



PARSONAGE WOOD

GREENSPACE ACTION PLAN, 2025 - 2030

BRIEFING DOCUMENT



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1. INTRODUCTION

A new five-year Greenspace Action Plan (GAP) is being produced for Parsonage Wood. This briefing document provides an overview of how the GAP will be produced and sets out how stakeholders can contribute to shaping the plan.

GAPs are essentially map-based management plans that provide focus and direction for the running and improvement of open spaces. They provide a clear, logical process to determine the activities that should take place over a stated period of time to achieve the objectives for the site.

The GAP is being produced by the Countryside Management Service (CMS), part of Hertfordshire County Council's Countryside and Rights of Way Service, on behalf of Hertfordshire County Council. The completed document will inform the management actions to be undertaken over the next five years, commencing in April 2025.

Engaging communities is integral to the production of GAPs, to ensure that stakeholders are fully aware of and able to interact with the plan production process. This briefing document initiates and supports this community engagement.

The engagement period will run from 25th November to 15th December 2024. A further engagement period in February 2025 will provide an opportunity to assess the draft version of the GAP. Please use the contact details in Section 6 to comment on the aspirations for the site.

This document has been broken down into easy-to-read sections:

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

Section 3 reviews recent management of the site.

Section 4 contains the core objectives for the Parsonage Wood GAP.

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

2. BACKGROUND

Parsonage Wood is a 3.3ha native broadleaved woodland situated between South Hatfield and Welham Green, ten minutes from the edge of either settlement. The woodland is bordered by grassland on all sides, some grazed and some cut annually though none are managed primarily for biodiversity.

The woodland is within the Metropolitan Green Belt. To the north of Parsonage Wood, Bunchley's Pond and the surrounding woodland and grassland is a registered village green. The fields to the south of the site are a Local Wildlife Site due to the species diversity within the grassland and, further south, Bush Wood is a Local Wildlife Site and ancient semi-natural woodland. Parsonage Wood is connected to the nearby woodlands by a network of hedgerows.

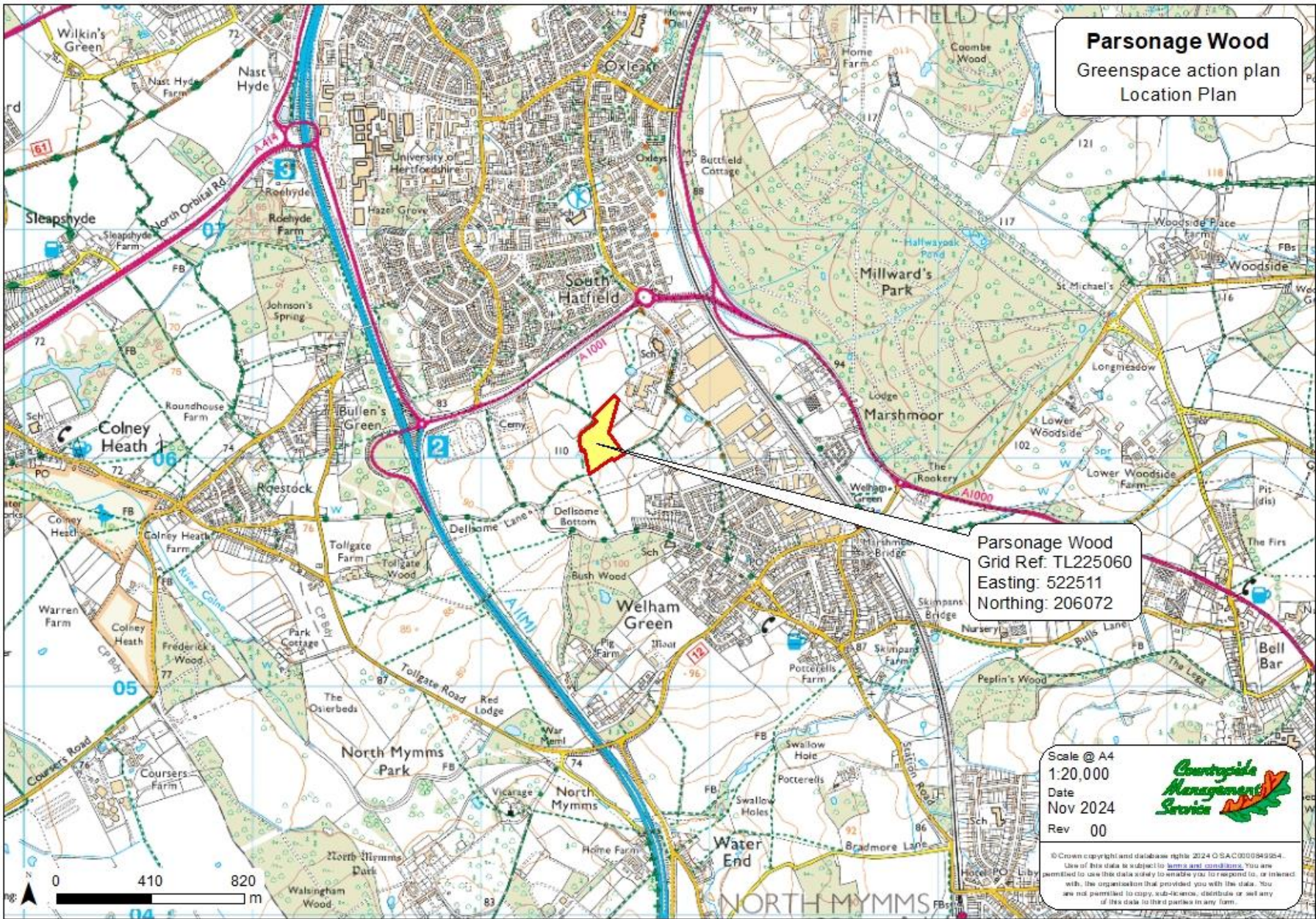
Parsonage Wood is a seasonally wet plantation broadleaved woodland containing a series of glades and two ponds. A hedgerow runs along part of its eastern boundary. The glades have reduced in size over time as a result of natural succession but still provide an important edge habitat supporting a range of invertebrates. Similarly, the ponds have become increasingly shaded, and the hedgerow has become over-mature, however both are still valuable resources for wildlife. Several protected species such as noctule and long eared bats and great crested newts can be found within the woodland and the surrounding area.

The land was historically farmed prior to planting with trees and there are no known historic or archaeological features of interest.

Parsonage Wood can be accessed from a Public Right of Way (PRoW) which runs around the south, west and north edges of the site connecting Welham Green to the southeast and Hatfield to the north. Walkers use paths within the woodland as an alternative route to the PRoWs.

There is currently little developed land immediately adjacent to the woodland however there is a planning application to develop housing on the field immediately north of the site, adjacent to Bunchley's Pond. This land has been allocated for development in the Local Plan, which was adopted in October 2023.

Parsonage Wood
Greenspace action plan
Location Plan

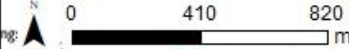


Parsonage Wood
Grid Ref: TL225060
Easting: 522511
Northing: 206072

Scale @ A4
1:20,000
Date
Nov 2024
Rev 00



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3. REVIEW OF PROGRESS

The site was used for agriculture from at least 1800 until 1960 with farm buildings located on the western edge of the site. “New Barnfield Meadow” as the site was then known was recorded as a Local Wildlife Site due to diversity of grassland species it contained prior to being planted with trees.

The woodland was planted approximately 25 years ago with ash, pedunculate oak, hazel, apple, and hornbeam in groupings of 10 – 20 trees in the north and south sections of the woodland. Other native species are also present at lower frequencies. A number of individual trees were planted within the central compartment. The canopy has closed across the majority of the planted area preventing the growth of saplings and ground flora throughout most of the woodland. There is evidence of coppicing having taken place along the main path in the past 15 years. The trees have otherwise been allowed to develop without intervention. In the north compartment the trees have developed with uniform structure. The trees in the south compartment have more varied structure, in part due to the greater variety of species planted and their differing growth rates. Natural regeneration has resulted in scrub growing in areas where more light is available particularly in the central compartment.

The hedgerow along the eastern edge of the north compartment is in moderate condition, having been allowed to become overmature with gaps between the base of the foliage and the ground. The hedgerow is comprised of native species, primarily hawthorn and field maple.

The ponds existed prior to the woodland planting. At this time the south pond was already surrounded by trees, but the north pond was more exposed. Self-seeded trees have grown around the north pond and both ponds are now excessively shaded and receive considerable organic input from fallen leaves.

Paths were well established prior to the woodland planting, however some of these have become overgrown and unusable in the past two decades. The main paths along the east and south edges of the site are cleared of tall vegetation periodically and remain usable.

4. GREENSPACE ACTION PLAN (GAP) 2025-30

The Parsonage Wood GAP 2025-30 will be a simple, easy to read plan for use by officers of Hertfordshire County Council and members of the public and will act as a guide to the work of volunteers. The plan will be largely map based, with sequential, annual management maps to show the actions planned for each year. The resulting change will be represented on the map for the following year. The document will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains effective and relevant.

The plan will be costed, and potential funding sources identified. Once the final GAP is agreed, external funding will be sought to enable the plan to be delivered.

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

Aim

To conserve and enhance the value of the site for wildlife and people, promoting a healthy and diverse woodland habitat, and developing the site as a safe and enjoyable place to visit for all members of the local community.

Objectives

A. To develop Parsonage Wood into a safe and welcoming place for visitors

- A1 Improve all site entrances to form welcoming, appealing gateways into the site.
- A2 Undertake regular inspections and maintenance of trees, furniture, and structures to ensure their condition is maintained.
- A3 Provide a suitable network of accessible paths throughout the site.
- A4 Create engaging interpretation to enable visitors to learn about the habitats and wildlife of Parsonage Wood.

B. To conserve and enhance the natural environment of Parsonage Wood

- B1 Undertake a structured programme of woodland management to diversify species and age structure of the woodland and increase rates of regeneration of tree saplings and ground flora, applying best practice and traditional techniques such as coppicing.
- B2 Recognise the value of mature and veteran trees and provide optimum conditions for longevity.

- B3 Maximise the value of woodland glade and edge habitats.
- B4 Maximise the value of existing pond habitats and explore opportunities to create additional ponds.

C. To provide opportunities for the local community to engage with Parsonage Wood

- C1 Engage the local community at every stage of the GAP development process.
- C2 Create opportunities for the local community to be involved in the management of the site in a structured and supported way and ensure all involved are given the opportunity to contribute towards achievement of the GAP objectives.
- C3 Encourage use of the site by a wide range of local user groups.
- C4 Promote responsible and respectful use of Parsonage Wood, and proactively respond to misuse of the site and anti-social behaviour.

D. To ensure all management and activities are environmentally and financially sustainable.

- D1 Ensure ongoing management costs are financially sustainable.
- D2 Carry out management according to environmental best practice by minimising the use of pesticides and herbicides, planning vegetation management operations to limit disturbance to wildlife, identifying opportunities to enhance biodiversity potential (i.e. retaining deadwood from tree safety operations) etc.
- D3 Identify and apply to external funding sources for capital works where available.

E. To promote the site as a valuable community resource

- E1 Promote the site as a valuable community resource to a wide audience through a variety of online media platforms, including a web resource and social media.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PLAN PRODUCTION PROCESS

Effective community engagement is at the centre of successful management plans. The value of a GAP is maximised when it incorporates and balances the aspirations of stakeholders and interest groups.

To provide all interested stakeholders and groups with the opportunity to feed into the production of the new GAP, we have adopted a structured two-stage approach to community engagement.

- For the first stage (this briefing document), stakeholders and site users will be invited to make comment on the core aspirations in Section 4; it is hoped that any further aspirations and/or issues will be identified through this information gathering process. This first stage of community engagement will run between **25th November and 15th December 2024**.
- For the second stage, stakeholders and site users will be invited to read through and make comment on the draft GAP, which will include the detailed proposals and actions. This stage is intended to run approximately in **February 2025**.

Following the second stage exercise, the final document will be produced, published and the actions will commence.

Please be aware that we will not respond individually to comments received through the public engagements; instead, we will produce a summary of comments, noting any amendments made to the plan as a result. This engagement response document will be published online alongside the briefing document, draft plan and final plan. We will retain contact details only for the purpose of keeping respondents informed about the plan development process.

5.1 Greenspace Action Plan production process

1. Production of briefing document and outline proposals.
2. Stakeholder engagement on briefing document. Engagement will run from approximately 25th November 2024 and 15th December 2024.

3. Production of draft GAP.
4. Stakeholder engagement on draft GAP. Engagement will run approximately in February 2025.
5. Production of final GAP.
6. Publicity and promotion.

5.2 Stakeholders

- Relevant Hertfordshire County Council Councillors
- Relevant Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council Councillors
- Relevant HCC Officers
- Relevant WHBC Officers
- North Mymms Parish Council
- Welham Green Residents Association
- Local Community
- HCC Rights of Way
- HCC Ecology Team
- HCC Historic Environment Team
- Relevant Local Nature Groups and Organisations
- Relevant Local Developers

6. STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Thank you for taking the time to read this document. We are keen to receive feedback from you on our proposals for the Parsonage Wood Greenspace Action Plan (GAP) 2025-2030.

Please return your comments using the contact details below by **15th December** at the latest.

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