

PART I - DELEGATED

10. BIODIVERSITY OPPORTUNITIES AUDIT, ALTERNATIVE GRASSLAND MANAGEMENT AND TREE STRATEGY UPDATE

(DCES)

1 Summary

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the progress of the Biodiversity Opportunities Audit (BOA), the Alternative Grassland Management (AGM) initiative adopted in March 2022, and the Tree Strategy adopted in January 2022 and to make recommendations for future years.

2 Background and Context

2.1 The BOA identifies and quantifies opportunities for ecological gain in the District's minor open spaces, which historically have had only a basic level of maintenance. The report set out opportunities that could be implemented on these minor open spaces to improve biodiversity and enhance habitats, whilst balancing the needs of formal and informal recreation uses. Major open spaces (e.g. Leavesden County Park, The Aquadrome & Oxhey Woods) were not included in the BOA as they already have detailed management plans in place.

2.2 The AGM initiative was established to supplement the findings of the BOA to address a Council motion that was unanimously passed at the Leisure Environment and Community in November 2021, which stated "...*This motion will aim to decrease grass cutting by up to 50% of TRDC owned land and achieve concurrent gains in biodiversity...*"

2.3 The final version of the Three Rivers Tree Strategy was approved by Policy and Resources in December 2021 and Leisure, Environment and Community Committee in January 2022.

2.4 The strategy contains an Action Plan of key tasks for Community Services to achieve over the 5 year period 2022-2027, subject, in some cases, to the necessary resources being available.

2.5 The BOA, AGM and Tree Strategy also aim to help deliver the Council's Climate Change Emergency and Sustainability Strategy, and meet its commitment to be carbon neutral following the Council's declaration of a Climate Emergency in 2019.

3 Update on the BOA Action Plan

3.1 The BOA included an Action Plan for the delivery of improvements identified. Year 1 of the Action Plan and the progress so far are as follows:

Habitat Management	Year 1 Tasks (2022-2023)	Progress
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Grassland Management	To implement a Hay Meadow Cut, Conservation Cut, Enhanced amenity cutting and Ride management throughout the district.	Year one grassland management for sites identified in the BOA & AGM has been completed.
Grassland Enhancements	Mark out Rewilding areas. Plan and conduct spring wildflower planting on selected sites	Following assessment of the areas and fire risk, officers are proposing to amend the locations for implementation next year. Spring wildflower planting took place in the Autumn at two sites: Cassiobridge Play Area and Hayling Road verges.
Woodland & Trees	Planting of 53 standard trees throughout the district	Standard tree planting took place in January in locations identified in the BOA. (Appendix A)

4 Update on the AGM initiative progress

4.1 As agreed in the March 2022 Committees: in various areas throughout the District, the grass cutting regimes were modified and / or reduced for the benefit of biodiversity.

4.2 This AGM has commenced across the District, and has included:

- Marking out, both on the ground and on maps, areas of longer grass to be left uncut, and then managed as hay meadow, ride management or conservation cut. As well as marking out areas to be left to rewild.
- Paths were cut through areas of longer grass to maintain access to sites.
- The Grounds team began the Enhanced Amenity cutting of relevant sites, including TRDC owned roadside verges.
- Cattle arrived at the Horses' field as part of a new conservation grazing regime. Existing site that already have areas of grazing, include Chorleywood House Estate, Croxley Common Moor and the Withered Beds.
- The first hay cut was completed in August by a contractor, who collected and disposed of the grass.

4.3 The BOA and AGM collectively aimed to achieve an increase in the percentage of grassland managed for biodiversity, as follows:

Grassland management type	Description	2022
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		All grass* - estimated %	Available grass** – estimated %	All grass* - actual %	Available grass** – actual %
Cut & Lift (Hay Meadow & Conservation Cut)	Cut once or twice per year	22	25	25	28
Reduced cut	Cut on rotation	3	3	3	4
Uncut	Rewilded	6	7	6	7
Conservation grazing	Light grazing for biodiversity benefit	27	31	27	31
Enhanced Amenity Grass	Reduced frequency / increased height of cutting	10	11	11	12
General Amenity Grass	Cut regularly for general recreation	20	23	16	18
Permanent Amenity Grass	Sports pitches / event grounds / open cemeteries	12	N/A	12	N/A

* Includes areas of permanent amenity grass for sports provision, events, open cemeteries, etc.

**excludes areas of permanent grass for sports pitches events, open cemeteries, etc.

- 4.4 To note, the AGM initiative is applied to grassland TRDC are responsible for managing and maintaining - this has been termed Available Grass as it excludes areas of permanent amenity grass for sports pitches, play areas, events, open cemeteries, etc. 88% of TRDC grassland is deemed “available grass”. Available grass areas are then managed with the benefit of biodiversity balanced with the requirement for recreation/leisure.
- 4.5 The expected percentages outlined in the table at 4.3 have been broadly met this year, there was a slight reduction in the area of cut and lift at Chorleywood Road Cemetery due to the impracticality of lifting grass.
- 4.6 However, a larger area of South Oxhey Playing Field was cut and lifted than originally planned, as agreed with the Lead Members and local ward Councillors. It was later observed that there was significantly less grass growth than was anticipated, highlighting the year to year variance in grass growth. Overall the area of cut and lift grass was higher in 2022 than estimated.
- 4.7 Further details on the first year of the alternative grassland management initiative are detailed from point 4.15 onwards.

Update on the Tree Strategy Action Plan

- 4.8 The table detailed at Appendix G reports on the progress made against the agreed actions within the Tree Strategy.

- 4.9 A number of actions remain “On hold”. In short, this has arisen due to emerging and changing priorities, in particular implementation of the BOA, and the delivery of tree planting for the Queens Green Canopy, which have significantly increased the workload within the Trees and Landscapes team.
- 4.10 In addition, Oak Processionary Moth and Ash Dieback are causing an increase in workload across the district and this will be a focus for Officers in the next few years.
- 4.11 However, a number of actions have been achieved, including the recruitment to the post of Community Biodiversity Officer; implementation of the action plan to deliver the recommendations of the Biodiversity Opportunities Audit, including tree planting; and creating a public portal for residents to be able to access Tree Preservation Order (TPO) information online.
- 4.12 In addition, the Queen’s Green Canopy scheme was successfully delivered during the 2021/22 tree planting season, with 3 trees planted in each main population centre within the district along with a commemorative plaque, which equated to a total of 24 trees, including English Oak, Walnut, Wild Cherry and Sergeants Cherry.
- 4.13 During the end of November and early December, two new areas of woodland were created as part of the QGC at The Horses’ Field, Leavesden Country Park and Denham Way Playing Fields, Maple Cross. These were community events and resulted in the planting of approximately 800 whips.
- 4.14 During the planting season, November 2022 to March 2023, approximately 975 new trees/whips have been planted on TRDC land. The Council has also advised on and supported the planting of 600 whips at West Herts Crematorium, on the district boundary at Bedmond.

Discussion – Alternative Grassland Management

Highlights

- 4.15 In this initial year of widespread changes to grassland management in the district, officers visited the vast majority of sites during the growing season, in particular those that had areas of long grass for the first time. All sites had some diversity of wildflowers, although most were dominated by a range of grass species. Though many sites showed some signs of agricultural improvement, most still retain much of the character of more traditional grasslands.
- 4.16 No systematic botanical recording was undertaken, however initial assessment would suggest that National Vegetation Classification (NVC) would place many sites within MG6 (a dry neutral grassland type). These grasslands are described by NVC as being typical of ‘recreational sites such as village greens, road verge and lawns’, although further work would be required to confirm these initial assessments.
- 4.17 Highlights included Fortune Common and Romilly Drive, both of which had good numbers and diversity of wildflowers, and Leavesden Country Park where there was another good show of Pyramidal Orchid (Appendix E). In addition, at Fortune Common, Cuckoo flower and Marsh Foxtail were recorded, both plants typical of older damp meadows.
- 4.18 During the growing season officers also identified opportunities to extend the areas of hay cutting on some sites next year, in particular at Scotsbridge, South Oxhey Playing Fields, and Romilly Drive. Production of a new management plan for

Chorleywood House Estate will also consider opportunities to extend areas of long grass on the site (Appendix C outline proposals).

- 4.19 In autumn, spring flowering wildflowers were planted on road verges on Hayling Road, South Oxhey, to become a welcome burst of colour in the Spring. In addition, a community planting event took place in the October half term holiday at Cassiobridge Play Area in Croxley Green.

Weather

- 4.20 There was a dry start to the growing season this year, and by May and June many of the BOA & AGM sites were full of colour. However, as the dry weather progressed it became the hottest, and one of the driest summers on record. As a result, grass growth was substantially lower than previous years and by mid-July many sites were very dry.
- 4.21 Although longer grass can create cooler microclimates within grassland, and help to reduce moisture loss by shading bare soil, the extreme heat and lack of rain substantially increased the risk of wildfires. A number of sites were affected by grass fires in July and August, as a result the decision was taken to cut firebreaks in locations with long grass, close to residential property (e.g. The Horses' Field).
- 4.22 Due to the fire risk an amendment was made to the hay cut specification, in that the hay (arisings) was immediately collected, rather than being left on site for a few days to enable insects to escape and seeds to drop to the ground. However, the cutting that took place in the latter part of August, allowed many insects to complete their lifecycle and for seeds to ripen and fall to the ground.
- 4.23 Due to the fire risk and the challenges in procuring cut and lift services, undertaking the cut and lift earlier in the season may be the solution. This would also avoid the harvest season when farmers are understandably busy, but this may be subject to weather conditions if sites are too wet to access without causing ground damage.
- 4.24 On the whole, despite the weather, the trees planted during the recent tree planting season are growing well. Out of the trees planted, only 2 did not survive. One due to vandalism and one likely due to poor quality stock.

Procurement

- 4.25 Procurement of a contractor to undertake the first hay cut and lift commenced in early June with Officers seeking quotes from a number of contractors in the area. However, this was a challenge for a number of reasons:
- Contractors with suitable machinery tend to be farmers, who are often busy during the harvest period from mid July onwards.
 - Farmers may not always be able to quickly meet the health and safety requirements for contractors working on public open space (such as suitably trained operatives and necessary insurance).
 - The current interest in grassland management initiatives and demand for cut and lift services appears to have increased in recent years, resulting in a lack of capacity in local contractors.

As a result, the hay cut was delayed, with work taking place in mid-August, slightly beyond the agreed timeframe of between late June and early August.

- 4.26 Despite these challenges local farmers proved to be the solution this year, with the necessary large machinery able to efficiently complete the cut, carried out by trained and experienced operatives.
- 4.27 In future years, awarding a multi-year contract for hay cutting services may make it easier to secure a contractor to carry out the work at the right time.
- 4.28 Grounds Maintenance were due to undertake some of the cut and lift of smaller areas, however, despite being ordered in March (following approval from the March Policy and Resources Committee), there was a significant delay to the delivery of a new cut & lift machine from the manufacturer.
- 4.29 This is not a situation unique to Three Rivers and was highlighted as an issue in the March LEC and P&R report. Due to the delay it was not possible to cut and lift smaller sites in 2022. The new machinery ordered has now been received by the Grounds Maintenance team.

Grass disposal

- 4.30 As part of the process to increase the area of cut and lift in the district, officers have been investigating means of disposing of large volumes of hay and / or cut grass. In most situations, due to litter, Ragwort and dog mess, the cut hay is not of sufficient quality to be fed to livestock. Also because of the large volumes of grass and resulting fire risk, it was not felt appropriate to attempt to compost the grass on-site.
- 4.31 The alternative includes composting off-site, but this is complicated by the transportation of grass to green waste facilities. It is generally more cost-effective to move hay as bales, however green waste sites will not accept baled grass as it is too tightly compressed to compost efficiently. As a result the baled grass would have to be disposed of in landfill, at an additional cost.
- 4.32 One of the major benefits to the use of contractors for the large scale cut and lift has been the disposal of the grass sustainably. Farming contractors who undertook the work this year were able to compost the grass on their farm, before spreading it on arable fields as a soil improver, with any better quality hay fed to livestock.
- 4.33 For this reason, and the anticipated cost of purchasing, storing and servicing large scale hay cutting machinery, officers recommend continuing to use contractors to complete the large scale hay cutting for the period of the BOA, with a review at the end of this period.

Site Access

- 4.34 The hay cut, conducted by contractors was completed efficiently, largely due to the large-size of machinery used. However, one drawback to the use of large machinery was issues with access to some sites, due to the width and angle of gates.
- 4.35 In some situations the access to sites is purposely narrow to prevent unauthorised access, but as a result this restricts the size of machinery that can be used. Officers will be reviewing access to some sites and looking for means of improving access for larger machinery, whilst ensuring sites remain secure.

Public perception

- 4.36 Information on the initiative has been provided on the Council's website and feedback received has been logged by officers throughout the season. Consultation is ongoing with residents, the local community and councillors. A social media campaign is also

currently being used to encourage people to share their views and opinions on the changes and suggest amendments or additional opportunities. The website can be accessed at: <https://www.threerivers.gov.uk/eqcl-page/grassland-management>

4.37 In total 65 members of the public have submitted comments on the Alternative Grassland Management initiative, of which 10 responded via the survey. In addition 55 comments were received during the grass cutting period. The consultation report is detailed at Appendix F.

4.38 A summary of positive comments includes:

- Particularly at the beginning of the season, there were a number of positive comments, complementing the wildflowers and the Council's management of grassland for biodiversity.
- The comments appreciated the benefit the initiative has had to biodiversity and requested that more land is incorporated with an emphasis on "fostering wildflowers, especially the less competitive ones", which prior to the initiative would not have had the opportunity to flower.

4.39 A summary of negative comments includes:

- The negative comments were mainly around the following topics: grasslands appearing untidy and overgrown, which in turn were leading to increased antisocial behaviour in the form of littering and not picking up dog poo. Health and safety concerns were raised in relation to dog health and potential road incidents along with confusion over land ownership.
- As the season progressed, there were a number of negative comments (11 in total) in relation to the hot, dry weather as people began to worry about the risk of fires.
- Some respondents expressed displeasure at the timing of cutting; for example when the HCC section of Tudor Way was cut early in the season, highlighting that last year it was "packed with wild flowers."

4.40 These comments have been considered as part of the recommendations for the 2023 grass cutting season.

Ash Dieback (ADB) and Oak Processionary Moth (OPM)

4.41 OPM is a moth species specific to Oak trees (*Quercus sp.*) thought to have been imported into Britain via infected trees from mainland Europe where it is native. Whilst in some years large infestations can substantially defoliate trees, the moth is primarily an issue for human health.

4.42 Fine hairs produced by the moth caterpillars as a defence mechanism for their nests can be a serious irritant to human skin and respiratory system, although it is unlikely to result in serious illness in most cases. Animals, in particular people's pets, may also suffer from contact with the hairs.

4.43 OPM is currently a notifiable pest, meaning that landowners are required to report sightings to the Forestry Commission (FC). The FC are currently conducting surveillance of OPM across the region. When detected, the FC will normally issue a plant health notice to a tree owner, which requires them to undertake control of the infestation.

- 4.44 It is anticipated that OPM will become more widespread, due to warmer and dryer summers resulting from Climate Change. In the future it is possible that control of OPM will be managed via a risk-based strategy, with control limited to areas of highest public use.
- 4.45 OPM is frequently identified by tree officers and tree surgeons when carrying out their work – a substantial number of cases were also identified during the Council's recent tree safety inspection.
- 4.46 On a number of occasions works to Oak trees have been significantly delayed by the need to treat OPM infestations, which have in several cases doubled the cost of undertaking works to infected trees.
- 4.47 Trees and Landscapes currently have an annual budget of £17,000 to deal with OPM. Currently this budget is sufficient to deal with OPM and any variances will be reported through budget monitoring.
- 4.48 In addition to OPM, site visits and tree inspections by officers in recent months have revealed an increasing number of Ash trees in declining health with Ash Dieback, in particular at Chorleywood House Estate, Oxhey Woods, Batchworth Heath and Carpenters Wood.
- 4.49 ADB (Ash Die Back) is caused by an airborne fungus, and affects a range of Ash species (*Fraxinus sp.*). But notably Common Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) our native species, which is widespread across Three Rivers district.
- 4.50 The disease has a high mortality rate (60-70%) rapidly killing saplings and young Ash trees. In mature specimens, it may re-infect trees in successive years, leading to a gradual decline in health. Eventually trees may succumb to ADB; become infected by other tree pathogens, and/or reach an unsafe condition and have to be felled.
- 4.51 Current advice on management of ADB recommends a risk-based approach, only felling trees where their condition poses a safety risk. This approach is also designed to avoid pre-emptive felling which may lead to the removal of Ash trees that may recover from the disease; be unaffected by it; or provide significant biodiversity benefits by being retained as standing deadwood.
- 4.52 The Council currently takes a risk based approach to managing Ash, as approved as part of the Council's Tree Strategy. However, in recent months it has become clear that increasing numbers of Ash trees in the district are in poor health due to ADB. For example there are large numbers of trees in Carpenters Wood and Chorleywood House Estate which are now in poor health, and will need to be removed in the near future due to safety reasons. Similarly there are significant numbers close to main roads in Oxhey Woods and at Batchworth Heath.
- 4.53 Officers anticipate managing ADB over future years in order to use Council resources as efficiently and effectively as possible, by actively managing the impact of Ash Dieback. A budget of £25,000 per year was approved at P&R 23 January 2023 for financial years 2023/24, 2024/25 and 2025/26 for ADB.
- 4.54 This would include identifying and inspecting areas of Ash in high risk locations (including within parks and open spaces and woodland areas with high visitor numbers) and developing a programme of works to fell or prune Ash in decline to remove the risk of its failure at a later date.

- 4.55 This approach would be more cost effective and less disruptive to residents within the district, and would reduce the safety risk these trees will pose in the future.
- 4.56 Much of the Ash is growing in woodland situations, where the natural regeneration of other tree species will replace felled trees. Creating temporary gaps in the woodland canopy will also have some ecological benefit. However, some replanting may be necessary in some locations.

Summary of recommendations for 2023 and future years

Grass Cutting

- 4.57 Appendix B, C & D outlines future proposals for the Alternative Grassland Management initiative.
- 4.58 Throughout the growing season, maintain areas of short grass as firebreaks close to residential areas.
- 4.59 Undertake the majority of the first hay cut and collect in late June / early July (subject to weather conditions) to reduce the fire risk, and to avoid busier times in the farming calendar.
- 4.60 Due to access issues, focus hay cutting by contractors to a smaller number of larger, more accessible sites.
- 4.61 Following assessment of long grass areas, increase the area of hay cutting and edge succession management and reduce the area of conservation cut grass. Appendix H outlines the changes to grass cutting regimes for the 2023 grass cutting season.
- 4.62 Due to the difficulties and uncertainties of grass disposal, continue to use contractors for the first cut of the larger hay meadow areas.
- 4.63 Tender for a contractor to carry out the first hay cut & collect, and award a multi-year contract. A budget of £30,000 a year was agreed at P&R 23 January 2023 for financial years 2023/24, 2024/25 and 2025/26 for AGM.
- 4.64 Where possible, improve vehicle access to sites to facilitate the access of larger machinery, whilst keeping the site secure.
- 4.65 Continue to make improvements to the mapping of TRDC open space on GIS, to assist with communication of management regimes between Landscapes & Leisure, Grounds Maintenance, Contractors and the public.
- 4.66 Continue to update the website and social media to keep the local community informed of the different grass cutting regimes and the benefits these have for biodiversity.
- 4.67 Consider, where relevant and budget allows, interpretation at larger sites on the regimes and their biodiversity benefits.
- 4.68 Enable officers to make modifications to the timing and specification of cutting regimes during the growing season, based on weather conditions in any particular year.
- 4.69 The recommendations for 2023 will result in the following:

Grassland management type	Description	2023	
		All grass* - estimated %	Available grass** - estimated %
Cut & Lift (Hay Meadow & Conservation Cut)	Cut once or twice per year	24	27
Reduced cut	Cut on rotation	6	7
Uncut	Rewilded	6	7
Conservation grazing	Light grazing for biodiversity benefit	26	30
Enhanced Amenity Grass	Reduced frequency / increased height of cutting	13	14
General Amenity Grass	Cut regularly for general recreation	13	15
Permanent Amenity Grass	Sports pitches / event grounds / open cemeteries	12	N/A

* Includes areas of permanent amenity grass for sports provision, events, open cemeteries, etc.

**excludes areas of permanent grass for sports pitches events, open cemeteries, etc.

4.70 Comparing the figures within the table at point 4.3 and within the table at 4.69, the percentage of available grass, which will undertake an alternative grass cutting regime for biodiversity benefits will change from:

- 77% (2022 estimated), 82% (actual 2022) and 85% (2023 estimate)

4.71 Percentages also take into account the recommendation to introduce a firebreak as outlined previously.

4.72 For 2023, estimates are slightly lower than 2022 for Hay Meadow management. This reflects habitat assessment carried out by officers during the growing season, which observed that it would be more appropriate to manage some areas (particularly under the canopy of mature trees) as woodland edge habitat rather than meadow (Appendix B & C). This has resulted in a slight decline in Hay Meadow management, but an increase in Reduced Cut (Edge Succession & Ride Management).

Biodiversity Opportunities Audit (BOA)

4.73 The annual budget for community biodiversity projects of £7,000 will be used towards several elements such as standard tree planting, hedge restoration and spring wildflower planting, as outlined within the BOA. In addition, Officers have secured £50,000 from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund for 2024/25 to deliver a range of community biodiversity activities, which will support the delivery of the action plan.

- 4.74 Officers will continue to review the BOA and identify further opportunities for improvements, enhancements and funding (Appendix B & D). Officers will also propose amendments to actions on an annual basis to take advantage of new opportunities, in particular those that involve the local community in implementation of the audit.
- 4.75 In addition an annual work programme and summary of the achievements for the year will be shared within the Members Information Bulletin towards the end of each financial year.

Tree Strategy

- 4.76 Officers will continue to work through the Tree Strategy action plan as and when resources allow. Initially the focus will be on the risk management of Ash Dieback across the District..

5 Options and Reasons for Recommendations

- 5.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the progress of the Biodiversity Opportunities Audit (BOA), the Alternative Grassland Management (AGM) initiative adopted in March 2022, the Tree Strategy adopted in January 2022 and to make recommendations for future years.

6 Policy/Budget Reference and Implications

- 6.1 The recommendations in this report are within the Council's agreed policies and budgets.

- 6.2 The recommendations in this report relate to the achievement of the following performance indicators.

- CP02/EP16 - Satisfaction with Parks and Open Spaces – enhancing biodiversity across the district is strongly supported by community groups and residents – including Sustainable Three Rivers. By introducing a number of schemes and projects and through showing investment in these spaces, residents are more likely to be satisfied with our parks and open spaces.
- LL34 - To Maintain Accreditation with Green Flag – biodiversity and sustainability are key requirements within the Green Flag assessment and these projects will support the Council in achieving Green Flag across the 4 main sites.
- LL35 - To ensure all our key open spaces have a current management plan in place – how the Council implements different biodiversity projects and tree planting initiatives are detailed within the agreed management plans
- LL39 - Number of new trees planted by TRDC Trees and Landscapes Officers – the BOA Action Plan and Tree Strategy supports and recommends future tree planting opportunities across the district.
- CP50 – Climate Emergency and Sustainability Action Plan – improving the biodiversity of the district is within the action plan – failure to do this will have an impact on the action plan.

- 6.3 The impact of the recommendations on this/these performance indicator(s) is:

- The implementation of the AGM initiative, BOA action plan and Tree Strategy will support the Council with achieving the Corporate Framework

Priority Themes, delivering against Key Performance Indicators and Service Performance Indicators for Leisure and Landscapes, Environmental Protection and Community Partnerships.

7 Financial Implications

7.1 The following table details the revenue budget, which have been allowed for within the current budgets for 2023/24 to 2025/26:

7.2 These costs are as follows:

REVENUE IMPLICATION	2023/24 £ <i>(estimated)</i>	2024/25 £ <i>(estimated)</i>	2025/26 £ <i>(estimated)</i>
<i>Biodiversity Opportunities Audit</i>	7,000	7,000 50,000 (UKSPF)	7,000
Alternative Grassland Management	30,000	30,000	30,000
<i>Ash Dieback</i>	<i>25,000</i>	<i>25,000</i>	<i>25,000</i>

8 Legal Implications

8.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the progress of the Biodiversity Opportunities Audit, the Alternative Grassland Management initiative adopted, the Tree Strategy and to make recommendations for endorsement. As such, there are no legal implications arising from the report.

9 Staffing Implications

9.1 The delivery of the Biodiversity Opportunities Audit Action Plan, Alternative Grassland Management and management of Ash Dieback will require the time of staff within Leisure and Landscapes and Environmental Protection.

10 Environmental Implications

10.1 Continued implementation of the BOA, Tree Strategy and AGM will enable a varied and diverse development of habitats, which will have a positive impact on the flora and fauna across the district.

10.2 The alternative management regimes for the Council's grassland areas, that enables vegetation to flower and support invertebrates, and other wildlife will have a positive effect on biodiversity in the district.

11 Public Health Implications

11.1 A body of evidence is growing which explains the benefit people can experience from contact with the natural world; for example, increased prominence of social prescribing by clinicians for walking or gardening to alleviate symptoms.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-the-environment/state-of-the-environment-health-people-and-the-environment>

11.2 During a recent (2021) survey of people using Leavesden Country Park, over 80% said that being able to use the park was either very important or important to their health and wellbeing and 98% of people said using the park enhanced their quality of life.

11.3 Trees and greenery may boost lifespan, this has been studied for 8 years by Harvard researchers and published in April Environmental Health Perspectives.

<https://health.usnews.com/wellness/articles/2016-12-09/the-many-health-benefits-of-trees>

12 Customer Services Centre Implications, Community Safety Implications

12.1 None Specific

13 Communications and Website Implications

13.1 Information on the initiative is included on the Council's website to outline the changes to the grassland management regimes.

<https://www.threerivers.gov.uk/egcl-page/grassland-management>

14 Risk and Health & Safety Implications

14.1 The Council has agreed its risk management strategy which can be found on the website at <http://www.threerivers.gov.uk> In addition, the risks of the proposals in the report have also been assessed against the Council's duties under Health and Safety legislation relating to employees, visitors and persons affected by our operations. The risk management implications of this report are detailed below.

14.2 The subject of this report is covered by the Environmental Protection and Leisure and Landscapes Service Plans. Any risks resulting from this report will be included in the risk register and, if necessary, managed within this/these plan(s).

14.3 If the recommendations are rejected the risks are as follows;

Nature of Risk	Consequence	Suggested Control Measures	Response <i>(tolerate, treat, terminate, transfer)</i>	Risk Rating <i>(combination of likelihood and impact)</i>
Environmental Protection and Leisure and Landscapes are unable to implement the actions from the BOA and alternative	The Council is criticised for not progressing with alternative grass management Reputational damage and potential	Communications can be managed around ensuring residents are aware that the Council does have a Climate Change Strategy.	Treat	4

grassland management initiative	complaints from some residents	Members to agree the recommendations		
Objectives of the Climate Change Strategy are not achieved	Corporate Framework implications Reputational damage and potential complaints	Members to agree the recommendations	Treat	4
Tree failure as a result of Ash Dieback causes damage to property, rail accident/disaster, loss of life/serious injury	Financial implications, Budget implications, legal implications and reputation	Members to agree the recommendations Tree inspections undertaken regularly by tree officers, Budget has been allocated to manage ash dieback over future years. New Tree Strategy approved - risk management of trees in high risk areas - dealt with as a priority.	Treat	4

14.4 If the recommendations are accepted the risks are as follows;

Nature of Risk	Consequence	Suggested Control Measures	Response <i>(tolerate, treat terminate, transfer)</i>	Risk Rating <i>(combination of likelihood and impact)</i>
Continued complaints from some residents, particularly in urban areas who perceive the enhanced amenity cut grass on verges, as 'untidy' or 'unsightly', and a cost cutting measure	Reputational damage and potential complaints from some residents	Continue with marketing and comms on the scheme Continue to make ammendments to plans where possible to address concerns	Treat	4
Operational uncertainties, e.g. grass disposal, weather impacts	Additional costs incurred Works delayed or changes	Officers to report any financial implications through in year budget monitoring	Treat	4

	made to specifications			
Grounds Maintenance team is overwhelmed by additional cut and lift works required in the autumn and is unable to complete them before sites become too wet for machinery	Grass is left uncut, or sites are left muddy and rutted during the winter months	This would need to be monitored – additional contractor work may be required to complete the tasks or arisings may need to be left on site.	Tolerate	6
Tree failure as a result of Ash Dieback causes damage to property, rail accident/disaster, loss of life/serious injury	Financial implications, Budget implications, legal implications and reputation	Members to agree the recommendations Tree inspections undertaken regularly by tree officers, Budget has been allocated to manage ash dieback over future years. New Tree Strategy approved - risk management of trees in high risk areas - dealt with as a priority.	Treat	4

- The above risks are scored using the matrix below. The Council has determined its aversion to risk and is prepared to tolerate risks where the combination of impact and likelihood scores 6 or less.

Very Likely ----- Likelihood ----- Remote	Low	High	Very High	Very High
	4	8	12	16
	Low	Medium	High	Very High
	3	6	9	12
	Low	Low	Medium	High
	2	4	6	8
	Low	Low	Low	Low
	1	2	3	4
	Impact			
	Low	----->		Unacceptable

Impact Score	Likelihood Score
4 (Catastrophic)	4 (Very Likely (≥80%))
3 (Critical)	3 (Likely (21-79%))
2 (Significant)	2 (Unlikely (6-20%))
1 (Marginal)	1 (Remote (≤5%))

14.5 In the officers' opinion none of the risks in paragraphs 14.3 and 14.4 above, were they to come about, would seriously prejudice the achievement of the Strategic Plan and are therefore operational risks. The effectiveness of the management of operational

15 Recommendation

That the Leisure, Environment and Community Committee:

15.1 Agree the recommendations for future grass cutting seasons, biodiversity opportunities audit implementation and Tree Strategy focus as outlined in points 4.57 to 4.76.

Report prepared by:

Charlotte Gomes, Landscapes and Leisure Development Manager

Alex Laurie, Principal Tree and Landscape Officer

Jess Hodges, Community Biodiversity Officer

Data checked by:

Alex Laurie, Principal Tree and Landscape Officer

Jess Hodges, Community Biodiversity Officer

Data rating:

1	Poor	
2	Sufficient	x
3	High	

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Standard Tree Planting Locations

Appendix B: Proposed amendments to BOA plans

Appendix C: Proposed ammendments to AGM initiative - plans

Appendix D: Proposed additional new BOA site - plan

Appendix E: Site Highlights

Appendix F: Consultation Summary and Response

Appendix G: Update on the Tree Strategy Action Plan

Appendix H: Alternative Grassland Management