

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL  
CLIMATE AND BIODIVERSITY CABINET PANEL – 10 SEPTEMBER 2024  
REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR (RESIDENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD)

**THE COMMONS LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT PLAN 2025-2035**

**1 Executive Summary**

- 1.1 A Landscape Management Plan for a given site ensures that future management takes consideration of existing site conditions and provides actions to improve and enhance habitats and biodiversity.
- 1.2 It is a requirement for grant funding proposals and good practice to produce Landscape Management Plans for our nature reserves.
- 1.3 Each plan has a vision statement, outlining the overall goals and intentions of the site and its management.
- 1.4 If the Climate Biodiversity Cabinet panel unanimously approves the recommendation, to recommend to Cabinet that public consultation be carried out on the draft of The Commons Landscape Management Plan, the Executive Cabinet Member for Environment can approve commencement of the public consultation in accordance with their delegated authority.

**2 Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1 To note the draft Commons Landscape Management Plan and to recommend to Cabinet that Cabinet authorise a public consultation on the Plan.
- 2.2 If Recommendation 2.1 is unanimously approved by the Panel, the Executive Cabinet Member for Environment can give approval for public consultation to be carried out on the draft plan in accordance with their delegated authority.

**3 Explanation**

- 3.1 The Commons Local Nature Reserve is located to the southeast of Welwyn Garden City. The site is owned by Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council and has been managed under the terms of a 10-year Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) Agreement since 2014. This agreement has been extended until 31 October 2028.
- 3.2 The Landscape Management Plan is produced to ensure the council's Nature Reserves are maintained in a strategic and planned way. The plans typically run for 10 years.
- 3.3 The plan is designed to be read and understood by all who are involved or interested in the management of the site, with the aim that more people can understand, contribute and have a say in how the reserve is managed.

- 3.4 The existing management plan for The Commons is due to be renewed for 2025.
- 3.5 The new draft plan has been produced by our contractor (Maydencroft) working closely with the Council's Landscape Conservation Officer.
- 3.6 The draft plan gives a background to the sites, policy context, an analysis and evaluation of the site, aims and objectives, action plans and a monitoring/review process. Key features of the Plan are:
- The context of the site both historically and within the current landscape
  - The current habitats and wildlife provided by the site.
  - Policy context
  - Current and proposed management
  - Actions plan
- 3.7 Landscape Management Plans are available to Councillors, Officers, Volunteers and to the public.
- 3.8 The proposed public consultation will run for 8 weeks. Consultation documents will be made available to the public and sent directly to stakeholders.
- 3.9 Once the consultation feedback has been received, amendments may be made to the draft plan. The revised Commons Landscape Management Plan for 2025-2035 will then be resubmitted to Climate Biodiversity Panel and then to Cabinet for adoption.

#### **4 Legal Implication(s)**

- 4.1 The Commons was designated as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) in 1998. The site is also a designated Wildlife Site
- 4.2 There is legislation that is relevant to this Plan, and they are set out in pages 21-22 of the Management Plan. Most notably, section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 states that every public body, including local authorities, must from time to time consider what action the authority can properly take, consistently with the proper exercise of its functions, to further the general biodiversity objective. The general biodiversity objective is the consideration and enhancement of biodiversity in England through the exercise of functions in relation to England. Conserving biodiversity includes restoring or enhancing a species population or habitat. After giving the matter consideration the authority must (unless it concludes there is no new action it can properly take):
- 4.2.1 Determine such policies and specific objectives as it considers appropriate for taking action to further the general biodiversity objective, and
- 4.2.2 Take such action as it considers appropriate in the light of those policies and objectives, to further that objective.
- 4.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) sets out the national planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied.

- 4.4 Some of the key messages from the NPPF which are of relevance to the site and its context include: conserving and enhancing the natural environment, minimise and net gain on biodiversity, and considering the impacts of climate change.

## **5 Financial Implication(s)**

- 5.1 The vision will be achieved through the Aims and Objectives and the implementation of the Action Plans. The Action Plans consist of a Capital Works Programme and Annual Maintenance and Monitoring schedule.
- 5.2 The Commons Landscape Management Plan would be managed through existing budgets and grant funding (from central Government).

## **6 Risk Management Implications**

- 6.1 The main risks related to this the plan are: If some of the key actions are not undertaken there is a risk that some of the habitats may be affected which in turn could affect biodiversity on the site.

## **7 Security & Terrorism Implication(s)**

- 7.1 There are no security and terrorism implications.

## **8 Procurement Implication(s)**

- 8.1 There are no procurement implications arising from this Landscape Management Plan. The contractor who undertakes tree and landscape works was procured under contract through a tendering process in 2021.

## **9 Climate Change Implication(s)**

- 9.1 The appropriate management of the vegetation on site is likely to positively contribute to climate change mitigation.

## **10 Human Resources**

- 10.1 The landscape management plan is managed from existing resources in the landscape and ecology team, and any tree or landscape works is undertaken by contractors and also volunteers.

## **11 Health & Wellbeing Implications**

- 11.1 There is growing evidence to suggest that being in nature has positive effects on people's mental health. Studies have shown that green spaces can lower levels of stress and reduce rates of depression and anxiety, reduce cortisol levels and improve general well-being.
- 11.2 The proposed management plan looks to enhance access in and around the site and encourages use of the site by members of the public.

## **11 Communication and Engagement Implications**

- 11.1 Some of the proposed works within the action plan will be undertaken with the help of our established volunteer groups. The involvement of these groups means that there is good communication with these groups.

11.2 The management plan will be made available to everyone so those wishing to understand the proposed works and the reasons they are being undertaken.

## **12 Link to Corporate Priorities**

13.1 The subject of this report is linked to the Council's corporate priorities of a commitment towards, Attractive and Accessible Green Spaces.

## **14 Equality and Diversity**

14.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) was not completed because this report does not propose changes to existing service-related policies or the development of new service-related policies.

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### Appendices

Appendix A – The Commons Landscape Management Plan 2025-2035