



THE WITHEY BEDS

GREENSPACE ACTION PLAN 2025 – 2030

BRIEFING DOCUMENT



CONTENTS

Contents.....	2
1. Introduction.....	3
2. Backgorund.....	4
3. Review of Progress	6
4. Greenspace Action Plan (GAP) 2025-30	7
5. Community Engagement and Plan Production Process.....	10
5.1 Action Plan Production Process	10
5.2 Stakeholders	11
6. Stakeholder Feedback.....	12

1. INTRODUCTION

A new five-year action plan is being produced for The Withey Beds. 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 essentially 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 to be undertaken over the next five years, commencing in April 2025, by outlining aspirational objectives and actions.

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 in November 2024 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 easy to read sections:

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

Section 3 reviews recent management of the site.

Section 4 contains the core objectives for the Withey Beds GAP.

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

2. BACKGROUND

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

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

The Withey Beds are situated within a designated 'Area of Archaeological Significance' that includes a string of important sites for prehistoric to medieval history. More recent historic remains are visible at the Withey Beds in the form of a World War II pillbox, now used as a roost by bats.

The site provides an important habitat for wetland birds including kingfisher, Cetti's warbler, green sandpiper, water rail and barn owl; mammals including six species of bat; invertebrates including butterflies, dragonflies and damselflies and four nationally notable species, the oak jewel beetle, a soldier fly, a solitary bee and Roesel's bush cricket.

The site is accessible from Moor Lane and provides opportunities for informal recreation. Although these opportunities are limited by its location and lack of parking, the Withey Beds is highly valued by the local community.

The Withey Beds

Site Location

Legend

 The Withey Beds site boundary

The Withey Beds
Central grid reference: TQ079940
Postcode: WD18 9QP

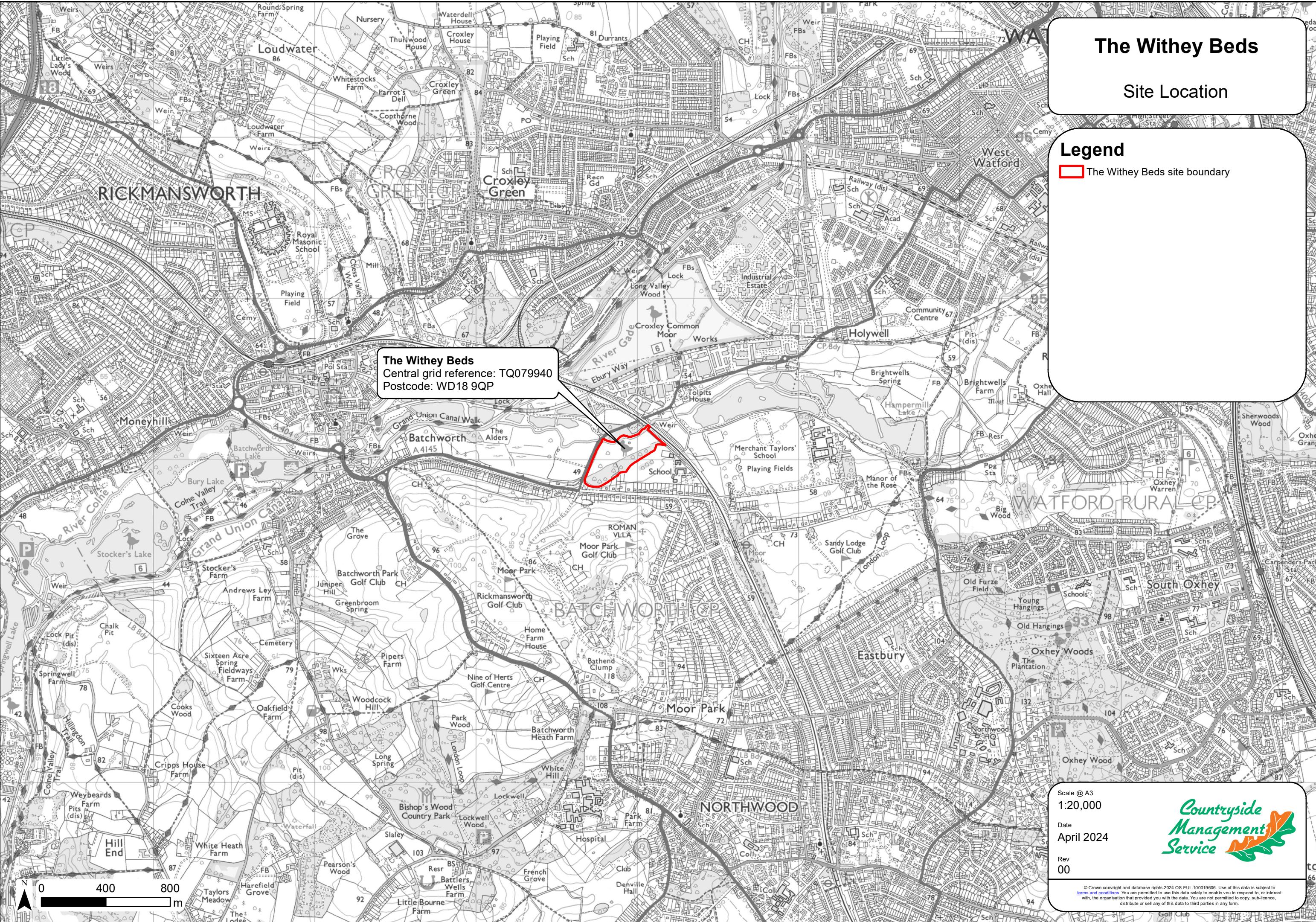
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Date
April 2024

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**Countryside
Management
Service**

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3. REVIEW OF PROGRESS

The management and achievements over the last six years have been guided by the previous Greenspace Action Plan for The Withey Beds, maintaining the site as a welcoming site which supports diverse wetland flora and fauna. The boardwalk through the wetland, which was damaged in August 2023 by a fallen tree is being repaired this summer after being temporarily closed to the public.

Some actions included in the previous plan were prevented by the pandemic and the associated lockdowns, in particular the willow structure could not be maintained and is now overgrown and is no longer a defined structure. During lockdown it was not possible to host events and activities at the Withey Beds but both the regular volunteer activities and public events have been resumed since then including an annual guided walk organised by the Friends of the Withey Beds (FotWB).

Regular maintenance operations have included cutting back vegetation in the ponds and ditches on rotation to maintain areas of open water, maintaining site furniture, reactive tree works to address safety issues and regular monitoring for otters, water voles, river flies, amphibians and reptiles, dragonflies and damselflies, bats and flora. The grassland has been grazed with a combination of Dexter cattle and Southdown sheep throughout previous years under a Higher Level Stewardship agreement to promote structural diversity and encourage the development of a diverse range of flowering plants within the sward. This stewardship agreement was recently renewed. A number of regular maintenance activities are carried out by FotWB including management of a small area of willows for basket weaving, carrying out species monitoring, and maintaining site furniture.

The new GAP is intended to build on previous work to ensure that the wide range of habitats and wildlife found here are maintained and enhanced, while allowing for the local community to explore, learn about and enjoy this very special wetland throughout the year. The majority of regular actions to maintain the habitats and infrastructure will continue along with events and monitoring activities.

4. GREENSPACE ACTION PLAN (GAP) 2025-30

The Withey Beds GAP 2025-30 will be a simple, easy to read plan for use by officers of Three Rivers District Council 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 proposed 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 and potential funding sources identified. Once the final GAP is agreed, external funding will be sought to enable the plan to be delivered.

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

Aim

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

Objectives

A To protect and conserve the habitats and species that can be found at The Withey Beds for the benefit of its wildlife and aesthetic appeal.

- A1 Maintain a mosaic of high quality wetland habitats through controlling encroachment of herbaceous and woody vegetation.
- A2 Enhance the river corridor by identifying and implementing in channel and morphological improvements and managing bank vegetation.
- A3 Continue to manage a small area of willows for basket weaving.
- A4 Continue to graze the grassland with rare breed cattle to promote structural and floristic diversity within the sward.
- A5 Undertake monitoring and repairs to the bat hibernaculum.
- A6 Continue to monitor and record the wildlife within the site.
- A7 Monitor and control Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS).

B To provide an area of open space that is well-maintained, safe and welcoming for local residents and visitors to enjoy, ensuring to maintain

the correct balance between raising awareness of the site and protecting its wildlife.

- B1 Maintain the entrance to be inviting by maintaining gates and signage and providing good sightlines along the road.
- B2 Improve access to, from and around The Withey Beds.
- B3 Undertake proactive response to the misuse of the site.
- B4 Monitor the grounds maintenance regimes (including grass cutting, litter collection) to ensure they comply with the contracted standard.
- B5 Maintain all furniture, signage and structures including grazing infrastructure to a high standard, undertaking repairs as required ensuring a consistent style.
- B6 Carry out regular risk assessments of the facilities, natural features and general environment and undertake any repairs.
- B7 Maintain and regularly update the notice board.
- B8 Improve views across the various habitats within the site.

C To ensure ongoing costs are financially and environmentally sustainable.

- C1 Ensure the costs of ongoing maintenance are financially sustainable and make best use of the resources available by identifying approaches which will deliver multiple benefits.
- C2 Secure external funding to deliver proposed activities beyond annual maintenance.
- C3 Ensure all management is carried out according to environmental best practice, including a presumption against the use of herbicide, and planning management actions to minimise disturbance to wildlife.
- C4 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.

D To promote The Withey Beds as an important wetland site and valuable community resource, providing opportunities for local communities to engage with the site and its management.

- D1 Promote the greater awareness and support for the site through a variety of media platforms, including on site interpretation, website and social media.
- D2 Encourage and support community and volunteer activity on the site and ensure all involved operate towards achievement of the GAP.
- D3 Maintain regular contact with key stakeholders and community groups and consult on decision making where appropriate.
- D4 Continue to offer all site users a variety of events and activities.

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 **Monday 8th July 2024 to Sunday 5th 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. This stage is intended to run in between approximately **Monday 4th November and Monday 24th November 2024**.

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 Action Plan Production Process

1. Production of briefing document and outline proposals.
2. Stakeholder engagement on briefing document. Engagement will run from approximately 8th July to 5th August 2024.
3. Production of draft GAP.

4. Stakeholder engagement on draft GAP. Engagement will run from approximately 4th November to 24th November 2024.
5. Production of final GAP.
6. Publicity and promotion.

5.2 Stakeholders

- Relevant Three Rivers District Council Councillors
- Relevant Three Rivers District Council Officers
- Relevant Hertfordshire County Council Councillors
- Relevant Hertfordshire County Council Officers
- Batchworth Community Council
- Environment Agency
- Natural England
- Friends of the Withey Beds
- Herts & Middlesex Bat group
- Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust
- Hertfordshire Ecology
- Historic Environment Record
- Highways
- Local grazier
- Watford Piscators
- The Ramblers
- Open Spaces Society
- Canal and Rivers Trust
- Hertfordshire and Middlesex Butterfly Conservation
- Hertfordshire and Middlesex Moth Group
- Local community and site users

6. STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Thank you for taking the time to read this document. We are keen to receive feedback from you on our proposals for the Withey Beds Action Plan 2025-30.

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

FAO Sarah Roberts

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