

Who we are

Formed in 1998, Pathways Consultancy works to connect people with place. Our work focusses on green and public spaces. We strive to help people to improve, celebrate and increase their use and care of their local green spaces. We have built a rich expertise in the tools that build this kind of connection: consultation, research, evaluation and facilitation. As trained Forest School leaders and also co-running an outdoor learning setting, we have also built up an expertise in the design and creation of creation of playable natural landscapes.

The site and the opportunity

Formally a stock piling yard for the National Coal Board, serving local pits, the RSPB reserve at Old Moor is now a haven for migrating wetland birds. Facilities for families and children include: a café; an education room; meadow and a small woodland for outdoor education; a sinuous path weaving alongside watery inlets; a family hide; a traditional play area. However ringed by arterial roads, the overall feel to a new visitor is of an urban nature reserve. Where one gets views of the watery expanses or gets a chance to go into the reeds that line the edges of the pools, a glimpse of a more immersive experience is possible.

The opportunity

The RSPB wants Old Moor to become the premier destination for families wanting to experience nature first hand, in an exciting and safe environment. They state: *'We want to introduce wild play on to the reserve. This is not nature themed play but truly wild play.'* They say they want children to 'fall in love with nature' and to become immersed in it. They want to see children climbing, rolling, crawling, discovering, building, inventing and exploring. And, through this close contact with the natural world, getting dirty, wet, tired, happy and muddy.

Meeting a need for outdoor play

Creative play is central to every child's learning and social development. And creative play outside in natural environments has been shown to have even deeper social and emotional benefits. Studies have shown that children's overall well-being, social skills and ability to concentrate and learn is stimulated by having natural, green environments in which to play.

Current play invitations and limits to play at Old Moor

The reserve at Old Moor does not at present lend itself to natural play. It's simply not wild enough. It's flat, it's difficult to get any height and views over the wetlands, there is little tree cover, formal paths channel people to the most cared for areas of the site and away from the woodland and reedy areas. In addition loose play materials are absent from the site at Old Moor and the play facilities that exist so far are unidimensional (ie: they can only be used in one way) such as a hop scotch course, a swing.

Play priorities for the Discovery Zone

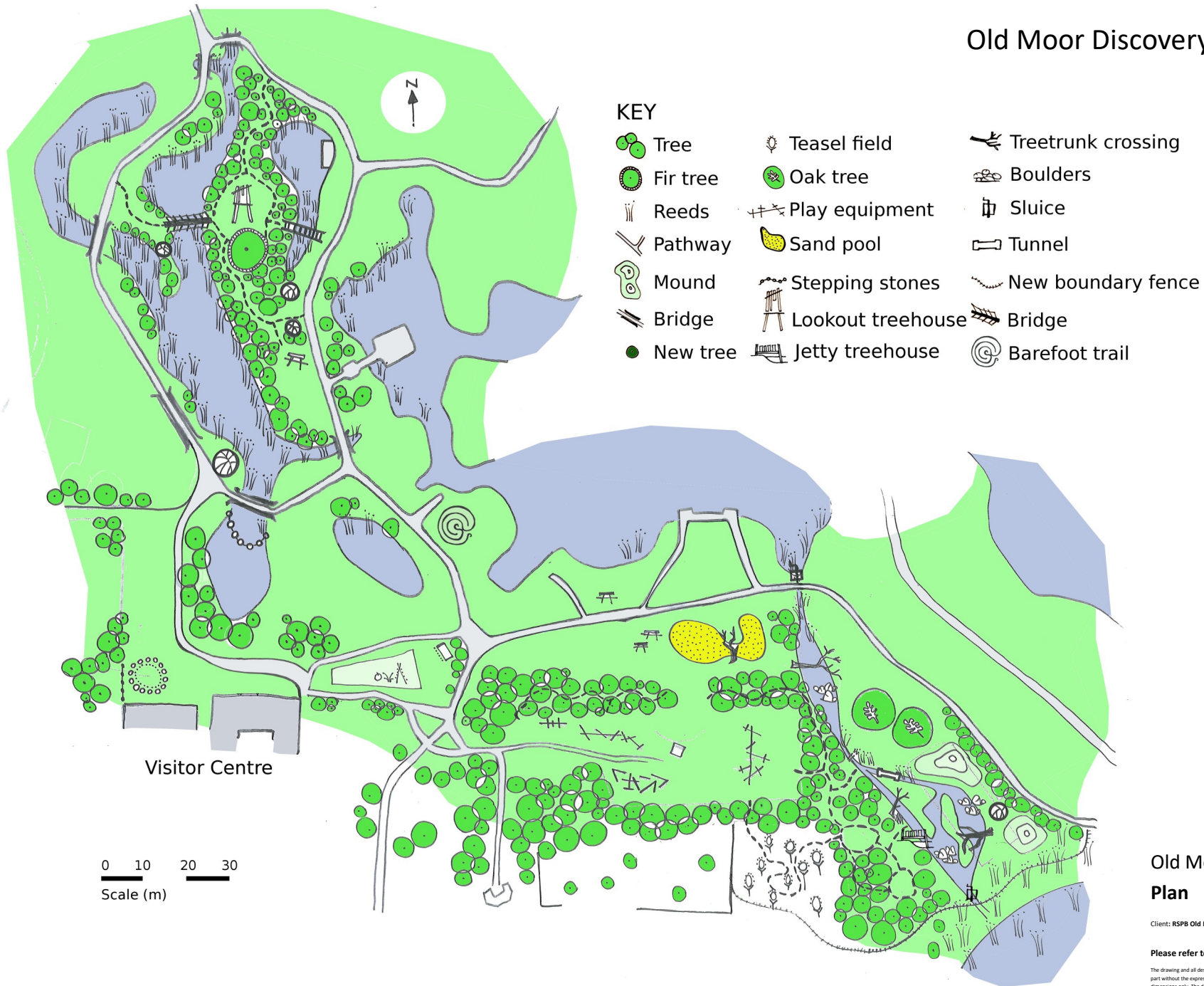
Play priorities for Old Moor have therefore been identified as follows:

- To create areas of the landscape that children can become immersed in
- To enable adventurous journeys across the site to discover new 'worlds'
- To introduce 'loose materials' for interaction with the environment.
- To make creative 'play prompts' to support imaginative play.
- To enable children to connect safely with water and mud

In all, a natural playable landscape to support adventurous, fun play.

Old Moor Discovery Zone

Old Moor Discovery Zone master plan



Old Moor Discovery Zone Master Plan

Client: RSPB Old Moor

Pathways

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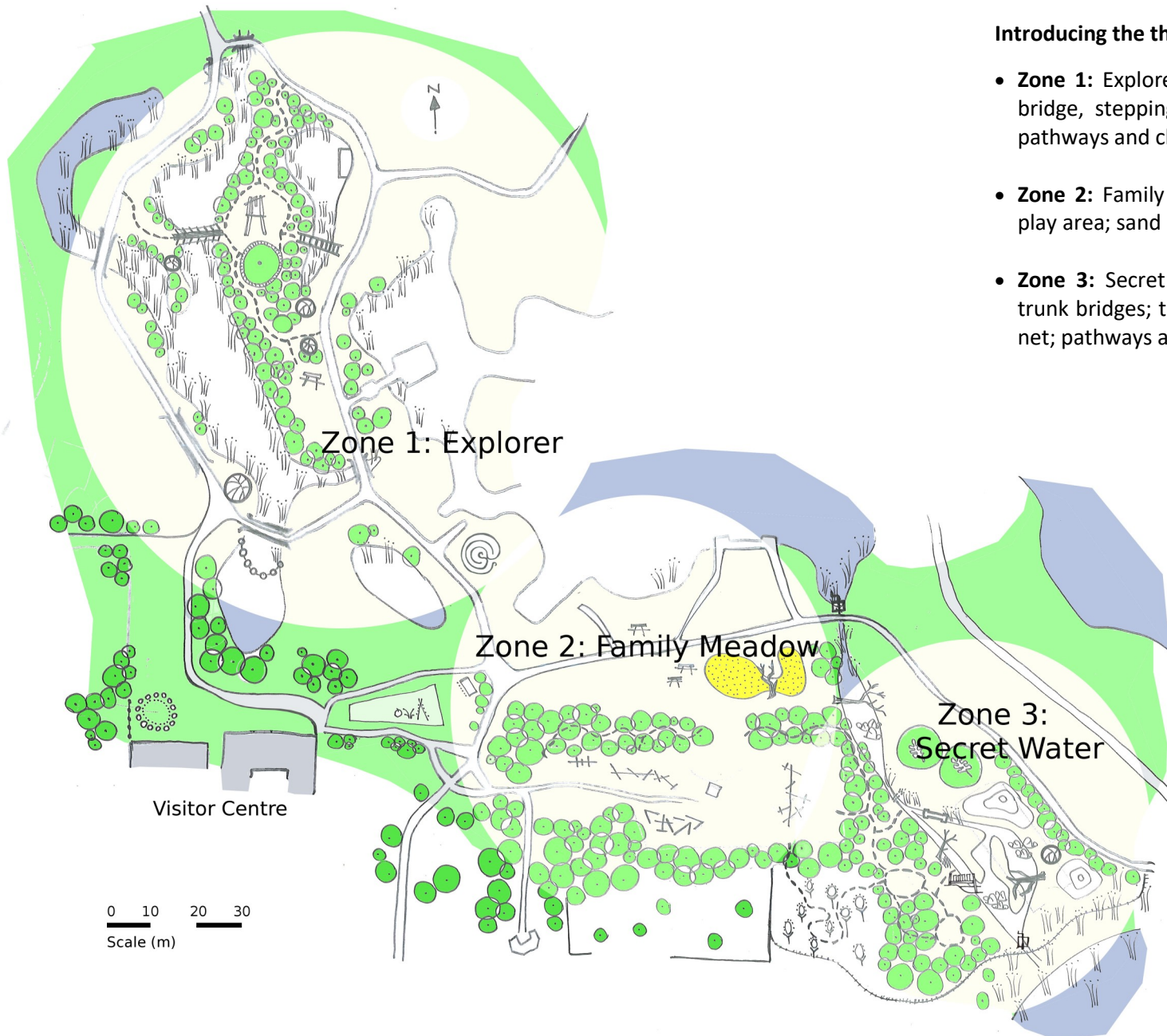
Please refer to separate detailed drawings each play element

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Old Moor Discovery Zones

Introducing the three zones

- **Zone 1: Explorer Zone:** floating rope bridge, wobbly wooden bridge, stepping stones, tower treehouse, willow dwellings, pathways and clearings and barefoot trail labyrinth.
- **Zone 2: Family Meadow:** pathways linking this to the formal play area; sand pool with clambering log.
- **Zone 3: Secret Water Zone:** watery channels; mounds; tree trunk bridges; tunnel; willow dwelling; jetty tree house; cargo net; pathways and clearings.



Old Moor Discovery Zone

Client: RSPB Old Moor Date: 06/11/2018
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Old Moor: Explorer Zone

The current site and future vision

The site here is currently a network of small wildlife ponds, viewed from a circular path. Thickets, reeds and waterways are all 'off-limits' currently. To create a wild, secluded Explorer Zone, we will thread child-sized paths through the wooded areas, that open into a secret glade with an exciting lookout treehouse. For younger children, we will create a barefoot trail in the shape of a labyrinth. Willow dwellings will be scattered across the area to encourage exploration and creative play. New ways of bridging the ponds will be built—stepping stones, a floating rope bridge and a wobbly wooden bridge.

Play elements

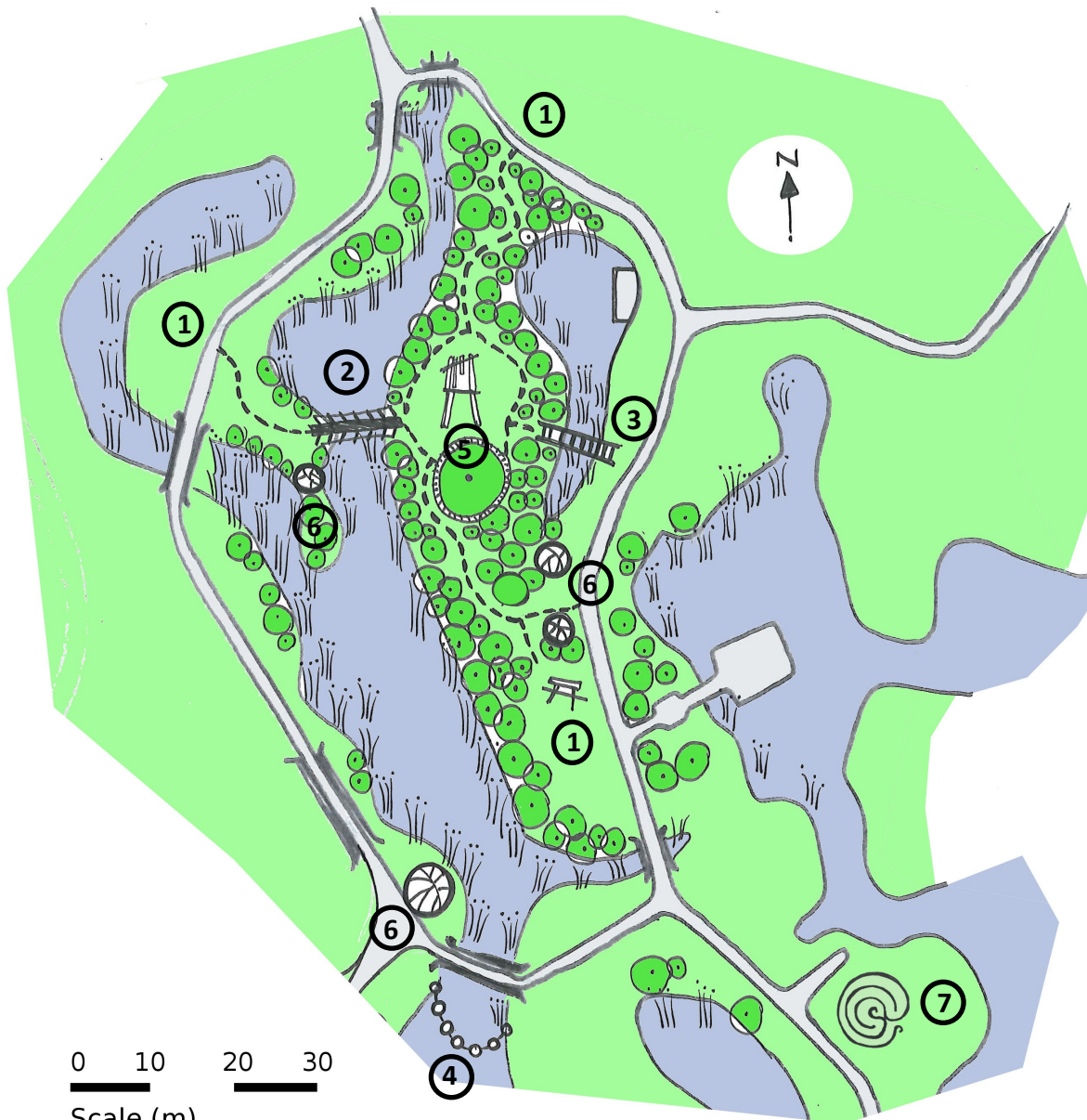
- Play element 1: Pathways and clearings
- Play element 2: Floating rope bridge
- Play element 3: Wobbly wooden bridge
- Play element 4: Boulder stepping stones
- Play element 5: Lookout treehouse
- Play element 6: Willow dwellings
- Play element 7: Barefoot labyrinth

Construction overview

Clear narrow pathways into the central point of the 'island'; make a clearing and erect a tall timber lookout structure, with bark chipping safety surface. Paths connect to two new bridges across the ponds. Access to any deep water prevented by leaving thick scrub and where this is not sufficient, installing brash fencing or using hedge laying techniques. Paths to be formed naturally by footfall. Create barefoot trail labyrinth filled with variety of sensory materials.

Old Moor Explorer Zone

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Old Moor Family Meadow Zone

The current site and future vision

The existing play area feels tired and run down and is surrounded by a dense thicket which prevents any views into the wider reserve. On the other side of this woodland fringe, is a rough meadow with little current play value—which stretches to the path and on to the pond dipping area. Our vision is to create a link from the existing play area to the wider reserve and target this part of Old Moor for families with younger children. The grassland shall be managed to become an attractive meadow area for picnics. In addition we shall install a natural looking sand pool with a tree trunk for clambering on.

Play elements

Play element 1: Connect formal play area to meadow

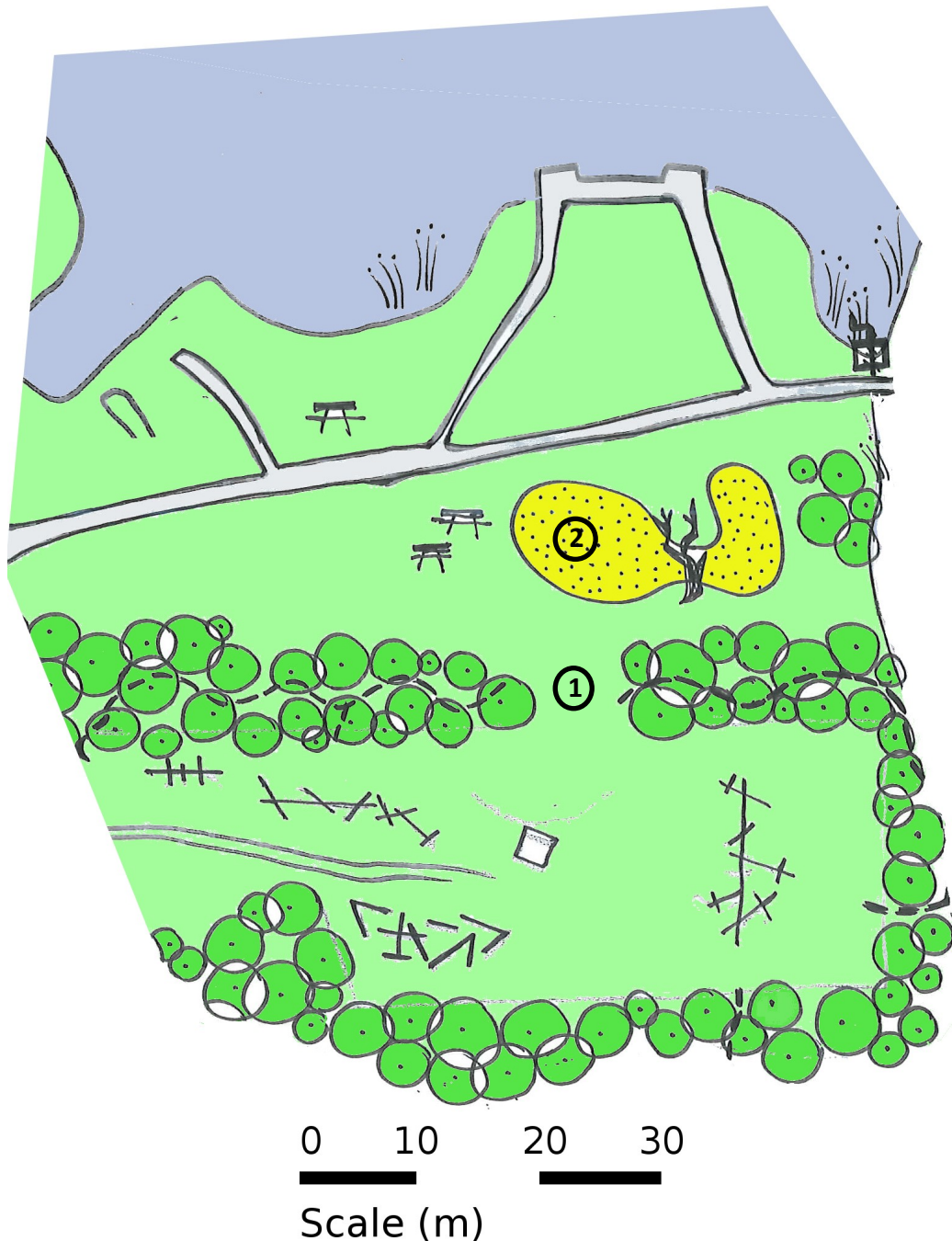
Play element 2: Sand pool with tree trunk log

Construction overview

Adjust/remove some of the items in the existing play area. Rangers and volunteer team to repaint existing structures and in some areas add planting across play area, giving the impression that the structures arise from the undergrowth whilst preserving a safe fall area. Link existing play area to meadow area and dipping platforms and lake beyond by removing a 4-5m wide section of trees that create the border between. Clear child-sized paths routes through the thicket. Build large sand pool, mounds and fingers (approx 9x6m) with tree trunk logs to play on. Mow the meadow on both sides of path, create areas for sitting and picnicking.

Old Moor Family Meadow Zone

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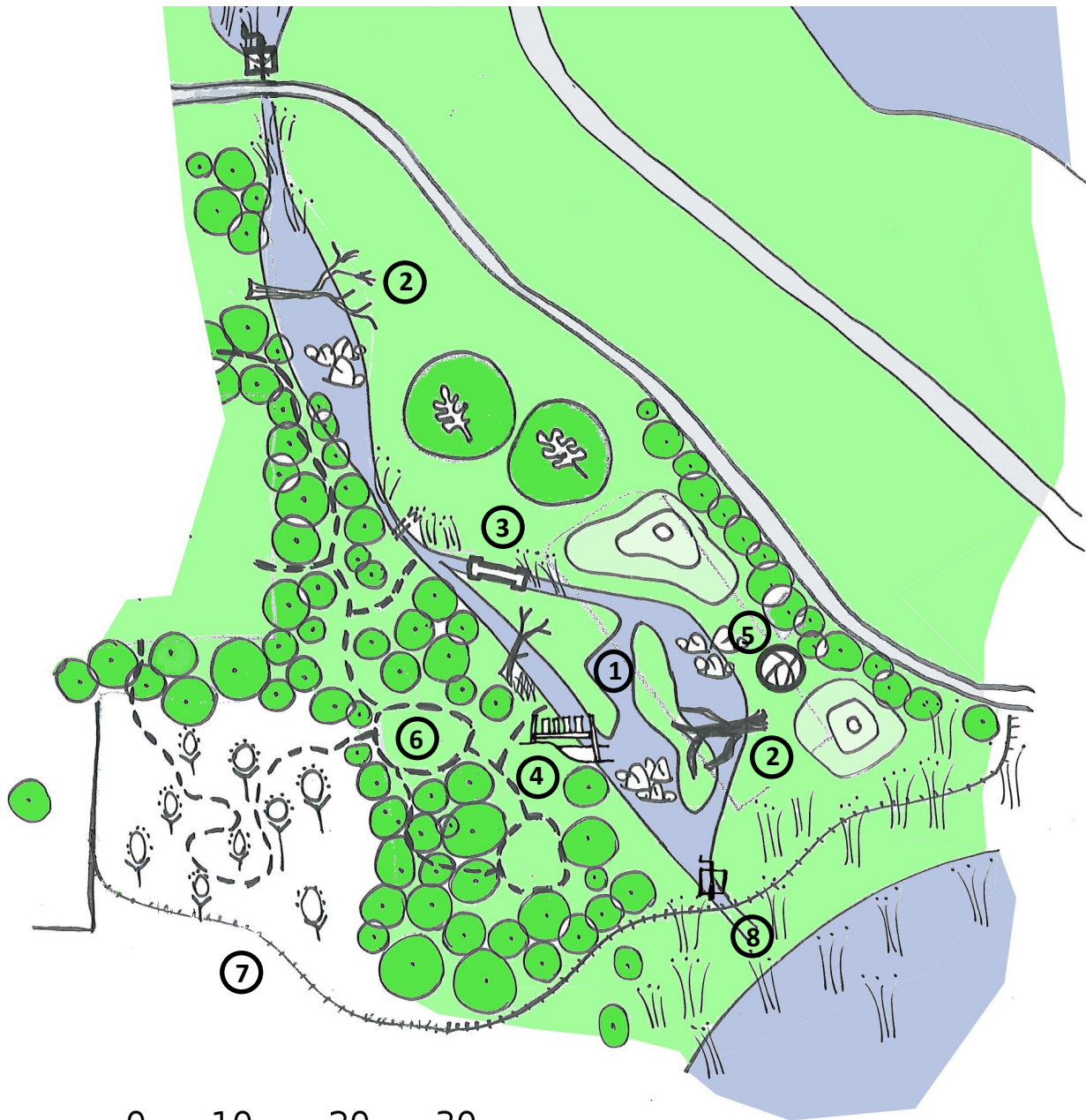
Old Moor: Secret Water Zone

The current site and future vision

The site here is currently a flat area of rough grassland. Features include a small ditch edging the thicket that borders the current play area and two mature oak trees. The vision is to create a watery playable landscape—mirroring those on the continent—but a first for the UK. Channels with 400mm of water will weave round islands, reached by scrambling through tunnels or along fallen tree trunks. A willow dwelling will be found in the hillocky area, and excitement added by a jetty-like treehouse reached through ribbons of paths through the thickets.

Play elements

- Play element 1: Secret water area
- Play element 2: Tree-trunk bridge and boulders
- Play element 3: Tunnel
- Play element 4: Jetty treehouse
- Play element 5: Willow dwellings
- Play element 6: Clearings and pathways
- Play element 7: Brush fence
- Play element 8: Sluice to control depth of water.



0 10 20 30

Scale (m)

Old Moor Secret Water Zone

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Old Moor: Secret Water Zone



Construction overview

Create water and mud play, by repurposing the existing overflow channel between the large pond to the north and the smaller pond at far south of the site. Fit penfold sluice at top to allow filling with water and at the and bottom to control depth.

Water play area will be sculpted by excavator to create a network of mounds, pools and channels with a concrete tunnel, two tree trunk bridge crossings, boulders and stepping stones. Base of channels to be compacted hardcore base, lined with pond-lining layer topped with 200mm pea gravel to create firm base for channel bottom. Sides defined by variety of natural edgings, timber, boulders, sawn posts.

On western bank entry points will be defined by gaps created in trees and shrubs. A jetty treehouse will be created to give another entrance to the channels. The woodland in this area will be managed to create a network of paths and clearings. The timber and wire fence between the formal play area and the woodland to be removed by RSPB. Openings created through to the teasel field.

A brash fence to be created to edge Secret Water to ensure children do not enter the pond at the south of the site here. The brash fence to run from the teasel field and orchard corner, through the teasel field, along the southern pond and connecting to the main path on western edge of Secret Water. A willow dwelling created between the new mounds and hillocks on the eastern side.

Old Moor Secret Water Zone

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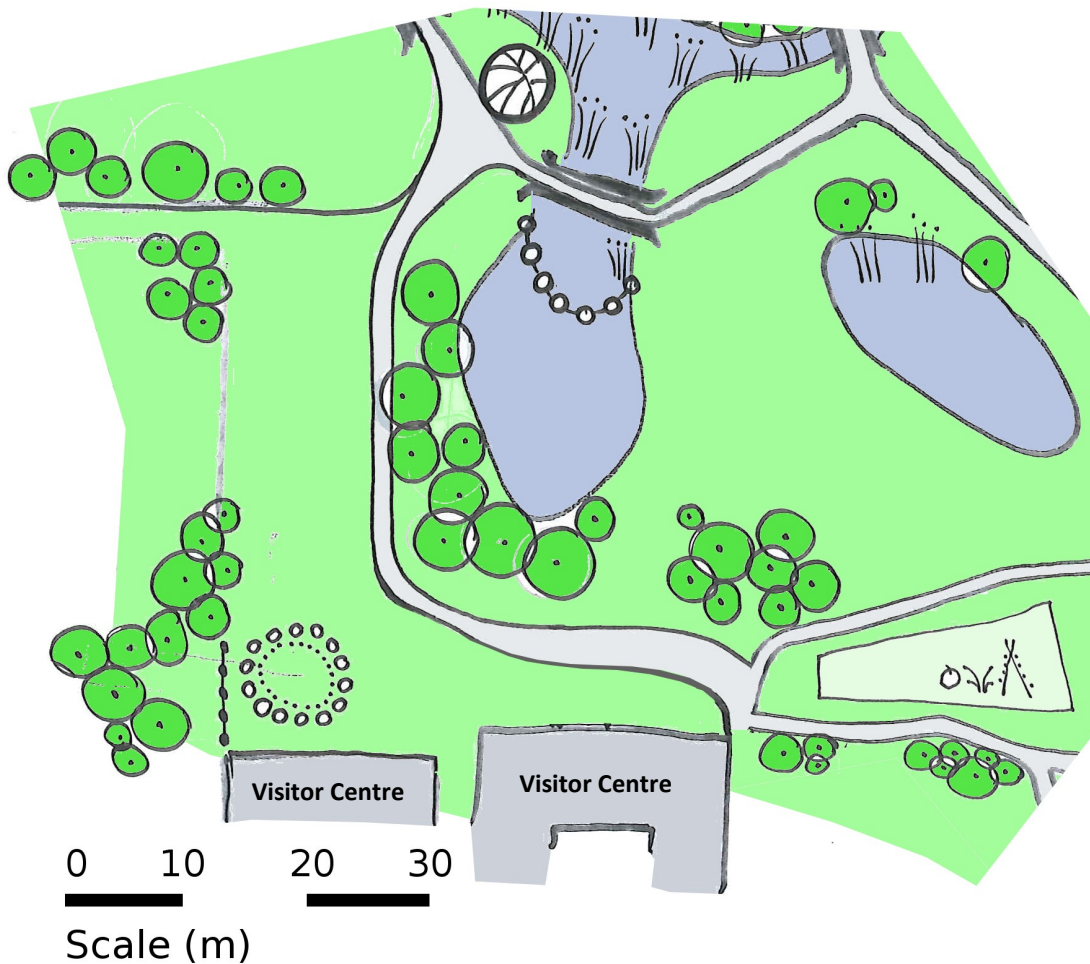
Additional work to support new entrance

Concept

To improve the visitor experience at Old Moor, the RSPB will be remodelling the entrance to the reserve. As part of this process the area to the north of the current visitor centre will be cleared—unused hides taken out, fences taken down and raised beds remodelled. A new route through to the reserve will be created zone will be created here, as well as new outdoor seating for the Education area. In addition to creating a new playable, landscape, Pathways will support the creation of the pathways to the reserve.

Construction

The RSPB team will clear the existing hides and transform the concrete foundations into attractive seating areas. They will clear the hedges and trees required to create a route and sightlines through to the reserve. Pathways to prepare the footings for a 80m running of path. RSPB to carry out various planting and garden design in front of centre. RSPB and Pathways to source from site 35 log rounds to create education area. Alternatively reuse the lumber from the planters that will be dismantled to create benches.



Construction notes for supporting the creation of a new entrance to the reserve:

Item	Material	Workmanship/Assembly	Quantity
1.	Log rounds	450mm high, 400-500mm diameter	35 no.
2.	Pathway onto reserve	Excavator to scratch route out, RSPB team to complete	

Old Moor Discovery Zone

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Timetable and additional information

Timetable

Work will be conducted on site from September 2019 through to March 2020 —so avoiding doing any noisy or earth work activity during the nesting season which begins in the Spring. The playable landscape will be completed at the end of March 2020 but areas will need reseeding with meadow grass and planting up with willows and reeds. The area will be ready to for playing on in the 2020summer holidays.

A skilled local team

We are committed to using local suppliers to support the delivery of this work—knowing the work will be benefited from the talents and skills that they will bring to this work. We are proud to showcase the work of local craftspeople – and love how their work is inspired from the landscapes in which they work and live. Rather than an ‘off the shelf’ process we aim to create the play area almost by hand – knitting together the skills and expertise of a team of people.

Ethical sourcing - a ‘womble’ approach

We are committed to using local suppliers and sourced materials where possible. We pride ourselves on environmentally friendly construction methods, limiting where possible concrete use, choosing natural alternatives to tanned or chemically treated timber, air/road miles for materials. Where possible we model ourselves on the Wombles—reusing materials from the worksite and repurposing as we go.

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