



# Southern Country Park

## Greenspace Action Plan

2008 - 2013



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# **Southern Country Park Greenspace Action Plan 2008 – 2013**

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All appendices for the Southern Country Park Greenpeace Action Plan have been produced as a separate document, which can also be viewed and downloaded from the Parks and Open Spaces Section of the Council's website <a href="http://www.eastherts.gov.uk">www.eastherts.gov.uk</a>	

(All Greenspace Action Plan Management Maps are also available in separate PDF documents which can be downloaded from the Parks and Open Spaces section of the Council's website [www.eastherts.gov.uk](http://www.eastherts.gov.uk) and printed at A3 size for easier viewing).

# Reader's Summary

This plan has been created, in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council's Countryside management Service (CMS), to guide the development of the park for 5 years (2008 -2013) in response to the Council's aim to plan the management and improvement of parks in East Herts. It follows sufficient consultation and assessment to establish what is important to the park's users and to ensure that the chosen aims and objectives are sustainable.

The park whilst being attractive and popular with local residents is relatively young and not yet fully established. However, it is well designed and has been managed and improved already to a standard that provides a good user experience and that protects its many natural features. This plan is designed to enhance these assets and to raise the standard of the park from good to excellent over the next 5 years.

The initial key objectives to be addressed in the first year will be to:

- improve signage and information to visitors including the promotion of the site to a wider audience
- provide more seating across the park
- improve access from the upgraded car park to the lake area to link in with the existing upgraded footpath
- expand on the good relationship with local residents by forming a Friends of Group

A play area is already tendered for and is to be installed in April 08.

Other key objectives are to:

- enhance the appearance of the main entrance incorporating two parking bays for disabled visitors
- develop grass management by introducing livestock
- further improve public interaction with the diversity of wildlife around the lake by installing a boardwalk and by replanting the reed bed
- develop facilities for anglers and improve the management of this activity

Funding is in place for all but one of these objectives through the Council's existing budgets and has been identified in its financial plan for the next three years. The boardwalk and reed bed improvements are to be bid for externally as described in the plan. The plan itself will help to support this bid by demonstrating that such improvements are sustainable and will greatly enhance this overall project to develop the park.



# General Information

## Introduction

The Council adopted a Parks and Open Spaces Strategy in October 2007 which was developed as part of the overarching East Herts Cultural Strategy “Culture for All”. The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2007 -2012 ([Appendix 2](#)) provides a policy framework for the parks and open spaces owned and managed by East Herts Council. It is aligned to the Council’s Play Strategy and reflects the Council’s Corporate Objectives, the ‘East Herts Together’ Community Strategy and the Local Plan Second Review (April 2007) as well as county, regional and national policy. The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy 2007 -2012 has led to a programme of work to develop management plans in the first instance for the 5 major parks within the District, one of which is Southern Country Park.

Southern Country Park is a relatively new park, approximately 23ha in size, which was created by Countryside Properties Plc as part of a Section 106 planning obligation agreement. East Herts Council took over the ownership and management of the park on 26th June 2001.

East Herts Council has worked in partnership with the Countryside Management Service (CMS) to produce this Greenspace Action Plan for the park and to carry out work on a range of our open spaces. CMS arrange most of the organisational work through managing groups of volunteers on our behalf. The Council pays CMS an annual contribution towards their costs as part of a larger District wide arrangement.

Greenspace Action Plans (GAPs) in their simplest form are easy to read map-based management plans. They are designed to be read and understood by a variety of people who might be interested in the management of a particular site. In this way a GAP can allow more people to understand, contribute and have a say in how a site should be managed. Built into the plan is an action point for an annual review that allows the plan to be revisited and progress to be monitored.

This document also includes a more detailed description of the process that has been followed to arrive at this plan of action. This can be found in the Initial Findings.

The plan carries supporting documents and reference material as part of an appendix. This ensures that specialist and detailed informative is available but does not inhibit the ‘day to day’ use of the document.

The plan has been prepared and organised primarily to facilitate the efficient management and development of the site. We have used the Green Flag criteria as an initial guide to exploring the range of issues that are important to a successful park. These are listed in [Appendix 3](#). An Action Matrix was created to make it easier to cross reference objectives against actions. It will also be used to record progress and revise actions over the course of the five years. This can be found at the end of this document on page 36.

## **Broad Aims of the Plan**

- To guide improvements and the sustainability of appropriate management in an open, organised and structured manner that will help develop partnerships and involve a broad range of input from stakeholders.
- To guide the investment of resources that will deliver benefits to people, wildlife, landscape and the historic environment.
- To involve and utilise the local community and gain support for management proposals.
- To provide an area of open space that is welcoming, safe and well maintained for local people and visitors from the wider district to enjoy.
- To provide interpretative and educational material that will spread awareness of the wildlife, history, park management and the wider countryside.
- To ensure there is equality in access and usage of the park.
- To promote and develop the health and leisure benefits to the community that this park offers.

## **Background**

Historically, the area to the south-west of Bishop's Stortford and to the north of Thorley Parish was agricultural land and was grazed by horses and sheep. Much of this area, now known as St Michael's Mead, has been developed. This development was planned through the preparation of the East Herts Local Plan First Review, between 1987 and 1993, and parallel development proposals by the developer of the St Michael's Mead residential area (Countryside Properties Plc).

Through joint working between the Council, the developer, and consultation with the local community, proposals for the 900 house St Michael's Mead residential development, including parks to the north and south, were incorporated into the 1993 Local Plan and granted planning permission, subject to a detailed Section 106 Planning Obligation, in 1992.

Southern Country Park was created by Countryside Properties Plc as part of this Section 106 planning obligation agreement, and is situated to the south of the St Michael's Mead residential area.

There are two other significant open spaces in the vicinity of the park, Northern Parkland and Thorley Wedge:

- Northern Parkland, developed as part of the same planning process as Southern Country Park, is located to the north of the St Michael's Mead residential area, (roughly 750m north from Southern Country Park) and covers approximately 5.55HA (22.209 acres). Primarily created to provide

play and recreation for the residents, it includes a large play area and a number of goals for kickabouts.

- Thorley Wedge is a long extensive strip of land, about 700m to the North West of Southern Country Park that runs between several adjacent housing areas. It again provides for general recreation and includes a further large play area, a teenage shelter and a kickabout area.

The park itself lies within Thorley Parish, which was the original settlement dominated by the 14th century parish church. The splendid views of the spire from the park will be maintained as the vegetation matures. The name Thorley has been defined in some texts as the “hill of the god of thunder”. Details such as this from the areas previous history will be reflected on through site information and projects such as the inclusion of art in the park. Nearby Thorley Hall is medieval in origin and has recently been up graded into a conference centre.



## Character and Aspirations

The park’s character was defined from the outset as a natural area for local residents of all ages to enjoy. This relates to the original Countryside Commission definition for a country park as a `honey pot` of robust country side areas that could take large numbers of (urban) users to experience the feeling of the countryside and could absorb these while not feeling overcrowded. Many of the designated features such as picnic areas, car parks, bridle paths, lakes and natural water, woodland and informal park land are available in the park. It is a large diverse space formed by native planting and areas of low key management (long grass). Formal Countryside Park designation has not been sought to date but will be investigated in year 1 of the plan. (Action 1)

The park itself can be seen to divide into two distinct areas when you are looking at a map of the site. The first, to the western side, surrounds the balancing pond and lends itself to quiet reflection and peaceful pastimes such as angling, bird watching and gentle walks. The second, to the eastern side, contains the Thorley lane car park and older children’s play area; and is a large open area of grass set aside for more physical pursuits such as kite flying, ballgames and exercising dogs. Surrounding both these distinct areas are a wide range of wildlife habitats and features such as woodland, grazing areas, chalk banks, informal play spaces, streams and a natural pond that all contribute to the overall feeling of a country park.



We aim to develop the park without losing this “country park” feel. Residents have been keen to protect the park as an ecological asset and to ensure that the Council is not planning to overdevelop or spoil the park by changing its character. This aspiration is fundamental to the development plan and sits alongside the other key aim to ensure that the park is accessible and enjoyable for a wide range of visitors. The Council has explored the potential for improving the park within this context by looking for inspiration at some other nearby Country Parks. These include Lee Valley Country Park, Stanborough Park, The Forest of Marston Vale and Stanwick Lakes.

The ecological and educational value of the park is crucial and should be balanced with providing enjoyment to a wide range of visitors. This can be achieved for example with the introduction of play, better provision for responsible angling and better footpath links around the site. A carefully developed and managed park can achieve diversity without losing its integrity.

The Council recognises from its consultation process and from general communication that local residents have a strong and positive relationship with the park. It is acknowledged that encouraging visitors from further afield should not spoil the “local” feeling of the park. Southern Country Park therefore will continue to welcome new visitors, but whilst aspiring toward some of the other parks mentioned, will remain in essence, a community park with a range of facilities that focus on local residents of all ages and abilities.

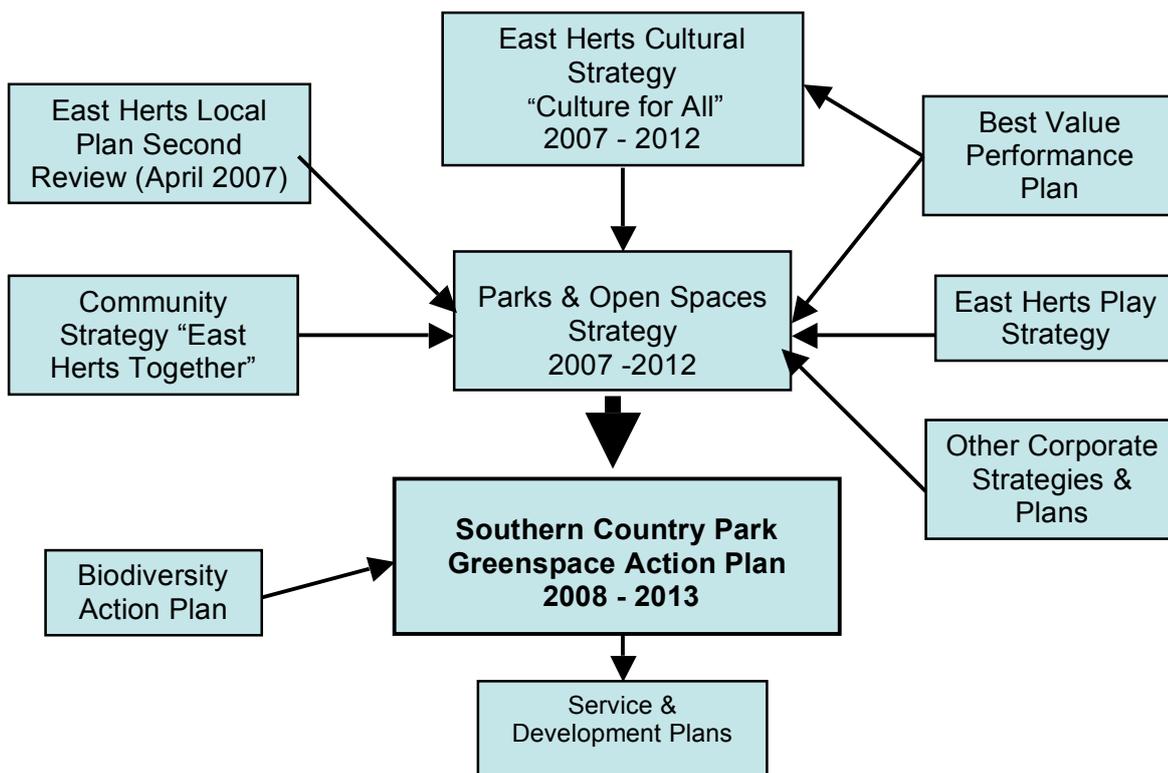
## **Policy Framework**

The Council recognises that its parks and open spaces contribute to:

- the overall Vision and Priorities of the Council
- the quality of life of local people
- the physical, social and economic regeneration of the District
- the greening, attractiveness and biodiversity of the District

Accordingly this Management Plan and the people that deliver it are guided by and embrace the aims, objectives and principles of the following overarching plans and strategies. Further information on all East Herts Strategies and Policies can be found on the Council’s website [www.eastherts.gov.uk](http://www.eastherts.gov.uk)

The following diagram represents how this Management Plan fits within the overall strategic framework for Parks and Open Spaces within East Herts:



## Green Flag Status

Hertfordshire's Local Area Agreement (LAA) consists of a number of targets aimed at improving the quality of life for Hertfordshire residents. One of the aims of the LAA is to ensure that more open spaces in the county can boast Green Flag status. Successful Green Flag parks are considered to be welcoming, safe and well maintained, with strong community involvement and good management of wildlife assets. The Council aspires to achieve, and then maintain Green Flag status at Southern Country Park to demonstrate its commitment to providing successful and well managed open spaces.

## Environmental Considerations

### *Environmental Policy*

The Rio Earth Summit in 1992 reached a number of important agreements. One of these was the adoption of Agenda 21, a comprehensive action plan for the pursuit of sustainable development in the 21st century, and Local Authorities have a key role in implementing and carrying forward much of the action required in Agenda 21.

East Herts adopted a revised Local Agenda 21 Action Plan in October 2000 having started the process in 1997. Five (5) area based community groups were established to progress the preparation and implementation for the plan including one for Stortford which included the discussion of issues on the Southern Country Park. As well as raising issues, the Groups also undertook specific projects in their own areas.

However, in East Herts, Agenda 21 has been incorporated into the Community Strategy process. This has enabled a co-ordinated approach to create local partnerships; developing local environmental initiatives; exchanging of ideas and enabling the Council to prepare strategies for sustainable development.

The other key document that we are signed up to is the Local Biodiversity Action Plan – agreed April 1998 and revised in 2006. Although it doesn't mention the park by name, the document reflects our commitment to Biodiversity in the District. Our East Herts Green Pages (a list of environmental volunteer groups in East Herts) supports additional action to progress work in these areas.

The Parks and Open Spaces Strategy (see [Appendix 2](#)) summarises how we intend to manage our open spaces and our commitment to creating working management plans. In addition, the Council has produced a detailed 'Environmental Policy Statement' which outlines the council's commitment to sustainability and includes a specific section on 'Natural Habitats and Biodiversity' (sections EP26 to EP 31 refer to this). A copy of the 'Environmental Policy Statement' document is attached in [Appendix 4](#).

The new Grounds Maintenance Contract contains an Environmental Protection Schedule by which the contractor must abide. This is attached in [Appendix 5](#). The Council's main contractor John O'Conner (Ground Maintenance) Ltd, employed in the management of the park, is fully aware of and committed to energy conservation and the reduction of pollution in the service that they provide. See [Appendix 6](#) for details of John O'Conner's energy conservation and pollution reduction guidelines.

As part of Hertfordshire County Council's Environment Department, the CMS are accredited to ISO14001. Therefore, all volunteer activity or contract management undertaken by CMS will be guided by this standard. See [Appendix 7](#) for a copy of HCC Environmental Policy.

### ***Pesticide Use***

The Council has taken a conscious decision in addition to its corporate aspirations to protect the environment, to limit the use of pesticide in the park only to problems that could not otherwise be dealt with adequately. The housing developers employed a regime of chemical control around the newly planted trees and along path edges whilst the park was in their ownership. In 2001 when the Council took over management of the park, this practice was stopped. Trees were strimmed around when necessary and paths were left to physical control by natural footfall of visitors. This has proved successful in that trees have grown healthily without the need for chemical control and footpaths have remained sufficiently tidy by the aspirations of a Country Park. The control of Ragwort has been tackled so far by pulling weeds by hand and will be monitored to see whether chemical control may be necessary. **(Action 35)** The meadow area affected by Ragwort is currently fenced and not accessible to livestock.

The Council recognises that chemical control is sometimes necessary but is committed within the boundaries of this countryside park to keep this use to an absolute minimum.

## ***Peat Use***

Peat has been used by commercial growers and amateur gardeners since the mid 20th century. Mixed with sand and loam it became a popular high quality growing medium, and to meet the demand, acres of UK peat bogs were drained and destroyed. This kind of peatland is now one of the UK's rarest and most threatened habitats. Environmentalists, the government, and gardening organisations all say the horticultural industry should phase out peat and use sustainable, and if possible, locally sourced alternatives instead.

The original developers of the site are likely to have sourced their plants from nurseries that used peat. The Council has not planted any plants grown in peat in the park since adopting the site in 2001. This policy will continue by ensuring that only bare root trees and shrubs are planted in the future. Careful planning of planting programmes at the appropriate time of year will ensure that this approach is sustainable.

## ***Recycling***

All horticultural waste on the site is processed in a sustainable way. Tree and shrub pruning arisings are chipped back onto site where possible and where this is inappropriate they are taken by our contractor to a local waste recycling plant. Ace of Herts, our local centre based at Cumberlow Green Farm in Rushden have facilities to process the green waste material into compost for resale to the public. Materials removed from the site such as mulch mats and tree guards are also recycled where possible.

## **Community Involvement**

Working with the local community is essential to achieving the goals set out in this plan. The Council has worked with CMS to carry out a programme of consultation leading up to the creation of this management plan and to the formation of a "Friends of Greenspaces" group.

The programme started in 2002 with talks to Thorley Parish Council and St Michael's Mead Resident's Association. This was followed by publicising a consultation meeting where local residents were asked to comment on the management and future plans for the park.

Proposals for environmental and access improvements were discussed and it was agreed that the park should be managed for wildlife and people. The meeting was held locally with approximately 30 local residents and officers from EHC and CMS.

At this time it was made clear to residents that the maintenance of the park would be adapted to meet some of the aspirations of this consultation immediately. A more definitive management plan would not be drawn up though until the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy had been created through its own consultation process. It was explained that this would set the Council's priorities across the whole district and would guide the creation of individual management plans.

Based on the discussions from the initial meeting with the community in 2002, various groundworks have been undertaken in the park, including the removal of loose tree-guards, a change in grass cutting regimes, the general tidying of the area and access improvements.

Initial work was started on a more formal management plan in conjunction with CMS in 2006, and by the summer of 2007, following the publication of the Draft Parks and Open Spaces Strategy, the basic ideas for this management plan were formulated for local residents to comment on.

A meeting on site in the park was promoted resulting in an encouraging turn out of about 40 interested people on the evening of 21 August 2007. The group was shown around the park stopping at key points of interest to introduce the main aims and objectives of the plan. Feedback on the day was very positive and residents were given feedback forms to take away and return.

We received 15 forms from attendees of the consultation walk. The comments received on the day and within these forms can be summarised in four main areas; which we have used to guide the proposals for the Action Plan.

*1) Lake and reedbed improvements to reduce erosion, bank damage and benefit wildlife.*

People were asked to comment on proposals to improve the biodiversity value of the reedbed and marginal habitats. All of the responses stated that people were broadly in agreement with the proposals.

Additional comments from people regarding the lake and reedbed management included:

- Concerns about the current angling practices
- One person suggested more life buoys

*2) Access improvements to make the park more accessible to all.*

People were asked to comment on the installation of boardwalks, better surfaced paths, designated and managed fishing areas and site interpretation panels. These proposals were received with enthusiasm.

Additional comments included:

- Suggestions that more car parking is needed at Moor Hall Lane

*3) Management of grassland, picnic area, ponds and wooded areas.*

People were asked to comment on the management of the mown areas, plantations and woodlands. We also discussed the creation of a new pond with a dipping platform and a picnic area. All of the responses reflected that people were in favour of these.

Additional comments included:

- Three people had concerns about the new play area feeling that it may lead to anti-social behaviour rather than help to resolve it.
- Four people offered suggestions for locations of new dog waste and litter bins.
- A keenness to see art in the park by some was tempered by one resident's assertion that this would be a waste of money.
- One person would like to see more habitats created for butterflies.
- One person felt a BBQ area would be useful.

*4) People were asked if they would be interested in joining in activities in the park.*

From the 15 returned forms, 11 people said they would be interested in joining activities such as guided walks, conservation work, healthy walking in the park.

An example of the feedback form and the promotional handout from this consultation walk can be found in [Appendix 8](#). The comments and feedback from this process were considered carefully as this management plan was developed.

Those that took part in the consultation process will be contacted in the spring of 2008 to update them on the progress with the development of the park and to follow their interest in forming a "Friends Of" group for the park. They will be introduced to a management plan that has been designed to reflect their various concerns and to capture the ideas that they supported. **(Action 2)**

CMS works with local volunteers and community groups to help them care for and enjoy their local environment. Volunteers will be encouraged to adopt the Friends of Greenspaces approach (FoG) developed by CMS. This is a countywide structured programme of volunteer opportunities that is tailored to the needs of specific groups associated with their own local greenspace. Developing the skills and experience of volunteers in an organised programme will help us to deliver our vision for the site.

Volunteer training will include;

- basic first aid
- use of risk assessments
- task planning and supervision
- practical countryside management skills
- Health walk leader training

Following this an annual program will include.

- 2 meetings per annum attended by appropriate CMS and EHC officers and volunteer group representatives, to identify a work program from the plan. **(Action 3)**
- Identification of training requirements specific to work program. **(Action 4)**
- Ongoing generic training as part of the program being developed by CMS.

This approach has been successful across a wide range of open spaces in Hertfordshire. [Appendix 9](#) contains examples of projects and literature at some of these sites.

## Measuring Success

### *Patterns of Usage*

The parks and open spaces managed by East Herts Council always feature prominently in the Residents Survey / MORI poll that has been commissioned biannually since 1993. The 2007 report identified the most frequently used culture and leisure facilities in East Herts to be the riverside and country paths. They are not only used by the most people, but also most frequently. To add further context to the findings, it should be noted that the Active People Survey (conducted by Ipsos MORI on behalf of Sport England) shows that East Herts has the third highest level of participation in moderate intensity sport and active recreation of all authorities in the East of England region and is in the top 25% nationally. ([www.sportengland.org/061206\\_active\\_people\\_east\\_factsheet\\_embargo\\_7\\_dec.pdf](http://www.sportengland.org/061206_active_people_east_factsheet_embargo_7_dec.pdf))

The top three factors which residents say would make them more likely to use leisure and culture facilities tend to group around various themes; increased provision, better maintenance/cleanliness, improved range/choice and greater personal safety, as well as some more specific issues such as increased awareness of theatre programmes and better access/proximity to cinemas.

### *Monitoring Usage*

In 2007 as part of the Parks and Open Spaces Development Programme, the Council undertook an audit of its main open spaces and play areas. The framework devised to undertake this audit assessed both the quality and quantity of the facilities and equipment of each individual site, and more specifically the provision for children and teenagers. Therefore each site was scored against its own individual attributes and the final score achieved shown as a percentage score. This enables individual sites to be assessed against each other whilst taking into account their own individual characters.

All information gathered from the audit has been recorded in an Excel spreadsheet; with an individual score sheet and written statement for each site. Southern Country Park was audited in June 2007 as part of this district wide project. The results for Southern Country Park have been included in [Appendix 10](#). We plan to expand the audit in the future by engaging with the Friends of Group to undertake snapshot surveys of the number of visitors to the park.

The Council is fully committed to the LAA aspirations to improve its open spaces and as such has benefited from the County-wide procurement of Greenstat, a tool for measuring residents' satisfaction of the services they are provided in relation to parks and open spaces. The system has been promoted on the Council's web site and in the spring 2008 edition of Link, the quarterly magazine issued to all residents. Southern Country Park has been included on the system and the early indications are that the park is well used and popular. **(Action 5)** This data will be continually collected and reviewed. Any changes in the response from residents will be considered at the annual review of the management plan. **(Action 6)**

The PPG17 audit, undertaken as part of the Local Plan 2nd Review in July 2005, investigated use of the District's open spaces. Usage data about Southern County

Park indicated that it had a 'High /Significant' level of use in that 'the area is used either everyday or almost everyday by either people or wildlife'. Specific data about the number of visitors each year to the park was not undertaken as part of the PPG17 survey but we will be using Greenstat to gauge usage in the future. We estimate about 15000 visitors per year at time of writing.



### **Reviewing Progress**

An intrinsic part of the management plan is to annually review the actions set out in the Action Matrix. As actions are carried out, they will be assessed and any issues recorded. The annual review will consider all of the issues recorded throughout the year. Key stakeholders including the Friends of Group will also be invited to walk the park with managers to discuss progress and note any new actions that might be considered for the next year.

A brief report will be prepared to summarise the findings and any new actions agreed will be added to the Action Matrix.

## **Needs Assessment**

### **Introduction**

Having established the basic aims and aspirations for the park, it was important to explore and assess in more detail, the various features and issues that relate to the day to day management and use of the park. This assessment was carried out by both Council and CMS Officers after having consulted with residents and local park users. Specialist contractors have also advised on some elements of the assessment. The following sections explore the main areas that were identified as either being satisfactory or requiring action. The actions have been prioritised and included in the Action Matrix and on the annual Management Maps. These actions are not exhaustive and it is expected that as the management plan is developed further, new actions may be included or existing actions revised. The plan will be reviewed on an annual basis and the actions amended accordingly. (Action 7)

## Funding

For the purpose of funding, these actions have been grouped into relevant packages (see the Funding Stream column of the Action Matrix). The Council will work with CMS to identify funding for developmental projects relating to access, interpretation, community involvement and biodiversity. (Action 8) The Action Matrix points to the broad funding streams that we will be applying to. The specific groups that we will target are as follows:

- Landfill Community Fund
  - Biffa Award
  - Waste Recycling Environmental Ltd (WREN)
- Big Lottery Fund
  - Heritage Lottery Fund
- Natural England
  - Access to Nature
  - Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund

The Council provides a capital and revenue budget to develop and maintain all its parks and open spaces. The budget supports approximately 180 open spaces including the 5 major parks and around 40 significant open spaces. It also provides for the inspection and maintenance of the Councils trees, 46 equipped play areas and 31 football pitches. The main Contract budget for 2007/8 was £924,000 from this we also fund tree risk assessments and the proposed works. Our additional miscellaneous Revenue budget of £75,150 also reserves funds for the development works on specific sites each year. Approximately £50,000 was spent at Southern Country Park in the year 2006/07 from revenue budgets in addition to the routine contract grass cutting works. Spending has been prioritised from the above budgets to support the launching of the formal management plan in 2008/09. The Action Matrix provides further details.

## Public Access

### ***Access to the Park***

The park has two main access points - from Moor Hall Lane in the north-west and via the Thorley Lane car park in the south east. There are also ten (10) other access points into the park. All of the entrances are safe and tidy. There has been some concern from residents that parking is inadequate at the north-west end contributing to congestion. We have found through monitoring that the problems are not significant at this stage and that they have often been due to anglers parking in the road at this end of the park near the lake. We will be working with a local fishing club to control this activity to a better extent and will be encouraging anglers to park in the larger, recently extended and improved car park off Thorley Lane at the north-west end. (Action 9) A new footpath extension is needed to link the car park to make this a practical option and a DDA compliant gateway will be installed from the car park to this new pathway. (Action 10) The distance between lake and car park is approximately 100m and therefore not too far to expect anglers to walk with their equipment. The north-west entrance at Moor Hall Lane is also to be redesigned to accommodate two parking spaces for disabled visitors and to improve the visual

aspect of this important entrance from the residential area. (Action11) An early sketch of how this will be set out is included in Appendix 11.

### **Signage**

At the time of writing, the park does not currently have any signage to inform visitors of its facilities or to celebrate its significance. The only signs in place are to warn visitors of the potential hazard of the lake. Interpretation boards are planned therefore to be installed at the two main entrances along with a series of smaller “welcome to” boards at the other entrances.

The notice boards will initially contain simple map based information that will describe the aims of the GAP with an invitation to become involved in the Friends Of group. They will also clarify safety issues such as where the nearest public telephones and emergency equipment are. (Action 12) Information on the new byelaws will be displayed on the reverse of these two main information boards. (Action 13)

This is an example of the style of notice board that will be installed which is already in place at Pishiobury Park, another of the Council’s major parks. The aim is to create a consistent style of entrance signs across the district that indicates a Council owned and “cared for” park.



Fully considered and functional interpretation panels will replace these in year 2 of the plan and additional ‘welcome’ signs will be installed at all the minor entrances in year 3. (Action 14) These interpretation panels will guide visitors as to what facilities are provided, what wildlife they might expect to find and details of the remaining actions from the plan. The design of these panels will be guided by the Council and CMS but provided by a specialist consultant as part of a package of promotional devices such as leaflets based on professional artwork that can be utilised for media and web site articles. (Action 15)

The boards will use glass reinforced plastic (GRP) as it is rigid and not susceptible to damp and mildew. Artwork is then sealed against the elements and relatively vandal resistant. The display units could be made from steel or hardwood, but the style or materials adopted for the park will be of the same type throughout. The main site panels will be A0 size and the other entrance panels will be approximately A1 size but may form part of an entrance structure.

The Council will explore the possible installation of brown tourist direction signs by Hertfordshire Highways. Early indications are that this is a straightforward process. Installation will be in year 3 after the main infrastructure is in place to accommodate larger numbers of visitors more easily. (Action 16)



Local people regularly comment on the large unattractive warning signs in the middle of the lake. These were installed by the developers at a time when this was common practice to mitigate against litigation. These signs will be removed, relying on more aesthetically pleasing signage beside the lake that meets recognised standards as noted in the Health and Safety section of this plan. (Action 17)

### **Public Art**

The Council will engage local communities to place a piece of public art or perhaps even a series of pieces into Southern County Park. (Action 18) The Council views public art as a mechanism for improving spaces and places through the intervention



and involvement of artists and crafts people. Our ambition is to use public art to resonate with the site and to create an opportunity for a whole range of people to engage with it. We will seek to enhance both the character and image of the park as well as attracting new visitors. A theme will be chosen in consultation with users of the park and variations on this theme will be created at significant locations around the park. This will help to lead visitors visually from one area to another. More investigation is required to establish the costs of this project and whether external funds can be attracted to support this initiative. (Action 19) Early indications are that a budget of £4 to £5K will need to be allowed for. One medium that has been used successfully at other country parks is chainsaw sculpture where large logs are crafted into shapes such as acorns, animals or birds with skilful use of a chainsaw.

### **Community Access**

Three years ago the footpath around the north side of the lake was upgraded to tarmac with a resin and stone finish providing improved access for wheelchairs and parents with buggies. Park users had expressed concern that the previous loose gravel surface made access to the park difficult and in particular made it hard for parents with young children to reach the shallow sloped area where they like to feed the ducks. Our own survey of the park, undertaken in June 2007 as part of our Parks and Open Spaces Development Programme and in relation to our Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) commitments, also highlighted this as an issue for visitors in wheelchairs or with mobility problems. The new footpath provided stable and firm access to the most visited area of the park. An attractive surface finish



was chosen that would not conflict with the country park character. Drainage channels have also been installed where a natural spring crosses the path.

Previously, budgets were not available to complete a circular route around the entire lake. However, the new easy access footpath proposed to link the lake with the car park will also include the upgrading of the footpath to the south of the lake. (Action 20)

The Council has an Access & Partnerships Officer who is able to give advice on compliance with the DDA. A site visit with him has been arranged as part of the development of this plan to ensure that proposals are appropriate, and to seek any further suggestions that he may have to enhance the enjoyment of the park for disabled visitors. (Action 21) He will also be able to guide an inclusive marketing strategy.

The Council will investigate installing a path to link the car park to the proposed new shallow pond which is to be developed as a dipping pond in year 3. (Action 22) The actual route of the pathway will depend upon a survey of the site which has some steep contours. These could be overcome with some creative engineering. The development of a natural shallow pond with pond wildlife interpretation board and pond dipping area will be of great benefit to local schools and wildlife organisations as a locally accessible free educational resource. Details of the pond construction can be found in Appendix 12. (Action 23)

### ***Byelaws and Fishing***

Residents were consulted in 2006 concerning the introduction of byelaws for the parks in St Michael's Mead. Council Members had been keen to create byelaws in order to control some of the anti-social behaviour that has occurred. This includes the anti-social and potentially dangerous use of motorcycles across both north and south parks and the use of model aircraft on Northern Parkland. (Full details of the byelaws are listed on the Council's website and can be found in Appendix 13). A keen area of debate was whether or not fishing should be allowed. The consensus from residents was that the Council should encourage responsible angling for the whole community including young, old and disabled. The proposed parking space at the entrance and the new footpath will both help to develop this. The assessment has identified the need to work in partnership with a local fishing club to help encourage responsible use of the site. (Action 24) This may include a permit scheme designed not to disadvantage but to encourage local young people and will certainly include measures to keep the site free from discarded tackle that could become a hazard to wildlife. There have been reports of some antisocial behaviour involving anglers on the site including conflict with dog owners and general late night rowdiness. A monitored permit scheme alongside the byelaws will help the Police to deal with any such issues that cause a nuisance to nearby residents or other visitors. We have received proposals from Bishop's Stortford & District Angling Society and will be looking further at these in year 1. (Appendix 14) Significant plans to construct platforms to protect bank erosion and enhance facilities for fishing have been held until year 3 while we focus resources on improving overall access to the park. (Action 25) Initial partnership terms will be agreed within the first year and action taken to mark swims and begin a process of control.

We will install coir turf reinforcement mats (TRM) over the gabions on the south bank of the lake to allow the successful establishment of under sown grasses and wildflowers at the same time as this work.

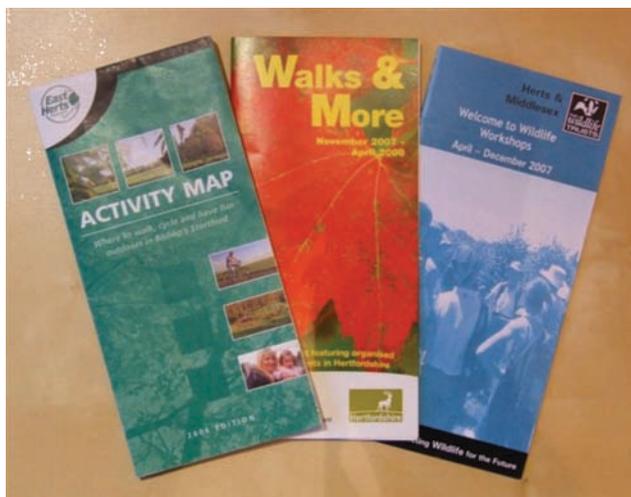
We will also explore the need to control the level and species of stock in the lake. Anglers have noted a predominance of carp, some a weight of up to 15lb, and a significant amount of large goldfish. Current reports from anglers on the level of stock are inconsistent and so a specialist survey is likely to be required. It may be appropriate to introduce predator fish such as pike. (Action 26)

### **Rights of Way**

New bridleways and a footpath are being created through dedication by Hertfordshire County Council under Section 25 of the Highways Act 1980. The new Rights of Way will link into the existing network and provide useful routes for residents of the estate and the area as a whole. A new bridge was installed on the bridleway by the County Council in 2005 to strengthen a weak point in the network behind the small pond.

A map showing details of the public Rights of Way network is being prepared to include with the management maps in the final draft of this document.

Additional improvements to structures on the existing Rights of Way network will include the repair of an old brick culvert near this pond that pre-dates the park. (Action 27) This culvert does not directly affect the Right of Way as the route diverts around this point. Its repair though will reintroduce the small pond to the circular route around the park. The County Council has installed way markers across the network and within Southern Country Park. This links in with the self-guided East Herts Health Walks information leaflets currently being developed.



Accessibility will be improved by constructing a surfaced route from the main car park at the Thorley Lane entrance across to the lake. The path around the lake will also require improvement to ensure it is suitable for use by walkers, wheelchairs, cyclists and pushchairs. The sections of the park are currently quite separate and the access improvements will provide opportunities for more people to enjoy more of the site. (Actions 10 & 21) This path will be constructed at the same time as the upgrade around the south side of the lake.

## **Seating**

The Council is committed to providing sustainable, robust and attractive seating across its open spaces. We have standardised our approach to this by procuring a high quality steel ended design with arms to provide support to less able users and with recycled plastic boards that have proved resistant to all but the most persistent vandalism. The assessment found that more seating could be installed into the park at certain prime locations. Five more seats will be installed in year 1. Provision will then be reviewed as part of the Annual Review. (Action 28)



There may also be an opportunity to install carved timber seating as part of the artwork project in a style that is befitting a country park. An example from Marston Vale Community Forest is shown below. Whilst it would not usually be appropriate to mix the design of seating within one space, our assessment has concluded that the two designs would serve together without conflict. Timber seating introduced as part of an artwork project that involves the public, and in particular local young people, will also stand a better chance of surviving any potential vandalism. (Action 19)



## **Health and Safety**

### ***Safety of Equipment and Facilities***

A thorough and comprehensive system of safety and contract monitoring inspections is in place for the park. On a quarterly basis all our main open spaces are thoroughly inspected by the Area Environmental Inspection team. Hazards and defects are recorded and any work required is actioned straight away. The Council has a robust system of monitoring the grounds maintenance contract comprising of 50 inspections of various operations each week across the district including random inspections, previous problem areas, and work completed the previous week. The contractor provides details of scheduled operations carried out on a weekly basis and reports any damaged or missing litter or dog bins. The contractor inspects the lifebuoys at the same time as visiting the dog bins. They carry a stock of life buoys for immediate replacement should they find one missing.

The contractor inspects all play areas 5 times a week including Saturday, and any defects are noted and actioned. Monthly inspections of the play areas are also carried out by the Area Environmental Inspection team. (Action 29)

In addition to these routine inspections we aim to engage both the Friends of Group and the proposed partnership with a fishing club in carrying out adhoc inspections of the park. Any issues of concern from these groups will be reported back to the Council through the Customer Help Desk.

In 2008, the Council, following a trial in 2005, is to commence with a new Tree Risk Management Programme, to inspect all Council owned trees across the district. The principles of the inspection are to systematically plot all trees and woodlands onto its Geographical Information System (GIS) and to identify both the current and the potential risk of each tree or group of trees. The trees in the park are identified as a lower priority for capture than some other spaces but, as a major open space, are still due to be programmed for inspection by the end of 2009. (Action 30) The majority of trees in the park are young and do not pose any significant risk to the public. They are largely in areas that visitors to the park do not walk through or sit near. The programme will ensure that each tree is inspected by an independent arboricultural consultant to identify the type of tree and its current condition. The consultant will make any necessary recommendations for work that may be required and will also indicate according to the condition of the tree and its location, when it should next be inspected. This prioritises inspection to those trees that present the greatest risk to the public and ensures that resources are not wasted by inspecting more frequently than is necessary. The more mature trees in the park have, pending this full inspection, been checked for safety by our own Area Environmental Inspector who specialises in tree work under the guidance of our Arboricultural Officer.

### ***Security to Visitors***

East Herts Council has and will continue to work in close partnership with the local police in tackling anti-social behaviour in its parks and open spaces. The Community Safety Team at East Herts Council liaises with the local Police Constables (PCs) and Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) about any emerging issues in an area (e.g. vandalism, vehicle nuisance, graffiti) and looks at ways to tackle these issues. Problems or concerns about an area, when reported to the Council by residents, are passed to the local PC and PCSOs for them to be able to pay attention to whilst out on patrol. Similarly the local officers will also make East Herts Council aware when they may be able to assist in tackling a problem, for example by cutting back hedges or removing graffiti.

Over the past few years the close working relationship between the Police and East Herts Council has resulted in some positive results in areas previously experiencing problems of anti-social behaviour, for example:

- The use of motorised vehicles in parks and open spaces has been tackled by the use of signs being erected warning of the consequences of their use under Section 59 of the Police Reform Act (2002) and increased police patrols in problem areas. This has led to a number of warnings to those responsible and in some instances their motorbikes being seized. In some areas kissing gates have been installed at the access points to open spaces

to deter use of vehicles and help with the capture of those responsible whilst still allowing members of the public access to the area.

- A youth shelter in Thorley Wedge open space. The local youth worker identified that the young people would like somewhere to go and a youth shelter was suggested. The young people worked with the Youth Service and the Council to look at different designs and how to get funding. The project is still in its infancy but is a good example of the community and local agencies working together at all levels.

There have been some reports of motorcycle misuse in the park and the Council will continue to monitor this. (Action 31) Evidence of tyre tracks are found occasionally near the westerly entrance from Thorley Lane. A kissing gate is to be installed in year 1 at this entrance and at the currently unofficial entrance adjacent to the car park. (Action 32) Complaints relating to this are relatively low though indicating that incidents at this park are limited. The Police have asked us to concentrate, at the time of writing, on exploring problems at Northern Country Park. We have introduced byelaws, as previously mentioned to support the Police in dealing with this potential problem by both providing them with additional powers and by making it clear to residents that it is not acceptable. We have investigated a range of potential solutions in addition to working with the police. One such solution is the “k” barrier designed to restrict access to motorcycles whilst still allowing cycles and wheelchairs. These barriers though are expensive and with numerous access points to the park would be a considerable investment. Whilst well designed the barriers are not particularly attractive. If the problem increases or we find evidence that there is a serious risk to the public, we will consider diverting funds to install physical barriers.

There have been some isolated reports of noisy behaviour by young people around the lake area particularly near the Residential and Nursing Home and of conflict between anglers and other users of the park. The new older children’s play area should help to encourage young people to congregate in the area of the park that is not so close to dwellings.

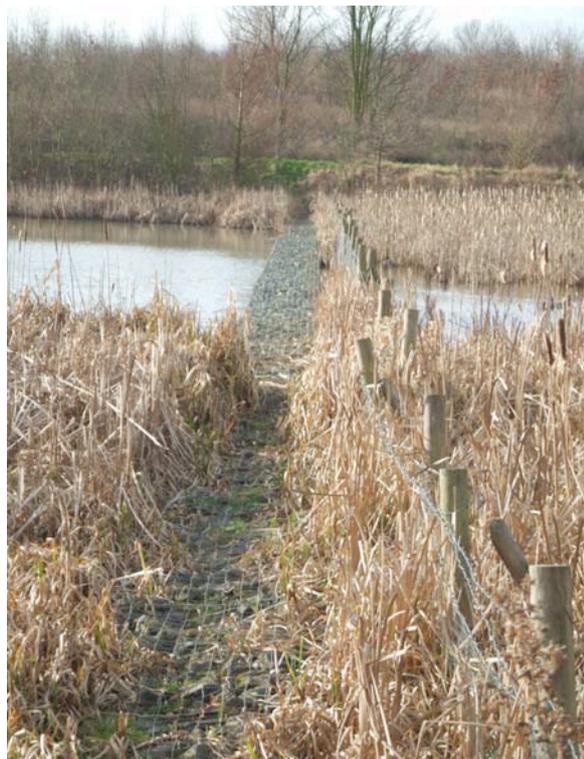
In order to promote good angling practice and to control the areas available for fishing, an existing club has been approached to help us manage angling on site (detailed previously in the Byelaws section). The Council will agree a scheme with them to control fishing in the park. (Action 24) To support this initiative, designated areas for angling with specially designed platforms will be installed to encourage appropriate usage that conforms to the byelaws. (Action 25) This arrangement will be developed in partnership with the Police to ensure that any associated antisocial behaviour is dealt with appropriately.

Historically, fences have been erected around wetland features in parks to improve public safety. Many of these are not now needed as due to an increase in public safety awareness eliminating the need to fence people away from interesting habitats. Work was carried out in 2005 for example to negate the requirement for a fence completely enclosing the small natural pond. It had steep banks all around that would have made escape from the water difficult in an emergency. A 4.0m section of bank was re-graded to create a more shallow entry point into the water. The ecological habitat was also improved as part of the project by creating a shallow water shelf where a variety of native herbaceous plants were planted. Further works

are planned in year 3 to excavate a larger shelf area to extend the shallow area further around the pond. This will be carried out as part of the operation to restore the banks to the balancing pond whilst large machinery is on site. (Action 33)



An ongoing problem on site has been the misuse of the gabion revetment dividing the reedbed from the balancing pond. Children and anglers are known to regularly walk across the structure. Having not been designed for public access, the surface is slippery with no safety features and is therefore potentially dangerous. Wire fences that should prevent access are periodically damaged, leaving the Council with a difficult problem. Rather than installing more robust and unattractive steel barriers, constructing a boardwalk over the gabions will create safe access for all. The boardwalk will be constructed from recycled plastic that has the look of timber. It will be designed to create a high quality and attractive structure that will not only increase safety, but will add a new attraction to the park. Visitors will be able to interact closely with the reed beds and have an opportunity to better understand



this important habitat. An interpretation board will be installed midway at a stopping point where visitors will be introduced to the variety of plants and animals that they might spot. (Action 34)

### ***Dogs in the Park***

Eleven (11) dog bins are now provided across the park to encourage dog owners to clear up after their pets. In response to our most recent consultation with the local community, five (5) of these dog bins were installed in locations proposed by the community and local dog walkers. These are emptied twice a week in summer and once a week in winter. The Council's animal warden carries out a visual patrol of the area approximately once a month to ensure that park users are abiding by dog fouling legislation and hands out free poop scoop bags to encourage this. The Area Environment Inspectors and the Animal Warden are all authorised to issue fixed penalty notice fines to dog walkers who fail to pick up after their pets. Further information on Environmental Crime is available on the Council's website [www.eastherts.gov.uk](http://www.eastherts.gov.uk)

The provision of dog waste bins has proved largely successful in Southern Country Park and the majority of dog owners using the site behave responsibly. The grounds maintenance contractor will also clear dog faeces around each bin when visited and where necessary as part of the weekly litter picking operations.

During his patrols the Animal Warden, as a 'Licensed Rehabilitation Keeper', will also assist and rescue swans and other wildlife across the district. For example, swans have been occasionally found caught up in fishing line and young ducklings washed into the grid.

### ***Meadow Enclosure***

An enclosed meadow is to be created in the area of semi improved grassland that was formerly a horse paddock. This area will create a dog free zone and accommodate a picnic area. Families can enjoy informal recreation and play in long grass without concerns caused by dog fouling.



This area has not previously received specific management to diversify the ground flora or improve the amenity value. Conservation cutting will provide better conditions for a wider range of ground flora. Appropriate management of semi-improved grassland contributes directly to the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) for Hertfordshire (This is described later in the Conservation section of the plan). Maintaining areas of long grass provides important habitat for a wide variety of wildlife (including BAP priority species).

The area will require a cut and lift for the first three years with a view to considering late summer grazing from year 4. (Action 35) Weed control may be necessary during the first two years of the management plan to reduce density of sow thistle and ragwort. (Action 36) Picnic benches and kissing gates will be installed.

A tree folly is planned for year 2 to link with the art project. It will form a central and eye-catching feature in the meadow. Eight (8) semi-mature Sweet Chestnut trees will be planted to form a circular arbour to be pollarded every four years. This will create a natural canopy to the tree folly that will frame a sculpture at its centre. (Action 37)

### **Dog Free Zones**

In order to enforce the dog free zones, Dog Control Order's will be implemented for the meadow enclosure and the new older children's play area in 2008. (Action 38) The Dog Control Order will enable the Council to create dog free zones and allow 'Authorised Officers' to issue fixed penalty notices (FPNs) to those committing 'environmental crimes' such as littering or dog fouling. This legislation allows the Council and the residents to work together in keeping streets, parks and open spaces free from dog fouling and other environmental crime.

The following sign is used by the Council at all designated areas and outlines the Dog Control Orders in effect in East Herts:

**East Herts Council**

**Dog Control Orders 2006 (EXCLUSION AREAS)**

The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005

The Dog Control Orders (Prescribed Offences and Penalties, etc.) Regulations 2006 (S.I.2006/1059)

Notice is hereby given that, under the provisions of the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (2005), East Herts Council proposes to implement the following Dog Control Orders from 5th February 2007:

- The following sites / types of East Herts Council owned land are designated as areas from which all dogs (except Guide Dogs) must be excluded:
  - > All fenced children's playgrounds and areas which are designated and marked for children's play
  - > All fenced games areas e.g. tennis, ball courts, skate parks
  - > All bowling greens
  - > Marked playing pitches - when in use for playing sports
- No one person may take more than four (4) dogs on to any East Herts Council owned land at one time.

Fixed Penalty Notices of £50 will be issued for breaches of these orders.

The Dog Control Orders come into force on 5th February 2007.

Further information and maps showing the designated areas are available on East Herts Council's website [www.eastherts.gov.uk](http://www.eastherts.gov.uk) or for inspection on request at the Council's two main offices from 8.30am to 5pm Monday to Friday:

Wallfields, Pegs lane Hertford. SG13 8EQ      The Council Offices, The Causeway Bishop's Stortford. CM23 2EN

[www.eastherts.gov.uk](http://www.eastherts.gov.uk)

### **Litter and Waste Management**

The full details of the grounds contract litter regime are contained in [Appendix 5](#). The grounds maintenance contractor performs all litter requirements to Environmental Protection Agency standards. This park is programmed for a weekly cleansing visit to achieve a satisfactory standard. This is a relatively high level and

has proved sufficient to date but is reviewed regularly through monitoring inspections. (Action 29) A higher frequency would be programmed if any regular increase in the level of litter were identified. Our cleansing contractor is able to provide a service to carry out any clearance of the lake or stream that may be necessary.

In connection with our dog fouling initiatives, the Council has powers under The Clean Neighbourhoods Act (2005) to issue Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) to those found to be committing "Environmental Crime" (detailed later in the General Maintenance section). As part of this new legislation it is now an offence to drop litter such as food and packaging, cigarette filters or chewing gum in an open or public place and anyone caught doing so can be fined via a Fixed Penalty Notice. Area Environmental Inspectors monitor the park as part of their normal duties but have not found there to be any serious issues in this park.

### ***Health & Safety Policies***

As a Council owned and maintained site Southern Country Park is covered by East Herts Council's general Health and Safety Policy. These policies, and all other health and safety policies, are available to view on the Council's website [www.eastherts.gov.uk](http://www.eastherts.gov.uk). They are all due to be comprehensively reviewed in 2008 in line with the Council's recent organisational restructuring.

Members of the public using the park are afforded protection by both the Health & Safety at Work Act (1974) and the Occupiers Liability Act (1957, revised 1984).

Council employees and contractors working in the park have a responsibility to take all reasonable precautions for their own health and safety and for that of others who may be affected by their actions, including the general public. Such precautions include: making themselves familiar with and conforming to all applicable safety rules; correctly using safety equipment; following instructions and advice regarding the use of substances; and reporting all accidents, damage, hazards, violent incidents and/or shortcomings in the Council's health and safety arrangements.

### ***Risk Assessments***

The nature and use of Southern Country Park, and the operations that are carried out in it, present a variety of health and safety risks. These relate to both supervised and controlled activities and to the unsupervised use of the site by the general public.

As the park contains considerable areas of open and running water, a RoSPA safety inspection of the lake area was commissioned in April 2000, prior to adoption of the park by EHC in 2001, to establish in detail what actions were needed to ensure the safety of the public. A copy of this report is included in [Appendix 15](#). The following actions were consequently undertaken:

- Extra Lifebelts (Throw Buoys) placed around the balancing pond (regularly checked)
- Additional "Danger Deep Water" signs placed around the pond
- Increased marginal planting along the banks of the balancing pond undertaken to deter swimming at shallow entry points
- Decreased the slope on the edge of the smaller natural pond

This marginal planting is now well established and has succeeded in reducing the area of bank leading into shallow water that might encourage bathing. However, the bank along this edge is still used by visitors to throw feed to the ducks and has resulted in a worn, unattractive area that is covered in duck faeces. Additional works are now planned in year 3 to develop the original planting initiative further. Coir rolls and hazel faggots will be installed two or three metres from the water's edge to create an area that can be infilled with soil into which more marginal herbaceous



species can be planted. This will not only further encourage appropriate use of the lake, but will bring together biological, ecological and engineering concepts to vegetate and stabilise the eroding banks. (Action 39)



A special duck feeding area will be created that will still allow access to the water's edge but should contain the activity and discourage the wildfowl from leaving the lake and grazing. (Action 40) Details of both these action points can be found in the Wetland Management section of Specifications for Development Actions - see Appendix 12.

The new interpretation boards will take into account recent legislation and the RoSPA guidelines, and the signs around the balancing pond will be upgraded with the most up to date National Water Safety Signs.

Any potential hazards and risks associated with the park for employees, contractors and the general public are identified and evaluated as part of the quarterly Open Spaces Inspections undertaken by the council's Area Environment Inspectors. This inspection is in addition to the many adhoc visits and visual inspections undertaken by Council officers and contractors. An annual risk assessment and hazard review of all Council owned parks and open spaces is also undertaken and a remedial action report produced if any hazards are identified. The new older children's play area will also be subject to an annual safety inspection carried out by our independent Register of Play Inspectors International (RPII) consultant. (Action 41)

As part of this programme, a major review of the potential risks and hazards of the park was carried out in January 2008. The hazards identified were numbered and marked on a map of the park and listed on an action sheet, both of which are included in Appendix 16. All the hazards identified as part of this risk assessment were prioritised and actioned according to their level of risk. Nineteen (19) hazards were identified, of which 6 were low risk, 10 classed as medium risk and 2 as high

risk. Work was undertaken immediately to rectify these as part of the ongoing maintenance of the park.

### ***Toilet Facilities***

The Council has considered the potential need to install a toilet block on the site for visitors. Previous and current monitoring suggests that the majority of visitors either walk to the park from nearby housing areas or drive in for brief dog walking visits. This type of use would not justify the need for considerable investment in installing and maintaining a toilet facility. In addition, the Council's experience shows that toilet facilities in locations such as this can be subject to vandalism and anti-social behaviour.

## **General Maintenance**

### ***Main Contractor***

The Council has recently re-tendered its Grounds Maintenance contract involving an extensive consultation process and the rewrite of the contract specification. The contract was awarded on 15th November 2007 to John O'Conner Grounds Maintenance Limited who will start work on 1st April 2008. This large family owned company has an impressive history of working with local authorities to implement action plans and to develop good relationships with customers. They will be key to ensuring the successful implementation of this management plan and have committed wholeheartedly to its aims and aspirations. [Appendix 17](#) contains further examples of their work and previous Green Flag awarded parks.

### ***Grounds, Buildings and Equipment***

The maintenance of the park is carried out to a high standard by both the main grounds maintenance contractor and where necessary by specialist contractors to carry out for instance, arboricultural or conservation operations. As the Friends of group develops, the aim will be to find opportunities to engage the community in voluntary work. This is an area that CMS have considerable experience in and have used to great advantage in some of our other key parks, for example Pishiobury and Red, White and Blue.

The Council's monitoring processes demonstrate considerable improvements in contract performance by the previous contractor over the last three years. The tendering process has ensured that the new contractor should not only deliver adequately but improve on these high standards.

Whenever problems are discovered they are discussed openly and resolved by utilising the appropriate resources. For example, a maintenance problem that had been identified by local residents and confirmed through our regular monitoring inspections was that the outflow pipe to the lake was becoming blocked periodically. This was due to debris collecting inside the pipe and becoming trapped. A solution was devised by our one of our own Area Environmental Inspectors in redesigning the outflow grate. A local engineer was commissioned to fabricate and install a new raise-able and lockable grate. This is now lifted on a monthly basis by the grounds maintenance contractor. **(Action 29)**

### ***Horticultural and Arboricultural Standards***

Our Grounds Maintenance Contractor provides a resource that covers the full range of Horticultural and Grounds Maintenance skills required to carry out the contract and additional works. We also engage specialist arboricultural and management contractors to implement the ongoing improvements to the site. Works by a local arboricultural contractor for instance, have recently been carried out as part of an ongoing programme to remove mulch mats and tree guards from established areas of whip planting whilst thinning these areas to encourage more healthy growth. (Action 42)

### ***Environmental Crime***

East Herts Council is committed to improving standards of neighbourhood management, raising awareness of and tackling environmental crime and anti-social behaviour. Therefore, in November 2006 after considering the results of public consultations, the Council adopted powers from the new Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 (CNEA) to take enforcement action for non-compliance with Orders passed as part of the Environmental Crime and Enforcement Policy. The following list details the specific areas targeted by the Council under the Act:

- Litter
- Graffiti
- Dog Control
- Distribution of Free Literature
- Abandoned Vehicles
- Nuisance Vehicles
- Fly Tipping
- Abandoned Shopping Trolleys

Under the powers of the CNEA, the Council via its Authorised Officers, including the Area Environmental Inspectors, is permitted to issue Fixed Penalty Notice (FPNs) fines to those individuals or organisations breaching these Orders and committing environmental crime. Representatives from other government agencies such as housing associations and the Police will work alongside the Council to target problem areas and tackle environmental crime. The Council will be hosting a number of events across the district to raise awareness about the effects of environmental crime and to deter those already offending.

### ***Customer Enquiry Data Base***

The Council's back office system (Mayrise) provides a live link to the Council's Contractors for all Environmental issues including cleanliness, environmental crime and safety.

Mayrise is driven by a 'Works Orders' structure where customer enquiries, complaints or environmental issues are logged to the system as a 'job' for handling appropriately. The 'job' is then either issued to the contractor to deal with, or to the Area Environmental Inspectors to investigate issues of cleanliness, crime and safety immediately, or within system generated response times.

Contract performance issues are recorded, verified and validated through a series of tracking and management functions and the system ensures that jobs are assigned and completed effectively. The live link on the system for Contractors' allows for effective recording, tracking and actioning of Complaints.

The system has a built in reporting tool and is integrated with a sophisticated external reporting tool for more complex auditing and management to ensure relevant and appropriate assessment of statistics. This allows for continual development of the system and improvement of service delivery.

The system houses a map and print facility for viewing detail of areas across the district. This is linked directly to the grounds contract to measure quantities. Features such as street furniture and equipped play areas are plotted on the maps to ensure that call centre staff can deploy inspections accurately and quickly in response to customer enquires.

## **Conservation**

### ***Introduction***

Where possible, conservation management on site contributes directly to the objectives in the local Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) 'A Vision for the Wildlife and Natural Habitats of Hertfordshire'.

The functions of the BAP are to:

- To ensure that national targets for species and habitats, as specified in the UK Action Plan, are translated into effective action at a local level.
- To identify targets for species and habitats appropriate to the local area, and reflecting the values of people locally.
- To develop effective local partnerships to ensure that programmes for biodiversity conservation are maintained in the long-term.
- To raise awareness of the need for biodiversity in a local context.
- To ensure that opportunities for conservation and enhancement of the whole biodiversity resource are fully considered.
- To provide a basis for monitoring progress in the biodiversity conservation, at both local and national level.

Below is a list of objectives taken from 'A Vision for the Wildlife and Natural Habitats of Hertfordshire'. This management plan makes direct and measurable contributions to each of the following objectives. Detailed specifications for annual management actions can be found in [Appendix 18](#).

### **A Vision for Woodlands**

- In 50 years time, the area of woodland in Hertfordshire will have increased from the existing 15000ha (9% of the county area) to approximately 20000ha (12% of the county area).
- The overall woodland resource will be managed for a variety of objectives, including conservation, recreation and timber production.

- Woodlands, both ancient and more recent, will continue to provide a valued recreational resource for the local population. Educational objectives will be included in the management of all publicly owned woodlands.
- An expanded woodland resource will be highly valued as a wildlife, recreational, educational and timber resource.



#### A Vision for Wetlands

- Open water will be highly valued, managed to a carefully prepared strategy, ensuring their wise use for the benefit of both humans and wildlife.
- The overall extent of wetland habitat will reach a minimum of 1500 hectares. The priority will be to restore hydrological and ecological links, increase appreciation and strategic use and restore sympathetic management.

#### A Vision for Neutral Grassland

- In north and east Herts, there will be an area of at least 150 hectares of neutral grassland, concentrated around the villages and managed as an integral part of the rural economy.
- New areas of public open space will be created around the towns and villages in East Hertfordshire.
- In total, there will be about 950 hectares of unimproved neutral grassland of long standing, as well as a further 1000 hectares of wildlife-rich grassland being restored from semi-improved grassland or created on former arable land.

#### A Vision for Chalk Grassland

- Some of both the existing and new chalk grassland sites will provide a valuable recreational resource for local people, particularly where access does not interfere with farming operations.

#### A Vision for Urban Habitats

- Every urban resident will be able to enter a greenspace with wildlife value within 280 metres of their home.
- Every Urban area will have Local Nature Reserves at a minimum level of 1 hectare per 1000 population.
- Every urban area will have its own wildlife area or access to a place within ten minutes walk where field studies on the environment can be carried out.

- Environmental information, performance indicators and species information will be freely available to individuals, schools, newspapers and other media.

### ***Sheep into the Park***

The BAP supports the increase in neutral grassland, concentrated around the villages and managed as an integral part of the rural economy. In addition to this, where possible, areas of public open space can provide wildlife-rich grassland restored from semi-improved grassland.

Grazing is of particularly high wildlife conservation value and offers species rich grasslands very beneficial conditions to develop and improve. Grazing is also a means for us to directly support a rural business. In areas where conflicts with park users or issues relating to fencing are minimal, the Council will look at the potential to use grazing instead of mechanical grass cutting. We aim to be grazing sheep in this park by the end of year 2. [Appendix 18](#) contains more specific details of this action. (Action 43)

### ***Chalk Banks***

During the initial landscaping of the park, a large area of chalk was used to create a long linear bank to the west of the brook. This provides ideal conditions for many chalk grassland species. New chalk grassland sites can provide a valuable recreational resource for local people and be an important resource for wildlife.

The chalk bank has received cut and lift management for several years prior to this management plan, encouraging a diverse flora. The area of cut and lift is to be increased to extend this habitat to maximise the potential of the chalk soil. (Action 44)

### ***Improvement of the Reed Beds***

The BAP encourages an increased appreciation of wetland habitats coupled with sympathetic management. At present there is a concern that the reedbed is not developing to its full potential due to the original singular planting of Typha. In addition to this Himalayan Balsam and Willow are also increasing in the reedbed. This can be addressed by removing unwanted vegetation and replanting with Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*).

This work should be phased over four years, clearing and replanting 25% of the total area per year. Where possible we will allow existing



areas of Common Reed to remain as habitat and a refuge for wildlife and will ensure that the direction of work will assist natural colonisation of desirable species. (Action 45)

However, the Himalayan Balsam will need to be removed in the early years of this operation due to its invasive nature. The clearing of the Himalayan Balsam will take place over a two year period with the plants being pulled and removed in the spring of the first year and again in the second year. (Action 46) More information on this is in [Appendix 19](#).



### ***Provision of Woodland***

New woodland planting in the park will contribute to increasing the area of woodland in Hertfordshire towards BAP targets. The woodlands will be managed for a variety of objectives, including conservation, recreation and education. An expanded woodland resource will be highly valued as a wildlife, recreational, educational and timber resource. (Action 47)

### ***Hedge Laying***

Hedges are important elements of the landscape and historic features in their own right. The hedgerow adjacent to the brook is one of the few remaining historic landscape features in the park. This boundary has been restored using the traditional technique of laying, staking and top binding.

Using this traditional technique hedges will be laid on the boundary adjacent to the new link footpath by the Residential and Nursing Home (Premier Court) near to the new play area to improve the visual aspect and security of the park and also along the boundary adjacent to Moor Hall Lane. (Action 48)

However, due to the proximity of underground cables on the bridle path adjacent to the dual carriageway, a new hedge is not possible. Therefore a new island of planting will be introduced which will provide a visual barrier to hide the view of St James Road from the park. (Action 49)

Active management of the woodland and plantations in the park will create attractive natural woodland areas, which supports the recommendations of the UK Forestry Strategy. Further selective thinning in the plantations initially planted by Countryside Properties will be carried out. (Action 47) This will remove undesirable species to favour the native oak or ash standards and mixed native shrubs. Shrubs adjacent to paths will be coppiced as part of an eight year cycle. Full specifications for annual management actions are listed in [Appendix 18](#).

## Community Involvement and Promotion

### **Introduction**

The park is already used for a wide range of leisure activities. These include angling, walking, jogging, kite flying, horse riding, feeding the ducks, bird spotting, informal kickabouts, children's play and dog walking. The management plan reflects this diversity and seeks to ensure that the infrastructure of the park can sustain this use. Footpaths have been upgraded and there are plans to further extend the network. The car parking area has been extended and improved. Activities will be monitored and reviewed each year to ensure that any changes are considered.

### **New play Area for Older Children**

In 2004, following modification to the original planning obligation relating to the St Michael's Mead development, the Planning Inspector awarded East Herts Council £165,000 section 106 funding to be used for the benefit of the local community. Initial consultation in 2005 with the local community of St Michael's Mead identified the provision of two new play areas as the preferred choice of the residents. Further consultation with the community in spring 2007 saw Southern Country Park selected as the preferred site for an older children's play area and Turners Crescent as the site for a younger children's play area. The contract for the design, supply and installation of these two new play areas has been put out to tender in line with East Herts corporate procurement procedure and processes, and completion of the project is scheduled for April 2008.

### **Marketing Strategy**

In line with the council's policy of promoting particular council services and individual events, a programme of publicity has been specifically arranged for Southern Country Park beginning in the spring of 2008. This will highlight the new GreenStat toolkit on the website; the new older children's play area and the future development plans for the park. The park is to be promoted in the spring edition of Link, the Council's free quarterly magazine distributed to all households in the District, and as part of the summer programme of free events in "Out and About in East Herts" magazine. (Action 50)

### **Provision of Information to Users**

One of the key strengths of the park is its accessibility and short but interesting walks. The Council's Health & Fitness Development Officer will be working with CMS to promote the park as part of the 'Health Walks' programme.

These are described in a series of leaflets, available from the Council and local libraries, and are being publicised on both the Council's website and on the CMS website, [www.hertsdirect.org/healthwalks](http://www.hertsdirect.org/healthwalks). Many of the leaflets can be downloaded as Acrobat PDF files that can be printed off to take with you. Walks marked with a  are health walks. Southern Country Park is the latest to be added to these and a leaflet is currently being produced to show the walks. This has proved to be a great way for the Council to engage directly with the community in our other parks and open spaces.

As previously noted, CMS will be working with Officers from the Council to promote the park and to form the 'Friends of' group. Again, Link magazine and the Council's website will be used to promote this and any forthcoming countryside events.

### **Community Resource**

The development of the park provides an ideal opportunity for the Council to work with others to promote and improve the park as a valuable community resource. For example, the development of the shallow dipping pond and the improvements to access throughout the park will allow the park to become an ideal educational resource for local schools and wildlife groups. (Action 23)

The Council will work in partnership with national, regional, local organisations and individuals to develop and promote the park. In this way and by developing a 'Friends of' group and raising awareness of the park itself, the Council will be fulfilling it's vision "to improve the quality of people's lives and preserve all that is best in East Herts".

