Tolworth Court Farm
Moated Manor Site

Management Plan
2008 – 2018
**General Information**

**Name**

Tolworth Court Farm Moated Manor

**Location**

Tolworth Court Farm Moated Manor forms part of Tolworth Court Farm and sits in the context of the Hogsmill/Bonsegate Green Chain.

The south west boundary is Kingston Road (A240), the south eastern boundary is the fence-line running along the River Hogsmill. Old Kingston Road forms the North West boundary and Kingston University playing fields border the site on the north east. It is separated from the bulk of the former Tolworth Court Farm by the A240, the latter site is now known as Tolworth Court Farm Fields (TCFF) and is a designated Local Nature Reserve. (Location map in Annex 1)

**Area**

2.7 ha

**Grid Reference**

TQ 163 603

**Access**

There is no public access at present due to safety concerns. A locked vehicle access gate is situated on Old Kingston Road but is blocked by a bund. A steel sliding barrier may be buried in the bund. Access on foot requires climbing over a partially collapsed wall on the left of this gate.

**Land Tenure**

The freehold of the site is owned by Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames (RBK).
1 General Description & History

1.1 General Description

1. The Moated Manor site is roughly square with an area of approximately 2.7ha. Landscape features include remnants of old farm buildings, a medieval moat and pond. A barn, near the gated entrance, has a relatively new roof but no walls, and is the largest remaining structure. A small brick hut remains on the corner of Kingston Road and Old Kingston Road.

2. The pond forms part of the moat, which runs from south west to south eastern boundaries and partially encloses an island. Evidence suggests there may be remains of a medieval manor on the island.

3. The site slopes slightly uphill from south to north. Large areas contain rank vegetation, some of which has recently been cleared. This vegetation hides material from the pond excavation in the 1990s and various areas of rubble and litter left by Gypsies and the demolition of buildings.

4. Habitats with nature conservation potential include; grassland, scrub/woodland, wetland and veteran/pollard crack willows.

5. The boundaries are largely fenced with earth bunds along Kingston and Old Kingston roads installed by RBK in 1992.

6. A stream runs along the north east boundary towards the River Hogsmill; this boundary is not fenced. Electricity pylon wires cross the south west of the site.

1.2 History

1. Documentary research has so far indicated that the Moated Manor on Tolworth Court is the site mentioned in the Domesday Survey as Taleorde, held in 1086 by Richard of Tonbridge. In 1066 Alwin held it from King Edward. It was assessed at 5 hides, with land for 3 ploughs. There were 7 villagers, 8 smallholders and 7 slaves, a mill, and meadowland. The land passed through a number of families before being granted to Hugh le Despencer in 1321. Despencer was executed for treason in the Civil War of 1325-6, an Inquisition Post Mortem of his lands gives an important record of Tolworth Court. ‘Talworth’ had a capital messuage compassed with a moat containing two halls, a chapel, six chambers, a kitchen and chamber, a bakehouse, a brewhouse, a gate and drawbridge; outside the moat are two barns, two ox-houses, one cart-house, a stable, and a sheep-fold (Dyer, 2000).

2. Members of Surrey Archaeological Society carried out non-invasive archaeological surveys in 1994-1995. The results of these highlighted a large number of features which as well as those of the obvious moated manor, appear to show the position of a number of probable house platforms from a deserted medieval village, with associated boundaries.
and a complex series of leats for the water management of the moat and presumed mill.

3. Excavations in 2000 provided evidence for the date of construction of the moat, but failed to confirm the presence of any buildings within the moated island (Dyer, 2000). Features that provide evidence of agricultural activities from the Late Iron age were found in the area suspected to be the site of the medieval village.

4. Tolworth Court Farm was an active farm until 1988 when it passed into public ownership. Since then the site has gone from being a collection of semi-derelict buildings with grazing animals and chickens to a fly-tipped wasteland of abandoned, collapsing buildings, through a period of gypsy invasion and subsequent work to make it secure.

1.3 Geology

1. The soil geology of the site consists of a thin covering of clay-based loam to a depth of approximately 15 cm. This overlies natural deposits of London Clay. In the northeast portion of the site as well as towards the Hogsmill River, in the southwest, small pockets of gravel and alluvium are thought to be present (Dyer, 2000).

1.4 Topography

2. The site lies on land that slightly rises from south to north approximately 20 metres above sea level. A number of artificial depressions and earthwork platforms are present on site relating to various archaeological features thought to be present, but the situation is complicated by spoil heaps, bunds and rubble from the last few decades.

1.5 Hydrology

3. The moat and pond area remain wet throughout the year. The old mill pond is now a winter wet hollow that was once fed by a stream connected to the Hogsmill.

1.6 Potential value

4. Appropriate management and restoration will enhance the nature conservation value substantially by increasing biodiversity and restoring the pond, veteran willows and hedgerows. The preservation of any waterlogged deposits and archaeological remains will add value to the site.

5. Access improvements will allow the site to be used for public recreation and education. The potential value for environmental education is high due to the variety of habitats. School visits could include pond dipping for example. In the RBK Biodiversity Action Plan two priority habitats are identified on the Moated Manor Site; Hedgerows and Open Standing Water.
6. On a landscape scale Tolworth Court Farm Moated Manor would add value to the Hogsmill Green Chain that incorporates the Hogsmill Local Nature Reserve and Bonesgate (tributary of Hogsmill) Open Space. The south east boundary that runs along the River Hogsmill forms part of Thames Down Link, a long distance path that links Kingston and Dorking.

7. Green corridors are an important feature for connecting local populations. For example, water voles are known to be active further downstream and upstream of Tolworth Court Farm Moated Manor, the site could provide a passage between the two areas. The close proximity of the areas either side of this particular corridor increases the ecological and amenity value of both the site and those of the surrounding area.

2 Management Aims & Objectives

2.1. Aim

1. The overall management aim is to conserve, enhance and restore the existing nature conservation and historical interest of the Moated Manor Site and to provide local people with an accessible place to enjoy nature.

2. Nature conservation and landscape value should be balanced with public access, hazards and available techniques/budgetary provision.

2.2. Objectives

• Conserve existing biodiversity and archaeological remains, especially organic material in waterlogged deposits.
• Interpret biodiversity value and archaeological remains.
• Maximise biodiversity value of site by managing habitats to increase diversity, especially in the context of the Hogsmill Green Chain.
• Provide for public access.
• Provide secure access for site management machinery.

3 Management for Amenity

3.1. Safety

1. Public safety should be a priority at all times. The site has had a chequered history before and during RBK ownership, receiving very little management besides the installation of bunds and recent vegetation management. This has resulted in a build up of problems meaning the site is currently unsafe for public access. Material left on site includes hay and silt from the pond excavations.

2. Rubble and litter left by gypsies and the demolition of buildings needs to be cleared using machinery and some areas levelled off, especially paths.
3. Scrub clearance is required in order to assess these hazards. Considerable litter clearance has already taken place and rubble piled up. Particular attention should be paid to the access points and footpaths, the pond and to trees that overhang boundaries and footpaths.

3.2. Community Involvement

1. The site offer opportunities for local volunteer interest groups such as the Hogsmill Action Group to become active in routine management. A ‘Friends of’ group could become important to the security of the site. The members can monitor the site for vandalism, fly tipping and other anti-social behaviour and get involved in practical conservation tasks such as scrub clearance, hedgerow maintenance and wildlife recording.

3.3 Built Structures

2. The old farmyard area contains a structurally sound large ‘dutch’ barn with a relatively new roof but no walls, the former timber slating has been removed by travellers. This covered area may be useful for visiting school groups.

3. There is evidence of concrete, wall footings and troughs covered by silt from moat excavation plus an area of hay from meadow management. The surface of the silt needs to be levelled in preparation for mowing/hay cutting. It should be possible to arrange for an area of the old farmyard to be cleared so that the mowings can be composted. An area of hardstanding in comp. 7 adjacent to Kingston Rd may be suitable. Removal of concrete areas is not recommended as they seal in areas of ground that may contain archaeological remains.

4. A small hut in the south west corner (see access map) could be developed as a site store while the initial work is carried out. The roof is unsafe and would need replacing. A structural survey and clearance of material pushed against walls is needed before any decision can be made. Once the site is opened to the public the structure could be secured with a grill on the entrance and developed for use by bats.

3.4 Footpaths and Access

1. There are currently no surfaced or marked footpaths. Scrub clearance in the south west corner has opened a potential access point and path onto the site from Kingston Road. This corner is fenced with a bund along the inside but could be developed for pedestrian access (see Access and Infrastructure Map 2 Annex 2). A kissing gate with RADAR bypass facility that is lockable out of hours could be installed as the site may be unsafe for night time access. Some form of limitation to access would also benefit wildlife that has been disturbed very little in recent years. An interpretation panel could be installed here.
2. A network of paths, some utilising areas of old farmyard concrete, should connect the access points and areas of interest such as the pond (Map 2, Annex 2). The paths may need surfacing in places and should be profiled to provide adequate drainage.

3. The old machinery access, located on Old Kingston Rd opposite the barn, is a double-door gate in a poor state of repair that is blocked by the bund. A steel sliding barrier outside the gate may be buried in the bund. It is proposed that a new vehicle access point be created nearer the main road on Old Kingston Rd, away from the Tolworth Court Farm Cottages (Map 2, Annex 2). This would minimise disturbance, allow greater room for manoeuvre for large vehicles entering the site and easier access to all parts of the site (not having to manoeuvre around the barn). There is also likely to be a hard-standing surface as this area was the site of previous buildings.

4. Scrub and bund clearance is needed (comp. 10 Habitat Map 3, Annex 3) to assess the proposed access point. Steel swinging gates with sliding barrier behind would provide the necessary security with the addition of wooden boards that act as a visual screen while initial work is completed. The gap in the wall where the old access point was should be rebuilt.

3.5 Bye-laws

1. Declaration as a statutory Local Nature Reserve will enable the formulation of bye-laws to cover the Moated Manor Site. These could be used to address issues such as access conditions, preservation of wildlife, litter, motorcycling, control of dogs and fishing, amongst others.

3.6 Interpretation

2. It is important to provide visitors to the site with information about the wildlife that occurs there and the management that is being carried out to conserve it. This can be achieved by the provision of information boards and leaflets.

3. A board situated at the pedestrian entrance on Kingston Rd should give information about the site’s ecology and management. The production of information leaflets about the site will raise the profile of the wildlife and historical interest and should lay out the programme of access improvements with a timetable.

4 Nature Conservation Management

4.1 Survey and Monitoring

1. Survey and monitoring is an integral component of site management. Survey work adds to the site knowledge base and helps refine conservation priorities. Ecological surveys for both flora and fauna should be carried out as soon as the appropriate season occurs. Monitoring
provides essential feedback, enabling management actions to be evaluated.

4.2 Planting

2. It is anticipated that a hedge will be planted along the Old Kingston Road. All plant introductions to the site should be native species, preferably material of local provenance. This will ensure maximum benefit to wildlife and help to promote local distinctiveness.

4.3 Dead Wood

3. Dead wood is an essential habitat for many species, especially invertebrates and fungi. It is therefore desirable to retain as much dead wood as possible. Standing dead trees should be allowed to stand whenever possible, as this provides habitat for a range of fauna including nesting birds and roosting bats. However standing dead trees can be a safety hazard and this should take precedence in areas of high public use. The crack willows provide dead wood surrounded by live tissue that is particularly valuable and need to be re-pollarded in order to conserve this habitat.

4.4 Species Control & Management

4. Large areas of the site require clearing of rank vegetation including nettles, brambles and young scrub including buddleia, hawthorn and elder (see habitats map 3 compartment 4). Some clearance has already been completed in the south west corner. Clearance initially needs to be by hand using brush cutters to avoid damaging machines.

5. Scrub clearance will promote diversity and allow assessment of hazards such as rubble and steel fencing. The site has very few exotic invasive plants, such as *Crassula helmsii*, Japanese knotweed or Himalayan balsam.

5 Habitat Management Objectives

5.1 Semi-natural grassland

1. The mesotrophic grassland covers approximately 0.6ha and is maintained by annual cutting (Map 3 comp. 3). Strimmers have been used over the last few years owing to the lack of machinery access and are slowly expanding the grassland area. Restoration in cleared areas and further scrub clearance could potentially create more than one hectare of grassland. The areas recently cleared will require regular cutting in spring to prevent scrub returning (Map 3 comp. 9).

2. Managing the grassland by cutting for hay is the most cost-effective method. Depending on the size of the machinery the Moated Manor Site could be cut at the same time as TCFF. Cutting should ideally take place
twice a year, one cut around March/April and another around August/September. Cutting twice will allow more effective scrub clearance and grassland enlargement. The cutting regime should take into account invertebrates and small mammals, which rely on sward height and seed production for critical periods in their life cycles. It would be beneficial to leave small areas that are cut every 2 years in order to create a more varied structure. There is currently very little thistle or ragwort within the grassland.

3. Managing the grassland can be achieved using two methods: a cutting regime and/or grazing by cattle. The site is too small to warrant the necessary resources to manage the grassland by grazing alone. However, some of the benefits of grazing can be combined with cutting; aftermath grazing is an ideal option for nature conservation as grazing creates a varied structure and physical disturbances to the vegetation and soil. This is important for providing suitable conditions for germinating seedlings, and for invertebrates.

4. If a grazing area were introduced there would be a requirement for temporary fencing. Scrub clearance is required to expand the current grassland area but also to ensure that all hazards are identified and rubbish removed before grazing is introduced to the expanded area.

5. Periodic light-chain harrowing between September and end of February provides an alternative to grazing that reduces ‘thatch’ plant material. If left this will prevent the establishment of seedlings and create bare ground, leading to an increase in undesirable species. However care should be taken not to disturb ant nests.

6. The continuation of the cutting regime will maintain botanical diversity and grazing, if introduced, should improve it.

7. If left unmanaged the grassland is likely to become increasingly dominated by coarse grasses and tall herbs such as thistles and docks. Cutting the grassland for hay in the summer months has the effect of reducing the vigour of the dominant grasses and may give other less-competitive species the opportunity to set seed. By removing the cuttings, soil nutrient levels are gradually diminished, which favours less competitive species. The resultant hay can be used for composting or animal fodder/bedding. Hay should not be stored in the barn due to the risk of fire.

**5.2 Scrub**

1. Scrub is an important component of grassland habitats. Though clearance of some scrub is needed to restore and maintain both wetland and grassland it is important to leave areas of scrub that provide habitats for feeding and nesting birds, small mammals and invertebrates. Some patches of scrub should be allowed to remain in grassland areas, not just along boundaries, there by increasing scrub-edge habitats. Scrub in compartment 8 should be reduced to a manageable patch, whilst encroaching scrub in compartments 1, 2, 7 and 10 should be pushed back.
5.3 Pond and Moat

2. The pond was created in the early 1990’s by the Lower Mole Project who partially excavated one arm of the former moat to a depth determined by Surrey University Archaeologists. The Archaeologists aim was to ensure that medieval and early post-medieval deposits remained undisturbed & water-logged. Since excavation there has be no further management on the moat. There is some open water which now needs to be increased if the pond is to survive.

3. Scrub clearance along the banks and the reduction of competitive species such as Common Reedmace (*Typha latifolia*) should prevent further drying out. The western bank of the pond needs to be re-graded as it's steep and unsafe due to many years of stable waste accumulation. This will give rise to a quantity of vegetation and well-composted stable waste.

4. Without regular maintenance the pond will become a marshy hollow, as the bankside plants root out and mud collects. Maintenance should consist of de-silting and reduction of competitive species and algal mats. Ideally bankside vegetation should be half tall herbage allowed to stand over winter and half an open shore with short vegetation and some bare mud.

5. Fencing or dense vegetation at some points around the pond/moat may be required to ensure public safety. Allowing the reeds to form a protective barrier on the western side should provide the necessary screen. A viewpoint on the highest part of the bank could be installed with protective post and rail fence to take advantage of a high mound of soil and rubble with an old crack willow on top.

6. Ponds are an excellent educational resource providing a fascinating insight into aquatic life. A pond-dipping platform would allow easy access and minimises disturbance around the pond. The lack of facilities on-site would make it more appropriate for older groups of children and students.

7. Many of the veteran crack willows growing in the damp conditions of the moat are unsafe and require pollarding or re-pollarding (Map 3 comp. 11). Pollarding greatly reduces the risk of branches and trees collapsing, it prolongs the life of a tree and tends to produce conditions that are suitable for epiphytes, fungi, insects associated with dead wood and nesting birds and bats. The boggy area in the south west part of the moat contains willows that are semi-collapsed and may require security fencing. This area would benefit from coppicing in order to open up sight lines onto Hogsmill walk.

8. The moat island (Map 3 comp. 6) would benefit from some scrub clearance in the long term in order to safeguard any medieval remains that may still be present; advice of English Heritage should be sought. A number of old-variety damsons should be highlighted for conservation and
education and further fruit trees could perhaps be added, especially old varieties. Some scrub should be left in-situ to provide a scrub-edge habitat that is valuable for birds and invertebrates.

5.4 Wetland/streamside

1. The old Mill Pond is now more of a winter wet hollow and should be maintained as such. A fallen crack willow that is continuing to grow (“Phoenix” tree) should be removed or highlighted depending on the safety assessment. It may be worth investigating whether it would be possible to reanimate the stream that fed the pond from the Hogsmill and if the flow could be controlled via a sluice gate that would allow periodic ‘drowning’.

2. The area around the old pond is overgrown with scrub that requires clearance and subsequent maintenance by mowing or grazing. Any grazing in this area would need to take place during the summer when it is less waterlogged. Older scrub is beginning to encroach into this area from the south east boundary and needs to be cleared back (Map 3 comp. 5).

3. Glades/scallops could be opened up along the Hogsmill walk allowing more sunlight to penetrate to ground level and increasing scrub-edge habitat.

4. Any management proposal within 8m of the Hogsmill river would be in consultation with the Environment Agency as it is classed as a main river.

5.5 Boundaries and Hedgerows

1. All boundaries except the north eastern are currently fenced with chain link fencing. Earth bunds run along Kingston and Old Kingston Road. Where older trees are present on the boundaries, hedges can be developed by coppicing, and hedgerow plants such as hawthorn planted in any gaps. The planting of a hedge along the southern end of Old Kingston Rd bund will improve the aesthetic and wildlife value and allow the option of removing the fence when the hedge has developed to a sufficient size. The hedge should start at the hut in the south west corner and end at the new vehicle access point.

2. Further scrub needs to be cleared from the Old Kingston Road bund in order to plant the hedge and determine if suitable hedgerow species are already present. The hedge should be 90% hawthorn and 10% native species. Stable waste and topsoil created when re-profiling the pond could be used to help ‘bed in’ and fertilise the hedge. Once clear the inward facing slope of the bund could be planted with local wild flowers that would require virtually no maintenance other than periodic mowing.

3. Scrub and hedge boundaries should be managed by coppicing over long rotation including the removal/coppicing of sycamores and promotion of oaks (where present) to hedgerow trees. Hedgerows will act as a visual screen from the busy road. Bramble clearance along boundaries will
increase grassland area and allow new vehicle access to be developed. Some scrap removal from boundaries may be required.
1. New pedestrian access point and information panels
2. Proposed site store
3. New vehicle access
4. Hedgeline
5. Old vehicle access – blocked by soil bund

Site boundary
Proposed footpath
Habitats

3. Mown area/grassland
4. Rank Vegetation/Old Mill Pond. Willows, medium scrub, elder/hawthorn
5. Medium Scrubs: Willow Hawthorn
6. Moat Island, Oak, Hawthorn and Elder
7. Sycamore: needs coppicing.
   Willow/scrub behind
8. Brambles/Elder
9. Scrub Cleared
10. Bramble, Elder and Buddleia
11. Wetland: typha in wetland. Cracked willow needs repollarding