

Walsworth Common Draft Management Plan 2015-2020



**NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL**



Walsworth Common Management Plan 2014-2019

CONTENTS	PAGE
Executive Summary	3
1. The purpose of this document	4
2. Aims	5
3. Site Description	6
Recreation	7
Access	9
Entrances	9
Information	10
Wildlife	10
History	12
Community Involvement	13
Flood Alleviation	14
Funding	14
Grounds Maintenance	15
4. Actions	16
5. Action plan	20
6. Maps	26
Appendices	33
1. Specifications	33
2. Strategies	38
3. Wildlife surveys	39
4. Water voles	40
5. In-river structures	40
6. Enhancing the wildflower meadow	44



Executive Summary

The purpose of this document is to guide the maintenance and development of Walsworth Common.

Walsworth Common is registered Common Land (No. CL050), and it constitutes a 9.6ha. open space owned by North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC). This large green space with the River Purwell and fine mature trees provides some visual relief from the residential and industrial landscape of north-east Hitchin.

A number of policy documents have identified the link between public health and access to well managed open space. Walsworth Common can make a significant contribution to the health and well being of local people and visitors.

The river valleys of the Oughton, Hiz and Purwell are significant elements of Hitchin's green infrastructure. At Walsworth Common there are opportunities to enhance the provision for formal and informal recreation; whilst extending the scale of community events; as well as facilitating access to nature.

The formal recreational facilities include two football pitches, changing rooms, a basketball court, skateboard ramp and two children's play areas. Also there are opportunities to increase the usage of the Common for community outdoor public events like fairs, festivals, circuses and concerts.

The key to the further development of the Common's recreational potential is the replacement of a bridge which is the sole vehicular access on to the site. This will allow vehicles to access the common from the Woolgrove Road car park. Finding funding for the new bridge is a priority task.

Local people use the Common for informal recreation like dog walking or as a walking/cycling route to school and work. Opportunities exist to promote longer recreational routes which link the town and countryside via other publicly owned green spaces along the Purwell Valley. Leaflets, interpretation, signage, websites and guided walks will be developed to encourage this kind of informal usage.

It is important to ensure a balance is struck between recreational and biodiversity objectives on the Common. Key wildlife habitats include the River Purwell; a chalk river, Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Habitat and Local Wildlife Site which runs along the eastern and northern boundary; a significant area of longer conservation grass;

approximately 60 mature trees; some areas of valuable scrub; and a pond. There are opportunities to improve all of these habitats and for strengthening links to other Local Wildlife Sites like Purwell Meadows Local Nature Reserve and Purwell Ninesprings, thus enhancing the 'wildlife corridor' function of the Purwell Valley.

DRAFT

1. The purpose of this document

The purpose of this document is to guide the future maintenance and management of Walsworth Common. It is intended that the plan is referred to and used on a regular basis to review progress and plan developments. A set of annual management maps and an action plan table are included to aid the purposes of annual review and planning.

This document is guided by the strategies and objectives of North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) who own and manage the Common.

NHDC's Vision for North Hertfordshire is

- Making North Herts a vibrant place to live, work and prosper

The Council's priorities for 2014-15 and for the next five years are:

- Promoting Sustainable Growth
- Working With Our Communities
- Living Within Our Means

These priorities will be delivered within the framework of NHDC's Corporate Core Values which are:-

- Aiming to deliver what our customers want
- Delivering high quality services
- Striving to continuously innovate and improve
- Encouraging a listening and learning culture amongst our colleagues
- Promoting equality in service delivery and within our organisation

The following documents have also influenced this management plan:

- Hertfordshire Biodiversity Action Plan
- North Herts Partnership's Sustainable Community Strategy
- NHDC Green Infrastructure Strategy & associated action plans
- NHDC Tree Strategy
- NHDC A Green Space Management Strategy for North Hertfordshire 2014-2019.
- NHDC Grounds Maintenance Contract 2012 – 2017.

2. Aims

The aims of the management plan are:

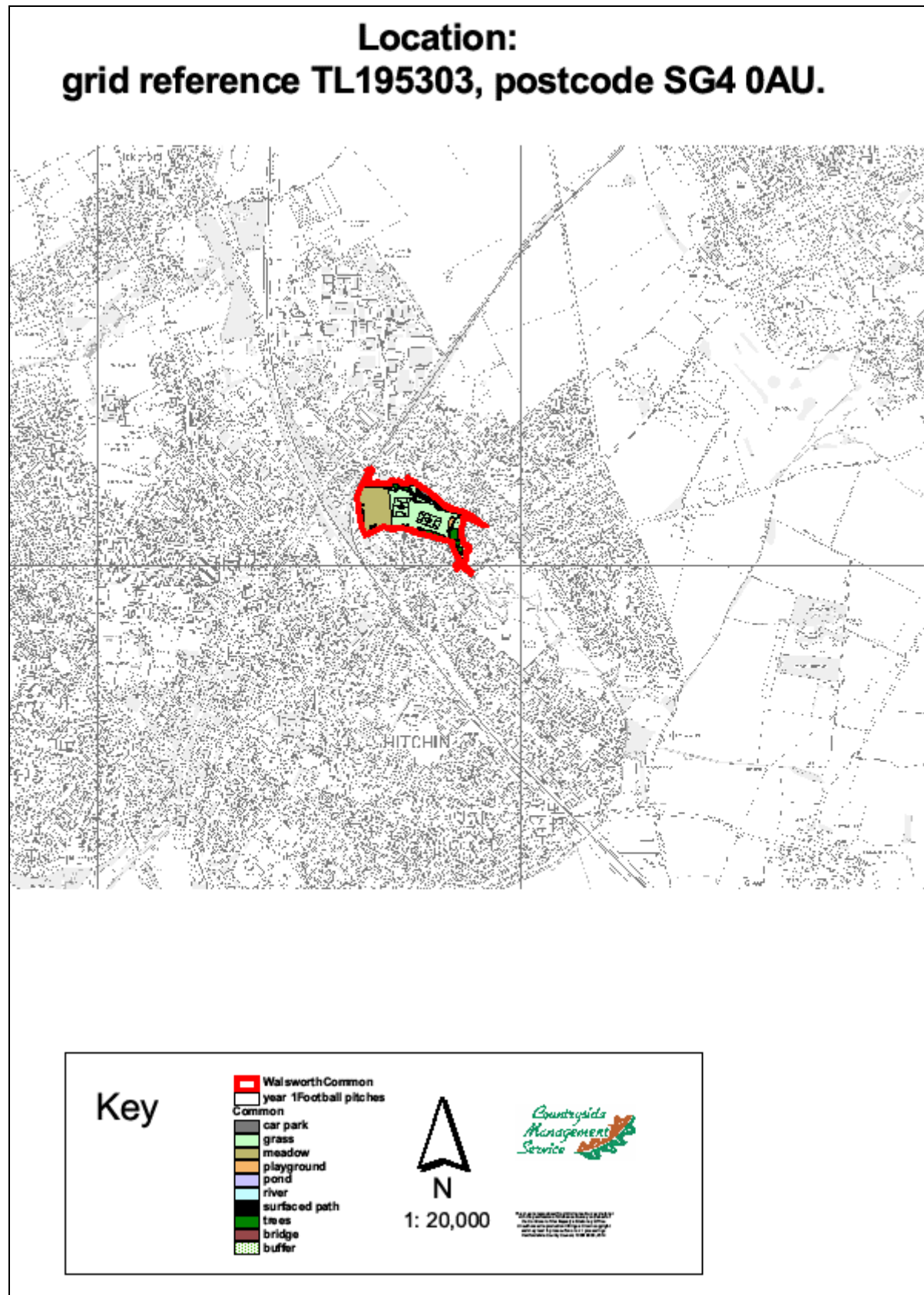
- **to improve the Common as a formal and informal recreational resource; and,**
- **to enhance habitats so that the Common acts as a fully functioning link in the River Purwell wildlife corridor.**

Objectives:

The objectives of the management plan are

- **to improve access for people and vehicles;**
- **to improve the information on the Common by developing signage and interpretation;**
- **to improve the existing facilities such as the football pitches, play area, car park, skateboard ramps changing rooms and benches;**
- **to promote awareness and interest in Walsworth Common and the Purwell Valley;**
- **to enhance the wildlife habitats including the river and its banks, the conservation grass, scrub and pond;**
- **to enhance the visual amenity by boundary tree and hedge planting and by opening up views of the river;**
- **to support community involvement and volunteer activity, and to ensure all involved operate towards achievement of the plan;**
- **to secure external funding to ensure the viability of capital works, especially the vehicle bridge replacement;**
- **to ensure on going maintenance costs are sustainable; and**
- **to provide a framework for planning and annual reviews of progress.**

3. Site description



Walsworth Common is a 9.6ha. open space owned by North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC). It is situated on the Purwell Valley floodplain in the north east of Hitchin.

Data from the British Geological Survey indicates that the site comprises of a combination of superficial alluvium deposits overlying chalk bedrock. These deposits have been extracted, then the land re-filled largely with household refuse. The site was restored with a minimum of 12inches of sandy loam topsoil material capable of promoting plant growth.

The Common consists of a levelled area of seeded grassland the majority of which is in regular recreational use. The River Purwell flows along the Common's northern and eastern boundary. A number of mature trees including an avenue of poplars; aspens; attractive pollarded willows; and areas of scrub punctuate the open space. A railway embankment provides the western boundary. To the north and south residential developments are mostly screened by trees, so that the Common retains some of its original river valley landscape features.

Two local gas mains, one high pressure, cross the western part of the Common and lead to a gas sub station to the south of the site. There are five inspection chamber covers providing access to foul and surface water sewers. The site overlies a 400 mm diameter main foul sewer, a 100 mm foul sewer connecting to this main; and a surface water sewer.

The NHDC Green Space Management Strategy assesses Walsworth Common as in 'fair condition'.

Walsworth Common is recorded on the Register of Common Land (no. CL050). This means that under Section 38 of the Commons Act 2006 consent from the Planning Inspectorate may be required for installing structures on the Common.

The River Purwell is designated as a 'main river' therefore flood defence consent for works in or by the river are required from the Environment Agency.

- **Recreation**

Increasing emphasis on the 'public health' role played by local authorities requires them to promote the role of open spaces, parks and playgrounds as a means to reduce the impact of obesity on long term health; and to aid in the management of mental health issues such as depression; and in aiding relaxation as referred to in the Councils existing Greenspace Strategy.



Children's playground

Recreation, both formal and informal, is Walsworth Common's main function and is the focus of future developments. Since 1974 the Common has hosted the annual

Walsworth festival in May of each year. NHDC have aspirations that Walsworth Common will develop the potential to host other outdoor events in the future.

Formal recreational facilities include two football pitches, a small set of changing rooms, a basketball court, skateboard ramps and play areas. The football pitches are impaired by undulating ground. It is important to note that the undulating nature of the ground is related to historical use of the site as a landfill and due to the settlement of the waste over time. A degree of settlement may well continue into the future as the biodegradable proportion of the waste continues to degrade.

The changing rooms are in need of refurbishment or replacement.

Hitchin Town Cricket Club (HTC) commissioned TGMS Ltd. Sports Surface Consultants to produce a feasibility study for the creation of two new football pitches at the western end of the Common. The cost of the proposal for a levelled but un-drained pitch surface was estimated to be in the region of £58,000. HTCG are providing these funds in mitigation against the expected loss of playing fields elsewhere in Hitchin, and only if these playing fields are lost. This mitigation has been agreed by Sport England and the Football association and only extends to the preparation of the land for the new pitches. Funding for a new changing pavilion and re-furbishing the existing pitches is not being provided by HTCG.

Evidence is accumulating about the benefits of play in a natural environment as well as about the effects of being deprived of natural play opportunities. Natural play areas are not expected to replace manufactured equipment, but to complement it, allowing children to choose and to experience a wide range of play opportunities. To the east of the playground, there is some raised ground which could be developed as a natural play area.

Groundwork Hertfordshire have been contracted to renovate the children's play area.

NHDC's Green Space Management Strategy for North Hertfordshire 2014-2019 identifies the intention to undertake enhancements to wheeled sport provision in 2016-17. This will involve improvements to the existing skate park.

For visitors seeking a more relaxed experience, there are eleven benches of differing styles, although two of the benches are in need of repair or replacement. Fourteen litter bins and four dog bins have been installed. All of these facilities are concentrated in the north and east of the site.

A popular route for commuting, leisure and a safe route to schools, the Common is a key part of Hitchin's Green Infrastructure and an important link in the local sustainable transport network. Walkers can venture out of the town along the valley towards St. Ippolitts and Little Wymondley via Purwell Meadows and Purwell Ninesprings, or can gain access to the Rivers Hiz and Oughton. There are many opportunities for creating and publicising recreational walking routes.



Winter walk

There are also opportunities to enhance visual access to the river by punctuating the vegetated buffer strip with a few regularly maintained viewing points.

- **Access**

Car borne visitors to Walsworth Common make use of the car park on Woolgrove Road. Maintenance vehicles enter through the car park, then have to negotiate a bridge across the River Purwell to gain access to the open space. Unfortunately, the existing vehicle access bridge from the car park onto the common is an ageing, wooden structure and has an axle limit of only 2 tons and a gross limit of 3 tons.

The weight loading limit of this bridge is insufficient, especially given the proposals and the need for access by maintenance vehicles on to the common. Replacing the bridge is the key to future plans for the Common. Consent from the Environment Agency for the new structure has been obtained (see Appendix 1). Planning consents, including the consent of the Planning Inspectorate under Section 38 of the Commons Act 2006 may also be required. The surface of the car park will also need to be upgraded to take into account this extra traffic. NHDC A Green Space Management Strategy for North Hertfordshire 2014-2019 includes the intention to re-surface this facility in 2017-18.



Bridge and barrier at Woolgrove Road car park

- **Entrances**

There are a total of six formal pedestrian entrances, only two of which have signage or information. There are two footbridges which allow pedestrians to cross the river

from Woolgrove Road. Welcoming signs at entrances to all NHDC open spaces should follow the same corporate style and the entrance signs installed at Purwell Meadows provide an attractive template. Two public footpaths and rights of way (one of which has a tarmac surface and is lit at night) cross the eastern end of the Common, and there are many other informal, un-surfaced paths. The surfaced path, although narrow, may have the potential to be developed as a cycle path.

Although all the other entrances are accessible, the entrance from Common Rise consists of a set of steps which are inaccessible to wheelchairs or buggies.



Steps at Common Rise entrance

The western entrance on Woolgrove Road is overgrown with scrub and would benefit from clearance, especially at the roadside where sightlines are restricted.

- **Information**

Currently, there are two notice boards which provide information for visitors. The one located near the car park is used by the Friends of Walsworth Common, the other is by the eastern footbridge. There is little information about the Common on the NHDC website. New interpretation boards and a leaflet which would be downloadable from the NHDC website, will assist with promoting the site to a new set of visitors.



Information board in Woolgrove Road car park

- **Wildlife**

It is important to ensure a careful balance between recreational and biodiversity objectives on Walsworth Common. The Common supports a number of important habitats and there are opportunities to enhance their value for wildlife.

The North Herts Landscape Strategy provides some guidance about priority actions to benefit wildlife in the Purwell Valley directing that management should:

- Promote and encourage the biodiversity of locally native species
- Promote and maintain semi-natural habitats along the river
- Promote the planting of trees
- Do not clear vegetation from river banks where evidence of use for perching and nesting.

The Purwell is a chalk river and Local Wildlife Site. Chalk rivers are globally rare. Out of approximately two hundred in the world, 161 chalk rivers are located in England. Their pure alkaline waters which emanate from an aquifer in the chalk bedrock support a very specific community of flora and fauna. Chalk rivers have been designated a Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Habitat which indicates the rarity and threatened nature of this resource.

The river channel has been artificially widened in some stretches. Just upstream, in Purwell Meadows, the Purwell is approximately a metre across but, by the time it has reached the stretch adjacent to Woolgrove Road, it has broadened to nine metres. Where the river channel has been over widened, the flow slows down, silt is deposited, and the essential elements of a vibrant chalk stream: riffles, (a short, relatively shallow and coarse-bedded length of stream over which the stream flows at slower velocity but a higher turbulence than it normally does in comparison to a pool) and bare gravels and pools which fish depend upon for spawning; are lost.

The installation of in-river structures (see Appendix 4 for details) in the shape of large woody debris would recreate these natural conditions whilst strengthening the growth of marginal vegetation which provides shelter and food for insects, fish and mammals. Furthermore, if the river is narrower it can still maintain sufficient depth for fish and mammals even at low flow rates. The Environment Agency's Water Framework Directive Investigation (2012) is supportive of this approach calling for action to 'create low flow channels in over-widened channels' and 'management and use of large woody debris' on this stretch of the Purwell.

Such works will increase the capacity of the river to act as a corridor for wildlife. Unfortunately, downstream by the Grove Road bridge, a weir and culvert constitutes a considerable barrier to fish migration. However, a healthy colony of water voles exists upstream on Purwell Ninesprings (See Appendix 3) and signs have been found on Purwell Meadows, nearby. This colony would expand on to the Common if the habitat conditions here were favourable.



Ducks by Woolgrove Road entrance

Despite notices urging visitors to refrain from feeding ducks, un-natural aggregations of ducks, attracted by feeding, gather by the eastern footbridge. They are having a local, detrimental effect by over-grazing emergent vegetation and by adding to the silt burden. A re-invigorated campaign to reduce the amount of duck feeding would be beneficial.

A 2.5 ha. area of conservation grass established for two years has provided valuable habitats for some wildflowers and insects (see Appendix 2 for species list). There are opportunities to extend this habitat under the poplar avenue and under the aspen trees.

There are approximately 60 mature trees including pollarded willows by the river, an avenue of poplars and a line of mature aspens. Some new staked trees have been planted along the top of the river bank. The pro-active tree management regime outlined in the NHDC Tree Strategy will be applied to the existing stock. This entails retaining appropriate tree species and pollarding to strengthen the river valley landscape character, but also establishing a more balanced age structure and diverse species mix by new planting along the river and by the railway embankment.

Three small clumps of dense and over-mature scrub to the south east of the Common provide shelter and food for small birds. A lack of management has resulted in a few dead trees, some tall and 'leggy' trees and some unchecked woody bramble, thus reducing the density and therefore the habitat value of the clumps. Nearby, an unused overflow car park is being invaded by bramble.



Over-mature scrub

A wildlife pond has been established adjacent to the scrub, though it has become over shaded.

On the railway embankment a significant area of dense Japanese Knotweed has become established. NHDC have reported this to Railtrack and their contractors have commenced treatment. As there is a possibility of it spreading on to the Common, close monitoring of this area is advisable. Another invasive species, Himalayan Balsam, appears along the river but this is kept under control by volunteers.

- **History**

Walsworth Common has a long and fascinating history as outlined at http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/walsworth_and_purwell-2.pdf , a presentation by Keith Fitzpatrick Matthew (Archaeology Officer NHDC).

Walsworth was first recorded by the Saxons as *Waltonesford* which means 'the ford at the farm of a stranger' (probably a Celtic speaking Briton.)

The Common was managed as a water meadow, part of Purwell field: one of the large open medieval fields in Hitchin and Great Wymondley parishes which survived until 1766. Court rolls from this period state that no-one should put horses onto Walsworth Common between May Day and Lammas as it was reserved for pasture for cows belonging to the poor.

'The Natural History of the Hitchin Region' (1934) refers to the 'moorish' pieces of land such as Oughton Head and Walsworth Common. At this time, the Purwell supported a considerable variety of wildlife, but to anglers the main feature was the excellence of the trout, which bred freely and reached considerable size. In 1880, for example, a 10lb. trout was reported to be caught under the Walsworth railway bridge.



Walsworth Common by Jean Watts 1934 in Hitchin Museum & Art Gallery

By 1956 the 'moorish' nature of the Common was sadly lost. It was subject to mineral extraction, then re-filled, largely with household refuse. As a condition of the planning permission, the site was restored with a minimum of 12 inches of material capable of promoting plant growth. Gas monitoring boreholes are still used to assess carbon dioxide and methane concentrations underground.

- **Community Involvement**

The Friends of Walsworth Common (FoWC) organise regular litter picking sessions in the river and around the Common. They advertise their activities on the car park notice board and through the St' Faith's Church website at: <http://www.stfaithshitchin.org.uk/index.html>.

NHDC has provided the FoWC group with litter-picking tools and a pair of waders, and the council arrange for the collection of the litter. In addition the group clears up after the Walsworth Festival in May. Currently, the FoWC do not benefit from the support available to volunteer groups from the Countryside Management Service (CMS) in terms of training opportunities, insurance cover and safety plans, for example.



Friends of Walsworth Common notice

In the past CMS mid week conservation volunteers have also made a contribution to practical management tasks like clearing scrub from the pond and removing invasive Himalayan Balsam.

The Walsworth festival is an annual celebration that brings the community of Walsworth together on the Common in May. It provides a good opportunity to pass on information about new management plans and changes to the function of the Common.

- **Flood Alleviation**

Areas in the vicinity of the Purwell are included in National Flood Zones 2 and 3. Inclusion in National Flood Zone 2 implies there is a medium probability (i.e. between 1 in 100 and 1 in 1,000) of a flood in any one year whereas National Flood Zone 3 implies a high (i.e. 1 in 100 or greater) probability (see constraints map). Despite the heavy rainfall of January and February 2014 (officially the wettest winter on record) there was only a small, (approximately 200 square metres) area of flooding to the east of the surfaced footpath.

To the south east of the Common, where invasive vegetation in the river threatens to close the channel during the summer months, NHDC engage a contractor to cut a 1 metre wide channel to ensure the river flows freely.

The River Purwell is designated as a 'main river' therefore flood defence consent for works in or by the river are required from the Environment Agency.

- **Funding**

“Living within our means” is one of NHDC’s three ‘Priorities for the District’ for 2014-15 and for the next five years. This is in direct response to the economic downturn and the reduction in central government funding.

NHDC’s Green Space Management Plan has adapted to the reduction in public finance by proposing to ‘work with external agencies and the local community to produce prioritised action plans and aim to secure external funding opportunities to supplement a limited NHDC capital investment programme.’ So improvements to green spaces like Walsworth Common will be achieved by combining ‘realistic’ capital investment with external grant funding and voluntary labour from the community.

The replacement of the vehicle access bridge, for example, will be part funded by NHDC’s capital expenditure programme but external grant funding will also be required. Identifying sources of grant funding will be a priority action.

NHDC’s Green Space Management Plan includes the intention to use £30,000 to re-surface the car park facility in 2017-18.

As far as football facilities are concerned, HTCG are providing funds to NHDC in mitigation of playing fields being lost elsewhere in Hitchin; but only if those fields are lost. However there is no defined timescale for this and it may or may not happen.

NHDC’s Green Space Management Strategy for North Hertfordshire 2014-2019 includes the intention to undertake enhancements to wheeled sport provision in 2016-17. NHDC has set aside £20,000 as a ‘pump primer’ allowance towards the full cost of the works, but additional external funding will need to be found by the user group.

- **Grounds Maintenance**

The Grounds Maintenance Contract provides for the day to day maintenance of green spaces in the urban district areas of North Herts. John O’Conner Grounds Maintenance Limited is the sole grounds maintenance contractor holding a 5 year performance monitored contract. There are financial penalties for non-performance.

Grounds maintenance tasks at Walsworth Common include:

Task	Frequency
Emptying 16 litter bins.	Daily
Inspecting play equipment and cleaning play area of litter.	Daily
Emptying 4 dog bins	Weekly
Inspecting seats and benches	13 times per year
Maintenance and pruning of planted area.	10 times per year
Amenity & sports grass	The frequency of cut is regulated so that the grass does not exceed 60mm in height at any time throughout the year. Machines are adjusted to a height of cut of 25mm.

	Between October and March inclusive and in any period of drought the height of cut is raised by 5mm
Conservation grass	Mower cutting blades are set to a height of cut of 100mm. The first cut is not carried out until after the main flowering season. i.e. end of July early August. Cuttings are allowed to 'fly' to lie on the surface of grassed areas for a period of between seven to twelve days (sufficient time for the wild flower seed to disperse) after which they are collected and removed.
Marking football pitch	32 times per year
Hedge maintenance	Twice per year

Also, maintenance budgets provide for maintenance works that are not included in the Grounds Maintenance Contract. These can be repairs to fencing, new signs, or removing fly-tipping, for example, and are issued on an ad-hoc basis.

4. Actions

- **Access**

Raising the scale of public events will increase the footfall and vehicular traffic on the Common. It necessitates the replacement of the vehicle access bridge from the car park, and will require the re-surfacing of the car park in 2017. A new bridge structure has been designed and consent has been gained (see appendix). Grant funding for part of the cost of constructing and installing the structure needs to be found.

Action

1. **Secure external grant funding for the installation of the bridge to support current capital resources.**
2. **Manage the project to remove the existing structure and the installation of the new bridge and security barrier.**
3. **Resurface the car park in 2017-18.**

The surfaced public footpath which links Meadowbank with Woolgrove Road, although narrow, may have the potential to be developed as a cycle path.

Action

4. **Develop surfaced path to accommodate cyclists. As this makes up part of the definitive footpath network, consultation will be required with Herts. Highways to investigate the possibility of re-designing the surfaced path to accommodate cyclists.**

A loosely surfaced path which follows the river's southern bank from the car park to the eastern footbridge has been infiltrated with weeds.

Action

5. Treat surface to restore 'lost path'

- **Entrances**

The name and ownership of the site is essential information for visitors. Unfortunately, four of the pedestrian entrances are devoid of signage. The welcome entrance signs should follow the corporate style followed at other NHDC sites.

Action

6. Install six new wooden welcome signs; one at each of the entrances.

Although all the other entrances are of an easy access standard, the entrance from Common Rise requires the negotiation of a set of steps which are not accessible for wheelchairs, mobility vehicles or buggies. A light would make the entrance feel less intimidating at night.

Action

7. Install an easy access ramp at the entrance on Common Rise, and investigate the possibility of installing a streetlight with Herts county council

The western entrance from Woolgrove Road is overgrown with scrub and would benefit from clearance, especially by the roadside where sightlines are limited.

Action

8. Clear scrub from the western entrance on the Woolgrove Road.

The view of the railway embankment, its boundary fencing and the gas sub-station diminishes the semi-rural aspect of the Common. These areas should be screened by some appropriate tree and hedge planting along the boundary. Planting willow cuttings along the river bank will help create some shading and cover for fish.

Action

9. Plant mixed hedge species to screen the view of the railway embankment and gas sub-station, and willow cuttings along river.

Benches and litter bins are constructed in a number of different styles and materials. It would be beneficial to replace benches, when that is necessary, with a standard design and colour.

Two benches are damaged and should be replaced as soon as possible.

Action

10. Replace two damaged benches and strengthen the area to the front of the benches to prevent wear. When bin and bench replacements are required, replace them with a standard specification.

- **Recreation**

NHDC's aspirations for the Common to be available as a community outdoor event venue would require changes to the infrastructure but also consultation locally, marketing and other arrangements. Also, NHDC's Green Space Management Strategy identifies the intention to undertake enhancements to wheeled sport provision in 2016-17.

Action

11. Manage the project to make arrangements for public events on the Common. Each application for permission to organise an event will be considered on its merits.

12. Undertake enhancements to wheeled sport provision in 2016-17 by encouraging user group to attract part funding.

There are opportunities to promote sustainable transport routes and informal recreation visiting the local countryside using the Common as a link in the network and as a place to advertise the routes.

Action

13. Attract external funding to promote the Common's informal recreational potential through interpretation on NHDC's website, on-site interpretation panels and leaflets, and through guided walks. Design and install a new interpretation panel and a new enclosed information board. Following existing NHDC design protocols, develop an interpretation leaflet for the Common in its context of the Purwell Valley. Include this information on NHDC's website

The River Purwell is an attractive and interesting feature, but views of the river are often restricted by the tall vegetation of the river buffer strip.

Action

14. Create two informal river viewing points by regular cutting of the river buffer vegetation in appropriate locations.

The children's playground is in need of renovation and there is an opportunity to develop a natural play area to the east of the playground facility amongst some raised ground.

Action

15. Consider the needs of older children, teenagers and the disabled within the playground renovation project. Design and install a natural play facility. This is being undertaken as part of the Play Ground Strategy in 2015

The viability of the football provision is brought into question by the undulating nature of the ground which is caused by the settlement of waste material over time.

Action

- 16. Continue to monitor methane and carbon dioxide concentrations under ground.**
- 17. Consider levelling off to create flat surface for football pitches**

- **Wildlife**

Stretches of the River Purwell are over wide and there are large amounts of silt deposition in these areas. Installing some in-river structures would act to diversify the flow. Where the channel is narrowed, the flow will be faster and scouring of silt and fine gravel will occur, thus creating improved conditions for spawning fish. Within and downstream of the structures silt will deposit, vegetation will take hold and new habitats will be created. Consent for these structures from the Environment Agency will be required.

Action

- 18. Install large woody debris as in-river structures (See Appendix 4) to narrow the river, diversify the flow and create new habitats.**
- 19. Continue to liaise with the Environment Agency regarding flood risk consents for all structures.**

Although signs have been erected which inform visitors about the link between duck feeding and encouraging vermin, the practice still continues. Feeding the ducks encourages un-sustainable numbers of wildfowl which add to the silt burden and over grazing of emergent vegetation locally.

Action

- 20. Continue the campaign to reduce duck feeding by investigating the possibility of relocating signs on to bridge with Herts. Highways.**

The river's buffer strip of uncut vegetation on its bank slopes provides a valuable habitat and corridor for wildlife. Maintaining this habitat is crucial to the possible re-colonisation of the Common by water voles which will migrate from the nearby population upstream. Cutting one third of the buffer strip every year on a 3 year rotation will prevent the encroachment of scrub and will retain habitat structure.

Action

21. Retain the vegetated river buffer strip except at the two viewing points. Manage strip by cutting on a 3 year rotation.

Unfortunately, some litter finds its way into the river.

Action

22. Remove litter from river.

The experiment with conservation grass has been successful as far as increasing numbers of wildflowers and insects is concerned, but there are opportunities to enhance the flora by seeding (see Appendix 6). There are other locations where low, (or no) management grass could be established: under the avenue of poplars, for example. This will benefit species that depend upon the combination of grass and tree habitat: fungi, lopper caterpillars, moths, other insects and some birds, for example. The shading of trees is likely to restrict the growth of grass, so it may not be necessary to cut the grass at all. This would prevent the compaction of roots and damage to bark that often occurs when cutting grass around trees, and would reduce costs.

Action

23. Manage areas of conservation grass by cutting and lifting in September. Seed small areas to enhance wildflowers as an experiment.

So that the areas of scrub continue to provide valuable habitats for small birds, the shrubs and trees will require some rotational management: cutting back bramble, coppicing over-mature scrub; and possibly planting new scrub species to retain structure and density. There are three distinct clumps of scrub in the south east corner of the Common. One clump should be restored in each of the first three years. Arisings cut in the first 2 years will be used to construct in-river structures. Thereafter, they will need to be chipped and removed from site. Some trees around the car park will require management for safety and tree health purposes.

Action

24. Commence a system of rotational scrub management: one clump of scrub each year for 3 years, starting at the south-eastern corner.

The pond has become over-shaded and quite heavily silted. Cutting back some of the scrub and removing the silt will benefit the habitat by increasing light levels, reducing leaf fall and producing some areas of deeper water.

Action

25. Cut back scrub around the pond and remove the silt from the pond.

The Japanese Knotweed established on the railway embankment may spread on to the Common. It is important to continue to control the spread of Himalayan Balsam along the river.

Action

26. Monitor the railway embankment boundary fence for the spread of Japanese Knotweed on to Common. If necessary inform Railtrack of spread and instruct them to treat. Continue to control Himalayan Balsam.

The trees around the car park require maintenance for safety and tree health reasons. The new tree plantings on the river bank and by the railway embankment will require some maintenance: ensuring supporting stakes and tree ties are secure, and some weeding, for example.

Action

27. Maintain trees around car park and new tree and hedge plantings.

• Community Involvement

The forthcoming developments on the Common will have an impact on the local community and it is important that they are kept fully informed.

A number of the actions in this plan can be delivered by volunteers. The FoWC, under an informal arrangement with NHDC, have made a significant contribution to the safety and appearance of the Common by collecting litter on a monthly basis. This arrangement should be formalised to ensure that responsibilities and liabilities are clearly identified and covered. CMS can provide training and support for the FoWC. The CMS mid week conservation volunteers are also in a position to make a contribution to the management of the Common.

Action

28. Provide information about this management plan to the local community at the Walsworth festival, for example.

29. Develop a programme of volunteer activity.

30. To enable volunteer activities to continue, some development of the Friends group is a necessity. Incorporate FoWC as a CMS Friends group and provide training.

No,	Walsworth Common management actions	Responsible	Cost	When	Done
2015-16					
1. & 2.	Apply for planning consent for bridge, including to the Planning Inspectorate under Section 38 of the Commons Act 2006, if necessary. Secure external funding to support current capital resources. Replace vehicle bridge and security barrier.	CMS/NHDC NHDC NHDC	£120,000	April April July	
25.	Develop programme of volunteer activity.	CMS, FoWC.	Officer time	April	
11.	Manage project to make arrangements for public events.	NHDC	Officer time	On going	
13, 6, 10,	Attract external funding for easy access ramp at Common Rise entrance and investigate installing streetlight, 6 entrance signs, interpretation leaflet, boards, website, 2 benches, & pond clearance.	CMS	£8,000 approx.	April	
20	Continue campaign to reduce duck feeding.	NHDC	Officer time	On going	
4	Investigate re-location of signs with Herts. Highways.	CMS		April	
5	Investigate the possibility of accommodating cyclists on surfaced path with Herts. Highways.	CMS		April	
5	Treat surface to restore lost cinder path	NHDC	£5,000	April	
28	Publicise management plan at Walsworth festival.	CMS	Officer time	May	
15	Implement playground renovation project.	NHDC	Officer time	May	
27	Maintain all new tree plantings.	CMS volunteers	Free	May & July	
18, 19	Install large woody debris as in-river structures. Liaise with E.A. re: flood risk consent.	CMS volunteers	£100	May & July	
21	Create informal river viewing points by regular cutting of buffer vegetation in 2 locations.	NHDC	Grounds contract	May-Aug. monthly	
22	Remove litter from common and river.	FoWC.	Grounds contract	Monthly	
26	Monitor Japanese Knotweed, inform Railtrack and treat if necessary.	NHDC	Officer	July	

	Continue to control Himalayan Balsam.	CMS volunteers	time		
23	Cut and lift grass in meadow areas. Prepare wild flower enhancement area and sow seeds	NHDC CMS volunteers	£1200	Sept. Sept.	
21	Cut southern third of river buffer strip.	NHDC	Grounds contract	Sept	
8	Cut back scrub and tidy entrance on Woolgrove Road by railway.	NHDC	£2000	Nov.	
24	Start first phase of rotational scrub management regime in S.E. corner.	CMS volunteers	Free	Dec.	
16	Continue to monitor methane & carbon dioxide concentrations.	NHDC	Officer time	Dec	
	Review annual actions in management plan	NHDC & CMS	Officer time	March	

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Action	Walsworth Common management actions	Responsible	Cost	When	Done
2016-17					
29 & 30	Develop programme of volunteer activity. Provide training for FoWC.	CMS, FoWC.	Officer time	April	
12, 5, 6, 9,21	Implement project to install easy access ramp at Common Rise entrance & 2 benches, clear pond (Sept), and develop 6 entrance signs, interpretation leaflet, boards and website.	CMS	£5000 plus Officer time	April onwards	
17	Consider levelling off of football pitches	NHDC	£45000 est	April	
23.	Incorporate small wildflower enhancement area into amenity grass cutting regime.	NHDC	Grounds contract	April	
15	Design and install natural play facility.	NHDC	Officer time	Sept 2015	
22	Remove litter from Common and river.	FoWC	Free	monthly	
27	Maintain all new tree plantings.	CMS, volunteers	Free	May & July	
12	Work with user group to attract funding for enhanced wheeled sport provision (skate park).	NHDC, user group	Officer time	May	
26	Monitor Japanese Knotweed and treat if necessary. Continue to control Himalayan Balsam.	NHDC CMS volunteers	Officer time	July	
23	Cut and lift grass in meadow areas.	NHDC	Grounds contract	Sept.	
21	Cut eastern third of river buffer strip.	NHDC	Grounds contract	Sept	
25	Remove silt from pond and cut back surrounding scrub.	CMS contractor & volunteers.	£10,000	Sept.	
24	Start second phase of rotational scrub management regime.	CMS volunteers	Free	Nov.	
8	Plant mixed hedge species in gaps along railway boundary, by gas sub-station & willow cuttings along river bank.	CMS volunteers	£1500	Dec.	
16	Continue to monitor methane & carbon dioxide concentrations.	NHDC	Officer	Dec	16

			time		
	Review annual actions in management plan	NHDC & CMS	Officer time	March	

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Action	Walsworth Common management actions	Responsible	Cost	When	Done
2017-18					
29	Develop programme of volunteer activity.	CMS, FoWC.	Officer time	April	
3	Fund, design, specify and oversee contractors to re-surface car park.	NHDC	£25,000	April	
27	Maintain all new tree plantings.	CMS, volunteers	Free	May & July	
22	Remove litter from Common and river.	FoWC	Grounds contract	monthly	
26	Monitor Japanese Knotweed and treat if necessary. Continue to control Himalayan Balsam.	NHDC CMS volunteers	Officer time	July	
12	Install enhanced wheeled sport facility.	NHDC	£20,000		
23	Cut and lift grass in meadow areas.	NHDC	Grounds contract	Sept.	
24	Cut northern third of river buffer strip.	NHDC	Grounds contract	Sept	
20	Start third phase of rotational scrub management regime.	CMS volunteers	Free	Nov.	
16	Continue to monitor methane & carbon dioxide concentrations.	NHDC	Officer time	Dec	16
	Review annual actions in management plan	NHDC & CMS	Officer time	March	

Action	Walsworth Common management actions	Responsible	Cost	When	Done
2018-19					
29	Develop programme of volunteer activity.	CMS, FoWC.	Officer time	April	
22	Remove litter from river and Common.	FoWC	Grounds contract	monthly	
26	Monitor Japanese Knotweed and treat if necessary. Continue to control Himalayan Balsam.	NHDC CMS volunteers	Officer time	July	
23	Cut and lift grass in meadow areas.	NHDC	Grounds contract	Sept.	
21	Cut southern third of river buffer strip.	NHDC	Grounds contract	Sept	
27	Maintain all new tree plantings.	CMS, volunteers	Free	June	
16	Continue to monitor methane & carbon dioxide concentrations.	NHDC	Officer time	Dec	
	Review annual actions in management plan	NHDC & CMS	Officer time	March	

Action	Walsworth Common management actions	Responsible	Cost	When	Done
2019-20					
25	Develop programme of volunteer activity.	CMS, FoWC.	Officer time	April	
22	Remove litter from Common and river.	FoWC	Grounds contract	monthly	
26	Monitor Japanese Knotweed and treat if necessary. Continue to control Himalayan Balsam.	NHDC CMS volunteers	Officer time	July	
23	Cut and lift grass in meadow areas.	NHDC,	Grounds contract	Sept.	
21	Cut eastern third of river buffer strip.	NHDC	Grounds contract	Sept	
16	Continue to monitor methane & carbon dioxide concentrations.	NHDC	Officer time	Dec	16
	Review management plan and write new plan.	CMS, NHDC	Officer time	Sept	