



Coulston Common

Registered Charity

Management Plan

2021 - 2031

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



Above: Misty morning, Coulsdon Common (©Tim Nightingale)

Coulsdon Common is a unique 51 hectare (126 acre) open space owned and managed by the City of London Corporation.

The site is part of the four Coulsdon Commons, protected downland and woodland sites on the border of London and Surrey. The Coulsdon Commons is a registered charity (number 232989) which receives the major part of its funding from the City of London Corporation.

The Coulsdon Commons includes ancient woodland, rare wood pasture and remnants of chalk grassland, one of the most biodiverse habitats in Western Europe. The four commons are part of the newly-designated South London Downs National Nature Reserve; a wider landscape of open spaces which are nationally-recognised for their value to people and nature.

Situated in an increasingly urbanised landscape, we are working to carefully manage Coulsdon Common as an important site with the support of local people at all levels to try and minimise the deterioration of habitats and reduce the impacts of fragmentation.

The City of London Corporation is committed to managing Coulsdon Common in perpetuity to ensure that it remains as a truly special place.

Contents

Introduction	4
Things we have learnt in the last 10 years	5
Achievements 2010-20	6
1.0 Site description	
1.1 Location	8
1.2 Ownership and access rights	8
1.3 Site status	8
1.4 Financial situation	8
1.5 Physical features	9
1.6 Cultural heritage	9
Site Map	12
1.8 Access and visitors	13
1.9 Current use	16
2.0 Biological features	
2.1 Communities and flora	17
2.2 Species of interest	25

3.0 The need for management

3.1 The legacy of the Coulson Commons and the South London Downs NNR	29
3.2 Chalk grassland restoration and management	30
3.3 The importance of grazing	31
3.4 Climate change	33
3.5 Biodiversity in crisis	33
3.6 Fragmentation, pests and disease	34
3.7 Nature deficit, visitor access and community engagement	35

4.0 Vision

5.0 Aims & targets

Biological	39
People	52
Estate assets and legal issues	60

6.0 Work programme 2021-2031

Background information

Glossary	72
Contact details	73

Below: Coulsdon Common in the snow
(©Tim Nightingale)



Introduction

Coulsdon Common was acquired under the Corporation of London (Open Spaces) Act 1878. This Act enables the City of London to acquire and protect land up to 25 miles out from the boundary of the Square Mile. Enacted over 130 years ago, the City of London has a duty to protect and conserve Coulsdon Common for public recreation and wildlife conservation 'in perpetuity'. Coulsdon Common is further safeguarded by national legislation. It is a registered charity which receives a major part of its funding from the City.

Coulsdon Common has been influenced by the legacy of centuries of interactions between people and the environment. The history of the site is complex, with swathes of ancient oak woodland, wood pasture, flower-rich meadows and pockets of nationally rare chalk downland habitats requiring delicate management techniques. Much work has gone on over the last few decades to restore the natural landscape elements across the Common to improve biodiversity and sustain vital ecosystem functions.

The site is, however, much more than a nature reserve or time capsule from a bygone era, rather it is a living landscape and place for people to find beauty, quiet and space in an increasingly busy and hectic modern society

that is becoming disconnected from nature. The challenge for the City, as land managers, is to balance traditional habitat management with 21st century expertise and expectations, and to ensure that Coulsdon Common is prepared for the mounting social and environmental **pressures as we progress through the 2020's and beyond.**

Coulsdon Common is managed by a small ranger team who are collectively responsible for the Coulsdon Commons including Riddlesdown, Kenley Common and Farthing Downs. The dedicated Coulsdon "chain gang" Volunteers support a site Ranger and are actively involved with completing projects each month with additional tasks carried out by external volunteer groups. Since 2019, Coulsdon Common has been part of the South London Downs National Nature Reserve (NNR) that links 417ha of downland and woodland sites and is a ground-breaking new partnership initiative involving Natural England (NE), the City of London Corporation and Croydon Council.

The vision from our 2011-21 local plan outlined the use of traditional management techniques across the site where local people are involved in our work and we are known for the sloping chalk meadows, grazing animals and woodlands. This new management plan aims to continue this vision and build upon the achievements of previous plans.

This new Management Plan aims to summarise how Coulsdon Common will be managed over the next 10 years and will be a practical working

document to guide the tasks and projects that will take place over the next decade.

This management plan is the result of extensive consultation with a wide variety of stakeholders including government and non-government agencies, local authorities, conservation experts, local groups and site visitors.

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

Below: Common buzzard, Coulsdon Common (©Tim Nightingale)



Things we have learnt in the last 10 years

- We recorded several new species on Coulsdon Common including red kite, peregrine falcon, broad leaved helleborine, violet helleborine orchid and brown hairstreak butterfly.
- Woodland management within Stites Hill Wood has encouraged visitors to explore this area.
- Targeted grazing has increased biodiversity in grassland areas such as the Maze and the Merlewood Paddocks. Wildflowers still present in the seedbank have become established.
- Greater communication with local residents through promoting community conservation tasks, leaflet drops and signage has helped to inform the local community about activities on the Common and why it is special.
- The community has shown a huge interest in volunteering on the Common with rising volunteer numbers and a larger variety of tasks throughout the seasons.
- Public events have been growing in popularity since our renewed focus on events

and community engagement, with an increased demand for wildlife themed events in particular.

- Relaxing amenity mowing regimes has benefited invertebrates across the site, particularly near Hayes Lane where we have seen marbled white and meadow brown butterflies for the first time.

- New soil bunding has been very effective at deterring vehicle incursions to protect the Common's fragile habitats and visitors.

Below: Activities at the Meet the Calves event, Merlewood Estate Office



Achievements 2010-2020

Community involvement, access and recreation

Volunteers

- Over the past 10 years we have engaged with hundreds of volunteers, achieving an average of 1200 volunteer hours per year, whilst doubling the number of volunteers attending the Coulsdon “Chain Gang” conservation tasks. Projects have included

chalk grassland and wood pasture restoration, woodland management, footpath maintenance and scrub clearance as well as assisting with public events.

Events and public participation

- There has been an increase in family-friendly events including self-guided trails, bat walks, Halloween storytelling, Easter events, Christmas trails and 35 wildlife talks and walks.

Education

- The Rangers regularly host primary and secondary school groups on Coulsdon Common, leading activities such as practical conservation work and nature

days. Rangers have also visited schools to lead talks and nature activities. We have connections with at least 6 local schools and colleges and several scout/brownie groups

Classroom refurbishment

- A permanent classroom at the Merlewood Estate Office was refurbished providing space for workshops, exhibitions and training.

Heritage panel

- A new interpretation panel focusing on the historical connections to milling on the Common and military encampments has been installed near the Windmill paddock.

New notice boards

- Two new noticeboards were installed to improve communication with visitors, advertise events and inform the public about upcoming projects.

Green Flag Award

- Annual accreditation since 2007 in this prestigious national award scheme reflects the high management standards practiced on Coulsdon Common.

Calving events

- ‘Meet the calves’ events are hugely popular and a good opportunity to engage and educate the local community about the vital conservation grazing work of the Sussex cattle and Jacob sheep.

Below: Corporate volunteers, Coulsdon Common



Achievements 2010-2020

Habitat conservation and restoration

Chalk grassland restoration

- Through clearing over mature scrub, the area of chalk grassland in the Maze was extended. Additionally, by replacing almost 500m of stock fencing around the Maze we were able to restore conservation grazing by cattle and sheep. In 2016, 0.2ha of chalk grassland was reclaimed in Merlewood Far

when some over mature scrub was removed and a derelict hedgerow was coppiced by the woodland edge.

Wood pasture restoration

- In 2016, The Grove was extended to incorporate an area not grazed for over 50 years. This entire field is now being managed as wood pasture.

Conservation grazing

- Many of the wildflower meadows and downs are grazed by our own herds of Sussex cattle and Jacob's sheep. They move between permanently fenced fields and temporary electric fenced areas. There is a lot of public support for the conservation grazing animals across the four Coulsdon Commons.

Higher Level Stewardship Scheme

- We were awarded grant funding for a 10-year programme to carry out specific conservation projects and management techniques in 2011. These projects have helped to improve the Common for biodiversity and wildlife value.

Hedgerow creation

- A 50m section of blackthorn hedge was laid between the Merlewood fields, providing habitat for wildlife.

Woodland management

- New woodland rides have linked existing open grassland areas across Stites Hill Wood.

Below: Sussex cattle grazing The Grove, Coulsdon Common (Gary Watson)



1 Site description

1.1 Location

Coulsdon Common is located within the London Borough of Croydon. The Common lies above the Caterham/Croydon valley, west of the A22 (Godstone Road) and west of Hayes Lane.

1.2 Ownership and access rights

Coulsdon Common is owned by the City of London which acquired a large proportion of it in 1883. The site was purchased under the Corporation of London (Open Spaces) Act 1878, providing the public with open access to all areas subject to the byelaws. Coulsdon Common was bought at the same time as three other open spaces collectively making up the Coulsdon Commons, these being Farthing Downs, Riddlesdown and Kenley Common.

1.3 Site status

Coulsdon Common is not registered common land, becoming exempt in December 1966 under Section 11 of the Commons Registration Act 1965; there are no rights registered over the site today. It lies within the Metropolitan Green Belt and has been designated part of the South London Downs National Nature Reserve (NNR) since July 2019.

All of the Common is designated as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) within the London Borough of Croydon.

The whole of Coulsdon Common is within a Tier 3 Archaeological Priority Area due to evidence indicating the potential for heritage assets of archaeological interest and the likelihood that currently unidentified heritage assets, particularly sites of historic and archaeological interest, will be discovered in the future. This area makes up a section of the Croydon Downs Archaeological Priority Area.

1.4 Financial situation

The City of London Corporation provides funding for the management of Coulsdon Common largely from its private funds. For the last 10 years there have been increasing pressures to make revenue savings and these are likely to continue. **The City's revenue can now meet only part of the running costs for Coulsdon Common; the site is increasingly reliant on grants and other sources of income.**



Left: Merlewood fields, Coulsdon Common
(©Tim Nightingale)



Above: Woodland walks, Coulsdon Common (©Tim Nightingale)

The success of much of this management plan depends on the ability to identify and secure significant external funding to match any savings required by the City of London. Countryside Stewardship grants help pay for habitat conservation work but the long-term future of these grants is uncertain. New sources of revenue will need to be explored in coming years: the passing of a new Open Spaces Act (2018) together with increased use of technology may open up some new avenues for funding.

1.5 Physical features

The whole area lies on the chalk strata of the North Downs, which runs from Kent through Surrey to Hampshire. The proximity of chalk to the surface gives rise to infertile, calcareous, shallow, well-drained soils. Where the chalk is overlain by a layer of clay-with-flints, the soils are of a brown earth type, ranging from loams to clay-loams, with a clay-enriched sub-soil. These soils are rather heavier and more fertile than those lying directly over chalk, in some instances they are of an acidic nature, even though the chalk is only a few feet below the surface.

An unusual feature of the Common are the variety of soil types ranging from calcareous to neutral to acidic resulting in a very diverse range of native flora including some local and nationally rare species.

1.6 Cultural heritage

1.6.1 Landscape

Coulsdon Common lies within the landscape character area of the North Downs. In a more local context, the Common was part of the very characteristic downland landscape of open chalk hills, patchwork fields and small woodlands linked by scrubby shaws and thick hedgerows.

The growth of railways close to London meant that many downs in the surrounding area were developed, becoming lost underneath residential housing and roads. The City Corporation's ownership since 1883 prevented Coulsdon Common being developed in this way as well as nearby Riddlesdown and Farthing Downs.

1.6.2 Land use history

Coulsdon Common is a relic agricultural and pastoral landscape, strongly influenced by its use as marginal Common land. The celebrated downland we see today owes its appearance to a combination of underlying chalk geology and human influence that often go hand-in-hand with grazing animals. Chalk downland is often unsuitable for intensive agriculture because of the nutrient-poor, shallow soil and steep slopes. For this reason, Coulsdon Common and similar downland sites such as Riddlesdown

survived uncultivated when other, more easily worked land was ploughed or settled upon.

During Medieval times, Coulsdon Common, alongside the other Coulsdon Commons sites, formed part of the waste land of the Manor of Watendone. Commoners had legal rights to gather fuel, bedding and roofing, as well as rights to graze their own cattle and sheep.

By the time the City of London acquired Coulsdon Common in 1883 the need for grazing and wood products had declined and the land use was changing. As the grazing diminished, thick scrub and trees grew up, and many parts of the Common that were once open were lost.

1.6.3 Archaeology

Coulsdon Common has a long history of human activity and settlement; finds have been made in the surrounding area of material illustrative of human occupation dating back to the Mesolithic (8500 – 4000 BC). It is likely that the beginnings of agriculture by the Bronze Age (2400 – 700 BC) would have started to change the landscape with areas of native woodland being cleared – the root of the downland systems that have survived.

Most of the earth banks and remains of field systems are from the Medieval period. The earliest features from these periods occur in woodlands across the Northern parts of the site, namely the presence of lynchets scattered throughout the woodlands. These are likely to represent the remains of a medieval agricultural landscape with arable ploughing nearer the top



Above: The Windmill Paddock on Stites Hill road, Coulsdon Common

of the hills on the clay plateau and livestock on slopes which were too steep to plough.

There were two post windmills on Coulsdon Common, both constructed in the 18th century. However, a mill may have been present as early as 1191 as records from Taunton Farm, a sub manor of Coulsdon, mention a mill.

There are five separate quarries on Coulsdon Common. These are of a small scale and are likely to relate to the extraction of marl for the enrichment of agricultural land nearby.

1.6.4 First and Second World Wars (1914-1945)

There was extensive military occupation on the Common during the First and Second World Wars, particularly around the area known as The Grove. Neville House, on the Merlewood area of the site was used as billets before being demolished shortly after 1945. Nearby barracks also expanded onto the Common near the Fox Public House. As the war progressed more of the Common was requisitioned until by 1945 the whole Common was taken. A flak tower was built in or near the Windmill Enclosure by Stites Hill Road. All the army buildings were removed from the Common by 1960. In the woods adjacent to Hayes Lane there are a number of man-made platforms and possible bomb craters.

1.6.5 Recent history

In the 1950's the Merlewood area became accessible to the public, with some parts being grazed by horses under licence. However, this did not suppress the successional scrub, therefore hay making was introduced in 1966, a traditional practice continued today across many areas of the Common.

Scrub and undergrowth was cleared from other areas from the late 1960s to 1971 to restore a more open landscape. These areas were maintained by haymaking and during the 1990s grazing was reintroduced to some of the grassland and the wood pasture.

A series of three ponds in the centre of the Common have been created for nature conservation. The first pond was recognised in 1971 as a possible bomb crater which held water. Two new ponds were added in more recent years, the most recent in 2009. A new pond was dug very close to the existing ponds in winter 2020, to further enhance the sites aquatic habitats.

Onsite interpretation has improved recently with the installation of a history board telling the story of the windmills on Coulsdon Common.

Below: The ponds in winter,
Coulsdon Common
(©Tim Nightingale)



Couldson Common



1.7 Access and visitors

1.7.1 Visitor appeal

Coulsdon Common is a very popular site, with many acres of grassland and biodiverse woodland, the majority of site users come from the local area. Walking, trail running and dog walking are all very popular activities seen across the Common. Other popular activities are cycling and horse-riding which is allowed on the network of permissive rides. The Common is also a valuable resource used by schools, hiking groups and wildlife enthusiasts.

The Common is used quite heavily as an access route for a variety of local people going to and from nearby locations including school children, commuters and families. There is a well-maintained football pitch and recreational area which is hired to local football clubs on weekends, and used by the public throughout the rest of the week. The Fox public house is located on Coulsdon Common, with City of London land being leased to the pub for use as a car park.

Below: The drinking fountain and Fox pub, Coulsdon Common, (Gary Watson)



Right:
t:
Blu-
eb
ells

“

This is our sanctuary during lockdown.
Oasis of nature in the middle of
suburbia.

Visitor comment

1.7.2 Access provision

Coulsdon Common is easily accessed by visitors, especially those living locally in the surrounding residential areas. There is a public car park for visitors located on Fox Lane that is well-used by visitors arriving by car, especially at weekends. The nearest railway stations are at Caterham, Whyteleafe and Upper Warlingham with services from Central London. Regular bus services also stop a short walk away from the Common with links to Croydon, Caterham, Oxted and Redhill.

There are multiple public rights of way that run across Coulsdon Common which are well-maintained for walkers including the London LOOP which is a 150-mile circular hiking route around London. Permissive rides for bikes and horses link with routes through woodlands and other local open spaces. A network of informal grass footpaths is mown in the summer months around the meadows and through the woodlands to maintain open access and discourage visitors from trampling wildflowers and grasses.

1.7.3 Stakeholders

Coulsdon Common is a complex site with various aspects including wildlife conservation, visitor recreation, highways and a public house, all taking high priority when it comes to management, visitor safety and communications. There are many stakeholders including Natural England, Historic England, The Fox public House, Croydon Council, Highways England and local residents.

Below: Merlewood paddocks, Coulsdon Common (©Tim Nightingale)



1.7.4 Visitor facilities and information provision

There are two notice boards which are updated regularly with site information, upcoming events, volunteering opportunities and much more. They also display the map of the South London Downs National Nature Reserve. A new heritage board has been designed and installed near the Windmill Paddock.

Byelaw boards can be found at the main entrances to Coulsdon Common with the site byelaws, maps of the Common and other useful visitor information. Any fields with livestock in are sign-posted on the gateways before you enter the field.

Dog poo bins are located near to the main entrances onto the Common and areas of high use.

An e-newsletter provides visitors and others on the mailing list with regular information about current news and issues on Coulsdon Common as well as the wider Coulsdon Commons. The City of London website includes a range of information for visitors including how we manage the site, wildlife commonly seen and volunteering opportunities.

Rangers run a programme of events throughout the year. These are popular with visitors and help to engage people with Coulsdon Common's rich history and nature rich habitats. Events include nature walks and talks, self-guided trails, heritage tours and nature-based activities for

families, which are promoted locally via the website, e-newsletter and on social media.

1.7.5 Education and research

School and college groups regularly visit the Common to learn about management, conservation and history. Student and other research groups are encouraged, and the staff and volunteers also carry out long term

monitoring for the benefit of the site and to contribute to regional and national monitoring programmes. Examples of these are butterfly transects, moth trapping and monitoring for bats, contributing to a national picture of ecosystem health and the changes happening to protected sites across Britain.

Below: City of London byelaw board, Coulsdon Common (Gary Watson)





Above: Snowfall on the pipe track, Coulsdon Common (©Tim Nightingale)

1.7.6 Other estate features

The Merlewood Estate Office is located on Coulsdon Common. This is the main estate yard and office for the collective Coulsdon Common's and is the base for the ranger team. There is a small reception area for the public, visitors and contractors which displays site maps and information on the Coulsdon Commons.

Infrastructure on the Common includes stock-proof fences to contain grazing animals, benches and a range of gates, posts and boundary fences to prevent vehicles from gaining access to the Common.

1.8 Current use

Under the Open Spaces Act, the requirement is for Coulsdon Common to be managed for informal recreation. Given the popularity of this site and its location in one of the most densely populated regions in the UK, care must be taken to ensure that recreation activities remain low-key and do not result in damage and that there is minimal conflict between recreation and conservation. Legal obligations such as the NERC (Natural Environment and Rural Communities) Act 2006 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 require positive management for nature conservation; this is strengthened and supported

by the NNR designation and grant funding through Countryside Stewardship.

2 Biological features

2.1 Communities and flora

Coulsdon Common is most well known for its spectacular semi-natural ancient woodlands and species rich grassland meadows all rolling across the slopes and hills of the South London Downs NNR. The woodlands put on a spectacular display in spring with a carpet of bluebells, whilst the chalk grasslands come alive in the summer months with a large variety of wildflowers. Coulsdon Common also has grasslands on neutral and acidic soils, providing a larger variety of grassland species than is normally found on a site of this size.

Woodlands

Closed canopy mixed broad-leaved woodland covers around 21ha of Coulsdon Common, with some areas having plants indicative of ancient woodland sites, including bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), wood anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*) and wood sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*). The canopy is dominated by pedunculate oak (*Quercus robur*) and ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), with additional species such as beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), silver birch (*Betula pendula*), yew (*Taxus baccata*), wild cherry (*Prunus avium*), wych elm (*Ulmus glabra*), lime (*Tilia x europaea*), sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*), whitebeam (*Sorbus aria*) and field maple (*Acer campestre*). Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), holly (*Ilex aquifolium*),



hazel (*Corylus avellane*) and elder (*Sambucus nigra*) form the understory.

Semi-natural ancient woodland

Much of the woodlands are thought to be ancient woodland including Rydons Wood, the Merlewood woodlands and some of the woodland surrounding Merlewood Far and The Maze. These are the woodlands on Coulsdon Common which have developed naturally over hundreds of years. Most have been used by humans, managed for timber and other industries

over the centuries, but they have had woodland cover for over 400 years. These woodlands have a ground flora indicative of ancient woodland sites, including species such as bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), wood anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*), wood sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*), dog's mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*) and wood melick (*Melica uniflora*).

Above: Stites Hill Wood, Coulsdon Common (©Tim Nightingale)

Below: Oak tree, Coulsdon Common (©Tim Nightingale)



Veteran trees

A veteran tree is one that is biologically, aesthetically or culturally important because of its age, size or condition. In 2010 we identified 393 veteran trees located throughout the woodlands.

Species include pedunculate oak (*Quercus robur*), ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), sycamore (*Acer*

pseudoplatanus), yew (*Taxus baccata*), beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), field maple (*Acer campestre*), silver birch (*Betula pendula*), sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*), whitebeam (*Sorbus aria*), horse chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) and lime (*Tilia x europaea*). The majority of these veterans are either maiden trees, coppiced or pollarded.



Above: Yellow stagshorn fungus, (Charlie Jackson)

Veteran characteristics include:

- Shattered branch stumps
- Rot holes
- Decaying wood
- Fallen deadwood
- Water collecting depressions
- Sap runs
- Fractured bark
- Bracket fungi

These features provide many unique micro-habitats on a single tree, allowing it to support a wide range of wildlife. Cavities provide homes for birds and bats to nest and roost in, while deadwood supports a variety of specialised fungi, lichens and invertebrates. Many species supported by veteran trees and their associated deadwood are very rare and cannot survive anywhere else. The veteran and notable trees on Coulsdon Common were mapped and tagged in 2010/11. Further survey work is now required to establish management priorities for these trees to aid their longevity.

Secondary woodland

Stites Hill Wood and the areas surrounding The Fox football pitch are secondary woodland, which is classified as a woodland occupying a site that has not been wooded continuously throughout history (in Britain since the last ice advance). It may be the product of natural succession or of planting on formerly unwooded land. These woodlands are a mixture of pedunculate oak (*Quercus robur*), birch (*Betula pendula*), beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), wild cherry (*Prunus avium*), holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), hazel (*Corylus avellane*), yew (*Taxus baccata*) and other species.

Wood pasture

In the Grove, cattle graze open grassland beneath scattered trees and amongst blocks of scrub. Land containing trees that is grazed with domestic animals or deer is often referred to as **wood pasture which is identified as a 'priority' habitat**. The density of trees can be very variable, ranging from dense woodland to open grassland with occasional trees.

Grazing livestock are the key component in maintaining a varied structure over both large areas and at the small microhabitat scale. Many studies have shown that low density of grazing is beneficial to the majority of animals and plants that occur in woodland.



Left: Cows grazing in wood pasture

Below: Grazing Sussex cattle, the Grove, Coulsdon Common



Below: Jay, Coulsdon Common (Michael Bromley)



Deadwood

Dead and decaying wood is one of our most important habitats whether it is within living trees, standing or lying on the ground. It supports a huge range of insects which also provide a food source for bats and birds. Decaying wood is not just a single habitat but a complex series of changing microhabitats intricately linked to the fungi that 'process' the decaying wood. Deadwood is actively left on the Common as a management tool for biodiversity.

Below: Deadwood habitat,
Coulston Common (©Tim Nightingale)



Right: Male stag beetle

Hazel coppicing

There are small pockets of hazel on Coulston Common, much of which is scattered within the understorey of the woodlands, however there are some pockets where hazel is the dominant tree species such as Rydon's Wood. Coppicing occurs as blocks of woodland are thinned in rotation. This ensures that the woodland always contains areas of trees at different stages of maturity. In areas of freshly cut coppice, more sunlight can reach the woodland floor allowing ground flora to thrive.

Variation in tree height, tree age and light level provides a more complex habitat structure. In turn, this allows the woodland to support a greater variety of plant and animal species. We collect the timber by-products from the hazel coppice and use them for charcoal making, hedge laying and pea sticks for the volunteers.

Below: Vigorous growth
of coppiced hazel



Hedgerows

Coulsdon Common has many species rich hedgerows (Priority habitat) located across the site including species such as hawthorn, (*Crataegus monogyna*) blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), crab apple (*Malus sylvestris*), yew, cherry and spindle (*Euonymus europaeus*). Some mark boundaries and others are managed specifically for their wildlife conservation value. They are a vital resource for wildlife and often act as corridors linking habitats.

Hedges which border Public Rights of Way need to be managed regularly to ensure they do not present a hazard to access. The rest of our hedges are managed for their conservation value using the following techniques:

Coppicing & hedge-laying create new growth and maintain the hedgerow.

Trimming hedges is done on a three-year rotation, with different sections of hedge trimmed each year. This ensures that production of flowers, nuts and berries is not drastically reduced across the site at any one time. Planting with native species will be done if a hedgerow is “gappy” or when a new hedgerow is being planted. This ensures hedges are in-keeping with the landscape character. Veteran hedgerow trees are retained and managed individually as necessary. Long grass margins are left adjacent to the hedgerows and are cut on rotation.



Left: Hawthorn flower, Coulsdon Common



Left: Brown hairstreak butterfly; one species that utilises dense hedges

Below: A newly laid hedge, Merlewood paddocks, Coulsdon Common



Lowland meadow

Neutral grassland, a Priority Habitat, covers an area of approximately 3.7ha. It dominates the grassland habitat on Coulsdon Common. The richest neutral grassland tends to be nearest the chalk grassland on the Merlewood area of the Common. However neutral grassland occurs across the site, with botanically rich swards kept nutrient poor by a hay cutting regime. The richest of these swards can be seen in the Windmill Farm area of the Common, on Stites hill

Road. Here, yellow rattle, Ox-eye daisy and Common spotted orchid all proliferate. Relatively species-rich neutral grassland can also be found just North of Stites hill road, west of Homefield Road and east of Rydon's lane. Common bird's foot trefoil, knapweed, meadow vetchling and red clover are common.

Conversely, the most species-poor grassland, lies North east of the Merlewood estate office on an area formerly occupied by Neville house.

Lowland acid grassland

Acid grassland, Priority Habitat, covers around 1.2ha and is found only on grassland North of Fox Lane. It's dominated by sheep's fescue with frequent patches of common bent (*Agrostis capillaris*), heath bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*), sheep's sorrel (*Rumex acetosella*), tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*) and harebell (*Campanula rotundifolia*). The grassland shifts in composition towards a more neutral grassland in a westerly direction.

Above: Common spotted orchid and yellow rattle, Coulsdon Common



Left: Wildflowers and invertebrates commonly seen in neutral grassland habitats on Coulsdon Common



Chalk grassland

Chalk grassland, a Priority Habitat, covers a total area of roughly 4ha on Coulsdon Common across three meadows: The Maze, Merlewood Far and some of Merlewood Near.

This is a nationally rare habitat which is **sometimes referred to as “Europe’s tropical rainforest”**. These habitats can have up to 40 flowering plants in one square metre, meaning a well-managed chalk downland is an incredibly biodiverse habitat. This unique environment is a result of the thin layer of lime rich but low nutrient soil on top of chalk.

Ninety million years ago these meadows would have been at the bottom of the ocean. Over millions of years the bodies of microscopic plankton accumulated at the bottom of the great sea, compressed with sediment to eventually become rock. Later earth movements, related to the formation of the Alps, raised these former sea-floor deposits above sea level.

Nowadays this creates a somewhat harsh environment for common grasses and flowers, resulting in rare plant species growing here, which in turn support rare invertebrates and larger animals.

To maximise biodiversity, we manage the chalk grasslands by grazing cattle and sheep. Conservation grazing creates a varied sward height, space for new seedlings to grow,

localised soil enrichment without the introduction of nutrients into the system and a low yet significant impact on scrub regrowth. This dappled shady environment is favoured by a variety of invertebrates and essential for specialist species that rely on herbivore dung such as fungi and many species of beetles. Merlewood Far is the most species rich chalk grassland meadow on Coulsdon Common with key chalk grassland indicator species being

found here such as hundreds of pyramidal orchids (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*), bee orchid (*Ophrys apifera*), rough hawkbit (*Leontodon hispidus*) and greater yellow rattle (*Rhinanthus angustifolius*). Merlewood Far is managed mainly through hay making with occasional grazing.

The Maze also lies on chalk and was recently cleared of over-mature scrub in order to restore it back to a species-rich chalk grassland habitat.



Left: Pyramidal orchids



Left: Brown hairstreak butterfly, one species that utilises dense hedgerows.

Above: Hundreds of common frogs gathering to mate and lay spawn, Coulsdon Common (© Tim Nightingale)

Ponds

There are two well established ponds, a Priority Habitat, in an open glade in Stites Hill Woods, and another newly created pond nearby. Common frogs (*Rana temporaria*) and smooth newts (*Lissotriton vulgaris*) are known to use the established ponds for breeding.

Wetland habitats are locally rare, mostly because of the permeable chalk beneath the ground. However, in damper areas, we are expanding the number of ponds on Coulsdon

and neighboring Kenley Common through trial 'scrapes'. If they hold water, these could soon connect ponds across the landscape for newts, toads and frogs.

There is a hibernacula located around the edge of the established ponds that provides shelter for amphibians at different times of the year. This is made of buried stone and logs, covered by soil.

Mallard ducks (*Anas platyrhynchos*), grey herons (*Ardea cinerea*), daubentons bats (*myotis daubentonii*) and many other species have been seen using these ponds. They are an essential source of water for countless birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates on site.

2.2 Species of Interest

Vascular plants

Coulsdon Common is well known for its incredible display of wildflowers on the chalk downlands, as well as the ancient woodlands and meadows across the rest of the common.

Wildflowers, grasses and herbs are such an important part of any habitat, providing nectar and food sources to insects, nesting opportunities for invertebrates, birds, reptiles, amphibians and small mammals, as well as overwintering habitats.

More variation in vascular plants means more diverse invertebrates will be attracted. These in turn will bring a wider variety of predators to the food chain increasing the biodiversity of the habitat.

Some nationally scarce and locally rare species are present on Coulsdon Common including greater yellow-rattle (*Rhinanthus angustifolius*), sanfoin (*Onobrychis viciifolia*), tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*) and hoary plantain (*Plantago media*).

The last National Vegetation Classification (NVC) survey completed for Coulsdon Common was in 2001/2002 therefore we will be commissioning an up-to-date NVC survey throughout the duration of this management plan.

Scientific Name	Common Name	UK Red Data List	England Red List	Surrey SCC	Orchids and chalk grassland indicator species
<i>Anacamptis pyramidalis</i>	Pyramidal orchid	LC	LC		
<i>Dactylorhiza fuchsii</i>	Common spotted orchid	LC	LC		** London BAP priority species
<i>Dactylorhiza praetermissa</i>	Southern marsh orchid	LC	LC		
<i>Galium verum</i>	Lady's bedstraw	LC	LC		Key
<i>Leontodon hispidus</i>	Rough hawkbit	LC	LC		LC – least concern
<i>Linum catharticum</i>	Fairy flax	LC	LC		VU – vulnerable
<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>	Common Bird's-foot trefoil	LC	LC		EN – endangered
<i>Ophrys apifera</i>	Bee orchid	LC	LC		NT – near threatened
<i>Plantago media</i>	Hoary plantain	LC	NT	●	SCC – species of conservation concern
<i>Primula veris</i>	Cowslip	LC	LC		BAP – biodiversity action plan/UK Priority species
<i>Rhinanthus angustifolius</i>	Greater yellow rattle**	LC	LC	●	

Below: Bee orchid,



Right: Greater yellow rattle
(Oskar Gran)



Fungi

Coulsdon Common is a fantastic place to see fungi which can be found in all habitats across the site including the grasslands, woodlands, leaf litter and footpaths.

Through the dedication of a very knowledgeable volunteer we have found 149 species on site. Two of these species are on the UK Red List; Bluefoot Bolete (*Xerocomellus cisalpinus*) and Parasitic Bolete (*Pseudoboletus parasiticus*).

Roman snail

The slow-breeding Roman snail occurs on the site, having been found near the Merlewood Far paddock. This conspicuous mollusc is vulnerable to people collecting them for the restaurant trade and is becoming rare. The round-mouthed snail, which is more closely related to sea-living periwinkles than to other terrestrial snails, is found on the chalky soils here.

Below: Parasitic bolete (©Bjorn S)



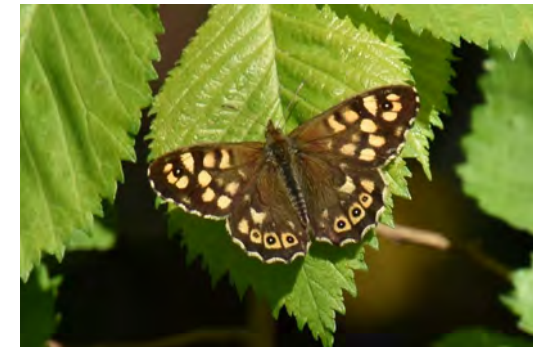
Butterflies

Since 1990 butterfly transects have identified 29 species on Coulsdon Common. Of particular note are the following species which are rare or threatened; sightings of purple emperor (*Apatura iris*), small blue (*Cupido minimus*) and brown hairstreak (*Thecla betulae*).

Below: Orange tip butterfly (©Jeannie Debs)



Above: Silver washed fritillary, Coulsdon Common



Above: Speckled Wood, Coulsdon Common (Gary Watson)

Scientific Name	Common Name	UK Red List	UK Priority	London Priority	Surrey Species of Conservation Concern	Chalk grassland indicator
<i>Aricia agestis</i>	Brown argus				•	
<i>Thecla betulae</i>	Brown hairstreak	VU	•	•	•	
<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>	Common blue	LC	•			•
<i>Callophrys rubi</i>	Green hairstreak	LC			•	
<i>Melanargia galathea</i>	Marbled white	LC			•	•
<i>Apatura iris</i>	Purple emperor	NT			•	
<i>Favonius quercus</i>	Purple hairstreak	LC			•	
<i>Argynnis paphia</i>	Silver-washed Fritillary	LC			•	
<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>	Small heath	NT	•	•	•	•

Birds

A total of 56 bird species have been recorded on Coulsdon Common, of which 8 are on the IUCN's Red List of Threatened Species and 10 are on the Amber List. The site is of local importance for 'downland' birds, including, linnet and bullfinch but is also host to various warblers, finches and buntings.

Each year a good number of starlings are also seen on site. There are regular sightings of at least 5 raptors hunting on site; kestrel, sparrow hawk, buzzard, red kite and peregrine falcon and the woodlands are home to breeding tawny owls.

Scientific Name	Common Name	IUCN Category	UK Priority	London Priority	Surrey SCC
<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>	Black-headed Gull	AMBER			●
<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>	Bullfinch	AMBER	●	●	●
<i>Larus canus</i>	Common gull	AMBER			●
<i>Prunella modularis</i>	Dunnock	AMBER	●	●	●
<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	Fieldfare	RED			●
<i>Larus argentatus</i>	Herring gull	RED	●	●	●
<i>Delichon urbica</i>	House martin	AMBER			●
<i>Passer domesticus</i>	House sparrow	RED	●	●	●
<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Kestrel	AMBER			●
<i>Larus fuscus</i>	Lesser black-backed gull	AMBER			●
<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	Linnet	RED	●	●	●
<i>Anthus pratensis</i>	Meadow pipit	AMBER			●
<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	Mistle thrush	RED			●
<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	Perigrine falcon			●	●
<i>Milvus milvus</i>	Red kite				●
<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	Redwing	RED			●
<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	Song thrush	RED	●	●	●
<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Starling	RED	●	●	●
<i>Apus apus</i>	Swift	AMBER			●
<i>Strix aluco</i>	Tawny owl	AMBER			●

Below: Wren
(©Tim Nightingale)



Below: Kestrel, Coulsdon Common
(Gary Watson)



Below: Siskin
(©John McIntyre)



Mammals

The resident mammals are mainly common species that are an integral part of the ecosystem and food chains on the site. There are regular sightings of roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*) and fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) and there are some well-established and active badger (*Meles meles*) setts. There have been anecdotal sightings of european hedgehogs (*Erinaceus europaeus*), a UK Priority Species.

Small mammals are represented by bank vole, short tailed vole, wood mouse, common shrew and pygmy shrew. Yellow necked-mouse has also been recorded. Grey squirrel are common throughout all woodland compartments.

Bats

As biological indicators of ecosystem health, the presence of various bat species across the site suggests that there is a plentiful supply of nocturnal insects. Four species have been found, including pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*), soprano pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*), daubenton's (*Myotis daubentonii*) and serotine (*Eptesicus serotinus*).

There is also a well-established maternity roost within the eaves of the roof of one of ranger's houses on the edge of Coulsdon Common. A maternity roost survey is required to determine the species present, but it is thought that there is likely to be in excess of 50 bats using this roost throughout the summer.



Above: Fox, Coulsdon Common, (©Tim Nightingale)



Right: Badger (Tim Hunt)

Below: Bank vole (©PTES)



3

The need for management

3.1 The legacy of the Coulson Commons and the South London Downs NNR

The four Coulsdon Commons are more than just your average suburban parks; because of their size, age and centuries of management, many of the habitats within the Coulsdon Commons are now rare within London and the South East of England.

Over the many years since their purchase by the City of London Corporation in 1883, the rural landscape surrounding the Coulsdon Commons has significantly changed; initially, new railway lines were spreading rapidly across South London, driving up land values and creating a surge of new housing developments from the heart of London into the surrounding countryside. Today, the four Commons are some of the last significant swathes of open space in South London; they are green oases in an increasingly urban landscape. The protection afforded in perpetuity to these open spaces, under their own Act of Parliament, helps secure and safeguard them for the benefit of all Londoners.

In 2019, Coulsdon Common (along with the other Coulsdon Commons) became part of Greater London's newest National Nature Reserve known as the South London Downs National Nature Reserve.

This designation brought together 1,030 acres of land managed by the City of London Corporation and London Borough of Croydon to create a linked downland landscape rich in nature and opportunities for people to engage with the natural world. A steering group regularly

meets, with project partners collaborating on joint initiatives such as increasing habitat connectivity across the NNR.

National Nature Reserves (NNRs) were established to protect some of our most important habitats, species and geology, and to provide 'outdoor laboratories' for research. Most NNRs offer great opportunities to schools, specialist interest groups and the public to experience wildlife at first hand and to learn more about nature conservation.

Below: Coulsdon Common



3.2 The importance of chalk grassland restoration and management

Chalk grasslands were once widespread across the landscape, wherever suitable substrate occurred. Historically, agricultural techniques gradually advanced to the point where around the 18th century, meadows were being ploughed for more intensive farming. This trend continued and accelerated with the introduction of fertilisers and heavy machinery.

The general topography of the remaining chalk grassland sites being very steep left another big challenge for the chalk grassland habitats - ecological succession. Succession is the process by which ecosystems change and develop over time.

In terms of chalk grassland habitats, without management they will become colonised by tussocky grasses over time, which shade and dominate the rare wildflowers, scrub then populates the downland and trees begin to grow eventually becoming woodland.

Coulsdon Common has 3 meadows which lie above chalk: Merlewood Far, parts of Merlewood Near and The Maze. Merlewood Far is the most species rich chalk downland in site which is currently managed through hay making with some occasional grazing.

The Maze has recently been cleared of over mature scrub therefore is still improving. Our focus now is on fine tuning the management of the restored open downland through grazing of

cows and sheep so that returning rare and specialist plants and invertebrates can become established and thrive.

Below: New lambs and sheep grazing the Merlewood paddocks, Coulsdon Common)



“

It is estimated that since WWII we have lost roughly 80% of our chalk grasslands in the UK. The remaining sites tend to be on valley sides and slopes too steep to be ploughed or re-seeded.

3.3 The importance of grazing

Grazing over millennia shaped parts of Coulsdon Common to the landscape we have today and is still an integral part of grassland management to maximise biodiversity.

Grazing helps to maintain a more varied vegetative structure than mowing and is also much less damaging to invertebrates living in the grassland.

Conservation grazing creates a diversity in sward height, a limited and beneficial amount of soil disturbance, localised soil enrichment without the introduction of nutrients into the system overall and can produce tunnels and cavities within scrub blocks. Hoof prints create hot microclimate conditions which specialised invertebrates such as the small blue (*Polyommatus bellargus*) butterfly require for egg laying; a butterfly we are hoping to encourage to inhabit Coulsdon Common.

Conversely, the resulting dappled shady environment created by grazing is favoured by a variety of invertebrates and essential for specialist species that rely on dung such as fungi and many species of beetles.

The presence of ant hills in the chalk grasslands indicates centuries of grazing by animals as the anthills are retained rather than being flattened by mechanical mowing. Each mound is created by a single colony of meadow ants which can number several thousand individuals and extend up to a metre underground. Many anthills are

believed to be several hundreds of years old, highly intricate and benefit not just the ants stored within, but add to the biodiversity of these meadow systems by creating small scale micro-habitats each with valuable differences in soil nutrients, temperature, humidity, drainage and sunlight. This drives the diversity of plant species found in the chalk grasslands, favouring rare wildflowers and herbs.

Grazing does have a limited effect on scrub growth. Tree regeneration is not completely stopped; shrubs, brambles and dead wood protect some seedlings that are able to grow

into trees if left. Grazing of these plants when they are young and often supple does help to suppress their growth to some extent, but often other forms of removal are needed such as through tree popping, cutting and treating or spraying with targeted herbicide.

Below: Species rich chalk grassland (Des Sussex)



3.3.1 Managing livestock

Our approach to grazing is intended to be as sustainable and holistic as possible. Jacob sheep and Sussex Cattle are bred on the Coulsdon Commons to ensure that the calves and lambs spend their first grazing season learning from their mothers about what plant species to forage and to become accustomed to the various site-users, both human and canine, they will encounter on what are busy suburban open spaces. Sussex Cattle are a very docile rare

breed that would historically have roamed the downs of Surrey and Sussex. They cope well with the steep downland terrain and low quality grazing, a trait that benefits the flower rich grasslands present on the Commons. Jacob Sheep, which are also now a rare breed, similarly fare extremely well on the exposed downland slopes and will graze 'swards' very short. This is vital for small, low-growing plants that need open conditions to successfully flower.

Below: Grazing sussex cattle, Coulsdon Common
(©Tim Nightingale)



In addition to daily welfare checks from Rangers and volunteers, we help maintain herd health by **carrying out breeding 'in-house' using a bought in bull** for several years. This eliminates the risk of disease entering a herd with new stock, reducing the reliance on veterinary treatment and vaccinations.

We graze with both cows and sheep due to their different grazing techniques and preferences. The cows use their strong curling tongue to wrap around the grass and pull it up, tearing it off in clumps. Jacob sheep are a hardy and attractive breed used to 'nibble' at the shorter grass cutting it low down to the ground. Through the combined use of sheep and cattle, a mosaic of different microhabitats is created, creating multiple niches for species over a small

Below: Jacob sheep, Coulsdon Common



3.4 Climate change

Climate change is causing higher temperatures and more extreme and unpredictable weather events. Managing Coulsdon Common in the face of these uncertainties is a challenge; projections suggest that oak trees may decline in health as a result and other species such as hazel, may fare better in warmer conditions. Generally, this might result in a more scrubby and open woodland with lower tree canopies.

One way to reduce the risks associated with climate change is to make the Common more

resilient. Generally, ecosystems with a higher diversity of species are more resilient to negative drivers such as climate change or disease, for example. Actions to boost resilience include increasing structural diversity within habitats to create more ecological niches for wildlife to fill promoting species diversity. Other actions include managing and monitoring ancient oaks and other tree species to reduce the risk of structural failure in high winds. Likewise, surveying and monitoring plants and animals will play an important role in understanding the impact of climate change, species response and efficacy of our work.

3.5 Biodiversity in crisis

The UK is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world*. Biodiversity has plummeted due to the loss of wildlife and wildlife habitats.

- In 1966 there were 40 million more birds in the UK than there are today.
- Numbers of the most endangered species in the UK have halved since the 1970s.
- One in 10 species in the UK is now threatened with extinction.
- **A quarter of Britain's native mammals are at risk of extinction.**
- Moths have declined by 88% and butterflies by 76% since 1970.
- Approximately one plant species is lost per county per year, and the rate of loss is accelerating.
- Despite government policies and actions, 150 out of 250 'priority species' for nature conservation are still declining in number.

*UK State of Nature reports (2013 and 2016).



Left: Burnet moth,
(©Giles Watson)

3.6 Fragmentation, pests and diseases

The Common is increasingly under threat from pests and diseases that benefit from general warming and continue to be introduced on plant stock from abroad.

Ash dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*) is one such disease that has inflicted Coulsdon Common's population of ash trees over the last few years. It has been spreading rapidly since it was first identified in the UK in 2012 and can affect up to 95% of ash trees on a site.

On Coulsdon Common, and across the wider Coulsdon Commons, we are finding that some of the older trees are showing some resilience to the disease. Through ongoing tree safety checks, severely afflicted ash trees, especially those in high-use areas and on our urban boundaries, have been cleared.

Although it is not currently present on Coulsdon Common, we are aware that the oak processionary moth (*Thaumetopoea processionea*) is within the local environment. The caterpillars of oak processionary moth (OPM) are found on oak trees and are a hazard to human and animal health. We are continuously monitoring the site for any signs of OPM and adhering to the most up-to-date advice from the Forestry Commission on its management.

Habitat fragmentation is a very real threat to all habitats across the world, with wildlife being cut off from other habitats isolating individuals within

one habitat, unable to move between habitats to mate and expand territories due to roads, buildings and railways. Through the linking of habitats using wildlife corridors such as hedgerows and controlled successional scrub

blocks, we are aiming to create a mosaic of interlinked habitats across Coulsdon Common.

Below: Ash dieback disease noticeable in the lack of leaves on ash trees, (©Tim Nightingale)



3.7 Nature deficit, visitor access and community engagement

With more and more green spaces being lost across the country and the fast pace of life within our society, it is now more important than ever for people to have access to open spaces. We know there are numerous benefits to having access to the outdoors including improving mental health, keeping physically active and learning about the natural environment and its necessity to sustain life on earth.

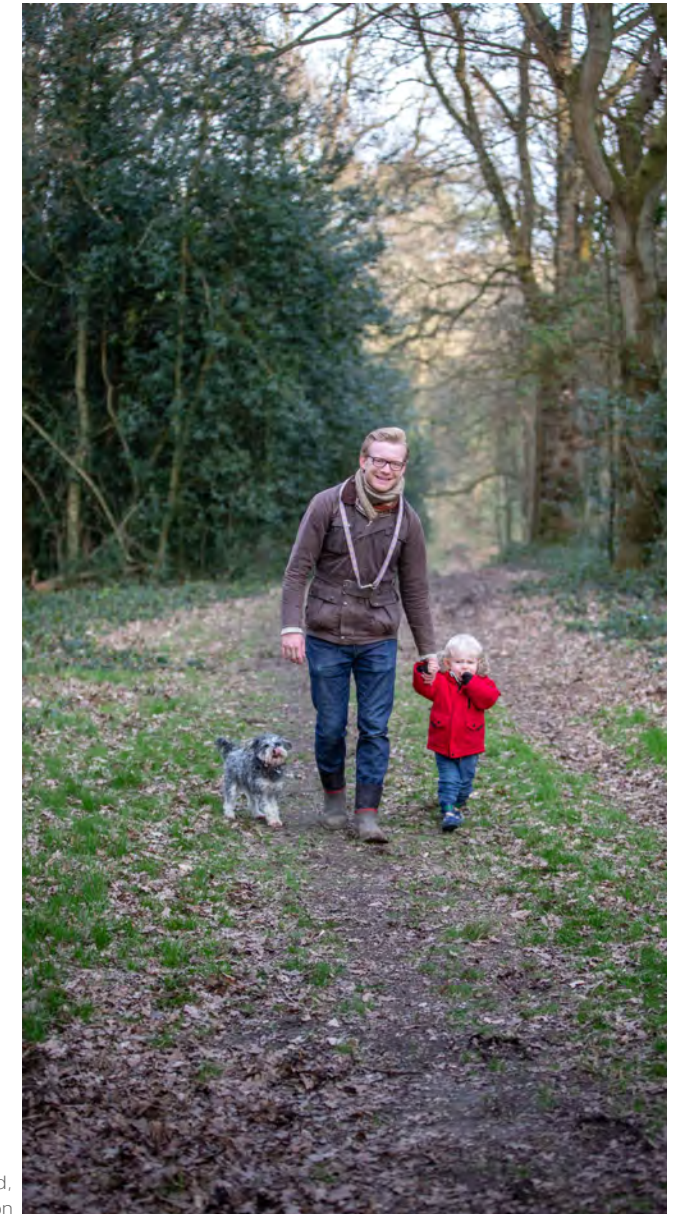
Nature deficit can cause numerous problems amongst children and adults and we are committed to encouraging anyone and everyone to get outdoors and use Coulsdon Common. We endeavour to make Coulsdon Common as accessible as possible to everyone whilst ensuring site security, visitor safety and livestock welfare.

We have found that by opening up new glades and areas of Stites Hill Woods that more families are venturing further onto the Common, not just sticking to their regular dog walking or bike riding routes. More people have been able to explore the woodland areas which were previously used as a through route. We will continue to encourage more people to explore the whole of the site, diversifying the way they visit and changing their perception of Coulsdon Common, all the while encouraging pro-environmental behaviour such as picking up dog waste and taking litter home. Through public events, interpretation and regular visitor/

ranger communication we will promote the wilder side of Coulsdon Common so that **Coulsdon's visitors are aware of how special and important the site is for nature conservation.**

We aim to actively encourage all members of our community to get involved in the management and conservation work on Coulsdon Common. We have a large, very active and incredibly valuable volunteering group who over the past 10 years have achieved an average of over 1,200 volunteer hours per year. However, we are aware that wider members of our community are not as actively involved, therefore we are hoping to create more connections and opportunities for work experience students, Duke of Edinburgh activities, apprenticeships, youth volunteering and more.

One of the most significant outcomes from the ongoing coronavirus pandemic has been the importance of the site not just for physical exercise but the restorative effect it has on **people's mental health and wellbeing.** We will take the opportunity to build on some of lessons learnt from the pandemic.



Right: A family walking through Stites Hill Wood, Coulsdon Common

4 Vision

Vision statement:

Coulsdon Common will be enjoyed and **cherished in ways that contribute to people's health and wellbeing**. City of London Rangers will work together with volunteers, communities and stakeholders to deliver management actions that protect and promote its wildlife, heritage and landscape. The biodiverse chalk downlands, flower-rich grasslands, ancient woodland and open wood pasture will be treasured by local people and all those who come to visit:

- Coulsdon Common's mosaic of wildlife habitats are enhanced, extended and integrated into the wider downland landscape of the National Nature Reserve.
- People are integral to the site. They understand and are inspired by Coulsdon Common's special wildlife and heritage and are actively involved in its conservation.
- Coulsdon's heritage assets will remain properly protected whilst events and interpretation will uncover the Common's interesting past.
- Conservation grazing and traditional skills will be used to maintain a tranquil landscape where wildlife will be abundant and can easily move between habitats and is resilient and adapted to a changing climate.

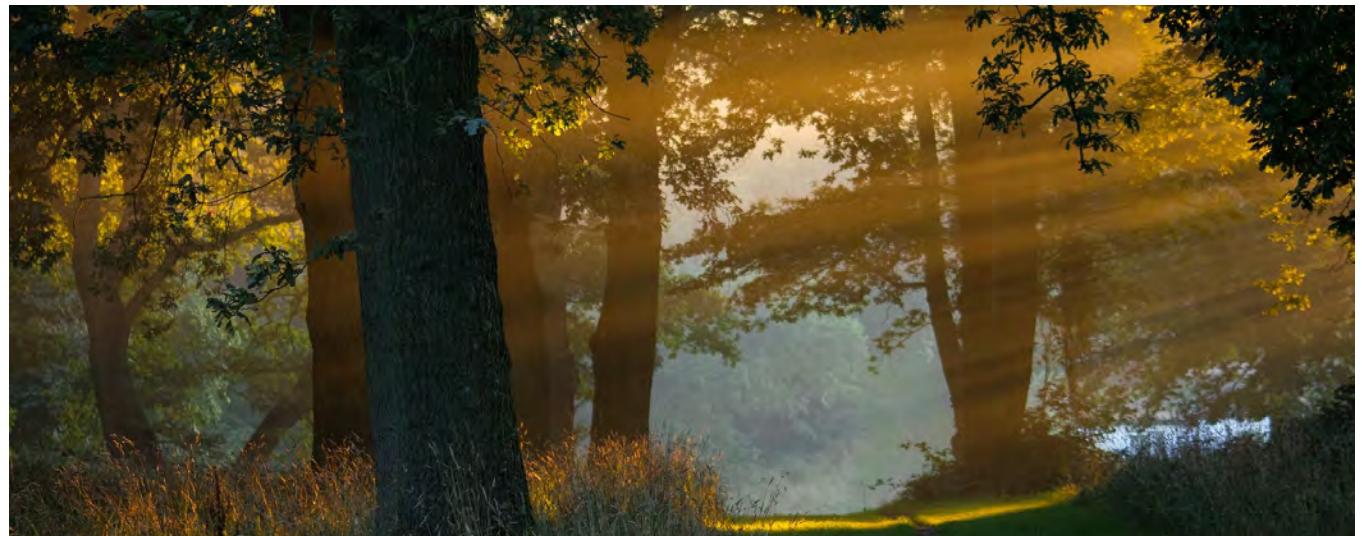
The vision for the next ten years will specifically focus on key projects to:

- Expand and explore new grazing regimes through invisible fencing technology and different hay cutting approaches to maximise plant and animal diversity within the grassland habitats and edges.
- Ensure the woodlands across the Common are sustainably managed, creating places rich in biodiversity whilst recycling by-products locally where possible such as producing charcoal.
- Explore options for new habitat features such as ponds and refugia for rare and threatened species.
- Establish a rotational system of managing hedges and scrub of varied age, species and structure to support the widest range of wildlife.

- Monitor wildlife and changes to the environment through species surveys to build a bigger picture of the impact of management actions.
- Explore opportunities and initiatives to showcase the less known heritage features present on the Common and celebrate these through the Green Heritage Award.
- Improve access on the common, upgrading key tracks, maintaining rights of way and replacing trail posts.
- Develop interpretation materials and continue with events such as walks, talks and workshops to engage with our audiences.

On the next page of this Management Plan we have used a specially commissioned vision illustration to highlight the elements of change within the next 10 years of management.

Below: Woodland sunset, Coulsdon Common







Above: Coulsdon Common (©Tim Nightingale)

5 Aims & objectives

The aims of the 2021-2031 Management Plan seek to maintain a biodiverse nature reserve and provide a direction of travel towards achieving the vision for the site. The targets detailed here will be monitored throughout the plan and adjusted as needed to achieve the overall aims. Each aim is linked to the governing document of the Coulsdon Commons charity, the Corporation of London (Open Spaces) Act 1878.

Aim 1: Biological

Maintain the biodiversity of Coulsdon Common by managing the habitats to favourable condition and achieving conservation gains that benefit the site and beyond.

Aim 2: People and heritage

Encourage the sustainable use of Coulsdon Common for recreation, promoting community involvement in its management.

Aim 3: Estate assets and legal issues

To fulfil all legal obligations and to maintain estate and heritage structures in good condition so they are safe and secure, now and in the future.

Aim 1: Biological

The biological elements of Coulsdon Common are interdependent: habitats and species cannot be managed in isolation.

In general, the stronger the nature reserve is in terms of habitat vigour and diversity, the more resilient it will be to the impact of outside influences such as climate change, pollution and habitat loss in surrounding areas.

4.1.1 Woodland management

Woodlands make up almost half of Coulsdon Common, the majority being mixed broad-leaved deciduous woodlands, with a mixture of ancient and secondary woodlands.

Over the life of this management plan we will be working to increase biodiversity within these woodlands, whilst controlling undesirable species such as laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*), snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*) and controlling the spread of holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) that can otherwise shade out and smother low-lying plants on the ground and in the woodland understory.

Target: Creating a mosaic of age classes and a multi-storied canopy including plenty of links between different levels of the canopy and undergrowth, benefitting all wildlife.

Achieved by:

- Re-coppicing the hazel (*Corylus avellana*) in Rydons Wood in 2022/23 on the 12 year coppice rotation.
- Hazel-layering to increase the amount of hazel coppice stools.
- Thinning woodland edges to graded grass-scrub-wood interface up to 10m into woodland.
- Focused targeting of rides, glades and woodland edge management, with rotational scalloping across the Merlewood paddocks and Stites Hill Wood.
- Creating new pollards in Stites Hill Wood and throughout The Grove.
- Surveying for Dormice in Stites Hill Wood.

Right: Young holly in woodland, Coulsdon Common
(©Tim Nightingale)



Target: Have a better understanding of the veteran trees including locations, management required and habitat potential, to better protect them for future generations to enjoy.

Achieved by:

- Re-surveying the ancient, veteran and maiden trees to assess condition and identify any preservation work including pruning, clearing surrounding vegetation halo release and other stresses that may be affecting the health of the trees.
- Carrying out the work programme and updating when required.
- Surveying for bats to locate potential roost sites.

Target: Ensure woodland ground flora thrives by providing space to grow where sunlight can reach the woodland floor.

Achieved by:

- Thinning dense canopies to encourage development of understorey and ground flora.
- Coppicing hazel throughout these woodlands at the same time.
- Significantly thinning the holly understorey in specific areas.
- Cut and take grass from established glades in Stites Hill Wood.

Target: Retain habitat, protect trees and increase biodiversity along the driveway to Coulsdon Common and the Merlewood Estate Office.

Achieved by:

- Pollard the lime trees along the drive.
- Manage beech hedge through regular cutting.

Target: Investigate maximising the biodiversity value of Lodge Garden by planting an orchard.

Achieved by:

- Investigate grant funding for this project.
- Planting an orchard in lodge garden.
- Planting a mixed broadleaf hedge on boundary with Ninehams gardens.

Below: Oak woodland, Coulsdon Common (©Tim Nightingale)



4.1.2 Wood pasture

Target: Restore and manage a biodiverse wood pasture in The Grove.

Achieved by:

- Continue thinning the trees throughout the compartment.
- Encouraging thicker pockets of scrub in select locations.
- Annually assessing whether hay cuts or grazing or a combination of both are the best management technique to increase biodiversity, following best practice and guidance.

Right and Below: Greater yellow rattle and seed head, (©Elanor Wexler)



Seeding The Grove

To encourage a more biodiverse grassland sward throughout The Grove we will be using a select seed mixture including plants such as birds foot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), oxeye daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*) and greater yellow rattle (*Rhinanthus angustifolius*).

Known as 'the meadow maker' or 'nature's lawnmower', yellow rattle suppresses the growth of surrounding competitive grasses creating space for less common wildflowers to establish and thrive.

Target: Actively restoring a biodiverse grassland sward through seeding and planting in The Grove.

Achieved by:

- Trialling the spreading of green hay from around The Fox football pitch in order to enhance sward diversity.
- Exploring opportunities with local conservation land managers to collect and reseed areas of species-poor grassland with locally sourced material.
- Explore funding opportunities for this project.
- Monitoring establishment of sward using wildflower surveys.



Left: Wood pasture habitat in The Grove, Coulsdon Common

4.1.3 Managing arisings from woodland management

All felling, clearance and extraction activities should be carefully planned and timed to minimise disturbance and damage to wildlife.

As far as possible, sustainable use of all arisings should be found within the woodland, examples include deadwood habitat creation, charcoal making and using hazel stakes and binders for hedge laying. If this is not possible, regional markets such as firewood sales and wood chip

for biofuel can recover some of the costs of habitat management whilst removing excess nutrients from particularly sensitive areas.

When we do have to burn wood and brash cut during habitat work, we use a burning platform to avoid damaging the soil and influencing the type of vegetation that would grow on burn sites.



Target: Sustainable use of habitat work arisings

Achieved by:

- Begin milling timber from woodland management for use on the Common e.g. bench tops, fence posts, rails etc.
- Identifying possible markets for supply of wood product.
- Utilising local volunteer skills and enthusiasm, practice traditional woodland management techniques such as layering and hedgelaying.

Target: No damage to soil or tree canopy as a result of burning excess brash resulting from habitat works

Achieved by:

- Using a burning platform for all fires on the Common.
- Positioning platforms in clear areas to avoid damaging tree canopies.
- Ensuring the method is appropriate for the job, avoiding damage when moving the burning platform and using additional protection underneath as required.

Left: Rangers carrying out habitat work, Coulsdon Common, (©Tim Nightingale)

4.1.4 Decaying wood

The presence of dead and decaying wood is important to the health of woodlands and plays a big part in nutrient recycling. When left in situ, deadwood provides a constantly changing series of microhabitats.

The cavities, holes and hollows associated with the decay of heartwood provide valuable nesting and roosting sites for birds, bats and hibernating invertebrates.

Target: Management of deadwood as a habitat by protecting existing biomass and ensuring continuous supply of deadwood.

Achieved by:

- Retention of aerial deadwood and creation of further standing deadwood where risk management will allow.
- Retention of fallen deadwood in situ in large pieces close to the source tree.
- Diverting public or fencing off veteran trees where there is a significant risk to the public.
- Retention of cut timber arisings from tree management in log piles stacked nearby.
- Retention of flowering and fruiting vegetation near deadwood for birds, mammals and pollinating invertebrates.
- Creating more deadwood habitat piles near to the grasslands.



Above: Greater spotted woodpecker, (James West)



Left: Invertebrate activity and fungi in deadwood, Coulsdon Common

4.1.5 Hedge creation and management

Our aim is to manage the hedges on Coulsdon Common to their maximum wildlife potential, increasing biodiversity and enabling them to be valuable habitat resources year-round. We are proposing to increase the number of conservation hedges which means adjusting the management of these hedgerows (such as the timing and frequency of trimming), as well as planting a new hedge line as a wildlife corridor to connect woodland habitats.

Target: Maintain hedges for their wildlife value and increase the longevity of all hedges on site.

Achieved by:

- Re-laying hedges in next ten years.
- Avoiding cutting during sensitive times of the year (never during bird nest season) when food for birds and pollinators is scarce.
- Managing more hedges for biodiversity.

Target: Ensure all habitats on site are connected by wildlife corridors.

Achieved by:

- Planting a new hedge in Lodge garden.
- Selecting a diverse range of native tree species.



Top and bottom: Newly-laid hedge verses established hedge, Merlewood Paddocks, Coulsdon Common

4.1.6 Chalk grassland restoration and management

The magnificent chalk grasslands in the Merlewood Paddocks are incredibly popular with walkers and wildlife enthusiasts. These meadows are managed with a combination of hay cutting and grazing in order to encourage rare and specialist species to thrive. The seasonal removal of certain plants is also necessary across the meadows, namely ragwort species, that can quickly colonise grasslands and, without action, cause toxicity problems for grazing animals.

Target: Maintain and improve chalk grassland habitat

Achieved by:

- Continuing with the hay cutting regime.
- Reviewing additional grazing to reduce nutrient and improve grassland sward for biodiversity.

Below: Hay cutting and collecting, Merlewood Far
Coulston Common



The Maze

In recent years The Maze has been cleared of dense over mature scrub to restore the meadow back to chalk grassland habitat. Since then intensive restoration and management has been undertaken to remove scrub regrowth and ranker grasses and to encourage the delicate wildflowers chalk downlands are famous for.

Target: Increase the area of chalk grassland on the Maze.

Achieved by:

- Selectively thinning trees to increase grassland habitat.
- Grinding out stumps where appropriate.
- Grazing with cattle followed by sheep to achieve desired sward height and diversity.

4.1.7 Grassland management

The acid and neutral grasslands across the Common mostly have an annual hay cut for conservation management. This management needs to be reviewed as there are areas with increasing amounts of undesirable species such as creeping thistle (*Cirsium arvense*) and bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*). By altering the management of these meadows, through more regular cutting or targeted grazing it should be possible to enhance their floristic value.



Above: Spring wildflowers in an area of grassland restoration,
The Maze,
Coulsdon Common

Target: Manage the grasslands to encourage the highest biodiversity, whether through grazing or hay making.

Achieved by:

- Exploring the introduction of grazing to more of the grassland areas, specifically the Merlewood Paddocks.
- Continuing with the grazing regime on The Maze and the Merlewood Paddocks, including occasional late winter grazing.
- Adjusting the cutting regime in some of the meadows to encourage an increase in biodiversity and a decrease in undesirable species.

Target: Ensure grassland boundaries are maintained for both maximum habitat potential and access.

Achieved by:

- Managing scrub encroachment into the grassland through rotational cutting/ coppicing whilst maintaining successional scrub zones for breeding birds and winter food sources.
- Ensuring we leave at least 10% of all the hay cut meadows uncut each year to create more overwintering habitat for invertebrates and late-flowering species, through buffer zones, blocks and/or strips depending on the meadow.

Target: Improving the overall biodiversity of the acid grassland surrounding The Fox football pitch.

Achieved by:

- Managing the woodland edge encroaching onto the grassland through scrub control and felling.
- Extending the area of acid grassland where possible.
- Lifting up low lying tree branches to increase light to grassland.

Target: Enhancing low biodiverse grassland pockets across the site.

Achieved by:

- Reviewing the cutting regime of areas of grassland across Coulsdon Common, such as areas which have previously been regularly mown for aesthetic purposes.
- Consider leaving for the summer and then cutting and removing cuttings in early autumn.
- Research seeding or planting with plugs to establish wildflowers.



Above: Acid grassland,
The Fox,
Coulsdon Common

Target: Protect delicate grassland habitats from compaction and trampling.

Achieved by:

- Maintaining mown footpaths for the public to encourage site exploration but discourage site users walking through the middle of the grasslands.

Target: Reduce the spread of ragwort across the site.

Achieved by:

- Annually removing ragwort by hand.

4.1.8 Grazing

Since 2019 we have been trialling a new “No Fence” system with our Sussex cattle in order to be more selective about where they graze across the Coulsdon Commons, without the need for electric fencing or permanent stock fencing. This new technology builds upon existing ‘invisible fence’ systems that have been used across other City of London Open Spaces. The main differences include a collar GPS system that allows us to locate cattle and draw grazing compartments on a mobile phone app.

This new grazing technique may also allow for better information to be gathered about grazing habits so we can fine tune the conservation grazing programme.

Target: Have the whole herd trained with the No Fence system

Achieved by:

- Ensuring all animals have been trained with the collars and are monitored.
- Using the system in new compartments on Coulsdon Common without the need for temporary electric fencing, such as the Merlewood Paddocks and selected areas of The Grove.
- All rangers being alerted immediately through the No Fence app if a cow leaves the designated compartment and can respond promptly.

4.1.9 Day-to-day management of livestock

The livestock are checked every day by rangers or by trained volunteers. At certain times of the year, livestock management is particularly labour intensive. Across the Coulsdon Commons we have a specially selected group of livestock volunteers who help with cattle round-ups, livestock movements, sheep husbandry such as worming or foot trimming and general livestock management.

Target: Enable grazing through improving livestock equipment

Achieved by:

- Installing mains-fed water in The Maze.
- Replacing stock-proof fencing around The Grove.

Below: Sussex cattle grazing, The Grove, Coulsdon Common (Gary Watson)



Target: Maintain a specialist livestock volunteer team who can assist rangers with day-to-day livestock management

Achieved by:

- Continuing to support our dedicated livestock lookers.
- Training volunteers to help with general livestock management until we have a small, skilled and dedicated group we can call on to help as and when needed.

4.1.10 Pond creation and maintenance

We know the importance of water to sustain life on Earth. Coulsdon Common already has two well established ponds in Stites Hill Woods that support amphibians and aquatic plants.

In 2020, a new scrape was trialled to test a woodland location for an additional pond. This successfully held water through winter 2020/21

and will be expanded to establish a viable new pond within Stites Hill Woods, with the aim to create more across the life of this plan.

The ponds will be supplied by rainwater and, as such, will be subject to seasonal changes in water level and managed as natural habitats. Naturally, ponds occur in various forms as they fill in with organic matter and silt, but support a wide range of amphibians for breeding (e.g. egg laying newts), feeding and resting with

species often travelling long distances within the landscape to use these ponds.

Target: Create and maintain ponds

Achieved by:

- Digging into the clay within Stites Hill Wood utilising the natural geology of the area to create a new pond, which, over time will fill with rainwater and become colonised by aquatic plants and animals.
- Monitor new ponds and consider whether a dead hedge or fence is required to protect it from dog disturbance.
- Investigating other locations for the possible creation of further ponds promptly.
- Removing invasive and undesirable plants.
- Clearing organic matter and silt depositions when necessary.
- Assessing impact of human/dog disturbance and reducing harm by dead hedging, information posters and other natural/semi-natural barriers.



Left: Stites Hill Wood pond, Coulsdon Common (Gary Watson)

4.1.11 Successional wood and scrub

Scrub is maintained using proactive management techniques to largely suppress the establishment of trees and promote continuous scrub growth. Cutting rotations vary so that scrub blocks are cut at different ages across the site. Birds that nest in scrub often require a vigorous field layer margin skirting the scrub block to protect low and vulnerable nests. Many of the insect species associated with scrub specialise in the decaying wood component, and these insects need ready access to nectar and pollens. This highlights the need for a well-maintained mosaic that includes standing and fallen dead wood and a well-structured interface between scrub, grassland and woodland.

One species which benefits from regularly cut scrub is the brown hairstreak butterfly (pg.27). A blackthorn thicket at the top of the Merlewood Paddock is intended to become a key habitat managed for the brown hairstreak. This block will be brought into four-year coppice rotation, designed to give the optimum mix of habitat elements required to support egg laying of the brown hairstreak butterflies.

Open space is the most important part of woodland and scrub for butterflies, especially its edge habitat where the warmest conditions are found. Graded edges and cutting scallops increases the structural diversity of the woodland and provides sheltered herb-rich grassy areas, supporting butterflies, moths and other invertebrates.

Target: Management of the blackthorn thicket to sustain a thriving population of brown hairstreak butterfly

Achieved by:

- Cutting no more than a fourth of the blackthorn thicket in each year, ensuring that there are uncut sections of different ages.
- Cutting only outside of the breeding bird season (March to August).



Above: Brown hairstreak eggs on young blackthorn,



Left: Speckled wood, (Bill Bessant)



Above: Surveying for night-flying moths

4.1.11 Species monitoring and research

We know that over the past 10 years our biological recording has not been sufficient. Although we have a good data coverage on butterfly species, vascular plants and fungi on the Common, we are lacking in up-to-date data on many other species.

This information can help guide the future management of the habitats on Coulsdon Common and is essential in understanding the effects of our long-term management.

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

The data we collect contributes to many national monitoring programmes: the data gathered informs not only the work carried out on the nature reserve but also across the country.

Aim 2: People

Encourage the sustainable use of Coulsdon Common for recreation, promoting community involvement in its management.

Coulsdon Common is protected forever for people to enjoy by virtue of the Corporation of London (Open Spaces) Act 1878. The Act allows people access to Coulsdon Common for recreation. Byelaws made under the Act regulate activity to protect the Common and its visitors. The 1878 Act, together with a 2018

update, permit some other types of activity, such as organised events and some forms of commercial activity to occur under license. The following section uses the criteria of the Green Flag Award scheme to assess service delivery in relation to people.

4.2.1 A welcoming place

There are numerous entrances onto Coulsdon Common, some with byelaw boards welcoming visitors to the site, displaying a map of the site with key information and contact details for the estate office. There are two notice boards, each displaying important information on events, livestock movements, contact information and the National Nature Reserve map. New byelaw boards are currently being designed and

created to incorporate more relevant and current information at our entrances with new maps to replace the old, deteriorating signs.

There are 6.5km of mown footpaths throughout the grasslands and woodlands on Coulsdon Common, with the purpose of encouraging people to explore, whilst discouraging the trampling of the wildflowers and grasses by walking across the middle of precious meadows and glades. Additionally, there are almost 3km of permissive rides for horse riders, cyclists and walkers.

Target: Maintain Coulsdon Common as a welcoming place

Achieved by:

- Regular ranger patrolling to provide visual presence and interaction with visitors.
- Regular litter picking to keep the site clean and safe for people and animals.
- Keeping paths and rides clear of encroaching vegetation and regularly mown.
- Providing and maintaining safe permissive rides.
- Working towards making the site as accessible as possible for all site users.
- Improving particularly boggy parts of the unsurfaced path network for access.
- Investigate alternative material to woodchip on permissive rides to improve access year-round.

Below: Byelaw boards and signs, Coulsdon Common



Target: Provide appropriate signage

Achieved by:

- Maintaining and improving way marker signs to demarcate Public Footpaths, and permissive rides.
- Replace all finger posts as and when necessary.
- Creating and installing new interpretation panels for the Merlewood Paddocks and The Grove with information on history and wildlife.
- Keeping information on the notice boards relevant and up to date.
- Using temporary signage (including those about grazing) before and after habitat work, to highlight what's taking place and why.
- Using accessible language that reinforces positive environmental behaviour e.g. “thank you for taking your litter home” rather than “do not drop litter”.



Above: Temporary signage explaining habitat management, Coudsdon Common (Gary Watson)

Target: Improve access across the Common

Achieved by:

- Explore possibilities for improving access for walkers, horse riders and cyclists along Homefield Road.

4.2.2 Healthy, safe and secure

The City has a strong safety culture and safety systems are imbedded in all aspects of work covered by this plan. At the heart of the operation, a team of Rangers regularly patrol the Common to assist visitors and advise on behaviour in relation to the byelaws and can respond to incidents 24 hours a day year-round.

Beyond that is a range of safety planning, inspections and systems that transcend all areas of operation to ensure that Coudsdon Common is a safe place to visit and work. As a countryside site managed under legislation that requires the protection of the natural aspect, the provision of facilities on Coudsdon Common is limited. However, such features as footpaths, benches, gates, waymarkers and fences are regularly inspected and kept in good order.

4.2.3 Well-maintained and clean

Work across several areas of activity contributes towards the achievement of the Green Flag Award scheme. This work is explained throughout the plan. The relevant targets in relation to 'well maintained and clean' are summarised here. For some targets, reference is made to the sections of the plan that give more detail.

There are parts of Coulsdon Common where litter is regularly a problem. The rangers litter pick every weekend and throughout the week to

keep the site looking clean and welcoming. Members of the local community often assist with litter picking across the rest of the site.

There is an ongoing issue with boundary houses fly-tipping garden waste onto the Common. Individuals have been challenged on this but there is a wider issue which needs to be addressed and resolved throughout the life of this plan.

Below: Coulsdon Common "Chain Gang", The Grove, Coulsdon Common



Target: Ensure that Coulsdon Common is well maintained and clean.

Achieved by:

- Litter picking patrols conducted at least once a week.
- Graffiti removed promptly.
- Offensive graffiti removed within 24 hours.
- Damage caused by vandalism made safe within 24 hours.
- Removing fly tipping within 48 hours where possible.
- Developing campaigns to tackle the litter across the problem areas on site.
- Developing a campaign to tackle the ongoing fly tipping from boundary houses with door-to-door visits, leafletting, posters and community days to clean up the Common.

4.2.4 Community involvement

Coulsdon Common has benefitted from significant levels of community involvement over the past 10 years. There are many volunteer groups including The Conservation Volunteers (TCV), Downlands Partnership and corporate groups in addition to our own practical, livestock, events and survey volunteers.

We aim to actively encourage all members of our community to get involved in conservation work on Coulsdon Common. Through the lifetime of this plan we are hoping to focus on

building connections with younger people at the beginning of their career who have an interest in countryside management and wildlife conservation, or individuals who have a personal interest in wildlife surveying. Therefore, we are hoping to create more connections and opportunities for work experience students, Duke of Edinburgh activities, apprenticeships, youth volunteering and more.

Target: Widening participation of our local community

Achieved by:

- Putting a call out to wildlife enthusiasts to undertake surveying and monitoring on Coulsdon Common.
- Enabling and encouraging more work experience students to shadow rangers and assist with practical projects.
- Creating new apprenticeship positions within the ranger team.
- Promote youth volunteering opportunities on weekends and during college holidays.
- Encourage more secondary schools to get involved in conservation days on the Common.
- Continuing to make connections with local scout and brownie groups, facilitating group activities on site.
- Hosting light conservation sessions targeting specific neighbours to the common.

Target: Supporting volunteer groups on Coulsdon Common

Achieved by:

- Leading a programme of regular volunteer tasks.
- Keeping volunteer tasks interesting and varied throughout the year, ensuring the volunteers know exactly why we are carrying out the task and the benefit it has to the Common.
- Ensuring there are tasks and opportunities for people with varying skill sets and interests such as wildlife surveying, practical conservation, events, heritage conservation etc.
- Continuing to involve other volunteering organisations such as TCV, CCV and the Downlands Partnership
- Seeking opportunities to recruit a greater diversity of volunteers and specifically those who are less represented in nature conservation.

“

I've been volunteering across the Commons since I moved here in 1995... I love the company and exercise but also the joys of keeping ancient crafts like charcoal making alive!

Coulsdon Commons volunteer

Right: Volunteers helping at a community event, Coulsdon Common



4.2.5 Key messages and communication

Coulsdon Common represents a site of significance for wildlife that also benefits people and is important to the physical environment and for society at large.

These elements and benefits to the environment as well as our physical and mental health and wellbeing might not necessarily be seen, understood or mutually perceived by everyone; It is important that the value and significance of this site are clearly communicated via key messages aimed at:

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

Promoting pro-environmental behaviours such as taking litter home and always picking up after your dog.

Face to face contact: a regular ranger presence offers both reassurance and a point of contact for many people. Face-to-face conversations are an effective way to target and deliver key messages to visitors.



Above: Dog walker, Coulsdon Common, (©Tim Nightingale)

Target: Maintain a visible ranger presence.

Achieved by:

- A minimum of two patrols each week, including weekends, and a 24/7 on-call out of hours emergency ranger service.
- Rangers to adopt a friendly approach **using the four E's technique to Engage; Explain; Encourage; Escalate** (to the Police if necessary)
- Targeted pop-up activities focusing on specific issues.

Virtual contact

The way in which we receive information and experience activities, even outdoors, is constantly evolving and being shaped by emerging technologies that are part of our everyday lives. These technologies can be a fantastic opportunity to engage with different visitor demographics, provide information and be a creative tool to exploring the Coulsdon Commons.

Visitor information is available via the City of London website, but increasingly this is becoming a streamlined prospectus rather than an archive of information. Consequently, it will be necessary to develop new and innovative ways to convey detailed site and subject specific information.

For example, digital walking trails, including sections across the Coulsdon Commons, are helping smartphone users to accurately navigate routes, see images of what to look out for and have detailed information of interesting sights at the touch of a button.

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

Target: Ensure virtual interaction.

Achieved by:

- Promoting our social media platforms and maintaining communications via social media.
- Producing a monthly electronic newsletter for subscribers.
- Producing site and subject specific material for electronic and physical distribution.



Above: Meet the calves event, Merlewood Estate Yard

4.2.6 Activities and events

On Coulsdon Common we aim to actively engage with all site users, encouraging our local community to get involved and participate in a diverse and varied range of events and activities. These will provide opportunities for people to explore, learn about and celebrate Coulsdon Common.

Over the next 10 years we aim to target our events programme to encourage a wider range of participants to get involved.

We would like to hold an informal community day once a year to promote the work the rangers and volunteers do, with a range of informal activities for members of the public to observe or participate in, whilst speaking to the public about their interests or concerns on site.

Under the 2018 Act, charges can be levied for licensing events and commercial activities. Whilst not wanting to discourage visitors to the site, we should ensure certain activities are balanced according to the sensitive nature of the site.

Right: Meet the calves event,
Merlewood Estate Yard

Target: Provide and facilitate events.

Achieved by:

- A ranger-lead programme with a wide variety of events throughout the year including:
- Family events (during weekends and school holidays)
- Nature walks and talks
- Heritage themed events
- Meet the ranger events, learning about management and upcoming projects
- Community days
- “Helping on the Common” days (e.g. litter picking)
- Practical craft workshops (e.g. bushcraft, festive wreath making)
- Health walks and rambles
- Practical volunteering
- Wildlife surveys and citizen science (e.g. nature BioBlitz, moth trapping)
- Outreach talks to local clubs and societies.
- Promoting events through a variety of media, using an electronic booking system.
- Exploring options for charging for certain activities using authority given by the 2018 Act.
- Gather feedback from activities and use to help plan and tailor future events.



4.2.7 Educational visits, work experience and student studies

Coulsdon Common is a great place to learn about the wonders, complexity and fragility of nature. It naturally provides places for learning and play without the need for artificial enhancement. The Common can function as an outdoor classroom for a range of studies and activities.

The Ranger team responds positively to requests by schools, colleges and youth groups to provide educational sessions on site whenever possible. Work experience can be accommodated within safeguarding constraints. We would like to encourage more undergraduate and postgraduate studies of Coulsdon Common through links with higher education establishments.

Target: Provide opportunities for formal learning.

Achieved by:

- Responding positively to requests to provide educational activities.
- Supporting and leading visits by schools and educational establishments.
- Guiding educational organisations on the safe use of the Common in relation to specific hazards such as livestock, ground conditions and electric fencing.
- Providing work experience placements when safeguarding measures are possible.
- Advising students on possible topics for study where there are gaps in our knowledge or projects of interest.

the Open Spaces and Heritage Department in order to share experiences and knowledge, as well as learn about new projects which could be relevant to the site. Our designated livestock ranger regularly communicates with other open spaces who have livestock for conservation grazing, especially when it comes to the new “No Fence” system we have been trialling.

Target: Maintain good working relationships with other public open spaces and organisations

Achieved by:

- Rangers will continue attending Culture Days to encourage networking with other open spaces.
- Regularly liaising with Croydon Council's teams who manage the other sites within the South London Downs NNR.
- Continue working with other conservation graziers to keep up to date with methods and ideas to enhance our grazing approach.

4.2.8 Liaison with other public open spaces

Through the creation of the South London Downs NNR, we have strengthened our relationship with Croydon Council who own several large open spaces local to Coulsdon Common. This partnership has enabled us to protect more of the open spaces in the local area, raising the profile of the site collectively. We can also collaborate with grant applications, habitat conservation projects and public communications.

Annually, the rangers attend networking “Culture Days” days with other divisions within

Below: Guided wildflower walk, Merlewood Far Coulsdon Common



Aim 3: Estate assets & legal issues

To fulfil all legal obligations and to maintain estate and heritage structures in good condition so they are safe and secure, now and in the future.

4.3.1 Conserve and protect heritage features

The presence of multiple lynchets from medieval times, as well as five small quarries and the remnants of historic ponds need to be protected.

Target: Preserve, protect and promote heritage features.

Achieved by:

- Ensuring that all staff and contractors working on site are aware of the locations of delicate heritage features on site.
- Never allowing vehicles to drive on heritage features.
- Targeting key heritage features to preserve on Coulsdon common.
- Clearing trees and scrub where appropriate.
- Providing interpretation for key heritage features.



Left: City of London coal post sign
Below left: Infantry training on Coulsdon Common
Right: Cattle grazing next to the former windmill, Stites Hill Road



4.3.2 Tree safety




The tree safety strategy for Coulsdon Common takes full account of the conservation importance of the site. The inspection process should not lead to a loss of character or species diversity. Rather, it should assist the management process ensuring that, as far as reasonably practicable, balance is maintained between conservation and risk management. Accordingly, the following principles are applied:

- Standing dead timber is an important resource and is left wherever possible. Dead trees are 'reduced' if safety work is necessary.

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

Zoning
Zoning is an important part of managing tree risk. Each part of the Common is divided into one of three risk zones; high, medium and low risk.



ZONE	FREQUENCY
 High risk Main public areas, properties, roads, easy access routes etc.	Annually in autumn/winter (any trees retained to have defects but not felled - inspected every six months)
 Medium risk Other areas frequented by the public not included above	At least every two years (retained trees every 12 months)
 Low risk	During normal routine patrols
Zones 1 and 2 following a storm event (winds gusting 45 mph+)	Areas inspected as soon as practicable after the event (usually next day but always within five days)

Left: Beech tree
Coulsdon Common, (© Tim Nightingale)

4.3.3 Bats and other protected species

All bats and their roosts are protected in law: all trees must be inspected before any surgery or felling. Surveys should also be made before any work on trees and improvements made to bat habitats wherever possible. In addition, general bat surveys should be carried out to ensure that the best information is available about where and how bats are using Coulsdon Common. Full details are given in the bat policy.

Target: Prevent any harm to bats, their roosts, or other protected species.

Achieved by:

- Implementing the bat policy; ensuring the needs/legislation regarding other protected species like badgers are adhered to when carrying out habitat work.

4.3.4 Residential boundaries

Residential boundaries are managed according to set criteria to ensure safety and consistency. Managing for light and views are not generally considered appropriate reasons to undertake work. Generally, homeowners are not permitted access across the Common to maintain their properties, although exceptions are sometimes granted if the work benefits the Common or its visitors – for example tree safety work. Wayleaves for gateway access from boundary gardens can be purchased annually.

Target: Manage residential boundaries.

Achieved by:

- Regularly patrolling and inspecting (including tree safety).
- Using set criteria to determine requests to manage vegetation.
- Annually issuing wayleaves to allow neighbours direct access onto the Common.
- Only permitting under licence access across the Common to the rear of properties for Maintenance if the proposed work benefits the Common or its visitors (tree safety for example).
- Challenging fly-tipping of garden waste along residential boundaries

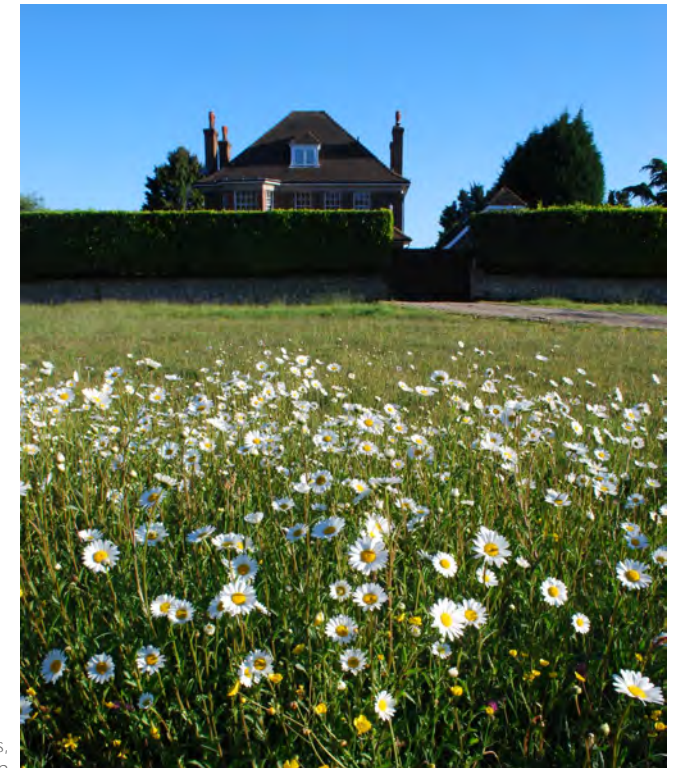
4.3.5 External accreditation

Achieving external quality standards validates management practices and gives assurance to our community, staff and elected Members that Coulsdon Common is being well run. Coulsdon Common has successfully achieved a Green Flag award every year since 2007. External assessments of wildlife and habitat quality are welcomed and outside input into surveying and data analysis is sought.

Target: Seek external accreditation.

Achieved by:

- Applying annually for Green Flag Award and Green Heritage accreditation.
- Seeking professional input into wildlife and habitat assessments.
- Welcoming specialist groups to survey for species.



Right: Oxeye daisies, Coulsdon Common



Above: Jacob sheep, Coulsdon Common (©Tim Nightingale)

6

2021 –2031 work

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

The table on the following pages summarises when the major projects will be undertaken on Coulsdon Common in the next 10 years. An annual plan and details of each project further guide the work.

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

This aims to enrich people's lives by enhancing and promoting access to ecologically diverse open spaces and outstanding Heritage assets across London and beyond. Coulsdon Common receives grant funding from Natural England in the form of a Countryside Stewardship Scheme Agreement. This gives an area payment for some habitat types and also money for some specific projects.

Key to projects:

1 - essential

2 - highly desirable

3 – desirable

CODE	OBJECTIVE 1: BIOLOGICAL	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10
WOODLAND											
BIO1	Target: Create a mosaic of age classes for biodiversity	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
BIO1.1	Re-coppice hazel in 12 year rotation		1	1							
BIO1.2	Layer hazel to increase amount of coppice stools	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
BIO1.3	Thin wood edges to graded-grass-scrub-wood interface	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
BIO1.4	Rotational scalloping across Merlewood Paddocks & Stites Hill Wood	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
BIO1.5	Create new pollards in Stites Hill Wood and The Grove	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
BIO1.6	Survey for dormice in Stites Hill Wood	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
BIO2	Target: Improve understanding of veteran trees	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
BIO2.1	Re-survey ancient, veteran and maiden trees and identify preservation work	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
BIO2.2	Carry out work veteran tree work programme	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
BIO2.3	Survey for bats to locate potential roost sites	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
BIO3	Target: Increase diversity of woodland ground flora	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
BIO3.1	Thin dense canopies	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
BIO3.2	Coppice hazel throughout woodland	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
BIO3.3	Remove or thin overstood holly	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
BIO3.4	Cut and collect grass from established glades in Stites Hill Wood	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
BIO4	Target: Increase biodiversity along Merlewood driveway	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
BIO4.1	Pollard lime trees along drive	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
BIO4.2	Manage beech hedge through regular cutting	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
BIO5	Target: Investigate improvements to Lodge Garden for biodiversity	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
BIO5.1	Investigate grant funding for a project	3	3	3	3	3					
BIO5.2	Identify possible location and scope for an orchard	3	3	3	3	3					
BIO5.3	Plant a mixed broadleaf hedge on boundary with Ninehams Gardens	2	2	2							

CODE	OBJECTIVE 3: ESTATE ASSETS & LEGAL ISSUES	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10
EST6	Target: Seek external accreditation	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
EST6.1	Annual application for Green Flag and Green Heritage accreditation	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
EST6.2	Seek professional input into wildlife and habitat assessments	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
EST6.3	Welcome specialist groups to survey for species	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
EST7	Target: Fulfil all other legal obligations	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
EST7.1	Liaise with Natural England	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
EST7.2	Liaise with Historic England	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
EST7.3	Produce new Management Plan										1
EST7.4	Fulfil all Countryside Stewardship requirements	1	1	1	1	1					

Background information

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

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

National Nature Reserve (NNR): are designated by Natural England as key places for wildlife and natural features in England. They were established to protect the most significant areas of habitat and of geological formations.

Priority species: are species that were identified as being the most threatened and requiring conservation action under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP). Formerly BAP priority species.

IUCN/Red data book: list (originally a red book) of rare and threatened species of plant and animal. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List is a critical indicator of the health of the world's biodiversity.

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

Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI): are areas which are designated locally for their wildlife importance.

Sward: an expanse of short grass and vegetation.

Veteran tree: a tree is one that is biologically, aesthetically or culturally important because of its age, size or condition.

The 2021-31 Coulsdon Common Management Plan has been ratified by Natural England (tbc).

Illustration by Dan Powell; photographs by Tim Nightingale, Gary Watson, Zuza Featherstone, Bill Bessant, Simon Issacs and Tim Hunt.

Thank you to those who have commented on and contributed to the plan, including staff and volunteers from the Coulsdon Commons, Tim Nightingale, Dr Jane McLaughlin and Bill Bessant.

Cover photo: Tim Nightingale.



Above: Stites Hill Wood Pond, Coulsdon Common, (© Tim Nightingale)

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

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

historic landscape.

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

The 2018 Act clarifies that the City of London can undertake management and husbandry activities such as cutting trees, managing the other vegetation and grazing.

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



Coulsdon Common

Registered Charity

Merlewood Estate Office
Ninehams Road
Caterham
Surrey
CR3 5LN

city.commonscityoflondon.gov.uk
www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/coulsdoncommon

If you would like to receive this publication in your language or an alternative format such as large print, Braille or audio tape, please contact the Open Spaces Department, City of London, PO Box 270, Guildhall, London EC2P 2EJ. Telephone 0207 332 3505.