

**CLIMATE
CHANGE &
LEISURE
COMMITTEE
24/06/2026**

CLIMATE CHANGE AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

24th JUNE 2026 7.30PM

PART I

POND WOOD TEN YEAR MANGEMENT PLAN 2026 - 2036 (ADE)

1 Summary

- 1.1 A new ten-year management plan has been developed for Pond Wood, South Oxhey.
- 1.2 The new plan contains management actions for the woodland over the next ten years from financial year 2026/27 until 2036/37. The detailed actions relate to woodland management for biodiversity and improvements to public access and interpretation.
- 1.3 The plan has a focus on the long-term management of numerous veteran Hornbeam trees which are a particular feature of Pond Wood.
- 1.4 These veteran trees require careful, phased management to ensure they continue to thrive and do not go into decline. The aim of the plan is also to identify younger Hornbeam trees, which are suitable to start as new pollards.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 That:

That the Climate Change and Leisure Committee:

Adopt the new 10-year Management Plan for Pond Wood

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: Alex Laurie, Principal Trees and Woodlands Officer

3 Details

Plan development process:

- 3.1 The plan was developed and produced by Countryside Management Service (CMS), part of Hertfordshire County Council, who are commissioned by Three Rivers District Council (TRDC) to assist with the management of TRDC Open Space.
- 3.2 An initial consultation was held between the 1st and 22nd of September 2025. The aim was to inform stakeholders and residents that Three Rivers District Council was about to prepare a management plan for Pond Wood and to invite ideas for what might feature in the new plan. An opportunity to speak to CMS and TRDC staff was also held, on site, on 16th September 2025.

- 3.3 Once a draft management plan had been completed, a second session of public consultation on the draft plan was held between 2nd February and 28th February 2026.
- 3.4 Despite the various consultation opportunities, stakeholder and public engagement with the plan was very low. Four people responded to the initial briefing document; but only one person attended the meeting on-site; and only one person made comments on the draft plan.
- 3.5 This is most likely due to the small size of the site (less than 2 hectares), which mainly functions as a pedestrian cut through between Seacroft Drive and Northwick Road, and occasional use by dog walkers.
- 3.6 The feedback received and discussions on site with officers was predominantly positive and supportive regarding proposed works to manage the veteran trees and other works aimed at conserving the wildlife value of the site. There was a suggestion to surface the main path through the site to improve the occasionally muddy condition of some sections in the winter.
- 3.7 However, officers are concerned this could be damaging to the roots of the veteran trees in the wood and the cost versus benefit would not justify it. However, woodchip from tree works will be spread across parts of the path where needed to improve conditions.

The Management Plan:

- 3.8 The key actions within the Pond Wood Management Plan relate to woodland management for biodiversity, particularly the large numbers of veteran Hornbeam trees throughout the wood.
- 3.9 Veteran trees are those which have reached an age well beyond what would be normal for a particular species. Due to their age, they can support a wide diversity of rare and/or protected wildlife, that younger trees cannot. They may also have important historical or cultural significance and amenity value.
- 3.10 Unusually the management plan for Pond Wood covers a ten-year period. This is to ensure that the veteran trees receive a continuity of management over two or three cycles of crown reduction work.
- 3.11 Some of these actions will be subject to securing external funding, they include:
- 3.11.1 The phased crown reduction of veteran Hornbeam trees – These will be gradual reductions over several cycles to reduce the risk of trees collapsing or uprooting, helping to extend their longevity.
- 3.11.2 Halo thinning around veteran trees – removing and cutting back smaller trees around veteran specimens to allow more light in, helping them to regenerate.
- 3.11.3 Starting new pollards – younger Hornbeams in the wood will be identified and be pollarded for the first time to ensure there are replacements for the long term.
- 3.11.4 Clearing non-native invasive species - such as Laurel, Rhododendron and variegated archangel to prevent their spread through the wood.
- 3.11.5 Cutting back trees and vegetation from footpath edges and clearing litter and fly tipping – to make entrances and access points to the wood safer and more welcoming.

4 Options and Reasons for Recommendations

- 4.1 The officer recommendation is that the management plan for Pond Wood is formally adopted by the Council.
- 4.2 Officers will then begin implementing the actions within the plans, subject to the availability of funding where necessary.
- 4.3 If the plans are not approved by the committee, maintenance of the wood will continue at a minimum level, but no additional improvements for biodiversity or public access will be undertaken.

5 Policy/Budget Reference and Implications

- 5.1 The recommendations in this report are within the Council's agreed policy and budgets. The relevant policies are the Tree Strategy agreed in 2022, and Nature Recovery Strategy agreed in 2023.
- 5.2 The recommendations in this report relate to and support the achievement of the following objectives within the Council Plan 2026 – 2029:
 - 5.2.1 Focus on restoring nature, boosting biodiversity, protecting trees and woodlands and key habitats
 - 5.2.2 Continue to invest in and improve our parks, open spaces and walking routes
 - 5.2.3 .

6 Financial Implications

- 6.1 Work outlined within the Management Plans will be completed within existing budgets or be subject to external funding.
- 6.2 Work to trees for safety will be facilitated utilising the tree management budget; Ash trees suffering from Ash Die Back (ADB) will be facilitated utilising the existing ADB budget. Works to management the veteran Hornbeams will be completed using existing management plan budgets, or via external funding, where possible, subject to adoption of the Management Plan.

7 Legal Implications

- 7.1 All proposed works and equipment will be tendered within the Council's constitution and contract procedure rules and any other permissions obtained (for example planning) where required.
- 7.2 Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006, updated by the Environment Act 2021, places a legal responsibility on public authorities in England to have due regard for habitats and species of the greatest conservation importance, whilst protecting all biodiversity.

- 7.3 Section 40(1) states that a “public authority which has any functions exercisable in relation to England must from time to time consider what action the authority can properly take, consistently with the proper exercise of its functions, to further the general biodiversity objective.”
- 7.4 The accompanying footnote to this part of the Act states that the aim of the biodiversity objective is to provide for the enhancement or improvement of biodiversity, not just its maintenance in its current state. Gone is the former ‘have regard’ element in respect of conserving biodiversity, and this has been replaced by a proactive duty (new section 40(1)) to “from time to time consider what action the authority can properly take, consistently with the proper exercise of its functions, to further the general biodiversity objective”.
- 7.5 Under the Council Constitution, Committee approval is required to enter into any contracts above the value of £25,000.

8 Equal Opportunities Implications

8.1 Relevance Test

Has a relevance test been completed for Equality Impact?	Yes
Did the relevance test conclude a full impact assessment was required?	No

A short Equality Impact and Outcome Assessment is included at Appendix 4. The Management Plan does not propose substantial changes to Pond wood but aims to make them more accessible to a wider range of people.

This includes physical access by cutting back vegetation from paths and removing barriers and obstacles. It also aims to remove psychological barriers by making entrances more welcoming to visitors.

9 Staffing Implications

- 9.1 Officers within Leisure and Natural Infrastructure, and Trees and Woodlands, will manage implementation of the plan over its lifetime.

10 Environmental Implications

- 10.1 The new management prescriptions for the wood will conserve the veteran trees over the longer term and enable a varied and diverse range of habitats, which will have a positive impact on the flora and fauna across the district.

10.2

Climate and Sustainability Impact Assessment Summary	
Homes, buildings, infrastructure, equipment and energy	0.00
Travel	0.00

Goods and Consumption	0.00
Ecology	3.00
Adaptation	0.00
Engagement and Influence	0
Total Overall Average Score	3.0

11 Community Safety Implications

- 11.1 Making entrances to the woods more welcoming and cutting back vegetation to make paths more accessible will hopefully give visitors more confidence to use the woods and feel safer when doing so.

12 Public Health implications

- 12.1 Trees and greenery may boost lifespan, this has been studied for 8 years by Harvard researchers and published in April Environmental Health Perspectives.

(<https://health.usnews.com/wellness/articles/2016-12-09/the-many-health-benefits-of-trees>)

13 Customer Services Centre Implications

None specific.

14 Communications and Website Implications

- 14.1 Implementation of the new management plans may require occasional external and website communications to advise residents and site users when works are taking place on site.

- 14.2 Good news stories will be circulated and shared via the Communications team, including across a range of social media channels.

15 Risk and Health & Safety Implications

- 15.1 The Council has agreed its risk management strategy which can be found on the website at <http://www.threerivers.gov.uk>.

- 15.2 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.

- 15.3 The subject of this report is covered by the Landscape and Leisure service plan(s). Any risks resulting from this report will be included in the risk register and, if necessary, managed within this/these plan(s).

15.4 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.

15.5 The subject of this report is covered by the service plan(s). Any risks resulting from this report will be included in the risk register and, if necessary, managed within this/these plan(s).

Nature of Risk	Consequence	Suggested Control Measures	Response <i>(tolerate, treat, terminate, transfer)</i>	Risk Rating <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 highlight any issues at an early stage	tolerate	Low 4

15.6 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.

Very Likely ----- Likelihood ----- ▼ Remote	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
 4 (Catastrophic)
 3 (Critical)
 2 (Significant)
 1 (Marginal)

Likelihood Score
 4 (Very Likely (≥80%))
 3 (Likely (21-79%))
 2 (Unlikely (6-20%))
 1 (Remote (≤5%))

- 15.7 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.
- 15.8 The remainder are therefore operational risks. Progress against the treatment plans for strategic risks is reported to the Policy and Resources Committee quarterly. The effectiveness of all treatment plans are reviewed by the Audit Committee annually.

Background Papers

Appendix 1 – Pond Wood Management Plan 2026-2036

Appendix 2 – Short Equality Impact and Outcome Assessment

Appendix 3 – Environmental Impact Assessment

