

POLTIMORE HOUSE AND GROUNDS

BOARD UPDATE REPORT TEMPLATE

Please complete all sections below and submit by the deadline set by LN ahead of the board meeting. Focus on what has changed since your last report — the board should be able to see progress at a glance.

Report Title / Area	Grounds
Reported By	Chris Lloyd
Date	October 2026
Reporting Period	February '26 – September '26
Board Meeting Date	13 th October '26

1. Summary

This report outlines funding received, projects completed and ongoing, together with up-coming grounds work and seasonal deadlines.

Volunteer summary; volunteer numbers, skills, corporate days, and areas of help that we need.

Volunteer-raised concerns, addressed and ongoing.

2. What You Have Been Doing

Set out the activity undertaken since the last report, what it achieved, and its current status. Add rows as needed.

Activity / What You Have Been Doing	Outcome / What This Has Achieved	Status
Legacy work: - Storm damage; - undergrowth encroachment; - infrastructure decay	Clearance of fallen trees continues and a tree strategy draft is developing. A large Yew tree which fell last year was planked for seasoning and is currently set under cover, slowly maturing for sale for grounds funds. Bramble growth has been rampant, especially in the area where an avenue of Poplars was felled. Reclaiming the grounds is ongoing, in line with our ecological aims, as considered with Devon Wildlife Trust. Old paths have been erased by fallen trees and bramble growth and a wooden bridge which spanned the stream finally decayed and had to be removed. Brambles have since claimed that site.	Reclamation and re-planning continue.
Grounds Maintenance: - Grass maintenance - Meadow management - Paths - Beds and pots maintenance	A simple grass management strategy has been established. This is primarily being achieved through differing mowing periods and heights, but also with discreet reseeding to include native meadow plants. The main types of sward range from close-mown lawns, including the arena and 'Len's	On-going

Activity / What You Have Been Doing	Outcome / What This Has Achieved	Status
	Bench' areas, regularly-mown rougher grass, such as the car parking area and informal paths through meadows and wildlife areas, summer hay meadow areas such as the orchard and area nearest the main gate, and managing long-term cycles of rough grassland management. • The principal path that runs around the grounds' boundary has been gradually improved to facilitate all-weather access. This work continues. The next big stage is to reinstate effective drainage taking the regular flood water from the adjacent 'Arboretum' field, beneath the path, and on to the drainage into the new pond. This is by introducing new land drainage and by raising the level of that NW boundary path on an open-structure French Drain type construction to create a level, all-weather surface, which allows for free passage of flood waters. • Seasonal bedding and pots are planted out and maintained to improve 'kerbside appeal' and add seasonal colour. Established beds are maintained.	
Growing Area	We have an ambitious programme of improvements throughout the grounds. Plants are expensive, so we need to grow our own plants too. The process is intended to grow surplus to sell through the café. Over the next years the grounds will become a shop front for plants propagated from the planting in the grounds. Volunteers can improve their horticultural skills. Brad has been growing first class, organic salads and vegetables for use in the café.	
Tranquillity Garden	The old bonfire area, characterised by a little copse of Stags Horn Sumach, has long been targeted for transformation to a themed garden. The original 'Asian Garden' idea became overwritten by the plants that we already had growing in the 'Growing Area', few of which suited an Asian theme, (including the South American origins of the Sumach). Following a winter of concerted effort, preceded by a year of arduous ground clearance – the area was deep in brambles – the new 'Tranquillity Garden' was opened by	Complete. Maintenance is ongoing

Activity / What You Have Been Doing	Outcome / What This Has Achieved	Status
	the High Sherriff of Devon in February this year.	
Friends' Garden	The walls to the old Laundry Block have been made safe, ready to landscape the ground beneath for new seating areas, pergola and associated planting. The capping of the top has been on-hold whilst the café drainage is undertaken.	Ongoing
Pond and Wetlands	During the work to the scaffolding on the main house, Weavers had a 12T swing shovel on site. We were able to make use of this during a two-day period when they weren't using it. We were able to get the new pond excavated and ground cleared for development of associated wetlands. Next stages are construction of the cascade from the old pond and spring into the new pond, construction of a new bridge and pond-dipping deck, and planting out of the surrounding wetland and boggy garden.	Ongoing
Arena reseeding	Following removal of the marquee flooring the ground was bare, compacted soil. This was cultivated and reseeded by hand.	Complete
Grass and lawns remediation	Years of ground disturbances from wildlife and minor tree-related incidents, along with plant movements have left the lawn areas in rough condition. Finer lawn areas are being cultivated to even out dips and hollows and reseeded to return these areas to a more cared-for character.	Ongoing
Café surrounds	Drainage work is taking place to address issues experienced during January/February this year. The outdoor grass seating area is to be levelled and reseeded, with removal of the rotten tree stump.	Ongoing

3. Key Achievements

Highlight the most significant results or milestones reached this period — the headlines the board should take away.

Opening of the Tranquillity Garden – special thanks to Marj Hulin and Gerry Tanswell who persevered.

All machinery up and running after a long period of serial disfunction. Thanks to Rob Hobley and David Pemberthy.

4. Challenges / Issues Encountered

We are struggling with volunteer numbers.

Thankfully, we have had significant help from a number of corporate bodies whose staff have joined us periodically to work through larger project tasks. Companies represented include HSBC, Mears, EDF, Suez, Barratt Homes.

5. Future Actions and Timelines

Set out what will happen next, who owns each action, and by when. Be specific with dates so progress can be tracked at the next meeting.

Future Action	Owner	Deadline / Timeline	Notes
Friends' Garden	Chris Lloyd	Through the winter '26-'27	
NW path drainage and surfacing	Chris Lloyd	Autumn 2026	£4,350 grant received
Fallen trees Removing and logging	Chris Lloyd	Winter 2026/27	Contractors have agreed day rates for fitting work in with budget availability and weather
Autumn planting - Friends' Garden - Aviary Avenue - Wetlands areas and pond	Chris Lloyd	Autumn/Winter 2026	'Sponsor a Plant' campaign launching for November 2026
Café structure & surrounds - Drainage - Seating area lawns	Chris Lloyd	Drainage - .Autumn 2026 Lawns – Winter/Spring 2026/27	Surveyors' report pending at time of AGM

6. Additional Information

Anything else the board should know — related agenda items, dependencies, or supporting documents attached.

Appendix I: Devon Wildlife Trust report - guiding work to improve ecological diversity through the grounds, especially grassland areas and wetland area. Citizen Science projects are proposed to survey wildlife throughout the grounds.

Appendix II: Grounds Management Strategy and plans

Appendix I: Devon Wildlife Trust Survey Report

Survey report: Poltimore House. Dr Cathy Horsley, Wilder Communities Officer, Devon Wildlife Trust, August 2026 (11 pages).



Survey report: Poltimore House

Dr Cathy Horsley
Wilder Communities Officer
August 2026

Summary

Poltimore House (SX967964) was visited by Cathy Horsley (Wilder Communities Officer, DWT) Chris Lloyd and Barbara Adams (Poltimore House) on 23/07/2026.

The grounds of Poltimore House offer a rich mosaic of different habitat types and as such support a wide diversity of plants and animals. The report summarises key habitat management recommendations for each habitat type that was surveyed. At the end of the report is a list of potential monitoring and recording surveys to choose from.

It is recommended that a habitat management plan is created, with clear aims and objectives. This will help make informed management decisions since it will be easier to review and assess the impact of habitat management. The plan should include treatment and monitoring of invasive non-native species such as *Rhododendron* and *Crocodylia* to prevent further spread, and to review the effectiveness of strategies for their removal.

For further details about Wilder Communities, please visit our website:

wildercommunities@devonwildlifetrust.org

devonwildlifetrust.org/wilder-communities



Background

Poltimore House is located to the south of Poltimore village, and approximately 800m from the city of Exeter. Following a fire in 2024, the house itself is a ruin. The grounds are a mosaic of habitats including rough grassland, marshy grassland, woodland, formal lawns and flower beds, and are approximately 5.2 ha.

A detailed ecological assessment was carried out in 2000, which was shared with Cathy.

A brief walkover survey was carried out in July 2026, and conditions were not ideal due to long periods of hot dry weather so plant species lists are incomplete.

The ruderal habitat patch is damp and includes dead wood, rosebay willowherb, creeping thistle, marsh thistle, pendulous sedge, meadowsweet, tufted vetch, greater birds foot trefoil, common hogweed, fleabane, creeping cinquefoil, cocksfoot, hedge bindweed, willow, hedge bedstraw, common sow thistle. It was alive with insect life including various hoverflies, muscid flies, bumblebees (including common carder bees), butterflies (including red admiral), and a frog was observed. A pair of gold finches were seen feeding on the thistle seeds.

The marshy grassland area has silver birch, willow, marsh thistle, dock, Yorkshire fog, nettle, bramble, pendulous sedge, water mint, selfheal, St Johns wort species, greater birds foot trefoil, spear thistle, fleabane, wild angelica, meadowsweet, hedge bindweed, yellow flag iris. Also observed here was a gatekeeper butterfly, honeybees, various hoverflies and a conopid fly. A stream-fed pool is planned here.

There are aspirations to work together with the neighbouring landowner to restore the length of the lime tree avenue that links the house to the local church. The trees were planted in 1710 and require pollarding to maintain them.

The amenity grassland is cut by rotary mowers and cuttings are left in situ. It was not possible to survey the species present due to the hot dry conditions however white clover, creeping buttercup and selfheal were noted.

The area identified for meadow creation includes greater birds foot trefoil, white clover, sweet vernal grass, cocksfoot, Yorkshire fog, dock, bent grass species, common hogweed, creeping buttercup, Timothy grass.



Recommendations

The mosaic of habitats at Poltimore helps make this site a special one for wildlife.

Dead wood

There is an abundance of dead wood across the site, which is a rare habitat in the landscape (a victim of people being too tidy!) but vitally important for a huge range of fungi, insects and the animals that feed on them.

<https://www.tcv.org.uk/scotland/dead-good-deadwood-survey/what-is-deadwood/>

Marshy grassland

This is a very special habitat as it is floristically diverse with species including wild angelica, water mint, selfheal, St Johns wort species, greater birds foot trefoil, spear thistle, great willowherb and meadowsweet, supporting many insects.

There are however some species present in places here which indicate that more habitat management is required. Silver birch, willow, Yorkshire fog, dock, bramble, and pendulous sedge form a community of plants indicative of a lack of disturbance, and although this is a useful habitat for many species, it is less valuable ecologically than the marshy grassland it is replacing, which is difficult to replicate (unlike scrub habitat).

Southern marsh orchid has been recorded historically in this area. This species requires the grassland to be kept open.

Therefore continue with targeted willow control and prevent scrub encroachment (e.g. bramble, pendulous sedge), as if left unmanaged, this will replace the marshy grassland. Leave the grassland uncut in the spring and summer, then cut. This will give the orchids the opportunity to flower and set seed. Remove the cuttings as this prevents nutrients going back into the soil (leaving the cuttings in situ will favour coarse grasses rather than the wildflowers).



Marshy grassland area and pond.
Photo credit: C. Horsley



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Recommendations

Amenity grassland

Some areas of grassland are kept short for amenity use. The grassland wasn't surveyed due to the hot dry weather making identification challenging, so I can't comment on the species diversity. However, since cuttings are left in situ, a simple yet very effective way of boosting plant species diversity and abundance is to collect the grass cuttings. This is because it will reduce the nutrients which favours wildflowers over competitive grasses.

By collecting the cuttings, the grassland could be maintained as a flower-rich lawn which doesn't impact on its amenity value, but would boost biodiversity as well as resilience to drought since different species have different rooting depths and different tolerances to dry weather.

It is recommended that a cut and collect mower is used instead. Potential sources of funding are listed on our webpage (link at the end of this document). This could potentially be loaned out in the local area to help facilitate similar management elsewhere, which would strengthen your funding application.

Hay meadow

An area has been identified as being suitable for creating a wildflower meadow. Current plant species diversity reflects that it has been managed by leaving the cuttings in situ. There may however be wildflower seed in the seed bank that will germinate when the conditions are suitable.

To aid the reduction of the grasses and make space for wildflowers, consider introducing yellow rattle. Yellow rattle is a meadow species often used in meadow restoration. This is because it is semi-parasitic on grasses, so it helps to reduce the over-dominance of competitive grasses and opens up the sward to allow wildflowers to flourish.

Note that yellow rattle seed has a very short shelf life. It is recommended that seed is sourced locally to ensure that it is fresh from that year. It must be sown onto bare ground, and requires exposure to the cold over winter to germinate. To prepare the ground, the grass should be cut short and cuttings removed. Then create small patches of bare ground using a rake, a fork, a strimmer, or a brush cutter. Mix the yellow rattle seed with a little sand, and throw small handfuls with a little force, at the bare soil. Trample in the seed by walking over the area firmly.

The area can be reassessed over the following years for its diversity and a decision made if sowing wildflower seed is necessary. The meadow area needs to be managed with an annual hay cut (after the yellow rattle has set and shed its seed) and cuttings must be removed.



Recommendations



Area selected for meadow creation.
Photo credit: C. Horsley

Ruderal habitat patch

This area is fantastic for a wide range of species, such as reptiles, amphibians, insects and birds which are variously feeding on the flowers, the seeds and using the space for sheltering. Managing this type of habitat involves creating disturbed ground or allowing disturbed, early-successional vegetation. These are transient habitats, as early colonisers are naturally outcompeted by other species. Disturbance is necessary to maintain this habitat.



Patch of ruderal habitat.
Photo credit: C. Horsley



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Recommendations

Lime tree avenue

This avenue is of historical importance as well as being of potential significance for bat roosts and bat commuting. The trees require pollarding to maintain the avenue. Potential sources of funding are listed on our funding webpage (link at the end of this document).

Bramble scrub

Bramble scrub is beneficial for a wide range of wildlife such as invertebrates, small mammals and birds. However, a targeted management plan of its control would be beneficial, to balance the different habitat types across the site and prevent scrub from dominating.

Consider cutting scalloped edges to bramble stands, as this creates more edge habitat that is favoured by pollinators since it is warmer and more sheltered and more flower-rich. Note that the centre of large old bramble stands are unfavourable for most nesting birds and insects as it is dark and cold. Large old bramble blocks could be broken up by cutting pathways through them.



Bramble scrub is beneficial for wildlife, but should be managed to prevent over-dominance

Photo credit: C. Horsley



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Recommendations

Special species

Glow worms

<https://www.glowworms.org.uk/>

Glow worms were recorded in the 2000 survey. Although considered common, this species is apparently declining in the UK and is under threat from a warming climate, light pollution and habitat fragmentation.

Due to its nocturnal habits, it is under-studied and as such, habitat management recommendations in the literature are not clear. However, it seems that open grassland (cut at least once a year) is preferred, and thus prevention of scrub encroachment where there were previous records may be desirable. Glow worm larvae feed on small snails, so it is recommended that habitat management is focused on vegetation structure to maintain snail populations (as recommended by Tim Gardiner) – that is, damp, shady areas such as edges of scrub, leaf litter and dead wood, and avoiding using chemicals especially molluscicides.

It is recommended that you survey for glow worms to see if they are present. Their numbers are often low and do fluctuate annually, so it is advisable to repeat the survey for a few years if none are detected. Surveys could be carried out in conjunction with bat surveys.

Consider trying to link up this habitat by working with other landowners across the landscape to help maintain populations.

For surveying advice, Buglife have provided the following:

Though I've read it is suggested adult Glow-worms are active from May to September, I have only ever observed them in Devon during their window of peak activity during June and July. Search after complete darkness on calm, warm nights, ideally when there is no bright moon. Typically, adults are easiest to find by walking around the correct habitat ie: hedgerows and scrub, away from sources of light pollution, and often near damp or wet areas at around 11:00–01:00. Make sure to search without a head torch! For the larvae, large numbers of empty snail shells are an indicator of their presence. They glow much more faintly, and only intermittently, for a few seconds at a time. If you aim to spot them at night, you should aim to search only on particularly dark, moonless nights. They are active over a longer time span than the adults, supposedly between April and October, though I did once observe one at Bolberry Down while searching for Mediterranean Oil Beetles in November. Have a close look at the larvae online as it can be easy to confuse them with Ladybird larvae, Carrion Beetle larvae, and Ground Beetle larvae. (Sam Skevington, pers. comm.)



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Recommendations

Bats

Despite the destruction to the house in 2024 by fire, there is an impressive list of bat species still on site. Records from a survey in 2025 include Barbastelle, Bechstein, Brandts, common and soprano pipistrelle, Daubentons, Greater horseshoe, Leislars, Lesser horseshoe, Noctule, Natterers and Serotine.

These species will variously be making use of hedgerows, grassland, water, ancient and veteran trees, dead wood, and woodland edges across the landscape for commuting, feeding, hibernating, and roosting. A mosaic of these different landscape elements is essential to maintain these populations.

Across Poltimore, bear in mind these important habitat features, and continue with current management to maintain them. In addition, note that any work that encourages pollinators and other insects, such as boosting floral abundance and diversity in the various grasslands, will be extremely beneficial for bats.



Recommendations

Problem species

Rhododendron

There are some patches of Rhododendron across the site that should be monitored to prevent from spreading further, and removed if possible. It is highly destructive to native plants, fungi and lichen, preventing them from cohabiting the space, it harbours disease, and its nectar is toxic to bees.

<https://www.plantlife.org.uk/invasive-species-why-is-rhododendron-a-problem/>
<https://www.wcl.org.uk/a-garden-beauty-and-an-ecological-disaster.asp>
https://openurl.ebsco.com/EPDB%3Agcd%3A12%3A15091212/detailv2?sid=ebsco%3Aplink%3Acrawler-gcd&id=ebsco%3Agcd%3A79556507&crl=c&jrnl=13025821&link_origin=scholar.google.co.uk

Crocasmia

Another non-native invasive species, Crocasmia spreads by underground corms and rhizomes and reduces native plant diversity. It is present in the marshy grassland area, and it is recommended that it is removed as soon as possible. Left unchecked it will spread and outcompete the native plants. This area is the most botanically interesting on the site and requires protection from invasive species spread. It can be dug out relatively easily as it is fairly shallow-rooted.

<https://www.nonnativespecies.org/non-native-species/information-portal/view/1040>



Recommendations

Recording

The aims of setting up some recording and monitoring on site were identified as a means of measuring the impact of habitat management, and to improve the knowledge of what species are present on site. The use of recording and monitoring for education purposes is also a priority.

Surveying can be time consuming, so consider what you want to use the data for when you select what to record. Below are some suggestions. Note that survey equipment is available to borrow from DWT's Exeter office. Contact the Wilder Communities team to book.

Ad hoc surveys - useful for a snapshot of species present

Moth trapping (send your records to the Devon Moth Group)

Invertebrate hunt (share your records via iRecord) - recording invertebrates generally across the site. You could consider inviting specialists from the Devon Fly Group.

Glow worm surveys

Regular surveys - useful for measuring impact of management and recognising trends

Bat surveys - this is strongly recommended due to the bat species already present

Big Butterfly Count or a weekly butterfly transect walk (set this up through Butterfly Conservation)

Bumblebee transect - monthly BeeWalk with Bumblebee Conservation Trust

Grassland surveys - for the marshy grassland, new meadow, and amenity grassland if management changes are implemented here. This could be carried out as a W-walk, where you walk in a W-shape across the survey area, stopping at regular intervals to record the species and their abundances within a quadrat. (share your records via iRecord)

FIT count - quick and easy way of surveying pollinators and contributing to a national monitoring scheme <https://ukpoms.org.uk/fit-counts>

Reptile survey - use reptile mats (available to borrow from DWT) to measure and monitor the local population



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Further information

[Funding Opportunities | Devon Wildlife Trust](#)

[Wilder Communities Resources | Devon Wildlife Trust](#)



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Appendix II: Grounds Management Strategy and Plans

Grounds management overview – priorities and proposals across kit, propagation, mowing, access, drainage, events spaces, landscape, arboriculture, interpretation and the café surrounds.

1. Kit: machinery and hand tools

- Compile a full inventory.
- Gauge the working life of each piece of kit.
- Develop a replacement budget for key items.
- Consider hand-tool turnover – losses and breakages.

2. Working / Goods Inward areas

- Public access should be restricted on health and safety grounds.

3. Propagation / Nursery area

- Develop a key propagation team.
- Develop infrastructure:
 - work benches and watering management (mist/humidity control);
 - potting-on and standing-out areas.
- Work up propagation lists.
- Source stock plants to complement landscape planting proposals.

4. Mowing strategy

- Close-mown areas: car park, arena and Aviary Avenue environs.
- Seasonal meadows: Daffodil Avenue to Len's Bench, the Orchard, and the Entrance summer meadow – cutting regimes to develop biodiversity and wildlife value.
- Medium-cut areas for informal circulation, allowing visual access to grounds features.

5. Access and circulation

- Improve the main perimeter paths for all-weather access, with wheelchair users in mind.
 - Possible provision of 'off-road' wheelchairs for hire.
- Recreate by-pass paths for event areas.
- Surface types: main access – road planings; secondary permanent circulation – wood chippings or quarry scalplings on Mypex or similar geotextile; seasonal informal paths through meadows and wild areas – cut grass.

6. Drainage: paths and events areas for all-weather use

- The principal project is the NW boundary perimeter path. Winter flooding closed this section of the path for two months in the winter of 2026. The proposal is to sort out the land drainage and raise the path, encased in geotextile and constructed as a raised French drain structure of Type 2 aggregate, topped off with compacted quarry scalplings or road planings. This will allow flood water from neighbouring land to flow through to the natural drainage and land drains via the new wetland areas.
- Car parking areas are under consideration. Proposals include installing land drainage to link with historic systems, installing a proprietary grass-reinforcing system, then re-seeding. The area is to be included in proposals for redevelopment of the main house – no details at present.
- Arena – a plan for winter drainage and surfacing is needed and is to be worked up.

7. Landscape for events spaces

- Arena – landscape work to be completed to integrate the space fully with the perimeter pathway, deal with existing spoil heaps around the site, and manage boundary planting to enhance the grounds. The general landscape character is to progress from manicured gardens and grounds in the arena and top of Aviary Avenue, becoming less manicured and more natural moving clockwise towards the NW and North.
- Upper Aviary Avenue – small events area (where small plays are performed).

- Cwtch area – landscape considerations currently include provision for Contact Success, barbecues and a possible venue for a sauna and plunge pool. The tree/shrub area adjoining the Cwtch building is to be refurbished with new and replacement planting.
- Len’s Bench to Willow Hut – children’s picnic areas.
- Orchard area – picnic venue.
- An additional location to be developed off the soon-to-be-reopened wild pathway from Daffodil Glade to Lime Avenue.
- Top of Lime Avenue – the new clearing where the Yew tree fell; a woodland informal seating and picnic area to be created, primarily with suitable planting.

8. Landscape projects: Friends’ Garden and new pedestrian entrance feature; Aviary Avenue; Wetland Area

- To be presented separately (see Appendix III for the Friends’ Garden proposals).

9. Arboriculture

Points to explore: Lime Avenue (overtures to Jeremy regarding uniform maintenance?); partnerships with the National Trust, Bicton and EDDC?; upgrading tree stock by removing scrubby tree cover and replacing it (squirrel cull?).

- Lime Avenue is populated by *Tilia × europaea* in various stages of life from ‘mature’ to ‘in decline’, including some regrowth from old stumps. The overall character is maintained by the regular spacing, but individual trees vary in their immediate requirements. Some could be allowed to continue for a number of years without intervention, but others are in immediate need of crown reduction to relieve stresses on their decaying main stems. The most suitable way to keep a cohesive avenue character is to re-pollard the whole avenue at the same time. This is likely to be very expensive, so a funding process needs to be explored, beginning with quotes/estimates from tree surgery companies and exploring possible partnerships with other bodies.
- Much of the tree stock through the rest of the grounds is in very poor condition through a combination of self-set saplings in inappropriate positions and persistent squirrel damage. It is proposed that some of these specimens are removed in cycles, linked to replanting in a programme of seasonal landscape projects. EDDC will be consulted at each stage, even though most of the affected trees fall outside the terms of the TPO.

10. Natural wealth and integration: identification projects and education/interpretation

- A signage and interpretation scheme is being drawn up to cover wildlife and botany, encouraging exploration themes in areas such as the seasonal meadows and the soon-to-be-developed wetland areas.
- Devon Wildlife Trust will soon provide help with survey advice and identification (see Appendix I).
- The long-term aim is to increase the presence and diversity of both native flora and invertebrate/amphibian populations.

11. Café surrounds: “kerbside appeal”, seating, bike provision and play provision (and elsewhere on site)

- This area is markedly different in use from the rest of the grounds and requires the type of consideration given to public parks and play areas. Designs are to be sketched up and consulted upon.
- The main entrance and driveway – an introduction to the ethos of the site, explained through site interpretation.