

c/o 41 Magdalen Rd
Oxford
OX4 1RB

elly@greenoxford.com

Thursday 10th June '08

Dear Fergus,

Please find enclosed the letter of local support re. Aston's Eyst.

If you have any questions please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Best wishes

Elly Patullo

PA to Cllr. Craig Simmons

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c/o 41 Magdalen Road
Oxford
OX4 1RB

Friday, 30 May 2008

To Whom It May Concern:

Re: Land at Aston's Eyot, Iffley Fields

We are writing to express our support for the East Area Parliament's proposal that the City Council rent the land known as Aston's Eyot from Christchurch College.

Were the Council to secure the rental of this land, we the undersigned would be interested in forming a management committee and applying for funding to develop the area for wildlife and the local community.

Several potential sources of funding for such a project have already been identified, as detailed overleaf.

We very much hope the Council will respond favourably to this proposal.

Yours sincerely,

Name (please print)	Signature	Address
LAWN ERREY		67 Stratford St Oxford
KATE PATULLO		260 IFFLEY ROAD, OXF.
HENRY TRACY		262 IFFLEY Rd OX.
RUTH ASHLEY		139 HURST ST, OXF
ANTHONY CHOP		"
SARAH MATTHEWS		1 ASTON ST OXF41A
EMMA STONES		14 Reckony Rd OXFORD
JOAN CLANCH		54 Stratford St. OX4 1BU
Sarah Matthews		3rd Floor

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OX4

Identified Sources of Funding

1. Awards for All www.awardsforall.org.uk
2. Parks for People (Heritage Lottery Fund) www.hlf.org.uk
3. Community Spaces (Big Lottery Fund) www.community-spaces.org.uk
4. The Tudor Trust www.tudortrust.org.uk
5. The Johnson Wax Ltd Charitable Trust
6. The Rowan Bentall Charitable Trust

Ann Hoggan - *Ann Hoggan* 53 Astor Street
3/41EW
C Pitson C PITSON 217 IAFLEY RD OX4 1SQ
P Perkins ~~PP~~ Perkins 329, meadow Lane
OXFORD.
G Rose *G Rose* 71 Newmarket St. OX4 4BZ
OXFORD
OX4 1SZ
Lawrence Brown 59 Beaford St. OX4 1SU
OX 249062.

Iffley Fields Community Nature Plan Group

Statement on Aston's Eyot

The Iffley Fields Community Nature Plan Group was set up with the help of Oxford City Council in 1998, as an offshoot of Iffley Fields Residents Association.

Contact details for the group were until recently published in the council's Countryside Events leaflet – we are not sure why they are no longer, or why the council did not try to get in touch regarding the offer from Christ Church to allow Oxford City Council to take over management of Aston's Eyot.

One of IFRA's main objectives is 'stewardship of the meadows' and this is one of the main reasons that it set up the nature plan group.

The surveys and consultations we have done with local people show that looking after Aston's Eyot and the Kidneys is one of the key matters that they care about.

It is our view that this would best be served by Oxford City Council seizing upon the opportunity to take over the management of the Eyot so that it could be managed sympathetically alongside the Kidneys which it already manages well.

The long-term aim of the Community Nature Plan group is to have Long Meadow, Aston's Eyot and the Kidneys declared a Local Nature Reserve, which would give the area considerably greater protection for nature conservation and amenity use than it now enjoys.

The users of Aston's Eyot are largely local people. It is they who keep the paths open, enjoy the wildlife, walk their dogs, clear up the litter left by the careless or the incompetent, pick the apples and blackberries and go running or walking there for pleasure. As our representatives, it is in our interests that the council should manage it.

Attached is the policy document prepared for the Community Nature Plan local consultation in May 2001, updated in January 2002 and again in March 2008. The policy urges precisely this.

We therefore urge the council to seize this opportunity and take over the management of Aston's Eyot in the interests of the people of East Oxford.

March 2008

Aston's Eyot

History

Aston's Eyot is a 12.0 ha. Island bordered by the Thames, Cherwell New Cut and Shire Lake Ditch. It can be approached from Meadow Lane via the Kidneys and across a footbridge, or from Jackdaw Lane off Iffley Road. The land is owned by Christ Church; however it is believed that in the past it may have also been owned by both New College and Magdalen College. It used to be in the County of Berkshire, and is still part of St Aldate's parish and outside East Ward.

Until the mid nineteenth century the land was a low-lying riverside water meadow. It was used as a mixture of pasture and market garden. From Victorian times until the Second World War it was used as a rubbish tip. The area contains the residue of Victorian pottery and glass, often bearing scraps of College crests, as well as broken tiles, food jars and medicine bottles. The level of the land was raised by about one metre, and the area must during this period have been particularly unpleasant and smelly.

After the Second World War the northern part of the site was used as a rugby pitch. However, due to problems caused to players by glass fragments rising through the surface, this was abandoned. Since tipping ceased, the vegetation has gradually developed so that the area has become a semi-natural wilderness, with scrub predominating. Scrub is an under-represented habitat with the Oxford City Local Plan area.

Between 1974 and 1984 Christ Church gave Oxford City Council a non-exclusive licence to use Aston's Eyot as a public open space. This was greatly appreciated by local people, not least because the gate at Jackdaw Lane was kept locked and cars kept out.

In 1983 Christ Church also leased the land to a bottle-digging club. During 1983-4 this club brought in large mechanical excavators which soon devastated a large area of the Eyot. The formerly locked gate was left open, and the club members' cars allowed on the land. The effects on the wildlife and habitat of Aston's Eyot of the bottle diggers' activities so shocked local people that they formed a committee ("The Friends of Aston's Eyot") to negotiate with Christ Church on behalf of the plants and animals that were being destroyed. The affair brought considerable local press coverage and caused acrimony between college and townspeople.

Christ Church allowed the bottle digging club to conclude its mechanical digging. However bottle diggers continued for a period to dig illicitly, although manually, and the college in an attempt to control this issued some individual licences. These were finally withdrawn in 1999.

The city council in the 1980s regarded Aston's Eyot as "such an important area of accessible urban countryside" that it was very anxious to continue with the management licence and prepared to find funds to do so.

During rebuilding of one of the college boathouses on Christ Church Meadow, a pontoon bridge was placed across the Cherwell. This was greatly appreciated by local people as an informal link with walks through the Meadow.

During rebuilding of one of the college boathouses on Christ Church Meadow in the late 1980s, a pontoon bridge was placed across the Cherwell. This was greatly appreciated by local people as an informal link with walks through the Meadow.

Current Use

Christ Church has always indicated that it intends that Aston's Eyot should remain open to the public. Recently much better relations have been established with the college through liaison with the Treasurer of Christ Church. Mr Richardson, the recently retired treasurer, came on a stroll through the fields at the beginning of the Nature Plan's work, while the current Treasurer has been ready to consult with local residents on some management issues.

Local people use the Eyot extensively for dog walking, walks, jogging, cycling, fruit picking (mainly apples, blackberries, sloes and sometimes cherries), watching the river, including the Eights (although the presence of the burned-out University boathouse blights the most popular view), enjoying the natural environment, going for picnics, bird watching, etc. It is used by Isis School for cross country running and wildlife walks. A local boy flies his hawk there. The land is also used for rough sleeping, motorcycle scrambling, bottle digging and flytipping, as well as a place for more furtive activity such as drug taking. In the past twenty years there have been at least 3 deaths in the fields, none suspicious.

The area is very rich in wildlife, particularly birds and plants. The cuckoo returns regularly each spring. Recent bird sightings have included red kite and osprey. Although there is no evidence of badgers, foxes are present, as well as plentiful rabbits and muntjak deer. There have been no sightings of mink, and the area would be suitable for polecat if it returns to Oxford.

A significant feature of the area are stands of dense thorny bushes which have grown up, particularly of rose and blackthorn.

The apple trees near the Kidneys are probably the remains of a Victorian orchard and many old fashioned varieties are present although the trees are in poor condition due to lack of management.

Christ Church has recently expressed interest in grazing some of its herd of Old English Longhorn cattle on the area cleared by the bottle diggers. As feared by local people at the time, this area has never recovered the wildlife diversity it had before the clearance, being dominated by weeds such as nettles and fat hen. However given time and better management, restoring the wildlife value of this area would be possible. Christ Church has recently been clearing this area.

Proposals have been floated for a new foot/cycle crossing across the Thames linking Aston's Eyot with the towpath and connecting with the footpath that runs past the Four Pillars Hotel to South Oxford. This would represent a change in the Local Plan which currently supports a link with Christ Church Meadow. As one of the reasons for Aston's Eyot's richness in wildlife is its isolation, the Community Nature Plan does not support this proposal, which is not backed by Christ Church. The Community Nature Plan does support an extension of Meadow Lane as a cycling route behind the playing fields to join the Plain via Cowley Place.

Japanese Knotweed, one of the three most invasive weeds in Britain, is colonising swathes of the Eyot. While its red foliage is very attractive in autumn, it is of virtually no wildlife value and an aggressive weed spread by both root systems and pieces of stem.

Proposals for future stewardship

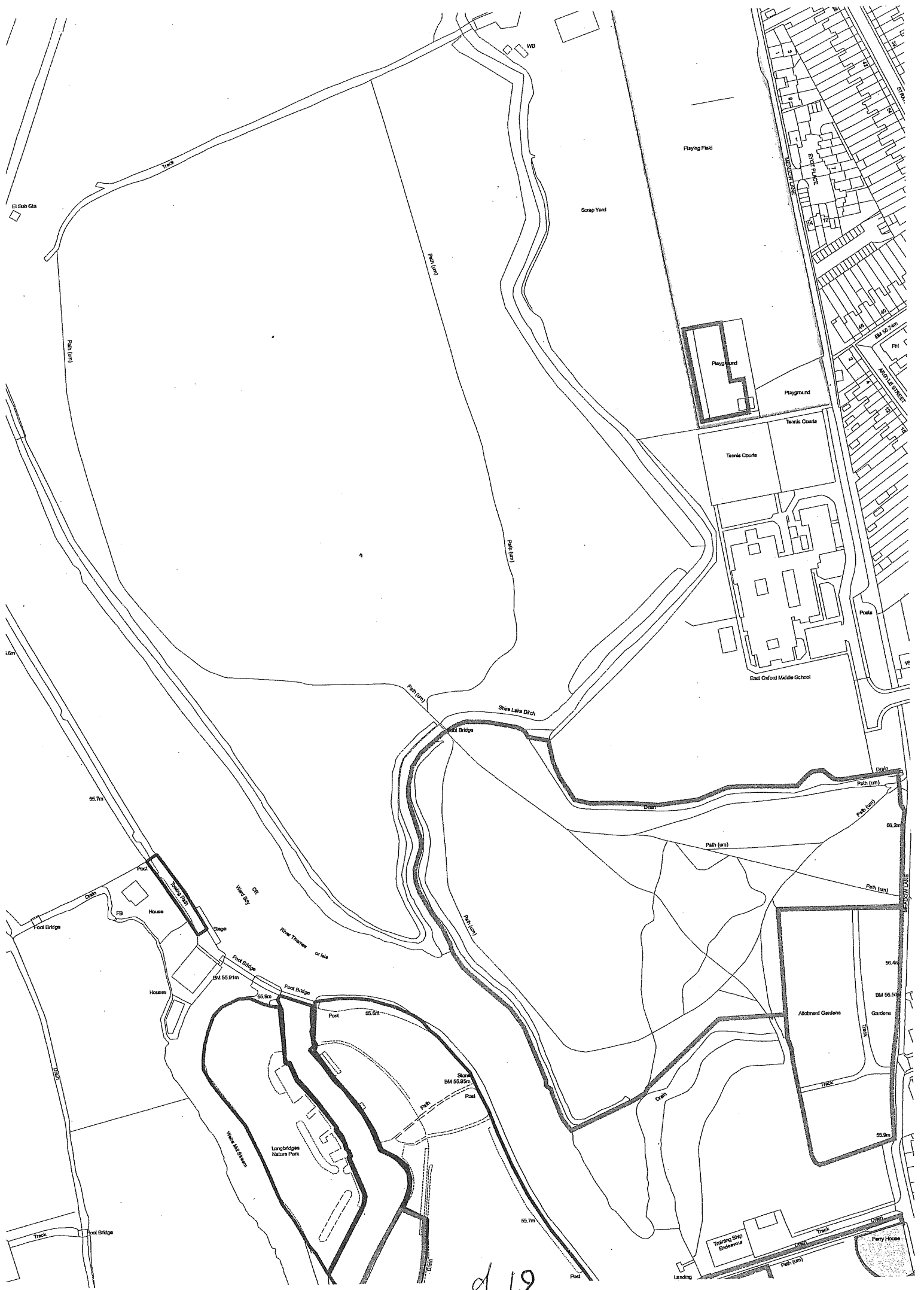
Any proposals for Aston's Eyot should preserve its scrubby, rough nature	<i>Supported</i>
Local access should continue to be sought and responsibly used.	<i>Supported</i>
The area requires a long-term management plan to preserve its wildlife and its amenities	<i>Supported</i>
The current dialogue between Christ Church and local people is to be welcomed and it is hoped that it will continue	<i>Supported</i>
A notice advertising that people are welcome to use the land under the Countryside Code, with a description of the code, should be erected at Jackdaw Lane, as suggested by Christ Church	<i>Supported</i> <i>Notices have been erected at the two entrances</i>
The City Council is well placed to undertake management of the site as an area of significance for wildlife and people	<i>Supported</i>
Ideally, Aston's Eyot should be declared a Local Nature Reserve under the provisions of Section 21, National Countryside Act 1949	<i>Supported</i>
<p>Christ Church has proposed grazing part of its herd of Old English Longhorn Cattle on the Eyot. What do you think of this proposal?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cattle were certainly grazed here in the 19th century, • It is unlikely that cattle have been grazed here since, because of the glass (it is likely that Ms Farrar's memories of cattle [see local history] refer to Long Meadow • The cattle would be attractive and interesting • They would require significant amounts of fencing, both to keep them in and the public out. More information on the type and extent of the fencing proposed is 	<i>Mixed reactions to this 2001 proposal, but generally not supported and it did not take place</i>

<p>required</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They might require access to Shire Lake Ditch for water. Even if the water is drinkable, this would effectively block off two paths which currently cross the proposed grazing area • The quality of the ground remains a problem. There is a real danger that glass and pottery shards would damage their hooves • The project might mean the importation of considerable quantities of topsoil to improve the quality of the grazing 	
<p>Town maps of the area, e.g. the A-Z of Oxford, continue to show the area of the Eyot adjacent to the scrapyard as 'Playing Field' This designation should be corrected</p>	<p><i>Supported</i></p>
<p>The trees in the plantation next to the scrapyard need thinning and underplanting with bushes such as hazel and plants such as bluebells.</p>	<p><i>Supported</i></p>
<p>Slightly better general upkeep is required, particularly maintenance of the paths. Local people could undertake this work in small working parties</p>	<p><i>Supported</i></p>
<p>Disabled access to the main path could be improved without destroying the rural character of the area</p>	<p><i>Supported</i></p>
<p>Clear and improve riverside walk along the Ditch/Cherwell, to avoid bank and path erosion, while making the path more passable but without spoiling its mysterious, secret nature. This could be undertaken by small working parties of local people</p>	<p><i>Supported</i> <i>This path is currently virtually impassable</i></p>
<p>Motorbikes on the Eyot damage the ground and disturb the peacefulness of the area. Notices at the entrances should make it clear that motorcycles are not allowed on the land. A kissing gate on the Jackdaw Lane entrance might help to solve this problem although any gate wide enough to admit wheelchairs will also admit a motorbike.</p>	<p><i>Supported.</i> <i>notices erected & Kissing gate installed between Aston's Eyot/Kidneys</i> <i>Motorbikes remain a problem</i></p>
<p>Competition angling should not be permitted on the Eyot, as anglers</p>	<p><i>Supported</i></p>

clubs already dominate large stretches of the river and canal on competition days. To prevent this, the Community Nature Plan group should lease the fishing rights.	
Dog owners are probably the most regular users of the Eyot; they appreciate and enjoy the area and are likely to be the first to notice any problems arising on it.	<i>Supported</i>
Dog dirt on the entrance path at Jackdaw Lane is a problem. Dog owners should be encouraged to bury/take away their dog's faeces.	<i>Supported</i>
A dog loo has been considered but the consensus is that they are noisome and need regular maintenance. Do you agree?	<i>Supported</i>
The giant craters made by illicit bottle digging require backfilling, as they are loosening tree roots. In some cases they could be made into gently sloped hollows rather than filled	<i>Supported</i>
Bottle digging on the Eyot should remain forbidden. As it is likely a certain amount of illicit digging will always take place, legitimising this by issuing licences would rapidly lead to an out-of-control escalation of the activity, as it did in the past Bottle digging is a factor in the spread of Japanese Knotweed	<i>Supported</i>
Children (and others) removing bottles etc. from abandoned diggings are not a problem	<i>Supported</i>
The large fallen willow trunk which used to be used as a seat/picnic place opposite the boathouses should be replaced A large boulder imported to the same place would fulfil the same role and be impervious to fire Perhaps we could have both?	<i>Supported</i>
Some bank maintenance work needs to be done opposite the boathouses (at the confluence of the Cherwell/Thames) to prevent further bank erosion The banks could be reinforced with natural material such as woven willow or coir A willow could be planted on the bank to help hold it together	<i>Supported</i> <i>The bank continues to erode and the whole area has degraded from the once pleasant place it was</i>

<p>The riparian (river bank) willows along the Thames and Cherwell and Shire Lake Ditch need regular pollarding This is particularly urgent in the case of Cherwell willows which are splitting and falling apart Any pollarding needs to take place outside the nesting season as many birds nest in the willows Any pollarding needs to take place outside the winter as the willows are used as wren roosts for large numbers of wrens Any pollarding needs to be above head height (i.e. ten feet from ground level) to protect birds using the thick growth at the base of the pollard from easy access by predators (modern machine pollarding techniques cut too low and render the tree much less attractive to birds) A small percentage of the willows should be cut each year, to reduce adverse impact on the environment</p>	<p><i>Supported</i> <i>Some pollarding on Isis carried out</i> <i>Cherwell trees still need attention</i></p>
<p>The semi-natural, herb-rich grassland close to the gravel path is particularly valuable. Apart from being flowery and attractive this is home for the uncommon butterflies the Dingy Skipper and Brown Argus. If left to natural processes the grassland will be covered first by brambles and then by shrubs. Regular mowing, either annually or biannually, is needed.</p>	<p><i>Supported.</i> <i>This has not been addressed. A single mowing by Christ Church in 2002 led to a vast crop of nettles.</i></p>
<p>The Japanese Knotweed needs to be brought under control and if possible eliminated. Non-chemical means (regular cutting and burning) are preferred Any chemical means require a licence from the Environment Agency</p>	<p><i>Supported very strongly.</i> <i>However amateur efforts to tackle knotweed are probably worsening problem</i></p>
<p>The apple trees growing near the Kidneys entrance need identifying and some small management measures undertaken to prolong their life If possible, more specimens of the same old-fashioned varieties of apple should be procured and planted on the Eyot It may be possible to encourage mistletoe to grow on the apple trees</p>	<p><i>Supported</i></p>
<p>The Eyot represents an ideal site for planting the rare black poplar. If possible three or four specimens should be obtained and planted</p>	
<p>The Eyot is regularly used by rough sleepers and others of no settled abode</p>	<p><i>Mixed reactions. Mainly tolerant but there is also</i></p>

<p>The drawbacks of this activity are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Almost invariably campers leave large quantities of litter, including human faeces • Campers are often drug users and discard used needles in the undergrowth • Their presence often discourages people, particularly the elderly and those with young children, from using the Eyot • They represent encroachment of human settlement on an area enjoyed by local people because of its wildness and openness <p>On the other hand</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a lot of land in the Eyot, and it is possible for the occasional camper to spend some time there without disturbing anyone • In many cases campers are people with no other place to go and few resources for succeeding in conventional society <p>Should the presence of the occasional camper be tolerated as long as it doesn't become too overt and/or cause environmental problems, such as litter</p>	<p><i>considerable strong feeling that rough sleepers are preventing local people from fully using the area. 2007-8 perception of significant worsening of problem.</i></p>
<p>Regular litterpicks are needed in the Eyot. This could be undertaken by small parties of local people. The best time is late autumn or early spring.</p>	<p><i>Supported. Litterpicks always attract willing volunteers</i></p>
<p>The "Millennium Bridge" proposal to link Aston's Eyot with South Oxford has both advantages and disadvantages</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is opposed by Christ Church • It would change use of the area from recreational to a through route, albeit only on foot or cycle. However there would be no effective way of preventing motorbikes from using the route • It would create a pleasant link with the centre of town and cut considerable time off the journey for those wishing to travel to the Grandpont area • Donnington Bridge was originally a footbridge (and before that a ferry) • The presence of the Four Pillars Hotel at Eastwyke Farm, together with the lack of progress on the rebuilding of the burnt-out University boathouse, raises issues of possible development on the south side of the Thames with which the footbridge would link <p>The Community Nature Plan opposes the inclusion of the new Millennium Bridge proposals in the new Local Plan</p>	<p><i>A separate consultation on the feasibility of a part-time bridge linking Aston's Eyot with Christ Church Meadows (as during building works on boathouses) received a very high level of support. The Isis bridge received a low level of support and considerable adverse comment. March 2008 meeting with Christ Church: Christ Church indicated they would be willing to look favourably on such a bridge over Cherwell.</i></p>



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CITY OF OXFORD
SCHEDULE OF OUTGOING PAYMENTS

5205 SW/2, 5204 NW/8

7/112

is Astons Eyott. Ippey fields.

Christ Church.

Dimensions

LAND,

tion of Premises Licence to use as casual Public Open Space

Premises

Outgoings

itee Rec./Am.

Rent £25 (in arrears) to be paid annually on 24th June
1st payment 24.6.75.

of Tenancy 10 yrs. from 24.6.74.

Rateable Value

ons of Tenancy T. T.

is offer letter 21.9.73. DP 15 CS. 23.10.73 Rec./Am. Cites. 22.10.73. Copy licence & plan 16.
f.74 & 2.9.74.