



CROXLEY COMMON MOOR

GREENSPACE ACTION PLAN 2025 – 2030

BRIEFING DOCUMENT



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1. INTRODUCTION

A new five-year Greenspace Action Plan (GAP) is being produced for Croxley Common Moor. This briefing document provides an overview of how the GAP will be produced and sets out how stakeholders can contribute to shaping the plan.

GAPs are map-based management plans that provide focus and direction for the running and improvement of open spaces. They provide a clear, logical process to determine the activities that should take place over a stated period of time to achieve the objectives for the site.

The GAP is being produced by the Countryside Management Service (CMS), part of Hertfordshire County Council's Countryside and Rights of Way Service, on behalf of and in partnership with Three Rivers District Council. The completed document will inform the management actions to be undertaken over the next five years, commencing in April 2025.

Engaging communities is integral to the production of GAPs, to ensure that stakeholders are fully aware of and able to interact with the plan production process. This briefing document initiates and supports this community engagement.

The engagement period will run from 8 July 2024 to 5 August 2024. A further engagement period will provide an opportunity to assess the draft version of the GAP. Please use the contact details in Section 6 to comment on the aspirations for the site.

This document has been broken down into the following sections:

Section 2 provides an overview of the site and location map.

Section 3 reviews recent management.

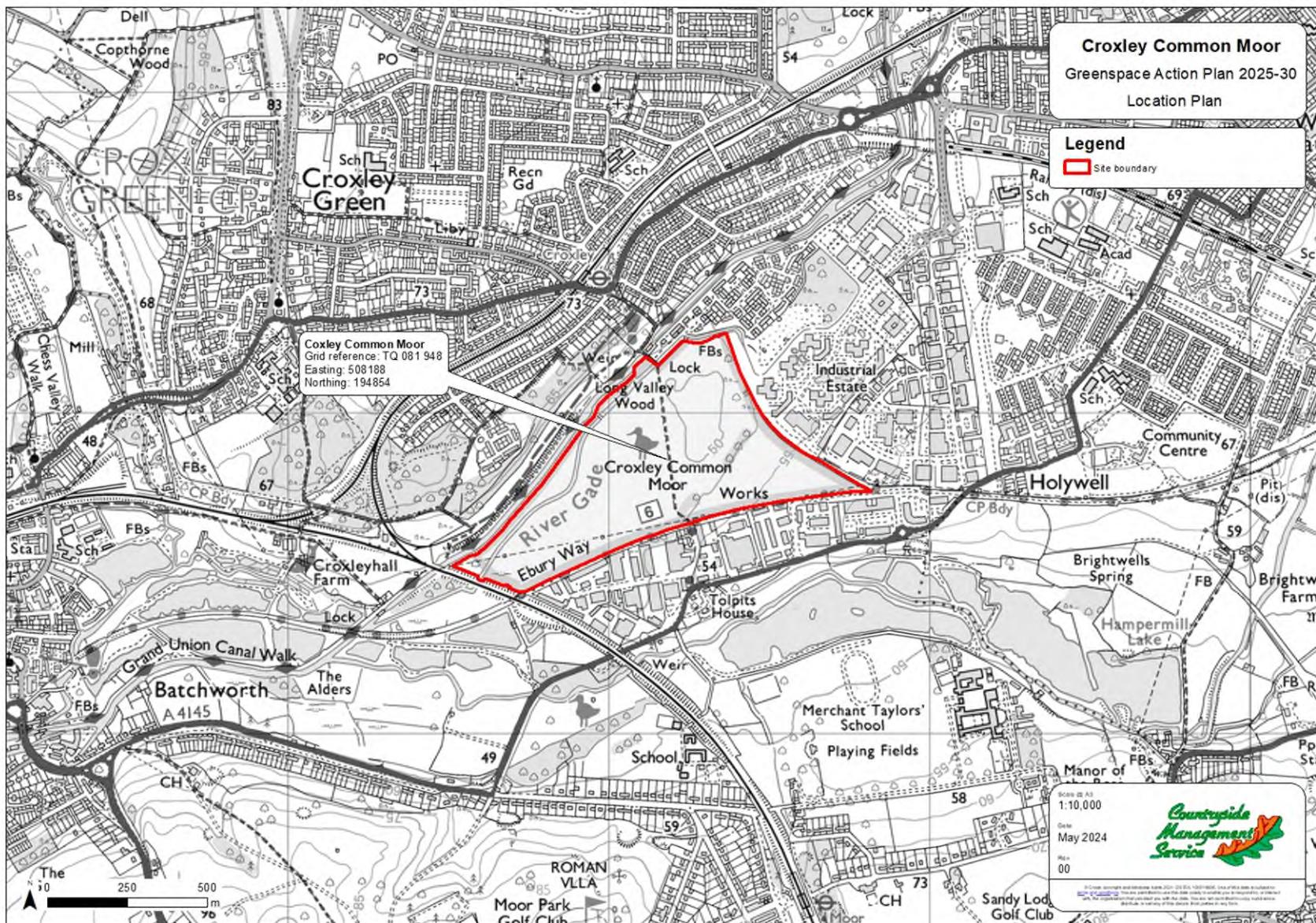
Section 4 contains the core aims and objectives.

Section 5 summarises the public engagement methodology, setting out how and when stakeholders can contribute to the plan.

2. BACKGROUND

Croxley Common Moor is an important open space located in Croxley Green, covering an area of approximately 39 hectares. The site is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and consists of a mosaic of wildlife habitats including trees, river, scrub, grassland and wetland. The grassland in particular is of high nature conservation and landscape value, consisting of a mixture of locally rare acid and neutral grassland communities. A range of soil types support a high diversity of plant species, including important acid heathland indicator species such as Petty whin, Dyers greenweed and Heather, while areas of hawthorn, broom and gorse give structural diversity. The Grand Union Canal and the River Gade run along the north-west of the site and areas along the River Gade are dominated by tall rush, grass and sedge communities. The diversity of habitats supports a wide variety of wildlife, in particular a rich invertebrate fauna, including several locally rare species.

The Moor is locally valued as a place to undertake a wide range of recreational activities including walking, wildlife watching and practical volunteering. It is used extensively by people from the local community and nearby business estates, and provides good access links between Rickmansworth, Watford and Northwood via the adjacent Ebury Way with which the site has multiple entrances. The site is managed jointly by Three Rivers District Council, the Countryside Management Service and the Friends of Croxley Common Moor, a local community group.



3. REVIEW OF RECENT MANAGEMENT

Management of the site in recent years has been directed through two documents, a ten-year Habitat Plan, along with an Access Plan produced in 2016. Management has also been led by the Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreement for the site, and as the site is a SSSI, advice from Natural England.

Ongoing grassland management is delivered through conservation grazing, with around 30 cattle grazing the site between May and October. Open grazing has produced a variation in grazing pressure across the site, with cattle favouring drier grassland areas over wetter areas. There has been a long-term ambition to graze the site with native breeds, which would be more likely to enter these wetter areas. Ragwort is present within the grassland, at varying levels year on year. This is pulled annually by volunteers and removed from site.

Beyond grazing, the main management required on the Moor is scrub management. When grazing on the Moor ceased in the 20th Century, scrub began to encroach across the site at the expense of grassland habitats. The return of cattle grazing helps keep remaining grassland areas open, however, scrub management is a large part of volunteer activity on the site, with both the Friends of Croxley Common Moor and CMS volunteers undertaking scrub clearance to reduce the extent across the site. Material is currently disposed of through burning on site on sacrificial sites. Volunteer scrub management is supplemented by contractor works to tackle larger areas, the most significant in recent years being the removal of willows from the wetter western end of the site, though much of this area has regrown with dense birch growth. Whilst scrub management has been successful in creating a mosaic of scrub ages and structure across the site, it has not always resulted in scrub reduction and the desired reversion of cleared areas back to grassland. As part of the GAP production process, a repeat of previous scrub distribution analysis will be undertaken using aerial photos to map changes in scrub extent across the site and evaluate the success of recent work.

Site management has also been tailored to the requirements of the slate sober moth, for which Croxley Common Moor was the last known site in the country. This included fencing off trial areas to promote the growth of the caterpillar food plant, petty whin, by protecting young growth from cattle and rabbit grazing. Fencing has since been removed as there appeared to be little difference between fenced and unfenced areas.

The main area of trees on site is represented by a belt running north-south across the Moor, with a number of mature trees present, particularly ash. Elsewhere, scattered individual trees are found across the site, including oak and willow. Apart from the willow removal mentioned above, little management has been carried out on these.

The Access Plan included a number of upgrades to the site, many of which have been completed over the course of recent years. This has included installation of kissing gates at main access points, construction of a section of boardwalk, replacement of interpretation, replacement of the bridge over the River Gade at the end of Mill Lane and surfacing of the Public Footpath across the site.

4. GREENSPACE ACTION PLAN (GAP) 2025-2030

The Croxley Common Moor GAP 2025-2030 will be a simple, easy to read plan for use by officers of TRDC, CMS and members of the public, and will act as a guide to the work of volunteers. The plan will be largely map based, with sequential, annual management maps to show the actions planned for each year. The resulting change will be represented on the map for the following year. The document will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains effective and relevant.

The plan will be costed to the secured grant funding, and work programmed to minimise disruption for site users and neighbours.

The aim and objectives of the GAP will be as follows:

Aims

To provide a valuable, welcoming green space for the community whilst ensuring the nationally important biodiversity features are protected and enhanced.

Objectives

A. A welcoming place – *To provide a welcoming green space for the enjoyment of the local community, finding a balance between biodiversity and public access*

A1 Maintain site entrances to form welcoming, appealing gateways to the Moor

A2 Maintain a suitable network of access routes across the site, including an additional boardwalk at the entrance from the Ebury Way identified in the previous Access Plan

A3 Consolidate signage at main entrances to ensure clear communication to site users

Healthy, safe and secure – *To provide and maintain clear and safe public access onto, and around Croxley Common Moor*

B1 Carry out planned and reactive tree works to address safety issues

B2 Respond promptly to reports of misuse of the site, ensuring a proportionate response to anti-social behaviour

B. Well-maintained and clean – *To ensure that all aspects of Croxley Common Moor are kept clean and well maintained*

C1 Manage and maintain paths, boardwalks, benches, access infrastructure and signage

C2 Remove fly-tipping, undertake regular litter picking, empty litter bins, and carry out small scale vegetation management along access routes

C. Environmental management – *To ensure all aspects of site management are undertaken with sustainability as a guiding principle*

D1 Carry out management in compliance with the SSSI designation of the site

D2 Carry out all management in accordance with the Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) scheme for the site, and apply for future schemes where appropriate

D3 Ensure all site activities adhere to relevant TRDC policies and strategies, including all work undertaken by contractors

D4 Ensure ongoing maintenance costs are financially sustainable

D5 Secure external funding to ensure the viability of capital works

D6 Ensure impacts of climate change are considered in management decisions, both in terms of the effect of climate change on wildlife habitats and of carbon emissions from management operations

D7 Carry out management according to environmental best practice, including a presumption against the use of herbicide

D8 Monitor and record improvements to habitats and wildlife, including evaluating success of grazing through undertaking rapid grassland assessments

Biodiversity, landscape and heritage – *To conserve and enhance the important wildlife, landscape and heritage features of Croxley Common Moor*

- E1 Carry out appropriate responsive management to conserve and enhance the mosaic of important wildlife habitats for which the site is designated a SSSI
- E2 Maintain a diverse range of grassland habitats, maximising areas for wildflowers and pollinators through continued grazing
- E3 Manage vegetation to promote the maintenance of a mosaic of wetland features across the site
- E4 Undertake a programme of scrub management with the aim of reducing scrub levels across the site, whilst maintaining a diverse range of age and structure of remaining scrub
- E5 Manage woodland habitats for their nature conservation value, maintaining a diverse structure and range of species present
- E6 Control invasive species
- E7 Protect and enhance chalk stream habitat through both management of areas directly under TRDC control and engaging with wider catchment partners
- E8 Protect and celebrate heritage features

D. Community involvement – *To ensure engagement and involvement of local communities*

- F1 Work with and engage key stakeholders
- F2 Support volunteer activity at Croxley Common Moor and ensure all involved operate towards achievement of the GAP
- F3 Support the Friends of Croxley Common Moor and encourage the local community to become further involved in site management in a structured and supported way

E. Marketing and communication – *To promote awareness and interest in Croxley Common Moor*

G1 Widely promote volunteer and community events at Croxley Common Moor, using both traditional and electronic media

G2 Utilise noticeboards to update site users of activities on site

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PLAN PRODUCTION PROCESS

Effective community engagement is at the centre of successful management plans. The value of a GAP is maximised when it incorporates and balances the aspirations of stakeholders and interest groups.

In order to provide all interested stakeholders and groups with the opportunity to feed into the production of the new GAP, we have adopted a structured two-stage approach to community engagement.

- For the first stage (this briefing document), stakeholders and site users will be invited to make comment on the core aspirations in Section 4; it is hoped that any further aspirations and/or issues will be identified through this information gathering process. This first stage of community engagement will run between **8 July 2024 and 5 August 2024**.
- For the second stage, stakeholders and site users will be invited to read through and make comment on the draft GAP, which will include the detailed proposals and actions.

Following the second stage exercise, the final document will be produced, published and the actions will commence.

Please be aware that we will not respond individually to comments received through the public engagements; instead, we will produce a summary of comments, noting any amendments made to the plan as a result. This engagement response document will be published online alongside the briefing document, draft plan and final plan. We will retain contact details only for the purpose of keeping respondents informed about the plan development process.

5.1 Greenspace Action Plan production process

1. Production of briefing document and outline proposals.
2. Stakeholder engagement on briefing document. Engagement will run from 8 July 2024 to 5 August 2024.
3. Production of draft GAP.
4. Stakeholder engagement on draft GAP.
5. Production of final GAP.
6. Publicity and promotion.

5.2 Stakeholders

- Friends of Croxley Common Moor
- Site users
- Three Rivers District Council – relevant members and officers
- Hertfordshire County Council – relevant members and officers
- CMS volunteers
- Natural England
- Environment Agency
- Hertfordshire Ecology
- Historic Environment Record
- The Ramblers
- Rights of Way (HCC)
- Open Spaces Society
- Canal and Rivers Trust
- Croxley Green Parish Council
- Croxley Green Residents Association
- Byewaters Estate Management Company
- Watford Borough Council
- Spokes
- Adjacent businesses
- Hertfordshire & Middlesex Wildlife Trust
- Butterfly Conservation

- Hertfordshire and Middlesex Moth Group

6. STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Thank you for taking the time to read this document. We would like to receive feedback from you on our proposals for the Croxley Common Moor Greenspace Action Plan (GAP) 2025-2030.

Please return your comments using the contact details below by **5 August 2024** at the latest.

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