



# WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

A Meeting of the **HIGHWOOD MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE** will be held virtually on **MONDAY 1 FEBRUARY 2021 AT 7.00 PM**

Susan Parsonage  
Chief Executive

Note: The Council has made arrangements under the Coronavirus Act 2020 to hold this meeting virtually via Microsoft Teams. The meeting may be viewed live using the following link: [https://youtu.be/a\\_GbY7wQOOQk](https://youtu.be/a_GbY7wQOOQk)

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# 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

David Hare

### Town Councils

Kay Gilder

Woodley Town Council

Mary Holmes

Woodley Town Council

Geoff Littler

Earley Town Council

Alistair Neal

Earley Town Council

### Friends of Highwood

Freda Pattison

Community Representative

ITEM NO.	WARD	SUBJECT	PAGE NO.
1.		<b>ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN</b> To elect a Chairman for the meeting.	
2.		<b>APOLOGIES</b> To receive any apologies for absence.	
3.		<b>DECLARATION OF INTEREST</b> To receive any declarations of interest.	
4.		<b>MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING</b> To confirm the Minutes of the meeting held on 8 January 2020.	5 - 8
5.		<b>COUNTRYSIDE SERVICE RANGERS' REPORT</b> To consider the report from the Countryside Service.	9 - 10
6.		<b>REPORT FROM THE FRIENDS OF HIGHWOOD</b> To consider a report from the Friends of Highwood.	

### CONTACT OFFICER

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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE  
HIGHWOOD MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE  
HELD ON 8 JANUARY 2020 FROM 7.00 PM TO 8.30 PM**

**Committee Members Present**

Councillors: Laura Blumenthal, David Hare, Kay Gilder, Mary Holmes, Geoff Littler and Alistair Neal

**Friends of Highwood**

Freda Pattison (Community Representative)

**Officers Present**

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

**1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

Kay Gilder was elected as Chairman for the 2019/20 Conference.

**2. APOLOGIES**

There were no apologies.

**3. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Minutes of the Conference held on 8 January 2019 were confirmed as correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**5. COUNTRYSIDE SERVICE RANGER'S REVIEW**

Simon Bartlam, Countryside Operations Officer, gave an update on progress at Highwood since the conference in January 2019.

Simon began by updating the Conference on the actions set out in the Minutes from the previous Conference, as follows:

- Bulmershe Pond Transfer – there had been no progress during the year, but Simon was continuing to monitor the situation. It was suggested that Members continue to use contacts at the University to chase progress.
- Cyclists – Simon reported that there had been few issues with cyclists and no complaints had been made. The site included signs with contact details in case of any incidents.
- Encroachment – there had been no issues relating to encroachment during the year.
- Access Improvements – Simon reported that the residual £18k funding would be used over the next few months to continue improvements and repairs to paths around the site. The Countryside Service had budgets which could be used for further works when the £18k was used up. There was a gas pipeline running through part of the site and a meeting was being arranged with the pipeline owners to clarify any works being undertaken in the vicinity.

- Ditch Blockages – Simon reported that the ditch leading to Earley Station had been cleared of leaves and debris.
- Highwood Web Pages – there had been no progress over the past year. Simon reported that a new staff member would be able to assist in developing web pages over the next six months. It was also suggested that contact be made with local schools, e.g. Bulmershe, about potential involvement. Simon confirmed that there was a definitive map of the site which could be shared with Members.

Simon went on to introduce the Countryside Service Rangers' Review for 2019/20. Simon highlighted the following points:

- Scrub Removal from the Heathland Compartment – this could involve removing a significant amount of topsoil (up to 300 tons) from the site. Simon was investigating funding options for this work, e.g. Defra grants and Thames Water funding. It was suggested that a site visit be arranged during the summer to brief Members on the ongoing works.
- Rhododendron removal from Compartment 4.
- Reed bed establishment on Southlake – works being undertaken by the angling club and the Countryside service.
- Network Rail Scheme – funding for woodland improvement works in the Reading area, including works at Highwood.
- General work including cutting back footpaths, strimming and removing hung up trees. Once again, volunteer involvement was much appreciated with 105 volunteer workdays (excluding Friends visits) during the year.
- Removal of five incidents of fly tipping and dumping of garden waste.
- Responded to four incidents of illegal camping and removal of one individual from the site.
- New Dog Bin – it was reported that a new dog bin had been requested adjacent to the entrance from the Cala Homes site. Simon agreed to chase progress on this.
- Upcoming works over the next few months included coppicing in Compartment 4 and Rododendron/Laurel control in Compartments 1-4. This was in addition to the path surfacing works.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) The Rangers' Review report be noted;
- 2) Simon Bartlam and the Countryside Service team be thanked for their hard work and support during 2019;
- 3) Laura Blumenthal contact Alison Swaddle about engagement with the University re Bulmershe Pond;

- 4) David Hare make use of contacts at the University on the pond issue, as necessary;
- 5) A copy of the Highwood definitive map be circulated to members of the conference;
- 6) A site visit be arranged for the summer of 2020 to provide Members with an update on site issues;
- 7) Simon Bartlam chase progress on the proposed new dog bin adjacent to the Cala Homes site entrance;
- 8) Development of Highwood web pages be pursued during 2020, including contact with local schools;
- 9) The proposed improvement works over the next few months be supported.

## **6. REPORT FROM THE FRIENDS OF HIGHWOOD**

Simon Bartlam reported that the Friends Group had continued to support the Countryside Service by walking the site every day, litter picking, reporting problems and directing Countryside Service staff to the location of jobs on the site.

Freda Pattison confirmed that Friends' issues had been addressed during the earlier discussions.

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

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## Highwood Management Conference

**1 February 2021**

### Countryside Service Rangers Review

#### **1/ Management Tasks**

- Scrub removal from Heathland Compartment.
- Rhododendron removal from compartment 4.
- The Scraping of a larger section of Heathland has taken place with excess topsoil/leaf litter/ materials being removed from site .After the success of the 2017 area, a compartment will be programmed in every year.
- The Final £18.5k of footpath improvements was carried out in March before Covid restrictions were in place. Our Highwood access improvement budget has now been closed.

#### **2/ General Ranging**

- General work including cutting back footpaths, strimming and removing hung-up trees. (monthly visits between April and October)
- Removing 5 incidents of fly tipping, garden waste.
- Litter picking.
- Cleaning out of the Kingfisher ditch.
- The replacement of the railway sleeper bridge access from High Tree Drive with a surfaced culvert.
- Tree surgeon spent 1 days making safe dangerous trees on site.
- Respond to 3 incidents of illegal camping on site.
- 1 reported incidents to the Countryside Service regards aggressive cycling on the site.
- BTCV have been monitoring the regeneration of areas cleared of Laurel reporting a positive colonisation by native species.
- A large area of large Leaved Periwinkle was removed that was becoming established after some garden fly tipping had taken place.

#### **3/ Volunteer Involvement**

- The Friends group has continued to support The Countryside Service, by walking every day helping to patrol the site, litterpicking, reporting of problems and directing us on site to location of jobs.

- 89 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 Community Services.
- Two students from Addington School have also spent 8 days working on the site alongside staff.
- 3 days Himalayan balsam/ scrub pulling from Heathland compartment.

#### **4/ Next year (this winter)**

- Coppicing compartment 4.
- Rhododendron/ Laurel control in compartment 6.
- Scrub removal from Heathland Glade.
- 1 days Heathland scraping as part of the regeneration project.
- Reed bed establishment on Southlake (not technically Highwood but CS staff and volunteers managed project).
- CROW (Conserve Reading on Wednesdays) have been commissioned in for several dates to carry out conservation work on the Heathland after a donation was made to improve the area.