

# Castle Garth Management Plan

Updated January 2017

**Site Code from NYCC:** SE53-02

**Site name:** Cawood Castle Garth

**Grid reference:** SE573 375

**Site Area:** 4.93 ha **District:** Selby

**Site Owner:** Cawood Parish Council

**Protected Site:** Scheduled Ancient Monument: **Unique Identifier** 972391

**NYCC Designation:** Site of Interest for Nature Conservation (SINC)

## **Contacts:**

1. Chris Luker (Chair of Parish Council)
2. Robina Burton (Clerk to Parish Council)
3. Jeremy Noote (Garth Warden )
4. Sheila Elcock (Garth Warden)

## **Grass cutting and Grazing**

Mr Ian Dennis, Ryther, grass cutting and removal. Tele: 01757 269122 or 07885822080

Karen McDiarmid, Stockbridge, sheep grazing. Tele: 01757 269013 or 07812956470

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## **Known Ecological Value of Site** (*notable habitats & species*)

- Great Crested Newts
- Large area of semi-improved grassland
- Common Star-of-Bethlehem (*Ornithogalum angustifolium*) possibly naturalised historically.

**Site Description** (to include habitat types, topography, aspect, adjacent land use, notable species, any public access etc).

The Castle Garth is an extensive area of semi-improved grassland containing extensive earthworks associated with the moats and fishponds of Cawood Castle.

The grassland is a mixture of species-poor swards dominated by false oat grass (*Arrhenatherum elatius*) and more open areas characterised by a mix of grasses, common sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*) and buttercups (*Ranunculus spp.*).

Small areas on the moat banks support a species-rich turf with common bird's foot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), rough hawkbit (*Leontodon hispidus*), pignut (*Conopodium majus*) and, very locally, quaking grass (*Briza media*).

The New Cut moat supports stands of hairy sedge (*Carex hirta*), Blackberry bushes and rushes (*Juncus spp.*) with hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) scrub along the bank tops.

A single Lime Tree is growing close to the inner moat

There is a further stand of mixed scrub along the eastern boundary of the site. Close to the pond.

The pond contains Reed Mace (*Typha angustifolia*), yellow iris (*Iris pseudacorus*) and water starwort (*Callitriche sp.*).

Great Crested Newts and other newts and frogs are breeding here.

A small area of mixed woodland with fruit trees and scrub towards the west of the site close to the Bishopdyke waterway.

Old WW11 concrete Nissen bases support lichens and fungi in the small woodland.

There is open public access to the site, together with a network of formal and grass footpaths. The site is well used for informal recreation. Children use it to go to school.

The archaeology of the site is being studied, and investigative trenches are dug from time to time.

There are 5 Interpretation boards, 6 benches, 3 picnic benches, 1 bridge over the moat steps and a viewing platform near the pond and various rubbish bins situated on the site.

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## Past Management of Garth

The Garth is a protected historic site by Historic England as a Scheduled Ancient Monument and by NYCC as a SINC site (Site of Interest for Nature Conservation)

On parts of the Garth are the remains of a rare medieval garden (only a few medieval gardens left in the country today). This is more important nationally than the Gatehouse due to the scarcity of gardens left in Great Britain today. It is very important that this site is protected and preserved for future generations.

### As this is a highly protected site therefore:

- **NO** digging ( without Schedule Monument Consent from Historic England)
- **NO** use of metal detectors
- **NO** removal of artefacts found on the site (these to be reported to the Parish Council and the details recorded)
- **NO** fires allowed (except by permission of the Parish Council and only on paving slabs to protect the grass).

### No disturbance to the Great Crested Newts or their habitat

There are warning signs on the entrance gates concerning the consumption of alcohol, cycling, motorised bikes and dog mess. These are not allowed on the site.

## **Pedestrians Access only.**

### **Grassland**

The Garth site is a rare area of medieval grassland in the mostly agricultural Vale of York. As far as its known the site has not been ploughed or had fertilisers added so is a unique organic site. Grazing by cows in the past resulted in damage to the pond sides. This was corrected by supporting the sides with wood around 1990.

The grass was of a fine quality with a large variety of species. NYCC placed a SINC (Site of Interest for Nature Conservation) designation on the site which is given to these areas of fine grassland in order to protect them. The SINC came with free Ecological advice and some finance for small projects like waders for the work on the pond.

The Garth has been cut annually for many years by a local farmer using a small tractor and the cuttings were left lying on the ground. This resulted in rotting hay collecting around the more invasive grass species and destroying the finer, better quality grasses.

A few years ago, after an Ecological Survey of the Garth, the recommendation was to leave the grassland as it was not worth restoring. This decision was a result of the rotting hay being left on the ground and the loss of the finer species of grass.

After a discussion with the NYCC SINC Officer, it was agreed that a Management Plan be put in place to try to restore the quality of the grassland. This was to include sheep grazing as well as regular grass cutting, baling and removal.

Aftermath sheep grazing started on the Garth in late autumn/winter 2010 on a rotation basis across the site. Mr J Sykes a farmer from North Milford, was the first farmer to agree to cut bale and remove the grass as per the management plan, followed by grazing by his flock of sheep. Then, after 2 years Ms Karen McDiarmid brought in her flock of rare breed Norfolk Horn sheep. These sheep have been grazing the site ever since. Mr Ian Dennis then offered to manage the grass cutting and removal. He uses the hay as bedding for his pigs at Ryther.

There has been an historic problem finding a farmer to cut the grass due to the undulations of the earthworks on the site but also to the large amounts of dog mess that was lying on the ground. This was found in the hay and on the vehicle's wheels. Farmers cannot use the hay if it is contaminated by dog mess. Signs have been put in place for dog owners to pick up after their animals and some improvements have been noticed. It was agreed that special dog waste bins and bags be put on the Garth and this has made a difference to the amount of mess seen but is still an issue.

### **Wild Flower area**

In 2004/05 it was agreed to establish a wild flower area on the part of the Garth near the Thorpe Lane end of the site. This area was cut and the grass removed by volunteers 3 times during the year. The quality of the grass was greatly improved. The Star of Bethlehem plants which grow here increased due to protection from previous mechanical cutting. This area had a few native meadow species (such as Pignut *conopodium majus*), seeded in, but otherwise has been previously managed with the rest of the site previously. It was very clear that this regime greatly benefitted the grassland.

## **Pond**

The pond was restored in the late 1990's and Reed Mace or False Bulrush (*Typha latifolia*) was planted which later became a problem; spreading across the site into other water filled sites. This is not beneficial to the newts which need open water to mate. Removal of the Reed Mace can only be done in December and January when the newts are in hibernation. This is not a good time for volunteers to go into the water especially in the snow. The pond has been cleared of most of the plants for the last 8 years by a local resident but they keep regrowing. One of the problems is the disposal of the plants which have been removed from the water. Some years it has been taken off site and in others, left on the banks or put in the small wood nearby where it can act as cover for small animals.

Animals and pond dipping are not allowed in the pond due to the presence of Great Crested Newt.

## **Paths**

Cutting grass regularly along footpaths, repair of gates and fencing etc has been undertaken including the mowing of a "secret" path close to the inner moat wooded area.

## **Seats, Bridge and Boards**

These have been cleaned and painted when needed. A set of spare pictures for the 2 wildlife boards by the pond are kept with the Parish Council. The moat bridge has been painted.

## **Access to the Site**

At times, the Environment Agency needs access to the Bishopdyke waterway. This can result in the site, if wet, being churned up by the vehicles. There have been incidences when the ground is too wet to allow access unless it absolutely necessary (danger of flooding). When the EA need access they have contacted us by email. This does not often allow us much notice. Sometimes when the sheep are present the access can be difficult and care must be taken getting past them on the site.

The EA have been asked not to dump rubbish from the dyke onto the Garth. In the past this has resulted in many Oil Seed Rape plants growing alongside the dyke and these have to be removed manually. If the sheep are in the field the gate is padlocked. Both the EA and Karen have keys to the gate.

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## **Ecological Management Aims**

***It should be noted that this is an important archaeological site, and therefore other management works not mentioned here will need to be agreed with the Parish Council and Historic England. Also the presence of the statutorily protected great crested newts means that some works will need to be carried out under licence from Natural England.***

## **Grassland**

The site has had decreasing plant species diversity over the years. This is likely to be largely due to nutrient enrichment from the decomposing cut grass. Most wild flower species thrive best in conditions of low soil fertility. These wildflowers are to be encouraged to grow across the site.

Therefore the recommended management is to take the grass cuttings off each time the grass is cut to start to reverse this species loss and increase the chance of wild flowers growing.

The grass is to be cut in July/August, followed by the grazing of sheep from September to February. It is important that there is a rotation of the sheep across the site to allow a reasonable sward to be left (60mm or 2 inches in height).

The grass cuttings should be removed from the site altogether, or can be piled under the trees at the edge, where they will provide valuable additional habitat for wildlife

Longer grass should be left around the pond for the newts. In addition there should be a corridor of longer grass from either side of the pond allowing access to the grassland and wooded areas beyond. (See Map).

### **Wetland**

Wetland/pond management works to enhance the ecological value of these parts of the site will need to be carried out in December and January, every few years or when necessary. This involves the removal of Reed Mace being the main invasive species.

### **Introduced species**

It should be ensured that no plant or animal species are introduced onto the site or ponds except under ecological guidance. Introduction has been agreed for wildflowers by Cawood Parish Council for the formation of a wildflower meadow.

Any plants not allowed should be removed as soon as possible. (E.g. Garden plants)

Tree planting is to be avoided in the archaeological sensitive areas.

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## **Details of Proposed Management of Garth**

### **Grassland**

The grassland should be cut and the cuttings removed mechanically as set out in the Ecological Management Aims (previous paragraph) to ensure maximum benefit in botanical terms and adequate protection for the statutorily protected newts. Newts forage in the grass after the breeding time is over. They can remain out of the pond for 3 years. If there is a drought the newts can survive in the grassland but can also travel up to 500 metres from the site.

Longer grass to be left around the edges of the pond and along the access corridor to and from the pond for the Great Crested Newts and other wildlife.

Low intensity sheep grazing to be undertaken over approximately a third of the site at a time (controlled by electric fencing), and leaving a habitat link to the ponds of ungrazed tall grass/herbs for use by the newts at all times.

*(N.B. These habitat links will need to be cut periodically (with cuttings removed), when newts are least likely to be using them – i.e. during newt hibernation times - to ensure this remains as rough grass/herb habitat in December and January).*

By the end of the grazing season the sward should be approximately 60mm (2 inches) in height, and care must be taken to ensure the grassland is not poached by livestock.

It is important that there is no supplementary feeding for the sheep, except in exceptional circumstances, and under agreement with Parish Council. This applies particularly to hay being brought for feed to avoid the introduction of plant seeds that are not locally sourced.

It is also important to ensure that the main footpaths remain open and are not obstructed by electric fencing. This fencing to display “Danger Electric “signs. Other signs warning the public of sheep on the site to be displayed. The main

The main gate near the castle is kept locked when the sheep are present.

### **Pond and Wetland areas**

Wetland/open water management works, carried out under ecological guidance, should be undertaken in winter to minimise disruption to the newts. Work proposed in these areas needs to be done following guidelines for newt protection from Natural England, during December and January only.

### **Wild Flowers**

Some agreed planting of wildflowers in the spring (with Parish Council consent) for the formation of a wild flower meadow.

Additional planting of Buddleias for food for butterflies in woodland area near Gill Green has already been agreed by the Parish Council.

### **Invasive Species**

**Oil Seed Rape, Himalayan Balsam and Hog Weed** to be removed as soon as seen and taken from the site.

### **Nettles**

- To be cut back along paths.
- Nettles in the centre of the grassland by the New Cut moat to be cut back regularly (It spoils the quality of the hay for the farmer).
- Other nettles around the edges of the site to be left for butterflies to lay their eggs This provides food for caterpillars
- Best management of nettles is cutting or strimming out

### **Parking on the site**

No more than 3 (three) vehicles to be allowed to park on the site without permission from the Cawood Parish Council during events on the Garth.

## **Paths**

Grass to be kept short along the designated footpaths to a minimum width of 1.2m. It can be allowed to grow over the scalplings. This is the recommended base for a footpath for wheelchairs and prams. The grass paths to be mown frequently and any nettles close to paths to be cut back.

## **Dogs**

Dogs to be kept on the lead on the Garth site at all times. All dog mess to be picked up by the owners and put in the bins provided. Dog mess bags are provided at the school entrance the path along the top of the site and by the castle entrance.

## **Boards, Benches, Moat Bridge, Steps and Viewing Platform to the pond and Picnic Tables**

These will need cleaning from time to time. The benches also need sealing/painting to protect the wood. The bridge is now 10 years old and will needs some maintenance to the pathway and struts. The steps and viewing platform are approx 20 years old.

## **Access**

This is required on a regular basis by the Environment Agency. Agreements are in place for them to contact the Garth Wardens by e mail when they wish to access the Bishopdyke.

They are NOT allowed to dump waste matter onto the site. All rubbish from the water should be removed from the site.

In very wet conditions access can be denied until the land has dried (except when there is a danger of flooding). The EA have keys to the chain on the gate if the gate is locked.

## **Further information**

Contact the Cawood Castle Garth Group for further advice on the Ecological and historical management of the site.

**A map** of detailed management of the Garth over a five year period is attached to this document.

**First compiled in** June 2009 later updated Oct 2010, January 2012 and January 2017

This management plan is to be agreed by Cawood Parish Council.

A copy of the plan to be sent to NYCC Ecology department and Historic England.

**Signed.....**

**Date.....**