

# Shenfield Common Management Plan 2020 – 2030

Prepared for the Conservators of Shenfield Common  
Final January 2020



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## Introduction

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Shenfield Common is a green space in the very heart of Brentwood town, with a history which can be traced back over centuries.

The common has undergone many changes in its history. The most dramatic, and the one which led to the greatest changes in management and habitat, was the depositing of spoil from the construction of the railway onto the common. From this point, the common was changed forever.

Management of the common has always presented difficulties and the resources available to the Conservators have always been limited. The common is also surrounded by urban Brentwood, which leads to a range of issues, including litter and vandalism. These issues are not new; indeed, the common was very nearly lost in the 1930's after valiant efforts to improve it were repeatedly thwarted.

Several documents setting out ideas for management of the common have been written in recent years.<sup>1</sup> However, none of these plans really grasp the fundamental issues which have prevented effective management of the common. The implementation of these plans has consequently been piecemeal, at best.

It is now time for a fresh examination of Shenfield Common. An approach is required which befits its position as a greenspace at the heart of Brentwood town and which enables the common to fulfil its potential as a public open space in the heart of the town. It must be an approach which acknowledges the common's long heritage, but which is grounded in the reality of today. Above all it must be realistic and achievable; and it must be sustainable. There is little benefit in advocating management actions which cannot be implemented, or 'grand projects' which will deteriorate in a matter of years.

Additional funding will be required to implement the plan. Indeed, there has been insufficient funding to implement even basic management in recent years. Support has been provided by Brentwood Borough Council for many years, but the level of support is variable and has reduced, given budget constraints in the council. Despite its prominent location and attractive setting for nearby houses, there is little community interest in the site. Additional funding, support and interest in the site will be needed to take this plan forward.

The focus of the previous recent management plans has been primarily on the nature conservation management of the site. There has been less focus on people and the public amenity value of the common. This plan aims to take a balanced approach, recognising the amenity, heritage and nature conservation value of the site. The strengths and weaknesses in each of these areas are assessed, before management proposals are made. Sometimes the 'perfect' actions may be compromised due to the need to prioritise needs, for example amenity over nature conservation. Some desirable actions may not be feasible in the short term due to resource limitations; and most may only be taken forward with further funding.

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<sup>1</sup> Shenfield Common Management Plan 2012 – 2017 (written by Thames Chase)  
Shenfield Common Tree Survey Report, February 2013 (written by Thames Chase)  
Shenfield Common Management Plan (Draft) 2006 (written by Dave Bigden)  
Shenfield Common Management Plan 2001 – 2027 (written by Claire Mennim, Countryside Manager for Brentwood Borough Council)

## Vision for Shenfield Common

The implementation of this management plan will deliver the following vision:

Shenfield Common will have been restored to its rightful place as an attractive area of greenspace in the heart of Brentwood. Its heritage will be understood and valued by visitors, residents and by Brentwood Borough Council. Management structures will be secure and there will be resources in place to manage the site for people and for wildlife, to reduce risks to managing organisations and to carry out essential works every year. The paths will be improved and anti-social behaviour will have decreased, with the result that more people visit and enjoy the common. Wider rides through the common have made the common safer and have greatly increased the wildlife of the common. The woodland will be more diverse, with birds, butterflies and other wildlife returning.

### Objectives

- 1 To improve the amenity and recreation value of the common;
- 2 To improve the nature conservation value of the common;
- 3 To preserve the landscape importance of Shenfield Common as a valuable urban greenspace;
- 4 To preserve the heritage of the common and increase understanding of its value.

## Strengths and Weaknesses of the Reserve

### Strengths

- Green oasis in urban area;
- Strong landscape feature in urban area, shielding houses and roads;
- Strong element of green infrastructure and a green corridor, linking to Hartswood and woodland beyond;
- Range of habitats with value for wildlife and nature conservation;
- Attractive amenity area;
- Opportunities for access;
- High heritage value.

### Weaknesses and Threats

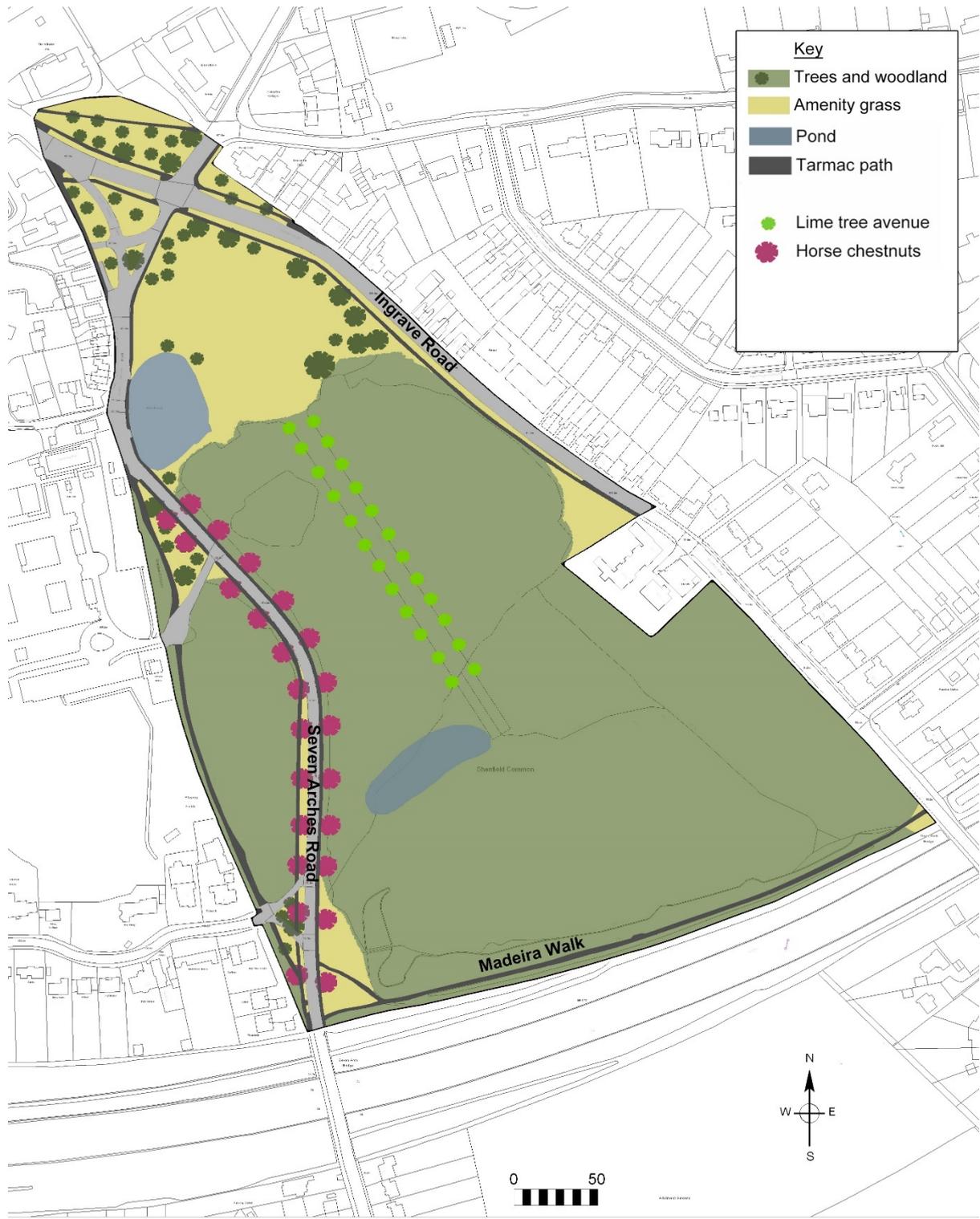
- Lack of management in recent years has diminished the quality of access provision, amenity value and the quality and diversity of habitats;
- Difficult terrain for access in some areas;
- Anti-social behaviour;
- Lack of interest from the community and no community group;
- Insufficient resources to carry out basic access and safety management, with no security of funding.

## Summary of Site Information

Shenfield Common is close to the centre of Brentwood town, OS grid reference TQ 601 933. An overview of the site is shown in Plan 1.

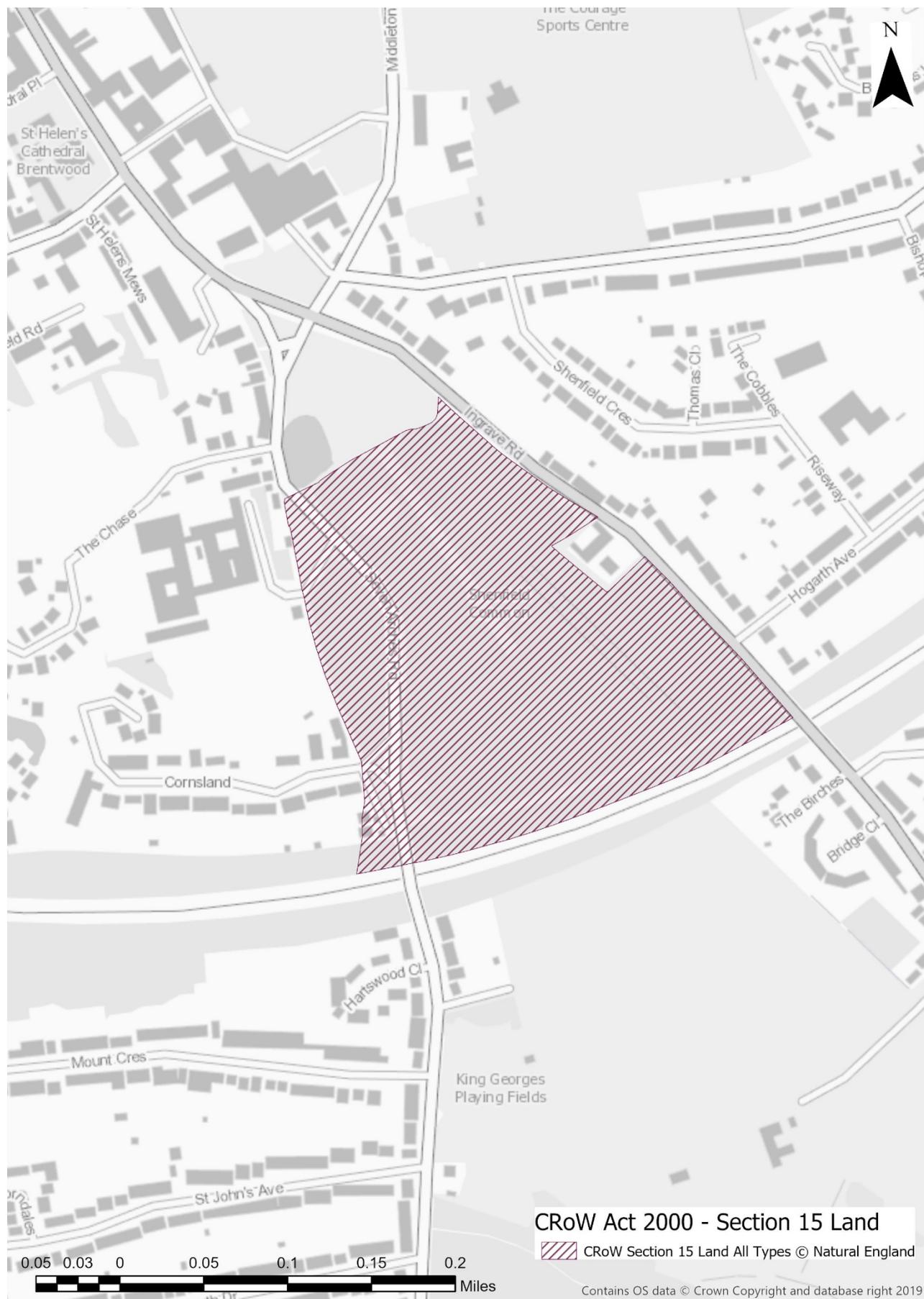
Description, ownership and management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This management plan covers Shenfield Common;</li> <li>• The common is managed by the Conservators of Shenfield Common;</li> <li>• Not a registered common;</li> <li>• The site is a mixture of woodland and amenity grassland.</li> </ul>
Size and Extent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shenfield Common is approximately 12 hectares;</li> <li>• The woodland covers approximately 8.5 hectares;</li> <li>• The remainder is amenity grassland, paths and ponds.</li> </ul>
Rights of Way and Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The public have a right to recreation under establishing Act of Parliament 1881, c.clix;</li> <li>• There is a public right of way (footpath) crossing the common by the Toby Carvery (PROW 272_71);</li> <li>• Madeira Walk along the southern extent of the common is a public right of way (footpath PROW 272_28);</li> <li>• Access on foot is permitted throughout the common;</li> <li>• There are several tarmac-surfaced paths crossing the common;</li> <li>• Part of the common is Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 Section 15 land which requires that public access on foot is permitted (pre-existing rights) (see Plan 2).</li> </ul>
Access Points – Pedestrian and Vehicle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No car park; closest car park in King George’s Park;</li> <li>• There are limited vehicle access points for management of the woodland.</li> </ul>
Byelaws	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Byelaws apply to the site.</li> </ul>
Tree Preservation Order	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No tree preservation order.</li> </ul>
Facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benches;</li> <li>• Litter bins;</li> <li>• Tarmac-surfaced and unsurfaced paths.</li> </ul>
Statutory Designations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The site is no longer registered common land, see section on history.</li> </ul>
Non-statutory designations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listed in Brentwood Borough Council review of Local Wildlife Sites (2012) as a potential Local Wildlife Site if habitat restoration works are undertaken (BrePLoWS6);</li> <li>• Green Belt;</li> <li>• Woodland is listed by Natural England as Deciduous Woodland Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitat (England), see Plan 3;</li> <li>• Most of the common is within Thames Chase Community Forest (see Plan 4).</li> </ul>

# Plan 1: Overview of Site

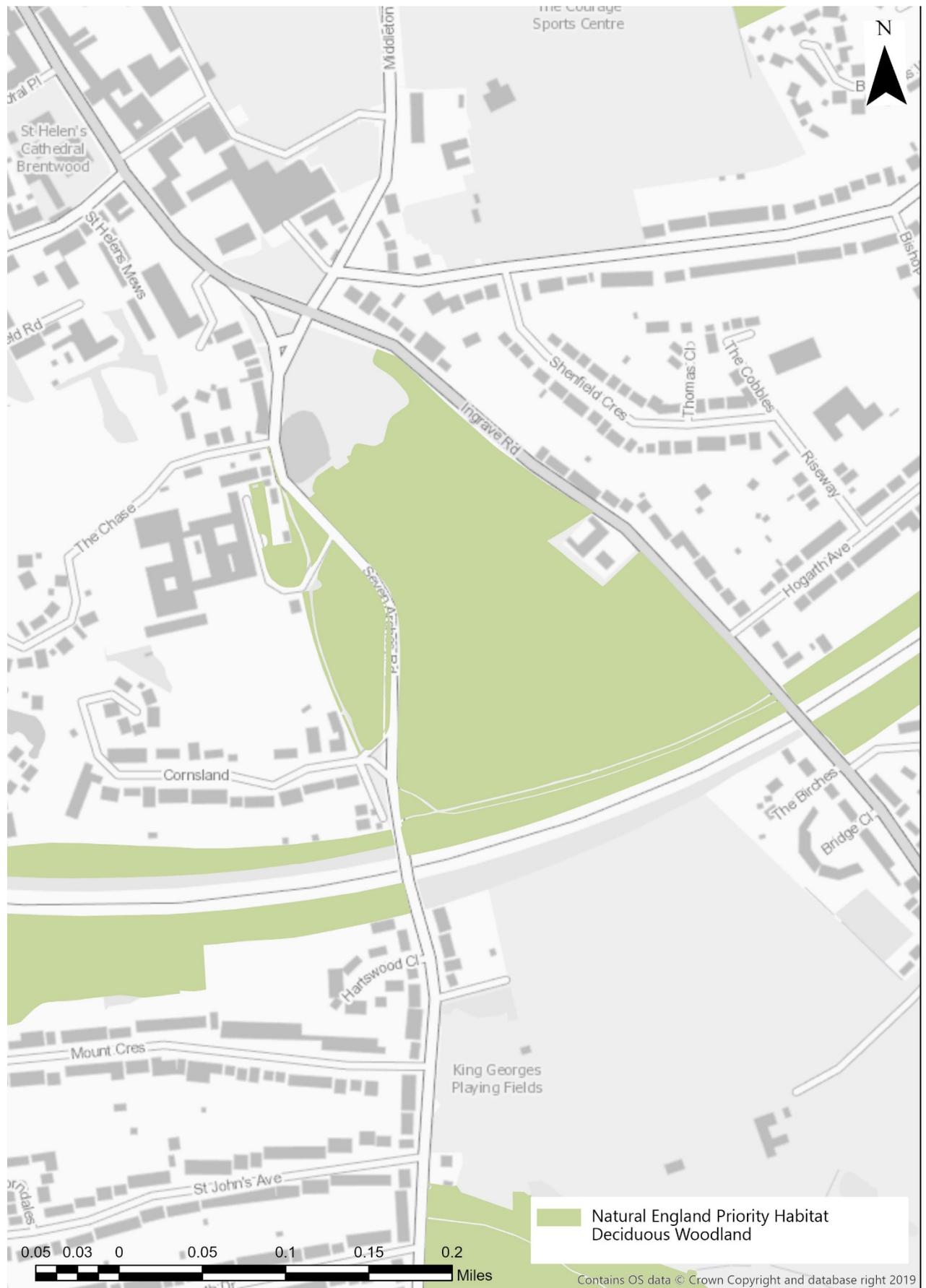


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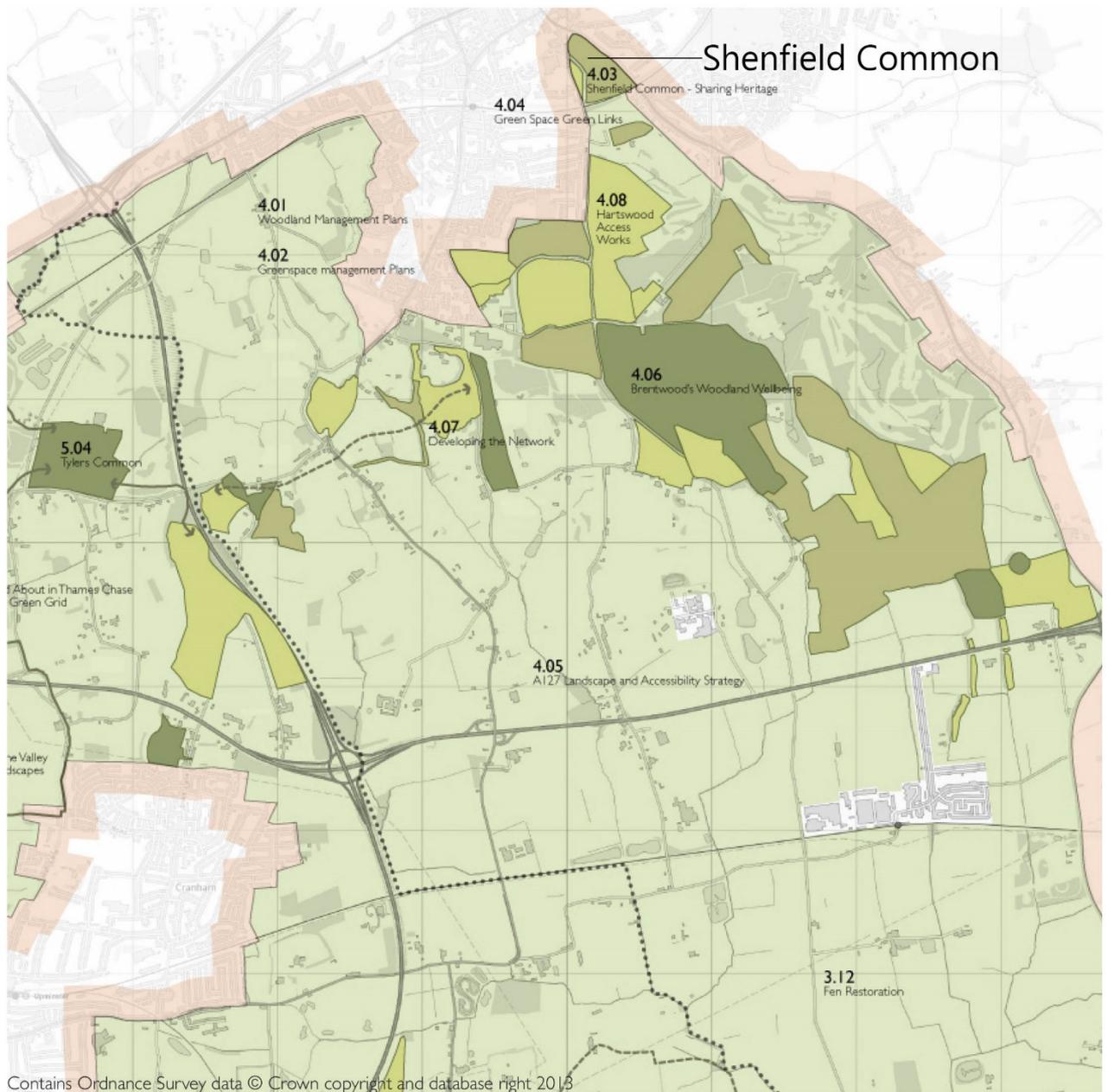
Plan 2: CROW Act 2000 Section 15 Land



### Plan 3: Natural England Priority Habitat - Deciduous Woodland



# Plan 4: Thames Chase Community Forest



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north

© Thames Chase Plan 2014

Project Map for Area 4  
Thorndon and Warley Woods

Shenfield Common is not designated as Local Wildlife Sites (LoWS); a county designation administered by Essex Wildlife Trust. In a 2012 review of LoWS carried out for Brentwood Borough Council,<sup>2</sup> which forms part of the evidence base for the local plan 2016 -2033, it was noted that the common has potential as a LoWS.<sup>3</sup>

## Recent Management Plans

Several management plans have been produced in recent years. These all detail actions needed for both public amenity and nature conservation. Most plans detail actions to improve paths, benches and litter bins, woodland management and control of sycamore and actions to manage the pond.

Shenfield Common Management Plan 2012 – 2017 (written by Thames Chase): This plan set out management prescriptions for public access and nature conservation, over a five year period.

Shenfield Common Tree Survey Report, February 2013 (written by Thames Chase/Dave Bigden): This plan detailed an inspection of all the trees on areas where there is public access. This included where the common abuts the highway, the main routes through the woodland and the open common. It did not include the smaller paths or the boundary where the Four Oaks meet the woodland edge. The plan supplemented the management plan 2012 – 2017. Works were graded from 1 (most urgent) to 4 (monitoring). All actions graded 1 – 3 will have been carried out within 6 months.

Shenfield Common Management Plan (Draft) 2006 (written by Dave Bigden): This plan evaluated the ecology, landscape, public amenity, community use and accessibility of the common. It set out a 5 year action plan.

Shenfield Common Management Plan 2001 – 2027 (written by Claire Mennim, Countryside Manager for Brentwood Borough Council): The plan details amenity and woodland works and a brief action plan.

The extent of the implementation of these plans has been variable.

The common was entered into a Woodland Grant Scheme between 1994 and 1999. Works included in this were thinning to encourage regeneration and to favour canopy trees, opening up the lime avenue and replanting specimens and clearance around the woodland pond.

## Management Structures

The common was established through an Act of Parliament - the Commons Regulation (Shenfield) Provisional Order Confirmation Act 1881 and Enclosure Acts 1845-1875. The enclosure award dated 1883 made provision for management and the nomination of seven Conservators. One was to be appointed by the Lord of the Manor, two by the copyholders, two by Brentwood vestry meeting (after 1894 by Brentwood Urban District Council) and two by the Shenfield vestry meeting (after 1894 by Shenfield Parish Council).

In 1934 the government transferred the appointment of the Conservators of Shenfield Common to Brentwood Urban District Council; however the Chair is nominated by the Lord of the Manor. The

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<sup>2</sup> Brentwood Borough Council (2012), Local Wildlife Sites Review, undertaken by EECOS.

<sup>3</sup> Number BrePLoWS6.

membership of the Conservators comprises of Borough Councillors and members of the local community.

It is the priority of the Conservators to safeguard Shenfield Common and they meet on a quarterly basis to consider any issues that are related to the Common.

Brentwood Borough Council have provided support over many years. This includes installing bollards, carrying out emergency tree safety and regular cutting of the grass.

## **Links with Local Strategies**

### Brentwood Local Plan

The current local plan at the time of this report is the Replacement Local Plan 2005. The new local plan 2016 – 2033 is in preparation, with the Regulation 19 plan published in February 2019.

Shenfield Common is identified as one of Brentwood's important 'green wedges' which link the countryside with the town and which provides accessible green infrastructure in the town centre.

In the Green Belt review undertaken as part of the local plan 2016 – 2033<sup>4</sup> the common is assessed as being a 'critical countryside gap' and an important green wedge between Shenfield and Brentwood/Warley. Its importance as accessible, natural countryside is noted as a strength.

### Brentwood Borough Council Open Spaces Assessment

The Brentwood Borough Council Sport, Leisure and Open Space Assessment (2016)<sup>5</sup> lists Shenfield Common as an informal/natural open space. Shenfield Common is scored as 3.29 for quality overall (rated as good). However, the full scoring in Appendix 7 records Shenfield common as 'amber' quality, scoring only 2.57. It must therefore be assumed there has been an error in transcribing the scores to the main report as there is no commentary explaining why the score in the main report differs from the assessment. The score in the main report is therefore assumed to be too high. The site also scores the maximum score for litter (i.e. it is good), whereas there is known to be an ongoing litter and graffiti problem on the site. The 'Horse Pond' (assumed to be the Mill Pond) is scored separately; scoring 2 and being assessed as poor quality. No rationale is given for scoring the pond separately.

In the previous Brentwood Borough Council open spaces audit (2007)<sup>6</sup> the common scored only 52% in terms of quality and 43% for accessibility. Levels of usage were recorded as 'often'. It is clear from this assessment that the common falls below an acceptable standard for an open space in such a prominent location. The report further advises Brentwood Council<sup>7</sup> that *'Consideration will be given to improving sites that scored low in terms of quality, accessibility and usage. As a priority, the Council will seek to protect and enhance public access to highly used Council owned sites that are low in quality and low in accessibility and seek to influence other landowners within the Borough to do likewise.'*

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<sup>4</sup> Brentwood Borough Council (2018), Green Belt Study Part II: Green Belt Parcel Definition and Review, p125.

<sup>5</sup> Ploszajski Lynch Consulting Ltd (2016), Sport Leisure and Open Space Assessment, Main Report and Appendices.

<sup>6</sup> Survey and Assessment of Needs and Audit of Open Space, Sport and Recreation Facilities in Brentwood Borough (2007).

<sup>7</sup> Under recommendation NSN 2.

Both the most recent and the previous open space assessments therefore record that Shenfield Common falls below the standard which should be expected for a prominent, publicly accessible site, in which the local authority has a management interest (see previously under 'Management Structures').

## **Geology, Soils, Landform and Hydrology**

The common is situated on glacial sands and gravels of the Bagshot formation, covered with slowly permeable acid soil of low fertility. This band of soil forms an 'L' shape, continuing under Woodman Road Cemetery and Donkey Lane Plantation and re-appearing again at the southern end of Hartswood at The Avenue and in Little Warley Common.

The common rises slightly to the north, but the most prominent landform features are the mounds and hummocks created by the spoil from the railway at the southern end of the common. These are shown clearly in the Lidar image to the right (Environment Agency data under Open Government Licence). (The Lidar image also reveals where there is a high density of holly or other evergreen trees – other trees are not captured).



There are two ponds on the common; the Mill Pond next to Seven Arches Road and an ephemeral pond further to the south in the woodland. A ditch line follows the boundary with Brentwood County High School between the school entrance and Cornsland.

## **Services, Easements and Rights of Access**

Some properties are accessed across the common:

- The Toby Carvery;
- Brentwood County High School;
- Properties on Seven Arches Road next to Registry Office.

There is a small payment for wayleave access. The payment and conditions could usefully be reviewed.

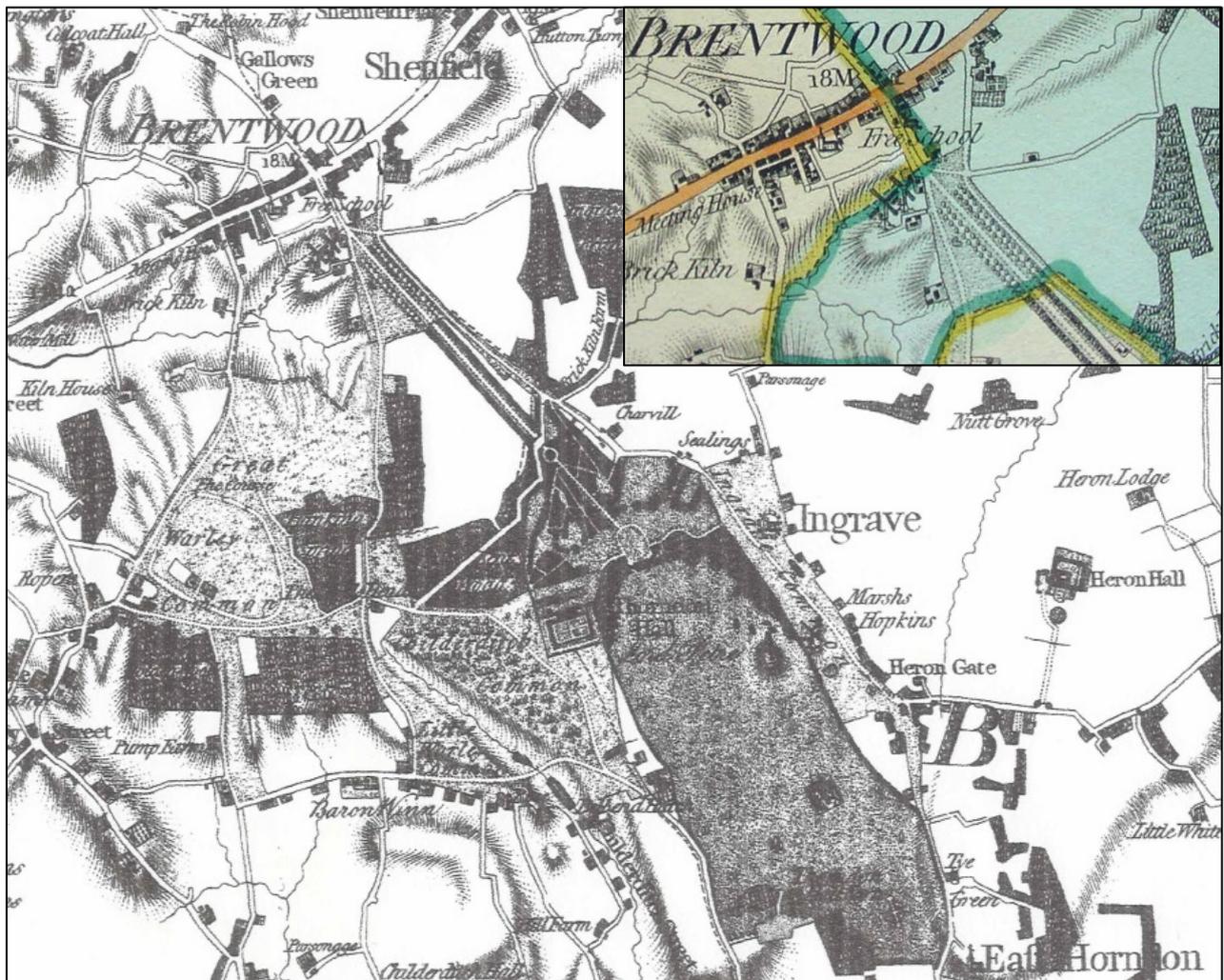
The location of services is not known.

## History of Shenfield Common

Shenfield Common has long been part of the Manor of Shenfield. The Domesday Book records the manor as Chenefeld, meaning 'good lands'.

Although various parts of the manor were sold off, the common was protected. The copyholders of the common had rights to graze and to mill in the pond, paying an annual amount to the Vicar of Shenfield for these rights.

In the 1773 Chapman and Andre map of Essex, Shenfield Common is shown in pride of place as the starting point for a two mile long, double tree-lined avenue, forming the entrance route to Thorndon Hall, prior to Capability Brown's landscaping.



The construction of the railway in 1840, however, spelled a period of decline for the common. The spoil excavated for the railway was dumped on the common, destroying the grazing land. Subsequently the common became a notorious haunt for horse traders, gypsies and bare fist fighters and a 'no-go' area.

The problems became so bad that local people tried to find a solution, but common lands were a right guarded jealously. In 1870, having failed to resolve the problems, the Vicar of Shenfield approached the Lady of the Manor to have the common made into a public park through a Parliamentary Bill, describing nuisances caused by 'vagrants and gypsies'.

The change was effected through the Commons Regulation (Shenfield) Provisional Order Confirmation Act 1881 and Enclosure Acts 1845-1875. The enclosure award dated 1883 made provision for management and the nomination of seven Conservators. One was to be appointed by the Lord of the Manor, two by the copyholders, two by Brentwood vestry meeting (after 1894 by Brentwood Urban District Council) and two by the Shenfield vestry meeting (after 1894 by Shenfield Parish Council).

In 1885 the Mill Pond was enlarged, as related by local journalist Sylvia Kent:<sup>8</sup>

It wasn't until the snowy winter of 1885 that one of the new Conservators of the common ... suggested that the tiny pond alongside the millpond be joined to afford more room for skating in wintertime. In his book "Brentwood Fireside Tales 1906-26" John Larkin described how it came about:

*"On summer evenings and early mornings came young men, old men and big boys. Some with picks, some with shovels, some with wheelbarrows. Working men, city clerks, bank clerks, shop assistants, and tradesmen – in fact all sorts and conditions of men set to work. Some picked, shovelled, wheeled away, whilst others went to the Artichoke for beer. So by shovelling, picking, wheeling, beer-drinking and working in black coats, cricket costumes, football jersey, velveteen coats and in shirt sleeves the job was finished and the mill pond as we see it now (1926) is evidence of what one can do by volunteer labour if men are of the mind."*

Private subscriptions for the upkeep of the common were never sufficient and some attempts to improve the area were doomed to fail. In 1895 a bandstand was built, only to be persistently vandalised and sold for £5 in 1913. Another bandstand was constructed in the 1920's, but that too was vandalised.

Several trees have been planted on the common; four oak trees by Parish Chairmen in 1900 to mark the turning of the century and horse chestnuts along the Seven Arches Road by young people in 1901 to commemorate the coronation of King Edward 7<sup>th</sup>. A lime avenue was planted in the centre of the site in 1895 to provide useful employment to the unemployed.<sup>9</sup>

In the mid 1930's the Clerk to the Council submitted a plan to exchange the common for a parcel of land of equal size outside of the town. Over 1,000 people condemned the plan and the Council withdrew its plan, granting the common a reprieve.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://sylviakent.blogspot.co.uk/2007/02/shenfield-pond-in-snow.html>

<sup>9</sup> Listen to Frances Clamp talking about the history of Shenfield Common <http://www.phoenixfm.com/2012/08/18/the-ideal-day-to-put-your-blanket-on-the-ground/>

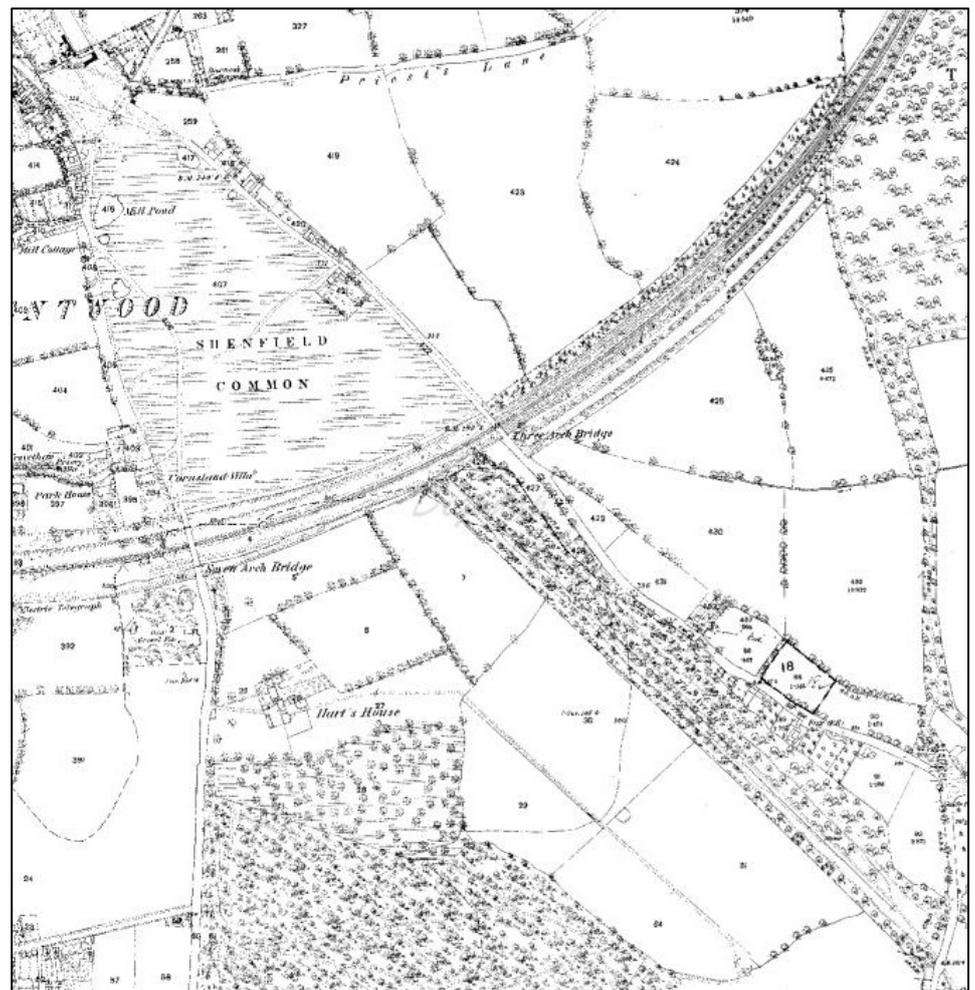
## Mapped History of Shenfield Common

The common has gradually become more wooded as grazing management ceased. This series of maps clearly shows the changes in vegetation and buildings around the common.

In maps produced after the construction of the railway (1870-80), the common is shown as much more open.

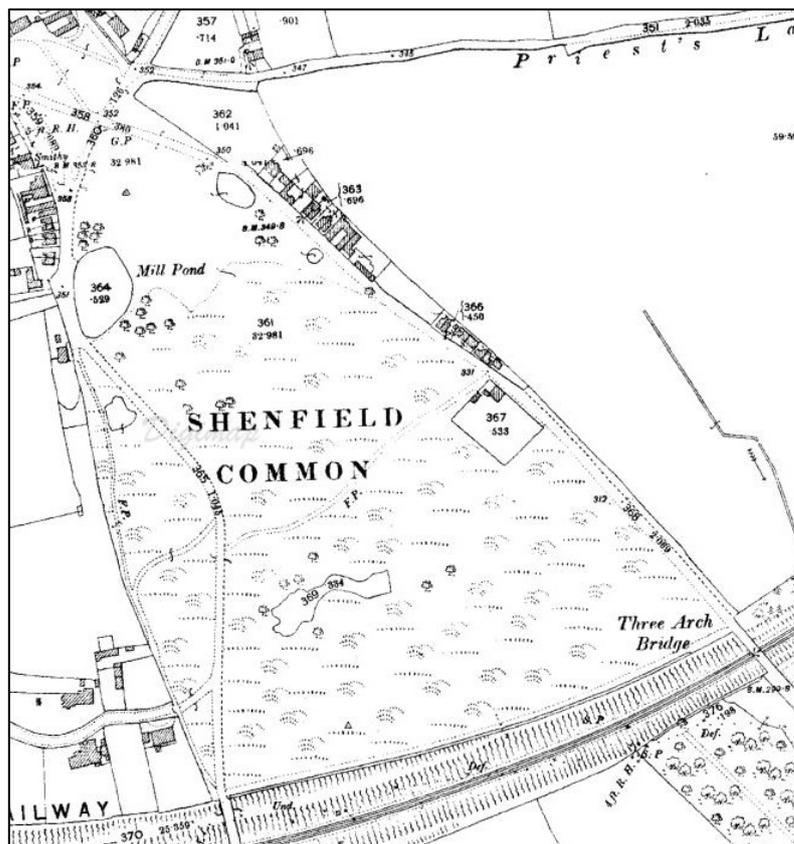


In this map the remains of the Thorndon Hall avenue can still be seen to the south of the railway line. Although this woodland is now housing, the boundary of the former avenue woodland remains as the edge of King George's Park and the allotments.

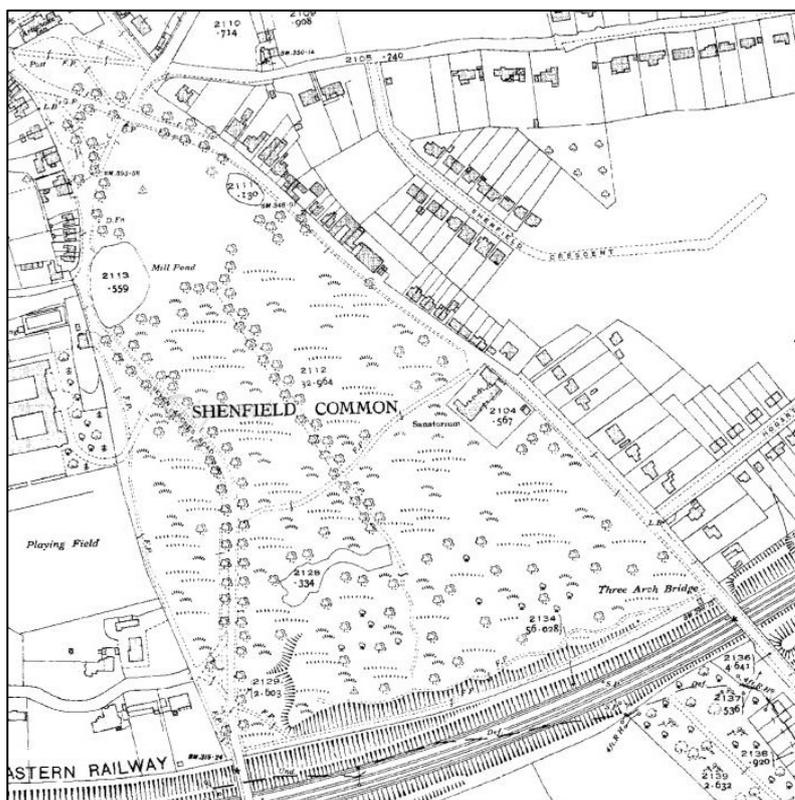


In the 1890 map several ponds are shown, including the mill pond. There woodland pond remains as a damp area which periodically holds water.

A pond shown near Ingrave Road is no longer present. This was known as 'How's Folly'. It was dug out in 1856 by Mr How, a master at Brentwood School who lived at The Firs nearby. How's Folly pond lasted a century but was eventually filled in and willows planted on the spot.

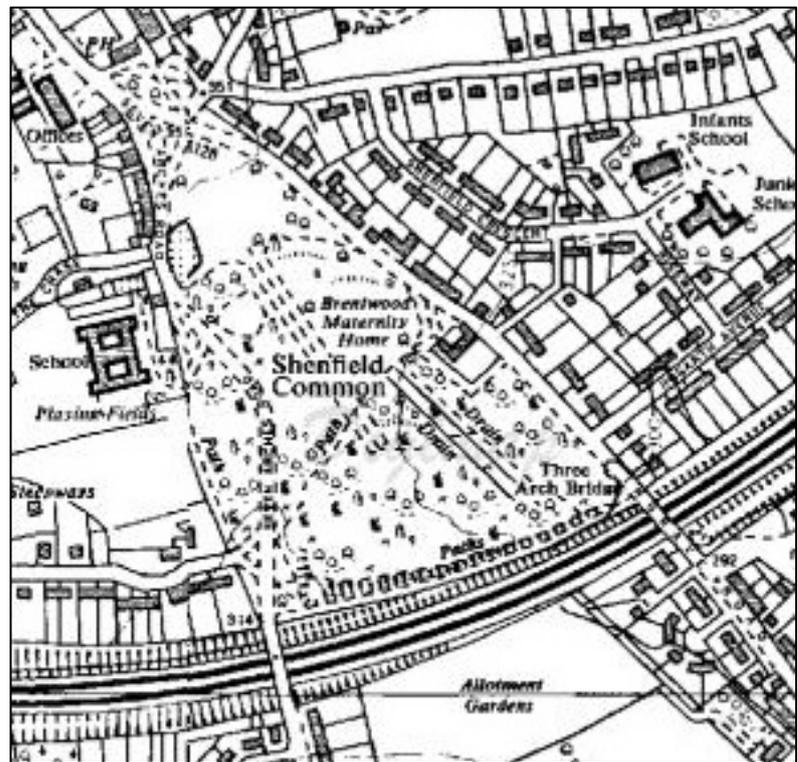


By the 1920's scattered trees are starting to appear on the southern part of the common. Also mapped are the lime avenue and the horse chestnut avenue along Seven Arches Road, along with other planting alongside Ingrave Road.



The map from the 1960's is particularly interesting. In the south eastern corner are two features marked 'drain', which would appear to be on the alignment of the 1770's avenue. This feature is still visible on the ground, forming a more open area in this part of the woodland.

The lime avenue is also show in the centre of the common. This feature mimics the 1700 avenue, but is not quite in alignment with it. It cannot be known whether the lime avenue was intended to reflect the history of the common or whether it was simply planted as an attractive feature, perhaps to create a link to the woodland pond.



# Amenity and Public Access

## Introduction

Shenfield Common is a semi-natural open space, not a formal park, but it is in a prominent location and is the closest semi-natural open space to the town centre. Amenity and the quality of public access will therefore be a priority for the common. This section assesses provision for access and recreation on the common. An overview of paths and other access infrastructure is shown in Plan 5.

## Amenity and Access Assessment

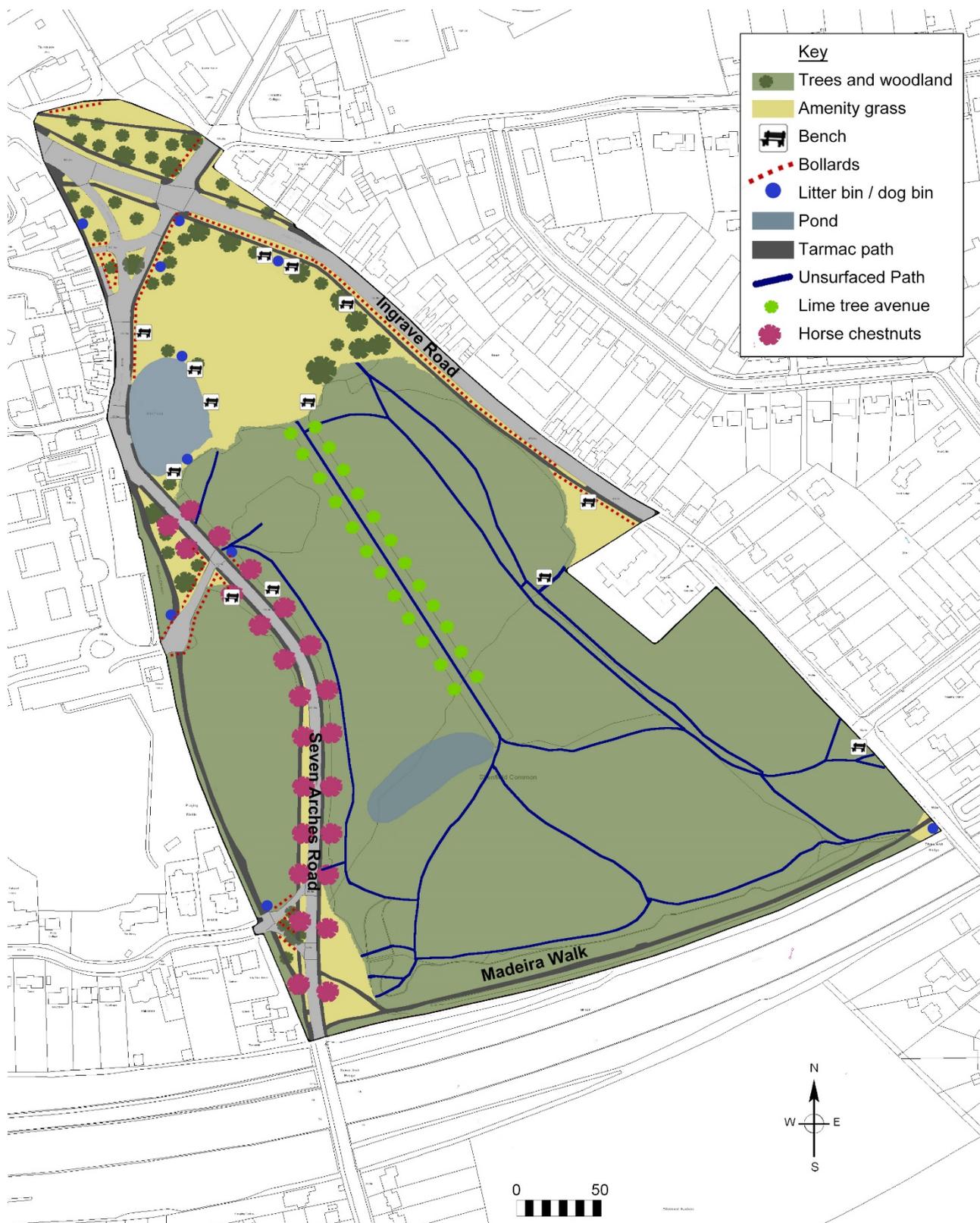
### A Welcoming Place

A welcoming site draws people and makes them feel welcome through its appearance, facilities and maintenance. This includes the location of paths, provision of information, quality and position of entrances and signing.

Table 1: Shenfield Common - Signing Assessment

	Assessment	Actions Required
Entrance Signs/Naming Signs	There are no naming or entrance signs, apart from a map board near the Mill Pond displaying byelaws.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A small number of signs would be appropriate, limited in the first instance to naming and contact details in case of issues on the site;</li> <li>• If a project is developed, for example through a Heritage Lottery fund grant, to enhance the heritage and amenity value of the site, further signing or other interpretation may be appropriate.</li> </ul>
Dog Signing	As an amenity greenspace used for recreation there should be a requirement that dog fouling is picked up. There is no signing indicating expected behaviour regarding dog fouling.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Install no dog fouling signing on amenity grassland area of the common;</li> <li>• It is an aim of this plan to encourage more people to walk through the woodland. Therefore, more dog bins at woodland entrances would be beneficial, as this is the main area used by dog walkers. Brentwood Borough Council has dual litter and dog fouling bins. The style and location these are considered later. Signing is required to indicate that bins are dual use.</li> </ul>
Style, Clarity and Maintenance	There is currently no signing in place, except map board near Mill Pond.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entrance signs would be appropriate, see above;</li> <li>• Ensure all new signing follows best practice;</li> <li>• Ensure messages on new signing are welcoming and friendly.</li> </ul>
Signing around the area	No signing in place to direct people to the common.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None required – this is a local site and does not require signing from further afield.</li> </ul>

Plan 5: Paths and Other Access Infrastructure (as at 2019)



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## Physical Access

This assessment is based on the suitability of the park for all sectors of the community. The standard expected on Shenfield Common is not that which would be expected in a formal park, but its proximity to the town centre and potential to provide access links mean that higher standards will be in place.

The hummocky landform of the southern part of the common places some constraints on access, most notable for visitors with disabilities.

Table 2: Shenfield Common – Physical Access Assessment

	Assessment	Actions Required
Access to the site	<p><u>Public Transport</u>: Buses routes on Ingrave Road and Seven Arches Road.</p> <p><u>Road Crossings</u>: Common surrounded by roads but Pelican crossings at southern and northern ends of common on A128. Seven Arches Road has footways.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good access and crossing points, no further actions required.</li> </ul>
Benches	<p>There are several benches on the amenity grassland and some benches in the woodland. These benches are of various types but are, nonetheless, functional. Several benches have been removed in recent years. Some of the benches are in poor condition. Consideration needs to be given to the location of benches.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine where benches are required – install more benches or replace in areas where these are needed. Do not replace benches in areas where they are not needed. Monitor condition of benches and replace as required;</li> <li>• Agree a standard bench design and ensure replacement benches are of the same design;</li> <li>• Consider replacement of benches in any capital grant.</li> </ul>
Car Parking	<p>There is no car parking. There was an informal car park opposite Brentwood County High School but this has now been closed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None, car parking on site not required.</li> </ul>
Paths and Access Routes	<p>Madeira Walk runs adjacent to the railway and is surfaced and lit. This, along with the path running in front of the Toby Carvery are public rights of way. The surface is the responsibility of Essex County Council. Vegetation from top and sides (including overhanging or dangerous trees) are the responsibility of the landowner.</p> <p>There is a path alongside Brentwood County High School which is constructed of plastic honeycomb grid base filled with gravel.</p> <p>There are several tarmac-surfaced paths.</p> <p>There are several paths throughout the</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement a hierarchy of paths to form a practical network. Concentrate improvement and maintenance on these paths, see Plan 8;</li> <li>• Do not clear or maintain other desire lines.</li> </ul>

	Assessment	Actions Required
	<p>woodland, none of which are surfaced, see Plan 5. The condition of these paths varies and some are overgrown and muddy in winter. Improving the quality of these paths will greatly increase the amenity value of the site but it will not be possible to improve and continue to maintain all the paths to a high standard. A hierarchy of paths is therefore proposed to rationalise the path network, as detailed in Plan 8 and page 42.</p> <p>There are several desire lines across the common. It is difficult to close such paths as visitors tend to continue to find routes and in doing so often make new paths. Improving the main paths will help to channel most visitors to these paths as they will be more attractive and easier to use and through this the creation of desire lines will diminish.</p>	
Access for Visitors with disabilities	<p>There is good access to the common as there are footways surrounding the site. There are dropped kerbs at several points and direct access from tarmac-surfaced paths surrounding the common.</p> <p>There are no specific facilities for disabled people on the grassland part of the common but this is reasonably accessible, with flat, level grass.</p> <p>Access to the woodland area is very restricted for visitors with mobility or other physical impairments. The landform of the southern common would make disabled access difficult to achieve, but muddy routes and overgrown paths also prevent visitors. These are areas which could be improved.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that at least one path through the woodland is opened up to be more accessible;</li> <li>• Consider surfacing one woodland path to increase use by a wider range of visitors.</li> </ul>
Entrance Points	<p>There are many entrance points for the common, see Plan 5.</p> <p>The amenity greenspace is open on all sides.</p> <p>The main access points for the woodland are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lime avenue from the amenity green;</li> <li>• Madeira Walk access at Seven Arches Road and Ingrave Road.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve and maintain the main entrance points as identified in the paths hierarchy, see Plan 8;</li> <li>• Improve and maintain subsidiary entrance points which link to the paths to be retained, as detailed in the path network hierarchy;</li> <li>• Do not maintain other desire line entrances. Some could be blocked off with brash.</li> </ul>

	Assessment	Actions Required
	<p>Subsidiary entrances are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Various desire line entrances along Seven Arches Road opposite Brentwood County High School;</li> <li>• Several desire lines ascending bank from grassy area near to Madeira Walk (Seven Arches Road);</li> <li>• Entrances (3) to the north of Madeira Walk around Pelican crossing on Ingrave Road;</li> <li>• To the north of 'Four Oaks' on the Ingrave Road.</li> </ul>	

### A Safe and Secure Place

The following table provides an assessment of safety and security.

There are a range of safety considerations:

- Sight lines and impeded visibility: the woodland is dense in places, with holly in particular impeding sight lines and making the woodland dark. This may deter some people from visiting the site and decreases the feeling of safety;
- Slopes and banks: these can be slippery and some are several metres high;
- Trees: There are many trees on the common, including overhanging the public highway and footways, as well as in the woodland next to paths. Tree safety is an important area of responsibility. The organisation which holds the liability for damage or injury caused by trees is not clear and needs to be determined as a high priority;
- Bollards: have been installed for security to prevent vehicle encampments. These are located along the A128 and around some of the smaller parcels of the common to prevent cars parking on the common and traveller incursions. The bollards are of a range of designs and materials – some are wooden and some are plastic. This does not provide a coherent design. Wooden bollards have a limited lifespan as they rot at the base.
- Pond: Although the pond is not very deep, any waterbody may present a danger to some users.





*Fire site, litter and vandalised trees*



*Holly impedes sight lines and makes woodland dark*

Table 3: Shenfield Common - Safe and Secure Place Assessment

	Assessment	Actions Required
A Safer Place	<p>There is litter throughout the common and graffiti on benches. This is greater in the woodland than on the more open (and overlooked) common.</p> <p>There are several fire sites.</p> <p>There are broken or vandalised trees.</p> <p>Trees planted to replace those in the horse chestnut avenue are routinely vandalised.</p> <p>There is a high level of litter. There can be high levels of litter around Brentwood County High School.</p> <p>There are some incidents of anti-social behaviour. Dense areas of woodland and poor sight lines offer concealed areas for such behaviour.</p> <p>Trees overhanging paths and highways need to be inspected for safety and tree works carried out.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undertake regular litter picking;</li> <li>• Remove encampments, fire sites, vandalised trees etc. as soon as practicable after they occur to maintain a welcoming aspect to the common;</li> <li>• Increased use of the woodland and more visitors will help to reduce anti-social behaviour;</li> <li>• Clearance of holly and other dense undergrowth will also help to reduce anti-social use.</li> <li>• Regular tree safety surveys in all areas of public access – on the common, adjacent to highways and footways and primary path network in the woodland, see next.</li> </ul>
Safe Design	<p>Sight lines are poor throughout much of the woodland. Dense holly undergrowth, dense sycamore and overgrown paths diminish the feeling of safety of the common and make it feel less welcoming.</p> <p>The steep slopes on the southern part of the common become slippery.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open up some paths as detailed in the path hierarchy and through widening some paths into rides as detailed in the woodland management actions.</li> <li>• Install steps on main route down steep slope on the southern end of the common.</li> </ul>
Dogs	<p>There is no signing to indicate acceptable behaviour of dogs and whether dog fouling will be picked up.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include information that dog fouling is not permitted at all entrances;</li> <li>• Request visitors to pick up dog fouling in woodland area.</li> </ul>

## Tree Inspections

There are different risk zones on Shenfield Common. A programme of tree inspection needs to be prioritised to those areas where there is potentially the most risk to people and property. A zoned approach should be taken at Shenfield Common in line with National Tree Safety Group guidance.<sup>10</sup>

The common has been zoned into three inspection zones, see Plan 6 and Table 4. These broadly relate to the level of recreational use, traffic or presence of potential features which could be at risk. Additional risk factors have been taken into account, detailed in Table 5. The zones are shown in Plan 6.

An initial full inspection is required to provide an inventory and baseline. From this an appropriate tree inspection regime will be formulated. Tree safety works in woodland areas will be carried out when works take place in woodland compartments as shown in Plan 9 and the action table.

Table 4: Tree Inspection Zones

Tree Inspection Zone	Details
High Traffic Zone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All areas adjacent to highways;</li><li>• Madeira Walk;</li><li>• Chairman's tree;</li><li>• Any trees identified as potential hazardous in lower risk zones should be included in the survey for more regular inspection.</li></ul>
Medium Traffic Zone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lime avenue;</li><li>• Path adjacent to Brentwood County High School</li><li>• All priority paths in path hierarchy (see later, page 42, for details of path hierarchy)</li></ul>
Low Traffic Zone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All other areas.</li></ul>

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<sup>10</sup> National Tree Safety Group (2011); Common Sense Risk Management of Trees.

Table 5: Potential Features at Risk - to Guide Tree Inspection Zoning

Hazard Zone Categories	Areas or Features of the Common
High Hazard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Permanent structures with a value in excess of £50,000 or are habitable</li> <li>• Seating areas</li> <li>• Parked cars (e.g. outside properties)</li> <li>• Footpaths/access ways with high pedestrian use</li> <li>• Individual trees or groups of trees with high risk tree characteristics such as:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– standing dead trees or those with very poor condition</li> <li>– trees that visually obstruct traffic signs, traffic lights, or street lamps</li> </ul> </li> <li>• A roads and principle roads in built up areas</li> </ul>
Medium Hazard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• B roads, secondary distributor and visually obstructed lights and signs</li> <li>• In High use Parks/Public areas: informal play areas, minor paths, grass recreation areas</li> <li>• Bus stops in high use thoroughfares</li> <li>• Trees with medium risk characteristics, such as:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Old and veteran trees</li> <li>– High density of large or mature trees</li> <li>– Areas of recent root disturbance such as footway reconstruction, trenching, drainage etc.</li> <li>– Storm damaged trees</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Low Hazard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unclassified roads: congested junctions and visually obstructed traffic lights/signs</li> <li>• Trees with medium to low densities of large diameter, mature or “problem” species trees</li> <li>• Moderate to low use parks, playgrounds and picnic areas</li> <li>• Public areas with dispersed recreation</li> <li>• Open areas, woods, riparian and peripheral areas with limited use or access</li> </ul>

# Plan 6: Tree Inspection Zones



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## A Clean and Well-Maintained Place

The only regular maintenance of the common is cutting of the amenity grass areas. This is carried out by Brentwood Borough Council on behalf of the Conservators. The grassland of the common is cut 10 times throughout the growing season. Brentwood Borough Council also empties the bins.

All other works including replacing bollards, benches and clearing paths in the woodland are not routinely scheduled and are undertaken subject to resources.

There are currently 9 litter bins on the common, of varying design, see right. Some of the wooden bins are starting to deteriorate and require replacement in the short to medium term. The location of bins needs to be reviewed in consultation with Brentwood Borough Council.



There is no Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) relating to the common in respect of dog fouling. It would be beneficial that the main grassland common, and ideally the woodland as well, is a no dog fouling area. The common should be included in any future Public Space Protection Order for greenspaces in Brentwood. In the absence of a PSPO, signs could be erected on Shenfield Common to indicate that dog fouling should be picked up.

## SWOT Analysis – Access and Amenity

Table 6: SWOT Analysis – Access and Amenity

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open access throughout the common;</li> <li>• Open grassed area of the common has high amenity, heritage and landscape value;</li> <li>• Good access from Brentwood town centre;</li> <li>• Good access onto the grassland part of the common for less able visitors;</li> <li>• Madeira Walk is surfaced and lit and is a well-used route;</li> <li>• Many tarmac-surfaced paths;</li> <li>• Good supply of benches;</li> <li>• Good supply of litter bins;</li> <li>• Support from Brentwood Borough Council to install access infrastructure and some routine works including grass cutting and bin emptying.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of investment in access provision has resulted in poor access in the woodland area;</li> <li>• Paths in the woodland are muddy and overgrown;</li> <li>• The spoil heaps of the southern common limit access for less able visitors;</li> <li>• There is no signing – no naming signs, no signs conveying heritage;</li> <li>• Litter throughout the woodland (and rats), fire sites;</li> <li>• Anti-social behaviour and vandalism in woodland;</li> <li>• Holly and sycamore block sight lines and create an unwelcoming atmosphere;</li> <li>• Insufficient dog waste bins and no advertised rules regarding dog fouling;</li> <li>• No resources to undertake regular path clearance or litter clearance;</li> <li>• No agreed mechanisms or funding to ensure replacement of access infrastructure – bins, benches and bollards;</li> <li>• No forward planning for replacement of infrastructure.</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rationalisation of the path network, concentrating improvements on a few key routes, will increase the amenity and accessibility of the common for all visitors and will ensure that the paths are maintained to a higher standard;</li> <li>• Installing signing as part of any heritage grant;</li> <li>• Decide on rules for dog fouling and implement;</li> <li>• Clearance of holly and denser undergrowth will improve sight lines and feeling of safety;</li> <li>• Install steps on one main route near Seven Arches Bridge;</li> <li>• Discourage use/allow desire lines to disappear.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of resources to manage paths and access has led to a reduction in quality and hence the amenity of the woodland and there is a risk that this will continue;</li> <li>• Lack of and the <i>ad hoc</i> manner of woodland management has led to a reduction in amenity and safety in the woodland;</li> <li>• Ongoing maintenance must be targeted and achievable with a low budget.</li> </ul>

# Nature Conservation

## Past Habitats of the Common and the Development of the Woodland

Before outlining an approach for the nature conservation management of Shenfield Common, it is first useful to examine how the current habitat of the common has developed and discuss possible directions such management could take.

Shenfield Common was, until the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a more open area. When commoners stopped grazing the common after the spoil from the railway was deposited on the site, woodland began to develop. Secondary woodland has now established on two thirds of Shenfield Common.

The open, gorse and bracken covered rough land of the last century can be clearly seen in the following photographs, which demonstrate the huge change in habitat which has taken place in the last 100 years.



Bandstand in open area near Seven Arches Road (near former car park), looking north west.

Lime avenue is clearly visible in centre of Common.

Houses on Ingrave Road in the distance (note two houses with central chimneys – these are now derelict, next to former car garage).

Seven Arches Road Mill Pond looking south. Newly planted horse chestnuts line the road. Bandstand of previous photograph is visible to the east of the road.





One of the ponds on the Common. It is not clear which pond this is. If the trees in the top left corner form the lime avenue, this would be the Mill Pond facing south east. However, the shape of the banks could suggest the woodland pond.

Looking north,  
Seven Arches  
Road.



*Shenfield Common, Brentwood.*



*Entrance to Common, Brentwood.*

In the 2012 review for Brentwood Council of Local Wildlife Sites (LoWs),<sup>11</sup> a county designation administered by Essex Wildlife Trust, Shenfield Common is not designated as a LoW, but as a potential Local Wildlife Site.<sup>12</sup>

The report makes the following commentary:

*“Shenfield Common is a popular area for informal recreation and has some value as woodland. However, it actually represents an old, probably grazed wood-pasture or even open heath and, given the scarcity of this habitat across Essex, this might be given higher priority than its developing woodland flora and fauna.”*

going on to suggest:

*“The common (actually no longer a piece of registered Common Land) is clearly popular as a place for local informal recreation, experiencing woodland wildlife and popular activities such as feeding the ducks on the large pond. However, there are several other woods nearby (e.g. Thorndon Country Park) that better fulfil the role of accessible natural woodland greenspace and so this criterion has not been applied to Shenfield Common. The true potential value of Shenfield Common lies in its origin as a large tract of rough, open and probably heathy grassland. As recently as 1920, the common was largely open, with a scattering of trees at the southern end but since then it has tumbled down to species-poor oak woodland. In places within the ground flora, traces of the acid grassland vegetation can still be seen. Public opinion would probably resist the complete clearance of this recent woodland cover to restore heathland. However, this is an Essex and England BAP habitat and the restoration of a more open canopy, to create a parkland habitat under which acid grassland and heathland can flourish once more ought to be achievable.”*

The text correctly identifies a potential difficulty with adopting large-scale clearance of woodland; that of public opinion against such a scheme. The wooded common is now a landscape feature and shields the now far busier roads and houses. The conversion of substantial areas to open habitat is likely to be resisted. While the common was certainly more open, it is also not clear, however, that the common was heath habitat.

Resource implications must also be considered and are the paramount limiting factor. If resources are available for clearance the priority should be on sites where more heathland habitat remains under the tree canopy. Parts of Little Warley Common for example - part of the Thorndon Park Site of Special Scientific Interest - is in unfavourable condition due to the need to open up the habitat.<sup>13</sup>

There would also be on-going resource implications in managing the site following clearance. It must be remembered that the woodland has established due to lack of grazing management and, unless the site is regularly grazed or vegetation is controlled, the woodland will re-establish. As grazing is not practical, the need for regular vegetation cutting would create an unsustainable burden for the future management of the common.

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<sup>11</sup> Brentwood Borough Council (2012); Local Wildlife Sites Review, undertaken by EECOS.

<sup>12</sup> Number BrePLoWS6.

<sup>13</sup> This unit, which was formerly more open common land, is assessed against wood-pasture targets. It is currently in unfavourable condition mainly because cover of open-grown scrub and nectar sources for invertebrates are well below minimum targets, largely as a result of much of the unit having developed into closed-canopy birch/oak woodland since grazing ceased, while bracken has taken over the remaining open areas and suppressed other species in the field layer. For the same reasons the unit has rather poor structural and species diversity and fails some targets for vegetation heterogeneity for invertebrates. However, it is now recovering because Brentwood Borough Council are controlling the bracken and restoring a more open structure by selectively felling some trees, under an ongoing agreement with the Forestry Commission.

It would be beneficial, however, from both a nature conservation and amenity perspective, to make some parts of the site more open. If carried out in a selective way, this would improve the diversity of habitats on the common, improve sight lines and reduce the rather oppressive, dark feeling which parts of the common now has. This could be achieved through widening rides, which would also improve the amenity value of the common. It could also restore some of the heritage value of the site, for example through opening up the lime avenue.

## Woodland

It is useful also to consider the nature conservation value of the current woodland stand when assessing the possible approaches to management.

The woodland which would typically arise on the soils present at Shenfield Common is oak and birch woodland.<sup>14</sup> This type of woodland is present at Little Warley Common to the south of Hartswood, demonstrating the typical early successional stage woodland which develops from former open grass and grassy heath habitats. The species composition of this woodland type can vary greatly, with management playing a role in altering the abundance of particular species. At Thrift Wood and Hare Hall Shaws, for example, which are both ancient woodland on the same geological and soil substrate, hornbeam was historically selected for its commercial value and this tree is now the most dominant species. Hartswood, however, has a greater range of species, with a higher proportion of oak in the woodland stand.

The woodland at Shenfield Common is mixed secondary woodland and its composition varies across the site. In some areas sycamore is the dominant tree, forming over 50% of the stand. There is some maturing oak, especially in the south eastern corner near to Three Arches Bridge. In other areas birch is a common component of the stand. Hornbeam, beech and hazel are occasional species in the stand. The understorey is mainly holly, which is very dense in places, with occasional yew, for example to the east of the lime avenue.

Sycamore has become dominant across some areas of the woodland, see Plan 7. This species is not native to Britain but has naturalised.

Sycamore has long been regarded as a 'nuisance' tree in nature conservation terms. It supports a low diversity of invertebrates when compared to many native species.<sup>15</sup> It also seeds readily and the tree casts a dense shade, restricting the growth of ground flora and the regeneration of other trees. This has allowed the tree to fill an ecological gap, out-competing other native species. This is particularly the case on acidic soils such as those at Shenfield Common. On more base-rich soils dominance of sycamore, over a long time period, can alternate with ash, but on acid soils sycamore has the competitive edge.<sup>16</sup> Natural England lists sycamore as a species which has a demonstrated a major negative effect, arising from it being a competitive species and being "*aesthetically bad*".<sup>17</sup> Both of these traits are demonstrated at Shenfield Common.

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<sup>14</sup> *Quercus robur* - *Pteridium aquilinum* - *Rubus fruticosus* woodland, National Vegetation Classification W10.

<sup>15</sup> 43 species vs. 423 species for a native oak (Peterken (2001), Ecological Effects of Introduced Tree Species in Britain). In defence of sycamore it may not support the diversity of invertebrates of some native trees, but it does support large populations of aphids.

<sup>16</sup> Savill *et al* (1997); Ecology of sycamore in Britain. How does it compete with native trees?

<sup>17</sup> English Nature (2005); Audit of non-native species in England, Report number 662.

Plan 7: Abundance of Sycamore in Woodland Stand (approximate)



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Sycamore, however, is not entirely without merit. It may not support the range of insect life of native trees, for example, but it does support large populations.

Decisions around the appropriate management intervention in woodland which has a high component of sycamore must be weighed carefully. Possible approaches range from doing nothing through to complete eradication. On each point in this range there are implications for resource requirements and for nature conservation.

The complete eradication of sycamore may be a difficult task in which to succeed. Sycamore germinates in low light, producing a ‘seedling bank’ of hundreds of young trees under the canopy. The tree cannot grow to maturity in low light but if the canopy is broken through felling, these seedlings are in a prime position to grow rapidly, out-competing any other native trees. Opening the canopy in an attempt to eradicate the tree, with associated disturbance of the ground, will succeed in producing conditions which are more favourable for sycamore than for other species. Therefore, if eradication is to be successful, intensive follow up work will be required for several years, which will require ongoing resource commitment.

An additional factor to consider at Shenfield Common is that as the climate warms, sycamore may become more vulnerable in drought-prone eastern counties<sup>18</sup> and, therefore, increased management may be required if trees fail.

Factors to consider in deciding the appropriate management for sycamore in Shenfield Common:

Table 7: Evaluation of Factors relating to Sycamore Management

Factors in Decision	Comments	Conclusions
The sycamore is casting dense shade.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduces ground flora;</li> <li>• Reduces regeneration of native species;</li> <li>• Therefore has a negative effect on the biodiversity of the common;</li> <li>• Dense shade makes the woodland dark and ‘oppressive’ for visitors;</li> <li>• The shade is now severely affecting the biodiversity of the woodland pond.</li> </ul>	Opening up the woodland, in places at least, would be beneficial and would improve both amenity and biodiversity.
Seeding sources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are several large seeding trees within Shenfield Common;</li> <li>• There are some seeding trees along the railway which would continue to spread seed onto the common, although many have now been coppiced.</li> </ul>	Impossible to eradicate completely all seeding sources (e.g. some on the railway), therefore even if sycamore removed there will be ongoing high maintenance.
High dominance of sycamore in the stand.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In some places, particularly in the south of the common, sycamore is the dominant species;</li> <li>• To remove all sycamore would remove the canopy which would allow seedling regeneration;</li> <li>• Remove most of the woodland cover is unlikely to be acceptable to the public.</li> </ul>	Complete eradication (clear felling) in areas with high sycamore dominance would remove the woodland which would be publicly unacceptable and would create high ongoing maintenance requirements.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/website/forestresearch.nsf/byunique/INFD-8CYL7X>

Factors in Decision	Comments	Conclusions
The landscape impact of the common.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The woodland is now an established feature of the landscape, shielding houses and the busy Ingrave Road;</li> <li>Brentwood Borough Council landscape assessment<sup>19</sup> recognises the levels of intrusion of the A128;</li> <li>The landscape assessment also recognises the importance of the former grounds of Thorndon Hall and the network of woodlands and commons of southern Brentwood.</li> </ul>	Whilst it may be laudable for habitat and historic landscape reasons to return to a previous open landscape, the woodland is now an established feature of the urban landscape, offering shielding and structure to the urban scene.
Low level of resources for management implementation and maintenance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There are limited resources available to Shenfield Conservators;</li> <li>Capital for larger-scale works may be available through grant-aid, or some works may be achievable at low cost, e.g. tree felling which produces a commodity;</li> <li>Ongoing maintenance of any management works must be realistically evaluated as there will not be resources available for high cost maintenance, either in terms of time or money.</li> </ul>	<p>Management actions will be fully funded with maintenance costs evaluated and kept within available resources.</p> <p>Seek management options for which ongoing maintenance can be achieved at (at most) nil cost, i.e. it produces a commodity.</p>

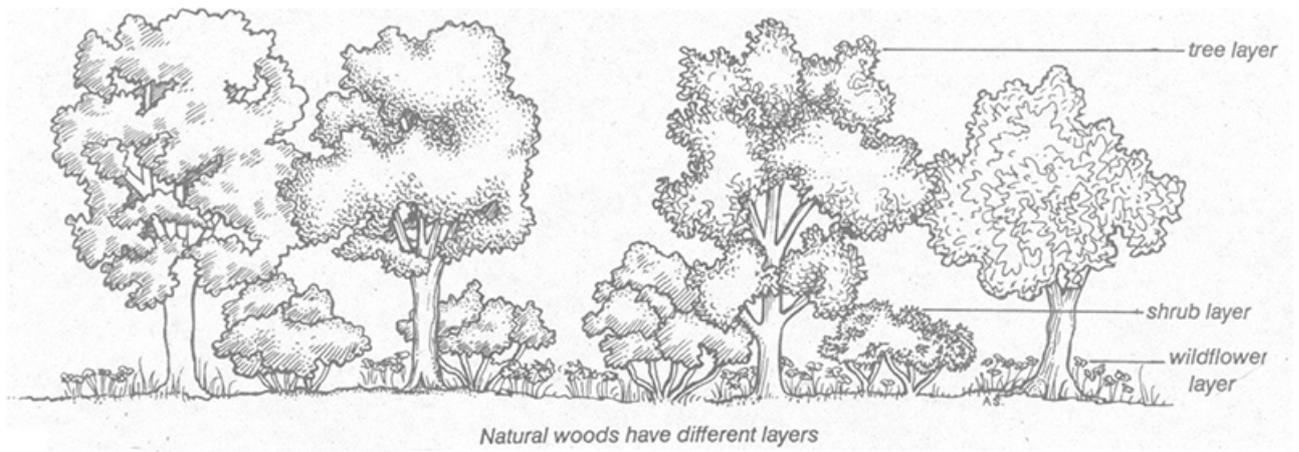
From the preceding analysis it would seem clear that some form sycamore and woodland management is required to improve both the nature conservation value and amenity of the common. This management must be at nil cost, or funded, with a low level of maintenance required.

Some management of sycamore appears to have been undertaken but this appears to be *ad hoc* and, unfortunately, has not really achieved any significant positive results. In some areas several trees are ring-barked and marked with numbers, but there is no record of the significance of these numbers. Some of the ring-barked trees are close to public paths and will therefore potentially cause a hazard as the tree dies. In other areas trees have also been felled; some have been cut at a height of around 1m from the ground and many have not been treated with herbicide and are therefore re-growing.

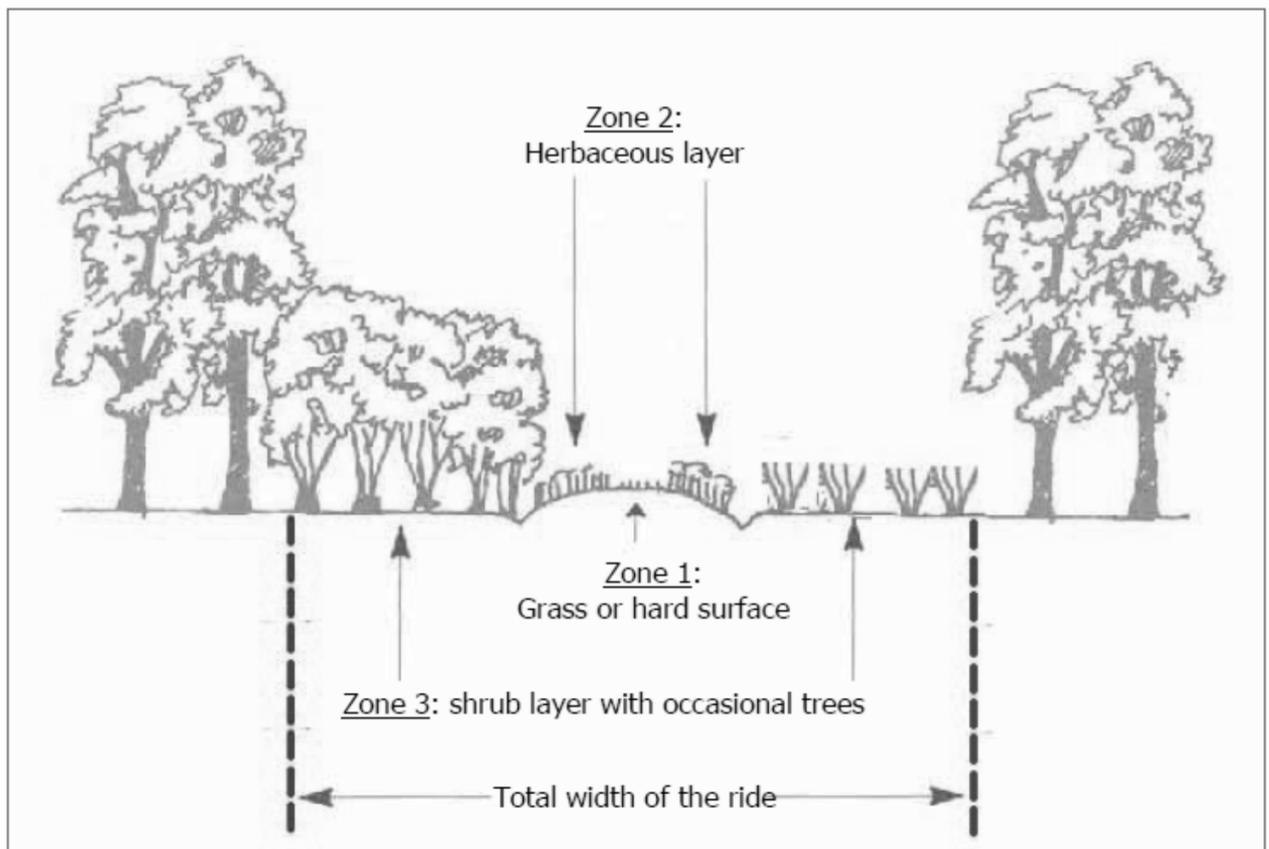
Native woodlands have a layered structure with a canopy layer (tall trees such as oak, ash and beech), a layer of smaller trees (such as birch, rowan, cherry and field maple), a shrub layer (hazel, hawthorn, elder, blackthorn and guelder rose) and a ground flora layer, as well as sub-shrubs and climbers such as honeysuckle, see over page.

These layers are under-developed at Shenfield Common. Holly is the dominant understorey shrub. This creates shade under which other trees cannot establish, as well as making the woodland darker and reducing its visual amenity.

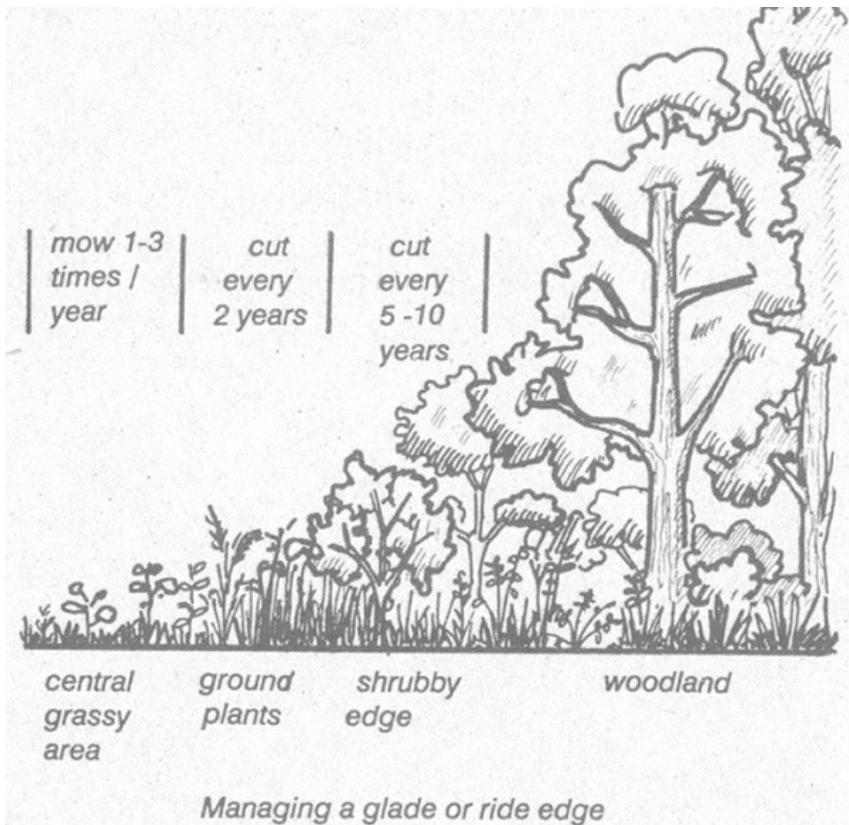
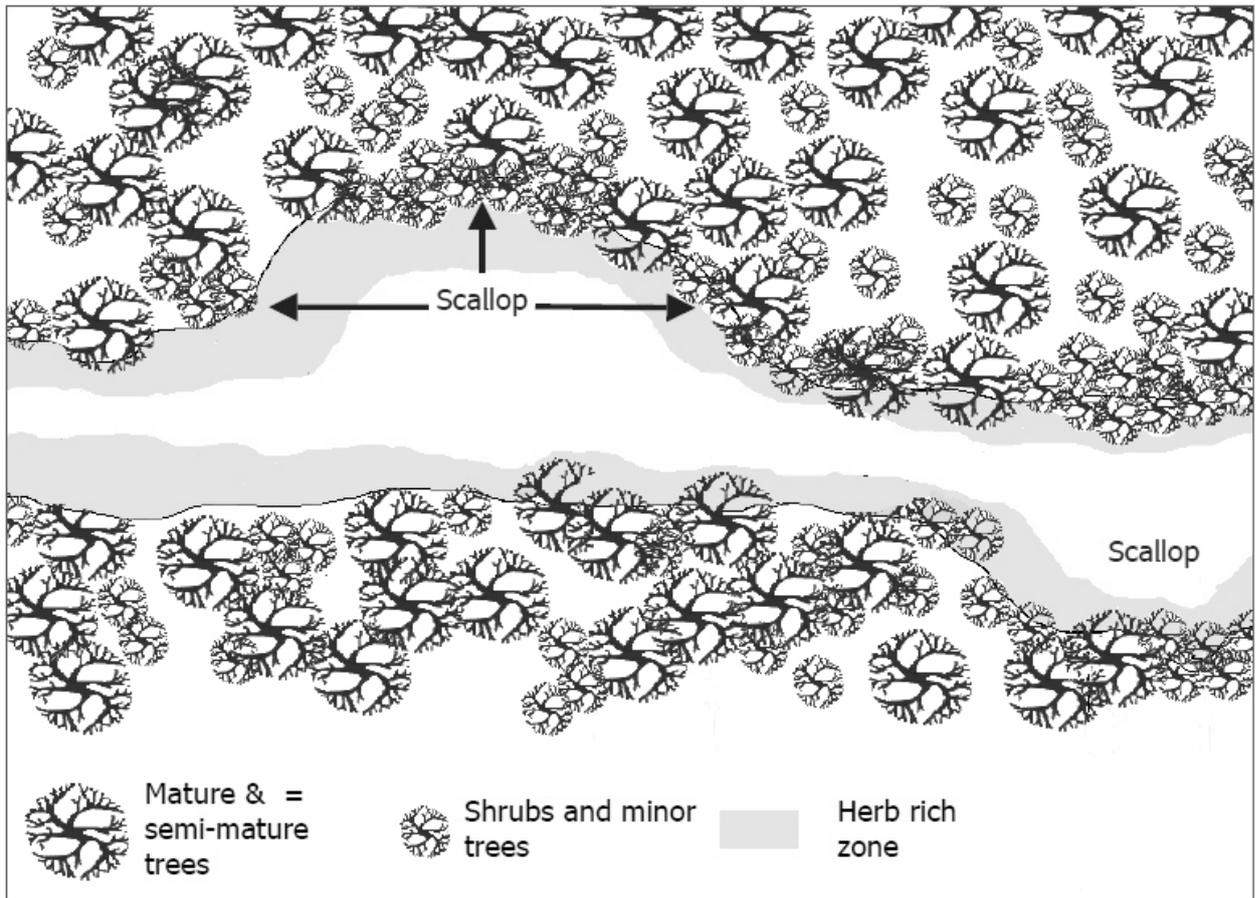
<sup>19</sup> Mid-Essex Landscape Character Assessment (2006) (Brentwood). Shenfield Common falls within F9 Little Warley Wooded Farmland.



Increasing the width of the paths will increase diversity through enabling a wider range of vegetation to grow. The aim is to provide a more diverse range of scrub of different ages, as well as taller herb vegetation. A number of smaller cleared indentations next to paths (or 'scallops') can also be created. The scrub in all these areas can be coppiced and allowed to regrow, and then re-coppiced after a number of years (see next page).<sup>20</sup>



<sup>20</sup> Source [https://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/ewqs-on011-ride-mangt.pdf/\\$file/ewqs-on011-ride-mangt.pdf](https://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/ewqs-on011-ride-mangt.pdf/$file/ewqs-on011-ride-mangt.pdf)



The management of the woodland should concentrate on:

- Opening up rides on main paths – this will both increase the nature conservation and biodiversity of the common and improve amenity;
- Thin out holly understorey;
- Eradicate sycamore in areas where it is less dense;
- Coppice some areas of sycamore in areas where dominant, especially next to paths (eradication not considered feasible in very dense areas).

## Ponds

There are two ponds on the common; the Mill Pond on the open grassland and the woodland pond.

### Mill Pond

The pond is both a historic feature of the common and a well-recognised landmark.

This shallow pond has a vegetated edge and shallow sloping banks. A file record dated 2004, shows that the pond is only around 0.5 metres deep at its deepest point. There is no obvious inlet point from which the pond receives water and no streams lead to the pond. An island, shown in the figure below, has now been removed. The pond was also desilted in recent years.

The water level in the pond fluctuates seasonally and a low water level in the summer is not uncommon. In the hot summers of the mid 1990's, for example, fish had to be removed from the pond as the low water levels were causing them distress.

Intermittent low water levels are unlikely to have a long-term detrimental effect on wildlife communities. Indeed, temporary ponds are a recognised type of pond and can, despite the term, be very long-lived, as in the case of the Mill Pond. This is because the sediment, which builds in all ponds, oxidises and reduces in the periods when the pond is dry. A dry phase is, however, less visually attractive and more likely to cause concern to members of the public.

The pond is highly enriched due to the high levels of fish and waterfowl present. The silt is disturbed by the fish and waterfowl and the pond is highly eutrophic, see photos above. The pond should be monitored for algal blooms as these could be dangerous to dogs entering the pond. The fish will also reduce the level of invertebrates present as these will be a source of food. These factors reduce the pond's value for wildlife. Although the



stock of fish could be reduced, it would be difficult to reduce the levels of wildlife. The emergent and marginal vegetation surrounding the pond is of high value and should be retained and ideally increased.

Australian Swamp Stonecrop (*Crassula helmsii*), a non-native invasive species, has been recorded in the pond in the past. The plant was added to Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 in 2010,<sup>21</sup> making it an offence to release or allow the species to escape into the wild. This species needs to be treated with chemicals and will not be removed manually, as fragments as small as 5mm can regrow, re-infecting the pond and also spreading to other receptor sites.<sup>22</sup> The pond should be monitored for the reoccurrence of this species, along with other invasive species such as Water Fern (*Azolla filiculoides*), New Zealand Pigmyweed (*Hydrocotyle ranunculoides*) and Parrot's Feather (*Myriophyllum* spp.) and water lilies. These species may be deposited in the pond by people or from the feet of visiting waterfowl.

The pond is also adjacent to Seven Arches Road and therefore there will be a degree of contamination from road runoff, which could be more of a problem due to the shallow water.

### Woodland Pond

The origin of this pond is unclear. Whereas the Mill Pond is visible on all of the historic maps, the woodland pond is only mapped after 1890. As with the Mill Pond there is not obvious inlet to the pond and it is not stream-fed. This pond too has historically been seasonal, with water levels often reaching low levels in the summer months.

Over time, ponds will fill with sediment and become progressively shallower, becoming wetlands and eventually drying out. This pond is now heavily shaded, with willow and vegetation encroaching into the pond. The decision which now needs to be taken with the woodland pond is whether management will take place and, if management is required, in what form and how intensive this will be.

Shaded woodland ponds can appear dark and gloomy and few wetland plants can tolerate dense shade, making them appear less beneficial as wildlife habitats. However, woody debris is utilised by many invertebrates, including dragonflies and beetles. The clearance of trees around woodland ponds needs to be carefully considered. Research suggests that those ponds where trees have grown up relatively recently, for example, as in this case, on former open common land, may benefit the most from allowing more light into the pond.<sup>23</sup> However, this will be done



sensitively, not clearing a belt around the whole pond and retaining some trees, scrub and detritus in the pond itself.

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<sup>21</sup> The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (Variation of Schedule 9) (England and Wales) Order 2010.

<sup>22</sup> Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (2004), Information Sheet 11: Australian Swamp Stonecrop..

<sup>23</sup> Biggs *et al* (1994), New Approaches to The Management of Ponds.

Opening up the pond is likely to improve its wildlife value through encouraging the growth of marginal vegetation and improve its aesthetic appeal. It may slow down succession of the pond but it will not, however, restore the pond to an area of open water. Dredging or more drastic works across the whole pond are not considered a feasible or desirable option. The pond is unlikely to be restored to an attractive open pond, it would destroy the habitats which are present and the work would be very costly to undertake. Some opening of tree cover and desilting close to the lime avenue could enhance the nature conservation and amenity of the pond.

### Public Perception

Perhaps the greatest problem with the ponds on Shenfield Common is that of perception.

Both ponds deviate from what is typically thought to be an 'ideal' pond; a pond with open, clear water and an attractive fringe of vegetation, which holds water throughout the year. Certainly, from viewing the old photos of the common, the Mill Pond appears to have always been a shallow pond and probably has always had low summer water levels.



The ponds do, however, have nature conservation value in their own right. Perhaps the task to be undertaken is one of raising the awareness of value of these ponds and to recognise that, in the case of the Mill Pond, occasional low water levels are a part of the natural cycle of this pond and, unless this becomes a permanent state, is not necessarily a cause for concern.

### **Grassland**

The grassland of the common was probably once heathy grassland, but is now maintained as short sward and is mown on an amenity regime. Due to this, there is little nature conservation interest in the main area of grassland, but it has high amenity and landscape value. The main area of grassland is therefore considered in the amenity and access section of this plan.

The woodland management outlined in this document will increase the amount of nature conservation value grassland and ground flora of the site.

## SWOT Analysis – Nature Conservation

Table 8: SWOT Analysis – Nature Conservation

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Several types of habitat – grassland, woodland pond and pond on open common, areas of banks and bare earth;</li> <li>• Very valuable site in urban setting.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of management of woodland in the past;</li> <li>• Lack of diversity in some areas of the woodland;</li> <li>• Sycamore has become dominant in some places;</li> <li>• Holly understorey is dense in places reducing regeneration and amenity.</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve diversity of the woodland through creating woodland rides;</li> <li>• Increase structural diversity through coppicing some areas of sycamore;</li> <li>• Encourage regeneration of understorey species through reducing holly;</li> <li>• Eradication of sycamore in areas where it is less dense;</li> <li>• Woodland management may be cost-neutral if a product can be extracted.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of resources to manage the woodland;</li> <li>• Lack of and the <i>ad hoc</i> manner of woodland management has led to a reduction in amenity and safety in the woodland;</li> <li>• Ongoing management must be targeted and achievable with a low budget;</li> <li>• Climate change effects on woodland species;</li> <li>• Vandalism to any planted trees.</li> </ul>

# Management Aims and Actions

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## Management Aims and Objectives

- 5 To improve the amenity and recreation value of the common;
- 6 To improve the nature conservation value of the common;
- 7 To preserve the landscape importance of Shenfield Common as a valuable urban greenspace;
- 8 To preserve the heritage of the common and increase understanding of its value.

## Summary of Management Actions

The priority of management actions is as follows. All of these will require resources in addition to those available to the Conservators at present:

- 1 Reducing and managing risks to Conservators and Brentwood Borough Council (tree safety, preventing ingress of encampments, safety of members of the public). Maintaining the general amenity of the common and safety and enjoyment of visitors. Management of the Mill Pond;
- 2 Improving the amenity of the woodland areas of the common.;
- 3 Woodland management where this doesn't reduce amenity or increase risk. Actions must be able to be sustained and management continued. Ideally self-financing;

### **1 Essential Works and Reducing and Managing Risks**

#### Essential works - Minimum

- Inspections of infrastructure – paths, benches, bins and bollards. Replace or repair as necessary;
- Regular litter picking and clearing up evidence of anti-social behaviour (fires, vandalised trees etc.) regularly and as soon as possible after this occurs;
- Regular tree inspections as per tree inspection schedule;
- Remove dead or dangerous trees;
- Secure clarity on the ongoing support available from Brentwood Borough Council;
- Seek clarity on responsible organisation for liabilities;
- Seek additional funding to enable this plan to be implemented, including grant sources and CIL/s106 contributions;
- Regular grass cutting on open common.

#### Management of the Mill Pond

- This pond has always been a shallow pond which has been prone to drying out. Education may be required so that residents and visitors understand and accept the fluctuation in water level. As summers become drier due to climate change it is likely that this pond will get very low more frequently. It would not be appropriate in an area of water stress to refill the pond. Fish may become distressed.
- General maintenance (e.g. painting railings, litter removal);
- Consider removal of some fish;
- Monitor for non-native invasive species and address using appropriate and recommended techniques;
- Maintain emergent and marginal vegetation and increase if possible.

## 2 Amenity Improvements

The following amenity improvements will make the common more welcoming to visitors. This could help to encourage more people to use the route through the wood. Increased 'through traffic' may also help to reduce anti-social behaviour. A hierarchy of routes is proposed.

### High Priority – Accessible Route through the Woodland

The priority for improvement are routes which are the most accessible as this will open up the common for the greatest number of people. Due to the landform of the common there is a limited choice of routes which are flat; or nearly so. However, there are routes from both the Ingrave Road and Seven Arches Road, joining at the lime avenue, which are reasonably level and which provide a route through the woodland, see Plan 8. These routes will be opened up with wide woodland rides created, 'scallop' and a graded edge, see page 35. The additional light would lessen muddy conditions and would also bring significant biodiversity improvements. These routes would require ongoing maintenance and cutting on rotation.

Entrance signs and waymarkers would help to encourage people to explore the woodland. Benches would also improve the amenity of the woodland.

Communication with members of the public will be important to explain the works.

If resources are available, these through-routes could be surfaced.

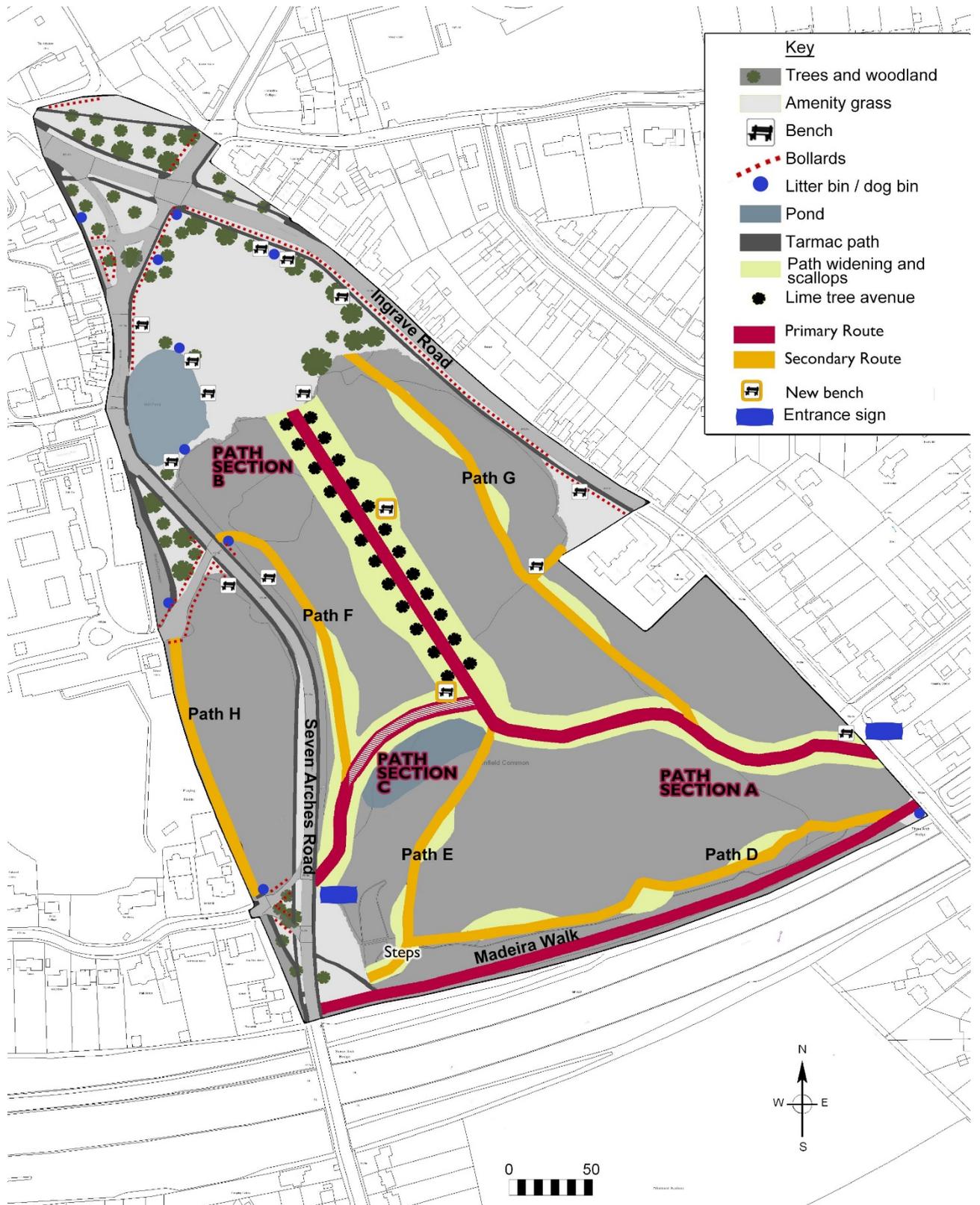
### Network of Secondary Paths

A lower priority is a network of secondary paths to enable access around the common. Again, this will both allow people to enjoy the common and help to lessen anti-social behaviour. A limited number of additional paths will be maintained to form this secondary network. Widening parts of these paths would also improve biodiversity, i.e. through 'scalloping' the edges as previously described on page 35. These paths would require a minimal level of maintenance, i.e. trimming overhanging vegetation. Steps and a handrail should be installed on the bank close to Madeira Walk. Other desire lines through the common (shown in blue on Plan 5) will not be maintained. Significant clearance of holly is required on Path F.

Removal of holly from all areas of the woodland would be beneficial to open up sight lines and increase light. Lidar shows where there is a high density of holly (see right). It would be beneficial to leave some holly alongside the Ingrave Road as this offers some noise and visual protection but holly needs to be substantially thinned elsewhere. This includes along the lime avenue, around the school and on eastern side of Ingrave Road.



Plan 8: Path Network



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### **3 Management of Woodland Area**

Woodland management compartments are shown in Plan 9. The boundaries are based around the density of sycamore as this determines appropriate management.

Sycamore eradication across the entire woodland is not feasible or necessary. Coppicing of sycamore in areas of high density would add diversity and would prevent trees reaching seeding age. Ideally this would be achieved through selling standing wood to a contractor. Coppicing work would need to be continued on a rotation of 7 – 10 years (beyond the lifetime of this plan).

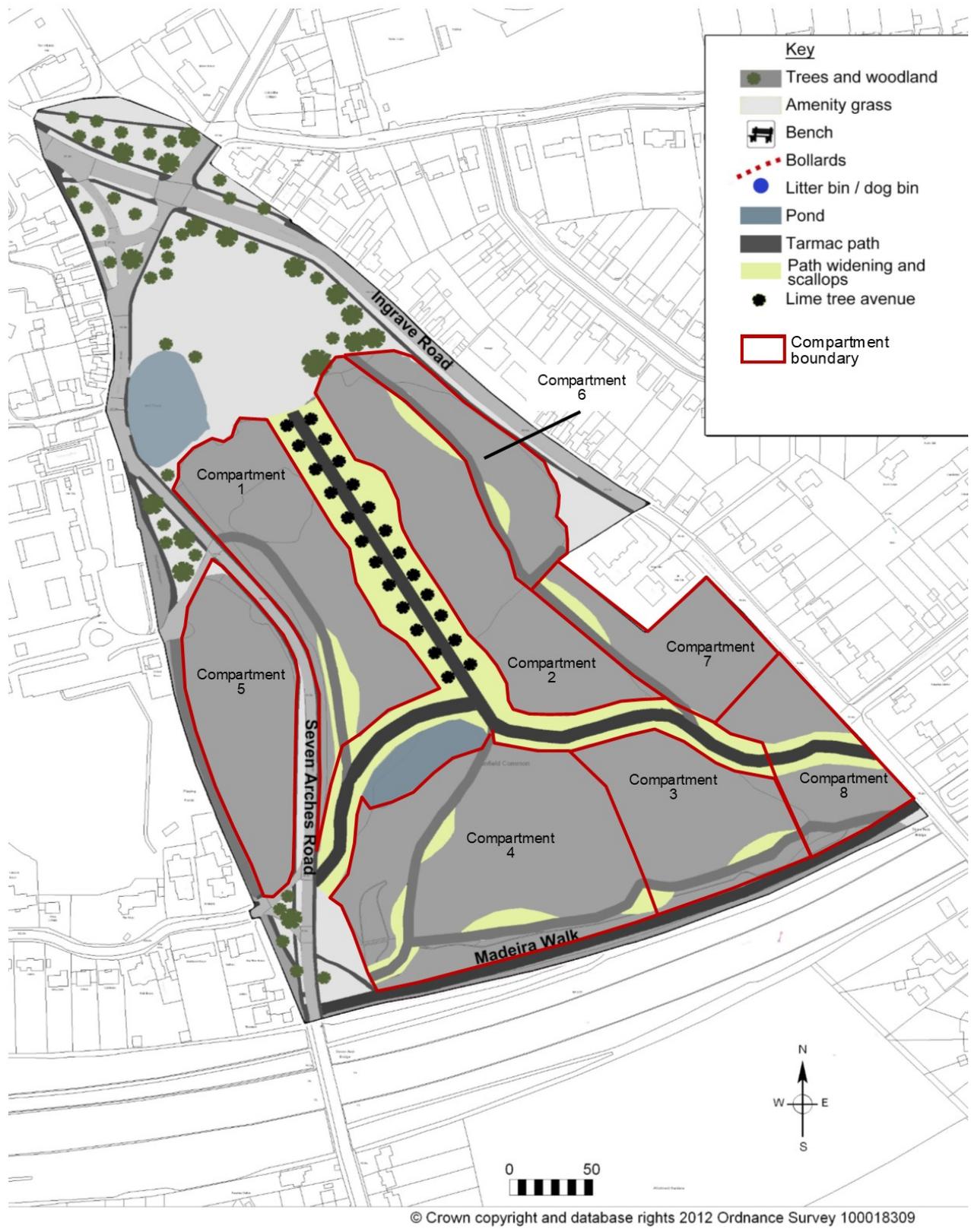
In the central part of woodland and south east corner there is less sycamore. It would be possible to remove sycamore in these areas to favour other trees. In these areas some underplanting/restocking may be required. Native species should be used to create a diverse woodland structure as outlined previously. Ash should be avoided due to ash dieback.

The woodland south of Cornsland/adjacent to Brentwood County High School contains high levels of holly and sycamore in parts. The holly and sycamore should be removed and underplanted/restocked with native species.

Some sensitive clearance around the woodland pond, especially of sycamore on the southern edge will allow more light to enter the pond. Willows at the lime avenue end of the pond could be coppiced. There is value in wet areas of woodland and ephemeral ponds and current best practice is to not dig out or carry out extensive tree clearance to try to turn such ponds into more 'aesthetically pleasing' ponds, as they support unique fauna.

A felling licence will be required for felling of timber which totals more than 5 cubic metres in any year. This will be applied for through the Forestry Commission.

# Plan 9: Woodland Management Compartments



## Management Actions

### Action Plan

The implementation of the plan is dependant on resources. Although years are indicated, the works will not be delivered without this plan being funded.

If the works are not delivered in the year indicated, the years should be adjusted.

Works in one area should be completed before moving to another area. If works indicated to be completed in one year are not achieved, the works should be completed in subsequent years before moving to the next action. Works undertaken on the common in past have been piecemeal and not completed, which reduces the impact and benefit of works.

Area of Common	Description	Budget Estimate	Priority	Delivery	Year
All areas	Inspect infrastructure - benches, bollards and bins. Replace as necessary.	Annual budget £350	Low	Conservators and BBC	All years
All areas	Carry out regular walk-over of woodland and open common, litter picking and removal of evidence of anti-social behaviour (drug paraphernalia, vandalised trees, fire sites etc.) Clear litter and debris from ditch next to Brentwood County High School.	-	High	Volunteers or BBC	All years
Mill Pond	Monitor Mill Pond for non-native species and remove as necessary. Monitor for algal bloom.		High	Conservators or volunteers	All years
Open common	Grass cutting of common	In kind from BBC	High	BBC	All years
Woodland	Maintenance of path network to ensure paths are clear for users - cut back brambles, overhanging vegetation.	In kind from BBC	Medium	BBC	All years
All areas	Tree works as identified by tree inspections.	£1,000	High	BBC	All years as necessary
Management structures	Determine maintenance responsibility of metalled paths		High	Conservators, BBC, ECC	2020
Management structures	Discuss location of bins with Brentwood Borough Council. Agree on location of bins. Include signing to indicate that dog waste is permitted in bins.	£250	Medium	Conservators and BBC	2020

Area of Common	Description	Budget Estimate	Priority	Delivery	Year
Management structures	Secure support from Brentwood Borough Council for routine maintenance and implementation of this management plan.	-	High	Conservators and BBC	2020
Management structures	Discuss options for s106/CIL through emerging Local Plan for implementation of this management plan.	-	High	Conservators and BBC	2020
Management structures	Explore funding sources to enable implementation of this plan.	-	High	Conservators and BBC	2020
Path Section A	Widen path from Ingrave Road (Pelican crossing) to end of lime avenue. Open between 5m - 10m either side of path, coppicing trees.	£2,500	As resources allow	Volunteers or contractors	2021
Path Section A	Install entrance sign near Pelican crossing entrance and waymarker signs.	£400	As resources allow	Volunteers or contractors	2021
Woodland Compartment 2	Remove holly from southern end of Compartment 2 to improve sight lines around improved Path Section A	£1,200	As resources allow	Volunteers or contractors	2021
Woodland Compartment 3	Remove holly from Compartment 3 adjacent to path to improve sight lines around improved Path Section A	£1,800	As resources allow	Volunteers or contractors	2021
Mill Pond	Consider removal of fish.		Low	Conservators	2022
Path F	Widen and remove holly from around Path F (substantial holly near to woodland pond).	£2,000	As resources allow	Volunteers or contractors	2022
Path Section C	Create a new path from southern end of lime avenue around northern edge of woodland pond (small existing path). Widen to 5m - 10m either side of path. Continue to Seven Arches Road.	£3,000	As resources allow	Volunteers or contractors	2022
Path Section C	Install entrance sign at Seven Arches Road entrance	£400	As resources allow	Volunteers or contractors	2022
Woodland Compartment 1	Remove holly from southern end of Compartment 1 adjacent to path to improve sight lines around improved Path Section C		As resources allow	Volunteers or contractors	2022
Path Section B (Lime Avenue)	Remove trees from both sides of lime avenue between 10 - 20m each side.	£6,000	As resources allow	Volunteers or contractors	2023
Seven Arches Road	Replace any failed horse chestnut trees.	£2,500	As resources allow	Volunteers or contractors	2023
Path Section A	Cut vegetation along widened Path Section A. Remove any sycamore which have seeded (3 years after path widened).	£300	As resources allow	Volunteers or contractors	2024

Area of Common	Description	Budget Estimate	Priority	Delivery	Year
Woodland Compartment 5	Remove holly. Remove sycamore, herbicide stumps. Underplant with native species.	£2,000	As resources allow	Volunteers or contractors	2024
Path E	Create scalloped edges to path. Remove holly from adjacent to path.	£600	As resources allow	Volunteers or contractors	2025
Path E	Install steps on bank close to Madeira Walk	£1,500	As resources allow	Volunteers or contractors	2025
Path Section C	Cut vegetation along widened Path Section C. Remove any sycamore which have seeded (3 years after path widened).	£300	As resources allow	Volunteers or contractors	2025
Woodland Compartment 1	Remove holly. Remove sycamore, herbicide stumps. Underplant with native species.	£5,000	As resources allow	Volunteers or contractors	2025
Woodland Compartment 8	Remove holly. Remove sycamore, herbicide stumps. Underplant with native species.	£5,000	As resources allow	Volunteers or contractors	2025
Woodland Compartment 5	Maintenance Compartment 5 - replace failed planted trees, remove seeding sycamore.	£800	As resources allow	Volunteers or contractors	2025
Path D	Create scalloped edges to path. Remove holly from adjacent to path.	£600	As resources allow	Volunteers or contractors	2026
Path Section B (Lime Avenue)	Cut vegetation along widened Path Section B (Lime Avenue). Remove any sycamore which have seeded (3 years after path widened).	£300	As resources allow	Volunteers or contractors	2026
Woodland Compartment 1	Maintenance Compartment 1 - replace failed planted trees, remove seeding sycamore.	£600	As resources allow	Volunteers or contractors	2026
Woodland Compartment 8	Maintenance Compartment 8 - replace failed planted trees, remove seeding sycamore.	£600	As resources allow	Volunteers or contractors	2026
Woodland Compartment 2	Remove holly. Remove sycamore, herbicide stumps. Underplant with native species.	£5,000	As resources allow	Volunteers or contractors	2026
Woodland Compartment 3	Coppice woodland. Plant native standards.	£5,000	As resources allow	Contractor, sale of standing wood	2026
Path G	Create scallops along path	£600	As resources allow	Volunteers or contractors	2027

Area of Common	Description	Budget Estimate	Priority	Delivery	Year
Woodland Compartment 2	Maintenance Compartment 2 - replace failed planted trees, remove seeding sycamore.	£600	As resources allow	Volunteers or contractors	2027
Woodland Compartment 4	Coppice woodland. Plant native standards. Open up eastern end of woodland pond.	£5,000	As resources allow	Contractor, sale of standing wood	2027
Woodland Compartment 6	Coppice woodland. Plant native standards.	£5,000	As resources allow	Contractor, sale of standing wood	2028
Woodland Compartment 7	Coppice woodland. Plant native standards.	£5,000	As resources allow	Contractor, sale of standing wood	2029