

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE - 14 MARCH 2022

LEISURE, ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY COMMITTEE – 16 MARCH 2022

PART I -

7. BIODIVERSITY OPPORTUNITIES AUDIT, INCLUDING ALTERNATIVE GRASSLAND MANAGEMENT

(DCES)

1 Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to summarise the content and implications of the Biodiversity Opportunities Audit (BOA) of minor TRDC open spaces.
- 1.2 The report also includes proposals for alternative grassland management for parts of the district, in particular some of the Council's major open spaces, such as Chorleywood House Estate and Leavesden Country Park.
- 1.3 The report and Appendices C and E includes financial implications of the recommendations detailed at point 13.1 and 13.2.

2 Background and Context

- 2.1 Three Rivers District Council has 5 year Management Plans in place for its major open spaces, including Rickmansworth Aquadrome, South Oxhey Playing Fields, and Leavesden Country Park. These plans contain detailed actions for the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity. The plans are reviewed and updated every 5 years and new actions set for that period.
- 2.2 The Council's Climate Emergency and Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan has an objective of "*ensuring that all TRDC owned land is managed sustainably and for the benefit of biodiversity and soil health*". Officers therefore commissioned Countryside Management Service (CMS) to undertake an audit of the Council's minor open spaces where detailed site management plans do not exist. The audit is designed to identify opportunities for biodiversity improvements, including grassland management, spring wildflower planting and tree planting. A total of 60 sites owned and managed by Three Rivers District Council, have been included within the audit and the full report is available at Appendix A.
- 2.3 As part of the initial work to introduce alternative grassland management, nine pilot sites were identified for a conservation cut during summer 2021. The outcome of these pilot sites were presented to the Leisure, Environment and Community Committee on the 24 November 2021 and at the 24 January 2022, Policy and Resources Committee. These pilot sites will be continued and increased in area this season (2022 and beyond). Of the nine sites, seven were included within the BOA. The remaining two were within the Council's major open spaces, and will be adopted within the site Management Plans.
- 2.4 In addition to the BOA, an amended Motion put forward by Councillor Michaels was discussed and agreed at the Leisure, Environment and Community Committee on the 24 November 2021 and at the 24 January 2022 Policy and Resources Committee, where Members agreed:

Members agree that, subject to the Biodiversity Opportunities Audit report, appropriate budget provision to be made in the forthcoming Council budget for alternative grassland management, acknowledging that there are a variety of options, and that a further report come back to this Committee in March on the options being implemented. A public consultation exercise be undertaken post implementation of the revised regime to assess the impact. (PR69/21)

2.5 Details on alternative grassland management are outlined from point 2.15 onwards.

2.6 Please refer to Appendix B for a glossary of terms.

Biodiversity Opportunities Audit

2.7 As detailed at 2.2, CMS were commissioned to undertake an audit of 60 sites across Three Rivers, taking into account existing recreational uses but to also identify and quantify opportunities for ecological gain on sites, which historically only had a basic level of maintenance.

2.8 Five key concepts are outlined within the BOA and include:

- **Common Approach:** Using a standard range of management techniques to enable ecological opportunities to be maximised in a cost effective way. A set range of management options will help make it more efficient for implementation by Grounds Maintenance teams.
- **Dual Purpose:** Recognition that public open space plays a vital role in public mental and physical health, as well as providing wildlife havens.
- **Ecological Networking:** The identification of opportunities to enhance ecological features, and improve connectivity between habitats.
- **Carbon Sequestration:** Increasing an open space's ability to capture and store Carbon Dioxide.
- **Biodiversity Net Gain:** Identifying opportunities for ecological enhancement on TRDC open space, which could potentially be funded through development. The Environment Act requires new developments to make quantifiable improvements to biodiversity, over and above any ecological impacts resulting from that development.

2.9 The BOA report outlines a range of potential management prescriptions, following on from site surveys, carried out during summer 2021.

2.10 These management prescriptions include:

- **Spring Wildflowers** – Planting bulbs and spring-flowering plants to provide an early nectar source with minimal inconvenience to recreational greenspace usage.
- **Conservation Cut** - relaxation of the mowing regime to an annual cut-and-lift. This enables areas of long grass over the growing season, allowing wildflowers to thrive while also extending their potential flowering season.
- **Hay meadow cut & meadow enhancement** - requires higher resource input and therefore surveys have been conducted to highlight the sites worthy of increased investment. These areas are cut and lifted twice a year.

- Enhanced Amenity cut - provides some wildlife benefits, achieved by raising the cutting height of an amenity cut to a minimum of 50mm. This allows species present in the amenity grass areas to flower and low flowering species could be introduced to increase diversity, such as Birds-foot Trefoil, Daisy and Selfheal.
- Ride Management - Annual cutting of grass, bramble and small scrub to maintain areas of long grass/bramble/ small scrub, such as woodland footpaths and edges.
- Hedge restoration - Assists with reconnecting fragmented habitats offering benefits similar to woodland edge habitat. Involves coppicing, laying and replanting hedgerows.
- Wetland Creation - Wetlands hold approximately two thirds of the UK's freshwater species. Creating new wetland areas will vastly improve the ecological diversity of any greenspace.
- Woodland Creation – planting large numbers of small trees creates the opportunity for carbon sequestration while enhancing greenspace. The social benefits and ecological benefits of tree planting are accompanied by screening, noise absorption and reducing temperatures.
- Standard tree planting – planting small numbers of larger trees is another option when woodland creation is not appropriate, but still offers many of the same benefits.

2.11 Officers have developed an action plan to support the implementation of these recommendations, which is phased over a 5 year period. This action plan is detailed at Appendix C.

2.12 Officers will monitor progress during Years 1 and 2 as some sites, where Meadow Enhancement has been recommended, may not be necessary as a diverse meadow vegetation may already exist. Officers will therefore review this and identify other priority sites for Meadow Creation in Year 3.

2.13 The specific actions for Year 1 can be viewed within Appendix F and detailed at point 2.39.

2.14 The financial implications detailed at point 2.43 and within section 5 are based on a contractor undertaking all of the work included within the action plan. However, there are opportunities to reduce costs, through a community engagement programme, led by the new Community Biodiversity Officer and could include, but is not limited to volunteer activities to plant trees or wildflowers each season.

Alternative Grassland Management

2.15 Within the BOA there are recommendations for alternative grassland management, including Conservation Cut (cut & lift once a year), Hay Meadow Cut (cut & lift twice a year), Enhanced Amenity (reduced frequency of cutting) and Ride Management (cut once per year). These recommendations prescribe the most suitable grassland management regime, depending on the site's location and habitat. For example, Enhanced Amenity is more suitable on roadside verges; Hay Meadow cut is more suitable on large areas with lower leisure and recreational uses; Ride management is more suitable along woodland paths and edges.

- 2.16 This part of the report will also factor in the larger sites, which were excluded from the BOA due to having their own site specific Management Plan.
- 2.17 There are two ways of looking at the current percentage of grassland kept longer for biodiversity benefits:
- All TRDC grassland – this includes sites requiring short grass for specific purposes, such as sports pitches, open cemeteries and event grounds (e.g. The Green - Croxley Revels and Rickmansworth Aquadrome –Canal Festival/Dog Free Picnic Area)
 - Available TRDC grassland – this excludes areas that are kept as short grass for specific purposes (as above), but still includes areas kept short for informal sports and recreation, picnicking and dog walking.
- 2.18 Following the BOA report and further scrutiny by Officers (in particular the new Community Biodiversity Officer) on the current grassland management regimes, the previously reported figures have now been amended and are detailed below and at point 2.24.
- 2.19 The current percentages that are maintained as longer grass, is as follows:
- All TRDC grassland – 54%
 - Available TRDC grassland – 62%
- 2.20 These percentages are broken down as follows:

Grassland management type	Description	All grass	Available grass (excludes permanent amenity grass)
Cut & Lift	Cut & lift once or twice a year	16%	18%
Cut & Lift (pilot sites)	Cut and lift once a year	3%	3%
Reduced cut	Cut once a year, or uncut	8%	10%
3 year rotational cut & lift	Horse's Field	6%	7%
Conservation grazing	Light grazing for biodiversity benefit	21%	24%
General Amenity Grass	Cut regularly for general recreation	33%	38%
Permanent Amenity Grass	Sports pitches / event grounds / open cemeteries	13%	N/A

- 2.21 In addition to the above, the BOA makes recommendations for alternative grassland management at a number of sites across the district, including Berry Lane, Rickmansworth Park and Tanners Hill.
- 2.22 The full list of sites and their proposed grassland management regimes are detailed within Appendix D.
- 2.23 With these additions, it would mean, the percentage of longer grass would change to:

- All TRDC grassland – 67%
- Available TRDC grassland – 77%

2.24 This can be broken down as follows:

Grassland management type	Description	All grass	Available grass (excludes permanent grass)
Cut & Lift (major sites, pilot sites & Audit)	Cut once or twice per year	21%	24%
Reduced cut	Cut once a year	3%	3%
Uncut	Rewilded	6%	7%
Conservation grazing	Light grazing for biodiversity benefit	27%	31%
Enhanced Amenity Grass	Reduced frequency / increased height of cutting	11%	12%
General Amenity Grass	Cut regularly for general recreation	20%	23%
Permanent Amenity Grass	Sports pitches / event grounds / open cemeteries	12%	N/A

2.25 The remaining amenity grassland areas are comprised of football pitches, bowling greens, play areas, dog walking areas, picnic areas and areas for informal recreation and leisure. These areas are cut up to 12 times per year, depending on the weather.

2.26 It should be noted that areas managed by Parish Councils are not included in these calculations. Notable areas include: Chorleywood Common, Manor House Grounds and The Green, Sarratt.

Current Staffing

2.27 Grounds Maintenance is a small team of 14, plus a supervisor, who carry out many and varied duties across the District. This includes litter picking; emptying dog and litter bins; inspection of the 31 play areas, five adult gyms and four skate parks; grave digging; maintenance of three cemeteries, three bowling greens and the Rose Garden at Three Rivers House, shrubbery and tree works, installing signage; and marking out of football pitches and district wide grass cutting. In addition, they provide a reactive maintenance response where possible, such as incidences of damage and vandalism, cutting back overhanging vegetation, clearing smaller fallen trees; and assisting with flooding incidents and snow clearance, when necessary.

2.28 There are also four environmental maintenance staff that cover verge cutting across the district. They also undertake the following tasks; clearance of fly tipping; leaf clearance; mud/accident clean ups; shrub bed maintenance and hedge cutting; dead animal removal; emptying of dog bins (not including parks); drainage ditch maintenance at a number of sites; clearing up after traveller incursions; graffiti removal; and garage site maintenance.

- 2.29 An additional member of the Grounds Maintenance team has recently been approved as part of the budget setting process, with this post supporting the implementation of the new Tree Strategy and increasing need for a reactive maintenance response as detailed within point 2.26 and 2.27.
- 2.30 Along with the work programme detailed above, to date, Grounds Maintenance currently undertake a third of the cut and lift across the district, with the remaining carried out by a contractors/graziers. Extending this further and diversifying the grass cutting regimes will require additional staff training and equipment in order to implement the proposals effectively and with positive biodiversity results.

Ragwort

- 2.31 Areas of longer grass may increase issues with Ragwort and other injurious weeds, which would need treating or pulling prior to the sale of any grass as hay, or which might otherwise increase transport costs of grass for composting. The treatment of weeds prior to cutting would be an additional cost. Government guidance in relation to the disposal of ragwort, and the Weeds Act 1959 applies to owners of land. It covers in addition to Ragwort, the presence of Spear Thistle, Creeping or Field Thistle, Curled Dock and Broad Leaved Dock. Enforcement is by issue of a notice and the County Council has authority to do this.
- 2.32 The extent of any issues with Ragwort or other weeds are currently unknown as part of the alternative grassland management proposals. Additional costs may be incurred and this has been included as part of the annual contingency revenue budget. Anything over and above this will be reported via in-year budget monitoring.

Logistics

- 2.33 Officers propose that the alternative grassland management regimes are delivered in the following way:
- Hay Meadow Cut – cut and lifted twice a year. The first cut to be carried out by a procured contractor and the second cut to be carried out by Grounds Maintenance. The cuts will take place in August and October.
 - Conservation Cut – some sites will be cut and lifted once a year, other sites will be cut and left on site, once a year. These cuts will be carried out by Grounds Maintenance and will take place in September.
 - Enhanced Amenity – the height of the grass will be raised at certain locations – this will be carried out by Grounds Maintenance and frequency will be dependent on grass growth.
 - Ride Management – woodland edges and areas within woodlands will be cut on a two year rotation, with arisings left on site.
- 2.34 A contractor will need to be procured to carry out the first Hay Meadow Cut and additional equipment for Grounds Maintenance to carry out the grass cutting successfully will also need to be procured.
- 2.35 The arisings from the first Hay Meadow Cut and Lift will be baled by a contractor (if suitable) and removed from site and the arisings from the second Hay Meadow Cut and Lift and the arisings from the Conservation Cut will require disposal to an anaerobic digestion plant.

- 2.36 A number of variables will influence the grass cutting regimes and these will be monitored year on year. This includes factors such as the weather, which can impact the volume of grass or hay required for disposal; and the presence of litter, Ragwort and dog mess, which can affect the quality of hay produced and its saleability or disposal costs.
- 2.37 Members have previously suggested the sharing of equipment with other local authorities, however, as the timing of the Hay Meadow Cut and Conservation Cut all take place within a short window, it would be likely that all Local Authorities would be using the equipment at the same time, which would mean a delay to our own cuts and a reduction in biodiversity benefits.
- 2.38 Officers will monitor the first year's implementation and will consider whether it might be more cost effective over the long term for Grounds Maintenance to undertake the first Hay Meadow Cut, as well as subsequent cuts. However, this will require further capital investment in equipment to do this and possible additional staff resource and storage of the additional equipment would also be an issue.
- 2.39 A further report will come back to committee should Officers feel this would be a more financially viable approach for the Council.

Year 1 Actions

- 2.40 The following information outlines the specific actions for Year 1 only, further details on Year 1 actions can be viewed within Appendix F and subsequent years within Appendix C:

Management Prescriptions	Where	When
Alternative Grassland Management	See Appendix D for locations	From April 2022
Spring Wildflower Planting	Hayling Road verges, South Oxhey	From October
Tree Planting	53 trees planted at various sites across the district	From January 2023

- 2.41 The focus for Year 1 will be to introduce alternative grassland management regimes, along with tree planting and Spring Wildflower planting. This will include the twice annual Hay Meadow cut and lift and the annual Conservation cut and lift.
- 2.42 Meadow enhancements will not take place in years 1 and 2 due to Officers analysing the impact of the Hay Meadow cut and lift and the Conservation cut and lift on the identified areas. Should these areas already have good wildflower diversity, further enhancements will not be needed. However, should Officers identify that these sites need further work, then wildflower plugs and seeds will be introduced from Year 3 onwards.
- 2.43 From Year 2 onwards, further work will be undertaken to restore hedgerows, create and enhance wetlands at 2 sites and create new small woodlands.

Financial Implications

- 2.44 The financial implications of the BOA are detailed within the Action Plan at Appendix C and within the overall revenue implications at Appendix E.
- 2.45 The BOA Action Plan revenue costs detailed below are based on delivering the BOA Action Plan over a 5 year period.
- 2.46 As detailed at 2.14, there are opportunities to reduce costs, through a community engagement programme, led by the new Community Biodiversity Officer and could include, but is not limited to volunteer activities to plant trees or wildflowers each season. However, this is not guaranteed, therefore costs are based on a contractor delivering all of the work.
- 2.47 In order to implement the alternative grassland management regimes, additional capital and revenue resource will be required. Appendix E provides full costings and details their usage, however, it can be summarised as follows:

Capital

- Wessex Cut and Lift Machine - £11,300
- Small Cut and Lift ride-on - £17,000
- Storage for the Cut and Lift Ride-On - £1,000
- Tractor Mounted Flail - £6,540
- Small Flail - £5,890
- Contingency for changes in purchase prices - £10,000
- Signage - £2,500
- **TOTAL: £54,230**

Revenue

- Contractor to undertake first Hay Meadow Cut and Lift: estimated at £11,000
- Disposal of arisings (including labour and HGV driver): estimated at £18,255
- BOA budget: between £50,760 and £77,432 over 5 years
- Contingency budget: £10,000
- **TOTAL: Between £90,015 and £116,687 per annum over 5 years***

**see the finance table at point 5.7 for the total cost per annum*

- 2.48 The costs outlined above are based on estimates from suppliers and contractors and will need to be procured. A capital contingency has been included, should there be a significant difference in the purchase of equipment during the procurement phase, from the original estimates provided by suppliers in December 2021.
- 2.49 It is likely that the second cut and lift in the autumn will result in minimal arisings and will therefore have a lower disposal cost. However, the volume of arisings will vary from year to year, and the costs of disposal could increase. In some situations, the

arisings from the first Conservation Cut and the second Hay Meadow Cut may need to be cut up and left on site. It is important to note that the main biodiversity benefits will be realised from the first Hay Meadow Cut and Lift.

- 2.50 In addition, the cost for a contractor to carry out the first Hay Meadow cut may vary, depending on the quality of the grass (as outlined at point 2.35) and whether or not they can bail it and use it for hay. If they are unable to do this, a disposal cost will also be included in their fee.
- 2.51 These two factors are difficult to assess or anticipate as the weather and quality of the grass are the main influencing factors, therefore a revenue contingency budget has been included for consideration by Members.

Public Engagement

- 2.52 Following the agreed recommendation at the 24 January 2022 Policy and Resources Committee, Officers will undertake consultation post-implementation to assess the impact (PR69/21).
- 2.53 This would be carried out in partnership with the TRDC Communications team and the TRDC Consultation and Partnerships Officer.

Timescales

- 2.54 The BOA Action Plan outlines the timescales for implementation on a phased approach over the next 5 years. This can be reviewed at Appendix C.
- 2.55 Subject to budgets and availability of equipment, the Alternative Grassland Management regimes can be implemented from the 2022 grass cutting season, which will commence in April.

3 Options and Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 The purpose of this report is to summarise the content and implications of the Biodiversity Opportunities Audit (BOA) of minor TRDC open spaces.
- 3.2 The report also includes proposals for alternative grassland management for parts of the district, in particular some of the Council's major open spaces, such as Chorleywood House Estate and Leavesden Country Park.
- 3.3 The report and Appendices C and E includes financial implications of the recommendations detailed at point 13.1 and 13.2.

4 Policy/Budget Reference and Implications

- 4.1 The recommendations in this report are not within the Council's agreed budgets.
- 4.2 The recommendations in this report are within the Council's agreed policy.
- 4.3 The recommendations in this report relate to the achievement of the following performance indicators.
 - 4.3.1 Housing and Thriving Communities
 - 4.3.2 Sustainable Environment
 - 4.3.3 CP02/EP16 - Satisfaction with Parks and Open Spaces

- 4.3.4 LL34 - To Maintain Accreditation with Green Flag
- 4.3.5 LL35 - To ensure all our key open spaces have a current management plan in place
- 4.3.6 CP50 – Climate Emergency and Sustainability Action Plan
- 4.3.7 EP15 – Satisfaction with keeping public land clear of litter and refuse
- 4.4 The impact of the recommendations on this/these performance indicator(s) is:
 - 4.4.1 The implementation of the Biodiversity Opportunities Audit (BOA) Action Plan and the proposals for Alternative Grassland Management 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.

5 Financial Implications

- 5.1 There are both capital and revenue implications with proceeding with the recommendations outlined at points 13.1 and 13.2.
- 5.2 Officers have factored in existing budgets to deliver some elements of the scheme, which includes an annual tree planting budget, revenue budget for the Community Biodiversity Officer and existing staffing costs within Grounds Maintenance.
- 5.3 As detailed at 2.44, the following costs are based on delivering the BOA Action plan over 5 years.
- 5.4 A contingency budget has been included within the table for the reasons outlined in points 2.47 to 2.50. Any additional costs will be reported through the budget monitoring process.
- 5.5 The following tables highlight the expenditure required over and above existing budgets to deliver the proposals outlined within this report.
- 5.6 In Year 1, procurement for the contractor to undertake the first Hay Meadow Cut and Lift will take place in April, with the contract being awarded in May
- 5.7 Ongoing revenue expenditure would be as follows:

REVENUE IMPLICATION	Current Year 2022/23 £	2023/24 £	2024/25 £	2025/26 £	2026/27 £	Future Years per annum £
Revenue						
<i>Contractor – First Hay Meadow Cut and Lift</i>	11,000	11,000	11,000	11,000	11,000	11,000
<i>Biodiversity Opportunities</i>	50,760	70,545	77,432	64,288	57,629	0*

<i>Audit – delivery over 5 years</i>						
<i>Disposal costs of arisings</i>	18,255	18,255	18,255	18,255	18,255	18,255
<i>Contingency</i>	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000
Net Commitment	90,015	109,800	116,687	103,543	96,884	39,255*

**After the 5 year period, Officers will review the impact of the various management prescriptions and identify any future opportunities for biodiversity enhancements. Any further growth items will be presented as part of the budget setting process.*

5.8 Officers obtained quotes for capital equipment needed to carry out the alternative grassland management and these costs are detailed below. Please note, these will need to be procured and may result in higher or lower costs than those outlined within the table at 5.9. A contingency sum for this purpose has been included for Members to consider.

5.9 Ongoing capital expenditure and revenue implications of the capital expenditure include:

CAPITAL IMPLICATION	Current Year 2022/23 £	2023/24 £	2024/25 £	Every 5 Years per annum £	Every 10 Years per annum £	Future Years per annum £
<i>Wessex Cut and Lift Machine</i>	11,300				11,300	
<i>Small Cut and Lift Ride-on</i>	17,000			17,000		
<i>Storage for the Cut and Lift Ride-on</i>	1,000				1,000	
<i>Tractor Mounted Flail</i>	6,540				6,540	
<i>Small Flail</i>	5,890				5,890	
<i>Contingency for changes in purchase price</i>	10,000				10,000	
<i>Signage</i>	2,500				2,500	
Net Capital Commitment	54,230	0	0	17,000	37,230	0

Revenue implications of capital expenditure:					
Replacement flail blades	200	200	200		200
Fuel for the small cut and lift ride-on mower	50	50	50		50
Insurance implications	3,000	3,000	3,000		3,000
Net Revenue Commitment for Capital Expenditure	3,250	3,250	3,250		3,250

5.10 The Small Cut and Lift-Ride on will need to be replaced every 5 years and the other items of equipment will need to be replaced every 10 years, this will also need to be factored into future budgets.

5.11 Annual revenue implications are detailed above and include maintenance, fuel and insurance for the new items.

Financial Timings

5.12 Capital items will be procured in April and budget will be required to purchase the equipment in May 2022.

5.13 The timings for when the revenue budget will be needed for Year 1 are detailed below:

Item	Timings	Budget
Contractor – first Hay Meadow cut and lift	Procured in April, contract awarded in May 2022.	£11,000
Spring Wildflower Planting	Autumn 2022 (October onwards)	£41,860
Tree Planting	Procured in October, contract awarded in November.	£8,900
Disposal Costs	September 2022	£18,255
Contingency	February 2023	£10,000
Revenue implications of capital items	February 2023	£3,250

6 Legal Implications

6.1 All proposed works and equipment will be tendered within the Council's constitution and procurement procedures, where required.

6.2 The Council has a duty to have regard to conserving and enhancing biodiversity under S40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. This does not mean that the duty must be given greater weight than other matters and the audits that are being presented within this report satisfy the duty, which is for the Council to 'have regard' when it exercises its functions. As a landowner, the Council would also

be subject to the regime under the Weeds Act 1959, (as amended by the Ragwort Act 2003), this being referred to at point 2.30.

7 Staffing Implications

- 7.1 The delivery of the Biodiversity Opportunities Audit Action Plan will require the time of the Community Biodiversity Officer, supported by the new Parks and Sustainability Officer and the Principal Trees and Landscape Officer.
- 7.2 The current proposals outlined in 2.32 will not require additional staff resource, however, should Officers feel it would be more financially sustainable for ground maintenance to undertake the first Hay Meadow cut and lift and dispose the arisings, it is possible it will require further staff resource. As outlined in points 2.37 and 2.38, should this be the recommendation, a further report will be presented to Members.
- 7.3 Staff training on the new equipment will be provided free of charge as part of the purchase price.

8 Environmental Implications

- 8.1 New management prescriptions for the Council's minor parks and open spaces, will enable a varied and diverse development of habitats, which will have a positive impact on the flora and fauna across the district.
- 8.2 Introducing 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.

9 Public Health Implications

- 9.1 Accessible, well maintained parks and open spaces have never been more vital to the health and wellbeing of individuals than during the COVID 19 Pandemic. Being able to connect with wildlife has a positive impact on both the physical and mental health and wellbeing of individuals.
- 9.2 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.
- 9.3 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>

10 Customer Services Centre Implications, Community Safety Implications,

- 10.1 None Specific

11 Communications and Website Implications

- 11.1 Information will be included on the Council's website to outline the changes to the grassland management regimes, along with a number of posts across social media.

11.2 As outlined in point 2.51, Officers will consult with the local community post-implementation to assess the impact.

12 Risk and Health & Safety Implications

12.1 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.

12.2 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).

12.3 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>
The Council is criticised for not progressing with alternative grass management	Reputational damage and potential complaints.	Communications can be managed around ensuring residents are aware that the Council does have a Climate Change Strategy. Members to agree the recommendations	Treat	4
Environmental Protection and Leisure and Landscapes are unable to implement the actions from the BOA and alternative grassland management	Financial implications Staff implications	Budge increase to allow EP and LL to implement the actions outlined within the BOA and the recommendations for Alternative Grassland Management	Treat	4
Objectives of the Climate Change Strategy are not achieved	Corporate Framework implications Reputational damage and potential complaints	Members to agree the recommendations	Treat	4

12.4 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>
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 to the Council from some residents	Continue with marketing and comms on the scheme Public consultation following the first year of implementation	Treat	4
There are a number of unknowns e.g. amount of grass, quality of grass, weather impact etc.	Contingency budget to be included to allow for unknown variables	Contingency budget to be approved and monitored in Year 1. Officers to report any financial implications through in year budget monitoring	Treat	4
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

12.5 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	Low	High	Very High	Very High
	4	8	12	16
Low	Medium	High	Very High	
3	6	9	12	

	Low 2	Low 4	Medium 6	High 8
	Low 1	Low 2	Low 3	Low 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%))

12.6 In the officers' opinion none of the risks in paragraphs 12.3 and 12.4 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

13 Recommendation

13.1 That the Policy and Resources Committee approves the Biodiversity Opportunities Audit Action Plan proposed in Appendix C and the delivery of an alternative grassland management regime as set out at 2.32 and within Appendix D, subject to any comment from the Leisure, Environment and Community Committee.

13.2 Following the capital budget provision made at Full Council on the 22 February 2022, any additional revenue budget requirements for 2022/23 and future years will need to be brought forward as part of the normal budget process.

Report prepared by:

Charlotte Gomes, Landscapes and Leisure Development Manager

Alex Laurie, Principal Tree and Landscape Officer

Jess Hodges, Community Biodiversity Officer

Malcolm Clarke, Waste & Environment Manager

Ray Figg, Head of Community Services

Data checked by:

Alex Laurie, Principal Tree and Landscape Officer

Jess Hodges, Community Biodiversity Officer

Malcolm Clarke, Waste & Environment Manager

Data rating:

1	Poor	
2	Sufficient	x
3	High	

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Biodiversity Opportunities Audit Report

Appendix B: Glossary of Terms

Appendix C: Biodiversity Opportunities Audit Action Plan

Appendix D: Alternative Grassland Management Locations and Regimes

Appendix E: Capital and Revenue Breakdown of Implementation

Appendix F: Year 1 Priorities 2022-23