



# West Wickham Commons

Registered Charity

West Wickham Common  
Spring Park

# Management Plan

2021 - 2031

This is one of  
14 green spaces  
managed by the  
City of London at  
little cost to the  
general public.





West Wickham Common and Spring Park are two unique public open spaces owned and managed by the City of London Corporation.

The two sites combined form the West Wickham Commons registered charity (number 232988) and receive the major part of their funding from the City of London Corporation.

West Wickham Common itself is a relic remnant of ‘wood pasture’ with ancient pollarded oak trees harking back to a time when the woodlands were traditionally managed for harvesting timber. It sits within a

wider, wooded downland landscape that extends well into the surrounding countryside and is characteristic of this type of habitat.

Spring Park is similarly wooded but unlike West Wickham Common is not associated with the historical wood pasture system of management; it is instead an area of ancient woodland and neutral grassland. This too is a remnant of a much larger forested landscape which is now rare in the area.

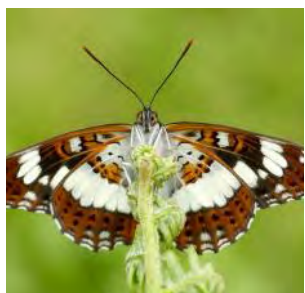
Both sites, which are separated by less than a mile, are situated in an increasingly urbanised landscape on the fringes of South London and

the pressures they are under require innovative approaches to management which allow for people and nature to coexist. The City of London are working carefully to manage these two important sites, involving the local community at all levels to try and minimise the deterioration of habitats and reduce the impacts of increased fragmentation.

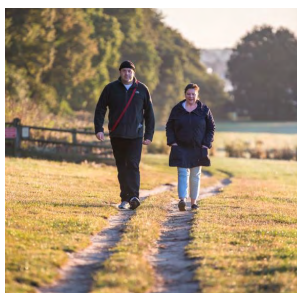
The City of London Corporation is committed to managing the West Wickham Commons in perpetuity to ensure that they remain as truly special places.



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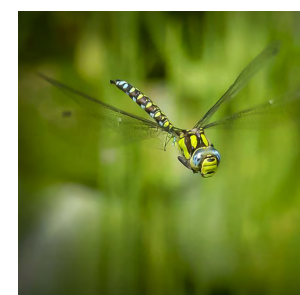
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Cover image: Silver washed fritillary

Inside image: Spring Park, (Mike Shoesmith)

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## Introduction

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West Wickham Common and Spring Park were acquired under the Corporation of London (Open Spaces) Act 1878. This Act enables the City of London to acquire and protect land up to 25 miles out from the boundary of the Square Mile. Enacted over 130 years ago, the City of London has a duty to protect and conserve West Wickham Common and Spring Park for public recreation and wildlife conservation **'in perpetuity'**. It is further safeguarded by national legislation.

Both sites have been influenced by the legacy of centuries of interactions between people and the environment. There is evidence that West Wickham Common was occupied from as far back as the Late Bronze Age up to the Medieval Period. Centuries of grazing and harvesting of timber have worked hand-in-hand to shape what was a much more open landscape that gave way to the magnificent oak **'pollards'**, **heathland and woodland** that now support a variety of rare and declining species.

Similarly, Spring Park, which was once part of a larger expanse of manorial woodland

of the Wickham Court Estate, with ties to the Boleyn family, has a long history of growing and extracting timber and wood products from **'coppice'** woodland dating back to the 16th century.

The soils and topography of West Wickham Common and Spring Park have conspired to create an environment where it was difficult to do anything other than grow trees and graze animals in the past. This has **ensured both sites' survival to this day as** rare examples of historic landscapes.

West Wickham Common and Spring Park are, however, much more than nature reserves or time capsules from a bygone era; they are living landscapes and places for people to find beauty, quiet and space in an increasingly busy and hectic modern society that is becoming disconnected from nature.

The challenge for the City, as land managers, is to balance traditional habitat management with 21st century expertise and expectations, and to ensure that West Wickham Common and Spring Park are prepared for the mounting social and environmental pressures as we progress **through the 2020's and beyond.**

These two sites, sitting as they do entirely within the West Wickham Commons charity,

are just two of six Open Spaces managed locally by the City of London. The other four sites (Farthing Downs, Riddlesdown, Kenley Common and Coulsdon Common) sit within a separate charity based on their close proximity to each other and are covered by separate site management plans.

This new management plan aims to summarise why, when and how the West Wickham Commons will be managed over the next 10 years. It builds upon the achievements of previous plans and is part of a series of documents that provide the vision and overall guidance to managing both sites. The plan is also a practical working document to guide the many hundreds of tasks that will take place over the next decade.

West Wickham Common and Spring Park are managed by a dedicated site Ranger and supported by a wider team of Rangers, administration staff, volunteers and contractors to protect and maintain the important features of the sites for people and wildlife.

Our thanks go out to all those who have helped to influence and produce this document and members of the public who participated in the consultation of this **plan's main actions.**

## Achievements 2010-2020



Left: White  
admiral,  
(Ian Leach)



Left: Veteran oak,  
West Wickham Common

### West Wickham Common

#### Looking after the ancient oak pollards

Annual condition assessments of West Wickham Common's 15 ancient oak pollards have been carried out to extend the lives of these culturally and biologically valuable ancients through targeted habitat management.

#### Improving the secondary woodland for wildlife

Holly clearance, canopy thinning and planting of hazel within the secondary woodland areas has been carried out by Rangers and volunteers. The new hazel plants, along with the natural regeneration of species such as cherry, rowan and birch is starting to increase diversity through the woodland and the creation of sunny, open glades has encouraged wildflowers and butterflies.

#### Showcasing the Earthworks' unique history

A new interpretation panel was installed exploring the historic origins and mystery of the undated mounds, banks and ditches on the Common.

#### Contributing to national monitoring schemes

Annual butterfly transects have recorded 25 species of butterflies throughout the woods and across the heath including occasional sightings of green hairstreak (*Callophrys rubi*), purple hairstreak (*Neozephyrus quercus*), white admiral (*Limenitis camilla*) and silver-washed fritillary (*Argynnis paphia*) contributing to the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme.

#### Green Flag & Green Heritage Award

Achieved this benchmark standard of world-class and accessible green spaces each year since 2012. Since 2015, the site has also attained the Green Heritage Award in recognition of good conservation standards of historic features in the landscape.

#### Heathland extension and translocation

Work has focused on preserving the existing area of heath throughout the Earthworks and increasing the area of new and potential heathland throughout the site. The spreading of heather seed and the successful translocation of young plants has already extended existing areas and facilitated the colonisation of new ones to preserve this fragile habitat.



## Achievements 2010-2020



Left:  
Traditional  
working  
horses for  
hauling  
timber

Below:  
Brown  
hairstreak  
butterfly  
&  
WWaSPs  
Volunteers



### Spring Park

#### Brown hairstreak butterfly eggs

Work in the previous management plan was delivered to conserve a diverse age range of blackthorn scrub for wildlife including the brown hairstreak butterfly (*Thecla betulae*). A total of 67 brown hairstreak eggs were counted during a survey in 2019 making Spring Park the largest known breeding colony to Kent Butterfly Conservation.

#### Regionally Important Geological Site (RIGGS)

The significance of the underlying geology at Spring Park is recognised under this proposed designation which may be confirmed by the Greater London Authority in the New London Plan 2020. A geotrail was developed with the London Geodiversity Partnership.



#### Green Flag Award

Achieved this benchmark standard of world-class and accessible green spaces each year since 2012.

#### Diversity of habitats recognised

An existing Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation designation was extended to include the Spring Park meadows and pond. Annual hay cutting of the meadows has improved the diversity of wildflowers including the first records of a pyramidal orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*) and the nationally-rare greater yellow rattle (*Rhinanthus angustifolius*).

#### Reinstating traditional coppice woodland

A full 16-year chestnut coppice rotation has been completed in woods adjacent to Woodland Way. The first decade of a 10-year hazel coppice rotation has also been met and the second decade is progressing well. Heavy horses were used to extract timber adjacent to the Spring Park Office as part of the sustainable management of this unique woodland.

#### Planting a new hedgerow

The West Wickham and Spring Park Volunteers (WWaSPs) and staff planted a 150m stretch of hedgerow to provide a corridor for wildlife and restore the boundary between the two historic meadows.

# 1

## Site Description

### West Wickham Common

#### Location

West Wickham Common is located in the London Borough of Bromley covering an area of 10 hectares (25 acre). West Wickham Common remains part of a 'green arc' of urban commons, gardens and other open spaces on the boundary between London and the wider Kent countryside. It sits immediately above Coney Hall Village in the South. To the north and east the common is bounded by the A232 Croydon Road. Hayes Common lies adjacent to the north of the site.

#### Ownership

West Wickham Common is owned by the City of London which acquired it in 1892 from Colonel Sir John Farnaby Lennard, part of the last Lennard baronets of Wickham Court. In the 1860s, Sir John Lennard began to sell off plots of West Wickham Common for villas and it was feared that without intervening, the Common would be lost forever. The City's acquisition under the Corporation of London (Open Spaces) Act

1878 ensured the public have open access to all areas subject to the byelaws.

#### Site status

West Wickham Common is now not a registered common. It became exempt in December 1966 under Section 11 of the Commons Registration Act 1965. There are therefore no rights registered over the site.

In conjunction with the River Ravensbourne, Ravensbourne Valley Woodlands and Hayes and Keston Commons, all of West Wickham Common is classified by the Greater London Authority as a Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC). The SINC designation acknowledges West Wickham Common's diversity of habitat (specifically the mosaic of ancient woodland, acid grassland and heathland).

Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) are areas designated for their importance for wildlife.

Local sites are designated by local authorities in cooperation with Wildlife Trusts. Their selection is typically based upon habitats that support rare or scarce species of plants and animals.



Above: Open heathland, West Wickham Common



#### 1.4 Physical features

West Wickham Common lies on a steep slope which rises from 76m above sea-level at the western end of the site to its highest point at 98m. The greater part of the common consists of an extensive plateau and gives far-reaching views across the Addington Valley.

The majority of the common lies on South London Pebbly Sands over the older rocks of the Harwich Formation comprising of sands, loams (mixed soils of sand, silt and clay) and pebbles. Overlaying these deposits, the soils are generally thin, free-draining and acidic. These impoverished soils, unsuitable for arable farming, provide the right conditions for heathland and acid grassland and a variety of otherwise uncommon plants and animals. In summer, these soils are susceptible to drying out and, where paths have eroded on the steeper slopes, compacted sand and pebbles are exposed.

No permanent running or standing water is present on West Wickham Common. Historically, a pond was located near Gates Green Road, with early records documenting it as far back as 1888 until it was drained and levelled in 1952. West Wickham Common is in the upper part of the River Ravensbourne catchment, which feeds into the River Thames.

Below: Viewpoint towards the Addington Valley, West Wickham Common



“

I appreciate all that has been done on West Wickham Common to return it to heathland. Also managing trees to maintain open views across Coney Hall to Addington is excellent.

- 2020 consultation response



# 1

## Site Description

### Spring Park

#### Location

Spring Park extends over 20 hectares (50 acres) and represents both a natural and cultural landscape that has changed very little since the City's acquisition. Spring Park, like West Wickham Common, is situated in the London Borough of Bromley. The site lies between the A2022 Addington Road, and south west tip of the residential area of West Wickham. The site is bounded by two open spaces in separate ownership; Spring Park adjoins Croydon Council's Threehalfpenny Wood to the west and Bromley Council's Sparrows Den and Cheyne Wood to the east.

#### Ownership

The acquisition of Spring Park came in several parts. Decades after the original sale of West Wickham Common to the City from Colonel Sir John Farnaby Lennard, the woodland at Spring Park was gifted to the corporation in 1926 by Colonel Sir Arthur and Stephen Hallam Farnaby Lennard, also from Wickham Court. The transfer of land to

the City came under the same act of parliament to preserve Spring Park for quiet recreation and public enjoyment. One year later, the parcel of land containing the two open meadows was purchased from the same vendor, completing Spring Park as it is seen today.

#### Site status

Spring Park is designated a SINC by the Greater London Authority. This designation primarily relates to the ancient woodland, and the assemblage of woodland flora.



Above: Walkers on a woodland path, Spring Park

Specifically, Spring Park holds an important population of small-leaved lime (*Tilia cordata*), a nationally-rare tree species and a sign of undisturbed ancient woodland. Like West Wickham Common, Spring Park is not registered common land.

#### Physical features

Spring Park is geologically complex and showcases a wealth of landscape features otherwise hidden from view in the urbanised landscape of South London. The woodland slope at Spring Park consists of a south-facing scarp slope formed in the Palaeocene period over 55 million years ago at a time when the climate was significantly warmer than it is today. From the highest point at 95m above sea-level, the woodland slopes towards a flat, dry river valley extending across the meadow.

Paths on the highest part of Spring Park towards Woodland Way where the soils are thin reveal large pebbles from the Harwich Formation whilst the steepest parts of the slope are formed of clay strata from the Lambeth Group. Both the Harwich Formation and the Lambeth group are characteristic of the London Basin and are remnants of the prehistoric River Thames where it cut its course through the landscape. Towards the base of these formations, groundwater emerges at

several locations on the woodland slope. From these “springs”, the water flows down and then sinks deep below the ground into the sand and pebble beds at the base of the slope.

Spring Park is named after these numerous “springs” and channels that remain damp even during the summer months. Historically, in exceptionally wet years, the grassland at the base of the slope would have been subject to seasonal flooding from the bourne of the Ravensbourne. However, this river has since been diverted underground to prevent future flooding impacts.

A pond at the foot of the slope and grassland was excavated in 1993 as part of a landscape restoration project. Situated in the same location as a former pond from a 1887 OS map, this is the only permanent body of standing water on the site.

Supply of water for the maintenance of the pond is mainly met by diverting some of the seasonal streams from the springs above. The pond is occasionally subject to shortfall in water in dry summer months but is replenished by heavier rainfall during the wet winter months.

“

I used to play as a child in Spring Park Wood - I remember the spring, puff balls and the beautiful trees.

- 2020 consultation response



Below: Common toads  
(© Mark Shoesmith)

Right: Wet woodland,  
Spring Park

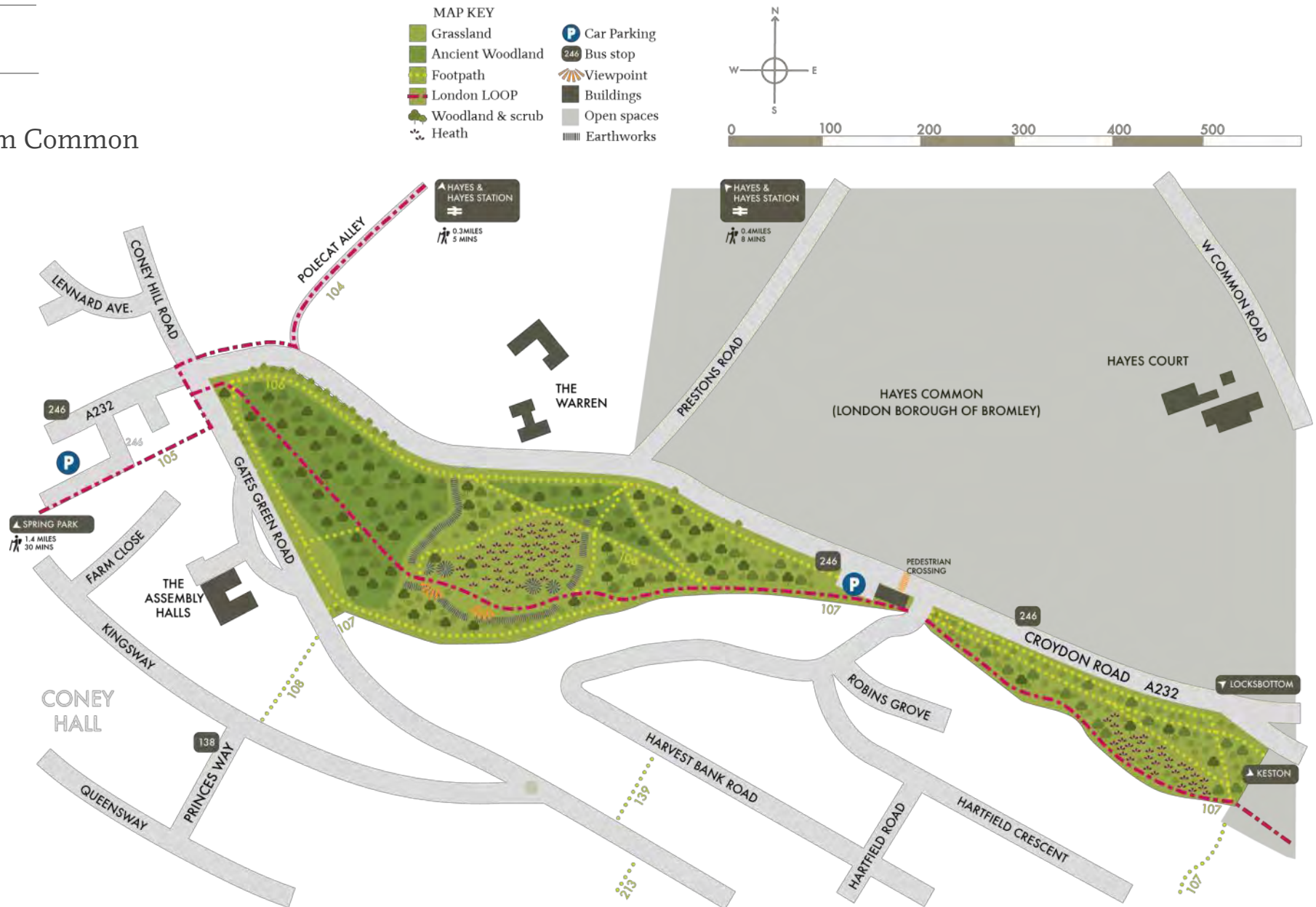


Above: The restored pond,  
Spring Park



## Site Map

### West Wickham Common



## Site Map

### Spring Park





## Cultural Information

### West Wickham Common

#### Landscape

Both West Wickham Common and Spring Park lie within the landscape character area of the North Kent Plains. In a more local context, historically, the area around the two sites was lightly settled and thus the area is still characterised by parcels of surviving woodland, heathland and common land. These were places where for centuries local people could graze cattle, gather food for livestock and collect firewood. Most of the many large, ancient trees around the area are a direct result of past human management and traditional woodland practices.

There are around 15 veteran oak pollards, some at least 600 years old. One of these was painted by Sir John Everett Millais in 1853 for his painting 'The Proscribed Royalist, 1651'. The painting depicts a young Puritan woman protecting a fleeing Royalist soldier after the Battle of Worcester in 1651, the decisive defeat by Charles II by Oliver Cromwell. The Royalist is hiding in a hollow

tree, a reference to a famous incident in which Charles himself hid in a tree to evade capture from his pursuers.

#### Archaeology

With visible archaeological features, there are clear signs that West Wickham Common was used periodically by humans for various means. Past archaeological surveys coupled with a recent Royal Commission on Historical Monuments of England (RCHME) study indicate that there are landscape features of potentially regional significance. West Wickham Common falls within Bromley Council's Hayes and West Wickham Common's Archaeological Priority Area with a series of Earthworks in the centre of the common being the main point of interest. The Earthworks could be the site of a Iron

Age hill fort. A deep defensive ditch to either side of an entrance causeway forms an incomplete ring which may have been further fortified by a row of upright spiked logs, called a palisade. The defences are believed to be incomplete with no known reason to why it was never finished. Long straight banks continue on to Hayes Common and are probably part of a Medieval field system (1066 – 1540).

Some earth mounds scattered around the site may be the remains of artificial rabbit warrens kept as an important source of protein, prized amongst wealthy landowners. A map of 1772 shows warrens in this area and local place names such as "Coney" (meaning rabbit) or "The Warren" suggest a link.

Below: An artist's impression of the earthworks, West Wickham Common



Left: "The Proscribed Royalist, 1651" (John Everett Millais)

## Cultural Information

### Spring Park

As part of a historical manorial landscape, **Spring Park's existence today is a small** snapshot of what the surrounding countryside looked like. The nearby West Wickham Court, would have once been the centre of an interweaving mix of commons and woodlands with small irregular fields for grazing animals.

#### Landscape

A Portland stone drinking fountain, in commemoration of Margaret Anderson McAndrew who lived at Wickham House from 1881-1925, is one of the key historic features to see at Spring Park. It is located at the entrance to Spring Park from Woodland Way. This structure is on Bromley Council's protected buildings list.

Going back further in time, a prominent line of small-leaved lime trees growing along the bank and ditched southwest boundary coincides with the old county boundary of Kent and Surrey. Another small bank and ditched boundary runs along the entire

length between Spring Park and Threehalfpenny Woods including southwards to Addington Road.

A small wood bank along the south-eastern boundary marking the woodland and meadow edge within Spring Park. A small keepers lodge built in the 19th century still stands, having been altered over the years to accommodate on-site Rangers.



Above: The Keeper's Cottage, Spring Park



Above: The Portland stone drinking fountain, Spring Park



## Access and Visitors

### Visitor appeal

Visitors to the West Wickham Commons come for informal recreation and activities such as hiking, jogging and walking. The qualities which draw visitors include their natural aspect, regionally rare wildlife and local distinctiveness. Further, they provide the visitor with a glimpse into the past and perhaps, more importantly in today's hectic world, a restorative opportunity for quiet reflection and thoughtful contemplation.

### Access provision

The majority of visitors arrive to the sites on foot or by car. West Wickham Common is served by regular bus services from Bromley and Westerham with the nearest railway station at Hayes. Spring Park is similarly well-connected by bus with links to Croydon, Eltham, Addington and Bromley. There are regular tram services from East Croydon Station, Wimbledon and Beckenham alighting at Addington Village interchange which is 1.6km from Spring Park. Spring Park is also well-placed near to the National Cycle Route 21 running from Greenwich to Crawley. A short, marked

cyclepath linking to the route follows the Addington Road at the edge of the site. A surfaced easy-access trail runs around the perimeter of the Earthworks from the car park at West Wickham Common. There are 6km of footpaths throughout Spring Park and 3.5km of footpaths on West Wickham Common creating connections within the site but also joining to the network of public rights of way in the wider countryside. This includes Section 4 of the London Outer Orbital Path (London LOOP) through Spring park and section 3 at West Wickham Common.

### Visitor facilities and information provision

Spring Park has two tarmacked car parks along the Addington Road that provide 26 regular spaces with 2 additional disabled bays; at West Wickham Common there is just one car park with 5 regular and 1 disabled bays. The car parks at Spring Park are rarely full as many visitors use the substantial car park provided by Bromley Council at Sparrows Den, which adjoins Spring Park to the east.

Wooden notice boards on Spring Park and West Wickham Common are regularly updated with information about events, current issues and news. These are strategically placed in key areas to maximise potential readership. Information

about current news and issues is also available from the City's website, social media pages and an electronic newsletter distributed to visitors and others on a mailing list.

Recently a new interpretation panel has been erected at the Earthworks on West Wickham Common to provide heritage information about this important archaeological feature. Whilst many of these type of boards have been present on the sites over the years, a renewed focus has been placed on designing and creating



Above: Waymarkers for the London LOOP, Spring Park

imaginative interpretive materials which celebrate local history, wildlife and other points of interest to showcase Spring Park and West Wickham Common's story. The management story can also be told through traditional methods used to make infrastructure in keeping with the wooded,

social and natural history of both sites; Where possible, timber produced as part of the 'coppicing' rotations on Spring Park is turned into a range of products including fencing materials, benches and the occasional interpretive sign.

In the same way that coppice products were historically a fundamental part of the rural economy for hundreds of generations, this use of locally produced timber maintains that link with our past and offers perhaps a route to conservation and sustainable management of these woodland resources.

“

West Wickham Common is one of my favourite places to walk. I walk across it every day and have done for the 25 years I lived here. It never ceases to enhance my happiness, whatever the weather.

- 2020 consultation response



Left: Benches provide a welcome place for walkers, West Wickham Common

Large map and byelaw boards are presently situated at the main approaches, gates and entrances to both sites. These provide visitors with general information about the sites, contact details and the byelaws which are unique to each site.

During the last decade, many of these boards have become unstable and have since been removed for the safety of visitors. The byelaw boards require increasing maintenance and monitoring due to their ageing and declining structural integrity. Options are being explored to redesign and install updated boards that balance the original look of the historic boards with a welcoming impression for visitors.

Dog bins are provided near key entrance points. Currently dog bags are provided from dispensers as well, but this provision of service is subject to future review.



### Education and research

Schools and college groups regularly visit the West Wickham Commons to learn about nature management and conservation. Student and other research projects are encouraged and the staff and volunteers also carry out long-term monitoring to further our knowledge of how these sites benefit people and wildlife.

Examples of these are butterfly transects, moth trapping, plant communities and dragonfly and damselfly monitoring. These surveys underpin and contribute to regional and national monitoring programmes to build a national picture of ecosystem health and the changes happening to protected sites across Britain.

The sites have been well-recorded for different species. With several technological changes in ecological monitoring there is the potential to enable greater contributions from volunteers and citizen scientists. **Successful community ‘BioBlitz’** led by the rangers (events to take a snapshot of the variety of life found in a specific location) and species recording apps such as iNaturalist could build a bigger picture of ecosystem health and support a deeper knowledge of wildlife using the sites. **This could also help to deepen people’s connection with nature on their doorstep.**



Above: Volunteers collecting heather seed for heathland restoration, West Wickham Common



Above: West Wickham and Spring Park Volunteers (WWaSPs) digging in new signage,

### Community involvement

True to the original Act which set out to protect the West Wickham Commons for the benefit and use of the public, the local community is an integral part of the two sites’ management. Primarily, it is through practical conservation volunteering that the local community has the most involvement. The West Wickham and Spring Park volunteers (affectionately known as the ‘WWaSPs’), meet on two days a month during the winter season and one in

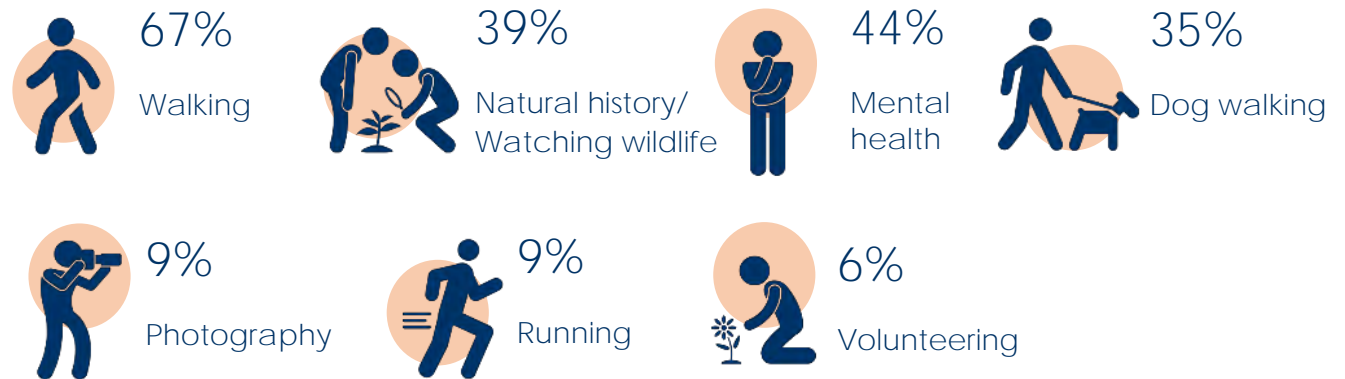
summer. Much of the work to manage the two sites is literally done by the local community themselves. Additionally, the West Wickham Commons Consultative Group advises the City on the development and implementation of the management plan. It comprises a broad representation from the City and interested parties from the local community.

#### Services and access

Several services and utilities traverse the sites; two utility companies have statutory rights of access onto Spring Park and one company on West Wickham Common to repair and maintain their structures. At Spring Park there are two purpose-built buildings that function as a base for the on site ranger to store equipment and materials and also as a place for volunteers to assemble prior to tasks. There are Rangers Lodges on both West Wickham Common and Spring Park facilitating a site presence 365 days a year.

#### Current use

Under the Open Spaces Act the requirement is for West Wickham Common and Spring Park to be managed for informal recreation. Given the popularity of these two sites and location in one of the most densely populated regions in the UK, care must be taken to ensure that recreation



#### Primary reasons for visiting Spring Park & West Wickham Common Results from the 2020 consultation

activities remain low key and do not result in damage and that there is minimal conflict between recreation and conservation. Legal obligations such as the NERC (Natural Environment and Rural Communities) Act and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 require positive management for nature conservation; this is strengthened and supported by grant funding through Countryside Stewardship.

#### Financial situation

The City of London Corporation provides funding for the management of West Wickham Common and Spring Park largely from its private funds. For the last 10 years there have been increasing pressures to make revenue savings and these are likely

to continue. The City's revenue can now meet only part of the running costs for West Wickham Common and Spring Park; the sites are increasingly reliant on grants and other sources of income. The success of much of this management plan depends on the ability to identify and secure significant external funding to match any savings required by the City of London. Countryside stewardship grants help pay for habitat conservation work but the long term future of these grants is uncertain.

New sources of revenue will need to be explored in coming years: the passing of a new Open Spaces Act (2018) together with increased use of technology may open up some new avenues.



## Biological Features

### West Wickham Common

#### Habitats

With a mixture of veteran trees, secondary woodland, scrub, heathland, acidic grassland and wood pasture, the habitats now present on the Common likely developed in a wood pasture system which combined the grazing of livestock with the traditional management practice of 'pollarding'. The main attributes of a historic wood pasture system include old trees that have grown in relatively open conditions, an open ground layer, plenty of decaying wood, flowers and shrubs. The overall picture of West Wickham Common is a mosaic of different habitats with a value for wildlife that is more than the sum of its parts. The most important and extensive habitats are described below.

#### Wood pasture

Much of the western end of West Wickham Common is a living example of relic wood pasture. In order to manage each part of West Wickham Common effectively and maintain biodiversity, it is necessary to look in more detail at the plant communities.



Right: Veteran oak pollards,  
West Wickham Common

#### What is wood pasture?

Land containing trees that is or was grazed with domestic animals or deer is referred to as wood pasture. The density of trees can be very variable, ranging from dense woodland to open grassland or heathland with scattered trees.

It is a habitat reminiscent of the ancient Neolithic 'wildwood' with a history of large herbivores (including deer and livestock) grazing amongst trees. In the past, much of West Wickham Common was probably managed as wood

pasture with the land under its trees mostly being rough heathland. Within the wood pasture there were areas where the trees were regularly 'pollarded'.

Today, we value this habitat for its wildlife and recreational value and are working to conserve the ancient trees that were enabled through the wood pasture system.

### Ancient trees

Ancient trees are a vital habitat and a treasured part of socio-ecological landscapes; a single specimen can contain micro-habitat features supporting vast amounts of other plants, animals, and fungi within its canopy, trunk and root system. These trees are those that have reached a great age in comparison with others of the same species. They are often gnarled, knobbly, huge, bent and hollow. There are 15 ancient oak pollards on the common and the majority of these trees, judging by their girth, are thought to be at least 600 years old. Remains of at least 16 dead pollards can be traced in the undergrowth and no doubt others have rotted away contributing to rich deadwood habitat, nutrient systems and underground life.

Ancient trees are often an indicator of past human activity and are therefore an important biomarker of cultural, genetic and natural heritage. Past site managers recognised the importance of these old trees but practices for conserving ancient trees have somewhat changed; up until the 1950s, cables were attached to some pollards on the common to prevent them splitting apart under their own weight. Some of these chains and braces are still visible today. Concrete was also poured into some of the hollow trunks to prevent malicious fire damage. In

the 1950s, the tops were cut out of some trees to reduce the weight of the limbs. In some cases, this work proved a little severe compared with the modern approach of gradual weight reduction. It is probable that some trees may have died following this work.

In 1990 further work took place to reduce the height of most of the pollards. On this occasion relatively small sections of timber were removed. In 2004, a Veteran Tree Survey looked at every tree in detail and produced individual 30-year management schedules.

Right: Standing dead pollards,  
West Wickham Common

### Pollarding:

Pollarding is an age-old management system where the trees are repeatedly cut for a product; it can be carried out on almost any broad-leaved tree species. The branches are pruned back to a point roughly 2.5m above ground level; this allows new branches to grow out of reach of any grazing animals.





## Woodland

The woodland habitat on West Wickham Common can be roughly split into two different communities; the western section which is characterised by mature woodland amongst the ancient pollards and the exposed eastern section, which is a fairly young, dense, closed canopy woodland. The woodland in the western part of the common is dominated by oak and beech with holly and hazel and sometimes bramble as a shrub layer. Other, rarer plants which appear here include Butcher's broom (*Ruscus aculeatus*) and green-flowered helleborine (*Epipactis phyllanthos*). It contains the greatest concentrations of ancient pollards, so we know that these parts were historically more open.

Over the last decade, work to conserve this habitat has involved creating a more open aspect again; this woodland is now characterised by multiple transitions between tall and short vegetation, light and shaded areas, warm and cool places. The micro-variations within this woodland area benefit a variety of plant and animals that occupy specific niches at the woodland edge, canopy and understory.

The woodland found in the eastern section of the common has developed where there

would have been an expanse of open heath or grassland in the past. Following a gradual reversion to woodland via a transitional scrub phase, this area of secondary woodland is today dominated by oak and birch with an understory of often densely-growing holly.



Right: Intricate flowers of the green flowered helleborine, West Wickham Common



Left: Holly, West Wickham Common

## Heathland

An expanse of heathland is located around the north west of the common. Occurring below 300m above sea level, lowland heathland is a rare and threatened habitat; the UK supports 20% of the world's lowland heathland habitat.

In Bromley, the majority of this habitat is found on Keston and Hayes Common with small patches on Chislehurst Common, West Wickham Common, Farnborough Common and Petts Wood. Only around 15% of heathland that existed in 1800 remains, having either been built on or replaced by woodland and grassland, not least around London.

It is a nutrient-deprived habitat, characterised by sandy, mineral soils and a mosaic of low-growing heather, scattered trees and areas of bare ground. Heathland originates from the historic clearance of woodland and was used by people for thousands of years for taking gorse, turf, gravel and for grazing livestock. Today conservation management replaces these past activities on the heathland and its existence relies solely upon human activity 'holding back' the natural process of succession to stop it reverting into woodland again.

From a nature conservation perspective, the heathland is one of the most valuable features on the common. It is a Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitat and supports highly-adapted plants that thrive in the nutrient poor soils. The exposed, hot and dry microclimate also provides the optimum conditions for basking or sheltering invertebrates such as the green hairstreak (*Callophrys rubi*) butterfly.

The heather-dominated (*Calluna sp.*) community grows within the Earthworks where a few areas of buried seed germinated following disturbance of the mineral soil by machinery in the 1990's. This original area of heathland has now spread to over 0.5 hectares in size. Following a restoration project with funding from the London's Heathland Heritage Partnership in 2007, the heathland was enlarged using an excavator to remove the nutrient rich woodland soil to reveal the underlying mineral subsoil and subsequently seeded using heather cuttings from sites in Surrey.

This newer heathland area, which is growing and spreading

rapidly now covers over 1 hectare of land within Earthworks.

Dormant heather seeds have also germinated in the east corner of the Common following several years of woodland glade creation. This new area could potentially become a second significant heathland during the life of this Management Plan and could act as a stepping-stone for mobile heathland species that are found on the remnant heaths across the road on Hayes Common.



Left: Varied age structure of heather provides a habitat for many different species of plants and animals



### Grassland

There is a small area of acid grassland on the north side of the common. Acid grassland is a rarity within Greater London and is often found as part of the lowland heath landscapes such as West Wickham Common.

Much like the low-nutrient soils under the heath, this type of grassland supports a diverse community of invertebrates and uncommon plants including common bent grass (*Agrostis capillaris*), slender trefoil (*Trifolium micranthum*) and bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*). The infertile acidic soil (pH4.5-5.5) means that the grasses are generally small and grow close to the ground offering up light and space for less competitive wildflowers.

### Deadwood habitat

Veteran trees, with their standing and aerial deadwood and associated fallen timber play a vital role in providing ecological niches for a range of flora and fauna such as fungi, lichen, invertebrates, birds and bats.

Despite this essential role, deadwood has been removed from woodland ecosystems by humans for thousands of years; it is important to the health of woodlands and plays a big part in nutrient recycling. When



Left: Fungi,  
Spring Park  
(© Mark Shoesmith)

Above: Wasp beetle,  
The beetle's larvae live in dry,  
dead wood

left to decay in situ, deadwood provides a constantly changing series of microhabitats. The value of this unique habitat differs between different species, age of the tree and decay time amongst other factors. The cavities, holes and hollows associated with the decay of heartwood provide valuable nesting and roosting sites for birds, bats and hibernating invertebrates.



Right: Deadwood provides a vital  
role in functioning ecosystems

## Biological Features

### Spring Park

The habitats found at Spring Park are a living legacy of traditional landscape management and varied geology. A visitor to Spring Park a hundred years ago would have found a working “coppice” woodland alongside a hay meadow.

During the course of the past century, with the declining demand for woodland products and less intensive management, the coppice has grown into mature trees with large oaks which stand tall throughout the woodland. The old meadows and “coppice” woodland are now an important relic of the agricultural and pastoral landscape of the area and support flora and fauna that are otherwise uncommon in the surrounding urban landscape.

#### Ancient woodland

Spring Park contains one of the best examples of Ancient Woodland in the local area. The dominant species is pedunculate oak, followed by sweet chestnut, small-leaved lime and hazel with smaller

populations of sliver and downy birch, beech, and alder. Ancient Woodland in England can be defined as areas of woodland that have persisted since 1600. Ancient woodlands are the richest and most complex terrestrial habitat and cover a small portion of the UK.

The population of small-leaved limes is significant as it is most likely the largest population in Greater London. Small-leaved lime trees, once favoured for their pliable bark for rope making, are now nationally vulnerable due to their inability to successfully spread by seed. Small populations still exist, but their tendency to be found in established and ancient woodland means they are a rare sight.

The woodland occupies the entirety of the slope at Spring Park. Various component parts of the woodland exhibit different characteristics and are divided into defined compartments based on tree species, underlying soils and how they are managed.

#### Small-leaved lime:

A native tree of England and Wales, the small-leaved lime was believed to be the dominant tree of much of England before the pedunculate oak. The small-leaved lime is a hugely beneficial tree for pollinating invertebrates which are attracted to its sweet-smelling flowers. Its demise was thought to have happened over centuries of grazing in woodlands. Now uncommon, small populations, like the one at Spring Park, exist as the late naturalist Oliver Rackham described, “as a living link to the Mesolithic wildwoods after the last ice age”.



Right: Characteristics of the small-leaved lime





Above: Bluebells

Left: Chestnut coppicing, Spring Park

### Coppice woodland

Sweet chestnut trees are distributed in patches throughout the entire woodland and there are some significant and notable areas where planted sweet chestnut forms a community with large oak “standards” These compartments or “coupes” of sweet chestnut coppice are located in a strip adjacent to Woodland Way on the upper plateau of Spring Park above the meadow. This sweet chestnut understory is cut on a series of rotations creating different sizes of timber over a 16 year period. This traditional form of woodland management was reintroduced as a management objective in 1985.

Other coppice woodland includes a block of hazel coppice through the centre of the

woodland area on the steepest section of the slope as well a small-leaved lime coup in the far south-west corner of the site. By removing some of the canopy through coppicing to create a coup (a defined area of coppice woodland), more light and heat can reach the forest floor presenting an opportunity for woodland flowers, such as British bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), wood anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*), dog violets (*Viola* sp.) and yellow archangel (*Lamium galeobdolon*).



The bluebells this year were the best that I've seen in 24 years of living here. Lots of other wild flowers too. The coppicing is having a brilliant affect.

### What is coppicing?

Woodlands in the UK have been traditionally managed, often intensively, for centuries making use of the self-renewing abilities of trees to gather an indefinite supply of timber for building, fuel and fodder for domestic animals.

The practice of coppicing involves cutting the tree close to ground level; this allows successive new branches (shoots) to emerge from the stump (stool) which can be repeatedly cut to gather wood. Today the focus is on creating a more open and diverse structure to the woodland which benefits wildlife, rather than the produce from coppicing. The resources produced are still utilised to make a range of timber products for the commons such as benches, fence posts and signs.

Creating different levels of shade and vegetation density provides a wider variety of habitat niches, which are filled by a diversity of invertebrates, mammals and birds. Butterfly species such as speckled wood (*Pararge aegeria*) utilise the warm, sunny woodland glades and edges and are almost always found in patches of dappled light. Violets attract silver-washed fritillaries (*Argynnis paphia*) as it is their food plant which their caterpillars need to survive when they hatch.

Over the last century, coppicing has decreased drastically, which has had a hugely negative impact on open woodland specialists, such as the white admiral butterfly (*Limenitis camilla*).

#### Alder woodland

Along the spring lines at Spring Park there are small patches of woodland that is comprised primarily of alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) alongside downy birch (*Betula pubescens*).

The understorey is dominated by hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*), with lesser amounts of rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*), spindle (*Euonymus europaea*) and guelder-rose (*Viburnum opulus*). Under the trees

there is a mixture of damp and shade tolerant wildflowers and grasses including tufted hair-grass (*Deschampsia cespitosa*) yellow archangel, remote sedge (*Carex remota*), wood sedge (*Carex sylvatica*) and common figwort (*Scrophularia nodosa*).

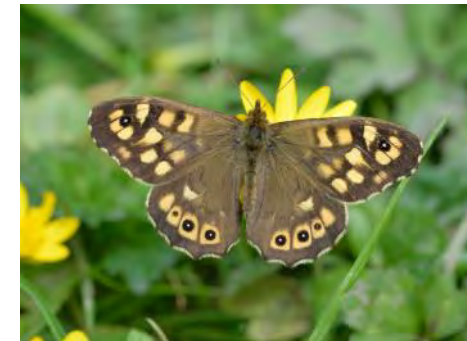
#### Oak and sweet chestnut woodland

An expanse of woodland that has been managed as non-intervention woodland is in the far east of Spring Park. Many of the trees in this area have not been felled or thinned and subsequently the woodland has a closed canopy with dominant species of oak and sweet chestnut vying for light.

Compared with the adjacent coppice woodland, there is a notable absence of

the typical ground flora associated with old woodland and many of the animals that go with it. With this in mind, this block is seen to hold less conservation and amenity value.

To increase the area's value for nature conservation, the woodland block will be thinned to avoid the problem of continued over-shading.



Left: Speckled wood, (Bob Eade)



Above: Sweet violet



Right: Wood anemone, Spring Park (Moira O'Donnell)





Above: Collecting hay from the meadow, Spring Park

### Neutral grassland

Since 1966, the grassland at Spring Park has been managed as an amenity area with three rugby pitches cut several times throughout each growing season. Management of the grassland as a hay meadow was reintroduced in 1991 when the third rugby pitch, nearest the south western end of the meadow, was no longer needed.

In recent years, maintaining the entirety of the meadow as a grassland for biodiversity has been prioritised and in 2016 it ceased its use as seasonal rugby pitches. The neutral

and acid grassland supports a number of positive indicator species of flora and adds to the semi-natural quality of Spring Park. The floristic diversity suggests that the semi-improved grassland habitat may be roughly divided into two different communities: the north eastern third (Kent Field) which is a relatively species-poor, agriculturally improved community, and the south west section which is floristically rather more diverse and includes an area of calcareous grassland towards the top of the slope (Little Kent Field).

In this more diverse grassland, notably Yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*) is generally dominant together with annual meadow

grass (*Poa annua*) and sheep's fescue (*Festuca ovina*). Herbs and flowers include ribwort plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*) and common bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*).

The nationally rare greater yellow rattle (*Rhinanthus angustifolius*) has spread through the entire meadow over the last decade and is now a major component of the grassland. Known as 'the meadow maker' or 'nature's lawnmower', yellow rattle is a semi-parasitic plant that draws water and nutrients from plants growing nearby, especially grasses. Yellow rattle can suppress the growth of grasses by as much as 60% meaning that in the resulting space, other, less common flowers have room to grow.

The meadows are usually cut for hay in late summer when the majority of wildflowers have set seed. The wildflowers, which are the fabric supporting much of the pollinating invertebrates, can be sustained by the annual cutting and removal of plants to prevent nutrients from enriching the soil.

In September 2020, parts of the meadow were reseeded with a mixture of native wildflower seeds as part the Brilliant Butterflies landscape initiative for pollinating invertebrates led by Butterfly Conservation.

## Hedgerows

The two major hedgerows found at Spring Park, along the south western and southern sides of the meadow are relatively recent additions to the site having both been planted on new earth banks in 1990 to create a link between different habitats. The hedges were created using a diverse range of native woody shrubs.

The dense growth of the hedges is providing an increasingly important habitat and natural corridor for a wide variety of wildlife. The wildlife value of the hedges is further enhanced by a wide herbaceous habitat either side of the southern hedgerow, and the blackthorn scrub coppice alongside the south western hedge.

In 2011, the West Wickham and Spring Park volunteers (WWaSPs) planted a new hedge running north-south across the meadow approximately along the line of an ancient hedgerow which is visible in old aerial photographs from the 1940's.

Hedgerows provide food and cover for many species including a vast majority of UK woodland birds, small mammals and amphibians. Several bat species also use the hedges as navigable landmarks for their orientation to feeding or roosting sites.



Above: Fixing stakes and binders to a newly-laid hedge, Spring Park

## Successional areas and scrub

The scrub is a component of woodland edge habitat within glades and along paths but is also found in a key area of Spring park as a result of deliberate management. A belt of blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) dominated scrub is located along the south western end of the meadow, adjacent to the hedgerow along the driveway to the Spring Park Office. To stop the area developing into secondary woodland, resulting in a gradual loss of habitat diversity and a decline in associated species of plants and animals, a four-year coppice rotation was introduced here in 2003.

This belt supports a large breeding colony of brown hairstreak butterfly (*Thecla betulae*) which has been recorded as the largest known site monitored by Kent Butterfly Conservation following egg searches in December 2019. It was noted that the vast majority of eggs had been deposited on plants that had two years of growth since coppicing so the management of this area must continue to ensure two year old growth is always available for the butterflies.

The southern woodland edge at Spring Park along the meadow is also managed as part of the coppice rotation. This



variation in structure enriches the habitat between the woodland and open grassland by providing the micro heterogeneity in habitats which different animals can benefit from such as invertebrates, small mammals and birds.

### Value of scrub

Scrub provides a valuable niche for nesting songbirds, overwintering invertebrates and other animals as a source of shelter and food.

Scrub of varied age, species and structure supports the widest range of wildlife, as some species depend on specific growth stages of certain plants throughout the year.

Trees and shrubs that produce flowers and bear fruit and berries, for example, are a reliable source of food and nectar at times of the year when other habitats are resource deficient.

Right: Water forget-me-not,  
Spring Park  
(Moira O'Donnell)

### Wetland

The seasonal ditches running through the woodland significantly add to the diversity plants found at Spring Park. The more reliable ditches, where the ground is at least moist even in the driest of summers, ensures that the stands of alder and other wetland loving plants and insects thrive in the otherwise dry expanse of woodland.

The pond located on the edge of the meadow and woodland at Spring Park has typical pond and riparian flora along its



banks including purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*), lesser water plantain (*Baldellia ranunculoides*) marsh woundwort (*Stachys palustris*) water forget-me-not (*Myosotis scorpioides*) and yellow flag iris (*Iris pseudacorus*).

It provides a home for significant breeding odonata populations of damselflies and dragonflies with 13 species recorded. Frogs, toads and smooth newt (*Lissotriton vulgaris*) frequently use the pond to breed and small populations return to the pond each year.

Below: Marsh woundwort,  
Spring Park  
(Moira O'Donnell)



## Rare Species & Wildlife

### West Wickham Common

#### Plants

The acid woodland at West Wickham Common contains a number of plants of local interest such as climbing corydalis (*Ceratocarpus claviculata*), Solomon's seal (*Polygonatum multiflorum*) and butcher's broom (*Ruscus aculeatus*) – the latter a plant steeped in human history for its uses as a scrubber to clean butcher's blocks and its antibacterial properties.

#### Fungi

Fungi are an integral component of woodland ecosystems chiefly because of their invaluable role in driving the process of wood decay and decomposition of organic matter. The combined effort of both professional and amateur mycologists over the years has resulted in more than 180 species of fungi being recorded on the common with a number of important species identified in recent surveys.

Lichens, bryophytes, mosses and liverworts are also well represented. The mosaic of



Left: Silver washed fritillary

different habitats and veteran trees means that there is a strong representation across many of the major fungal groups. Of note, there are several fungal species associated with decaying and standing deadwood including oak pin (*Cudoniella acicularis*), birch polypore (*Piptoporus betulinus*) and conifer blueing bracket (*Postia caesia*).

#### Butterflies

As a result of ongoing survey efforts by volunteers and professional recorders, there are also good records of butterflies and moths present on West Wickham Common. The most significant species are the woodland specialists, such as the white admiral (*Limenitis camilla*), silver-washed fritillary (*Argynnis paphia*) and speckled wood (*Pararge aegeria*) which thrive within the sunlit clearings provided by the

woodland glade creation work and the dry, warm expanse of the open heathland.

#### Moths

Through a combination of moth surveys carried out during 2015 and 2012 with further casual sightings undertaken periodically, a total of 255 moth species have now been recorded on West Wickham Common. A large proportion of these moths have their associated food plants of oak trees, scots pine and the various lichens and algae found on trees. This demonstrates that the Common supports a very rich community of moths through these range of habitats. The toadflax brocade moth, (*Calophasia lunula*), is one of several Red Data Book species present.



### Saproxylic invertebrates

A 'saproxylic' species is one that depends on dead or decaying wood in order to live. Some feed on the wood, others use it as a retreat or hunting surface.

Ancient trees, pollards and old coppiced stools are home to a wide range of saproxylic species because they have abundant dead and decaying wood in a variety of different moisture and light conditions. The occurrence of carefully managed ancient oak pollards ensures that there is a high proportion of beetles which utilise this resource on West Wickham Common.

A survey of saproxylic beetles in 2009 recorded 62 species with 8 species having conservation status either as notable or Red Data Book. Rare species include *Procræus tibialis*, a click beetle which is found solely on native veteran trees, and *Dorcatoma dresdensis*, a beetle species whose larvae feed exclusively in decayed heartwood on the tiny strand-like filaments of fungi.

West Wickham Common is one of the remaining strongholds of the saproxylic stag beetle (*Lucanus cervus*), the UK's largest terrestrial beetle. The larvae live in the decaying wood of deciduous trees, often in roots, stumps and fallen timber of broad-

leaved trees, and take between three and a half and six years to become fully grown. Once mature, their adult lifespan is short; they emerge in May with the sole purpose of mating and die in August once the eggs have been laid in decaying wood.

The stag beetle is listed on Annex II of the EC Habitats Directive and is a priority species in both the UK and Bromley Biodiversity Action Plans. The presence and continuity of deadwood habitat which has been left to decay in-situ is essential in the conservation of this species.

In 2006 and 2007 a project took place on the edge of the Earthworks on West Wickham Common to create new habitat using piles of tree trunks, vegetation, wood chip and earth. This proved a suitable habitat for these magnificent creatures during their long juvenile life stage before emergence as adults. The pile is topped-up with timber, wood chip and grass cuttings each winter to maintain the habitat. Stag beetle larvae are often observed under trunks, stumps and wood piles in many other areas of West Wickham Common and Spring Park.



Right: Stag beetle life cycle: egg, larva, pupa and female/ male adult.

### Tree hole-using birds and bats

The wide variety of old trees and standing deadwood provides an important function for hole-nesting birds such as greater spotted woodpecker (*Dendrocopos major*), blue tit (*Parus caeruleus*) and tawny owl (*Strix aluco*). The large coniferous scots pine additionally attract large flocks of long-tailed tit (*Aegithalos caudatus*) and occasional goldcrest (*Regulus regulus*), the UK's smallest bird; goldcrests have specially adapted beaks to feed on insects between narrow pine needles.

As biological indicators of ecosystem health, the presence of bat species across the two sites suggests that there is a plentiful supply of insects. Five species have been recorded using the site for feeding, specifically noctule (*Nyctalus noctule*), serotine (*Eptesicus serotinus*), brown long-eared (*Plecotus auratus*), common pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*) and soprano pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*).

### Reptiles

Heathlands provide the right micro-climate and biological needs because of the open aspect and fine soils to support reptile species. Although there are no positive records of reptile use of this habitat, reptile species including grass snake (*Natrix natrix*), common lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*), slow

worms (*Anguis fragilis*) and adder (*Vipera berus*) are documented on neighbouring Keston Common and Hayes Common.

The road which fragments and dissects West Wickham Common and these open spaces is a major impediment on reptile movements.

Below: Goldcrest,  
(Francis C. Franklin)

Right: Common Lizard,  
(Natural England/Allan  
Drewitt)





## Rare Species & Wildlife

### Spring Park

#### Plants

The characteristic flora of Spring Park is centred around woodland wildflowers and herbs as well as the aquatic flora in and around the margins of the pond. Although not rare, the assemblage of wildflowers, many of which indicate the continuity of ancient woodland, are locally important in terms of biodiversity value and supporting a wide range of specialist species.

Swathes of bluebells carpet the woodland each year as well as patches of wood anemone, primrose, sanicle and dog violet. Species of note in the Spring Park meadow includes, among many others, the nationally rare greater yellow-rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*).

#### Butterflies

As mentioned earlier, Spring Park is recognised as one of the top breeding colony sites in the South East for brown hairstreak butterfly (*Thecla betulae*). The brown hairstreak butterfly is a Red Book List species and a conservation priority within Greater London.

The butterfly species has declined rapidly in the last 60 years and are confined to areas where there are dense networks of hedges and small woodlands. Across the life stages of the butterfly, there is a near sole reliance on blackthorn; microscopic eggs (around 1mm across) are laid on new growth of blackthorn twigs which in turn emerge as larvae to feed on unfurling buds.

The variety of woodland and grassland flora sustains other butterflies including marbled white, silver washed fritillary, meadow brown and occasional sightings of both the chalk hill blue butterfly and white admiral.



Above: Lifecycle of the brown hairstreak butterfly: ovum, larva, pupa and adult

Left: Peacock butterfly caterpillar, Spring Park (Moirá O'Donnell)



Left: Ruddy darter  
(Ian Leach)

Below: Smooth newt  
(Ian Kirke)



Above: Common whitethroat,  
Andreas Trepte

### Dragonflies and damselflies

Informal surveys of invertebrates associated with wetland habitat have been carried out since 2006, mainly by the pond on Spring Park.

To date 13 species have been recorded, many breeding, including the nationally notable ruddy darter dragonfly (*Sympetrum sanguineum*), large red damselfly (*Pyrrhosoma nymphula*) and broad-bodied chaser dragonfly (*Libellula depressa*).

### Birds

Alongside West Wickham Common, the site's ancient woodland contains various cracks, holes and cavities that attract woodland birds to nest, perch and scour for food.

Birds commonly associated with open grassland and urban parks are also spotted including green woodpecker (*Picus viridis*), starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) and song thrush (*Turdus philomelos*), a BAP priority bird species. In recent years, there has been consistent records of common whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*) in the blackthorn scrub at Spring Park. This small passerine is suspected to be breeding during the summer months following their passage from Sub-Saharan Africa. Another regular summer visitor is the swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) and can be seen feeding on the wing in the open meadow.

### Reptiles and amphibians

The pond at Spring Park supports breeding populations of common frog (*Rana temporaria*), common toad (*Bufo bufo*) and smooth newt (*Lissotriton vulgaris*). The arisings of harvested wood from winter tree work has been stacked in the area surrounding the pond to create hibernacula for amphibians and supports connections with the damp woodland, pond and their associated terrestrial habitat.



# 3

## Vision

### West Wickham Common

West Wickham Common will continue to be a beautiful natural place, open for public enjoyment. The unique nature of the majestic ancient pollards set in a landscape of open heath, acid grassland, ancient field systems and quiet meandering pathways will be treasured by local people and all of those who come to visit.

Whether for daily exercise, a Sunday afternoon walk with family or just that special place for quiet contemplation and a chance to get close to nature, we are committed to the conservation, protection and enhancement of West Wickham Common for future generations.

The local community will be encouraged to join in with efforts to conserve and celebrate the site through volunteering, joining us on ranger-led educational activities and promotion of the site through innovative media. Our aim is to enhance the ecological functioning of the site at a landscape scale, maintain its place as a key component of the wider cultural landscape and a direct link to

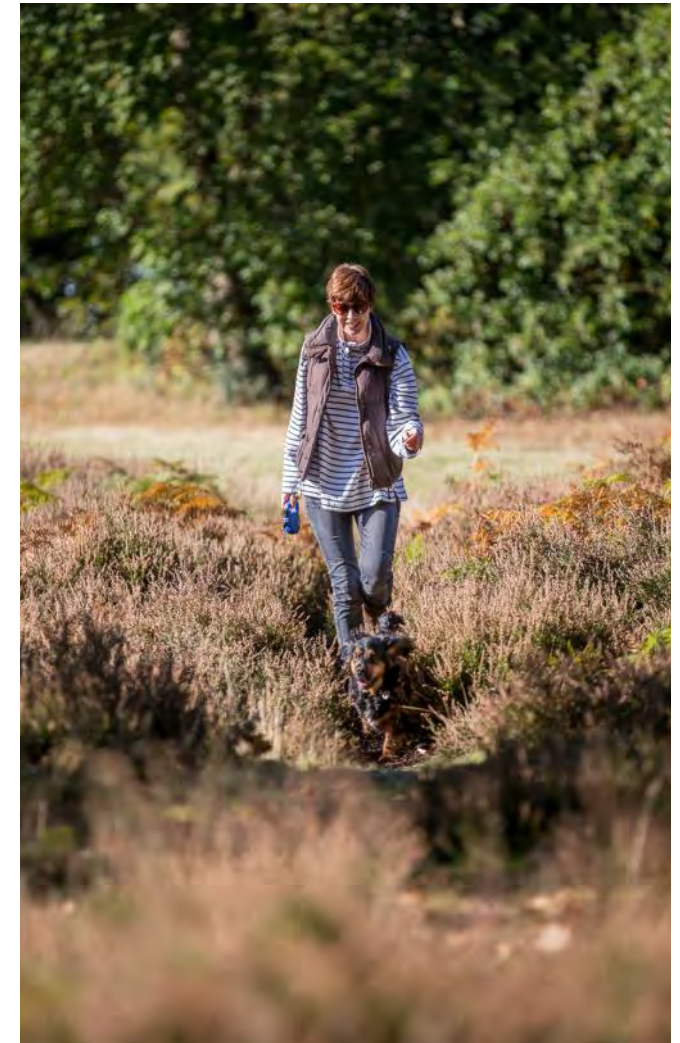
our past as well as providing a vital store of carbon in response to climate change. Our Management will balance the conservation of biodiversity and cultural heritage, and protection of the ancient oaks and the open areas of heath and grassland as refugia for wildlife.

There will be clear and inclusive access and interpretation measures enabling visitors to make the most of their visit. These measures will reflect the special nature of the site. Recreational activities that co-exist with the landscape and wildlife will be encouraged.

The vision for the next ten years will specifically focus on key projects to:

- Protect and enhance the ancient pollard oaks
- Maintain and enhance wildlife habitats with particular focus on the open heath, edge habitat along rides and landscape elements such as ponds
- Provide innovative interpretation about the site, in particular the ancient trees and archaeological features
- Improve the access to the site by upgrading key tracks and maintaining rights of way for walkers
- Diversify age structure and species within the woodland to support greater biodiversity and increase resilience to

stresses such as disease and climate change.



Above: Dog walker on the heath, West Wickham Common







# 3

## Vision

### Spring Park

Spring Park will continue to be a beautiful natural place, open to public enjoyment. The unique nature of the woods will be treasured by local people and all those who visit and there will be a commitment to its conservation and enhancement for future generations.

The local community will be encouraged to join in with efforts to conserve and celebrate the woods through widening participation and enhancement of volunteering. The aim of this will be to enhance the ecological functioning of the site at a landscape scale, maintain a key component of the wider cultural landscape, and provide vital ecosystem services in response to the challenges of a warming climate and an ecological crisis.

Our management will balance the conservation of biodiversity and cultural heritage, maintain the long-established coppice cycles and collection of rare small-leaved lime and encourage the

understanding of and respect for Spring Park's long standing meadows, woodland and freshwater habitats.

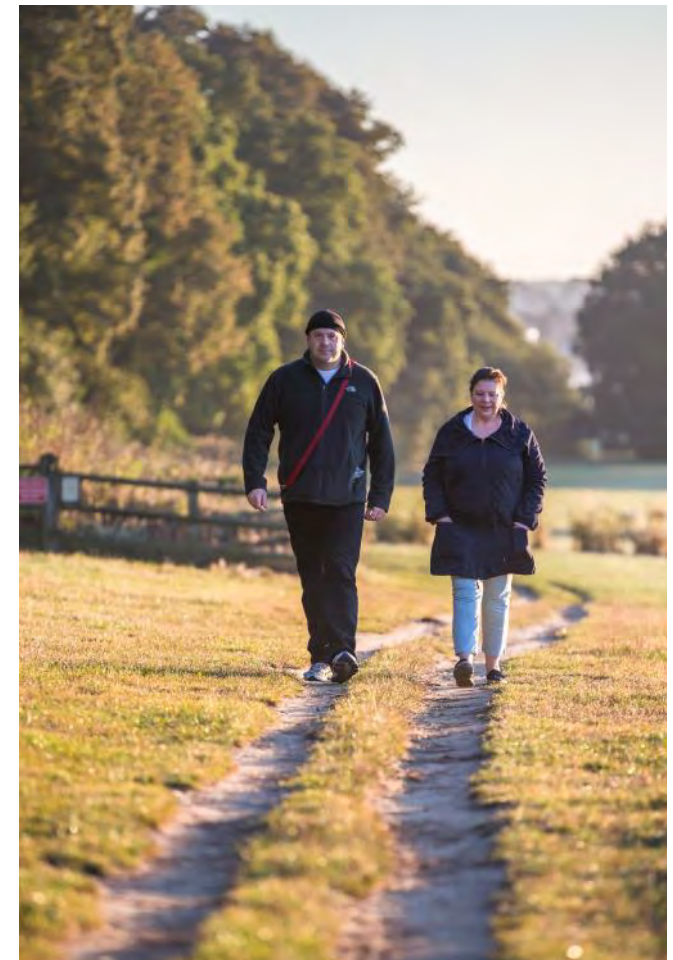
There will be clear and inclusive access and interpretation measures enabling visitors to make the most of their visit. These measures will reflect the special nature and qualities of the site in an increasingly urban setting on London's fringe. Recreational activities that co-exist with the landscape and wildlife will be encouraged.

The vision for the next ten years will specifically focus on key projects to:

- Maintain the current Sweet Chestnut coppice rotation to produce regular marketable short- and medium-term crops.
- Maintain and enhance wildlife habitats for biodiversity with particular focus on open space and edge habitat along rides.
- Diversify age structure and species within the woodland to support greater biodiversity and increase resilience to stresses such as disease and climate change.
- Improve the access to the woodland by upgrading key tracks and maintaining rights of way.

96% of respondents supported the 2021-2031 vision for managing Spring Park

– 2020 consultation



Above: Walkers at Spring Park














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## 4 Aims & methodology

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The aims of the 2021-2031 management plan seek to maintain the West Wickham Commons as biodiverse open spaces and provide a direction of travel towards achieving the vision for the site.

The targets detailed here will be monitored throughout the plan and adjusted as needed to achieve the overall aims.

Each aim is linked to the governing document of the West Wickham Commons charity, the Corporation of London (Open Spaces) Act 1878.

### Aim 1: Biological

Maintain the biodiversity of the West Wickham Commons by managing habitats to favourable condition and achieving conservation gains that benefit the site and beyond.

### Aim 2: People

Encourage the sustainable use of the West Wickham Commons for recreation and public enjoyment and promote community involvement in caring for them.

### Aim 3: Estate assets and legal issues

Protect the West Wickham Commons and its users from harm. Fulfil legal obligations, challenge threats and maintain assets in good condition for future generations to enjoy.



Just a big thank you for the wonderful work that you all do. Both sites are well managed and as a result appreciated by local residents.

– 2020 consultation response

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## Aim 1: Biological

### West Wickham Common

Maintain the biodiversity of the West Wickham Commons by managing habitats to favourable condition and achieving conservation gains that benefit the site and beyond.

The elements of West Wickham Common are interdependent: habitats and species cannot be managed in isolation. In general, the stronger the site is in terms of habitat vigour and diversity, the more resilient it will be to the impact of outside influences such as climate change, pollution and habitat loss in surrounding areas.

#### Ancient trees

Our aim is to keep the old pollards alive as long as possible to protect the associated plant, animal and fungal communities. Trees need regular inspections and pruning to reduce the weight of the branches. When cutting, care is taken to leave enough foliage to keep the tree alive whilst still removing enough wood to stop the heavy

branches tearing the tree apart or causing it to fall over.

It is also essential to ensure each tree receives enough light. As the height of the crown is reduced, more surrounding young trees may need to be removed.



The small clearings (halos) around each pollard start to join up over time, and grazing helps this become more open. Care needs to be taken that the environment **around the old trees doesn't change too quickly**: a sudden change in wind flow leaves trees susceptible to high winds or drought.

The pollards have been cut several times in recent years. However, despite detailed attention, many are increasingly fragile and need additional help. Some trees have been propped and tethered to prevent them falling over and fences are used round ones that are most vulnerable.

The health and condition of the ancient trees are monitored regularly to assess changes to their condition and to check for pests and diseases. A work programme details which year each tree needs to be worked on and what needs to be done. Each old tree has its own management plan that takes into account its specific needs: for some this means substantial work, for others it is just occasional checks. New pollards are created to provide continuity of habitat and historical context for the future and, ultimately, will replace the old pollards in time.

Left: Pollarding of the ancient oaks, West Wickham Common

Target: Conserve and enhance ancient trees

Achieved by:

- Annual condition check on old pollards
- Practical work on old pollards
- Installing, replacing and checking cables/props

### Secondary woodland and scrub

With the cessation of grazing livestock on West Wickham Common, there has been a gradual encroachment of scrub and secondary woodland in some areas. A dense wall of holly in an oak and birch woodland of uniform height has led to a decline in habitat diversity.

Generally, woodlands that are structurally diverse, that is woodlands which have a range of vegetation heights and trees of different ages, have a wider range of micro-habitats and niches for wildlife to exploit. Research has indicated that many species find the first ten meters from a woodland edge more favourable than dense woodland because of the greater availability of light.

The structural and species diversity helps to build in resilience to the ecosystem to help negate external influences such as disease or climate change. Some species also require a balance of age classes and structural variation to sustain healthy populations.

The overall aim is to achieve a varied habitat mosaic throughout the woodland. For improving habitat value for wildlife this should incorporate a diversity of tree ages and all stages of the full succession appropriate to the landscape of West Wickham Common from grassland and heathland through to scrub, to secondary woodland and ultimately ancient woodland in the future.

This will be achieved by gradually clearing portions of scrub and woodland avoiding bird nesting season (February to August). Where present, stands of oak, birch and hazel will be retained alongside standing deadwood and decaying timber for wildlife. Higher light levels will confer a range of benefits within the canopy and ground habitats, such as encouraging a greater diversity of invertebrates, epiphytic lichens and wood-decaying fungi.

Right: Habitat management work by volunteers, West Wickham Common

Target: Improve ecological value of secondary woodland

Achieved by:

- Cutting and treating dense holly understorey
- Thinning dense woodland canopies to encourage natural regeneration
- Planting native woodland shrubs and trees
- Creating woodland edge wildlife corridors
- Maintaining woodland edge wildlife corridors
- Cutting and treating invasive species: Laurel, Portuguese Laurel & Rhododendron
- Surveying & controlling Oak Processionary Moth infestations





## Heathland

Heathland has been shaped almost entirely due to human activity and once provided basic necessities to local communities for grazing livestock. Nowadays, heaths provide a valuable habitat for a diverse range of species including invertebrates, birds and reptiles. It exists as a state held back from reaching its climax community vegetation; if left undisturbed, heathland will naturally revert into secondary woodland as trees and enrich the nutrient-depleted soils over time.

One characteristic of well-managed heathland is a mosaic of different age groups of heather; the different stages of heather growth are an important feature used by species including nesting birds. The micro variation within the heathland is achieved by expanding the heathland area to create new growth.

The patchy mosaic of heather provides sunny spots for reptiles and invertebrates to bask, networks of tunnels for animals to move through unnoticed and taller tufts of heather for birds to demark their territories. In older areas or large patches of a uniform height and size, it might be necessary to break up clusters using mechanical methods. However in recent years several deliberate (acts of arson) and accidental



Left: Heather in flower,  
West Wickham Common

fires that have affected large parts of the heath have, by coincidence, created a **very varied age structure** so it's unlikely intervention will be required for a while.

Scrub will be encouraged along the edges of the open heathland and the adjoining woodland to provide habitat, primarily for birds, mammals and invertebrates; this will need routine cutting to prevent it from developing into secondary woodland.

The open expanse of heathland on West Wickham Common is an island within a patchwork of heathland stretching across



Above: Surveying for invertebrates,  
West Wickham Common

the adjacent Hayes and Keston Commons. The heaths that survive in the UK today are incredibly rare and a small fraction of what existed 100 years ago.

There is evidence to suggest that West Wickham Common used to be a much more open landscape and that an expanse of heath covered a larger portion of the site than it does today.

Over the last decade, heath on the Common has been expanded and new areas have been made by translocating heather seeds. The cultural and landscape

associations of heath on West Wickham Common add weight to the argument to conserve and support new areas offering stepping stones for heathland species that will support and protect the existing patches.

Target: Conserve and enhance the heathland

Achieved by:

- Maintaining existing heath by clearing bracken, bramble and saplings
- Extending existing heath by spreading seed and plug planting
- Establishing new heath by clearing trees, scrapping-off woodland soils and seed spreading

Below: The gradation of vegetation height from heather communities to the woodland edge provides ideal habitat for many species and blurs otherwise abrupt boundaries for wildlife living on fringes.

“

The heather has regenerated fantastically. Lowland heathland is rare and disappearing. This is a vital project.

– 2020 consultation response

Right: Different structure in heathland vegetation, West Wickham Common (Adrian Steel)





## Grassland

The gravelly, sandy soils of West Wickham Common contain areas of acid grassland – a habitat of national and local importance due to the variety of rare and declining plants and animals it supports including grasses, wildflowers, invertebrates and fungi. Acid grassland occurs on free-draining soil with acid conditions and is characterised by grassy tussocks and bare ground. In the UK, it is becoming increasingly rare.

Acid grassland can be an important part of heathland systems, adding to the overall diversity.

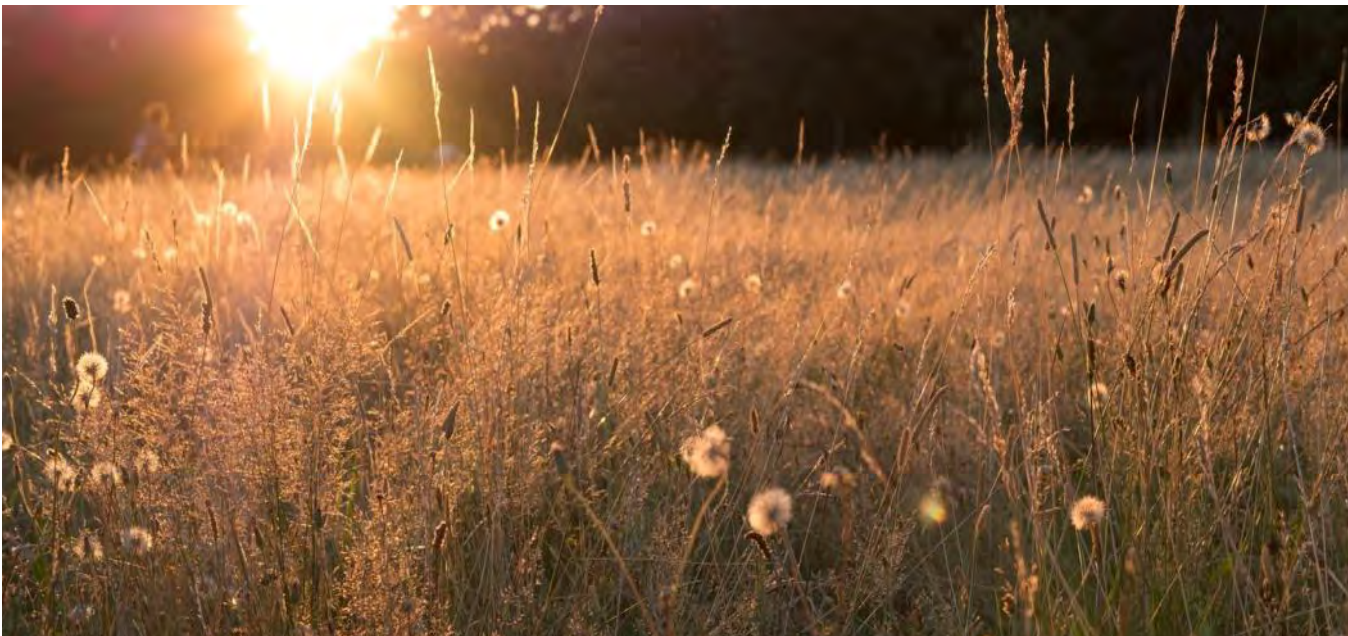
There are several small patches found on West Wickham Common on the southern edge of the Croydon Road. These strips are managed by annual cutting and removal of vegetation to preserve the balance of this nutrient-deprived system. We will expand these habitats by thinning scrub and secondary woodland incrementally around the grassland edges.

Target: Conserve and enhance grasslands

Achieved by:

- Maintaining existing grasslands by annual hay cutting and removal of arisings
- Controlling undesirable species e.g. Ragwort
- No loss of grassland through scrub encroachment

Below: Acid grassland



Below: Mating marbled white butterflies, (Bill Downey)



## Aim 1: Biological

### Spring Park

Maintain the biodiversity of the West Wickham Commons by managing habitats to favourable condition and achieving conservation gains that benefit the site and beyond.

#### Coppice woodland

Coppice woodlands are an intrinsic part of **the UK's natural and cultural heritage** - rich in landscape character, wildlife and land use history. The coppice woodland at Spring Park is managed today much in the same way as it was done in past centuries. Areas, or coups of sweet chestnut, hazel and small-leaved lime are coppiced during the winter work season (September to April).

The smaller trees within each compartment known as the understory are cut almost to ground level and send up healthy new shoots in the following spring. This technique of woodland management extends the life of these trees, rejuvenating it each time the stems are harvested.



Below: Regrowth stages of coppicing

The harvested wood is used to create piles within the coppice coups, providing great habitat for a large variety of invertebrates, mosses, lichens and fungi left to naturally decompose. Timber produced from coppicing is also used for stakes and binders in hedgelaying and fence posts. Routes for extracting the timber are carefully planned to avoid vulnerable parts of the woodland

and traditional heavy horses have been used in the past to access steep slopes. As mentioned earlier in the document, through opening up the area to light, different levels of shade and vegetation density are created. This ensures a wider **variety of habitat 'niches'**, which are filled by a diversity of plants and animals. In the areas cut in the last winter, there is a





Above: Traditional working horses used to carefully haul timber through the woodland, Spring Park (Luke Ellis)

burst of wildflowers including violets, bluebells and anemones. The various ages of regrowth provide ideal habitats for nesting birds and mammals in the dense regrowth of the coppiced 'stools'.

The compartments are cut on a rotation depending on the tree species in the coup. By cutting small areas on rotation, a mosaic of habitats, all at different ages and heights, are created within the expanse of woodland.



Above: Vigorous growth of coppiced hazel

95% of people agreed with the proposed options to manage the coppice woodland

Target: Conserve and enhance coppice woodland

Achieved by:

- Creating habitat piles from brushwood/ timber
- Maintaining established coppice rotations
- Establishing new coppice rotations

### Coppice rotations per species

Coppice - Sweet chestnut: takes place on a 16 year rotation. All stems are cut to a stub of >100mm, using chainsaws. All mature oak trees and some standards of other native species are left uncut to form the canopy layer

Coppice - Hazel: takes place on a 10 year rotation. All stools are cut to neat stubs using bowsaws.

Hazel is planted and layered to 'beat up' the coups and increase density. Standards are removed where necessary to allow light to the new coppice growth.

Coppice – Small-leaved lime: takes place on a 20 year rotation where it exists as a single species mono-culture. Small-leaved limes found within coups dominated by chestnut or hazel are coppiced on the 16 or 10 year cycles prescribed for these species. Occasional lime standards are left uncut to form a component of the canopy layer.

## Woodland

A large portion of woodland in the north-east section of Spring Park bordering Cheyne Woods and Sparrow's Den has been previously managed and maintained with minimal input or intervention over the last few decades.

Arguably, the woodland in this section possesses less biological value than that of the surrounding coppiced areas – the trees heavily compete for light and water and grow uniformly. The dense canopy formed by similar tree ages shades out less common flowers and plants that would otherwise be found on the woodland floor. Carrying out

works to vary the age structure by gradually thinning some of the trees would create sun-filled open glades enabling more plants to grow and improving this habitat's value for wildlife. Native trees might also be planted to supplement natural regeneration that has otherwise not occurred due to the availability of light.

Several large trees brought down by the heavy winds of the 1987 storm are still present in the understory today. Increasing the temperature, humidity and density of light to the woodland floor could alter the woodland for the decaying processes led by beetles, and fungi to accelerate.

Target: Improve ecological value of secondary woodland

Achieved by:

- Cutting and treating dense holly understorey
- Thinning dense woodland canopies to encourage natural regeneration
- Planting native woodland shrubs and trees
- Creating woodland edge wildlife corridors
- Maintaining woodland edge wildlife corridors
- Cutting and treating invasive species: Laurel, Portuguese Laurel & Rhododendron
- Surveying & controlling Oak Processionary Moth infestations
- Retaining piles of deadwood and safe fallen trees for invertebrates and fungi



Left: Broadleaved woodland, Spring Park



## Grassland

The grassland at Spring Park is managed to encourage wildflowers and provide an important habitat for birds and invertebrates. Work is carried out to prevent the rapid encroachment of shrubs in the meadow. This is done by carrying out an annual conservation hay cut. The hay is baled and supplies food throughout the winter for a herd of conservation grazing cattle on the nearby Coulsdon Commons.

In recent years, greater yellow rattle, a nationally-rare wildflower, has appeared in the grassland habitat at Spring Park. A specialist to chalk and neutral grasslands, the success of the greater yellow rattle highlights the potential to improve the grassland sward to contain a greater diversity of species that reflects the downland landscape Spring Park sits within. Similar habitats occur nearby at **Hutchinson's Bank and Chapel Bank Nature Reserves** with diverse neutral and chalk grasslands.

The short turf, low nutrients and patches of bare ground in the meadow means that there are opportunities for less-common wildflowers to grow. Similarly, these patches of exposed, fine sandy soil have been utilised by burrowing solitary wasps and bees including the beewolf (*Philanthus Triangulum*) - a large bee-predating wasp.

Wildflowers like Kidney vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*) are one of the desirable grassland species that would enhance the quality of the grassland at Spring Park for invertebrates; kidney vetch is the food plant for the small blue butterfly (*Cupido minimus*), but is also generally utilised by similar uncommon butterfly species including the chalkhill blue (*Polyommatus coridon*) and adonis blue butterfly (*Polyommatus bellargus*).

Below: Beewolf,  
Spring Park

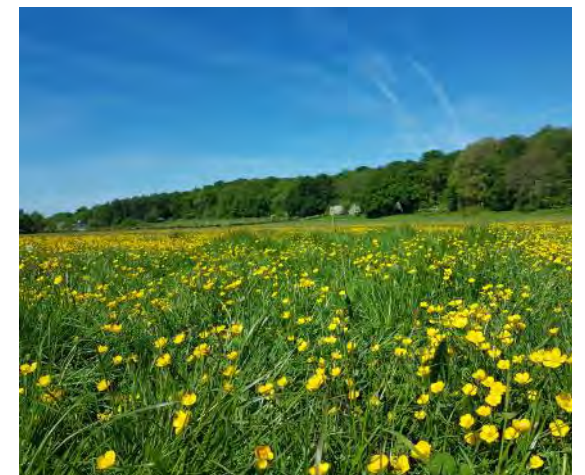


Target: Conserve and enhance grasslands

Achieved by:

- Maintaining existing grasslands by annual hay cutting and removal of arisings
- Extending grasslands by clearing trees and holly understory
- Controlling undesirable species e.g. Ragwort

Below: Buttercups in flower,  
Spring Park



### Freshwater pond

The freshwater pond is a rich habitat for a diverse range of aquatic invertebrates, wetland plants and amphibians. This vital source of water is also a key resource used by mammals, birds and other invertebrates in the wider landscape - a habitat in decline in the UK, especially within Greater London.

Smooth newts are one of the species which benefit most from managing the pond, particularly the vegetation around the pond margins. Newts are particularly sensitive to changes within ponds and, to successfully breed, require a diverse range of plant species in which they can wrap their eggs such as water mint (*Mentha aquatica*) and water forget-me-not (*Myosotis scorpioides*). In previous years, rotting vegetation, logs and piles of silt have been left on the bank of the pond to create an artificial 'hibernacula' - a place in which amphibians, such as frogs and newts, can use throughout the winter to protect themselves from the cold.

Based on recommendations for managing the freshwater pond at Spring Park, past practical activities have included regular small-scale tree clearance to maintain the edges in dappled shade, remove undesirable vegetation and more substantial silt removal.

The pond has suffered from vigorous growth of undesirable species in the pond margin including reed mace (*Typha latifolia*) and water horsetail (*Equisetum fluviatile*) which are regularly controlled.

The appearance of New Zealand pigmyweed (*Crassula recurva*), listed on Schedule 9 of the UK Wildlife and Countryside Act as an invasive, non-native species, has developed in the pond, posing a threat to native species due to depleted oxygen levels and its mat forming abilities.

Below: Common frogs,  
Spring Park  
(Mark Shoesmith)



Target: Conserve and enhance coppice freshwater habitat

Achieved by:

- Removal of silt and accumulated leaf litter
- Maintaining pond habitat
- Establishing new hibernacula for amphibians
- Controlling invasive and undesirable species e.g. New Zealand Pigmyweed



Above: Removing undesirable pond species,  
Spring Park



### Successional habitats

A mosaic of habitats at both site and landscape scale is essential for specific BAP species (in particular, assemblages of invertebrates and breeding birds). If managed well, scrub is an extremely valuable habitat to support blocks of woodland and grassland.

One species which benefits from regularly cut scrub is the brown hairstreak butterfly. A blackthorn thicket between the Spring Park Office and meadow is a key habitat managed for the brown hairstreak. A four year rotation of cutting is designed to give the correct mix of habitat elements required to support egg laying of the brown hairstreak.



Above: Newly created hedgerow, Spring Park



Right: Blackbird, Spring Park (Mike Shoesmith)

### Hedgerows

The hedgerows at Spring Park are maintained to provide habitat for a diversity of wildlife and a cultural feature that demarks old field boundaries. Much like successional habitats, hedges are an **important 'ecotone'** - an edge between habitat types through which many animals

can move, forage and take shelter within. Well managed hedges are dense, offering few gaps for predators to seek out nesting or vulnerable animals. The traditional approach of laying hedges, a countryside craft practiced for hundreds of years, offers the most sympathetic management for wildlife.

Timing work on hedges is vital to viable habitats; work is carried out on a rotational basis to ensure that these systems are not disturbed at critical times of the year for wildlife.

96% of respondents agreed with management options for biodiversity

– 2020 consultation

Target: Conserve and enhance successional habitats

Achieved by:

- Maintaining established scrub coppice rotation based on target species management (e.g. brown hairstreak)
- Maintaining woodland habitats through rotational cutting

Target: Conserve and enhance hedgerows

Achieved by:

- Maintaining hedges by rotational cutting
- Enhancing hedgerow habitat by rotational hedge laying

## Monitoring and survey work

Knowing what rare and threatened species live on the West Wickham Commons is essential for us to plan management works to ensure that they benefit from our work and are not adversely impacted. This can be challenging: many of these species are small and/or hard to find or identify.

As habitat restoration progresses and areas change, the associated fauna and flora will also change. Throughout all our work it is important to record actions that are carried out and to evaluate the success of techniques used. In addition, long term monitoring is especially valuable because it provides data showing how species and habitats are being affected by climate change that can be used to inform mitigation and response measures.

The data we collect contributes to many national monitoring programmes: the data gathered informs not only the work carried out on the nature reserve but also across the country. Research projects add to the information available about the West Wickham Commons and can influence activities beyond the two sites too. Examples of current recording projects include regular butterfly transects, butterfly egg counts for black hairstreak and recording moths through light trapping.

Right: Surveying for tree dwelling invertebrates, West Wickham Common



Below: Surveying for brown hairstreak eggs



Above: Moth trapping at night

Target: Monitor and survey habitats/ species

Achieved by:

- Monitoring of target species and reporting to local and national monitoring schemes e.g. butterflies and moths
- Annual monitoring and reporting for Countryside Stewardship Scheme
- Assessing condition of habitats in line with the newly-established Countryside Stewardship requirements



## Aim 2: People

Encourage the sustainable use of the West Wickham Commons for recreation and public enjoyment and promote community involvement in caring for them.

### Access and recreation

The West Wickham Commons are well used by people and exist as green oases within a wider network of commons and open spaces in and around the fringes of Greater London. It is important that visitors enjoy the time they spend on these two commons, but it is equally important that their impact is as light as possible to conserve and support the features, habitats and wildlife that make these sites special. The activities of some visitors can detract from the enjoyment of others if not carefully managed.

The West Wickham Commons play a vital role not only in relation to biodiversity but also social capital by restoring, supporting and boosting our physical and mental health and wellbeing. The vision for the West Wickham Commons is for quiet, informal and responsible recreation that coexists with the landscape and wildlife present.

True to the original words in the Corporation of London (Open Spaces) Act in 1878, the West Wickham Commons are protected in perpetuity for people to access for recreation. Byelaws made under the Act help regulate activities.

The site Ranger, supported by local volunteers, plays a huge role in making the West Wickham Commons a welcoming and accessible place for visitors. Both sites are recipients of the Green Flag Award, having been judged according to an international standard of good practice within the green space sector. To this end, the targets of the objective in this section of the plan uses the criteria of the Green Flag Award scheme to assess service delivery in relation to people.



Above: Woodland paths,  
Spring Park

Left: Family walking,  
West Wickham Common

Target: Prevent and discourage inappropriate use and behaviour

Achieved by:

- Attending Police Community Advisory Panel meetings and liaising with local police teams
- Encouraging visitors to take all litter home through signage and ranger presence
- Encouraging responsible dog walking through highlighting legal responsibilities and enforcing negative behaviour
- Removing fly tipping
- Maintaining an out-of-hours rota of rangers to respond to incidents 365 days a year

“

West Wickham Common is well managed without looking over managed!

– 2020 consultation response

Right: Dog walker,  
West Wickham Common



Target: Provide welcoming and accessible Open Spaces

Achieved by:

- Maintaining information and byelaw boards at key entrances
- Participation in Green Flag Award by facilitating independent audit of site facilities
- Maintaining accessible surfaced paths
- Maintaining unsurfaced paths by regular mowing throughout April-October and path-side vegetation clearance
- Providing and maintaining pathway infrastructure including fingerposts, gates and waymarkers
- Providing and maintaining byelaw boards at key entrances, noticeboards and benches
- Providing and maintaining provision for car parking including disabled access
- Regular patrolling by Rangers to provide a visual presence and interaction with visitors





Left: Local connections to the sustainable travel network

### Sustainable transport

Services are provided for accessing the West Wickham Commons by a variety of transport options. With the challenges of a growing urban population and climate change, reaching the two open spaces by foot, bike or public transport should be prioritised to improve air quality, reduce dependence on fossil fuels and enhance the quality of visitor experience.

At Spring Park, an over provision of free parking spaces has encouraged users to travel by car rather than opting for more sustainable transport options such as walking, arriving by bus or cycling.

Spring Park's proximity to national cycling routes and local public transport hubs should be utilised to promote and encourage greater use of low-carbon travel.

Target: Improve provision for visitors arriving by sustainable transport

Achieved by:

- Working in partnership with Bromley Council & Transport for London work up design options, cycle parking and the linear cycle path alongside Addington Road
- Identifying sources of funding for improvements from local or national sustainable transport initiatives Implement and publicise new transport options to encourage sustainable use

77% of respondents agreed in improving travel to Spring Park by bike

– 2020 consultation

“

Keeping the path separate from the road is useful as the road is very busy and being straight, cars travel fast on it. It makes a route for people with young families/prams to walk as well.

– 2020 consultation response

## Interpretation and education

The popularity and location of the West Wickham Commons presents an ideal opportunity for informal interpretation and formal education about the wildlife, history and management of these two sites. Information and stories about the West Wickham Commons have often been produced and interpreted with the support, knowledge and expertise from local interest groups, charities and organisations with aligning visions. Partners from previous years have included fruitful collaborations with the Ancient Tree Forum, London Geodiversity Partnership and London Wildlife Trust.

In recent years, there has been a growing concern that with the fast-pace of modern life, society has become more and more distanced from nature. The visions for the West Wickham Commons supports the use of these sites for recreation that is sensitive to and co-exists with the landscape and nature - slower activities that help beat stress, anxiety and connect with nature. Alongside this, interpretation and education plays a supporting role, offering a greater understanding and awareness of wildlife, landscape and heritage features that might otherwise get overlooked or passed by. Interpretation and engagements are aimed

Below: New interpretation exploring the history of the Earthworks, West Wickham Common



at a broad audience so all visitors can enjoy the sites and have a better understanding of their most important features and the role that the City of London and volunteers have in their management.

Target: Inform and promote appreciation of the West Wickham Commons

Achieved by:

- Providing up-to-date and relevant information for visitors at key areas and on noticeboards
- Providing attractive interpretation panels to highlight special habitats, species and heritage features
- Working with partners to develop and promote interpretation in new ways
- Using temporary signs before and after habitat work that explain why it is needed and beneficial to the site's management

Left: Volunteers surveying wildlife, Spring Park



### Activities and events

The Rangers organise events on the West Wickham Commons ranging from guided walks to ecological workshops, art events and 'bioblitz' citizen science-led sessions to produce a snapshot of all wildlife on the site at a point in time. There are many interesting and enjoyable ways to deliver key messages and opportunities to link with the popularity of green spaces for health and wellbeing.

Events should aim to interpret the West Wickham Commons as a place of natural and historical significance. Formal talks and presentations off-site to groups such as societies, schools and clubs can be a good way to deliver accurate information to a large group and provide an insight into all aspects of the work that the City of London rangers and volunteers do.

Target: Provide a diverse range of events and activities across the West Wickham Commons

Achieved by:

- Organising a Ranger-led programme of events throughout the year
- Supporting occasional events each year arranged by local groups with conservation interests or aims to provide healthy outdoor recreational opportunities and/or community benefit
- Providing outreach talks to local clubs and societies
- Promoting events through a variety of media and using electronic booking to support voluntary donations



Left: Identifying galls, Spring Park



Left: Discovering mushrooms on a fungal foray, Spring Park

## Key messages and communication

The West Wickham Commons represent two sites of significance for wildlife that also benefit people and are important to the physical environment for society at large. These elements and benefits might not necessarily be seen, understood or mutually perceived by everyone; It is important that the value and significance of these sites are clearly communicated via key messages aimed at:

- Promoting the benefits people enjoy from visiting the West Wickham Commons (as distinct from promoting the West Wickham Commons to attract more visitors).
- Highlighting their historical significance and ecological importance
- Describing the physical evidence of our work (the benefits of management for wildlife and people, including ecosystem services that benefit latent needs)
- Provide the appropriate information for people to safely enjoy their visit and respect the nature reserve to conserve it

The way in which we receive information and experience activities, even outdoors, is constantly evolving and being shaped by emerging technologies that are part of our everyday lives. These technologies can be a fantastic opportunity to engage with



Left: Visitors taking part in a survey, West Wickham Common

different visitor demographics, provide information and be a creative tool to exploring the West Wickham Commons. Visitor information is available via the City of London website, but increasingly this is becoming a streamlined prospectus rather than an archive of information. Consequently, it will be necessary to develop new and innovative ways to convey detailed site and subject specific information.

For example, digital walking trails, including sections across both of the West Wickham

Commons, are helping smartphone users to accurately navigate routes, see images of what to look out for and have detailed information of interesting sights at the touch of a button.

The West Wickham Commons have a dedicated Facebook page and maintain a presence on Twitter. With the growing number of users across all social media platforms, sharing information via these channels will likely become increasingly important.



Target: Communicate key messages across multiple digital platforms and media

Achieved by:

- Maintaining communications via social media
- Producing a monthly electronic newsletter for subscribers
- Producing site and subject specific material for electronic and physical distribution
- Researching new technologies and changes to nature and heritage interpretation and communication

### Community involvement

The West Wickham Commons have benefitted from significant levels of community involvement. During the lifetime of the proceeding management plan, a large portion of the practical work tasks could not have been completed without the many hours of volunteer participation each year.

This comprised contributions from the West Wickham and Spring Park Volunteers, affectionately known as the WWaSPs in addition to occasional corporate volunteer groups. It also included contributions from

people engaged in surveying and monitoring and other tasks that contributed to achievements above and beyond core management tasks.

The elected Members of the City Corporation who make decisions about the West Wickham Commons are guided by a Consultative Group who meet primarily to advise on the development and implementation of this plan and provide

Below: WWaSP volunteers,  
West Wickham Common



City Members with a local perspective on issues. The West Wickham Commons Consultative Group comprises local representatives including conservation specialists and representatives of user groups and community interests.

99% of respondents agreed with our actions to support existing and new volunteers in a range of practical tasks

– 2020 consultation

Target: Encourage community involvement in supporting the work of the West Wickham Commons

Achieved by:

- Promoting and providing volunteering opportunities through monthly work tasks and individual projects
- Supporting volunteer groups and individuals through provision of training, tools and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- Publishing issues relevant to the West Wickham Commons at local events and stakeholder meetings
- Facilitating work experience students, Duke of Edinburgh participants, research projects and corporate volunteering
- Planning and delivering projects that include opportunities for community involvement and are beneficial beyond the borders of the West Wickham Commons (e.g. see sustainable transport)



Left: Collecting hay,  
West Wickham Common

“

As a WWaSP volunteer, I think it's really important to encourage more volunteering. In that way people feel a connection to the area and help to ensure its place in the community.

– 2020 consultation response



Left: WWaSP volunteers,  
West Wickham Common





Above: Spring Park

### Coronavirus Impact

Since the start of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, the West Wickham Commons have become more popular with people and visited more frequently.

During our 2020 consultation on this plan, many comments reflected just how important the sites are to the local community; the pandemic has raised so many issues about their role in society and how these spaces are being used.

One of the most significant outcomes from the ongoing pandemic has been their importance not just for physical exercise but **their restorative effect on people's mental health and wellbeing.**

There will be many challenges to these sites **when restrictions on people's movement** ease. We will take the opportunity to build on some of lessons learnt from the pandemic so the West Wickham Commons can continue to support the communities that use them.

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Since COVID, it's been a lifeline having Spring Park so close by and being able to enjoy this space more often than normal. Thanks and credit to the team who look after it.

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### Aim 3: Estate Assets & Legal Issues

Protect the West Wickham Commons and its users from harm. Fulfil legal obligations, challenge threats and maintain assets in good condition for future generations to enjoy.

#### Historic features

The remains of the likely Iron Age fort on West Wickham Common is the principal heritage feature that requires conserving alongside the various smaller settlements of an unknown age and several ancient wood bank systems on Spring Park.

Currently the management of the fort and other features involves managing the vegetation growing over them to limit root damage. Keeping an open aspect to these monuments is beneficial for the management and also helps visitors to appreciate them.

Target: Conserve and protect heritage features

Achieved by:

- Maintaining heritage features by controlling scrub growth
- Liaising with Historic England and key stakeholders
- Maintaining and producing interpretative signage features
- Patrolling and enforcing byelaws to protect heritage features

#### Built assets

Many of the built structures on the West Wickham Commons are maintained by the City Surveyors Department and are listed in a 20-year plan for periodic maintenance. Assets managed this way include the Spring Park Office, entrance barriers and byelaw boards.

#### The Spring Park Office

The Spring Park Office was constructed to provide a base for the site Ranger, but also as a facility to support volunteering and community involvement so integral to the



Right: Archaeological examination of the earthworks  
West Wickham Common





Above: The Spring Park Office,

life of the West Wickham Commons. It has office accommodation, a workshop and toilet facilities which enables the Rangers to host events from here with direct access onto Spring Park.

The Rangers are supported by a wider team of City of London staff at the Merlewood Estate Office in Caterham which is the main base from which the Coulsdon Commons are managed from.

Target: Maintain built assets

Achieved by:

- Managing a system for reporting and rectifying defects
- Facilitating contractor inspections and working with the City Surveyors Department according to the agreed service responsibilities

Residential boundaries

Residential boundaries are managed according to set criteria to ensure safety and consistency. Managing for light and views are not generally considered appropriate reasons to undertake work.

Generally, homeowners are not permitted access across the Common to maintain their properties, although exceptions are sometimes granted if the work benefits the Common or its visitors – for example tree safety work.

Target: Manage residential boundaries

Achieved by:

- Granting annual license agreements to allow neighbours direct access onto the West Wickham Commons
- Only permitting under license access across the Common to properties for maintenance if the proposed work benefits the Commons or their visitors (tree safety for example)

### Utilities

Any maintenance or replacement of underlying pipework for water, gas and other utilities requires careful management to minimise damage to the West Wickham Commons. It is also essential that habitat and other work does not damage underground services.

Target: Protect utilities and infrastructure while safeguarding the West Wickham Commons

Achieved by:

- Ensuring records for utilities are up to date and accessible
- Liaising with utility companies and the City Surveyors Department to ensure due care and diligence to statutory responsibilities
- Granting access for the installation and maintenance of infrastructure assets under license only if the sites are adequately protected

### Emergency planning

It is essential that plans are in place to deal with emergencies and, that where possible and appropriate, access is granted to

emergency services to respond to incidents on the West Wickham Commons.

Target: Plan for emergencies

Achieved by:

- Maintaining emergency plans and keeping them available for instant use
- Regular liaison with emergency services
- 24hours over 7 days rota for Ranger response to incidents

### External accreditation

Achieving external quality standards validates management practices and gives assurance to our community that the sites are being well run.

Target: Retain Green Flag Awards for both sites and Green Heritage award for West Wickham Common

Achieved by:

- Applying for accreditation and meeting the standards for performance

### Illegal access

Target: Prevent illegal encroachment and ensure banks and posts prevent damage to the reserve by vehicles

Achieved by:

- Regular inspections and repairs to secure boundaries
- Providing clear contact details and responding effectively to incidents
- Maintaining posts and banks in good condition
- Keeping estate boundaries clearly determined with wayleaves and licences up to date



A wonderful resource which I hope will be valued and enjoyed for many years to come

– 2020 consultation response



## Tree Safety

The tree safety strategy for the West Wickham Commons takes full account of the conservation importance of the site.

The inspection process should not lead to a loss of character or species diversity, rather it should assist the management process ensuring that, as far as reasonably practicable, balance is maintained between conservation and risk management.

Accordingly, the following principles are applied:

- Standing dead timber is an important resource and is left wherever possible. Dead trees are 'reduced' if safety work is necessary.
- Limbs or timber felled are left in situ wherever possible.
- The presence of fungal bodies on trees is not to be taken as an automatic indication that the tree is dangerous but may act as an indicator that further, detailed, inspection is required.
- When considering remedial action to reduce risk, due consideration is given to removing the target from the hazard wherever possible.

Right: Stacked wood for habitat,  
Spring Park



Target: Manage tree safety

Achieved by:

- Using a risk-based approach and a zoning system
- Undertaking an annual review of the tree inspection (zoning) map
- Carrying out a documented tree hazard inspection regime
- Using experienced inspectors trained to Professional Tree Inspector level
- Prioritising work identified in inspections
- Inspecting after storm events
- Recording tree failures, surveying and monitoring tree condition

Being mindful of the impact of our activities  
The management of the West Wickham Commons aims to maintain and improve the conservation and historic value of both sites, and ensure visitor enjoyment.

However, these actions also have the potential to cause negative impacts. All contractors working in the West Wickham Commons follow a bio-security protocol to reduce the chance of invasive species and diseases being introduced.

Target: Reduce the environmental footprint of other activities

Achieved by:

- Following the bio-security policy
- Regular review of activities and practices while exploring options for reducing environmental impact
- Encouraging visitors to consider their impact when visiting, take litter home and avoid single-use plastic items
- Pursuing sustainable use of timber products from conservation work

## 5

### 2021 –2031 Work Programme

The following section details the works that will be carried out to achieve the aims and objectives of this management plan.

The table on the following pages summarises when the major projects will be undertaken on the West Wickham Commons in the next 10 years. These tables also detail where work will be carried out in each year of the management plan according to the site compartments which are shown on the map. An annual plan and details of each project further guide the work.

Other documents steer our work too. For example, the Open Spaces Department Business Plan is a City of London document listing the key projects for the Department and each open space.

This aims to enrich people's lives by enhancing and promoting access to ecologically diverse open spaces and outstanding Heritage assets across London and beyond.

The West Wickham Commons have grant funding from Natural England in the form of a Countryside Stewardship Scheme Agreement. This gives an area payment for some habitat types and also money for some specific projects.



Spring Park and West Wickham Common compartment boundaries and numbers  
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Location:

SP - Spring Park      WW - West Wickham Common

Key to projects:

1 - essential      2 - highly desirable      3- desirable

[illegible]

[illegible]



[illegible]

[illegible]



## 6

### Background Information

#### Glossary

**Ancient woodland:** woodland that has existed since at least 1600.

**Coppice:** a tree or block of trees cut once or more, close to ground level to obtain wood from the branches.

**Heathland:** an area of vegetation characterised by heathers, on impoverished soils that is the result of thousands of years of exploitation by humans.

**In favourable condition:** a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) that meets with Natural England conservation objectives.

**Pollard:** a tree that has been cut once or more, at a height of above 1.5m to obtain a crop of branches out of the reach of grazing animals.

**Red data book:** list (originally a red book) of rare and threatened species of plant and animal.

**Secondary woodland:** woodland that has grown up on previously open land such as heathland or farmland.

**Wood pasture:** Land containing trees that is or was grazed with domestic animals or deer is referred to as wood pasture.

#### Credits

The 2021-31 West Wickham Commons Management Plan has been ratified by Natural England [tbc]. The plan was drawn up by Tom Oliver, Allan Cameron and Barry Gutteridge; illustrations by Dan Powell; photographs kindly contributed by Mark Shoesmith and Moira O'Donnell. Thank you to those who commented on the plan, including City of London staff and volunteers.

Below: Emperor dragonfly,  
Spring Park  
(Mark Shoesmith)





Above: Fungi, Spring Park (Mark Shoesmith)

The City of London Corporation is the governing body for the Square Mile dedicated to a vibrant and thriving City, supporting a diverse and sustainable London within a globally successful UK.

The City owns and manages almost 4,500 ha of green spaces, parks and gardens in and around London as part of its commitment to sustaining a world class city. Each Open Space is a unique resource managed for the use and enjoyment of the public and for the conservation of wildlife and historic landscape.

The City's Open Spaces are protected under their own Acts of Parliament (Corporation of London (Open Spaces) Act, 1878 and City of London Corporation (Open Spaces) Act 2018). These enable the City to acquire land which, under the terms of the 1878 Act, must remain unenclosed and unbuilt upon as open spaces for the recreation and enjoyment of the public whilst preserving the natural aspect and protecting the trees and ground vegetation.

The 2018 Act clarifies that the City of London can undertake management and husbandry

activities such as cutting trees, managing the other vegetation and grazing.

The City of London is required by law to comply with certain duties relating to conservation as set out in section 28G of the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981, as amended) and the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006). These require the City of London to take reasonable steps to further the conservation and enhancement of its Open Spaces





# West Wickham Commons

Registered Charity

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Spring Park

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