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Democratic Services:
democracy@welhat.gov.uk

21 February 2025

You are requested to attend a meeting of the WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL CABINET to be held on Tuesday 4 March 2025 at 6.30 pm in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, The Campus, Welwyn Garden City, Herts, AL8 6AE.

AGENDA
PART 1

1. MINUTES

To confirm as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting held on 4th February 2025 (previously circulated).

2. APOLOGIES

3. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME AND PETITIONS

Up to thirty minutes will be made available for questions from members of the public on issues relating to the work of the Cabinet and to receive any petitions.

4. ACTIONS STATUS REPORT (Pages 5 - 6)

Report of the Executive Director (Finance and Transformation) on the status of actions agreed at the last Cabinet meeting.

5. NOTIFICATION OF URGENT BUSINESS TO BE CONSIDERED UNDER ITEM 12

6. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS BY MEMBERS

To note declarations of Members' disclosable pecuniary interests, non-disclosable pecuniary interests and non-pecuniary interests in respect of items on the Agenda.

7. ITEMS FOR RECOMMENDATION TO FULL COUNCIL

To consider the following items:

- (a) FP2113 Community Infrastructure Levy Adoption

Recommendation from CPPP on 18th February 2025:

[Agenda for Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel on Tuesday 18th February 2025, 7.30 pm – Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council](#)

8. ITEMS REQUIRING KEY DECISION

To consider the following items for decision in the current Forward Plan:-

- (a) FP2124 Community Engagement Strategy (Pages 7 - 22)

Report of the Executive Director (Finance & Transformation)

- (b) FP2080 Tree & Woodland Strategy (Pages 23 - 78)

Report of the Executive Director (Resident Services & Climate Change)

- (c) FP2082 The Landscape Management Plan (Pages 79 - 134)

Report of the Executive Director (Resident Services & Climate Change)

- (d) FP2117 Green Belt Stage 4 Assessment (Pages 135 - 140)

Report of the Executive Director (Place)

9. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CABINET PANELS

Recommendations from the meetings of the Council's Cabinet Panels:

- (a) FP2119 Review of former Tenant Arrears and Rent Arrears Policy

Recommendation from CHP on 19th February 2025:

[Agenda for Cabinet Housing Panel on Wednesday 19th February 2025, 7.30 pm – Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council](#)

- (b) FP2123 Tenancy Agreement

Recommendation from CHP on 19th February 2025:

[Agenda for Cabinet Housing Panel on Wednesday 19th February 2025, 7.30 pm – Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council](#)

10. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM GRANTS BOARD

- (a) FP2141 Community Grant Allocations 2025/26

The report for this item is to follow.

The Cabinet will receive the recommendations of the Grants Board held on the 20th February 2025:

[Agenda for Grants Board on Thursday 20th February 2025, 6.30 pm – Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council](#)

11. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION - INTERIM PLANS SUBMISSION (Pages 141 - 152)

Report of the Chief Executive

12. SUCH OTHER BUSINESS AS, IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIRMAN, IS OF SUFFICIENT URGENCY TO WARRANT IMMEDIATE CONSIDERATION

13. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Cabinet is asked to resolve:

That under Section 100(A)(2) and (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be now excluded from the meeting for Item 14 on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of confidential or exempt information as defined in Section 100(A)(3) and Paragraph 3 (private financial or business information) of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act (as amended).

In resolving to exclude the public in respect of the exempt information, it is considered that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

PART II

14. ITEMS OF AN EXEMPT NATURE REQUIRING KEY DECISION

To consider the following item of an exempt nature:

(a) FP2115 Minor Building Works Contract (Pages 153 - 156)

Report of the Executive Director (Resident Services & Climate Change)

15. ANY OTHER BUSINESS OF A CONFIDENTIAL OR EXEMPT NATURE AT THE DISCRETION OF THE CHAIRMAN

Circulation: Councillors A.Scott R.Grewal
S.Bonfante G.Moore
M.Holloway K.Thorpe
J.Quinton

Senior Leadership Team
Press and Public (except Part II Items)

If you require any further information about this agenda please contact Democratic Services, Governance Services on email – democracy@welhat.gov.uk

Agenda Item 4

Part I

Main author: Clare Cade

Executive Member: Cllr Kieran Thorpe

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET – 4 MARCH 2025

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (FINANCE AND TRANSFORMATION)

ACTIONS STATUS REPORT

1 Executive Summary

1.1 In order to ensure that actions identified at meetings are completed, this report lists the actions from the last Cabinet meeting, those responsible for completing each action and its current status.

2 Recommendation(s)

2.1 That Members note the status of the following actions which were identified at the last Cabinet meeting on 4 February 2025:

Minute	Action	Status/ Date Completed
360.1	FP2112 Award of Contract for Urban Tree Maintenance	Cabinet: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Noted the intention to award the Urban Tree Maintenance contract for an initial period commencing on 1st April 2025 and ending on 31st December 2027, with an optional 12-month extension, to Gristwood and Toms Limited.2. Agreed to delegate authority to award the contract to the Executive Director (Resident Services and Climate Change) in consultation with the Executive Member (Environment) following discussions with Hertfordshire County Council on their funding level under the Agency Agreement.
360.2	FP2110 Transformation Strategy	Cabinet noted the report.
361.1	FP2092 Local Plan Early Engagement Reporting and LDS	Cabinet agreed: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The key themes to inform the preparedness of the Local Plan.2. The Local Development Scheme be published on the Council's website, and a copy be sent to the Secretary of State to comply with the Written Ministerial Statement of 12 December 2024.
362	Appointments of Cabinet Panels and Outside Body	Cabinet agreed: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Councillor Julie Cragg to replace Councillor Thusu on the Climate Biodiversity Cabinet Panel; and2. Councillor Mark Short to replace Councillor Thusu on the Cabinet Planning and Parking Panel.3. Councillor Kieran Thorpe to replace Councillor Broach on the Hatfield Community Sports Fund Board.

363	Quarter 3 Capital Budget Monitoring Report 2024-25	Cabinet: 1. Noted: a) The capital forecast outturn positions. b) The forecast position as set out at 31 December 2024 for funding of the capital programme and reserve balances. 2. Approved the virements as set out in section 3.2 of the report.
364	Quarter 3 Revenue Budget Monitoring Report 2024-25	Cabinet: 1. Noted the revenue forecast outturn position as at Quarter Three (31 December 2024) and noted the position on debts set out in Section 5 of this report. 2. Approved the virements set out in Section 4.1.3 of this report.
365	Quarter 3 Performance Report	Cabinet noted the report and its contents.
366	Risk Management Quarter 3 Risk Registers	Cabinet noted the Risk Register at Quarter 3, and the comments and actions in respect of the strategic and serious/severe operational risks.
367	Quarter 3 Achievement List	Cabinet noted the report and its contents.

During the period since the last Cabinet meeting, the following decisions were taken by Cabinet Members exercising their individual delegated powers in accordance with paragraph 18 of the Cabinet Procedure Rules within the Constitution.

	Action	Date Completed
2025-07	Award of contract for Hatfield Marketplace	February 2025

Part I

Item No: 0

Main author: Kirsten Roberts

Executive Member: Jane Quinton

All Wards

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET – 4 MARCH 2025

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (FINANCE AND TRANSFORMATION)

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

1 Executive Summary

1.1 This report introduces the refreshed Community Engagement Strategy in Appendix 1.

2 Recommendation(s)

2.1 That Cabinet agrees:

2.1.1 The Community Engagement Strategy in Appendix 1

2.1.2 The Associated Action Plan for 2025-26 in Appendix B.

3 Explanation

3.1 The council's vision is to put the Community at the Heart of everything we do.

3.2 To do that successfully, the council recognises it needs to work in partnership with residents, businesses and other stakeholders across the borough and beyond.

3.3 Community engagement gives the council's stakeholders the chance to be informed, have their say and be part of the decisions that matter to them.

3.4 This strategy sets out the council's approach to community engagement over the next three years (2025-2028). This strategy should be read in conjunction with the councils' Transformation Strategy which sets out the council's approach to improving customer experience and promoting channel shift and the council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

Implications

4 Legal Implication(s)

4.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the contents of this report.

4.2 Officers will seek guidance from the legal team as part of developing surveys, consultations and events, as appropriate.

5 Financial Implication(s)

5.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the contents of this report and it is expected that the 2025-26 action plan in Appendix B will be delivered through existing budgets.

6 Risk Management Implication(s)

- 6.1 There are no direct risk implications arising from the contents of this report. Any key risks associated from any community engagement activities will be reviewed by Officers at the Community Engagement Group. Any new corporate risks arising from community engagement activities will be added to the council's corporate risk register.

7 Security & Terrorism Implication(s)

- 7.1 There are no direct security and terrorism implications arising from the contents of this report. Public safety at events will be considered by the Safety Advisory Group (SAG): [Safety Advisory Group – Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council](#)

8 Procurement Implication(s)

- 8.1 There are no direct procurement implications arising from the contents of this report.

9 Climate Change Implication(s)

- 9.1 There are no direct climate change implications arising from the contents of this report.

10 Health and Wellbeing Implication(s)

- 10.1 There are no direct health and wellbeing implications arising from the contents of this report.

11 Communication and Engagement Implication(s)

- 11.1 All community engagement activities will be promoted through the council's Communications team. Communications Plans will be developed, as required.
- 11.2 The council's Community Engagement Group will continue to meet on a regular basis to discuss upcoming opportunities for engagement with the community.
- 11.3 The council's Community & Engagement Group, Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cross-Party Customer Service Board have been consulted as part of the development of this strategy.

12 Link to Corporate Priorities

- 12.1 This report is linked to all the council's corporate priorities and task forces.

13 Equality and Diversity

- 13.1 An Equality Impact Assessment was completed and indicates that Community Engagement has the potential to have positive, negative and neutral impacts on protected characteristics, depending on the type of engagement. This is because from time to time, some community engagement may target a particular protected characteristic which may have a positive impact on those with that protected characteristic. However, this may have a neutral or negative impact on those with other protected characteristics.

13.2 This strategy will ensure that the council continues to develop a range of opportunities to ensure resident views are heard and develop an overall programme of community engagement that is accessible and provides opportunities for all.

Name of author Kirsten Roberts
Title Assistant Director (Customer Service & Transformation)

Date February 2025

Appendix 1 Community Engagement Strategy
Appendix A Welwyn Hatfield Equality & Diversity Profiles
Appendix B Community Engagement Action Plan 2025-26

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Community Engagement Strategy

Scope:	This strategy applies to all employees of the council.
Effective Date:	March 2025
Review Date:	March 2028
Author:	Assistant Director (Customer Services & Transformation)
Strategy Owned by:	Assistant Director (Customer Services & Transformation)
Statute:	Health & Social Care Act 2012 Public Sector Equality Duty, created by Equality Act 2010 Local Government Act (1997) Local Government and Public Involvement Act Localism Act (2011) Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 Climate Change Act (2008)
National Standards and Guidance	Best Value Standards and Intervention
Related Policies	Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy Vulnerable Person & Reasonable Adjustment Policy Resident Involvement Strategy Transformation Strategy Transition to Net Zero Strategy



1 Scope

- 1.1 This strategy outlines the council's approach to Community Engagement.

2 Policy Statement

- 2.1 Our Vision is to put the Community at the Heart of everything we do.
- 2.2 To do that successfully, we need to work in partnership with residents, businesses and other stakeholders across the borough and beyond.
- 2.3 Community engagement gives our stakeholders the chance to be informed, have their say and be part of decisions that matter to them.
- 2.4 This strategy sets out the council's approach to community engagement over the next three years (2025-2028). This strategy should be read in conjunction with the council's Transformation Strategy which sets out our approach to improving customer experience and promoting channel shift and the council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

3 Our Community

- 3.1 With a population of around 120,000 residents, Welwyn Hatfield is located in central Hertfordshire, just off the A1(M) motorway and 25 minutes by train from Central London.
- 3.2 Many major businesses are based in the borough, including the headquarters of Tesco and Ocado, as well as many smaller and independent businesses. The University of Hertfordshire in Hatfield is famous for its strong ties with industry, attracting students from around the world for courses in business, engineering and computer science. The University of London's Royal Veterinary College also has a campus in the borough and is ranked number 1 globally for Veterinary Science.
- 3.3 We are a landlord, responsible for engaging with tenants and leaseholders in over 10,000 properties. Please refer to the council's Resident Involvement Strategy for more detailed information about tenant and leaseholder engagement ([Council Housing Resident Involvement Strategy 2024-2027 – Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council](#)).
- 3.4 From our most recent Community Survey undertaken in Autumn 2023, 57% of respondents told us they feel well informed by the council. This is consistent with our tenants' view, with 57% of tenants surveyed telling us we listen and act upon their views and 70% telling us we keep them informed about things that matter to them (based on 2024-25 Tenant Satisfaction Measures).

3.5 Data published by Herts Insight shows that the borough has an equal split between males (49%) and females (51%), with 65% of the population between 16-64 years old. Most residents are white British (78.7.5%) followed by Asian/Asian British (8.8%), with Polish and Romanian amongst the most Non-English spoken languages. Over 17,906 residents assess themselves as disabled under the Equalities Act 2010 and around 6% of the population have informal caring responsibilities. Christianity is the most common religion (47%). Please refer to Appendix A for a further breakdown.

4 Types of Community Engagement

4.1 The council engages with the community in the following ways at different levels:

	Inform – Providing Information	Consult – offering options, deciding together or using feedback to improve services	Empower – Support independent community action	Collaborate-forming partnerships with the community to put decisions into practice
What this is	We provide stakeholders with information about Council services and keep them informed.	We engage and consult with the community through surveys and formal consultation. This feedback will be used to make decisions on service changes and service improvements.	We support the community to take action and make positive changes in their community.	We work collaboratively with our community, forming meaningful partnerships to make a positive difference.
How we do this:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessible Council websites • Social media pages that are regularly updated with council news and events • Regular Press Releases promoting council news and events • Residents' Magazine • Tenant Newsletter 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statutory consultation e.g. planning, parking. • Survey on new strategies/service changes • Regular Staff survey • Conduct borough-wide survey every three years • Offer satisfaction survey as part of complaints process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving self-serve so our community can contact us and access services more easily • Support network of volunteers working across the council • Sign post to funding and grant opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents panel for tenants • Youth Council • Community Safety Partnership • Creating effective partnerships with stakeholders.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business Newsletter • Staff Newsletter • Project Newsletters • Publish key decisions in advance of them being made • Promote partners and partner events, as appropriate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake rolling tenant satisfaction surveys 	<p>and other resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linking individuals and community groups with shared goals 	
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5 Our Community Engagement Commitments

5.1 Our commitments to drive community engagement are:

<p>1. More Effective Communication</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer information in clear language and different formats • Ensure information of the Council website is useful, clear and easy to navigate • Engage our communities through a range of communication channels • Provide regular opportunities for feedback • Share updates on our service and performance • Be open and transparent
<p>2. Partnership Working to Influence and Improve Services</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a culture where stakeholders are actively encouraged to be involved in scrutinising, shaping and feeding back on services, helping to improve customer satisfaction. • Consult with stakeholders, ensuring worthwhile conversations and feedback on results. • Provide a simple, accessible and defined complaints process and using feedback to shape future service delivery. • Demonstrate the results and impact of stakeholder involvement.
<p>3. Widen Participation</p>

- Create inclusive involvement opportunities to suit different needs and interest.
- Ensure all residents who want to, have the opportunity to engage with us and actively seek to reach those communities and individuals who do not engage with us.
- Identify a wide-ranging stakeholder group.
- Raise awareness of our stakeholder involvement activities.
- Support resident groups and partner organisations.
- Continue to consider what may prevent stakeholders from engaging with us and how these can be overcome.
- Improve the digital offering to widen our audience and access to services.

4. Celebrate our Thriving Communities

- Work with partner organisations to strengthen our communities.
- Support residents and business to take pride in where they live.
- Celebrate our successes with our community.
- Consider our stakeholders at the heart of decision making.

5. Ensure our Engagement meets our Standards

- Review achievements against this strategy every year.
- Make surveys and consultations clear and easy to access.
- Provide clear governance and terms of reference for the different engagement groups, as required.
- Treat all customers with fairness and respect, ensuring we understand their different needs.
- Continue to be inclusive and representative.

6 Governance

- 6.1 To deliver on the commitments, the council has drafted a Community Engagement action plan. Please refer to Appendix B. This will be overseen by the council's Community Engagement Group, a group of officers who meet monthly to review community events and engagement.
- 6.2 Key Community Engagement achievements will be reported monthly to Senior Management Team and quarterly to Cabinet as part of the council's quarterly achievements list and Annual Report.

6.3 The Action Plan will be reviewed and agreed annually by Cabinet.

Appendix A – Welwyn Hatfield Equality & Diversity Profile

Appendix B – Community & Engagement Action Plan 2025-26

Action	Service Responsible	By When
More Effective Communication		
Review inclusivity and accessibility of service information (including a review of Sign Video and Language Line)	Transformation & Customer Services (Customer Services)	July 2025
Review the effectiveness of Council’s social media platforms, residents’ magazine and ONE Website	Transformation & Customer Services (Communications, Engagement & Marketing)	September 2025
Develop monthly communication and engagement insight reporting	Transformation & Customer Services (Communications, Engagement & Marketing)	April 2025
Identify appropriate tools to support with effective consultation and engagement	Transformation & Customer Services (Communications, Engagement & Marketing)	June 2025
Partnership Working to Influence and Improve Services		
Promote and support key stakeholder’s activity, as appropriate.	All	Ongoing
Review the council’s existing communication and promotion of all town centres events	Transformation & Customer Services (Communications, Engagement & Marketing) Regeneration & Economic Development	September 2025
Widen Participation		
Identify all the council’s stakeholders and develop a stakeholder contact list	Transformation & Customer Services (Communications, Engagement & Marketing)	September 2025
Achieve level AA or above in line with government web content accessibility guidelines	IT & Digital	Ongoing

Develop a business case for a community e-newsletter	Transformation & Customer Services (Communications, Engagement & Marketing)	September 2025
Implement a resident satisfaction survey	Transformation & Customer Services	September 2025
Promote opportunities to be involved in Resident's Panel (for tenants & leaseholders) and the Youth Council	All	Ongoing
Celebrate our Thriving Communities		
Work with the council's Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Steering Group to ensure engagement and events represent the community	All	Ongoing
Publish the Council's quarterly achievement list and Annual Plan to celebrate achievements with our stakeholders.	Transformation & Customer Services	Ongoing
Ensure our Engagement meets our Standards		
Refresh the council's Community & Stakeholder Engagement Group	Transformation & Customer Services (Communications, Engagement & Marketing)	March 2025
Publish the council's Event Calendar on the ONE website	Transformation & Customer Services (Communications, Engagement & Marketing)	Ongoing from April 2025
Feedback and evidence how stakeholder views are considered as part of the decision-making process.	Transformation & Customer Services (Communications, Engagement & Marketing)	Ongoing

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Our Community: Welwyn Hatfield

POPULATION

Welwyn Hatfield has 121,749 residents



- 19% are under 16
- 65% are between 16-64
- 16% are over 65

RACE AND ETHNICITY



- 78.7% are White
- 8.8% are Asian/Asian British
- 6.1% are Black/Black British

'Polish and Romanian are the most spoken non-English languages in Welwyn Hatfield'

SEXUAL ORIENTATION



- The 2021 ONS Census estimates around 2.6% of the Welwyn Hatfield population are lesbian, gay or bisexual

DISABILITY



- 17,906 assessed themselves as disabled under the Equalities Act 2010

'Disabled people are five times less likely to be employed than non-disabled people'

CARERS

- Around 6% of people in Welwyn Hatfield have informal caring responsibilities

RELIGION AND BELIEF



- 47% of Welwyn Hatfield residents classify themselves as Christian
- 3% of residents follow Islam
- 3% are Hindu

'Urdu, Bengali-Sylheti, Arabic, Punjabi, Gujarati, Hindi and Tamil are mainly spoken by Muslim and Hindu population in Welwyn Hatfield'

For more information visit www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/equalities or email: equalities@hertfordshire.gov.uk

Full community profiles are available on www.hertslis.org



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Part I

Item No: 0

Main author: Oliver Waring

Executive Member: Cllr Sandreni

Bonfante

Ward: All

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET – 4 MARCH 2025

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (RESIDENT SERVICES AND CLIMATE CHANGE)

TREE AND WOODLAND STRATEGY 2025-2029

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this strategy is to set out the council's approach to managing its trees and woodland by supporting our changing and growing borough whilst also maintaining and improving the borough's tree stock and natural environment.
- 1.2 The strategy and its policies set out how Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council manages its trees and woodlands. The priority is to ensure trees and woodlands are in a safe condition whilst acknowledging that trees are natural resource that grow and change over time.
- 1.3 The strategy also acknowledges the importance of trees and woodland in the landscape, for climate change mitigation and for the health and wellbeing of the Borough's residents and visitors.
- 1.4 The proposed Trees and Woodland Strategy has been revised and the proposed strategy is in Appendix A.
- 1.5 A public consultation on the proposed strategy was undertaken between 11 November and 30 December 2024. There were 34 responses and strong support for the strategy with some comments received from respondents. The survey results can be found in Appendix B and C.
- 1.6 As a result of this feedback, the strategy has been amended to correct minor typos and to add information about watering of newly planted trees. There were some comments about additional works that respondents would like to see carried out to trees but the main rationale for tree maintenance is for health and safety reasons.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 For Cabinet to approve the Tree and Woodland Strategy 2025-2029.

3 Explanation

- 3.1 Best practice and guidance for Local Authorities is to have an agreed strategy to manage its trees and woodlands. It ensures there is strategic and consistent approach to tree risk management and the management of budgets as well stating clearly what and when the council will undertake works to trees.
- 3.2 A balanced approach to managing trees takes account of their contribution to biodiversity, the environment, human health, safety and quality of life. An

appropriate response to tree risk takes account of the human and financial costs involved in controlling risks. It also gives due value of trees in the widest sense.

- 3.3 Whilst it is acknowledged that trees, particularly in urban areas, can cause issues or can be considered a nuisance the wider benefits of trees both aesthetically and environmentally often outweigh these issues. This document draws upon the council's knowledge and experience as well as accepted industry standards to set aims for the planting, promotion and protection of the treed landscape and provides continuity in the long-term management of trees and woodlands. It will be used by the council, local groups, individuals, agencies and any other interested parties as a reference document.
- 3.4 Public consultation was undertaken on the proposed Trees and Woodland Strategy between 11 November 2024 and 30 December 2024. There was an online survey on the Council's website and the consultation was promoted via a press release, the website, and it was sent to a list of stakeholders/interested parties. The draft strategy was also presented at the Climate and Diversity Cabinet Panel.
- 3.5 There were 34 responses to the public consultation. Respondent information is provided in Appendix B.
- 3.6 Comments were received via the online consultation. Please see Appendix C which includes the response from officers. These have been reviewed and considered by the Landscape and Ecology Team. As a result of this feedback, the strategy has been amended to correct minor typos and to add information about watering of newly planted trees. There were some comments about additional works that respondents would like to see carried out to trees but the main rationale for tree maintenance is for health and safety reasons.
- 3.7 If the Tree and Woodlands Strategy is approved, it will be available to Councillors, Officers, Volunteers and to the public on the Council's website.

4 Legal Implication(s)

- 4.1 Landowners/managers have a common law duty of care to ensure trees are as safe as reasonably practicable. A tree owner should take steps to ensure that they are aware of whether a tree is likely to cause harm, and if it is, should take appropriate actions as necessary.
- 4.2 Legislation, including the occupiers' Liability act 1957 and 1984 and the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, place a duty on tree and woodland owners to consider the safety of those visiting their land.
- 4.3 The tree and woodland strategy demonstrate that the Council is taking a reasonable and practicable approach to the management of its trees and woodlands.

5 Financial Implication(s)

- 5.1 Management of the council's trees and woodlands is undertaken within existing budgets.

6 Risk Management Implications

6.1 The Tree and Woodland strategy demonstrates the Council has considered the risks posed by trees and woodlands and shows a reasonable and practicable approach to the management of those risks.

7 Security & Terrorism Implication(s)

7.1 There are no security and terrorism implications.

8 Procurement Implication(s)

8.1 There are no additional procurement implications arising from this strategy.

9 Climate Change Implication(s)

9.1 Trees and Woodlands play a vital role in mitigating the effects of climate change. Trees remove carbon dioxide from the air, storing carbon in the trees and soil, and releasing oxygen into the atmosphere.

9.2 Trees play a role in decreasing high summer temperatures in built up areas, reducing the urban heat island effect. Trees reduce flooding by slowing rainfall through the canopies of trees and soaking up water in the soil.

9.3 Appropriate management of the Council's tree stock ensures that trees are retained, and new planting is undertaken where it is appropriate.

9.4 The appropriate management of trees and woodlands contributes to the goals and objectives set in the Council's Climate change strategy.

10 Human Resources

10.1 There are no Human Resource implications. The strategy takes account existing resources.

11 Health & Wellbeing Implications

11.1 There is growing evidence to suggest that being in nature, including trees and woodland, 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 Conserving and enhancing trees and woodlands will benefit and enhance green spaces and nature within the borough. This will in turn have a positive effect in the health and wellbeing of residents and those visiting the borough.

11 Communication and Engagement Implications

11.1 Once approved, the Tree and Woodland Strategy and its policies will be published so that they are publicly available, to inform those wishing to understand process and how the trees and woodlands are to be managed in the Borough.

12 Link to Corporate Priorities

13.1 The subject of this report is linked to the Council's corporate priorities of a commitment towards Action on Climate Change.

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.

Name of author	Oliver Waring
Title	Landscape and Ecology Team Manager
Date	27 January 2025

Appendices

Appendix A – Tree and woodland strategy 2025-2029

Appendix B – Survey respondent information

Appendix C - Summary of consultation comments with responses from Environment, Landscape and Climate Change Service Manager.

Appendix A

Tree and Woodland Strategy

**Securing a long-term future for our trees and woodlands and
providing management and protection for generations to come**

2025 - 2029

www.welhat.gov.uk

**WELWYN
HATFIELD**
BOROUGH COUNCIL



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1. Introduction

- 1.1. The purpose of this strategy is to set out the council's approach to managing its trees and woodlands within the Borough by:
 - Supporting our changing and growing borough whilst also maintaining and improving the boroughs tree stock and natural environment.
 -
 - Contributing to biodiversity
 - Being a leader in tree planting and maintenance in the Borough. Contributing to the health of residents in the borough by bringing about improvements to air quality by sequestration of carbon dioxide and reduction in levels of nitrogen dioxide. By carrying out targeted tree planting to reduce air temperatures and the urban heat island effect.
- 1.2. The council's trees and woodlands are part of a wider multi-functional network of green infrastructure which runs throughout the borough. This includes both public and privately owned trees and in urban or rural locations. Green infrastructure provides a wide range of functions and its presence and quality has a direct impact on quality of life
- 1.3. The trees and woodlands which are managed by the council include:
 - Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI): Sherrardspark Wood and Northaw Great Wood
 - Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) including Mardley Heath, Danesbury, Singlers Marsh, The Commons, Howe Dell and Oxleys Wood
 - Small woods: Examples include Sam's Orchard and Woodhall orchard, closed church yards, St Luke's, St Etheldreda's, St Thomas a Beckett
 - Tree Belts
 - Communal gardens trees surrounding council accommodation.
 - Approximately 27,000 individual trees or small groups of trees
- 1.4. The council is not responsible for the trees and woodland within:
 - Schools
 - Town or parish council land
 - Sites managed by Better including Moneyhole Park, King George V playing fields, Stanborough Park and Panshanger golf course.
- 1.5. The council has a management agreement with Hertfordshire County Council's (HCC) Highways to manage their urban, street highway trees. This management agreement explicitly specifies the type of work and the reason why it is to be undertaken. Requests for variations to the works that would be

outside the management agreement will be referred to HCC. Hertfordshire Highways have a Tree Strategy and Guidance Document dated January 2013.¹

- 1.6 National polices are used to protect private trees and woodlands. This is primarily through the Town and Country Planning Acts 1990 and the Town and Country Planning (Trees) Regulations 1999. These documents form a legal framework for the designation of Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs).
- 1.7 The Welwyn Garden City Estate Management Scheme is a specific management scheme relating to the original area of the town, the aim of which is to protect the amenities and values of the area. This is another system of protection for most trees and hedges in the older part of Welwyn Garden City, enabling the council to protect those trees that it considers significant.
- 1.8 This strategy recognises and incorporates relevant local and national policy and guidance, and these include:

	National	County & Borough
Legislation	Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003 Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 Hedgerow Regulations 1997 Local Government Miscellaneous Provisions Act 1976 Burial Act 1853 Climate Change Act 2008 Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 Forestry Act 1967 (as amended) Local Authority (Public Health, Health and Wellbeing Boards and Health Security) Regulations 2013 Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 Occupiers Liability Act 1957 1984 Planning Act 2008 Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 Planning Compensation Act 1991 Town and Country Planning (Trees) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2008 Town and Country Planning (Trees) (England) Regulations 1999 Town and Country Planning Act 1990 Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Environment Act 2021	Leasehold Reform Act 1967
Policy	Biodiversity 2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services Keepers of time: A statement of policy for England's Ancient and Native Woodland National Planning Policy Framework The UK Forestry Standard England Tree Strategy consultation June 2020 The England Trees Action Plan 2021-2024 Tree health Resilience Strategy 2018 DEFRA	Hertfordshire County Council, Highway Tree Strategy and Guidance Document (Jan 2013) Policy EM3 (Estate Management Scheme) Welwyn Hatfield Business Plan 2015-2018 Welwyn Hatfield Community Strategy 2015-2020 Welwyn Hatfield Submission Local Plan Hertfordshire County Council Tree and Woodland Strategy 2022-2030 Hertfordshire County Council Pollinator Strategy Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council Climate Change Strategy

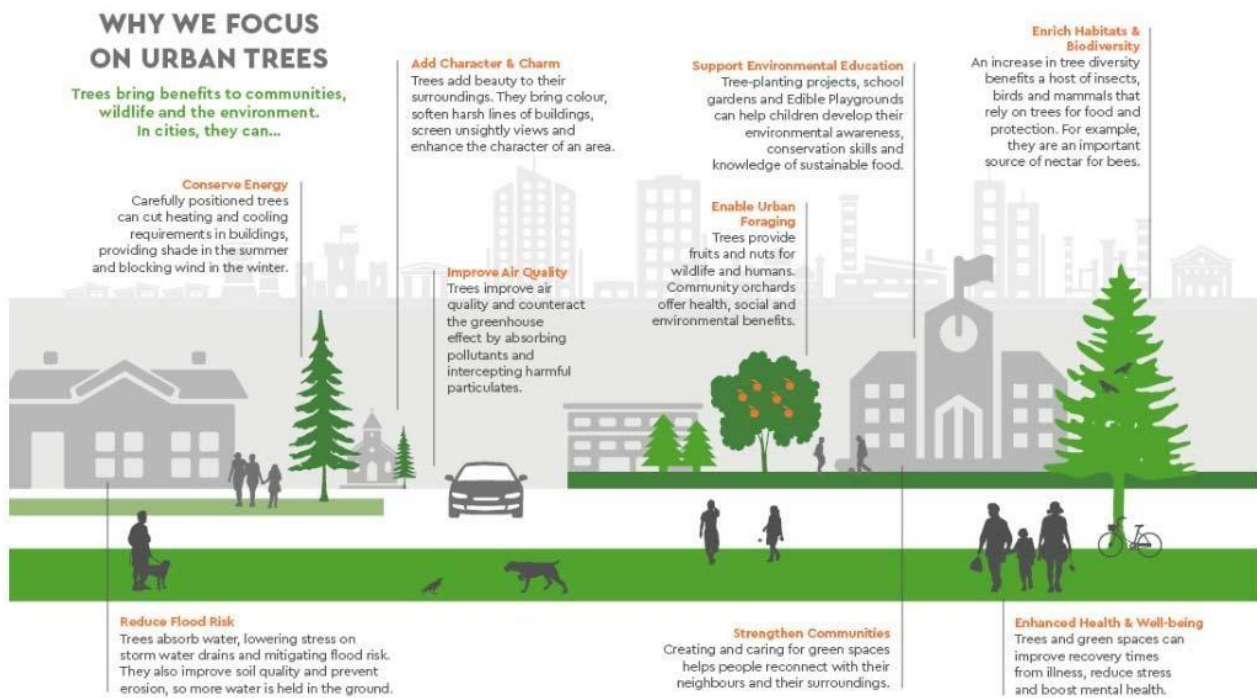
¹ [Hertfordshire Highways - Highway Tree Strategy](#)

<p>Guidance</p>	<p>BS3998 2010 Tree work – Recommendations BS5837:2012 Trees in relation to design, demolition and construction – Recommendations BS8545:2014 Trees: from nursery to independence in the landscape – Recommendations Common sense risk management of trees Faculty Jurisdiction Rules 2015 NHBC Standards 2011: 4.2 Building near trees NJUG guidelines for the planning, installation and maintenance of utility apparatus in proximity to trees Volume 4 Planning for a healthy environment – good practice guidance for green infrastructure and biodiversity Planning for A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment State of the UK's Woods and Trees 2021 - Woodland Trust Common sense risk management for Trees – National Tree Safety Group</p>	<p>Hertfordshire Strategic Green Infrastructure Plan Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust's 5 year plan Roads in Hertfordshire: Highway Design Guide Welwyn Hatfield Green Infrastructure Plan Hertfordshire's State of Nature report Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust London Tree Officers Association Joint Mitigation Protocol for subsidence claims</p>
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- 1.9. This document draws upon the council's knowledge and experience as well as accepted industry standards to set aims for the planting, promotion and protection of the treed landscape and provides continuity in the long term management of trees and woodlands. It will be used by the council, local groups, individuals, agencies and any other interested parties as a reference document.

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2. The Value and Benefits of Trees



2.1 The future will bring many challenges to balance the needs of the borough with the need to maintain and enhance the landscape. These include:

- Population growth
- Local Plan development sites
- Building heights and densities
- Climate change mitigation
- Maturing landscapes
- Pressure on nature and habitats
- Pests and diseases

3. The Trees and Woodlands in the Borough

- 3.1 Welwyn Hatfield is a borough to the north of London in the County of Hertfordshire. The two principal towns are Hatfield and Welwyn Garden City and there are a number of villages and hamlets. The borough also contains large areas of open countryside. Each urban, suburban and rural area has its own identity and character.
- 3.2 In Welwyn Hatfield the population size has increased by 8.5% from around 110,500 in 2011 to 119,900 in 2021. As of 2021, Welwyn Hatfield is the 15th most densely populated of the East of England's local authority areas, with around seven people living on each football pitch-sized area of land.²
- 3.3 Welwyn Garden City is an early example of the Garden City movement and Hatfield is a post second world war New Town. Both towns were designed around existing features such as woodland, field boundaries, orchards and individual mature trees as they were considered to be visually important for residents. As construction of each neighbourhood was completed it was landscaped and new sets of trees planted. These trees have grown old together and are frequently at the end of their natural lifespans. This treescape now gives both towns a unique character and challenges.
- 3.4 The borough's rural areas perform many strategic functions such as separating towns and villages from each other, providing access to the countryside for recreation and leisure and are also home to some of borough's key natural assets.
- 3.5 The borough has a range of natural resources and environmental assets of local, regional and national importance, including Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Local Nature Reserves, Wildlife Sites, trees and woodlands, extensive areas of agricultural land, minerals reserves, rivers, river valleys and floodplains and a comprehensive network of open spaces. The council is a custodian of some of these environmental assets, for example Northaw Great Wood, which is a medieval woodland pasture and has such high biodiversity importance that it is designated as a site of special scientific interest (SSSI).
- 3.5 It is important to ensure the continuity of tree cover across the borough, through a varied age ranges and a diversity of species. However, aged populations with little diversity are more likely to be damaged extensively by pests and/or diseases which will shorten their natural life expectancy.
- 3.6 Remnant orchards which were kept through the towns' construction can still be found today. These old trees could be interesting and unusual varieties which are not commonly available and planted now. Hertfordshire has lost two thirds of its orchards in the past fifty years. To counter this decline, the council

² [Welwyn Hatfield population change, Census 2021 – ONS](#)

has been planting orchards and fruit trees on suitable open spaces, freely accessible to the public. Some are planted and maintained by volunteer tree wardens.

- 3.7 It is important to plant species which provide forage for pollinating insects. Insect pollination is important to the reproduction and persistence of many wild plants that, in turn, underpin a wider and more complex network of animal and plant life. Pollination is therefore an important process in maintaining healthy and biodiverse ecosystems.
- 3.8 Woodlands need a range of tree ages, densities and species for the benefit of biodiversity and continuity of crown cover. Areas of young, dynamic growth lock away more carbon than an increasingly aged and dying one. To increase habitat types and create a healthy woodland, woods need to be actively managed. Management can include glade creation, ride widening, thinning and coppicing as well as new planting.
- 3.9 In addition to woodlands, there are smaller groups of trees planted or retained across the borough. These provide a visual and acoustic barrier to separate housing from commercial developments, busy roads and railways and other residential areas. These are managed in a similar way to individual trees but with consideration to improving and maintaining their function as a barrier. Individual trees may need to be removed to allow regeneration of lower-level vegetation.
- 3.11 Whilst these issues can seem disconnected and not immediately relevant when discussing a tree strategy for present residents, it is vital that decisions taken today are made with a view to improving life for future residents. Trees planted now might take more than a generation to mature, especially within woodlands.
- 3.12 In 2017 research was undertaken to examine tree cover in English towns and cities, the subsequent paper was entitled; *The Canopy Cover of England's Towns and Cities: baselining and setting targets to improve human health and wellbeing*. The base line survey recorded Hatfield as having 20% tree cover and Welwyn Garden City, 27%. The paper concluded that a recommended country wide target of 25% tree canopy cover is needed to offset the negative impacts of living in an urban environment and climate change within the next 10 years. Wherever possible the council will promote urban tree cover.

4. Climate Change

- 4.1 Along with other local councils Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council declared a climate emergency in 2019 and set itself five ambitious objectives. Including achieving net zero by 2030. <https://www.welhat.gov.uk/plans-strategies/climate-change-strategy/8>
- 4.2 It is important to note the contribution trees and woodlands make towards mitigating the impacts of climate change and their role in helping the Council achieve its Climate Change objectives.
- 4.3 Trees mitigate climate change through carbon capture but also prevent flooding, reduce city/town temperatures, reduce pollution and keep soils nutrient rich.
- 4.4 A [Treeconomics Report 2019](#) reveals that the Council manages a total tree stock of about 100,000 woodland trees and 16,900 street trees (This excludes trees on Highway land managed by WHBC). In total they store 78,000 tonnes of carbon, annually sequester 2,400 tonnes of carbon and annually remove 31 tonnes of pollution from the ground and air.
- 4.5 The UK hosted the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26 in Glasgow on 31 October 2021). At this meeting it was acknowledged that we are facing the twin threats of climate change and biodiversity loss and that one cannot be solved without the other. World leaders are being encouraged to include nature-based solutions in their climate plans.
- 4.6 It is acknowledged that the management of existing trees woodlands along with planting of new trees is an important part of the Council's journey towards achieving net zero by 2030.

Section 2 - Policies

5 Policy 1 Active Tree Management

The council will inspect trees within its management once within a three year rolling programme; one third of the trees in year one, the second third in year two and the last third in year three. The process then starts again the following year.

In certain circumstances the council will increase the frequency of inspections to every two years, 18 months or annually, in order to monitor the condition of certain trees more closely, especially those with fungal growths that are more obvious in particular times of the year.

The inspections will assess the condition of the tree and whether work is required to tackle any of the following issues:

- Decay, structural damage or any indication of imminent failure.
- Physical encroachment, where branches are touching buildings.
- There is a risk of vehicular or pedestrian safety.
- Sightlines are required to be maintained for road signs, street lights, council CCTV cameras.
- Previous pruning regimes dictate that a continuation of such measures remain appropriate for that specimen e.g. periodic reductions or pollarding.
- Thinning tree stands to allow remaining trees more room to grow.
- A proven claim of subsidence damage.
- Considered by the Tree Service to be an inappropriate species for the location.
- Other work which it is considered will improve the long-term viability of the tree.

Work required to tackle any of these issues will be carried out as soon as possible.

Works will be specified by professionally qualified Tree Officers and carried out by professional contractors in accordance with *BS3998 Recommendations for Tree Work (2010)* to maintain the highest possible standards of care and management.

A further inspection of the tree outside of the inspection cycle is unlikely to be carried out unless there is a sudden change in its condition or in response to issues associated with trees of its species and/or age.

5.1 If members of the public have specific concerns regarding trees or woodland managed by the council they can make contact via the council's Contact Centre on 01707 357000 or online via [Contact – Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council \(welhat.gov.uk\)](http://www.welhat.gov.uk)

5.2 This policy will be used when the council is considering works to trees in its management. When we refer to urban trees we encompass trees growing in all the following situations:

- on grass verges in front of houses
- in the gardens of communal housing schemes
- in closed church yards and cemeteries
- beside or behind houses whether in garage areas or in tree belts
- on urban open spaces

In the case of the last two categories, large groups of trees will be inspected as one whole group and recorded as such.

5.3 The council's contact centre is the main point of contact for all enquiries relating to trees on council land. The Council has no powers or statutory duties to maintain land or trees which it does not own. The Land Registry has details of who owns private land.

5.4 The council is committed to managing trees through the policies set out in this strategy. However, occasionally works may take place over and above that which is outlined to improve the long-term future or viability of a tree.

5.5 Within the urban environment, where the relationship between residents and their landscape is so close, there are inevitable conflicts. The council is positively managing individual trees that might directly impact small numbers of people but widely benefit the community as a whole. There is a difficult balance to achieve.

5.6 As an owner of a large number of street and woodland trees, claims are occasionally made against the council for damage caused to private property as a result of tree related subsidence. This happens when tree roots extract moisture from the soil beneath a property, causing downward movement and associated damage. Rarely, the opposite of subsidence occurs, heave, where the ground re-sets following removal of trees.

5.7 It is therefore important for the council to consider fully any duties it has to address the risk of subsidence occurring, alongside the environmental impact and financial cost that any proactive or responsive approach to this problem may have.

5.8 When and where subsidence will occur cannot be predicted as there are so many variable contributory causes, not least of which is the weather. There is also

no industry agreed method of tree maintenance that can definitely prevent subsidence from happening and research has suggested that general pruning of trees may increase water demand. The proactive management of trees to minimise subsidence risk is a specialist area and will be considered by the council as and when appropriate, in response to its duties of care.

- 5.9 Once notified of an incidence of subsidence, the council will respond and has adopted an approach to managing claims which involves the assessment of the importance of the implicated tree alongside the level of evidence required to prove its involvement and the likely cost of the claim. While the council will co-operate and communicate with claimants in the hope of reaching a mutually acceptable solution, claims will be vigorously defended when insufficient evidence is provided.
- 5.10 Individual trees recorded on the council's database will be assessed once within a three year rolling period. Tree groups and woodland boundaries with private property, car parks, roads and railways will also be inspected once within a three year rolling period in the context of their setting. All other woodland trees will be either subject to an approved management plan or left to grow unhindered. We rely on natural regeneration in all woodlands when felling is undertaken. If the expected regeneration is not adequate within ten years, we are obliged within the terms of the Woodland Improvement Grant to supplement with planting. In addition to natural regeneration, we plant native broadleaf trees to increase wildlife cover, all again within the parameters of the Woodland Improvement Grant.
- 5.11 Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council Tree Officers are qualified, experienced tree experts who will apply their knowledge of tree anatomy, tree physiology, tree biomechanics, geology and environmental conditions.

6 Policy 2 – Urban Tree Management

6.1 The council **will not** carry out tree works to council trees or Hertfordshire Highway trees of the following reasons:

- To increase the amount of sunlight reaching a property or where views are obstructed.
- To improve reception for mobile phone, satellite and television reception.
- To allow light to reach solar panels.
- To alleviate problems caused by natural or seasonal phenomena e.g. sap, pollen, leaves, seeds, bird droppings, flowers, nuts and berries.
- To alleviate build-up of algae and moss or prevent dampness on paths, structures or gardens.
- To alleviate potential insurance and subsidence issues unless supported by evidence such as relevant engineering report.
- To resolve footpath, heave or trip hazards caused by root ingress unless no viable alternative can be found to alleviate the problems.
- To facilitate vehicle crossovers unless the tree has a very limited life expectancy or is at an age where it can be relocated elsewhere. In this case, any associated costs will be borne by the crossover applicant.
- To remove lower branches from specimen trees. These will be trees chosen to grow in their natural form, where access beneath the crown is not required.
- Where the tree is a rare example of a native tree or makes a significant contribution to the landscape.
- To prune trees or branches that overhang boundaries unless the Tree Officers are concerned about the safety of the tree or the tree is touching the property.

6.2 The overriding view is that there will be a presumption to prune the tree(s) and not to remove healthy trees.

6.3 The council has an obligation to ensure the safety of people and property. Works may be carried out to satisfy the council's duty of care or for good arboricultural and woodland management practice.

- 6.4 Work to Hertfordshire Highway trees will also be carried out in line with this policy, which mirrors the standard the County Council has adopted.
- 6.5 Pruning trees to accommodate unhindered panoramas for new CCTV cameras is very difficult. Cutting sight lines through crowns can unbalance the tree and often stimulates more growth, quickly blocking the view again. Advice will be given on request about the scope for pruning when consulted about new CCTV locations.
- 6.6 In some instances there is difficult balance to be struck between good tree/woodland management and obligations to ensure safety to people and property. The priority is to ensure that trees and woodland are as safe as reasonably practicable.

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7 Policy 3 – Tree Planting

- 7.1 **The council will undertake tree planting across the borough on publicly owned land.**
- 7.2 **Planting will take place in the best possible situations to maximise gains for environmental improvement.**
- 7.3 **New planting positions will respect the view of existing road signs, street lights and CCTV cameras.**
- 7.4 **Urban planting will seek to respect the original layout of concepts of Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield New Town. Avenues of formal planting will be retained until their decline dictates that complete renewal is a more appropriate solution. Interim planting to fill gaps will not take place. Where practical, the original species will be selected again to renew the original layout. Where this is not practical we will notify local residents setting out why a different species is selected.**
- 7.5 **In addition, historically significant species will also be acknowledged and replanted where possible. If exact species are no longer suitable because of pests and diseases, the surrounding environment, or short life expectancy, species with a similar form and impact will be selected.**
- 7.6 The Council's Business Plan has a target to plant at least 300 urban trees across the borough on publicly owned land each year. The young trees will be watered twice a month for three years, between March and October each year.
- 7.7 Felled verge trees will be replaced on a one-for-one basis. The replacement may not occur in the following tree planting season if the schedule is already full. In these instances, the location is noted for the following year. Sometimes it is not possible to replant in the exact location due to developments on the highway such as crossovers, cycle tracks, underground services, street lights, signs or parking bays.
- 7.8 Sometimes trees which are felled are not replaced. Common reasons for this are the proximity of surrounding trees, the tree was removed to alleviate a proven subsidence case or it was a self-set or weed tree in an inappropriate location.
- 7.9 In areas monitored by CCTV, care will be taken to not obstruct the view of the cameras, especially where conflict could arise due to the future stature of the tree.
- 7.10 Trees removed from tree belts or groups of trees will only be replaced when the barrier effect has been compromised.
- 7.11 Within woodlands, new tree cover is encouraged by a combination of natural regeneration and replanting as appropriate.

8 Policy 4 - Pest and Diseases

- 8.1 The Council will keep abreast of all regional and national updates and advice on pest and diseases effecting trees and woodlands. Trees will be monitored for signs of pest and disease. Practical options for management will be considered, including felling if appropriate.**
- 8.2 The Council will disseminate information about locally important pests and disease to the public via the Council's website and other methods such as articles in One Magazine, press releases, etc.**
- 8.3 The control of muntjac deer and grey squirrels will be undertaken if the impact of the damage is considered to have a moderate impact on site biodiversity.**
- 8.4 Trees are more susceptible to having infection and disease if they are damaged, in poor health, growing in poor site conditions or are of a particular species. For much of the trees life it can defend itself or react to arising problems. If a tree has low vitality or is stressed it might not be able to defend itself. Infection can hasten tree decay, decline and death and can pose serious concerns for public health and safety.
- 8.5 Climate change affects both the spread of pests and diseases and the trees ability to react to it. It is important that the council has an understanding of the potential problems so that it can react in a swift and informed way.
- 8.6 Current pests and diseases in the borough are: brown-tailed moth, ash die-back, acute and chronic oak decline, horse chestnut bleeding canker and horse chestnut leaf miner. Pests and diseases which are likely to become a problem in the borough in future years are: oak processionary moth, sweet chestnut blight, oriental chestnut gall wasp and massaria disease on plane trees. Examples of pests and diseases which are not currently present in the UK are: Asian longhorn beetle, emerald ash borer, Citrus longhorn beetle and oak wilt. Consideration will be given as to how manage trees affect by pest and diseases as part of the inspection process.
- 8.7 In most cases there is very little that can be done to prevent these outbreaks from happening on a commercial scale and it becomes a matter of responding to the effects rather than prevention. The best defense is to ensure that the trees we have now and those that are planted in the future, are the best for their situation and are at their peak health and condition. Planting a diverse range of species also builds resilience into the tree population as pests and diseases sometimes target just one species. There are several key pests and diseases that are thought to be the potential high-risk factors of the future. The risk is becoming greater with the speed and spread of international pests and diseases.
- 8.8 High populations of grey squirrels and muntjac deer can cause extensive physical damage to trees and prevent the natural regeneration of woodland flowers. Without vegetation it is difficult to create a diverse structure. Squirrels and deer do not have natural predators, so control needs to be by human

intervention. This presents challenges in woodlands close to human habitation and is often not undertaken for this reason, to the detriment of the ecology of the woodland.

- 8.9 The control of deer numbers is essential across all of the UK so woodlands can be successfully managed for timber or wood fuel and healthy and diverse wildlife habitats.
- 8.10 Within Welwyn Hatfield, control of muntjac deer has been undertaken at Northaw Great Wood for some years. Trained and experienced stalkers are reducing the numbers of deer until the effects of browsing are considered to be at a sustainable level. Site assessments are made biennially. Deer control is undertaken in conjunction with adjacent land owners.
- 8.11 The council is being strongly advised by the Forestry Commission to reduce the numbers of muntjac within Sherrardspark Wood.

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9 Policy 5 – Protecting Trees through the Planning System

9.1 The council will seek to protect and retain existing trees, hedgerows and woodland on development sites through the use of planning conditions, Section 106 agreements and Tree Preservation Orders as appropriate.

9.2 The felling of trees protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) will require a replacement tree to be planted (with the exception for woodland TPOs).

9.3 New developments, such as housing and commercial schemes will be required to incorporate tree planting within the site as part of its design.

The council as the Local Planning Authority is responsible for enforcing the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

9.4 Whilst the council is responsible for its own trees and woodlands, a great deal of what combines to create a shared landscape is privately owned. Although the council does not have direct responsibility for these trees, it is actively engaged in protection of those considered worthy through the planning system.

9.5 The council's Submitted Local Plan (need to check to see if this still applies) has key policies within it on environmental assets. Policy SP11 sets out the strategic approach to the protection and enhancement of the borough's critical and environmental assets within the planning process. Policy SP12 states the council will work with partners to actively support the creation and enhancement of strategic green infrastructure across the borough. The opportunity to implement these policies can be achieved through the use of planning conditions, Section 106 agreements, Hedgerow Retention Notices and Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs).

9.6 TPOs are used to protect selected trees and woodlands if their removal would have a significant detrimental impact on the amenity of the area. An order can apply to one or many trees, including woodlands. Priority for TPOs is usually, though not exclusively, given to trees considered to be under threat; for example where imminent development is proposed. Welwyn Hatfield currently has over 550 TPOs in effect.

9.7 Conservation Areas can be defined as special areas of architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance. There are eight such areas within Welwyn Hatfield where all trees have protection. Anyone proposing works to trees must give the council six weeks' notice of their intention to do so. This enables the council to examine the proposal and decide whether or not to place a TPO on the tree(s) in question.

9.8 The Welwyn Garden City Estate Management Scheme relates to specific neighbourhoods within the town. Its aim is to protect the amenities and values of the area. This designation protects most trees and hedges and enables the council to protect the trees which are considered important.

- 9.9 It is recognised there is a need for development often at high densities in order to facilitate the demand for housing in the borough. It is anticipated that landscape proposals for developments will need to incorporate aspects of vertical and roof top greening and initiative tree planting as space becomes a premium.

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10 Policy 6 – Woodland Management

- 10.1 **The Council will maintain and enhance Sherrardspark Wood and Northaw Great Wood as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in accordance with their adopted management plans**
- 10.2 **The Council will maintain its remaining woodland, Mardley Heath which is a Local Nature Reserve (LNR), in accordance with its adopted management plan.**
- 10.3 **The council will seek to provide good access to council owned woodlands on public and permissive footpaths and bridleways for a wide range of abilities. Paths will be managed and upgraded where necessary on an annual basis, with support from Friends Groups.**
- 10.4 **Public access will be discouraged in some parts of Sherrardspark Wood and Northaw Great Wood to reduce disturbance to more sensitive wildlife, especially during breeding seasons.**
- 10.5 Sherrardspark Wood, Mardley Heath and Northaw Great Wood have management plans agreed by Natural England. These plans are the first step in allowing the council to apply for and receive grants, to ensure that they are maintained in a 'favourable conservation condition'.
- 10.6 Access is an important aspect of our land management programme. Interpretation boards at principal entrances to sites show visitors the best routes to walk and some general information. Sherrardspark Wood and Northaw Great Wood have extensive directional signage to inform people of permissive routes and Rights of Way that connect into the wider landscape. Notice boards give updates on forthcoming habitat management work and events.

11 Policy 7 Community Engagement

The Council will support, insure and equip Friends Groups who come together to execute agreed works to trees, woodlands, footpaths and bridleways and any other maintenance task that can be tackled safely.

The council will promote the health and well being benefits of trees and woodlands and of volunteering and will invite local residents who are keen to get involved or learn more to join a Friends Group or the Tree Wardens Scheme.

An annual programme of events will be arranged and support given to initiatives taken by these groups.

- 11.1 The council is fortunate to have a large group of people who are organised into friends groups and volunteer to work on a site of their choice. There are friends groups at three of the nine woodland sites and the largest group, with over 70 members, is the Sherrardspark Wood Wardens society which has been running for over 50 years.
- 11.2 In 2023 local volunteers gave over 806 days of work, in financial terms, this fantastic contribution was worth over £56,430. Common tasks include coppicing, tree planting, scrub and grassland management, hedge laying and fencing. Some volunteers lead guided walks and help survey important wildlife species.
- 11.3 A Tree Warden group was launched in 2006 for those interested in street trees. These volunteers are the 'eyes and ears' for the trees in their neighbourhood. A series of informative meetings are held each year to increase knowledge, allowing individuals to discuss issues within their community. There are currently around 60 members and the focus in recent years has been on the planting and maintenance of community orchards across the borough.
- 11.4 The members of the community who freely give their time to help protect and preserve the amenity, ecology and biodiversity of the borough are invaluable and the council recognises the need to match enthusiasm with support if their involvement is to be maintained.

12 Policy 8 Green Infrastructure

- 12.1 The council will seek to deliver its Green Infrastructure Strategy in collaboration with statutory bodies, landowners, developers, the public and others. This will include the use of Community Infrastructure Levy funding and Section 106 Agreements.
- 12.2 Green infrastructure is the network of multi-functional green space that can be proposed, newly designed or existing. These spaces can be rural or urban and include areas such as woodlands, farmland, river valleys, open spaces and country parks. This matrix of open land is made up of both privately owned land and council open space.
- 12.3 The council's Submission Local Plan has key policies within it on Environmental Assets. Policy SP12 state the council will work with partners to actively support the creation and enhancement of strategic green infrastructure across the borough. The opportunity to implement these policies can be achieved through the use of planning conditions, Section 106 Agreements, Hedgerow Retention Notices and Tree Preservation Orders.
- 12.4 Across the borough there is a wonderful legacy of public owned open spaces, woodlands, ponds, amenity green urban open spaces with shrubs and flowers, old hedgerows and individual mature trees. All these green features support a varied wildlife of great ecological significance and they are integral to the health and quality of life in the borough.
- 12.5 The key to accessing a large percentage of this green infrastructure is the network of Rights of Way across the borough that links both council and private land, a valued asset that is managed by Hertfordshire County Council.
- 12.6 All guidance given on planning consents will endeavor to protect suitable existing trees on development sites. However, the retention of valuable habitats or the creation of new opportunities for wildlife will be sought in larger applications and the potential for linking open spaces through new developments will be promoted.
- 12.7 All new developments over a certain size threshold are required to make a contribution to local green infrastructure through planning legislation, Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. All contributions offered for existing green infrastructure sites are invested in council owned open spaces.

13 Monitoring and Review

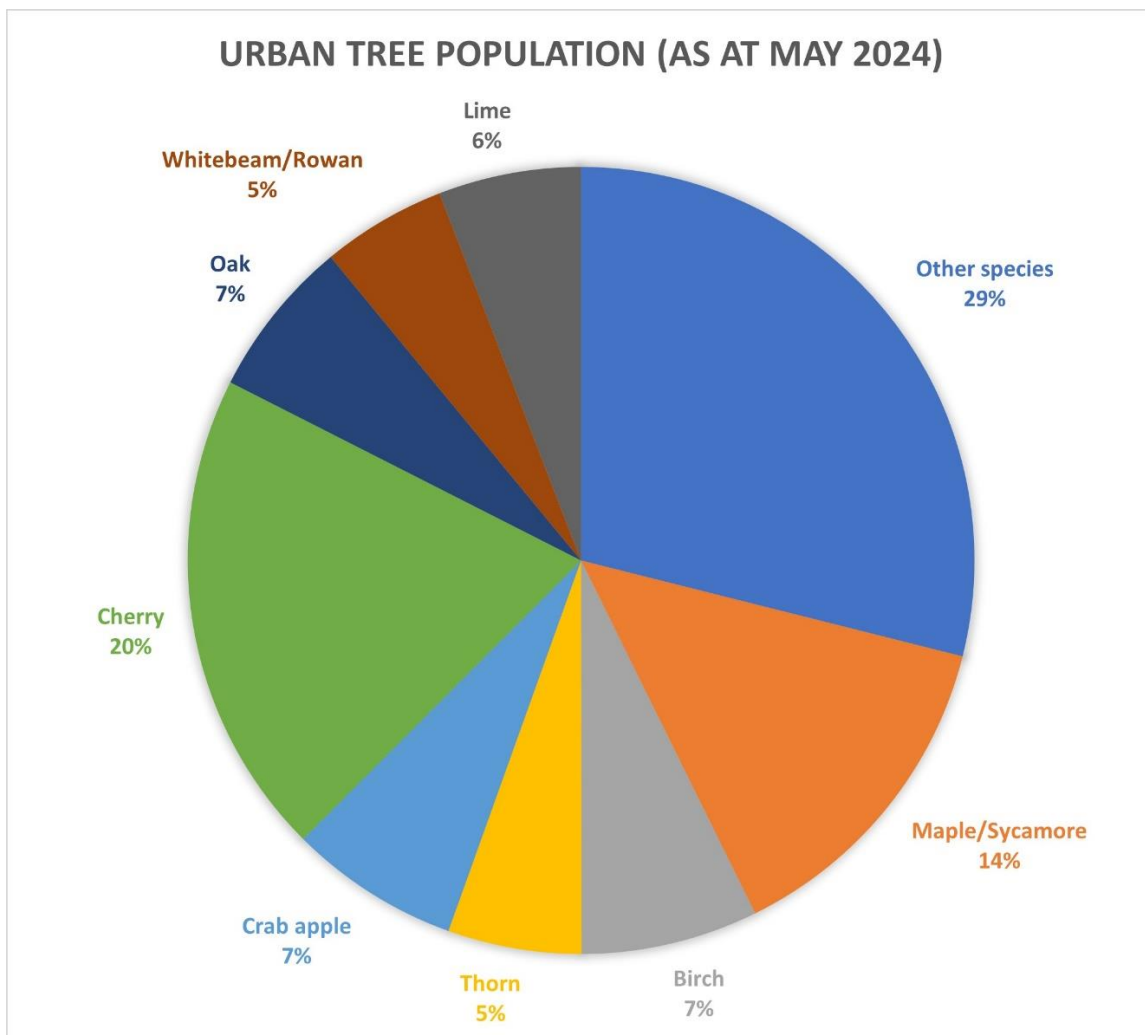
13.1 The policies set out in this strategy reflect the current circumstances, issues and trends anticipated to be relevant to tree management to 2029. An early review may be considered if there are any changes to legislation or council business which have implications for this strategy.

13.3 With regard to disseminating information, , we intend to add the following information to the website:

- Monthly felling lists which give the location, species and removal reason.
- We will fix felling notices on landmark or prominent trees and where a set is to be removed and replaced during the following winter. These tree removals may also be subject to press releases or letter drops to immediately surrounding residents.
- We are committed to planting at least 300 street trees across the borough every year. The planting season is from November to March and at the conclusion of every planting season in May we will post a list of all the trees planted, their location and species.
- An annual summary of the tree removal (outside of woodlands and dense tree groups 4 and 5 Policy 1) and planting. In most years this will show that more trees have been felled than planted due to the removal of self- sets and thinned groups.

14 Appendix 1 – Street Tree Audit (this will need updating)

Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council currently manages the urban trees on an individual basis. These are individually managed trees in open spaces, road side verges and highly frequented areas such as shopping parades and church yards.



The most frequently found eight species of tree are shown in figure 1. Cherry trees are the most commonly found urban tree. Eight tree types make up 71% of the urban tree population.

In managing a tree population it is important to know what species make up a population and by how much. Occasionally, a tree disease or pest will spread wildly and kill or maim a particular tree population. This was last seen in the elm population which was infected and killed by Dutch elm disease during the late 1970's to mid 1980's. It is therefore good practice to ensure a range of tree types make up the majority of the tree population.

No one tree type makes up the majority of the tree population. Therefore the Council do not need to avoid planting any one particular tree type but to continue to plant a diverse range of tree species.

15 Appendix 2 - Pests and Diseases

Some examples of pests and diseases that the borough has recently been affected by are;

Brown tail moth has a caterpillar that not only defoliates the trees on which it lives, but also causes public health issues due to irritant hairs from the caterpillar affecting people, particularly those with respiratory problems. This has been found in the Panshanger area and has resulted in the loss of a number of street trees as no effective treatment for the pests is available.

Bleeding canker is present in horse chestnut trees across the borough and has already led to the removal of several trees due to the interruption of conducting vessels within the tree leading to splits and cracks of structural branches and even the death and decline of whole trees.

Horse chestnut leaf minor is an insect that 'mines' the centre of the leaves leaving the tree visibly affected. Whilst this is not thought to be significant in terms of the tree's health it does have an aesthetic affect.

Acute and chronic decline is evident in our woodlands such as Sherrardspark Wood and even some of our mature Oak street trees. Symptoms of acute oak decline include dark fluid bleeding from splits in the bark on tree trunks. As affected trees approach death there is a notable deterioration of the canopy, or tree tops, and 'dieback' of the branches. The condition can kill a tree in as little as four or five years.

The issue of oak processionary moth has been given much press coverage, again due to the irritant hairs on the caterpillars and the devastating effect that infestations have to the mature oaks that host it. The attempts to contain the outbreaks in London have failed and the aim is to now keep infection rates as low as possible. Welwyn Hatfield now sits within the Established Zone for OPM. This means that the council is not obliged to deal with OPM cases by the Forestry Commission when it is found in the borough. The council decides how best to deal with each incident on a case-by-case basis. There have now been numerous cases of OPM in the borough in 2022/23. The borough council is working with the Tree Council and Hertfordshire County Council on an OPM strategy which is to be completed in 2024/25.

Asian longhorn beetle is a native of China that has been confirmed in Kent in March 2012 and work is continuing to try to eradicate it. In the United States and Italy, where it has been accidentally introduced in recent years, it has caused extensive damage to host trees. It can affect a wide range of broadleaved trees and shrubs such as maple (including sycamore), elm, horse chestnut, willow, poplar, birch and some fruit trees.

Ash dieback - Chalara dieback of ash is a serious disease of ash trees caused by a fungus called Chalara fraxinea (*C. fraxinea*).

The disease causes leaf loss and crown dieback in affected trees, and it can lead to tree death. For more information and advice about the symptoms and spread of

Chalara through Europe and into the UK please see the [Forestry Commission](#) website.

DRAFT

16 Appendix 3 - Subsidence Policy

Amenity Tree Evaluation

When assessing trees in relation to alleged subsidence the Tree Officers use a simplified version of TEMPO (Tree Evaluation Method for Preservation Orders). The basis of which assesses the condition of the tree, the safe life expectancy, the public visibility and any other factors such as historical importance.

This system means there is a simple consistent approach when assessing the trees. This approach gives a clear value of the tree in the landscape which helps when deciding what approach to take.

Each case is assessed on its own merits, with decisions on these cases taken by Senior Managers, who consider the financial implications of retention of trees and the amenity and landscape loss by their removal.

17 Appendix 4 - Types of Pruning

Clear from Overhead Obstructions - Reducing small number of branches back to give clearance to a structure such as building or lamp column, usually specified by a distance of clearance.

Coppicing - Cutting trees close to ground level with the intention of encouraging of multiple shoots.

Crown Lifting - Removal of lower branches to achieve a stated vertical clearance above ground level or other surface.

Crown Reduction - Operation that results in an overall reduction in the height and/or spread of the crown of a tree by means of a general shortening of twigs and/or branches whilst retaining the main framework of the crown.

Crown Thinning - Removal of a proportion of small live branches throughout the crown to achieve an even density of foliage around a well-spaced and balanced branch structure.

Pollard - Cutting a tree so as to encourage formation of numerous branches arising from the same height on a main stem or principal branches.

18 Appendix 5 - Glossary

Actionable nuisance - Where actual damage to property has been caused, or, if no action is taken to prevent it, damage will be imminently caused. It does not mean just the pure encroachment of roots or branches over the adjoining land.

Ancient semi natural woodland - Woodland that has existed continuously on that site since before 1600 and is now valued for its locally native species and wildlife habitats.

Bio-diversity - A range of species which live within a particular habitat.

BS 3998 (2010) British Standard 3998 Recommendations for tree work - This standard relates to Arboricultural operations and methods.

Conservation Area - Conservation Areas are areas of special architectural or historical interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve. Anyone wishing to cut down or carry out work on a tree in a conservation area is required to give the Council six weeks' prior notice.

Estate Management Scheme - The Estate Management scheme is part of the Leasehold Reform Act 1967. This is administered for purpose of maintaining and enhancing amenities and values in Welwyn Garden City. The scheme requires that written consent be obtained to cut down, lop or top any tree exceeding 15ft within the Estate Management areas.

Hazard - (In this instance) a tree which has the potential to harm persons or property.

Industry best practice - Is the use of techniques, methods or process which have been industry proven to be the most effective.

Natural regeneration - Young trees resulting from germination of seeds, which occur as a consequence of natural seeding.

Landmark trees - Trees which are considered to be prominent identifying features within the landscape.

Lapsed pollard - A pollarded tree that has not been cut in a regular cycle but left uncut for many years.

Native species – Trees which are considered to be naturally occurring in the UK.

Non-intervention - The management of woods where nothing is done to allow the succession of the wood to occur naturally.

Pathogen - A micro-organism causing disease.

Pollard - A tree cut once or repeatedly where the main stem forms the crown. Usually cut on a regular basis, with the whole or part of the crown removed.

Risk - The likelihood that a tree (in this instance) will cause harm to person or property.

Subsidence - The sinking (or movement) of structures due to shrinkage when clay soils dry out, sometimes due to extraction of moisture by tree roots.

Suckers - Shoots that arise from an underground stem or root of a tree.

Thinning - The removal of weak trees or trees with poor form from a group to allow the remaining trees to prosper.

Town and Country Planning Act - The Act of Parliament which consolidates certain enactments relating to town and country planning.

Tree Belts - Areas of trees which are sometimes small areas of woodland throughout the Borough which were originally planted to provide a visual and sometimes audio barrier to separate housing development from other estates.

Tree Preservation Order - A Tree Preservation Order (TPO) is order made by a Local Planning Authority (LPA) in respect to trees, groups of trees, woodlands and areas of trees. The principal effect of a TPO is to prohibit the cutting down, uprooting, topping, lopping, willful damage or willful destruction of trees without the LPAs consent.

Relevant primary and secondary legislation - Part 4VIII of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and in the Town and Country Planning (Trees) Regulations 1999.

Veteran Tree - A tree that is of interest biologically, culturally or aesthetically because of its age, size or condition.

Visual amenity - The visual amenity of a tree is its intrinsic beauty and/or its contribution to the landscape.

19 Appendix 6 – Useful Contacts

Hertfordshire County Council
Highway Tree Strategy and Guidance Document
www.hertsdirect.org.
Highway Fault reporting service

Arboricultural Association
The Malthouse, Stroud Green, Stonehouse, Gloucestershire, GL10 3DL, UK Tel
01242 522152 Email: admin@trees.org.uk
www.trees.org.uk

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) Defra,
Nobel House, 17 Smith Square, London, SW1P 3JR
Tel 08459 33 55 77 Email defra.helpline@defra.gsi.gov.uk
www.defra.gov.uk

Forestry Commission GB
www.forestry.gov.uk

Royal Horticultural Society
80 Vincent Square, London, SW1P 2PE
Tel 0845 062 1111 Email gardeningadvice@rhs.org.uk
www.rhs.org.uk

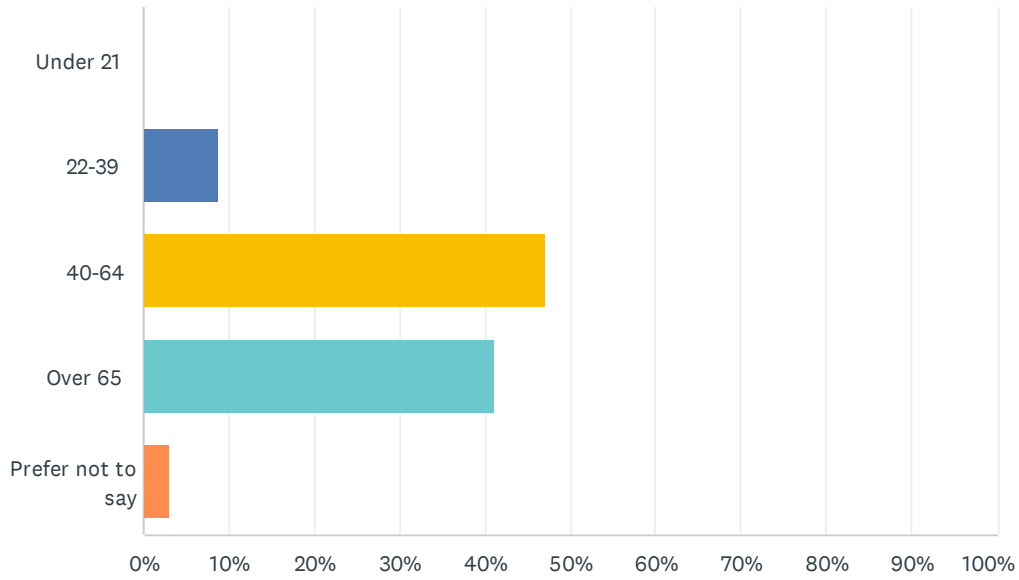
The Tree Council
71 Newcomen Street, London, SE1 1YT
Tel 020 7407 9992 Email info@treecouncil.org.uk
www.treecouncil.org.uk

Tree Advice Trust
Alice Holt Lodge, Wrecclesham, Farnham, Surrey, GU10 4LH Tel
09065 161147
www.treehelp.info

The Woodland Trust
Kempton Way, Grantham, NG31 6LL
Tel 01476 581111 Email enquiries@woodlandtrust.org.uk
www.woodlandtrust.org.uk

Q1 Which age category do you fall within?

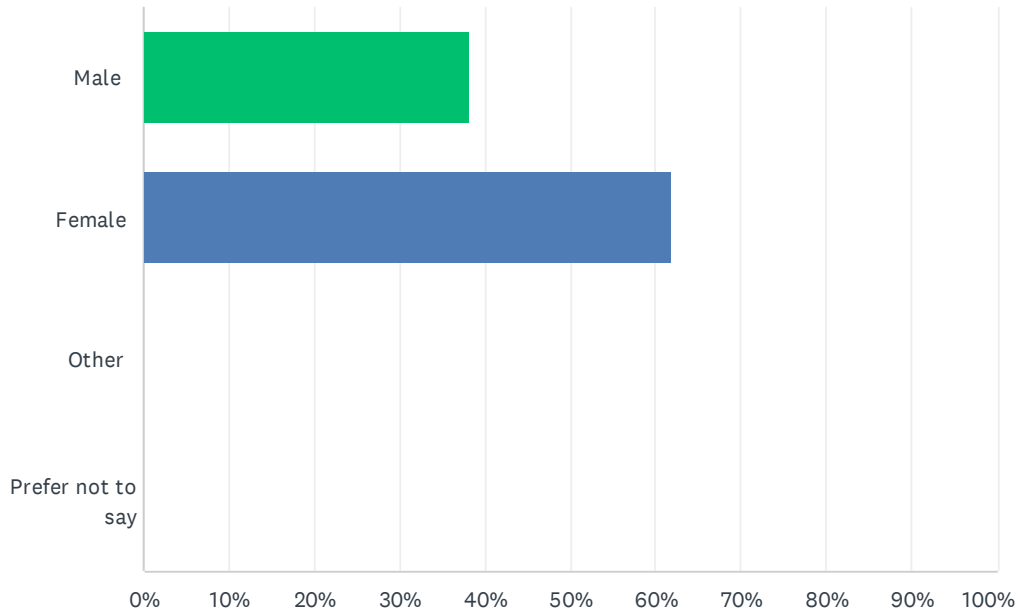
Answered: 34 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Under 21	0.00%	0
22-39	8.82%	3
40-64	47.06%	16
Over 65	41.18%	14
Prefer not to say	2.94%	1
TOTAL		34

Q2 How do you identify

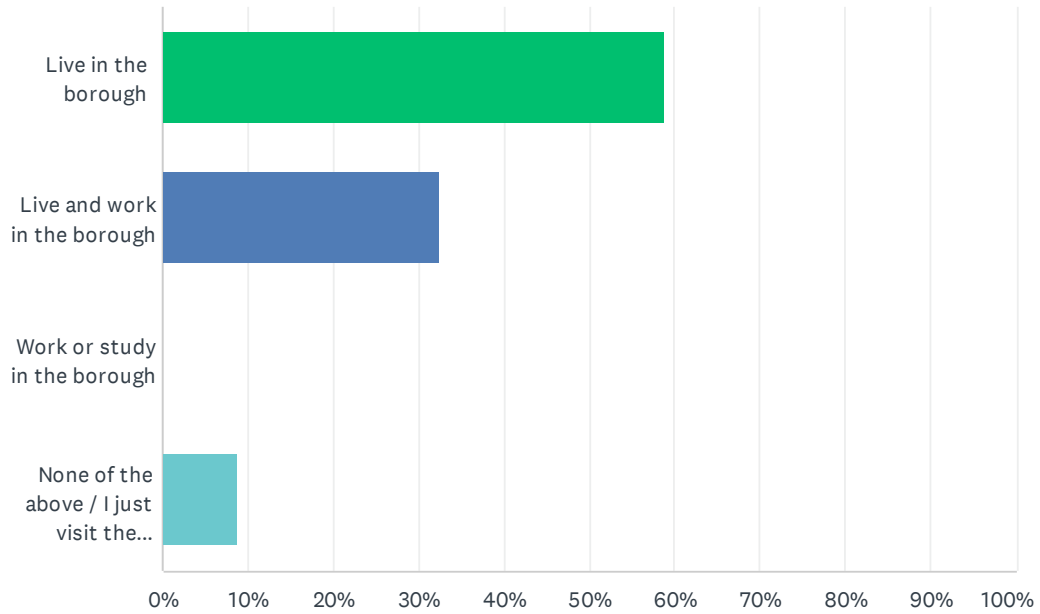
Answered: 34 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Male	38.24%	13
Female	61.76%	21
Other	0.00%	0
Prefer not to say	0.00%	0
TOTAL		34

Q3 Which of the below describes you best?

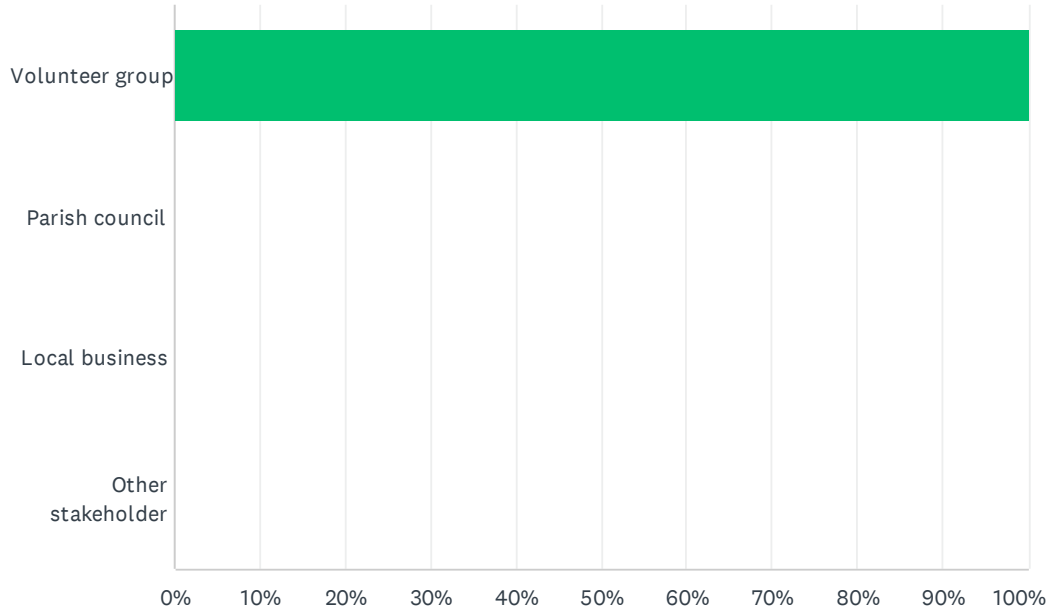
Answered: 34 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Live in the borough	58.82%	20
Live and work in the borough	32.35%	11
Work or study in the borough	0.00%	0
None of the above / I just visit the borough	8.82%	3
TOTAL		34

Q4 If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, please state the nature of your organisation?

Answered: 2 Skipped: 32



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Volunteer group	100.00%	2
Parish council	0.00%	0
Local business	0.00%	0
Other stakeholder	0.00%	0
Total Respondents: 2		

Q5 Do you have any comments regarding Policy 1 - Active Tree Management?

Answered: 7 Skipped: 27

Q6 Do you have any comments regarding Policy 2 - Urban Tree Management?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 28

Q7 Do you have any comments regarding Policy 3 - Tree Planting?

Answered: 8 Skipped: 26

Q8 Do you have any comments regarding Policy 4 - Pets and Diseases?

Answered: 5 Skipped: 29

Q9 Do you have any comments regarding Policy 5 - Protecting Tree through the Planning System?

Answered: 5 Skipped: 29

Q10 Do you have any comments regarding Policy 6 - Woodland Management?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 28

Q11 Do you have any comments regarding Policy 7 - Community Engagement?

Answered: 5 Skipped: 29

Q12 Do you have any comments regarding Policy 8 - Green Infrastruture?

Answered: 5 Skipped: 29

Q13 Do you have any general comments about the Strategy?

Answered: 8 Skipped: 26

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Appendix C:

Comments received from the public consultation and officer's response to the comments

Do you have any comments regarding Policy 1 - Active Tree Management?

Respondent comments:

Firstly, I must commend WHBC on producing a very well produced Strategy document. Well written with impressive detail for all readers. Concerns are the recurring problem on what defines a woodland or urban tree. When I was xxxxx on the WGC Society we used to have many conversations with xxxxxxxx on this issue. The concern was and still is how to treat the parkland trees within WGC. There currently does not seem to be a policy on these trees: trees are regarded as urban or woodland. A parkland tree is one similar to those found in Bushey Park, Richmond Park and the grounds of Hampton Court. The trees have had their crowns lifted and suckers removed either by deer or by the park maintenance. The result is a more open vista, enabling more easy mowing, the prevention of build up of rubbish under trees, and the possibility of bulb planting around tree bases. The approaches to the Garden City need to be treated in this way on a consistent basis. Valley Road is fine, but Stanborough Road and Stanborough Green are a mess. The trees looked after by Better are fine, those by WHBC are completely inconsistent with no sign of any strategy at all. First impressions of entering the town are spoilt by inconsistent policy Parkway is treated well but sometimes spoilt by late sucker removal.

Officer's response:

- 1) The trees across the Borough are managed primarily for health and safety reasons. In some case historic management such as pollarding will be undertaken to ensure trees are in good structural condition. Where trees are in good health and condition and there are no issues with sight lines they are allowed to grow to their natural form. The type of management requested is beyond health and safety works and would be an additional cost in resources. Currently there is no plan to manage trees in Welwyn Garden City differently from other trees in the Borough.***

Respondent comments:

Tree classifications - Urban trees include Plantations Valley Road Plantation is given as an example. It is an important evergreen noise barrier shielding homes on Handside from the A1(M). There is no evidence of it being inspected/ mitigation works implemented as it is progressively collapsing. It is noted in 5:10 of the Tree Strategy: 'All other woodland trees will be either subject to an approved management plan or left to grow unhindered. We rely on natural regeneration in all woodlands when felling is undertaken. If the expected regeneration is not adequate within ten years, we are obliged within the terms of the Woodland Improvement Grant to supplement with planting'. Sadly natural regeneration appears not to be occurring of the evergreen trees. There needs to be some form of planned replacement before the evergreen element completely collapses.

Officer's response:

- 2) ***This is a specific request for a specific site. The Tree Officers have been looking at work at Valley Road with a view to managing the existing trees and re-planting if necessary. The comment does not require an amendment to the Strategy.***

Respondent comments:

This seems to work well. If we have any problems with our trees, there is always a response.

Makes good sense

The policy fails to adequately cover the traditional practice of pollarding, which means active tree management is adversely changing some of the historic views, landscapes and vistas across the Borough.

Officer's response:

- 3) ***Where historic management such as pollarding has occurred the past, this will be continued. However, additional works over and above health safety works are not undertaken.***

Respondent comments:

The quarry plan on the BAe site should be fiercely opposed

Do you have any comments regarding Policy 2 - Urban Tree Management?

Respondent comments:

It is noted in paragraph 6.1 of the Tree Strategy: 'The council will not carry out tree works to council trees or Hertfordshire Highway trees for the following reasons: To remove lower branches from specimen trees. These will be trees chosen to grow in their natural form, where access beneath the crown is not required'. However some trees benefit from having lower branches removed. Examples include: • The lime tree in The Links - it needs trimming for vehicular sightline safety. It also needs trimming to encourage the previous bulb planting that was undertaken by local schoolchildren. The overgrown canopy has been used by rough sleepers/ for parties judging by the spirits bottles dumped within it. This is a form of wildlife which is not appreciated by residents. • The policy for 'Parkland Trees' trees would benefit from better definition e.g. along the south-western entrance to Welwyn Garden City at Stanborough Road and Stanborough Green. These have become straggly at their bases and do not present a good image for that significant entrance to the town. [Society Member xxxxx has responded more fully on 'Parkland Trees' and we support his detailed comments]. These are two examples. If the Council will not undertake the works then it should allow volunteer working parties to do them for the good of the town.

Officer's response:

4) See response 1

Respondent comments:

See question 5 answers on Policy 1. The urban trees that are not parkland trees are well maintained and the policy for their management clearly explained. I would like to see a separate Policy on Parkland Tree Management. This would need to have a clear definition of what that entails and those areas of WGC to which the policy applies. Such a policy would make it clear to the contractors that carry out the maintenance as to how the various areas of the town are to be treated.

Officer's response:

5) See response 1

Respondent comments:

It seems to be a fair system.

Makes good sense

The management of particularly mature trees seems less than ideal, many species require cutting back to remain in good health and this needs to be done before signs of disease and decay appear. A more 'pro-active' management strategy for some of the mature trees in the council's care would be better for residents and the trees.

Officer's response:

6) *It is difficult with most trees to pre-empt any disease or decay if they look in good health and condition. If works are required it is for health and safety reasons. It should be noted that some decayed wood, if safe to do so, can be left as it provides additional habitat.*

Do you have any comments regarding Policy 3 - Tree Planting?

Respondent comments:

It is noted in paragraph 7.1 of the Tree Strategy: 'Felled verge trees will be replaced on a one-for-one basis. The replacement may not occur in the following tree planting season if the schedule is already full. In these instances, the location is noted for the following year'. It would appear that this is not the case, As an example there are trees along Elmwood that have not been replaced. It is noted in paragraph 7:10 of the Tree Strategy: 'Trees removed from tree belts or groups of trees will only be replaced when the barrier effect has been compromised'. -----

----- It is noted in paragraph 7.4 of the Tree Strategy: 'Urban planting will seek

to respect the original layout of concerts of Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield New Town'. It is not clear what a 'concert' is within this context?

Officer's response:

7) *Spelling mistake noted and changed. The issue relates to a specific road. Tree planting is undertaken where possible although in some instance is not possible to plant where trees have been removed. Location noted and passed to Tree Officers.*

Respondent comments:

Planting very commendable but could find no mention of commitment to watering newly planted trees and I know the council does water them. Should be part of policy.

Officer's response:

8) *Noted and will amend the Strategy to reflect the watering that is undertaken.*

Respondent comments:

Good to have new trees planted but sometimes they are planted where there are many trees already, and it is not appropriate.

Officer's response:

9) *The comment is general so difficult to respond.*

Respondent comments:

The trees near the town centre are gorgeous when in bloom. Adding more decorative trees would be encouraged

Makes good sense.

Yes - in wetter areas and along river valleys can you think about planting the rare Black Poplar (Populus nigra) and in woods the rare Wild Service Tree (Sorbus torminalis).

Officer's response:

10) *Noted.*

Respondent comments:

I would prefer more of a focus on native trees, especially those with the characteristics of supporting more diverse ecosystems. A further push to plant community orchards should be included.

Officer's response:

11) Native trees are planted where appropriate. We have planted some community orchards across the Borough and will continue to look for areas that could support more trees/orchards.

Do you have any comments regarding Policy 4 - Pets and Diseases?

Respondent comments:

It was a surprise to read in 8.11 that: 'The council is being strongly advised by the Forestry Commission to reduce the numbers of muntjac within Sherrardspark Wood'. The deer are appreciated by residents so this should be consulted. It is assumed that the reference in the reply document should be to 'Pests' and not Pets.

Officer's response:

12) Spelling mistake noted and changed. Muntjac deer cause significant damage in the wood, and we are being encouraged by the Forestry Commission and Natural England to control them.

Respondent comments:

Sounds sensible.

Makes sense

Surprised little apparent attention is given to OPM, this might be a significant health hazard in coming years and yet its management is not covered in the summary document.

Officer's response:

13) The management of OPM is covered in the strategy. It is an evolving issue in which the Tree Officers are monitoring and keeping up to date with the guidance from the Forestry Commission.

Do you have any comments regarding Policy 5 - Protecting Tree through the Planning System?

Respondent comments:

Evergreens – as previously discussed Welwyn Garden City was blessed with many evergreen trees in private residences. These give structure to the town over the bleak winter months. Sadly many have felled and not replaced. The Council would benefit from including reference to a mitigation plan in their Tree Strategy.

Officer's response:

14) Where appropriate the use of evergreen trees will be recommended within proposed development. An additional policy on this would not be appropriate.

Respondent comments:

Good, developers should not be allowed to cut down trees needlessly.

Makes sense.

Do you have any comments regarding Policy 6 - Woodland Management?

Respondent comments:

No comment.

Where this policy applies needs to be clarified. See answers to questions 5 and 6.

It is good to see the management of the woods, and well done to all the volunteer woodwardens who help.

Makes sense but more needs to be done to ensure people follow the rules i.e. anti social behaviour by cyclists in our woods

I remain unconvinced sufficient resource is available to adequately manage all the WHBC controlled woodlands. Constraints on resource need addressing.

Officer's response:

15) There is a finite amount of resources within all council services. However, officers have been proactive in procuring grants for woodland management and Tree Planting.

Do you have any comments regarding Policy 7 - Community Engagement?

Respondent comments:

It is noted in paragraph 11.3 of the proposed Tree Strategy: A Tree Warden group was launched in 2006 for those interested in street trees. These volunteers are the 'eyes and ears' for the trees in their neighbourhood. On a personal note, I am a Tree Warden but I do not feel considered as 'eyes and ears'. As noted in previous correspondence I feel that the Council could make more effective use of this volunteer resource.

Officer's response:

16) The Tree Officers manage the Tree Wardens. They organise regular meetings and training for Tree Wardens. Comment is noted.

Respondent comments:

Great!

Makes sense

I would like to see wider use of the Borough's woodland for nature-based teaching and learning.

Do you have any comments regarding Policy 8 - Green Infrastructure?

Respondent comments:

It is noted in paragraph 13.2 of the proposed Tree Strategy: 'We are committed to planting at least 250 street trees across the Borough every year'. 250 trees sounds a very low figure across the Borough – is this benchmarkable with other Boroughs that have a Garden City? It is assumed that the reference in the reply document should be to Infrastructure and not 'Infrasture'.

Officer's response:

17) This has been amended to 300 trees. Spelling mistake noted and changed.

Respondent comments:

Any sustainability is good

Great!

Makes sense

I don't see much evidence of the conservation and promotion of green infrastructure across the Borough, there appears to have been a fall in interest after the 2000's and I am unclear how the borough is working to enhance this

A lot of Green infrastructure is dealt with via planning.

Do you have any general comments about the Strategy?

Respondent comments:

General comments: Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the tree strategy. It is a comprehensive document which is double the size of the one from the comparable London Borough of Richmond. 17 | APPENDIX 4: TYPES OF PRUNING - It is positive to note that the Council will not be stripping the leaves off healthy trees during the growing season in future. It would be nice to have a response to the comments. Alternatively the Council could write an article for the Welwyn Garden City Society magazine outlining the conflicting pressures required to maintain a Garden City.

Delighted to see it. Just hope there will be enough staff and money to carry it through

I am not an expert but it sounds very thorough and well-thought out.

Why are beautiful healthy trees removed without any reason that is communicated to locals (*specific location provided*)? could there be a notice shared with locals on the stumps if they are removed for a good reason?

Officer's response:

18) Noted. A tree felling list is put on our website. When large scale felling occurs it notices are put up and Ward councillors notified.

Respondent comments:

It's good to see this activity happening but much more needs to be done to protect our woodlands and open spaces from misuse

Given the resource constraints the strategy is probably as far as it is possible to go, but given the ambitious climate change targets the council has in place it seems a missed opportunity to leverage additional resource to be able to help deliver that through a more ambitious strategy.

Officer's response:

Noted

Part I

Item No: 0

Main author: Oliver Waring

Executive Member: Cllr Sandreni

Bonfante

Ward: Howlands

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET – 4 MARCH 2025

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (RESIDENT SERVICES AND CLIMATE CHANGE)

THE COMMONS LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT PLAN 2025-2035

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 It is a requirement for grant funding proposals and good practice to produce Landscape Management Plans for our nature reserves.
- 1.2 Each plan has a vision statement, outlining the overall goals and intentions of the site and its management.
- 1.3 The Commons Landscape Management Plan has been revised, and the proposed plan is in Appendix A.
- 1.4 A public consultation on the proposed plan was undertaken between 11 November and 30 December 2024. 100% of those who responded to the consultation agreed with the visions of the plan, and 83% agreed with the aims, objectives and proposals for the site. The survey results can be found in Appendix B.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 Cabinet is asked to consider and approve The Commons Landscape Management Plan for 2025-2035 in Appendix A.

3 Explanation

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 The previous management plan for The Commons is due to be renewed and has been revised (Appendix A).
- 3.3 The new plan has been produced by our contractor (Maydencroft) working closely with the Council's Landscape Conservation Officer.
- 3.4 The plan gives a background to the sites, policy context, an analysis and evaluation of the sites, 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

3.5 Public consultation was undertaken on the proposed The Commons Landscape Management Plan between 11 November 2024 and 30 December 2024. There was an online survey on the Council's website and the consultation was promoted via a press release, the website, and it was sent to a list of stakeholders/interested parties. The draft plan was also presented at the Climate and Diversity Cabinet Panel.

3.6 There were 20 responses to the public consultation. 100% of those who responded to the consultation agreed with the visions of the plan, and 83% agreed with the aims, objectives and proposals for the site. The survey results can be found in Appendix B.

3.7 If The Commons Landscape Management Plan is approved, it will be available to Councillors, Officers, Volunteers and to the public on the Council's website.

4 Legal Implication(s)

4.1 No legal implications

5 Financial Implication(s)

5.1 The Commons Landscape Management Plan is managed through existing budgets, some grant funding and much work from volunteers.

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 2024/25.

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.

Name of author	Oliver Waring
Title	Landscape and Ecology Team Manager
Date	31 January 2024

Appendices

Appendix A – The Commons Landscape Management Plan 2025-2035

Appendix B – Public Consultation Summary

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The Commons

10 Year Landscape Management Plan




2025 – 2035



DOCUMENT AMENDMENT HISTORY

Version	Status	Date	Amendment to this version
1	Draft	10.01.24	
2	Issue	01.07.24	Updates following WHBC review

DOCUMENT APPROVAL

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SITE SUMMARY

Site Name	The Commons Local Nature Reserve
Address	The Commons, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire, AL7 4RU
Grid Reference	TL258110
What3words	pilots.label.leaned
Size (ha)	13.2
Statutory Designations	Local Nature Reserve
National Character Area (NCA)	111: Northern Thames Basin



Figure 1: Aerial image showing The Commons Local Nature Reserve site boundary (© Google Earth, 2023)

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1. Introduction

Maydencroft Limited was commissioned by Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council to produce a 10-Year Landscape Management Plan (LMP) for The Commons Local Nature Reserve (LNR), hereafter referred to as the 'site'.

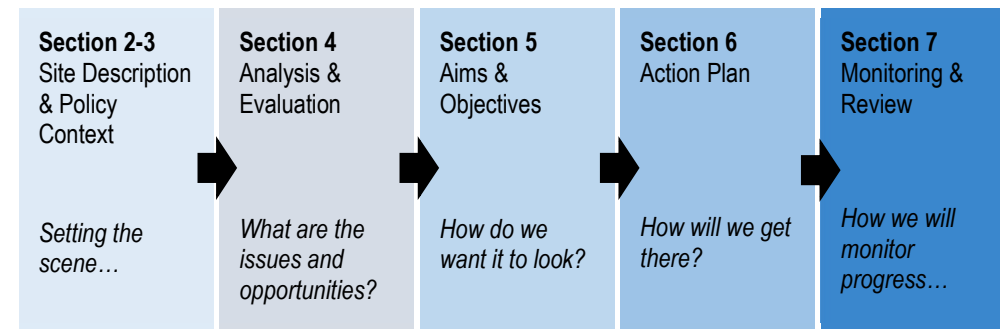
The Commons LNR is located to the southeast of Welwyn Garden City in central Hertfordshire. The site is owned by Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council, and has been managed under the terms of a 10-year Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) Agreement since 2014.



Figure 2: Map showing the location of the site (© Ordnance Survey, 2023)

This LMP is intended to direct the management of the site for a ten-year period from 2024 – 2034, working alongside the requirements for the stewardship agreement. It aims to capture all of the basic requirements to manage the site effectively, and seeks to make meaningful site improvements where opportunities are identified.

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 Commons LNR should be managed. The structure of the document aims to give a legible process for understanding the current condition of The Commons LNR and how actions for the next ten years have been determined. The layout can be summarised as follows:



Section 2 of this document provides a Site Description which sets out all the factual, baseline information relating to the site in terms of its history, ecology, function, and landscape. Section 3 summarises key areas of legislation that direct the actions and responsibilities for the management of the site. Section 4 takes this factual information and analyses it to ascertain the key issues facing the site and opportunities for improvement. The aims and objectives for site management and enhancement are set out in Section 5 and action plans for delivering these aspirations in Section 6. The final section includes details on how the plan will be monitored and reviewed.



- ### Key
- Site boundary
 - Listed Building
 - PRoW
 - LNR
 - Conservation Area
 - Wildlife Site
 - Ancient Woodland
 - Scheduled Monument
 - Parks and Gardens
 - Greenbelt

Client	Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council		
Project	The Commons LMP		
Title	Site Constraints Plan		
Drawn	VJ	Checked	LW
Drawing No.	MH9028-002		Date
			11.10.2023
			Revision
			Issue
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Key

- Site boundary
- Site furniture**
- Memorial plaque
- ◆ Memorial bench
- Dogs-on-leads sign
- Welcome signage
- Waymarker
- Bin
- Bridge
- Field gate
- Pedestrian gate
- Viewing platform
- Habitats and surfaces**
- Permissive footpaths
- Ditch
- Pond
- Fen
- Orchard
- Grassland
- Grassland - grazed
- Mature scrub with trees
- Woodland
- Wet woodland
- Cropland

Client	Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council		
Project	The Commons LMP		
Title	Site Description Map		
Drawn	VJ	Checked	LW
		Date	09.11.2023
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2. Site Description

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The Commons is a narrow V-shaped reserve located on the southeast limit of Welwyn Garden City, within the Howlands residential ward. The site falls within Green Belt land. The Howlands estate forms the site boundary to the north, which includes Commonswood School and Howlands Baptist Church on the site boundary. The New Queen Elizabeth II Hospital is located to the west, a privately-owned woodland also called The Commons to the southwest, and arable land with woodland blocks and hedged margins to the south and east. The A414 is located 0.6km to the south and the A1(M) 3km to the west.

The site can be separated into three distinct areas:

- Blackfan Fen located to the north of the east side of the site, and comprised of two compartments, North Fen and South Fen.
- Windmill Hill located to the east of the site, and comprised of two grassland compartments, Upper Windmill Hill and Lower Windmill Hill.
- Howlands, a long and narrow area of woodland and grassland to the west of the Hatfield Hyde Brook, extending to the reserve entrance along Howlands. This area incorporates a track from The Commons residential road leading to an old Thames Water pumping station now used as a volunteer base.

2.2 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

A 1st edition OS map from 1884 shows the site situated within an arable landscape comprising fields with scattered trees and hedgerow-lined margins, farmsteads and woodland blocks. The landscape had very little settlement until the creation of Welwyn

Garden City in the early-mid 20th century. The Hatfield Hyde Brook is not clearly identifiable on 19th century maps; however the presence of marsh is clear to the north of the site, now known as Blackfan Fen, and the land parcels have similar boundaries to present-day. The Commons woodland plantation to the southwest was planted at some point during the early 20th century.



Figure 3: 6-inch 1st edition OS map of The Commons and surrounding land from 1884. The marsh is demarcated by the red pin. (© National Library of Scotland, 2023)

A large assemblage of Neolithic worked flints have been found within Blackfan Fen. The flints have been interpreted as a possible burnt mound.

2.2.1 Historical Designations

Beehive Lane, Welwyn Garden City Conservation Area is located immediately to the northwest of the site.

Holwellhyde Farmhouse, located approximately 100m to the east of the site, is a Grade II listed building of 16th or early 17th century origins (list number 1172793).

There are two additional listed buildings within 500m of the site, both Grade II listed: Ludwick Hall and The Beehive Public House.

2.3 LANDSCAPE CONTEXT

2.3.1 National Character Area

Natural England have produced a framework of 159 landscape profiles for England, resulting in National Character Areas (NCA). The NCA profile summarises the key features of the character area. The site is located within **NCA: 111 Northern Thames Basin**, which extends from Hertfordshire in the west to the Essex coast in the east.

The NCA profile document summarises the key features of the character area. The area is broadly described as rich in geodiversity, archaeology and history, with diverse landscapes ranging from woodlands, river valleys and open arable areas to historic and recent urbanisation. Urban expansion has been a feature of the area since the 16th century, and as infrastructure improved connectivity into London, tranquillity has been reduced.

Semi-natural habitats in the area are diverse and provide important habitats for a wide range of species, but these have become fragmented over time. A number of Priority habitats are within the NCA; these include woodland, lowland grassland and fen.

Statements of Environmental Opportunity have been drawn up by Natural England to help understand the value of each NCA. Of particular relevance to the site is:

- SEO1: *Manage the rivers and river valleys to protect and improve water quality... Conserve the riparian landscapes and habitats, for their recreational and educational amenity and for their internationally significant ecological value; and*
- SEO3: *Protect and appropriately manage the historic environment for its contribution to local character and sense of identity, and as a framework for habitat restoration and sustainable development... Enhance and increase access between rural and urban areas through good green infrastructure links to allow communities recreational, health and wellbeing benefits.*

2.3.2 District Landscape Character

The Welwyn Hatfield Landscape Character Assessment was produced in 2005 by The Landscape Partnership Ltd. The site lies within area **45: Welwyn Fringes**. The area is described as an urban fringe belt around the eastern flanks of Welwyn, with a wide range of land uses. While the western end of this area has obvious urban-fringe land uses, the area to the east is more rural, with arable cultivation and some blocks of woodland. Key characteristics include a gently undulating, open landform, with large woodland blocks. There is an obvious sense of proximity to large settlements through the transport network, land uses and fly-tipping.

The Commons (including the private woodland to the southwest) is described as “*a unique area ecologically*” although the local landscape cannot be regarded as distinctive. The aim of the character area is to *improve and restore* which includes the use of low-density grazing for management of unimproved pasture, the reversal of habitat fragmentation by creating corridors, expansion of hedged field boundaries and woodland, and creation of buffer zones between field margins and semi-natural habitats.

2.3.3 Topography

The site is approximately 70m above sea level, with a lower elevation of 60m at the south of the site where the Fen Brook and Hatfield Hyde Brook converge. The surrounding landscape rises to the east and northwest of the site to an approximate elevation of 90m.

2.3.4 Landscape & Visual Appraisal

Windmill Hill is more elevated and provides views to the rural landscape to the north and east. Views are limited in distance due to woodland blocks and tree lines / scrub belts along field edges.

The rest of the site feels enclosed and peaceful due to the low-lying topography and woodland, which extends offsite to the southwest. This is an important feature of the site, as it provides a sense of separation from the urbanisation to the northwest.

2.3.5 Geology and soils

The geology is a major factor in determining an area's topography and soils. These, together with the climate, determine the natural vegetation and habitats which support a range of species.

The Geology Map of Britain (developed by the British Geological Survey) shows that the site lies on chalk sedimentary bedrock, formed between 93.9 and 83.6 million years ago during the Cretaceous period. Parts of the site also lie on sand and gravel superficial deposits formed between 2.588 million and 11,800 years ago.

The Soils Map of the United Kingdom (developed and hosted by Cranfield University) shows that the site is located on two Soils: Soil 8, which is described as being slightly acid, loamy and clayey soils with impeded drainage to the north, and Soil 6, which is described as freely-draining slightly acid loamy soils to the south. Soil 8 is associated with a wide range of pasture and woodland type habitats, and Soil 6 neutral and acid pastures and deciduous woodlands.

A 2m deep excavation by Thames Water to replace a sewer in the fen also revealed an extensive layer of compacted peat. Samples of the peat sequence were taken for radiocarbon dating by Wessex Archaeology. Samples indicated that the peat formed in the late Roman to Early Anglo-Saxon period (c. 5-6th century A.D) and was sealed by alluvial fan deposition in the late Medieval to early post-Medieval period (c. 15-16th century).

It should be noted that a site-based soil assessment was not carried out as part of the survey.

2.3.6 Hydrology

There are two watercourses on site: Fen Brook and Hatfield Hyde Brook. The brooks form part of the Lee (from Luton Hoo Lakes to Hertford) catchment, which has moderate ecological status. The two watercourses converge at the most southerly point of the site, and

continue southwards offsite as Hatfield Hyde Brook until discharging into the River Lee 1km to the south. Land in close proximity to the watercourses is in Flood Zone 3, which means there is a high probability of flooding from rivers.

There are several groundwater springs around the fen area of the site, which results in year-round provision of water and suitability for fen habitat.

2.4 HABITATS & WILDLIFE

2.4.1 Habitats

Lowland Fen

Blackfan Fen is divided into two compartments: North Fen (0.8ha) and South Fen (0.5ha). Previous surveys have shown the fen is dominated by lesser pond sedge (*Carex acutiformis*) and blunt-flowered rush (*Juncus subnodulosus*) with willowherb (*Epilobium hirsutum*), hemp-agrimony (*Eupatorium cannabinum*), common fleabane (*Pulicaria dysenterica*), fen bedstraw (*Galium uliginosum*), marsh bedstraw (*Galium palustre*), marsh horsetail (*Equisetum palustre*), ragged robin (*Silene flos-cuculi*) and meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*). Woody species include willow (*Salix* sp.), alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) and hazel (*Corylus avellana*). Many specimens have been coppiced or are pollards; the North Fen is more wooded compared to the South Fen. The south and west boundaries of South Fen are marked by dead hedges from willow and hazel coppicing works on site.



Figure 4: South Fen marked by a dead hedge boundary

Surface water is present on the fen for the majority of the year, likely from high groundwater levels due to the combined effect of loamy and clayey soils reducing percolation, and presence of springs.

The fen has not been recognised as a Priority habitat on MAGIC, but is an uncommon and locally important habitat in Hertfordshire.

An assessment of the sediments, pollen and plant macrofossils within the peat by Wessex Archaeology indicate that the site has remained a fen-type environment throughout the period of peat formation. However, there have been notable changes in the vegetational environment through time; in the earlier stages the fen was dominated by reeds and sedges in an open oak, hazel and ash wooded environment, which became increasingly open over time. Pollen records also suggest the onset or increase of hazel coppice management.

Wet Woodland

North Fen and South Fen are separated by 0.4ha of wet woodland. The woodland species composition is similar to the trees found in the fen (willow, alder and hazel) with ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*) and oak (*Quercus robur*) on drier ground.



Figure 5: Wet woodland between North Fen and South Fen

Woodland

Two areas of deciduous woodland are present onsite: to the east of the Fen Brook and surrounding Blackfan Fen, and to the west of the site within Howlands Meadow. The woodland onsite is listed as a Priority habitat.

The woodland surrounding the fen is a mature oak woodland with hornbeam and hazel coppice. Standing and fallen deadwood is present.



Figure 6: Coppice-with-standards woodland surrounding the fen

The Howlands Meadow woodland, which also extends offsite as The Commons woodland, is ash-dominated with field maple (*Acer campestre*), blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) and willow. Many ash trees are showing signs of ash dieback. A herbaceous woodland edge borders the surfaced footpath ride through the woodland; species include bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*), nettle (*Urtica dioica*), dog rose (*Rosa canina*) and common hogweed (*Heracleum sphondylium*), as well as grasses and rushes.



Figure 7: Ash-dominated woodland with herbaceous border in Howlands Meadow

Orchard

A 0.08ha orchard is located to the south of the old Thames Water pumping station. The orchard is listed as a Traditional Orchard under the Priority Habitat Inventory. The orchard more closely resembles an open area of grassland with scattered mature trees. Several saplings have been planted into this orchard as part of its restoration. These have derived from the mature crab apple trees elsewhere onsite. The grassland within the orchard is cut very regularly, at least once a month through the spring and summer to prevent scrub cover establishing.



Figure 8: The orchard to the south of the old Thames Water pumping station

Grassland

There are distinct areas of grassland onsite with differing management practices.

Lower Windmill Hill is a 1.3ha sloping tussocky grassland divided by a shrub belt. The area is grazed by Longhorn cattle from May/June – August. The grassland is topped in autumn when required.



Figure 9: Lower Windmill Hill

0.7ha of grassland to the north of Howlands Meadow is grazed by Longhorn cattle between August – October. The grassland is also topped in autumn when required. Previous surveys have identified the grassland composition as lowland neutral grassland, with cowslip (*Primula veris*), bird's-foot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), meadow vetchling (*Lathyrus pratensis*), tufted vetch (*Vicia cracca*) and greater knapweed (*Centaurea scabiosa*). Bee orchid (*Ophrys apifera*) and pyramidal orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*) have been recorded. Wetter areas of grassland support hard rush (*Juncus inflexus*).



Figure 10: Grazed grassland in Howlands Meadow

Species-poor short grassland is located at site entrances and bordering footpaths on Windmill Hill.



Figure 11: Grassland at the site entrance at Howlands

Hedgerows and Mixed Scrub

Hedgerows and mixed scrub with trees are found along the banks of the Fen Brook, at site entrances, to the west of North Fen, on Windmill Hill, and around the volunteer base.

Species include field maple, hazel, oak, hornbeam, ash, dog rose, blackthorn, hawthorn, bramble, nettle and ivy (*Hedera helix*). Hedgerows have been laid in places.



Figure 12: A mature scrub belt / hedgerow between Upper and Lower Windmill Hill



Figure 13: A laid field maple and hazel hedgerow in Howlands Meadow

Cropland

Upper Windmill Hill (1.5ha) is topped, ploughed and sown with 229kg of wild bird seed in mid-March. A wide arable field margin and mature scrub belt with trees form the outer perimeter of the cropland.

Table 1: Wild bird seed mix composition sown on Upper Windmill Hill.

Name	Quantity (kg)	%
Spring wheat	60	34.5
Spring barley	60	34.5
Spring oats	40	23
White millet	10	5.7
Quinoa	2	1.1
Red clover	1	0.6
White clover	1	0.6



Figure 14: Cropland with an arable field margin and mature scrub belt with trees

Ditches, Ponds and Pools

Hatfield Hyde Brook is a ditch that forms the boundary of the site to The Commons woodland to the south. The brook is spring-fed, with the source located in the Woodhall area of Welwyn Garden City. The brook has a gravel bed, and is shallow and slow flowing during dry conditions. Road drainage is directed into the brook, and high rainfall leads to an increase in flow, scouring the bed and leaving the banks steep with little emergent vegetation.



Figure 15: Hatfield Hyde Brook

Fen Brook flows southwards along the west boundary of Blackfan Fen and Windmill Hill. Fen Brook is also spring-fed and emerges at the north of the fen. The northern end of Fen Brook is shallow and muddy, with decaying wood and detritus.



Figure 16: The northern end of Fen Brook

A culvert enters Fen Brook from the west approximately halfway through the site. Road drainage enters the brook from this point, and the channel becomes steeper and faster-flowing. A greater diversity of flora is found along Fen Brook, although there are poached areas along the bank. Litter was observed within the channel.



Figure 17: Fen Brook at the entrance from The Commons. Bank poaching is frequent in this location

Two ponds were observed on site, located to the north within woodland surrounding the fen. The Fen Brook also widens to the north of the site creating a shallow pool. An abundance of aquatic and emergent vegetation is present. Due to groundwater conditions, additional hydrological features may be present within the Fen.



Figure 18: A pond within North Fen

2.4.2 Invasive non-native species

The Commons is included in a borough-wide invasive species management plan for WHBC due to the presence of Japanese knotweed (*Reynoutria japonica*) along a footpath.

Variegated yellow archangel (*Lamiastrum galeobdolon* subsp. *argentatum*) was observed within woodland to the north of Windmill Hill on the site visit.

Both species are listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 which means it is an offence to plant or otherwise cause these species to grow in the wild.



Figure 19: Variegated yellow archangel within the woodland

The site lies within the Forestry Commission's 'Established Area' for Oak Processionary Moth (OPM), with an oak tree to the northeast of the site recorded as infested in 2022.

Muntjac deer have been observed within the woodland on site.

2.4.3 Ecological designations

The site was designated as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) in 1998.

The site is also a Wildlife Site (WS80 'Blackfan Fen & the Commons Meadow' 58/037). The Wildlife Site WS79 'The Commons (Wood)' 58/023 is located immediately to the southwest of the site.

2.4.4 Tree preservation orders

The online service provided by Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council shows that of the 9th October 2023 there are no Tree Preservation Orders on site.

2.4.5 Wildlife

The variety of habitats on site support a wide range of species. Previous surveys have shown small mammals are found in good numbers within the fen and surrounding scrub. Species recorded include wood mouse, yellow-necked mouse, field vole, bank vole and both common and pigmy shrew. In some years, harvest mice have bred within the fen. The last recorded breeding was in 2017. Historically, water vole and water shrew have been recorded in the brook and ditch system within Blackfan Fen.

The reserve's freshwater habitats – ditches and ponds – offer a resource for rarer invertebrates, aquatic mammals and birds with limited distributions in Hertfordshire. It is possible that great crested newts could be present in the ponds but no formal survey has taken place to confirm this.

The eastern side of the fen lies on slightly higher and drier ground and the coppice-with-standards structure along with thorn scrub supports a varied bird life. In a 2014 survey, this included both resident and migrant species such as blackcap, fieldfare and redwing. Evidence of dormouse has been historically recorded along the hedge boundary of the North Fen.

Monitoring of the arable area has revealed its importance for farmland birds including yellowhammer, reed bunting, chaffinch, greenfinch and linnet. The former was recorded incidentally during the site visit between the cropland and the grazed field on Windmill Hill. Skylark and meadow pipit have also been recorded feeding here in the past. The hedgerows and wide margins on Windmill Hill support good populations of small mammals. These provide food for tawny and barn owls, the latter of which have successfully raised young between 2016 and 2020, when the last survey was carried out. More recently, three barn owls have been recorded on site by a local ornithologist. In 2014 there was anecdotal evidence of a polecat recorded on NBN Atlas. Additionally, butterflies are recorded in good numbers here, including past sightings of grizzled skipper and clouded yellow, a

migrant species. Nine species of grasshopper and cricket have been recorded.

As a result of the floristic diversity in the grazed grasslands, a wide range of insects have been recorded including bees and wasps, spiders and bugs as well as beetles, moths and grasshoppers. Historically, 26 species of butterfly have been recorded in Howlands Meadow including the locally scarce white-letter hairstreak but not all were still present in 2020 during the last survey. Both slow-worm and grass snake have been found in Howlands Meadow. Additionally, areas of grassland which are grazed by Longhorn cattle allow for the creation of bare ground which is important for invertebrates.

The woodland within Howlands Meadow has shown to be highly valuable for woodland edge species of birds, especially migrant warblers in the past. Other rare species that have occurred in this area include garden warbler and lesser spotted woodpecker. Decaying wood will support a number of invertebrates and fungi.

Mature trees within the woodlands may provide roosting opportunities for bats. Linear features such as hedgerows and streams provide commuting corridors for bats, and the grasslands and arable field provide foraging opportunities for bats.

2.5 ACCESS & FUNCTION

The site is primarily used by local people for dog walking and informal recreation. There is open pedestrian access to the majority of the site at all times of the year from a number of gates around the boundaries. Some areas of the site, including the fen, grazed areas of grassland, the volunteer hut and track at the old Thames Water pumping station, the orchard and arable land on Windmill Hill are fenced off and do not have public access.

More recently the site has been used by the council to host guided walks aimed at engaging the local community with their green spaces, such as the 'Muddy Boots' campaign ran in partnership with

local non-profit CultureWood CIC in 2023. There are plans in place to continue to deliver events such as these.

There are no public rights of way (PROW) through the site, although there is a network of footpaths around the site. Some surfacing works were completed by Maydencroft in 2021/22 on the central footpath running through the site. Other pathways are more informal and can become muddy in the winter.

A wooden platform overlooking the fen is located by the larger pond. The site has historically received educational visits from local schools; however, these have not taken place for a number of years.

There is no car park for the reserve, but there is limited parking available on adjacent residential roads.

A gas main and sewer run underneath the site. Gas works took place in 2022 which resulted in a number of trees being felled, and Thames Water have undertaken sewer works on site.

2.6 SIGNAGE AND FURNITURE

There is welcome signage at the three main entrances to the site. There are bins for litter and dog waste located at two of these entrances. There is a dogs-on-leads sign and waymarker posts towards the centre of the site.

There is one bench on site, which is a memorial bench to the north of Windmill Hill. A memorial plaque is located at the base of a tree on the footpath between the arable field and grazed grassland.

The site has been subject to some incidents of antisocial behaviour such as motorbikes being ridden through the site, vandalism of the memorial bench and signage, and the volunteer base has suffered theft.

2.7 SITE MANAGEMENT

The reserve is owned by Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council and has been managed under the terms of a 10-year Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) Agreement with Natural England since 2014. This agreement has been extended until 31st October 2028.

Volunteers are an integral part of the management of the site and there are two groups who work on site: The Commons Nature Group meet once per month, and the Wednesday Group meet on an ad hoc basis. Volunteers use the old Thames Water pumping station as a base and for storing tools. Some volunteers have chainsaw tickets and are therefore able to coppice and pollard smaller trees such as willow on the fen. Branches are used for creating dead hedges and logs for wildlife piles. The volunteers also cut the fen back and coppice around both fens to extend the habitat but not merge, as they are independent habitats with differing qualities. The traditional practice of hedgerow laying is also undertaken. A local ornithologist regularly volunteers their time and undertakes bird surveys on site.

Under the HLS, Longhorn cattle have been grazing Lower Windmill Hill from May/June to August, and 0.7ha of grassland to the north of Howlands Meadow is grazed by Longhorn cattle between August and October, as well as mowing when required.

The arable field on Upper Windmill Hill is topped, ploughed and sown with wild bird seed in mid-March. The results of this management approach seem beneficial to wildlife through informal observations. There are some challenges to this approach during wet weather due to the clayey soils in this location.

The orchard is regularly mown by volunteers. The herbaceous border along the woodland edge in Howlands Meadow is flailed in autumn.

Tree Safety Inspections (TSI) and resulting remedial works are routinely carried out along site boundaries, as well as along paths, specific points of interest and to check for ash dieback.



Figure 20: Topping the grassland within Howlands Meadow



Figure 21: Flailed herbaceous border in Howlands Meadow

3. Policy Context

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The following paragraphs summarise a few of the key areas of legislation, policies and strategies that direct the actions and responsibilities of WHBC with regard to the management of The Commons LNR.

3.2 NATIONAL POLICY

3.2.1 National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) and last updated in September 2023. The NPPF sets out the national planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied.

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 by protecting and enhancing “valued landscapes” and sites of biodiversity or geological value / soils. Recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits of natural capital and other ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;
- Taking opportunities to minimise impacts on and provide net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;
- To protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity, local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks should be identified, mapped and safeguarded, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity, wildlife corridors and stepping

stones that connect them, and areas identified by national and local partnerships for habitat management, enhancement, restoration or creation;

- Promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority species, and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity.

3.2.2 Improving Access to Greenspace: A New Review For 2020

This report sets out the importance of greenspace as being increasingly recognised as an important asset for supporting health and wellbeing. The report also highlights how ‘natural capital’ can help local authorities address local issues, help improve health and wellbeing, manage health and social care costs, reduce health inequalities, improve social cohesion and take positive action to address climate change. This report also makes the case that we must not lose sight of our growing population’s need for greenspace.

3.2.3 A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve The Environment

A Green Future was published in 2018 by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and sets out the Government’s actions to help the natural world regain and retain good health. The 25 Year Environment Plan aims to deliver cleaner air and water in our cities and rural landscapes, protect threatened species and provide richer wildlife habitats. The plan sets out a number of goals and also identifies six key areas for action which includes (but not limited to): “*Recovering of nature and enhancing the beauty of landscapes.*”

3.3 LEGISLATION

3.3.1 The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006

The Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act makes provision in connection with wildlife, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), National Parks and the Broads, amends the law relating to public rights of way, makes provision as to the Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council and provides for flexible administrative

arrangements in connection with functions relating to the environment and rural affairs.

Section 40 of the NERC Act states that every public body, including local authorities, must in exercising its functions, have regard to the purpose of conserving biodiversity. Conserving biodiversity includes restoring or enhancing a species population or habitat.

3.3.2 *The Occupier's Liability Act 1957 and 1984*

The Occupier's Liability Act amends the law of England and Wales as to the liability of the occupiers of premises for injury suffered by persons other than their guests. The occupier of a premises owes a duty to another (not being a visitor) in respect of any known danger associated with a risk or if they have reasonable grounds to believe the danger exists. The occupier owes a duty if they know or believe that another is in the vicinity or danger or may come into the vicinity of danger, and the risk is one against which they may reasonably be expected to offer protection against. Any duty owed by virtue may be discharged by taking steps to give warning of the danger or by discouraging persons from incurring the risk.

3.3.3 *The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981*

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 is an Act of UK Parliament which gives protection to native species, enhances the protection of SSSIs and builds upon the rights of way rules in the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. Birds, their nests and eggs are protected from injury and certain methods of killing and injuring are prohibited. Animals listed on Schedule 5 and their places of shelter and protection are protected from being killed injured or taken. Wild plants listed in Schedule 8 are protected from being uprooted and sold. The act contains measures for preventing the establishment of non-native species listed in Schedule 9 which may be detrimental to native wildlife.

3.3.4 *The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017*

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) states that work likely to impact on species or their habitat

listed under Schedule 2 (known as European Protected Species) require an EPS Licence issued by Natural England.

3.3.5 *The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000*

The Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000 (as amended) is an Act of UK Parliament normally gives a public right of access to land mapped as 'open country' or registered common land. These areas are known as 'open access land'. Public rights of way are typically listed and described in Definitive Maps and Statements (legal records of public rights of way) usually held at a local authority's office or library.

3.4 LOCAL POLICY

3.4.1 *Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council Local Plan 2016-2036*

The Local Plan was adopted by Welwyn Hatfield Council in October 2023 and provides the basis for assessing all development until 2036. The policies considered of relevance to the Site are summarised below:

Policy SP11 – Protection and enhancement of critical environmental assets

The protection, enhancement and management of the environmental, ecological and historic assets within the borough, will be sought commensurate with their status, significance and international, national and/or local importance.

Development that would secure positive improvements to and ensure the long-term conservation of ecological and heritage assets for the enjoyment of future generations will be supported.

Designation of ecological and heritage assets will be supported where it is deemed appropriate and necessary to safeguard them for the enjoyment of future generations.

Policy SP12 – Strategic Green Infrastructure

The Council will actively support the creation and enhancement of strategic green infrastructure across the borough. Opportunities to link existing green spaces and to improve public access and amenity will be supported in order to provide a comprehensive network of functional and linked spaces for the benefit of wildlife, biodiversity and the community.

Priorities for the creation and enhancement of green infrastructure include river corridors and sites designated for their nature conservation, heritage and/or landscape value.

The Commons has been listed as a strategic site to form part of the Welwyn Hatfield Green Corridor. The Green Corridor will connect existing green infrastructure, ecological assets, rights of way, and community resource.

Policy SADM 16 – Ecology and Landscape

Proposals will be expected to maintain, protect and wherever possible enhance biodiversity, the structure and function of ecological networks and the ecological status of water bodies.

Proposals will be expected to help conserve and enhance the borough's natural and historic landscape, and sit comfortably within the wider landscape setting. Proposals should take full account of the relevant Landscape Character Assessment and adopt the strategy and guidelines for managing change.

4. Analysis & Evaluation

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This section of the management plan constitutes an analysis of the current condition of The Commons compared to the 2014-2024 Management Plan, and whether it is achieving its full potential. It takes the factual information set out in the Site Description a stage further by discussing the quality of important features alongside any identified threats and issues, combined with the aspirations of Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council. This evaluation will determine the aims, objectives and future management actions for The Commons over the next ten years.

4.2 CONTINUATION OF MANAGEMENT & FUNDING

The Commons comprises a variety of important and locally rare habitats, including lowland fen, unimproved neutral grassland, woodland with scrub edges, and freshwater habitats, which in turn support a variety of species. The site's isolation from other nature reserves and position on the urban fringe of Welwyn Garden City highlights the importance of continuing to manage these habitats for biodiversity and people.

The previous 10-Yr LMP for The Commons LNR had at its core the following vision:

The Commons Local Nature Reserve will be a special place where local people and visitors can enjoy its visual qualities, its unique assemblage of wildlife and peaceful environment.

This and any future plan will be used to conserve and enhance the best aspects of The Commons and guide future management to ensure it remains an important place for wildlife and people.

It would appear that through the delivery of the LMP and ongoing management this vision is being met. Maintenance through HLS-funded cattle grazing with native Longhorns and cultivation of Upper Windmill Hill has helped to increase biodiversity of grassland areas.

Voluntary activities, including vegetation cutting on Blackfan Fen and coppicing of woodland and scrub species, provide successional and more diverse habitats elsewhere.

Volunteers are an integral part to the management of habitats on site. Opportunities to increase both the frequency of activities and local participation should be sought. This may be achieved by raising awareness of volunteer groups through local newsletters and exploring corporate volunteering opportunities. Additionally, volunteer training sessions should continue that will allow volunteers to undertake a greater variety of tasks.

Due to the successful management over the past 10 years to retain and restore the important habitats on site, Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council have received an extension to their Environmental Land Management Scheme, securing further funding to support ongoing management. This Management Plan for the period of 2025-2035, will ensure the commitments of this scheme are met. Other internal and external funding opportunities should be explored to support capital work projects.

4.3 WOODLAND MANAGEMENT

The previous LMP identified the felling and coppicing of the ash woodland to the north of Hatfield Hyde Brook. Works have been completed to trees showing signs of ash dieback, and retained ash trees are subject to routine Tree Safety Inspections and remedial works as required. Consequently, the woodland has become more open, allowing the understorey to develop.

The scrub-herbaceous border adjacent to the surfaced path in Howlands Meadow is cut and collected in autumn by a contractor. As shown in Figure 21, cutting is linear and one height, and occurs on both sides of the footpath. In order to move away from contractor involvement on site and increase biodiversity opportunities, it is recommended to rotationally cut the ride in offset scalloped sections as part of a volunteer task. This will increase the diversity of habitats

present and provide important niches for invertebrates and small mammals.

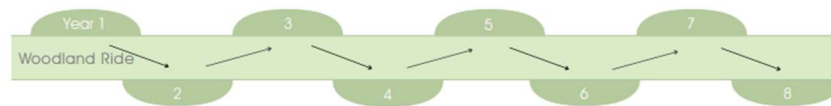


Figure 22: Offset scallops along a woodland ride (Butterfly Conservation, n.d.)

The oak and hazel standard-with-coppice woodland to the north and east of the fen has been successfully managed over the period of the previous LMP. Several hazel trees were observed to be overstood, and should be considered for the next round of coppicing. Brush from these works has been used to create dead hedges on site. Coppicing around the edges of the fen habitat will help to prevent the succession into woodland.



Figure 23: Overstood hazel coppice

Willow pollards have been created within the wet woodland area between the North and South Fens. The pollards are at a height suitable for ongoing management by volunteers. Hazel coppicing has also taken place in this area.

Mature trees should be left to go into senescence where safe to do so. Similarly, standing and fallen dead wood should be retained in-situ where not posing a health and safety or accessibility issue.

4.4 TREE RISK MANAGEMENT

The Commons contains many large trees and woodlands of varying ages and states of condition; as such it is not uncommon for trees to drop limbs and deadwood, or to fracture and fall.

To date, site management has taken a pragmatic approach to tree safety, through undertaking regular Tree Safety Inspections and

commissioning remedial work to high-risk trees as required, but also allowing trees to naturally decline and seeking to retain both standing and fallen deadwood. This approach is of huge benefit to wildlife, and far more cost-effective for WHBC budgets. It also sends an important message to visitors about the nature of the site and not to expect a sanitised, formal park.

Ash dieback is likely to affect more ash trees, both on site and to the private woodland to the southwest of the site. A continuing programme of monitoring and remedial works should be sufficient to appropriately manage risk.

It is likely that in the not-too-distant future, the site will start to see populations of Oak Processionary Moth (OPM), particularly given the abundance of oak trees present. As with any other tree-related issue, it is recommended that a risk-based approach is taken to OPM management, involving a process of survey, risk assessment, and then hand-removal of nests only where there is significant risk to the public. In general terms, it is likely that a signage campaign will be sufficient in warning the public of its presence and proceeding with caution.

4.5 GRASSLAND MANAGEMENT

Conservation grazing of Lower Windmill Hill and Howlands Meadow are key to the site's continued biodiversity value. Cattle are non-selective grazers, which means they leave areas of longer, tussocky coarse grasses and areas of bare ground to create a diverse structure. This allows wildflowers to grow, flower and set seed, providing a suitable habitat for a wide range of wildlife. Topping of the species-rich grassland in late summer can supplement grazing to avoid succession in years where grazing has not achieved the desired objective. The grassland should not be topped to a uniform height; areas of longer grass and scrub should be left to provide sward diversity, particularly around field margins. The stocking density of the cattle should be reviewed regularly with the grazier to identify any patterns in under-achievement.

The sowing of wild bird seed in mid-March on Upper Windmill Hill is providing a rich habitat that is able to support a greater variety of wildlife. Due to this success, Upper Windmill Hill should continue to be managed under the same programme of topping, ploughing and sowing of wild seed mix under the HLS. Wildflowers may be established by including small quantities of seed in sown mixtures from time to time. Arable margins should be cut on rotation.

4.6 SCRUB & HEDGEROW MANAGEMENT

Scrub provides a transitional habitat between open and wooded areas, and contains species suitable for nesting and feeding opportunities. Open areas of scrub, such as along the west bank of Fen Brook, on Windmill Hill and north of the orchard should continue to be rotationally coppiced to provide habitat diversity and prevent succession into woodland. Scrub along site entrances or footpaths may need to be cut back more frequently for access.

Hedgerows should continue to be managed under the programme within the previous LMP, to include re-laying and gapping up where necessary. Dead hedges using material from works on site should continue to be used as natural fences along footpaths and around the fen.

4.7 ORCHARD MANAGEMENT

Restoration of the Traditional Orchard would be a fantastic way to increase the number of habitats on site, improve biodiversity and provide opportunities for community involvement and learning new skills. As a first step, the number, location, condition and variety of fruit trees on site should be recorded. Consultation with The Orchard Project is recommended for advice on site preparation, tree selection (to include utilising any local varieties currently found on site), planting, aftercare and management. Opportunities for securing funding for capital works will also need to be explored.

4.8 FEN MANAGEMENT

The fen has been managed by cutting during the winter months by the volunteer groups to prevent succession to scrub. However, this is a slow process and due to limited capacity, the cutting cannot be completed all in one season.

One solution is to consider using Longhorn cattle to help manage the fen vegetation. Grazing will help to reduce the dominance of taller plants and scrub, and as cattle are non-selective grazers, they will eat large and less palatable plant species. Consultation with the grazier will establish the optimal stocking density to achieve a range of vegetation heights and management of undesirable vegetation, and the most suitable time of year for grazing to avoid excessive poaching, as well as the required changes to infrastructure. Natural England will also need to be consulted in regards to funding. A small area of fen can be grazed initially, and if successful, more areas can be opened up to grazing over time. The idea is that grazing would complement fen cutting by volunteers, resulting in more of the fen cut each year and enabling more volunteer time for other tasks around the reserve.

4.9 DITCH AND POND MANAGEMENT

Fen Brook was observed to contain litter and the banks are also subject to poaching. Poaching leads to the deterioration of habitat on the banks and exposes the soil, making it vulnerable to erosion and causing siltation of the water. This results in poorer water quality and ecological status. In order to restore the bank vegetation, it is recommended poaching 'hotspots' are protected from further erosion by dead hedges at the top of the bank. These should be of sufficient length to prevent the creation of new poached areas further along the channel and at a suitable height to prevent dogs jumping over. Signage can also be installed to notify members of the public.

Along both ditches, short sections of scrub and bankside vegetation should be coppiced on rotation to vary light levels and encourage

regeneration of vegetation. Additionally, inspections for obstructions and litter should take place regularly, and remedial works undertaken as required.

Prior to pond management works, it is recommended surveys are carried out to identify the likelihood of great crested newt presence, which will then inform the need for further surveys or amended programme of management. If great crested newt are absent, ponds should continue to be managed under the programme within the previous LMP, to include clearance of one third of aquatic and marginal plants per year to ensure open water is maintained.

4.10 INVASIVE SPECIES

Japanese knotweed has historically been recorded on site. An Invasive Species Management Plan for WHBC was produced in 2021. The control measures for Japanese knotweed in this Plan should be followed; this includes the installation of fencing around the patch and the cessation of vegetation cutting in this area to prevent the spread of Japanese knotweed around and off site.

Variegated yellow archangel was observed within the woodland between South Fen and Windmill Hill. This species can dominate the woodland floor and suppress native ground flora. Variegated yellow archangel can be controlled by hand pulling and digging of the plants and their roots, making the task suitable for volunteers. Plant material can be buried or burnt on site or disposed offsite as controlled waste. A D7 exemption may be required to burn arisings onsite. Good biosecurity procedures are necessary to prevent the spread of the species around and off site on equipment and boots.

The monitoring of invasive species on site should continue as part of the Invasive Species Management Plan. Regrowth of Japanese knotweed should be informed by surveys and control measures implemented from the Plan.

4.11 ACCESS & AMENITY

Non-surfaced pathways can become muddy in the winter. This is causing some access issues and encouraging users of the site to walk over sensitive habitats. Further surfacing works to other pathways is not recommended, due to the expense and concern that this might lead to unauthorised access by motorbikes. As an alternative, brash from tree works on site can be chipped and used to surface paths that are susceptible to becoming muddy in the winter months. Branches from tree works can also be used to more formally line the edges of paths and discourage the formation of new tracks through woodland areas.

There are currently some boundary issues as fallen fences on the north-eastern boundary of the site has led to the creation of informal tracks in to the site from neighbouring gardens. This has led to further issues with fly tipping of garden waste over garden fences and fences which extend back into the woodland. This situation should be monitored during routine walkover visits by WHBC Officers. Reinstatement of fallen fences should also be considered.

One aspiration is to encourage local schools and community groups to use The Commons for educational visits. There is the potential to develop a forest school on site, with the orchard an ideal location as it is closed off to the public and the access track is suitable for vehicles. As an initial step, consultation should be made with local schools and groups to gauge the level of interest in the scheme and opportunities for funding should be explored.

The previous management plan had an objective to provide interpretation boards, but this action has yet to be achieved, likely due to lack of budget. This will therefore continue over to the new plan with an aim to understand the costs for a signage scheme, and to secure either internal or external budget. It is recommended that these signs are map-based and include for clear trails around the site, with the potential to add more waymarks in the future.

Communication of site information, reserve management works and events should continue to be broadcast to the local community through newsletters, social media and the council website.

4.12 WILDLIFE

Management of the habitats as described above will provide suitable opportunities for a range of wildlife. Scarce, notable and protected species are also likely to benefit from wildlife-focussed habitat management. Efforts to manage habitats for species historically recorded in The Commons (including harvest mouse, hazel dormouse, water shrew and water vole) should continue where possible. The installation of bird and bat boxes in suitable locations may be considered to supplement natural nesting and roosting opportunities. Logs and branches from tree works on site can be stacked to provide a habitat for invertebrates, reptiles and amphibians. Grass heaps at least 1m³ can provide a suitable nesting site for grass snake, and hibernation opportunities for other reptiles over winter.

The effects of deer populations should be monitored and appropriate management taken as necessary. For example, over-browsing of coppice shoots will require remediation measures, such as the stacking of brash on cut stumps to protect regrowth.

Monitoring of the reserve's species (such as birds, bats, great crested newt, butterflies, flora and small mammals) should continue in partnership with local voluntary surveyors and results shared with relevant bodies.

5. Aims & Objectives

5.1 VISION STATEMENT

The Commons Nature Reserve will continue to be a welcoming and accessible green space for the enjoyment of local residents, schools and visitors.

Important habitats on site will be sensitively managed to keep a balance between protecting and enjoying the reserve.

Long-term management will seek to become more targeted, and recognise the importance of local volunteer groups for ongoing maintenance.

5.2 AIMS & OBJECTIVES

The vision for The Commons will be achieved through the following Aims and Objectives, and implementation of the Action Plan in Chapter 6. This Landscape Management Plan aims to support the requirements of the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme.

A To secure, maintain and enhance the biodiversity value of The Commons LNR

- A1 Undertake regular monitoring of invasive species present on site and treat as required.
- A2 Continue to undertake conservation grassland management, and seek opportunities to increase the area that is managed through grazing.
- A3 Continue the management of cropland as a floristically diverse area to support a number of invertebrate and bird species.
- A4 Continue to allow trees to go into senescence unless causing an unmanageable health and safety risk to the public.

- A5 Undertake sensitive management operations to improve the condition of woodlands.
- A6 Carry out targeted scrub management and coppicing in Blackfan Fen.
- A7 Continue hedge laying and creation of dead hedges using brash material generated onsite
- A8 Restore the orchard using locally sourced fruit varieties and develop into an educational area.
- A9 Regularly monitor the effectiveness of capital and maintenance operations, and adapt this LMP as required.

B To enable visitors and volunteers to continue to safely access and enjoy The Commons LNR

- B1 Maintain a network of accessible, waymarked routes and entrances.
- B2 Install a new site signage scheme.
- B3 Carry out regular site cleansing within woodland areas and ditches.
- B4 Explore opportunities to re-engage local schools with visits and outdoor learning experiences.
- B5 Undertake regular site-risk assessments and resultant works related to access, site boundaries and cattle.
- B6 Undertake periodic TSI in high-risk locations, such as along paths and boundaries.
- B7 Continue to share updates through social media, newsletters and on-site signage.

- C To secure the financial stability of The Commons LNR**
- C1 To manage the reserve and meet the commitments of the extended Environmental Land Management Scheme agreement.
 - C2 Explore internal and/or external funding options to support capital projects.
 - C3 Seek to increase volunteer involvement on site and continue volunteer training sessions.

6. Action Plans

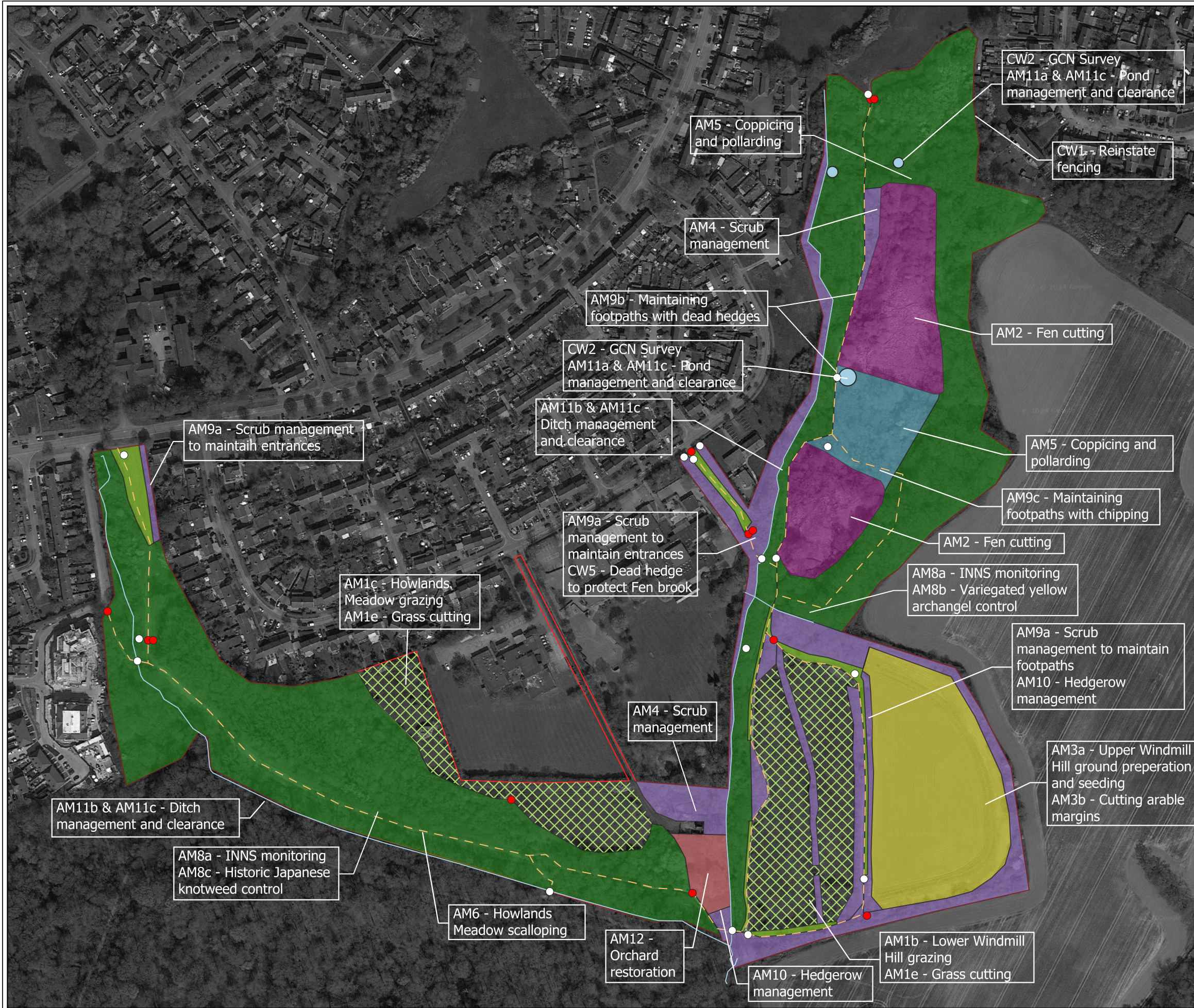
The following Action Plan section is divided into two tables. The first is a Capital Work Programme, covering all one-off items that will be delivered throughout the ten-year life span of the Management Plan. Each action is preceded by one or more objective references, and where appropriate suggests responsible parties and timescales.

The second table contains an Annual Maintenance & Monitoring Schedule including all of the regular tasks required to maintain the site in a positive condition. It should be noted that the schedule does not include for any reactive remedial works and standalone operations that will be determined by future management plan meetings.

6.1 CAPITAL WORKS PROGRAMME

Ref	Item	Description of Works	Year	Timing / Restrictions	Responsibility	Quantity	Unit	Pre-commencement Actions
CW1	Fencing	Consider reinstating or replacing fallen fencing along site boundaries.	1	n/a	WHBC	TBC	Lm	-
CW2	Ponds – Great crested newt survey	Great crested newt (GCN) surveys should be carried out prior to pond works to identify presence and inform the need for further surveys or amended programme of management.	1	Mar - Jun	WHBC	1	Item	-
CW3a	Site Signage – Brief & outline costs	Put together a brief describing the aims of a map-based welcome / interpretation signage scheme, including broad ideas about numbers, size, locations, materials and content. Consider inclusion of waymarkers and routes as part of the brief. Send the brief to signage companies / contractors to seek a rough idea of costs.	1	n/a	WHBC	n/a	n/a	Include volunteer groups in production of the brief.
CW3b	Site Signage – Funding	Identify any internal capital budget for delivering a signage scheme, or start to explore potential options for internal or external funding support.	1-2	n/a	WHBC	n/a	n/a	-
CW3c	Site Signage – Design	Further to confirmation of funding, adapt the previous outline brief into a full brief & specification, including text and images. Brief to be sent to companies for costing, in accordance with WHBC Procurement rules.	TBC	n/a	WHBC	n/a	n/a	Include volunteer groups in production of the brief.
CW3d	Site Signage – Production & installation	WHBC to commission a company (or companies) to design, produce and install welcome signage.	TBC	n/a	WHBC	TBC	No.	-
CW4	Fen – Grazing	Review potential to open up grazing to the Fen area. This will require an exercise to specify and cost the required changes to infrastructure, consideration over impact on stocking density, and communication with Natural England over funding agreement.	1	n/a	WHBC; Grazier; Natural England	n/a	n/a	-

Ref	Item	Description of Works	Year	Timing / Restrictions	Responsibility	Quantity	Unit	Pre-commencement Actions
CW5	Fen Brook – Dead hedging	Use brush from coppicing works to create dead hedges at the top of the bank where there are poaching 'hotspots' along the brook to restore the bank vegetation and prevent further erosion. Dead hedges should be of sufficient length to discourage the creation of new poached areas further along the channel and at a suitable height to prevent dogs jumping over. Consider inclusion of signage.	2	n/a	WHBC & Volunteers	TBC	Lm	Identify poaching hotspots and inform the local community of plans.
CW6a	Forest School – Consultation	Communication with local schools and groups to gauge the level of interest for site visits and outdoor learning experiences.	1	n/a	WHBC	n/a	n/a	-
CW6b	Forest School – Funding	If feedback is positive, internal or external funding should be explored and a proposal and plan developed to submit a funding application.	2	n/a	WHBC	n/a	n/a	-
CW7	Submit Environmental Land Management Scheme application	Develop and a submit a new Environmental Land Management Scheme application.	3	TBC	WHBC	n/a	n/a	-



Key

- Site boundary
- Furniture
- Access Points
- Permissive footpaths
- Ditch
- Pond
- Fen
- Orchard
- Grassland
- Grassland - grazed
- Mature scrub with trees
- Woodland
- Wet woodland
- Cropland

Client	Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council		
Project	The Commons LMP		
Title	Site Action Plan Map		
Drawn	TS	Checked	LW
Drawing No.	MH9028-003		Date
			05.01.2024
			Revision
			Issue
This drawing is confidential and the property of MAYDENCROFT LIMITED and must not be reproduced without written permission			
Scale	1:3000	Original Size	A3
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6.2 ANNUAL MAINTENANCE & MONITORING SCHEDULE

Ref	Item	Detail	Start	End	Frequency	Years	Quantity	Unit	Responsibility
AM1a	Grazing – Annual inspection	Undertake a walkover check of all grazing infrastructure including gates, fences, corral, and troughs.	Apr	May	Annual	All	1	Item	Grazier
AM1b	Grazing – Lower Windmill Hill	Cattle grazing to continue on Lower Windmill Hill.	May/June	Aug	Annual	All	1	Item	Grazier
AM1c	Grazing – Howlands Meadow	Cattle to be moved to Howlands Meadow.	Aug	Oct	Annual	All	1	Item	Grazier
AM1d	Grazing – Monitoring	Ongoing monitoring visits to check on cattle and infrastructure including checking stocking densities for patterns of under achievement.	May/June	Oct	Annual	All	1	Item	Grazier
AM1e	Grass cutting	Non-uniform topping of Lower Windmill Hill and Howlands Meadow in late summer leaving a longer sward around field margins, if grazing has not achieved the desired objective. Annual as needed depending on success of grazing.	Sep	Oct	Annual	As required	2	ha	Contractor
AM2	Fen – Cutting	Maintain the extent of fen habitat by cutting to prevent succession to scrub. Material to be collected and removed.	Oct	Feb	Annual	All	1.3	ha	Volunteers
AM3a	Upper Windmill Hill – Ground preparation and seeding	Continue to follow existing management regime. Top, plough and sow annual wild seed mix on cropped area. Promote the establishment of wildflowers such as cornflower by including small quantities of seed in sown mixtures from time to time.	Mar	Apr	Annual	All	1.5	ha	Contractor
AM3b	Upper Windmill Hill – Cutting arable margins	Maintain a wide grass headland and margin around the cropped area. Cut sections every 2-3 years on rotation to prevent scrub.	Mar	Apr	Every 2-3 years	Follow existing plan	~400	Lm	Contractor
AM4	Scrub Management	Rotationally coppice scrub areas to provide habitat diversity and prevent succession into woodland. Undertake targeted scrub management surrounding the fen to prevent succession to wet woodland.	Oct	Feb	Annual	All	~0.25	Ha	WHBC & Volunteers

Ref	Item	Detail	Start	End	Frequency	Years	Quantity	Unit	Responsibility
AM5a	Woodland – Coppicing	<p>Coppice hazel and pollard willow on rotation in woodland surrounding Blackfan Fen to maintain habitat diversity, prevent succession to woodland and open up the woodland floor.</p> <p>Overstood hazel to be coppiced first. Approx. 3-6 coppiced in one location per year on an eight-year cycle. Stools should be cut 10-20cm from the ground and at a 30-45° angle to allow water to run off.</p> <p>Stack brash on coppiced stumps to protect regrowth from deer browsing.</p>	Dec	Feb	3-6 per year	All	~4.7	Ha	Volunteers
AM5b	Woodland – Pollarding	<p>Pollard willow on rotation in woodland surrounding Blackfan Fen. Maintain willow pollards at a height suitable for continued management by volunteers.</p> <p>Branches should be pruned just above the previous cuts on a 3-4 year cycle</p>	Dec	Feb	Every 3-4 years	3,6,9	~1.7	Ha	Volunteers
AM6	Howlands Meadow – Scalloping	<p>Rotationally cut the ride in offset scalloped sections. A scallop should be created each year on a continuous cycle and be approximately 10m deep by 30m wide.</p> <p>Herbaceous vegetation within the scallop to be cut and collected to prevent nutrient enrichment of the soil. All scrub and trees within the scallop to be coppiced and the arisings used to protect regrowth from deer browsing or to create habitat piles around the edge (half in the shade and the cut half facing the sun).</p> <p>Once all scallops have been established (after 8-10 years), scallops to be cut annually on rotation, with the oldest scallop cut first.</p>	Oct	Feb	1 per year	All	~400	Lm	Volunteers
AM7	Tree Safety Inspection	<p>Lantra-qualified Professional Tree Inspector to undertake a Tree Safety Inspection at least every 3 years; any trees with significant defects requiring remedial works will be recorded in a detailed report.</p> <p>Survey to include for inspecting oak trees for evidence of OPM.</p> <p>Survey to include inspecting ash trees for evidence of ash dieback in the woodland to the north of Hatfield Hyde Brook</p>	Jan	Dec	Every 3 years	1,4,7,10	1	Item	WHBC

Ref	Item	Detail	Start	End	Frequency	Years	Quantity	Unit	Responsibility
AM8a	INNS – Monitoring	Undertake an annual walkover survey for variegated yellow archangel and Japanese knotweed in accordance with the 2021 INNS Management Plan.	May	Sep	Annual	All	1	Item	WHBC or Contractor
AM8b	INNS – Variegated yellow archangel control	Removal of variegated yellow archangel by hand pulling and digging of the plants and their roots. Plant material can be buried on site or disposed offsite as controlled waste. Good biosecurity procedures are necessary to prevent the spread of the species around and off site on equipment and boots.	Feb	Mar	Annual	All	1	Item	Volunteers
AM8c	INNS – Japanese knotweed control	Installation of fencing and cessation of vegetation cutting in this area to prevent the spread of Japanese knotweed around and off site. Regrowth to be monitored and subject to the control measures in the 2021 INNS Management Plan.	Jan	Dec	Annual	All	1	Item	WHBC
AM9a	Maintaining Footpaths & Entrances – Scrub management	Scrub along site entrances or footpaths may need to be cut back for access.	Oct	Feb	Annual	All	~700	Lm	WHBC & Volunteers
AM9b	Maintaining Footpaths & Entrances – Dead hedges	Dead hedges using material from works on site should continue to be used as natural fences along footpaths and around the fen.	Jan	Dec	Annual	As required	TBC	Lm	WHBC & Volunteers
AM9c	Maintaining Footpaths & Entrances – Chipping	Consider chipping brash from coppicing works on site and spreading on paths which become muddy in winter. Chipping will likely need to be replenished annually. Additionally, consider using larger branches from tree works to line path edges.	Jan	Dec	Annual	As required	TBC	Lm	WHBC & Volunteers
AM10	Hedgerow Management	Re-visit all hedgerows restored during previous plan and undertake management as necessary such as re-laying or gapping up.	Oct	Feb	Every 3-5 years	As required	TBC	Lm	WHBC & Volunteers
AM11a	Ditch & Pond Management – Pond Maintenance	Subject to the results of the GCN survey, ponds should continue to be cleared of one third of aquatic and marginal plants per year to ensure open water is maintained. Cleared material can be left in piles on site for wildlife.	Sep	Feb	Annual	All	2	No.	Volunteers

Ref	Item	Detail	Start	End	Frequency	Years	Quantity	Unit	Responsibility
AM11b	Ditch & Pond Management – Ditch Maintenance	Coppice 20-30m sections of scrub and bankside vegetation on rotation to vary light levels and encourage regeneration of vegetation.	Oct	Feb	Annual	All	~1300	Lm	Volunteers
AM11c	Ditch & Pond Management – Clearance	Remove litter and major obstructions to flow, especially in Fen & Hatfield Hyde Brooks.	Jan	Dec	Every 3-4 months and after every storm event	All	~1300 2	Lm No.	WHBC & Volunteers
AM12a	The Orchard – Planting	Aftercare of newly planted trees. Keep area around trees free of weeds. Water regularly through dry summer months.	May	Sep	As required	1-3	0.08	ha	Volunteers
AM12b	The Orchard – Pruning	Once established, undertake a programme of fruit tree pruning as identified in monitoring visits. Arisings can be left onsite to decay naturally as if they have fallen.	Nov	March	As required	6+	n/a	n/a	Volunteers
AM12c	Traditional Orchard – Grass Maintenance	Grass to be mechanically cut on a monthly basis to keep down scrub. Once the scrub has been controlled, consider reducing mowing frequency in future, and manage grassland with a hay cut taken in late-summer.	April	Sep	Monthly	1-3 (then review)	0.08	ha	Volunteers
AM13	Litter Picking & Site Cleaning	Carry out regular litter picking on site and remove any fly-tipped material. Clean and repair benches and signs as necessary.	Jan	Dec	Annual	All	1	Item	WHBC
AM14	Species Monitoring	Monitoring for species such as birds, bats, great crested newt, butterflies, flora and small mammals should continue. Results should be shared with relevant bodies.	Jan	Dec	Ongoing	All	n/a	n/a	WHBC & Volunteers
AM15	Volunteer Training	Continue volunteer training sessions in first aid, leadership and other skills so that the groups work safely and effectively on the reserve.	Jan	Dec	Ongoing	All	n/a	n/a	WHBC & Volunteers
AM16	Communication	Continue to share site updates through social media, newsletters and on-site signage. Include messages that seek to recruit more volunteers.	Jan	Dec	Ongoing	All	n/a	n/a	WHBC & Volunteers

7. Monitoring & Review

The Commons LMP is intended to cover a period of ten years, from 2024 to 2034. Monitoring will be used to measure the success of ongoing management and any capital enhancement works on site and to determine how site usage and habitats are responding to the changes. This information will then be utilised to modify management operations as required.

7.1 ANNUAL MANAGEMENT MEETINGS

It is recommended that annual management meetings are held between WHBC, stakeholders and contractors in order to review the progress of site management for the current year, and to agree the work programme for the forthcoming year. This approach will allow management objectives to be adjusted through the course of this plan or as and when the conditions on site change in response to management.

7.2 MANAGEMENT PLAN REVIEW

The management plan is intended to run for a period of ten years in which time it is hoped that the majority of the actions set out within the Capital Works Programme will be completed. At the end of the ten-year period, a meeting will be held with the landowner and all relevant stakeholders to discuss the progress of the plan and review successes, failures, and lessons learnt. The process of reviewing and amending the document, and the preparation of new action plans, will help build a new plan for the period 2034 - 2044.

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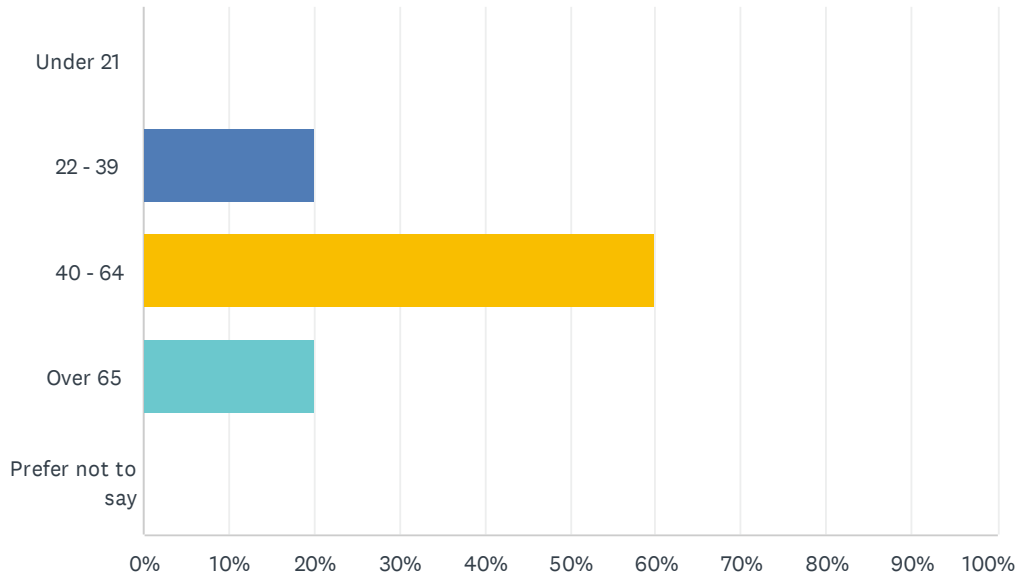
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Q1 Which age category do you fall within?

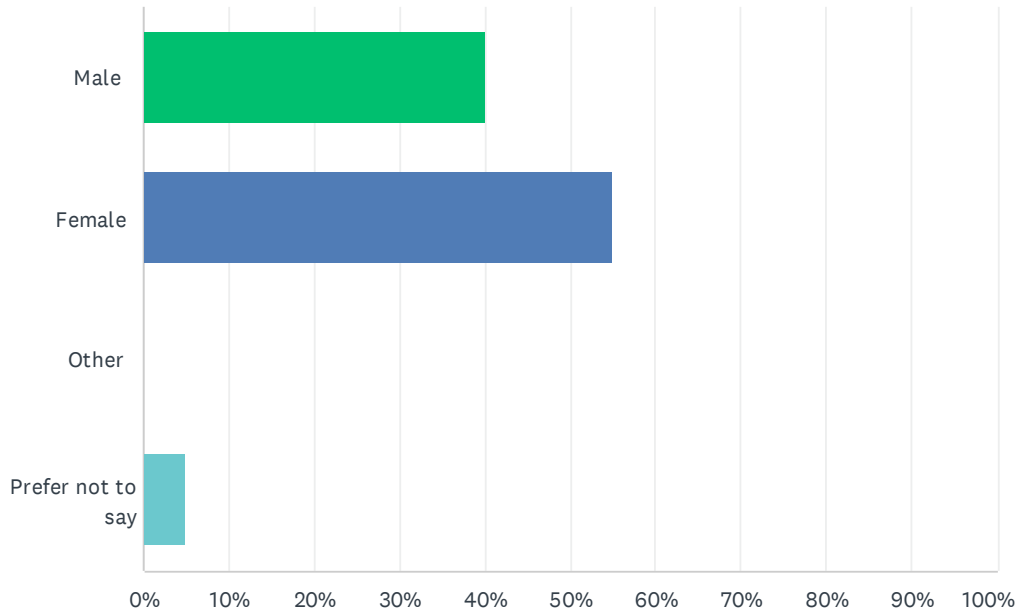
Answered: 20 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Under 21	0.00%	0
22 - 39	20.00%	4
40 - 64	60.00%	12
Over 65	20.00%	4
Prefer not to say	0.00%	0
Total Respondents: 20		

Q2 How do you identify?

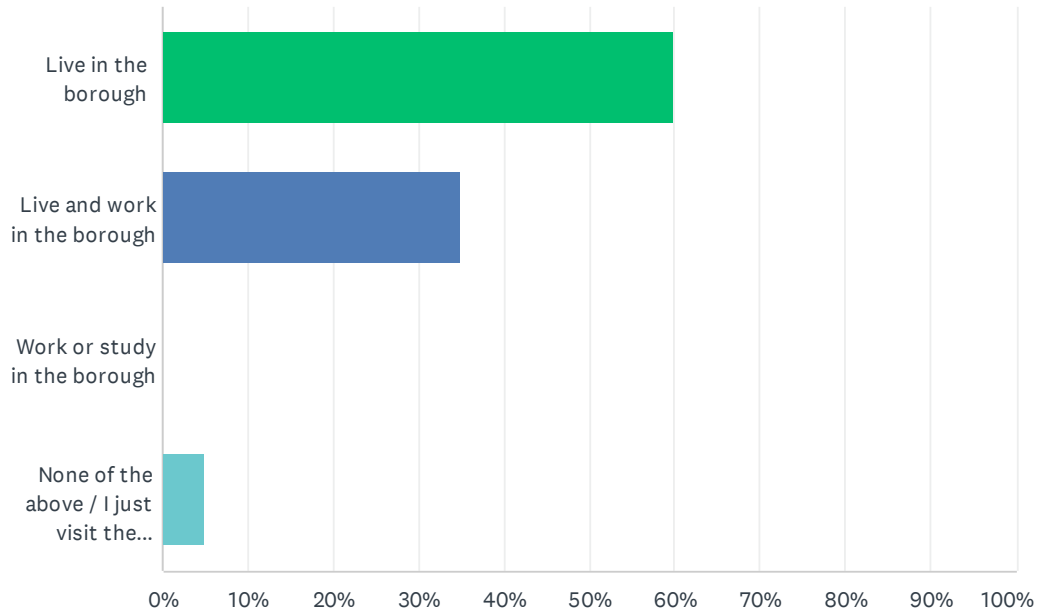
Answered: 20 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Male	40.00%	8
Female	55.00%	11
Other	0.00%	0
Prefer not to say	5.00%	1
Total Respondents: 20		

Q3 Which of the below describes you best?

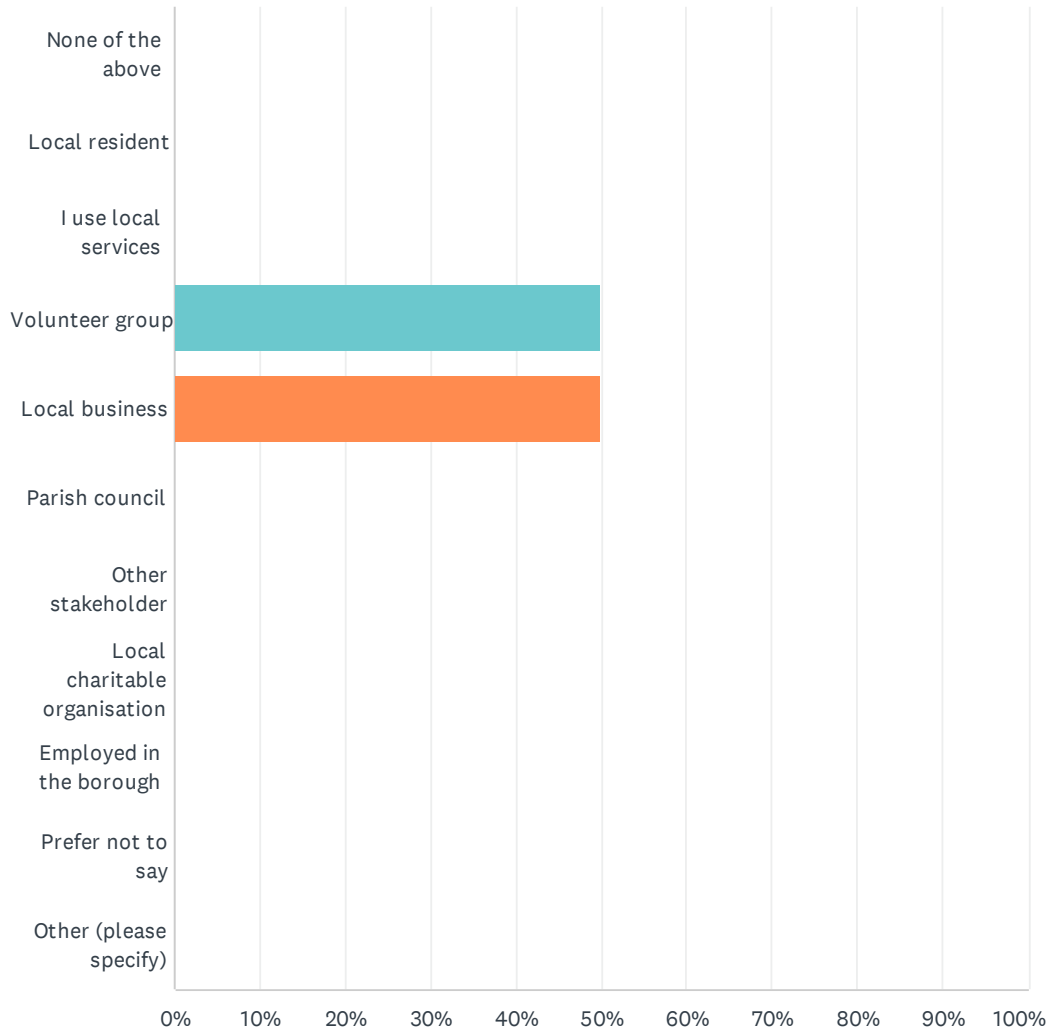
Answered: 20 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Live in the borough	60.00%	12
Live and work in the borough	35.00%	7
Work or study in the borough	0.00%	0
None of the above / I just visit the borough	5.00%	1
Total Respondents: 20		

Q4 If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, please state the nature of your organisation?

Answered: 2 Skipped: 18

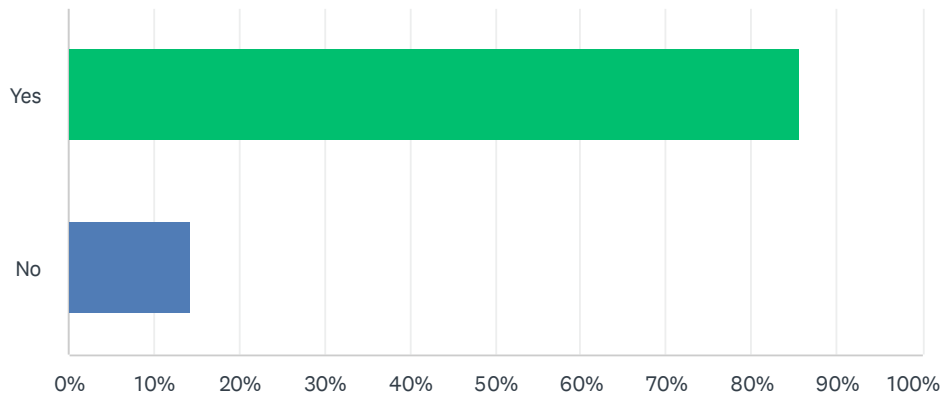


The Commons Landscape Management Plan Consultation

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
None of the above	0.00%	0
Local resident	0.00%	0
I use local services	0.00%	0
Volunteer group	50.00%	1
Local business	50.00%	1
Parish council	0.00%	0
Other stakeholder	0.00%	0
Local charitable organisation	0.00%	0
Employed in the borough	0.00%	0
Prefer not to say	0.00%	0
Other (please specify)	0.00%	0
TOTAL		2

Q5 Do you use or visit the open space/nature reserve?

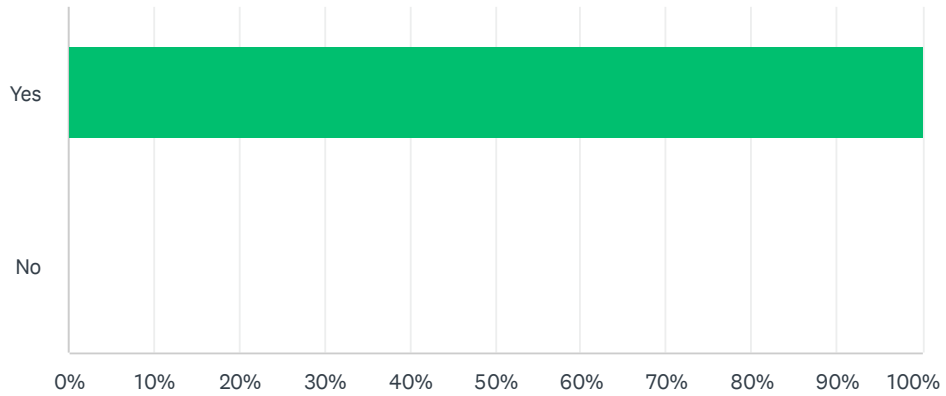
Answered: 7 Skipped: 13



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	85.71%	6
No	14.29%	1
TOTAL		7

Q6 Do you agree with the Vision for the site?

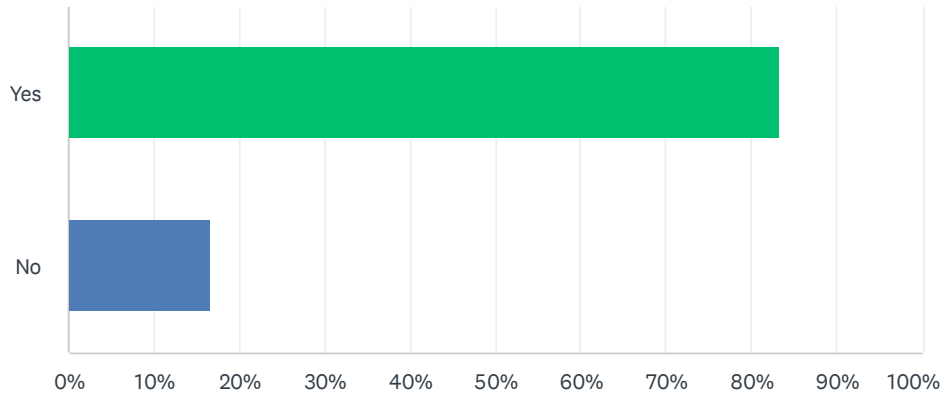
Answered: 6 Skipped: 14



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	100.00%	6
No	0.00%	0
TOTAL		6

Q7 Do you agree with the aims and objectives within the plan?

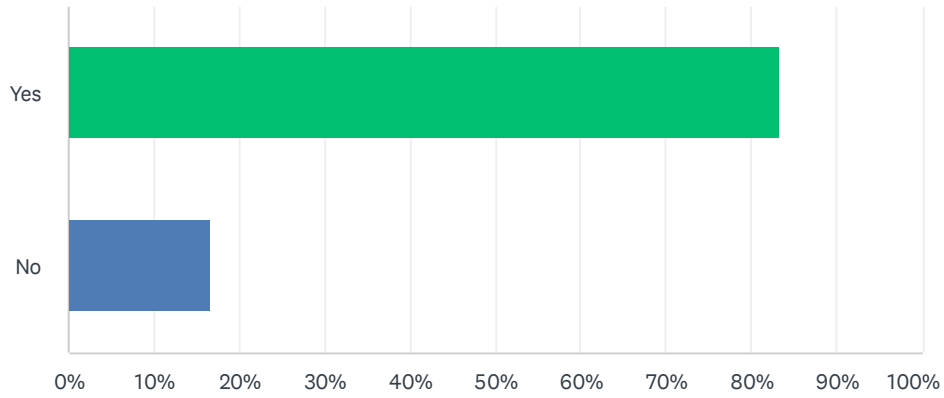
Answered: 6 Skipped: 14



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	83.33%	5
No	16.67%	1
TOTAL		6

Q8 Do you agree with the proposals within the Action Plan?

Answered: 6 Skipped: 14



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	83.33%	5
No	16.67%	1
TOTAL		6

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Part I

Main authors: Matthew Wilson

Executive Member: Cllr Rose Grewal

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET – 4 MARCH 2025
REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF PLACE

GREEN BELT REVIEW STAGE 4 – PROCUREMENT OF LAND USE CONSULTANTS LTD (LUC)

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report requests waiver of standard contract procedure and application of Contract Procedure Rule 33.2 (g) to enable the appointment of a consultant, Land Use Consultants Ltd (LUC) to undertake the next stage of the Green Belt Study (Stage 4) which will form part of the evidence base for the Local Plan Review.
- 1.2 LUC were the consultants responsible for undertaking the Stage 3 Green Belt Study which formed part of the evidence base (examination documents EX99A-E) for the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan (adopted October 2023).
- 1.3 Stage 4 will be a continuation of the Stage 3 Study, building on the methodology used at Stage 3.
- 1.4 It is recommended that a direct award is made to a consultant who has previously provided such services to the Council as this would be a continuation of the existing Green Belt Study and will ensure the findings of the full Green Belt Study (all four stages) are consistent and reliable.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 Standard contract procedures are waived and pursuant to Contract Procedure Rule 33.2 (g) Cabinet agrees a report from an Executive Director or the Chief Executive detailing a case where it is to the advantage of the Council that these rules should be waived.
- 2.2 Cabinet approves the direct award of contract to Land Use Consultants Ltd to continue the Green Belt Review (Stage 4) which forms part of the evidence base for the Local Plan Review.

3 Explanation

- 3.1 In order to be sound, a Local Plan should be positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy (para 36; NPPF 2024). Part of demonstrating that it is justified relies on a proportionate evidence base, which must be relevant and up-to-date (paras 32 and 36; NPPF 2024)
- 3.2 As part of providing the necessary evidence base for the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan, a Green Belt Review was undertaken. The study consisted of three stages.
- 3.3 The first stage was a strategic level study carried out by consultant SKM for Welwyn Hatfield, St Albans and Dacorum boroughs/districts.

- 3.4 The second stage was a finer grained study by consultant Jacobs, which looked at a number of smaller parcels of land within Welwyn Hatfield borough, adjacent to the urban boundaries. These parcels had either been identified in the Call for Sites or had been recommended for further assessment during the Stage 1 study.
- 3.5 The third stage was carried out by consultant LUC. This study built on the findings of Stages 1 and 2 but considered a wider range of potential sites adjacent to the urban areas, and addressed the comments made by Local Plan Inspector during Local Plan examination. LUC were also involved in helping to prepare hearing statements and responding to questions/representations as part of the Local Plan examination.
- 3.6 The Local Plan Inspector was satisfied that the three stages of the study taken together represented adequate and proportionate evidence on the Green Belt (para 256; Report on the Examination of the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan (2016), Sept 2023).
- 3.7 Stage 4 of the Green Belt Study will build on the previous three studies as a continuing piece of work. The study is likely to include the following tasks:

Task 1: Review of the Stage 3 Green Belt harm assessment findings

Task 2: Consideration of assessment required to identify grey belt

Task 3: Consideration of how new inset settlement boundaries could be defined on the basis of the Stage 3 washed-over settlements assessment

Task 4: Consider any work required to comment on suitability of new settlement locations in Green Belt terms

Task 5: Assess potential harm of releasing newly identified sites from the Green Belt

- 3.8 As noted in Stage 3 of the Green Belt, a degree of professional judgement was used by the consultants to come to the conclusions in the Study, as would be expected and necessary in any Green Belt Study.
- 3.9 The Stage 4 study will build on the methodology used at Stage 3 whilst updating it where relevant in light of recent national planning policy changes and best practice.
- 3.10 It will include reviewing previous findings (Tasks 1 and 3), considering the new concept of 'grey belt' (Task 2), and assessment of any new locations/sites which come forward as part of the Local Plan Review process (Tasks 4 and 5).
- 3.11 For the above reasons, it is considered that the Stage 4 study would be more reliable and consistent if the same consultant (LUC) continues this piece of work.
- 3.12 LUC are a leading consultant in Green Belt policy and review, having completed Green Belt studies for over 60 local authorities across the country (covering well over a third of England's Green Belt land to date).
- 3.13 LUC's work on Green Belts was cited as an important factor in being awarded RTPI Planning Consultancy of the Year in 2019 and 2022 and they were highly commended in the Planning Awards in 2024.

- 3.14 Having been appointed as the consultants for the Stage 3 study LUC are very familiar with the local area and key issues in Welwyn Hatfield Borough.
- 3.15 It is intended that the initial phase of the Green Belt Stage 4 study will cover Tasks 1 and 2. Work on these tasks can commence at this stage of the Local Plan Review.
- 3.16 Costs for Tasks 1 and 2 have been estimated at £64,911.25 excluding VAT. These costs are currently estimates as they are subject to agreement of the scope of the project and any changes needed as a result of the Government issuing new Planning Practice Guidance on Green Belts, which is due in January 2025.
- 3.17 Tasks 3, 4 and 5 are dependent on the number of areas that need to be reviewed and consideration of specific sites, requiring input on the proposed spatial growth strategy and sites identified through the Local Plan Call for Sites. Both of these matters will be considered at a later stage in the preparation of the Local Plan and therefore Tasks 3 to 5 will need to be considered and costed as a subsequent phase of the Stage 4 Green Belt Study.
- 3.18 The c.£65,000 fee for the first phase of the Green Belt Stage 4 Study is over the procurement threshold and would normally require a process of competitive tender. Given this project is the next stage of the existing Green Belt Review and the continuation of a project, this report requests waiver of standard contract procedure and application of Contract Procedure Rule 33.2 (g) to enable the appointment of LUC, who completed the previous and most detailed stage of the Study, and who are familiar with the issues raised and successfully addressed at the Welwyn Hatfield Local Plan examination.
- 3.19 It is noted that following the recent changes to the NPPF in December 2024, the Government has announced that there is an opportunity for funding for Green Belt Reviews for local planning authorities, up to a maximum of £70,000 per authority. Whilst there is no guarantee that an application for funding will be approved, WH Officers have completed the relevant Expression of Interest (EOI) and are due to hear the outcome in March 2025.

Implications

4 Legal Implication(s)

- 4.1 In national planning policy, the NPPF makes it clear that in order to be sound, a Local Plan should be positively prepared, justified, effective and consistent with national policy (para 36; NPPF 2024). Part of demonstrating that it is justified relies on a proportionate evidence base, which must be relevant and up-to-date (paras 32 and 36; NPPF 2024), and new evidence may need to be gathered to inform a local plan review (Paragraph: 068 Reference ID: 61-068-20190723; Plan-making; Planning Practice Guidance).
- 4.2 In the case of Green Belts, should it be necessary to alter boundaries, this is only justified in exceptional circumstances where fully evidenced through the preparation or updating of plans (para 145; NPPF 2024).
- 4.3 The commissioning of the Stage 4 Green Belt Review is a necessary part of the gathering of evidence for the Local Plan Review to meet the requirements of the aforementioned national policy and guidance.

5 Financial Implication(s)

- 5.1 The fee for undertaking the first phase of the Stage 4 Green Belt Study (Tasks 1 and 2) is estimated at c.£65,000 excluding VAT.
- 5.2 The second phase of the Stage 4 Green Belt Study (Tasks 3, 4 and 5) will need to be undertaken at a later stage of the Local Plan process once we have further information on the proposed spatial growth strategy and possible site allocations. As such, it is not possible to provide costs for the second phase at this time.
- 5.3 As announced by central Government in December 2024, local authorities are invited to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) for a share of Green Belt Review Funding 2024/25, up to a maximum of £70,000 per local authority. Whilst there is no guarantee that an application for funding will be approved, WH Officers have completed the relevant EOI and are due to hear the outcome of this in March.
- 5.4 If the grant bid is unsuccessful, these works were originally planned to be funded from the Local Plan Earmarked Reserve. Delegations are in place to draw down from this reserve, which will be utilised in the event of the grant bid being unsuccessful.

6 Risk Management Implications

- 6.1 LUC have worked on the previous Stage 3 Green Belt Study and are considered best placed to progress this project to Stage 4. The Stage 3 Green Belt Study (as a continuation of Stages 1 and 2) was considered by the Local Plan Inspector to represent adequate and proportionate Local Plan evidence. There are no anticipated risk management implications from continuing this project with the same consultant.

7 Security and Terrorism Implication(s)

- 7.1 There are no security and terrorism implications arising directly in relation to this report.

8 Procurement Implication(s)

- 8.1 The purpose of this report is to request waiver of standard contract procedures and implementation of Contract Procedure Rule 33.2 (g) Where the Cabinet agrees a report from an Executive Director or the Chief Executive detailing a case where it is to the advantage of the Council that these rules should be waived.
- 8.2 In this case this would be to facilitate appointment of Land Use Consultants Ltd (LUC) to carry out the next stage (Stage 4) in a continuous piece of work to review the Green Belt. The fee for the first phase of the Stage 4 Review is approximately £65,000 and therefore above the £50,000 sign off threshold.
- 8.3 The recommendation is in accordance with the Contract Procedure Rules and UK Procurement Law.

9 Climate Change Implication(s)

- 9.1 No climate change implications have been identified resulting from this report.

10 Human Resources Implication(s)

- 10.1 There are no specific Human Resources implications arising directly in relation to this report. Officers from WHBC will work with the appointed consultant to oversee the Stage 4 Green Belt Review process as part of their usual duties.
- 10.2 Appointment of a consultant will save significant officer time, freeing up the Planning Policy Team to concentrate on other parts of the Local Plan Review process.

11 Health and Wellbeing Implication(s)

- 11.1 There are no specific health and wellbeing implications associated with this report.

12 Communication and Engagement Implication(s)

- 12.1 There are no specific communication and engagement implications associated with this report.

13 Link to Corporate Priorities

- 13.1 The Stage 4 Green Belt Study will form part of the evidence base for the Local Plan Review. This will contribute to corporate priority: 'Homes to be proud of; plan for future homes in the right places'.

14 Equality and Diversity

- 14.1 An Equalities 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.

Matthew Wilson
Planning Policy and Implementation Manager

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Part I

Main author: Ka Ng

Executive Member: Cllr Max Holloway

All Wards

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET – 4 MARCH 2025
REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION – INTERIM PLAN SUBMISSION

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 On 16 December 2024, the government published a white paper on English devolution and reform to local government, setting out the potential for the most significant reforms to local government since the Local Government Act 1972.
- 1.2 The White Paper covers new transport, employment, housing, business and environmental policies, but also focuses on two aspects of reforming and joining-up public services through:
 - Widening and broadening devolution across England through the creation of new Strategic Authorities and;
 - A programme of local government reorganisation to create new unitary councils across two-tier areas
- 1.3 On 5 February 2025, the Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution wrote a letter to the Leaders of all District and Borough Councils in Hertfordshire and Hertfordshire County Council, formally inviting them to develop a proposal for local government reorganisation for the area, setting out further detail on the criteria, guidance for the development of proposals, and the timeline for the process. A copy of the letter can be found in Appendix A.
- 1.4 In order to comply with the Government's request to submit an interim plan for local government organisation in Hertfordshire by 21 March 2025, the purpose of this report is to seek delegated authority to be given to the Leader of the Council to submit a plan on behalf of Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council.

2 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 That Cabinet agrees for delegated authority to be given to the Leader of the Council, in consultation with Deputy Leader, to submit an interim plan to Government by 21 March 2025 for Local Government Reorganisation in Hertfordshire.

3 Explanation

- 3.1 The current government has made devolution a priority and the White Paper published in December 2024 sets out plans to create a new network of Strategic Authorities that will cover the whole of England.
- 3.2 These Strategic Authorities will have populations of at least 1.5 million people and responsibilities linked to transport and local infrastructure; skills and employment; housing and strategic planning (not determining planning

applications); economic development and regeneration; environment and climate change; health and wellbeing; and public safety.

- 3.3 A Strategic Authority will also cover a 'sensible' economic geography with a sense of identity'. It needs to be contiguous for all of the constituent authorities. It is the government's desire for a Mayor to lead a Strategic Authority. They want local areas to propose plans for devolution but they will use Ministerial Directives to force this to happen if places do not come up with appropriate proposals.
- 3.4 Hertfordshire did not apply to become a Devolution Priority Place (DPP). A DPP area has to commit to have a Mayoral Strategic Authority with a plan to have the elections for the Mayor in 2026. Therefore, there is more time to develop proposals for a strategic authority covering Hertfordshire and a further update will be provided once firmer proposals are available.
- 3.5 As part of its plans for devolution, the Government has announced a programme of local government reorganisation that will replace all two-tier county and district councils and small or failing unitaries with new unitary councils that have populations of at least 500,000 people. These much larger unitary structures would then join together in groups to form Strategic Authorities.
- 3.6 Hertfordshire is a two-tier area as there are ten district and borough councils, including Welwyn Hatfield, and the county council.
- 3.7 The Government believes that local government reorganisation, together with devolution over a big strategic area, will improve public services and support economic growth.
- 3.8 In accordance with the letter from the Minister dated 5 February 2025, we will need to submit proposals for the reorganisation of local government structures in Hertfordshire. In particular, an interim plan will need to be submitted by 21 March 2025 and that a full proposal will need to be submitted by 28 November 2025.
- 3.9 Discussions have started between all Hertfordshire district and borough councils, and Hertfordshire County Council about how best to enable devolution and shape plans for local government reorganisation.
- 3.10 As stated in the statement of our Leader published on 11 February, Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council remains committed to working together with all Hertfordshire authorities to develop a shared evidence-base to inform the options available to our county. Our priority is to ensure that any changes benefit local residents and businesses, whilst maintaining our efficient local government services and ensuring strong democratic accountability to our communities and neighbourhoods.
- 3.11 A White Paper Working Group involving officers from all district and borough councils as well as the county council has been set up to establish an evidence base for both the devolution and local government reorganisation proposals, this group is also starting to formulate a response on the Interim Plan.
- 3.12 The White Paper Working Group reports to the Hertfordshire Chief Executive Coordination Group, who in turns reports to Hertfordshire Leaders Group.
- 3.13 It is the intention that a single response for the Interim Plan will be submitted for Hertfordshire by 21 March, which is likely to contain multiple options being

explored. It should be noted that the March submission is primarily a checkpoint to get assurance that councils are working together to develop proposals in line with the Government's criteria. Any response in March does not prevent further options being developed or explored.

- 3.14 As the Interim Plan will be finalised in the coming weeks, which the Leader will take part in the discussions, this report is therefore seeking delegated authority to agree a plan for submission on behalf of Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council.
- 3.15 It should also be noted that for the Election for Hertfordshire County Council will go ahead as scheduled on 1 May 2025. The table below sets out the current timeline.

	Date	Event
Confirmed	5 Feb 2025	Statutory invitation received from the government to submit local government reorganisation proposals
Confirmed	21 Mar 2025	Submit interim Local Government Reorganisation proposal
Confirmed	1 May 2025	Hertfordshire County Council Elections
Confirmed	28 Nov 2025	Submit full Local Government Reorganisation proposal
Proposed	May 2027	Elections (Shadow authorities)
Proposed	Apr 2028	Vesting day for new unitary councils

Implications

4 Legal Implication(s)

- 4.1 By virtue of Part 1 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, the Secretary of State has the statutory power to invite proposals for a single tier of local government from any principal authority (which is defined as a county council or district council in England). The Councils across Hertfordshire, has received such an invitation.
- 4.2 When responding to a request, the Council must have regards to any guidance from the Secretary of State as to what the proposal should seek to achieve and matters that should be taken into account in formulating the proposal. The details of which is set out in the letter received on 5 February 2025.

5 Financial Implication(s)

- 5.1 The submission of the interim plan will be contained within existing budget.

6 Risk Management Implications

6.1 There is a new strategic risk put on the council’s risk register on devolution/local government reorganisation. The council needs to be mindful that significant resources will need to be directed to prepare for the delivery of the full proposal for submission in November 2025.

7 Security and Terrorism Implication(s)

7.1 None.

8 Procurement Implication(s)

8.1 None.

9 Climate Change Implication(s)

9.1 None.

10 Human Resources Implication(s)

10.1 None directly relating to the preparation of the Interim Plan. However significant resources will need to be made available to prepare for the full proposal in November 2025.

10.2 Local government reorganisation will have a direct impact on the council’s recruitment and retention and this will continue to be monitored by the council’s Senior Management Team, along with support from Human Resources team.

11 Health and Wellbeing Implication(s)

11.1 None.

12 Communication and Engagement Implication(s)

12.1 There is a Communications workstream as part of the County-wide White Paper Working Group, which involves our Communications team. There is an agreed protocol to keep authorities informed, whilst allowing individual authorities to publish their own statement, should they wish to.

13 Equality and Diversity

13.1 An EqIA was not completed for the Interim Plan stage, however as plans progress an Equalities Impact Assessment will be developed to inform final local government reorganisation proposals to be submitted to Government in November 2025.

Background Papers

English Devolution White Paper December 2024 – Power and Partnership: Foundations for Growth.

[English Devolution White Paper](#)

Name of author Ka Ng
Title Chief Executive
Date 23 February 2025



Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Jim McMahon OBE MP

*Minister of State for Local Government and
English Devolution*
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Your reference:

Our reference:

To: Leaders of two-tier councils in
Hertfordshire

Broxbourne Borough Council
Dacorum Borough Council
East Herts Council
Hertfordshire County Council
Hertsmere Borough Council
North Hertfordshire District Council
St Albans City and District Council
Stevenage Borough Council
Three Rivers District Council
Watford Borough Council
Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council

5 February 2025

Dear Leaders

This Government has been clear on our vision for simpler, more sustainable, local government structures, alongside a transfer of power out of Westminster through devolution. We know that councils of all political stripes are in crisis after a decade of decline and instability. Indeed, a record number of councils asked the government for support this year to help them set their budgets.

This new government will not waste this opportunity to build empowered, simplified, resilient and sustainable local government for your area that will increase value for money for council taxpayers. Local leaders are central to our mission to deliver change for hard-working people in every corner of the country through our Plan for Change, and our councils are doing everything they can to stay afloat and provide for their communities day in, day out. The Government will work closely with you to deliver these aims to the most ambitious timeline.

I am writing to you now to formally invite you to work with other council leaders in your area to develop a proposal for local government reorganisation, and to set out further detail on the criteria, guidance for the development of proposals, and the timeline for this process. A formal invitation with guidance for the development of your proposals is attached at Annex A. This invitation sets out the criteria against which proposals will be assessed.

Developing proposals for reorganisation

We expect there to be different views on the best structures for an area, and indeed there may be merits to a variety of approaches. Nevertheless, it is not in council taxpayers' interest to devote public funds and your valuable time and effort into the development of multiple proposals which unnecessarily fragment services, compete against one another, require lengthy implementation periods or which do not sufficiently address local interests and identities.

The public will rightly expect us to deliver on our shared responsibility to design and implement the best local government structures for efficient and high-quality public service delivery. We therefore expect local leaders to work collaboratively and proactively, including by sharing information, to develop robust and sustainable unitary proposals that are in the best interests of the whole area to which this invitation is issued, rather than developing competing proposals.

This will mean making every effort to work together to develop and jointly submit one proposal for unitary local government across the whole of your area. The proposal that is developed for the whole of your area may be for one or more new unitary councils and should be complementary to devolution plans. It is open to you to explore options with neighbouring councils in addition to those included in this invitation, particularly where this helps those councils to address concerns about their sustainability or limitations arising from their size or boundaries or where you are working together across a wider geography within a strategic authority.

I understand there will be some cases when it is not possible for all councils in an area to jointly develop and submit a proposal, despite their best efforts. This will not be a barrier to progress, and the Government will consider any suitable proposals submitted by the relevant local authorities.

Supporting places through change

It is essential that councils continue to deliver their business-as-usual services and duties, which remain unchanged until reorganisation is complete. This includes progress towards the Government's ambition of universal coverage of up-to-date local plans as quickly as possible. To support with capacity, I intend to provide some funds for preparing to take forward any proposal, and I will share further information later in the process.

Considering the efficiencies that are possible through reorganisation, we expect that areas will be able to meet transition costs over time from existing budgets, including from the flexible use of capital receipts that can support authorities in taking forward transformation and invest-to-save projects.

The default position is that assets and liabilities remain locally managed by councils, but we acknowledge that there are exceptional circumstances where there has been failure linked to capital practices. Where that is the case, proposals should reflect the extent to which the implications of this can be managed locally, including as part of efficiencies possible through reorganisation, and Commissioners should be engaged in these discussions. We will continue to discuss the approach that is proposed with the area.

I welcome the partnership approach that is being taken across the sector to respond to the ambitious plans set out in the White Paper. My department will continue to work closely with the Local Government Association (LGA), the District Councils Network, the County Councils Network and other local government partners to plan how best to support councils through this process. We envisage that practical support will be needed to understand and address the key thematic issues that will arise through reorganisation, including managing service impacts and opportunities for the workforce, digital and IT systems, and leadership support.

Timelines and next steps for interim plans and full proposals

We ask for an interim plan to be submitted on or before 21 March 2025, in line with the guidance set out in the attached Annex. My officials will provide feedback on your plan to help support you to develop final proposals.

I will expect any full proposal to be submitted **by 28 November**. If I decide to implement any proposal, and the necessary legislation is agreed by Parliament, we will work with you to move to elections to new 'shadow' unitary councils as soon as possible as is the usual arrangement in the process of local government reorganisation.

Following submission, I will consider any and all proposals carefully before taking decisions on how to proceed. My officials are available throughout to discuss how your reorganisation and devolution aspirations might work together and what support you think you might need to proceed.

This is a once in a generation opportunity to work together to put local government in your area on a more sustainable footing, creating simpler structures for your area that will deliver the services that local people and businesses need and deserve. As set out in the White Paper, my commitment is that clear leadership locally will be met with an active partner nationally.

I am copying this letter to council Chief Executives. I am also copying this letter to local Members of Parliament and to the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jim McMahon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

JIM MCMAHON OBE MP

Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT IN HEALTH ACT 2007**INVITATION FOR PROPOSALS FOR A SINGLE TIER OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, in exercise of his powers under Part 1 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 ('the 2007 Act'), hereby invites any principal authority in the area of the county of Hertfordshire, to submit a proposal for a single tier of local government.

This may be one of the following types of proposal as set out in the 2007 Act:

- Type A – a single tier of local authority covering the whole of the county concerned
- Type B – a single tier of local authority covering an area that is currently a district, or two or more districts
- Type C – a single tier of local authority covering the whole of the county concerned, or one or more districts in the county; and one or more relevant adjoining areas
- Combined proposal – a proposal that consists of two or more Type B proposals, two or more Type C proposals, or one or more Type B proposals and one or more Type C proposals.

Proposals must be submitted in accordance with paragraphs 1 to 3:

1. Any proposal must be made by **28 November 2025**.
2. In responding to this invitation an authority must have regard to the guidance from the Secretary of State set out in the Schedule to this invitation, and to any further guidance on responding to this invitation received from the Secretary of State.
3. An authority responding to this invitation may either make its own proposal or make a proposal jointly with any of the other authorities invited to respond.

Signed on behalf of the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government.



F KIRWAN

A senior civil servant in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

5 February 2025

SCHEDULE

Guidance from the Secretary of State for proposals for unitary local government.

Criteria for unitary local government

- 1. A proposal should seek to achieve for the whole of the area concerned the establishment of a single tier of local government.**
 - a) Proposals should be for sensible economic areas, with an appropriate tax base which does not create an undue advantage or disadvantage for one part of the area.
 - b) Proposals should be for a sensible geography which will help to increase housing supply and meet local needs.
 - c) Proposals should be supported by robust evidence and analysis and include an explanation of the outcomes it is expected to achieve, including evidence of estimated costs/benefits and local engagement.
 - d) Proposals should describe clearly the single tier local government structures it is putting forward for the whole of the area, and explain how, if implemented, these are expected to achieve the outcomes described.

- 2. Unitary local government must be the right size to achieve efficiencies, improve capacity and withstand financial shocks.**
 - a) As a guiding principle, new councils should aim for a population of 500,000 or more.
 - b) There may be certain scenarios in which this 500,000 figure does not make sense for an area, including on devolution, and this rationale should be set out in a proposal.
 - c) Efficiencies should be identified to help improve councils' finances and make sure that council taxpayers are getting the best possible value for their money.
 - d) Proposals should set out how an area will seek to manage transition costs, including planning for future service transformation opportunities from existing budgets, including from the flexible use of capital receipts that can support authorities in taking forward transformation and invest-to-save projects.
 - e) For areas covering councils that are in Best Value intervention and/or in receipt of Exceptional Financial Support, proposals must additionally demonstrate how reorganisation may contribute to putting local government in the area as a whole on a firmer footing and what area-specific arrangements may be necessary to make new structures viable.
 - f) In general, as with previous restructures, there is no proposal for council debt to be addressed centrally or written off as part of reorganisation. For areas where there are exceptional circumstances where there has been failure linked to capital practices, proposals should reflect the extent to which the implications of this can be managed locally, including as part of efficiencies possible through reorganisation.

3. Unitary structures must prioritise the delivery of high quality and sustainable public services to citizens.

- a) Proposals should show how new structures will improve local government and service delivery, and should avoid unnecessary fragmentation of services.
- b) Opportunities to deliver public service reform should be identified, including where they will lead to better value for money.
- c) Consideration should be given to the impacts for crucial services such as social care, children's services, SEND and homelessness, and for wider public services including for public safety.

4. Proposals should show how councils in the area have sought to work together in coming to a view that meets local needs and is informed by local views.

- a) It is for councils to decide how best to engage locally in a meaningful and constructive way and this engagement activity should be evidenced in your proposal.
- b) Proposals should consider issues of local identity and cultural and historic importance.
- c) Proposals should include evidence of local engagement, an explanation of the views that have been put forward and how concerns will be addressed.

5. New unitary structures must support devolution arrangements.

- a) Proposals will need to consider and set out for areas where there is already a Combined Authority (CA) or a Combined County Authority (CCA) established or a decision has been taken by Government to work with the area to establish one, how that institution and its governance arrangements will need to change to continue to function effectively; and set out clearly (where applicable) whether this proposal is supported by the CA/CCA /Mayor.
- b) Where no CA or CCA is already established or agreed then the proposal should set out how it will help unlock devolution.
- c) Proposals should ensure there are sensible population size ratios between local authorities and any strategic authority, with timelines that work for both priorities.

6. New unitary structures should enable stronger community engagement and deliver genuine opportunity for neighbourhood empowerment.

- a) Proposals will need to explain plans to make sure that communities are engaged.
- b) Where there are already arrangements in place it should be explained how these will enable strong community engagement.

Developing proposals for unitary local government

The following matters should be taken into account in formulating a proposal:

Boundary Changes

- a) Existing district areas should be considered the building blocks for your proposals, but where there is a strong justification more complex boundary changes will be considered.
- b) There will need to be a strong public services and financial sustainability related justification for any proposals that involve boundary changes, or that affect wider public services, such as fire and rescue authorities, due to the likely additional costs and complexities of implementation.

Engagement and consultation on reorganisation

- a) We expect local leaders to work collaboratively and proactively, including by sharing information, to develop robust and sustainable unitary proposals that are in the best interests of the whole area to which this invitation is issued, rather than developing competing proposals.
- b) For those areas where Commissioners have been appointed by the Secretary of State as part of the Best Value Intervention, their input will be important in the development of robust unitary proposals.
- c) We also expect local leaders to engage their Members of Parliament, and to ensure there is wide engagement with local partners and stakeholders, residents, workforce and their representatives, and businesses on a proposal.
- d) The engagement that is undertaken should both inform the development of robust proposals and should also build a shared understanding of the improvements you expect to deliver through reorganisation.
- e) The views of other public sector providers will be crucial to understanding the best way to structure local government in your area. This will include the relevant Mayor (if you already have one), Integrated Care Board, Police (Fire) and Crime Commissioner, Fire and Rescue Authority, local Higher Education and Further Education providers, National Park Authorities, and the voluntary and third sector.
- f) Once a proposal has been submitted it will be for the Government to decide on taking a proposal forward and to consult as required by statute. This will be a completely separate process to any consultation undertaken on mayoral devolution in an area, which will be undertaken in some areas early this year, in parallel with this invitation.

Interim plans

An interim plan should be provided to Government on or before **21 March 2025**. This should set out your progress on developing proposals in line with the criteria and guidance. The level of detail that is possible at this stage may vary from place to place but the expectation is that one interim plan is jointly submitted by all councils in the area. It may be the case that the interim plan describes more than one potential proposal for your area, if there is more than one option under consideration. The interim plan should:

- a) identify any barriers or challenges where further clarity or support would be helpful.
- b) identify the likely options for the size and boundaries of new councils that will offer the best structures for delivery of high-quality and sustainable public services across the area, along with indicative efficiency saving opportunities.
- c) include indicative costs and arrangements in relation to any options including planning for future service transformation opportunities.
- d) include early views as to the councillor numbers that will ensure both effective democratic representation for all parts of the area, and also effective governance and decision-making arrangements which will balance the unique needs of your cities, towns, rural and coastal areas, in line with the Local Government Boundary Commission for England guidance.
- e) include early views on how new structures will support devolution ambitions.
- f) include a summary of local engagement that has been undertaken and any views expressed, along with your further plans for wide local engagement to help shape your developing proposals.
- g) set out indicative costs of preparing proposals and standing up an implementation team as well as any arrangements proposed to coordinate potential capacity funding across the area.
- h) set out any voluntary arrangements that have been agreed to keep all councils involved in discussions as this work moves forward and to help balance the decisions needed now to maintain service delivery and ensure value for money for council taxpayers, with those key decisions that will affect the future success of any new councils in the area.

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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