

OXHEY WOODS MANAGEMENT PLAN

2027-2032

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

A new five-year Greenspace Action Plan (GAP) is being produced for Oxhey Woods. 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 (TRDC). The completed document will inform the management actions to be undertaken over the next five years, commencing in April 2027.

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 18 May to 7 June 2026. A further engagement period in autumn 2026 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 Oxhey Woods GAP.

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

Section 6 provides contact details to send feedback to.

2.0 BACKGROUND

Oxhey Woods is a 96-hectare site located on the southern edge of Watford, close to the residential area of South Oxhey, in Watford Rural Parish. The site is the largest Local Nature Reserve in Three Rivers District and forms part of a substantial urban green corridor. The site is owned and managed by Three Rivers District Council (TRDC), in partnership with Countryside Management Service (CMS) and Oxhey Woods Conservation Volunteers (OWCV).

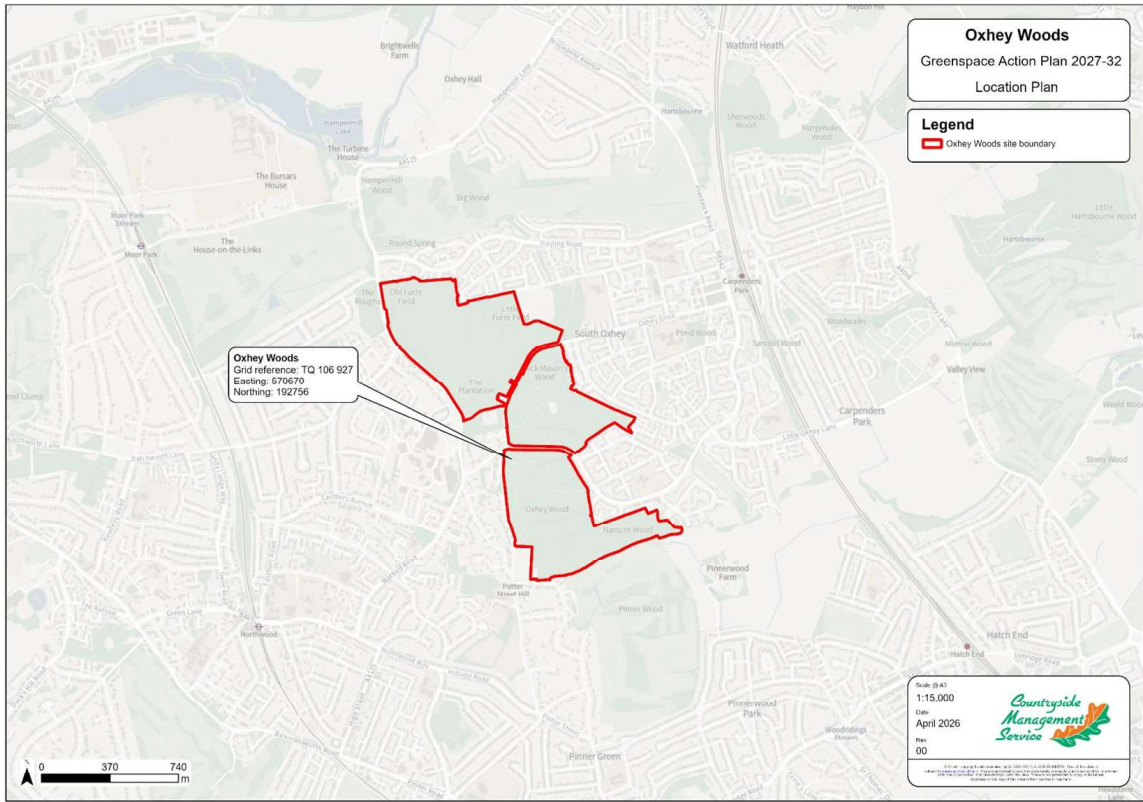
Historically, a “coppice with standards” management technique would have provided high quality timbers through the rotational growing of large “standard” oaks while quick-growing hazel and hornbeam were “coppiced” to provide wood for fuel.

Perhaps the heyday of Oxhey Woods as a worked woodland was the seventeenth century before fossil fuel use was widespread, given the woods’ proximity to London, and the city’s great demand for charcoal. This history is reflected in the woods today, be it the gnarled old oaks, great multi-stemmed hornbeams or the timber extraction routes used as bridleways today.

The site is divided by two roads into three main compartments, each with a distinctive character. There is a network of open space habitat through the site including rides, glades, ponds, watercourses, and heathland. Oxhey Woods qualifies for designation as a Local Wildlife Site due to the presence of Ancient Woodland Indicators and is recognised as one of the most important oak/hornbeam woodlands in the county.

Since Victorian introduction, the site has suffered invasive non-native species (INNS), particularly *Rhododendron ponticum*. A control programme has been in place at Oxhey Woods to reduce levels of rhododendron across the woodland, over the years supported by various grant funding, most recently through a Countryside Stewardship agreement which ended in 2025. Japanese knotweed has been recorded on site and was previously subject to annual spraying. Cherry laurel is also present, with coverage reduced as part of previous forestry operations.

Long-term management aims for the site have included control of invasive species, forestry works to improve condition and resilience of woodland habitats, and improved public access through path surfacing and infrastructure installation. Today, the site is a well-used and valued green space.



3.0 REVIEW OF PROGRESS

Progress over the course of the last five years focused on delivery of forestry works outlined in the Forestry Commission-approved Woodland Management Plan for the site, supported by funding through a Countryside Stewardship agreement. Works included:

- Continued control of rhododendron and cherry laurel.
- Thinning of areas of young pole-stage trees to reduce crowding, provide space for retained trees to develop and promote new tree growth.
- Halo-thinning of veteran oaks.
- Re-coppicing veteran boundary hornbeam stubbs, focusing on where these were at greatest risk of collapse.
- Coppicing of areas of hazel.
- Ride-widening to create more woodland edge habitat.

In addition, a number of works were undertaken to improve access around the site for visitors. These included:

- Surfacing a section of the London Outer Orbital Path where it runs through the northern compartment of the site.
- Replacement and consolidation of infrastructure at a number of access points to improve ease of access when entering the site.

4.0 GREENSPACE ACTION PLAN (GAP) 2027 – 2032

The Oxhey Woods GAP 2027-32 will be a simple, easy to read plan for use by officers of TRDC 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 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 are as follows:

Aims

To build on the success of previous plans and provide an accessible welcoming greenspace for the local community, whilst seeking further funding to deliver remaining actions from the Woodland Management Plan for the site to promote a resilient and sustainably managed woodland.

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 Facilitate non-motorised travel and recreational access, ensuring people feel safe and able to walk around and across Oxhey Woods, all year round

A2 Update interpretation panels on site

A3 Identify and improve surfacing problems in the car park and paths

B Healthy, safe and secure – *To provide and maintain clear and safe public access onto, and around Oxhey Woods*

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

C Well-maintained and clean – *To ensure that all aspects of Oxhey Woods are kept clean and well maintained*

- C1 Manage and maintain paths, bridges, steps, access infrastructure and signage
- C2 Remove fly-tipping, undertake regular litter picking, empty litter bins, and carry out small scale vegetation management at access points

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

- D1 Ensure all site activities adhere to relevant TRDC policies and strategies, including all work undertaken by contractors
- D2 Ensure ongoing maintenance costs are financially sustainable
- D3 Secure external funding to ensure the viability of capital works
- D4 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
- D5 Carry out management according to environmental best practice, including a presumption against the use of herbicide
- D6 Monitor and record improvements to Oxhey Woods' habitats and wildlife

E Biodiversity, landscape and heritage – *To conserve and enhance the important wildlife, landscape and heritage features of Oxhey Woods*

- E1 Deliver forestry works outlined in the Woodland Management Plan for the site, including further invasive species control, woodland thinning and hornbeam coppicing
- E2 Carry out a programme of ride management to provide a mosaic of woodland edge habitat
- E3 Carry out appropriate responsive management to conserve and enhance Oxhey Woods' key habitats
- E4 Maintain natural flood management features on watercourses within the woodland

F **Community involvement** – *Develop and maintain an informed, involved and enthusiastic local community*

F1 Work with and engage key stakeholders of the site

F2 Developing the Oxhey Woods Conservation Volunteers to maximise the impact they are able to make

G **Marketing and communication** – *To promote awareness and interest in Oxhey Woods*

G1 Develop and promote marketing and communications

5.0 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 18 May and Sunday 7 June 2026**. To support this stage, we will be holding a site walkover on Wednesday 27 May for any users or interested groups that may wish to discuss aspirations for the site in more detail.
- 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 **autumn 2026**.

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 summary will be published online alongside the 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

- Production of Briefing Document and outline proposals.
 - Stakeholder engagement on briefing document. Engagement will run from approximately 18 May to 7 June 2026.
 - Production of draft GAP.
 - Stakeholder engagement on draft GAP. Engagement will run in autumn 2026.
 - Production of final GAP.
 - Publicity and promotion.
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5.2 Stakeholders

- Site users
- Oxhey Woods Conservation Volunteers
- Three Rivers District Council – relevant members and officers
- Hertfordshire County Council – relevant members and officers
- CMS volunteers
- Hertfordshire Ecology
- Historic Environment Record
- The Ramblers
- Cycle Herts
- Rights of Way (HCC)
- Open Spaces Society
- Watford Rural Parish Council
- British Horse Society
- Hertfordshire & Middlesex Wildlife Trust
- South Oxhey Residents Association
- Oxhey Hall Residents Association

- Moor Park Residents Association
- Eastbury Residents Association

6.0 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 Oxhey Woods Greenspace Action Plan (GAP) 2027-2032.

Please return your comments using the contact details below by **Sunday 7 June** at the latest.

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