



Post Wood & Presdales Recreation Ground

Greenspace Action Plan 2019 - 2024

BRIEFING DOCUMENT

Produced by:



On behalf of:



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1. INTRODUCTION

A new five year Greenspace Action Plan (GAP) is being produced for Post Wood and Presdales Recreation Ground, near Ware. 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 HCC's Countryside and Rights of Way Service, on behalf of and in partnership with East Herts Council (EHC). The completed document will inform the management actions to be undertaken over the next five years, commencing April 2019.

Engaging communities is integral to production of GAPs, to ensure that stakeholders are fully aware of and able to interact with the planning and creation of the documents. This briefing document initiates and supports the first stage of the community engagement process by collating aims and objectives for the site.

The engagement period will run from 25th July to 20th August 2018. A further engagement period in October 2018 will provide the 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 Post Wood & Presdales Recreation Ground GAP that we are proposing.

Section 5 summarises the community engagement methodology, setting out how and when stakeholders can input into the plan.

2. BACKGROUND

Post Wood is an ancient oak-hornbeam woodland on the outskirts of Ware, Hertfordshire. It is adjoined by Presdales Recreation Ground, a popular open space surrounded by wooded boundaries. The sites are owned and managed by East Herts Council.

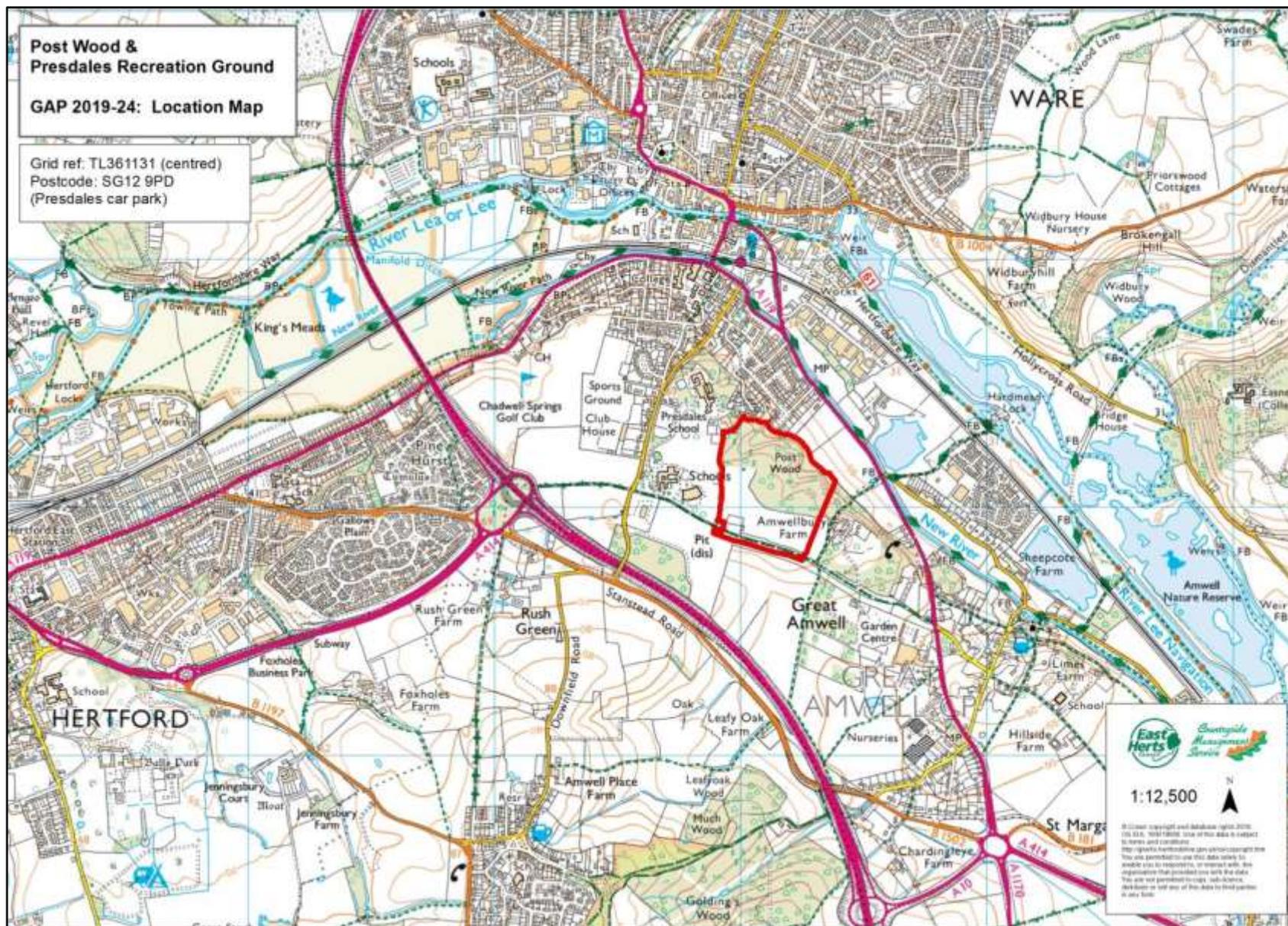
As an Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW), **Post Wood** has been in existence since before the beginning of the 17th Century. Tree species reminiscent of its ancient heritage are mature oaks and hornbeams, with hazel, crab apple and rowan in the understorey; more recent species additions include sweet chestnut and sycamore. Many of the hornbeam specimens were coppiced historically, prolonging the life of these trees and producing the gnarly forms seen today.

The ground flora contains remnants of ancient woodland habitat, including butchers broom, dogs mercury and wood anemone, whilst bluebells are a highlight each spring; however, the diversity of ancient woodland plants is low, and oak and hornbeam regeneration is poor. The causes behind poor growth appear to be heavy shading from the dense tree canopy and localised compaction from visitor footfall.

Presdales provides a large area of open space which is used for a range of recreational activities, from football to dog walking. With recreation being its main function, there is not a requirement to alter management of the grassland. The boundaries of Presdales are marked with mature hedgerows and linear woodland, providing landscape connectivity for woodland habitats, and creating attractive views across the field.

The only public Right of Way on the site is a tree-lined bridleway which runs along the southern boundary of Presdales. A network of footpaths throughout Post Wood provide good coverage of the woodland. A project was undertaken in early 2018 to resurface the footpaths, aiming to facilitate access for less able visitors, reduce path deterioration during winter months, and provide a solution to the compaction of woodland soils and plants from footfall.

Situated within the catchment of Ware, the woodland and recreation ground are popular sites for the local community. Owing to the value and scarcity of ancient woodlands, management of Post Wood for conservation is a high priority to ensure it is a protected and thriving habitat into the future.



3. REVIEW OF PROGRESS

Post Wood has received occasional and light-touch management during recent years, mainly restricted to removal of fallen tree obstacles and small-scale repairs of infrastructure. The woodland glade is cut once per year in most years, aiming to create a grassland habitat, although bracken and nettle burden is high. Occasional attempts to control cherry laurel have proved unsuccessful to date.

Resurfacing a large part of the footpath network around Post Wood was undertaken in early 2018, to address waterlogging and erosion issues during winter months. Provision of better footpaths aims to negate skirting of paths during wet conditions, and reduce footfall from desire tracks through the woods, which are likely to be having a long-term impact on wildflower plant growth. Steps and entrance points were also renewed due to disrepair, and the opportunity was taken to enlarge kissing gates at selected access points to aid pushchair access.

Presdales playing fields are maintained with a regular grass cutting regime, in order to keep the facility usable year-round. One pitch is left 'fallow' per year, and rotated, to allow recovery of grass.

Improvements to the bridleway running along the southern edge of Presdales were made in January 2018, primarily to prevent vehicle access and improve user experience. These included installation of a horse-friendly vehicle barrier, removal of redundant fencing, and scraping mud accumulation from the surface. The bridleway now has a more natural appeal with dense vegetation. Occasional cutting of the verges seeks to maintain access.

The Presdales car park remains in a poor state due to pot-holes, and disrepair has been flagged as a key issue by site users. The site is popular throughout the week and year-round, and especially so at weekends when football matches are being played.

Whilst both of these sites are highly popular and pleasant places to relax and explore, there are further opportunities available which will allow user experience and safety to be maximised, and will prioritise the conservation of the ancient woodland for future generations to enjoy.

4. GREENSPACE ACTION PLAN (GAP) 2018-2023

The Post Wood & Presdales GAP will be a simple, easy to read plan for use by officers of EHC and CMS, and members of the public. It will provide a guide for the work of staff, volunteers and contractors who manage the site.

The plan will be largely map based, with sequential annual management maps showing the actions planned for each year. The plan will be costed and potential funding sources identified where necessary. The document will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains effective and relevant.

Overall aim for Post Wood & Presdales:

To protect and enhance the ancient woodland habitat, and to maintain the sites as safe and enjoyable places to visit for the variety of user groups.

Objectives

A. **Public access and general maintenance** – *Ensure the sites are accessible, safe and enjoyable for visitors*

- A1 Renew and improve **information** panels and way-markers
- A2 Improve condition of **parking area**, ensuring it is welcoming and resilient
- A3 **Improve landscape features and visual amenity** through enhancing boundary hedgerows and fences, and removal of telecom infrastructure

B. **Conservation and woodland management** – *Enhance condition of the oak-hornbeam woodland and associated habitats, and improve ecosystem resilience*

- B1 Undertake a structured programme of **woodland management to increase rates of regeneration of trees and ground flora**, applying best practice and traditional techniques such as coppicing and pollarding
- B2 Recognise the value of **mature and veteran trees** and provide optimum conditions for their longevity
- B3 Remove **Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS)** of plants, notably cherry laurel, and selectively reduce introduced tree species
- B4 Maximise value of **woodland glade, edge and linear habitats**
- B5 Implement **monitoring** of wildlife taxa and tree diseases e.g. ash dieback; apply appropriate best practice in consultation with experts in these fields

C. Heritage and marketing – *Develop a stronger recognition of the heritage and ancient woodland aspects of site, and promote respectful and appropriate use*

3A Identify and preserve historic features

3B Inform site users and wider community about the site's heritage through effective and engaging information panels

3C Promote use of footpath network and responsible dog waste disposal, to reduce woodland damage and improve user experience

D. Community involvement – *Develop and maintain an informed, involved and enthusiastic local community.*

4A Encourage the local community to become involved in the management of the site through structure and support, and ensure all involved operate towards achievement of the objectives of the GAP

4B Support the creation of a **Friends of Post Wood** volunteer group if there is sufficient interest locally

4C Publicise and facilitate the involvement of a range of **local groups**, including the forest schools

4D Promote responsible and respectful use of the site, and proactively respond to misuse of the site and anti-social behaviour

E. Sustainable operations – *All management and activities will be environmentally and financially sustainable*

5A Ensure the costs of ongoing maintenance proposed in the GAP are **financially sustainable and achievable** with the resources available

5B Seek external funding from grant bodies and development funds, to deliver proposed activities beyond annual maintenance

5C Ensure all management is carried out according to **environmental best practice**, including on herbicide use, plant biosecurity to minimise tree disease, and sustainable woodland management practices

5D Identify approaches which will deliver **multiple benefits**, such as combining habitat and tree risk management

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND GAP PRODUCTION PROCESS

Effective community engagement is at the centre of successful management plans. The value of a GAP is maximised when it incorporates and addresses the aspirations of stakeholders and interest groups. The location of Post Wood means that it is of value and interest to a large catchment of people around Ware and the local area.

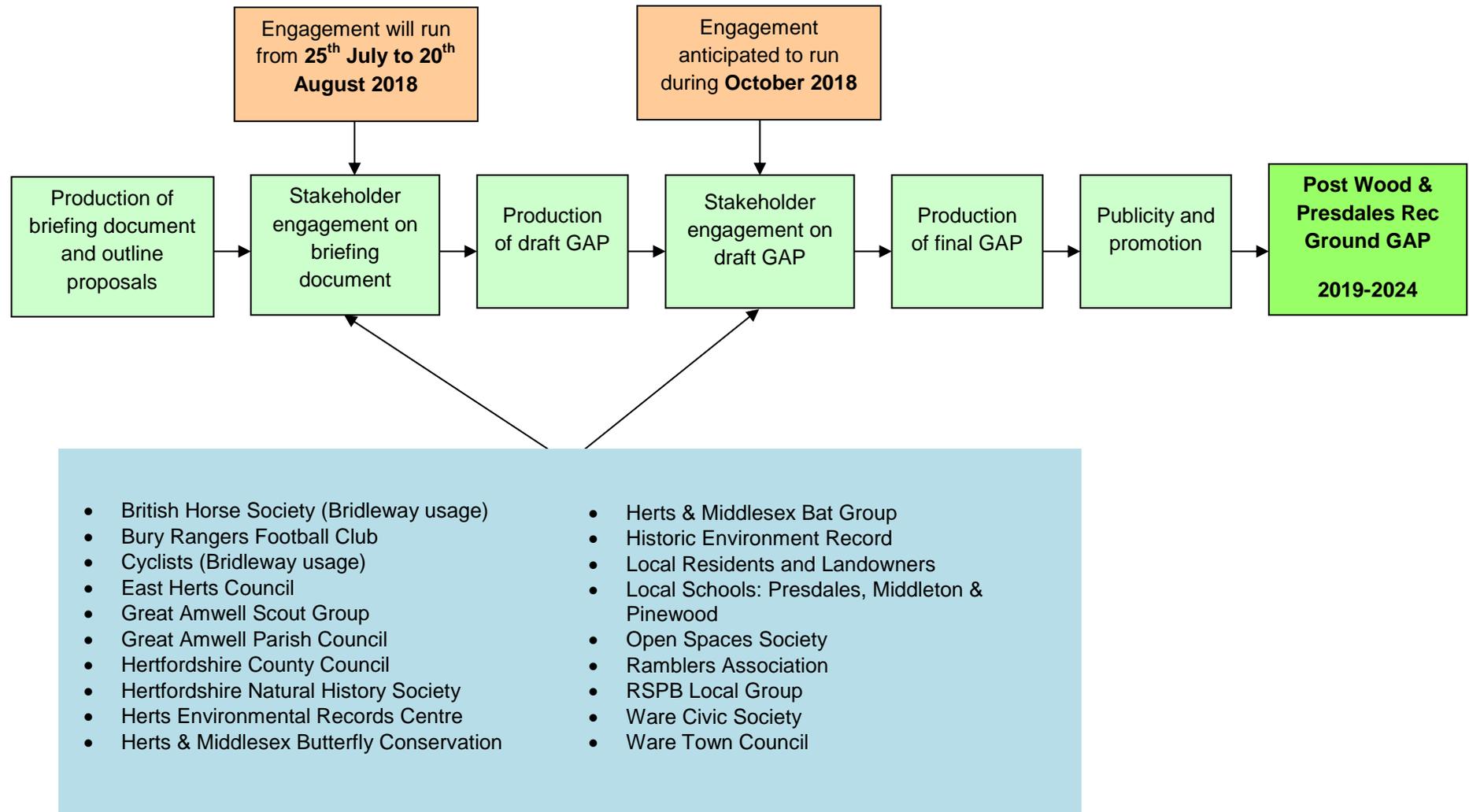
In order to provide all interested stakeholders and groups with the opportunity to feed into the production of the new GAP, we have adopted a structured two-stage approach to public engagement.

- 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 **Wednesday 25th July and Monday 20th August 2018**.
- 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 October 2018.

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.

The following diagram shows the Greenspace Action Plan production process:



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 Post Wood and Presdales Greenspace Action Plan (GAP) 2019-24.

Please return your comments using the contact details below by **Monday 20th August 2018** at the latest.

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