



## **The Village Pond and Pond Area in East Ilsley**

Anyone in and around the village have been aware that the East Ilsley pond was considerably overgrown in terms of reeds, had effectively reduced in size, and was falling short of one of its key purposes, as a flood alleviation device. The Parish Council laid plans to understand more about the issue/s, determine any remediation costs and ultimately raise the funding necessary for the project.

During discovery work to determine responsibility for the maintenance of the pond it was uncovered that in 1978 Berkshire County Council (now West Berkshire Council) had ceded ownership of the pond and surrounding area to the Parish Council. As the official landowner, we became solely responsible for raising the funds to complete the remediation work.

At the end of September 2021, the Parish Council were able to successfully complete the excavation and clean up of the pond in an attempt to make it an effective flood alleviation device.

Until the excavation was in progress, the contractors, and therefore the Parish Council, were unaware that the pond was harbouring 45 tonnes of excess silt and material (two times the original estimate). The removal of this quantity of silt has left us with a much larger, and deeper pond than anyone was anticipating.

Post excavation, as is our duty as land owners, we were required to undertake a risk assessment of the area. This risk assessment concluded that with the current lower water levels, and when full the depth of the body of water, the pond is now an area that presents a higher risk than it did before, in terms of the health and safety of visitors.

We have sought professional advice and guidance from a number of external organisations (Gallagher, Rradar, RoSPA and the HSE) to assist us in re-evaluating the legal requirements on the Parish Council as the landowners. With a dramatically changed pond landscape these responsibilities and risks have increased to a new level and recent updates to legislation have added additional pressures to ensure that, as landowners, we are keeping any visitors to the pond area safe.

Following these consultations, a number of recommendations have already been implemented, such as the construction of a safety shelf around the inside of the pond perimeter, a new Village Pond Policy, a Water and Area Assessment and a Generic Risk Assessment. These and other recommendations are being proposed at the next Parish Council meeting scheduled for 9th November 2021.

As we are sure you will appreciate, in its present state, the pond and pond area are not suitable places to encourage or permit large groups of people to congregate, especially when it's dark. The pond and the surrounding area also need time to settle and more firmly establish which could take some months. In parallel the Parish Council will be implementing the remainder of the recommendations. Care should be taken when visiting the area, particularly those with children, and they should be closely guarded at all times. As with any open body of water, people are advised to be cautious and vigilant.

We find ourselves in a difficult position at the time of year when the pond area has usually been a focal point for Hallowe'en and in the run up to Christmas. So it is with sincere regret, that this year (a year of exception), it will not be possible to allow the pond area to be decorated for Christmas due to the issues and concerns mentioned above. Hopefully, next year, when the risk assessment recommendations have been fully implemented, we can review this and act accordingly.

We hope this statement sufficiently explains our current position. You are welcome to join us at the meeting on 9th November where this will be discussed and further safety measures will be proposed to ensure that everyone can remain safe when they visit in the future.

***East Ilsley Parish Council, November 2021***