The Friends of Aston's Eyot

Charitable Incorporated Organisation
Registered Charity No. 1185744

Trustees' Annual Report and Financial Statement

for the accounting year ending 26 September 2025

Report date: July 2026

1. Reference and administration details

1.1 Charity name and Registration

The Friends of Aston's Eyot. Also known as: Friends of Aston's Eyot
The charity is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation , registration number 1185744, registered with the Charity Commission on 10 October 2019.

1.2 Charity's address

c/o 139 Hurst Street, Oxford, OX4 1HE
email: info@friendsofastonseyot.org
website: https://friendsofastonseyot.org

1.3 Names of the Trustees who manage the Charity

	Role	Date appointed	Date retired
Anthony Cheke	Chair	13 November 2024	
Ruth Ashcroft	Co-chair	11 November 2025	Re-elected
Laurence Burrell	Treasurer	11 November 2025	Re-elected
Charlotte Ellis		13 November 2024	
Susie Jakobsson		11 November 2025	Re-elected
Thelma Martin	Secretary	13 November 2024	
Ashok Stally-Chudasama		11 November 2025	Re-elected

1.4 Names of advisors and senior members of staff

None. There are no paid staff.

1.5 Bank

The Co-operative Bank, PO Box 250, Skelmersdale WN8 6WT

2 Structure, governance & management

2.1 Type of governing document

Constitution based on Charity Commission's model for a CIO with members

2.2 Charitable Objectives

1. To promote the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment, including biodiversity, of Aston's Eyot, the area of Oxford bounded by the rivers Thames and Cherwell and the Shire Lake ditch, in particular but not exclusively by:

a) carrying out work to protect, care for and manage or assist in managing the site as a habitat for wildlife and as a wild area.

b) surveying and recording species of fauna and flora present, disseminating the useful results of the surveys for the public benefit.

c) involving the wider public in activities such as working parties, wildlife events, path maintenance and other events in accordance with the objects or other events acceptable to the Landowners with their permission and in accordance with the objects.

2. To promote for the benefit of the inhabitants of Oxford and the surrounding area the provision of facilities for recreation or other leisure time occupation in the interests of social welfare and with the object of improving the life of the said inhabitants.

2.3 Trustee selection methods

There must be at least 3 trustees. The maximum number is 12. Trustees are elected according to the Constitution at the Annual General Meeting of members. At the first AGM all the trustees must retire, and in subsequent years half must retire by rotation. Those retired may stand for re-election.

2.4 Committees

The day to day management of the Friends is organised by a committee consisting of the trustees, and from time to time other committee members (none this year) who are not a trustee.

3. Public benefit

3.1 The trustees of The Friends of Aston's Eyot confirm that they have paid due regard to the guidance issued by the Charity Commission on public benefit in deciding what activities the charity should undertake.

4. Executive summary of activities and achievements

There were 112 paid up members. 8-20 people attended monthly work parties, and there were 7 further sessions with other conservation volunteer groups each attended by around 15-20 people. Up to 60 people volunteered individually and in smaller ad hoc volunteering sessions.

Core conservation management and survey work, supporting public access and volunteering, and maintaining good communication with members and visitors, were all continued.

Two main conservation achievements were firstly getting grant funding for and starting the construction of three deer exclosures (one trial waterside one, two larger ones in woodland and in an open area). The open area exclosure was begun by stripping a large area of nettles of both the nettle roots and the top few inches of soil. The woodland exclosure is part of a broader woodland project planned for 2025-26.

The second project was to continue to improve the water quality and aquatic habitats of the Shire Lake ditch. This involved improving water flow at least in winter by removal of onstructions from the ditch and digging out deeper channels at key points. In addition more light was let into the ditch by removal of overshading vegetation.

5. Activities, achievements and performance – full report

5.1. Main aims this year. In addition to keeping key conservation management and survey work going, supporting public access and volunteering, and maintaining good communications with members and visitors, our **specific aims for the year** were to:

a) Apply for funding for and deliver a project to install three deer exclosures in woodland, open and waterside habitats, using robust fencing materials and removing nettles first to allow establishment of habitat appropriate flora which would now be protected against grazing.

b) Continue habitat improvements, water flow, and pollution reduction in the Shire Lake ditch by removal of overhanging vegetation and obstructions in the ditch, and by digging out silt where necessary to improve the flow.

c) Continue woodland improvements particularly in the Plantation area and plant a new hedge here.

d) Continue development of protected areas for wildlife to be undisturbed by human and dog access.

5.2 Public access, volunteering and communications

a) Public access and paths. Aston's Eyot continues to be very well used by a wide variety of people walking, running, walking dogs, and enjoying the rivers. A hot dry summer meant that access to woodland shade was important, and that fires were a particular concern.

Oxford City Council assisted by mowing main paths, continuing a previous agreement with the landowner to do this.

b) Membership numbered 112 by the end of September 2025 year, up from 91 last year. Membership does go up and down at around 100, though the pool of interested people is always more than this. The annual subscription is £8 minimum; being able to take subscriptions and other donations through Paypal has been helpful.

c) Anti-social behaviour has not been a significant problem despite the hot summer.

d) River access. We continued to discourage the mooring of boats other than very temporarily on Aston's Eyot riverbanks, as this has almost always been associated with problems. We participated in a project to decrease the number of unlicensed small boats abandoned along the Thames.

e). Volunteering. Work parties on the last Sunday afternoon of every month were well attended with 10-25 people attending each time. Smaller extra volunteer sessions were also held on a more ad hoc basis for general maintenance of habitats and to progress projects. Many people put in individual effort as wildflower patch champions, nettle pullers and

diggers, and litter pickers. The general community effort to keep an eye on things and deal with problems had a significant effect on keeping the site litter free and calm.

We had 2 sessions with groups of around 15-30 people from Oxford Conservation Volunteers to help with ditch clearance, willow pollarding and woodland work. In April 2026 they came for a further 2 days to install the fencing for the new woodland deer exclosure. Good Gym teams of around 15 people came 3 times to scythe nettles, mend fences and clear branches overhanging paths. Oxford University Nature Conservation Society came in early autumn 2025 to help with putting up fencing on the new open exclosure. Oxford Biomedica had a workplace volunteering session with us in July 2025 for woodland work.

We also had two days of mowing from the City Council (via Oxford Direct Services) countryside team.

e) Website, calendar, newsletters and social media. Work continued on the website, particularly to improve function on smartphones and for visitors on site. The wildlife and conservation pages in particular were redone. Digital illustrated newsletters were sent out to members twice during the year. Posts were placed regularly to the Facebook page to advertise news, events, and sightings. WhatsApp groups are now being used for some volunteer communications and to share observations and sightings. The calendar was produced as usual, yielding useful income; it is illustrated with photos taken on Aston's Eyot sent in by visitors and members; these are valuable not only aesthetically but for the record of species seen and the current habitats and landscapes of the Eyot.

5.3 Habitat restoration and creation.

Deer exclosures. Muntjac numbers in particular have grown very high reaching a peak in the 2024-5 winter and remaining high. The impact on ground flora has been dramatic with very few plant species not eaten. Deer exclosures made over the last few years have made a very noticeable difference to plant diversity, but it has proved harder to keep the deer out despite regular maintenance. This led to the current project to install three new deer exclosures in woodland, open and waterside areas. The **open area exclosure (Shippam's Field)** was funded by the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment. An area of around 1200 square metres was stripped along with the top few inches of topsoil using a large digger in late summer 2025. The area was then fenced using heavy duty posts and robust fencing (eurofence). Seedlings emerging were then hoed off by hand and a mix of meadow, woodland edge and bird seed plant species were sown inside the exclosure and in the 10% left unfenced for comparison. The **woodland exclosure** was funded by an Awards for All National Lottery grant alongside other woodland work, and enclosed about 1500 square metres similarly, the work done in April 2026 including a specially designed badger access point. Shrubs will initially be left to regenerate naturally, and some woodland ground flora introduced to augment what comes naturally. Fencing was tested on a smaller waterside exclosure on the Shire Lake Ditch where water edge flora will be encouraged. Plant species present in all 3 exclosures are being monitored.

Shire Lake Ditch project. The ditch has been subject to serious sewage pollution coming from misconnected foul water pipes in a number of local properties and a restaurant, which was feeding into the surface drainage system emptying into the ditch at Jackdaw Lane. Thames Water corrected this in spring 2022, but with poor water through flow, the pollution

has been slow to clear and there are still episodes of very poor water quality. We have continued a project with the help of key volunteers and the volunteer teams to a) improve flow by removing blockages such as fallen branches, and by digging out channels, and b) let more light onto the water by removing the shading vegetation, to promote natural breakdown of the pollutants and help aquatic vegetation begin to return. Water quality and the presence of aquatic life are being monitored.
There is already better flow in winter, lower pollutant levels, better growth of aquatic plants, more fish, and kingfishers successfully fishing along stretches of the ditch.

Ponds project. This project created a group of clean water ponds for wildlife, to complement the more polluted habitat of the Shire Lake Ditch and the large seasonal pond on the adjacent Long Meadow. These new ponds were designed to be mainly very shallow, fish-free, and rain filled so that they have clean water. They are fenced against deer (to prevent water edge plants being eaten out) and dogs (to avoid damage, disturbance, and pollution from flea treatments). A variety of aquatic invertebrate species were recorded, and increasingly attract frogs, newts and dragonflies. The summer drought led to very low water levels, but this had the advantage of allowing emergent pond plants to establish. Plants over the whole site are monitored.

Conservation areas. To help keep a large central area free of human and dog disturbance, dead hedges were made to help limit access. One section of this area is mowed plus other management interventions; the rest is left untouched. This is part of a plan in progress to zone the Eyot into areas with more or less management intervention, and with and without human and dog access.

Woodland project. A number of trees were felled at the south end of the Plantation as part of a project to let in more light to this area to benefit growth of understorey shrubs and woodland ground flora. A new hedge was planted along the western edge at this end to provide a wind shelter as well as other benefits.

Trees. We undertake an annual tree safety check following Forestry Commission guidelines for land managers. The ash dieback situation has not become any worse this year and a number of affected trees have shown good signs of recovery. No trees had to be felled this year as unsafe, but tree surgeons were employed to remove 2 fallen trees that were impacting paths and a neighbouring site.

The Kidneys Nature Park is the City Council owned adjacent site, where Friends of Aston's Eyot are also involved with management since the two sites are physically connected and act as a single unit both ecologically and for human visitors. A volunteer group which concentrates on this area has been set up, and an initial task has been to open up a section of the Thames river access. The pollinator patches created in previous years to add meadow plant diversity continue to do well on the Kidneys meadow – the deer have a much lower impact here compared to Aston's Eyot, and the plants are spreading very gradually outwards from the patches. Noticeably more butterflies and bees are seen in pollinator patches than in the rest of the meadow.

5.4 Wildlife surveys and sightings

Badgers. 69 active badger sett entrances were counted in February 2025, up from 57 last year, but remaining lower than previous years. Numbers were up again to 94 in February

2026, so numbers continue to recover although as entrances are dug and abandoned all the time, and it is always hard to interpret these counts.

Camera trapping continued as usual with two volunteer teams, and with a variety of mammals and birds recorded, making a useful insight into the wildlife less often seen. It has confirmed the presence of weasels, several species of bird, and visiting otter.

Deer. A single survey in February 2024 resulted in 12 Muntjac seen – up from the 8 seen in March 2023. By February 2025 there were 13 live animals and 2 very recently dead ones, adding to the view that population numbers have risen to a very high level. In February 2026 there were 13 in one count and 14 in another; these counts will never catch all the animals present, but judging by the impact numbers do seem to have decreased slightly since the 2024-5 winter, when they were eating plants they never normally do, such as snowdrop. Up to 4 Roe were seen, which suggests a steady population.

Birds. The tit nest-boxes normally have a very high occupancy and success rate, but this summer (2025), like last year, there were more boxes unused. The nests in occupied boxes had good numbers of healthy fledglings, aided perhaps by the warm early summer weather. T Bird sightings of note included woodcock, garden warblers and bullfinches. Grey wagtails were regularly seen, as were the parakeets. A cuckoo was heard on the Kidneys.

Plants. Plant surveys were started again in spring 2026 for the deer exclosures specifically. In general it was noted that the number of species being eaten by deer remains high, with very little teasel, burdock, hogweed, mallow and hedge cranesbill surviving outside esclosures compared to recent years – leaving very few ground flora species untouched.

6. Financial Review

6.1 Sources of income and outgoings

During the financial year to 26.9.25:

Income came from membership subscriptions, donations, and sale of calendars and cards. Sales of calendars produced a net profit of £336.18. A quiz night and raffle raised hosted by a local pub raised £2320. We also applied for and received two grants: one from the National Lottery Community Fund (Awards for All) for £6080, paid in advance for work actually done in the 2025-26 financial year. The second was from the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment for £6038.67 paid in October 2025 in arrears for work completed in the 2024-25 calendar year.

Outgoings were for standard running costs including removal of dangerous and fallen trees, and the grant-funded deer exclosures projects, for which the Lottery funded woodland project is still ongoing.

The **balance** carried forward at 26 Sept 2025 was £3537.52, and this was all unrestricted funds, and an improvement on the £1509 at the start of the financial year.

6.2 Reserves policy

Reserves have been kept for a year's essential running costs such as public liability insurance and tree safety work. We currently aim for this to be around £4000 to allow for the predicted increase in essential tree surgeon costs with increasing likelihood of storm and drought damage, riverbank erosion, and the need to fell as a result of Ash Dieback which may affect more ash trees on Aston's Eyot.

6.3 Financial status

The charity currently has resources from unrestricted donations and subscriptions that are sufficient to meet its essential outgoings for at least another year, and it is expected that that will continue to be the case.

6.4 Restricted Funds

The grant received from the National Lottery Community Fund was awarded for specific projects, to be spent by end August 2027.

6.5 Details of any funds materially in deficit

The charity has no funds materially in deficit.

6.6 Remuneration of trustees

All trustees act in a voluntary capacity and receive no remuneration or other material benefits from their services to the charity. Out of pocket expenses necessarily and reasonably incurred by trustees in promoting the purposes of the charity are reimbursed at cost.

6.7 Statutory statements on liabilities

The trustees declare that

a) The charity has given no guarantees where potential liability under the guarantee is outstanding at the date of this statement

b) The charity has no outstanding debts which are secured by an express charge on any of the assets of the charity at the date of this statement.

Approved by the Trustees and signed on their behalf,

Ruth Ashcroft, Co-chair

15 July 2026

7. Receipts and payments accounts for financial year to 26.09.25

RECEIPTS	**This year**	***Last year***
	£	£
Subscriptions & donations	1521.55	*1517.83*
Sale of calendars	747.00	*682.20*
Sale of cards	185.00	
Gift Aid		*1333.68*
Quiz Night	2320.00	
Grants	6080.00	
Total receipts	**10853.55**	***3533.71***
Opening balance at start of year	1509.35	*13614.00*
	12.362.90	***17147.71***
PAYMENTS		
Insurance	276.72	*212.86*
AGM room hire	20.00	*20.00*
Solicitors' fee re lease		*586.00*
Printing calendars	410.82	*326.44*
Printing cards	127.62	
Printing leaflets	55.07	
Tree work	1100.00	*2990.00*
Tools & small kit	470.12	*121.60*
Fencing & tree guards	204.68	1271.53
Seeds and plants	24.95	*351.11*
Trail cameras & batteries		*212.97*
Pond construction materials		*8364.37*
Grant project – deer exclosure	6062.82	
Scything Course		*390.00*
Mower repair & service		*260.34*
Oxford Conservation Volunteers		*440.00*
Wild Oxfordshire subs	35.00	*35.00*
Website costs	23.96	
Sundries	13.95	*56.14*
Total payments	**8825.71**	***15638.36***
Closing balance at end of year	3537.19	*1509.35*
	12362.90	***17147.71***

The accounts were prepared by Hon. Treasurer Laurence Burrell.

8. Approval of the Trustees

The Trustees declare that they have approved the above Annual Report and Statement of financial activity.
Signed on behalf of the trustees

Name: Anthony Cheke
Role: Chair
Date: July 2026