CITY OF LONDON

Ashtead Common

Registered Charity

This is one of 14 green spaces managed by the City of London at little cost to the general public.

Ashtead Common Management Plan 2021 - 2031

Ashtead Common is a 200-hectare area of public open space owned and managed by the City of London Corporation.

Ashtead Common is a registered charity (number 1051510) that receives the major part of its funding from the City of London Corporation.

It is a wooded common, home to over 1,000 living ancient oak pollards. Its natural and cultural heritage are of national importance, the legacy of centuries of interaction between people and the environment.

The City of London Corporation is committed to managing Ashtead Common in perpetuity to ensure that it remains a special place for generations to come.

As we progress through the 2020s and beyond, the challenge of protecting this valuable resource will increase as pressures from environmental and human factors mount. This plan explains how this challenge will be met.

456 people, mostly from the local community, helped shape this plan by contributing to a consultation exercise conducted throughout the summer and autumn of 2020.

Contents

" Thank you for carefully managing this priceless local asset."

2020 consultation

Introduction

Ashtead Common was acquired by the City in 1991 under the Corporation of London (Open Spaces) Act 1878. This Act enables the City to acquire and protect land up to 25 miles out from the boundary of the square mile to keep it unenclosed and unbuilt upon as open space for the recreation and enjoyment of the public. The Act requires that the natural aspect, trees, pollards, shrubs, underwood and herbage are protected.

Already part of a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Ashtead Common was designated a National Nature Reserve in 1995 in recognition of its importance for wildlife and the City's commitment to its management.

There is evidence that Ashtead Common was occupied during the mid to late Iron Age up to a time around the 3rd century. During the period of early Roman influence, the site was the centre of a thriving brick and tile industry that exported products throughout south east Britain. After the tileworks were abandoned there is evidence suggestive of grazing for the rest of the Roman period, which may indicate that the use of the Common as wood pasture started at this time.

The wood pasture landscape with its characteristic open-grown pollards provides habitat that echoes characteristics of the wildwood and supports a variety of rare and declining species. The soils and topography of the Common have conspired to create an environment where it is difficult to do anything other than grow trees and graze animals to convert low quality pasture into food. This has ensured the Common's survival to this day as a rare example of an historic landscape.

A professional team of Rangers will continue to work with the local community and skilled contractors to protect and maintain the Common's important wildlife and features, while maintaining a high-quality open space for people to enjoy. This plan explains how that will happen.

Achievements and learning from the last 10 years

Ancient tree management

Over the course of the last 10 years around 700 ancient trees have received tree surgery work to prolong their lives, and over 900 have had competing vegetation managed in their vicinity. This programme is proving successful. Since 2009 76% of oak pollards have either improved (60%) or maintained (16%) their scores when assessed for health, vitality and structural integrity.

Research has shown that Ashtead oak pollards generally respond well to pruning, often producing vigorous 'frithy' regrowth.

Community involvement

Members of the community have contributed over 60,000 hours of volunteer time to help protect and care for Ashtead Common.

A visitor survey in 2013 estimated that Ashtead Common receives approximately 206,000 visits a year.

Species

The grasshopper warbler returned to the scrub grassland in spring 2018 following an absence of over 30 years.

Orchid populations have increased significantly from 156 common spotted and southern marsh orchids or their hybrids, to 412. The most significant increases in orchids occurred following scrub management work on the lower slopes. Broad-leaved helleborines have also increased from 19 to 33, predominantly along footpath 25 above the southern slopes.

A bat survey conducted in 2019 identified the presence of seven bat species.

Built heritage

Surrey Archaeological Society completed on-site investigations of Ashtead's Roman Villa, Earthworks and Tileworks in 2013, and since then work has continued behind the scenes to research and interpret the findings.

A separate archaeological investigation of the Earthworks in 2017 found evidence of a mid to late Iron Age settlement.

Habitat management

A 10 year programme of work funded by Natural England to restore wood pasture and maintain woodland, grassland and scrub habitat commenced in 2011.

An additional area of 11.7ha of scrub has been managed to achieve the desired 50:50 balance between scrub and grassland. The number of breeding bird territories within the scrub grassland has increased.

Access

940m of path have been surfaced, and a further 2,040m of path resurfaced using natural materials.

A new 200m path connecting The Greenway entrance at the Wells Estate to Ride 3 was installed.

Grazing expansion

The area grazed increased by 75% from 16ha to 28ha. Belted Galloway cattle were introduced to the site in spring 2017, in partnership with the Surrey Wildlife Trust. A traditional hardy breed, these animals are well-suited to life on the Common.

Renewable energy

Solar panels were installed at the Estate Office in 2014 and generate c.60% of the electricity used. A diesel ATV was replaced with an electric-powered model; electric chainsaws were introduced in 2019.

Challenges identified

The surface water outfall that joins the Rye Brook at Two Bridges is the single worst contributor of pollution into the Rye, which in turn feeds the River Mole, the largest tributary of the Thames.

Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) arrived in 2016 when six nests were identified and removed by specialist contractors. In subsequent years the number of nests removed went from 16 in 2017 to 244 in 2018 and over 1,000 in 2019. OPM caterpillars have toxic hairs that can cause skin rashes, eye complaints and breathing difficulties.

Ashtead Common has a high tick population and the attendant risk of Lyme disease has influenced the way the site is managed and used.

Climate change is causing a general warming, benefitting pests like OPM that continue to be introduced on plant stock from abroad. Spring is happening sooner, and exceptional weather events are becoming more frequent. Strong winds and drought are particularly hazardous to ancient trees.

With additional housing proposed in the Ashtead area, visitor pressure is likely to increase, and with it the attendant issues of habitat disturbance, waste, pollution and fire.

1.0 Site Description

1.1 Location

Ashtead Common is situated in north Surrey within Mole Valley Council District. It sits immediately below the pronounced spur of the Royal Borough of Kingston's southern boundary. To the west, a thin strip of woodland in separate ownership lies between the Common's western boundary and the A243 Kingston Road. To the east, the Common is bounded by Epsom Common.

The part owned by the City of London Corporation is 200ha in size.

1.2 Ownership and rights

The City of London acquired the Lordship of the Manor of Ashtead from the Trustees of Lord Barnby's Charitable Foundation. It was the wish of both the Trustees and Mole Valley District Council that the nature of the Common be forever preserved for the use and benefit of the general public. To achieve this, the Trustees approached Mole Valley District Council, which already held a lease for Woodfield, to see whether it would be prepared to purchase the Common.

On May 1st 1990 the Trustees entered into a contract to sell Ashtead Common to Mole Valley District Council.

In subsequent negotiations it was agreed that Mole Valley District Council would complete the acquisition of the southern part of Woodfield for the sum of £875. The Trustees transferred the remainder of the Common directly to the City of London for the sum of £29,125.

Both transfers were completed on March 25th 1991. On the same date the City sent a letter to Mole Valley District Council pledging not to exercise rights over the southern part of Woodfield.

1.3 Site Status

Ashtead Common was registered as a common in 1968; register unit number CL 280. An entry was made in the Register of Common Land in 1970 to record rights in common held by the private owners and tenant of Newton Wood. These include rights of access, right of pasture for four cattle, estovers (collection of firewood or bracken) and turbary (turf or peat).

In conjunction with Epsom Common, much of Ashtead Common (180ha) was designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in 1955 for its diversity of habitat, rare invertebrates (particularly decaying wood specialists, flies and butterflies) and rich community of breeding birds. Woodfield (7.3ha) was not included but was later designated as a Site of Nature Conservation Importance for species diversity with rare species present.

The area designated as National Nature Reserve on September 26th 1995 follows the SSSI boundary, so it too is 180ha in size.

In addition to Woodfield, the other notable exclusions are the City-owned land south of the railway line (sometimes called Howards Wood) and a thin strip adjacent to the railway line between the Woodlands Road entrance and Bridleway 38.

1.4 Financial situation

Ashtead Common is one of the City of London's more recent acquisitions, and at the start the intention was to run it differently to its other open spaces. Initially this involved employing just one member of staff who operated remotely from a base in Croydon and worked predominantly with volunteers from the local community.

Over the subsequent 15 years the operating model changed to become more like other City sites. A purpose-built office was constructed in 1997 and the team grew to include a Superintendent, Head Ranger, Senior Ranger, two Rangers and two support staff. However, the level of resourcing has reduced considerably in recent years and the annual budget of £367,000 in 2021 is £200,000 less than it was 12 years earlier.

The City of London Corporation provides funding for the management of Ashtead Common largely from its private funds. The City's revenue can now meet only part of the running costs for Ashtead Common; the nature reserve is increasingly reliant on grant income.

The success of much of this management plan depends on the ability to identify and secure significant external funding to match any savings required by the City of London. Agri-environment grants help pay for habitat conservation work, but the long-term future of these grants is uncertain.

New sources of revenue will need to be explored in coming years: the passing of a new City of London Open Spaces Act (2018) together with project specific funding may open up some new avenues.

1.5 Physical features

The greater part of Ashtead Common consists of a ridge running north-east to south-west. The highest point on the Common, at 88m above sea level, is centrally placed along that ridge. The lowest point, at 50m above sea level, is located on the Rye Brook.

The Common lies on London Clay – a heavy and impermeable sub-soil that is difficult to work. There is extreme contrast throughout the year, with frequent waterlogging and heavy run-off in the autumn and winter months and a hard surface in the summer. The site was described by early 20th century soil scientists as 'the unmixed London Clay at its worst; undrained, sour, and cold, saturated all the winter and cracking wide during the drought, it has little economic value except for timber' (Hall and Russell 1911).

The clay is overlain with fine sandy or silt drifts of varying depths with Plateau Gravel near the summit of the main ridge, giving rise to springs where it interfaces with the clay sub-soil. At least one spring contains magnesium sulphate (Epsom Salts) and an associated well was reputedly used to top-up the famous Epsom Well nearby at times of high demand.

The only semi-permanent stream on Ashtead Common is the Rye, which is fed by springs rising at the foot of the North Downs at the junction of the chalk and Thanet Sand.

Run-off from the Common enters the Rye, but so too does a considerable amount of water from a surface water drainage network that extends across a large part of Ashtead village.

There are four principal areas of permanent standing water, including a network of ponds and shallow pools created in 2006 along the Rye below Newton Wood. This system also includes a dam to control the release of water downstream, thereby reducing the risk of flooding for neighbouring properties.

1.6 Cultural information

1.6.1 Landscape

At one time Ashtead Common formed part of an extensive complex of woodland, parkland and common land in various ownerships that extended from the Esher estate of Prince Leopold I of Belgium, to Leatherhead Common and across to Epsom Common.

A surprising amount of this land is still open space. Epsom and Ashtead Commons adjoin to provide 375ha of contiguous open space. Prince's Coverts (349ha) is a remnant of Prince Leopold's land and is now managed by The Crown Estate. These three green spaces together provide 724ha (1,790 acres) of countryside within close proximity.

Ashtead Common falls within Natural England's National Character Area Profile 114 – Thames Basin Lowlands. Ashtead Common's significance within this area is noted several times within the profile.

In its Statement of Environmental Opportunity (SEO) relating to sustainable development the profile gives the example: *Ensuring that any development does not adversely affect ... Ashtead Common National Nature Reserve including through light, noise and air pollution and additional recreational pressures.*

The SEO relating to conservation gives the example: *Encouraging the re-introduction of traditional woodland management techniques such as coppicing and pollarding and encouraging the ongoing management of ancient pollarded trees, especially oaks on Ashtead Common National Nature Reserve.*

Ashtead Common's wood pasture landscape derives from it historically being a wooded common.

Extract from the Ordnance Survey of 1816. Ashtead Common is clearly shown as wood pasture, as distinct from woodland such as the adjoining Horton Wood (now known as Newton Wood).

1.6.2 Archaeology

Surrey's complex geology and poor-quality soils make it difficult to farm, and as a result historically it was a very rural county with a comparatively low population. It is perhaps surprising therefore that Ashtead Common, one of the least favourable parts of an unfavourable county, should be the location of a Roman villa, and a relatively high-status one at that. As with all of Ashtead Common's history, the reason is explained by the clay and trees, in this case the part they played in the manufacture of brick and tile.

Excavation of the tile kiln furnace.

The Earthworks is now known to be the site of a mid to late Iron Age settlement. It was listed as a Scheduled Monument in 1913, before the Villa (1934), but it was originally thought to be a temporary encampment or animal stockade. In 2017 an archaeological investigation found the presence of domestic items such as spinning bobbin weights suggestive of more permanent habitation. There is evidence that this site was in use at the point of the Roman conquest and may still have been in use in the 2nd century.

The Roman Villa itself is a Scheduled Monument located east of the Earthworks and dates to around AD100. There is evidence of 100 years of occupation on this site, with a number of periods of construction and alteration during this time. An early chalk floored building, possibly an outbuilding of an early house, was replaced by later periods of construction that had features such as underfloor heating, brick and tile floors and 13 rooms. A separate military style bath house is an unusual feature associated with the site and may indicate a military connection.

Between the Earthworks and Villa is another early Roman building that indicates a transitionary phase and therefore a peaceful change from the late Iron Age into the Roman period.

It is perhaps the features associated with the manufacture of brick and tile that have most significance.

To the east of the villa are the remains of a tile kiln that was used over an extended period and modified in a way that has preserved features of the earlier part.

In Roman times the supply of building materials was a profitable business, and products manufactured on Ashtead Common can be found in several Roman towns. The British Museum displays tiles from Ashtead Common, including one with a stag and hounds' motif (applied as an embossed stamp to provide a key for plaster) that is thought to be the only such design to feature animals.

Tile production on the site probably started in the late 1st century and continued through the early 3rd century. During its lifetime the facility is thought to have produced enough roof tiles for at least 50 villas, plus other kinds of tile as well.

The villa and tile kiln both show signs of modification around AD200 when the levels of both were raised, possibly in response to adverse environmental conditions. Not long after this the site was abandoned.

Trees would have provided fuel for the kilns, and it is known that then, as now, the predominant species in the vicinity of the villa were oak and hazel. Woodland cover increased after the tileworks were abandoned early in the 3rd century; evidence of grazing for the rest of the Roman period may indicate that the use of the Common for wood pasture started at this time.

1.6.3 Land use history

The Common is likely to have changed little in the 1,400 years following the period of Roman influence. The Saxons did not dramatically reorganise the country's wooded landscape. After the invasion of 1066, the Normans took complete control of the state, dividing the spoils between nobles. The Common became manorial waste, meaning it was an open, uncultivated and unoccupied part of the Lord of the Manor's estate. Some people were permitted to use the land, and over time they established the right to do so. Historically common rights to harvest wood and keep animals were exercised in concert by cutting branches above the height that animals can reach, thereby allowing the tender regrowth to escape being eaten by grazing livestock as it emerged. This is the practice of pollarding.

The arrival of the railway in 1858 bisected the Common, and a level crossing was installed to provide access for the houses north of the railway line. Woodfield Road which links the crossing with properties west of that point was constructed across the Common under an agreement with the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway. The railway bought imports of cheap coal, reducing the demand for firewood.

Despite this, Ashtead remained a wooded common managed largely as wood pasture up to the time when local farms made way for housing estates in the 1930s.

The mechanisation that enabled this development also produced improvements in agricultural technology that meant grazing on marginal land and commons declined.

The cessation of grazing and pollarding allowed for a gradual change from more open grassland and woodland conditions to denser vegetative cover.

The exception to this occurred during and after WWII, when the need to maximise food production led to the total clearance of much of the area south of Footpath 25 and the area east of Bridleway 38. Ploughing continued until as late as 1956 in the last area to be cultivated before the exercise was abandoned. An attempt to grow potatoes on Woodfield ended in failure when the crop became entombed in rock hard clay. Local people were allowed to keep any potatoes they could extricate from the ground themselves.

During both World Wars trees were felled to meet national demand for fuel and wood. Trees were taken to the north-west corner of the Common, the location of a sawmill at one time. It is not known how many trees were removed, but the presence of a series of pronounced ridges leading across the Common towards Epsom Gap indicate drag routes for the extraction of a considerable amount of timber.

1.7 Access and visitors

1.7.1 Visitor appeal

The same driving forces that led to the decline in the centuries-old land management practices of Ashtead Common encouraged a shift towards greater recreational use. In the heyday of the railway at the end of the 19th century the Common became, like Epsom Downs and Boxhill, a popular picnicking site, thanks to its proximity to central London. Various amusements and a tea-room were built on and adjacent to the Common.

Ashtead Common continues to be a popular place for recreation but is now a resource used predominantly by local people for informal recreation. A visitor survey published in 2013 found that there are about 206,000 visits to Ashtead Common a year. The largest user groups, each accounting for around 32% of visits, are dog walkers and walkers, with the latter most likely to visit in groups. Around 5% of visits are made by runners.

Although horse-riding still takes place (1% of visits), the bridleways and concessionary rides are now used more by cyclists (18% of visits). These activities are facilitated by byelaws that permit riding on bridleways and concessionary rides but prohibit these activities elsewhere.

On occasions more formal use of the Common is made by education groups and organised recreational activities such as cross-country running and fitness classes.

The City of London (Open Spaces) Act 2018 allows for the introduction of a schedule of rates to charge for these activities to raise income for the Common, and this is something that will be explored during the lifetime of this plan.

1.7.2 Access provision

In the 1960's unrestricted horse access rendered paths unusable and led to conflict between users, so Lord Barnby imposed limitations that came into effect following a public enquiry in 1969. These limited access to the bridleways, two concessionary horse rides and a free riding area south-east of Newton Wood. Many of these routes became impassable due to excessive encroachment of vegetation.

Since 1991 the City has invested considerable resource to reopen and maintain the network of paths, bridleways and concessionary rides. Some routes have been surfaced with natural material to provide year-round access and reduce the potential for conflict between user groups.

In 2010 the Ashtead Common Consultative Committee (now Consultative Group) revisited an earlier recommendation not to surface any more routes on Ashtead Common, which was made in response to a concern over the impact that surfacing has on the Common's sensitive hydrology. The Committee considered it acceptable to surface short sections of missing link in the surfaced path network, or localised problem spots, but maintained the opinion that path surfacing should otherwise be avoided.

A network of public rights of way links the Common with the wider area and includes a section of the Thames to Downs Link that runs from Kingston to Box Hill.

1.7.3 Visitor facilities and information provision

There are no formal car parks, toilets or refreshment facilities on Ashtead Common, but these can be found just beyond the boundary of the site, particularly in Ashtead village.

Information is available from the City's website, on-site notice boards and from the Ashtead Estate Office. A joint site leaflet that includes Epsom Common is available from a dispenser outside the office.

Important safety information is displayed in small cabinets attached to the main notice boards at the entrances to the Common, and the messages are rotated regularly to keep them fresh

An electronic newsletter is distributed to visitors and others on a mailing list, and Rangers interact via social media.

Dog bins are provided near key entrance points. Currently, dog bags are provided from dispensers; this is subject to future review.

1.7.4 Education and research

Rangers and volunteers carry out long-term monitoring of the site and its features. Research by students and external groups is encouraged and supported. Examples include breeding bird surveys, butterfly transects, moth trapping and pollution monitoring of the Rye Brook.

Alongside this, a programme of professional research primarily focuses on the key ecological aspects of the Common, particularly those associated with the ancient trees, to advance our knowledge of the site and beyond.

Rangers run a programme of guided walks and educational activities, responding positively to requests from local school groups to use Ashtead Common as an outdoor classroom.

1.7.5 Community involvement

The City of London adopted aspects of the Community Woodland model when it acquired Ashtead Common in 1991, and the local community has been an integral part of the Commons' management ever since. Much of the work to manage the Common is done by members of the local community working as volunteers.

The Ashtead Common Consultative Group advises the elected Members of the City Corporation on the development and implementation of this plan and provides Members with a local perspective on issues. The Group includes: Members and officers from the City Corporation and local Councils; officers from conservation organisations such as Natural England, Surrey Wildlife Trust and the Lower Mole Partnership; representatitives from user groups and community interests, such as the Residents' Association, volunteers, cyclists, riders and young people.

1.7.6 Services and access

Several services and utilities traverse the Common, including high and low pressure gas pipelines, high voltage electricity cables (above ground and buried), sewers, surface water drains and an aviation fuel pipeline.

Companies have rights of access to the electricity sub-station near Craddocks Avenue and the gas depressurisation station accessed from Woodlands Road. Network Rail have no specific rights of access, but occasionally licenses are issued for maintenance work on the line or at the railway sub-station near Lady Howard's Crossing.

Registered Commoners have access rights allowing them to pass over Ashtead Common with or without vehicles and livestock.

1.8 Statutory and contractual frameworks

1.8.1 National policy and legal framework

Act	Summary of content	Implications for Ashtead Common
Corporation of London (Open Spaces) Act 1878	The City of London Corporation can acquire and designate land up to 25 miles from the boundary of the City to protect it in perpetuity for the public to enjoy. Designated land to be kept as open space for public recreation. Natural aspect to be preserved. Various powers, rights and responsibilities conferred on the City Corporation, including the ability to make and enforce byelaws.	The land and access over it are protected in perpetuity. Byelaws protecting the site and its features to be enforced. Encroachments must be resisted and abated. Land to be unenclosed and unbuilt upon, except those features required for better attainment of the Act and deemed necessary by the City. The 1878 Act is the governing document for the Ashtead Common Charity.
City of London Corporation (Open Spaces) Act 2018	Restates powers listed in section 10 of the 1878 Act allowing the City to manage vegetation, scrape soil and graze with cattle or other animals. Events on the open space can be permitted and charged for. Utility companies can be granted easements or licences under whatever terms the City considers necessary to protect the open space.	Vegetation can be managed, and animals grazed. Events can be licensed and charged, but the Act states that a policy must exist to control this to protect the open space. Licences for installation and maintenance of utilities can contain terms deemed necessary to protect the Common.
Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW)	The Act defines access land but excludes from the definition 'land which is treated by section 15(1) as being accessible to the public apart from this Act.'	Ashtead Common is section 15 land under the Act because access is granted virtue of the 1878 Act. Consequently the provisions of the CROW Act do not apply.
AMAAA 1979 *	Scheduled Ancient Monuments have statutory protection. * *Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979*	Historic England consent is required for any work affecting the Earthworks or Villa site. Police can prosecute under this Act.

Act	Summary of content	Implications for Ashtead Common
Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981	Protection of wildlife (in general and for some species) and designation of SSSIs and NNRs. (SSSIs were first notified under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, but the current statute is the 1981 Act)	It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly damage, disturb or destroy SSSI land or its wildlife. It is also an offence to damage or remove SSSI signage. Natural England consent is required for any activity that may be likely to damage the SSSI.
Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006	Every public body must have due regard to the purpose of conserving biodiversity. The role of nature reserves is three-fold: conservation, research and access (Schedule 11, part 1, section 12). The Act extended the role of NNRs to include the provision of opportunities for public enjoyment of nature and/or open-air recreation.	The City is listed as a named body in relation to this Act. As a NNR, Ashtead Common's role is not only to conserve, but to undertake research, provide access and provide opportunities for public enjoyment and recreation.
Occupiers Liability Act 1984	This legislation replaces common law rules to determine duty of care. A duty exists if the occupier is aware (or should be) of a danger, people have access to the danger (legally or not) and protection from the danger can be reasonably expected. If duty exists, reasonable warning of danger should be given.	Vistors must be protected from and warned of dangers.
Forestry Act 1967	Felling licence normally required if felling $5m^3$ timber in a quarter, or $2m^3$ in a quarter if selling the wood. However, they are not required for designated open spaces (other than those areas excluded from the definition of public open space by the Countryside Act 1967 - ie country parks).	Felling licences are not required for Ashtead Common because it is designated as a public open space by virtue of the 1878 Act.
Road Traffic Act 1988	It is an offence to drive a mechanically propelled vehicle without authorisation on common land, footpaths or bridleways. Definitions of a road in relation to cyclists includes footpaths and bridleways. It is an offence to cycle recklessly, without due care or attention or without reasonable consideration for others. Even with authorisation, an offence is committed if someone drives dangerously in a public place.	Police might be best placed to enforce matters relating to vehicles on the Common using the Road Traffic Act. Staff, contractors and those with access rights are bound by the Road Traffic Act because the Common is a public open space.

National Nature Reserve Standard

As a body approved by Natural England to manage Ashtead Common National Nature Reserve, the City is expected to achieve a standard described in nine key principles:

- the NNR series will seek to represent the best places for England's biodiversity and geodiversity;
- a management plan for the NNR will be kept up-to-date and will reflect the requirements of this standard;
- the management of designated features and the wider reserve is exemplary;
- the NNR contributes to safeguarding and restoring ecosystems beyond its boundaries;
- the management of the NNR provides opportunities for public enjoyment, quiet recreation and engagement;
- research into the natural environment at an NNR is promoted and knowledge is shared;
- communities and stakeholders are involved in the management of the NNR;
- NNR managers will work collaboratively to promote the NNR series and wider goals;
- NNRs will support opportunities to demonstrate exemplary conservation management to others.

1.8.2 Local policy framework

At the time of publication of this plan, Mole Valley District Council were producing their Local Plan to cover the period 2020 to 2037. An earlier iteration of this plan recognised the need to protect biodiversity, historic landscapes, wildlife habitat, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and ecological networks. It also noted the need to minimise pollution and improve water quality. However, site allocations for over 1,000 houses were made for the Ashtead area, and many more for the District as a whole. *(Appendix A, p.73)*

Kingston's Core Strategy covers the period 2012-2027. It has policies to protect the natural environment and biodiversity. It states that development proposals should not harm open spaces and lists key views across open space that should be protected, including two looking towards Ashtead Common. *(Appendix A, p.73)*

The City will engage with neighbouring authorities to ensure their plans recognise the importance of protecting Ashtead Common.

97% of respondents agreed that it is appropriate to maintain and restore features of the wood pasture landscape.

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1.8.3 Contractual framework

The City Corporation receives funding from the Rural Payments Agency under the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) for Ashtead Common.

There is no financial audit for this payment, but there are a series of rules that must be adhered to *(Appendix B, p.74)*. The Basic Payment Scheme is due to be phased out by 2027.

1.8.4 Countryside Stewardship

For the past 10 years Ashtead Common has benefited from agri-environment funding from the government's Environmental Stewardship scheme. This grant ended in March 2021. Work has commenced on finding a replacement, which initially involves an application for funding under the Countryside Stewardship scheme. During the lifetime of this plan countryside stewardship agreements are likely to transition to the Environmental Land Management scheme, (ELMs).

Photo: Nikki Campana-Etheridge

1.9 Biological features

Wood pasture communities and flora

The main attributes of an historic wood pasture include old trees that have grown in relatively open conditions, an open ground layer, grazing animals (or a history of grazing), plenty of decaying wood, flowers and shrubs. These attributes make wood pasture a valuable wildlife habitat.

This type of habitat is dynamic and shifting. It is characterised by multiple transitions between tall and short vegetation, light and shaded areas, warm and cool places, all happening at both large and small scales. The habitat is continually changing but the essential elements – trees, grazing, scrub and ground flora – remain consistent.

The entire Common has been subject to these dynamically shifting patterns over time, creating a complex interconnectivity of resources that benefit a variety of species.

In this way Ashtead Common in its entirety - the open areas, the dense areas, the scrub, closed canopy woodland, and paths and rides - can be regarded as wood pasture.

But in order to manage each part of the Common effectively and maintain biodiversity, it is necessary to look in more detail at the biological components of Ashtead's wood pasture landscape, never forgetting each part plays a role in the bigger dynamic system.

" The common is a very special place."

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Purple Emperor butterfly

The Purple Emperor is listed in the SSSI designation as one of Ashtead Common's notable species.

This magnificent butterfly flies high in the tops of mature oak trees but lays its eggs on scrubby willows and enjoys probing for salts in animal dung. These resources are provided by the mature woodland, scrub, grassland and grazing components of the wood pasture system.

Pollarding

Pollarding is a management system where trees are repeatedly cut for product. The branches are pruned back to a point roughly 2.5m above ground level, allowing newly emerging branches to grow out of reach of livestock grazing below. Pollards are a defining characteristic of a wood pasture management system.

There are over 1,000 living ancient oak pollards on Ashtead Common and 1,186 pollards left as either standing dead trees or fallen trunks with remnant stumps. They are present across much of the site, mainly north of footpath 25, and occur within closed-canopy woodland, developing woodland, and areas of open grassland, bramble and bracken.

Some pollards have been destroyed or damaged by fire. Where fires occurred, they also cleared the understorey, encouraging bracken dominated areas to develop which in turn has suppressed the growth of younger trees. This, together with timber extraction, particularly during the World Wars, has led to missing generations of oak trees. Where there have been no fires woodland has successfully established itself around the pollards. In these places it has had a significant shading effect on the ancient trees.

Ancient pollard with a dead wood stack, both important habitats for saproxylic invertebrates (p20).

Ancient trees

Ancient trees are those that have reached a great age in comparison with others of the same species. They are often gnarled, knobbly, huge, bent and hollow. Oaks that are at least 400 years old and have these characteristics, like those on Ashtead Common, can be called ancient.

Previous management plans referred to the oak pollards as veteran trees. Veteran trees can be of any age but have the characteristics of ancient trees.

Ancient woodland

Defined as surviving since 1600, ancient woodland is characterised by unique and interdependent wildlife communities that have evolved together over centuries and would be irreplaceable if lost. Just 2% of British woodland can be described as ancient and the Woodland Trust estimates that over 1,000 ancient woodlands are currently under threat.

Woodland

Various component parts of the wooded common exhibit different characteristics.

The woodland found in the northern and western parts of the Common is characterised by the maturity of woody vegetation growing around the ancient pollards and the presence of ancient woodland indicators like bluebells. Previously described as Ashtead Common's ancient woodland, these areas are the parts of the wooded common that have escaped the worst ravages of fire. They contain the greatest concentrations of ancient pollards, so we know that these parts were historically more open.

Since 2009 work to conserve the ancient oak pollards has involved managing woody vegetation around the old trees, recreating a more open aspect in some areas.

Secondary woodland[1] has developed in some of the places where trees were mechanically cleared, typically south of Footpath 25 and east of Bridleway 38, plus some areas in the middle of the Common that were cleared by fire. These areas gradually reverted to woodland via a transitional scrub phase.

An understory of hazel is present in places and has been managed successfully as coppice in recent years, with relatively little deer browse damage.

The presence of hazel coppice[2] on Ashtead Common might be considered inconsistent with wood pasture management. However, we know that hazel existed on Ashtead Common 2,000 years ago. Perhaps it was heavily protected after cutting to prevent animals from eating the regrowth, or perhaps it all but disappeared only to reappear in any quantity after grazing activity ceased. The latter theory is supported by the relative youth of many of the hazel stools.

[1] Secondary woodland has grown up on land that has previously been cleared of trees. It lacks the overall diversity of undisturbed ancient woodland.

[2] Coppice is an area of woodland in which the trees or shrubs are periodically cut back to ground level to stimulate growth and provide firewood or timber.

[3] Scrub is an ecotone (a transition zone) between open grassland and woodland. It is dominated by shrubs and small trees and is important for invertebrates and breeding birds.

Scrub

Scrub[3] represents a transitionary stage between open habitats like grassland and closed canopy woodland. On Ashtead Common it is an important habitat, supporting a variety of invertebrates and breeding birds such as the grasshopper warbler, lesser whitethroat and blackcap. It is home to large populations of wintering thrushes and finches. Nightingales were present until 2003.

The grasshopper warbler re-appeared in 2018 after a long absence thanks to the successful recreation of suitable habitat.

Scrub on the southern slopes is mainly blackthorn, hawthorn or sallow, while that on the ridge is predominantly young oak, birch and hazel, with stands of aspen across the upper slopes.

By the mid-1950s the abandonment of agriculture on the southern slopes led to the development of a mosaic of scrub and grassland. This helped the site obtain its SSSI designation for, amongst other things, its importance for breeding birds. However, a gradual increase in the proportion of scrub compared to grassland, and a reduction in the amount of young scrub, ultimately led to a decline in the condition of the habitat for breeding birds.

Since 1995 the City has carried out a programme of scrub management aimed at creating a 50:50 balance between scrub and open grassland. This has included the removal of overly mature scrub and secondary woodland, and in places grazing with cattle.

Oak is unusual in being both a pioneer and climax species. It is one of the first saplings to appear on a newly cleared piece of land and a dominant species in mature closed canopy woodland. Oak saplings do not like shade but providing they have enough light to grow, other scrub species like blackthorn can offer protection, leading to the saying that scrub is the nursery of the oak.

Scrub therefore takes its place within the overall system, nurturing future wood pasture with young open-grown oak trees and providing a rich source of nectar for the valuable invertebrate fauna whilst providing cover for nesting birds.

Scrub grassland species listed in the SSSI notification

Type	Species	Habitat
Birds	Grasshopper warbler *(Locustella naevia)*	Likes marshy grassland with small bushes
	Lesser whitethroat *(Sylvia curruca)*	Likes early successional thorn and bramble
	Song thrush *(Turdus philomelas)* Mistle thrush *(Turdus viscivorus)*	Song thrush likes an intimate mosaic of grassland and mature scrub
	Finches	Variety of habitats
Insects	Purple emperor	Caterpillars like dense scrub blocks contining willow (particuaarly goat) near to large mature oaks

Saproxylic invertebrates

Ashtead Common is home to a diverse group of invertebrates that are dependent on decaying wood. These saproxylic species were studied in detail in a report published in 2009, which concluded that Ashtead Common ranked in the top 10 UK sites for decaying wood specialists, a result of international significance.

Many species of saproxylic invertebrate are extremely poor at dispersing themselves. Moving to a neighbouring tree is the human equivalent of emigrating to Australia and crossing roads and fields like emigrating to Mars. Consequently, the places where these species are found are known to have enjoyed centuries of habitat continuity.

Examples include the hornet rove beetle (*Velleius dilitatus*, Red Data Book 1), a large Devil's coach horse type beetle that lives in hornet nests.

Grassland

Woodfield is a distinct 7.3ha area of open grassland on the south side of the Common. Prior to 1991 it was mown regularly without removal of the cuttings, creating a peat-like layer of partly decomposed material. It is now managed as a hay meadow and is cut on a rotation to ensure some long vegetation is left each year. This is particularly important for skylarks (Wildlife and Countryside Act protected), a species that consistently returns to Woodfield each year to breed.

Woodfield has become floristically diverse (transitioning from National Vegetation Classification MG6 (influenced by cultivation) in 1999 to MG5c (floristically diverse, acid) in 2012 with species such as knapweed, greater birdsfoot trefoil, yellow rattle, cuckoo flower and common spotted and southern marsh orchid present.

Although now subject to a conservation mowing regime, Woodfield remains one of the most accessible parts of the Common for recreation. It is perhaps therefore the area of Ashtead Common where the need to strike a balance between recreation and nature conservation objectives is most keenly felt. Compromises are required to maintain that balance.

Wetland

The Rye Brook has main river status and as such falls under the remit of the Environment Agency. As riparian owner the City is responsible for managing the area around the channel, although in places the Rye demarcates a residential boundary, so the City is responsible for just one bank.

The Rye Brook is predominantly surface water fed and is therefore responsive to rainfall. During dry periods the water can disappear in places, although the flow into the Brook from the surface water outlet at Two Bridges never dries.

In 2004 a series of ponds and scrapes were created to restore a natural profile to part of the Rye Brook that had previously run in an artificially straightened channel. This river restoration project also involved the construction of a dam and flow control structure to retain water at times of peak flow. Prior to its construction there were occasions when properties downstream flooded when the Rye Brook burst its banks.

There are three distinct ponds on the Common that have different vegetation and flora to those along the Rye Brook. All three species of newt use all three ponds for breeding. Newts are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the great crested newt is fully protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

Flag Pond is situated among the clay pits of the former Roman Tileworks towards the north of the Common. It was restored in 1991 but little has been done since. It is acidic and often cloudy due to dog disturbance.

Ashtead Common Pond is located next to Bridleway 38 on the eastern edge of the Common. It was enlarged in 1987 and is shaded by overhanging trees. It is dominated by duckweed, which indicates over nutrification. It too is often cloudy.

New Pond was created in 1994 near Epsom Gap in the north-western corner of the Common. It supports a variety of aquatic fauna including the grass snake.

2.0 The need for management

2.1 The importance of managing the ancient oak pollards

Ashtead Common is home to over 1,000 living ancient oak pollard trees, an unusually large population and one of international significance.

The Ashtead Common oaks have been closely monitored for a number of years, and consequently it has been possible to accurately determine loss rates as trees have died. The 2009 Ancient Pollard Survey calculated the annual rate of loss at 1.3%. If losses continued at that rate the population would dip below the threshold needed to sustain key insect species within 150 years. This would not allow enough time for the existing younger generation of oak trees to become ancient and provide suitable habitat for the associated species.

However, without intervention to slow the rate of decline, the loss rate would increase exponentially as the ancients become more fragile and more shaded. Consequently, it is estimated that without intervention the critical threshold would actually be reached within 60 years.

In response the City embarked upon an ambitious programme of management in 2009. Since then an average of 70 ancient trees a year have benefited from tree surgery work, and more have had competing vegetation controlled in their vicinity to prolong their lives. It is hoped that with this intervention the date at which the existing cohort of ancient trees reach the critical threshold can be pushed back by approximately 300 years which would mean achieving a rate of loss of 0.5% a year.

The art of conserving pollards is still in its infancy and the process continues to be refined. Already the 2009 ancient tree management plan has been adapted twice; first, to divide the cohort of ancients into distinct management units to prioritise work, and then to refine the individual management prescriptions based on how the trees have responded to initial work.

Response of ancients to being cut

A study commissioned in 2018 looked at how 41 ancient trees had responded to being cut. It concluded that generally oak trees on Ashtead Common respond well, often producing "frithy" epicormic growth. The report recommended selecting trees with high vitality and lots of branches when prioritising work, and that only branches less than 30cm should be cut if possible, leaving a number uncut.

Generally, the approach to managing ancient pollards has transitioned away from a regime of phased retrenchment towards one-off treatments to prolong life, with possible re-visits to do more work only if the individual tree appears to have responded well to the initial cut.

Far right: Practical management of veteran trees.

Right: Veteran pollard.

2020 Ancient Oak Pollard Management Plan

Prompted by the need to revise the schedule of work for the ancient oaks in the 2021-2031 Management Plan in light of the changed approach to managing ancient trees, Luke Fay of Treeworks, the original 2009 plan's co-author, returned to the Common in the winter 2019/2020. He visited each live tree, calculated its current viability score*, compared this to the score from 2009 and then, depending on the tree's response to previous works, drew up a recommendation for future management. This will consist of either work to the tree itself, aerial work to maiden oaks in the vicinity of the tree, or clearance of understory around it, or a combination of all three.

The current viability scores demonstrate that, since 2009, 60% of the oaks have had their viability improved, 16% are unchanged, 17% have deteriorated and 6% over the 10 years have died. This gives strong validation to the large amount of practical work undertaken on and around the trees during the period of the 2011 to 2021 Management Plan.

*The viability score combines scores for the probability of collapse, probability of decline in the next 20 years, and current vitality, and allows for analysis of a tree's current health and likelihood of survival

Our aim is to keep the ancient oak pollards alive for as long as possible to protect the associated plant, animal and fungal communities while the younger oaks on the Common become old enough to provide suitable habitat.

2.2 The importance of managing bracken

"Invasive native plants include bracken in wood-pastures. Although bracken has long been present and was even a crop, it now displaces all other vegetation except bluebells. This is damaging in itself, and also the dead fronds are a fire risk, as on Ashtead Common. Bracken reduction should be at the top of the agenda with wood-pastures containing old trees." Oliver Rackham, Woodlands, 2006.

Past management systems probably supressed bracken growth, but now it covers a large proportion of the Common. A thatch of dead bracken fronds develops every winter, creating a potential fuel source for fire. This situation is particularly hazardous in spring as the Common begins to dry out, but before lush growth pushes through the old. In the past, major fires occurred every five to ten years, destroying large areas of woodland on Ashtead Common, including significant numbers of ancient oak pollards.

Bracken is now managed mainly by mowing it when the plant is at its most vigorous in early summer. Spraying using a selective herbicide and cutting by hand are also utilised techniques.

Top left: Surveying ancient trees.

Bottom left: bracken management.

2.3 The importance of managing scrub and grassland

On Ashtead Common scrub does not occur as an isolated habitat but forms an integral part of an ecologically rich mosaic. The scrub is an ecotone, or ecological transition, between open grassland and closed canopy woodland. Such ecotones are often the areas that provide for the greatest biodiversity in terms of both species' diversity and biomass.

The fact that scrub is a transitional phase ironically means that it both represents a threat to grassland habitat, whilst itself being under threat as it gradually transitions into secondary woodland.

Since the cessation of ploughing in 1956 the areas south of Footpath 25 and east of Bridleway 38 gradually transitioned from open aspect to dense scrub, with species benefitting and thriving from the process as it progressed. However, 40 years on a decline in species diversity was apparent. Areas of open grassland had disappeared and the scrub in many places had become overly mature.

In 1995 concerted efforts commenced to restore grassland and create younger scrub. This process has taken 25 years of on and off effort, with a strong resolve, since 2014, to reach a point where a more desirable 50% scrub and 50% grassland mix exists in many areas.

The benefits of managing scrub

A group of British Trust for Ornithology volunteers has surveyed breeding birds in part of the scrub grassland area for many years. The data they obtain enables year by year comparisons for migrant and resident species.

Between 2015 and 2020 the number of bird territories recorded increased by 97 from 2283 to 380. However, the situation for individual species is varied. Of the migrants, whitethroats and garden warblers have increased in number, whilst blackcaps and chiffchaff numbers have remained consistent albeit with fluctuations year on year. Lesser whitethroat numbers have remained very low and willow warblers, although sometimes present, do not appear to breed.

2.4 The importance of grazing

Grazing over millennia shaped Ashtead Common to create the landscape we have today.

After a significant period of absence grazing was reintroduced in 1999, initially to control the spread of Michaelmas daisy within the scrub grassland areas south of Footpath 25. In 2010 it was expanded to include an area on top of the Common, and the area grazed in this vicinity has increased significantly since then.

Grazing helps to maintain a more varied vegetative structure than mowing. Conservation grazing creates a diversity in sward height, a limited and beneficial amount of soil disturbance, localised soil enrichment without the introduction of nutrients into the system overall and can produce tunnels and cavities within scrub blocks. The resulting dappled shady environment is favoured by a variety of invertebrates and essential for specialist species that rely on herbivore dung.

Grazing animals can also supress bracken by trampling it.

"The Belted Galloways are excellent animals and I think, for the average visitor, they 'add value'."

2020 consultation

Cows graze Ashtead Common between spring and autumn each year.

2.5 Climate change

Climate change is causing higher temperatures and more extreme weather events. Projections suggest that oak trees may decline in health as a result. Other species such as rowan may fare better. Generally, this might result in a more scrubby and open woodland with lower tree canopies.

Managing Ashtead Common in the face of these uncertainties is a challenge. One way to reduce the risks associated with climate change is to make the Common more resilient. Actions to boost resilience include increasing structural diversity to promote species diversity, thereby allowing those species that can successfully adapt the space to thrive. Managing the ancient oak pollards will reduce the risk of structural failure in high winds and the fire risk can be mitigated by improving firebreaks and by managing bracken.

Another way of responding to climate change is adapting the way we work, for example by reducing the length of the habitat management (cutting) season in recognition of the earlier onset of spring.

Surveying and monitoring play an important role here in understanding the impact of climate change, species response and efficacy of our work.

Biodiversity in crisis

The UK is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world. Biodiversity has plummeted due to the loss of wildlife and wildlife habitats.

- In 1966 there were 40 million more birds in the UK than there are today.
- Numbers of the most endangered species in the UK have halved since the 1970s.
- One in 10 species in the UK is now threatened with extinction.
- 11.5% of species native to Surrey are now locally extinct (compared with 2% nationally).
- Moths have declined by 88% and butterflies by 76% since 1970.
- Approximately one plant species is lost per county per year, and the rate of loss is accelerating.
- Despite government policies and actions, 150 out of 250 'priority species' for nature conservation are still declining in number.

UK State of Nature reports (2013 and 2016).
Surrey State of Nature report (2017).
Our Vanishing Flora (2012).

Flooding

More extreme weather events will cause more flooding. It is important to consider the effects of vegetation management, particularly tree cutting, in relation to this issue. Trees can often use more water than shorter types of vegetation mainly because their aerodynamically rougher canopies can intercept more water.

When active, trees absorb water, but during winter months their effect is limited to the amount of water they can intercept with their branches and baffle with their stems and roots. For this reason, other types of natural vegetative cover can be equally as effective (sometimes more so) in intercepting and dissipating water. Particularly effective forms of cover include rough grassland, scrub and bracken. *(Water Use by Trees, Forestry Commission Information Note 065, April 2005)*.

Ashtead Common can naturally absorb and retain vast amounts of water. Any attempt to drain it will inevitably mean more water enters the Rye Brook quicker than it would otherwise, potentially contributing to flooding downstream. Therefore, the decision was taken some time ago not to undertake any work that could increase the flow of water into the Rye Brook, accepting that paths and rides may at times be waterlogged as a result.

95% of respondents agreed that managing Ashtead Common to promote biodiversity is a high priority.

2020 consultation

Pollution

Water from a surface water catchment covering a large part of Ashtead enters the Rye Brook at Two Bridges. This has been identified as the single worst source of pollution along the course of the Rye Brook, introducing contaminated road water and waste poured into drains or from illegal connections into the watercourse.

The Common suffers from air, light and noise pollution, particularly from busy roads nearby that also fragment wildlife habitat. High nitrogen levels caused by pollution adversely impact the mycorrhizal fungi that aid tree growth and protect them from diseases. Long term monitoring of pollution is required to assess its impact on the plant and animal communities that live on the Common.

Pests and diseases

The Common is increasingly under threat from pests and diseases that benefit from general warming and continue to be introduced on plant stock from abroad.

The caterpillar of the Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) has toxic hairs that can cause allergic reactions. This species is a particular threat because of the severity of infestations. The caterpillars build nests of toxic hairs which can remain a hazard long after the caterpillars have gone. It is an introduced species with few natural controls, although there are indications that predators are now present in the UK and that native species are adapting to make use of the available food source.

OPM nest, with caterpillars.

OPM was first recorded on Ashtead Common in 2016 when six nests were identified. By 2019 the number of nests had reached over 1,200. In accordance with statutory requirements the outbreak was initially treated with an insecticide in an effort to contain its spread. However, Ashtead Common is noted in part for its rare butterflies and moths, and other species that spend much of their lives in a larval state, so continued use of insecticide spray is undesirable.

Ticks and the attendant risk of Lyme disease is another issue with the potential to have an impact on how Ashtead Common is used and managed. Ticks live on birds and mammals of all sizes (not just deer) so have abundant food resource on the Common. Naturally controlled by cold and dry weather, the trend towards warmer and wetter conditions appears to be increasing the abundance of ticks. There is no insecticide that targets ticks alone.

Oak decline (a coverall term applied to several conditions) and acute oak decline (bacterial infection) are observed and monitored. Mildew is often observed on oak trees, although recent survey work suggests that it is not impacting significantly on tree vitality.

Linking to the wider environment

Fragmentation is a major threat to wildlife throughout the UK. Modern agricultural practices have reduced the land available for wildlife, and some habitat has been lost and broken up by housing and roads. The populations of plants and animals trapped on these 'islands' are too small to be resilient to the stresses of climate change, pollution and of general erosion caused by the high numbers of people living nearby.

Ashtead Common is a rich resource of varied wildlife that, given the opportunity, could spill back out into the wider environment were it to offer a more extensive interconnected system of wildlife habitat.

Here as in so much of the UK, the landscape has been shaped by human activities to the extent that continued management is needed to maintain habitats so that the species that have made their home there can thrive. Without this intervention they would be displaced by other species.

Our aim is to maintain a diverse 'reservoir' of healthy species and to seek to build links with surrounding natural areas so that populations of plants, fungi and animals can expand and move between the Common and the wider environment.

2.6 Community engagement, access and visitor safety

Between 2011 and 2021 Ashtead Common achieved an average of over 6,500 volunteer hours a year. This included a significant contribution from directly managed groups, as well as volunteers from other organisations. The figure represents a significant investment by the local community in caring for Ashtead Common. For every eight hours of volunteering achieved approximately one hour of staff time is needed to facilitate it, so a significant amount of the team resource has been invested in enabling community involvement.

Ashtead Common has a dedicated team of professional Rangers who aim to ensure that high standards are achieved to make people feel that they are in a cared-for place.

In recognition of this the Common has achieved a Green Flag Award every year since 2003. This award assesses standards under eight overall criteria that include a welcoming place (safe and equal access, signage), safe and secure (quality of provision, safe facilities, personal security control of dogs and fouling), and well maintained and clean.

Ashtead Common is valued for providing a green and tranquil oasis in the midst of busy lives, contributing to the health and wellbeing of local people. The number of people living within easy reach of the nature reserve is likely to increase in the coming years. The challenge will be to accommodate their need for green space without harming those aspects that they come to see.

Reducing our environmental impact

Green waste: reduce, reuse, recycle, and sometimes burn

Although much of the wood cut during tree management is left *in situ* as decaying wood habitat, leaving it all would create access problems for future work. To minimise bonfires, timber is milled into rails and posts for site fences, benches and other structures; brash is used to create dead hedges to mark footpaths and bridleways; cut hazel is processed into wooden stakes and pea sticks for local allotment holders; large tree trunks and branches are sold to contractors, usually for firewood; and the Ashtead Common Volunteers are given access to smaller pieces for firewood for personal use. Grass on Woodfield is cut and removed as a hay crop; elsewhere grass is cut and left *in situ*.

As little green waste as possible is burned. Where this is unavoidable, all bonfires are raised above the ground on burning platforms to protect the soil from damage and keep ash away from the ground until it is removed from site. The detrimental effects of burning are partially offset by a degree of carbon offsetting (e.g.vegetation regrowth or continued carbon storage by ancient trees whose life has been been extended) and the reduced risk of catastrophic wildfires due to firebreak management. However, overall the burning of green waste is detrimental to the environment, and the amount burned at Ashtead Common will be reduced during the lifetime of this plan.

Burning platforms protect the soil beneath a fire from damage. The ash is removed to prevent localised soil enrichment.

Grazing

Animals have grazed Ashtead Common for millennia, converting low quality pasture into food. Today, we graze the Common to achieve conservation gains, often instead of using machines. The livestock are not fed supplements: they exist purely on what they can obtain from the site. There is evidence to suggest that cows that graze this way balance nutrients from a variety of grasses, herbs and shrubs to maintain healthy digestive systems; this contrasts with farming systems where animals fed on supplements have higher methane emissions.

Vehicles and machinery

Where possible, the vehicles and machinery used on Ashtead Common are being replaced with electric alternatives. In addition to reducing local emissions, electric vehicles and power tools are less noisy. Photovoltaic cells on the Ashtead Estate Office produce approximately 5,000kwh of electricity a year to help charge this equipment. A low ground impact electric all-terrain vehicle is often used in place of a 4x4; this is confined to the surfaced route when ground conditions are poor.

3.0 A vision for Ashtead Common

Ashtead Common: a place for countryside recreation and wildlife conservation where community involvement remains integral to maintaining an open space of national significance, a place that resists urban pressures and strives to protect an historic landscape and its features in a setting proactively managed to retain and enhance biodiversity.

The long-term vision for Ashtead Common for the lifetime of this plan and beyond

Ashtead Common is recognised as a special place for people and wildlife protected forever by a well-supported charity dedicated to preserving the natural aspect for people to enjoy.

Outstanding habitats

The Common is proactively managed as a resource rich in wildlife, maintaining biodiversity whilst looking beyond its boundaries to promote opportunities for wide scale restoration of ecosystems.

The famous ancient pollarded oak trees are managed within a wood pasture system to keep them alive for as long as possible. In addition to the old trees there are plenty of oaks of all ages to act as replacements for the ancients.

Tree density across the Common is variable. In some areas the woodland is dense, with abundant hazel, in other areas the pollarded trees stand in open conditions. All areas are grazed with livestock.

Ground vegetation is dominated by grasses and herbs, not bracken. Wide, open rides and firebreaks are managed by mowing and grazing.

Areas of grass and scrub are maintained as an intricate mosaic, with the trees and bushes varying in density, some tightly packed and some scattered. These areas are a haven for insects, birds and rarer plants.

The Rye Brook is clean and healthy, and its meanders and wet marshy areas provide an important reserve for wetland plants and animals.

Woodfield is a glorious flowery and varied hay meadow with singing skylarks.

A place for people

People are an integral part of Ashtead Common and it is a central part of the local community.

The Common is a safe, welcoming and accessible place for informal countryside recreation. Walkers, runners, horse riders, cyclists and other users make use of a limited network of surfaced tracks as well as the many unsurfaced paths, rides and firebreaks.

Scientific study

The Common is a place of scientific study where contributions are encouraged from students, amateur naturalists and professionals to increase understanding of ecosystems within the Common and beyond.

Cultural history

The history of the site is promoted, and heritage assets are protected and conserved appropriately according to their significance.

Ashtead Common is still productive. Local people benefit from products such as firewood, coppice goods and hay as long as this does not compromise management objectives.

96% of respondents agree with this vision.

2020 consultation

4.0 Aims and targets

The aims of the 2021-2031 management plan seek to maintain a biodiverse nature reserve and provide a direction of travel towards achieving the vision for the site.

The targets detailed here will be monitored throughout the plan and adjusted as needed to achieve the overall aims.

Each aim is linked to the governing document of the Ashtead Common charity, the Corporation of London (Open Spaces) Act 1878.

Aim 1: Biological

Maintain the biodiversity of Ashtead Common by managing habitats to favourable condition and achieving conservation gains that benefit the site and beyond.

Governing document link: preserve natural aspect, protect the timber and other trees, pollards, shrubs, underwood and herbage.

Aim 2: People

Encourage the sustainable use of Ashtead Common for recreation and promote community involvement in all aspects of the site.

Governing document link: commons acquired by the City to be kept as open spaces for the recreation and enjoyment of the public.

Aim 3: Estate assets and legal issues

Protect Ashtead Common and its users from harm. Fulfil legal obligations, challenge threats and maintain assets in good condition.

Governing document link: open spaces kept uninclosed and unbuilt upon. Shall by all lawful means prevent, resist and abate inclosures, encroachments and buildings upon. The City may from time to time make and alter byelaws.

A definition of favourable condition

The conservation status of a habitat will be taken to be in a favourable condition when:

- the area that it covers is stable and increasing, and
- the specific structure and functions that are necessary for its long-term maintenance exist, and are likely to do so for the foreseeable future, and
- the condition of its typical species is favourable (as defined in article 1(i))

From European Habitats Directive 1992 Article 1(e)

4.1 Aim 1: Biological

Maintain the biodiversity of Ashtead Common by managing habitats to favourable condition and achieving conservation gains that benefit the site and beyond.

The elements of Ashtead Common are interdependent: habitats and species cannot be managed in isolation. In general, the stronger the nature reserve is in terms of habitat vigour and diversity, the more resilient it will be to the impact of outside influences such as climate change, pollution and habitat loss in surrounding areas.

4.1.1 Restoring wood pasture

Ashtead Common is a wood pasture system. Its three key elements are the ancient oak pollards, scrub and understory components, and the grassland communities growing beneath. Conserving these elements involves restoring features of the historic Common that gradually declined following the cessation of traditional wood pasture management practices. It is important to stress that wood pasture restoration is not an attempt to recreate history, but a long-term campaign to provide and maintain habitat for as many species as possible.

The targets in the following section all contribute towards the restoration of wood pasture.

Microhabitats

The management of wood pasture areas through grazing and occasional mechanical cutting aims to maintain a wide range of micro-habitats for wildlife, such as those shown here.

a) Dung; b) Standing undisturbed deadwood;
c) Laying undisturbed deadwood;
d) Flowering scrub; e) Unsurfaced rides;
f) Areas of cropped grass with flowering plants;
g) Scrub (bramble);
h) Open water and localised poached areas.

4.1.2 Ancient oak pollards

Our aim is to keep the old pollards alive as long as possible to protect the associated plant, animal and fungal communities.

Research has shown that when pruning ancient oaks, cutting larger branches (over 30cm diameter), leaving long stubs and using rip cuts (a technique designed to mimic natural branch drop), promotes dieback. When this guidance is followed, Ashtead Common's ancient oaks tend to respond well to pruning.

Guidelines for managing ancient trees

1: Factors influencing the timing and sequencing specified of tree works

The care of the living ancient trees should be considered a priority for management. Therefore, any works intended for the care of the ancient trees must be carried out with sensitivity and skill in order to have the intended effect on tree health. With this aim the following guidelines should be followed:

- No pruning works should be carried out on trees in the year following an exceptionally dry summer. In some cases, this may over-ride works scheduled as routine tree management. However, there may be particularly high public safety risk trees or trees posing a very high risk of structural failure that will have to be worked on during this period.
- Contractors should be aware of the vulnerability of ancient trees to hot and dry weather. It is recommended that there should be flexibility in their terms of contract to ensure that financial / contractual pressures do not lead to trees being worked on during exceptionally hot periods.
- The sequencing of management on the Common is informed by a system of 10 'Districts', discrete areas, each containing between 80 and 130 live ancient trees. Sequencing of operations by district enables managers to achieve efficiencies and consistency of management outcomes.
- Sequencing and timing of operations must remain flexible so that the management team can respond appropriately to environmental and other events and factors (e.g. drought, storms, instability of an individual tree). Where long term management plans are implemented, incorporation of flexibility within these plans is particularly important in the context of increasing frequency of extreme weather associated with climate change.
- Equally it is essential, in the context of long-term management that operatives who are appropriately experienced and qualified in ancient tree management are able, where necessary, to vary work specifications in response to factors such as changes in tree stability and vitality.

Treework Environmental Practice 2020 Ancient Tree Survey and Management Update

Guidelines for managing ancient trees contd.

2: Arisings from tree work operations

A system for managing arisings from tree surgery and halo management works has been adopted to provide greatest saproxylic habitat benefit while maintaining sufficient clear access for management teams. This method will be applied to future works and includes the following considerations:

- Arisings are managed by the team on the ground at the time that the works are carried out.
- Large limbs and stems, providing bulk deadwood habitat are left in situ.
- Small branches are moved to eco-piles so that they do not prevent bramble. management
- Halo arisings are generally chipped.

3: Trees being managed to reduce shade from their crowns on ancient trees (high halo)

715 operations have been specified to pollard, thin the crowns of or prune back branches of trees that are shading ancient trees. The trees that these works are specified to be carried out to are younger trees than the ancient trees and many of them could, with the right management, become the ancients of the future providing succession and continuity of saproxylic habitat.

It is recommended that works to develop these trees as succession to the current ancient tree population should include:

- Recording and monitoring future pollards (not all high-haloed trees will become suitable pollards).
- Applying veteranisation / deadwood habitat formation techniques to the trees when carrying out specified pruning operations.

Treework Environmental Practice 2020 Ancient Tree Survey and Management Update

Target: prolong the lives of the ancient oak pollards.
Ancient tree work programme to be delivered. Approximately 40 trees to be worked on every year. Work will include pruning and clearing surrounding vegetation.

Achieved by:

- carrying out the work programme;
- being flexible to respond to adverse conditions like drought that might adversely impact results.

Target: protect tree roots.

Achieved by identifying the 20 ancient trees most vulnerable to root compaction and taking measures to minimise damage by**:**

- moving paths;
- making dead hedges to exclude people from the area around the tree;
- mulching (mindful that woodchip on saturated clay can quickly turn to porridge and exacerbate the problem).

4.1.3 New pollards

New pollards will be created to promote biodiversity by offering nuanced habitat variations, offering an element of continuity of habitat for species dependent on the ancient pollards that must, even with management, decline in vigour. Although these young pollards will not contain the decaying wood, fissures and cracks initially, they will develop them more quickly than an undamaged tree.

However, as recognised in the 2000-2005 Management Plan, 'a new generation of oak pollards [will not necessarily create] a new generation of ancient trees of the quality seen today.' If the pollards created now do eventually provide suitable habitat, it will not be for hundreds of years.

Although the cultural and landscape associations of pollarding on Ashtead Common add weight to the argument to create and manage new pollards, it must be recognised that it is unlikely that the historic landscape of the Common will be perpetuated without the consistent, long-term application of centuries-old woodland management processes.

" The work we have seen taking place has richly benefitted the ecology of the woodland and benefited the local community."

2020 consultation

Target: create new pollards.
Create 100+ new oak pollards.

Achieved by:

- creating blocks of 5-10 new pollards each year; these new pollards will be tagged, recorded and mapped;
- creating new pollards as a by-product of halo release as the opportunity presents; these trees will also be recorded and mapped.

Target: retain other important trees.
Retain all trees (ie not just ancients) with good habitat or high aesthetic value, unless subject to over-riding safety issues.

Achieved by:

- visual and bat assessments carried out prior to any work on the tree;
- modifying work as needed to ensure no unnecessary loss of wildlife/ aesthetic value.

Illustration of stages involved in establishing a new oak pollard, based on three models presented in Establishing Oak Pollards by Neville Fay of Treework Environmental Practice, January 2020.

A: at 10 years, pollard initiation

B: at 25 years, after re-pollarding

C: at 50 years, after re-pollarding

4.1.4 Decaying wood

Keeping a large amount and varied types of decaying wood on Ashtead Common is essential.

Decaying wood habitat is found within the living ancient oak pollards, the dead standing and fallen trees, branches, stems and twigs. It is important that decaying wood is present in a variety of locations across the Common, including the scrub/ grassland areas.

91% of respondents agree with our plans to manage oaks, create new pollards and artificially create veteran tree features.

2020 consultation

Target: provide decaying wood habitat.
Ashtead Common to always have a good variety of types of decaying wood.

Achieved by:

- extending the life of the ancient oak pollards by implementing the 2020 ancient tree plan;
- retaining standing dead trees and dead branches on trees unless there is an over-riding safety reason for their removal;
- leaving fallen dead trees and branches in situ unless they are blocking access;
- leaving habitat piles of cut material following management work in places where they will not impede access or compromise future management activity;
- supporting the Veteranisation Project by safeguarding the veteranised trees and contributing to the ongoing monitoring.

Oaks Damaged to Save Threatened Species

This week an international trial began to evaluate the effects of five different ways to actively damage oaks to try and get young oaks to "age" more quickly. Natural damage which occurs on older oaks such as when branches break off or when the bark is damaged by animals and hollowing will be mimicked and followed up over a 25-year period. The aim of the trial is to gain knowledge on how Red Data Book (threatened) species such as fungi, insects, lichens, birds and bats associated with old oaks can be conserved in sites where there will be a lack of ancient oaks in the future. The work is being carried out by arborists.

At 16 sites in Sweden, one in Norway and three in England, 35 oaks per site (49 at Ashtead) will be damaged during the autumn. The treated trees and the control oaks will be, in cooperation with different researchers from various universities, followed up both with regard to what happens to the trees and which species colonise the newly created habitats.

The lack of and loss of ancient oaks in the landscape, has resulted as a consequence of industrialisation of agriculture and forestry over the last decades. There is often a significant age gap between the few really ancient trees of 400 years plus and the next generation which may only be 80 to 100 years old. The "delivery time" – the time it takes to create an old oak which can contain threatened species is often 200 – 300 years.

Press release Issued at the start of the 2012 -2037 Veteranisation Project

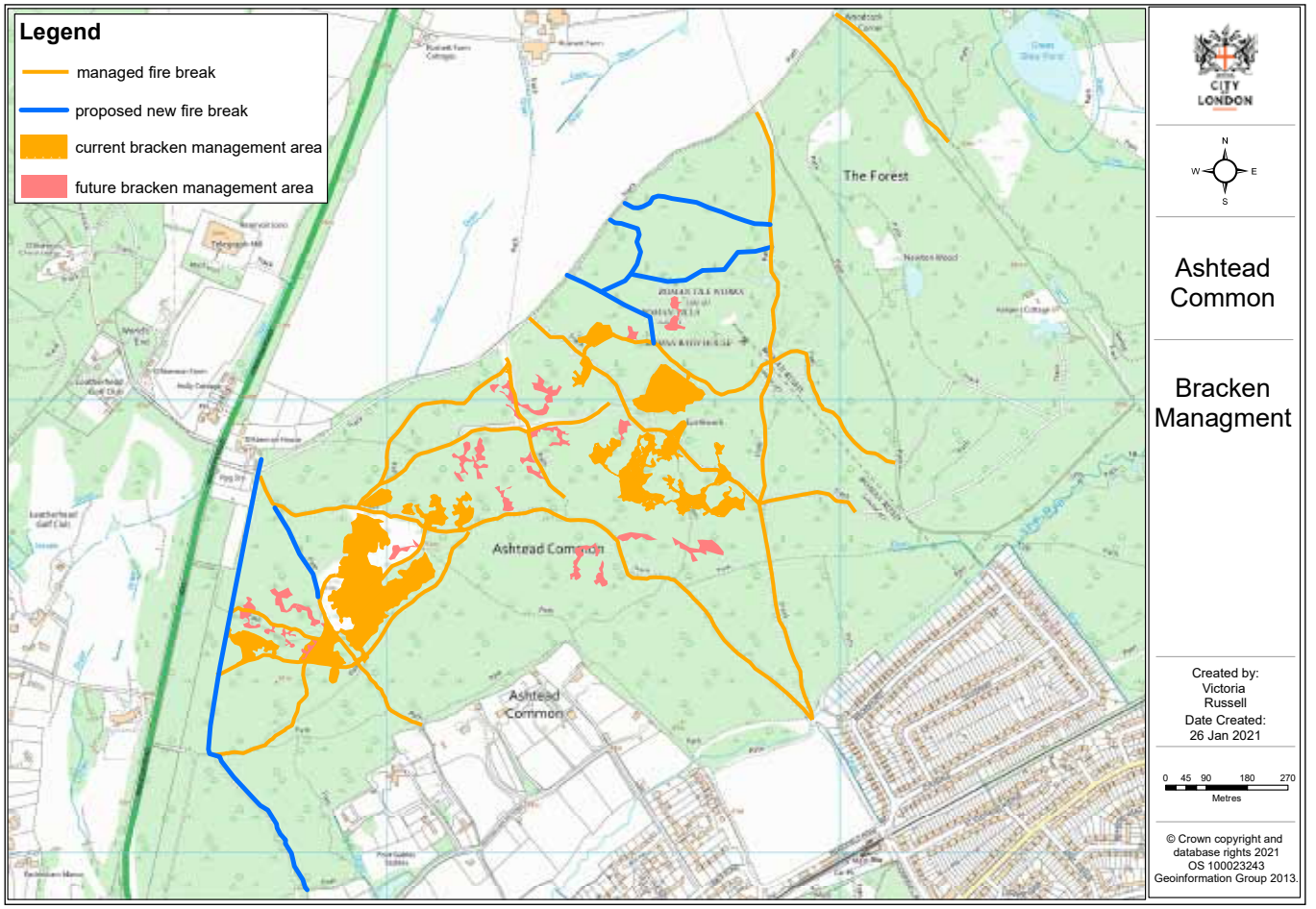
4.1.5 Bracken, firebreaks and rides

Target: control bracken.
Control bracken growth.

Achieved by:

- increase the area of bracken controlled by 2.8ha;
- application of bracken targeted herbicide in June/July;
- mow bracken areas in June/July
- selectively strim and rake areas where ant hills are present.

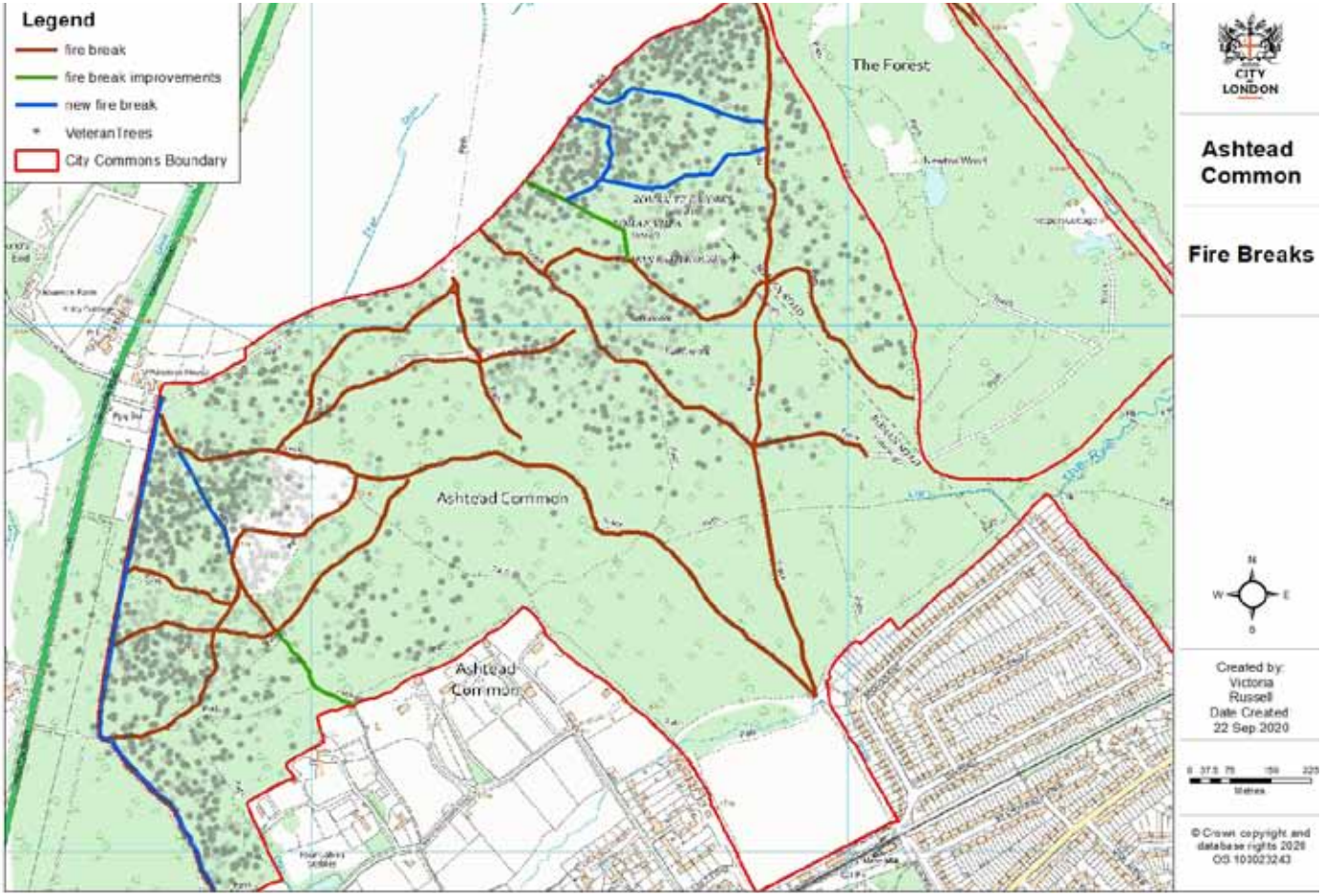
Above: Left unchecked, bracken rapidly shades out more fragile plants.



Right: Fire damage in 2015 - bracken control measures prevent the build up of dead and dry vegetation, limiting the spread and severity of fires.

94% of respondents agree with our plan to manage bracken and firebreaks.

2020 consultation



Target: improve and maintain firebreaks and rides. Enhance the firebreak network.

Achieved by:

- increasing the firebreak network by 2,675 metres;
- maintaining the existing 8,480 metres of rides and firebreaks by mowing and controlling bracken;
- regularly mowing firebreaks and rides to maintain a low sward height across a 6m width .

4.1.6 Grazing

The area grazed with cattle increased by 12ha during the 10 years of the previous management plan. Much of this increase occurred in incremental steps during the latter years of this period, and this is the aim going forward.

Additional areas have been identified for grazing, chosen because they either adjoin places that are currently grazed successfully and are therefore natural extensions, or are already structurally suited to grazing with a mix of open and enclosed areas containing ancient trees.

Initially grazing will follow the same model as previous years, using temporary electric fencing and a relatively small group of cattle that are moved between enclosures.

However, the long-term goal is to achieve extensive whole site grazing, and this might be achievable during the lifetime of this plan as invisible or virtual fencing technology advances.

85% of respondents agree with our plan to expand grazing.

2020 consultation

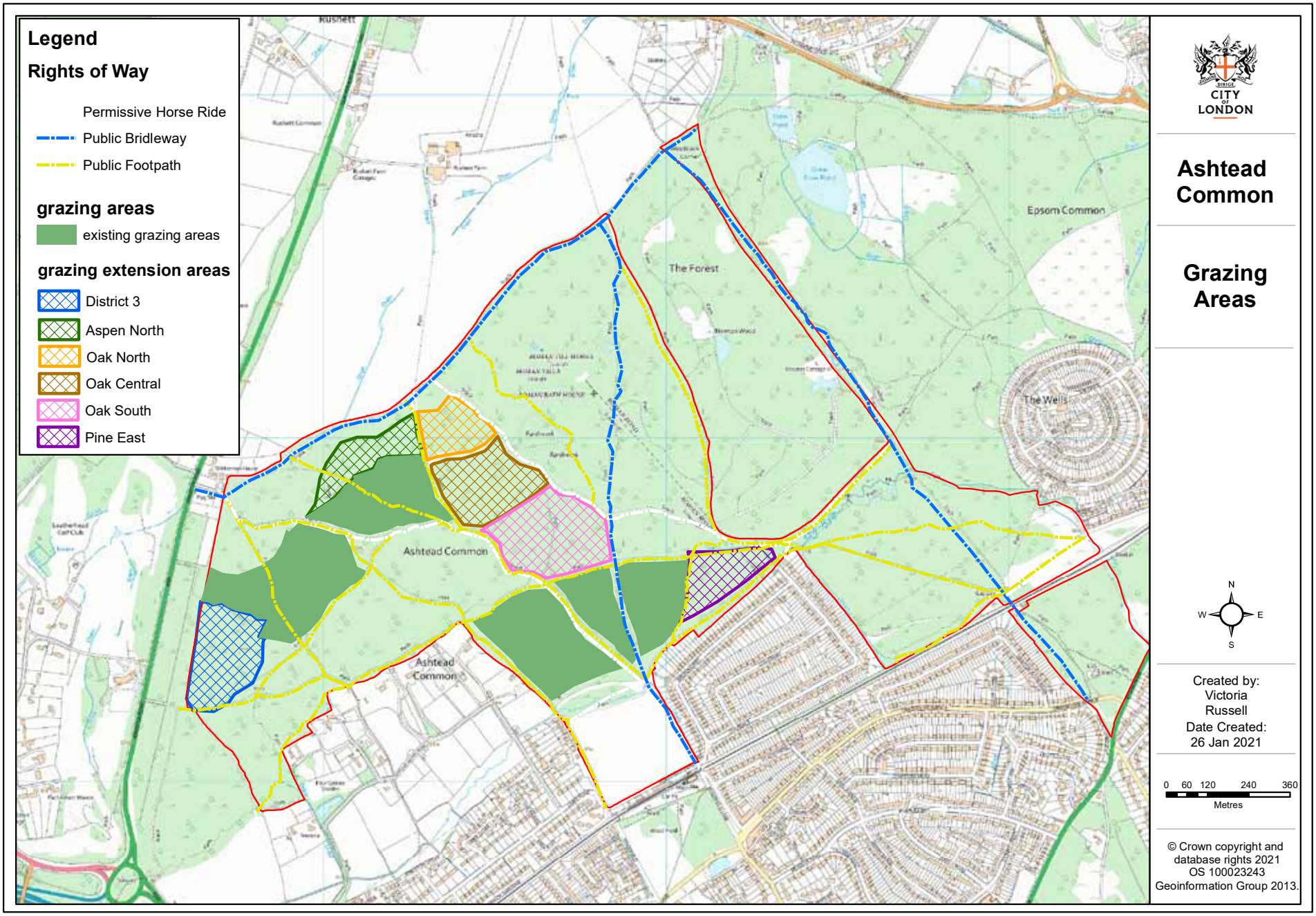
With this in mind, the new grazing areas collectively form a layout that can be adapted for invisible fencing as and when the time comes.

Cows are assessed for temperament before being turned out on site, and the herd is frequently checked and managed to reduce risk to the public. Signage is deployed near the temporary grazing enclosure and further back from it to alert people to the presence of grazing animals and advise on appropriate dog control.

Target: increase the area grazed.

Achieved by:

- increasing the area of Ashtead Common grazed by 23ha, extending above Footpath 25 on the western boundary, between CR1/Footpath 31 and CR2 in the centre of the Common, and below Footpath 25 at the south-western corner of Newton Wood;
- rotating a single small herd of around 8-12 cattle between grazing areas (not all areas will be grazed every year);
- containing cattle within temporary enclosures that are erected and dismantled as the animals are moved;
- checking animals at least once a day;
- where possible, using breeds that are suited to conservation grazing; no supplemental feeding and limiting the use of spot-on treatments and wormers to assessed need;
- working with our grazing partner to monitor the development of invisible fencing systems and instigate trials if a robust, safe and low-input system is developed ;
- if trials of invisible fencing are successful, developing and implementing a plan to graze as much of the Common as possible.


Legend
Rights of Way
Permissive Horse Ride
Public Bridleway
Public Footpath
grazing areas
existing grazing areas
grazing extension areas
District 3
Aspen North
Oak North
Oak Central
Oak South
Pine East
Rushett
Epsom Common
The Forest
The Wells
Ashtead Common
Ashtead Common
CITY OF LONDON
Ashtead Common
Grazing Areas
N
W
E
S
Created by: Victoria Russell
Date Created: 26 Jan 2021
0 60 120 240 360
Metres
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4.1.7 Woodland

Primarily the areas of close canopy woodland on Ashtead Common are maintained in association with the work to protect ancient oak pollards. Clearing competing vegetation from around the ancients involves coppicing and pollarding, and the management of bramble and holly. Therefore, much of the work to maintain woodland follows the district-based rotation of the ancient tree schedule. Some blocks of woodland without many ancient oaks receive minimal input and have in effect become non-intervention areas.

Arguably the hazel on Ashtead Common is not a significant habitat type but coppicing it does present opportunities to enhance transitional zones for the benefit of insects, birds and ground flora. It may also benefit dormice.

Target: manage woodland.

Achieved by:

- halo release around ancient oak pollards as prescribed in the ancient tree management plan;
- coppicing hazel stands on rotation;
- grazing within areas of closed canopy woodland;
- manage transitionary zone (ecotone); interface between woodland and other habitats by coppicing and scalloping woodland edge;
- removal of non-native species like Turkey oak.

4.1.8 Scrub

Scrub is maintained using proactive management techniques to largely supress the establishment of trees and promote continuous scrub growth. The exception to this is where a small number of potential oak pollards of the future are identified (and subsequently managed) within the scrub areas. This concession recognises that scrub provides a nursery for the oak which can in turn provide structural diversity and localised shade.

Half the area should be covered by scrub blocks of varying ages between 0 and 15 years old, and the other half should be open grassland comprising some parts kept permanently open, including rides, paths and glades, and transitory areas of grass that form and exist temporarily within recently cleared blocks.

Cutting rotations vary so that scrub blocks are cut at different ages between 8 and 15 years.

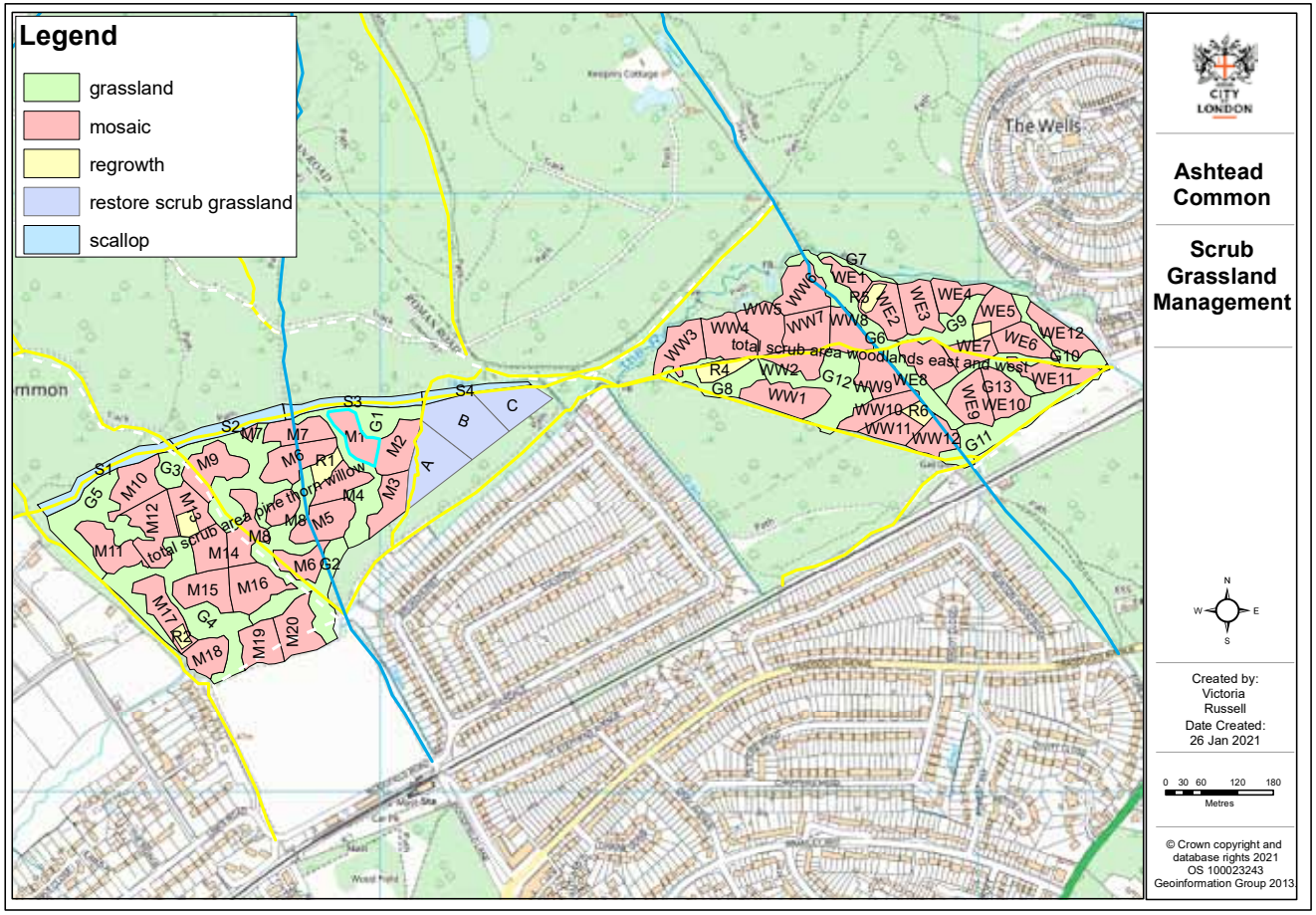
Birds that nest in scrub often require a vigorous field layer margin skirting the scrub block to protect low and vulnerable nests.

Many of the insect species associated with scrub specialise in the decaying wood component, and these insects need ready access to nectar and pollens. This highlights the need for a well-maintained mosaic that includes standing and fallen dead wood and a well-structured interface between scrub, grassland and woodland.

Although the cutting rotation is prescribed in this document, a decision must be taken each year to ensure the appropriateness of the work. This should include a review of the previous years' species data, and if necessary, a change of tack to avoid compromising active breeding locations. Consideration must also be given to the impact that practical management might have on active and ongoing survey work, particularly butterfly transects.

The rotation is designed to give the correct mix of habitat elements overall, with each block typically comprising:

- a small proportion of retained old scrub;
- a few perching trees (possibly the pollards for the future);
- significant areas of cut scrub that will be allowed to regrow;
- transitory patches of grassland (stump-ground areas) that might scrub-over very quickly or in places might hold-out a bit longer due to grazing.



Guidance for managing grass within scrub areas

Permanent grassland within the scrub grassland areas should receive only just enough management intervention to prevent it from succeeding to scrub. Grazing will contribute, but there will often be a need for mechanical intervention as well. Typically, this will involve using a tractor mounted mower set for a high cut, but sensitive areas (for example around ant hills) could be brush cut. Removing saplings by hand and treating cut stumps with herbicide to prevent regrowth are also techniques to consider.

It is important not to mow right up to the edge of scrub blocks to retain a skirt of rank vegetation around them.

In the absence of effective grazing, mechanically cutting areas of permanent grassland is preferable to not managing them at all.

Target: increase the area of scrub managed.

Achieved by:

- encourage regrowth of dense blocks of young scrub that are at least 0.5ha in size where secondary growth has been cleared;
- bringing an additional 3.1ha of mature scrub/ secondary woodland into the scrub grassland rotation;
- manage an additional 1.57ha of transitionary zone (ecotone) interface between the scrub and other habitats by scalloping woodland edges.

4.1.9 Grassland - Woodfield

Skylarks often nest on Woodfield so grass cutting cannot commence until the chicks have fledged. This will inevitably favour species that prefer a later cut in the summer.

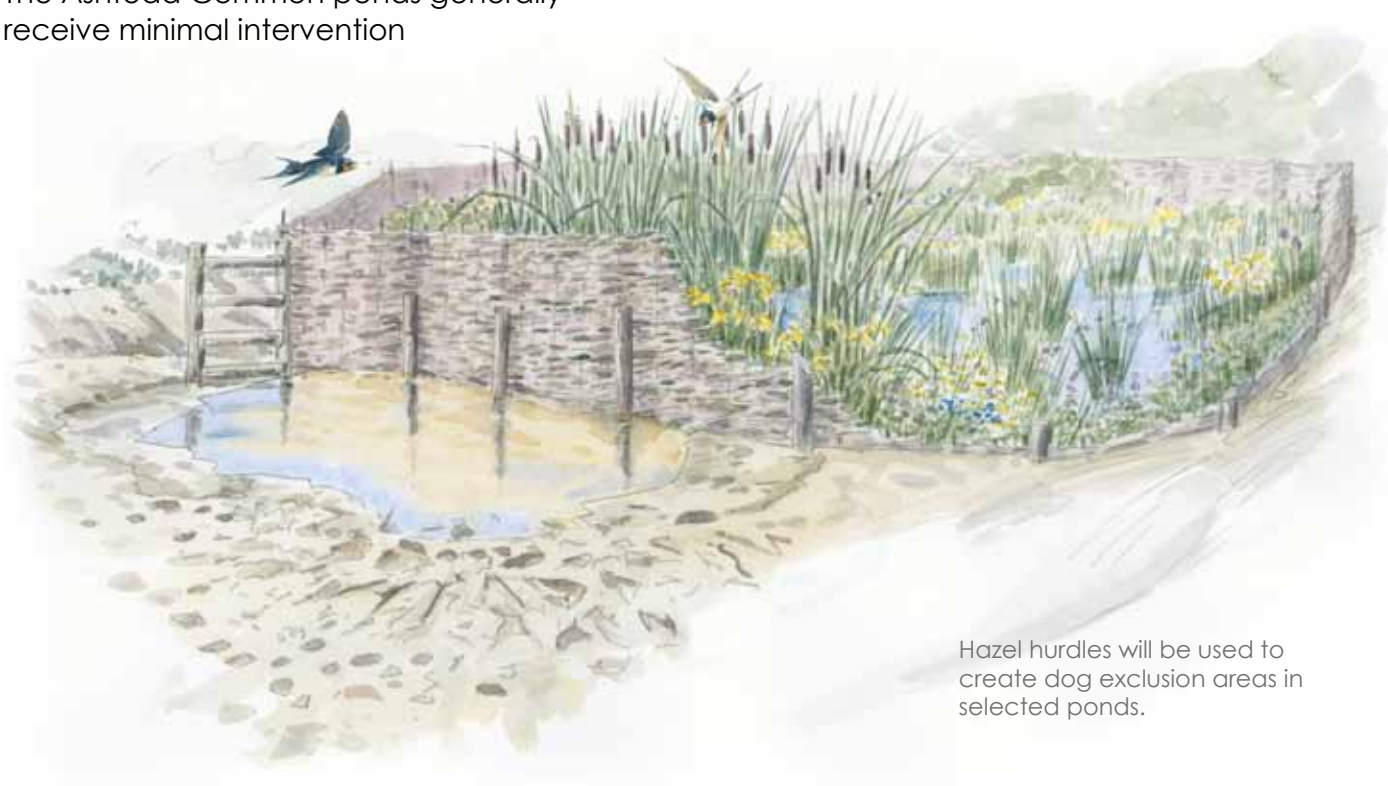
Target: manage Woodfield as a hay meadow.

Achieved by:

- cutting the grass on rotation and removing the cuttings;
- review of cutting rotation when NVC survey is complete;
- preventing scrub encroachment.

4.1.10 Wetland

The Ashtead Common ponds generally receive minimal intervention



Hazel hurdles will be used to create dog exclusion areas in selected ponds.

Target: manage and maintain wetland habitats.

Achieved by:

- manage and maintain riparian zones to control flood risk and promote diversity;
- inspection of the dam and flow control structure by a Supervising Engineer twice a year;
- cut grass and control vegetation growth around flow control structure;
- review pond maintenance regimes and explore options for the creation of one additional pond during the lifetime of the plan;
- create small dog exclusion areas within selected ponds.

Reed bed filtration system project

Water from a surface water catchment covering a large part of Ashtead enters the Rye Brook at Two Bridges, feeding the River Mole, the largest tributary of the Thames. This surface water outfall has been identified as the single worst source of pollution along the course of the Rye Brook, introducing contaminated road water and waste either poured into drains or from illegal connections into the watercourse.

We have a design for a natural reed bed filtration system that willl not only treat the pollution before it enters the Rye Brook but also turn a small corner of Woodfield into a wetland habitat that will enhance biodiversity.The design ensures it will not increase the risk of flooding upstream.

Such a project offers opportunities for partnership working and community involvement. If it happens, there will be some disruption during construction, but in the long term this project will improve water quality in the Rye, Mole and Thames, an issue that must be addressed.

This project will be expensive and can only happen if external funding is secured.

93% of respondents agree with our plan to create a reed bed.

2020 consultation

4.1.11 Monitoring and research

Conducting research is a statutory role under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. This duty is reinforced by the related NNR standard that requires that research be promoted, and knowledge shared.

A hierarchy of monitoring and research activities are supported, ranging from individual student projects to professionally conducted international studies. Local community volunteers are engaged in monitoring wildlife populations, either through directly supported surveys on behalf of the City, or indirectly supported initiatives under the umbrella of other organisations like the British Trust for Ornithology or Surrey Wildlife Trust.

It is vital to structure and coordinate these various studies carefully to ensure that the right things are being researched in the right way.

Most research is focussed on the ancient trees and the species associated with them. However, there remain gaps in our knowledge, particularly in relation to bats, flies, fungi and the impact of climate change, pollution and other human derived pressures on ecosystems.

Consequently, it is necessary to plan a programme of monitoring and research over the next 10 years to maintain the continuity of ongoing or periodic research programmes, whilst scheduling research aimed at filling knowledge gaps.

There is already a lot of data on file from surveys conducted over many years. Currently this information is dispersed, and there is a need to establish a comprehensive inventory.

Target: monitor and research the ecology of Ashtead Common.

Achieved by:

- implementing a 10-year schedule for survey and monitoring (see section 5);
- recording work carried out, particularly in relation to that funded by Countryside Stewardship;
- supporting volunteers and other organisations undertaking monitoring and recording;
- commissioning comprehensive professional level surveys targeted at knowledge gaps or to maintain continuity of data (e.g. in relation to ancient tree health);
- maintaining important species map for notable species;
- casual recording of species presence;
- maintaining a list of possible student projects;
- monitoring for pests and diseases;
- constructing a comprehensive inventory and safe, accessible storage of survey data.

Far left: Scientific research into bat activity response to management.

Left: Overnight moth-trapping using light traps.

4.1.12 Targets in response to climate change

In addition to the overall mission to conserve biodiversity and maintain the resilience of the Common, some specific targets linked to climate change have been developed.

Target: adapt to climate change.

Achieved by:

- reducing the habitat management season by two weeks so that cutting ceases by February 15;
- replacing hydrocarbon powered vehicles and machinery;
- review disposal of green waste to reduce amount burnt by 30% by 2026;
- keep management policies under review.

Although the scale of climate change can feel overwhelming, everything we do to mitigate rising carbon levels and protect biodiversity is important.

Above: Grazing is a low impact, sustainable management technique that promotes biodiversity.

Left: Management decisions can be made that promote and protect biodiversity, e.g. continuing the use of burning platforms so that management work doesn't damage soils or ground vegetation.

Right: Our ancient trees and woodland lock up carbon, produce oxygen and absorb pollution.

4.2 Aim 2: People

Encourage the sustainable use of Ashtead Common for recreation and promote community involvement in all aspects of the site.

Ashtead Common is protected forever for people to enjoy by virtue of the Corporation of London (Open Spaces) Act 1878. The Act allows people access to Ashtead Common for recreation. Byelaws made under the Act regulate activity to protect the Common and its visitors.

The 1878 Act, together with a 2018 update, permit some other types of activity, such as organised events and some forms of commercial activity to occur under license.

The following section uses the criteria of the Green Flag Award scheme to assess service delivery in relation to people.

4.2.1 A welcoming place

Because there are many places to access Ashtead Common there is no single main entrance point.

Each point of entry has a notice board to display information to visitors, including a map of the site. The current map was developed by community volunteers in 2012 and is designed to clearly show where visitors can walk and ride around the Common. Each map panel indicates if cycling and riding are permitted from that point of entry. The map is also available online and from a leaflet dispenser at the Ashtead Estate Office.

Information boards at main entrance points have small A4 sized cabinets attached to them to display key safety messages. The information displayed in these is rotated regularly to keep it fresh, and covers topics such as fire, fragile trees, OPM and Lyme disease.

Three kilometres of path have been surfaced. Although there is no circular surfaced route around Ashtead Common, the network of surfaced tracks provides through routes linking residential areas to Epsom Common, Princes Coverts (across the A243 Kingston Road) and countryside beyond. Generally, paths are surfaced to a width of 2.75 metres, giving people plenty of space and reducing the potential for conflict between user groups on the busiest routes.

Surfaced routes provide year-round access for wheelchairs and mobility scooters. Main entrances are generally not gated. Accessible gates are installed in places where there is gated access onto the Common.

Grazing is managed using a series of temporary enclosures that are erected immediately prior to the animals arriving and taken down when they move on. This means that only relatively small areas are fenced at any one time. Accessible gates are installed on footpaths that cross the temporary enclosures, and ‘squeezes’ allow access at points where unofficial desire line paths cross the fence line.

Target: maintain Ashtead Common as a welcoming place.

Achieved by:

- regular Ranger patrolling to provide a visual presence and interaction with visitors;
- printing and distributing the site leaflet (map also available online);
- keeping paths and rides clear of encroaching vegetation and regularly mown;
- maintaining dead hedges and finger post signs to demarcate footpaths;
- providing and maintaining surface paths;
- providing and maintaining gates that can be used by people with wheelchairs and pushchairs;
- closing the unsurfaced concessionary rides only when ground conditions deteriorate, and reopening them as soon as conditions allow (rather than using arbitrary calendar dates);
- tackling particularly troublesome parts of the unsurfaced path network to improve access.

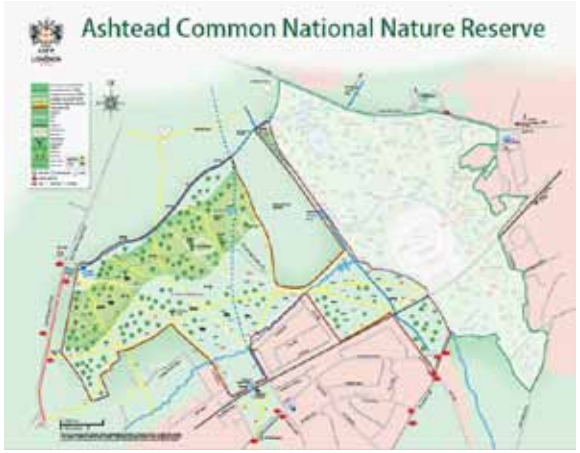
83% of respondents agree that no more paths should be surfaced, other than to deal with localised problem areas.

2020 consultation

Target: provide appropriate signage.

Achieved by:

- limiting the use of signage to situations where it achieves a clear purpose;
- providing and maintaining on-site signage and way-markers;
- keeping information relevant and up to date;
- regularly rotating the safety messages displayed in the A4 cabinets attached to main notice boards;
- using temporary signs (including those about grazing) before and after habitat work, and removing them before they get tired;
- using accessible language that focuses on positive behaviour e.g. 'thank you for taking your litter home' rather than 'do not drop litter'.



Muddy paths

Ashtead Common's muddiness is to be celebrated as the reason for its existence and survival. However, it does mean that much of the path network is hard to traverse in the autumn and winter months.

Section 1.7.2 explains why there are not more surfaced paths on the Common, and section 2.5 explains why it is not drained.

Particularly troublesome wet spots can be addressed, as long as alternative wetland habitat is created in the process. An example of this is Shaun's Puddle created in 2016 to improve access on CR1. Material to fill a depression was obtained by digging a small pond next to the ride. The ground immediately surrounding the area could then be drained into the pond.

4.2.2 Healthy, safe and secure

The City has a strong safety culture and safety systems are imbedded in all aspects of work covered by this plan.

At the heart of the operation is a team of four Rangers working a rota to ensure seven-day cover with provision to respond to incidents and emergencies out of hours. Rangers regularly patrol the Common to assist visitors and advise on behaviour in relation to the byelaws.

Beyond that is a range of safety planning, inspections and systems that transcend all areas of operation to ensure that Ashtead Common is a safe place to visit and work.

As a countryside site managed under legislation that requires the protection of the natural aspect (and one of the City's more recent acquisitions, unbounded by the expectations of the past as described in section 1.4) the provision of facilities on Ashtead Common is limited. However, such features as surfaced paths, benches, gates, way-markers and fences are regularly inspected and kept in good order.

" We are very grateful for having access to the Common during the pandemic and have discovered areas we did not know."

2020 consultation

Target: ensure Ashtead Common is a healthy, safe and secure place.

Achieved by:

- maintaining a dedicated Ranger team working seven days a week and permanently on call for incidents and emergencies;
- regular patrols to assist visitors and advise on behaviour in relation to byelaws;
- system of incident recording, and incident reports shared with Police as required;
- emergency planning information and maps kept up to date and shared with the emergency services (the fire and ambulance services have keys to the site);
- robust system of tree safety inspections (see section 4.3);
- probability of collapse assessment for all ancient oak pollards completed in 2020;
- risk-based approach to managing Oak Processionary Moth infestation;
- systematic approach to managing Lyme disease risk;
- audits of countryside furniture conducted every six months;
- dog bins provided to control dog fouling.

Far right: Monolith tree survey, tree safety inspection.

4.2.3 Well-maintained and clean

Work across several areas of activity contributes towards the achievement of the Green Flag Award scheme standards. This work is explained throughout the plan. The relevant targets in relation to 'well maintained and clean' are summarised here. For some targets, reference is made to the sections of the plan that give more detail.

Littering and fly-tipping are not significant issues on Ashtead Common. When incidents do occur, they are dealt with promptly by the Ranger team. Members of the local community often assist with litter picking.

Target: ensure that Ashtead Common is well maintained and clean.

Achieved by:

- defining industry standards of arboricultural maintenance through research and practice;
- ancient tree programme with individual management prescriptions for each ancient tree (See section 4.1.3);
- programme of tree safety assessments using a zoned risk-based approach (see section 4.3.1);
- safety assessments of standing dead trees;
- litter picking patrols conducted at least twice a week;
- dog bins emptied twice a week;
- graffiti removed within a week;
- offensive graffiti removed within 24 hours;
- damage caused by vandalism made safe within 24 hours;
- grass verges areas cut 10 times a year between March and October;
- residential boundaries regularly inspected and strimmed yearly (see 4.3.5);
- bridge inspections and maintenance undertaken by the City's Department for the Built Environment (see 4.3.3);
- dam inspection conducted twice a year by a Panel Engineer (see section 4.3.4);
- Asset Management Plan overseen by the City of London Corporation's Surveyors Department (covers built structures including heritage assets.

4.2.4 Community involvement

Ashtead Common has benefitted from significant levels of community involvement for over 30 years. During the lifetime of the preceding management plan the Common averaged 6,500 hours of volunteer participation a year.

This comprised contributions from: the Ashtead Common Volunteers, a directly managed conservation work group; the Lower Mole Countryside Partnership; TCV; Surrey Archaeological Society; and corporate volunteer groups. It also included contributions from people engaged in surveying and monitoring and other tasks that contributed to achievements above and beyond core management tasks.

The aim is to maintain a high degree of community involvement during the next 10 years. This means keeping opportunities for engagement relevant, worthwhile and effective. If budgets continue to decrease and less can be done by staff and contractors, the importance of volunteering may increase. However, this can only happen if the existing model evolves and new ways are created for people to be involved.

Target: support at least 5,000 hours of community involvement a year.

Achieved by:

- leading a programme of regular activities for the Ashtead Common Volunteers;
- holding one meeting and one site visit for the Ashtead Common Consultative Group each year;
- offering a range of activities to involve the community in all aspects of our work – practical work, surveying, events and education, interpretation, administration, rangering;
- continuing to involve the Lower Mole Partnership, TCV and other volunteer organisations in the management of Ashtead Common;
- seeking opportunities to promote diversity;
- reviewing volunteering to ensure it is providing the most effective and efficient way for people to contribute towards the management priorities of Ashtead Common;
- planning and delivering projects that include opportunities for community involvement (reed bed project p43 and Roman Villa project p 53).

4.2.5 Marketing and communication

Applying the concept of marketing to Ashtead Common means understanding the Common's significance and the benefits it provides for people and society at large. These elements can then be communicated via key messages aimed at:

- promoting the benefits people enjoy from visiting Ashtead Common (as distinct from promoting Ashtead Common to attract more visitors);
- highlighting the significance of Ashtead Common, its history and ecological importance (sense of place);
- describing the physical evidence of our work (the benefits of management for wildlife and people, including ecosystem services that benefit latent needs);
- providing information for people to safely enjoy their visit and respect the nature reserve to keep it safe from harm.

95% of respondents agree with these key messages.
2020 consultation

Key messages

- Ashtead Common is a special place, and the plants, animals and fungi that make it special are only here because it is carefully looked after.
- There is nowhere else quite like it – it's amazing.
- Nature is important to all of us, we wouldn't survive without it.
- There are many threats to wildlife in general and there are particular threats to Ashtead Common.
- The City of London Corporation funds and maintains Ashtead Common (which is a registered charity) using staff who are skilled at what they do.
- This is of direct benefit to local people and to the wider world.
- Visitors and others can help us to keep Ashtead Common special.
- People visiting Ashtead Common need to stay safe and respect the nature reserve to keep it safe from harm.
- People can help by financially supporting the Ashtead Common charity.

Target Groups

All visitors should be offered key information about Ashtead Common to aid their visit e.g. map, safety information (OPM, Lyme disease, fragile trees) and the unique and special nature of the reserve.

Interpretative material should be written so as to be accessible to a wide range of people, **including young people of school age**.

The **local community** needs to know that their continued love of Ashtead Common and involvement in its care are crucial to its future. They must be reassured that the City of London Corporation shares their passion for protecting the site.

Ashtead Common is outside of London and is not visited frequently by **City of London Staff and elected Members**. Ensuring their understanding of the issues around the management of the nature reserve is important in ensuring financial and other support.

The **Ashtead Common Consultative Group** helps elected Members make decisions about the Common as well as liaising with the wider community. Keeping the group up-to-date on key issues is valuable to all.

Face to face contact: a regular staff presence offers both reassurance and a point of contact for many people. Face-to-face conversations are an effective way to target and deliver key messages to visitors.

Target: maintain a visible Ranger presence.

Achieved by:

- a minimum of two patrols each week and a 24 hour over 365 day on-call facility;
- Rangers to adopt a friendly approach using the four E's technique of -
  - engage
  - explain
  - encourage
  - escalate (to Police if necessary);
- targeted pop-up activities focusing on specific issues;
- Meet the Ranger sessions delivered as part of the events programme.

Virtual contact

As this plan moves towards its expiry date in 2031 this might seem like a statement of the obvious, but many people receive their information, and form opinions based on electronic media. Ashtead Common maintains a presence on Facebook and Twitter, and it is likely that communicating with people using these platforms (and similar as they develop and change) will become increasingly important.

Visitor information is available via the City's website, but increasingly this is becoming a prospectus rather than an archive of information. Consequently, it will be necessary to develop new and innovative ways to convey detailed site and subject specific information.

For example, the opportunity to interpret the Roman Villa and Tileworks using augmented reality could be realised as part of a project to increase awareness of this important heritage asset.

Ashtead Common currently part-funds a post based elsewhere within The Commons Division to assist with interpretation and communications. It is likely that this arrangement will need revising as the demand for this area of activity increases.

It is also important that printed material, particularly the site map, remains readily available.

Target: optimise virtual interaction.

Achieved by:

- maintaining communications via social media;
- producing a monthly electronic newsletter for subscribers;
- considering implications of resourcing social media communication within the Commons Division;
- producing site and subject specific material for electronic and physical distribution;
- providing a site map leaflet and keep office dispenser topped-up;
- seeking opportunities to interpret the Roman Villa and Tileworks.

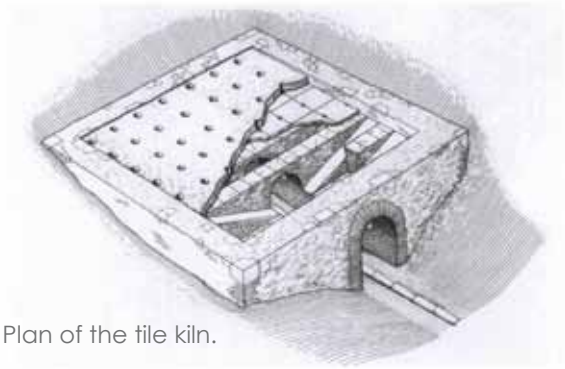
Roman Villa project

Surrey Archaeological Society completed on-site investigations of Ashtead's Roman Villa and Tileworks in 2013. Since then, work has continued behind the scenes to research and interpret the findings.

During the period of the next management plan we would like to share what we have learnt about Ashtead's Roman (and Iron Age) past with visitors and the local community.

Such a project might use virtual reality and electronic media to bring the story alive. It might also have an educational element and opportunities for community involvement.

This project will need external funding to realise its potential.

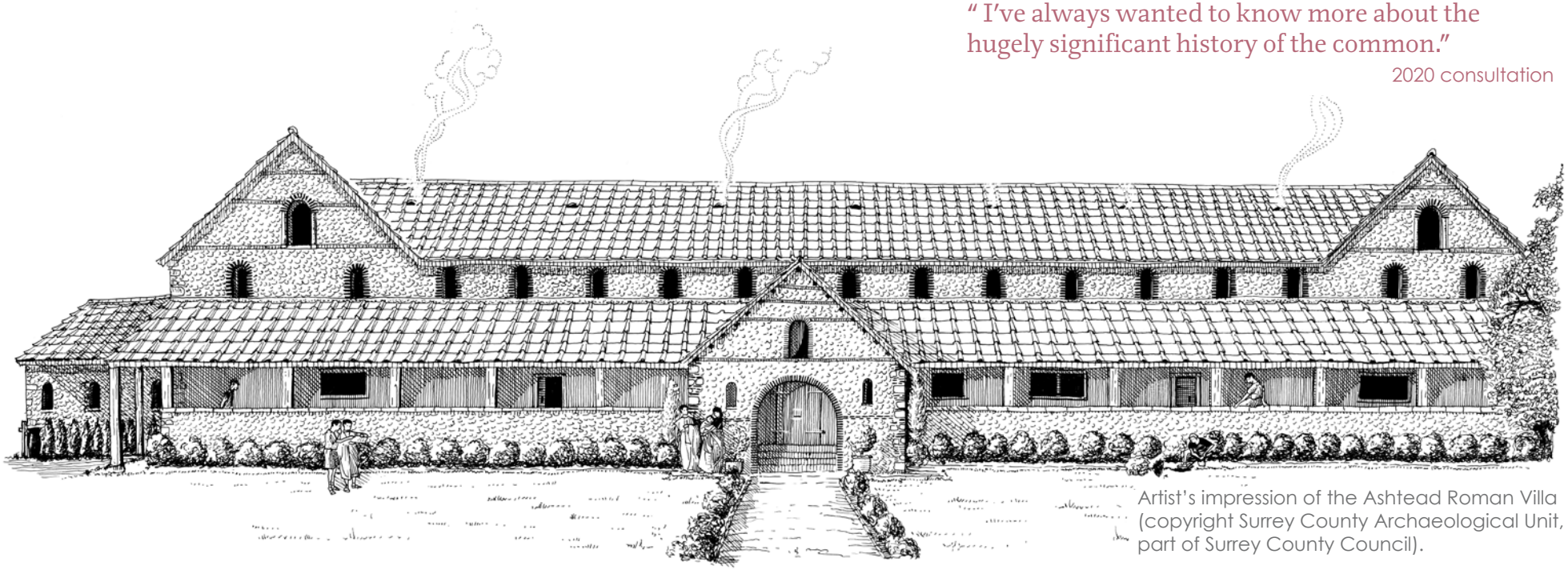


Plan of the tile kiln.

88% of respondents support this project proposal.

" I've always wanted to know more about the hugely significant history of the common."

2020 consultation



Artist's impression of the Ashtead Roman Villa (copyright Surrey County Archaeological Unit, part of Surrey County Council).

4.2.6 Activities and events

Events on the Common tend to be small-scale Ranger-led activities such as guided walks. Often these are themed around nature and the work of the Ranger team. Events focussed on the Roman Villa and Tileworks are often popular, and exploration of the built heritage can be linked to the cultural heritage of the historic landscape.

The Common does not lend itself to large static events such as festivals and fairs due to the lack of infrastructure and suitable space.

When larger events like cross country runs do occur, they tend to be organised by others under license. The City of London (Open Spaces) Act 2018 allows events to take place but requires a local policy to control them to protect the open space. Ashtead Common's policy limits the number of people that can attend an organised event to 250 and directs organisers of events with over 50 participants to the late summer and early autumn months when there is less chance of disturbing wildlife but before ground conditions deteriorate.

Under the 2018 Act, charges can be levied for licensing events and commercial activities.

Target: provide and facilitate events.

Achieved by:

- a Ranger-led programme of 12 low-key events a year;
- hosting one or two larger events each year that support conservation aims or provide healthy outdoor recreational opportunities and/or community benefit;
- hosting meetings for specialist groups at no cost if their visit contributes to a greater understanding of Ashtead Common's ecology;
- at least outreach six talks a year to local clubs and societies;
- promoting Ashtead Common at two external events a year, such as Ashtead Village Day;
- promoting events through a variety of media and using electronic booking;
- exploring options for charging for events using authority given by the 2018 Act.

10K run, Ashtead Common.

4.2.7 Educational visits, work experience and student studies

Ashtead Common is a great place to learn about the wonders, complexity and fragility of nature. It naturally provides places for learning and play without the need for artificial enhancement. The Common can function as an outdoor classroom for a range of studies and activities.

The Ranger team responds positively to requests by schools, colleges and youth groups to provide educational sessions on site whenever possible.

Work experience can be accommodated within safeguarding constraints. Anyone under the age of 18 is considered vulnerable, but it is often possible to introduce controls to facilitate placements.

Undergraduate and postgraduate studies of Ashtead Common are encouraged and supported, often through links with higher education establishments.

Fungi identification walk.

Target: provide opportunities for formal learning.

Achieved by:

- responding positively to requests to provide educational activities;
- supporting visits by schools and educational establishments;
- guiding educational and youth organisations on the safe use of the Common in relation to specific hazards such as ticks (Lyme disease), OPM and fragile trees;
- widening and regularly mowing paths and rides to reduce tick contacts;
- providing work experience placements when safeguarding measures are possible;
- advising students on possible topics for study;
- exploring the introduction of a scheme to license commercial activity to allow forest school activities within constraints necessary to protect the Common (e.g. no fires).

" It is amazing to fully understand how much goes into its management and preservation!"

2020 consultation

4.2.8 Liaison with other public open spaces

Ashtead Common shares its SSSI designation with neighbouring Epsom Common, and regular liaison with Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is maintained via a SSSI Forum that also includes Natural England, Epsom Common Association and the Lower Mole Partnership.

Part of Ashtead Common is owned by Mole Valley District Council, within whose boundary the whole Common lies. It is therefore important to liaise closely with the authority. This is achieved in part through the Ashtead Common Consultative Group, but also via links at officer level.

Target: maintain good working relationships with other public open spaces.

Achieved by:

- attending and chairing (on rotation) the Epsom and Ashtead Commons SSSI forum;
- holding one meeting and one site visit for the Ashtead Common Consultative Group each year;
- contributing to the work of the River Mole Catchment Partnership in relation to the Rye Brook.

4.3 Aim 3: Estate and asset management

Protect Ashtead Common and its users from harm. Fulfil legal obligations, challenge threats and maintain assets in good condition.

4.3.1 Tree safety

The tree safety strategy for Ashtead Common takes full account of the conservation importance of the site.

The inspection process should not lead to a loss of character or species diversity. Rather, it should assist the management process ensuring that, as far as reasonably practicable, balance is maintained between conservation and risk management. Accordingly, the following principles are applied:

- Standing dead timber is an important resource and is left wherever possible. Dead trees are 'reduced' if safety work is necessary.
- Limbs or timber felled are left *in situ* wherever possible.
- The presence of fungal bodies on trees is not to be taken as an automatic indication that the tree is dangerous but may act as an indicator that further, detailed, inspection is required.
- When considering remedial action to reduce risk, due consideration is given to removing the target from the hazard wherever possible.

Zoning

Zoning is an important part of managing tree risk. Each part of the Common is divided into one of three risk zones.

ZONE	FREQUENCY
High risk Main public areas, properties, roads, easy access routes etc.	Annually in autumn/winter (any trees retained noted to have defects but not felled - inspected every six months)
Medium risk Other areas frequented by the public not included above	At least every two years (retained trees every 12 months)
Low risk	During normal routine patrols
High and medium risk zones following a storm event (winds gusting 45 mph+)	Areas inspected as soon as practicable after the event (usually next day but always within five days)

Target: manage tree safety.

Achieved by:

- using a risk-based approach and a zoning system;
- annual review of the tree inspection (zoning) map;
- carrying out a documented tree hazard inspection regime;
- using experienced inspectors trained to Professional Tree Inspector level
- only recording trees with defects;
- prioritising work identified in inspections;
- inspecting after storm events;
- recording tree failures;
- survey and monitoring, particularly in relation to ancient trees.

4.3.2 Historic features

There are two Scheduled Monuments on Ashtead Common. A feature listed (1005955) in 1925 as 'Camp in Ashtead Forest' is actually the site of an Iron Age settlement. This feature is often shown on maps as 'Earthworks'.

The 'Roman Villa in Ashtead Forest' was listed in 1934 (1003753). The areas designated exclude many of the features subsequently discovered, including the Tileworks.

These areas do however benefit from the protection afforded the whole Common under the 1878 Act.

Currently the management of Scheduled Monuments and associated heritage assets involves managing the vegetation growing over them to limit root damage. In future years this might involve the use of livestock, but this is not envisaged during the lifetime of this plan unless a suitable virtual fence system is adopted (see 4.1.6).

Target: conserve and protect heritage assets.

Achieved by:

- producing a management statement for the Villa, Earthworks and Tileworks to guide conservation;
- defining a heritage management zone to include the Scheduled Monuments, Tileworks, Proto Villa and Well to target work to interpret, manage and protect features;
- producing interpretative signage for heritage features (see also Roman Villa project p55);
- patrolling and enforcing byelaws to protect heritage features;
- conserving and storing artefacts in good condition;
- maintaining the Coal Tax posts (see overleaf);
- managing vegetation.

Coal Tax posts

A tax on coal entering London was introduced following the Great Fire in 1666 to fund the rebuilding of the City. The tax continued for many years, and in 1861 the boundary at which the tax became payable was defined as the Metropolitan Police District and the City. About 280 posts were installed to mark the point within which duty was payable so that nobody could claim ignorance of the tax.

Almost 200 Coal Tax posts survive, including three on Ashtead Common. Their existence on site is coincidental to the City's ownership of the Common.

4.3.3 Bridges

The main bridges on Ashtead Common are inspected and maintained by the City's Department for the Built Environment, which also maintains the City's bridges over the Thames. The Two Bridges were strengthened in 2018 to achieve a load rating of 18 tonnes (axle limit of 11.5 tonnes). Woodlands Road Bridge is due to be strengthened in 2021. When the work is completed it will have a load rating of 40 tonnes. The bridges over the Rye Brook at the end of The Common and Overdale are rated at 7.5 tonnes.

Target: maintain bridges.

Achieved by:

- routinely inspecting bridges at The Common, Two Bridges, Overdale, Woodlands Road and The Greenway;
- monitoring of smaller structures like Adam's Bridge and The Greenway boardwalk carried out during site audits every six months.

" It is a truly special place, especially considering it is inside the M25. Well done to all the hard work that goes into keeping it in such good condition."

2020 consultation

Right: Rye Brook Dam and Flow Control Structure. (see overleaf)

4.3.4 Rye Brook dam and flow control structure

The Rye Brook dam was installed in 2004 and designed to cope with a 1 in 100-year storm event. At capacity, the complex will not hold the 25,000 cubic metres of water needed for it to constitute a reservoir under the Reservoirs Act 1975. However, because of the potential for damage to downstream property if the structure were to fail, the City manages the dam as if it were a reservoir under the 1975 Act.

A Supervising Engineer inspects the dam twice a year. Typical maintenance requirements include managing vegetation to ensure it does not impede water flow.

Target: maintain Rye Brook dam.

Achieved by:

- inspection by a Supervising Engineer twice a year;
- management of vegetation to ensure channel and overspill area are not impeded.

"We have lived in Ashtead for 25 years and have been impressed with the work over the last decade which has opened up areas of the common and increased diversity."

2020 consultation

4.3.5 Residential boundaries

Boundaries with neighbouring residential properties are managed according to set criteria to ensure safety and consistency. Managing for light and views are not generally considered appropriate reasons to undertake work.

Generally, homeowners are not permitted access across the Common to maintain their properties, although exceptions are sometimes granted if the work benefits the Common or its visitors – for example tree safety work.

Criteria for managing vegetation along residential boundaries

Protection: to maintain the legal tenure of Ashtead Common.

Biodiversity: to remove any "undesirable species".

Tree Safety: to improve access for carrying out tree safety inspections and works.

Fire: reduce the risk of fire crossing the residential boundary.

Flooding: clearing trees & shrubs from the banks of streams and ditches.

Access: to maintain access for routine maintenance and patrols.

Target: Manage residential boundaries.

Achieved by:

- regularly patrolling and inspecting (including tree safety);
- periodic strimming (usually under contract) to maintain access;
- using set criteria to determine requests to manage vegetation;
- granting annually renewing licence agreements to allow neighbours direct access onto the Common (or place one end of a bridge upon the Common where a ditch or the Rye Brook delineate the boundary);
- only permitting under licence access across the Common to the rear of properties for maintenance if the proposed work benefits the Common or its visitors (tree safety for example).

4.3.6 Built assets

Many of the built structures on Ashtead Common are maintained by the City Surveyors Department and are listed in a 20-year plan for periodic maintenance and replacement. Assets managed this way include the Ashtead Estate Office, entrance barriers, corporate sign (image) boards and built heritage features including the Scheduled Monuments. Some built assets are not currently managed by the Surveyors Department, most notably the road called The Common that runs along the western edge of Woodfield.

The short section of Woodlands Road that runs over Ashtead Common between the Woodlands Road entrance and Marneys Close is subject to an easement agreement drawn up in 1977. Under this agreement the City is indemnified against any claims made in relation to the condition of the road.


Adrian Brown

Target: maintain built assets.

Achieved by:

- 20-year maintenance plan;
- system for reporting and rectifying defects;
- on-site audits conducted every six months;
- monthly workplace inspections;
- periodic gulley sucking of surface; water drains along The Common and Estate Office yard;
- periodic reapplication of thermoplastic lines at the Estate Office and The Common.

Ashtead Estate Office

The Ashtead Estate Office was constructed in 1997 not only to provide a base for the Ranger team, but also as a facility to support volunteering and community involvement so integral to the life of Ashtead Common. It has meeting space and office accommodation that is often shared with other City departments.

It is the only publicly accessible building north of the railway line, and as such fulfils a vital function within the community by acting as a polling station for elections.

4.3.7 Utilities

The City of London (Open Spaces) Act 2018 allows the granting of easements and licences under whatever terms the City considers necessary to protect the open space.

A map of services is maintained as a guide only and does not replace the need for thorough checks prior to any activity that might impact on services.

Target: protect utilities and infrastructure while safeguarding the Common.

Achieved by:

- granting access for the installation and maintenance of infrastructure assets under license only if the Common is adequately protected;
- ensuring companies proposing work that might damage the SSSI gain consent from Natural England;
- maintaining a map of utilities to act only as a general location guide;
- maintaining our own water supply network across the Common for grazing animals and regularly monitoring use to check for leaks.

4.3.8 Emergency planning

It is essential that plans are in place to deal with emergencies.

Target: plan for emergencies.

Achieved by:

- maintaining emergency plans and keeping them available for instant use;
- regular liaison with emergency services;
- fire service and ambulance service have keys to access the Common;
- 24 hours over 7 days rota for Ranger response;
- maintaining a 24-hour call answering service for people to report incidents.

Robust emergency planning guides our response to incidents.

4.3.9 External accreditation

Achieving external quality standards validates management practices and gives assurance to our community, staff and elected Members that Ashtead Common is being well run.

Ashtead Common has successfully achieved a Green Flag award every year since 2003 and a Green Heritage award since 2007.

External assessments of wildlife and habitat quality are welcomed and outside input into surveying and data analysis is sought.

Target: seek external accreditation.

Achieved by:

- applying annually for Green Flag and Green Heritage accreditation;
- seeking professional input into wildlife and habitat assessments;
- welcoming specialist groups to survey for species.

4.3.10 Local development

Ashtead Common must be protected from potential harm caused by development near its boundaries, land use changes or proposed initiatives that could increase pressure on the site.

This will involve working with neighbouring authorities and others to ensure potential impacts of development proposals are fully explained. The obvious impacts of increased infrastructure and housing are often understood, but less considered factors such as light pollution and habitat fragmentation should also be highlighted.

Target: protect Ashtead Common from inappropriate development beyond its borders that could adversely impact the site.

Achieved by:

- monitoring plans for development beyond the boundaries of the Common;
- commenting on and objecting to development plans if they are considered detrimental to the Common;
- working with neighbouring authorities and others to ensure Ashtead Common is recognised and valued.

5.0 Work Programme

The work programme years run from 1 April to 31 March. Each numbered row is associated with a detailed work plan.

Key to projects: **1** - essential; **2** - highly desirable; **3** - desirable

AIM 1: BIOLOGICAL		Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10
Code	**Ancient oak pollards**	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
1.1	Practical work on ancient pollards	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
1.2	Manage vegetation around ancient pollards	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
1.3	Protect roots of 20 ancient pollards	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**
1.4	Create 100 new pollards	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**
1.5	Create habitat piles and veteranise trees	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**
1.6	Retain other important trees	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**
Code	**Bracken, firebreaks and rides**	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
1.7	Increase area of bracken mown by 2.8ha	**2**	**2**	**2**							
1.8	Apply targetted herbicide to control bracken	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**
1.9	Selectively strim and rake bracken	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**
1.10	Increase firebreak network by 2,675m	**2**	**2**	**2**							
1.11	Maintain existing rides and firebreaks	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**

AIM 1: BIOLOGICAL		Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10
Code	**Grazing**	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
1.12	Graze Ashtead Common	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
1.13	Increase the area grazed by 23ha		**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**					
1.14	Monitor development of virtual fencing systems			**3**			**3**			**3**	
Code	**Woodland**	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
1.15	Coppice hazel stands on rotation	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**
1.16	Manage transition zones	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**
1.17	Remove non-native species	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**
1.18	Control invasive species	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**
Code	**Scrub**	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
1.19	Manage scrub on rotation	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
1.20	Create new blocks of dense young scrub growth	**1**		**1**		**1**		**1**		**1**	
1.21	Bring additional 3.1ha into rotation		**3**			**3**			**3**		
1.22	Increase area of managed ecotones by 1.57ha			**3**			**3**			**3**	
1.23	Mow grassland within scrub areas	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**
Code	**Grassland**	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
1.24	Cut grass on rotation and remove arisings	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
1.25	Review Woodfield cutting rotation	**2**									
1.26	Excavate encroaching scrub on Woodfield and ditch		**1**		**1**		**1**		**1**		**1**

AIM 1: BIOLOGICAL		Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10
Code	**Wetland**	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
1.27	Review pond maintenance regimes			**3**							
1.28	Create a new pond							**3**			
1.29	Create dog exclusion zones in some ponds		**2**			**2**					
Code	**Monitoring and research**	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
1.30	Ancient tree 1 - next 10 year plan and condition										**1**
1.31	Veteranised tree survey										
1.32	SSSI Assessment and Woodfield	**2**									
1.33	Flies	**2**									
1.34	Birds				**2**				**2**		
1.35	Grasshoppers and crickets			**3**							
1.36	Bees and wasps					**3**					
1.37	Spiders							**3**			
1.38	Grassland beetles									**3**	
1.39	Ferns		**3**								
1.40	Lichens						**3**				
1.41	Mosses										
1.42	Wetland assessment				**2**						

AIM 1: BIOLOGICAL		Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10
Code	***Monitoring and research contd.***	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
1.43	Saproxylic invertebrates			**2**							
1.44	Fungi		**2**								
1.45	Soil pH and nitrogen										
1.46	Maintain important species map	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**
1.47	Collate survey data into one accessible place		**2**								
Code	**Adapt to climate change**	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
1.48	End cutting season early (and review timing periodically)	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
1.49	Replace hydrocarbon-powered vehicles and equipment									**1**	
1.50	Reduce amount of green waste burnt					**1**					
1.51	Reduce electricity consumption	**2**					**2**				

Key to projects: **1** - essential; **2** - highly desirable; **3** - desirable

" Thank you for all your hard work maintaining the common; it is a superb natural resource that benefits the whole community and is at the very heart of Ashtead."

2020 consultation

AIM 2: PEOPLE		Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10
Code	**A welcoming place**	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
2.1	Regular Ranger patrols	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
2.2	Print and distribute site leaflet	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**
2.3	Mow paths and rides	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
2.4	Maintain dead hedges and finger posts	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**
2.5	Maintain surfaced paths	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**
2.6	Maintain gates	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**
2.7	Open and close concessionary rides	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**
2.8	Tackle issues with unsurfaced path network	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**
2.9	Provide and maintain on-site signage	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
2.10	Regularly rotate safety messages	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
2.11	Temporarily sign grazing and work areas	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
Code	**Healthy, safe and secure**	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
2.12	Maintain 24hr, 365 day Ranger cover	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
2.13	Record and report incidents	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
2.14	Maintain and update emergency planning information	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
2.15	Maintain risk-based approach to managing OPM	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**
2.16	Maintain risk-based approach to managing Lyme disease	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**

AIM 2: PEOPLE		Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10
Code	***Healthy, safe and secure contd.***	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
2.17	Conduct audits of countryside furniture every six months	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**
2.18	Provide dog bins	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**
Code	**Well-maintained and clean**	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
2.19	Litter-picking patrols at least twice a week	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
2.20	Dog bins emptied twice a week	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
2.21	Graffiti removed within a week	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**
2.22	Offensive graffiti removed within 24 hours	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
2.23	Damage caused by vandalism made safe within 24 hours	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
2.24	Grass verges cut 10 times each year	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**
Code	**Community involvement**	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
2.25	Lead programme of directly-managed volunteer activity	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**
2.26	Meet the Ashtead Common Consultative Group twice a year	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
2.27	Provide a range of volunteering opportunities	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**
2.28	Involve other volunteer organisations such as Lower Mole, TCV	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**
2.29	Review volunteering						**1**				

Key to projects: **1** - essential; **2** - highly desirable; **3** - desirable

AIM 2: PEOPLE		Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10
Code	**Marketing and communication**	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
2.30	Maintain social media presence	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**
2.31	Develop capacity to resource social media										
2.32	Produce site and subject specific material	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
2.33	Produce monthly electronic newsletter	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**
Code	**Activities and events**	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
2.34	Deliver Ranger-led programme of 12 events each year	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**
2.35	Host 1-2 larger events to promote conservation, health etc.	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**
2.36	Deliver six outreach talks to local clubs and societies	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**
2.37	Promote Ashtead Common at two external events each year	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**
2.38	Introduce scheme to license activities and events	**2**									
Code	**Educational visits, work experience and students**	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
2.39	Provide educational activities where possible, on request	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**
2.40	Provide opportunities for work experience where possible	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**
2.41	Maintain a list of possible study topics	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**	**3**
2.42	License educational activities in accordance with scheme	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**

Key to projects: **1** - essential; **2** - highly desirable; **3** - desirable

AIM 3: ESTATE AND ASSET MANAGEMENT		Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10
Code	**Tree safety**	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
3.1	Inspect trees in accordance with tree safety policy	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
3.2	Undertake tree safety work	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
3.3	Annual review of zoning map	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
3.4	Inspect standing dead trees	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
Code	**Conserve and protect heritage assets**	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
3.5	Produce management statement for heritage assets	**3**									
3.6	Produce interpretative signage for heritage features		**3**								
3.7	Maintain Coal Tax posts			**2**							
3.8	Manage vegetation growing on heritage assets	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
Code	**Estate and asset management**	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
3.9	Boundaries regularly inspected and maintained	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
3.10	Bridges regularly inspected by Dept. of Built Environment										
3.11	Rye Brook Dam inspected twice a year by Panel Engineer	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**
3.12	Mow dam and control vegetation growth in channel	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
3.13	Inspect and maintain banks of the Rye Brook	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
3.14	Maintain and implement 20-year asset management plan	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
3.15	Clean drains at Estate Office yard and along The Common		**2**			**2**			**2**		

AIM 3: ESTATE AND ASSET MANAGEMENT		Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10
Code	*Estate and asset management contd.*	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
3.16	Reapply thermoplastic lines at office and The Common	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
3.17	Grant licences for infrastructure installation and maintenance	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
3.18	Maintain water supply to drinking troughs	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
Code	**External accreditation**	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
3.19	Green Flag and Green Heritage	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**
Code	**Income generation**	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
3.20	Administer grants and apply for grant funding	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
3.21	Wayleaves	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**
Code	**Special projects**	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
SP1	Reed bed filtration system at Two Bridges										
SP2	Interpretation of the Roman Villa and environs										

Key to projects: **1** - essential; **2** - highly desirable; **3** - desirable

" You have dramatically turned around the gradual decline of The Common because of lack of management to what it is today - a National Nature Reserve. Thank you!"

2020 consultation

Appendix A: Local Plans

Mole Valley Local Plan (At the time of writing this is in development: the information below is subject to change)	
Policy	**Summary of content**
Strategy SS Rural Areas	High priority placed on protecting rural character, areas of recognised biodiversity, landscape and heritage importance.
Policy EN1 Green Belt	Inappropriate development within the Green Belt will not be permitted.
Policy EN9 Enhancing biodiversity	Development should protect, enhance or recover wildlife habitat, particularly in or adjacent to sites designated for their nature importance. Development within SSSIs or SNCIs will not generally be permitted. Where practical, development proposals are required to achieve measurable net gains in biodiversity, increase coherence of ecological networks, offer opportunities for improved health and wellbeing, provide educational opportunities.
Policy EN13 Promoting environmental quality	Development should minimize emission of pollutants, maintain or improve watercourse quality and mitigate potential adverse impact.
Kingston Core Strategy 2012-2027	
Policy	**Summary of content**
Policy CS3 The natural and green environment	Access to and protection of open space. Promote management of biodiversity, including working in partnership to protect and enhance Kingston's open space network. The document also states the need to maintain key views across open space and shows two such views looking towards Ashtead Common.
Policy DM5 Green Belt	Development adjacent to Green Belt must not adversely impact. Ensure new development contributes to the provision and improvement of open space. Ensure development proposals do not harm open space. Green Belt will be protected from inappropriate development (stated elsewhere in plan).
DM6 Biodiversity	Ensure new development does not result in a net loss of biodiversity.

Appendix B: Basic Payment Scheme Cross Compliance Requirements

Condition	Summary of content	Implications for Ashtead Common
GAEC 5	Limiting soil erosion	Minimize damage to soil caused by livestock or vehicles and machinery.
GAEC 7a	Protect boundary features such as hedgerows and banks	Take reasonable steps to ensure green cover within 2m of the centre of a hedgerow. Do not cut a hedgerow between March 1st and August 31st. Do not remove earth banks.
GAEC 7b	Public Rights of Way	Do not obstruct paths. Maintain footpath furniture to make them safe and easy to use.
GAEC 7c	Trees	Trees must not be felled between March 1st and August 31st apart from safety requirements.
GAEC 7e	Scheduled Monuments	Historic England consent required for anything affecting Scheduled Monuments.
SMR 1	Nitrate Vulnerable Zones	The Common is not in a NVZ (but it is in a Drinking Water Safeguard Zone, with no specific requirements).
SMR 2	Wild birds	Comply with management notices served by Natural England. Must not recklessly destroy or damage interest features.
SMR 3	Habitats and species	Must not destroy a plant of European protected species.
SMR 7	Cattle	Must tag, have passports and notify the British Cattle Movement Service of movements and deaths.
SMR 13	Animal welfare	Includes the need for a daily inspection of animals

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CITY OF LONDON

Ashtead Common

Registered Charity

Ashtead Common
Ashtead Estate Office
Woodfield Road
Ashtead
KT21 2DU

Phone: 01372 279 083

Email: city.commons@cityoflondon.gov.uk

https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do-/green-spaces/ashtead-common

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