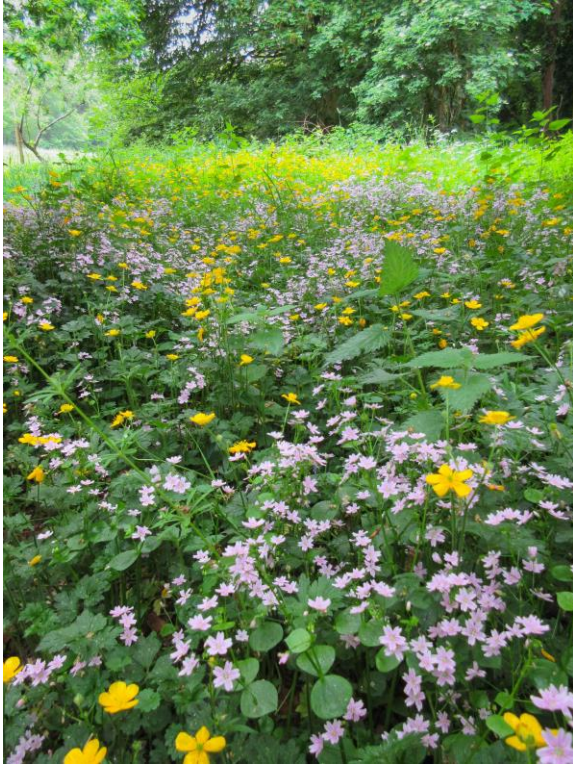


# BRENT ISLAND TRUST

## MANAGEMENT PLAN

June 2023





## 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 and riverbank                | h) The leat                       |
| i) The weir                               | j) Mature woodland                |
| k) Between the gate and weir              | l) Structures – linhay and bridge |
| m) Miscellaneous signs, dog waste bin etc | n) Access lane                    |

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. Management for wildlife requires patience and consistency. Habitats need to be maintained in the same way for a number of years to foster the species that depend on them.

Communication is through the website ([www.brentisland.org.uk](http://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.

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 pastureland 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 wildflowers and finer grass species, which support a diversity of insects. Tree seedlings growing in the meadow are removed. A narrow strip on the outside edge of the path bordering the path around the meadow is cut at least annually, to prevent brambles from encroaching.

In 2015 two trial areas were sown with yellow rattle to encourage the growth of wildflowers for bees, butterflies and other invertebrates. Yellow rattle has successfully established in the lower half of the meadow but struggles in the top half. There are no plans to introduce further seeds into the meadow.

The two areas of the meadow (b1 and b2, together with the tussocky grass, c) are cut in rotation such that one of the three areas remains uncut for two or three years depending on its vigour. This allows for a wide range of wild plants to become established without grasses becoming rank and suppressing them.

- 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 as needed to prevent the trees becoming choked. Pruning and training the trees is carried out as necessary.
- 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 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.

Which areas are to be cut, and the timing, are decided on a year-by-year basis but typically there are five areas along the north edge of the meadow, three to the west and the south is treated as a single area.

- 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 riverbank. 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 at least annually but, ideally, more often.

In 2019 steps were built to provide access to the beach area and to prevent further erosion of the bank. This has been highly successful, and the steps are examined periodically for any signs of damage or decay.

The large ‘Elephant Beech Tree’ stood on the riverbank upstream of the Linhay. This fell in 2020 and has since come into leaf in its horizontal position. After consulting Westcountry Rivers Trust, it was decided to leave it in place as it does not impede the river’s flow and provides an additional habitat for wildlife both in and out of the river. However, it will be monitored to ensure it remains benign.

- 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.

In 2018/9 a section of the riverbank just upstream of the Linhay suffered from significant erosion which was rapidly expanding. Westcountry Rivers Trust were contracted to introduce repairs comprising chestnut stakes driven into the riverbed and backfilled with branches and brash tied together with hemp rope. This provided an environment for regrowth of vegetation and to capture debris from the river to further reinforce the

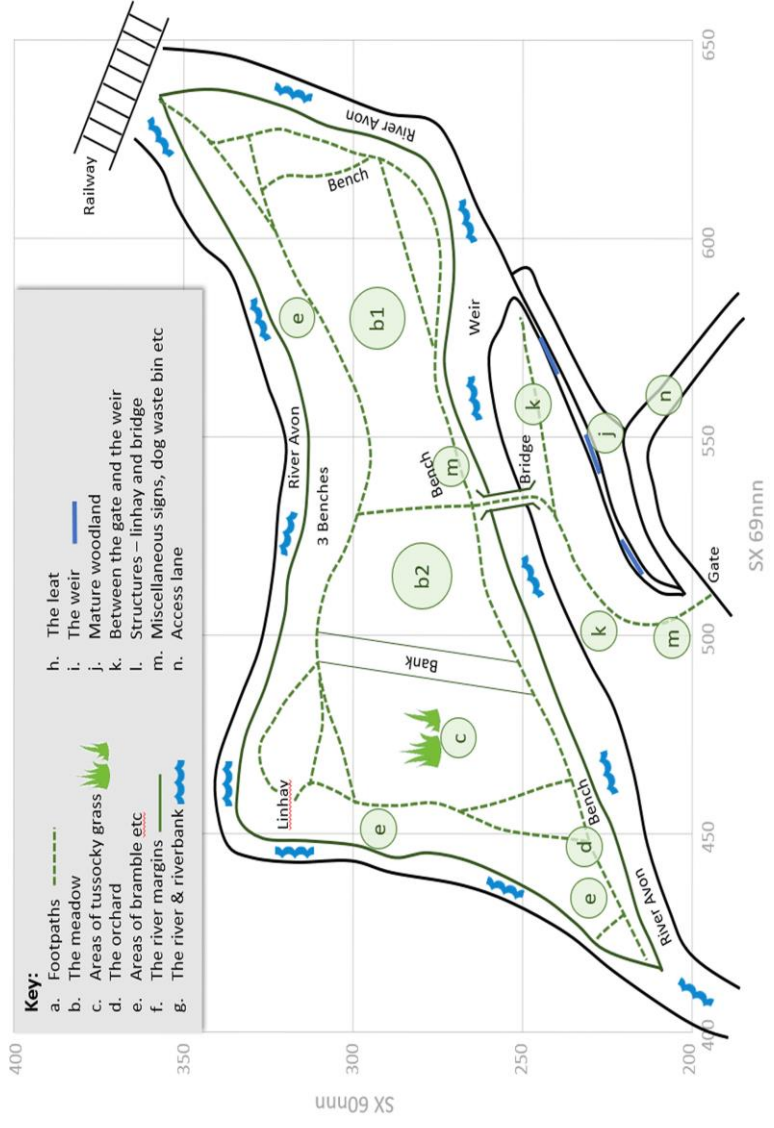
repairs. This approach has been very successful and has withstood several high-water levels. The area is now backfilled with further brash from cuttings across the Island.

- 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 sweet chestnut, was installed in 2014 by the contractors who carried out the project to stabilize the weir. Original ironwork was re-used. The leat gates are prone to being blocked by debris in the river and need regular clearing. The skunk cabbage is being contained by cutting its shoots at the base as they appear and essentially preventing flowering which could disperse seed further down the river. Large trees should not be allowed to grow along the northern side of the leat as the roots will damage the banks.

The leat runs under trees and so can become choked with leaves. These are removed periodically.

- i) The weir:** This is essential for the preservation of the weir pool - 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 stabilised, 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 several 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 must be kept for large tree trunks in the river above the weir and The Island bridge and these should be reported. The committee will decide on the best way to clear them.
- 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

Map of Brent Island showing the main features referred to in this management plan



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. 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 suitable material. 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.

In 2019 the steps behind the Linhay which lead down to the river were repaired. They are periodically inspected for decay or damage.

- **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.

- m) Signs and interpretation board:** In 2019 the Interpretation Board was placed on The Island near to the bridge. It provides a brief history of The Island and a few examples of wildlife to be found there. This has survived the weather remarkably well but will be updated and replaced as necessary.

There are two Dartmoor National Park Authority (DNPA) signs near the gate. At the time of writing (February 2022) they have become badly worn and are largely illegible. DNPA are planning to replace them.

There is a dog waste bin near the gate. Bags are provided on a nearby chain at the Island trust's expense, but the bin is emptied by the council.

- n) Access Lane:** The lane from St Petroc's church down to The Island is very uneven and several people have requested that it should be improved. It's not known who has its legal ownership (it is certainly not The Island Trust). However, at the time of writing (February 2022) the DNPA are reviewing whether it can be improved under their scheme to improve access for all people.

## **Risk Management**

There is a Risk Assessment Checklist which identifies elements of the Island which should be reviewed at least every 6 months. This is to identify potential hazards and any other repair work which needs to be carried out.

The Committee will keep this plan under review, and it will be revised as necessary (typically every 5 years).

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](http://www.brentisland.org.uk).



