

# WITHEY BEDS LOCAL NATURE RESERVE GREENSPACE ACTION PLAN (GAP) 2019 - 2024



Briefing Document

July 2018



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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This briefing document has been produced to guide the first stage of engagement that will support the writing of a Greenspace Action Plan (GAP) for the Withey Beds Local Nature Reserve (LNR). The GAP is being produced by Countryside Management Service (CMS), part of HCC's Countryside and Rights of Way Service, on behalf of and in partnership with Three Rivers District Council (TRDC). The plan will cover a 5 year period 2019 to 2024.

GAP's are map based management plans and are invaluable documents that give focus and direction to the running and improvement of all types of open space. They provide a clear, logical process to determine the activities that should take place on a site, over a stated period of time, in order to meet agreed project objectives and core aspirations.

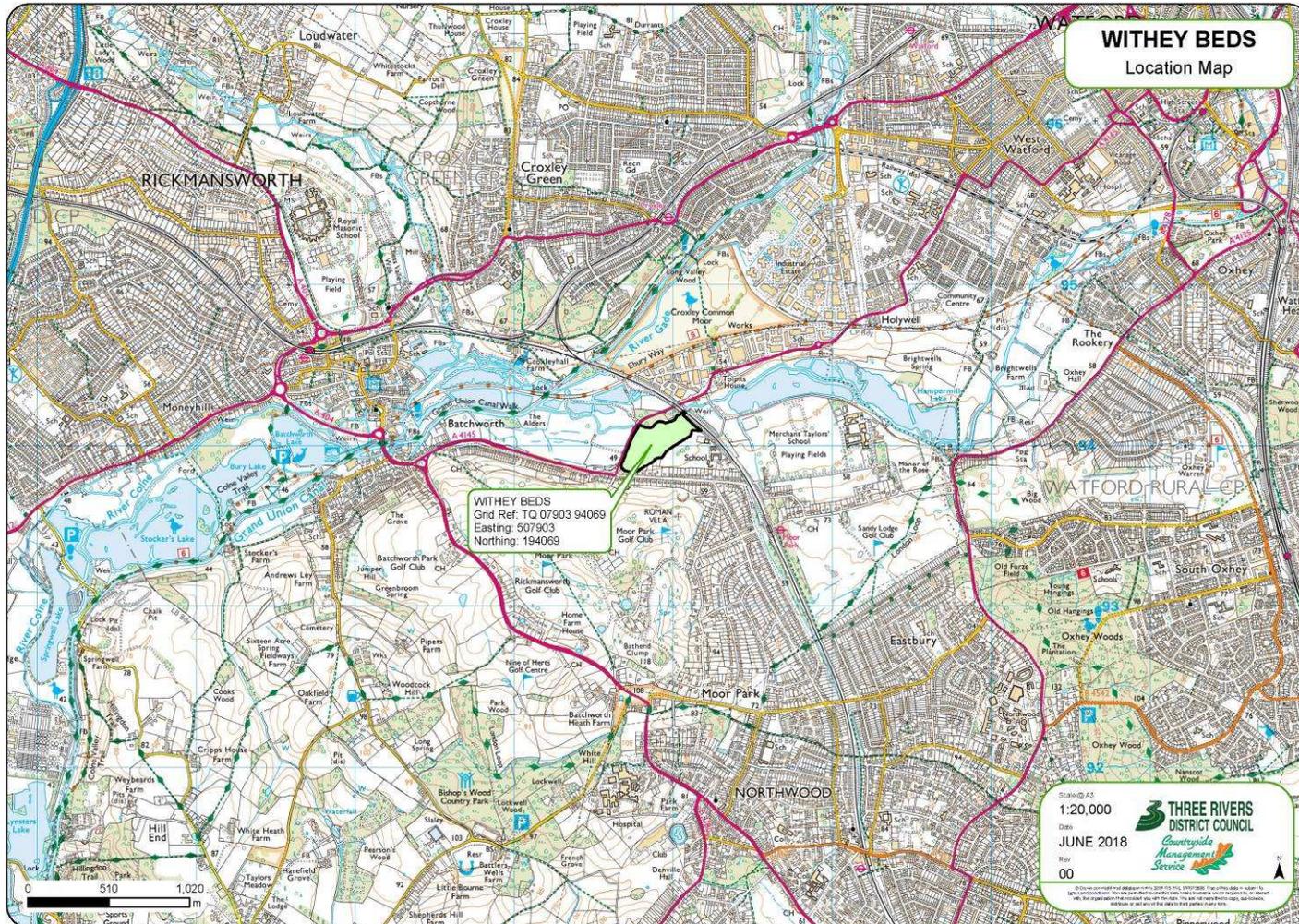
It is our intention to hold a structured engagement to ensure that stakeholders are fully aware of the plan production process. Engagement will be encouraged and opportunities to feed into the plan in a constructive and timely way promoted locally. This document is intended to initiate and support this process.

This document has been broken down into easy to read sections. Sections 2, 3 and 4 provide background information, historical context and a review of current management operations.

Section 5 outlines the aims and objectives of the plan and how we intend to use and present the document.

Section 6 summarises the engagement methodology that forms a part of the GAP production process, specifying how and when we will engage with stakeholders.

## 2.0 LOCATION



### **3.0 BACKGROUND**

The Withey Beds Local Nature Reserve (LNR) is a 7.6ha (18.78 acres) site located east of Rickmansworth; near the confluence of the Gade, Chess and Colne; close to the Grand Union Canal; and adjacent to Hampermill Lake, Hampton Hall Meadows and Croxley Common Moor. The Withey Beds lies within an extensive network of unimproved grassland and wetland habitats in the Upper Colne River Valley floodplain. The site is owned and managed by Three Rivers District Council (TRDC).

The site is adjacent to the River Colne and consists of areas of unimproved wet grassland/grazing meadow, tall herb swamp, wet woodland, wetland habitats, ponds, ditches, a backwater and scrape. The Withey Beds provides a mixture of relatively undisturbed habitats for wildlife and has been designated a Local Nature Reserve and Local Wildlife Site.

The site also provides opportunities for informal recreation. Although these opportunities are limited by its location, the Withey Beds is highly valued by the local community.

### **4.0 REVIEW OF PROGRESS**

The Withey Beds GAP 2014-19 has helped to guide the Council's management over the last five years. This plan included a large wetland project in partnership with Environment Agency (EA) which created ponds around the boardwalk, a scrape at the northern end of the site, a backwater linked to the River Colne along with gravel riffles and flow deflectors in the river. The project also helped to fund the installation of grazing infrastructure to graze the meadow area and during the life of the plan 4 Dexter cattle have been introduced to graze the site. The Withey Beds have been included in a Natural England (NE) Higher Level Stewardship Agreement with Croxley Common Moor. A new interpretation panel has also been installed on site. Current maintenance operations at the Withey Beds include: path cutting, meadow cutting – until grazing was introduced, management and maintenance of the boardwalk and signage, small scale vegetation management, litter picking, fly tip removal and reactive tree works to address safety issues.

The new GAP will look to further develop the habitats and biodiversity of the site while retaining its recreational and historic value.

## 5.0 GREENSPACE ACTION PLAN (GAP) 2019-24

Withey Beds GAP will be a simple, easy to read plan for use by Council officers, CMS officers, members of the public, and act as a guide to volunteer activity. The plan will be largely map based, with sequential, annual management maps to show the actions planned for each year. The resulting change will be represented on the map for the following year. The plan will be costed and potential funding sources identified; once the final GAP is agreed, external funding will be sought to enable the plan to be delivered. The document will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains effective and relevant.

### **Objective:**

The objective of the GAP is to make the Withey Beds a welcoming, diverse, beautiful and tranquil green space for the use and enjoyment of all residents and visitors to the site, while protecting and conserving the important wildlife and habitats that are found there.

### **Aims:**

- To provide an area of open space that is welcoming, safe and well maintained for local residents and visitors to enjoy.
- To create an inviting entrance into the Withey Beds.
- To maintain and enhance the natural habitats found at the Withey Beds and strengthen support from visitors to protect and conserve them.
- To protect and conserve the habitats and species that can be found on site.
- To enhance the river corridor and wetland areas for the benefit of its wildlife and aesthetic appeal.
- To conserve the grassland and fulfil the HLS agreement by annual grazing.
- To promote the Withey Beds as a very special wetland site, a tranquil haven within the populous south west corner of Hertfordshire, which provides local residents and visitors with the opportunity to experience high quality habitats and close encounters with a diversity of wildlife.
- To ensure all furniture and facilities at the Withey Beds are in safe and serviceable condition and, where appropriate, of uniform design.

## 6.0 ENGAGEMENT

Effective engagement is at the centre of a successful GAP. Their particular value comes from balancing the thoughts and aspirations of stakeholders and interest groups throughout the writing process.

In order to enable as many stakeholders and interest groups as possible to have the opportunity to feed into the production of the new GAP, we have adopted a structured two-stage approach to engagement.

For the first stage, stakeholders and interest groups will be invited to make comment on the core aspirations that we are putting forward as part of this briefing document; it is hoped that any further aspirations and/or issues will be addressed through this information gathering process.

For the second stage, stakeholders and interest groups will be invited to read through and make comment on the draft GAP.

Following this exercise, the final document will be produced, published and promoted more widely to the general public.

We will not respond individually to comments received unless it is to clarify points raised. Instead we will produce a summary of comments, noting any amendments made to the plan as a result. This engagement response document will be published online alongside the briefing document, draft plan and final plan. We will retain contact details only for the purpose of keeping respondents informed about the plan development process.

The following diagram shows the Greenspace Action Plan production process:

# WITHEY BEDS GREENSPACE ACTION PLAN (GAP) 2019-2024

## GAP Production Process

