

BRENT ISLAND TRUST

MANAGEMENT PLAN

April 2016



Summary

The Island is managed for the protection of wildlife and for people to enjoy. When these aims conflict the protection of wildlife will normally take precedence. The aim of management for wildlife is to maintain a diversity of natural habitats for the benefit of a range of species. They are shown on the included map and are defined as follows:

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| a) Footpaths | b) The Meadow |
| c) Tussocky Grass | d) The Orchard |
| e) Bramble, nettle etc | f) River margins |
| g) The river | h) The leat |
| i) The weir | j) Mature woodland |
| k) Between the gate and weir | l) Structures – linhay and bridge |

The plan for each area is described in subsequent pages.

Methods of management are through research, recording and communication, so that people using The Island can understand and participate in what is happening.

Communication is through the website (www.brentisland.org.uk), boards in the linhay, emails, newsletters and discussion with members. The aim is to keep the number of official signs to a minimum as they detract from the natural appearance of the Island.

Working parties are organised and everyone who is willing to help is welcomed. No work should be carried out without the knowledge and approval of the Management Committee, as the Committee is responsible to the membership for ensuring that any activity is consistent with this management plan.

Dogs are welcome on The Island subject to their owners being responsible and keeping them under control. Management for wildlife requires patience and consistency. Habitats need to be maintained in the same way for a number of years in order to foster the species that depend on them.

The Trust has adopted a Risk Management policy to safeguard visitors to The Island and Risk Assessment forms for working parties.

Management of Habitats

- a) **Footpaths:** These will be kept clear of brambles, roots, stones, holes and other hazards to provide easy access for visitors to explore and enjoy The Island.

- b) **The meadow:** This is ancient pasture land on deep loamy sand, which may never have been sprayed or ploughed. After being let for grazing it was left empty for five years until acquired by the trust in 1994, when it was cut and raked in the summer and then grazed in the early autumn. Since 2001 the meadow has been cut every autumn. The cut grass is raked and removed to reduce fertility and encourage wild flowers and finer grass species, which support a diversity of insects. Tree seedlings growing in the meadow will be removed. A strip on the outside edge of the path bordering the path around the meadow will be cut annually, to prevent brambles encroaching. In 2015 two trial areas were sown with yellow rattle to encourage the growth of wild flowers for bees, butterflies and invertebrates. This experiment will be extended if successful. Plugs of appropriate wild flowers may also be planted.

- c) **Areas of tussocky grass:** These provide important habitat for small mammals, including voles, and for insects and the birds which feed on them. It is important to keep brambles, bracken and sapling trees out of these areas, and it is intended to cut these areas less often, at the discretion of the Committee.

- d) **The orchard:** An area at the south western end of the meadow was planted with orchard apple trees in the winter of 2009/10. Five standard trees of differing varieties, including traditional dessert, cooking and cider, being planted in memory of the Trust's first Secretary, Don Stansbury and other individuals. The area of grass under the trees will be mown or strimmed more frequently to prevent the trees becoming choked. A plan for protecting, pruning and training the trees has been implemented. The addition of a small number of additional trees in the same area and to the east of the Linhay will be considered. These may include grafts from the original Island apple tree variety.

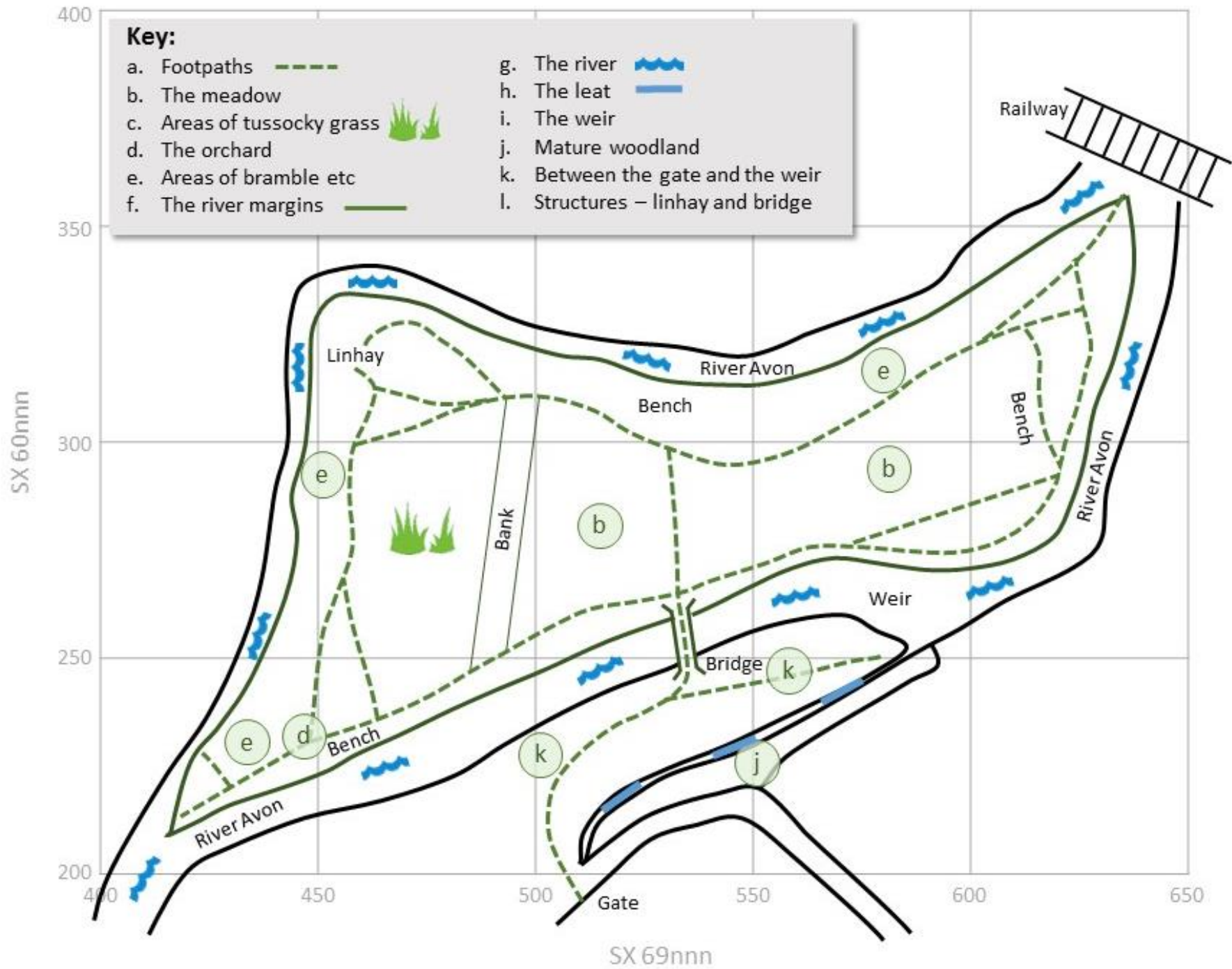
- e) Areas of bramble, nettle, blackthorn and willow thicket:** Bramble patches provide food and shelter for wildlife and create areas with less human intervention. Thickets of blackthorn and willow provide areas for nesting birds, small mammals and invertebrates. Dense bank cover, protected by brambles, is hoped will provide habitat for otters known to be on this river. Areas of brambles will be cut back with brushcutters every winter in a rolling programme to prevent invasion by sapling trees and to keep the bramble growth young and healthy. It is important that the margins of the Meadow should have scalloped edges, to soften the transition to the mature trees and provide habitat for a variety of wildlife.
- f) The river margins:** Large trees shelter the meadow and provide habitat for wildlife including birds and bats. Views of the river have been opened up, but it is important to restrict access to other areas of the river bank. Rhododendron on the banks must be removed where possible, and invasive Himalayan Balsam will be removed. Bracken will be prevented from encroaching on the meadow by “bashing” with sticks in late Spring and early Summer. The beach area by the weirpool will be monitored for erosion and protection constructed if necessary.
- g) The river:** The aim is to preserve the natural character of the river for most of the length of The Island with occasional viewpoints. In 2015 students from King Edward VI Community College, Totnes, carried out an aquatic invertebrate survey. It is hoped that this will be repeated in future years. We will continue to work with the Westcountry Rivers Trust to monitor the presence of fish and look for signs of otters.
- h) The leat:** This provides a different water environment because it is shallow and slow moving. The aim is to keep a consistent flow and depth. A new sluice gate, in oak, was installed in 2014 by the contractors who carried out the project to stabilize the weir. Original ironwork was re-used. Every year in the Spring silt is cleared from the leat by members of the Scouts and Explorers to ensure it flows easily. It is our policy to involve young people in caring for the Island. The leat gates are prone to being blocked by debris in the river and need regular clearing. The skunk cabbage is being contained and should be kept within about 20 metres of the gate. Large trees should not be allowed to grow

along the northern side of the leat as the roots will damage the banks.

- i) **The weir:** This is essential for the preservation of the weirpool - an important area for insects, birds and bats. A bat survey in 2015 established that 10 species were living on or using The Island. The weir is also important for the leat, and for the balance between the two arms of the river. The foot of the weir was stabilized and the fish ladder improved to the latest standard in 2014. The project cost a total of £42,000 and Brent Island Trust raised £10,000 towards this, with help from a number of sources. The project was managed by the Westcountry Rivers Trust, with funding from DEFRA's SHRImp (South Hams Rivers Improvement Project). Gravel may have to be removed from the fish pools to provide sufficient depth for fish to migrate upriver. In the Autumn spate salmon are regularly seen running upstream at Lydia Bridge. A watch has to be kept for large tree trunks in the river above the weir and The Island bridge and these should be reported.

- j) **Mature woodland:** The area between the leat and the lane is rarely entered by dogs or walkers. It is being kept as woodland. It contains several of our largest trees and significant piles of wood on the ground, which are good for wildlife. The area of mature woodland across the river from the northern side of the Island is in private ownership and is an important part of the natural landscape. All mature trees on The Island (across the bridge) are subject to a Tree Preservation Order. Those between the leat and the lane fall within the South Brent Conservation Area. Any work on trees in these two areas must be approved by the Dartmoor National Park Authority. All large trees on The Island have been identified and measured around the girth at a height of four feet. Some heights will be recorded periodically. The coppice of oak and the north eastern end is being left to grow naturally. White willows and wild cherries have been planted. As part of our Risk Management a qualified tree surgeon will inspect the mature trees annually.

- k) **Between the gate and the weir:** Young oaks to the north of the path are being left to grow to maturity. Hazels and alders are naturalising in the area between the path and the leat, and these should be encouraged as they will provide a good habitat for a



diversity of wildlife, including birds and small mammals. Larger species of trees should be removed. The large oak on the riverbank beyond the bridge is dying and will be kept under observation. The path will be surfaced periodically with a mixture of china clay quarry sand and small stones. This provides a good dry surface which drains well and will be topped up as needed.

l) Structures:

- **The linhay** was renovated in 1997 and houses display boards providing information about the island and its wildlife. They are a valuable resource for displaying work by the primary school children. Displays will be changed at intervals to maintain the interest of visitors. There have been recurrent outbreaks of vandalism in the linhay, with the display boards being particularly targeted. We will continue to repair these where possible. There has been occasional nuisance from graffiti, broken bottles and fires. There are two separate loft areas which are suitable for larger nesting birds. The space under the eaves at the front and back of the building has been partitioned into 20 areas suitable for a variety of birds and bats. They may also be used by insects and mammals.
- **The bridge.** The stone surface of the bridge occasionally needs dressing to prevent damage to the arches. Ivy will be removed periodically to prevent damage to the masonry. During the period when the river level was low, for the work on the weir in 2014, damage to the bridge stonework and underscored piers was repaired and the surface dressed with the same sand and stone mix as the path. The bridge was repointed in 2009.

The Committee will keep this plan under review and we will consult the full membership for a complete update in 2020.

Species surveys of the flowering plants, grasses, sedges and rushes, ferns and trees have been carried out at five-year intervals with the most recent in 2015. It is intended to repeat this annually if possible. It is hoped that other wildlife groups – such as bats, fungi, birds, butterflies etc - will be surveyed at regular intervals.

Some of the more recent survey results follow and the latest data can be seen on The Island's website at www.brentisland.org.uk.

Recent Wildlife Surveys

The full list of wildlife surveys can be found on The Island's website at www.brentisland.org.uk

'WILD FLOWERS' - 65 Species	
American Skunk-cabbage	Ivy
Bluebell	Ivy-leaved Toadflax
Bramble	Japanese Anemone
Broad-leaved Dock	Lesser Burdock
Broad-leaved Willowherb	Lesser Stitchwort
Bugle	Lords-and-Ladies
Cat's-ear	Montbretia
Cleavers	Nipplewort
Common Dandelion	Opposite-leaved Golden-saxifrage
Common Knapweed	Pignut
Common Mouse-ear	Pink Purslane
Common Nettle	Primrose
Common Sorrel	Ramsons
Cow Parsley	Red Bistort
Creeping Buttercup	Red Campion
Creeping Thistle	Red Clover
Dog's Mercury	Ribwort Plantain
Dusky Cranesbill	Rough Chervil
Enchanter's-nightshade	Sanicle
Foxglove	Self-heal
Garden Solomon's-seal	Thyme-leaved Speedwell
Germander Speedwell	Tutsan
Greater Common Bird's-foot-trefoil	Violet (prob. Common Dog-violet)
Greater Plantain	Wavy Bitter-cress
Greater Stitchwort	White Clover
Ground-elder	Wild Angelica
Ground-ivy	Wood Avens
Hairy Bitter-cress	Wood Dock
Hedge Woundwort	Wood Speedwell
Hemlock Water-dropwort	Wood-sorrel
Herb-Robert	Yarrow
Hogweed	Yellow Archangel
Indian Balsam	

GRASSES , SEDGES & RUSHES - 21 Species

Annual Meadow-grass	Pendulous Sedge
Cock's-foot	Perennial Rye-grass
Common Bent	Red Fescue
Creeping Bent	Remote Sedge
Creeping Soft-grass	Rough Meadow-grass
Crested Dog's-tail	Soft-rush
False Oat-grass	Sweet Vernal-grass
Field Wood-rush	Timothy
Giant Fescue	Wood false-brome
Great Wood-rush	Yorkshire-fog
Meadow Foxtail	

FERNS - 9 species

Maidenhair Spleenwort	Hart's-tongue
Lady-fern	Polypody sp.
Scaly Male-fern	Soft Shield-fern
Broad Buckler-fern	Bracken
Male-fern	

TREES, SHRUBS & WOODY CLIMBERS - 21 species

Sycamore	Wild Cherry
Alder	Cherry Laurel
Traveller's-joy	Blackthorn
Hazel	Pedunculate Oak
Cotoneaster	Field-rose
Hawthorn	Grey Willow
Spurge-laurel	Elder
Beech	Rowan
Ash	Snowberry
Holly	Elm
Honeysuckle	

BATS	
Common Pipistrelle Soprano Pipistrelle Whiskered and/or Natterer's Daubenton's Lesser Horseshoe	Longeared Nathusius Pipistrelle Noctule Serotine Greater Horseshoe

AQUATIC INVERTEBRATES	
Olive nymphs Stonefly nymphs Flat Bodied nymphs	Cased caddis Uncased caddis

FISH – a count taken prior to the weir restoration	
Brown Trout Salmon	Eel

