

Harberton Parish Neighbourhood Plan (HNP)

Community visit to Eastern ('Preston Farm') Site

17 June 2024

1. This site had been put forward for potential allocation for housing development in HNP in response to the Call for Sites. It is understood that the landowner's initial ideas for the development include:

- protecting and enhancing the streams and wetter ground on the site for nature
- setting aside land for nature and community.

2. Accordingly, to inform the community consultation event on housing in July 2024, representatives of the Neighbourhood Plan Committee visited the site with trustees of Sustainable Harbourne Valley, with the landowner's permission, primarily to further understanding of its potential for nature regeneration and flood risk mitigation. The following points were made.

General

3. Observations:

- There are two streams on this site - the Harberton stream running roughly East to West, and a small tributary to it, running roughly North to South.
- Local residents observed that the stream water level as it runs through the village can fluctuate widely very fast. Also that it sometimes runs foul and contains pollutants, possibly from slurry somewhere further upstream - children have to be kept away from it.
- The planned Community Land Trust (CLT) development at Oak Tree Field adjoins the site.

Land for nature/community

4. **Enthusiasm for land set aside for nature with minimal management, so as to enhance biodiversity.**

- Key vision: a wilder nature area, but with a path through it, with possible resting/stopping place (small open green area or sitting place?), to allow people to connect with the nature there.
- "This is a very well maintained village. We need a wilder area." This land is a good place for that - visually separate from the neat village centre, but close to it.
- "It would be lovely to have more places to walk in nature around the village."

5. **Enthusiasm for the idea of a footpath** from the village centre (churchyard or CLT site) through to the new housing on allocated sites.

6. **The Northern end of the site could be the optimal area to set aside** - adjoining the churchyard and planned recreation/green space in the CLT site. It could ideally encompass the North-South tributary all the way to its junction with the Harberton Stream - creating an enhanced ecological corridor joining all these. The land immediately around the Harberton stream itself could then be landscaped for surface water retention from the housing development itself (eg attenuation ponds, suitable planting).

7. Ideally, **the drier areas of the existing field could be left as wild meadow** to provide a complementary habitat to the stream mini-wetlands - ie minimal management, just cut or grazed

just a couple of times a year (does ELMS reward this?) However, it was recognised that there would be limits to how much of the site could be set aside for nature/community.

- The land would not be suitable for a community orchard due to the soil and the fact that they require significant ongoing maintenance in perpetuity.

8. Key question: who would own and be responsible for the management of any community land (maintenance, public liability insurance, etc)?

- A new community organisation (eg Community Benefit Society (CBS)? But volunteer resources to maintain the village playing fields is already currently stretched.
- A residents' management co for the new development? How ensure aligned with community benefit objectives? Owned by a CBS but leased back to the ManCo for management?
- Could the land be owned and/or managed to the Oak Tree Field CLT/social landlord, under suitable contracts/covenants/S106 agreements?

The streams

9. Key principle for the streams should be to slow the flow of water through the land for example by:

- retaining it in boggy ground
- suitable planting (eg willows) to retain soil and absorb water
- capturing it in small attenuation ponds.

This would:

- increase surface water absorption and reduce flooding risk in the lower village
- retain water in the land and mitigate future drought problems from climate change
- support biodiversity.

Straightening the streams would be counterproductive.

10. Co-ordination between CLT and this site would be beneficial, and probably also the Western ('Ford Farm') Site. It is understood that the CLT development plans to channel surface water into the North-South tributary. It could be very important to ensure land management around this stream in the Eastern ('Preston Farm') Site allows for adequate water absorption and flow attenuation.

Other points

- Would be good for nature if the hedges around the site could be laid rather than cut as part of the ongoing land management plan.
- Green roofs on the housing would complement the biodiversity enhancements and flood risk mitigation of the land management.