



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

A Meeting of the **HIGHWOOD MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE** will be held at the Oakwood Centre, Headley Road, Woodley, Reading, RG5 4JZ on **THURSDAY 17 AUGUST 2023 AT 8.00 PM**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susan Parsonage', written in a cursive style.

Susan Parsonage
Chief Executive

Published on 9 August 2023



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

Our Vision

A great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business

Enriching Lives

- Champion outstanding education and enable our children and young people to achieve their full potential, regardless of their background.
- Support our residents to lead happy, healthy lives and provide access to good leisure facilities to complement an active lifestyle.
- Engage and involve our communities through arts and culture and create a sense of identity which people feel part of.
- Support growth in our local economy and help to build business.

Safe, Strong, Communities

- Protect and safeguard our children, young and vulnerable people.
- Offer quality care and support, at the right time, to prevent the need for long term care.
- Nurture communities and help them to thrive.
- Ensure our borough and communities remain safe for all.

A Clean and Green Borough

- Do all we can to become carbon neutral and sustainable for the future.
- Protect our borough, keep it clean and enhance our green areas.
- Reduce our waste, improve biodiversity and increase recycling.
- Connect our parks and open spaces with green cycleways.

Right Homes, Right Places

- Offer quality, affordable, sustainable homes fit for the future.
- Build our fair share of housing with the right infrastructure to support and enable our borough to grow.
- Protect our unique places and preserve our natural environment.
- Help with your housing needs and support people to live independently in their own homes.

Keeping the Borough Moving

- Maintain and improve our roads, footpaths and cycleways.
- Tackle traffic congestion, minimise delays and disruptions.
- Enable safe and sustainable travel around the borough with good transport infrastructure.
- Promote healthy alternative travel options and support our partners to offer affordable, accessible public transport with good network links.

Changing the Way We Work for You

- Be relentlessly customer focussed.
- Work with our partners to provide efficient, effective, joined up services which are focussed around you.
- Communicate better with you, owning issues, updating on progress and responding appropriately as well as promoting what is happening in our Borough.
- Drive innovative digital ways of working that will connect our communities, businesses and customers to our services in a way that suits their needs.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE HIGHWOOD MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE

Wokingham Borough Councillors

Laura Blumenthal

Tony Skuse

Town Councils

Kay Gilder

Woodley Town Council

Mary Holmes

Woodley Town Council

Geoff Littler

Earley Town Council

Sheena Matthews

Earley Town Council

Friends of Highwood

ITEM NO.	WARD	SUBJECT	PAGE NO.
1.		ELECTION OF CHAIR To elect a Chair for the 2023 meeting.	
2.		APOLOGIES To receive any apologies for absence.	
3.		DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST To receive any declarations of interest.	
4.		MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING To confirm the Minutes of the meeting held on 3 August 2022.	5 - 8
5.		COUNTRYSIDE SERVICE - RANGERS' REPORT To consider the annual update report from the Countryside Service together with any matters arising from the site visit.	9 - 10

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
HIGHWOOD MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE
HELD ON 3 AUGUST 2022 FROM 6.00 PM TO 9.10 PM**

Committee Members Present

Councillors: Shirley Boyt, Laura Blumenthal, Kay Gilder, Mary Holmes, Geoff Littler and Alistair Neal

Also in attendance: Sheena Matthews

Officers Present

Simon Bartlam (Countryside Operations Officer) and Neil Carr (Democratic and Electoral Services Specialist)

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Kay Gilder was elected as Chair for the 2022 Conference.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Freda Pattison (Friends of Highwood).

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the held on 1 February 2021 were confirmed as correct record and signed by the Chair.

5. COUNTRYSIDE SERVICE RANGERS' REPORT

Simon Bartlam, Countryside Operations Officer provided an update on progress at Highwood since the previous meeting in 2021.

Simon began by updating Members on actions set out in the Minutes of the 2021 meeting:

- Bulmershe Pond Transfer – not transferred to WBC yet. Simon had chased Blandys Solicitors re progress. Blandys were chasing the University for an update. It appeared that there had been a delay due to an electrical cable being laid through the area. Simon agreed to keep chasing the University to ensure that action was taken to transfer the pond.
- Apprenticeships – Shirley Boyt asked about progress relating to apprenticeships. The Minutes referred to a potential arrangement with the Berkshire College of Agriculture. Simon confirmed that there had been no progress due to the impact of Covid-19. Simon agreed to review the potential for apprentices and report back to Members in due course.

Simon referred to the site visit, held at Highwood/Southlake prior to the meeting. Members felt that the site visit was positive and helped Members to understand the issues on the ground. Members requested that the site visit become part of the annual meeting process.

Simon introduced the Rangers' Report for 2021/22 and highlighted the following points:

- The Countryside Service had taken on responsibility for Southlake reservoir which was adjacent to the Highwood site. Southlake included a dam and woodland bank. Simon had regular discussions with the reservoir inspectors. The inspectors had highlighted concerns about vermin burrowing in the woodland bank and the potential risks relating to mature trees in the embankment. Other work at Southlake included the removal of silt and improvements to reed beds around the lake.
- Work at Highwood over the past year included scrub removal from the heathland areas and rhododendron removal from two areas. Work had also continued to cut back footpaths and remove incidents of fly tipping and litter. Countryside Service staff had also spent time on health and safety tree work including dead-wooding on the main footpath through the site.
- The Friends group had continued to support the Countryside Service by walking the site every day. In addition, 118 volunteer workdays (excluding Friends visits) were carried out in 2021. These included volunteers from CROW (Conserve Reading on Wednesdays), Thames Valley Conservation Volunteers, BTCV and Community Groups. A member of the public had also provided £800 to support the work of the volunteer groups. Simon confirmed that volunteer work days had been lower in 2020/21 due to the impact of Covid-19. The number of volunteer work days was expected to increase in 2022.

In the ensuing discussion, Members raised the following points (including feedback from the Friends group):

- Provision of Information Boards on the Highwood site – Simon confirmed that he was seeking funding. The cost of design, construction and installation of information boards was estimated at £4k to £5k.
- Part of the footpath (near the High Trees) had not been resurfaced for some time which was causing problems for visitors. Simon agreed to investigate.
- The gate adjacent to the new houses had lost its springer – meaning that the gate did not stay closed – increasing risks for dogs exiting the site, etc. Simon agreed to investigate.
- When were new trees planted to replace lost trees? The planting season was November to February. Simon referred to the Borough Council's new Tree Strategy and the commitment to plant 250,000 new trees in the Borough as part of the Climate Emergency Action Plan.
- Thames water site (adjacent to Southlake). Simon had chased WBC Property to see if the site had been transferred over. There was some confusion. Simon agreed to investigate further.
- Network Rail grants. Simon confirmed that the Countryside Service had not pursued this as the Highwood site was not close enough to any lines, but the Council may have applied for other sites. Simon subsequently confirmed that the Network Rail scheme did not fit in with the Council's projects or timescales, so the Council had not pursued this avenue any further.

- WBC had received some grant funding. However, this had not benefitted Highwood as the site was not near to any railway corridors.
- Bat population at Highwood. Simon agreed to carry out some research and to provide data to Members on the local bat population. Simon confirmed that the insect population appeared to have fallen this year which was not a good sign for bats and birds in the area.
- Members recalled a sign on Church Road giving directions to Highwood. Simon agreed to investigate the sign with the Highways team and discuss its potential reinstatement.
- Allotment area – Simon agreed to chase RBC re the future of the allotment area (including the ongoing dumping of rubbish) and the adjoining open space. This area could potentially link to a future wildlife corridor.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) the Rangers' Report on Highwood for 2021/22 be noted;
- 2) Simon Bartlam and the Countryside Service team be thanked for their hard work and support during the year;
- 3) Simon Bartlam provide follow-up information relating to the questions raised by Members during the site visit and the meeting;
- 4) the Conference move to a summer timeslot to enable a site visit to be undertaken before each meeting;
- 5) clarification be sought on the scope for including Southlake issues within the remit of the Highwood Management Conference.

6. FRIENDS OF HIGHWOOD

Simon Bartlam confirmed that Freda Pattison was unable to attend the meeting due to poor health.

The Friends group had continued to support the Countryside Service by walking the site every day, litter picking, reporting problems and directing staff to the specific location of issues.

RESOLVED: That the Friends of Highwood be thanked for their ongoing commitment, enthusiasm and support for the Countryside Service.

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Countryside Service Rangers Review - August 2023

Highwood Management Conference

17 August 2023

1/ Management Tasks

- Scrub removal from Heathland Compartment (7).
- Rhododendron removal from comp 6 and replant.

2/ General Ranging

- General work including cutting back footpaths and strimming (monthly visits between April and October).
- Removing 7 incidents of fly tipping of garden waste.
- Litter picking.
- Countryside Service staff spent 4 days carrying out H&S tree work on the site.
- Tree surgeon spent 2 days making safe dangerous trees on Highwood site and 4 more days on Southlake.
- Responded to 1 incident of illegal camping on site.
- Ditch line on Kingfisher Drive has been cleaned out by staff and an excavator.
- Tree work programmed in on trees suffering from Ash die back alongside Yew Tree drive boundary.
- Footpath improvements including surfacing and ditch clearing.
- Removal of water soldiers and cleaning of lily pond at Southlake.

3/ Volunteer involvement

- The Friends Group has continued to support the Countryside Service, by walking every day helping to patrol the site, litter picking, reporting of problems and directing us on site to location of jobs.
- 98 volunteer workdays (excluding Friends visits) have been carried out this year; including volunteers from CROW (Conserve Reading on Wednesdays), Thames Valley Conservation Volunteers, BTCV and Dinton Wednesday Conservation Volunteers.

4/ Next year (this winter)

- Clear compound/culvert area on Southlake.
- Rhododendron/Laurel control in compartments 6 and 8 and underplanting with native trees.
- Scrub removal from Heathland Glade.
- 1 days Heathland scraping as part of the regeneration project.
- Reed bed establishment on Southlake to continue.
- Complete the design and installation of the interpretation boards.
- Construction of viewing hatch in lake outlet to comply with Reservoir Act.
- Begin management of the Bulmershe pond area which is due to be handed over to WBC over the next few weeks.