



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