

Draft
Beechen Wood
Green Space Action Plan
2009 – 2013



Produced by:
Countryside Management Service
On behalf of
Three Rivers District Council
2008



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Beechen Wood Greenspace Action Plan

1.0 Introduction

Beechen Wood is a small isolated wood surrounded by houses. It is currently an Ecosite (Ref: 88/011). It is a planted Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) wood, 2.39ha in size. The Wood is located in Maple Cross in south-west Hertfordshire, just west of the Grand Union Canal. The wood is owned and managed by Three Rivers District Council.

2.0 Site Description

2.1 Woodland

The wood is comprised mainly of Beech with some Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) and Oak (*Quercus robur*). The Beech is denser to the west and there is a good understory layer, dominated in areas by dense Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), but also consisting of Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), Spindle (*Euonymus europaeus*) and Elder (*Sambucus nigra*). There is a species rich ground layer including Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scriptus*) and Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*) which will benefit from some management. The locally rare Enchanters Nightshade (*Ciccaea lutetiana*) can also be found on the site.

The wood has one main ride running its length from east to west, but a number of smaller paths criss – cross this.

The wood is now semi-natural in character, although it is not ancient. It was, in all probability, originally planted with beech for the local furniture industry in the 19th century. It is generally in good health with a diverse age structure with plenty of natural tree regeneration in the gaps created by storm damage. There are plenty of squirrels and some bark damage is evident. This is likely to be a significant issue in the future, where squirrel damage to larger trees may affect tree safety. There are a number of mature Beech trees with dead wood in their crowns that may need attention; however these should be surveyed for bats before works are carried out.

The site contains several hollows, probably the result of mineral extraction at some point. Consultation with the county's Historic Environment Unit confirms there are no entries on their register from within the wood.

The wood is well used, particularly by dog walkers and there is evidence that children play in the wood.

The entrance to the wood on the north-west side is via a stile that takes walkers along a path adjacent to a fenced mast and into the wood. This stile is not suitable and should be removed and replaced with a kissing gate.

Flytipping is a problem in the wood and is regularly removed by Three Rivers District Council; a letter may need to be sent to the local residents.

2.2 Grassland

There is a large area of grassland on the north boundary which in turn is lined with a hedge. The grass is currently close mown, however species such as Creeping Buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*) and Common Mallow (*Malva sylvestris*) are surviving.

3.0 Aims

- The production of a Green Space Action Plan for Beechen Wood to increase the biodiversity value and to involve the local community.

4.0 Objectives

- Advise on the management of the site to increase Biodiversity
- Encourage local communities and businesses to become involved in decision making and appropriate management of their local green space
- Improve and promote public access and interpretation of the site, where appropriate

5.0 Current Management

Little is currently done in the wood, health and safety work and removal of fly tipping are the main activities. The meadow is currently amenity cut and of little value to wildlife, however with changes this could be improved.

6.0 Suggested roles for implementation:-

6.1 Countryside Management Service (CMS)

- Specialist advice
- Support with grant applications
- Specifications for management works
- Press and PR with Three Rivers District Council
- Support events

6.2 Three Rivers District Council

- Responsible for implementation of plan
- Day to day management of Beechen Wood
- Admin and budget management
- Signature and responsibility for grant applications/claims
- Member involvement and reporting

6.3 Community

- Involve local groups
- Securing external grants
- Input into decision making process
- Eyes and ears reporting to Three Rivers District Council
- Open days, guided walks, family events

- Monitoring of the plan

7.0 Contacts:

Three Rivers District Council
Darren Monk/Julie Hughes
01923 727124

Countryside Management Service
West and Southern Area
CMS Building
The Nursery Site
Hixberry Lane
St Albans
Herts
AL4 0TZ
(Telephone 01727 848168)

8.0 Suggested Management

8.1 Woodland

The main management, carried out over the first two years will concentrate on thinning the re – generation of Ash, Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) and the large amounts of Holly now invading the understory, (any hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and small amounts of Ash should be coppiced). During years 3-5 the woodland should be monitored, especially for holly regeneration and path maintenance and management should be carried out when necessary.

8.2 Scrub edge

A scrub edge will be allowed to grow up along the wood edge and the grassland edge to provide a structured edge habitat. The edge habitat should be cut in the fourth year to stop succession to woodland.

8.3 Grassland

The currently close mown grassland should be turned into a hay meadow, by changing the cutting regime, this would provide a good nectar source for invertebrates and provide extra habitat for small mammals which may be using the wood. The hay meadow should be cut once a year, with arising being removed (see attached table of works). Cut a 2m path through the meadow, leaving a minimum 5 metre strip along hedge and wood edge.

9.0 Species List

Trees

Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*)
Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*)
Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*)
Cherry (*Prunus avium*)

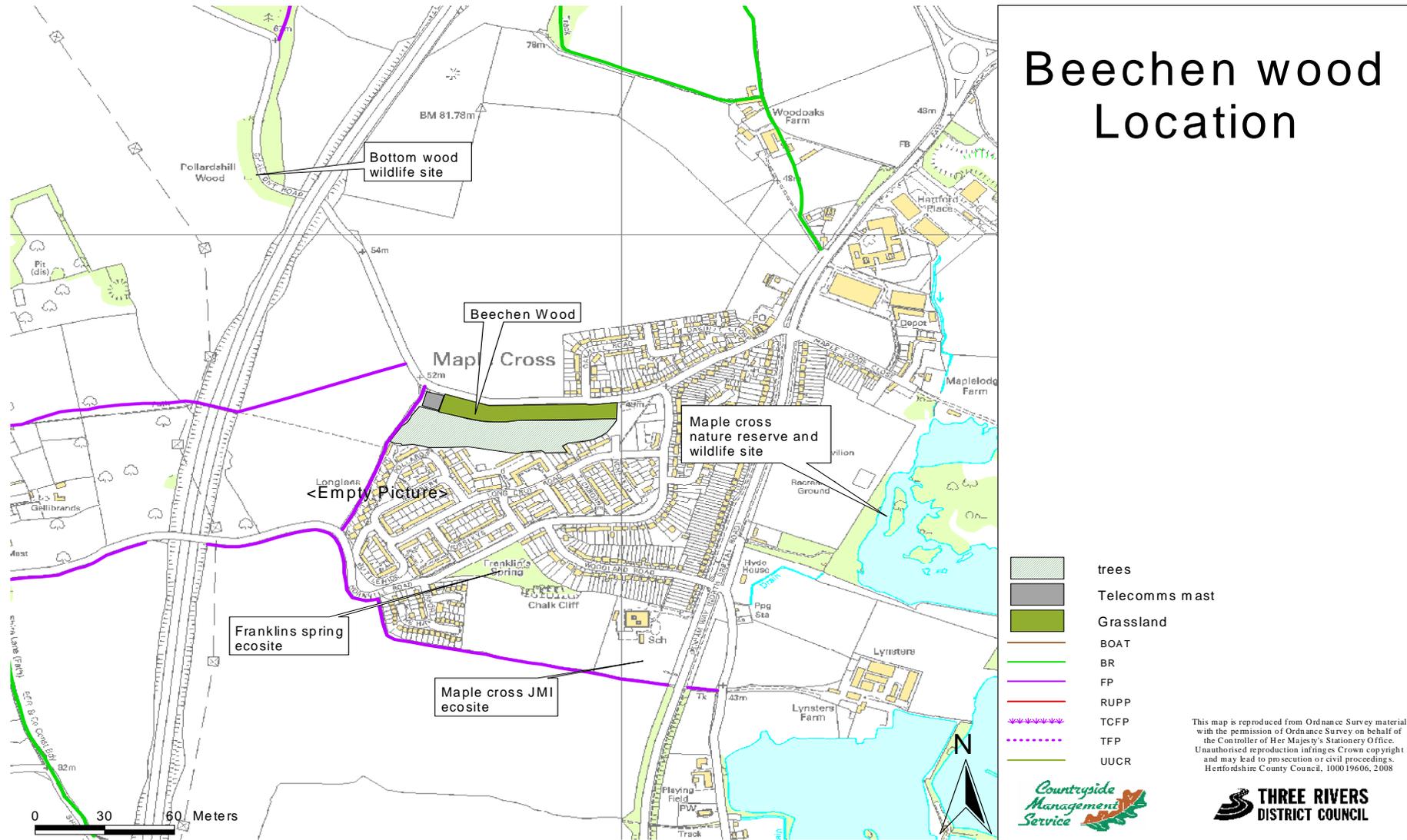
Field Maple (*Acer campestre*)
Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*)
Oak (*Quercus robur*)
Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*)
Spindle (*Euonymus europaeus*)
Elder (*Sambucus nigra*)

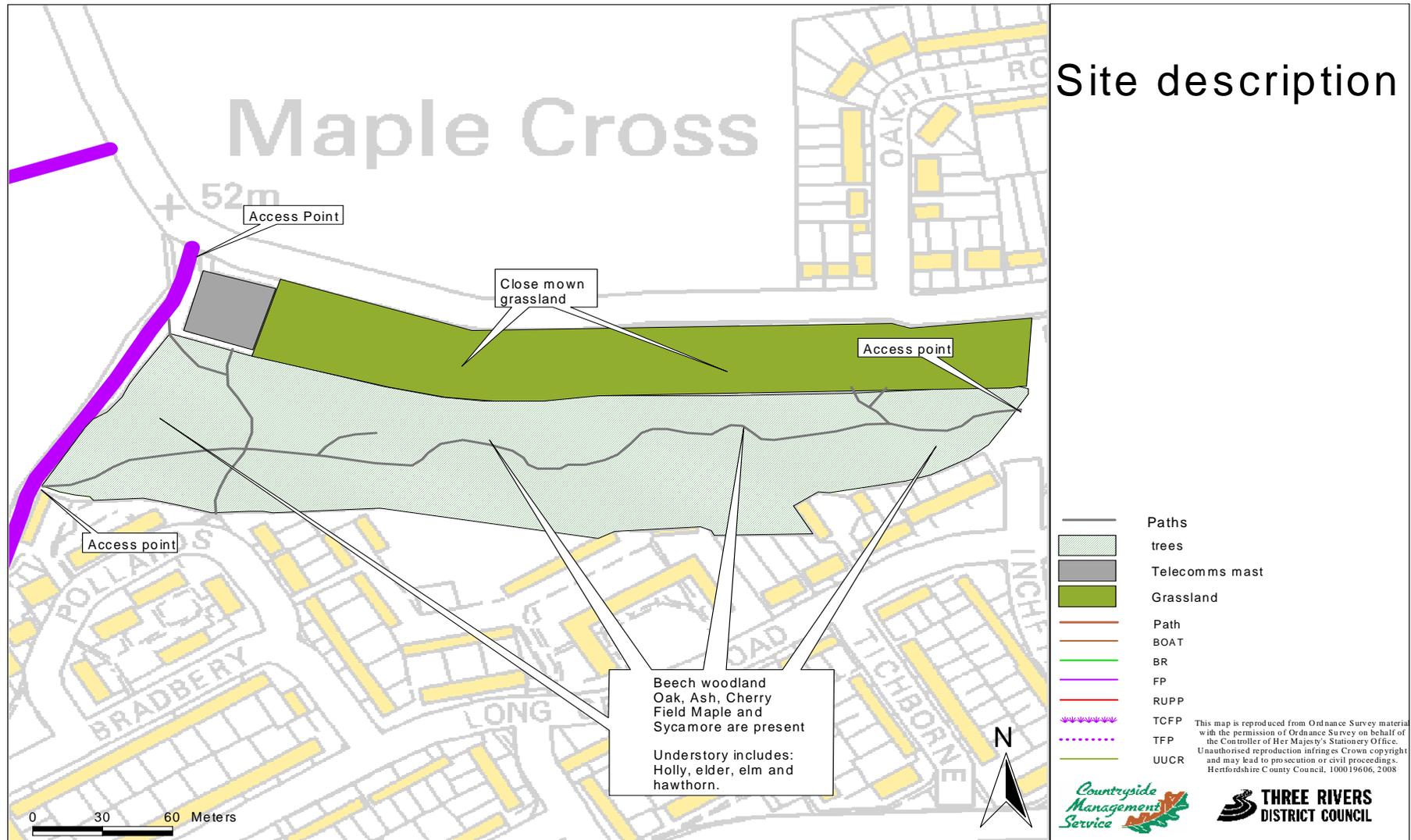
Herbs

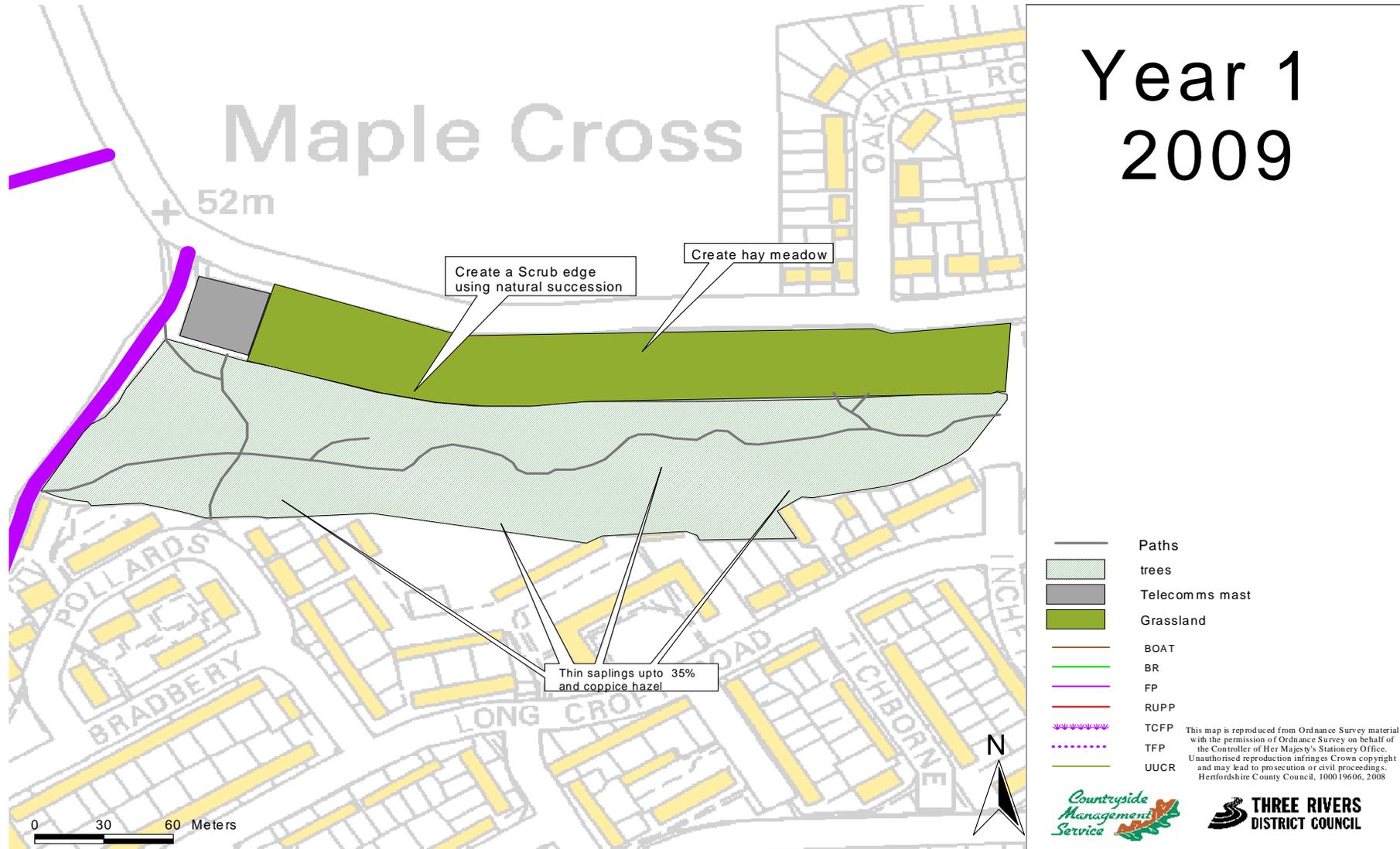
Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scriptus*)
Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*)
Red Campion (*Silene dioica*)
Sweet Woodruff (*Galium odoratum*)
Dogs Mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*)
Enchanters Nightshade (*Circaea lutetiana*)

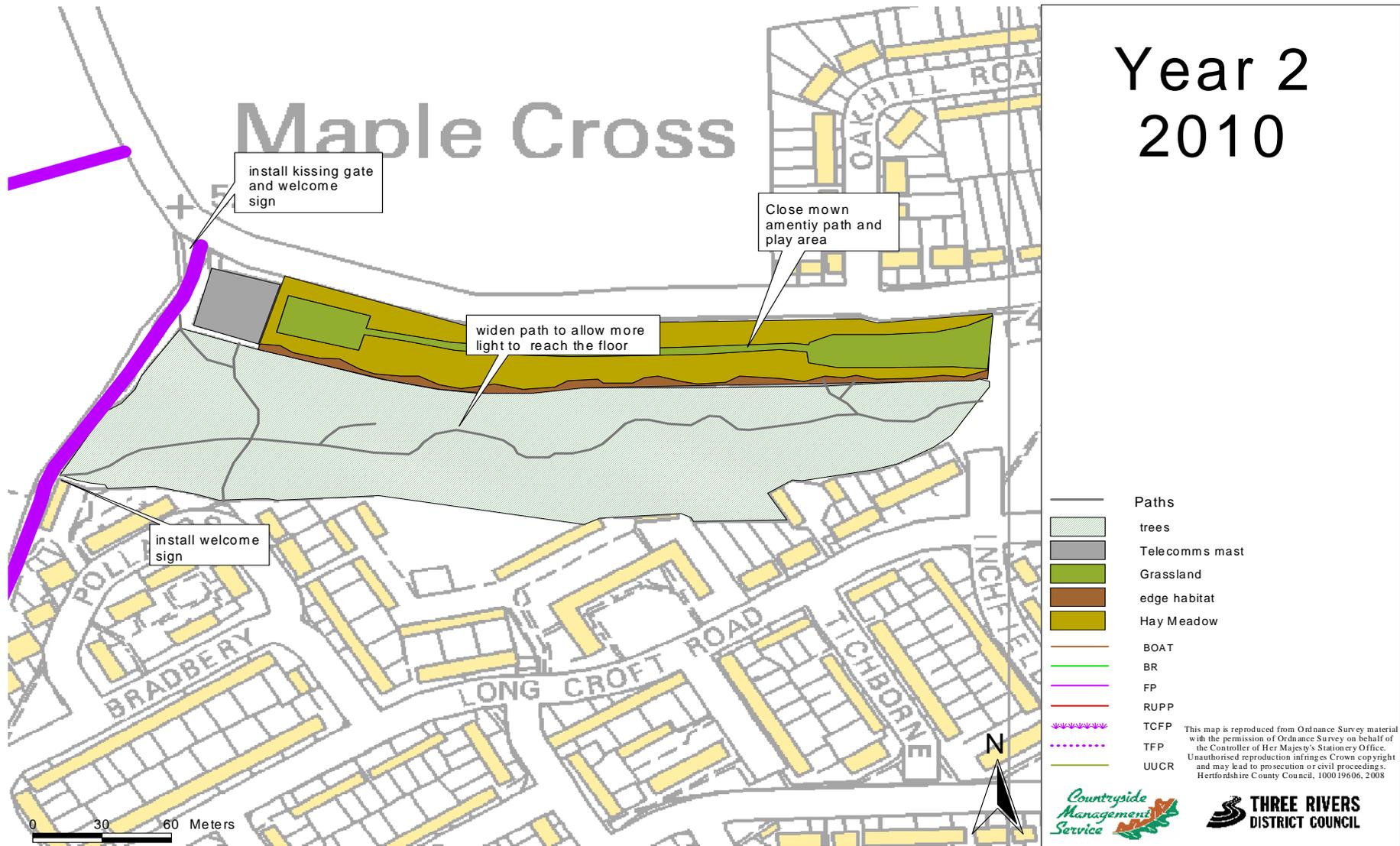
10.0 Draft Gap actions

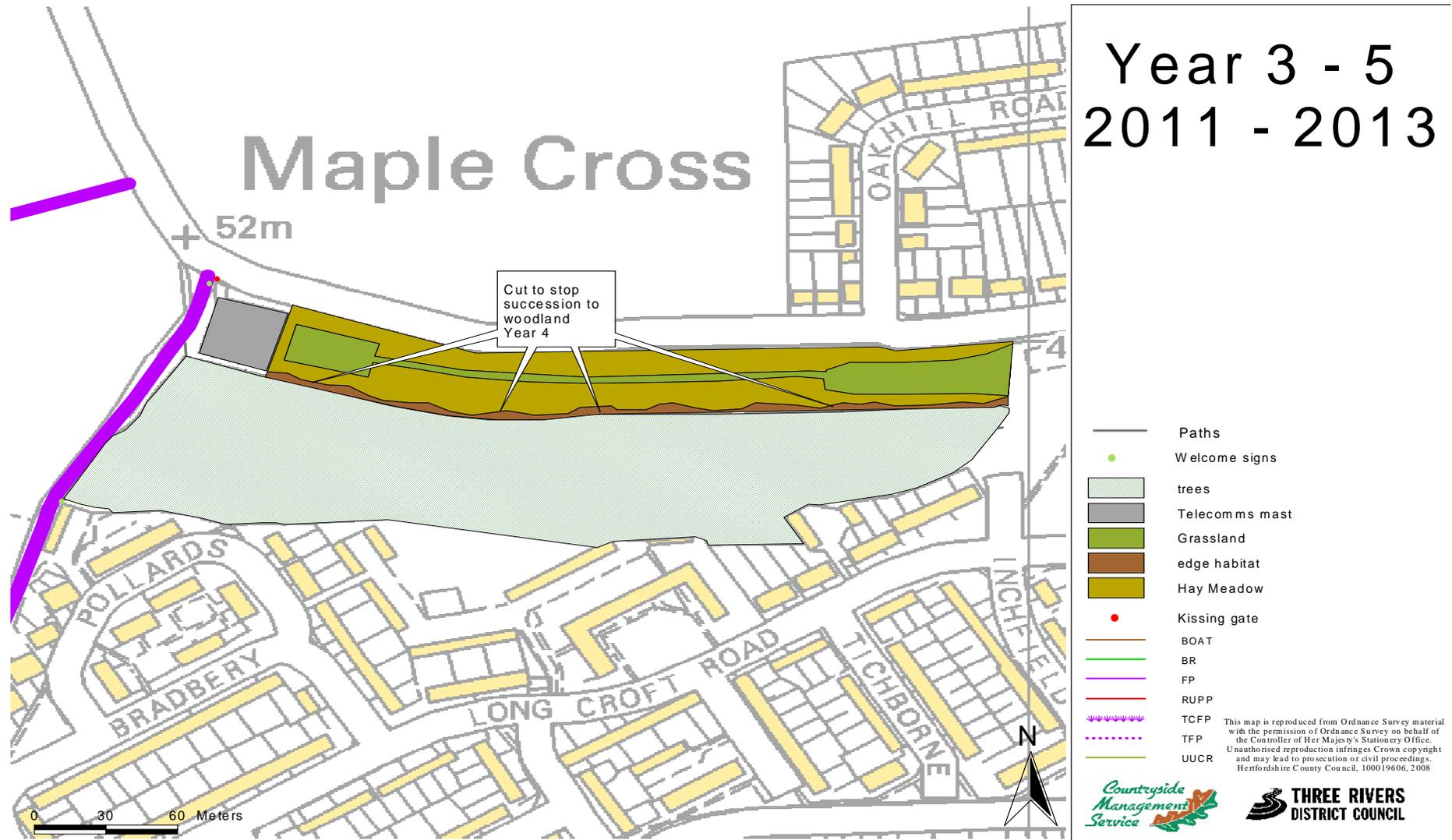
Year	Activity	Partner	Cost estimate	Potential sources of funding
Annually as per contract specification	Site risk assessment & tree safety survey	TRDC	N/A	TRDC Tree contract
Annually as per contract specification	Litter pick/ remove flytipping	TRDC	N/A	TRDC Grounds maintenance contract
Annually as per contract specification	Monitor and maintain signage and bins and other infrastructure	TRDC	N/A	TRDC Grounds maintenance contract
Annually as per contract specification	Maintain definitive and permissive access for horses (where permitted) and pedestrians	TRDC/ HCC (along RoW)	N/A	TRDC Grounds maintenance contract / HCC
Yr1 (2009)	Create scrub edge by natural regeneration	TRDC		TRDC
Yr 1 (2009)	35% Thin of the wood, mostly saplings, coppice hazel	TRDC		TRDC
Yr1 (2009)	Change cutting regime to create hay meadow on the currently close mown grassland leaving a path and play area	TRDC		TRDC Grounds maintenance contract
Yr2 (2010)	Install welcome signs and kissing gates	TRDC		TRDC
Yr2 (2010)	Continue to remove saplings	TRDC		TRDC Grounds maintenance contract
Yr2 (2010)	Widen main east/west ride	TRDC		TRDC Grounds maintenance contract
Yr2 (2010)	Cut and collect the grassland, removing all cuttings	TRDC		TRDC Grounds maintenance contract
Yr3 (2011)	Cut and collect the grassland removing all cuttings	TRDC		TRDC Grounds maintenance contract
Yr4 (2012)	Cut the edge habitat to stop succession to woodland.	TRDC		TRDC Grounds maintenance contract
Yr4 (2012)	Cut and collect the grassland removing all cuttings	TRDC		TRDC Grounds maintenance contract
Yr5 (2013)	Cut and collect the grassland removing all cuttings	TRDC		TRDC Grounds team











11.0 Management Specifications

11.1 Annual Management

Minimum standards of annual management will be expected:

- Maintenance of all related signage and park infrastructure
- Litter clearance/ removal of fly tipping
- Maintain rides and glades
- Control of non native species, including the removal of all non native material off site
- In addition Three Rivers DC will carry out a site risk assessment and tree safety survey in areas of high public access and undertake necessary work, e.g. tip pruning. Taking into account relevant wildlife law.
- Contractors under officer supervision may remove trees. Those deemed to be too large should be removed by tree surgeons.
- Maintain key pedestrian access points (consider installing kissing gates at access points).

11.2 Woodland

Currently the woodland is under managed; however there is scope to improve the woodland as a habitat.

- Ride widening along the path should be carried out. A width of no less than 6 metres (ideally 25m, however due to the small size of the wood this is inappropriate) should be created with sinuous edges, a structurally diverse edge should be allowed to develop to provide light, warmth and sunny conditions.
- Other management works should be in accordance with Three Rivers DC woodland management plan.

11.3 Hedge Management

The hedge along the grassland boundary will require management and gapping up.

- All hedge whips should be planted between October and March and should be of native species and provenance. (thorn species)
- Hedge plants should be bare root transplants 40-60cm in size (these can be purchased through CMS supply contract at a reduced rate).
- 4-6 plants to be planted per metre in two parallel staggered rows
- Plants to be protected from rabbit damage by use of canes and clear spirals
- Planting to be kept weed free for a 3yr period using organic mulch, or plastic strip to ensure successful establishment.
- Failed plants to be identified and replaced during first season following planting

11.4 Grassland

This area should be removed from an amenity cut and placed into a hay meadow cut.

- Cut and collect grass once a year
- Cut in late August to early September
- All cuttings to be removed and disposed of appropriately
- Leave a 2 metre close mown path, through the middle. 5 metres from the hedge and or woodland.

11.5 Scrub edge

An area along the woodland boundary abutting the grassland should be allowed to develop into a structurally diverse habitat.

- An area of no more than 6 metres wide
- Allowed to scrub up using natural succession, over a period of four years
- Cut in the four year to stop succession to woodland anytime from the end of October to the end of March.
- Arisings to be removed from site and disposed of.