

**HITCHIN COMMITTEE  
5 DECEMBER 2017**

**\*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

**AGENDA ITEM No.**

**7**

**TITLE OF REPORT: UPDATE REGARDING THE ONGOING MAINTENANCE OF AREAS OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPORTANCE**

REPORT OF: THE HEAD OF LEISURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR WASTE, RECYCLING AND ENVIRONMENT

COUNCIL PRIORITY: ATTRACTIVE AND THRIVING / PROSPER AND PROTECT

**1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1.1 To provide the committee an update regarding the progress and development of the areas of environmental sensitivity, including Local Nature Reserves, within the area of Hitchin.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 To note and discuss the evolution of the management plans for the next five years as they relate to Oughtonhead Common, Purwell Meadows and Burymead Springs. As such the Committee will be supporting the proposed Action Plans for each location.

2.2 To note the progress achieved to deliver the management plans for Walsworth Common, Cadwell Lane and St John's Cemetery.

2.3 To provide feedback and comments to officers.

**3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

3.1 The items within the previous Management Plans for Oughtonhead Common, Purwell Meadows have been delivered and these plans have now being updated with revised Action Plans identifying works for a further period of 5 years.

3.2 Actions identified for Walsworth Common, Cadwell Lane and St John's Cemetery have commenced and we are now part way through the delivery of the agreed 5 year management plans for these locations. This progress is for note only.

3.3 Burymead Springs was not available to public access for a period of time during the construction of the adjacent rail curve. Now that work is complete and the appropriate renovations are complete, the site is now available once more for the public to enjoy and a recent consultation exercise has refined proposals for the future management plan.

#### 4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 Any alternative options were considered as part of the production process for the Greenspace Action Plan and have been already included or excluded as appropriate depending upon the location, environmental sensitivities and financial resources.

#### 5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1 Please refer to Appendix D below for a detailed flow chart of the production process we have used for the creation of the Greenspace Action Plans for Oughtonhead Common, Purwell Meadows and Burymead Springs.

#### 6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key decision and has not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

#### 7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 **Oughtonhead Common** – works completed are the renovation of the fenland habitat, renewal of the fencing and enlargement of the grazing compartments and increasing the number of long horn cattle present on site. In 2016 the site regained its Greenflag accreditation
- 7.2 **Walsworth Common** – Countryside Management Services secured a £10,000 grant from Tesco's Bags for Life Scheme which has enabled the pond to be cleared and excavated. The areas of scrub encroachment to the rear of the Millstream PH have been reduced and cut back clearing large areas of grassland. The areas of vegetation along the river bank have been cut back as a fresh start to maintaining this habitat differently with areas of longer grass on both banks instead of a single river bank.
- 7.3 **Purwell Meadows** – The boundary fence line along Purwell Road has been replanted with a new hedge, the cattle coral has been replaced and relocated. Interpretation signage has been installed on site and also a scrape was excavated to permit the grazing cattle to cross the river without damaging the embankments. In 2015 the site gained Greenflag accreditation which is due for renewal in 2017.
- 7.4 **Burymead Springs** – The loss of this site for a number of years due to the development of the rail curve impacted significantly upon the delivery of the management plan for this site. However one of the criteria that were imposed upon the developer included the delivery of the actions identified within the action plan at that time. Network Rail as the developer have now completed the various elements contained within the management plan and have now handed the site back to North Herts for maintenance. Countryside Management Services have completed a process of consultation that has cumulated in the development of the forthcoming action plan.

- 7.5 **St John's Cemetery** – The maintenance of the older sections of the cemetery was adjusted so as to allow the area to be used as a garden of remembrance. As such areas were planted with bulbs and mowing schedules amended to encourage a wild meadow habitat. Additionally supplementary seating has been installed. The initial area has now been increase to include an adjacent second phase. This project has attracted significant attention which has helped to develop a very proactive volunteer group who now meet regularly at the cemetery to undertake ongoing maintenance tasks such as clearing ivy off memorials and maintaining the yew and box hedging.
- 7.6 **Cadwell Lane** – A new hedge line has been planted adjacent the boundary with the industrial estate. The riverside walk has been cleared of vegetation and opened up for visitors and the river has been de shaded by removing over hanging trees to encourage greater biodiversity in the watercourse.

## **8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS**

- 8.1 The next generation of updated Management Plans for Oughtonhead Common, Purwell Meadows and Burymead Springs are requiring renewal. As such the Action Plans for these locations are attached for further information and final comment. The Management Plans have been put out to public consultation during 2016 and 2017 with the comments received incorporated into the final document where ever reasonable and practical to do so.
- 8.2 Delivery of the existing Management Plans for Walsworth Common, Cadwell Lane and St John's Cemetery are currently in progress and we will be working towards the delivery of the identified actions in these locations.

## **9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 The terms of reference for Hitchin Area Committee are set out in section 9.8.1 and 9.8.2 of the Council's Constitution.
- 9.2 Of particular relevance to this report are the Committee's functions "*To act as a forum for discussion on matters of local interest and in particular to elicit/hear the views of local bodies and organisations*" and "*To provide local input into centrally determined specifications for all services.*"

## **10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 There are no specific financial implications. If the funds can not be sourced from existing revenue or external grants funds the ambitions of the various Action Plans will not be met and will be rolled over into the next plan.

## **11. RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 Any existing risks are already contained with current work programs and failure to deliver the identified action plans for each location would only delay the delivery of the identified works. Any negative impacts would be managed locally on each location as appropriate if the action plans are not completed.

## **12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 12.1 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.2 There are no adverse impacts generated by the actions contained within this report. All the actions are positive in terms of allowing greater access to green spaces to residents.

## **13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS**

- 13.1 The Social Value Act and “go local” policy do not apply to this report.

## **14. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 14.1 There are no direct human resource implications relevant to this report.

## **15. APPENDICES**

- 15.1 Appendix A – Oughtonhead Common Action Plan
- 15.2 Appendix B – Purwell Meadows Action Plan
- 15.3 Appendix C – Burymead Springs Action Plan
- 15.4 Appendix D – Greenspace Action Plan Production Process including Consultation Flow Chart

## **16. CONTACT OFFICERS**

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**17. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 17.1 Management Plans for - Oughtonhead Common  
Walsworth Common  
Purwell Meadows  
Burymead Springs  
St John's Cemetery  
Cadwell Lane
- 17.2 Full versions of the above documents are available on the NHDC web site.