

Flitwick Nature Park Management Plan

August 2025 – April 2030

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1. Introduction

1.1 Flitwick

Flitwick is a town in Central Bedfordshire and is mentioned in the 1086 Domesday Book as ‘a hamlet on the River Flitt’. The Flitt starts as a small pool near Chalton then flows north through Flitwick Moor (Site of Special Scientific Interest), Flitton, Chicksands, Shefford and Stanford before meeting the Rivel lvel at Langford.

The town lies between Bedford and Luton and is adjacent to the town of Ampthill with the A507 road and a watercourse called Running Waters separating the two. There are two tiers of local government covering Flitwick at parish (Flitwick Town Council) and unitary authority level (Central Bedfordshire Council).

Flitwick has good transport links with Junction 12 of the M1 being a 5-minute drive and Bedford, Luton and the A1 25-30 minutes’ drive. The town is served by a train station on the Thameslink line making it a convenient location for commuting to London. Flitwick has steadily grown in recent years with a current population of 13,663 (2021 census).

1.2 Flitwick Nature Park

Flitwick Town Council acquired the land in 2014. In 2019 Flitwick Town Council received planning permission to change the 27.7ha site into a Nature Park to deliver on ecological, leisure and community involvement objectives and provide a new cemetery. The Nature Park and cemetery were not delivered, and the land reverted to unmanaged open grassland that was used by local and surrounding communities as an informal open access site heavily frequented by dog walkers.

The site is now formally known as Flitwick Nature Park (FNP) and consists of approximately 27.7ha of former agricultural land having previously formed part of Central Bedfordshire’s portfolio of farmland. The site was planted with trees and shrubs during winter 2023/24 using DEFRA funding, administered by the Forest of Marston Vale Trust under the Trees for Climate Grant. The site is located west of Maulden Road and south of the A507, close to the urban fringes of Flitwick which lies to the southwest. The settlement of Ampthill lies 1.8 miles northwest of the site.

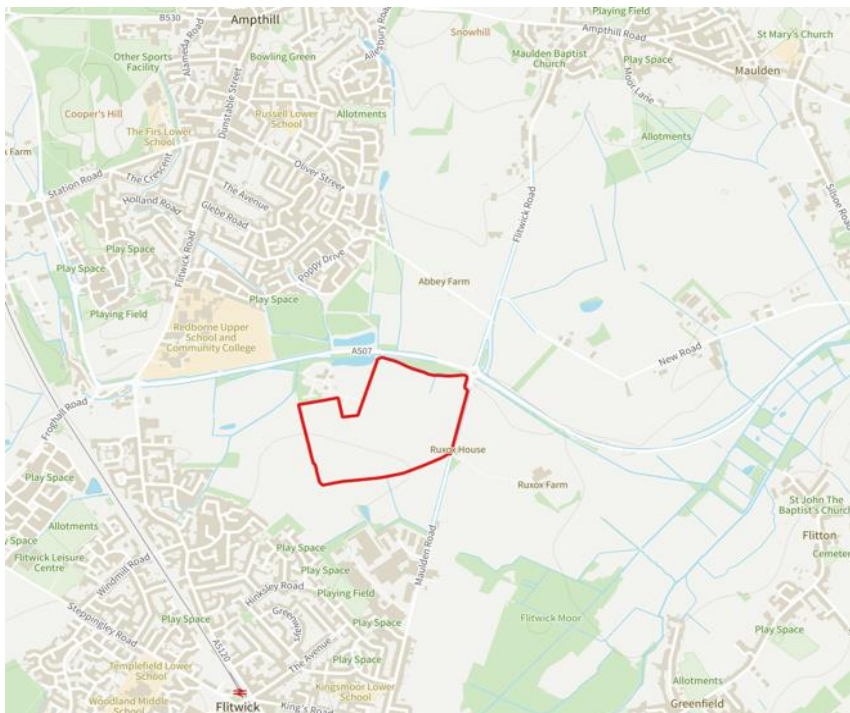
Flitwick Nature Park rises to the south providing views towards the Greensand Ridge and Flit Valley. An Anglian Water sewage treatment plant is located on the western boundary of the site which is served by an access road that runs parallel with the northeastern boundary from the A507/Maulden Road roundabout. A Public Bridleway (BW No.2) runs outside of the southern boundary providing off-road links to the town. The site is rural in nature, surrounded by agricultural fields, hedges and open countryside.

2. Site description

2.1 Summary of site details

Site Name	Flitwick Nature Park
Site Status	Country Park
Location	TL 040361 OS map 1:2500 map no.
N.E Character Area	NCA 90: Bedfordshire Greensand Ridge
Local Landscape Character Type	Central Beds LCA: Type 7a – Flit Greensand Valley
Local Planning Authority	Central Bedfordshire council
Tenure	Freehold
Area	27.2ha
Consultees for original plan	Public Consultation carried out as part of Flitwick Nature Park Design
Owner	Flitwick Town Council
Last Update	July 2025
Key Contacts	Town Clerk – Stacie Lockey Stacielockey@flitwick.gov.uk Amenities Officer – Sarah Burgess sarahburgess@flitwick.gov.uk

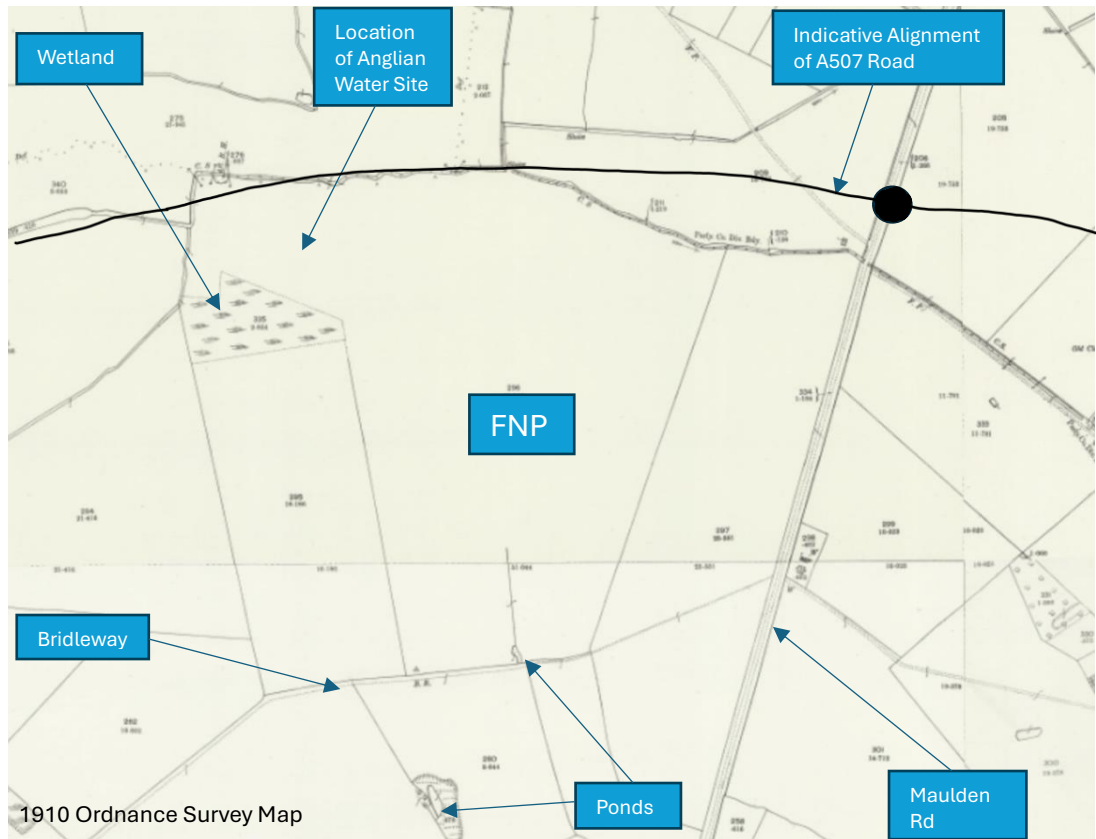
2.2 Location Map



Flitwick Nature Park boundary shown as red line

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2.3 Historical map



2.4 Aerial photo (Google Earth)



2.5 Site history

The site was actively farmed for many decades until Flitwick Town Council took ownership in 2014 when it reverted to unmanaged grassland. The site was originally divided into 3 fields with an area of wetland to the northwest of the site as shown in the above 1910 Ordnance Survey map. A pond was located on the southern boundary adjacent to the bridleway which no longer exists.

Previous planning applications for the proposed cemetery and Nature Park projects resulted in archaeological field evaluations and heritage assessments that noted areas within the site that ranged from low to high archaeological significance. The second assessment noted one area of sub ground archaeological activity on the southwest part of the site that is thought to comprise enclosures with possible internal features.

As part of the Environmental Impact Assessment to re-forest the park Central Beds Councils Archaeologist was consulted to aid the design of the new woodland around heritage assets. Three areas of significance were identified as part of this engagement with one supporting the discovery of the enclosures to the southwest of the site, another showing potential remains of iron age settlements to the east of the site and a third noting potential alluvial deposits relating to roman British activity within the vicinity of the River Flit in association with evidence found in the surrounding area.

The design of the new woodland and recently approved Flitwick Nature Park planning application have accommodated the below ground heritage assets by incorporating them within open space and creating a 40m grass buffer strip alongside the River Flit with a further 50m buffer containing shallow rooting hazel compartments.

2.6 Water, Flood Risk and Drainage

The northern part of the Nature Park which lies adjacent to the River Flit is within Flood Zones 2 and 3 and at risk of surface water flooding as shown in the image 1 and 2.

Image 1 - Flood Zone Map

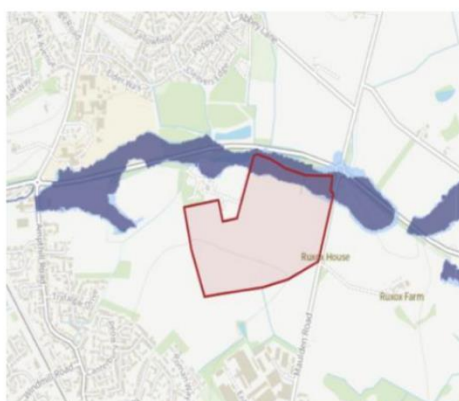
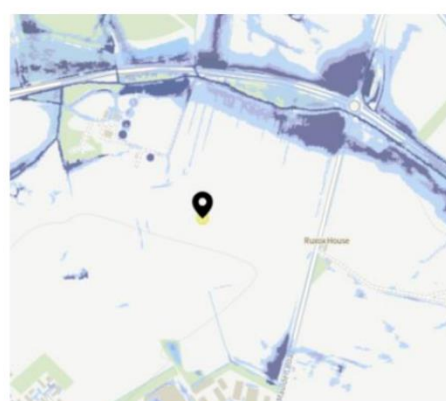


Image 2 - Surface Water Flooding.



The northeastern corner of the site is prone to localised flooding that sits wet over winter due to a lack of connectivity with the surrounding ditch network. The site is within an NVZ, Drinking Water Safeguard Zone, a Source Protection – Zone III total catchment and a EWCO Water Quality Area.

2.7 Services

A foul water sewage pipe crosses the park from the Anglian Water site located to the northeast. No other services are known to exist across the park.

2.8 Geology

The site slopes gently from a low ridge in the southwest to level terrain in the northeast forming the floodplain of small stream which runs parallel to the A507 road adjacent to the northern site boundary.

British Geological Survey 1:50,000 scale information records the solid geology in the south as Woburn Sands Formation and elsewhere as West Walton and Ampthill Clay Formations. Overlying drift cover is recorded across the entire site: on the higher ground in the south comprising glacio-fluvial sand and gravel; in central areas Head, and in the north River Alluvium.

2.9 Soils

The National Soil Map (published at 1:250,000 scale) shows Thames Association in the north; groundwater-affected wet alluvial clays. Elsewhere, Evesham 3 Association is recorded: variably calcareous clays formed over Jurassic mudstone.

The Forest Research Ecological Site Classification ESC programme reports that the site has a ‘warm, sheltered and slightly dry climate’.

A soils survey that was carried as part of the woodland design and Environmental Impact Assessment noted that presence of 3 soil types across the site which included:

Loams Over Sand (Soil Type 1)

These soils occur on the higher ground in the south of the site and comprise stoneless or very slightly stony sandy loam upper layers, mainly over sandy lower layers. The soils are free draining (Soil Wetness class I) The sandy soils in the south of the site present a slightly dry moisture regime and moderate nutrient supply (in the long term). Target grassland habitat should be dry neutral to acid grassland. However, the current high topsoil nutrient status means that grass growth is likely to be excessive, and extractive mowing (removal of cuttings) in late summer/early autumn over a period of 3 -5 years is recommended to speed the process of nutrient decline.

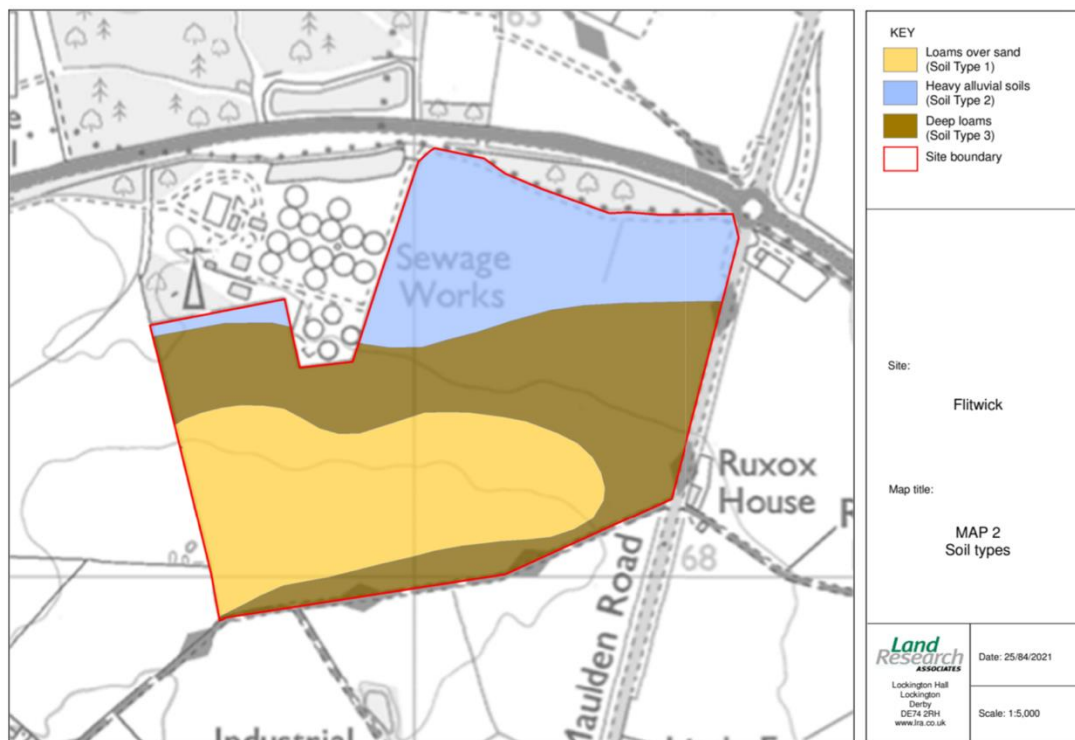
Heavy Alluvial Soils (Soil Type 2)

These soils are found on the lower ground in the north of the site within the flood plain and comprise stoneless clay loam or upper clay layers, with underlying slowly permeable clay or clay loam at relatively shallow depth. Sand and gravel layers often occur at depth. These soils

are affected by shallow groundwater and are seasonally waterlogged (Soil Wetness Class III or IV). Because these soils have a rich moist regime, they are best suited to the establishment of moist neutral grassland and native woodland. Extractive mowing would help control weed growth rates. These soils are heavy and wet and likely to increase in wetness under natural drainage with the departure of agricultural land management. Subsoil waterlogging and periods of standing water are predicted between late November and early April with open grassland likely to become infested with rushes and sedges. Nutrient status is low and weed competition is likely to be relatively low requiring limited management.

Deep Loams (Soil Type 3)

These soils are found on the slopes between the sandy high ground and the alluvial areas. They comprise sandy clay loam topsoil’s, with sandy clay loam or sandy loam subsoil showing evidence of seasonal waterlogging appears to be caused by groundwater perched above underlying clay layers (the subsoils are usually permeable in the upper 80cm). These soils are mainly free draining where drained for agriculture (Soil Wetness Class II) but are likely to be affected by seasonal waterlogging under natural conditions which would put them into Soil Wetness Class III.



Map showing soils type from Soils Survey Report Drafted by Land Research Associates

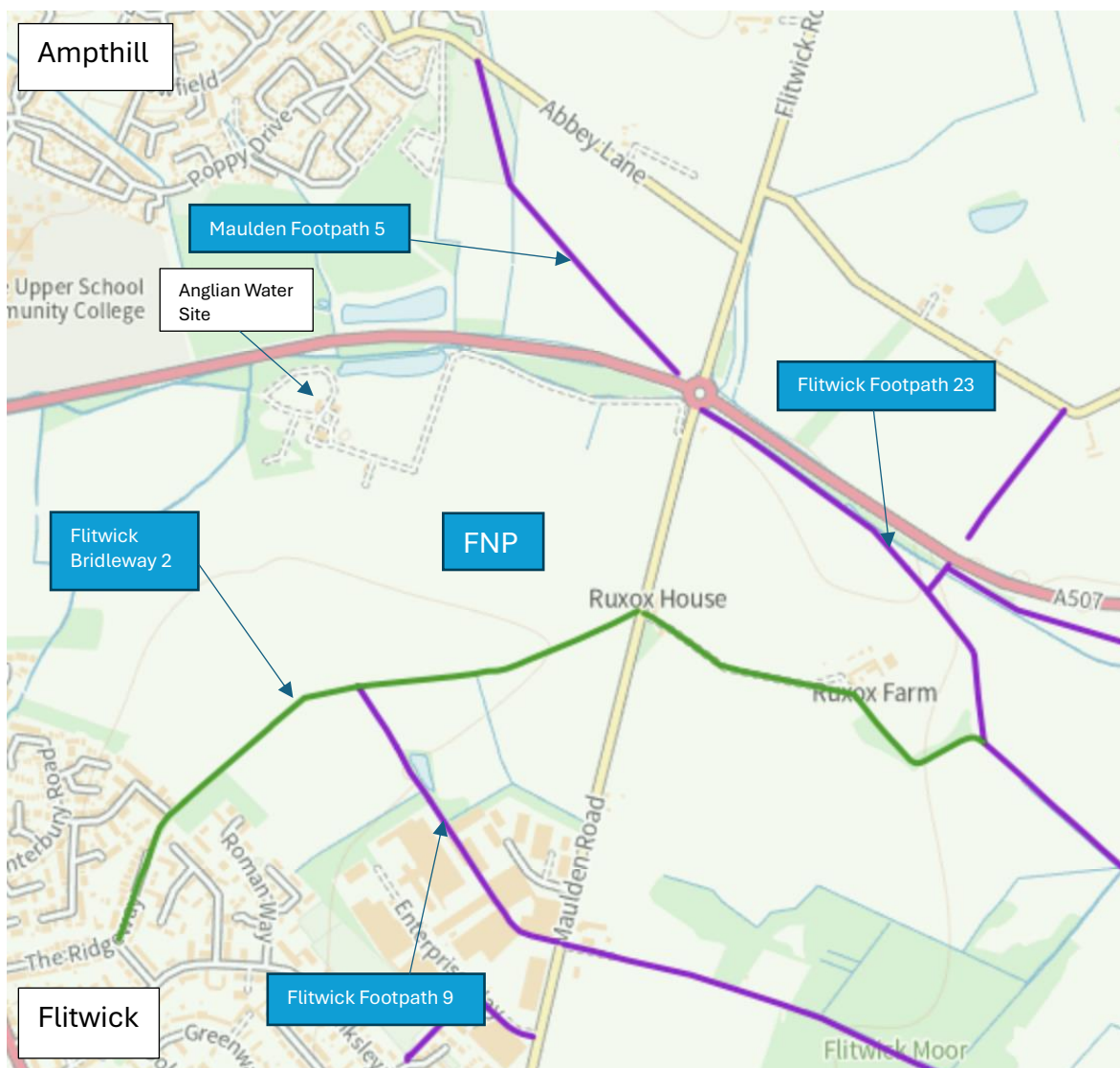
2.10 Ecology

Due to the sites predominately arable history it has limited ecological and biodiversity value. A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, as part of the 2024 Planning Application, noted that the site could provide suitable habitat for Great Crested Newts and bats due to the mature oaks located along Maulden Road. A further ecological survey was carried out in July 2024 and found a few

common lizards, noting the site is suitable for ground nesting birds and hedgehogs may also be present.

The existing grass sward is a weedy fallow consisting of meadow grassland with common herbaceous species including lentil vetch, common fleabane and ragwort with self-set oak trees dotted throughout the field. Data held by the BRMC show that Skylarks, Lapwing, Brown Hare and a Sparrowhawk have been spotted on site and Barn Owls, Yellow Wagtails, Kestrels, Badgers and a Whitethroat have been seen within surrounding fields.

2.11 Site access



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Definitive Public Rights of Way

The public footpaths surrounding the site as shown on the map above are detailed below:

Flitwick Bridleway 2

The bridleway starts in Flitwick from the Ridgeway and aligns along the southern boundary of the site to the Maulden Road before continuing to Flitton via Ruxox Farm. This bridleway is a very important route for users visiting the site from Flitwick.

Flitwick Footpath 9

The footpath starts from its junction with Bridleway 2 on the southern boundary of the site and continues to Flitton via Maulden Road and Flitwick Moor. A well-used path by residents who live near Maulden Road which provides good access to the site.

Maulden Footpath 5

This footpath starts from Abbey Lane in Ampthill continuing southwards to the A507 at the Flitwick/Maulden roundabout. The footpath ends at the A507 opposite the start of Flitwick Footpath 23. This footpath is well used and provides access to the site from Ampthill.

Flitwick Footpath 23

The Footpath starts from Maulden Road immediately south of the A507 roundabout, opposite the Flitwick Nature Park, and continues eastwards connecting to a network of paths that head to Maulden and Flitton.

Non-definitive desire lines

Because the site laid fallow and unmanaged for a few years desire lines form people using the site crossed the site at multiple locations often connecting to the above-mentioned Public Rights of Way or to different unauthorised parking locations around the site.

Woodland rides

The newly created woodland includes a network of new woodland rides (grass or surfaced access routes) that provide access between the woodland compartments and around the perimeter of the site that link into the connecting Public Rights of Way network. Some of the new rides follow the alignment of the desire lines but not all as some paths crossed areas that were fenced for grazing.

Access for all

The perimeter path will be surfaced as part of a project to deliver access all year round and encourage people with limited mobility to visit the site. The internal rides will be left as grassed routes. The new surfaced route is planned for delivery in 2026. Interpretation boards and new benches will also be delivered as part of this project.

Access by car

The site will have a formal car park as part of the formalisation of the site. Situated on the east of the site with access from Maulden Road, Flitwick, the car park will consist of 16 standard size parking bays, 4 accessible parking bays and overspill for 10 cars. Cycle parking will also be provided. .

Access by public transport

By bus: Grant Palmer operate an hourly bus service between Flitwick, Ampthill and Maulden.

By train: Flitwick train station is on the Midland Main Line and managed by Thameslink with two trains an hour via the Bedford to Brighton route.

2.12 Local communities and visitors

Flitwick Nature Park is located to the north of Flitwick, southeast of Ampthill and the villages of Maulden to the north and Flitton to the east. Flitwick has steadily grown in recent years with a current population of 13,663 whilst Ampthill has a population of 8,825 (2021 census).

The site has no counters to record visitor numbers but given the number of eroded paths (desire lines) usage is high and constant. Current visitors include dog walkers, runners/joggers and walkers. Dog walking appears to be the main use with people either walking via the public bridleway off The Ridgeway in Flitwick or driving to the park.

Visitor surveys and feedback are obtained via Flitwick Town Councils website, social media and annual residents' survey. Any complaints or questions dealt with by council staff. Further public engagement work will be carried out as infrastructure is delivered and the park matures.

2.13 Pest, diseases and invasive species

Because the site has been left as fallow grassland for more than 5 years some undesirable pests and species have grown in dominance and could conflict with future land management activities. Known pests and species found on site are as follows:

Grey squirrel

Numbers of squirrel found on site are low and mainly seen along the northern and western boundaries where groups of larger trees are located. As the new woodland matures squirrel numbers will grow unless numbers are controlled. If numbers are not controlled then the squirrels will have a negative impact on the emerging woodland by stripping bark, including main stem and branches, to access the sweet sap and to mark territory. The stripping of bark will prevent the flow of water and nutrients thus weakening the trees and making them susceptible to disease which can be fatal for younger trees. The bark stripping can also deform stems, leading to rot and cavities which will reduce the quality and value of the tree.

Tree species particularly vulnerable to grey squirrel that are present on site are Oak, Birch, Hornbeam and Scotts pine trees. Squirrel populations will be monitored by the Public Realm team.

Rabbits

The rabbit population is restricted to the southwestern boundary where the terrain rises away from the wetter areas to the north of the site. Because the rabbit population is restricted to the western boundary the impacts on flora and fauna and young saplings is limited but populations are likely to increase as the new woodland matures and provides cover for new burrows.

Deer

Although numbers found within the site are low deer numbers are high within the surrounding landscape with Muntjak, Chinese Water and Fallow deer all grazing on grasses, flora and fauna, emerging trees and shrubs and crops. Sika deer have also been seen within Bedfordshire which will add to the pressure on vegetation and crop.

High deer populations can negatively impact new and existing woodlands by overgrazing, damaging/killing saplings, and reducing biodiversity. Deer can also strip bark which can weaken the tree and reduce the timber value or kill the tree if its ring barked at the base. Deer can also reduce understorey vegetation which includes flora and fauna and emerging trees & shrubs which can negatively affect the habitats of various woodland species including insects, birds and other animals. Deer population will be monitored by the Public Realm team and management of deer populations will be actioned if necessary to protect the trees.

Mink

Unknown numbers on site but very likely they are present given the water course along the northern boundary. Mink feed on fish, invertebrates, birds and small mammals including the water vole and is noted in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan as a species that should be controlled. Mink population will be monitored by the Public Realm team.

Ragwort

Ragwort is a native UK plant that is an important food source for the Cinnabar moth caterpillar and a nectar/pollen source for many other insects including butterflies and bees. It supports a wide variety of insects thus contributing to biodiversity.

Unfortunately, Ragwort can cause serious harm to livestock, especially horses and cattle due to its toxicity which causes liver damage. Ragwort is easily spread by wind and can be difficult to control due to its ability to regenerate from roots, even after being damaged. The Weeds Act 1959 lists Ragwort as a problematic plant, and landowners should take measure to prevent its spread to agriculture land. Ragwort is controlled within the site by spraying using certified contractors and pulling using volunteers with all plants either burnt on site or removed for disposal.

Ash dieback

The new woodland has no ash trees as this species is no longer allowed to be planted within the UK due to the presence of ash dieback disease. Young ash trees are in pockets of existing scrub along the northern and western boundaries which will be monitored by the Public Realm team and volunteers for signs of deadwood in the canopy that could fall on public access routes.

Oak Processionary Moth (OAP)

OAP is a non-native moth species whose caterpillars are a pest of oak trees and pose a health risk to humans and animals due to their irritating hairs which can cause skin rashes, eye and throat irritation and in some cases breathing difficulties. The caterpillars are known for their 'procession' behaviour, moving in a nose to tail line and covered in small irritating hairs and web

like nests on trunks or within tree branches. Mature oak trees along eastern boundary will be monitored during March and April and specialist contractors used to remove any nests.

2.14 Safety and security

Flitwick Town Council has a Health and Safety Policy statement which can be found on our website – www.flitwick.gov.uk. The policy statement is reviewed regularly by Council. Risk assessments are carried out for all task of the Council and these are reviewed, at a minimum annually or sooner if the task changes. The Council have a Health and Safety Advisor and there is an annual visit. FTC staff are first aid trained, and volunteers are provided with toolbox talks and risk assessments. The Public Realm team presently carry out fortnightly site checks.

Risk assessments are available for all site visits and management tasks which are held in paper and digital form and updated annually. Copies of these are digitally communicated to all contractors and formal visitors who carry out any works or surveys and are then asked to sign off to say they have understood the risk assessment.

All volunteers who work on site are given a site induction and task safety briefing before starting any works and a qualified first aider is present at all group sessions.

2.15 Marketing – Flitwick Town Council use various platforms to promote Town Council sites and activities; these include social media – Facebook, Instagram and X, a dedicated website, Flitwick Papers, banners and paid advertising in local publications.

2.16 Resources

The Town Council have a Central Projects Fund which can be requested to be drawn upon. Additional funding will also be sought by the Town Council where appropriate.

2.17 Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows

Historically boundary trees were located on internal and perimeter field boundaries but were reduced to the perimeter when internal boundaries were removed after WW2. The avenue of mature oak along Maulden Road are the oldest trees on site.

The new woodland was delivered as part of the Trees for Climate woodland creation scheme which is a DEFRA funded grant and administered by the Forest of Marston Vale Trust. The grant pays for all capital costs in the delivery of the woodland, including the first 3 years of beat up and 2-3 years of spraying which was managed by the Forest of Marston Vale Trust. An annual grant is paid to Flitwick Town Council which covers costs associated with the management of the woodland and environmental, ecological, leisure and water resource benefits that the woodland will deliver as it matures.

The woodland creation scheme consisted of a new boundary hedge with hedge trees, 7 compartments (Cpts) of dense woodland, 3 Cpts of Hazel coppice with Oak standards, 1 Cpt of mixed shrubs, 2 Cpts of low-density wood pasture and areas of open space including 3 fenced areas for grazing.



Flitwick Nature Park woodland creation map delivered winter 2023/24

The different woodland compartment types are as follows:

Cpt No.	Size (ha)	Woodland Type	Density and number of trees	Main species
1a	1.01	High density mixed woodland	2525 trees (2500 sph)	Pendunculate oak Hornbeam, Red oak Small leaved lime (SLL), Field maple, Silver birch, Alder and Willow
1b	1.23	High density mixed woodland	3075 trees (2500 sph)	Pendunculate oak, Red oak, Norway maple, Silver birch, Scotts pine and Hornbeam
1c	0.73	High density mixed woodland	1825 trees (2500 sph)	Pendunculate oak, Red oak, Norway maple, Silver birch, Scotts pine and Hornbeam
1d	2.25	Hazel coppice	5625 Hazels (2500 sph)	Hazel with Oak standards
1e	0.90	Hazel coppice	2250 Hazels (2500 sph)	Hazel with Oak standards
1f	3.59	High density mixed woodland	8975 trees (2500 sph)	Pendunculate oak, Red oak, Scotts pine, SLL,

				Silver birch, Hornbeam and Field maple
1g	0.92	High density mixed woodland	2300 trees (2500 sph)	Pendunculate oak, Red oak, Scotts pine, SLL, Silver birch, Hornbeam and Field maple
1h	0.45	Hazel coppice	1125 Hazels (2500 sph)	Hazel with Oak standards
1i	0.47	High density mixed woodland	1175 trees (2500 stems per hectare sph)	Pendunculate oak, Red oak, Wild cherry, Rowan, Alder, Silver birch and Field maple
1j	0.17	Mixed shrubs with small trees	425 shrubs & trees (2500 sph)	Hawthorn, Hazel, Guelder rose, Crab apple, Bird cherry and Wild privet
WP1	2.24	Low density wood pasture	114 trees (51 sph)	Hornbeam, Norway maple, P. oak, Scotts pine and SLL
WP2	0.47	Low density wood pasture	24 trees (51 sph)	Hornbeam, Norway maple, P. oak, Scotts pine and SLL

Stems per hectare (SPH)

The site had very little hedgerows except for the scrubby perimeter boundary along the western boundary and a short section of ditch that once extended across the site as shown on the 1910 historical map. The new perimeter hedge was planted with native shrubs at 5 plants per meter in two staggered rows and consists of the following species:

Species	Percentage %	Plant numbers
Blackthorn	1	172
Crab apple	2	312
Dogwood	5	384
Field maple	1	204
Goat willow	10	768
Guelder rose	1	204
Hawthorn	70	4738
Hornbeam	1	77
Spindle	1	77
Wayfaring tree	1	172
Wild privet	2	154
Hazel	5	543
Total	100	7805

2.18 Site maintenance

Flitwick Town Council manage the site by fortnightly site checks and actioning anything that needs it promptly. Litter picks are regularly carried out on site and dog waste generally isn't a problem. In the future site checks will be more regular as the site develops. Litter bins and dog waste bins will be installed on site and these will be regularly emptied and checked by the Public Realm team. Access rides are cut monthly during the summer months. Larger areas may see the Council make use of contractors. Herbicides will be used when required for control of invasive species such as ragwort.

2.19 Partnership organisations

Flitwick Town Council are committed to working with outside organisations; these include volunteers, community payback, local schools and businesses, the Greensand Trust and the Forest of Marston Vale.

2.20 Staff and labour resources

Flitwick Town Council employ 3 full time Public Realm Operatives and a full time Supervisor. The Public Realm team report to the Amenities Officer. Volunteers and Councillors are drafted in when required. Flitwick Town Council currently work with the Community Payback team and when the opportunity arises, the team will be utilised at the Nature Park.

3. Site analysis and assessment

A welcoming site

Site strengths	Site weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<p>Access points - Via the rights of way network and desire lines</p> <p>Usage – site popular with dog walkers, runners and walkers</p>	<p>Signage – no external or internal signs/maps or info boards.</p> <p>Car parking – limited spaces and uneven pot holed surface. Can attract anti-social use.</p> <p>Facilities – no toilets, benches, picnic tables or other infrastructure</p> <p>Access for all – limited access for disabled people</p> <p>Dog bins – only one available</p>	<p>Signage – whole site requires waymarking, signage and info boards</p> <p>Car Parking – a new surfaced car park is proposed.</p> <p>Access points – provide signposts from all site access</p> <p>Access for all – new surfaced routes for all abilities and for all year use</p> <p>Dog bins – install 2 more dog bins to control dog mess</p>	<p>Antisocial behaviour – vandalism to wooden gates. Litter left where cars park.</p> <p>Antisocial behaviour – livestock fences cut, and trees removed.</p>

A healthy and safe site

Site strengths	Site weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<p>Safety policy – Flitwick Town Council update policy annually</p> <p>Environmental policy - Flitwick Town Council update policy annually</p> <p>Tree survey – Biannual survey for roadside oaks due Oct 2027</p> <p>inspections Health and safety checks carried out to protect public fortnightly</p> <p>Risk assessments - carried out for all tasks and events held within the site</p> <p>Safe systems of work – for higher risk activities or specialist tools etc</p>	<p>Staff - small Public Realm team stretched across multiple sites within Flitwick and around.</p> <p>Staff – site not manned 24/7 which can lead to antisocial activities on site</p> <p>Conflicts of use – irresponsible dog walkers leading to dog fouling and poor dog control.</p> <p>Access points – site used by horse riders</p>	<p>Uniformed staff – increase staff attendance on site and/or use volunteer rangers as site develops</p> <p>Police – FTC work very closely with Bedfordshire Police</p> <p>Central Beds Council – increase support from Safer Neighbourhood Team</p> <p>Monitoring – use wildlife cameras to monitor areas where anti-social activities take place.</p>	<p>Housing developments – potential increase in anti-social behaviour and wear/tear on site infrastructure</p> <p>Unauthorised access – motorbikes using the site risking other users and livestock</p>

Site maintenance

Site strengths	Site weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<p>Site maintenance – site checked regularly and maintained by Public Realm team</p> <p>Regular visitors – Help monitor site and report problems found on site via Facebook or contacting FTC reception</p>	<p>Dog bins – only one bin for whole site leading to littering and dog fouling.</p> <p>Litter – only one litter bin on site leading to littering.</p> <p>Litter and dog bins will be increased onsite once planning permission has been approved.</p> <p>Isolated & exposed – no daily staff</p>	<p>Events – Raise profile of responsible dog walking</p> <p>Volunteering – Recruit a team of volunteers to help maintain and monitor the site.</p> <p>Central Beds Council – Work with Rights of Way Officer to improve access and surfacing.</p>	<p>Increased visitor numbers – could result in more anti-social activities, conflicts of use and wear & tear within the site.</p> <p>Staffing – limited staff resource needs to cover multiple sites.</p> <p>Resources – limited funding available so more visitors mean</p>

<p>Litter – litter levels low and regular litter picks</p> <p>Budget – Annual budget set for site maintenance and improvements</p>	<p>presence and isolated nature of the site can lead to anti-social activities and vandalism.</p> <p>Surfacing & drainage – no surfaced routes so some areas unusable during winter. Poor drainage results in localised flooding which also affects access.</p>	<p>Developments s106 – Work with planning officers and developers to gain financial contributions to help maintain and upgrade on site access and facilities.</p>	<p>higher maintenance costs through wear and tear etc.</p> <p>Fly tipping – site exposed to fly tipping</p>
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Conservation and heritage

Site strengths	Site weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<p>Diversity of habitats – mixture of open accessible grassland, fenced grassland for livestock, new woodland/hedgerow/wood pasture habitat.</p> <p>Ground nesting birds – Fenced grassland to reduce disturbance from dogs and walkers. Suitable habitat for lizards, bats and hedgehogs.</p> <p>Below ground heritage – protected by leaving areas as grassland.</p>	<p>A new site – limited habitat value due to young age of trees and hedges.</p> <p>Conservation tasks – limited volunteer numbers and high demand on existing staff limits opportunities</p> <p>Even aged woodland – lack of diversity in new woodland blocks which will change as they mature and are thinned/coppiced.</p> <p>Water – no water supply available for livestock</p>	<p>Grassland management – graze grassland to create ground nesting bird habitat.</p> <p>Woodland management plan – will help identify early opportunities to add interest to even aged woodland.</p> <p>Water supply – install water supply for livestock</p> <p>Ponds – restore pond shown on 1910 OS map.</p> <p>Woodland edge – create a herbaceous woodland edge by leaving 1m grass verge along access rides.</p> <p>Bird/bat boxes – install bird and bat boxes on site.</p>	<p>Livestock – limited availability of suitable graziers and animals</p> <p>Rabbit and deer – eating young trees and flora and fauna.</p> <p>Grey squirrel – negative impact on trees.</p> <p>Mink – negative impact on birds, lizards, insects and small mammals.</p> <p>Invasive plants – creeping thistle, ragwort or Himalayan balsam.</p> <p>Climate change – may bring drier weather or periods of heavy rain leading to localised flooding.</p> <p>Tree pests and diseases – Oak and Ash die back and invasive pests</p>

			like processionary moth. Increase visitor pressure – conflicts of use and for wildlife.
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Community involvement

Site strengths	Site weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<p>Ownership – owned by Flitwick Town Council.</p> <p>Feedback – encouraged through social media, email or visiting Council Offices.</p> <p>Budget – set annual budget to maintain and improve the site</p> <p>Visitors – local community using the site for dog walking, running and walking.</p>	<p>Promotion - not signed at access points.</p> <p>Facilities – no surfaced paths, benches, info panels or picnic benches.</p> <p>Visitors – no data on number of people using the site</p>	<p>Events – community targeted events on site</p> <p>Community engagement – use social media and staff to consult and engage with local communities and via the annual resident’s survey</p> <p>Volunteering – recruit a volunteer ranger team to help manage and monitor the site.</p> <p>Community Pay Back – Have team help maintain site</p> <p>Financing – funds available to support community events</p> <p>Visitor counting – use volunteers to spot check user numbers, activities⁹ and diversity</p>	<p>User group conflicts of use – could be a future concern as more user groups/volunteers are attracted to the site as it matures.</p>

Sustainability

Site strengths	Site weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<p>Staff qualifications – No staff have environmental management qualifications</p> <p>EMS – FTC has an Environmental Management System/policy in place</p>	<p>Recycling litter – only one bin so difficult to separate waste from recycling.</p>	<p>Machinery – purchase more efficient sustainable models</p> <p>Recycle waste - install more bins with options to separate and recycle</p> <p>Sustainable access – encourage more</p>	

<p>Green Waste – all green waste from FNP will be stacked in habitat piles.</p> <p>Herbicides – risk assessments, contractors for large areas and trained staff for backpack sprayers (smaller areas)</p> <p>Hazel compartments – offer potential to generate a supply of material for hedge laying, making fencing hurdles or sellable products such as baskets or pea sticks etc.</p> <p>Machinery – Newer equipment is environmentally friendly and more efficient. Equipment has a maintenance and replacement schedule</p>		<p>users to walk or cycle to the site rather than drive.</p>	
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Marketing

Site strengths	Site weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<p>Website – https://www.flitwick.gov.uk/visiting-flitwick/parks-and-open-spaces/</p> <p>Facebook – https://www.facebook.com/FlitwickTC https://x.com/NewsFTC</p> <p>Press releases –</p> <p>Budget – finance available to help promote site</p> <p>Staff – FTC has a marketing officer</p>	<p>Accreditation – no Green Flag accreditation</p> <p>News blog – site still in early days but could this happen once works start on new site infrastructure? Yes</p> <p>Site info panels – no structures on site to inform users about the site and how its</p>	<p>Greenflag accreditation – seek membership</p> <p>New info site panels – funding to be sourced for new site info and interpretation panels.</p> <p>New leaflets</p>	<p>Budget – There is a marketing budget to cover all of FTC’s marketing activities including the Nature Park</p>

	managed. Interpretation boards will be introduced following planning permission		
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Management

Site strengths	Site weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<p>Council owned – Experienced staff and resource to manage site in a consistent manner.</p> <p>Funding – 15 years of guaranteed income to help manage and develop site with Trees for Climate grant.</p> <p>Community – Local community offer opportunity to create volunteer ranger team and further support.</p>	<p>Council officers – staff resource stretched across multiple sites.</p>	<p>Volunteer Ranger Team – a potential vital resource on the sites doorstep.</p> <p>Stronger partnerships – with local schools, businesses and stake holders.</p>	<p>Economic climate – cuts in staff leading to less site management and maintenance.</p>

4. Vision

To create a thriving nature park where woodland and grassland habitats flourish, providing a sanctuary for wildlife and a place for people to connect with nature. The park will inspire people to connect with nature, fostering a sense of stewardship and responsibility for the environment.

5. Management aims and objectives

The management aims and objectives for the Flitwick Nature Park will be to manage public access whilst protecting, improving and creating habitats for all wildlife are as follows.

a) MA1: To provide a welcoming, safe, and clean park for the enjoyment of all

MO1a - Welcoming

- MO1a - Provide clear and welcoming entrance signage for all users.
- MO1ab - Improve car parking facilities.

- MO1ac - Install map boards to assist orientation around the site and show surrounding connectivity via public rights of way network.
- MO1ad - Deliver a new perimeter surfaced access route suitable for all users.
- MO1ae - Waymark access network
- MO1af - Maintain all existing access routes within the park.
- MO1ag - Provide new benches and picnic tables.
- MO1ah - Provide dog litter bins and all formal entrance/exit points to site.
- MO1ai - Monitor anti-social activities/vandalism and work with local community support officer.
- MO1aj - Establish a volunteer team to help maintain park and manage areas of woodland and hazel coppice.
- MO1ak - Become a destination for learning how to manage hazel coppice and make related products such as hurdles, hedge laying materials and garden products.

MO1b - Healthy and safe

- MO1b - Monitor site usage and as numbers increase provide a uniformed ranger presence on site.
- MO1ba - Carry out monthly site safety inspections to include tree inspections, access infrastructure, livestock fencing and signs of vandalism or antisocial activities.
- MO1bb - Review and update site risk assessments, health and safety and environmental policies.
- MO1bc - Work with visitors and local communities to promote respectful and appropriate use of the park including responsible dog walking.
- MO1bd - Provide first aid training to staff and volunteers

MO1c - A well maintained site

- MO1c - Carry out regular litter picking using staff and volunteers
- MO1ca - Promote responsible dog walking and monitor dog fouling and carry out focused campaigns to tackle problem areas.
- MO1cb - Monitor dog bins and ensure bins are emptied to meet demand.
- MO1cc - Ensure all staff and volunteers are trained to use maintenance equipment and machinery and refreshed every 3-5 years depending on frequency of use.
- MO1cd - Maintain all maintenance machinery as per recommended schedules.
- MO1ce - Ensure all contractors carrying out works on site have appropriate training and certification.
- MO1cf - Monitor and maintain all site infrastructure and respond to visitor pressure.
- MO1cg - Recruit and maintain a volunteer team to help maintain and monitor site.

b) MA2: To maximise the biodiversity of the Nature Park

MO2a - Grassland

- MO2a - Working with the grazier improve the sward within the 3 grass fields for grazing whilst increasing plant diversification.
- MO2ab - Any fields not grazed to be managed for hay and if mown all cuttings to be collected and composted.
- MO2ac - Grassland within and surrounding the woodland compartments to be managed as rough grassland and cut every 2-3 years to prevent scrub establishing.

- MO2ad - Monitor and remove ragwort and creeping thistle from all grazing and hay fields.
- MO2ae - Recruit volunteers to record bird, insect, mammal and lizard populations.

MO2b - Woodland

- MO2b - Retain 1m herbaceous buffer between recently planted woodland compartments and all maintained access routes.
- MO2ba - Control grass competition and replace dead plants during first 3 years.
- MO2bb - Plant more fruit trees along access routes.
- MO2bc - Monitor woodland and hazel compartments for damage by deer and voles.
- MO2bd - Manage hazel compartments as prescribed within the Hazel Management Plan.
- MO2be - Recruit volunteers to record bird, insect, mammal and lizard populations.
- MO2bf - Draft a woodland management plan by 2030.
- MO2bg - Create deadwood habitat at every opportunity through brush piles, leaving dying trees if safe to do so and leaving felled trees on the ground.

MO2c - Ponds and wetland habitat

- MO2ca - Restore pond located to the south of the site shown on 1910 OS map.
- MO2cb - Investigate other areas within the park for pond creation linked to wetland areas shown on the 1910 OS map.
- MO2cc - Connect perimeter security ditch with culverts to allow free flow of water and create seasonal wetland features.
- MO2cd - Monitor and control mink numbers.

MO2d - Hedgerows

- MO2da - Retain 1m herbaceous buffer between recently planted hedge and all maintained access routes.
- MO2db - Control grass competition and replace dead plants during first 3 years.
- MO2dc - Allow hedges to grow tall and bushy to promote nesting, foraging and sheltered habitat where growth will not impede access.

MO2e - Successional areas and scrub

- MO2ea - Retain areas of scrub along western and north-western boundaries.
- MO2eb - Prevent scrub from establishing in designated open space associated with woodland creation to prevent damage to below ground heritage features.

c) MA3: Work with local communities and user groups to enhance their onsite experience whilst protecting habitats and wildlife

- MO3a - In line with Flitwick Town Council objectives promote and enhance recreational activities within the park.
- MO3b - Recruit and support a volunteer team to support council staff and help monitor and manage the park.
- MO3c - As the site matures design a varied program of tasks and activities for volunteers to promote volunteering on site.
- MO3d - Provide effective channels for visitor feedback.

- MO3e – Monitor effects of public access on wildlife/habitats and take effective action to mitigate

d) MA4: Manage the Environmental Management System

- MO4a - Ensure Flitwick Town Council is aware of best practice and current knowledge on environmental management to make informed decisions regarding the park.
- MO4b - Review and maintain a Coshh Manual (Control of Substances Hazardous to Health).
- MO4c - Encourage all staff to contribute to the sustainable management of the park.
- MO4d - Review and maintain risk assessments associated with tasks and works on site.
- MO4e - Stack green waste as habitat piles where possible and especially dead wood habitat.
- MO4f - Encourage the use of sustainable transport methods for accessing the park.
- MO4g - Ensure all new machinery or tools are environmentally friendly as possible.
- MO4h - Minimise waste and promote recycling.

e) MA5 Increase the understanding and interest in Flitwick Nature Park and the surrounding countryside

- MO5a - Design and install interpretation for the park in line with Flitwick Town Council brand guidelines to provide information about the park, access and the surrounding countryside.
- MO5b - Ensure all signage and infrastructure follows Disability Discrimination Act regulations.
- MO5c - Promote the site via the Councils website and social media channels.

f) MA6 To monitor and review the management, species, habitats and visitors to the park:

- MO6a - Monitor and review annually management plan objectives.
- MO6b - Survey and monitor wildlife species on site to influence habitat management practices.
- MO6c - Monitor customer feedback and act on valid points where budgets or assets allow.
- MO6d - Monitor habitats, access and site usage.
- MO6e - Check for potential income from grants to improve habitat, access or interpretation on site.
- MO6f - Form stronger partnerships with local schools, businesses and organisations to deliver infrastructure or adapt management practices that improve their usage and visitor experience. This must not be detrimental to existing habitat or species.
- MO6g - Long term aim is to apply for Green Flag status.

6. Five-year action plan



6. Five-year action plan

Flitwick Nature Park Action Plan

Annual actions (MA - Management Aim MO - Management Objective)						
Aim	Objective	Action	Responsible officer	Finance	Date	Actions/status
MA1: To Provide a welcoming, safe, and clean park for the enjoyment of all						
MA1a: Welcoming	MO1a	New welcome signs				
	MO1ab	Improve parking facilities				
	MO1ac	New map boards				
	MO1ad	New surfaced perimeter access route				
	MO1ae	Waymark access network				
	MO1af	Maintain grass access routes				
	MO1ag	New benches & picnic tables				
	MO1ah	Provide dog bins				
	MO1ai	Monitor antisocial activities				
	MO1aj	Establish volunteer team				
	MO1ak	Become a learning destination				
	MA1b: Healthy and Safe					
MA1b: Healthy and Safe	MO1b	Monitor site usage including uniformed ranger presence				
	MO1ba	Monthly safety inspections				
	MO1bb	Review risk assessments, health & safety and environmental policies				
	MO1bc	Work with visitors to reduce conflicts of use				
	MO1bd	Provide first aid training to staff and volunteers				
MA1c: A well maintained site						
MA1c: A well maintained site	MO1c	Regular litter picking				
	MO1ca	Promote responsible dog walking				
	MO1cb	Monitor dog bins				
	MO1cd	Maintain machinery				
	MO1ce	Check contractor certifications				
	MO1cf	Monitor & maintain site infrastructure				
	MO1cg	Recruit & maintain volunteer team				

Flitwick Nature Park Management Plan

MA2: Maximise the biodiversity of the Nature Park						
MO2a: Grassland	MO2a	Improve grassland sward				
	MO2ab	Ungrazed fields managed for hay or if mown cuttings collected & composted				
	MO2ac	Woodland grassed edge and glades cut every 2-3 years				
	MO2ad	Monitor & remove ragwort & creeping thistle from hay fields				
	MO2ae	Recruit volunteers to record ecology				
MO2b: Woodland	MO2b	Retain 1m herbacious buffer adjacent to woodland (cut every 3 years)				
	MO2ba	Control grass competition around new trees and replace dead plants				
	MO2bb	Increase fruit trees along access routes				
	MO2bc	Monitor woodland blocks for damage by deer and voles				
	MO2bd	Manage hazel compartments as per Hazle Management Plan				
	MO2be	Recruit volunteers to help manage and record				
	MO2bf	Draft woodland amnagement plan by 2030				
	MO2bg	Create dead wood habitat at every opportunity				
MO2c: Ponds and wetland habitat	MO2ca	Restore pond shown on 1910 map				
	MO2cb	Investigate possibility for other ponds				
	MO2cc	Connect perimeter ditch to allow free flow of water				
	MO2cd	Monitor & contril mink population				

Flitwick Nature Park Management Plan

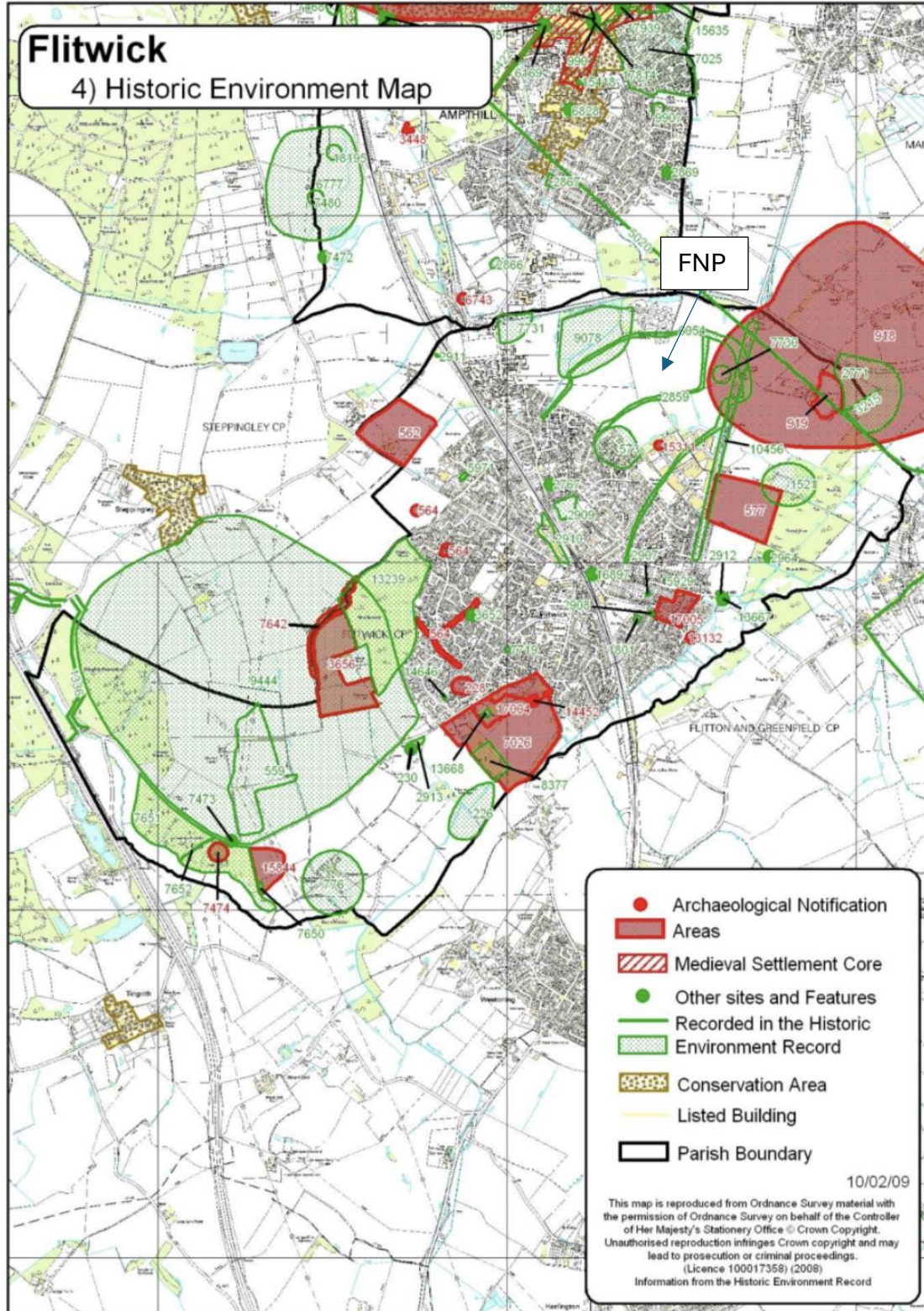
MO2d: Hedgerows	MO2da	Retain 1m grass buffer adjacent to all hedges (cut every 3 years)				
	MO2db	Control grass competition on new hedge and replace dead plants for first 3 years				
	MO2dc	Allow hedges to grow tall and bushy				
MO2e: Successional areas and scrub	MO2ea	Retain areas of existing scrub				
	MO2eb	Prevent scrub establishing in designated open space				
MA3: Work with local communities and user groups to enhance onsite experience whilst protecting habitats and wildlife	MO3a	Promote & enhance recreational objectives within the park				
	MO3b	Recruit and support volunteer team				
	MO3c	Design program of varied tasks as opportunities arise				
	MO3d	Provide opportunities for visitor feedback				
	MO3e	Monitor impacts of public access				
MA4: Manage the environmental management system	MO4a	Ensure FTC is aware of best practice and latest knowledge on environmental management systems				
	MO4b	Review and maintain Coshh manual				
	MO4c	Encourage all staff/volunteers to contribute to sustainable management of the park				
	MO4d	Review and maintain risk assessments				
	MO4e	Stack green waste as habitat piles where possible & especially dead wood habitat				
	MO4f	Encourage the use of sustainable transport methods for all users of the park				
	MO4g	Purchase environmentally friendly tools & machinery				
	MO4h	Minimise waste and promote recycling				

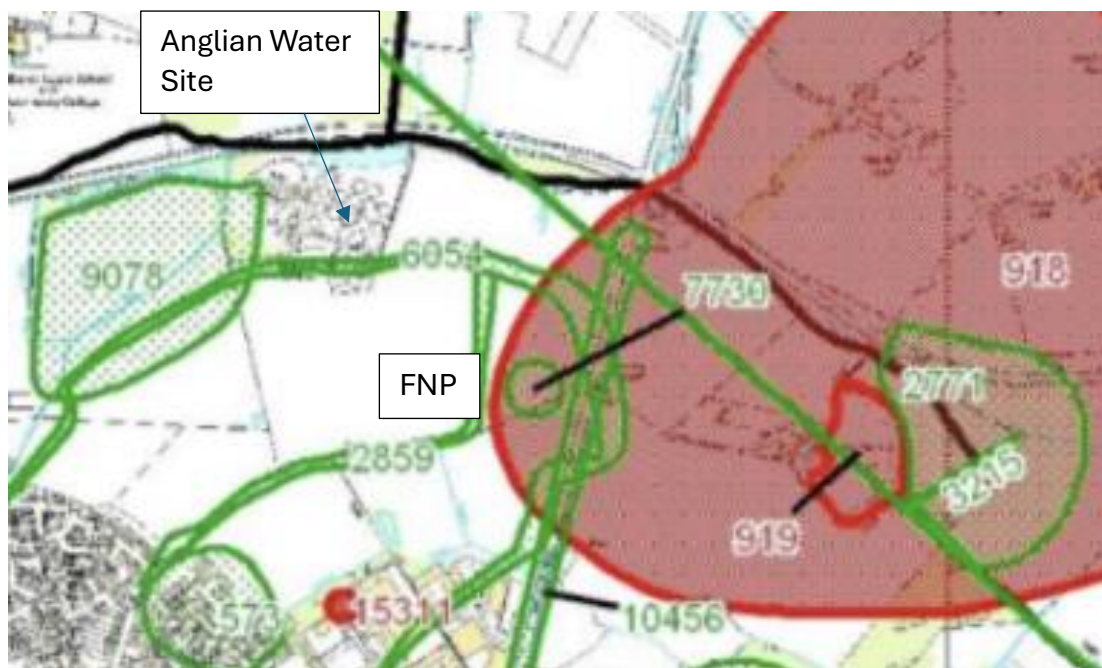
Flitwick Nature Park Management Plan

MA5: Increase the understanding and interest in Flitwick Nature Park and the surrounding countryside	MO5a	Design and install interpretation panels				
	MO5b	Ensure all signs and infrastructure follows Disability Discrimination Act regulations				
	MO5c	Promote the park via the councils website and social media platforms				
MA6: To monitor and review the management, species, habitats, and visitors to the park	MO6a	Monitor and review management plan objectives annually				
	MO6b	Survey and monitor wildlife species on site to influence habitat management practices				
	MO6c	Monitor customer feedback and act on valid points where budgets or assets allow				
	MO6d	Monitor habitats, access and site usage				
	MO6e	Check for potential income from grants to improve habitat, access or interpretation at the park				
	MO6f	Form local partnerships to help deliver habitat and access improvements				
	MO6g	Apply for Green Flag Status				

7. Appendices

7.1 Extract from Historic Environment Map and Record Extract





Key to Map Reference Numbers

Number	Feature
918	Roman occupation Ruxox
919	Ruxox Farm, moat / monastic house / manor
2859	Ridgeway
6054	Greenway
7730	Castle Green
9078	Cropmarks, west of sewage works

7.2. Flitwick Nature Park Hazel Coppice Woodland Management Plan

Creating Hazel Coppice from a New Plantation

1. Definition

- a. Coppicing is *the periodic cutting of broadleaf trees down to a stump and then allowing them to regrow. When cut at ground level some species of tree don't die but instead respond by sending up new shoots from the cut stump (often called a stool). This is the case for most species of native broadleaf tree and it is this characteristic that means a tree can be coppiced. Certain species coppice better than others with hazel, sweet chestnut, willow and ash being good examples.*
- b. Coppiced trees can go through the cutting and re-growing cycle over and over again and so provide a sustainable source of wood. In the spring after cutting, the established root systems of the stools enable new shoots to grow much more vigorously than a newly planted tree, reaching perhaps 1.5m (5ft) or more in the first growing season, depending on the species and the growing conditions. This means that useful poles are quickly produced which can be cut once they reach a useful size. The process then starts all over again. (Source and further information – The National Coppice federation - www.ncfed.org.uk).
- c. Some terms used in this document:
 - i. *Stool* – the cut stump of a coppiced tree
 - ii. *Coupe* – the area of a wood cut each winter
 - iii. *Coppice rotation* – time period between each successive cut. In the case of hazel, this is usually around seven years
 - iv. *In-rotation coppice* – coppice that is currently being managed on a known length of rotation.
 - v. *Ride* – the tracks adjacent to coppice coupes that allow access into and out of the wood
 - vi. *Product* – the commercially valuable stems resulting from each winter's cut
 - vii. *Brash* – parts of cut trees that are not saleable

2. Source of advice

- a. In 2023, a local commercial coppicing business (Wassledine¹) was asked to advise on the creation of an area of planting intended as hazel coppice, within the wider Flitwick Nature Park (FNP). Wassledine's experience suggests that there is a future, in Bedfordshire, for well-managed, commercial, hazel coppice and that there is potential for local people to become involved with such a venture.
- b. This section of the management plan is based on Wassledine's experience over the course of work since 1998 and also discussion with others in the UK who have broadly similar experience. There appears

however, to be little knowledge and experience of how best to create a coppice rotation in new plantations.

3. Practical considerations

- a. Coppicing requires an open-ended, constant effort, that is, cutting and removal of product is necessary annually. Plans for creating coppice therefore must embrace this annual need for labour, whether professional, volunteer, or a combination of the two. As with other endeavours in the forestry world, coppice is a long-term affair and it will be decades before a really valuable harvest can be expected from coppice created from scratch. Other non-monetary benefits will arise earlier however.
- b. As mentioned above, although many tree species coppice, this advice focusses exclusively on hazel.
- c. The main commercial markets in hazel coppice are for long, straight poles of varying size - usually less than 50mm diameter. The small size lends itself to cutting with hand tools. Whilst at any scale, a chainsaw is accepted as essential for the initial cut, every other part of the process can be carried out with basic, relatively cheap hand tools. The skills required to use such tools safely and efficiently can be acquired fairly quickly by most able-bodied people who have the enthusiasm and determination to have a go, if taught by an experienced person, on-the-job, without the need for expensive external training courses. The relatively small and light stems cut in hazel coppice in combination with the simple, cheap and easy-to-use tools makes coppicing the only aspect of forestry (apart from planting) that lends itself well to the safe and enjoyable involvement of initially unskilled volunteers.

4. Financial considerations

- a. This document assumes:
 - i. all the initial costs of tree planting and establishment incurred at FNP to the present, has been covered through *Trees for Climate*²
 - ii. the availability of a budget to manage and develop the site in future
- b. Establishment of a coppice rotation will incur costs over the course of several years (see below). A small amount of equipment is required, as well as fuel, training, insurance etc. but most of the cost will be time for work on the ground
- c. Well-managed hazel coppice can start to bring in a small income after perhaps a decade. This should increase over time.

5. Other considerations

- a. It seems unlikely that as a local authority body, the primary motivation for FTC creating FNP and its hazel coppice is to make a profit. Other benefits

of woodland and open spaces, focusing on the hazel coppice are listed (in no particular order):

- i. Carbon capture, possibly faster than woodland managed as high forest
- ii. Improved landscape diversity particularly within the coppice area
- iii. Improved informal leisure opportunities for local people, bringing, in its simplest form, mental and physical health benefits
- iv. Accelerated creation of diversity of habitats through the coppice cycle
- v. Opportunities for education and information about woodlands - new and traditional uses of wood products, tools and techniques, biodiversity, the woodland economy, etc.
- vi. Coppice products sold to local people, thus contributing to a reduction in imported goods and road miles
- vii. Opportunities for local people to get involved in coppice management. These will primarily be of a voluntary nature and would focus on practical work. Such involvement is well proven as bringing important physical and mental health benefits, not only from simple physical activity but also from being part of a group, doing something useful, contributing to the common good and feeling valued. Volunteer labour can reduce costs generally, but it takes significant investment in time to achieve such a goal and then to maintain it. In net terms therefore, volunteers generally have a cost
- viii. More commercial work-related opportunities exist in the medium to long term. Whether FTC manage the coppice in-house or contract it to a third party, the profit in the hazel could contribute to the costs of an apprentice who would learn the skills required and potentially take on the management. This is very much a long-term aspiration.

6. Establishing coppice in newly planted hazel

- a. In established, in-rotation hazel coppice, the whole area is divided into seven coupes of roughly equal size and shape (the length of coppice cycle can be longer or shorter for a number of reasons but this document uses seven years throughout). One is cut each winter so that when the last is cut in year seven, the first will have regrown and be ready to cut again in year eight. The combined area of coppice always contains all stages of growth, from completely clear after cutting, through middle stages where regrowth produces a dense, impenetrable thicket, to the last year when hazel's dense canopy of leaves is raised to 4-5m and creates a dark understorey in which few other plants can survive. This is in marked contrast to an uncoppiced woodland plantation, where the age structure is uniform throughout. The diversity created within a small area is what

makes coppice relatively attractive to so many species. It also creates a woodland that holds much interest and beauty for human visitors.

- b. In the case of FNP, the planting plan already has seven coupes outlined. They appear to be roughly the same size and shape (as square as possible) and all are accessible directly from a ride. This layout is ideal and should be followed as far as possible in future. Location of rides was fixed by the planting. The coupes should be marked out on the ground as soon as possible (the longer this is left, the more difficult the process will be amongst the quickly growing and tightly planted trees), perhaps using simple wooden pegs driven into the ground at each coupe's corner
- c. In the future, the aim should be to bring the 3.5 hectares of hazel into a seven-year rotation as soon as possible.
- d. Nothing should be cut until the hazel is established and growing vigorously – perhaps after its third summer, so by the end of summer 2026. Delay is recommended if there is any doubt about the vigour of the hazel's growth
- e. Before the first cut, the tree guards will have to be removed.
- f. Each cut of a healthy and vigorous hazel plant stimulates it to produce larger numbers of stems, a feature that gardeners will recognise from pruning other woody shrubs or trees. Hazel's response is particularly marked. Production of multiple stems in plants growing close together forces each stem to grow straight upwards, towards the light, resulting in large number of long straight, generally unbranched stems – exactly what a commercial coppice business requires.
- g. To achieve a seven-year rotation Wassledine advises cutting the whole area over three winters, a third each year (temporarily ignoring the coupe boundaries). Cutting the whole 3.5 hectares in one winter might produce results slightly more quickly but this *third at a time* approach is less radical and allows room for delaying a second cut if plants in the first area don't respond as hoped. Cuts would be taken at the end of the winters of 2026/27, 27/28, and 28/29.
- h. In winter 2029/30, the first cut would be taken from coupe 1, following the mapped boundaries as closely as possible. In subsequent winters, each of the seven coupes would be cut until 2035/36 during which winter, coupe seven would be cut to complete the rotation. Thus, following these proposals, a complete rotation would be achieved after thirteen summers from planting in 2023/24.

Table 1. Summary of suggested actions to create a coppice rotation

Year No.	Winter of	Action
0	2023/24	Planting
1	2024/25	No action
2	2025/26	No action
3	2026/27	Cut one third of hazel
4	2027/28	Cut one third of hazel
5	2028/29	Cut one third of hazel

6	2029/30	Cut coupe 1 following mapped boundaries
7	2030/31	Cut coupe 2 following mapped boundaries
8-12	2031-2036	Cut coupes 3-7
13	2036/37	Cut coupe 1

- i. Coupe order – there is on-going debate in the coppice world regarding whether to cut adjacent coupes each winter or to move the cut around at random. There are pros and cons to each approach. Wassledine suggest that cutting adjacent coupes makes life slightly more straightforward in that the next coupe to cut at any time is clear – it’s simply the next one along. Once this decision is made it will be difficult to change, but it won’t be completely fixed until 2035.

7. Managing the coppice – workforce and the case for a commercial approach

- a. Management of hazel coppice is a labour intensive business requiring significant investment of time through the winter and into the spring every year. Coppice management in a wood can lead to worthwhile outcomes for wildlife and landscape and there are examples of coppice being managed successfully purely for these reasons. However, without a commercial element, the work has a cost that can be difficult to justify even in ancient woodland where special wildlife (bats, dormice, bluebells, oxlips, butterflies, etc.) are being looked after. A potential financial return could be important in the decision making process. Two simple options present themselves for Flitwick Town Council to develop a hazel coppice rotation.
 - i. Use existing or recruited employee/s to carry out the necessary work – early in the process this could be an existing grounds maintenance team without the need for additional skills or training.
 - ii. Engage a suitable contractor to carry out the work
- b. However, a third option is definitely worth considering:
 - iii. Development of a volunteer team to be involved with the coppice management into the future. This could be managed in-house or through a third party contractor - the same or a different contract to the one in ii. above (see below)

8. Involving local people in Flitwick Nature Park³

- a. FNP’s location close to large populations of people means that lots of local people are likely already to be interested in what happens there. For the same reason it’s a likely project for the development of a volunteer team to help with a whole array of tasks. There are at least two sides to involving people
 - i. Intellectual - information about what’s planned and what’s going on now

- ii. Physical - opportunities to get involved in the process
- b. To be successful, a volunteer group needs support in the form of information, management, training, finances, tools and guidance. As it develops, other facilities might become necessary - storage, workshop, admin, decision making and financial management structure, etc. Although volunteer-led and managed volunteer groups are common, there is usually a support network of some kind provided by professionals somewhere in the background.
- c. Information
 - i. It has been assumed here that Flitwick Town Council (FTC) and the Forest Team, have carried out some promotion amongst people in and around the town so there should be a general, possibly low level awareness of at least the fact that the Park has been created and perhaps of the intentions for management in the future. It is also highly visible from Maulden Road and the A507, so many people who pass by will know something's happening there.
 - ii. Coppicing, by its very nature, appears to be destructive, so in a newly created woodland, the first cuts have potential to cause concern if people aren't aware of what's going on. Even without an ambition to recruit volunteers in future, a regular effort should be made to introduce the idea of coppice to people as soon as possible, by on-site signage⁴ and guided walks; information on websites reached perhaps via QR codes on site; social media posts; a local radio, TV and newspaper(?) campaign and talks to local groups. It has been assumed that this kind of effort is planned or has already started with regard to the wider Park.
 - iii. If involvement of local people in the future management of coppice is seen to be important, recruitment of a volunteer team should be mentioned in this publicity at an early a stage as possible – even though there won't be anything practical to do with regard the coppice until the winter of 2026/27
- d. Volunteer involvement - there are several ways in which volunteers could be involved in FNP's future management. Many apply to the wider Park but this section will focus specifically on involvement of volunteers in the hazel coppice.
 - i. Practical work:
 1. Remove guards from trees to be coppiced
 2. First cut of hazel over three winters and removal of cut material, starting winter 2026/27
 3. First cut of coupe 1, winter 2029/30. Training provided on the job. Use of power tools as necessary by professionals, volunteers with hand tools
 4. From this point, there should be a small amount of saleable material produced and potential for the beginnings of some

craft workshops. These opportunities should develop each year.

- ii. The approach to volunteer working - from the outset, Flitwick Town Council should make their ambitions as clear as possible in this regard. Three approaches present themselves:
 - a. Develop and manage a volunteer team in-house
 - b. Contract a coppicing business to develop and manage a volunteer team in exchange for money and/or coppice products – the balance of which should change over time. Volunteers working alongside the contractor
 - c. Contract a local charity⁵ to develop and manage a volunteer team in exchange for money. Volunteers working alongside the charity's staff
- e. Commercial – In the long term (15 years plus), there should be saleable products available from the coppice. As has been mentioned above, a commercial element would provide incentive for the coppice to be cut every year, which is what is needed to bring it into production and maintain it in future. FTC may see an opportunity for its own business enterprise here and have the necessary skills to develop it. Alternatively, it is possible to foresee volunteers running a small coppice business, perhaps as a social enterprise, most likely with some support. Equally, a local coppice business might work in partnership with FTC to provide expert supervision and training for volunteers as well as more labour and use of power tools where necessary, in exchange for payments initially and then, if successful, for the products, as more volume is produced.
- f. Formal training and employment – Again in the long-term, it is possible that a commercial venture could be successful enough to provide opportunities for work-based training such as an apprenticeship or internship and eventually a paid post.

Notes

1. *Wassledine is a Bedfordshire based coppice business established in 2003, cutting hazel, willow and birch - <http://wassledine.co.uk>*
2. *Trees for Climate – an ambitious multi-million-pound programme offering landowners, farmers and community groups free expert advice and funding to transform their land through hedge and tree planting and woodland creation - <https://www.marstonvale.org/trees-for-climate>*
3. *For the purposes of this document, Flitwick Town Council is assumed to be committed to involving local volunteers in the management of the whole site in future*
4. *Wassledine has access to some explanatory signs produced by the National Coppice Federation and others*
5. *Likely organisations – The Greensand Trust, The Forest of Marston Vale Trust, The Wildlife Trust (BCN), The Conservation Volunteers*

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