

# Pocket Parks Plus

## Refurbishment of The Pound, Stratton Audley, Oxfordshire



Produced on behalf of  
Stratton Audley Parish Council by:

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Oxfordshire Playing Fields Association

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## End of Grant Report

Set out below is our End of Grant Report that tells the story of how our project (the refurbishment of The Pound) was conceived, delivered and now benefits the population of Stratton Audley and the surrounding area.

## The Headlines

*'I want to say that having visited the completed Pound the other day, I think the Parish Council has done a really superlative job in conceiving and executing such a project. It gives the village a real central point for the first time, and the place itself is beautifully constructed, and has all the information any visitor could want. Really well done - Respect!*

— Michael Hackney (long-time resident).

## The background to our new Pocket Park.

Stratton Audley is an attractive traditional village situated within a conservation area. It has a population of some 430 people of which about 25% are retired and about 18% are under 18. The site 'The Pound' is circa 538m<sup>2</sup> and located on Launton Road at the start of the Cross Bucks Way. It is opposite the church of St Mary and St Edburga, which acts very much as a community hub, as there is no dedicated village hall available for community use. There are no other formal open green spaces close to the park, although the village does have a children's play area on Cherry Street, which lies roughly 300 meters away from The Pound.

The village playgroup takes place in the church, just over the road from The Pound, and they were fully supportive of the project; especially as the inclusion of a new dry-stone wall made the space a safe place for use by children.

The Pound has been owned by the Parish Council since the end of the 1890s. Over the years, it had been allowed to become overgrown and, more recently, was only used to access a public footpath (the Cross Bucks Way) that runs through it. It has important historical links as it overlooks the site of a medieval castle which is a scheduled Ancient Monument. It was also the location of the old village stocks.

The aim of the project was, primarily, to bring the area back into use as a safe green space, given that there are no other formal open green spaces for public use by the village community and the need to improve outdoor recreation space was clearly identified in the Parish Plan of 2014.

Prior to our application for funding, residents were already behind the project, and volunteers helped the Parish Council to begin clearance work in October 2018, with a view to making it more accessible and attractive. The allocation of Pocket Park Plus funding enabled the aspirations of the project to become a reality. Consultation with the community, both at a specific consultation event, and as part of the Annual Parish meeting, helped to determine the elements that should be included in the final design. It was also clear that the project would be invaluable to promote the work of the Stratton Audley Historical Society, who already had a popular circular village walk in place.

## The main outcome we sought to achieve through our new Pocket Park.

The objective for the project was simple - to provide access for the community to a small, but valuable, green space in the centre of the village. The inclusion of Interpretative notice boards has

helped to educate visitors on the history of the village and the site, while seating and planting has created a tranquil environment that now suits a wide range of informal and formal use.

Outcomes from our new or renovated park	
Improve the physical appearance of the existing park/develop a park on this site	✓
Increase the use of the park (more people visiting the park/green space) than before the project	✓
Increase the use of the park (green space) by more people from different backgrounds than before the project	✓
Increasing local people’s satisfaction with the park/green space / local area than before project	✓
Increase the number of people who volunteer to work to support the park/green space than before the project	✓
Increase in the use of the park to bring people from different backgrounds together (social mixing) than before the project	✓
Improve bio-diversity and environmental impacts than before the project	✓
Improvements in wellbeing	✓
Other please specify Become a focal information point for the history of the village.	✓

**Improving the physical appearance of the park/develop a park on this site**

Prior to work commencing the area was effectively inaccessible due to being overgrown. (Some clearance work was carried out by residents, see below)



Main work started in April 2019 to prepare the site and turn it into a safe accessible area.  
(see below)



By August 2019, the new stone walls and seating has created a secure area now twice the size.  
(see below)



### **Increase the use of the park (more people visiting the park/green space) than before the project**

As can be seen from the photos above, prior to the improvements being actioned, the site was used for access to the Cross Bucks Way footpath network. It was unsafe for children to play in due to it being completely open to the road.

The Pound now offers an attractive starting point to this valuable footbath route as well as its more immediate value as a local green space. It is too early to monitor use, but it is fully expected that the space will be used informally by older villagers for relaxation, young families for picnics and play, as well as more formally by other groups including the pre-school play group based at the church.

## **Increasing local people's satisfaction with the park/green space / local area than before project**

The Pound was officially opened at an event on 28<sup>th</sup> August 2019, which was attended by over 50 people from the village (See Appendix 1). The opportunity to collect feedback from attendees was taken and these comments are attached as Appendix 2.

These comments show overwhelmingly that there is widespread satisfaction with the end result, particularly that the area is once again available to the community.

## **The main partners in our Pocket Parks project**

The main partners that have contributed to the project were: -

1. Stratton Audley Parish Council
2. Cherwell District Council
3. Stratton Audley Historical Society
4. Shelswell Group of Parishes (the church)

## **The main costs / resources associated with the project**

<b>Resource</b>	<b>Number of people</b>	<b>Cost (£)</b>
Staff who ran managed the project	1	
Staff who delivered the project	2	
Contractors who delivered the project	3	
Consultants who helped during the planning/design stage	1	
Volunteers who delivered the project (you may not need to include costs, if people were not offered any incentives)	10	
Capital costs for fixtures/fittings in the park		23,119.00
Other costs, please specify (production of the End of Project report by the Oxfordshire Playing Fields Association)	1	500.00
<b>Totals</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>23,619.00</b>

## **The physical changes to the park/green space**

As explained, the project has brought public access back to an area of land that previously had none. Specifically, the following elements have been included:

- The area has been cleared and weeded.
- A wildflower seed mix has been sown over an area of 100sqm.
- Large numbers of daffodils and snowdrops have been planted.
- An eating apple tree, heritage species and a conference pear tree have been planted.
- Two new benches have been installed, including one looking out over the site of the fort.
- A picnic bench and table has also been installed.
- A circular bench has been installed around the tree.

- A new dry-stone wall has been built on the roadside, with a footpath running alongside. The two walls that were dangerous and in disrepair at the back and to one side of the site have been completely rebuilt, while improved access has been created through the installation of a ‘kissing’ gate, rather than stile into the field at the rear.
- An information board on the history of the site has been installed, and a Parish Council noticeboard with walking routes in and around the village has also been included.



### **Bringing people from different backgrounds together**

At the time of the 2011 UK census there were 434 usual residents of Stratton Audley. 100% lived in households with no one living in communal establishments. The average (mean) age of residents was 42.4 years. Three residents were of ‘Mixed/multiple ethnic groups’ while the remaining 431 were categorised as ‘White’.

Whilst the project was developed primarily as a recreational space for local people, the experience of the redevelopment of the village playground in 2016 suggests others from the surrounding area, including Bicester, are likely to visit from time to time. Also, as the location for the start of the 22-mile Cross Bucks Way footpath, it is believed that running groups and walkers will use it as a congregational point and resting place. Note: The Playground has been flagged on community group websites as one of the best small space playgrounds in the County.

### **Voluntary support for the park**

Six volunteers worked on the project and they have expressed their interest in continuing to work on the site to help maintain it. This has been measured by keeping a record of those who have volunteered to work.



### **Bio-diversity and environmental changes**

Aspects of the project that will promote wider bio diversity have included:

- The existing cherry tree was overgrown and inaccessible. This has been cleared and the tree is thriving;
- 1100 daffodil bulbs have been planted;
- An area of over 100m<sup>2</sup> has been planted with a wildflower seed mix;
- 100's of snowdrops have been planted in a central position around the tree.

No monitoring of the impact of these measures has so far been undertaken.

### **Needs that have been addressed; Including physical and mental health, wellbeing, Integration and social mixing etc.**

Access to the site has been protected, firstly through the removal of a stile that may have inhibited access by anyone with a limited ability to climb and, secondly, through the specification of a disability friendly kissing gate and that of a wide gate from the roadside to allow for operation by a mobility scooter.

### **What made these changes possible?**

The project developed and was eventually made possible through a series of inputs from the key stakeholders. These interventions can be summarised as follows: -

- An ambitious plan of action developed by the Parish Council
- A dedicated team of local volunteers led by the Parish Council
- Clear and competent advice from the District Council
- The support of local villagers
- The support and assistance of the landowner of the field adjacent to the site
- The support of the owner of the adjacent historic house (the former telephone & post office) who in the process decided to rebuild his adjoining wall and plant new shrubs

- Support from the Local Historical Society who now use it as the kick off point for organised walks around the village

However, the scale of the project would never have been realised without funding from MHCLG and agreement by the District Council to supplement this with an additional grant.

### **What has been learnt so far**

The project was made possible through the dedication and expertise of a small but valuable group of volunteers. The initial idea of opening up access to the Pound was a local discussion point, even before the application for a Pocket Parks grant was made, as a team of villagers, orchestrated by the Parish Council, had come together in 2018 to undertake the initial clearance work on the site. These volunteers have worked together since to perform manual work such as site clearance and planting and will continue to work together with ongoing maintenance issues.

It was also important to have one person dedicated to the overall management of the project and to ensure that everything was kept on track. This was vitally important for the success of the project and involved daily overseeing of the works over a four-month period.

On a project of this kind, it is important to ensure that all planning work is thoroughly undertaken in advance, including site surveys and the location of any services. In particular, the project group worked with the local electricity supplier to ensure that this was well managed and also the highways department of Oxfordshire County Council.

The project has very clearly demonstrated that improving access to a green site encourages all ages and abilities to get more physically active. The improvements to the site led the project team to request to the adjacent landowner, that the Parish Council could pay to replace the stile on the land with a kissing gate of a similar design to the one already included in the project. This has meant that access to the Cross Bucks Walk that starts at The Pound is now easier, as there is no need to climb a stile and it is clear that older residents are now using this path and are more active as a result. The provision of an access gate from the road was important to ensure that maintenance vehicles are able to enter the site.

The development of this site has had an unexpected additional benefit. It has caused people in the community to think more about the local access paths and ask for them to be improved so they can walk the fields rather than the roads. It has resulted in further improvements to the Bucks Way and a number of stiles being replaced by gates and gravel being laid on other paths. This has been funded separately out of a small village improvement fund. As a result, two new circular walking routes have been created which are now accessible and being used by older residents.

It cannot be overstated that this particular project is an important additional green space for Stratton Audley. It has significantly improved a disused area and already has resulted in increased usage by the community. It has stimulated interest in the village history and is also encouraging others to explore the outdoors using the Pound Pocket Park as a base to start and finish local walks.

### **Contact details**

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## Some 50 villagers attend ‘Pound’ Opening Ceremony



The rain held off and those attending enjoyed a glass of bubbly followed by ice cream for all. During a brief address, Chairman of the Parish Council John Honsinger thanked everyone for attending and particularly Stewart Hopkins, whose idea it had been to clear this disused piece of land exactly one year ago. Thanks to a grant, what had been thought to be a long-term project has become a reality and the village now has a delightful, safe green outdoor ‘Pocket Park’ located in an historic part of the community.

County & District Councillor Ian Corkin helped long-time resident Alison Howson unveil the new information board featuring a castle drawing by her late husband and plant the fruit trees, ably assisted by local children Amia & Zachary. A number of new benches and a picnic table have been installed, over 1000 daffodil bulbs planted and part of the area sown to create a wild flower meadow by the spring. The addition of the stocks which were a historic feature of the Pound is still a work-in-progress. Specific thanks went to all the volunteers and contributors who had helped, including Stewart Hopkins, Paul Roberts, Alex Smith, Ian Brent-Smith, Jon Hill, Mike Hedgecox, Henri Pappenfus, Simon Goss, Rob & Pam Spencelayh, John Edwards, Jo Stalder, Dikon Leigh-Wood, Becky Adams and Dorothy Howarth.



## Appendix 2 – Feedback comments

NAME	COMMENT
Annette Jones	Excellent use of an abandoned space
Jeff and Audrey	Well done to everyone involved in this project, particularly John H and Stewart H. I'd suggest a sign by the gate to draw motorist's attention to the Pound Park.
Vicky Acton	Thanks to everyone who worked to produce this lovely space.
Andrew Wilson	A lovely starting & finishing point for the Bucks Way (footpath). Congratulation to all of those involved.
Paddy Hall	Yet another landmark for the village. Thanks to all concerned
Alison Howson	A lovely feature for our village and I am sure it will be well used.
Phillip & Elizabeth Sutcliffe	Many congratulations to everyone involved. This is a real asset to the village. We will enjoy it - thankyou
Margaret Holmes	Such hard work has produced a lovely place. Well done to all.
Stephanie Hopkins	What a wonderful area for the community. A great team effort.
Ian Caskin	Fantastic community event and a real asset for the village. Well done to all concerned.
Ruth Parkin	What a fabulous amenity and a great turnout. Has inspired me to do a walk to Marsh Gibbon.
Bex Hopkins	Wow! Well done everyone. I hope everyone is very proud. I'd love something like this in my village. I am inspired!
Tim & Nicky Lane	Many congratulations! A terrific effort and a huge benefit for the village
Eileen	A lovely area to relax and enjoy the scenery. Ideal for a family picnic where little kids can freely run and play in a safe enclosed space.
John Smith	From an overgrown area of dense bushes there are now spectacular views over which you can gaze seated on lovely benches. Thankyou.
Dickon and Janine Leigh-Wood	A brilliant concept and delivered a great place for all – well done
Paul Martin & Sarah Taylor	A fabulous project that has made such a difference to this side of the village. We really love it and the information board is so impressive. Thank you for all your hard work.
Paul, Melissa, Seb & Theo Smith	Lovely space – looking forward to picnicking here in the summer.
Pam & Rob Spencelayh	Really useful area now. Well planned and enhances the village
Malachy O'Neill	Didn't realize such a beautiful view.
Sue	Great to see an untidy space put to good use. Well done.
Mike Gore & Antonia Wilde	Lovely space for families and everyone to use in the village. Love the wild flowers.
Mary	Really lovely! The information board is a great bonus

### Appendix 3 – Capital Costs

	<b>Item</b>	<b>Net Cost (£)</b>
1	Earthworks	1,950.00
2	Stonemason	9,472.00
3	Supply of Stone	4,375.00
4	Fencing & Gates	1,884.00
5	Interpretive Boards	2,570.00
6	Hard Landscape / Furniture	1,258.00
7	Planting / Bulbs	1,286.00
8	Miscellaneous	324.00
	<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>23,119.00</b>

Appendix 4 – Our completed project



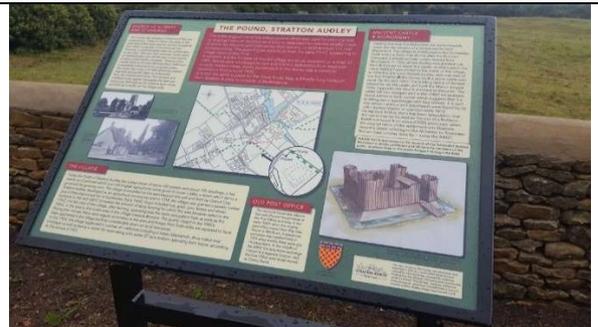
**The New Stone Wall**



**View from the highway entrance**



**New bench**



**The Interpretive board**



**Nearing completion**



**Accessible 'mobility' gate**



**View back from the adjacent field**



**The Christmas lights**