

**Climate Change and Leisure Committee**  
**Wednesday, 2 July 2025**

PART I

**Withey Beds Management Plan 2025-2035**  
**ADE**

**1 Summary**

- 1.1 New ten-year management plan has been developed for The Withey Beds in Rickmansworth.
- 1.2 The new plan contains management actions over the next ten years from financial year April 2025 until March 2035. The detailed actions relate to habitats and wildlife improvements for biodiversity, management of the wet woodland and a requirement for external funding in order to replace a smaller section of the current boardwalk.
- 1.3 Officers are recommending that these plans are approved by the Climate Change, Leisure and Housing committee and adopted by the Council. Should the plans be approved, Officers will seek to implement the actions within the plans over the next ten years. Work will be completed within existing budgets or subject to external funding.

**2 Details**

**2.1 Plan development process**

- 2.1.1 The plans were developed and produced by Countryside Management Service (CMS), part of Hertfordshire County Council, who were commissioned by Three Rivers District Council (TRDC) to assist with the management of TRDC Open Space.
- 2.1.2 Public consultation on the management plans was carried out in two stages. An initial period of consultation was held to encourage residents, site users, Friends of the Withey Beds, Councillors and other interested parties to share ideas and thoughts on the management of the Nature Reserve over the next five years.
- 2.1.3 Once draft plans had been completed, a second period of consultation was held to enable stakeholders to comment on draft versions of the plans. Minor amendments and an amendment to the proposal for the boardwalk were made to the plans to produce the final version.

**2.2 Consultation Process**

- 2.2.1 The initial consultation was held for 4 weeks between the 8 July and 5 August 2025.
- 2.2.2 Public and stakeholder consultation, on the draft management plan, took place between 23 December 2024 and 20 January 2025.
- 2.2.3 A total of 5 responses were received as feedback to the public consultation process. These included Friends of the Withey Beds, Canal and Rivers Trust and

Councillors. The feedback received was supportive of the new management plan but had a focus on concerns regarding the proposed change to the damaged boardwalk.

- 2.2.4 Outside of the standard management plan engagement process, an additional briefing was held on the 7 May 2025 to discuss the concerns raised by the 3 Councillors and Friends of the Withey Beds – this outlined the need to balance public access against nurturing the unique habitats, along with highlighting extremely limited safe access to the site and the existing boardwalk being inaccessible for most of the year due to high water levels. In addition, Officers highlighted that full replacement of the boardwalk would cost in excess of £170,000 and there was no available funding for this. However, in response to the feedback, the management plan proposes a shorter section of boardwalk with viewing platform in the fens, along with river restoration work, where funding can be applied for to deliver this.

## 2.3 Aim and Objectives

- 2.3.1 To make The Withey Beds a welcoming, diverse, beautiful and tranquil green space for the use and enjoyment of all residents and visitors to the site, while protecting and conserving the important wildlife and habitats that are found there.

- 2.3.2 The key detailed actions relate to:

- Apply for funding to implement boardwalk and river proposals
- Review management in accordance with any new actions in the Local Nature Recovery Strategy
- Thin scrub and trees around the river and back channel

## 3 **Options and Reasons for Recommendations**

- 3.1 The officer recommendation is that the management plan for The Withey Beds is formally adopted by the Council.
- 3.2 Officers will then begin to implement the actions within the plans, subject to available funding where necessary.
- 3.3 If the plans are not approved by the committee, maintenance of the site will continue at a minimum level, but no additional improvements for biodiversity or public access will be undertaken.

## 4 **Policy/Budget Reference and Implications**

- 4.1 The recommendations in this report are within the Council's agreed budgets. The proposals also relate to securing additional funding, as outlined within the report.
- 4.2 The recommendations in this report relate to the achievement of the following performance indicators for the Leisure and Natural Infrastructure Service Plan 2025-2028.
- 4.2.1 LNI04 - External Funding secured to support Leisure and Natural Infrastructure Projects and Activities.

4.2.2 LNI05 - Year on year increase in the area of land owned by Three Rivers District Council, being managed for biodiversity benefit.

4.3 The recommendations in this report relate to the achievement of the following Corporate Framework Objectives:

4.3.1 Sustainable Communities

4.3.2 Net Carbon Zero and Climate Resilient

## **5 Financial Implications**

5.1 The Council's Medium Term Financial Plan includes an annual budget to maintain 13 sites with management plans, including the management of The Withey Beds. This is not sufficient to deliver the actions planned within the Management Plan as such the delivery of projects will be dependent on securing external funding which will need to be obtained in advance of projects proceeding.

## **6 Legal Implications**

6.1 All proposed works and equipment will be tendered within the Council's constitution and Contract Procedure Rules, where required.

6.2 The preparation of this plan is being undertaken in order to support compliance with the Council's statutory obligations and its Corporate Framework and Priorities.

6.3 The Council has a duty to have regard to conserving and enhancing biodiversity under S40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. This does not mean that the duty must be given greater weight than other matters and the Management Plan recommendations that are being presented within this report satisfy the duty, which is for the Council to 'have regard' when it exercises its functions.

6.4 Subject to the receipt of external funding, under the Council Constitution (as outlined in part 3, section 4.1.3 of the Council Constitution), Committee approval is required to enter into any contract above the value of £25,000.

## **7 Equal Opportunities Implications**

7.1 An Impact Assessment has been completed for these Management Plans.

7.2 On the whole the new Management plans should have a positive impact on the accessibility of the site.

7.3 Funding will need to be sourced in order to make these improvements.

## **8 Staffing Implications**

8.1 Delivering the Management Plan project and objectives as well as securing external funding in order to deliver these will be led by the Leisure and Natural Infrastructure Service.

8.2 In particular, it will require the time of the Leisure Assets Manager, Natural Infrastructure Programme Manager and the Principal Trees and Woodlands Officer.

- 8.3 Officers will also be working collaboratively and will require support and input from Officers in other services, including Regulatory Services, Environmental Protection, Finance and Legal.

## **9 Environmental Implications**

## **10 Community Safety Implications**

- 10.1 None Specific

## **11 Public Health implications**

- 11.1 Being able to connect with wildlife has a positive impact on both the physical and mental health and wellbeing of individuals.

## **12 Customer Services Centre Implications**

- 12.1 None Specific

## **13 Communications and Website Implications**

- 13.1 The website will be kept updated with any relevant changes to the site, following the adoption and ongoing delivery of the Management Plan.
- 13.2 Good news stories will be circulated and shared via the Communications team, including across a range of social media channels.

## **14 Risk and Health & Safety Implications**

- 14.1 The Council has agreed its risk management strategy which can be found on the website at <http://www.threerivers.gov.uk>. In addition, the risks of the proposals in the report have also been assessed against the Council's duties under Health and Safety legislation relating to employees, visitors and persons affected by our operations. The risk management implications of this report are detailed below.
- 14.2 The subject of this report is covered by the Leisure & Natural Infrastructure service plan. Any risks resulting from this report will be included in the risk register and, if necessary, managed within this plan.

<b>Nature of Risk</b>	<b>Consequence</b>	<b>Suggested Control Measures</b>	<b>Response</b> <i>(tolerate, treat, terminate, transfer)</i>	<b>Risk Rating</b> <i>(combination of likelihood and impact)</i>
Actions within the Management Plans are not implemented due to a lack of resources	Reputational damage to the Council	Implementation of the plans is monitored and reported to hi-light any issues at an early stage	Tolerate	4
The boardwalk is	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reputational damage</li> </ul>	Implementation of the	Treat	8

left in a state of disrepair and damage without repair or replacement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to the Council</li> <li>Risk of slip, trip or fall to public who ignore the cordons in place</li> <li>Financial implication if an injury occurred</li> </ul>	Withey Beds boardwalk and river enhancement proposal		
The full boardwalk is replaced	Financial implications to the Council for the initial replacement costs and ongoing maintenance	Implementation of the Withey Beds boardwalk and river enhancement proposal	Treat	8

- 14.3 The above risks are scored using the matrix below. The Council has determined its aversion to risk and is prepared to tolerate risks where the combination of impact and likelihood scores 6 or less.

<div>Very Likely</div> <div>Likelihood</div> <div>Remote</div>	Low 4	High 8	Very High 12	Very High 16
	Low 3	Medium 6	High 9	Very High 12
	Low 2	Low 4	Medium 6	High 8
	Low 1	Low 2	Low 3	Low 4
	Impact			
	Low	Unacceptable		
	Impact Score		Likelihood Score	

4 (Catastrophic)	4 (Very Likely (≥80%))
3 (Critical)	3 (Likely (21-79%))
2 (Significant)	2 (Unlikely (6-20%))
1 (Marginal)	1 (Remote (≤5%))

- 14.4 In the officers' opinion none of the new risks above, were they to come about, would seriously prejudice the achievement of the Strategic Plan and are therefore operational risks. The effectiveness of the management of operational risks is reviewed by the Audit Committee annually.

## 15 Recommendation

- 15.1 That the Climate Change and Leisure Committee:
- 15.2 Adopt the new ten-year Management Plan for The Withey Beds.
- 15.3 Give delegated authority to the Director of Finance to enter into a contract or funding agreement above the value of £25,000, subject to securing external funding to facilitate works to support the implementation of the Management Plans.

Report prepared by: Kelly Barnard, Leisure Assets Manager

## Data Quality

Data sources:

Public Consultation

Data checked by:

Andrew Taylor – Projects Officer, Countryside Management Service (CMS)

Data rating: Tick

1	Poor	
2	Sufficient	✓
3	High	

## APPENDICES / ATTACHMENTS

APPENDIX A: The Withey Beds Greenspace Action Plan 2025 – 2035

APPENDIX B: The Withey Beds boardwalk and river enhancement proposal