Pocket Park, Plumpton Green: a report for the Parish Council

The Parish Council owns the Pocket Park and asked the Plumpton Wildlife and Habitat Group for suggestions on its management. This report describes the results of a preliminary vegetation survey carried out on 14 April 2013 and makes some suggestions for future management. Further surveys are planned for birds and other wildlife species. The rookery on the site is being monitored currently and has been monitored annually since 1987.

General information

The site borders the northern side of the Bevern Stream (Figure 1) and the land immediately adjacent to the stream floods occasionally. In fact, it had flooded on the night of the 13/14th April after a day of heavy rain and there was still some standing water both in the flood zone and elsewhere on the site where rainwater had remained in some places.

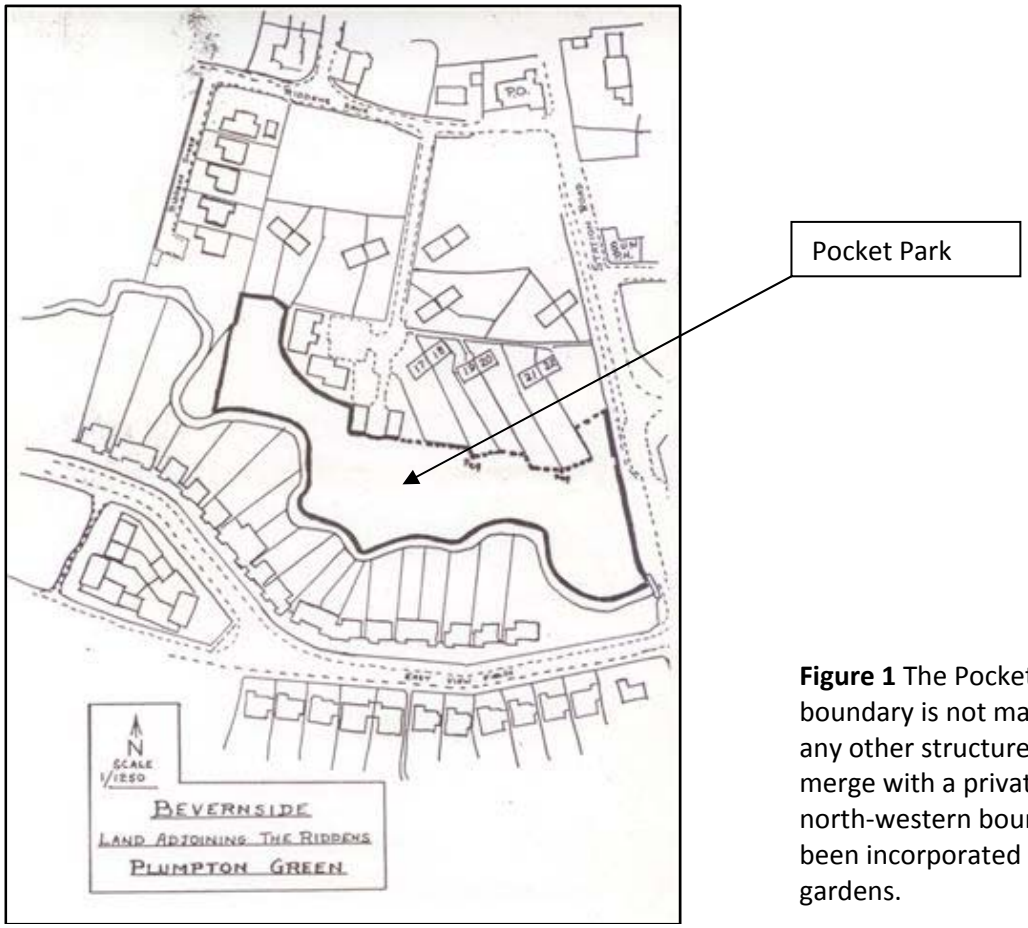

Figure 1 The Pocket. The western boundary is not marked by a fence or any other structure but appears to merge with a private garden. On the north-western boundary some land has been incorporated into private gardens.

History

There has probably been woodland on at least part of the site since at least 1840. The southern part appears as woodland on the Tithe Map of that time and probably dates back much further than that (see Figure 2). The northern part of the site was recorded as pasture on the Tithe apportionment. There are some indicators of ancient woodland present: field maple, holly, redcurrant, moschatel, pendulous sedge, ramsons and stinking iris, which suggest that it has never been completely cleared. There has been some disturbance, however, as is evident from the amount of blackthorn, which is absent from undisturbed woodland. While it meets the criteria for ancient woodland on account of

its age (i.e. present as woodland on 1st edition Ordnance Survey maps), it cannot be classified as Ancient Woodland, partly because of its small size, partly because there is no evidence of past use as coppice and partly because there are only seven ancient woodland indicator plant species out of a total of 100 listed for South-East England. Ancient woodland classification is usually given to woodland that contains at least 24 ancient woodland indicators.

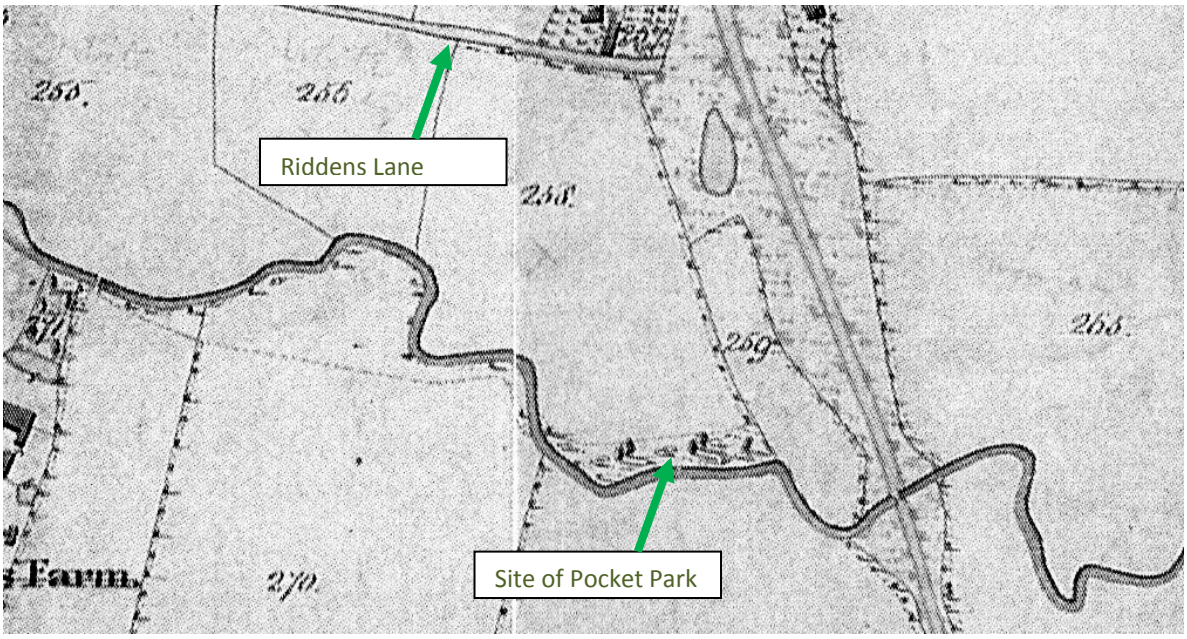

Figure 2 Portion of the 1841 Tithe Map, showing the current Pocket Park as part woodland.

Vegetation

The site was walked and species in the canopy, understorey and field layer recorded. Bryophytes were not surveyed on this occasion but a survey of these is planned. The list of 53 plant species recorded is given in Table 1 (pages 4 & 5). This list is incomplete because at the time of the survey some herbaceous perennial species had not appeared above ground and the shrubs and trees were not in leaf. Although most species are native, several are garden escapes or deliberate introductions, including daffodils, bamboo, Leyland Cypress, a number of unidentified horticultural forms of honeysuckle, and an unidentified rose.

Although a complete systematic National Vegetation Classification survey was not carried out because of the difficulty of the terrain, enough information was collected to classify the wood as W8 Ash-Field Maple-Dog's Mercury woodland, which is abundant on the relatively warm, dry lowlands of southern and eastern Britain on base-rich soils. Ash, field maple and hazel are all characteristic species, and the site has these, with ash as the dominant tree, as well as other characteristic plants, such as blackthorn, elder, privet, spindle, lords-and-ladies, false brome, bramble and ivy. There are seven sub-communities of this type of woodland, each with slightly differing plant communities in the field layer. The most striking feature of Pocket Park is the dominance of ramsons (wild garlic) in the spring and this allows its classification as one of the less common sub-communities, the W8f *Fraxinus excelsior-Acer campestre-Mercurialis perennis* woodland *Allium ursinum* sub-community. Dog's mercury is rare in the wood and should typically be more abundant but this is probably due to the fact that the site is too wet generally for this species and also that the dense cover of bramble would tend to suppress its growth.

Recommendations

Further survey work is recommended to identify and record species that occur later in the season.

The site is valuable habitat for a vegetation type that is not common in the parish and also is important for bryophytes, birds and insects. There is a considerable amount of dead and dying wood, both standing and fallen and this is a valuable resource for invertebrates and birds.

Human disturbance, past and present, is apparent. There is a considerable amount of garden refuse dumped on the site as well as some general rubbish, some historic, scattered throughout. There appears to be an old soakaway pit but the drain that carried water to it from the housing area is broken and no longer functions.

Some residents on the north boundary have extended their gardens into the site by mowing the grass, erecting a bird feeder and bird bath. This does not seem to be a problem. On the western edge, the Pocket Park boundary is indistinct but appears to run from a line of conifers south to a sluice on the Bevern. West of this appears to be part of a private garden but there is no evidence of 'gardening'.

The site would benefit from rubbish clearance. Garden plants and introduced species should be removed. It would also be useful to remove some of the undergrowth to create some small glades to benefit the field layer plants and invertebrates and further survey work would help to identify suitable areas. A circular route could be cleared to make a pathway to facilitate walking and enjoyment of the area. This would also benefit the wildlife by channelling people away from the more sensitive and at present less disturbed areas. We have identified a possible route around the site for ease of access. Bird boxes could be erected to enhance the site for breeding birds.

It would be worth considering the educational potential of this site. It is close to the school and could be a useful resource for environmental/ecological studies. There is also a possibility that it could be 'developed' to serve as a community woodland, involving local people, including the Scouts, in its maintenance and conservation.

In summary, in addition to contributing to biodiversity in the parish, this site could be valuable in terms of its educational potential and as an area that could allow recreational activities as well as community involvement. To achieve its full potential, the boundary needs to be defined and marked, rubbish cleared and a path marked. It is important that neighbouring residents and allotment holders be consulted. Their support would be essential, especially in the cessation of fly-tipping.

Plumpton Wildlife and Habitat Group would be happy to advise further on the siting of paths, signage, clearance of rubbish and of some dense undergrowth to facilitate access.

Plumpton Wildlife and Habitat Group, April 2013.

Table 1: Species recorded in Pocket Park, 14 April 2013. The species marked with an asterisk are all Ancient Woodland Indicator species

Canopy		
English name	**Scientific name**	**Comments**
Ash	*Fraxinus excelsior*	Most common tree
Field Maple*	*Acer campestre*	A few individuals
Leyland cypress	*Cupressocyparis leylandii*	One mature specimen on stream bank apparently planted by a previous resident
Pedunculate oak	*Quercus robur*	A few mature specimens
Willow	*Salix* sp.	A few mature individuals
Understorey		
Blackthorn	*Prunus spinosa*	Widespread
Broad-leaved bamboo	*Sasa palmata*	Introduced species
Dogwood	*Cornus* sp.	This does not appear to be the native species but will be checked when in leaf
Elder	*Sambucus nigra*	Some
Evergreen variegated Euonymus	*Euonymus japonicus* Silver Queen	Garden escape
Fly honeysuckle	*Lonicera xylosteum*	Introduced probably
Hawthorn	*Crataegus monogyna*	Few individuals
Hazel	*Corylus avellana*	Few individuals
Holly*	*Ilex aquilinum*	One shrub
Honeysuckle	*Lonicera periclymenum*	Very little
Honeysuckle cultivars		At least 3 more unidentified
Privet	*Ligustrum vulgare*	Some
Redcurrant*	*Ribes rubrum*	Several individuals
Rose	*Rosa* sp.	A small-leaved, thornless and invasive garden rose
Spindle	*Euonymus europaeus*	Few individuals
Tutsan	*Hypericum androsaemum*	Few individuals

Wilson's honeysuckle	*Lonicera nitida*	Invasive garden escape
Field layer		
A cultivated Arum	*Arum italicum* Pictum	One clump, garden escape
A sedge	*Carex* sp.	Unidentified, not flowering
Bramble	*Rubus fruticosus*	Frequent
Broad-leaved dock	*Rumex obtusifolius*	Occasional
Cleavers	*Galium aparine*	Occasional
Common nettle	*Urtica dioica*	Frequent
Cow Parsley	*Anthriscus sylvestris*	Frequent
Creeping Buttercup	*Ranunculus repens*	Occasional
Daffodils	*Narcissus* sp.	Rare, garden escape
Day Lily	*Hemerocallis* sp.	one clump, garden escape
Dog's Mercury	*Mercurialis perennis*	Rare
False Brome	*Brachypodium sylvaticum*	Occasional
Germander speedwell	*Veronica chamaedrys*	Occasional
Great Willowherb	*Eplobium hirsutum*	Occasional
Hemlock Water-dropwort	*Oenanthe crocata*	Occasional
Herb-Robert	*Geranium robertianum*	Rare
Hogweed	*Heracleum sphondylium*	Occasional
Ivy	*Hedera helix*	Frequent
Ivy-leaved Speedwell	*Veronica hederifolia*	Rare
Lady's-smock	*Cardamine pratensis*	Occasional
Lesser Celandine	*Ranunculus ficaria*	Frequent
Lords-and-ladies	*Arum maculatum*	Frequent
Male-fern	*Dryopteris filix-mas*	Rare
Meadowsweet	*Filipendula ulmaria*	Frequent
Moschatel*	*Adoxa moschatellina*	Rare
Pendulous sedge*	*Carex pendula*	Occasional
Ramsons*	*Allium ursinum*	Dominant in field layer
Red Campion	*Silene dioica*	Occasional
Rough Meadow Grass	*Poa trivialis*	Frequent
Stinking Iris*	*Iris foetidissima*	Rare
White Dead-nettle	*Lamium album*	Rare
Wood Avens	*Geum urbanum*	Occasional
Yellow Archangel	*Lamiastrum galeobdolon* ssp. *argentatum*	Occasional, garden escape