The Story of Old Moor

and other things!

By Eric Bennett

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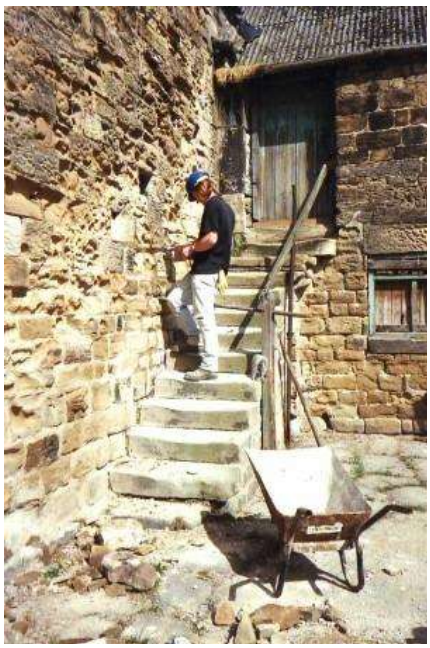


At the time of writing, it is about 30 years since Old Moor first cropped up and 21 years since I was directly involved. Records now are few and memories getting fainter. I thought that it was a story worth telling if only to record history accurately. Left much longer it might not happen at all. I have not been able to find any sign that the original files or drawings exist in archive for the project. I had kept some written information and dated photographs from which, together with recollections of what went on, I have based this narrative and can only blame old age for any inconsistencies. It's a personal story with Old Moor at its core but it does tend to stray off from time to time as I recalled things that were going on around it.

Eric Bennett December 2020

Chapter 1: Introduction

Dear Reader, large projects like Old Moor are rare and if you are extremely lucky they may occur as a ‘once in a lifetime ‘opportunity. These opportunities may arise more often but usually problems crop up or circumstances don’t align beneficially or something happens to result in the idea being shelved.

In this case, ‘Lady Luck’ was in my corner and despite there being many setbacks and pot holes along the way**-It did happen**! There were a few heart stopping moments when it looked like the scheme would go down, many deep breaths and bitten fingernails and lots of bogs to potentially flounder in (if the reader will excuse the ecological metaphor) both procedural and physical.

At the outset I said that opportunities are once in a lifetime but in an extraordinary coincidence, it happened twice with us in same time period with the small team I worked with at Barnsley Council. The Trans-Pennine Trail running through the Dearne Valley, connecting Old Moor with adjacent communities was another multi Local Authority initiative which was instigated by Barnsley Council. Robin Norbury as Chair of Planning in Barnsley set up a Steering Group of all the Local Authorities across the north of England from Hornsea in the East to Southport in the West. The aim was to create a long-distance footpath/cycleway/bridleway from coast to coast. This became part of the European Walking Route E8 and the National Cycle Route 62 and was opened by Councillor Norbury in 2001, although extensions and enhancements continue to this day. The total cost was approximately £60m funded in the main by grant aid from the EU and the UK.

At the official opening ceremony, all the Mayors of all the various towns involved along the route, I think around 25 in all, assembled for a photoshoot dubbed the ‘Chain Gang’. What a headline!

The TPT is not directly relevant to this story, except that it actually passes the front gate of Old Moor, but the two schemes are linked by the hard work of a relatively small group of people who wanted to make a difference.

Chapter 2: Background

I came to Barnsley in July 1975, after stints in Manchester, Warrington and Bolton. I liked to think I was sharing Lancastrian good sense with Yorkshire but unfortunately nobody else seemed to agree! I can't imagine why!

At that time we were based in Regent House in Regent Street. It was concrete and typical of its time. The heating was of the electric under-floor type which, because of the limited locations of thermostats, resulted in half the office being boiling and the other half freezing. I remember winter periods with snow on the ground outside when we had all the windows wide open to make the heat bearable. We were at the end next to the fire door which we often opened as well but this soon caused cold draughts in other areas with predictable results. Naturally the floor was always very hot and most people came up with ways to keep their feet off the ground whilst working. (It's funny the things you remember).

The work at that time involved the reclamation of derelict land, particularly colliery spoil heaps, of which there were many (drive through Barnsley today and you would be hard put to recognise the spoil heaps) but also the derelict tracks of the old 'Coal' railways that linked the collieries and in their new iterations made excellent recreational links throughout the Barnsley Area, many of which were later be incorporated into the Trans Pennine Trail. Some of the schemes particularly the Dearne Valley Park scheme included the creation of new habitats for wildlife, a large lake and extensive new woodlands etc which was right up my street. I always maintained that nature needs to be all round us and not just relegated to reserves. It is interesting to note that Cliff Wood, within the park, is now a nature reserve.

As a 'new boy', I had to learn my way around Barnsley. I remember one occasion in Thurnscoe. I had pulled over to check the map book when there was a knock on my window. I wound the window down and was greeted with a cheery 'eh love are ye lost' (I swear he didn't say 'eh-up' although that did become a familiar greeting and it took me some time to get used to being called love by a bloke!). He was the milkman and he quickly set me on the right road. I must say over the more than 30 years I lived in Barnsley I found most people to be the same, friendly and helpful.

In 1976 I happened to meet a Cudworth lad, Cliff Gorman, birdwatching at a site in Carlton, off Shaw Lane. The site was in a valley alongside the embankment of the former Hull & Barnsley Railway with extensive sidings serving the collieries. It was mostly marshland arising no doubt from mining subsidence. Cliff had been watching the area for a couple of years and rated it highly for the range of species recorded.

The land turned out to be in the ownership of the Council under the Amenity Services Department acquired by the former Cudworth UDC but never put to any use. Liaising with the Chief Officer Dennis Roberts we managed to get Council approval to its establishment

as a Nature Reserve on 16th December 1976. I think it was actually the first formally declared nature reserve in Barnsley. Thanks to Cliff, the Annual Report for 1976 he compiled was also the first to be produced for all wildlife groups and not just birds. That has continued to this day –that's a remarkable 44 years. The reserve was listed formally as a Local Nature Reserve, by English Nature, on 13 June 1980.

I chaired the Reserve Management Committee from the start in 1976 until the early 1990's and over those years we managed to make lots of changes and improvements and the project occupied many out of work hours at weekends working with pen and spade not to mention the binoculars!

To one side of Carlton Marsh, beyond the disused railway Sidings, was an area of scrap yards along Boulder Bridge Lane. This area was a quite long-standing problem for the Council with regular illegal burning causing major pollution down-wind on Shaw Lane and further away in Cudworth. Old Cars would be piled up into a great heap then simply set alight after dark. Fortunately I lived up-wind of the problem but I could easily see the flames and a dense column of smoke. It was like Towering Inferno!

Old buses were a regular sight being towed through Barnsley towards Boulder Bridge Lane. A bus spotter would have had a field day with the various bus company names from all over the country on the side of the buses. It was reputed that the main dealer in buses at Boulder Bridge Lane became a millionaire from selling the diesel engines to Hong Kong for use in Junks (a type of Chinese ship not piles of scrap). Apparently after a couple of hundred thousand miles in a bus the diesel engines were about run in and good for years more of active service in Asia powering ships.

In the office, big changes were happening. The former Environment Department of South Yorkshire County Council dealt with environment issues, ecology (they had an Ecologist on the staff) and was very active with practical conservation projects under the management of Roger Mitchell, who will appear again later in our story.

On the first April 1986, South Yorkshire County Council was abolished and services passed to the Districts. In the period prior to the changeover when staffing matters were being sorted out, Roger from the Environment Department had a meeting with my boss Ted Hutchinson the Director of Planning in Barnsley. Ted was keen to take on these functions and in due course plans were approved for setting up a new team in planning that would become the Countryside Unit and Malcolm Parker from the defunct County Council was appointed Group Leader. During that process I was offered the choice of staying in my present role or moving across to join the new team. The answer was easy.

Steve Robinson, also from the County Council, joined the team and we made up the Three Musketeers. We seemed to get on right from the start. Steve's favourite saying was '*when all's said and done there's more said than done'* we all just wanted to *do stuff!* Where my interests lay in conservation, Steve's was in farm and environmental education so our

preferences were complimentary and combined in many instances. The rest of the team included Mike Gibson, Footpaths Officer, Teresa Carr, Technician and Gaynor McKernan Group Clerk. The group was to grow considerably with externally funded projects but at the start this was our happy band.

With the new arrangements came new accommodation. We moved to Central Offices in Kendray Street above the market. The heating was better than Central Offices but the location in the centre had its downsides. The fair came fairly regularly each year, setting up their rides close by with various, automated calls such as 'Ooh-La-La' (there were others I have fortunately forgotten) which were repeated over and over again all day. There was the group playing Pan Pipes who seemed to have few alternative tunes in their repertoire. Finally, the bagpiper who was quite good but also had a limited play list and unfortunately always missed one note, always the same note and after a while you would anticipate its arrival a bit like intermittent toothache.

On one warm summer's day it was clear that something had generated a sudden interest over the neighbouring rooftops of Barnsley and enquiries soon made the situation clear. It was lunchtime and several girls from nearby beauticians were sunbathing topless on their flat roof apparently oblivious of the adjacent seven storey office. I say apparently because they left in a hurry when they did realise.

An even more exciting but potentially more dangerous event involved the installation of a thick layer of insulation on the roof of Central Offices. The contractors must have had a burner for melting tar which was presumably left unattended. I don't know the details but there was a sudden loud explosion and the alarms went off throughout the offices. The whole building was evacuated to the surrounding streets. A heavy steel ring, part of the gas cylinder, was found on the pavement at the entrance to the Arcade, at least 100 metres from Central Offices. It was a miracle that no one was killed or badly injured.

We had the luxury of starting with a completely clean slate so to a degree we were able to please ourselves how we developed our work area. We were extraordinarily lucky in that. A lot of it was strikingly different to what the Planning Department was used to so I think some of our antics caused a few raised eyebrows. Malcolm recently reminded me of the Wren logo we came up with on any leaflets etc. Unfortunately, this idea was shot down from on high –very high – as being an unsuitable brand deflection from the Council's logo.

The Carlton Marsh/Boulder Bridge Lane issue hadn't gone away though. The railway sidings adjacent to Carlton Marsh were purchased by a consortium of scrap dealers from Boulder Bridge Lane and in November 1986 planning consent was given to rework the embankment material for the recovery of fuel ash with an agreement to restore the land on completion to an agreed design including a large lake with surrounding grassland habitats. The scheme also included the construction of high earth screen banks planted with trees to permanently screen the scrapyards. A bond was paid to the Council to cover the

landscaping elements of the restoration scheme and a Compulsory Purchase Order was made as a back-up.

Leaving Boulder Bridge Lane for a moment readers, I have to mention another important milestone for me when after completing a training course I received my first Bat Survey Licence from the Nature Conservancy Council in June 1988. In those days there weren't many of us around. I think only a couple in South Yorkshire. This allowed me to survey and to 'disturb' bats in their roosts for conservation purposes. It also meant that when householders sought advice from NCC about a problem with bats I could be called to visit and report back to NCC in any of the four South Yorkshire districts usually working late in the evening.

Back at Boulder Bridge Lane, by December 1989 the fuel recovery had apparently produced significantly less than anticipated and with no significant void in which to create a lake, the scheme had to be modified with ponds and damp grassland and the land dedicated to the Council to be added to the Nature Reserve. No restoration work was done so by 1990 the Council took control of the land. The screen banks were planted and the meadows seeded.

Further work was also possible from our Countryside budget with stock fencing, access improvements, grassland management, footpath improvements and seating over a number of years in the early 1990's, when I left the Management Committee. Unknown to us though the scrap dealers challenged the legal position with the land and incredibly it was only fully resolved in August 2019 with an 'Out of Court Settlement' to a High Court case. The land is now firmly owned by the Council. The reserve is doing really well and Cliff is still publishing an annual report.

Aside from our main work we also got involved in the Planning Application and Highways Projects from time to time, usually to give comments on environmental aspects of applications or to suggest mitigation measures for the Planning Officers. Sometimes we were able to see an opportunity for something better. Examples include some of the sites around Old Moor where parts of some development sites could not be built on because of flood risk issues and we managed to negotiate the dedication of some to the Council. Park Hill Brickworks, Doveside and to some extent Gypsy Marsh were good examples of sites we managed to create around the Broomhill Ings suite of sites. On highway schemes we were able to exert some influence too; managing to improve the greening of schemes and in the case of Stocksbridge Bypass managed to save woodland from the bulldozer.

One area where we had to tread carefully was opencast mining. These schemes, because they necessarily involved major earth moving, can have the potential for achieving some environmental and wildlife benefit. Barnsley was, however, firmly Deep Mine country. This was only a couple of years after the year-long Miners' Strike and memories were still raw. Even mention of the word opencast was close to treason in the minds of most Barnsley Councillors and we had therefore only limited opportunities.

I do remember an occasion when I visited the St Aidens site with the minerals Planner Steve Normington in 1988. This was a large opencast site in a bend of the River Aire near Swillington, West Yorkshire. We were driven around the perimeter in a Land Rover and the scale of the hole was staggering. The largest machine working in the bottom seemed relatively small in scale.
When we went down and actually went inside the machine it was colossal. It felt rather like being inside a small factory unit. When it moved though it was extremely disconcerting. Your instinct is that something that big shouldn't move at all.

Ironically a week later they had their own disaster when the river broke in and flooded the whole site with the machine still in the bottom. The lake created by the flooding covered 250 acres and was 230 feet deep. It took 10 years and £20 million to deal with that problem and resume mining operations. I imagine the machine was irreparably damaged because it stands there today on the hillside above the reclaimed site, now a very successful nature reserve and Country Park managed by RSPB on behalf of Leeds City Council. FIG 20 shows the dragline and if you look closely you will see the much smaller RSPB Visitor centre in front of it. The restoration of the site included substantial new reedbeds which now (2020) support breeding Bittern and Bearded Tit.

Barnsley was the only district without a Biological Records Centre, which in the other districts were located in the Museums. We had inherited a lot of Phase 1 habitat survey data from the County Council and a number of sites allocated as of local significance but no recent information on their current state. Over the next few years we were able to make progress in three areas.

Biological records – Bill Ely from Rotherham Museum kindly helped us out with a trial copy of a new biological recording package he was developing called 'Recorder' and acquired a computer to use it on. I think it was perhaps the first computer in the department and at 40 Megs it seemed huge, a ludicrous notion by today's standards when it's not Meg's, or even Gigs but Teras! Pre Windows it was not simple to use but we managed to input about 20,000 records.

Sites of Local significance for nature conservation - A Sites of Scientific Interest (SSI) system in Barnsley existed as part of 'A Review of Nature Conservation in South Yorkshire' (South Yorkshire County Council 1981). This document listed sites of national and local interest within the county. A total of 257 sites were identified of which 37 were within the Barnsley district.

Phase 1 Habitat Survey –In 1988-89, a new Phase 1 habitat survey was carried out for the whole of the Barnsley district highlighting particular areas of conservation interest (Kelly) giving up to date information on the condition of the most important sites.

Review of Locally important sites – In 1990, following the Phase 1 Survey Maggie Bignall (MRB Ecology) was tasked with evaluating the most important sites representing a range of habitats within the borough with recommendations for any action required to safeguard the interest. A list of potential sites was taken from the earlier report and each of these sites was surveyed with a standard methodology. 69 sites were deemed to meet the required standard and were known as Natural Heritage Sites (NHS). They were documented to produce a site package containing detailed information on the site, its evaluation; details of species etc outline management prescription, constraints and opportunities.

Today, I understand there are now 63 of these Local Wildlife sites, 6 Local Nature Reserves (LNR's) and 4 of national significance (SSSI), all wildflower meadows in the west of the district, together with the South Pennine Moors Special Protection Area.

We also organised and supported a conservation liaison group with all the voluntary naturalist groups within the district some , like the Barnsley Naturalists interested in multiple subjects and some which were set up for one particular group i.e. Badgers, Birds, invertebrates etc. We were able to keep them aware of any developments that might interest them and to focus the wide spread of experience on a particular issue if it became necessary. The group met for many years, I think successfully. After I retired in 1999 I remained in this group as a volunteer representing the bat group until 2007.

As I mentioned earlier Steve Robinson's interests were with farm landscapes and environmental education. He organised many events that brought the two together. It was usually primary age children. In some cases events brought all of us out to help. Two farms stick in my memory, that of Davis Crossley from Darton and Helen and David Rhodes from Ardsley. We had quite large events there with lots of children and they seemed to love every minute of it, and the children did too!

The main theme was around the wildlife on farms and where food comes from. It was always interesting to ask young children where common items such as milk, bread and crisps etc came from. Invariably the answer would be Tesco or Asda, illustrating how in our modern lives we have become separated from our food sources. What was even more surprising in Barnsley, less than 10 years after the miners' strike, was how few young children knew what coal was when showed a piece.

It's not hard, with children in this age group, to get them interested in animals and wildlife. Helen and David had a dairy herd so there were lots of animals about. Around that time I usually had some bats, waifs and strays, which needed a bit of short term TLC to show the children. I also had one or two permanent residents that couldn't be released back into the wild. One of these was a Noctule bat which unfortunately had lost one wing. With regular hand feeding with mealworms it got quite tame and being quite large (think hamster) was ideal for young children to see and *gently* stroke.

I think we all enjoyed these days, particularly Teresa and Gaynor who otherwise didn't get out of the office. I was pleased, to learn that Helen and David are still doing similar work on their farm today.

In addition we showcased our work at Penistone Show each year and at any other events that seemed to offer us an opportunity to improve the awareness of nature conservation messages within the wider population in Barnsley. This often involved inviting school children to plant trees in their area. Sometimes there was an opportunity to have the Mayor attend officially and on one of these occasions we managed to get the official car (appropriately registered as THE1) stuck in a muddy field. Not the beast career move, but it was ok in the end). (FIG 20)

Chapter 3: Early stages around Broomhill

Wath Ings and probably most of the wetlands in the Dearne Valley were originally caused by mining subsidence probably in the 1930's. The concrete roads seem to have been constructed to serve the site as a stocking ground for surplus coal from Wath Manvers. Certainly, the site has always been referred to as coal stocking area and the surface of a large part of the site was covered by a residual coal carpet. There are also other local stories of the roads being used in the early days by Flying Circus shows using bi-planes.

The name *Old Moor* may derive from an archaic meaning of *moor*, referring to a marshy area that was difficult to cultivate. In the mid-18th century, it was farmed as part of the estate of the Marquis of Rockingham, from Wentworth Woodhouse. When we began our interest in the site the farm buildings were still occupied and the land a mix of arable and pasture with the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust reserve of Wath Ings and a grazing licence over the flood banks.

Birding first started on Wath Ings in the 1950's when Alan Archer, Colin Bower and Terence Kilburn apparently stumbled on it during a bicycle ride. On their next visit they were joined by
Michael Clegg, presenter of 'Clegg's People' on ITV's Tonight programme. Michael was also credited with discovering Broomhill Flash from the top deck of a passing bus. Around the same time Harold Crookes joined the group. Dave Standring, Phil Wordsworth and Ivan Martin were also among the Wath Pioneers. It's certain that without the hard work of this group of people Wath Ings or Old Moor would not exist today.

I was sad to hear recently that Phil had died a few years ago. I met Phil soon after moving to Barnsley at one of the Barnsley Bird Study Group meetings in the college Lecture Theatre in Barnsley. I recall one occasion when Phil sidled up to me furtively towards the end of a lecture and whispered 'would you do the vote of thanks' in his quiet way then left swiftly without waiting for an answer. Talk about in at the deep end! I was nearly ready to run away.

In the mid 1970's Yorkshire Wildlife Trust took over management of the site as a reserve. During the 1970's the 'Pioneers' were instrumental in bringing on the next generation of birders led by John Hewitt, Mick Turton, Nick Addey and Chris Needham and Graham Speight who kindly helped me with this early information.

The first hide, the now famous Wath Hide, was erected in 1975 by Dave Standring (FIG 2). Inside this hide, which still exists, the records of many years sightings are written on the timber walls. The Yorkshire Wildlife Trust had a tenancy from the National Rivers Authority (now the Environment Agency) for Wath Ings, until 1994 when they agreed to relinquish the tenancy to incorporate Wath Ings within the Old Moor site.

The latest generation is represented by Dave Waddington, a volunteer at Wath before being appointed Reserve Warden in the newly opened Old Moor site in 1998. He still works for RSPB in the same capacity. In Graham's words 'Dave is a man who has pretty much dedicated his life to the site'.

We were involved in the Dearne Valley from 1987 working with the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust at Broomhill Flash and Wath Ings. We had a modest budget that we managed to match with Countryside Commission Grants effectively doubling what we could achieve. It was clear then that it would be beneficial to have a number of different sites in the locality capable of supporting each other. These are shown in Fig 3.

Wath Ings: Working with the reserve Management Committee we supported the site by providing a new hide, and a new bridge crossing Knoll Beck and stock fencing to control grazing animals. Plans 2 & 3 show the Old Moor/Wath Ings site as it was before any work was carried out. FIG 2 shows Wath Ings and the Field Pools.

Broomhill Flash: Probably the main area of activity for us in this period. In August 1992 a new hide and school's facility, opened by Councillor Fisher, was installed, working with the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust Education Officer, Mildred Scott. The Visitor Centre (FIG 20) was sited next to the hide with windows giving close views of the birds for numerous visiting groups of primary school children. The window was covered by a special one-way film which allowed children to see out but prevented the birds being disturbed by excited children bobbing about inside. The whole thing could be secured at the end of the day by closing the shutters. It survived for many years but I understand both the hide and the classroom were burnt down and the hide replaced with a breeze-block structure, built by the local volunteers, in 2003. This was in turn replaced by the Garganey Trust in 2015/16, with a new double-decker hide.

The site came under threat when the farmer decided to sell the land. Ultimately the site was saved by its purchase by the Garganey Trust in 2002 and additional land was acquired in 2004 to create Clegg's meadow.

February 1993 was very cold and most of the Flash was frozen. Members of the Reserve Management Committee arranged for a supply of potatoes attracting wildfowl close to the windows and giving the children close views of the birds. Feeding like this on a nature reserve was however controversial as well as expensive and was not repeated. I can appreciate why it was controversial but the results were spectacular.

We did have a problem however with shooting over the flash from adjoining land, which happened from time to time.

Wombwell Ings: This was an exceptional site owned by the Environment Agency and banked to create flood storage capacity. It was essentially grazing marsh with a subsidence flash, adjacent to Broomhill Flash and bounded on two sides by the Rivers Dove and

Dearne and Bulling Dike. Overgrazing by unregulated horses from an adjacent caravan site was a problem as well as disturbance from the horse's owners walking the land.

A management arrangement was agreed with the Environment Agency to improve the habitat for birds on the site, including an experimental flooding of the site in March 1988, achieved by simply creating a low bund across the central ditch close to the outlet culvert. In terms of its effect on the bird population the results were spectacular but unfortunately the experiment had to be curtailed because of complaints of flooding in the caravan site. The Ings were enclosed by flood banks intended to impound excess flood water from the Dearne and hold it on the site to be discharged gradually as river levels fall, so presumably there must have been some unknown underground connection beneath the flood bank to cause the problem in the caravan site. Whatever the cause the experiment was never repeated.

One humorous aspect of this scheme was that when we sought consent for the scheme from the Council, there was a slight misunderstanding with one committee member thinking that with banks round the edge and the site flooded it would make a useful recreational facility for yachting!

Efforts to control the horse grazing were also attempted by formalising a grazing licence. This offered hope that some measure of control of overgrazing could be achieved with different levels of grazing at different times of the year. In the event this was simply a failure because horses tended to come and go in the same unregulated manner. When asked, it always seemed that the surplus horses always belonged to someone unknown to the usual graziers. In the end with pressure for attention building at Old Moor, I reluctantly had to admit defeat.

One positive here was that we were able to install a hide overlooking the flash.

Gypsy Marsh: This quite small site situated next to the old railway line is quite unlike anything else in the vicinity with the drier patches dominated by stands of heather and wetter areas with rushes and sedges and a hard footpath running through the middle. It was presumed to be a remnant of lowland heath and worthy of protection as a nature reserve. A significant feature was a very large 'L' shaped soil stack near the front of the site, the origins of which were unknown.

Part of the site was to be acquired by the Council for the Dearne Valley Parkway scheme but in the end it became possible to acquire the whole site in 1993 by, partly, using the value of the soil in the stack, which was significant.

Park Hill Brickworks: This site was acquired as 'planning gain' in relation to proposals for housing development on a former scrapyard and in particular those parts of the site which could not be protected from flood events. Much of the site was boggy with a fairly large lake at one end of which stood the old brick kiln structure and associated tall chimney

Historically the kilns are an interesting example of a Hoffmann Kiln, invented by Friedrich Hoffmann in Germany in 1858. They were common in Britain because of their efficient use of heat and at the time (1992) one like this was still turning out bricks in West Yorkshire. There are ten arched roof chambers back-to-back in two rows of five. Each chamber has a doorway in the front for loading and unloading, smaller passages to adjacent kilns and fuel charging openings in the roof. The efficiency of the system comes from the circulation of the hot gasses rotating round all of the kilns so that the ones ahead of the one currently being fired are warming and the ones behind cooling and ready for restocking. At each restocking the firing kiln moves round one. The system was so efficient that they could work continuously and there are records of some working continuously for years if not decades.

The kilns were partially demolished at one end but seven of the original 10 chambers were largely intact and the chimney, approximately 112 feet high was in fairly good condition with some cracks and holes particularly on the east side.

An initial survey recorded 9 Daubenton's bats *Myotis daubentoni* roosting in crevices within the chambers on 23rd September 1992. A more detailed survey by The Robert Stebbings Consultancy in March 1993 concluded that the building had been used extensively by bats over many years and probably for breeding. Studies elsewhere suggest that because bats tend to roost in deep and narrow crevices only 5-8 % of bats in occupation might be seen.

Because all bat species have special protection various recommendations were made for the treatment of the structure:-

- Stabilise the structure to prevent further deterioration and to remove a hazard to the public.

- Control human access by grilling openings to a design that will not prevent access for the bats.

- Further enhancement for bats could be made by sealing up some of the external openings.

Over the following months the structure of the kilns was stabilized, particularly the damaged end and work recommended to the openings, which were grilled. The chimney was inspected by a specialist and repaired with a new lightning conductor being fitted. On one remarkable day I was invited by the contractor to climb the ladders fixed vertically to the side of the chimney for a look at the top (with a safety rope of course).

I must tell readers that vertical ladders are not easy to climb. The contractors had a distinctive swinging fashion which seemed to be effortless but my legs felt like rubber by the time I got to the top. The view from the top was special but the very noticeable and quite

significant movement of the chimney caused by the wind was unexpected and initially worrying. Apparently if a brick chimney didn't move it would fall down. Lesson 1 learned but I didn't have any aspirations to retrain as a steeplejack.

Elsewhere on the site some areas were shallowly excavated to create different conditions.

Doveside Similarly to Park Hill, this site was acquired as 'planning gain' in relation to proposals for housing development on land adjacent to the River Dove, opposite Wombwell Ings. Flooding was again an issue here and the developer could only build on part of the site above the flood risk level. The remainder alongside the river was dedicated to the Council for public use, as a nature reserve. I believe this site is now managed by the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust.

Chapter 4: Background to the Old Moor story

In the 1950s the coal industry dominated the area but by 1990 the area from Old Moor eastward into Rotherham saw collieries closing, power stations, railways, marshalling yards, coking plants, and pit heaps becoming derelict. 11,000 jobs were lost in mining alone. Covering 1500 acres (600 hectares) it was the largest derelict site in Western Europe. Parts of the area were despoiled by heavy pollution. Plan 1 doesn't show the specific boundaries of the Wath Manvers area but does give a clear idea of the extent of the colliery areas, railways etc.

As the dereliction spread into Rotherham and Doncaster, the Leader of Barnsley Council, Hedley Salt led the setting up of the Dearne Valley Partnership to oversee and coordinate the regeneration of the whole area by the three councils. Old Moor became part of the plan to reclaim the wider Wath Manvers area of 600 hectares. Much of the ground was heavily polluted and needed to be restored by covering it with clean soil deep enough for trees and grassland to become established. To achieve this, some 700,000 tonnes of soil material were needed.

The vision, initially floated by Rodger Mitchell (Rotherham MBC & Yorkshire Wildlife Trust) was to source this extraordinary amount of soil material from Old Moor. This had a double advantage. Firstly, it provided a guaranteed supply of material when they needed it and from where it could easily be excavated and transported to Wath Manvers using off-road vehicles. Secondly the excavation would create the new wetland at Old Moor, which when linked to other existing important wildlife areas such as Wath Ings and Broomhill Flash ((both then managed by the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust) would create a significant and valuable suite of nature conservation sites and act as a symbolic greening of the Dearne Valley.

Accessibility was to be increased by building the Dearne Towns Link Road (now Dearne Valley Parkway A6195) to connect with the M1 and the A1, together with Manvers Way to act as a spine road through the new development.

Old Moor Nature Reserve could not have been created without this wider plan.

To achieve the vision for Old Moor and the regeneration of the whole Dearne Valley needed investment beyond the scope of local Councils. Specific support was required from Central Government, and the European Union (EU). But these grants would only become available if Central Government and the EU were persuaded that former mining areas like Barnsley, Rotherham and Doncaster needed such financial support to regenerate their areas for their local communities.

With the demise of the coal industry in the 1980s, former mining areas throughout the whole of Britain were suffering major deprivation. In response, a key initiative was taken by the Leader of BMBC, Hedley Salt and John Edwards, the Chief Executive, to set up the Coal Communities Campaign (CCC). This brought together all the existing and former mining area Local Authorities in the UK, from Wales to Tyneside, from Scotland to Kent, to lobby Government for additional resources to tackle coalfield deprivation. This enabled the CCC to liaise with Government both centrally and through Regional Offices to increase funding and coordinate how it would be spent.

The CCC then went on to lobby the European Union with other deprived former coalfield areas throughout Europe particularly in Germany, France, Spain and Belgium to direct

funding programmes to assist former mining areas in the EU. This resulted in the RECHAR programme, which directed European grants to former coalfield areas and resulted in massive investment into Barnsley. These included the European Regional Development Fund which was particularly important for many economic and environmental projects in Barnsley, including Old Moor.

Chapter 5: Old Moor - The early stages

Old Moor and Wath Ings was quite a different place at the outset before any major work had been carried out. Various views across the site can be seen in FIG 2. Plans 2 and 3 also show the makeup of the site with the ownership boundaries of British Coal and the National Rivers Authority (NRA) now the Environment Agency. The tenancy boundary for the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust reserve is also shown.

FIG 4 shows, in perhaps a more graphic way, the area from an air photo with the main land uses labelled. There was a mix of arable, pasture and hayfields with the concrete roads servicing the coal stocking area with the remaining patches of bare coal carpet and often thin patches of tussocky grass. Wath Ings itself formed a large portion of the site with the wetter areas of the field pools alongside Knoll Beck. These can be seen in FIG 5.

The farm buildings were in very poor condition with some in a state of partial collapse. Aside from the Farmhouse group and the large barns, now occupied by the Visitor Centre, there were two groups of single storey animal sheds which were in the worst condition. FIG 6 give a good impression of the state of the buildings.

In June 1993, the Dearne Towns Link Road (now Dearne Valley Parkway A6195) was completed and the future boundaries of Old Moor fixed.

The scheme first arose for us around 1990. That period was characterised by occasional flurries of excitement and long periods of frustrating inactivity, at least at our end. The tempo eventually picked up with preliminary allocations from funding bodies. The bulk of the ground work would be funded by The Department of the Environment's Derelict Land Grant at 100%. The facility development needed above that amounted to £950K from the UK government's City Challenge Programme matched with the same amount from the European Regional Development Fund. A small amount would be provided from our Countryside budget matched by Countryside Commission grants.

Allocations at this level required a correspondingly high level of justification in the form of Consultant's Reports. Ove Arup produced a colossal document covering the Engineering aspects which would have made an excellent door-stop. Grant Leisure Group produced a more modest document on Visitor Attraction issues which contained copious tables predicting very large visitor numbers due to a very large one-hour travel to site catchment. The Wildlife Advisory Service of The Wildfowl and Wetland Trust produced an even slimmer (and much more interesting to us) document on the ecological aspects, design and management.

The major proposal emerging from the initial investigations was for Old Moor to be managed by The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust alongside its other sites across the country and their flagship site at Slimbridge in Gloucestershire set up by Sir Peter Scott.

We had several meetings with the consultants in Barnsley but Malcolm and I particularly enjoyed visits to Slimbridge. On the first occasion we met in a first-floor conference room overlooking 'Swan Lake' We were seated, perhaps deliberately, facing the windows and distracted by what seemed like several hundred Whooper and Bewick's Swans and other teaming wildfowl on the lake outside. On subsequent visits we decided to sit with our backs to the window as an aid to concentration.

Low flow level measurements in the River Dearne following a drought gave a level of 18.3m AOD for the minimum level required to permit a gravity water supply to the site. In order to

protect the farm buildings and the themed area from flooding, these areas would be bunded to 21.3m AOD and the Green Lane area to 19.7m AOD.

Initial draft scheme

In April 1994 a draft scheme was produced by the WWT which saw the main Visitor Centre located at the southern corner of the Main Lake where large windows would provide the initial 'wow' factor for visitors from panoramic views over the lake. This is approximately the position of the Family Hide as it is today. A smaller satellite centre was to be located in the corner of the themed area overlooking the reedbeds at approximately the position of the Reedbed hide today.

The farm buildings would be 'back of house' and possibly also house a conservation skills training centre.

The Themed Area would contain a wildfowl collection concentrating on certain species with an international conservation message or a small collection of captive European wildfowl to allow interaction and appreciation of birds which could be observed at a distance from the hides.

The remainder of the scheme is recognisable in the site as we see it today with Reedbeds, Wader Scrape, Flood Meadows and Main Lake etc. Wath Ings itself was to be retained largely unchanged. Plans 4 shows the main site layout & Plan 5 show the Themed Area.

This all amounted to an extremely impressive and exciting scheme having a national significance in terms of the site itself and its links with a nationally and internationally recognised organisation like the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust.

Chapter 6: The Ups and downs

1994 was a very difficult year for us with three ‘disasters’ any of which could have scuppered the scheme. Late in 1993 or in early 1994, we had the devastating news that our City Challenge budget had been reduced to £470K with the same reduction in the EC match funding reducing the budget by almost £1 million. It rocked our confidence but as they say the show goes on. I cannot remember why this happened if indeed I ever knew.

The original scheme would be now be impossible and the scheme would have to be adjusted. Attention shifted to using the farm buildings rather than creating a new centre and interpretation features would have to be reduced. We would lose the ‘wow’ factor of the original scheme but there was no alternative. Plan 6 shows the building layout

I still have the minutes of a meeting held on 10th February 1994. It was an advisory group brought together to ensure that all the conservation interests were satisfied. Those who attended were:-

Yorkshire Wildlife Trust (YWT) - Leslie Blainey, Dennis Moffat & Chris Needham

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) –Andre Farrar

Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT) – David Price

English Nature – Tim Kohler

National Rivers Authority – Amanda Bird (Ecologist)

Barnsley MBC –Malcolm Parker and myself.

Malcolm gave an update on progress and important stages reached;-

- Planning Permission had been granted.
- Initial DOE approval has been given for derelict Land Grant.
- Final approval from DOE to the project appraisal expected in the near future for City Challenge funding.
- A further application was currently being made for EU funding under the ‘Life’ programme.
- Work expected to start on site in autumn 1994.
- Final opening date for the scheme was projected to be Easter 1997.
- Considerations on the building design were taking place.

The following aims of management were agreed:-

- Maximise habitat for breeding, wintering and passage birds
- Create a wide range of habitats, plant and animal communities.
- Facilitate observation and research and complete visitor experience.
- Facilitate environmental education for all age groups.
- General prescriptions for managing different habitats were outlined.

- Contribute to the national aim to achieve 100 pairs of Bittern by 2020 which at that time (1994) were estimated at 17 breeding males.

Old Moor as part of Broomhill Ings suite of sites

- The importance of considering all the nature conservation sites in the vicinity as a single management unit was paramount.
- BMBC would shortly be contacting English Nature for declaration of all the sites as a single LNR (Local Nature Reserve). As far as I know this has never happened although all the Broomhill Ings sites are currently (2020) listed as Natural Heritage Sites in the latest schedule from Barnsley Council.

Management Trust Partnership**.**

- Malcolm explained that it was likely that the scheme would be managed by a Charitable Trust, with a trading arm to deal with commercial aspects. It was hoped that all of the organisations present would be able to participate.

Other matters

- Meeting to be arranged with NRA fisheries staff.
- Circular footpath concept discarded in favour of two arms with no public access around the river banks.
- Interpretation needs to be to a high standard.
- Relationship with YWT to be dealt with separately between BMBC and YWT.
- Need to meet National Power regarding swan deaths from overhead power lines.

By April 1994 a full topographical survey of the whole site had been completed.

Borehole surveys had also been completed to determine ground and ground water conditions. Water levels in these boreholes were measured and recorded on a regular basis. This was vital information to guide the engineering. With the deeper excavations, particularly the Main Lake cutting through these shale bands, they would need to be sealed as excavations progressed in order to avoid uncontrolled movement of water from the River Dearne, especially in flood conditions.

After all this positive activity we were hit with a second potential disaster in the shape of plans for a new airport near Goldthorpe. This was not intended to be a major airport providing holiday flights etc but rather than a local feeder to larger regional airports probably more attractive to business activity than leisure.

I did see a plan showing the proposed route for a helicopter training circuit from Goldthorpe, round Old Moor Farm then back to Goldthorpe directly over the wetlands. Given the short route and likely relatively low altitude of the flights this would have been a total disaster for wildlife on Old Moor and probably seen the schemes demise eventually.

Thankfully after a few months the scheme had died and was not heard of again. The relief was only short lived however because we were soon to experience our third major setback. The Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust decided that they could no longer be involved with the scheme.

They cited as the main reason being conflicting timescales of Old Moor with their new site at Barn Elms in London. I could understand how they would find a prestigious scheme close to central London more attractive than a site in Barnsley but in the end wished them well and thanked them for their contribution. I always wondered how much the massive reduction in the budget and the airport had figured in their decision. In all honesty if I had been in their position I might well have come to the same conclusion.

I can't overstate our level of disappointment close to despair at the time. We really were on our own now with a massive scheme to start and no partners in the frame for looking after the site long term. We had never anticipated running the site directly, always recognising that it would be more successful in specialist hands.

At the time though there was no time for 'what iff's'. We had a site to build.

Chapter 7: Design Stage- The Brief

The brief came from the work carried out by the WWF consultancy team.

There were two main elements that needed to be brought together to achieve a functioning hydrological system for the site.

Flood Defence

The site is enclosed in earth flood banks intended to accommodate surplus water during flood events in order to protect vulnerable areas along the valley from flooding. An inlet spillway is located in the River Dearne banks towards the eastern end of Wath Ings. (FIG 2) The system operates when river levels reach the height of the spillway, when water will flow into Wath Ings and eventually the rest of the site depending on the severity of the event. This water would be retained in the area until levels in the river subside and then allowed to gradually return to the river. Historically I think it is true to say that flood waters have covered the whole site on only a few occasions but the area around the farm buildings has never been affected.

Normal flows from the land and Wath Ings discharge to Knoll Beck near to the junction with the River Dearne. This outlet is protected by a flap valve which automatically closes when water levels in Knoll Beck rise above the flap. Closure of the flap means that water levels would rise within the site, triggering Environment Agency pumps located nearby (FIG 2)

The available flood capacity is calculated as being above ground level and normal water levels.
In working out the design for the site this above ground figure was a factor that had to be accommodated with no possibility of reduction.

Hydrological factors

Water supplies and the ability to manipulate the flows of water through the system are key to the success or otherwise of schemes of this nature. The details set out here were supplied by the WWT in the initial project documents.

A low flow level in the River Dearne, recorded following a drought period in early November 1993 gave a level of 18.9m AOD, suggesting a gravity fed system was feasible. The Reservoir, at a higher level and pump feed would give the ability to maintain the system if in abnormally low river conditions the gravity system did not work. The system was planned to give the greatest extent of flexibility and based on the following three principles:-

Each unit must be capable of achieving water levels independent of the others and be fed by a gravity flow system.

The system must be capable of allowing the isolation and draw-down of individual sections whilst retaining supplies to surrounding lower tier units.

- Reedbeds -0.3m drawdown to substrate surface for exposure of litter layer.
- Main lake – should remain reasonably constant apart from natural drawdown during summer months.
- Wader Scrape **-** 0.4m drawdown to the substrate surface in the lowest hollows
- Flood Meadows - 0.3m drawdown to the substrate surface in the lowest lying areas

Above all that there should be a constant through flow through most of the units. In reedbeds low flushing rates are associated with low oxygen concentrations and build-up of ammonium compounds inhibiting reed growth. In other areas where there are large concentrations of feeding or loafing birds flushing is necessary to prevent nutrient build-up causing algal blooms.

The following retention times were recommended.

- Main Lake 50-72 days
- Wader Scrape 18-36 days
- Reedbeds 36 days
- Flood Meadows Winter only then as possible.
- Themed Area 10 days

Habitat Prescription –Main Lake

To enhance the current regional importance of the site for wintering wildfowl. This would form the main area for wintering wildfowl, providing habitat for existing populations and encouraging increased density and diversity of species. The numbers of summering and nesting wildfowl should be enhanced by provision of nesting islands and a sinuous shoreline. The bed profile of the lake should be variable with certain requirements. A ring-fence of deep water, at least 2 metres, would prevent the colonisation of the lake by emergent aquatic plants. The margins of the lake and in some areas associated with islands in the lake should shallow gradually between 0 and 0.5 metres for dabbling ducks

For breeding wildfowl, islands should have a minimum area of 200 square metres and should slope from the shoreline at a gradient of 1in5 to a top height of 0.5-1.0 metres above water level. Margins should be sinuous.

Due to the expanse of water and the prevailing wind direction a number of islands and some shorelines will be susceptible to wave erosion. This can be mitigated by positioning and the profile of islands. Groups of islands will provide sheltered bays for diving ducks.

The floodbank between the main lake and the reedbeds should have a gradual gradient and be managed as 'Wigeon Lawn'

Habitat prescription –Reedbeds

Occupying a substantial proportion of the overall site, the reedbeds should attract high densities of breeding species such as Reed Warbler and Reed Bunting but also the possible colonisation in the future by Bittern and Bearded Tit. The presence of open water meres and channels would also attract other waterbirds for feeding, breeding or roosting.

The reedbeds are designed in separate units enclosed by low bunds capable of retaining water depths of up to 0.3metres above normal levels (allowing for future rises in litter layers) and 0.5 metres freeboard and be at least 4 metres wide to allow vehicle access.

Water is supplied to each unit as previously described and where ditches pass through retaining bunds water levels can be fine-tuned with 'L-bend 'pipes. For water level management the inlet bend can be raised and the outlet lowered to reduce water levels.

The reedbeds should be constructed with an impermeable lower bed level with a surface substrate of 50:50 topsoil and subsoil mix to a minimum depth of 0.3 metres placed with minimum compaction.

The reedbed would incorporate a number of small meres, each ring-fenced with underwater trenches at least 2 metres deep to prevent reed encroachment. Shallower water can then be created in the middle of the meres. The reedbed levels should be variable and rise gradually at the margins to provide a range of reed at various water depths.

Habitat prescription –Wader Scrape

This area would be the main focus for feeding wading birds during periods of passage migration. Construction and management of nesting islands may attract breeding Terns, Ringed and Little Ringed Plover.

The area is designed as a shallow basin with a very gradual gradient to present a large area of open substrate following a small drop in water levels, with un-vegetated islands separated from the mainland by a 1.5 metre deep security canal.

The Wader Scrape should have an impermeable lower level, covered by an un-compacted layer of topsoil 0.4 metres deep taken from a dry area of the site and likely to be free of aquatic weed seeds. To encourage a high organic content it may be necessary to allow some plant growth from the seed bank prior to flooding. These would decompose to provide an initial flush of organic matter and nutrients.

Water levels should be maintained at the maximum level between October and March. During April and May levels could be lowered by 0.2 metres giving shallow water depths across most of the area and exposing areas of wet mud. Further lowering of 0.1 metres in late May and June would provide shallow water for feeding broods and should fluctuate around this level from mid-June to the end of September for the Autumn passage. Levels would then be brought gradually back to maximum into October.

Management requirements would be mainly around control of vegetation on islands and encroaching on to open mud areas. Encroachment on to islands could be inhibited by winter flooding fully submerging islands. High invertebrate densities are enhanced by periodic (every 4-6 years) draw down in July to allow rapid colonisation by annual species which should be rapidly submerged in September.

Habitat prescription –Flood Meadows.

The objective would be to maintain and enhance breeding habitat for wading birds and wildfowl. Wet grassland inundated to a shallow depth in winter would attract a wide range of wildfowl species whilst supporting breeding waders such as Redshank, Lapwing and Snipe in early summer. Ditches associated with the grassland can also be used by breeding wildfowl.

A ridge and furrow landform has been suggested. Each furrow should be flat and around 10-15 metres wide, the ridges flat and around 5 metres wide. There should be a height difference of about 0.3 metres between the ridge and the furrow and the ridges should be approximately 30-50 metres apart. In this way water can be retained in the furrows by surface flooding. The retention of surface-damp conditions by shallow flooding in the furrows is possible whilst still presenting a large area of shallow ‘edge’ habitat suitable for feeding and areas above water level suitable for nesting.

In areas to be excavated it is important that topsoil is retained for re-spreading on the excavated areas and remains un-compacted to retain an abundant earthworm population.. This will allow maximum regeneration from the seedbank. Ideally the area should be left unflooded for 1-2 seasons to allow soil; structure and fauna to develop. If in short supply topsoil should be deposited in the furrows. The area is divided by ditches which should hold a minimum of 1.5 metres of water in April to June.

Between December and February the water level should be retained at its highest level, flooded to the ridge tops and a maximum water depth of about 0.3 metres in the furrows. Prolonged flooding can be detrimental and every 5 years surface flooding should be prevented for 2-3 seasons. Throughout March water levels should be lowered to about the base of the furrows and retained at that level from April to June. From July to October the surface should be allowed to dry out to enable access for grazing stock. Water levels should rise to the maximum level throughout October and maintained throughout November and December.

Habitat prescription –Themed Area

The Themed Area in the original scheme was designed as a series of discrete units screened from adjacent areas by natural features like banks, ditches hedgerows etc. This was intended to add to visitor 'feeling of discovery' as they passed from area to area. Inherent in the design were a number of return routes giving the visitor options on the length of walk they preferred.

The exhibits shown for this area were not finished proposals but more of a shopping list at that stage. This level of facility, exciting as it was, depended on the level of funding initially expected and became impossible with the reduced budget. For reasons of continuity the name 'Themed Area' has been retained throughout the rest of this account although it's character has changed from the original concept to a more low key area where visitors can immerse themselves in the wetland character more intimately before progressing out to the remainder of the site where viewing is more constrained by lookout hides where bird can be viewed without disturbing them. The Themed Area also comes into its own for school groups, pond dipping etc FIG 16 and 18. Details of the original scheme are included now for readers who might be interested in how things might have been.

The exhibits would rely on indoor and outdoor experiences moving between the main Visitor Centre and the satellite centre. Between these two areas the visitor would pass through a series of exhibits describing various aspects of wetlands both in the UK and internationally. These would concentrate on certain species with a conservation message or story and attempt to place species in context. An alternative would be a small collection of captive European wildfowl, to allow interaction and appreciation with birds which can be observed from the hides. A succession Trail could carry visitors over a full range of wetland habitats. Exhibits would focus similar wetlands internationally.

At various stages in their tour around the exhibit area families and school parties would be invited to try some hands-on experiments at various 'Activity Stations' such as pond exploration. An indoor exhibit could be decorated as an underwater pond scene.

Exhibit buildings would have constantly changing themes or could concentrate on messages and habitats which cannot easily be illustrated in physical terms. These could be hi-tech.

There would be a number of potential themes for the Satellite centre, e.g., tropical wetlands, flooded forest swamps etc. A Discovery Centre with hands-on biological science centre and a linked resource facility for pupils, students, teachers and others would also be included.

There would be a Satellite catering and toilet facility.

Other concepts considered were:-

- Habitat creation demonstrations.
- Aquatic plant nursery.
- ‘Man and Wetlands’ exhibits showing close relationship between man and wetlands.
- Conservation Skills Centre-based in the Farm buildings.

One corollary to this story must be mentioned. Not everyone was enthusiastic about using pinioned birds as part of an exhibit. I will not say any more on that score except that it didn’t happen in the end.

Chapter 8: Final Designs.

Translating all the information that we had into a working plan for Old Moor was a daunting but exciting prospect. We had the brief produced by the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust. We had the conservation liaison group which had been established soon after the 1986 changes where we could air ideas and get comments from groups interested in disparate wildlife groups. We also had the Wath Ings management committee and individuals there who had long term knowledge of the site.

Draft plans were produced and discussed which often (if not usually) resulted in alternative and completely different ideas being suggested in return. Unfortunately ten people are likely to have ten different ideas. I am a firm believer in the notion that the camel was a horse designed by a committee so in the end I think you have to consider the comments made and choose one route to follow.

Since the flood defence requirements were at the heart of everything at Old Moor, it needed to inform other decisions and be dealt with first. I have to say that the engineers from the National Rivers Authority were very helpful and took a flexible attitude providing the flood capacity was retained. Since the various compartments, Main Lake, Wader Scrape, Reedbeds etc are tiered to benefit from a gravity flow of water through the site, this tiering could be used in reverse to accommodate incremental flooding. After discussions we agreed this incremental approach to flooding with Wath Ings and the Flood Meadows being the first level and thereafter progressing gradually up the site with increasing severity of flood events. This meant that light flooding only affected part of the site.

The public areas, the buildings, car park, Themed Area etc. would be protected up to the 1 in 100 year flood events with a flood bank extending fully around this corner of the site. This turned out to be a significant structure both in appearance but also in construction and was expensive. In chapter 6, I mentioned the borehole surveys carried out to determine ground and ground water conditions. There were a number of shale bands beneath the site which were sealed with clay beneath the ‘wet’ parts of the site. In order for the flood bank to protect the buildings etc, it was necessary to seal these shale bands and the solution was to excavate deep narrow trenches that were filled with bentonite in slurry form. This is a clay material which dries to form a barrier to underground water movements. This bentonite core lies beneath the full length of this floodbank and limits any kind of future excavation.

Since the gravity system for the site flows though this area from the reedbeds towards Wath Ings, it was necessary to install valves where pipework passes through the floodbank allowing the area to be isolated from the rest of the site in flood conditions.

The main change from the WWT scheme was the position of Bulling Dike. This emerges from a culvert beneath the Dearne Valley Parkway and meanders across the corner of the site to discharge into the river Dearne. The WWT scheme showed Bulling Dike diverted

alongside the road to discharge into the River Dearne next to the road bridge. This location appeared to me to be dangerously close to the Yorkshire Derwent Aqueduct. The aqueduct is actually two
Side-by-side 1.2 metre (4 feet) diameter high pressure water mains. I was told by Yorkshire Water engineers that only short sections could be uncovered at a time because of the risk of it being forced out of the ground under the high pressure. I didn't want to be responsible for a new Noah's flood in Barnsley!

With Bulling Dike on its existing line and the reservoir located between Bulling Dike and the River Dearne, the secondary lake shown on the WWT plan wasn't feasible. On the plus side omitting the secondary lake allowed the reedbed area to be increased with five units rather than the four shown on the WWT plan. Two of these contained small reed-fringed lakes where the two Reedbed hides are located today.

Another key feature I was keen to retain was the long hedge and ditch extending from the back of the farmyard right down to the edge of Wath Ings. With flood banks protecting this long narrow corridor it provided the best screened access route to potential viewing points overlooking the Main Lake, Wader Scrape Wath Ings and the Flood Meadows. It wasn't simply a footpath though. With the existing mature Hawthorn hedgerow, the water-filled ditch full of aquatic life on one side and the shrub planted screen banks on the other; this has developed a habitat in its own right and one in which visitors can feel enveloped and part of. It's brilliant for birds too whether Warblers flitting through the Hawthorns or perhaps a Firecrest in the Gorse or Waxwing in the Rowans.

This became the Green Lane. It was initially envisaged to have an outbound path on one side and a return on the other but for financial reasons only one path was made and the other side went to 'nature' and a lot of Dave Waddington's Tree Sparrow boxes.

Also around the outer edges of the farmyard were a number of mature trees including a particularly nice Oak tree that needed protection because of its location near the main haul-road. This tree can be seen in FIG 15.

With the layout settled it was time to concentrate on the details. All of the excavations had to be drawn up in detail at a scale of 1:500, with contours at 0.5metre intervals. This meant three AO size sheets each 841mmx1189mm or 33 inches x 46 inches, to cover the area. Taking the design criteria for each compartment from the WWT brief was a three-dimensional exercise that needed complete concentration. This was impossible in a busy office with phones ringing and people interrupting.

I got permission to work at home and spent a week carefully working through the contours for the whole site from the deepest part of the lake (about 3 metres) to the highest part of the banks. From deep channels in the reedbeds to dabbling duck shallows in the main lake, all the nuances of the brief needed detailing. Since it was necessary to have three sheets to

cover the site there was overlap and I needed the whole of the lounge floor to lay out all three sheets to make sure they all matched up.

With the contour plans in draft I needed to make a rough check of the flood storage capacity. It was only rough mind you. I used a planimeter, a small hand tool for measuring areas on plans. I made a rough calculation,by laboriously measuring the area of each contour, of the difference between the proposed excavation levels and the existing levels of the ground surface and the answer appeared to be positive. (In the end when the plans were digitised for computer aided design by the engineers, the increase in flood storage capacity was quite substantial). I have tried to find these contour plans but they all seem to have been lost with all the files.

With the contours completed, a detail specification was compiled from the WWT brief to cover issues such as maximum and draw down water levels, flow retention times for different compartments (for flushing) substrate compaction, (or lack thereof) soiling etc. This was all passed to Ron Marshall the Site Engineer for Rotherham MBC, for incorporation into contract documents.

A similar exercise was carried out for the landscaping, tree and shrub planting, grass seeding and reed planting. Whilst we did some of the early planting in the Themed Area with training teams, the main part was organised by Landscape Architects within the Council for implementation by contractors.

In June 1994 proposals for the Phase 1 Engineering Works were completed and the brief was passed to the Engineers in Rotherham for their work. This contract covered site preparation, stripping the contaminated coal carpet and construction of the culvert and access road and features such as trees that needed protection during the works. Initially the road served as the main haul road for materials moved from Old Moor to Wath Manvers but afterwards formed the main access road for the visitor centre. Other measures included the main flood banks, removal of hedgerows and trees within excavation areas and ditch work along Green Lane.

One area that I decided should be removed from any kind of disturbance was the meadow immediately behind the main farmhouse and adjacent to the footpath that now connects the Trans-Pennine Trail and the Car Park with the Visitor Centre. I discovered Adderstongue Ophioglossum vulgatum, a plant suggesting the field is an old flower meadow and may contain other species of note. By leaving the field undisturbed it left open the future possibility of improvement through sympathetic management.

I always felt that the garden boundary to this field might have been a Ha-Ha originally, judging by its appearance. It’s a notion I never had chance to pursue but some form of archaeological investigation might prove interesting if the opportunity arose. The farm is called Old Moor House on early maps.

Later in 1994, in a landmark moment for the scheme Don Bedford from the Council's Estates Department rang to confirm that the land had been acquired. It was agreed however that since building work was some time away the farmer could remain in the house giving him more time to relocate. At this stage the original farm track was retained for our access and the haul road limited solely for the main contractor.

Chapter 9: Implementation

1995 dawned with the exciting realisation that after five years of preparation and anticipation spades would soon be in the ground. Well not exactly spades but something slightly larger as well. On the engineering side work started in February to clear the contaminated coal waste and preparatory works for the main earth-moving contract. Hedgerows and trees would be removed in areas to be excavated. The concrete culvert crossing both Knoll Beck and the Trans-Pennine Trail, carrying, initially, the haul-road but ultimately the main road entrance for the site, was constructed together with embankments for the road. The ditch along Green Lane was widened and the flood banks constructed. FIG 6 and 9.

In the same period we were joined on site by a stonemasonry team from a job training agency that had previously been working at Wentworth Castle. They set up camp behind the barn and started working around the farmyard repairing and rebuilding where necessary, stone walls, the walls of outbuildings etc. FIG 8

1995 also brought big changes in the office that would affect me too. Ted Hutchinson, our department head as Director of Planning, retired. I had worked with him for 20 years since I moved to Barnsley. (Until Covid intervened a few of us still met up once a month for lunch with Ted). John Sanderson, former Deputy Director, took over as Head of Planning. Malcolm Parker moved up to Head of Policy (with special responsibility for the Unitary Development Plan) and on 13th March I was appointed to Malcolm's old role as Group Leader for Countryside.

By this time the group had grown considerably from externally funded generally three year projects each with a particular focus. In addition to Steve Robinson, Teresa Carr and Mike Gibson who I mentioned earlier and not in any particular order, the team now included, Pam Ashton the Trans Pennine Trail Officer and Mandy Loach, Mel Perkins and two other Landscape Architects for 'Learning Through Landscapes', an environmental education project associated with schools, Nigel Harrison and Andy Savage dealing with the Review of the Public Rights of way network, a legal process and Andy Wragg with a community-based project. Supporting all of us was Sarah Baldwin the Group Clerk who kept us all in check and who replaced Gaynor.

This was a daunting time with Old Moor winding up to full speed as it were and trying to get up to speed in each of the separate areas of work that the various projects staff were dealing with. By any measure Public Rights of Way were the hardest with not only the review process but also the routines of diversion order applications and reports of obstructions. This was closely followed by the Trans Pennine Trail, where regular Steering Group meetings from the various participating local authorities needed organising.

One of those cases cropped up that you only read about in the newspaper, a public footpath going through somebody's house. Many years before a small builder had a site with a public right of way crossing it roughly diagonally. In the process of building the houses the builder simply created his own diversion by building ginnel connections between houses from one cul-de-sac to the next. This operated without any problem for about 20 years until one householder next to a ginnel got fed up of youths sitting on his wall throwing empty bottles into his garden and blocked off the path.
In the ensuing furore it was quickly apparent that the original line of the footpath on the map, was still the legal public right of way since the builder had never sought a formal diversion order and that route passed directly through one house. I can only guess the levels of anxiety that created in the householder. It was a complicated process because the path had been there for some time and was established. Legally the right of way had to be first re-established (administratively) on the original route i.e. through the house then diverted again on to the established route. I have to say it took some time for me to get my head round the report before I was happy for it to go before the Committee. The issue was after all particularly serious for the householder concerned and it was important to deal with it in that spirit.

Commencement of the main excavation work in summer 1995 was an exciting time. The site seemed to be buzzing with people and machines. A large plant yard and compound was established close to the area now known as the Tree Sparrow Farm. The Site Engineer, Ron Marshall from Rotherham MBC, had an office where regular meetings were held with the contractor to monitor progress.

We had an initial problem because Ron was reluctant to have me in these meetings. I can understand why. Dealing with contractors on any scheme and especially schemes of this size, need a clear channel of communication, particularly where suggestions might be interpreted as instructions which in turn might lead to claims for payment for additional work.

For my part I was having none of that and insisted. It was my site and I was jolly well going to be involved. With habitat creation, the devil is in the detail. Anyone reading this who has supervised excavation works for habitat creation will know that having a machine driver used to this kind of work is priceless. With a driver used to normal excavation work close supervision is necessary until he begins to understand what is needed and why.

Although I had prepared a specification for the details of what I wanted, I knew that passing messages through the Engineer to the site foreman to the machine driver was a daisy chain guaranteed to lead to frustration and failure. I needed the opportunity to explain directly to the site foreman **why** something was necessary. A compromise was arrived at whereby the meetings were split and I came in for part of the time to monitor what was happening and explain the reasoning. After that things went along more smoothly without any further problems and I have to say Ron was very co-operative and patiently dealt with my requests.

Looking back a few years later I could see where the ultimate product, the detailing of the new habitats, was poorer than they could have been because of the chain of communication problems. Each link in the chain meant another interpretation of the original message. Compaction was probably the chief problem affecting the Reedbeds, Wader Scrape and the Flood meadows. It is one thing to specify that the soil spread over the base of the reedbeds, over the Wader Scrape and Flood Meadows, should not be compacted but quite another to be certain it wasn't compacted during day-to-day earthmoving operations when you are three steps removed from site supervision. The Reedbeds were probably the worst and after about five years the extent of reed growth was still limited to the fringes.

A simple one-to-one relationship with the machine driver is undoubtedly the most effective way of carrying out details of habitat creation. It's a two way process of course, the machine driver has to learn how you want things done and why it's important they are done that way and you have to learn the capabilities of the driver and how much he can be left to get on with it. It then comes down to trust like any kind of relationship. Realistically, the way that Local Authorities work on projects of this size, it is hard to see how things could have been done much differently with the Old Moor project especially as two separate Local Authorities were involved other than perhaps to have had a sum set aside for 'tickling up' the details where direct supervision might have been possible. In any area of life there is always room for improvement but having said all that it shouldn't be forgotten that the scheme proved to be a massive success and one to be proud of.

When the site preparation works were carried out, a gap was left in the main flood bank, where the Family Hide sits today, to accommodate the haul-road. When the main excavations began in summer 1995, soil was removed from the cultivated fields and meadows, some of which was retained for use in the reedbeds. The strategy seemed to be to reduce the ground surface across the site to roughly the finished levels for each compartment then work back from the furthest elements such as the Reservoir to the haul-road point completing the profile of each part as work progressed. By July, excavations were under way in the Themed Area, behind the flood banks, excavating ponds and water courses.

During this time work was also underway around the farm buildings. The Stonemasonry team were busy repairing or rebuilding walls, clearing areas of scrap and debris and stockpiling building stone from demolished out-buildings that were in the worst condition. FIG 8. During the winter planting was begun around the Themed Area by the training team.

By early 1996 the Themed Area excavation was completed and the ponds full of water and excavation started on the Reservoir. Heavy snow blanketed the site in January making it look more like scenes from the Arctic Tundra. This didn't last too long however and tree and shrub planting was able to get underway on the Green Lane flood banks. (FIG 9).

By March the Green Lane footpaths had been surfaced. It was time to look at the hides. Gilleard Brothers have been making bird hides for a long time and most reserves probably

have one of theirs. Two locations, the Wader Scrape Hide and the Wath Ings Hide were located on promontories with viewing required straight ahead and to each side. Taking their standard units I designed a three-sided hide by joining the standard units at an angle of about 25 degrees. Three other hides of a standard construction were also required one for each end of the Flood Meadows and one for the Main Lake which became known as the Family Hide.

By summer the Reservoir and inlet channel were full and complete with pipework abstraction facilities etc. This was completed and the taps turned on as it were to fill the system. This resulted in a telling off for me from the NRA Fisheries Team for not including a fish screen. It appeared we might have pinched most the fish stock from that part of the River Dearne. Later the presence of a thriving and busy flock of Cormorants on main lake islands tended to support their point! Sorry! FIG 10 has a series of air photos showing the extent of excavations across the site.

The pipework from the inlet channel passed underneath Bulling Dike in a syphon before discharging into the Reedbeds. The Reedbed units were all excavated, with soiling completed in the reed planting areas and the deeper channels water filled. Excavations had also been completed across the Flood Meadows with the deeper channels there also filled. (FIG 10).

In August work started on the construction of the footpaths, boardwalks and bridges in the Themed Area. (FIG11).

Around this time designs for the building work to the farm buildings were discussed with the Borough Architect's department and details agreed with the job Architect Mick Clover. (FIG 13). The main effort would be focused on the barns in order to create the Visitor Centre with basic renovation and repair to the farmhouses, pig sties and the cart shed. Externally the yard would be surfaced with and a new secure gate and fence at the entrance. Additional meetings would be held from time to time to agree details but otherwise the Architect was left to get on with that aspect. I do remember a suggestion though that the doorway in the first floor gable end should be reduced to a smaller window, an idea I resisted. I liked the door sized window which kept open the possibility of an outside area which did come to pass under RSPB plans for the café in that area. This can be seen in FIG 17.

By September the excavations were underway in the Main Lake and Wader Scrape. Gilleard brothers were on site constructing the hides. (FIG 9). Throughout the period the stonemasonry team were working through a long list of repairs and improvements around the farm. (FIG 12)

In October confirmation was received that the £470,000 EU grant had been approved and was available for the Visitor Centre building and the work was put out to tender. This also meant that we needed to take possession of the farmhouse so that repairs and renovations could take place.

Also this month we had a public open day at the weekend when work was halted. About 20-30 people attended and I was able to explain where we were up to and what would happen next. (FIG 12)

By November the excavation of the Wader Scrape was complete and the deep channels filled. The main lake was still under excavation. In December work commenced on the building work for the Visitor Centre with a planned completion date for June 1997.

January 1997 was wet and ground works on site were on hold for a while. Works on the farm buildings however progressed well and were on track.

Returning for a moment with Public Rights of Way, the service within the Council was split with regulatory process in Planning and the maintenance with Leisure Services who had a team of rangers. In order to try and iron out any potential difficulties I met with my opposite number in Leisure Services Geoff Carr on a monthly basis. There were always niggles between the staff on both sides that you can find in any organisation but we usually managed to stay on top of them. We did unfortunately have a more serious disagreement over clashing priorities that seemed to involve one or two individuals. In order to resolve them we were persuaded to take on something called 'Process Management' with a mediator from central management.

The idea is that everyone involved gets together with nobody in charge. The first stage is to identify issues so armed with post-it notes we all wrote issues, one per note. These were all posted on a large screen then everyone had to opportunity to place these in groups or topics. Anyone could move a note from one topic group to another. The groups or topics could also be put in a priority order. This all seems quite simple written down but in reality involved a few sessions that seemed to take hours. It seemed also that some individuals were being particularly difficult it seemed in order to hijack the process.

With a million and one things to deal with and Old Moor on the boil, I finally cracked and refused to carry on with what I came to regard as a total waste of time. I don't think Geoff was happy with it either. Fortunately John Sanderson supported me and we brought the whole thing to a swift conclusion. I have to say I don't believe it had any positive impact on the Public Rights of Way at all except perhaps to allow a bit of steam to blow.

At some time during the year John Armitage, Regional Officer for RSPB worked up a bid to take over Old Moor as an RSPB reserve. John lived locally and was very familiar with the area and its value for birds and wildlife generally. John worked hard on the proposal and arranged for most of the RSPB Board members including Barbara Young the CEO, to visit the site. Unfortunately the board declined the proposal because the policy at that time was to become involved only with natural sites having an existing high value for birds. I understand also that RSPB's Marketing Division were against the proposal because they felt the site would not produce enough revenue. I know John was bitterly disappointed. It

was much later as we will see later in this story, that RSPB came to recognise the value to birds from getting people more involved at sites such as Old Moor.

By December 1997 excavation of the habitats was just about completed and work pulled back to making up the floodbank and tidying up around the entrance area. Reed planting was under way on site by contractors supervised by the Council's Landscape Architect. (FIG 13).

By the end of the year all work on the wider site had been completed and activity was concentrated around the farm buildings. Melanie Perkins (Mel) part of the learning through landscapes Team, provided sterling support looking at the details around the farm in particular.

Discussions had been ongoing with Pat Clegg, widow of Michael Clegg (FIG 20) who had been one of the early pioneers in safeguarding Wath Ings. Pat wanted to set up a Charitable Trust in Michael's name to support Old Moor and to benefit conservation and education. The Michael Clegg Memorial Trust was registered with the Charity Commission in January 1998. The objectives of the Trust were:

- To establish a permanent memorial to Michael Clegg that will be of benefit to the public, at the Old Moor Wetlands Centre and to provide for its continuing maintenance.

- The advancement of education of the public through the development of the Old Moor Wetlands Centre and other areas of interest and importance for wildlife in the Dearne Valley and more widely in Yorkshire and the Humber.

- To assist the preservation of wildlife in such areas.

The Trustees and members of the Management Committee were drawn from across the Yorkshire and Humberside region and are representative of Michael's wide-ranging interests in natural history, environmental issues, media and education. The committee members brought similarly broad spectrum of knowledge and business skills to the conduct of the Trust's affairs.

<u>The Trustees and Management Committee</u>.

Patron: Professor David Dilks, Vice-Chancellor, University of Hull
Chairman of the Trustees and Management Committee: Hedley Salt CBE (Barnsley)
Hon. Secretary: Pat Clegg, (Knaresborough)
Hon. Treasurer: Alun Ellis (Leeds)
Projects Officer: Eric Bennett (Barnsley)

Trustees: Eric Bennett (Barnsley) Dr Bob Britton (Barnsley) Pat Clegg (Knaresborough) Charlie Flynn (Tadcaster) David Lowen (Leeds) Roger Mitchell (Bessacarr) Robin Norbury (Chair, Old Moor Board of Management.

Management Committee: Fiona Greig (Tadcaster) Caroline Harrison (Leeds) Dr. David Lewis (Hull), Graham Speight (Barnsley) Jeff Lunn (York)

Fundraising

The Trust embarked on a fundraising campaign which included the events described below.

Annual Summer Barbecue

This fundraising event was sponsored by Steve Smith Landlord of the Old Moor Tavern in nearby Broomhill.

Annual Bird Race

November1996 brought the inaugural Michael Clegg Bird Race. For the uninitiated this involves teams of four vying to record the greatest number of bird species in a day and usually the score would need to be well into three figures to get anywhere near the leaders. Success needs meticulous planning for events such as these to pick up the widest range of birds. I think records were limited to the Yorkshire boundaries which involved a considerable amount of driving to cover all potential sites for target species from the Pennine Moors to the Coast.

I entered with Bob Merryweather one of the Development Control Planners. Suffice it to say we didn't threaten the leaders. In fact we received special mention in the after race report for being the only team to not record House Sparrow until the middle of the afternoon. I don't think it was intended as a complement.

I am pleased to say that the event is still successfully generating funds for conservation today (2020) in the capable hands of Graham Speight. The event is held on the first Sunday of each year and the rules have changed. The winner is not now simply the highest score but the team that has beaten their own five year average by the greatest amount. This opens the race to all levels of expertise and experience. The race can also be done anywhere of the entrants choosing and potentially quite a small area. This new arrangement would avoid the manic driving the lengths of Yorkshire, the main feature of the former scheme.

Michael Clegg Memorial Scholarships

A number of scholarships of £500 were given to MSc students studying in the Centre for Coastal & Estuarine Studies at the University of Hull.

Annual Memorial Lecture at the University of Hull

There was a series of annual lectures, in the Middleton Hall at the University of Hull featuring a stellar list of speakers with a range of thought provoking topics around nature conservation.

Professor David Dilks (Vice-Chancellor University of Hull) 'Politicians as Naturalists'
Geoffrey Smith (TV Gardener) 'Gardening for Wildlife'
Professor John Lawton CBE (Chairman of RSPB) 'Birds, the environment & climate change'
Sir Martin Doughty (Chair of English Nature) 'Biodiversity & Sustainable Development'
Dr. Peter Addyman CBE (York Archaeology Trust) 'Archaeology in the Clegg Years'

Geoffrey Smith did a second talk entitled 'Trees in the Landscape as a Habitat' in the Council Chamber of Barnsley Town Hall preside over by The Mayor of Barnsley, Councillor Howard Lavender.

Support for Old Moor

In addition to the awareness raising benefits of major events such as the Memorial Lectures at Hull, the Trust was also able to help directly by supplying 3 standard wheelchairs and an electric mobility scooter which were available to enable less mobile visitors to get around the site. In addition to the Visitor Centre all of the hides were wheelchair accessible.

In March 1998 the farm buildings had been vacated and designs and estimates agreed for renovation and conversion for offices accommodation, messrooms and meeting space. By June work on the farm buildings was well underway and on target and on the reserve the habitats were establishing with breeding records up on previous years. During July the interpretation material was installed in the visitor centre. (FIG 17)

Things were going well and got better with news that the Department of the Environment had agreed to fund the proper surfacing of the access road provided a layby could be included near to the entrance to facilitate walkers on the Trans Pennine Trail. This was excellent news and really finished off the front of the site. A pedestrian footbridge was also installed to directly connect the Trans Pennine Trail with the car park and visitor centre.

The next task was staffing and the posts of Centre Manager, Assistant and Warden were advertised and appointed. Debbie Bushby was installed as Manager, with Jayne Wood as assistant and Dave Waddington as the Reserve Warden. They took up their posts in August and the hard work began for them to make everything work.

The site was unofficially opened to the public for the Bank Holiday weekend in September 1998 when around 1500 visitors toured the site during the weekend and 200 annual

memberships were taken out. I ruthlessly pulled rank to get membership card 001 and I still have it!

For quite a while the pressure had been mounting for me to deal adequately with a number of competing issues. I compared it to being a ‘plate spinner’; these acts appeared on variety shows on TV. They had a stand with several vertical poles about 6 feet tall. They started the 1st china plate spinning on the top of the first pole which was also moving. After starting plate 2 and plate 3, plate 1 needed more spinning to stop it falling, then plate 2. They then started plate’s 4 and 5 spinning by which time 2 and 3 needed re-Spinning, Plates 6 and 7 followed… I think you can get the point, however much you do there is always a plate that needs attention to stop it falling down.

In late November all my plates fell down and I was off work for about 6-8 weeks returning in February. In the meantime work progressed on site under the capable supervision of Mel and the staff at Old Moor with the design and provision of the children’s play area and landscaping around the buildings and all the other outstanding details entailed in the opening of the site.

My official part in the project ended at the end of March 1999 when I retired.

I returned however for an official opening event which was arranged for Yorkshire Day 1st August 1999 when the Mayor Elect Councillor Arthur Whittaker and the TV Gardener Geoffrey Smith unveiled a plaque with Councillor Robin Norbury Chairman of Planning and Councillor Jeff Ennis, MP (FIG 18) It was such a proud moment for me to see the place finished and buzzing with activity. Plans 7 & 8 show the layout of the site on completion in 1999 together with the air photo from 1999 (FIG 19)

Subsequently the project began to struggle financially and was making a loss with just 10,000 visits per year. The Council began a process to find a suitable body to take on and run the site and subsequently RSPB took over the management of the site in April 2003. Since then I am pleased to say the site has gone from strength to strength with substantial investment in facilities and habitats. For further information on this chapter of Old Moor I would recommend the reader to seek out an excellent paper by Matthew Capper entitled ‘Great bird reserves – RSPB Old Moor and the Dearne valley’ published in ‘British Birds’ (February 2019).

In 2002 the Michael Clegg Memorial Trust donated £2000 to the Garganey Trust to support the purchase of Broomhill Flash which was completed in January 2003.

In November 2005 The Michael Clegg Memorial Trust was formally wound up and removed from the charity register. The remaining funds were disbursed with a donation of £1500 to RSPB, in July 2004, to help unlock landfill tax Credit which would in turn unlock a much larger Lottery Grant for major improvement works at Old Moor both in habitats and building/visitor facilities.

A further £5000 was given to the Garganey Trust, in November 2004, to enable a further purchase of land at Broomhill Flash which later became Clegg's Meadow a new hay meadow; this was sown with seed harvested from an ancient wildflower meadow in Garforth.

The remaining balance of £62.30 was donated to Barnsley Biodiversity Trust.

In 2012 I let Dave Waddington, (who is now employed by RSPB at Old Moor) borrow a Trail Cam to set up in the reedbeds because he suspected breeding activity for Bittern. That indeed proved to be the case and FIG 20 shows one bird. Video footage of the same event shows three young birds together.

I was very pleased to be invited to a cake cutting event in April 2013 to mark RSPB's 10th anniversary at Old Moor. (FIG 20). This ceremony involved John Healey MP for Wentworth & Dearne, Mike Clarke CEO and Peter Robinson Regional Director of RSPB. Visitor numbers were then up to 100,000 for the year.

Postscript:

Over the years I have been back to Old Moor as a visitor many times and always smile to myself when staff on the desk ask if I'd been to Old Moor before! Walking quietly around the site and sitting in the hides brings back so many memories, of people and times, and a great deal of satisfaction.

I had similar feelings last summer when I visited Dearne Valley Park at Hoyle Mill in Barnsley. I remembered taking out the enormously high wall alongside Pontefract Road that supported the original railway line, excavated the large lake that stands by the river and planted the new woodland area next to Cliff Wood, which is now a nature reserve. I remembered too installing the long footbridge that crosses the River Deane on the series of old canal abutments. Above all I feel blessed to have had a job where I could make a real difference to make something that will last.

Readers may also recall that at the February 1994 meeting Andre Farrar (RSPB) mentioned a national target for achieving 100 breeding pairs of Bittern in the UK by 2020. The population at that time (1994) was estimated at 17 breeding males. Since it is 2020 now, I thought I would check where that target stands today. The latest published figure I could find was 198 booming males recorded in 2019 which was the best year ever for this species. I understand Old Moor had 3 nests in 2020 with Marsh Harrier also nesting on the Reserve for the first time. Bearded Tit is also now a breeding species.

Acknowledgements:

Malcolm Parker for remembering things I didn't and for patiently checking the many revisions.

Graham Speight for background information on Wath Ings and the Bird Race.

Pat Clegg for background and checking for The Michael Clegg memorial Trust.

John Sanderson for information on the regeneration of the Dearne Valley.

John Armitage for information on the earlier RSPB situation.

Jeff Lunn for information on Broomhill Flash

Kevin Peberdy, Wetlands Advisory Service, Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust. 'Revised Outline Design and Management proposals for Old Moor (April 1994.

Matthew Capper 'Great bird reserves – RSPB Old Moor and the Dearne valley' published in 'British Birds' (February 2019).

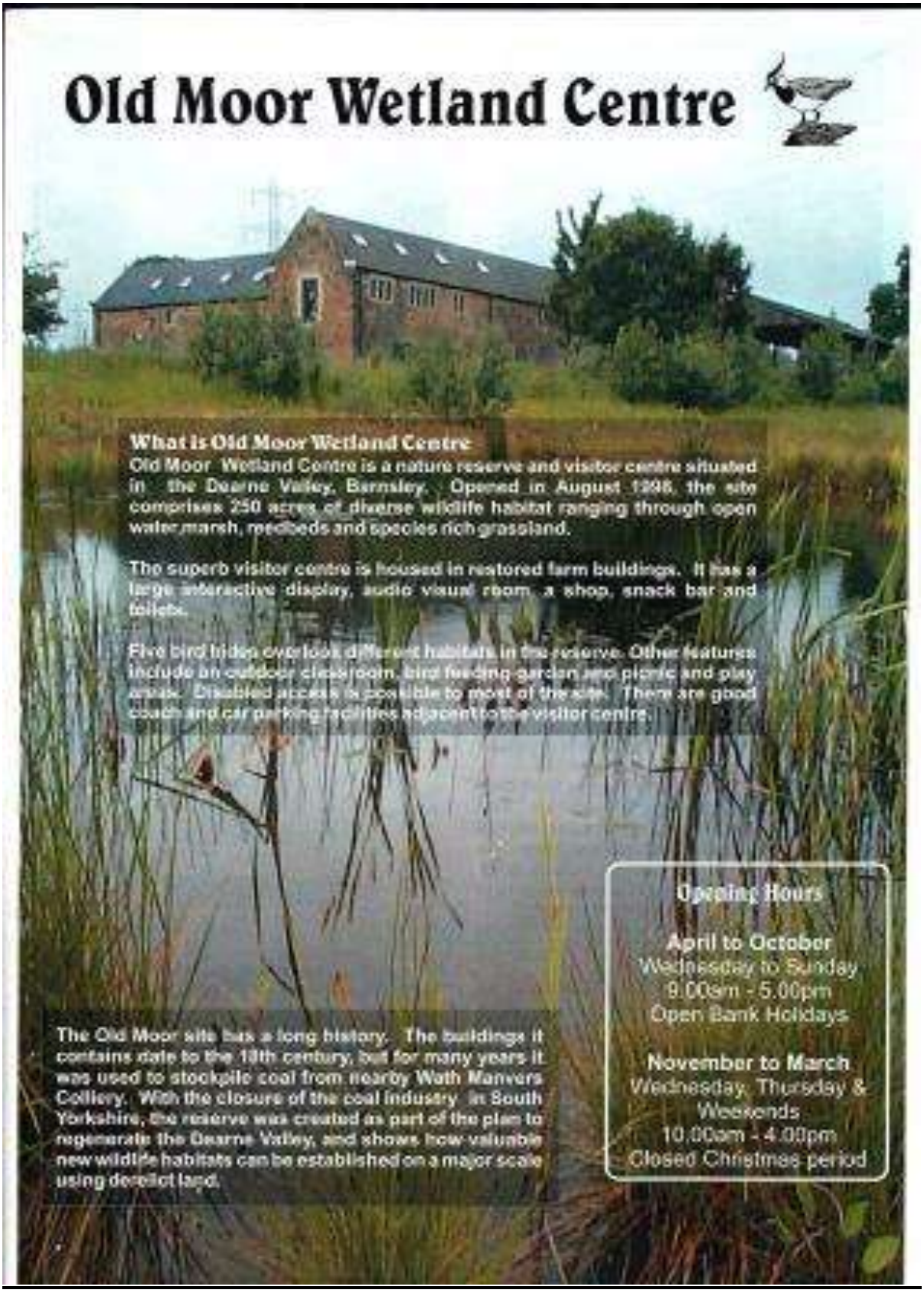
Appendix 1

Timeline for Old Moor

1930's	Mining subsidence causes ponds to form Concrete roads used for Flying Circus displays
1960's	First birders find the area
1975	First hide built by Dave Standring
April 1986	South Yorkshire County Council abolished Countryside Unit set up in Barnsley.
November 1988	Experimental flooding of Wombwell Ings New Hide installed in 1988-89
1987-93	Conservation work in the Broomhill area by new team
1990	First ideas for Old Moor/Wath Manvers link discussed and worked up with engineering, Marketing reports over next 2 years.
1991	New hide and classroom at Broomhill Flash with YWT Education Officer Mildred Scott
1992	Park Hill Brickworks acquired
1993	Gypsy marsh acquired Restoration work on Park Hill Brickworks Doveside acquired Dearne Towns Link Road completed in June Low flow measurement taken in River Dearne to calculate gravity flow system for Old Moor.
February 1994	Project meeting of interested groups to agree principles. YWT, RSPB, WWT, EN, NRA, BMBC Planning permission had been granted Initial DOE approval for Derelict Land Grant Final DOE approval expected for City Challenge funding Further application in train for EU funding Broomhill Ings concept agreed
April-June 1994	Borehole survey completed across the site Full Topographical survey completed Revised plan supplied by WWT Plan for Goldthorpe Airport mooted. With proposed helicopter training circuit over Old Moor. WWT Pull out

June 1994	Preparation of detailed contour plans for the Old Moor scheme with a detailed specification for Rotherham MBC Engineers. Phase 1 Engineering works plan prepared with specification for Clearing contaminated land and preparations for main excavation including new Knoll Beck culvert and access road (haul-road in the short term) construction of flood banks and ditch work along Green Lane.
Later 1994	Land acquisition form British Coal and NRA completed.
February 1995	Start of phase 1 engineering works on site Stonemasonry team start work around the farmyard
Summer 1995	Main earthmoving contract started on site Work around farmyard ongoing, clearing debris, demolishing poorer buildings, storing building stone, repairing walls etc.
Winter 1995/96	Tree planting along Green Lane flood banks and in Themed area. Some tall Willow stumps retained from excavation area replanted in Themed Area. Screen tree planting also around the roadside boundaries of the Themed Area.
Early 1996	Themed area excavation completed.
March 1996	Green Lane footpaths surfaced Hide construction started.
August 1996	Reservoir & water supply system completed. Reedbeds excavated Footpaths, bridges & boardwalks etc under way in Themed Area Designs agreed for buildings
September 1996	Excavation under way over Main Lake & wader Scrape
October 1996	Confirmation of approved EU grant Building work out to tender Public open day
November 1996	Wader Scrape completed First Michael Clegg Bird Race
December 1996	Building work started on Visitor Centre
1997	RSPB reject John Armitage's plan to take over Old Moor Main lake excavated & partially filled.

Summer 1997	Soiling to Reedbeds & Reed planting carried out
December 1997	Excavation works completed
January 1998	Michael Clegg Memorial Trust registered with Charity Commission
March 1998	Farmhouse vacated
Summer 1998	DOE agree to fund tarmac access road Visitor Centre completed and handed over. Staff appointed to Visitor Centre.
September 1998	Site un-officially opened to the public.
Early 1999	Exhibition installed in Visitor Centre Planting around visitor centre
August 1999	Official opening ceremony
2002	Michael Clegg Trust donates £2000 for the acquisition of Broomhill Flash by the Garganey Trust.
2003	Michael Clegg Trust donates a further £5000 to the Garganey Trust for additional land purchase re-seeded in 2004 to create Cleggs Meadow. RSPB take over Old Moor
2005	Michael Clegg Memorial Trust wound up and removed from the Charity list.
2012	Bittern proved breeding with Trail Cam footage.
2013	RSPB celebrate 10 years at Old Moor.


Old Moor Wetland Centre
What is Old Moor Wetland Centre
Old Moor Wetland Centre is a nature reserve and visitor centre situated in the Dearne Valley, Barnsley. Opened in August 1998, the site comprises 250 acres of diverse wildlife habitat ranging through open water,marsh, reedbeds and species rich grassland.
The superb visitor centre is housed in restored farm buildings. It has a large interactive display, audio visual room, a shop, snack bar and toilets.
Five bird hides overlook different habitats in the reserve. Other features include an outdoor classroom, bird feeding garden and picnic and play areas. Disabled access is possible to most of the site. There are good coach and car parking facilities adjacent to the visitor centre.
The Old Moor site has a long history. The buildings it contains date to the 18th century, but for many years it was used to stockpile coal from nearby Wath Manvers Colliery. With the closure of the coal industry in South Yorkshire, the reserve was created as part of the plan to regenerate the Dearne Valley, and shows how valuable new wildlife habitats can be established on a major scale using derelict land.
Opening Hours
April to October
Wednesday to Sunday
9.00am - 5.00pm
Open Bank Holidays
November to March
Wednesday, Thursday &
Weekends
10.00am - 4.00pm
Closed Christmas period

Development of the site

Most of the site is washland used by the Environmental Agency for flood relief. The soil excavated was used to reclaim derelict colliery spoil heaps on the Wath Manvers site. The excavation and other site development was funded by Derelict Land Grant. Visitor facilities and other features were financed by City Challenge and ERDF (Rechar). Old Moor is also a key South Yorkshire Forest site, and is linked to the Trans Pennine Trail. The Michael Clegg Memorial Trust is also funding specific features and equipment now being added.

Habitat

The finished site reflects the need to create a diversity of wetland habitats. Lowland wet grasslands and reedbeds feature prominently. They combine with a lake and shallow wader scrape, and a maze of open water channels to attract many common and rarer species.

The scrape can be drained to expose fresh mud which gives ideal feeding for redshank, and sandpipers. This area also features shingle islands for nesting birds such as the common tern and little ringed plover. With trigs, a small reserve already established as a breeding ground for wildfowl has been retained in the scheme.

Admissions

	Day Visit	Annual Membership
Adult	£2.50	£15.00
Child under 5	Free	-
Child 5-16	£1.25	£7.00
Concessions*	£2.00	£11.75
School	£1.25	£50.00
Family	£6.50	£25.00

*

How to get to Old Moor

Opening Hours

April - October: Weds to Sun 9.00 am - 5.00 pm
November - March: Wed, Thurs and weekends 10.00 am - 4.00 pm

Contact

Old Moor Wetland Centre, Old Moor Lane, off Manvers Way, Broomhill, Wombwell, Barnsley, South Yorkshire S73 0YF
Tel: 01226 751593 or Fax: 01226 751617.
Sorry No Dogs Allowed

BARNSLEY
Metropolitan Borough Council

1992

1999

FIG 1: Side by Side Air Photos of Old Moor

FIG 2

Wath Ings Field Pools 1988

Main Drain & Flood Defence outlet pump

Flood Defence outlet Flap Valves to River Dearne

Wath Ings Summer 1993

Grassland & Bulling Dike

Wath Ings Hide Summer 1993

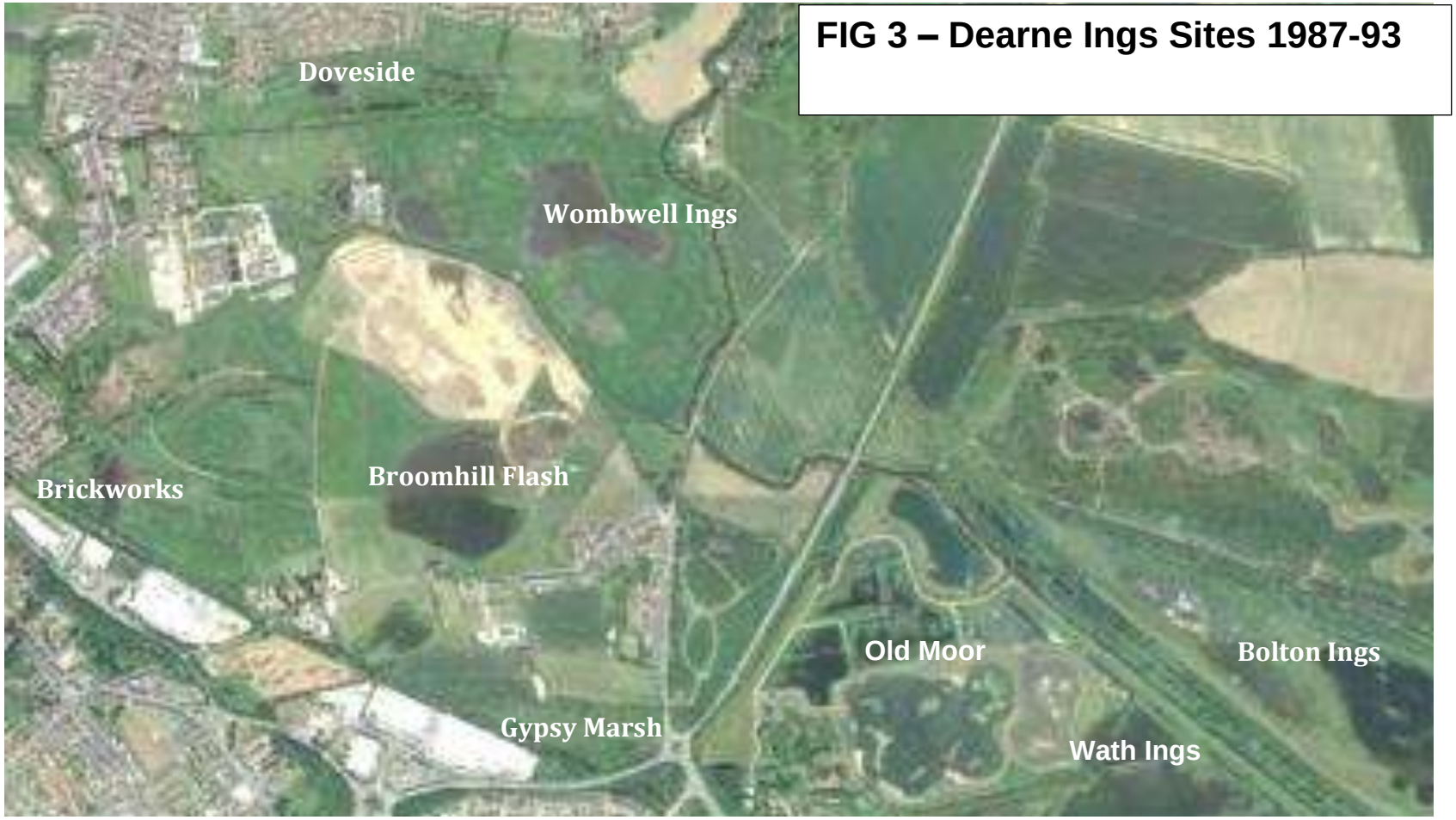


FIG 3 – Dearne Ings Sites 1987-93

FIG 4 Old Moor circa 1993

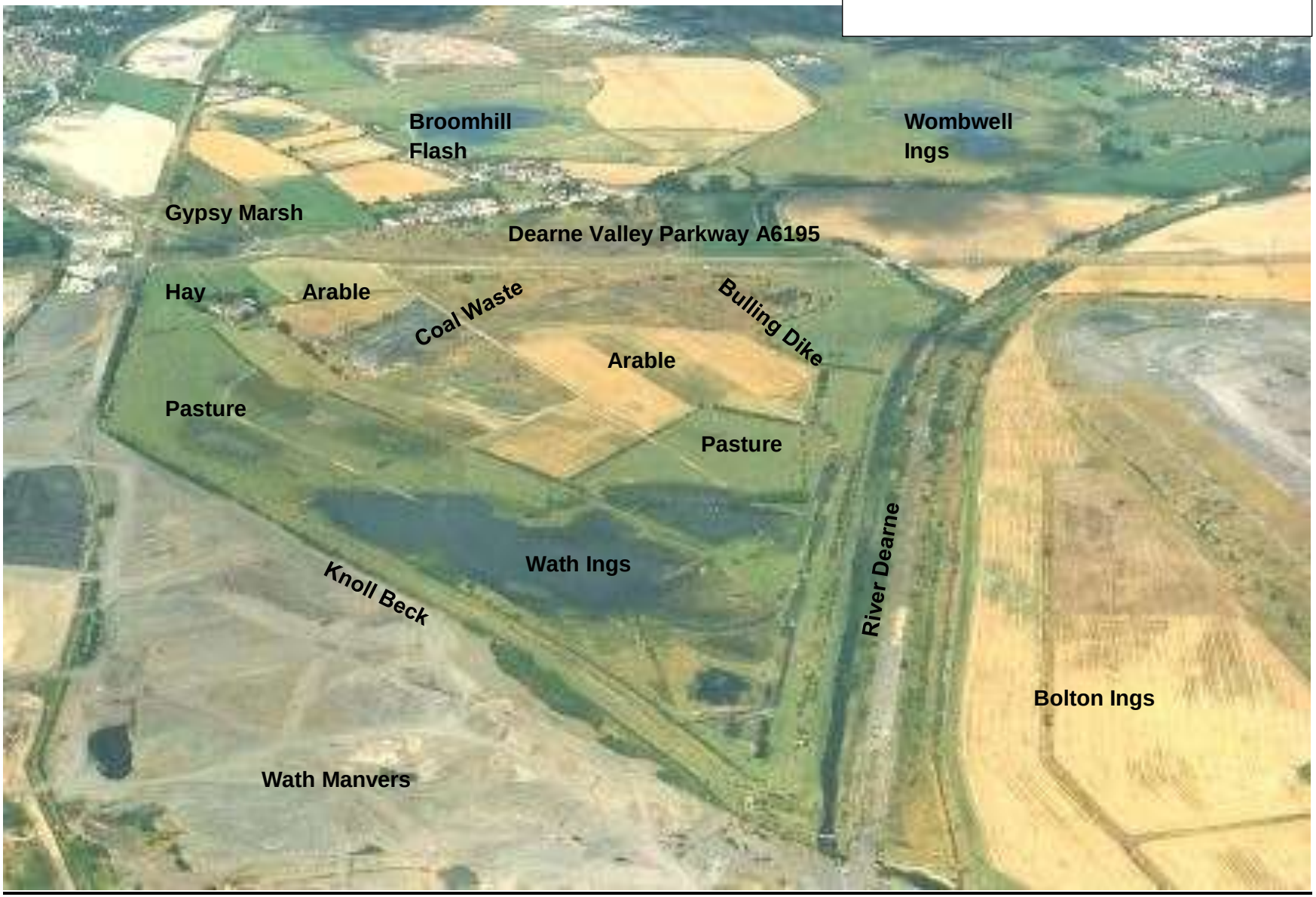


FIG 5 1993

Bulling Dike

Concrete Roadways

Arable

Coal Waste

Old Moor looking from the roadside near the River Dearne Bridge towards the farm

Old Moor Farm & Hayfield

FIG 6 1995

Various locations around the farmyard July 1995

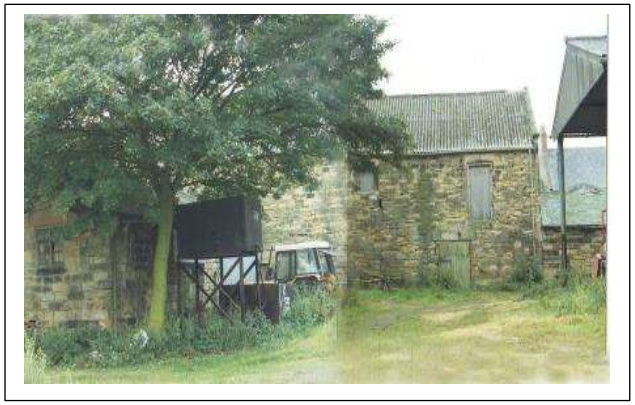


FIG 7 1995

Themed Area Excavations

Hay Meadow

New entrance & Roadway

Green Lane

Main Lake

Themed area

FIG 8 1995

Repaired and rebuilt stone walls in the farmyard

Farmhouse

Stonemasonry Team

Old Farm Machinery

Stonework repairs around the barn.

Repairing a garage to create a store for the stonemasons.

FIG 9 1996

Flood Meadows with Green Lane flood bank November

Excavation in the main lake in September

Green Lane –Wath Ings Hide September

Green Lane March

Wader Scrape November

Reservoir excavation May

FIG 10 1996

Air photo showing reservoir & reedbeds

Main lake, reedbeds & reservoir behind.

Reservoir & Reedbeds with lake and themed area beyond.

Entrance & themed area with Reedbeds and lake beyond.

Air photo dated August 1996

Themed area & lake with reedbeds beyond

FIG 11 1996

Footpath construction in themed area October

A new footbridge in themed area August

Footpath construction in themed area October

Footpath in themed area October

Themed area January

Vegetation establishment in themed area August

FIG 12 1996

Cart Shed March

Barn wall re-pointing August

Scaffolded barn with roof works under way December

Track area later used as play area near sparrow farm

Stonework repairs August

Public open day October

FIG 13 1997

Main Lake

Reed Planting

Reedbeds

Soiling Reedbeds

Reedbed profile with water in deep channel

Reedbed 1 soiling

FIG 14 1998

View from Visitor Centre
August

Main Lake May

Meeting with Architect Mick Clover and the contractor in the farmhouse

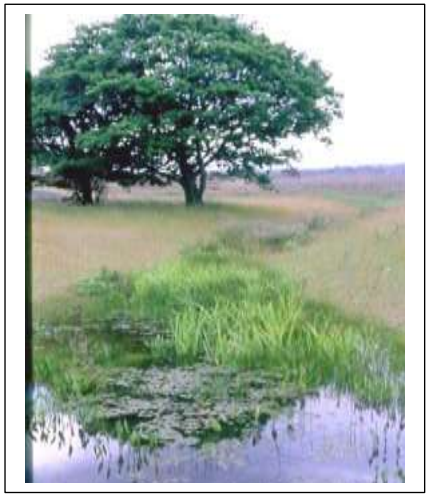
Wader Scrape
August

Wath Ings
August

Repointing external walls of barn

FIG 15 1999

Wader Scrape
Winter



Themed area outlet stream and Oak tree near the themed outlet channel
Summer

Flood Meadows
Summer

Reedbed 4 Summer

Reedbed 5 Summer

Reservoir Summer

FIG 16 1999

Willow weaving in the play area

Visitor Centre

Pond dipping summer 1999

Planting around the Visitor Centre

Planting around the Visitor Centre

Visitors with Manager Debbie Bushby February

FIG 17 1999

Visitor Centre first floor
January

Assembling the exhibition
February

Visitor Centre top floor main room
August 1998

Visitor Centre Ground Floor
January

Exhibition August

FIG 18 1999

Play Area

Official Opening 1st August 1999 by the Mayor Elect Cllr Arthur Whittaker & to the right Geoffrey Smith, Cllr Robin Norbury with Jeff Ennis MP

Interactive Display

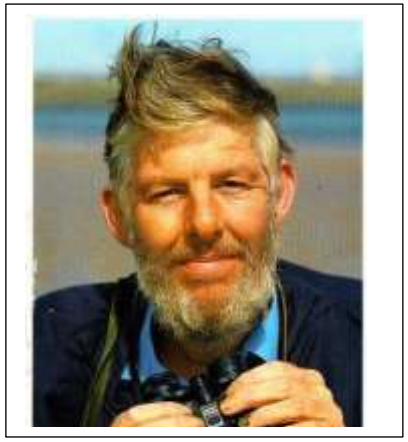
Play Area

With Geoffrey Smith after the opening

Pond Dipping


FIG 19 Old Moor 2019
River Dearne
Knoll Beck
Wath Ings
Reedbed 5
Wader Scrape
Reservoir
Reedbed 4
Reedbed 1
Reedbed 3
Main Lake
Flood Meadows
Reedbed 2
Dearne Valley Parkway A6195
Themed
Area
Visitor
Centre
Car Park
Manvers Way
New Publ;ic
entrance

FIG 20 Various



Michael Clegg

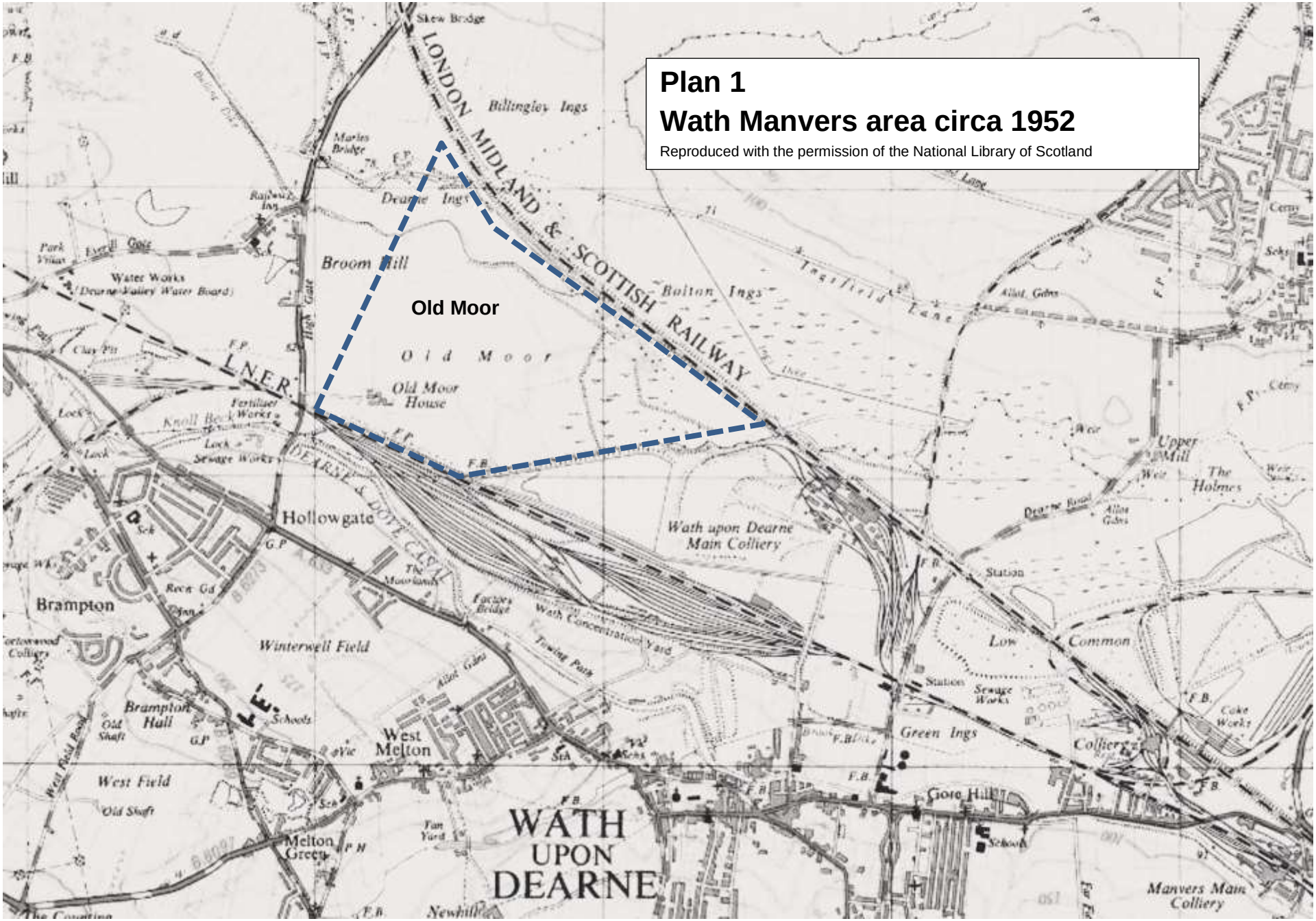
Cutting the cake at RSPB 10th Anniversary at Old Moor 2013. From R-L John Healey MP for Wentworth & Dearne. Mike Clarke Chief Executive RSPB far left Peter Robinson Regional Director RSPB.

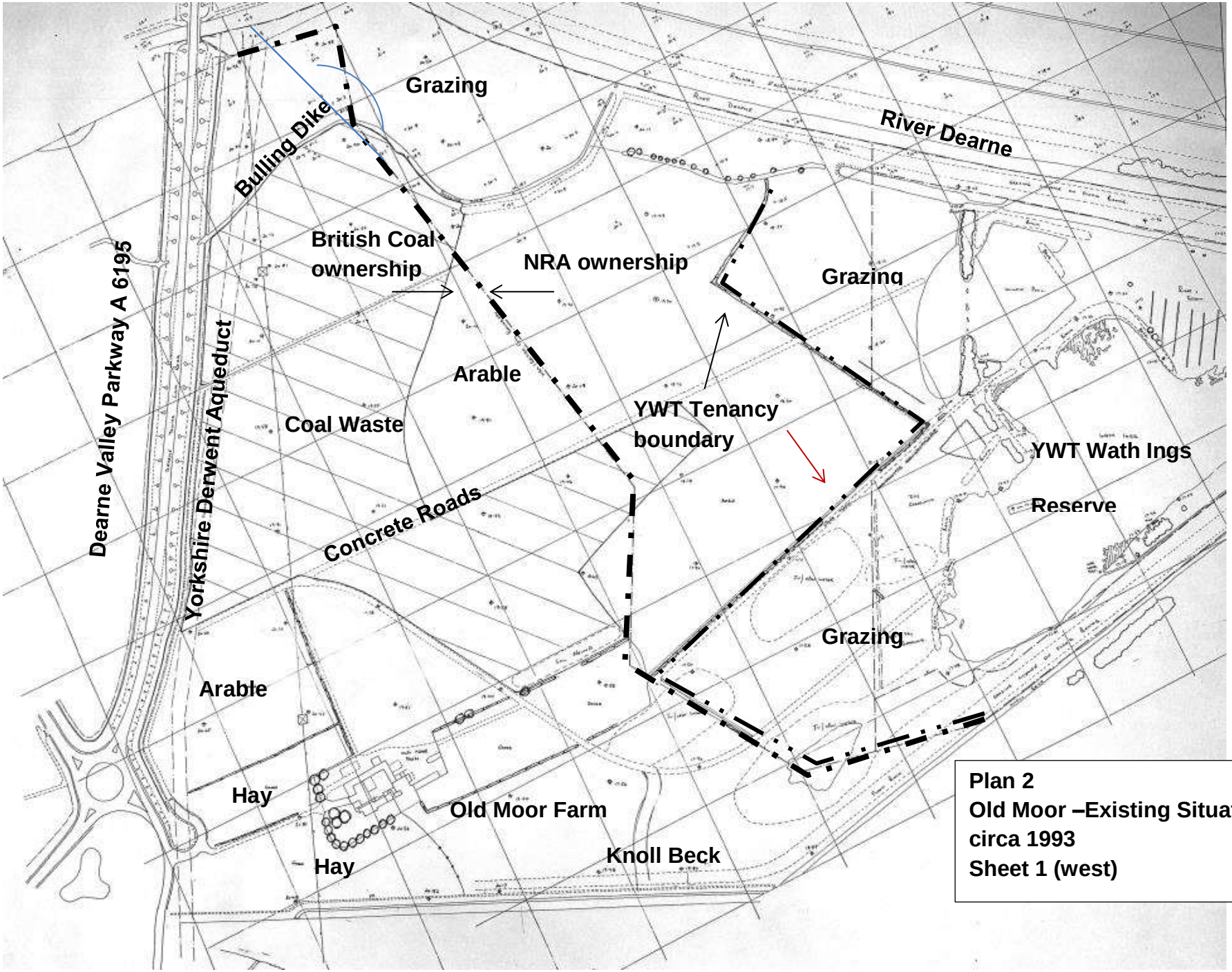
Bittern recorded on trailcam 2012

Dragline used at St Aidens 1988
Look carefully to see RSPB visitor centre in

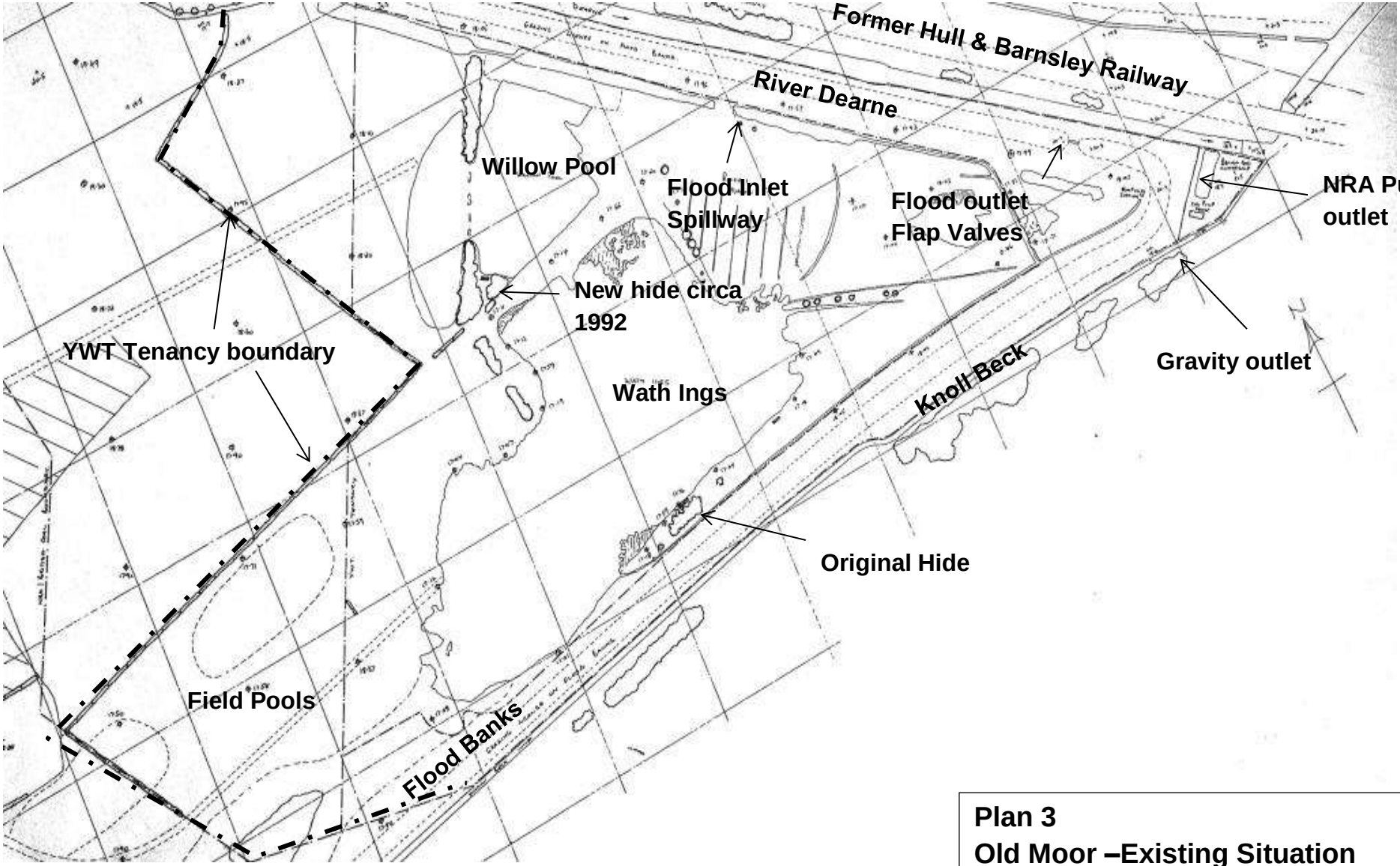
The Mayors car THE1 at a tree planting event

Classroom and Hide at Broomhill Flash August 1992


Plan 1
Wath Manvers area circa 1952
Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland
Old Moor
LONDON MIDLAND & SCOTTISH RAILWAY
LNER
Broom Hill
Old Moor
Old Moor House
Hollowgate
Brampton
Winterwell Field
Brampton Hall
West Melton
West Field
Melton Green
WATH UPON DEARNE
Wath upon Dearne Main Colliery
Low Common
Green Ings
Gore Hill
Manvers Main Colliery
Upper Mill
The Holmes
Bolton Ings
Billingley Ings
Dearne Ings
Water Works
Sewage Works
Station
Newhill

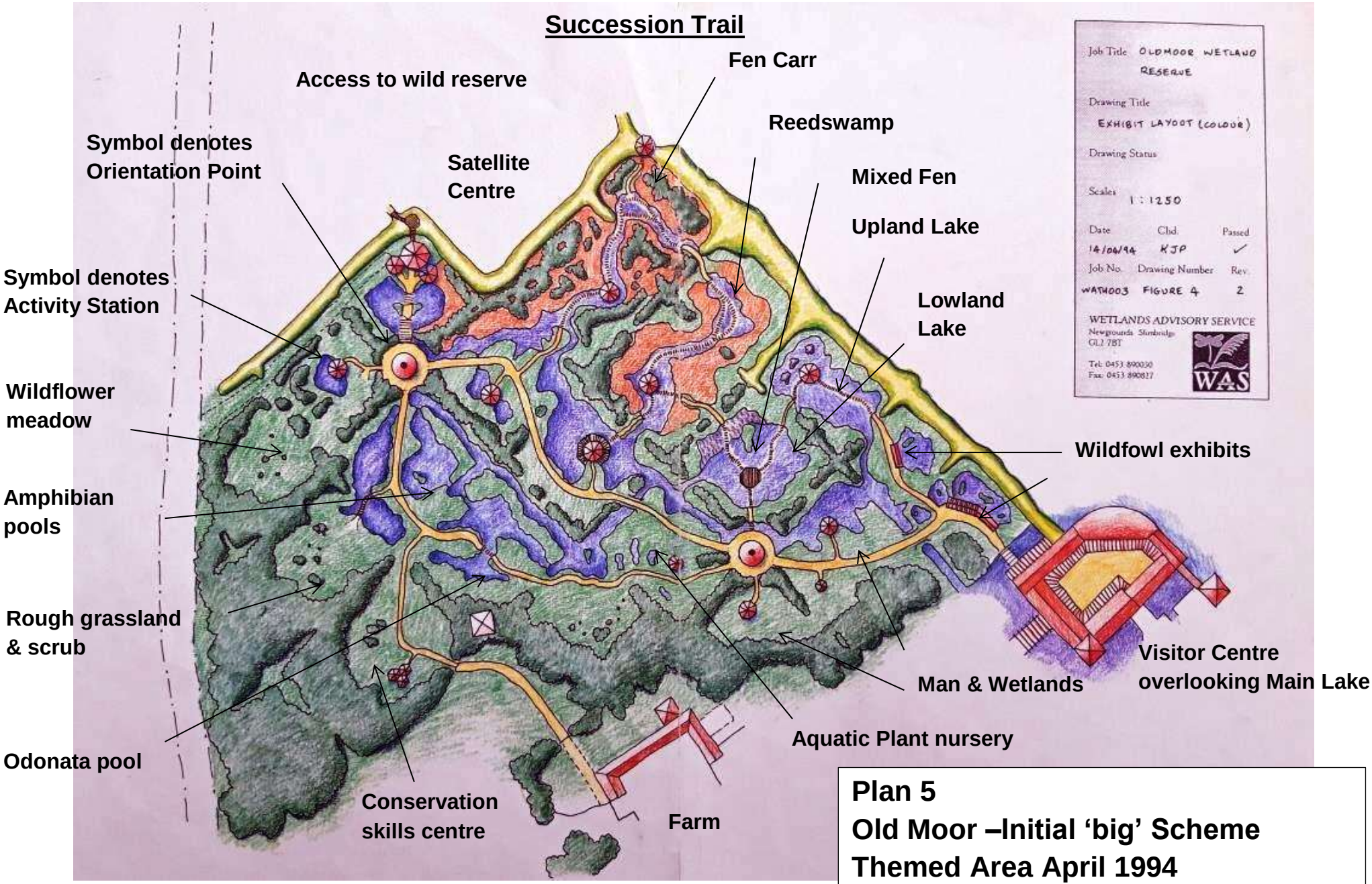


Plan 2
Old Moor –Existing Situation
circa 1993
Sheet 1 (west)



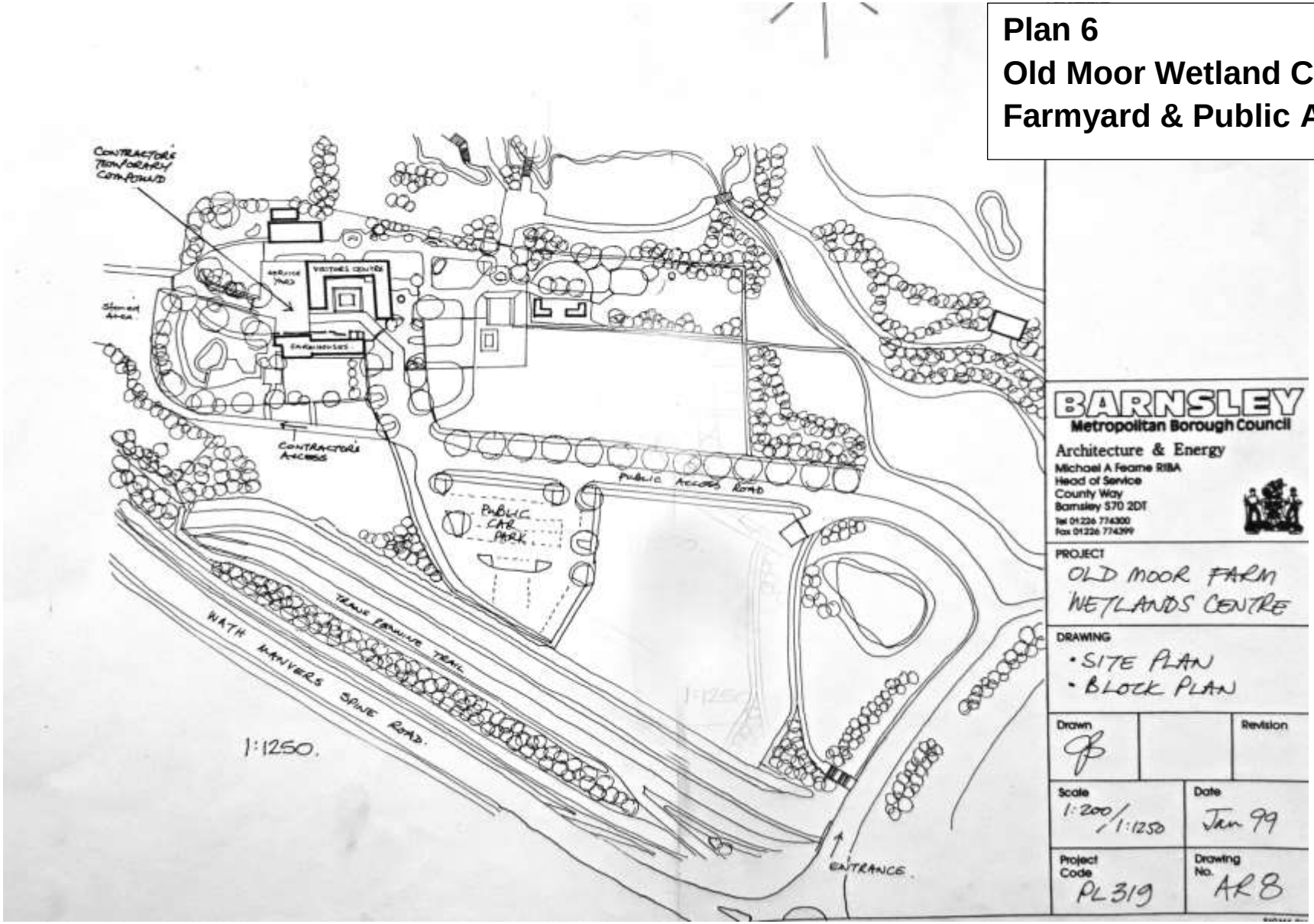
Plan 3
Old Moor –Existing Situation
Circa 1993 –Sheet 2 (East)

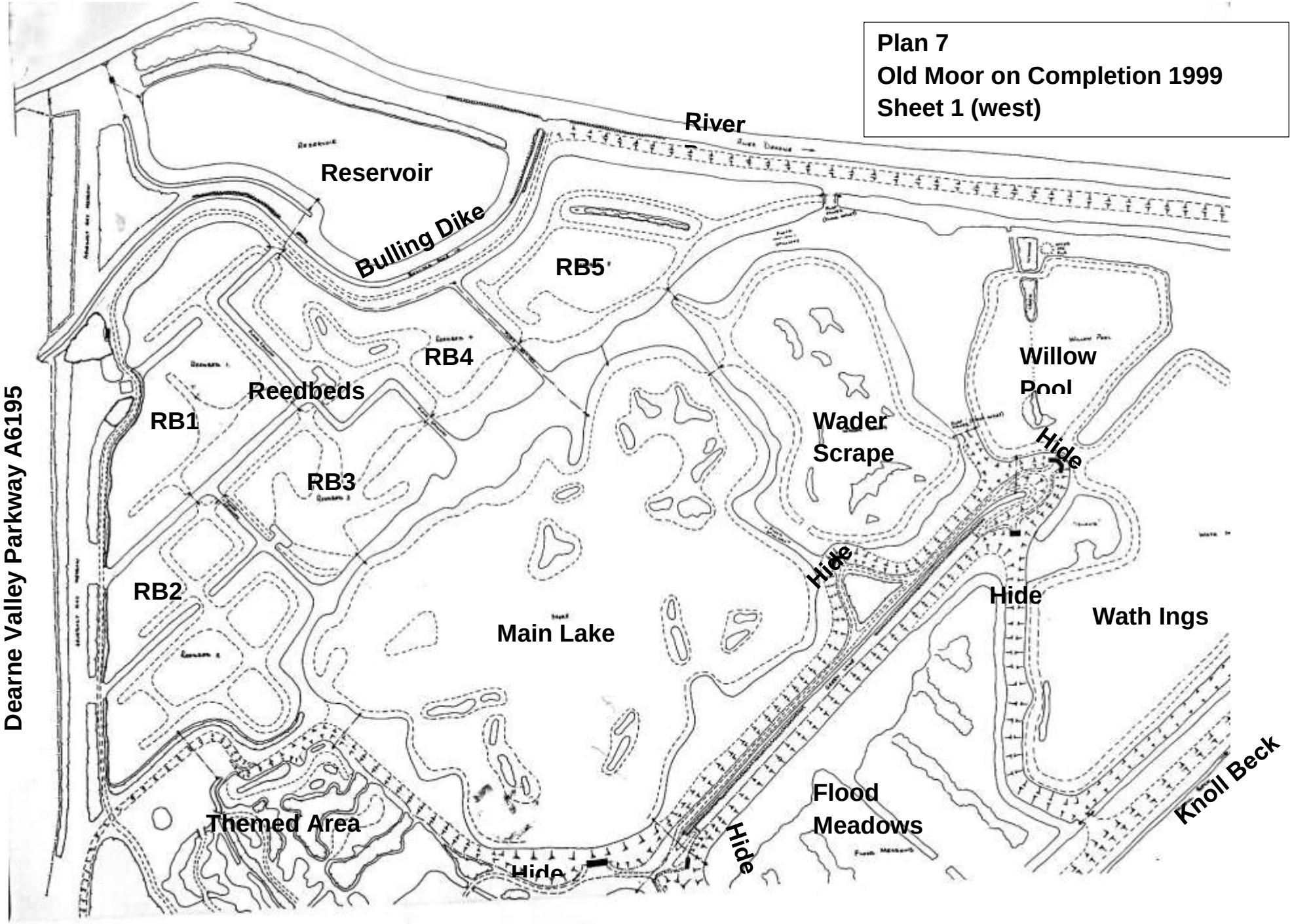
Plan 4
Old Moor –Initial 'big' Scheme
Full Site –April 1994

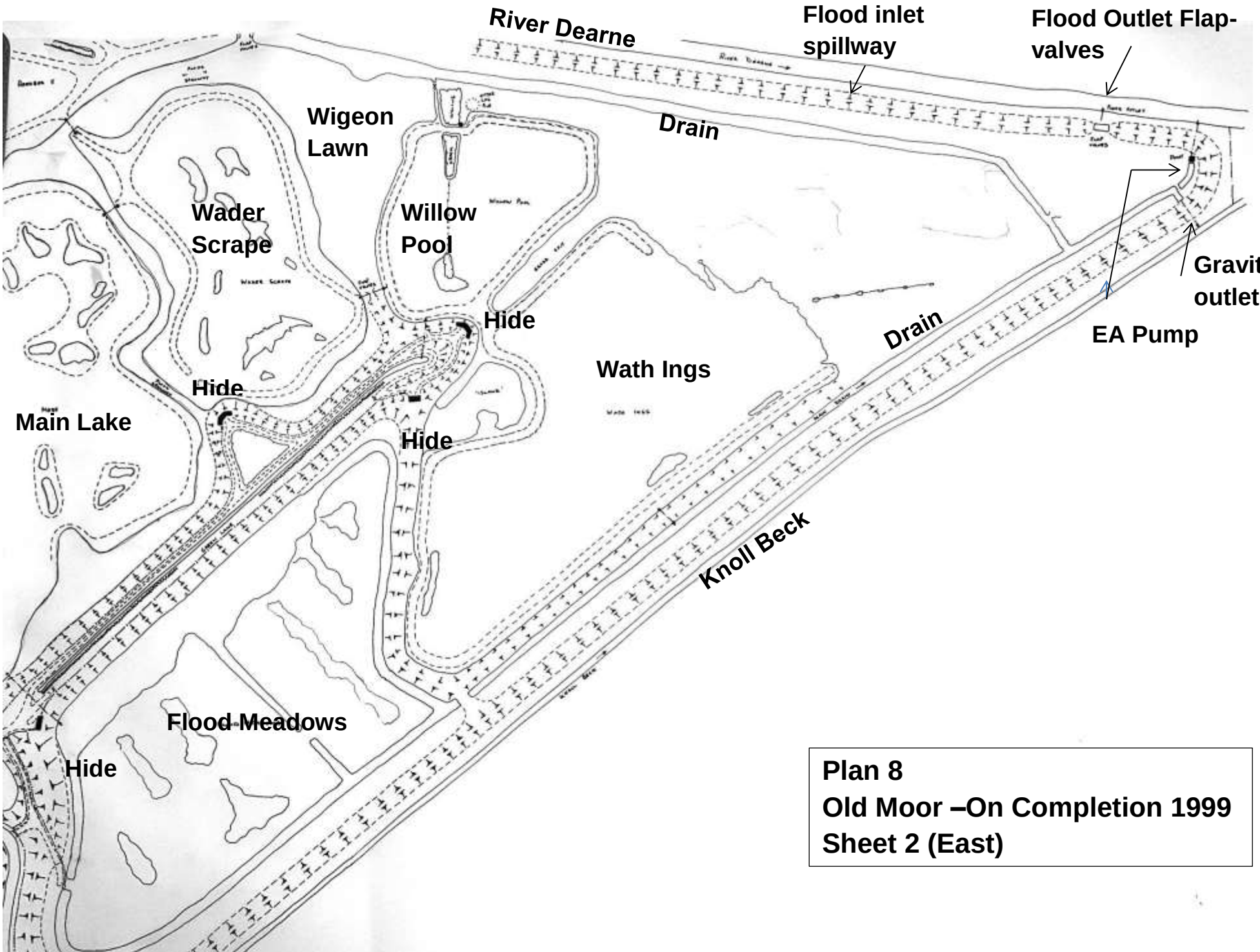


Plan 5
Old Moor –Initial 'big' Scheme
Themed Area April 1994

Plan 6
Old Moor Wetland Centre
Farmyard & Public Areas




Plan 7
Old Moor on Completion 1999
Sheet 1 (west)
River
Reservoir
Bulling Dike
RB5
RB4
Reedbeds
RB1
RB3
RB2
Main Lake
Wader
Scrape
Willow
Pool
Hide
Hide
Hide
Hide
Hide
Wath Ings
Flood
Meadows
Themed Area
Knoll Beck
Dearne Valley Parkway A6195



Plan 8
Old Moor –On Completion 1999
Sheet 2 (East)