

Abbey Road Conservation Volunteers

Item 6.1

Progress Report for Nov 2025 to Apr 2026.

For Communities Committee meeting 5th^h May 2026

Summary

This report is backdated to November last year to include the work on the pond and new scrape in November. This was the most significant intervention we have carried out on the site since we started work here in Oct 2020.

We have also carried out a large programme of tree, hedge and shrub planting.

Wildlife surveys continue to show how valuable this site is to nature, with many new species being recorded here for the first time.

We have got to know many local residents quite well through our regular attendance on site.

All the comments are very positive, with just the occasional dog mess issue.

A special mention for Wayne the contract grass cutter. He has a full understanding of the site and its particular requirements, and we are always pleased with his cutting of the grass, pathways and meadow when needed. (Unlike some previous contractors!)

Pond.

We had an exciting day in late November 2025, with an excavator on site re-profiling the winter pond and creating a scrape next to the stream.

All the work had been previously suggested and discussed with OART (Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust) and the EA (Environment Agency), and a permit obtained from the EA for the scrape just a few days before the work was scheduled. (needed because it is work near a 'Major River' i.e. the Tanyard stream!)

Our neighbour at Gatewick, Guy Sanderson, very generously offered to pay for one of his contractors to do the work for us.

The intention was to make the pond wider and a little deeper, and create a scrape to provide shallow water and mud for birds, insects and amphibians.

This made an instant and dramatic change, with far more standing water than we've had in recent years. The enlarged pond area and new scrape filled very quickly once the winter rains started.



As usual with this site, it flooded completely on two occasions during the winter. This flood water always drains away through the culvert under the A283 within a few days, doing exactly what a flood plain should do; releasing flood water gradually back into the water courses to help alleviate flooding downstream. The work completed this year will help with this.

Interestingly, the huge frog population here decided that the pond was now too deep for them, and they laid their 130+ clumps of frogspawn at the far end of the pond where it was shallower.

The scrape looks like being a big success. Despite being quite shallow, it is holding water longer than expected, even encouraging a few frogs to lay frogspawn in it. We have planted native Osier and Violet Willows around the scrape, making it a far more attractive feature than the bramble thicket it replaced. (The Osier 'basket' willows were collected locally from Phil Clay's Mumbles bird ringing site)



Stream

OART had carried out 2 invertebrate surveys on the Tanyard stream in recent years, but they have now committed to doing 3 surveys per year. The first was carried out in March, with others due in June and September. This should give us a regular health check on the stream and show any changes over time. The March survey showed a wide range of species that we would expect in a chalk stream in good condition. 3 species of fish were also found: Flounder, Stoneloach and Sticklebacks.

Hedges

In January, the **Dead Hedge** was extended and reinforced with another 130 Christmas trees. We had the same number last year. A great way to recycle them.

Live Hedge! The hedge we planted in Feb 2025 has established really well with only a few needing replacing. We had 150 plants, so planted them in a single row. This created a 50 metre long hedge. In Feb this year we planted a further 30 metres comprising 100 plants. So, this line of hedging is now complete.

We'll see how a single plant row establishes, as it is usual to plant a new hedge as a double row of plants. We will plant a second row at the back of the first row to thicken it if needed. We plan to trim this hedge to keep it to about 2metres high.

Trees

We planted 4 more Black Poplar trees this February, adding to the 9 added in previous years. Some of the first ones we planted are now over 12' tall. We have 7 of the known 8 clones of Black Poplar in Sussex, with 9 male and 5 female trees. These have all been donated to us by Kew Wakehurst and the local Rivers Trusts, as we fulfil the damp river/stream side habitat this tree requires. These stately trees will become a major feature of this site in future years.

As well as the Black Poplars we also planted 23 other trees (2 Lime, 6 Hornbeam, 6 Field Maple, 4 Silver Birch and 5 Alder), and more than 60 other shrubs including Hazel, Dogwood, Blackthorn, Purging Buckthorn and various Willows. These will add to the already impressive diversity of trees and shrubs growing on site.

Meadow

After several years of trying different cutting regimes, the current schedule of cutting half the meadow in early September, then the other half the following September is working well.

This allows long grasses to flourish for a year before being cut, stopping them from becoming too rampant, and allows insect species to survive the winter in the longer grass. One species that has benefited from this is the Wasp Spider. Not everyone's cup of tea, as the female is a large spider with impressive black and yellow stripes. First seen here in 2023 in small numbers, there were hundreds last summer. They mainly catch grasshoppers in their webs, so there must be a good population of these too. (They also eat the much smaller males after the 'act' unless they are very quick!)

We have been successfully transplanting Meadowsweet across the meadow from a single area near the road. This is a perennial that flourishes in damp meadows and has nectar-rich flowers from June to September. So is loved by flying insects.

Wildlife

There have now been 56 bird species recorded here, including these added so far in 2026. Meadow Pipit, Bullfinch, Mistle Thrush, Yellowhammer, Garden Warbler and most excitingly a fleeting visit from a Cuckoo on 21st April, and a single call of a Nightingale on the 23rd April.



One of the plants we have introduced to the site are the Buckthorns, both Alder and Purging Buckthorn. These are the food plants of the Brimstone butterfly, so it was great to find a tiny Brimstone butterfly egg on the underside of an Alder Buckthorn leaf in mid-April, showing that we have a breeding colony of Brimstones here for the first time.

Orchard

Steyning Community Orchard planted a further 3 apple trees into the Orchard in February, attended by the tree donors and their families. There are now 12 trees in this small Orchard. The last 3 trees (as agreed previously agreed with Council) will be planted next February.

Working Parties/Volunteers.

We currently have 19 people on our volunteers' list, plus 3 more who help with bird and botany surveys. We held 6 working parties in this period on the third Saturday each month, plus a few ad hoc sessions to deal with particular jobs. 16 different volunteers were involved in at least one of them, contributing over 100hrs work between them.

Roger Brown. Abbey Rd Conservation Volunteer Coordinator.

24th Apr 2026