



# **BERRYGROVE WOODS**

**GREENSPACE ACTION PLAN 2025 – 2030**

**BRIEFING DOCUMENT**



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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A new five-year Greenspace Action Plan (GAP) is being produced for Berrygrove Woods.

This briefing document provides an overview of how the GAP will be produced and sets out how stakeholders can contribute to shaping the plan.

GAPs are 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 objectives for the site.

The GAP is being produced by the Countryside Management Service (CMS), part of Hertfordshire County Council's Countryside and Rights of Way Service, on behalf of and in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council's Rural Estate. 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 for the briefing document will run from Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2024 to Monday 1<sup>st</sup> July 2024. A further engagement period in November 2024 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.

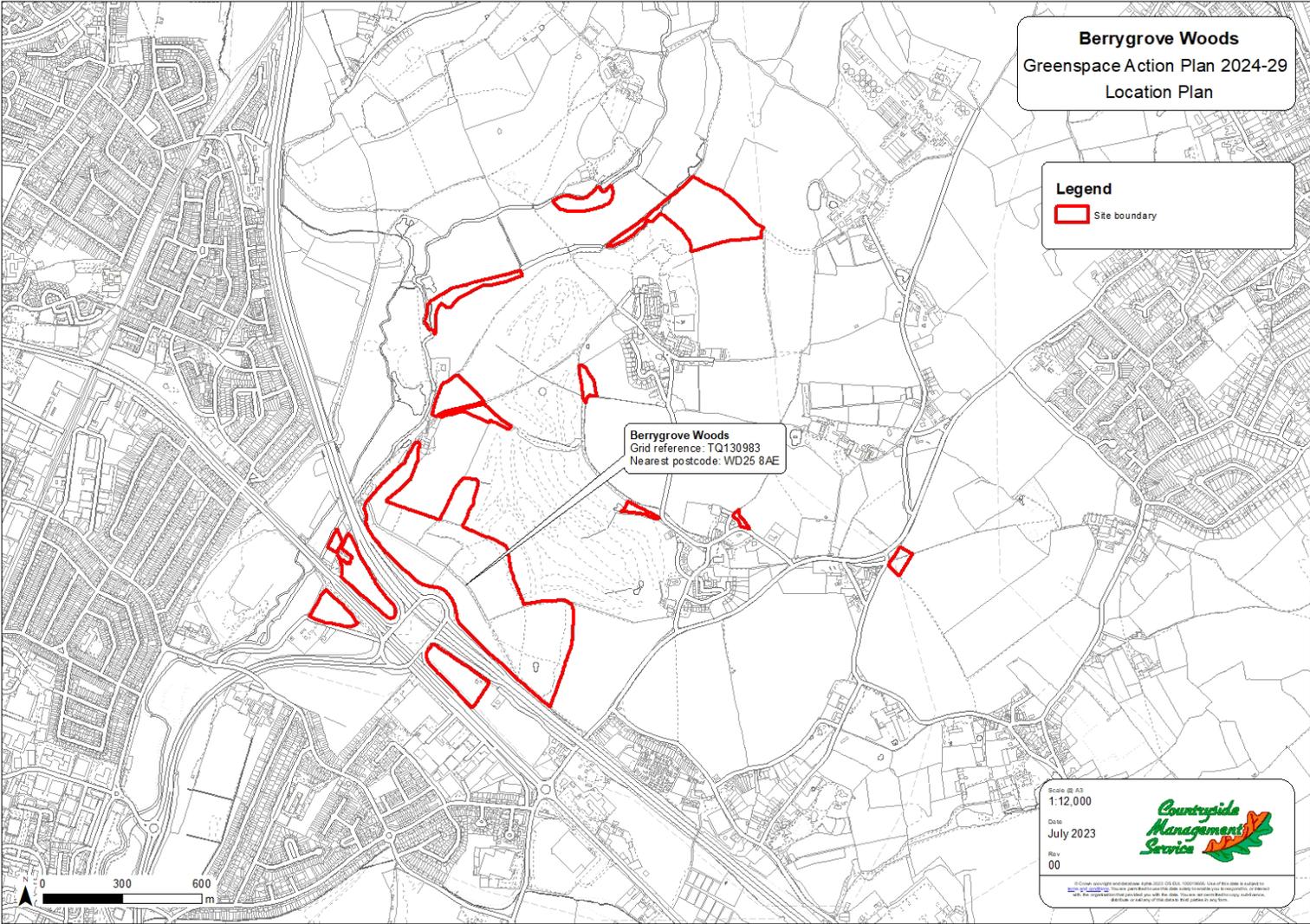
Section 3 reviews recent management of the site.

Section 4 contains the core objectives for the Berrygrove Woods 2025 – 2030 GAP.

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

Section 6 provides contact details for providing feedback on the Briefing Document

# 2. BACKGROUND



Berrygrove Woods are a network of woodland blocks, located between Aldenham village and the eastern edge of Watford. Two major roads, the M1 and A41, are prominent features in the landscape, with sections of Berrygrove Woods providing a visual screening.

Several of the northern blocks of woodland previously formed part of the Grade II listed parkland at Wall Hall. Much of the surrounding parkland has now been turned to arable farming or become part of Aldenham Golf Course, however, historic mapping suggests the boundaries of the remaining woodlands have changed little over time.

The woodlands are largely mixed, with distinct blocks often dissected by paths. Both conifer plantation and broadleaf species are present, with varying densities and woodland structure. Historical mapping and aerial photography suggest the woodlands are well established in their current location, though the composition of the woodlands has likely changed significantly over the years with the various felling and restocking operations.

### 3. REVIEW OF MANAGEMENT

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In recent years, with a relatively reduced staffing resource on the Countryside Works Team, the activities of Rural Estate's operational staff on this site has focused primarily on grounds maintenance activities and ensuring that the network of primary paths (footpaths and bridleways) are kept open, safe and usable by the public. The team also invests time and attention in combatting issues of anti-social behaviour.



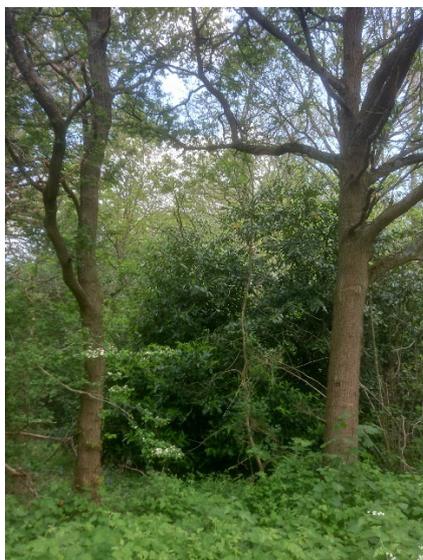
*Image 1: A well maintained pathway through the site*

In terms of habitat management, the team has overseen some removal of blocks of declining larch and pine with restoration to a native broadleaf mix through planting which, whilst relatively small-scale, has none-the-less been successful. The results of these activities are most evident in the main central compartment of Berrygrove Woods complex. In conjunction with this, there has been some bracken control undertaken in newly opened areas and successive beating-up and restocking of young plantation areas. There has also been some thinning of birch in more open areas where it has begun to dominate.



*Image 2: A section of the woodland that has been successfully thinned*

The team has also undertaken a degree of management of invasive laurel which is quite prevalent in several blocks through manual cutting and extraction in the compartment known as Abbey Wood, north of the formal Wall Hall Estate grounds. There has also been an effort to create a more varied and diverse woodland edge environment, particularly in the largest core compartment by means of scalloping and creation of more open areas and glades with some wildflower seeding.



*Image 3: Tall oak trees in the foreground with laurel behind*

A Forestry Commission approved Woodland Management Plan was completed for the woodlands in 2022, outlining forestry operations until 2023. Several constraints to operations have been identified within this plan, including limitations on access and timber storage areas. In addition, although much of the woodlands are on fairly level ground, steep slopes are present in some areas, particularly on embankments adjacent to major roads.

The majority of works outlined in the Woodland Management Plan involve thinning across much of the woodlands, along with several small blocks of regeneration felling, and removal of invasive cherry laurel. Ash dieback is also present, with removal of diseased ash a priority as part of thinning operations. There is an opportunity to seek external funding to help with the delivery of these operations, for example through application to a Countryside Stewardship agreement.



*Image 4: Scots pine plantation woodland*

A network of paths run through the woodlands, including Public Rights of Way, with the site providing a valuable recreational resource to the local population. A key aspect of this plan will be to make the site more welcoming to visitors through the creation and installation of entrance signage and interpretation. Increasing seating provision on site would be of benefit to provide place for visitors to sit and rest.



*Image 5: Existing bench*

## **4. GREENSPACE ACTION PLAN (GAP) 2025 - 2030**

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The Berrygrove Woods GAP 2025 - 2030 will be a simple, easy to read plan for use by Rural Estates 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:

### **Aims**

To improve the value of woodland habitats within Berrygrove Woods for wildlife, whilst providing an accessible greenspace which is a welcoming place to visit for gentle exercise and to enjoy nature.

### **Objectives**

**A. A welcoming place** – *To provide a welcoming green space to regular visitors and site users.*

A1 Design, produce and install welcome signage and interpretation at major entrances.

A2 Improve provision of seating and maintain seats in a consistent style.

**B. Healthy, safe and secure** – *To ensure that visitors to Berrygrove Woods feel safe and able to enjoy the site.*

B1 Respond proactively to anti-social behaviour any misuse of the site.

B2 Undertake tree safety surveys and carry out reactive tree work to address safety issues.

**C. Well maintained and clean** – *To ensure the standard of maintenance is upheld and relevant.*

- C1 Maintain site infrastructure, e.g. car park, gates, fencing, benches, steps, and surfaced paths.
- C2 Maintain ease of access by managing vegetation encroaching paths and entrances.
- C3 Carry out regular small-scale vegetation management and litter picking, and remove any fly-tipping.

**D. Sustainability** - *To ensure compliance with the council's environmental policies and seek sustainable activities and solutions.*

- D1 Ensure management activities contribute to delivering the aims of HCC's Sustainable Hertfordshire Strategy.
- D2 Ensure ongoing management costs are financially sustainable.
- D3 Secure external funding to finance delivery of woodland management works, for example through a Countryside Stewardship agreement.
- D4 Carry out management according to environmental best practice, using sustainable woodland management practices.
- D5 Market produce from forestry operations to increase the financial viability of woodland management.

**E. Biodiversity, Conservation and Heritage** – *To deliver works outlined in the Forestry Commission-approved Woodland Management Plan to conserve and enhance key habitats.*

- E1 Manage woodland habitats to improve value for wildlife and increase long-term resilience to disease and climate threats.
- E2 Enhance woodland structure through creation of temporary and permanent open space, including through ride creation and enhancement.
- E3 Monitor and control invasive non-native species and eradicate where possible.
- E4 Maintain and enhance ponds.

**F. Community Involvement** – *To develop an informed, involved and enthusiastic local community.*

F1 Provide an opportunity for stakeholders to influence the new GAP through a structured engagement process.

F2 Encourage the local community to become involved in the management of the site in a structured and supported way and ensure all involved operate towards achievement of the objectives of the GAP.

**G. Marketing** – *To promote awareness and interest in Berrygrove Woods.*

G1 Promote and celebrate projects that improve the site.

## 5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PLAN PRODUCTION PROCESS

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

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

- For the first stage (this briefing document), stakeholders and site users will be invited to make comment on the core aspirations in Section 4; it is hoped that any further aspirations and/or issues will be identified through this information gathering process. This first stage of community engagement will run between **Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2024 to Monday 1<sup>st</sup> July 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 in between approximately **Monday 4<sup>th</sup> November and Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2024**. To support this stage, we will be holding a guided walk and engagement session for any users or interested groups that may wish to discuss the proposals or a particular aspect in more detail. The arrangements for this event will be confirmed and advertised nearer the time.

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 Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2024 to Monday 1<sup>st</sup> July 2024.
3. Production of draft GAP.
4. Stakeholder engagement on draft GAP in November 2024.
5. Production of final GAP.
6. Publicity and promotion.

## **5.2 Stakeholders**

- Site users
- Hertfordshire County Council – relevant members and officers
- CMS volunteers
- Hertfordshire Ecology
- Historic Environment Record
- The Ramblers
- Rights of Way (HCC)
- Hertfordshire & Middlesex Wildlife Trust
- Butterfly Conservation
- Forestry Commission
- Aldenham Gold Course

## **6. STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK**

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

Please return your comments using the contact details below by Monday 1<sup>st</sup> July at the latest.

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