



The Greensand Trust

## Masterplan for Flitwick Nature Park, Flitwick, Central Bedfordshire

August 2022

Produced on behalf of Flitwick Town Council by

The Greensand Trust

The Greensand Trust

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Greensand Trust is an independent environmental charity that works with local communities and landowners to conserve, enhance and promote the distinctive landscape, wildlife and history of the Greensand Ridge and wider area.

At the heart of everything we do is the belief that the best results are brought about by empowering local people and working in partnership for a more sustainable future. Our work includes:

- Conservation management of important habitats and species;
- Promoting the local distinctiveness of the Greensand Ridge;
- Managing open spaces, country parks and nature reserves for the benefit of wildlife and visitors;
- Advising and assisting landowners to improve the wildlife and/or heritage value of their land;
- Promoting and delivering environmental education;
- Helping local communities access their local outdoor space and enabling them to improve their environment;
- Thinking strategically and working with partners on Green Infrastructure planning and delivery.

### 1.1 Proposed Works

It is intended that the land will be managed by Flitwick Town Council as a Nature Park to be managed to provide informal recreation opportunities and enhance its value for biodiversity. The masterplan includes biodiversity enhancements including establishment methods and maintenance of proposed habitats created.

### 1.2 Description

The proposed Flitwick Nature Park is a 27ha site located on the west side of Maulden Road near the northeast edge of Flitwick centred at Grid Reference TL040362. It has been designated for recreational use through the development management system. The underlying geology is Lower Greensand and the Ampthill Clay partly overlain by head deposits, alluvium and river terrace sands and gravels.

The site consists of an area of former arable farmland that has been left fallow for some time and has become colonised by a range of grassland, ruderal and weed vegetation that is not of significant botanical interest but does support nesting skylarks. There are few trees and no hedgerows on the site apart from a mature oak and numerous younger trees of various on the eastern roadside boundary.

The land rises to the south providing good views towards the Greensand Ridge and the Flit Valley.

A public bridleway runs along the southern edge of the site, there are various unofficial footpaths crossing it, with people accessing it via an informal path from the west (from A5120 Ampthill Road), and cars can drive into the site from Maulden Road and park along the surfaced track.

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## 2. MASTERPLAN

### 2.1 General Aim

The general aim is to establish and manage the site as a 'nature park' for informal access by local people and to maintain, create and enhance a range of habitats including lowland meadow, hedgerows, mature trees, woodland and ponds. The intention is for the majority of users to access the site either on foot or by bicycle, with internal access focused on a network of pedestrian routes. A small car parking area will be provided, to cater for users with disabilities in particular.

The initial masterplan will identify how the site can be laid out in terms of access, recreational areas and habitats, in order for FTC to put its development out to tender. The 'zoning' on the Masterplan

could be used to inform a Management Plan for the site, helping ensure its future management can be clearly directed and sustained in line with objectives.

Two 'options' have been provided based on two alternative car park locations.

## 2.2 Specific Objectives

- 1.) To establish and manage the majority of the site as lowland meadow managed by hay cutting and/or grazing.
- 2.) To plant new hedgerows, trees, orchard and woodland (including wet woodland) to enhance the landscape setting and reduce the impact of the adjacent water treatment works and the A507 while not restricting important views.
- 3.) To create new ponds, both for wildlife and to provide opportunities for pond dipping.
- 4.) To provide appropriate infrastructure such as fencing, gates, path surfacing, seating locations and cycle racks.
- 5.) To maintain and enhance populations of rare and uncommon species, and maintain suitable conditions for other species not presently found but which might naturally be encouraged at the site.
- 6.) To reduce the impact of introduced species where appropriate.
- 7.) To encourage walking and cycling as the main modes of accessing the site, and supporting the development of the Ampthill-Flitwick Green Wheel.
- 8.) To provide open access areas and restricted areas to protect wildlife such as ground nesting birds.
- 9.) To liaise with Central Bedfordshire Council for a Dogs on Leads order to cover the site and protect current and future wildlife.
- 10.) To raise public awareness of the sites importance for nature conservation.
- 11.) To encourage the use of the site as an educational resource.
- 12.) To involve the local community and volunteers in the management of the site.
- 13.) To maintain a hierarchy of paths, with surfaced multi-user routes to support access to and through the site as part of the Ampthill-Flitwick Green Wheel, but otherwise utilising mown paths for walking access.
- 14.) To prevent unauthorised vehicular access

## 2.3 Rationale

### Lowland Meadow

Grasslands are traditionally maintained by the removal of grass and seedling bushes through grazing and/or cutting. The removal of plant material and nutrients as animal bodies or hay is important in restricting the growth of tall and robust plants. These thrive on high nutrient levels and can reduce species diversity by shading out plants of smaller stature that can tolerate cutting and grazing and persist under low nutrient and more open conditions. Reducing the build-up of nutrients in the soil at this site is difficult due to its location in a river floodplain. Grazing may not be an option in an urban fringe site such as this but managing the vegetation by hay cutting will help to continue the removal of nutrients and maintain open vegetation to further encourage the spread of finer grassland plant species.

The western section of the meadow area will be separated from the remainder of the site by a new hedgerow and fencing, and will be maintained as a restricted access area to provide undisturbed conditions for ground nesting birds such as skylarks and other wildlife. It will take 5-10 years for the meadow to mature.

### Hedgerows

Hedgerows would traditionally have been managed by laying or coppicing to maintain a dense structure and keep them stock proof. There are no remaining sections of hedgerows and they will need to be restored by replanting. In the longer term will require some form of management such as laying or coppicing to ensure they retain their structure, though this would be best carried out by working on short lengths in rotation to maintain the continuity of dense hedgerow habitat.

The new hedgerows will help to link up the existing hedgerow network on the adjacent areas of farmland and enhance existing wildlife corridors. They will take c. 10-15 years to reach maturity.

### Mature trees

There are currently few trees on the site apart from along the eastern roadside boundary, and no woodland. Mature trees provide special features not present in younger trees such as fissured bark, sap runs, dead wood and hollow stems. These trees are especially important for fungi, bryophytes, lichens, beetles and other characteristic invertebrates. Species such as woodpeckers and birds use them for roosting or feeding and the hollow bases can be used as lying up places by otters. Fallen timber left around mature trees provides important additional habitat, especially for invertebrates.

The new woodland and orchard will provide additional habitats for wildlife, provide a screen to the adjacent water treatment works and access track, and will act as a link between wet woodland and other habitats elsewhere in the Flit valley. The scattered copses will provide additional small areas of woodland habitat and in time will become prominent landscape features

that will break up the open landscape of much of the park. The copses, woodland and orchard will take 20-30 years to reach maturity.

### Ponds

Ponds provide habitats for a range of wetland plant and animal species. Ponds are subject to successional change as they gradually fill up with vegetation and dry out. Some management to maintain open water in the ponds will need to be planned every few years. Two of the ponds will be in the open access area to use for educational purposes such as pond dipping, with the other in the restricted access area to provide undisturbed conditions for wildlife.

## 2.4 Management Prescriptions

The following prescriptions could be used and expanded upon in the Management Plan for the site.

- Approximately 20ha of new meadow grassland will be established on the site by cultivating it and sowing in the autumn with a meadow wildflower mix such as the EM2 Standard Meadow Mixture from Emorsgate Seeds <https://wildseed.co.uk/mixtures/view/3>. It is recommended that soil testing is carried out prior to seeding to ensure that a seed mix is used that is most appropriate for the soil conditions. Seed rich hay from a local species-rich meadow site could also be scattered over the fields to introduce additional species of local provenance. In the first year the new meadow areas will be cut regularly through the summer to encourage the sward to develop and prevent the spread of weed species, and in following years it will be hay cut once in late summer/early autumn and the cut material removed and taken off site, though the grazing at least part of the area should be considered.
- Mown paths will be maintained across the site during the summer by regular mowing to maintain easy access for the public and allow them to better appreciate the meadowland and other habitats.
- Approximately 2000m of new hedgerow will be planted as shown on page 9 using a mixture of native species of local provenance, including a selection of the following – hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), field maple (*Acer campestre*), hazel (*Corylus avellana*), goat willow (*Salix caprea*), wayfaring tree (*Viburnum lantana*), guelder rose (*Viburnum opulus*), crab apple (*Malus sylvestris*), holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), dogwood (*Cornus sanguinea*) and spindle (*Euonymus europaeus*). Once established, the hedgerows will be maintained by rotational trimming in late winter to maintain a source of berries for birds over the autumn and winter. In the longer term, sections of the hedgerows will also be layed or coppiced in rotation in autumn/winter as required to maintain a dense structure. A number of young standard native trees such as pedunculate oak (*Quercus robur*) will be planted in the new hedgerows.
- Approximately 3.5ha of new broad-leaved woodland will be planted in the north of the park to screen the adjacent water treatment works and access track. As the woodland is near the base of a small valley, it will mainly be planted with wet woodland species such as common alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) and willow sp. (*Salix* sp.), with other native tree and shrub species on the higher edges such as pedunculate oak, hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*), small-leaved lime (*Tilia cordata*), field maple, hazel and holly. One of the access paths will go through the

woodland and will be managed as a woodland ride with annual rotational hay cutting of each side of the ride, and maintenance of a scrub edge by rotational coppicing of sections of the adjacent woody vegetation.

- The scattered copses will be no more than c. 500sqm in size and will be planted with a similar range of native tree and shrub species to the higher areas of the woodland, and avoiding using willows and alder as they are on drier soils.
- A community orchard will be planted in the northwest corner of the park using a mixture of fruit trees of local provenance including apples, pears, plums and cherries. The trees will be planted 5-10m apart, and the ground beneath the trees will be seeded with the same meadow mixture as used for the rest of the site and managed in the same way.
- The potential impacts of deer on new tree planting have not been assessed. It is suggested that any tree/hedge planting is monitored. If necessary, in the first few years all the tree and hedgerow planting could be protected with 2m high deer fencing if tree tubes are not sufficient to prevent them being damaged by deer browsing.
- Three new ponds will be created on the site and planted with a range of native aquatic and emergent vegetation such as pondweed sp. (*Potamogeton* sp.), yellow iris (*Iris pseudacorus*) and purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*), avoiding invasive species such as reedmace (*Typha latifolia*).
- New nesting and roosting opportunities for birds and bats could be provided by installing a range of bird and bat boxes on some of the larger trees on the eastern boundary such as the mature oak. Woodcrete bird and bat boxes such as Schwegler 1B nest boxes [1B Schwegler Nest Box | NHBS Practical Conservation Equipment](#), Vivara Pro Seville 32mm WoodStone nest boxes [Woodstone® Seville Nest Box 32mm \(Green\) | Vivara Pro](#) and Schwegler 1FF boxes [Flat Bat Box 1FF » Schwegler Natur \(schwegler-natur.de\)](#) will last longer than wooden ones.
- Other wildlife features that could be provided in quiet areas of the site such as in the new areas of woodland or around the new ponds include one or more hedgehog boxes <https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/give-nature-a-home-in-your-garden/garden-activities/giveahogahome/>, insect hotels such as a Schwegler Clay and Reed Insect Nest <https://www.nhbs.com/schwegler-clay-and-reed-insect-nest> and log and brash heaps to provide refuge and hibernation features for hedgehogs, invertebrates and reptiles and amphibians. When constructing the log and brash heaps for reptiles and amphibians, the logs should be at the base of the heap with the brash stacked on top.
- Install c. 800 m of fencing around the restricted access area. A ditch and bund around the perimeter of the site should mostly negate the need for boundary fencing, though appropriate gates will be required at the access points to prevent use of the site by vehicles as shown on the plan on page 9.
- A new car park for approximately 20 cars including 4 disabled parking bays, will be provided either at the northeast or southeast corner of the park as shown on Options A and B of the map on pages 9 and 10. Security gates and fencing including a height barrier will be required at the car park entrance.

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- Install c. 2000m of 2.5m wide surfaced and edged access for all paths around the park as shown on the plan on page 9.
- Install five benches along the all access path and one alongside the public bridleway as shown on the plan on page 9.

## 2.5 Survey, Monitoring and Review

### Photography

Before and after photographs should be taken whenever establishment and management work is undertaken at the site. Fixed-point photographs are very useful when recording changes in vegetation structure and communities, and to assess recreational impacts such as erosion.

### Survey and Monitoring

- Monitor plant communities in the developing meadow grassland, woodland and ponds.
- Monitor establishment of new tree/hedge planting.
- Carry out detailed surveys of mammals, breeding birds, invertebrates, reptiles and amphibians and monitor populations of notable species.
- Ensure all entrances and paths are in a safe and usable condition.

### Review

- Review and update management plan after five years.

## 2.6 Community involvement, awareness raising and education

- Erect and update interpretation boards on the four entrances to the site, and produce a leaflet for the site and update as necessary.
- Investigate ways of providing a wardening service for the site.
- Organise walks and other interpretative events for the local community.
- Draw up a set of byelaws for the site and ensure these are enforced.
- Involve local people in volunteer work parties, species monitoring and general site wardening.
- Monitor visitor levels and take any measures necessary to maintain special interest where this may be under threat.
- Develop the site as an educational resource by involving local schools, colleges, community groups etc.
- Liaise with Central Bedfordshire Council for a Dogs on Leads order to cover the site and protect current and future wildlife.
- Include the site within the Ampthill-Flitwick Green Wheel using the existing public bridleway along the south edge of the site. Two cycle racks will be provided along the bridleway, which will be fenced along its north side to prevent cyclists accessing the remainder of the park.

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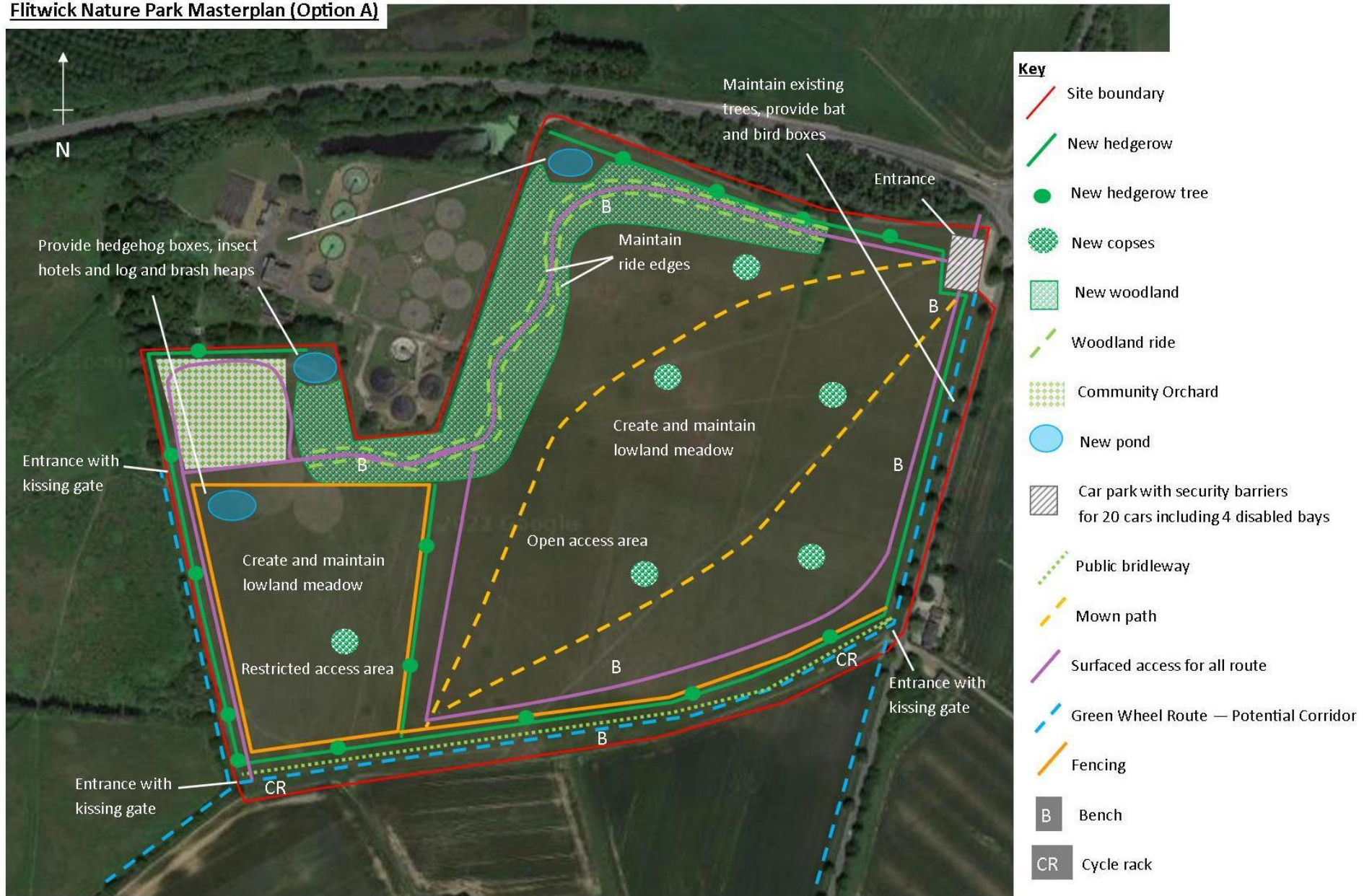
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**Flitwick Nature Park Masterplan (Option A)**



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