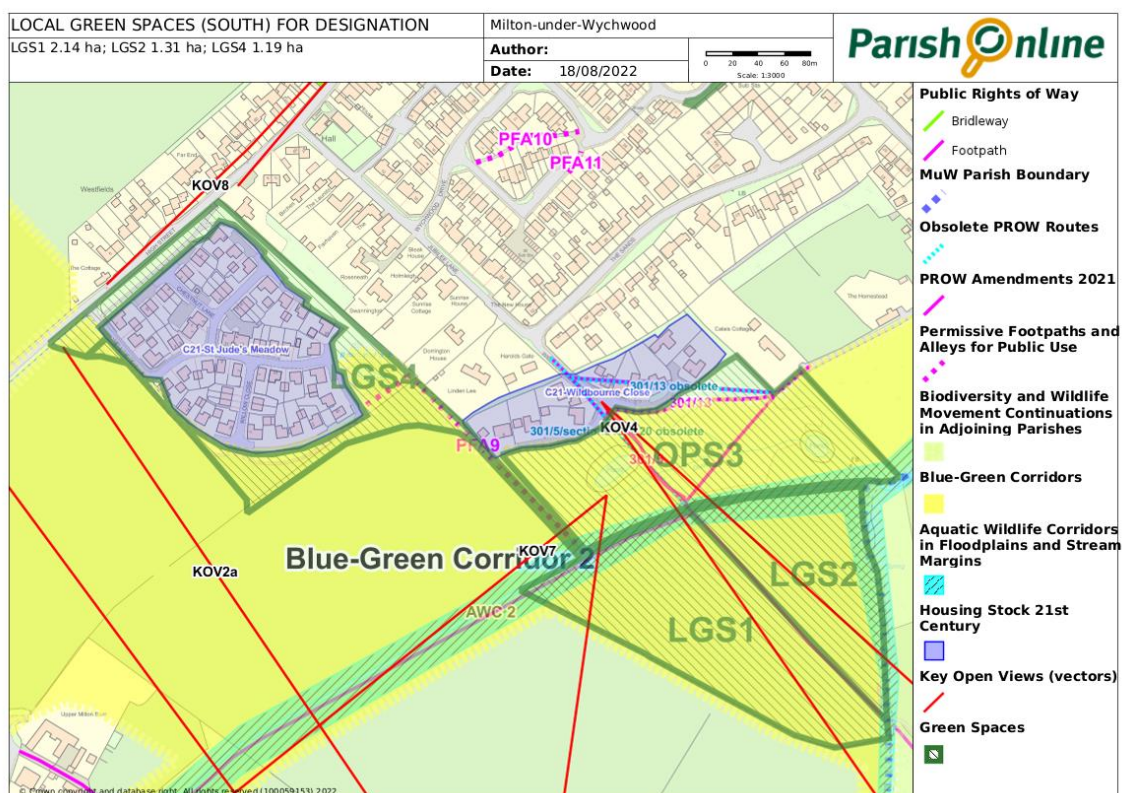


# 1. It finally belongs to us – and the ‘Eco Area’ becomes ‘Sarah’s Meadow’...

It all started when a property developer called Sharba obtained an option to buy 37 acres of land from Richard Hartley of Manor Farm. Sharba also purchased an area described as the “Eco Area” theoretically as an offset against biodiversity loss but widely regarded as a sop to the village. The subsequent history is interesting; there is more detail in the box at the end of this article.

The area was designated a Local Green Space (**LGS 2**) in our Neighbourhood Plan (see map below), and now, after many years, it belongs to the Parish Council (PC).



While this was happening, Sarah Olney of Natural England initiated the idea to dig ponds on the Eco Area in order to drain the land better and encourage a greater variety of wildlife.

After Sarah's unexpected death in 2022, Ann Berkeley from Wild Oxfordshire obtained funding from Thames Water and three ponds were dug in 2023.

It's great to see that early in 2024, wildlife is already establishing itself – snipe, mallard, moorhen, reed warbler, frog and common lizard as of early April. The PC has asked a local birding enthusiast to monitor the increase in birdlife.



Snipe

The area is now developing successfully into a significant community asset, and since much of this was due to the energy and foresight of Sarah Olney, it is thought appropriate for the area to be renamed to recognise her contribution by calling it 'Sarah's Meadow'.



Common Lizard

Photo courtesy of Tom Iles

In Newsletter One, we included news of a visit from Wild Oxfordshire ecologists to advise on developments there. These are being implemented in Spring and early Summer this year.



Also as a tribute to Sarah, a memorial seat in the shape of an earthworm has been installed there – see photo below. It's a beautiful piece of art and craftsmanship made from a huge oak at Blenheim Palace. Furthermore, it's also useful - as a seat, of course!



Sarah's seat with two of the three new ponds just visible in the background

The land marked as **LGS1** in the map above, adjacent to LGS 2 [the “eco area”, now “Sarah’s Meadow”], belongs to Richard Hartley of Manor Farm who kindly allowed it to be designated as a Local Green Space (LGS 1) in our Neighbourhood Plan. Designation as a LGS affords it the highest possible protection from development.

A pond dug in LGS1 exposed the 17<sup>th</sup> century aqueduct put in by Shipton Manor (who once owned all the land around) to increase the water supply to the flour mill which was sited where Milton Service Station now stands.

In the development of the combined area of LGS1 and LGS2, another Parish Council success was in obtaining 460 trees from the Woodland Trust. These were all native trees such as oak, rowan, birch, hazel, beech, silver birch, wild cherry, crab apple, and dog rose. They were planted in April, 2022 on the higher ground, some of which had come from the ‘scrapings’ produced by the digging of the ponds. The planting was a great community event with all 460 trees having been planted in the space of less than 3 hours by local people, Cotswold Wardens, and youngsters from Scouts, Beavers, Cubs, Girl Guides (see photo below.)



Planting trees in April 2022

## Pat Ward April 2024

### **Further note on the development of the “Eco Area”, now Sarah’s Meadow**

It started when a property developer from Northampton called Sharba obtained an option to buy 37 acres from Richard Hartley of Manor Farm. Sharba submitted a plan to build 72 houses on 7 of those acres and to develop an area described as the “Eco Area” as an offset, theoretically, against biodiversity loss. There was widespread community disapproval of the plan to build the 72 houses and the “Eco Area” was seen as a sop to the village.

The planning application eventually went to a Planning Tribunal for an Inspector to make a decision. He decided to allow the building of 62 houses (10 less than the original application).

Sharba then sold the Planning Consent and land to McTaggart & Mickel of Glasgow whose vision for the Eco Area was for a pond, raised boardwalks and sign boards telling people what they could expect to see. The Parish Council informed M&M that they felt the plan was a bit like a ‘theme park’, and preferred the area to be left natural.

M&M then proposed a Deed of Variation on several important matters including doing away altogether with the Eco Area. Without consulting the Parish Council, this was agreed by WODC. The PC then negotiated with M&M for the Eco Area to be transferred to the PC so that it could remain in the spirit of the original Planning Consent. During this period, the area was designated a Local Green Space (**LGS 2**) in our Neighbourhood Plan. Designation as a Local Green Space affords the highest possible protection from development.

The Land Transfer is now, after many years, completed and the land now officially belongs to the MuW community under the aegis of the Parish Council.

In the meantime, Sarah Olney of Natural England obtained funding from Thames Water for the ‘Woody Dams’ and other works on Littlestock Brook and the Parish Field, and initiated the idea to dig ponds on the Eco Area in order to drain the land better and encourage a greater variety of wildlife.

With Sarah’s unexpected death in 2022, plans were put on hold until Ann Berkeley from Wild Oxfordshire revived the plans and obtained funds from Thames Water under their Evenlode Catchment Project. The ponds were dug by White Horse Contractors in 2023, and the wildlife is already establishing itself.