

Oxhey Woods Local Nature Reserve

Access and Interpretation Report

October 2010

Produced by:
Countryside Management Service

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Introduction

Purpose of the Report

To provide an overview of the existing access and interpretation for Oxhey Woods Local Nature Reserve. The report provides recommendations for improving and defining all access points and has been developed to support the delivery of best practice standards for the signage, gateways and interpretation. A series of 'special projects' are also recommended to improve access and interpretation within the wood. The costs to implement the recommendations have been estimated and sources of funding identified.

Site Description

Oxhey Woods Local Nature Reserve comprises of 97.8 hectares of woodland in South Oxhey, Hertfordshire, which is owned and managed by Three Rivers District Council. Oxhey Woods LNR is a County Wildlife Site (ref 90/006), notable for large amounts of Wild Service tree, *Sorbus torminalis* and Bluebell, *Hycinthoides non-scripta* throughout the site.

The woods also contain numerous veteran and mature trees, predominantly old coppice stools and there are several ponds and streams across the site. Some areas of the reserve are of ancient semi-natural woodland in character, whilst other areas are remnant Heath, Acid Grassland and Wood Pasture.

The Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment for Area 13 describes Oxhey Woods as 'An oasis of woodland in the middle of suburbia.' Housing surrounds the north, east and west sides of the wood, whilst the south side borders Pinner Hill Golf Course in Harrow.

Oxhey Woods has a complex history, the site was extensively researched by G.H Harper in his study "Oxhey Woods: Their History and Vegetation" in the 1970's. The different compartments can still be identified on the ground due to the different stand types and historic management, separated in most cases by pathways or banks and ditches.

Mixed broadleaf tree species dominate the canopy, although in a few areas there are conifers. Hornbeam / hazel coppice with oak standards and oak high forest appears to have been the most common silvicultural systems used in the wood.

Access and Interpretation

There is public access throughout Oxhey Woods, an old interpretation & notice board near the car park, and two small areas of seating. A permissive horse route is provided through the southern compartment and there are three promoted routes through the woods.

The site is dissected by 2 main roads that effectively split the woodland into 3 compartments, each with a different character. The southern compartment is the most used by visitors as it has a car park and number of well defined, but not surfaced, circular routes. The other two compartments, northern & central, are less well used by visitors, but can be accessed via informal points from the surrounding housing areas.

There are no formal road crossing points to link the woodland compartments, although many of the paths and promoted routes involve crossing the road. Current barriers to increased accessibility of the site include; sections of excessively muddy footpath, overgrown footpaths & rides, poorly defined entrance points, and a lack of interpretation.

Context

TRDC Greenspace

A statement of the local importance of woodlands and the Council's commitment to sustaining them is set out in the Council's Greenspace Strategy (draft 2003). Policies on tree and woodland protection, tree planting, veteran trees, woodland and open space management are also set out, as follows.

'Develop management plans for all Council owned woodlands. The multiple objectives of conservation, landscape, timber, recreation, access and education should be pursued with priorities determined by the character and the history of the woodlands, its contribution to landscape, conservation and recreation potential.

- *Endeavour to improve access for the whole community*
- *Encourage community involvement*
- *Improve timber quality where possible*
- *Develop multi-age structure woodland and retain standing deadwood where possible'*

Disability Discrimination Act 1995 & 2005

The DDA 1995 has had a wide reaching impact. The legislation places responsibilities upon owners of countryside sites and open spaces regarding provision for people with disability as part of a wider Disability Equality Duty for the Public Sector.

This legislation has been strengthened by the DDA 2005. This requires public bodies to positively promote disability equality and to have schemes in place and published by 4th December 2006. Such schemes explain how the body will promote equality for disabled people, challenge discrimination and lead to the removal of barriers for all disabled people.

The framework for action recommended in this report is based upon the principle of Least Restrictive Access (LRA). This approach aims to raise the standard of access at a site over a period of time. This approach is applied in the access and interpretation audit undertaken for TRDC.

Place Survey 2008

The 2008 Place Survey provides information on people's perceptions of their local area and the local services they receive. The survey collects information on 18 national indicators for local government. A key part of the Place Survey looks at people's perceptions of their local parks and open spaces, and their involvement as volunteers in local community.

TRDC was ranked 3rd amongst local authorities in Hertfordshire for the quality of its Parks and Open Spaces, showing a strong correlation between management of open spaces and overall satisfaction with local authority performance.

Access Options Key

Option A

Pedestrian access = bollards or kissing gate, & welcome sign



Option B

Enhanced Pedestrian access = bollards or kissing gate, & welcome sign / interpretation panel



Option C

Vehicle access = gate & welcome sign



Option D

Enhanced Vehicle access = gate, welcome sign & interpretation panel



Option E

= Finger post to access point



Option F

= Do nothing



Site Review

Access

We recommend that furniture and interpretation should clearly identify sites as being owned and managed by TRDC. Welcome signs should be used to make people feel more confident about using the site, raise expectations of site standards, in addition to establishing its status as a LNR.

Barrier free access is encouraged where possible and if structures are unavoidable, we promote use of the least restrictive option. Various designs of barriers are currently in use and control access to the site. Some barriers are in place to restrict motorised vehicles. The designs of some barriers make access difficult for people with limited mobility, elderly users and parents with buggies. If a barrier proves necessary, it may be possible to adopt an alternative design to allow legitimate users easier access to the site.

To maximise the use and enjoyment of the site by wide range of users we recommend creating an 'easy access trail' which would comprise of a high quality surfaced route of approximately 1km. This would be a circular route starting and finishing at the main car park, with benches at regular stopping points and along the route a series of sculptures to provide points of interest.

We have also identified sections of wider routes throughout out the LNR that become water logged and inaccessible at certain times of the year. We propose targeted improvements in these areas by; raising the current level of existing paths so that water is shed off the path, using French drains along side paths to capture surface run off before it reaches the path and installing a new series of culverts to receive water from the drains and take it underneath the path and away (see appendix 6).

Horse riding is currently allowed throughout the site, on all footpaths, but there is currently no clear guidance for riders or other users on use of the woods for riding. An element of the project would be to review, and where necessary, rationalise the current level of access for horses. Liaison with the British Horse Society and local stables would be carried out to produce a code of conduct and clear information on access for horses.

First impressions are important and many people that visit the site will be using existing car parking facilities. The car parking area should be relatively secure, ordered, feel safe, welcoming and be well maintained. Sympathetic habitat management adjacent to the car park will identify the site as 'cared for' and can make the site feel more welcoming. The proposals also provide a great opportunity for TRDC to showcase and gain support for the vital habitat management and maintenance work it performs.

Ride Management

An important element of the proposed improvements would be the widening of key access routes (rides) throughout the wood by targeted and selective tree removal and scrub /bramble control (see appendix 6).

This ride management would; allow light and air down to the paths to keep them dry, make footpaths more open & less intimidating to visitors, and create sunny glades, a natural element of native woodland, essential for wildflowers, insects & birds.

Ride management would enable occasional, permitted vehicular access through the site, along side & adjacent to pedestrian paths, to avoid damage to the walking surface when undertaking regular woodland management operations (see appendix 6).

Interpretation

Interpretation boards should be installed at the main entrances and car park. These should be produced in line with the established corporate 'house style' whilst promoting the individual character of the site, include contact details and provide information on features of interest within the LNR. We recommend installing brown signs and fingerposts stating destinations and distances from residential areas adjacent to the LNR. In addition to this, we suggest a similar approach is taken to the local Public Right of Way network making the LNR a 'destination'.

These measures will increase the number of pedestrian users. It will therefore be increasingly important to retain existing trails whilst rationalising the experience, and ensure that they are clearly and accurately way marked. These trails will also need to be supported by a site leaflet available off site and on the internet. Appropriate trails for new or uncertain visitors will provide an introduction to the site and give choice to new users.

New interpretation could also clearly identify all major routes and their status promoting strategic/circular enhanced options. Older users and people with mobility problems will benefit from additional resting points and benches along these longer trails.

Funding

The report identifies potential projects that may attract external funding and offer additional interest to visitors. CMS can assess these features in more detail to identify the most appropriate source of external funding on TRDC's behalf. CMS experience of similar projects has shown that projects such as these present good external funding opportunities as they provide a unique experience and enhance countryside recreation opportunities for local people and the wider community.

Summary

Implementation of the recommendations contained within the report will enable TRDC to continue to meet commitments made in its Greenspace Strategy by increasing access to a wide range of users. The improvements to access and interpretation will also help TRDC to continue to improve on its high scoring in the Place Survey, as in 2008 when 77% of respondents felt TRDC parks and open spaces were well managed.

The access proposals will also support TRDC in fulfilling its responsibilities under the DDA by making provision for people with disability using least restrictive access options, and could be an approach taken by CMS to other TRDC owned open spaces.

We believe that if TRDC undertakes the proposed improvements to access and interpretation at Oxhey woods it will demonstrate the importance it places on caring for these special natural areas for the people of the district.

Vision for TRDC Oxhey Woods Local Nature Reserve

Successful projects will provide learning opportunities for all members of the community, encourage people to take exercise, instil a sense of well being and pride in the local area and support volunteer activity on the sites.

What does this mean for Oxhey Woods LNR

- **Well signed entrance points clearly stating that TRDC own and manage the site.**
- **Greater awareness and understanding of management operations.**
- **Clear interpretation that allows people to learn and discover more about their Local Nature Reserve, including where they can walk and what they will see.**
- **A high quality, well marked circular trail and walking routes with an accompanying leaflet that has a clear explanation of terrain, path surface, obstacles (e.g. steps) etc.**
- **Users feel more confident about using the site and walking in the woodlands.**
- **Higher profile for the site through volunteering, local events and friends groups.**

Access Audit & recommendations

Compartment	Access no.	Photo Ref.	Description	Recommendation
Northern	N1	N1	Vehicle entrance onto Oxhey Drive Galvanised field gate and LL (London Loop) way mark. Over grown, but good vehicle access.	Option C Paint / replace gate Clear over hanging vegetation
	N2	N2	Pedestrian entrance onto Sandy Lane. No structures at present but link path to main ride overgrown.	Option A Clear over hanging vegetation along footpath to main ride
	N3	N3	Pedestrian entrance onto Sandy Lane. Very overgrown and little sign of use.	Option F Do nothing
	N4	N4	Pedestrian entrance onto Sandy Lane. Rotten wooden gate with over grown vegetation.	Option C Clear over hanging vegetation
	N5	N5	Vehicle entrance onto Sandy Lane. Metal barrier with steep slope behind.	Option C Clear over hanging vegetation
	N6	N6	Pedestrian entrance onto Nairn Gardens, London Loop entrance No structures, very overgrown with fly tipping and dumped spoil.	Option A Clear over hanging vegetation Level surface and remove rubbish 1 X finger post
	N7	N7	Pedestrian entrance onto Gosforth Lane. No structures, very close house back gardens, very overgrown with fly tipping and dumped spoil.	Option A Clear a new entrance point away from housing, level surface and clear fly tipping

Compartment	Access no.	Photo Ref.	Description	Recommendation
	N8	N8	Pedestrian entrance onto Gosforth Lane. No structures, steep bank into wood.	Option A Clear over hanging vegetation along footpath to main ride Install steps x 4, if necessary
	N9	N9	Vehicle entrance onto Oxhey Drive. Over grown and with fly tipping but good access point for maintenance. Pedestrian entrance via HCC owned section Large amounts of fly tipping	Option D & E Work with CSF to improve entrance Clear overhanging vegetation Level surface
	N10	N10	Pedestrian entrance onto Oxhey Drive. Two old barriers and a variety of bollard types x 9. Fly tipping and Utility compound (T Mobile, radio transmitter - site address 90570 emergency phone number 0808 121 4123.	Option C Extra bollards required Access required for vehicles Clear over hanging vegetation
Central	C1	C1	Pedestrian entrance onto Oxhey Drive. Chicane and LL way marks. Kerb trip hazard, poor sightlines on road bend	Option A, but retain chicane Level surface & build up behind kerb Clear over hanging vegetation and sight lines
	C2	C2	Pedestrian entrance onto Muirfield Road Palisade fence with squeeze to left hand side, rear of houses. Overgrown and with fly tipping. Steep bank into wood.	Option A and Remove 1 section of palisade fencing Clear fly tipping, level surface, install 6 x steps
	C3	C3	Pedestrian entrance onto Oxhey Drive. Chicane ½ missing, overgrown vegetation	Option A

Compartment	Access no.	Photo Ref.	Description	Recommendation
	C4	C4	Pedestrian entrance onto Furze Close Large log squeeze opens onto housing estate. Overgrown.	Option B, 4 bollards required 1x Finger post Clear over hanging vegetation Remove a section of log to widen entrance
	C5	C5	Pedestrian entrance onto Prestwick Road LL way mark, gentle slope into wood	Option A
	C6	C6	Pedestrian entrance at the junction of Oxhey Drive / Prestwick Road / The Woods. Close to road crossing to car park Parish Council bench / bin / waymark, fly tipping and overgrown	Option B Remove or replace bench & bin Clear overhanging vegetation and clear fly tipping
	C7	C7	Vehicle entrance on Oxhey Drive Very overgrown, bund / ditch	Option C Field gate Good access for management
Southern	S1	S1	Pedestrian entrance on Southview Four bollards, dead tree dividing path	Option A Check ownership Clear over hanging vegetation along footpath to main ride Remove dead tree and detritus from existing surfaced path
	S2	S2	Pedestrian entrance from golf club yard	Option A or extinguish entrance point Liaise with golf club regarding access 1 x finger post
	S3	S3	Pedestrian entrance from right of way Wooden kissing gate, overgrown	Option B Replace with metal kissing gate Clear overhanging vegetation 2 x finger posts

Compartment	Access no.	Photo Ref.	Description	Recommendation
	S4	S4	Pedestrian entrance on Prestwick Road Gate, overgrown and fly tipping, remains of old wooden barrier	Option A Install finger post from road Reuse existing barrier at S6
	S5	S5	Pedestrian entrance on Prestwick Road Flight of wooden steps, bund poor sightlines LL waymark	Option A Remove steps & bund, if possible Clear over hanging vegetation and sightlines. Create area of hard standing by road side
	S6	S6	Vehicle entrance on Prestwick Road Very overgrown	Option C Clear overhanging vegetation
	S7	S7	Pedestrian entrance on to Oxhey Drive	Option A Cut back overhanging Vegetation leading to main ride

Project Summary

Entrance Improvements

Item	Compartment	Access No.	Option
1	Northern	N1	C
2	Northern	N2	A
3	Northern	N3	F
4	Northern	N4	A
5	Northern	N5	A
6	Northern	N6	A
7	Northern	N7	A
8	Northern	N8	A
9	Northern	N9	D & E
10	Northern	N10	A or C
12	Central	C1	A
13	Central	C2	A
14	Central	C3	A
15	Central	C4	B & E
16	Central	C5	A
17	Central	C6	B
18	Central	C6	C
19	Southern	S1	A
20	Southern	S2	A & E
21	Southern	S3	A & E
22	Southern	S4	A
23	Southern	S5	A
24	Southern	S6	C
25	Southern	S7	A

Special Projects

Footpath Improvements	
SP1	Resurfacing & Drainage
SP2	Resurfacing & Drainage
SP3	Resurfacing & Drainage
SP4	Easy access trail & benches
SP5	Waymarking & Orienteering trail
SP6	Footbridge repairs
SP7	Rhododendron walk entrance improvements
Car Park Improvements	
SP8	Tree work - thinning in car park vicinity
	Install Interpretation Panel - A1 / notice board (See SP11 for Interp. production costs)
	Install Welcome signs x 4
	Install bylaws sign
	Surfacing around the gate - 30m ²
Ride Management	
SP9	Cut back main rides to average 15 metre width
	Cut back main rides to average 15 metre width
	Cut back main rides to average 15 metre width
Interpretation	
SP10	Sculptures
SP11	Leaflet + 4 interpretation panels / notice board, 4 x welcome boards

Funding

A number of sources of match funding should be investigated to support the proposed access and interpretation improvements.

Forestry Commission

Funding is currently available through the FC's English Woodlands Grant Scheme. A contribution to the cost of a range of the works proposed, such as ride management, entrance points, surfacing and interpretation would be eligible for Woodland Improvement Grant for Access and possibly Biodiversity.

Landfill Tax

Biffa Award - Grants available from £5,000 to £50,000 through their main grants programme, for Community or Biodiversity projects. www.biffaward.org

Nearest Biffa Site, 7 miles - Wembley Transfer Station, Marsh Lane, Alperton Lane, Wembley, HA0 1ES.

Cemex Community Award - Grants available from £1,000 to £15,000 through their Community Fund. www.cemexcf.org.uk

Nearest Cemex site, 4 miles - Westwood Depot and Landfill, The Gt Westwood Estate, Fir Tree Hill, Chandlers Cross, Hertfordshire, WD3 4LY.

Veolia Environmental Trust - Grants available of around £25,000 to £40,000 www.veoliatrust.org

Heritage Lottery Fund

- **Heritage Grants** - Grants available from £50,000 to £1 million
www.hlf.org.uk/HowToApply/programmes/Pages/heritagegrants
- **Your Heritage** - Grants available from £,3000 to £50,000
www.hlf.org.uk/HowToApply/programmes/Pages/yourheritage

Consultation

We propose that a defined period of consultation is carried out prior to any implementation of the recommended works within this report. This will have a several benefits ensuring that proposals;

- enhance and not conflict with the access needs of ground maintenance and other woodland management operations,
- give the local community an input into elements of the scheme, such as the sculpture design, interpretation content & trail routes,
- provide users with a fundamental understanding of what's going on, what the outcomes will be and why we are doing it.

Proposed Consultation Action Plan

8th October

- Consultation period begins
- Report sent out to key stakeholders involved in Oxhey Woods LNR with feedback deadline of 15th November.
- Report available to view at CMS and TRDC Offices.

11th October

- Information available on the CMS and TRDC websites.
- Information available at Watford Rural Parish Council Office.
- Notice of location of proposals, including web addresses, posted on Oxhey Woods LNR notice board.

13th November

- Guided walk at Oxhey Woods LNR, open to the general public, along the proposed easy access trail.

19th November

- Consultation period closes.

26th November

- Feedback received summarised, including recommended responses and forwarded to TRDC.

Appendices

1. Photo Reference



N1



N2



N3



N4



N5



N6



N7



N8



N9



N10



N11



C1



C2



C3



C4



C5



C6



C7



S1



S2



S3



S4



S5



S6

2. Specifications

Entrance Features

- English Oak 'Monolith' signs 350mm x 100mm x 1500mm overall length. 2-way weathered top, engraved legend and motif in filled with colour on one side, supplied in smooth-sanded natural Oak finish. Potential supplier - LANDMARK

Bollards

- Wardley Steel Bollard - 114mm diameter x 1200mm overall length. One groove and steel cap. Polyester powder coated, green. Potential supplier - Centrewire.

Or

- English Oak Bollard - 150mm x 150mm x 1500mm overall length, with 4-way weathered top, plain smooth-sanded natural Oak finish. Potential supplier - LANDMARK, Fitzpatrick Woolmer.

Interpretation Panels

- Lancer Range, Stainless Steel Interpretation Panel - A1, upright, with side mounted locking notice board. Potential supplier – Fitzpatrick Woolmer.

Welcome signs

- Cast aluminium header boards. Typeset and proof, text only and logo. Size 400 x 1000mm, Aluminium, Full colour vinyl to face. Finishing Anti graffiti coating to face. Freestanding units. Potential supplier – Fitzpatrick Woolmer.

Vehicle Gates

- Heavy Duty Triangular Vehicle Barrier (LE F010 201610) - 3 metre, manufactured from 100mm x 50mm RHS and galvanised. Potential supplier - Centrewire.

Kissing Gates

- Woodstock - Medium Mobility (-XX F010 321512) - Height 1 metre - 1.2 metre, maximum length in fence line 2.6m, width across hoops 1.7 metre. Self closing - meshed hoops. Potential supplier - Centrewire.

Path Surfacing

- 2 metre wide footpath, edged using 3600 x 25 x 100mm pressure treated softwood boards, secured with externally fixed 50 x 50 x 450mm pressure treated softwood pegs at 1200mm centres. Path surfacing of 150mm depth, laid on a geotextile membrane between soil and path. Sub-base of MOT Type 1 granite or crushed concrete followed by a top dressing compacted at both stages with a vibrating roller. Potential suppliers - Maydencroft Rural, Sentry Groundcare.

Ride Management

- Fell all unmarked trees along ride to a width of 15 metres, leaving marked trees. Flail bramble, remove all chippings off site, cut timber to approx 1.5 metre lengths and stack safely in designated areas. Potential suppliers - Maydencroft Rural, Sentry Groundcare, Arborcare (See appendices, fig 1).

Culverts and Drainage

- Culverts - Excavate the existing ditches / culverting and install two 600mm diameter x 4.0m concrete pipes, with concrete filled sandbags to secure the pipes. Rigid metal grills secured over the ends of the pipes. Back fill the sides to create a level base for path surfacing (see appendices, fig 4). Potential suppliers - Maydencroft Rural, Sentry Groundcare, Arborcare.
- French drains - Excavate a trench approx. 500mm wide x 600mm deep, insert a plastic land drain approx 200mm diameter, covered with pea shingle (see appendices fig 5). Potential suppliers - Maydencroft Rural, Sentry Groundcare, Arborcare.

(All timber products used would be sourced from sustainable supplies)

3. Potential Suppliers

- LANDMARK Timber Products, Chequers Yard, Lowden, Chippenham, Wiltshire, SN15 2BJ. Tel: 0808 129 3773 Email: sales@landmarktimber.co.uk
- Centrewire Ltd, Mossfield Road, Adderley Green, Longton, Stoke-on-Trent, ST3 5BW. Tel: 08451 807711 Email: sales@centrewire.com
- Fitzpatrick Woolmer, Design and Publishing Ltd, Unit 7 Lakeside Park, Neptune close, Rochester, KENT, ME2 4LT. Tel: 01634 711 771 Email: info@fwdp.co.uk
- Maydencroft Rural - Maydencroft Rural Limited, Maydencroft Manor, Gosmore, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG4 7QA. Tel: 01462 420 851 Email: info@maydencroft.com
- Sentry Groundcare - Tel: 07970 549011 Email: tomgh@sentry.co.uk
- Arborcare - Shangri - la, Todds green, Stevenage, Herts, SG1 2JE. Tel: 01438 726 425 Email: info@arborcareherts.co.uk

4. Existing Access Map

5. Existing Promoted routes map

6 Proposed Improvements Map

6. Images

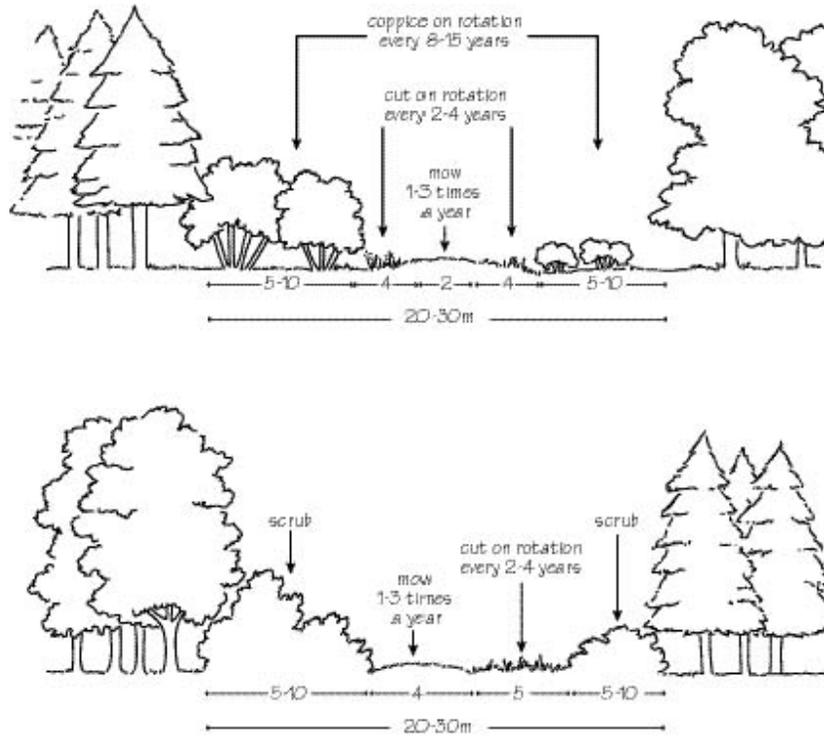


Fig 1 Ride management



Fig 2 vehicle access along side footpath



Fig 3 culvert

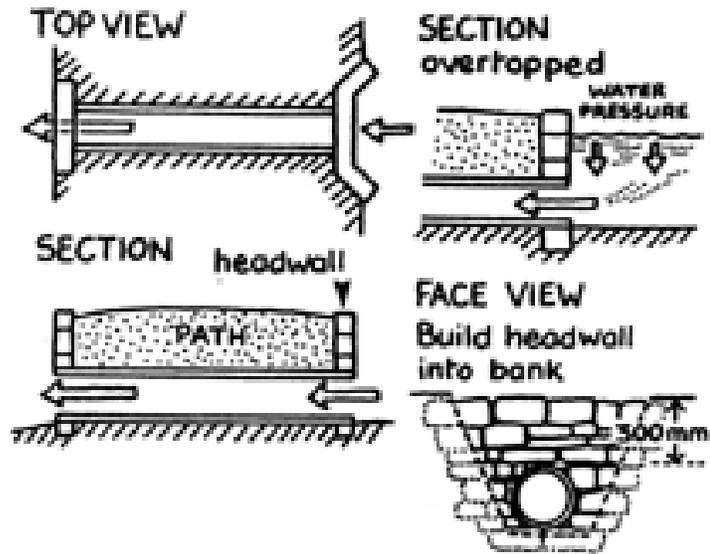


Fig 5 culvert design

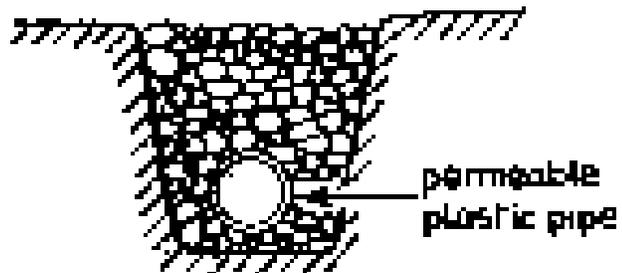


Fig 6 Cross section of a french drain

7. Proposed Works Procurement

