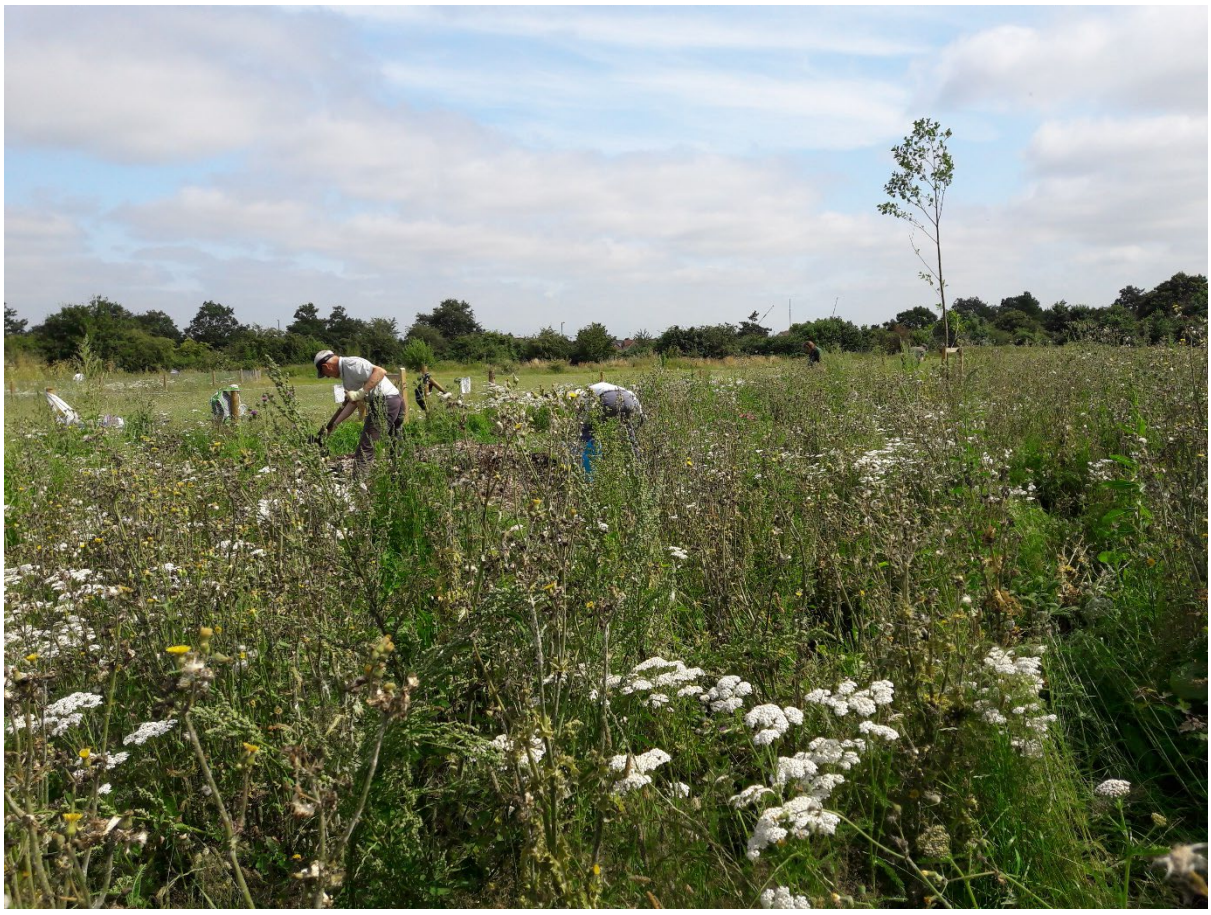
John Shennan Field Management Plan 2025-2029



Contents

Introduction

1. General Information

Area: Approximately 6.3 hectares
Ownership: Chelmsford City Council
Site name: John Shennan Field
Grid reference: TL 70564 05199

1.1 Site Location

The site is situated in Chelmsford, within the Moulsham Lodge Ward, with a population of some 5,700 people. However, it serves a larger area in terms of recreation, with the residents from adjoining wards also using it, as it is the most significant piece of public open space in the area. This can be qualified as we use place formatics. Whereby we can seek to identify footfall patterns and visitor behaviour data by introducing and using this to aid site management, maintenance, recovery, and growth. Monthly figures for place formatics show seasonal monthly variations of between 13,826 and 16,112 monthly visitor numbers to the site during 2022.

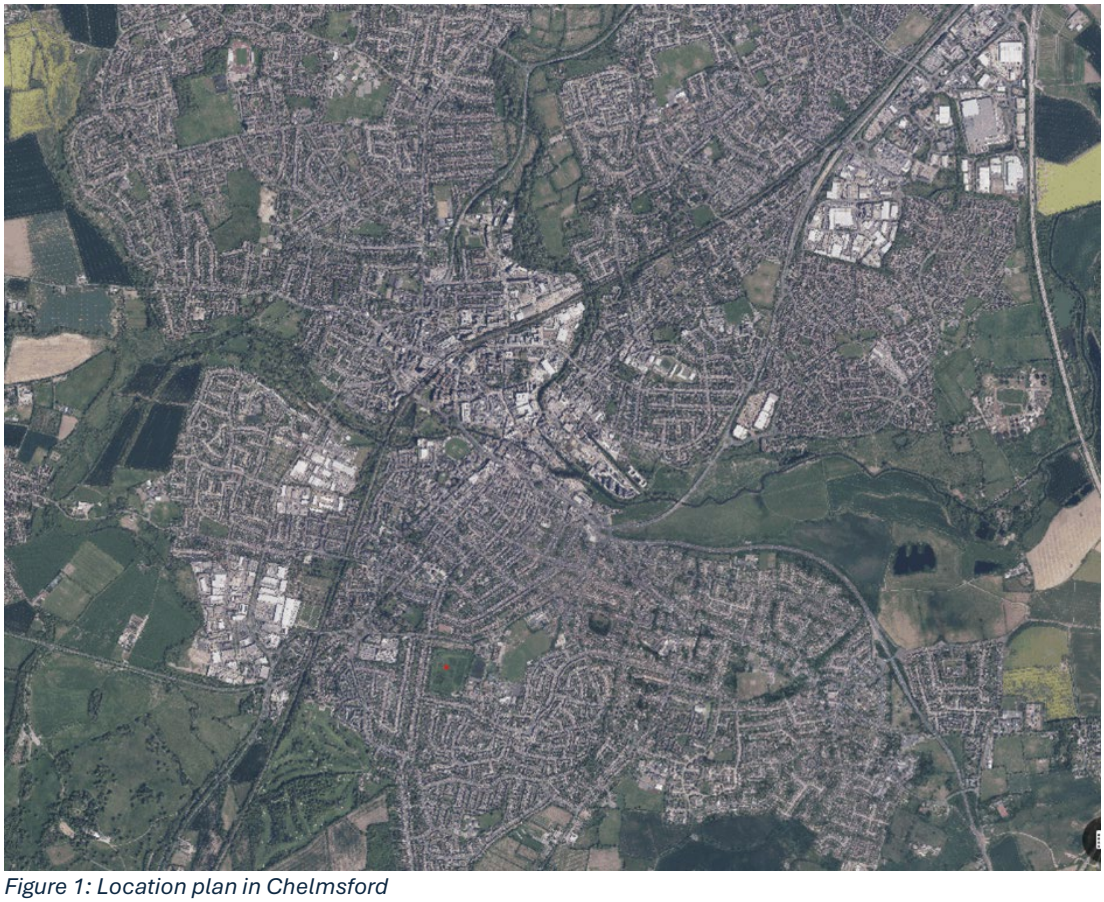


Figure 1: Location plan in Chelmsford

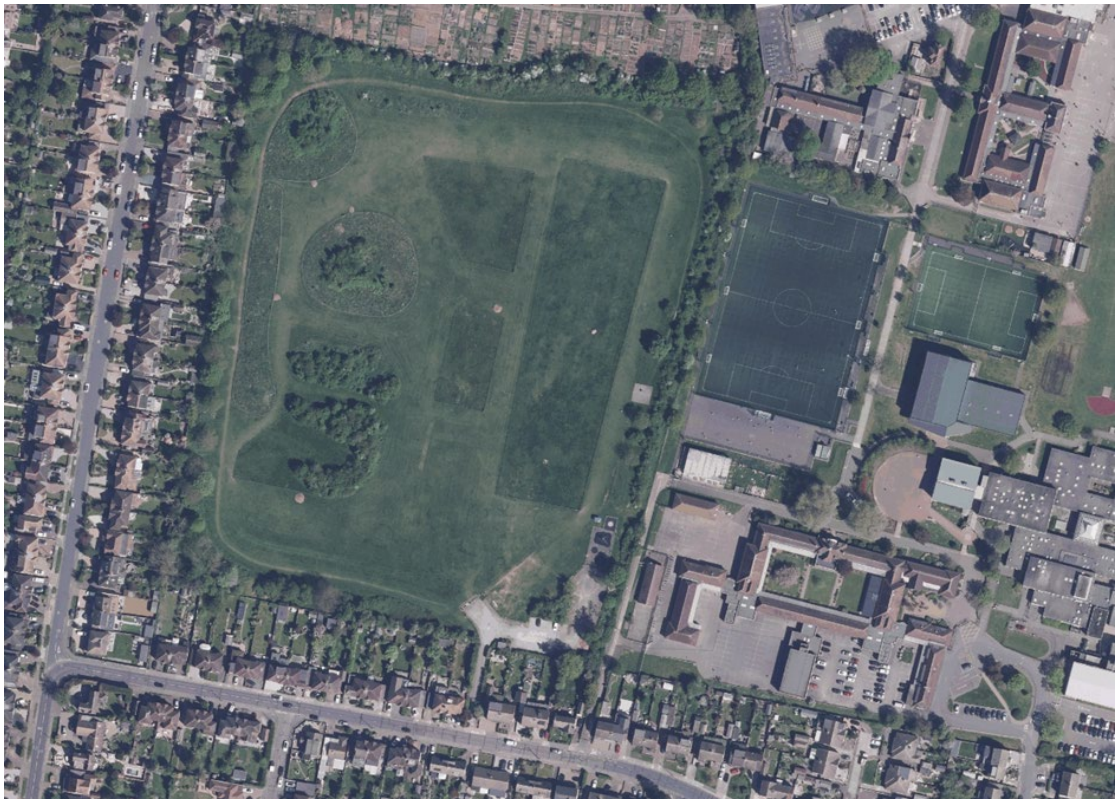


Figure 2: John Shennan Field - site plan aerial 2023

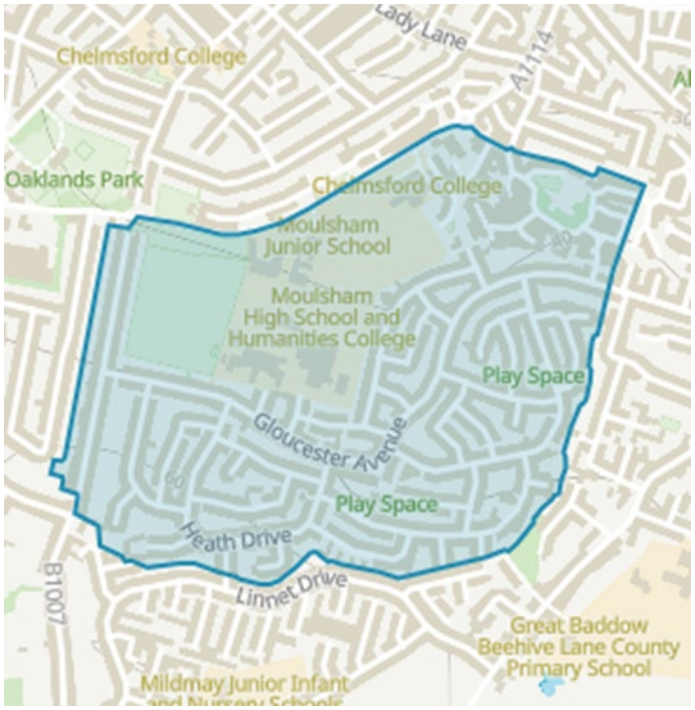


Figure 3: John Shennan Field Ward Area

1.2 Designations

John Shennan Field is identified as Open Space in the Council's Site Allocations Development Plan document. We are working with Natural England on seeking to achieve a declaration as a Local Nature Reserve in the near future.

1.3 Management

The site is managed as part of the Parks and Green Spaces, with regular Parks Volunteers practical sessions, which also include many residents promoted via the local residents Facebook group Friends of John Shennan Playing Field | Chelmsford | Facebook. Footpaths around the site are kept clear be being mown every 3 weeks from the spring to late summer. Regular monthly volunteer sessions, led by the Parks and Conservation Volunteer Leader and assistant, encourage the local community to come to engage with looking after the site, working to the management plan.

2. Site History

The history of the site is important in informing the management plan, in terms that the site is not what it initially appears, and this influences the ecology of it and hence its land management.

Early archive images from the 1920s show John Shennan Field as part of a rural scene, with fields and crops and farm machinery. The area would have been on the periphery of the market town of Chelmsford. The new Moulsham Lodge development, within which the site sits construction began in the late 1920s and early 1930's. The image below shows the field that corresponds to John Shennan Field, with the first houses being built in Longstomps Avenue and Oaklands Park in the distance.

Figure 4: 1920's

Figure 5: 1920's

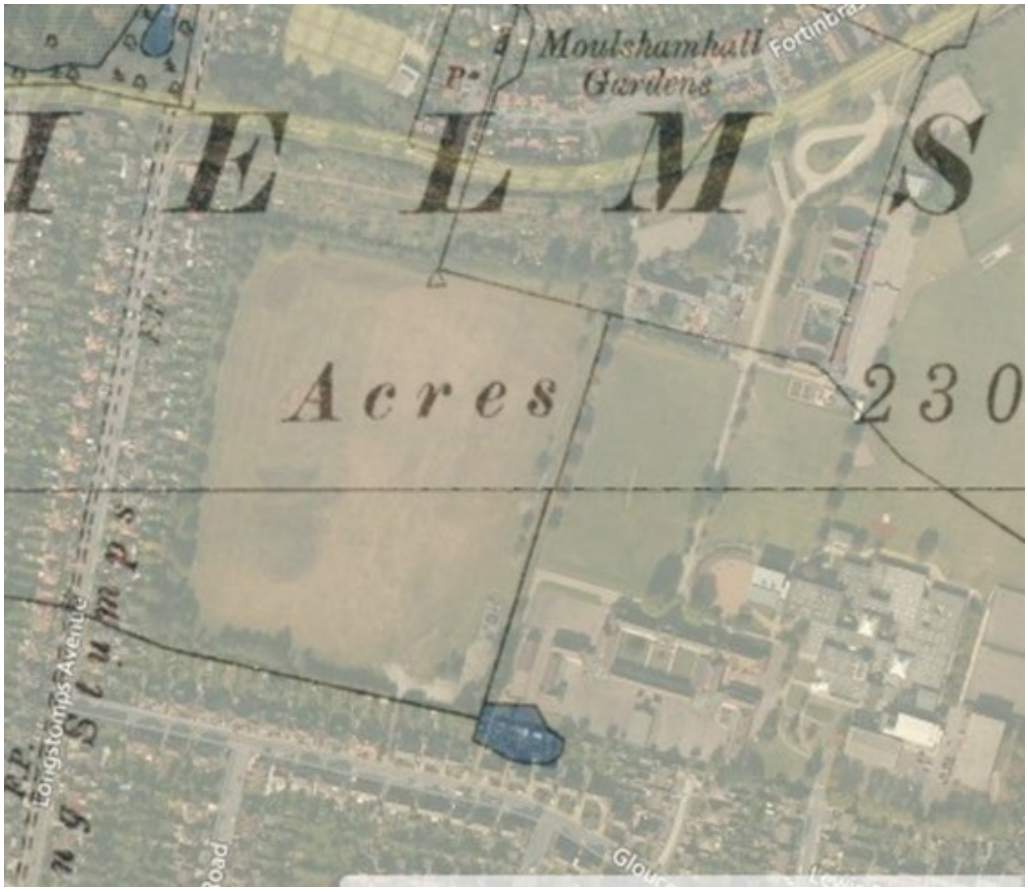


Figure 6: An overlay of an OS map 1888-1913 on today's Google map of John Shennan Field

Image credit: The History of Moulsham posted by Martin Robb 2016

Following this period, and the development of Moulsham Lodge, the land now known as John Shennan Field was used for gravel extraction, then later purchased by the council (1954) and used as a landfill site for the town.

Figure 7: John Shennan Field, prior to gravel extraction in 1935

The site was purchased by the council in 1954. It was used as a refuse tip until around the 1960's. The District Valuer and Valuation Office sent a letter dated 31.3.1966 to the Town Clerk saying "The Transfer of land at present held by the Councils Public Health Committee to its Parks Committee for the provision of playing fields and for the purpose is required to accompany the application to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government for sanction to the appropriation. The land comprised in the appropriation has recently been tipped with refuse by the Council and is in an unlevelled and rough condition."

It was developed, by the Council into a sports area with football pitches. later it was named after the then Head of Parks and included a changing pavilion (which was later demolished) play area, and small car park. Due to the nature of the landfill, which at the time was unregulated – it became unsuitable for use as a sports area. With the site undulating and dropping vastly as the site settled so the site became an informal recreation ground in the 1980s/90s. It continues to be subject to some ground settlement which periodically requires some levelling with imported topsoil. These settlement areas cover approximately 85% of the site mostly located in the central part. This is one of the reasons why any built facilities such as the play area, half basketball court, youth shelter, and carpark are located around the perimeter headland of the former waste tip.

It has been formally subject to methane seepage monitoring. The monitoring was concluded in 2010 and the site is now longer at risk in accordance with Atkins's consultant's assessment (dated 10th November 2010).

The site initially following cessation as a sports area was a vast space of open short mown grass with very little habitat opportunity and not that interesting to walk or play on. It had no tree cover other than at the edges of the site.

Over the last 15 to 20 years it has gradually been evolved into its present form, by the Parks team, working with Parks Volunteers on the site to a biodiversity development and management plan.

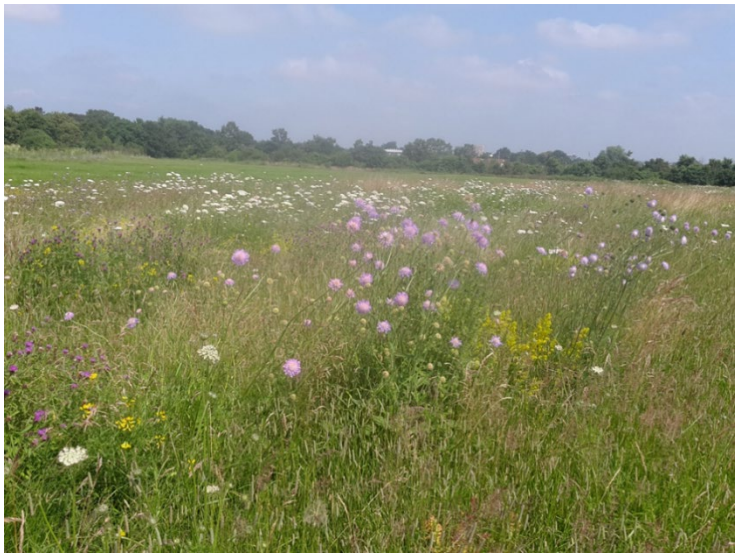


Figure 8

3. Site Description

Today John Shennan Field comprises of predominately grassland, with fenced areas of young tree planting of various ages, with wildflower grassland and informal footpaths. Areas are fenced as the space is heavily used by dog walkers and the stock fenced areas provide protection of ground nesting birds, reptiles and small mammals etc. Boundaries are generally defined by trees and scrub. The site is bordered to the north by private allotments, east by Moulsham High School and south/west by housing. Access is available for vehicles and pedestrians via Gloucester Avenue and by foot only via Princes Road There is a small free car park located at the Gloucester Road access.

3.1 Landfill and Ecology

The site is a pre-1974 landfill tip. Landfill sites pre-1974 are generally poorly capped and filled, this is the case at John Shennan, from the evidence of settlement and some minor investigative work undertaken in the past. The minimal soil cover and low nutrient status of this type of landfill sites however can provide an ideal environment to maximise biodiversity.

Tree planting on such sites can be difficult to establish, and species even selected for such difficult sites can have stunted growth. Select species have been trialled, on the understanding that they may not reach their full height due to soil conditions. The earliest tree planting on the site was undertaken in 2008-2010 as a trial to see what species would work. The three small coppices established well. We then waited to

see how these established over a 5-year period, adding species in each year to continue to test prior to continuing with additional mass planting.

Historic aerial maps illustrate how the site has evolved from a uniform amenity sports field into a more diverse and interesting ecological space, with recreational space.

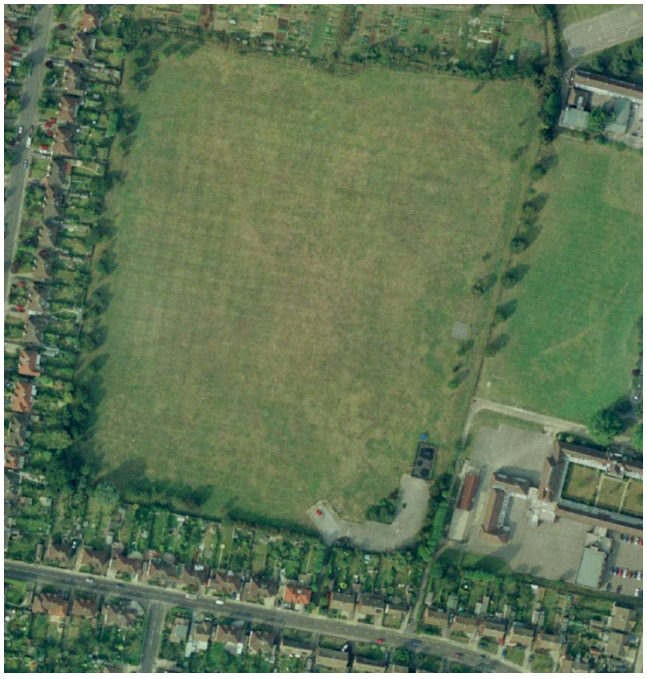


Figure 9: Aerial 2000 recreation area

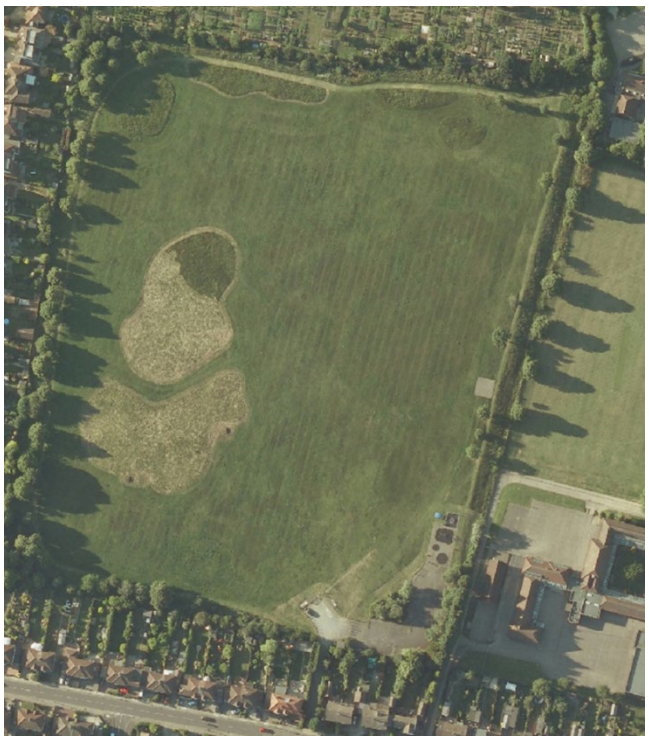


Figure 10: Aerial 2008 early tree plantations and relaxation of grassland management

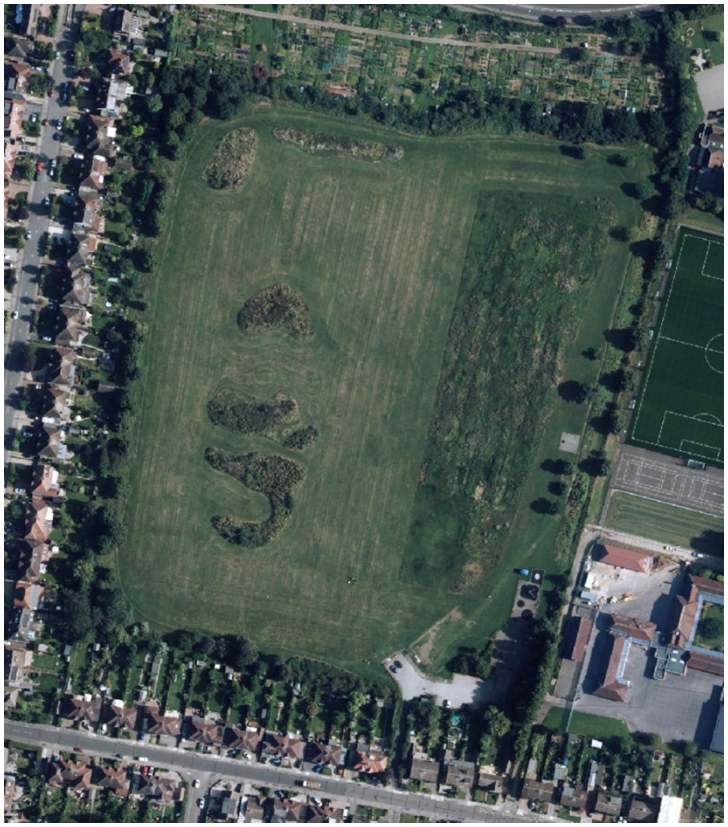


Figure 11: Aerial 2014 increased meadow grassland and maturing tree planting phase 1

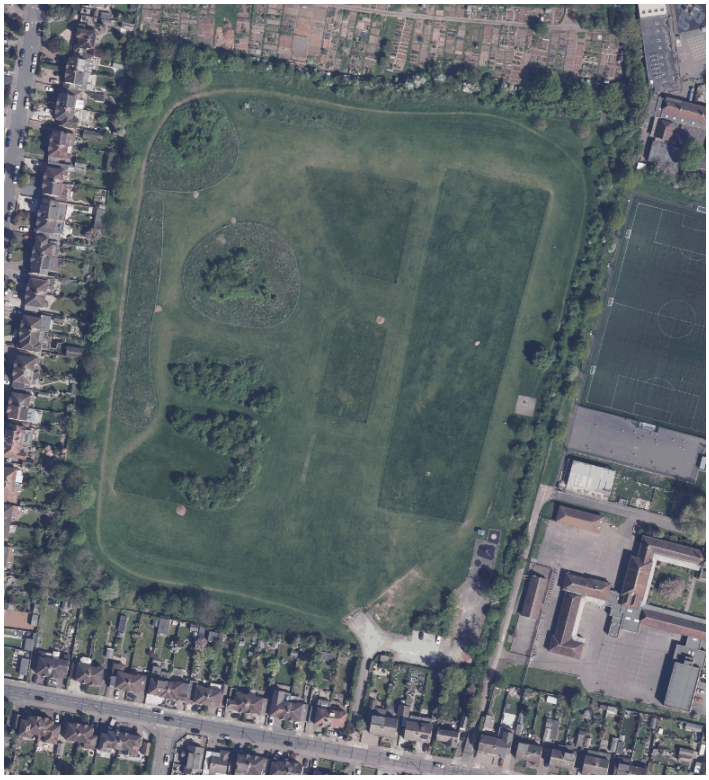


Figure 12: 2022 Aerial showing current compartments.

3.2 Key Community Objectives

The change in the management of the site, to one that seeks to create habitat and ecologically improve the area has been gradual and planned, having been undertaken over the last 15- 20 years. This includes a substantial tree planting scheme, combined with alterations to grassland management which commenced in 2007/8. From a consultation undertaken with residents in 2019 the desire to protect and enhance the space was recognised. This has consisted of a master planned increase in tree cover, associated with other ecological improvements to;

- increase the users experience on the site and make it more interesting to walk and use and create a connection to nature.
- Increase the biodiversity/ecology of the site and create habitats. Projects have included the addition of hibernacula and bat boxes, wildflower seed and plug planting.
- Ensuring space for informal recreation is maintained.

Key to the success of the site is to increase biodiversity whilst keeping the site accessible to all, with usable areas for recreation. In 2018 a public consultation was undertaken by the Residents Facebook group, working with CCC. Findings were;

1. Total number of responses were 421 and there was a 60/40 split between those who visit the site and those who currently do not.
2. There is overwhelming support for providing woodland planting and wildlife/ecological areas on the site with 80% support for this future proposal for the site.
3. In summary, high scoring suggestions (80% or more) are improved equipped play for all ages, open grass areas for informal recreation, wildlife/habitat creation, better footpath/cycleway links to Princess Road, and planting trees.
4. Other high scoring suggestions were (around mid-70's score) about the use of the area for dog walking, provision of forest school.
5. The provision of an outdoor gym and outdoor table tennis were items with 57% to 50% support.
6. Lower support (around 50% or lower) was found for other suggestion such as café and toilet provisions, School access, additional car parking (including for school run), "men's sheds", performance space, BMX track.

The play area is due for refurbishment in 2024 (subject to full council) Its redevelopment will involve public consultation.

Working with the residents Facebook group and involving the community in developing and helping to manage the site is fundamental to the success of this project, through the parks Volunteer Scheme.

3.3 Biodiversity management objectives

The overall aim for managing this site is to maintain and enhance the grassland habitat and to maintain the other habitats.

1. To manage the variety of habitats within the site to maximise their biodiversity value.
2. To maintain and enhance the grassland.
3. To manage the site to seek designation as an LNR
4. To ensure informal recreation spaces within the site

3.4 Connectivity with other sites

The site links through to a privately managed allotment site on its northern boundary and short mown school playing fields on the eastern side. Other than that, there is limited linkage to back gardens. This connection to residential properties is of benefit to birds and potentially hedgehogs and could form part of a future community project. There is evidence from the reptile survey undertaken in 2023 that slow worms are using the linkage to the allotments and the bank that joins the two sites. Also, that in creating fenced areas and relaxing grass mowing their numbers and spread over the site has increased.

4. Site evaluation

Following assessment of the site both by the inhouse team and the independent ecologist report; The management compartments are defined into 6 habitats:

- grassland/ mosaic (meadow with coppices of trees),
- mixed scrub,
- mature tree/mixed scrub belt,
- rough grassland meadow,
- amenity recreation grassland
- Young tree plantations

John Shennan Field

Habitat/Management Compartment

John Shennan Field

Grassland Management

4.1 Hybrid Ecology 2022 Ecological Report

An independent ecologist was commissioned in 2022 to undertake a desktop and field survey of the site to assist in providing management prescriptions to increase the biodiversity value of the site. From this further survey and transect works have then been commissioned, which have informed this plan. We will also be commissioning an independent ecologist to undertake a grassland species survey in 2024. Building a base line of data for the site to enable its development and management going forward. *The following information extract is taken from her report:*

Survey and Report

The site has been surveyed by an independent Ecologist in 2022, to inform and advise this plan and allow its development – the report was surveyed and prepared by Gemma Holmes, Consultant Ecologist at Hybrid Ecology Ltd. Gemma is a qualified ecologist with 15 years' experience in professional survey work and is an Associate member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM). Gemma holds licences to survey for great crested newt and bats in the UK (Licence numbers 2015-19096-CLS-CLS and 2016-27305-CLS-CLS respectively).

Desktop assessment

Landscape context
Aerial imagery (Google Earth Pro, 2021) was used to examine the landscape context of the site in relation to significant ecological assets such as woodland, established hedgerows, grassland and any naturalised features that would allow wildlife use and dispersal.

Conservation designations and Priority Habitats
In the UK there are various designations that are legally protected at European and domestic level. They include Special Areas for Conservation (SAC), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), National Nature Reserve (NNR), Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS).

The Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act came into force on 1st October 2006. Section 41 (S41) of the Act requires the Secretary of State to publish a list of habitats and species, which are of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England (commonly referred to as 'Priority Habitats or Species'). The S41 list is used to guide decision-makers - such as Councils - in implementing their duty under section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in England, when carrying out their

normal functions. Priority Habitats are mapped by Natural England using aerial maps.

Multi-Agency Geographical Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) and mapping provided by Essex Field Club was used to identify any conservation designations or Priority Habitats on or close to the site.

There are also various local initiatives to improve biodiversity, these differ depending on the administrative area and Local Plan.

Biological Records Search
A search for records of protected and Priority Species was ordered from Essex Field Club up to 2km from the site.

Field survey

Habitats
To inform the management plan., an ecological walkover survey was carried out on 7th June 2022 by ecologist Gemma Holmes (BSc Hons ACIEEM). The survey included all land shown in Figure 2. The survey was undertaken broadly in accordance with the Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey (JNCC 2010) and aimed to broadly map habitats and assess their ecological importance.

Species
The survey also included an assessment of the site's potential to support any legally protected species; or Species and Habitats of Principal Importance (Priority Species), as identified by Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006).

Legally protected/priority species include but are not limited to: All species of bat, great crested newt, reptiles (common lizard, slow worm, grass snake and adder), badger and nesting birds. Priority Species include common toad and hedgehog. Where best practice guidelines exist, these have been used to assess the likelihood that individual species will be present, for example: Bat Surveys: Good Practice Guidelines (BCT 2016) and Habitat Suitability Index for Great Crested Newt (Oldham et al, 2000).

In accordance with BCT, 2016, the vegetation on/adjacent to the site was subject to Preliminary Roost Assessment for bats in accordance with Figure 4. This included a ground-level assessment of vegetation for roosting, commuting and foraging potential. Potential roost features (PRFs) in trees include the following:

- *Woodpecker holes*
- *Natural branch shed cavities*
- *Flaking bark*

Table 4.1 Guidelines for assessing the potential suitability of proposed development sites for bats, based on the presence of habitat features within the landscape, to be applied using professional judgement.

Suitability	Description Roosting habitats	Commuting and foraging habitats
Negligible	Negligible habitat features on site likely to be used by roosting bats.	Negligible habitat features on site likely to be used by commuting or foraging bats.
Low	A structure with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by individual bats opportunistically. However, these potential roost sites do not provide enough space, shelter, protection, appropriate conditions[a] and/or suitable surrounding habitat to be used on a regular basis or by larger numbers of bats (i.e. unlikely to be suitable for maternity or hibernation[b]). A tree of sufficient size and age to contain PRFs but with none seen from the ground or features seen with only very limited roosting potential.[c]	Habitat that could be used by small numbers of commuting bats such as a gappy hedgerow or unvegetated stream, but isolated, i.e. not very well connected to the surrounding landscape by other habitat. Suitable, but isolated habitat that could be used by small numbers of foraging bats such as a lone tree (not in a parkland situation) or a patch of scrub.
Moderate	A structure or tree with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by bats due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions[a] and surrounding habitat but unlikely to support a roost of high conservation status (with respect to roost type only – the assessments in this table are made irrespective of species conservation status, which is established after presence is confirmed).	Continuous habitat connected to the wider landscape that could be used by bats for commuting such as lines of trees and scrub or linked back gardens. Habitat that is connected to the wider landscape that could be used by bats for foraging such as trees, scrub, grassland or water.
High	A structure or tree with one or more potential roost sites that are obviously suitable for use by larger numbers of bats on a more regular basis and potentially for longer periods of time due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions[a] and surrounding habitat.	Continuous, high-quality habitat that is well connected to the wider landscape that is likely to be used regularly by commuting bats such as river valleys, streams, hedgerows, lines of trees and woodland edge. High-quality habitat that is well connected to the wider landscape that is likely to be used regularly by foraging bats such as broadleaved woodland, tree-lined watercourses and grazed parkland. Site is close to and connected to known roosts.

Desktop assessment

Landscape context

The site is immediately bordered to the south and west by residential housing. Allotments extend to the north, Moulsham School is to the east. The location is urban, with high density housing and associated infrastructure. The closest areas of woodland are associated with Chelmsford Golf Club, 800 metres to the south-west.

Conservation designations

See Appendix 1 for maps showing surrounding conservation designations. The site is currently not designated for any conservation reason. The closest conservation designations are:

- *Writtle Wood Cemetery LoWS, 710 metres to the north-west.*
- *Moulsham Thrift Wood LoWS, 730 metres to the south-west.*
- *Marconi Ponds LNR, 980 metres to the north-west.*
- *Galleywood Common LNR, 1km to the south.*
- *Chelmer Valley Riverside LNR, 1.8km to the north-east.*
- *Hylands Park LNR, 2km to the south-west.*

Priority Habitats

See Appendix 2 for maps showing Priority Habitats. There are currently no Priority Habitats mapped on the site. The closest PH is 95 metres to the north-west, beyond Prices Road and comprises lowland deciduous woodland.

Local initiatives

The site is just outside the B-Lines network, identified by Buglife and a wide range of conservation and landowner partners. B-Lines aims to coordinate the delivery of wildflower-rich habitats to aid pollinator movement across the landscape.
B-Lines is a landscape scale initiative to enhance declining pollinator populations by connecting the best remaining wildflower-rich habitats through the creation or restoration of wildflower habitats. B-Lines was identified as a method to reverse pollinator declines in the National Pollinator Strategy's Implementation Plan, by aiding their movement across the fragmented landscape.
B-Lines are 3km corridors within which wildflower habitat restoration and creation can be focused and co-ordinated to maximise gains for pollinators. Habitat can be delivered by organisations, landowners, businesses, communities or individuals.

Contribution to B-Lines can be achieved through a variety of wildflower enhancement methods, such as habitat restoration (e.g. scrub clearance/re-introducing management/green haying), wildflower meadow creation in species poor grasslands, wildlife gardens, landowners entering agri-environment schemes, orchard planting, disturbance management and brownfield habitat creation, bee friendly formal planting, living roofs, etc.

Biological records search

Records provided by Essex Field Club are included in the protected species section.

Field Survey

Habitats

Habitats are broadly mapped out and described in the following section. Photographs are provided in Figure ..

Established trees/scrub

The southern boundary comprises the following tree species, with scattered bramble Rubus fructicosus agg encroaching to the north:

- *Lime Tilia sp.*
- *Silver birch Betula pendula*
- *Hawthorn Crataegus monogyna*
- *Cherry Prunus sp.*
- *Ash Fraxinus excelsior*

In the south-western corner there is a group of semi-mature ash and lime trees. The western boundary comprises a row of semi-mature lime trees. The north-western corner comprises a group of semi-mature ash trees.

Mixed scrub with trees

The northern boundary comprises dense hawthorn and blackthorn scrub with semi-mature horse chestnut Aesculus hippocastanum trees. The north-eastern corner comprises ash with young elm Ulmus sp. - some of which are dead and provide good invertebrate habitat. The eastern boundary comprises hawthorn, field maple Acer campestre, elder Sambucas nigra and prunus sp. scrub on the bank.

Grassland and tree planting enclosures

There are eight enclosures on the site, defined by wire mesh fencing. The enclosure to the east is primarily a meadow but will be planted with whips to create small islands of trees. Two of the other islands also have this approach, whilst the remainder are planted with young trees predominantly. The tree planting to date comprises the following species mix:

- *Field Maple Acer campestre*
- *Common Alder Alnus glutinosa*
- *Downey Birch Betula pubescens*
- *Hornbeam Carpinus betulus*
- *Hazelnut Corylus avellana*
- *Hawthorn Crataegus monogyna*
- *Wild Privet Ligustrum vulgare*
- *Crab Apple Malus sylvestris*
- *Cherry Plum Prunus cerasifera*
- *Blackthorn Prunus spinosa*
- *English Oak Quercus robur*
- *Goat Willow or Pussy Willow Salix caprea*
- *Guelder Rose Viburnum opulus*
- *Dog Rose Rosa canina*
- *Scots Pine (Pinus sylvestris)*
- *English Yew (Taxus baccata)*
- *Holly (Ilex aquifolium)*

The south-western enclosure comprises established tree planting – field maple Acer campestre, rowan Sorbus aucuparia in a U shape around the eastern aspect. To the west of the tree planting there are dense tall ruderals including:

- *Dock Rumex sp.*
- *Creeping thistle Cirsium arvense*
- *False oat grass Arrhenathrum elatius*
- *Borage Borago sp.*
- *Hemlock Cerastium fontanum*

Hemlock Conium maculatum was identified in all tree planting enclosures, dominant in enclosure 2. Hemlock is highly toxic to livestock and humans and can be fatal. Strict biosecurity protocols will be followed as detailed later in this report to seek to eradicate it.

The eastern enclosures contain naturally regenerated semi-improved grassland. While this isn't botanically "rich" or unimproved, it still holds substantial wildlife benefits. Observable species include:

- *Oxeye daisy Leucanthemum vulgare*
- *Marsh thistle Cirsium palustre*
- *Mallow Malva sp.*
- *White clover Trifolium repens*
- *Field scabious Knautia arvensis*
- *Common knapweed Centaurea nigra*
- *Birds foot trefoil Lotus corniculatus*
- *Red clover Trifolium pratense*
- *False oat grass Arrhenathrum elatius*
- *Lady's bedstraw Galium verum.*

Rough grassland
Towards the north-western corner there is an area of rough semi-improved grassland with cocksfoot Dactylis glomerata, common hogweed Heracleum sphondylium, creeping thistle and oak Quercus robur saplings. This has established naturally through relaxation of the mowing regime.

Amenity grassland
The perimeter grassland is "improved" in nature (i.e. shows evidence of high nutrient input) and comprises a track around the edge of the field. Observable species include perennial rye grass Lolium perenne, creeping buttercup Ranunculus repens, dock Rumex sp., white clover Trifolium repens, common mouse-ear Cerastium fontanum, cow parsley Anthriscus sylvestris, barley, ribwort plantain Plantago lanceolata, yarrow Achillea millefolium, dandelion Taraxacum officionale agg. and daisy Bellis perennis. This character is replicated throughout all grassland areas outside of the highlighted compartments, notably along the southern edge of the site. These areas would benefit from a relaxation of the mowing regime.

Areas below/adjacent to boundary tree canopies are longer and provide more structure for wildlife.

Species

Bats
Legislation
All species of bat together with their breeding sites or resting places are protected under Regulation 41 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2019,

EU Exit) and Section 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. This means an offence can be committed if you:

- *Deliberately capture, injure or kill a bat.*
- *Intentionally or recklessly disturb a bat in its roost or deliberately disturb a group of bats.*
- *Damage or destroy a bat roosting place (even if bats are not occupying the roost at the time).*
- *Possess or advertise/sell/exchange a bat (dead or alive) or any part of a bat.*
- *Intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a bat roost.*

Data records
The search returned records for five bat species within 2km: Common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle Leisler's bat, brown long eared bat and noctule. Of these, soprano pipistrelle, brown long-eared bat and noctule are Priority Species.

Assessment
Given the age of the site, the majority of trees are young or semi-mature. There are no veterans or trees with substantial wildlife interest. The site is relatively isolated in the landscape although does link directly to back gardens which collectively are likely to support foraging behaviour.

The bat interest on the site will be focused in sheltered areas; along the perimeter trees and around scrub, and potentially over the enclosures where insect activity will be concentrated.

The site could be enhanced for bats by installing crevice bat boxes on boundary trees. It is recommended that transect surveys are undertaken to better understand the bat activity on the site as budgets allow

Update note on this report; Bat boxes and a survey have been undertaken in 2023 and will continue to be monitored going forward. A copy of this survey is in the appendix

Reptiles
Legislation
The adder, common lizard, grass snake and slow worm are fully protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

Data records
There are records for slow worm, grass snake and adder within 2km. All three are Priority Species.

Assessment
UK reptiles include common lizard, slow worm, grass snake and adder. The site shows promise as a reptile receptor (likely small numbers of common lizard and slow worm), particularly around the grassland enclosures and where the intensively

used amenity grassland meets the longer rested grass, along the western boundary. Grass snake and adder are unlikely to be present given the isolation in the landscape and lack of suitable habitat/water.

The potential for common lizard and slow worm is likely to be reduced by the high numbers of dog walkers, therefore it is recommended that any enhancement measures for this species group are focused away from areas heavily used by the public – such as rough grassland verges alongside established trees to the west that connects to rear gardens.

Reptile surveys could be undertaken on the site as budgets allow.

Update note on this report; a survey have been undertaken in 2023 and will continue to be monitored going forward. A copy is in the appendix.

Great crested newt

There are no ponds within 250 metres of the site and therefore great crested newt interest is likely to be negligible.

Badger

Legislation

Badgers and their setts are protected under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992, which makes it illegal to kill, injure or take badgers or to interfere with a badger sett. The term 'badger sett' is normally understood to mean the system of tunnels and chambers, in which badgers live, and their entrances and immediate surrounds. The 1992 Act specifically defines a sett as "any structure or place which displays signs indicating current use by a badger.' Interference with a sett includes blocking tunnels or damaging the sett in any way.

Records

Confidential – available on request.

Assessment

There was no evidence of badger on the site, no badger setts were identified.

Nesting birds

Legislation

Under Section 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), wild birds are protected from being killed, injured or captured, while their nests and eggs are protected from being damaged, destroyed or taken. In addition, certain species such as the barn owl are included in Schedule 1 of the Act and are protected against disturbance while nesting and when they have dependent young.

Furthermore, the Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) Regulations 2012 placed new duties on Local Authorities to take steps to contribute to the protection and creation of a sufficient area and diversity of wild bird habitat.

Data records

The search returned local records for kingfisher, Cett's warbler, fieldfare, peregrine, merlin, brambling, red kite and black redstart – these species receive protection under Schedule 1 of the WCA. Priority bird records include cuckoo, yellowhammer and house sparrow.

Assessment

The site shows good scope for nesting birds around the perimeter trees and scrub in the western enclosures. The eastern enclosures may attract ground nesting birds, although the presence of dogs on the site is likely to reduce this potential.
As is best practice, it is recommended that any tree work or scrub clearance be timed to avoid the bird breeding season which is commonly accepted as being between 1st March and 31st August. Where this is not possible, a nest search should be undertaken by a suitably qualified ecologist immediately prior to works commencing.

Other Priority Species

Records were also returned for hedgehog and common toad. The site links to back gardens and therefore could reasonably attract hedgehog. The lack of water surrounding the site limits the potential for toad to be present.

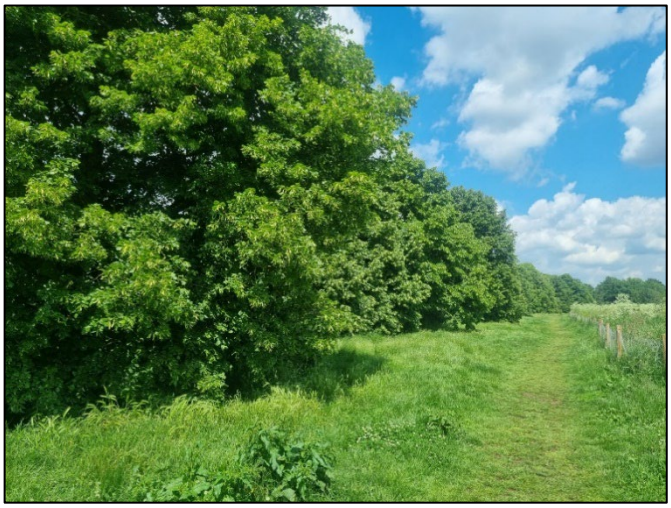


Fig 6a. Western boundary lime trees. Note relaxed mowing regime along western edge.

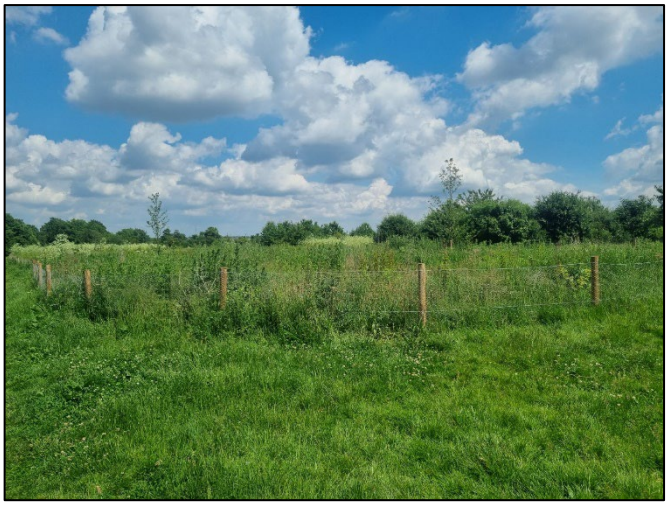


Fig 6b. Enclosure in south-western corner.

Fig 6c. Dense hemlock near western boundary. To be controlled.

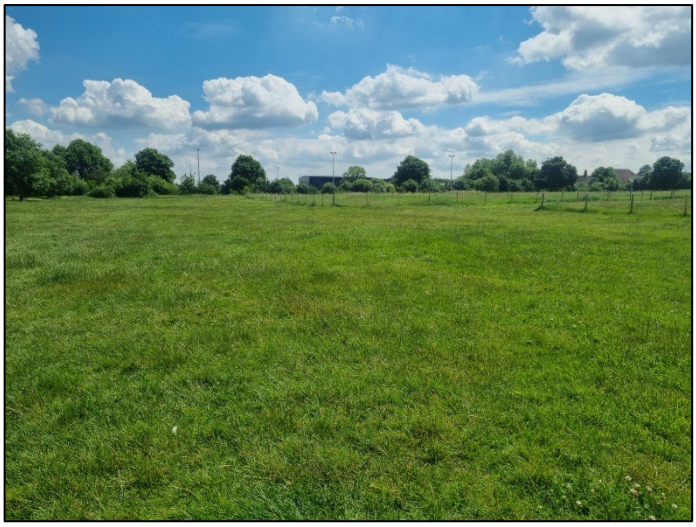


Fig 6d. Northern boundary – this is where the rough grassland island will be extended.

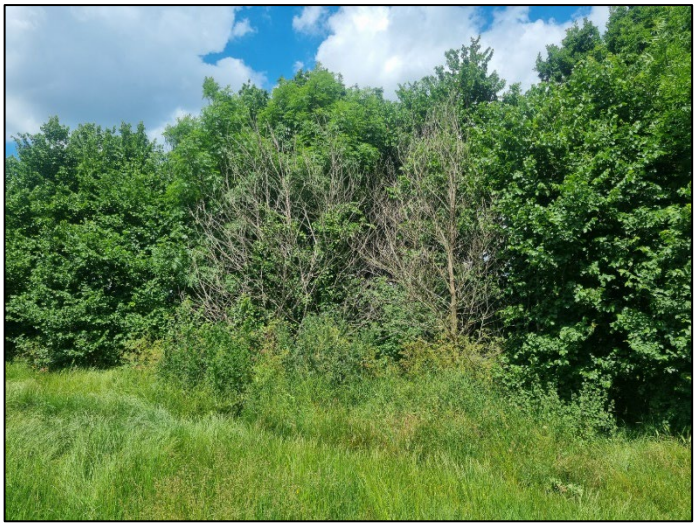


Fig 6e. Dead elm trees in north – eastern corner, retain as invertebrate habitat

Fig 6f. Grassland enclosure to the east.

Fig 6g. Example of meadow grassland

Management operations

The management proposals have been divided into five broad themes that reflect the main habitat types present on site. These are:

1. *Grassland management*
2. *Tree management*
3. *Scrub management*
4. *Protected species management*
5. *Visitor management*

The site has been split in to compartments that form the basis for management planning and delivery Compartment boundaries have been determined by the presence of physical features and/or distinct changes in habitat type. Each management proposal is underpinned by several management prescriptions that detail the operational activities required to conserve and enhance the features described

Grassland management

Enclosure

The aim is to maximise floristic diversity and interest for pollinators. Since floristic diversity typically declines where cut grass is left uncollected, the grassland compartment will be subject to an annual cut, with the arisings collected and removed off-site. Cut-and-collect mowing reduces soil fertility; by taking the cuttings away, the nutrients are removed and cannot return into the soil. Removing the cut grass also opens the surface of the soil in the grass, allowing wildflower seeds to germinate. Wildflower seed can remain dormant in the soil for decades, so this simple change can make a big difference in just one or two seasons.

The annual cut should aim to take place in September (or as instructed), which typically gives enough time for most flowers to set seed. However, the timing of the cut may need to be altered subject to seasonal variations, for example a warm dry spring may lead to later flowering for some species. The above will help contribute to the B-Lines project by improving floristic diversity.

To monitor grassland diversity in the enclosure, an annual botanical survey is recommended.

Rough grassland

The rough grassland island to the north-west of the site will be extended along the northern edge of the site to improve the connectivity between the grassland enclosures, scrub and allotments beyond. The area will be defined for the benefit of the grounds maintenance team. This will also contribute to the B-Lines project by extending and connecting habitat for pollinators.

Amenity grassland

Path areas outside enclosures are subject to a close amenity cut which provides little structure or interest to wildlife. Whilst it is acknowledged that the site does need to be open/accessible, the scale of the space is such that there is scope to relax the mowing regime, particularly along the edges of established vegetation. As a general principle, it is recommended that a minimum 2-metre-long grass verge is retained along all boundaries. This will provide connectivity to wildlife using the vegetation and improved habitat for basking reptiles. Cuttings should be removed from site where practical.

Tree management

Trees are surveyed for health and safety reasons by Chelmsford Council as required. Any remedial works required are recorded and undertaken within a specified timeframe, as necessary.

Trees are valuable habitats. Where a tree is identified as hazardous and requires remedial works, the focus should always be on removing the immediate hazard, whilst endeavouring to retain as much of the tree as possible as habitat. This includes the retention of small, dead trees (that pose no risk to the public) as habitat for insects.

Where tree work is required around a "potential bat roost feature" i.e. any crevice or cavity offering shelter (this could be a woodpecker hole, knot hole, flaking bark or hazard beam) an ecologist should be engaged to determine whether a bat roost could potentially be present and to provide a climbed inspection accordingly.

Trees are likely to support nesting birds between March and August/September inclusive – tree work should avoid this season wherever possible.

Ash dieback

There are several ash trees on the site, ash dieback was not observed. The advice below taken from the Government website should be followed in relation to the identification and management of ash trees.

"The evidence informing ash dieback policy and the resulting management advice is under constant review; this guidance will change periodically. Current advice recommends that land managers should already be identifying their ash tree population, assessing ash tree condition, monitoring for any change over time, and be planning mitigation for the expected loss of a large proportion of ash trees. Such works should look to minimise the loss of ash trees as a habitat used by other species and as an important tree in the landscape by, for example, undertaking compensatory tree planting with site appropriate species in advance of the expected loss of ash trees."

Tree enclosures
Hemlock, an invasive plant is particularly prevalent in tree planting enclosures to the west of the site. Hemlock will be controlled through hand pulling and burning.

Biosecurity measures should always be in place, as follows (please note this is not an exhaustive list):

- *Always wear gloves, mask, and protective clothing when handling the plant.*
- *Dig out all the plant(s), including the long taproot, (alternatively, glyphosate treatment can be used to eradicate the plant).*
- *Wash hands, preferably with soap, after bagging up the plant for removal.*
- *Continue to monitor the area for seedling growth.*

Tall ruderal species (dock, burdock, creeping thistle etc.) growing around newly planted trees will be managed to reduce competition. This could be achieved through hand pulling or spot spraying, as budgets allow.

Scrub management
It is recommended that the current extent of woody scrub, predominantly along the northern and eastern edges of the site is retained and no management is currently recommended. To create structure, as described earlier in this report, it is recommended that the mowing regime is relaxed along the edges of the scrub, to create structure and interest to wildlife using the habitat for foraging, shelter and dispersal.

Protected species management
The site provides interest for a variety of species/species groups. They include:

- *Bats – foraging activity around perimeter grassland over enclosures.*
- *Nesting birds – throughout trees and scrub.*
- *Reptiles – potential interest along the western boundary and within grassland enclosures.*
- *Flora and invertebrates within grassland enclosure*

Bats

An annual transect survey would be beneficial to understand the bat species present on the site. This should be undertaken in June or July (the peak activity season) by two ecologists with professional grade bat detectors.

To improve roosing opportunities, it is recommended that six crevice style bat boxes are installed on two separate boundary trees. Boxes will be ecostyrocrete (a long lasting, thermally stable material) and will be installed above 3 metres, facing south, south-east and south-west for maximum solar gain. Trees should be selected by an ecologist to ensure the best chance of occupation. Suitable boxes are provided in Figure 7.

Once installed, bat boxes should only ever be checked by a bat-licensed ecologist. Inspections of boxes can be carried out at any time of year. The success of bat boxes is entirely dependent on the site, but we recommend boxes are checked the following year after installation, and annually as budgets allow.

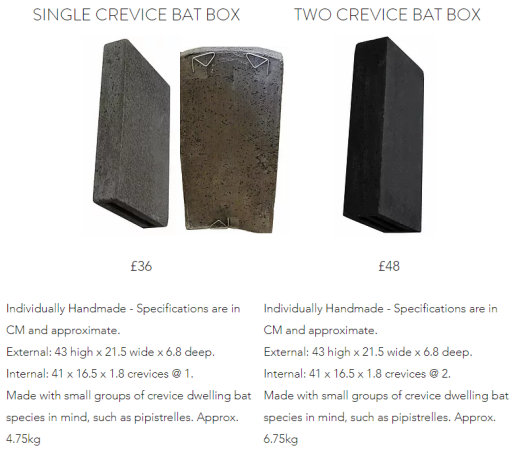


Fig 7. Bat boxes for trees Home|Greenwood's Ecohabitatsgreenwoodsecohabitats.co.uk)

Update note: A bat transect survey was completed as a baseline in 2023. Bat boxes were also installed where practicable on trees on site. It is planned to undertake further surveys going forward every 3-4 years. See report in appendix.

Nesting birds

The availability of nesting habitat on the site is good, therefore no specific recommendations for nesting birds are recommended. Data from the residents Facebook group is listed in the appendix Insert residents info

Reptiles

The rough grassland island to the north-west of the site – see Figure 8 - will be extended through relaxation of the mowing regime to improve habitat availability and connectivity. An annual reptile presence/absence survey is recommended once the grassland along the northern edge of the site has developed.

Update note: A reptile survey was completed in 2023 see report in appendix

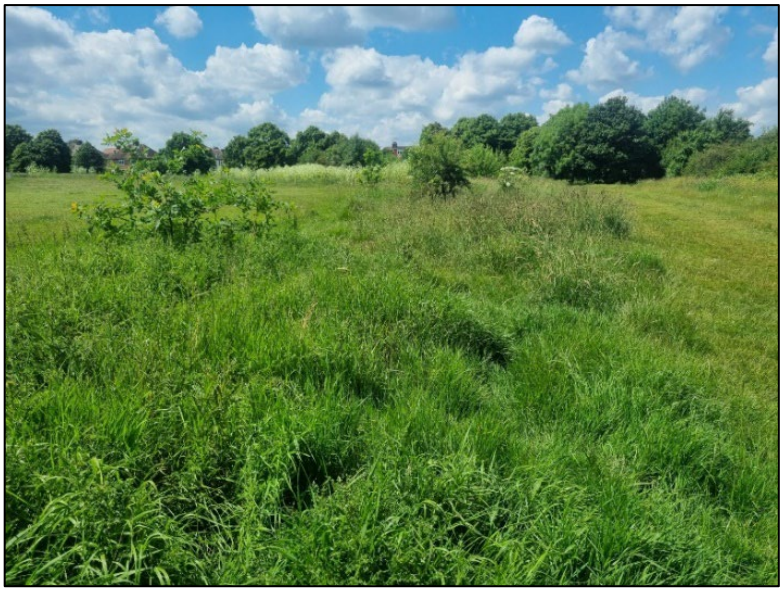


Fig 8. Rough grassland to be extended.

Invertebrates

The grassland enclosures provide interest for insects As they mature and become more diverse through mowing/removal of arisings, the interest for insects will increase.

It is recommended that an annual invertebrate survey is carried out, as budgets allow. Surveys for terrestrial insects and most other invertebrates should be carried out between April and September, with adjustment for local weather conditions and latitudes.

Update note: Monitoring going forward will be on a 5 year review

Flora

It is recommended that a botanical survey is undertaken in the grassland enclosure annually, between Spring and Summer. A series of 2x2 metre quadrats will be sampled from within the three enclosures. All vascular plants will be identified and accorded a relative value reflecting their cover within the quadrat.

Update note on this report: This survey is being undertaken in 2024. And results will be reviewed and influence management going forward.

The table below uses some information from Gemma Holmes' report, which has been added to.

Table 1. Management operations

Item	Aim	Management operation	Who	When
Grassland/tree planting enclosure	To create a grassland rich in wildflowers and to increase opportunities for pollinators.	Every year, after flowering take a 'hay cut' from compartments 1-3: cut back with a strimmer or tractor mower to 150mm. Leave the 'hay' to dry and shed seed for 1 to 7 days then remove from site.	Volunteer group/grounds maintenance team	**Cut only when instructed, in late September/October.**
Grassland - rough	To encourage structure and to improve connectivity to the north of the site	Relax mowing regime to create an elongated island along northern boundary. Area to be enhanced will be defined for contractor's benefit so it is not mown.	CCC to define area as required.	**Relax mowing from Spring 2023**
Grassland – amenity	To give people a safe place to walk and play whilst maximising wildlife value where possible	Continue amenity cut in high traffic areas. Allow a 2-metre wild verge adjacent to trees and scrub along boundaries.	Grounds maintenance	**NA**
Trees	Maintain tree safety across the site	Annual safety survey. Identify hazards and undertake remedial works outside nesting season as required. Monitor ash dieback as required.	CCC	**Annually or as required**
Tree planting enclosures	To meet planting commitments set by the Council	Plant new trees in accordance with horticultural best practice. Ensure watering requirements are met. Replace all dying stock as soon as possible. Inspect trees for health and vitality.	Volunteer group CCC	**Between December – March inclusive.** **Every Autumn.**

Item	Aim	Management operation	Who	When
		Remove hemlock by hand pulling, removing from site and burning. Reduce prevalence of tall ruderal plants through either hand pulling or spot spraying with herbicide.	contractor Volunteer group/grounds maintenance	**During growing season.** **During peak growing season.**
Habitat surveying	To monitor and review to adapt plan	Minimum 3 times a year in the growing season Grassland base survey by ecologist	Parks Volunteers Ecologist	**From May to October 2024**
Reptile survey	To monitor/review and adapt plan	Every 5 years by ecologist	Ecologist	**2029**
Bat transact survey and Clean out of boxes/review if new locations possible	To monitor	Every 3 to 4 years	Ecologist	
Addition of more hibernaculum within copses	To improve habitat	Build and create	Parks Volunteers	**ongoing**
Signage	Increase site awareness	Create interpretation on site	Parks team	**ongoing**
Play area	refurbish	Consultation with community	Parks Team	**2024/25**
Basketball area	refurbish	Community project	Parks Team	**2024**

Habitat survey

An independent ecologist has been employed to undertake the habitat survey (phase 1) full details of this in the appendix along with a transact Bat survey and reptile survey also been completed. These inform the management plan.

Priority Habitats

See Appendix 2 for maps showing Priority Habitats. There are currently no Priority Habitats mapped on the site. The closest PH is 95 metres to the north-west, beyond Prices Road and comprises lowland deciduous woodland.

Desktop assessment results

Conservation designations

See Appendix 1 for maps showing surrounding conservation designations. The site is currently not designated for any conservation reason. The closest conservation designations are:

- Writtle Wood Cemetery LoWS, 710 metres to the north-west.
- Moulsham Thrift Wood LoWS, 730 metres to the south-west.
- Marconi Ponds LNR, 980 metres to the north-west.
- Galleywood Common LNR, 1km to the south.
- Chelmer Valley Riverside LNR, 1.8km to the north-east.
- Hylands Park LNR, 2km to the south-west.

6. Community and Education

As an open space within a dense urban area the site is important for the local community as the main area for informal recreation and being close to nature. Seating was installed on site in 2021, and additional recreational seating and possibly picnic benches will also be added to the site in consultation with users.

For the local community

Footpaths on site also connect to local schools and into/out of the City centre and to Oaklands Park and museum. Open green spaces like this are important for mental health particularly in urban areas (Rick Nauert, 2018). The site is an important pedestrian link for local people to the city centre. It provides a peaceful place to escape urban life and an opportunity for all ages to engage with wildlife.

Volunteering
Monthly volunteer sessions are run on site to manage the site for wildlife and seek to enhance and improve habitats. Volunteer sessions are run and lead by the Parks and Conservation Volunteer Leader and local residents are invited along to help to carry out practical maintenance, with posters on site and via Facebook . In addition to this, corporate groups (from local businesses) volunteer on specific projects on the site organised and lead by the Parks and Conservation Volunteer leader working to the management plan for the site.

Local schools
Occasionally local schools are invited to the site to carry out practical work, via led workshops. Recently all students from Widford School (some 500 primary age children) planted wildflower plugs on the site as part of a whole days practical workshop, combined with an in school assembly.

6.1 Information/site interpretation and reporting provision

On-site signage and interpretation are provided at the main entrances (shown in the image below). It is proposed to develop interpretation panels for the site, which will include its history and biodiversity. Also, in consultation with local schools and the community a nature trail.

Notice boards are located at the main entrances to inform people visiting the site about events, volunteering and ways that they can get involved. In addition to this the Parks website www.loveyorchelmsford.co.uk and Facebook has information about the site and ways to get involved along with activities for children to do on site e.g. going on a bug hunt, identifying wildflowers and much more.

Reporting – notice boards and the web site also have links to ParkWatch the out of hours reporting line.

6.2 Litter and dog waste

Litter and dog waste are managed as part of the ground maintenance, by parks staff on a cyclical programme. Dog wardens also monitor the site.

6.3 Play area

The play area is managed as part of the ground maintenance undertaken by CCC– with dedicated ROSPA qualified play inspectors undertaking both inspections and minor repairs. It is due for refurbishment in 2024/5 and a consultation exercise will be undertaken as part of this, with local schools and residents. It will sit on the same footprint as the current one – due to the restrictive nature of the site. The basketball area is due for refurbishment in the next two years.

6.4 Budget

The budget for the site is provided by the budget from Chelmsford City Council Parks for Nature Reserves, as part of its ground's maintenance. For one off projects, additional funds will be sought.

7. References and acknowledgements

Rick Nauert (2018) Mental Health Benefits from Green Spaces. *Psych Central*. Available at: https://psychcentral.com/news/2014/01/08/mental-health-benefits-from-green-spaces/64241.html (Accessed 6th May 2020).

Credit to The History of Moulsham posted by Martin Robb 2016

Ecological Management plan John Shennan Field prepared by Gemma Holmes BSc (hons) ACIEEM version 1 prepared for CCC 2023

8. Appendices

Residents Bird Survey 2023

Bat survey October 2023 Hybrid Ecology

Reptile survey 2023 Hybrid Ecology