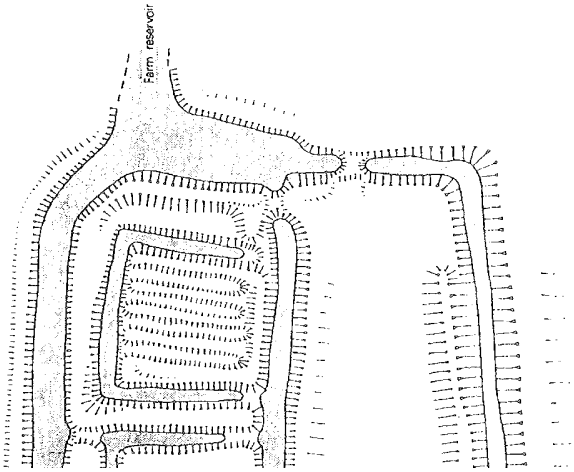
Forestry Commission
England

MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE MEDIEVAL FISHERY AND WARREN IN HOME WOOD

Monument No SM29423



This plan is a renewal of the current management plan that expired on 28 Feb 2006

Coverage of this plan is for the period 28 February 2006 – 28 February 2011

SIGNED: …….. ***DATE: ……..***

FOREST DISTRICT MANAGER
FOREST COMMISSION
NORTHANTS FOREST DISTRICT

SIGNED: …….. ***DATE: ……..***

INSPECTOR FOR ANCIENT
MONUMENTS
ENGLISH HERITAGE

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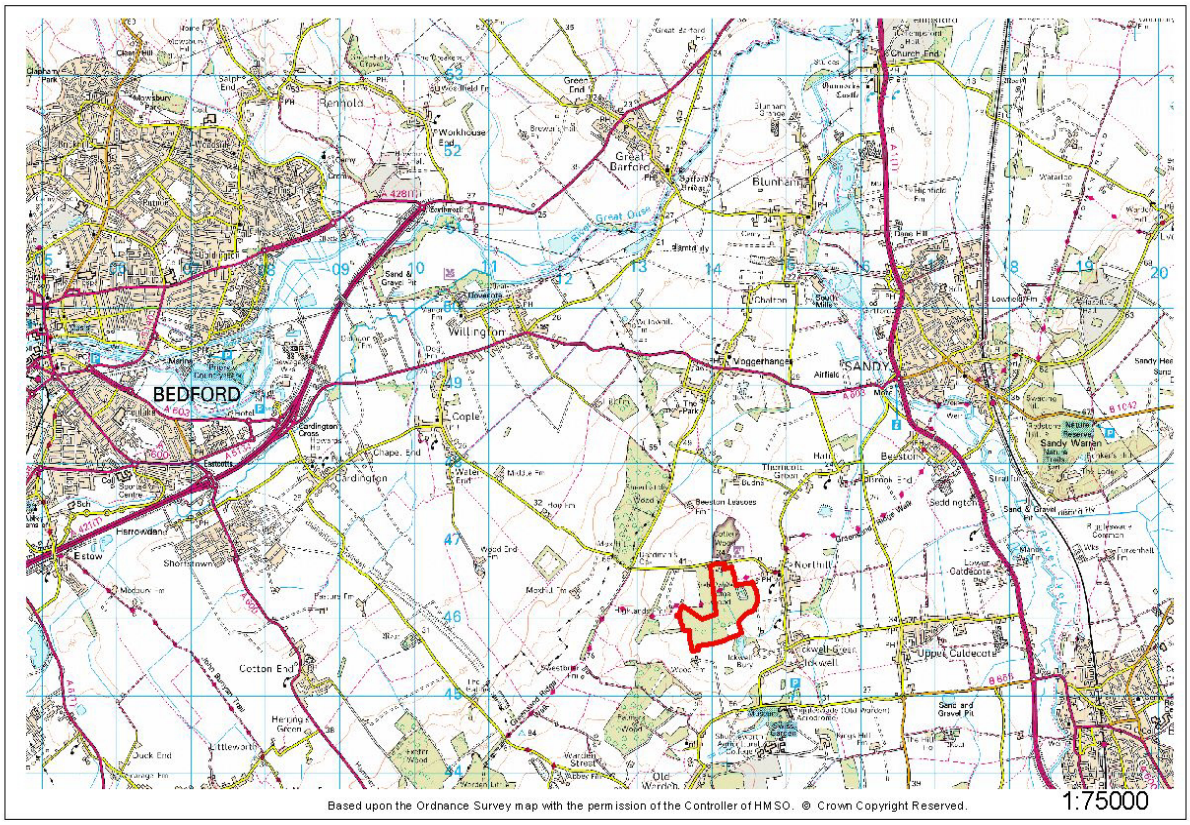
1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

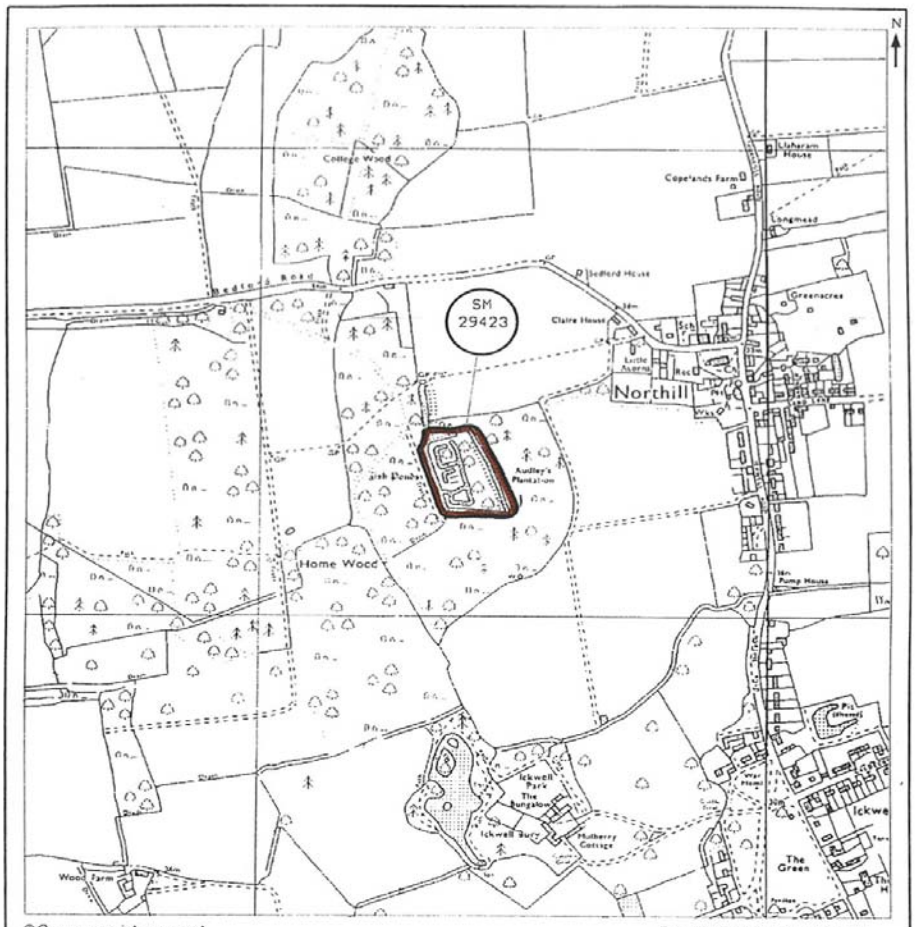
1 .1 DETAILS OF SCHEDULE ENTRY

MONUMENT NAME:	-	MEDIEVAL FISHERY AND WARREN IN HOME WOOD
PARISH:	-	NORTHILL
DISTRICT:	-	MID BEDFORDSHIRE
COUNTY:	-	BEDFORDSHIRE
NATIONAL MONUMENT No:	-	29423
NATIONAL GRID REF:	-	TL 14394631



The schedule of the monument is shown below, with the outlined in black and highlighted in red. It includes a two-metre boundary around the archaeological features, considered to be essential for the monument's support and preservation.

MONUMENT INCLUDED IN THE SCHEDULE ON 2 DECEMBER 1998



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For identification purposes only

Site Name: Medieval fishery and warren in Home Wood		
County: Bedfordshire	District: Mid Bedfordshire	Parish: Northill
Notes:		
Key: Monument No. Location/extent of site	Scale: 1:10000 Derived from: 1:10000 Centred on NGR: TL14394631 Extract from OS sheet: TL14NW	
	Date: 2.9.98	Monument No: SM29423

English Heritage

Fortress House 23 Savile Row London W1X 1AB Telephone 071-973 3000 Fax 071-973 3001

A concise map of the monument is shown on Diagram 1 (page 7), supplied by Bedfordshire County Council.

1 .2 DESCRIPTION OF THE MONUMENT

The monument includes the visible and buried remains of a medieval fishpond and warren complex located within a small valley to the west of the village of Northill, some 550m south west of St Mary's church.

The complex is defined by a broad ditch surrounding a roughly rectangular island orientated NNW-SSE in line with the valley floor. The western arm of the perimeter ditch is 10m – 12m wide and some 170m in length, water-filled from springs on the valley floor, and flanked by a slight outer bank which is thought to have resulted from periodic dredging during the period of use. The eastern arm is similar in width but different in character, with a more pronounced 'V' shaped profile cut into the rising ground to a depth of 3m. It is now normally dry. A substantial internal bank created from the upcast follows the entire length, rising to a pronounced knoll at the southern end. The western halves of the southern and northern arms remain waterfilled or waterlogged for much of the year. These are generally no more than 6m in width, although the western part of the northern ditch appears to have been widened prior to 1781 – the date of the earliest know large scale map of the area. Between 1781 and 1884 a linear pond was added to the north west corner of the perimeter ditch. This pond has since been enlarged and extended further to the north. It is not included in the scheduling.

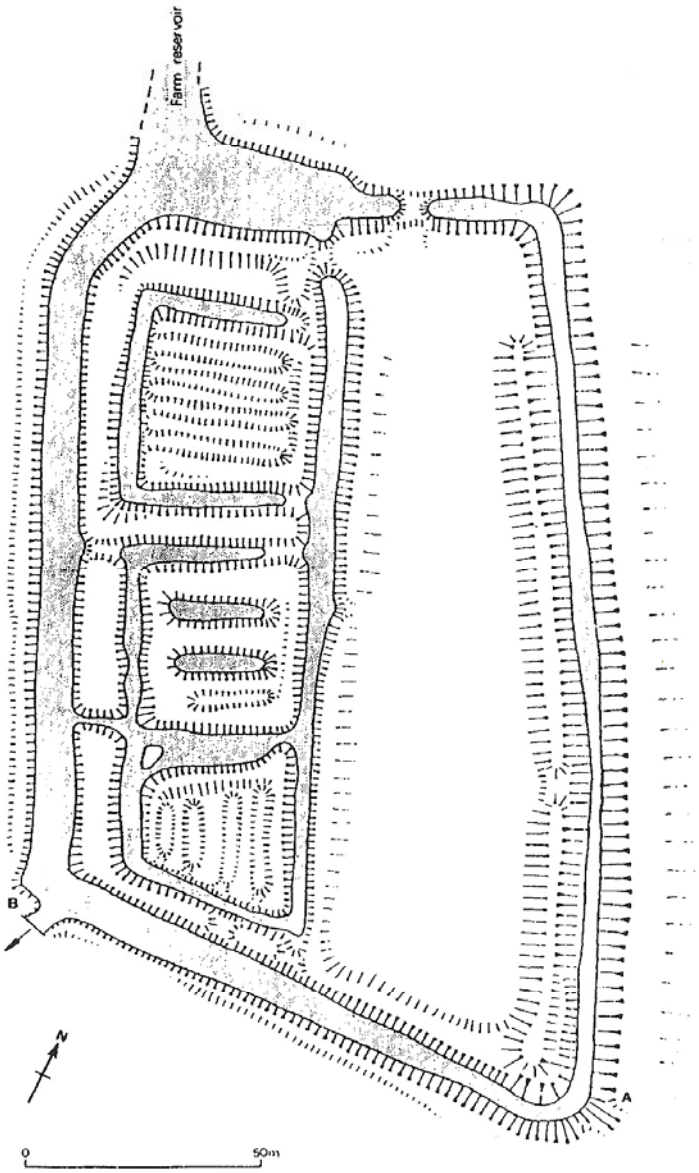
The island is divided in two lengthways by a broad central ditch and the western half is further sub-divided into three rectangular compartments, each surrounded by interconnecting ditches and containing arrangements of between three and four narrow rectangular fishponds. Narrow breaches in the inner face of the perimeter ditch and junctions with the main central channel indicate the means by which the flow of water through this system was originally regulated. The ponds and connecting ditches vary between 0.5m and 1m in depth and contain considerable deposits of waterlogged silt and leaf mould.

The eastern side of the island is generally level and may have contained a dwelling for the keeper and other buildings related to the management of the fishery. It has also been suggested that this side saw use as a managed rabbit warren, with the level area acting as warren pasture and the large internal bank and knoll to the east serving as a purpose-built nesting area or pillow mound. The surrounding ditch, when fully wet, would have provided an effective means of confining the rabbit population, the only point of access being a narrow causeway across the northern arm which may well be a later addition. The original entrance is thought to have been a bridge, the location of which is marked by a gap in the internal bank near the centre of the eastern arm.

The complex was probably attached to the medieval estate of Northill Manor, which was located on the crest of the slope to the east, slight to the west of the church and shown on the map of 1781 (Beds R.O: X1/87). It certainly formed part of the Manor's property by the late 18th century, when the property was in the hands of John Robinson, although it is not known whether it was still actively managed at that time.

Diagram 1.

HOME WOOD FISHERY, Northill, Bedfordshire
TL 144 463



Bedfordshire County Council

1 .3 ASSESSMENT OF IMPORTANCE

A fishpond is an artificially created pool of slow moving freshwater constructed for the purpose of cultivating, breeding and storing fish to provide a constant and sustainable supply of food. They may be dug into the ground, embanked above ground level, or formed by placing a dam across a narrow valley. Groups of up to twelve ponds variously arranged in a single line or in a cluster and joined by leats have been recorded. The ponds may be of the same size or of several different sizes with each pond being stocked with different species or ages of fish. The size of the pond related to function, with large ponds thought to have had a storage capability whilst smaller, shallower ponds were for fish cultivation and breeding. Fishponds were maintained by a water management system which included inlet and outlet channels carrying water from a river or stream, a series of sluices set into the bottom of the dam and along the channels and leats, and an overflow leat which controlled fluctuations in water flow and prevented flooding.

Buildings for use by fishermen or for the storage of equipment, and islands possibly used for fishing, wildfowl management or as shallow spawning areas, are also recorded.

The tradition of constructing and using fishponds in England began during the medieval period and peaked in the 12th century. They were largely built by the wealthy sectors of society with monastic institutions and royal residences often having large and complex fishponds. The difficulties of obtaining fresh meat in winter and the value placed on fish in terms of its protein content and as a status food may have been factors which favoured the development of fishponds and which made them so valuable. The practice of constructing fishponds declined after the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the 16th century although in some areas it continued into the 17th century. Most fishponds fell out of use during the post-medieval period although some were re-used as ornamental features in 19th and early 20th century landscape parks or gardens, or as watercress beds.

Documentary sources provide a wealth of information about the way fishponds were stocked and managed. The main species of fish kept were eel, tench, pickerel, bream, perch and roach. Large quantities of fish could be supplied at a time. Once a year, probably in the spring, ponds were drained and cleared.

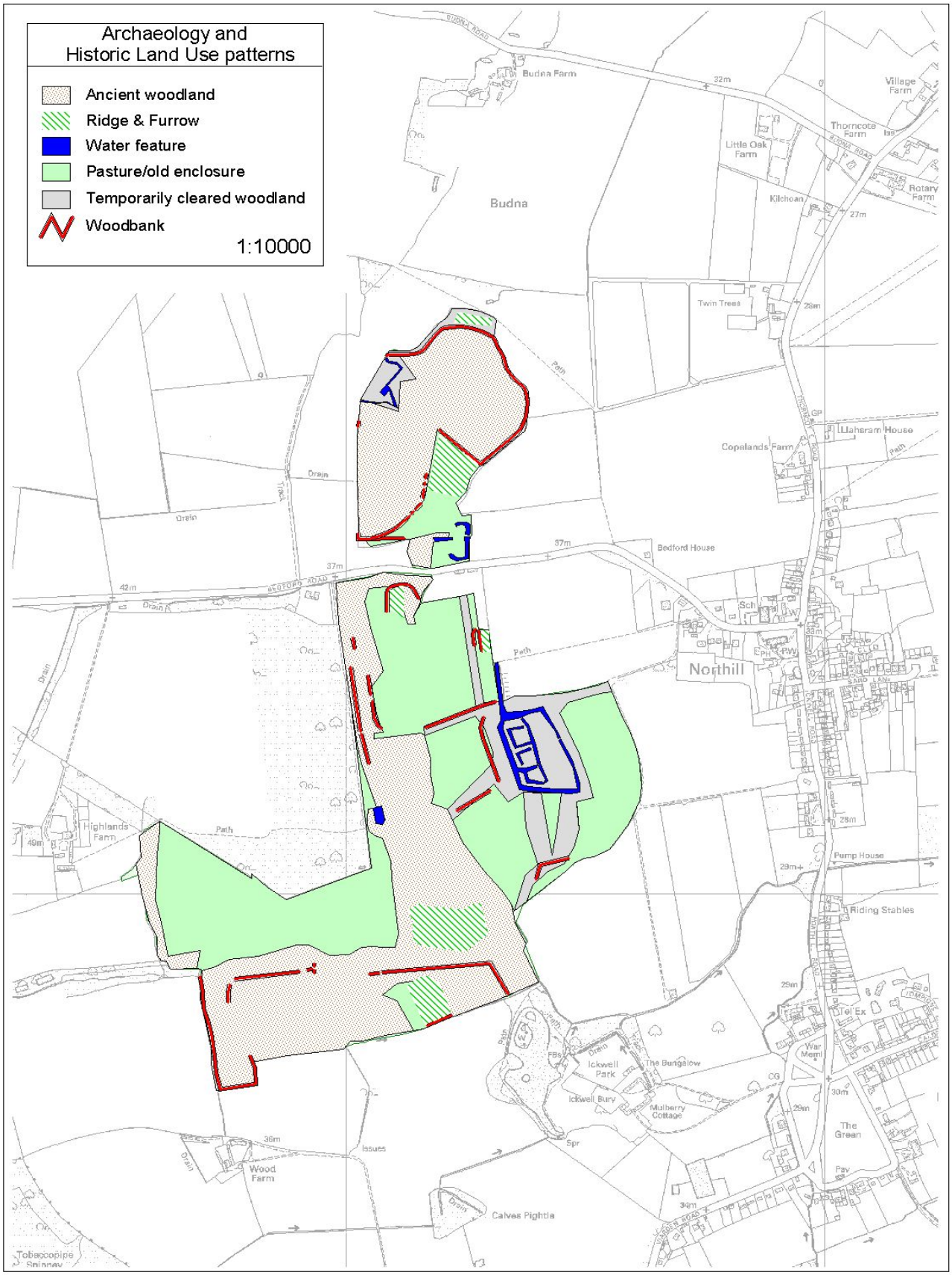
Fishponds are widely scattered throughout England and extend into Scotland and Wales. The majority are found in central, eastern and southern parts and in areas with heavy clay soils. Fewer fishponds are found in coastal areas and parts of the country rich in natural lakes and streams where other sources of fresh fish were available. Although 17th century manuals suggest that areas of waste ground were suitable for fishponds, in practice it appears that most fishponds were located close to villages, manors or monasteries or within parks so that a watch could be kept on them to prevent poaching. Although approximately 2000 examples are recorded nationally, this is thought to be only a small proportion of those in existence in medieval times. Despite being relatively common, fishponds are important for their associations with other classes of medieval monument and in providing evidence of site economy.

The largely undisturbed fishery complex in Home Wood is exceptionally well preserved, retaining visible evidence of all the major components which made up the stock and water management systems on the site. It is all the more interesting on account of its unusual size for a manorial (as opposed to monastic) property, and its comparative isolation form the settlement to which it belonged. The partly buried channels and ponds will provide detailed information concerning the water management system, and contain waterlogged deposits from which both artefacts and environmental evidence can be retrieved to illustrate the development of the site, and the landscape in which it was set. The island may also retain

buried information for structures associated with the operation of the fishery, as well as the warren that is thought to have occupied the eastern side.

Rabbit warrens, like fishponds, were devised in order to provide a constant supply of fresh meat. The pelts, of course, were also of considerable value. The tradition of constructing artificial warrens dates from the 12th century, following the introduction of rabbits into England from the continent. Warrens usually contain artificial breeding places, known as pillow mounds or rabbit buries, which were intended to centralise the colony and make catching the animals easier, whether by using nets, ferrets or dogs. Many warrens were also enclosed by walls, ditches, banks or hedges in order to contain and protect the stocks; larger warrens might even include living quarters for the warrener who kept charge of the site. Early warrens were mostly associated with the higher levels of society; however, they gradually spread in popularity so that by the 16th and 17th centuries they were a common feature of manors and estates throughout the country. The practice declined in the 18th century as a result of the increased availability of imported furs, and ultimately ceased as a result of changes in agricultural practice in the 19th and early 20th century. Warrens may provide evidence of the economy of both secular and ecclesiastical estates, especially when associated with other forms of husbandry such as deer parks, field systems and fishponds. All well-preserved medieval examples are considered worthy of protection.

The earthworks in Home Wood include evidence for the establishment of a sizeable artificial warren alongside the fishpond complex, utilising the upcast from the ditch which served both as part of the water management system and as the warren boundary. Taking both aspects together, the complex represents a significant component of the medieval landscape created to support the economy of the manor, and provides a graphic illustration of the sophistication of medieval husbandry.


Archaeology and
Historic Land Use patterns
Ancient woodland
Ridge & Furrow
Water feature
Pasture/old enclosure
Temporarily cleared woodland
Woodbank
1:10000
Budna
Budna Farm
Village Farm
Thorncote Farm
Little Oak Farm
Kilchoan
Rotary Farm
Twin Trees
Copelands Farm
Llahsram House
Bedford House
Northill
Highlands Farm
Pump House
Riding Stables
Ickwell Park
The Bungalow
Ickwell Bury
Mulberry Cottage
The Green
Wood Farm
Calves Pightla
Tobaccopipe

1 .4 TENURE

Lessee Forestry Commission – Lease dated 27/10/55 for 999 years.

Lessor Old Warren Estate

Agents for the lessor

Robinson & Hall
Chartered Surveyors
118 Broomham Road
Bedford
MK40 2QN Tel: 01234 352201

Public Access There is no public access to this wood, however the owner has agreed to a permissive path to circumnavigate the monument. This would link with the public footpath.

Rights of Way A public footpath passes through Home Wood approx. 100m to the north of the monument.

1 .5 MANAGEMENT ORGANISATION

Forest Commission District Office – Forest Commission

Mr Kevin Stannard Forest District Manager
Forest District Manager
Top Lodge
Fineshade
Northants
NN17 3BB Tel: 01780 444394

Forest Commission Beat Office

Mr Stephen Knight Forester responsible for day to day management of the site.
Beat Forester
Forest Lodge
Yardley Hastings
Northants
NN17 1HA Tel: 01604 696239

English Heritage

Mr John Ette Inspector of Ancient Monuments
English Heritage
62 – 74 Burleith Street
Cambridge
CB1 1DJ Tel: 01223 582700

Agents for Lessor

Robinson & Hall
Chartered Surveyors
118 Broomham Road
Bedford
MK40 2QN Tel: 01234 352

2 STATEMENT OF PLANNED MANAGEMENT

2 .1 Management Objectives

a) To minimise the natural degradation of the site, by removing most of the encroaching vegetation, particularly shrubs and trees, and by preventing excessive animal disturbance.

b) To maintain stable ground conditions.

c) To stabilise and improve declining water levels without altering the profile of the earthworks.

d) To pursue further archaeological research of the site.

e) Increase public awareness of the historical environment through access and interpretation

2 .2 Management Work Programme

a) Tree and shrub removal

Removal of all invasive Sycamore trees is required to preserve and restore the monument.

The western outer moat

Where possible, after felling, sycamore trees will be removed, whole, but some small timber stacks may be left if extraction proves difficult or likely to cause to damage to the site. Burning of any timber would not be permitted on site. No machinery would be permitted to the three central islands because of the sensitivity of the earth works. Instead, trees need to be removed, pole length, using cable winch extraction from outside the sensitive area.

Sycamore stumps must not be removed but treated to prevent re-growth. During this operation, prevention of water contamination will need to be considered before treatment is applied and treatment must be carried out within a specified time period after felling.

Shrub growth, such as elder, will also needs to be kept under control and again, stump treatment will be required to prevent re-growth after felling. Waste would be removed from site or stacked to create small woodpiles on non-sensitive areas. No burning will be permitted on site.

b) Removal of dead material

Remove excessive accumulation of dead trees and any others likely to cause damage to the site through wind-throw or root penetration.

Dead wood and fallen trees need to be removed, particularly from the eastern arm of the outer moat, where trees and debris have collapsed into the water-feature. Removal requires the use of winch extraction from the exterior of the outer moat.

This work would be carried out in order to enhance the amenity of the site and the quality of the standing water. However, some dead timber will be left on site for conservation purposes particularly that still standing on the eastern warren area.

Wind vulnerable trees would be felled and removed, where possible, at the same time.

c) Maintenance of water levels

In order to retain the value of the archaeological site, the water levels should be improved and maintained.

To achieve the required water level, the breached dam to the north west of the site needs to be reinstated and much of the tertiary accumulation removed from the outer moat. This work needs to be supervised by a qualified Wetland Archaeologist and the debris inspected for artefacts as the work proceeds.

The brick dam to the south west of the site (marked B on Diagram 1) continues to cause concern as this structure maintains the water level over a majority of the outer moat. The vegetation covering the damn and over-spill drain needs to be removed *(see picture below)* to assist inspection by a qualified civil engineer. Any remedial recommendations to repair and/or maintain the dam will need to be agreed with English Heritage, and submitted in the form of an amendment to this plan.

The south-west Dam – Jan 2005

d) Restoration of internal fish ponds

Actions to restore the appearance and functioning of the internal fish ponds

Tree cover on the internal fishponds

Removal of tertiary deposits using a suction pump, or mechanical digger, is required to improve water levels. Whatever method is adopted, the objective is to re-form the original moat profile without damaging the site. This work needs to be supervised by a qualified Wetland Archaeologist and the debris inspected for artefacts as the work proceeds.

The Alder *(Alnus glutinosa*) trees would be coppiced and the lop and tops removed from sensitive areas and watercourses. A likely consequence of reducing the tree cover is incursion by woody weeds, course grasses and sedge, which needs to be controlled. Cutting by hand is currently the only feasible option, within the confines of the sensitive fish pond complex.

e) Improvement of machine access to carry out works

The installation of a proper access point across the moat

Access to the site, over the outer moat, has become difficult as the crossing point sinks into the moat, under the passage of traffic and remedial action will be required to maintain future machine access. The in-filled section of moat needs to be carefully removed by mechanical digger, large culvert pipes laid and a permanent track-way laid over the top. The type of material used to dress the surface will need to be agreed with English Heritage.

f) Maintenance of the eastern warren area

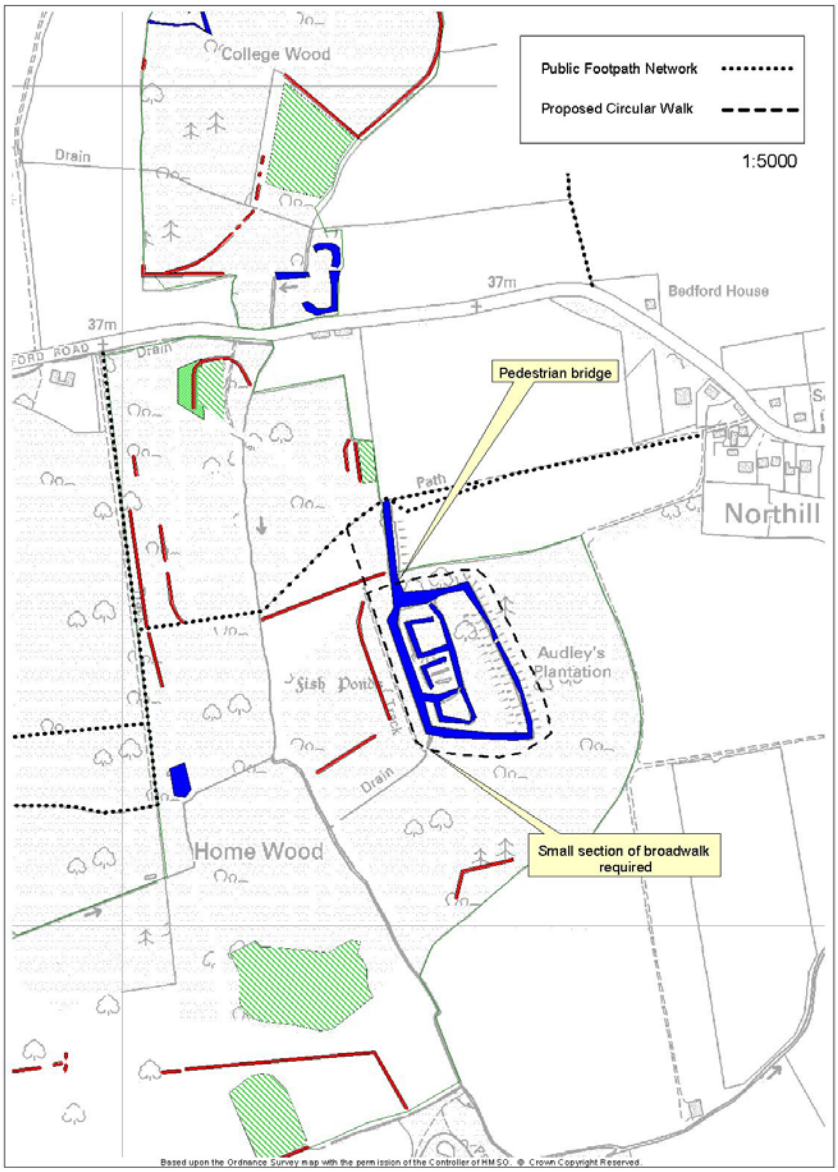
Continue to maintain open and/or cleared areas

This area has now been cleared of shrubs and fallen timber and will be mown twice, annually, to prevent shrub and tree encroachment. The standing deadwood will be left in situ on conservation grounds.

g) Site interpretation & public access

Home Wood fishery trail

The site owners have agreed to allow public access around the site, the proposed route of which is shown below. This would take the form of the waymarked trail with interpretation boards placed at the start of the trail. A short section of raised boardwalk would be required over the outspill of the western dam, where the ground conditions are permanently waterlogged. To provide a circular walk, a pedestrian footbridge will need to be installed over the northern arm of the outer moat (the farm reservoir) and also provide a vantagepoint over the whole SAM complex.



h) Survey of flora and flora

Pre-operational assessments should be carried out, prior to each phase of work.

Before the commencement of any operations on this site, a survey of the flora and fauna will be carried out to prevent damaging any rare or protected species/habitats. In particular, the area needs to be surveyed for the presence of Water vole, *Arvicola terrestris*, and Great Crested Newt, *Triturus cristatus.*

The timing of any operations will also need to bear in mind the breeding or flowering seasons of any protected species, such as Badgers.

2 .3 Liaison

An annual meeting will be held between English Heritage and Forest Enterprise to discuss progress/implementation of the management plan and future operations.

2.4 Projected costs to restore monument

Plan Reference	PROJECT ELEMENT AND WORKS REQUIRED	Costing (exc VAT)
Section 2.2 a	***Large reduction in the tree cover over the whole SAM complex.*** Removal of sycamore across majority of site, including trees along bank of outer moat.. This requires whole tree cable winch extraction to remove trees from sensitive areas, such as the internal ponds. Cross-cut smaller lop and top and stacked on site to decompose. ***Prevention of broadleaved tree re-growth*** Follow up chemical treatment of stumps is required to prevent coppice re-growth of broadleaved trees.	*4000*
Section 2.2 b	***Removal of fallen trees and debris*** Remove accumulation of dead and fallen trees from eastern arm of outer moat, using cable winch.	*1500*
Section 2.2 c	***Maintaining/improving water level in Outer moat*** Clearance, Inspection and repair of main western dam. Removal of tertiary accumulations in outer moat, using suction pump or lightweight mechanical digger.	*9000*
Section 2.2 d	***Restoration of internal fish ponds*** Removal of tertiary accumulations from internal ponds. Coppice alder trees x 20. Control of course grasses and sedge.	*5000*
Section 2.2 e	***Improvement of access to carry out works.*** Remove soil infill from northern arm of moat. Reform access point by laying large culvert pipes and recovering with soil/stone to provide bridged vehicular access with free flow of water.	*2500*
Section 2.2 g	***Site Interpretation*** Visitor interpretation boards x 2	*5000*
Section 2.2 g	***Circular footpath*** Improvements to provide public access and circular walk around SAM. Provision and installation of waymarker posts x30 Installation and purchase of short section of broadwalk, due to waterlogged ground conditions around western dam. Installation and purchase of pedestrian bridge	*1000* *2000* *20000*
	Sheet Total	*50000*

Plan Reference	PROJECT ELEMENT AND WORKS REQUIRED	Costing (exc VAT)
Section 2.2 h	***Pre-operational impact assessments and surveys*** Survey of fauna and flora, prior to implementation	*1500*
Section 2.2 c&d	***Archaeological supervision and inspection*** Archaeologists required, on site, to supervise sensitive works and check recovery from excavations.	*3500*
	Sheet total	*5000*
	Carried over	*50000*
	Total Projected Cost	*£ 55000*

APPENDICES