 2022 7 large Ash and several saplings were showing symptoms.

Meadows, wildflower patches and nettle control. Meadow areas and rougher grassy areas were mowed to schedule, and cuttings removed, with the work done by tractor mowing, the powerscythe and the manual scything. Nettle control remains a problem. We experimented with putting down thick geotextile over some of the worst areas, and found that leaving this for 2-4 months did make it easier to then dig out roots; without the digging it would need to be left for at least a whole growing season to have any impact. One volunteer dug out heroic quantities of roots. Nettle pulling sessions in April and May 2022 and 2023 did help other flower species grow away.

The “bird-seed patch” was mostly re-dug to allow annual plant species and biennials to flourish – including teasel, ragwort, thistle, and vipers bugloss as species deer tend to leave alone. These provide good flowers for insects then seed for birds. Some volunteers, “wild flower champions”, who each took on a small patch of either path edge or part of a meadow area to keep clear of nettles have made a real difference to these areas in terms of promoting the growth of other plant species.

Deer exclosures. During the 2021-2022 year, both the Muntjac and Roe deer really learnt how to breach our 4ft high wire netting fences protecting some areas from grazing. The impact on ground flora in all habitats was found to be very considerable, as a result of the high deer densities on site. We researched better fencing methods since the British Deer Society research shows that “soft” methods such as tape, noises, lights, human urine, lion dung etc do not work for long, and started improving the exclosure fencing during the 2022-23 winter. We are also trialling metal posts rather than wooden especially near the most frequented main path where wooden ones are routinely removed for kindling fires.

The Kidneys Nature Park is the City Council owned adjacent site, where Friends of Aston’s Eyot are also involved with management since the two sites are physically connected and act as a single unit both ecologically and for human visitors. The pollinator patches created in previous years to add meadow plant diversity continue to do well on the Kidneys meadow – the deer have a much lower impact here, and the plants are spreading gradually outwards from the patches. Noticeably more butterflies and bees are seen in these patches than in the rest of the meadow.

Stretches of hedging round the open area nearest Meadow Lane were planted in the 2021/2022 winter but most suffered during the summer drought and some had to be replaced in the 2022/23 winter. Crab apple and goat willow were also planted and have done slightly better. The Council started re-surfacing the muddiest sections of the main paths here last winter, and got some hardcore down but have not yet completed with surface topping which left the paths very lumpy.

Trial pond. A shallow rainwater-fed wildlife pond (5m x 6m) was dug in February and March over a series of sessions. Robust liner and thick

underlay and overlay were used, followed by a layer of sand and gravel. The spoil was used to create a bank also covered with liner then sand and gravel to both act as extra water catchment and to create a bee bank for ground nesting wild bees. The summer drought meant that it never got more than half full, and sowings of water edge plants failed. It successfully filled once rain began in autumn 2022. In late summer 2022 a boggy area was added by lining a dug pit (c. 4m x 6m) with old tarpaulins and backfilling. All areas were sown with suitable water edge plants in autumn. Piles of logs were also added nearby to provide cover especially for amphibia and grass snakes. The area was fenced to prevent disturbance and damage from people, dogs, deer, badgers and foxes. Birds, dragonflies and water beetles were observed visiting the pond.

The trial has also been useful to point up design improvements for a future ponds project, for which planning and fund-raising has now been started.

Shire Lake Ditch. Sewage pollution coming from road surface drainage running into the ditch has been an ongoing problem. Sewage fungus was visible at the Jackdaw Lane bridge for most of 2021, and was particularly bad from late winter 2022 onwards. Thames Water located and corrected the connections on 6 residential properties and one Cowley Road restaurant in spring 2022, and continued testing for some weeks afterwards. They think the problem is resolved. We noted improvement but still some continuing sewage fungus until end 2022, and our regular water testing shows very high nutrient and ammonia levels persisting. Time will tell whether this is due to pollution lodged in the silt being slow to clear, or whether there are still misconnected properties.

It was not all bad news – Kingfisher, Grey Wagtail and other birds are finding food in this section of the ditch. In the School corner to Muntjac Point stretch the water quality remains somewhat better though still too high in nutrients, and fish are regularly seen.

Oxford Conservation Volunteers cleared the third remaining stretch of the ditch by Muntjac Point at the Thames end of the ditch in October 2021, to remove excess sedges blocking the waterway and to clear a section of the bank of bramble.

5.4 Wildlife surveys and sightings

Badgers. 75 active badger holes were counted in February 2022, up on last year when lockdown disturbances had an impact on setts (causing one sett to relocate further away from easy access). The Oxfordshire Badger Group returned in May 2022 for the second of 4 rounds of vaccination against bovine TB. They caught 11 badgers including one white one, thought not to be the same white one as caught last year (they take photos). Camera traps suggest there are 2 white badgers on site, and a total population around 17-19 individuals. It remains to be seen what impact the drought had on cub (and adult) survival.

Camera trapping - the team have experimented with low glow cameras for better picture quality though some animals do notice the infrared light. No glow cameras employ black LEDs which show no light but give lower picture quality. Roe, muntjac, foxes, weasel, rabbits, mice and rats recorded regularly as well as a number of different birds. Of note was a Marsh Tit caught on camera in March 2022.

Deer. A survey in March gave 6 adult and 2 well grown Muntjac fawns. Roe were seen regularly but no good counts.

Birds. Tit nest-boxes continued to have high occupancy and high fledging success. Bird sightings otherwise included Nuthatch, Parakeets, Grey Wagtails, Kingfishers, Tree-creepers, Linnets in September, Coal tits and Siskins in the 2021/22 winter and Firecrests in the 2022/23 winter. The Plantation Tawny owl is regularly seen and heard

Butterflies. Fairly good numbers were seen of 20 species, though the drought in summer 2022 probably affected later generations of species depending on nettles as they became very dry. Brown Argus was seen again on the Kidneys pollinator patches. Marbled Whites and Small Copper were not observed this year though they may well have been present. Brown Hairstreak eggs are still being found on the blackthorn.

Moths. With evenings a bit calmer this year, we returned to regular moth surveying. Results still to be analysed but we added a number of species. The scallop proved to be as good for moths as it is for butterflies – a sheltered flower rich spot.

Wild bees and wasps. The session with Ivan Wright produced one new species of solitary wasp, and an unusual new bee species – despite the heat that day. We have now recorded 73 species of bees and wasps. Black Horehound and White Bryony were particularly good flower species for them.

Fungi. Autumn 2021 was particularly good for fungi of all sorts, with Earth Stars and the rare Orchard Tooth-Crust found. We have not found the latter again this year.

Plants. No surveys this year except for Japanese Knotweed. 4 small shoots were found and destroyed on the Old Knotweed Patch, and none on the Elsevier patch and Claire's patch. Claire Malone-Lee has had an article published in *British Wildlife* on Japanese Knotweed eradication without use of herbicide, based on her work and records in one of the three Knotweed sites – the rest having been controlled initially with glyphosate.

6. Financial Review

6.1 Sources of income and outgoings

During the financial year to 26.9.22:

Income came from membership subscriptions, donations, sale of calendars and an Awards for All grant from the National Lottery Community Fund.

Subscriptions and donations at £3338.80 were higher than last year, mostly due to £2340 donated specifically to cover solicitor's fees incurred during lease negotiations. Sales of calendars produced a net profit of £352.31. We are now registered for Gift Aid, and in the process of collecting Gift Aid declarations from donors.

The National Lottery Community Fund kindly awarded us an Awards for All grant of £3825 in January 2022, for path improvement and habitat improvement projects. Following the signing of the lease, we applied for two further grants for two projects in March 2023, both successful.

Outgoings were for standard running costs, solicitors fees (funded by earmarked donations), the trial pond project, and grant funded projects which included some of the tree work. This grant was spent as required by the end of January 2023.

The **balance** carried forward at 26 Sept 2022 was £4703.50, which included £851.88 not yet spent from the Lottery grant (ring-fenced for specific projects). There was also an invoice not yet received for work done for £480. Thus the unrestricted part of the balance carried forward was £3371.62.

6.2 Reserves policy

There is no formal reserves policy, as basic running costs have been low. Informally, reserves have been kept for a year's essential running costs such as public liability insurance and tree safety work. We are now aiming for this to be around £4000 to allow for the predicted increase in essential tree surgeon costs with increasing likelihood of both storm damage and the need to fell as a result of Ash Dieback which is beginning to affect ash trees on Aston's Eyot.

6.3 Financial status

The charity currently has resources from unrestricted donations and subscriptions that are sufficient to meet its essential outgoings for at least another year, and it is expected that that will continue to be the case.

6.4 Restricted Funds

The grant (£3825) from the National Lottery was awarded for specific projects, to be spent by end of January 2023. This is now spent as agreed.

6.5 Details of any funds materially in deficit

The charity has no funds materially in deficit.

6.6 Remuneration of trustees

All trustees act in a voluntary capacity and receive no remuneration or other material benefits from their services to the charity. Out of pocket

expenses necessarily and reasonably incurred by trustees in promoting the purposes of the charity are reimbursed at cost.

6.7 Statutory statements on liabilities

The trustees declare that

- a) The charity has given no guarantees where potential liability under the guarantee is outstanding at the date of this statement
- b) The charity has no outstanding debts which are secured by an express charge on any of the assets of the charity at the date of this statement.

Approved by the Trustees and signed on their behalf,

Ruth Ashcroft, Co-chair

10 July 2023

7. Receipts and payments accounts for financial year to 26.09.22

RECEIPTS	This year	Last year
	£	£
Subscriptions & donations	3338.80	2451.50
Sale of calendars	586.50	822.00
Grants	3825.00	
Total receipts	7750.30	3273.50
Opening balance at 27 September 2021	4278.	79 2404.80
	12029.09	5678.30
PAYMENTS		
Insurance	157.99	133.00
AGM room hire	20.00	
Solicitor's fees (re lease)	2340.00	
Printing calendars	234.19	296.45
Printing leaflets		47.20
Tree work	1776.00	
Tools & small kit	827.85	165.88
Fencing & tree guards	339.42	460.76
Seeds and plants	140.82	81.75
Trail cameras & batteries	152.49	
Nest boxes		28.80
Pond construction materials	803.78	
Path materials	398.33	
Oxford Conservation Volunteers*		
Wild Oxfordshire subs	35.00	70.00
Website costs	45.98	28.78
Sundries	53.74	86.89
Total payments	7325.59	1399.51
Closing balance at 26 September 2021	4703.50	4278.79
	12029.09	5678.30

Notes

- a) * Invoice due from Oxford Conservation Volunteers for £480
b) The solicitor's fee was covered by donations given for the purpose

The accounts were prepared by Hon. Treasurer Laurence Burrell.

8. Approval of the Trustees

The Trustees declare that they have approved the above Annual Report and Statement of financial activity.

Signed on behalf of the trustees

Name: Anthony Cheke

Role: Chair

THE FRIENDS OF ASTON'S EYOT

England & Wales - Charity number 1185744

Accounts



The Friends of Aston's Eyot

*Charitable Incorporated Organisation
Registered Charity No. 1185744*

Trustees' Annual Report and Financial Statement

for the accounting year ending 26 September 2021

Report date: June 2022

1. Reference and administration details

1.1 Charity name and Registration

The Friends of Aston's Eyot. Also known as: Friends of Aston's Eyot
The charity is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation , registration number 1185744, registered with the Charity Commission on 10 October 2019.

1.2 Charity's address

c/o 139 Hurst Street, Oxford, OX4 1HE
email: info@friendsofastonseyt.org
website: <https://friendsofastonseyt.org>

1.3 Names of the Trustees who manage the Charity

	Role	Date appointed	Date retired
Anthony Cheke	Chair	10 October 2019	
Ruth Ashcroft elected	Co-chair	18 November 2021	Re-
Laurence Burrell elected	Treasurer	18 November 2021	Re-
Charlotte Ellis		18 November 2021	
Adam Gibbon		10 October 2019	
Susie Jakobsson-Thomas elected		18 November 2021	Re-

Thelma Martin
Ashok Stally-Chudasama

Secretary 10 October 2019
18 November 2021

1.4 Names of advisors and senior members of staff

None. There are no paid staff.

1.5 Bank

The Co-operative Bank, PO Box 250, Skelmersdale WN8 6WT

2 Structure, governance & management

2.1 Type of governing document

Constitution based on Charity Commission's model for a CIO with members

2.2 Charitable Objectives

1. To promote the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment, including biodiversity, of Aston's Eyot, the area of Oxford bounded by the rivers Thames and Cherwell and the Shire Lake ditch, in particular but not exclusively by:

- a) carrying out work to protect, care for and manage or assist in managing the site as a habitat for wildlife and as a wild area.
- b) surveying and recording species of fauna and flora present, disseminating the useful results of the surveys for the public benefit.
- c) involving the wider public in activities such as working parties, wildlife events, path maintenance and other events in accordance with the objects or other events acceptable to the Landowners with their permission and in accordance with the objects.

2. To promote for the benefit of the inhabitants of Oxford and the surrounding area the provision of facilities for recreation or other leisure time occupation in the interests of social welfare and with the object of improving the life of the said inhabitants.

2.3 Trustee selection methods

There must be at least 3 trustees. The maximum number is 12. Trustees are elected according to the Constitution at the Annual General Meeting of members. At the first AGM all the trustees must retire, and in subsequent years half must retire by rotation. Those retired may stand for re-election.

2.4 Committees

The day to day management of the Friends is organised by a committee consisting of the trustees plus currently two other committee members who are not trustees.

3. Public benefit

3.1 The trustees of The Friends of Aston's Eyot confirm that they have paid due regard to the guidance issued by the Charity Commission on public benefit in deciding what activities the charity should undertake.

4. Executive summary of activities and achievements

4.1 Fulfilling our objects in the continuing pandemic:

Key aims were to keep core conservation and survey work going as and when possible, to adapt volunteer opportunities for safe working, and to facilitate safe access for the greatly increased visitor numbers while minimising negative impacts on habitats and wildlife. Only a few small events were possible. However communications to members and visitors were greatly improved by reinstating regular (digital) newsletters, reinvigorating the Friends Facebook page, and by starting a review and update of the Friends website.

4.2 Provision of facilities for recreation and volunteering :

The pandemic continued to result in greatly increased numbers visiting Aston's Eyot with several hundred visits a day at the peak of lockdowns. People visiting included families with children, large numbers of teenagers and young adults, and older adults of all ages and backgrounds. To make this safe, the main path network was mowed much wider and more frequently, and steps taken to accommodate quiet recreation while endeavouring to minimise the impact increased visitor numbers had on wildlife and habitats. The few events possible were on the themes of well-being and art in nature. Regular newsletters were reinstated, the facebook page reinvigorated with regular posts, and an overhaul of the website initiated.

People also benefited from volunteering. Including litter-pickers, around 60-70 local people were involved, and another 60+ from three visiting volunteer groups. Two Duke of Edinburgh Award students volunteered with us, and three students carried out individual ecology projects. Membership of the Friends increased by 11% to 147; membership is not required for access.

4.3 Conservation management and habitat restoration:

A tree inspection was undertaken, including monitoring for Ash die-back, and some unsafe trees were felled or reduced by tree surgeons. Tree species in the Plantation (mainly Ash) were mapped to help develop plans for this area post Ash die-back. Young tree and shrub plantings were checked and tree guards repaired as necessary. Meadow areas were maintained with mowing regimes and nettle control, and some sample areas protected against deer grazing to boost flowering. Additional areas were maintained by scything. Water quality in the Shire Lake Ditch was

monitored regularly by testing for pollutants, and a continuing serious sewage pollution problem tackled with only partial success. Plans were drawn up with Oxford City Council Parks Dept for habitat and access improvements on the neighbouring Kidneys Nature Park, though only a small part of the programme was completed this year. Oxford City Council assisted with management with 2 mowing days and other help on Aston's Eyot.

4.4 Surveys of fauna and flora:

Surveys were continued as possible mainly by observers working individually. 68 bird species present were recorded this year, highlights being a marsh tit sighting and larger numbers of nuthatches and ring-necked parakeets. Nestboxes were monitored and young birds ringed. 64 active badger sett entrances were recorded, and 11 animals were vaccinated against TB by the Oxfordshire Badger group as the start of a four year programme. Mammals and birds were also monitored with trail cams and other sightings. 19 species of butterfly were recorded, slightly fewer than usual. Moth surveys using light traps were not possible due to high numbers of visitors on site in the evenings and more vandalism and disturbance than usual. Plant surveys focused on the loss of diversity caused by heavy trampling to path verges by increased footfall during winter and spring lockdowns, and the impact of grazing by the high density of deer present. Results of surveys were reported to relevant organisations and county recorders.

5. Activities, achievements and performance - full report

5.1 The Covid-19 pandemic made our second year as a charity and eleventh year as a local community organisation another very different one. Our **main aims** this year have been:

a). To keep key conservation management work going, and to continue where possible the programme of wildlife surveys and habitat restoration to promote biodiversity, on both Aston's Eyot and the neighbouring City Council owned Kidneys Nature Park. Together they form a unit both ecologically and in terms of public use, and they form an important part of the local Conservation Target Area of the Thames and Cherwell at Oxford which is expected to become part of the national Nature Recovery Network.

Specific aims for the year were: i) Agree and implement with Oxford City Council a programme of habitats and paths improvements on the Kidneys, ii) Facilitate the start of the first year of badger vaccination against TB, iii) Make a post-Ash-dieback plan for the Plantation, the woodland area that will be most impacted because of the high proportion of Ash here, iv) continue to investigate the impact of deer on ground flora.

b). To continue to facilitate Covid-safe public access for volunteering and peaceful recreation for the benefit of the local community, and to work to manage the impact of increased visitor pressure on the reserve so as to

maintain both the biodiversity and also the natural landscape value and wild feel that differentiates Aston's Eyot from much other green space locally. Foot-fall on both Aston's Eyot and the Kidneys increased dramatically from the start of the first lockdown and stayed high, demonstrating here as elsewhere the importance of green spaces and nature reserves are for the well-being of people in towns and cities.

c). To update the website, reinvigorate the Facebook page, and reinstate regular newsletters for members.

5.2 Public access and volunteering

a) Membership of the Friends was 147, up another 11% from last year and 28% from 2 years ago. Many new members commented that they had joined to give something back to a place that had become important to them. **Visitor** numbers remained very much higher than pre-pandemic, with a guestimated five-fold increase in the both spring lockdowns and remaining high since at several hundred visits a day. They included many families with children as well as adults of all ages and backgrounds.

a) Paths and access. Safe public access was facilitated by keeping the main path network mowed extra wide by Oxford City Council. Smaller paths were kept scythed by volunteers as and when possible. A problem during the 2020/21 winter months was that the extra footfall caused all paths to become very muddy and for a wide area of path verges to become seriously trampled impacting the vegetation. This led to a decision in autumn 2021 to improve main paths with addition of gravel. Meadow areas and riverbanks were used by visitors to walk and sit as well, also resulting in more trampling than usual. Efforts were made to keep some areas undisturbed for wildlife by resisting the creation of new paths in with natural barriers and by explanatory notices where necessary, but this was less successful this year than last.

b) Anti-social behaviour. In March and April 2021 with strict spring lockdowns in place, there were numerous gatherings and parties, some large, and often involving fires as the weather was cold. This led to damage to trees, burning of tree stakes, other minor vandalism, more litter, and more creation of new paths into areas normally kept free of disturbance. Once summer came and lockdowns eased, most of these problems reduced. While facilitating public access is a key aim of the Friends, and was very important to many people during lockdowns, these events did make clear to us the importance of actively presenting Aston's Eyot as primarily a nature reserve rather than a party zone.

Litter problems were managed through litter picking by the local community and the involvement of Duke of Edinburgh award students. Tree stakes and fence posts near the busiest paths (thus the most prone to being removed for bonfires) were gradually replaced with metal ones.

c) Volunteering. Our regular monthly work parties had to be abandoned in the late winter and spring lockdown, but resumed in summer with 15-20 attending each time. Individual effort and work in

very small groups was able to continue throughout, and involved around 50 people in all. In addition the Oxford Conservation Volunteers came with around 25 people to pollard some of the riverside willows. Oxford Good Gym volunteers joined us twice with around 20 people to blitz nettle pulling and scything tasks. Elsevier publishers sent a team twice for a day as part of their workplace volunteering. We had two Duke of Edinburgh award students volunteer with us this year. Oxford City Council continued to help with two days of mowing and path clearance.

d) Events. Once again these were limited by the pandemic. A few small ones were run by others, including forest bathing, uses of wild plants, and an art project celebrating the rivers through willow sculptures. The annual photo competition was held as usual, with best submissions used to illustrate the Friends of Aston's Eyot calendar which is produced in part as a fund-raiser.

e) Website, newsletters and social media. Thanks to the work of new recruits, a much needed review and update of the Friends website is now underway, and regular newsletters have also been started again with the first sent out in the summer. The Friends facebook page has also been reinvigorated with frequent posts covering events, work parties and what's about to see, which rapidly attracted a number of followers.

5.3 Conservation management and habitat restoration

a) Trees, woodland, and tree safety. Half the 13 hectare site is wooded.

We have a Tree Safety Policy in place, under which trees near main paths are monitored for health and stability. As a result, a few trees which were dying or becoming unstable were felled by tree surgeons in December 2020. Ash trees continue to be monitored for Ash Dieback. 3 large trees are definitely infected, 3 more possibly, and some saplings by the Jackdaw Lane bridge are infected. The spread of this disease is proving slower than we had expected, though spread it almost certainly will. A small number of elms also died this year as a result of Dutch Elm Disease.

The Plantation. This spring the tree species in the Plantation were mapped to help develop plans for this area post ash dieback, since so many of the trees are ash here. We are planning to fell a few of the weaker ash here where this will promote the growth of the smaller oak and alder trees present.

Deer enclosure areas and tree guards round new plantings were inspected and repaired as necessary, and some nettle control (pulling and scything) was achieved.

b) Meadow areas. Having started 10 years ago with a complete loss of all grassy areas to nettles as a result of neglect and soil disturbance from

bottle-digging (Aston's Eyot was a rubbish tip in the 1920's-40's), we now have 2-3 acres of meadow areas and rougher grassland. These were maintained as usual this year by mowing once or more times, with additional nettle control still required in early summer. Further areas near main paths were managed as rough grassland with mowing and scything. A project underway on the Kidneys meadow to improve the meadow area here for pollinators by increasing floral diversity was informally monitored and continues to do well in terms of abundance of flowers, bees and butterflies.

A focus both this year and last has been to investigate informally the impact of the high deer density on flower abundance through grazing. A section of the main meadow area was fenced off for a second year in early spring, and showed an immediate marked increase in flower numbers for both spring and summer flowering species such as cowslip and yellow rattle, though this year we have had to work harder to keep deer out. A section of flowering riverbank was also enclosed to prevent loss of flowering plants from both deer grazing and trampling by people.

c) Improving water quality in the Shire Lake Ditch. This is an ongoing project to improve poor water quality. Water quality has continued to be monitored regularly, especially near the street drainage outlets at Jackdaw Lane bridge, by the school, and from the scrapyard. All year it has been clear that there is sewage pollution still coming in at the Jackdaw Lane Bridge despite repairs to the sewer last year: high ammonia and phosphate levels, sewage smells, and sewage "fungus" (actually bacteria) present. A number of local residents helped to contact Thames Water and the Environment Agency about this, and Thames Water staff reported that they had located which area of housing the pollution was coming from and were taking steps to identify exactly which the buildings had misconnected drains so that their plumbing can be rectified. We will keep monitoring – it takes time for the pollution to dissipate as it binds to the silt in the ditch. The two other areas of the ditch remained less contaminated and this resulted in better conditions for aquatic wildlife.

The Kidneys. Friends of Aston's Eyot is also the friends group for the neighbouring Council-owned Kidneys Nature Park – together the two sites complement each other in terms of habitats, and in many ways act as a single unit for wildlife and walkers. In spring we agreed a plan of tasks this year with the Countryside team: re-gravelling some paths to reduce winter mud, mending fences, provision of a noticeboard, more pollinator patches, and further tree and shrub planting to improve biodiversity. In the event, the Countryside team have been seriously set back by lack of staff and by the extent of growth this year on all reserves. In the end, other

than routine tasks, only the repairs to the metal footbridge have been done, We will go ahead with the planting this winter.

Student projects. Projects carried out on Aston's Eyot this year have included one on people and green places, one on phosphate pollution in the Thames, and one on the nutrient content of pollen in relation to flower selection by bumblebees.

5.4 Wildlife surveys

Although the Covid pandemic limited activities, some wildlife recording continued with a number of people putting in individual effort. Members frequently report sightings too.

a) **Birds.** 68 species were recorded in 2021; of note was the regular presence in late summer of nuthatches, previously only seen once, and sightings of a marsh tit in February; a pair of coal tits, rare in the city, bred by the sports ground. Sparrowhawk young were heard after fledging, but the nest was not found. Kingfishers were less in evidence than usual, but ring-necked parakeets are increasingly seen and heard. Mild winters have meant few interesting waterbirds in winter on the Thames and Cherwell, with no sightings of goosander, grebes or coot during 2020-21. Nestboxes were checked and young ringed in May, though some had already fledged; there was 90% occupancy, with (of known occupants) 5 blue tit nests and 18 great tits.

c) **Badgers.** The Oxfordshire Badger Group came in May 2021 to vaccinate the badgers against TB, as the first year in a four year programme. After a fortnight of pre-baiting with peanuts, traps were set, and 11 badgers were caught and vaccinated over two nights at the end of May, including one white animal and a cub. The peanuts used as bait were rapidly taken by the badgers in the run up to live trapping. The camera traps suggest we still have two white badgers resident on the Eyot. Our annual badger hole census in February revealed fewer holes than usual (64 entrances compared to 82 last year), but that does not necessarily imply fewer badgers - they were in the same areas as before (3 main setts on the Eyot, one on Meadow Lane rec.), though some inactive holes were reopened later and a few new ones dug. Spring disturbance by people during lockdown was significant in some places, and caused badgers to move setts a short distance.

d) **Trail cams** were monitored and recorded roe deer (max. 8 seen together), and muntjac (max 4 together but almost certainly more present), both of which bred successfully on the Eyot. Camera trapping also revealed foxes, squirrels, wood mice, brown rats and the occasional rabbit, now scarce on the Eyot. Trail camera footage highlights were shared with members at the AGM. There was an unconfirmed sighting by a visitor of the now rare water vole in the ditch; no otters or mink were seen this year, but there were several sightings of weasels.

e) **Butterfly counts** were made but less frequently. 3 observers recorded 19 species out of the 23 species recorded in recent years. It was generally

a rather poor year for butterflies with numbers and variety down on previous years, though a migrant painted lady, sporadic in recent years, was seen in August, and marbled whites returned to the Kidneys, enjoying the recently established knapweed patches. Sightings are reported to the local Butterfly Conservation branch.

f) **Moths.** Light trapping could not take place in 2021 due to the high numbers of people using the site in the evenings, and the risk of vandalism and theft from a small subset of those attending gatherings.

g) **Plant report.** Winter 2020/21 ended with a fair amount of anxiety about the plants on the path edges, the river edges, and the areas of scrub, woodland and plantation because so much footfall during lockdown in winter and spring had widened the paths and created a sea of mud. At the same time it was good that so many more people were benefiting from the experience of being out of doors on the Eyot and taking an interest in its biodiversity. The path edges recovered through the summer, but not all the diversity of plants. Some of this is probably because of past trampling, but we are increasingly conscious that some of the common nectar bearing plants we want to encourage as food for the insect population are being browsed by the deer, so are flourishing only where they are protected by fencing.

This year's rather limited plant recording has shown a reduction in species out in the open, unprotected areas. Plants that have been more numerous in the past include eg violets, tufted vetch and bird's-foot trefoil. This is mainly due to browsing by deer. The return of the Pyramidal Orchid on Middle Way after an absence of five years since its first appearance in 2016 was a delight, but as this too was browsed after several weeks, we hope the fencing now placed round the plant will allow it to flower again next year. The only species of wild flower not previously recorded on the Eyot but found this year was a little group of young greater celandine plants that appeared in the Orchard.

On the positive side, it's now clear that there is a range of plants that the deer don't eat, many of them woodland edge plants, and excellent for insects, such as ground ivy, garlic mustard, hemlock, welshed thistle, wood forget-me-nots. **Wild flower patch champions** (15-18 people) have taken on small patches of path verges to keep the nettles at bay (by pulling them out) so that these wild flowers can flourish and increase. The conversations the wild flower patch champions have had with people passing, together with information on the web page, has led to a good number of new recruits to the role.

6. Financial Review

6.1 Sources of income and outgoings

During the financial year to 26.9.21:

Income came from membership subscriptions, donations, and sale of calendars. Subscriptions and donations at £2451.50 were up by 288% from last year, mostly due to extra donations as well as the 11% increase in membership, with donors noting the value of Aston's Eyot to them personally during the covid lockdowns. Sales of calendars produced a net profit of £525. Following the September 2021 AGM it was agreed that we would apply for further grant funding, and apply to register for Gift Aid.

Outgoings were for standard running costs, including tools and small kit bought using the remains of the Co-op grant received last financial year. This grant was spent as required by December 2020, and an end of grant report completed.

The balance carried forward was £4278.79, up from £2404.80 at the start of year.

6.2 Reserves policy

There is no formal reserves policy, as basic running costs have been low. Informally, reserves have been kept for a year's essential running costs such as public liability insurance. We have gradually increased this to be around £4000 to allow for the predicted increase in essential tree surgeon costs with increasing likelihood of both storm damage and the need to fell as a result of Ash Dieback which is beginning to affect ash trees on Aston's Eyot.

6.3 Financial status

The charity currently has resources from unrestricted donations and subscriptions that are sufficient to meet its essential outgoings for at least another year, and it is expected that that will continue to be the case.

6.4 Restricted Funds

The grant (£750) from the Midland Counties Co-operative was a restricted fund for the purposes of buying tools and small kit for volunteer use, and the term of this grant was December 2019 to December 2020. This is now spent as agreed and the end-of-grant report completed.

6.5 Details of any funds materially in deficit

The charity has no funds materially in deficit.

6.6 Remuneration of trustees

All trustees act in a voluntary capacity and receive no remuneration or other material benefits from their services to the charity. Out of pocket expenses necessarily and reasonably incurred by trustees in promoting the purposes of the charity are reimbursed at cost.

6.7 Statutory statements on liabilities

The trustees declare that

- a) The charity has given no guarantees where potential liability under the guarantee is outstanding at the date of this statement
- b) The charity has no outstanding debts which are secured by an express charge on any of the assets of the charity at the date of this statement.

Approved by the Trustees and signed on their behalf,

Ruth Ashcroft, Co-chair

15 July 2022

7. Receipts and payments accounts for financial year to 26.09.21

RECEIPTS	This year	Last year
	£	£
Subscriptions & donations	2451.50	851.00
Sale of calendars	822.00	545.50
Mid-counties Co-op grant		750.00
Total receipts	3273.50	2146.50
Opening balance at 27 September 2020	2404.80	1867.14
	5678.30	4013.64
 PAYMENTS		
Insurance	133.00	133.00
AGM room hire		20.00
Printing calendars	296.45	296.45
Printing leaflets	47.20	72.08
Co-op grant spend (tools & small kit)	165.88	497.50
Oxford Conservation Volunteers		360.00
Wild Oxfordshire sub (2 years)	70.00	
Mower service		146.26
Website costs	28.78	
Trail cameras		
Tree stakes, posts & netting	460.76	
Seeds	81.75	
Nest boxes	28.80	
Sundries	86.89	83.55
Total payments	1399.51	1608.84
Closing balance at 26 September 2021	4278.79	2404.80
	5678.30	4013.64

Notes

Two invoices for work done during the year were not received in time for 20-21 accounts:

- 1) Oxford Conservation Volunteers (£120)
- 2) Tree surgeon's invoice for one day's work

The accounts were prepared by Hon. Treasurer Laurence Burrell.

8. Approval of the Trustees

The Trustees declare that they have approved the above Annual Report and Statement of financial activity.

Signed on behalf of the trustees

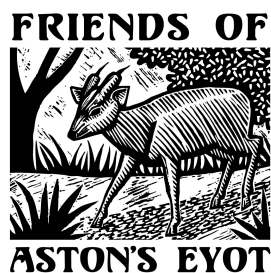
Name: Anthony Cheke

Role: Chair

THE FRIENDS OF ASTON'S EYOT

England & Wales - Charity number 1185744

Accounts



The Friends of Aston's Eyot

*Charitable Incorporated Organisation
Registered Charity No. 1185744*

Trustees' Annual Report and Financial Statement

for the accounting year ending 26 September 2020

Report date: February 2021

1. Reference and administration details

1.1 Charity name and Registration

The Friends of Aston's Eyot. Also known as: Friends of Aston's Eyot

The charity is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, registration number 1185744, registered with the Charity Commission on 10 October 2019.

1.2 Charity's address

c/o 139 Hurst Street, Oxford, OX4 1HE

email: info@friendsofastonseyot.org

website: <https://friendsofastonseyot.org>

1.3 Names of the Trustees who manage the Charity

Role	Date appointed	Date retired	
Anthony Cheke		Chair	10 October 2019
Ruth Ashcroft		Co-chair	10 October 2019
Penny Bassett			10 October 2019
Laurence Burrell		Treasurer	10 October 2019
Adam Gibbon			10 October 2019
Susie Jakobsson-Thomas			10 October 2019
James Martin			10 October 2019
Thelma Martin		Secretary	10 October 2019
			19 November 2020
			died 4 April 2020

1.4 Names of advisors and senior members of staff

None. There are no paid staff.

1.5 Bank

The Co-operative Bank, PO Box 250, Skelmersdale WN8 6WT

2 Structure, governance & management

2.1 Type of governing document

Constitution based on Charity Commission's model for a CIO with members

2.2 Charitable Objectives

1. To promote the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment, including biodiversity, of Aston's Eyot, the area of Oxford bounded by the rivers Thames and Cherwell and the Shire Lake ditch, in particular but not exclusively by:

a) carrying out work to protect, care for and manage or assist in managing the site as a habitat for wildlife and as a wild area.

b) surveying and recording species of fauna and flora present, disseminating the useful results of the surveys for the public benefit.

c) involving the wider public in activities such as working parties, wildlife events, path maintenance and other events in accordance with the objects or other events acceptable to the Landowners with their permission and in accordance with the objects.

2. To promote for the benefit of the inhabitants of Oxford and the surrounding area the provision of facilities for recreation or other leisure time occupation in the interests of social welfare and with the object of improving the life of the said inhabitants.

2.3 Trustee selection methods

There must be at least 3 trustees. The maximum number is 12. Trustees are elected according to the Constitution at the Annual General Meeting of members. At the first AGM all the trustees must retire, and in subsequent years half must retire by rotation. Those retired may stand for re-election.

(Note: the first AGM took place on 19 November 2020, all the trustees retired, and all were re-elected except one who opted not to put herself up for election as out of the country).

2.4 Committees

The day to day management of the Friends is organised by a committee consisting of the trustees plus currently two other committee members who are not trustees.

3. Public benefit

3.1 The trustees of The Friends of Aston's Eyot confirm that they have paid due regard to the guidance issued by the Charity Commission on public benefit in deciding what activities the charity should undertake.

4. Executive summary of activities and achievements

4.1 Fulfilling our objects in the pandemic:

Key aims were to keep core conservation and survey work going as and when possible, to adapt volunteer opportunities for safe working, and to facilitate safe access for the greatly increased visitor numbers while minimising negative impacts on habitats and wildlife. Events were not possible.

4.2 Provision of facilities for recreation and volunteering :

The pandemic greatly increased numbers visiting Aston's Eyot to several hundred visits a day. People visiting included families with children and adults of all ages and backgrounds. To make this safe, the main path network was mowed much wider and more frequently, and steps taken to accommodate quiet recreation while minimising impact on nature conservation.

People also benefited from volunteering. Including litter-pickers, around 50-60 local people were involved, and another 50+ from visiting volunteer groups. Two Duke of Edinburgh Award students volunteered with us. Membership of the Friends increased by 15% to 132; membership is not required for access.

4.3 Conservation management and habitat restoration:

A tree safety policy was drawn up, and initial inspections undertaken. Some unsafe trees were felled or reduced by the landowner Christ Church's tree surgeons. An attractive new woodland path was created to replace an old one now unsafe with unstable but wildlife-rich trees. Young tree and shrub plantings were checked and tree guards repaired as necessary. Meadow areas were maintained with mowing regimes and nettle control, and some sample areas protected against deer grazing to boost flowering. Additional areas adjacent to paths were brought into management by scything. Water quality in the Shire Lake Ditch was monitored regularly by testing for pollutants, and a serious sewage pollution problem tackled semi-successfully. Oxford City Council assisted with management with 3 mowing days and other help..

4.4 Surveys of fauna and flora:

10 observers recorded 61 species of birds (0 new, 3 unusual for site) in 2020. 3 observers recorded 20 species of butterfly (1 new). 82 active badger sett entrances were recorded, and initial steps taken for vaccination against TB this summer. Mammals were monitored with trail cams and other sightings. Moths were recorded regularly with light traps. Freshwater Habitats Trust took eDNA samples for Great Crested Newt. A planned plant resurvey was started but then had to be postponed. Results of surveys were reported to relevant organisations and county recorders.

5. Activities, achievements and performance – full report

5.1 The Covid-19 pandemic made our first year as a charity and tenth year as a local community organisation a very different one. Our **main aims** this year have been:

- a). To keep key conservation management work going, and to continue where possible the programme of wildlife surveys and habitat restoration to promote biodiversity, on both Aston's Eyot and to a lesser extent the neighbouring City Council owned Kidneys Nature Park. Together they form a unit both ecologically and in terms of public use, and they form an important part of the local Conservation Target Area of the Thames and Cherwell at Oxford which is expected to become part of the national Nature Recovery Network.
- b). To facilitate Covid-safe public access for volunteering and peaceful recreation for the benefit of the local community, and to work to maintain the natural landscape value and wild feel that differentiates Aston's Eyot from much other green space locally. Foot-fall on both Aston's Eyot and the Kidneys increased dramatically, demonstrating here as elsewhere the importance of green spaces and nature reserves are for the well-being of people in towns and cities.

5.2 Public access and volunteering

a) Membership of the Friends stood at 132 by November, up another 15% from last year. **Visitor** numbers were very much higher with a guestimated five-fold increase in the spring lockdown and remaining very high since at several hundred visits a day. They included many families with children as well as adults of all ages and backgrounds. Many people commented on how important Aston's Eyot and the Kidneys was to them, a "life-line" was a common phrase used.

a) Paths and access. Safe public access was facilitated by keeping the main path network mowed extra wide by Oxford City Council, who gave us an extra (third) day of mowing. Smaller paths were kept scythed by volunteers as and when possible. Meadow areas and riverbanks were used by visitors to walk and sit as well, resulting in more trampling than usual. Efforts were made reasonably successfully to keep some areas undisturbed for wildlife by resisting the creation of new paths in with natural barriers and by explanatory notices where necessary.

b) Litter and anti-social behaviour. The usual winter group litter-picks took place over the 2019-20 winter once the vegetation had died down. In the spring lockdown there were many more young adults on site in the evenings, and this initially caused a litter problem, overcome with poster prompts and the individual litter picking efforts of the local community. There was one rave during the summer which the police dispersed.

c) Volunteering. Our regular monthly work parties had to be abandoned from March onwards, but individual effort and work in very small groups continued, and involved around 40 people. In addition the Oxford Conservation Volunteers came four times with around 20 people each time, and helped with paths and the pollarding of waterside willows. Oxford Good Gym volunteers joined us for a Sunday afternoon, and Elsevier publishers sent a team for a day as part of their workplace volunteering. We had two Duke of Edinburgh award students volunteer with us this year. Oxford City Council continued to help with three days of mowing and path clearance.

d) Events. All events planned had to cancelled, sadly. The annual photo competition was held as usual, with best submissions used to illustrate the Friends of Aston's Eyot calendar which is produced in part as a fund-raiser.

5.3 Conservation management and habitat restoration

a) Trees, woodland, and tree safety. Half the 13 hectare site is wooded.

We drew up **tree safety policy** for Aston's Eyot following Forestry Commission guidance for best practice. This recognises that very few people are killed or badly injured by falling trees, and that trees at all stages of their life cycle play an important role ecologically, for air quality and carbon sequestration, and for human well-being and landscape value. The policy involves zoning the site into zones according to the level of public footfall and proximity to neighbouring property, regular inspection of trees in falling distance of property or paths in higher risk zones, with problem trees found then felled or reduced, or paths re-routed to avoid them. The first inspection was completed during the 2019-20 winter. Further inspections of Ash were undertaken in July and August to check for Ash dieback; two large trees show signs of dieback but it remains unconfirmed whether this is due to Ash Dieback disease. Further checks will continue to be made.

The landowner Christ Church had tree surgeons in autumn 2019 to check trees with us along the boundary with the Metal Salvage and SS Mary & John primary school, and felled two

unstable trees and removed a number of large branches that could cause damage. However as the remaining trees along this stretch are elderly and seem to be more unstable (several more fell over winter), a decision was taken to close a path that runs through this area, leave the trees for wildlife, and create a new woodland path instead with volunteer labour.

Deer enclosure areas and tree guards round new plantings were inspected and repaired as necessary, and some nettle control (pulling and scything) was achieved.

b) Meadow areas. Having started 10 years ago with a complete loss of all grassy areas to nettles as a result of neglect and soil disturbance from bottle-digging (Aston's Eyot was a rubbish tip in the 1920's-40's), we now have 2-3 acres of meadow areas and rougher grassland. These were maintained as usual this year by mowing once or more times, with additional nettle control still required in early summer. Some small extra areas were also added near main paths by beginning nettle control through scything. A project underway on the Kidneys meadow to improve the meadow area here for pollinators by increasing floral diversity was informally monitored and continues to do well in terms of abundance of flowers, bees and butterflies.

A focus this year has been to investigate informally the impact of the high deer density on flower abundance through grazing. A section of the main meadow area was fenced off in early spring, and showed an immediate marked increase in flower numbers for spring flowering species such as cowslip, but the effect was less marked later in the year. Further work and investigation is planned next year for various flower assemblages.

c) Improving water quality in the Shire Lake Ditch. This is an ongoing project to improve poor water quality. This year, a serious pollution incident began in spring 2020 when there was clear evidence of sewage pollution at the Jackdaw Lane bridge, where there is a surface drainage outlet feeding in from neighbouring streets. A collapsed sewer turned out to be a main cause of the pollution, but it seems misconnected properties are also involved. A campaign was started together with the local residents association IFRA to persuade Thames Water and the Environment Agency to clear this up but with only partial success (in that some contamination continues). Our regular testing of the water in the ditch for pollutants also showed a worrying deterioration in water quality at the site of a second drainage outlet near the neighbouring primary school, where there have been sewage pollution incidents before from misconnected properties. Together with IFRA and local wild swimming groups, the help of the City Council Leisure and Parks leader was enlisted, and the Council have passed a motion to apply for designated bathing water status for the Thames at Oxford.

We will continue regular water quality monitoring.

5.4 Wildlife surveys

Although the Covid pandemic limited activities, some regular recording continued with a number of people putting in individual effort. Members frequently report sightings too.

a) A planned re-survey of plants was begun but then postponed due to the pandemic.

b) Birds. On Aston's Eyot, the Kidneys, and neighbouring areas, 61 species were recorded by 10 observers in 2020, 3 of which were unusual for the sites (Marsh Tit, Little Egret, Grey Wagtail). A new species for the sites, Nuthatch, was seen in November 2019, but not in 2020. The usual nestbox inspection and ringing of chicks had to be cancelled, but winter nestbox repairs and maintenance was done.

c) Badgers. The active sett entrance count in February came to 82 excluding the convent sett, which compares with 89 in 2019. The Oxfordshire Badger Group plan to vaccinate the

badgers against TB this coming summer, and the first site visit to plan this took place in November. It is hoped that this exercise will give some information on actual numbers.

d) **Trail cams** were monitored and recorded roe deer, muntjac, badgers (including white individuals), foxes, rabbits, and a weasel. Including other sightings, 4 weasels were seen, rabbits are seen only rarely, and there were no sightings of otters or mink this year. There were two sightings of a water vole in the ditch near the Thames, but no photos to confirm as yet. Trail camera footage highlights were shared with members at the AGM.

e) **Butterfly counts** were made but less frequently. 3 observers recorded 20 species out of the 23 species recorded in recent years. A Brown Argus was seen on the Kidneys for the first time in many years, on one of the new pollinator patches. Marbled Whites, recently arrived, continue to be seen on the meadows. Otherwise it was not a particularly good year for numbers. Sightings are reported to the local Butterfly Conservation branch.

f) **Moths** were recorded with regular light trapping, but the numbers of people on site in the evenings this year had an impact on where traps could safely be set. This will be repeated next year. Results were reported to the County Moth Recorder, but not yet analysed.

g) The Freshwater Habitats Trust sampled for eDNA in the Shire Lake Ditch adjacent to Long Meadow and the ditch on Christ Church meadow for the presence of Great Crested Newts, which are known to be present on neighbouring Long Meadow where they make unsuccessful breeding attempts in the pond there which now dries up too soon every summer. Results were negative.

6. Financial Review

6.1 Sources of income and outgoings

During the financial year to 26.9.20:

Income came from subscriptions and donations (£851, up 35% from last year), sale of calendars produced a net profit of £249, and we received a small grant (£750) from the Midcounties Co-operative Community Fund. No other fund-raising was attempted this year, as lease negotiations are underway with the landowner to give us more security of tenure than we have now with an informal agreement, which would make projects more attractive to future funders. We are not yet registered for Gift Aid, but are considering doing so.

Outgoings were for standard running costs, and tools bought using the Co-op grant. £252 of this grant remained unspent at the end of the financial year, but has been spent since, and an end of grant report completed.

The balance carried forward was £2404.80, up from £1867.14 at the start of year.

6.2 Reserves policy

There is no formal reserves policy, as basic running costs have been low. Informally, reserves are kept for a year's essential running costs such as public liability insurance. However this is under review at least informally as if Ash Dieback hits the reserve, extra tree work costs will be incurred, and also if a lease is taken on Aston's Eyot.

6.3 Financial status

The charity currently has resources from unrestricted donations and subscriptions that are sufficient to meet its essential outgoings for at least another year, and it is expected that that will continue to be the case.

6.4 Restricted Funds

The grant (£750) from the Midland Counties Co-operative was a restricted fund for the purposes of buying tools and small kit for volunteer use, and the term of this grant was December 2019 to December 2020. This is now spent as agreed and the end-of-grant report completed.

6.5 Details of any funds materially in deficit

The charity has no funds materially in deficit.

6.6 Remuneration of trustees

All trustees act in a voluntary capacity and receive no remuneration or other material benefits from their services to the charity. Out of pocket expenses necessarily and reasonably incurred by trustees in promoting the purposes of the charity are reimbursed at cost.

6.7 Statutory statements on liabilities

The trustees declare that

- a) The charity has given no guarantees where potential liability under the guarantee is outstanding at the date of this statement
- b) The charity has no outstanding debts which are secured by an express charge on any of the assets of the charity at the date of this statement.

Approved by the Trustees and signed on their behalf,

Ruth Ashcroft, Co-chair

15 Feb 2021

7. Receipts and payments accounts for financial year to 26.09.20

RECEIPTS	This year	Last year
£		
Subscriptions & donations	851.00	634.00
Sale of calendars	545.50	587.50
Mid-counties Co-op grant	750.00	
Total receipts	2146.50	1221.50
Opening balance at 27 September 2019	1867.14	2399.66
4013.64	3621.16	
PAYMENTS		
Insurance	133.00	133.00
AGM room hire	20.00	40.00 (<i>incl for EGM</i>)
Printing calendars	296.45	
Printing leaflets	72.08	59.76
Co-op grant spend (tools & small kit)	497.50	
Oxford Conservation Volunteers	360.00	600.00
Mower service	146.26	28.76
Website updating		270.65
Trail cameras		246.97
Tree stakes and posts		282.00
Seeds		50.00
Sundries	83.55	62.88
Total payments	1608.84	1754.02
Closing balance at 26 September 2020	2404.80	1867.14
4013.64	3621.16	

Notes

- 1) In 2019-20, £252.50 of the Midcounties Co-op grant remained unspent by 26.9.20 but was spent by the end of the grant term in December 2020.
- 2) In 2018-19, the payment for printing calendars was made in the previous financial year
- 3) In 2018-19, the payment to Oxford Conservation Volunteers covered work over more than two years

The accounts were prepared by Hon. Treasurer Laurence Burrell.

8. Approval of the Trustees

The Trustees declare that they have approved the above Annual Report and Statement of financial activity.

Signed on behalf of the trustees

Name: Anthony Cheke

Role: Chair