Management of ponds and the Crassula Helmsii invasive weed

Information for consideration at 8th September 2026 Conservation Committee meeting

The background context for these notes is the advice received from Amy Robinson, Senior Ecologist at ECDC, as recorded in the report of her informal visit on 17th July 2026, attached separately.

Cowlan Pond

Crassula Helmsii management

Bearing in mind the modest size of this pond and that it supports protected and rare animal and plant species, Amy recommended the best method for managing this invasive weed in this pond is to cover the weed with a black light-proof material weighted down across its span and pegged or dug down at the edges.

The main area requiring this treatment is that to the west of the bridge but the same method should be used to manage any smaller patches of the weed in the main pond area.

The material needs to hold its position as the pond level rises and should be left in place for three years. This will kill the weed under the cover. Meanwhile, the pond and its wildlife will continue to thrive.

The necessary materials have been delivered to the site, thanks to Myles, who will need to be reimbursed, and a date has been set to install the material and reduce the reed mace (see below).

We are unlikely to eradicate the weed entirely, so ongoing vigilance will be necessary.

General management

More general maintenance of this pond should include reducing the reed mace, which is swamping the pond. Given the presence of Crassula Helmsii, this should be done once the weed has been covered and without entering the pond, by cutting the reed mace and removing the cut leaves from the bridge or banks. The blackthorn around the pond bank should be kept cut.

Since Max (MDarb) cut back the blackthorn around the edge of the pond and reduced the nearby blackthorn stands, the growth has regrown and is now too long to be dealt with using strimmers or secateurs/loppers. Arguably, we should have been more vigilant about managing this. As it is we need Max to clear this growth again and thereafter organise volunteers to manage it regularly.

Hide Pond

General management

As advised by Amy Robinson, a working party recently cleared growth from the sight line in front of the hide and the along the south/west boundary to allow more light into the pond. This work was conducted on Saturday 1st August 2026 by the committee's three officers, Carol Travers and Julie Poole.

As Amy Robinson suggested, it had been our intention also to cut down the reed mace in front of the hide and reduce the reed mace growth across the pond, especially in the middle. Unfortunately, we were unable to conduct this work as in doing the clearing work described above, we discovered that this pond is also badly affected by the invasive weed Crassula Helmsii. This came as a very unwelcome surprise. Its presence meant that we could not enter the water or use a kayak.

Crassula Helmsii management

We don't know how widespread Crassula Helmsii is in this pond but there is a large area of coverage along the south/west shore, which became evident as we cleared the growth along the boundary here. So much so that it seems quite probable that it exists elsewhere in the pond.

Bearing in mind that the pond is mostly inaccessible, it is impossible for volunteers to assess the severity of the problem. Given the area that already exists and that we don't know the full extent of the problem, the management strategy advised for use on the Cowlan Pond cannot be applied here.

Given that this pond is not accessed by people, we must conclude that the spread of the invasive weed to it must have been caused by wildlife. Crassula Helmsii is included in a list of non-native invasive plant species on www.gov.uk, which states that landowners should treat or dispose of such plants where possible and that 'If you find invasive non-native plants on your land, you must stop them from spreading and causing a nuisance or damage to other land or property. If you do not, you could be responsible for any damage they cause and may be prosecuted.'

Given the potential jeopardy, it is the opinion of the committee's officers that the matter needs to be raised at the Parish Council to discuss appointing an ecologist to survey, advise and recommend how to manage the invasive weed on this pond. Any such survey should perhaps also include the other three ponds in the Holts Meadow, which are not included in the Conservation Group's remit.

Peter Travers
Chair – LD Conservation Group
17th August 2026