



Farthing Downs

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: Grazing Sussex cows by the Folly, Farthing Downs (Gary Watson)

Farthing Downs is a unique 95 hectare (235 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 Farthing Downs 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 Farthing Downs in perpetuity to ensure that it remains as a truly special place.

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Below: Woodland path over New Hill, Farthing Downs (Gary Watson)



Introduction

Farthing Downs 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 Farthing Downs for public recreation and wildlife conservation 'in perpetuity'. Farthing Downs is further safeguarded by national legislation. It is a registered charity which receives a major part of its funding from the City of London.

Farthing Downs 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 flower-rich meadows, nationally rare chalk downland habitat requiring delicate management techniques alongside ancient woodland, hedgerows and deciduous woodland. Much work has gone on over the last few decades to restore the natural landscape elements across the site to improve biodiversity and sustain vital ecosystem functions.

There is evidence of rich human heritage with the impacts of past still visible today through impressions on Farthing Downs; the site is a scheduled monument containing an Anglo-Saxon cemetery and Iron Age field systems.

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 of London, as land managers, is to balance traditional habitat management with 21st century expertise and expectations, and to ensure that Farthing Downs is prepared for mounting social and environmental pressures as we progress through the 2020's and beyond.

Farthing Downs is managed by a small ranger team who are collectively responsible for the Coulsdon Commons including Riddlesdown, Kenley Common and Coulsdon Common. A dedicated group of volunteers support a site Ranger and are actively involved with completing projects each month with additional tasks carried out by external volunteer groups.

Already a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Farthing Downs has been part of the South London Downs National Nature Reserve (NNR) since 2019. The newly designated NNR 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 build upon the achievements of previous plans, summarising how Farthing Downs will be managed over the next 10 years.

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: Looking towards The City of London from Farthing Downs



Things we have learnt in the last 10 years

- Relaxing amenity mowing between spring and summer has benefited invertebrates across the site, particularly near the car park where we have seen an **increase in wildlife** including butterflies, moths and birds.
- Chalk grassland restoration on New Hill has **encouraged more visitors to explore this area**.
- Targeted grazing has **increased biodiversity** in grassland areas such as 8-Acre and Stoney White Piece. 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 downs 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.
- Reinforcing the bank and ditch along the roadside has been very effective at deterring vehicle incursions to protect the site's fragile habitats and visitors.



Above: Pyramidal orchid, Farthing Downs,
(Daniel Greenwood)

Achievements 2010-2020

Community involvement, access and recreation

Volunteers

- Over the past 10 years we have engaged with hundreds of volunteers from many different groups achieving an average of 820 volunteer hours per year. Projects have included chalk grassland restoration and scrub clearance, woodland management, Public Rights of Way maintenance and large-scale ragwort pulling.

Events and public participation

- The events programme has focused on the natural world and conservation including events such as fungi forays, bat walks, livestock talks and wildflower walks. Guided walks have also showcased how the downs are managed.

Narrated nature trail

- In conjunction with Croydon Council's Happy Valley, the nature trail has been improved with all new QR codes and audio narration from celebrity voices including Tony Robinson, Benjamin Zaphaniah, Joanna Lumley and Noddy Holder. It's 29 individual markers span across the neighbouring sites. Translations in Polish, Urdu and French are planned to allow more people to enjoy the trail.

Ditch and bank restoration

- In 2018 the ditch and bank along both sides of Ditches Lane was reinstated, totalling two miles. In collaboration with Historic England, this project was overlooked by archaeologists throughout to protect any potential heritage features or artefacts uncovered.

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 and Green Heritage

- Annual accreditation since 2007 in this prestigious national award scheme reflects the high management standards that goes into conserving Farthing Downs.

Below: Walkers coming from The Folly, Farthing Downs



Achievements 2010-2020

Habitat conservation and restoration

Chalk grassland restoration

- After ten years of work we have achieved the vision of having a chalk grassland “ribbon” linking almost all the downland together and creating wildlife corridors. This was realised through projects such as restoring historic chalk grassland by clearing over mature scrub from New Field and 13

Acre Bury, managing woodland edges and removing dense scrub blocks to retain chalk grassland in the Main Grazing Area.

Taking action on Ash Dieback

- Much of the ash heavily impacted by the onset of Ash Dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*), has been safely cleared around the residential boundaries and high-footfall areas of New Hill.

Conservation grazing

- Many of the wildflower meadows are grazed by our herd of Sussex cattle and Jacob 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 Farthing Downs for biodiversity and wildlife value.

Hazel coppicing

- Hazel coppicing on either side of the Downs has created a varied age structure and abundance of fruit on the trees which will enhance the habitat for many species including dormice (*Muscardinus avellanarius*) found locally in Happy Valley.

Below: Scabious flowers,
Farthing Downs (Daniel Greenwood)



1

Site Description

1.1 Location

Farthing Downs is located within the London Borough of Croydon. It lies directly above Coulsdon and on a clear day provides incredible views of the City of London, Canary Wharf and Croydon.

1.2 Ownership and access rights

Farthing Downs 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. Farthing Downs was bought at the same time as three other open spaces collectively making up the Coulsdon Commons, these being Coulsdon Common, Riddlesdown and Kenley Common.

1.3 Site status

Farthing Downs, along with the neighbouring site of Happy Valley, is designated as Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) by Natural England for its diversity of habitat, rare invertebrates (particularly chalk grassland butterflies), ground nesting birds and rich assemblage of wildflowers; the site has the largest community of greater yellow-rattle in the UK, which is nationally rare.

Right: New Hill from Farthing Downs
(Gary Watson)

Farthing Downs 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.

The whole of the Main Grazing Area is protected as a Scheduled Monument by Historic England. The site includes multiple archaeological features dating as far back as the Iron Age

including aggregate field systems, trackways and Anglo-Saxon barrows.

All of the site is designated as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) within the London Borough of Croydon. Croydon Council and Historic England have classed the whole of the Main Grazing Area, both Upper and Lower Woodplace fields, 8-Acre and the grasslands around the carpark as a Tier 1 Archaeological Priority Area with heritage assets of national importance (Scheduled Monuments) and are of very high archaeological sensitivity.





Above: Bird's eye view of Farthing Downs towards Coulsdon with the City of London in the distance (©Andy Carr)

The rest of Farthing Downs to the east 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.

1.4 Financial situation

The City of London provides funding for the management of Farthing Downs 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 of London's revenue can now meet only part of the running costs for Farthing Downs; the site is increasingly reliant on grants and other sources of income.

The success of much of this management plan depends on the ability to identify and secure significant external funding to match any

savings required by the City of London. Countryside Stewardship grants help pay for habitat conservation work but the long-term future of these grants is uncertain. New sources of revenue will need to be explored in coming years: the passing of a new Open Spaces Act (2018) together with increased use of technology may open up some new avenues for funding.

1.5 Physical features

The distinct physical features of Farthing Downs have played a huge role in sculpting both the habitats found on the site and the activities that gave rise to the heritage features that have endured to this day.

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.

The majority of the downs is a steep sided chalk ridge that rises north to south as a projecting spur of the North Downs.

1.6 Cultural heritage

1.6.1 Landscape

Farthing Downs lies within the landscape character area of the North Downs. In a more local context, the site 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 of London's ownership since 1883 prevented Farthing Downs being developed in this way as well as nearby Riddlesdown and Coulsdon Common.

1.6.2 Land use history

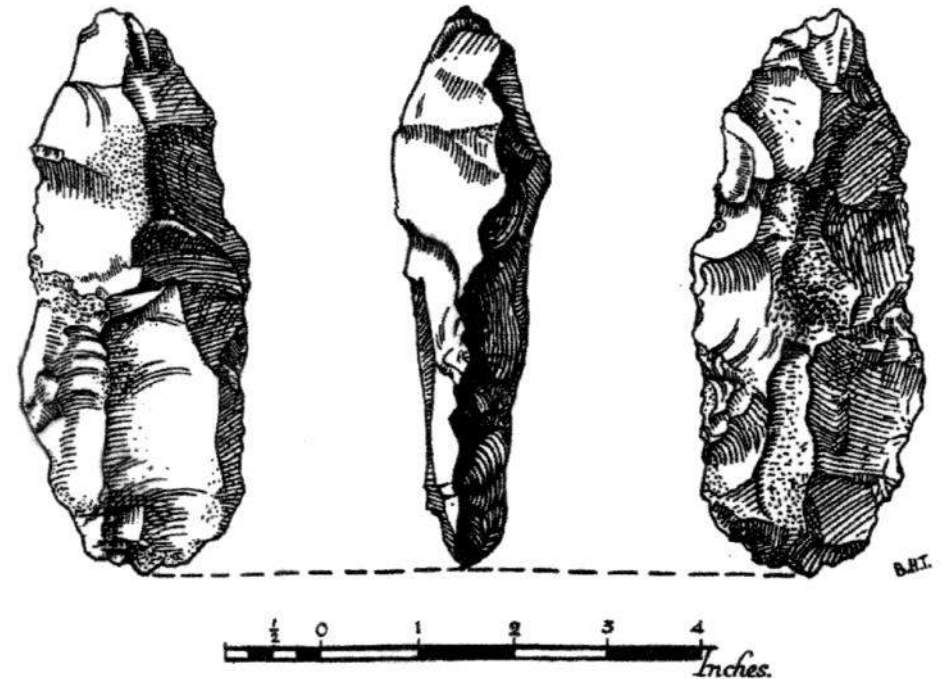
Farthing Downs is a relic agricultural and pastoral landscape, strongly influenced by its use as marginal Common land. The celebrated downland we see today owes its appearance to a combination of underlying chalk geology and human influence that often go hand-in-hand with grazing animals. Chalk downland is largely unsuitable for intensive agriculture because of the nutrient-poor, shallow soil and steep slopes. For this reason, Farthing Downs and similar downland sites such as Riddlesdown survived uncultivated when other, more easily worked land was ploughed or settled upon.

During Medieval times, Farthing Downs, 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 Farthing Downs 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 downs that were once open were lost.

Stone Age flint axe found on Farthing Downs by Brian Hope-Taylor

**Surrey
Archaeological
Collections
XLIX (1946)**



Above: Stone Age flint on Farthing Downs

1.6.3 Archaeology

Farthing Downs has a long history of human activity and settlement. Bronze age flint flakes found in a series of pits in Stoney White Piece, suggests that there was a settlement in this area in the Early Neolithic period (12,000-2000 years ago).

The Iron Age saw a large increase in the agricultural expansion of Farthing Downs; The extensive remains of an Iron Age field system and trackway across the Main Grazing Area indicate that a significant community were living

and working in the area. Numerous pottery fragments have been recovered, and there is evidence of a series of mainly rectangular fields which would have been first ploughed in the 1st century BC. The landscape thus consisted of open cultivated farmland. These findings resulted in the remains being scheduled in 1948. This field system changed and developed over time but continued in use into the Roman period until the middle of the 2nd century AD, with Roman-British pottery finds also recovered during excavations in the area.

Fifteen Anglo-Saxon (410AD to 1066AD) burial mounds have been discovered and are still visible across the Main Grazing Area on Farthing Downs; all of which have been excavated in the past.

Six flat graves from the same period were also uncovered during excavations, although these are not visible today. Some of the grave artefacts that were discovered are now held in the Guildford or Ashmolean Museums.

A series of large lynchets scattered across the whole site are likely to represent the remains of medieval strip fields. In the post-medieval period, the chalk meadows were likely used for grazing with the more fertile clay meadows sectioned into compartments and used as arable land.

In the 1800's sheep grazed on the Main Grazing Area, including 100's of sheep grazing under licence after the land was purchased by the City of London Corporation in 1883. This grazing gradually reduced over time, leading to an increase in scrub encroachment until in 1930 grazing ceased entirely.

1.6.4 The Second World War (1939-1945)

There was extensive military occupation on Farthing Downs during the Second World War; a large number of anti-glider ditches were cut across the length of the downs. This was part of London's defensive strategy should axis forces attempt an invasion. These were eventually filled in around 1947 but are visible whilst travelling along Ditches Lane.

In 1947 the Surrey Agriculture War Executive allocated Farthing Downs for cultivation, however, thanks to Brian Hope Taylor's significant archaeological finds and resistance from the City of London Corporation the site was, instead, preserved for the nation.

During and for a while after WW11 the eastern side of Tollers Field was used as allotments and the fields on the thinner soils of New Hill, were used to grow cereals.

Below: How a cultivated Farthing Downs might have looked around 18C



1.6.5 Recent history

Grazing on Farthing Downs gradually came to an end in the 1960's allowing dense, dark stands of scrub to form where once there were grasses and flowers. Fortunately some pockets of grassland were kept open by mechanical haymaking and in the early 1990's, grazing was reintroduced to the main body of the downs, now referred to as the Main Grazing Area.

In 2002 New Hill, together with 8-Acre, was bought at auction by the City of London from a developer. Much of this part of the Downs had become coated in dense scrub and young ash woodland. In the 1980's Surrey Wildlife Trust began, unofficially, clearing scrub and mowing 8-Acre and Stoney White Piece. This work has been continued by the City of London resulting in the patchwork of species-rich chalk grassland, woodland, hedges and scrubby shaws that we now see across New Hill.

In 2004, Woodplace Farm Fields to the west of Farthing Downs were also purchased, following a successful local fundraising appeal.



Top left: New Hill, 2010 (Google Earth)

Top right: New Hill, 2020 (Google Earth)

Bottom right: Wildflowers on Stoney White Piece New Hill, (Sharon Tucker)

Farthing Downs Site Map



1.7 Access and visitors

1.7.1 Visitor appeal

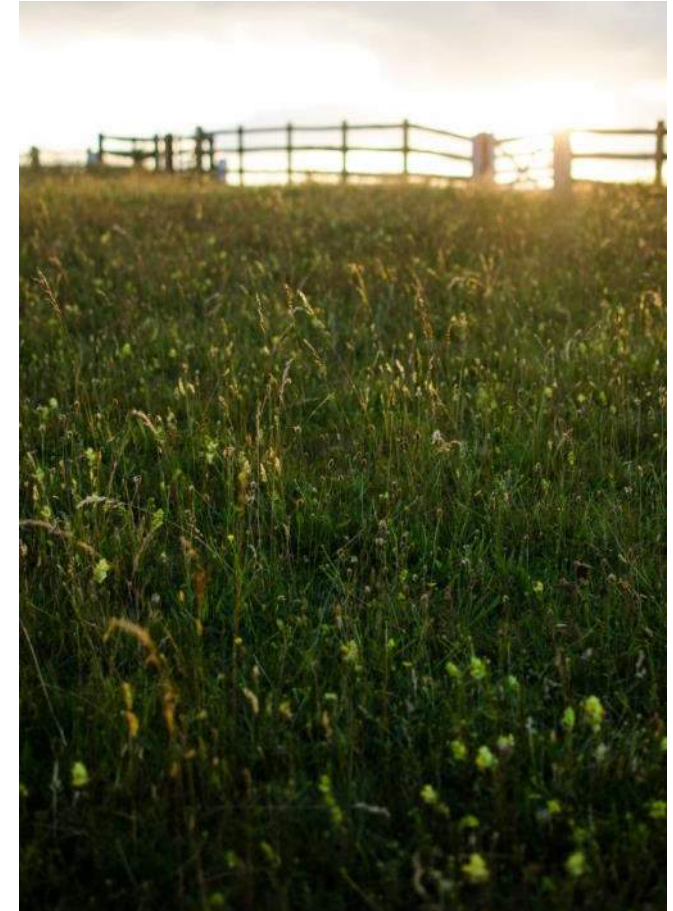
Farthing Downs is a very popular site, with the majority of site users coming from the local area. Walking, trail running and dog walking are all very popular activities seen across the Downs. Other popular activities are cycling and horse-riding which is permitted on the Public Bridleways and Permissive Rides.

Ditches Lane intersects the Main Grazing Area of Farthing Downs and forms part of the 470km L' Avenue Verte London-Paris cycle route and is one of the first significant hills from London. The rising slope of the North Downs offers an impressive view towards London and countryside in the opposite direction.

On occasions more formal use of Farthing Downs is made by education groups and organised recreational activities such as cross-country running.

The City of London (Open Spaces) Act 2018 allows for the introduction of a schedule of rates to charge for these activities to raise income, and this is something that will be explored in the life of this plan.

Below:
Cyclist over Ditches Lane, Farthing Downs



Above: Open meadows, Farthing Downs (Daniel Greenwood)



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

Visitor comment

1.7.2 Access provision

Farthing Downs is easily accessed by visitors, especially those living locally in the surrounding residential areas. There is a small pay and display public car park for visitors located on to the south of the site that is well-used by visitors arriving by car especially at weekends. The nearest railway stations are Coulsdon South and Coulsdon Town with services from Central London. Regular bus services also stop a short walk away with links to Croydon, Caterham, Oxted and Redhill.

There are multiple Public Footpaths that run across Farthing Downs which are well-maintained for walkers including a section of the London loop; a 150-mile circular hiking route around London. Public Bridleways and Permissive Rides for bikes and horses link routes throughout grasslands and other local open spaces. A network of informal grass footpaths is mown in the summer months around selected meadows and through the woodlands to keep the open access and to discourage visitors from trampling wildflowers and grasses. In the Main Grazing Area, footpaths are not mown due to the cows favouring the grass on the paths keeping the grass short.

1.7.3 Stakeholders

Farthing Downs is a complex site with various aspects including wildlife conservation, visitor recreation and highways all taking high priority when it comes to management, visitor safety and communications. There are many

Below: Great tit,
New Hill, Farthing Downs (Gary Watson)



stakeholders and neighbouring landowners including Natural England, Historic England, Croydon Council and Happy Valley, Highways, Friends of Farthing Downs and Happy Valley, local residence associations and private landowners.

1.7.4 Visitor facilities and information provision

There are two notice boards on site 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. Additionally, there are a group of heritage boards near the car park, as well as a heritage and nature trail running across Farthing Downs and neighbouring Happy Valley.

Byelaw boards can be found at the main entrances to Farthing Downs with the site byelaws, maps of the Downs 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 Farthing Downs and areas of high use. These are accompanied by posters reminding dog owners that all dog faeces must be picked up. Currently dog bags are provided from dispensers; this is subject to future review.

An e-newsletter provides visitors and others on the mailing list with regular information about

current news and issues on Farthing Downs 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 Farthing Downs' rich history and habitats. Events include nature walks and talks, self-guided trails, heritage walks and nature-based activities for families, which are promoted locally via the website, posters, e-news and on social media. Most events are free and donations help to support the cost of equipment and contribute to the wider operation of the Commons.

Below: City of London byelaw board, Farthing Downs (Gary Watson)





Above: Information point, Farthing Downs (Gary Watson)

1.7.5 Education and research

School and college groups regularly visit the Downs 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.

1.7.6 Other estate features

Infrastructure includes a small public toilet block next to the car park, 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 Downs.

1.8 Current use

Under the Open Spaces Act, there is a requirement for Farthing Downs to be managed for informal recreation. Given the popularity of this site and its location in one of the most densely populated regions of the UK, care must

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

During the lifetime of this plan, Countryside Stewardship agreements are likely to transition to the Environmental Land Management scheme, (ELMS).

2 Biological features

2.1 Communities and flora

Lowland meadow

Neutral grassland, a Priority Habitat, covers an area of almost 40ha across Upper and Lower Woodplace Farm Fields, Stables and Tollers fields and patches within the Main Grazing Area. The richest neutral grassland tends to be nearest the chalk downland, namely the Main Grazing Area where there is a continuous transition from the chalk to neutral, maintained by grazing Sussex cattle.

The main attribute of lowland meadow includes open flower-rich grassland with plenty of grasses, flowers and shrubs. This type of habitat is dynamic and shifting. It is characterised by multiple transitions between tall and short vegetation, light and shaded areas and warm and cooler places, all happening at both large and small scales. The habitat is continually changing but the essential elements—wildflowers, scrub and grazing remain consistent.

Ant hills

Because the grasslands are kept open by grazing livestock (a tradition carried out over centuries) and are not cut often, there are many ant hills that are visible on the Downs created by colonies of

yellow meadow ant (*Lasius flavus*). Each ant hill can extend 30cm above and below ground creating their own microclimates for rare plants that require heat to grow. The mass of narrow underground chambers used by the ants to raise their young provide the additional protection for chalk hill blue butterfly larvae, who are taken below ground by the ants to be 'farmed' for their secreted substances.

Below: Tufted vetch
Farthing Downs (Sharon Tucker)



Below: Grassland wildflowers



Chalk grassland

Chalk grassland, a Priority Habitat, covers the majority of the grassland on the Main Grazing Area, all of 8 Acre and a large portion of Stoney White Piece on Farthing Downs, totalling an area of almost 29ha.

This nationally rare chalk downland 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 (see pg.30).

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 downlands by grazing cattle and sheep (see pg. 32). Conservation grazing creates a varied sward height, controlled soil disturbance creates 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 the dung of the sheep and cattle

Below: Chalk grassland, Farthing Downs (Daniel Greenwood)



such as fungi and many species of beetles. Some of the chalk grassland fields are managed as a hay meadow in late summer/autumn. The cuttings are removed to reduce nutrients and bailed to feed the livestock during the winter.

Below: Fragrant orchid, Farthing Downs (Sharon Tucker)



Below: Looking towards Happy Valley and Devilsden Woods from Farthing Downs (Daniel Greenwood)



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 72 mature, ancient and veteran trees located mainly throughout the woodlands with some open grown maidens in the grasslands. Species include pedunculate oak (*Quercus robur*), ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), yew

(*Taxus baccata*), beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), field maple (*Acer campestre*) and whitebeam (*Sorbus aria*). The majority of these veterans are maiden trees with a few coppice too.

Veteran characteristics include:

- Shattered branch stumps
- Rot holes



Above: Yellow stagshorn fungus, (Charlie Jackson)

- 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 fungi and invertebrate species supported by veteran trees and their associated deadwood are very rare and cannot survive anywhere else. These species are extremely poor at dispersing themselves and rely on a consistent supply of deadwood to survive. Where possible, fallen branches are left next to the original tree and stacks of cut timber from conservation work are left in habitat piles.

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; supply of well-rotted wood is a key requirement for stag beetles, a Priority Species found on the Downs.

Below: Fungi growing in association with decomposing wood, New Hill, Farthing Downs (Gary Watson)

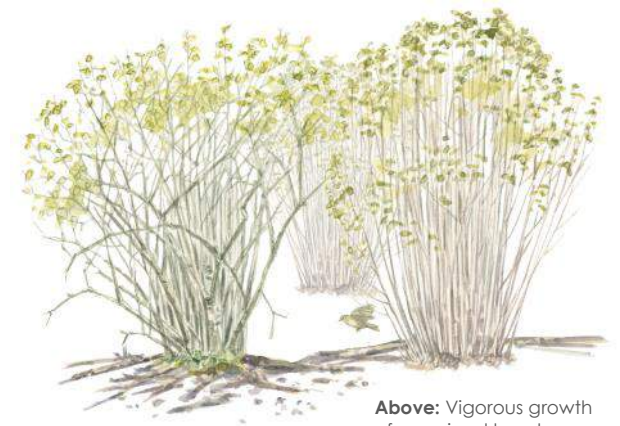


Right: Male stag beetle

Hazel coppicing

Hazel is common on Farthing Downs, both within the woodlands and on the boundaries either side of the Main Grazing Area. This hazel is coppiced to ensure that there are 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.

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Above: Vigorous growth of coppiced hazel

Semi-natural ancient woodland

Some of the woodlands have plants indicative of ancient woodlands. These are the woodlands 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. Ground flora includes bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), wood anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*), dog's mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*), hairy brome (*Bromopsis ramosa*) and wood-sedge (*Bromopsis ramosa*).

Below: Woodland edges on New Hill, Farthing Downs
(Gary Watson)



Secondary woodland

Secondary woodland is the dominant woodland type on Farthing Downs and 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 young oaks (*Quercus robur*) ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), birch (*Betula pendula*), beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), field maple (*Acer campestre*), yew (*Taxus baccata*), whitebeam (*Sorbus aria*) and other species.

Hedgerows

Farthing Downs has several species rich hedgerows located across the site including species such as hawthorn, blackthorn, crab apple, yew, cherry and spindle. 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 prevent 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.

Successional areas and scrub

Scrub represents a transitional stage between open habitats like grassland and closed canopy woodland. Across the grassland habitats and some woodland edges small pockets of scrub provide a valuable habitat for reptiles, nesting birds and invertebrates such as the brown hairstreak (*Thecla betulae*).

In winter, the berries of various scrub species provide a vital food source for many animals. On Farthing Downs, pockets of scrub are home

to yellowhammer, blackcap and various thrushes. However, without attention, scrub can encroach on open habitats and must be controlled to ensure it does not spread and take over the grassland. Grazing animals will eat some young regrowth but cannot completely control scrub alone.

Scrub is therefore managed in three ways; by cutting back any large encroaching scrub plants and treating it with herbicide to prevent it from growing back, by coppicing and allowing

to regrow at a controlled rate, or through a technique called tree popping where the root of the plant is pulled out of the ground to remove the whole plant without herbicides.



Left: Brown hairstreak butterfly; one species that utilises scrub



Left: Patchy scrub habitat, Farthing Downs, (©Tim Nightingale)

Below: Yellowhammer (©Hannah Knutsson)



2.2 Species of Interest

Vascular plants

Farthing Downs is well known for its incredible display of wildflowers on the vast chalk downland, as well as the ancient woodlands and meadows across the rest of the Downs. A total of 270 species of vascular plants were recorded during 2013/2014 National Vegetation Classification (NVC) survey, including chalk and neutral grassland specialists and woodland flora.

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 Farthing Downs including greater yellow-rattle (*Rhinanthus angustifolius*), man orchid (*Orchis anthropophora*) and fly orchid (*Ophrys insectifera*).

The last National Vegetation Classification (NVC) survey completed for Farthing Downs was in 2013/2014 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>Briza media</i>	Quaking grass	LC	NT	●	** London Priority Species
<i>Dactylorhiza fuchsii</i>	Common spotted orchid	LC	LC		Key
<i>Galium verum</i>	Lady's bedstraw	LC	LC		LC – least concern
<i>Knautia arvensis</i>	Field scabious	LC	NT	●	VU – vulnerable
<i>Leontodon hispidus</i>	Rough hawkbit	LC	LC		EN – endangered
<i>Linum catharticum</i>	Fairy flax	LC	LC		NT – near threatened
<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>	Common bird's-foot trefoil	LC	LC		SCC – species of conservation concern
<i>Neottia ovata</i>	Common twayblade	LC	LC		
<i>Ophrys apifera</i>	Bee orchid	LC	LC		
<i>Ophrys insectifera</i>	Fly orchid	VU	VU	●	
<i>Orchis anthropophora</i>	Man orchid	EN	EN	●	
<i>Phyteuma orbiculare</i>	Round-headed rampion	LC	LC		
<i>Plantago media</i>	Hoary plantain	LC	NT	●	Below, left to right:
<i>Primula veris</i>	Cowslip	LC	LC		Bee orchid, Farthing Downs
<i>Rhinanthus angustifolius</i>	Greater yellow rattle**	LC	LC	●	Man orchid, Farthing Downs Fly orchid, Farthing Downs (©Gill Peachey)



Spurge laurel

Spurge laurel (*Daphne laureola*) is an evergreen shrub that is found in open woodlands and hedgerows on chalky soils. It can be found mainly on the eastern edge of 13 Acre Bury with smaller populations in the other scrubby boundary areas. Its green clusters of flowers appear over winter, from December to April, and are followed by black berries. These berries are an important food source for birds and small mammals over winter. Despite its name, this shrub is neither a spurge nor a laurel - it's one of two species of *Daphne* native to the UK (the other is *Daphne Mezereum*).

Fungi

Farthing Downs is a fantastic habitat for fungi with fungi being 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 recorded 116 species. One of which is on the UK Red List; Red-cracked Bolete (*Boletus chrysenteron*).

Roman snail

Roman snails are frequently found on Farthing Downs with small populations in the wooded areas and scrub blocks. This conspicuous mollusc is vulnerable to people collecting them for the restaurant trade and is becoming rare elsewhere in the UK. Roman snails require calcareous soils as they need to consume calcium carbonate to form their shell and it is for this reason that they have probably persisted in good numbers.

Mammals

In 2001 a dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*) survey by the Surrey Wildlife Trust identified dormouse-opened hazelnut shells, suggesting their presence on the site. Dormice are known to breed in neighbouring Happy Valley and it is suspected they make use of the continuous strip of yew woodland and coppice between the sites. The woodland management reflects this and is targeted towards maintaining habitat for the benefit healthy populations of dormice.

Other 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*).

There are well-established badger (*Meles meles*) sets on site and there have been anecdotal sightings of hedgehogs (*Erinaceus europaeus*).

Bats

As biological indicators of ecosystem health, the presence of numerous bats across the site suggests that there is a plentiful supply of nocturnal insects. So far we have only identified the common pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*) and noctule (*Nyctalus noctule*) on Farthing Downs, however with more surveying to be done we are optimistic that there will be more species found using the site. All bat species and their roosts are protected by law so it is important to ensure that careful survey work is carried out before any tree work takes place.

Reptiles and amphibians

Although there is no water source on Farthing Downs there are populations of 3 UK Priority Species; common toad (*Bufo bufo*), common lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*) and slow worm (*Anguis fragilis*) as well as common frog (*Rana temporaria*) and smooth newts (*Lissotriton vulgaris*). There have also been possible unconfirmed historic sightings of grass snake (*Natrix natrix*).

Beetles

Farthing Downs has been identified as of national importance for its dung beetle community. During 2002-2003 a survey of dung beetles was carried out identifying 27 species, four of which were nationally notable or rare. This placed Farthing Downs amongst the top five recorded sites for dung beetles in the UK, being important not so much for its rarities but for the variety of species it supports. Recent surveys of glow-worm (*Lampyris noctiluca*) were carried out in 2019 and 2020 of which over 20 individuals were recorded in the open grassland and meadow edges.



Right: *aphodius porcus*

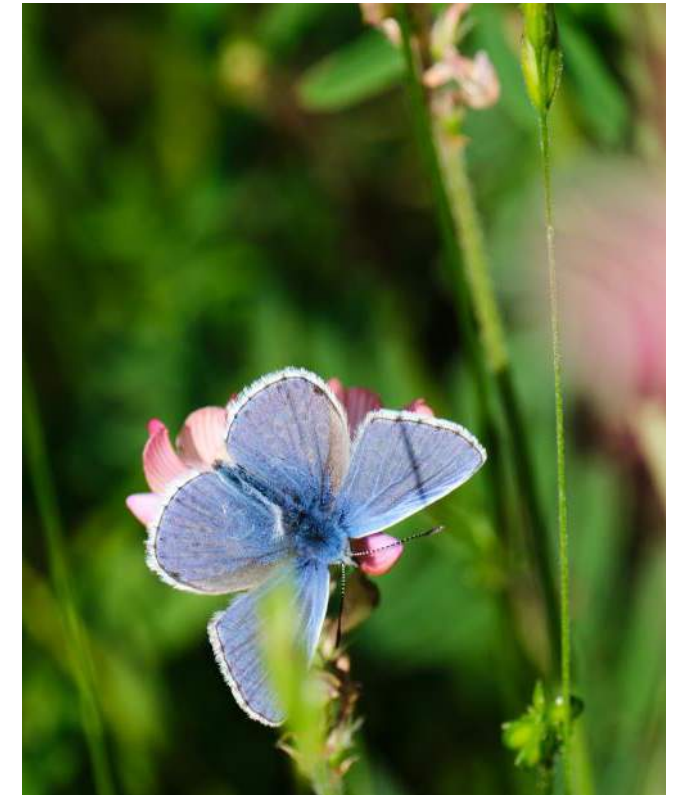


- 1: Crab spider, Farthing Downs (Mike Bromley)
- 2: Roman snail, Farthing Downs (Gary Watson)
- 3: Roe Deer, New Hill, Farthing Downs (Gary Watson)
- 4: Parasol mushroom, Farthing Downs (Daniel Greenwood)
- 5: Thick-legged beetle (Alison Day)

Butterflies

Since 1990 butterfly transects have identified 31 species on Farthing Downs. An additional transect set up in 2003 has identified 32 species on New Hill. Of particular note are the following species which are rare in Surrey and London; chalk hill blue (*Polyommatus coridon*), green hairstreak (*Callophrys rubi*), dingy skipper (*Erynnis tages*) small blue (*Cupido minimus*) and brown hairstreak (*Thecla betulae*).

Scientific Name	Common Name	UK Red List	UK Priority	London Priority	Surrey Species of Conservation Concern	Chalk grassland indicator
<i>Thecla betulae</i>	Brown hairstreak	VU	•	•	•	
<i>Polyommatus coridon</i>	Chalk hill blue	NT		•	•	•
<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>	Common blue	LC	•			•
<i>Erynnis tages</i>	Dingy skipper	VU				
<i>Callophrys rubi</i>	Green hairstreak	LC			•	
<i>Melanargia galathea</i>	Marbled white	LC			•	•
<i>Argynnis paphia</i>	Silver-washed Fritillary	LC			•	
<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>	Small heath	NT	•	•	•	•



Left: Brown argus, Farthing Downs (Mike Bromley)

Above: Brimstone, Farthing Downs (Mike Bromley)

Right: Common blue (@Tim Nightingale)

Birds

Bird surveys have been conducted by a dedicated volunteer on Farthing Downs since 2002 and on New Hill since 2004. A total of 55 species have been recorded on Farthing Downs and 46 on New Hill.

Most species are 'downland' birds, including skylark, linnet and stonechat but the numerous scrub blocks also host various warblers, finches and buntings and migrating wheatears. 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 and more recently, little owls. The grassland supports ground feeding birds including green woodpecker, jackdaw and starling.

Below: Skylark



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>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Kestrel	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>	Peregrine falcon			•	•
<i>Milvus milvus</i>	Red kite				•
<i>Turdus iliacus</i>	Redwing	RED			•
<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	Skylark	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			•
<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>	Yellowhammer	RED	•	•	•

Below: Song thrush, (Daniel Greenwood)



Below: Stonechat, Farthing Downs (Gary Watson)



3

The need for management

3.1 The legacy of the Coulsdon 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, Farthing Downs (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: The Folly, Farthing Downs (Gary Watson)



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.

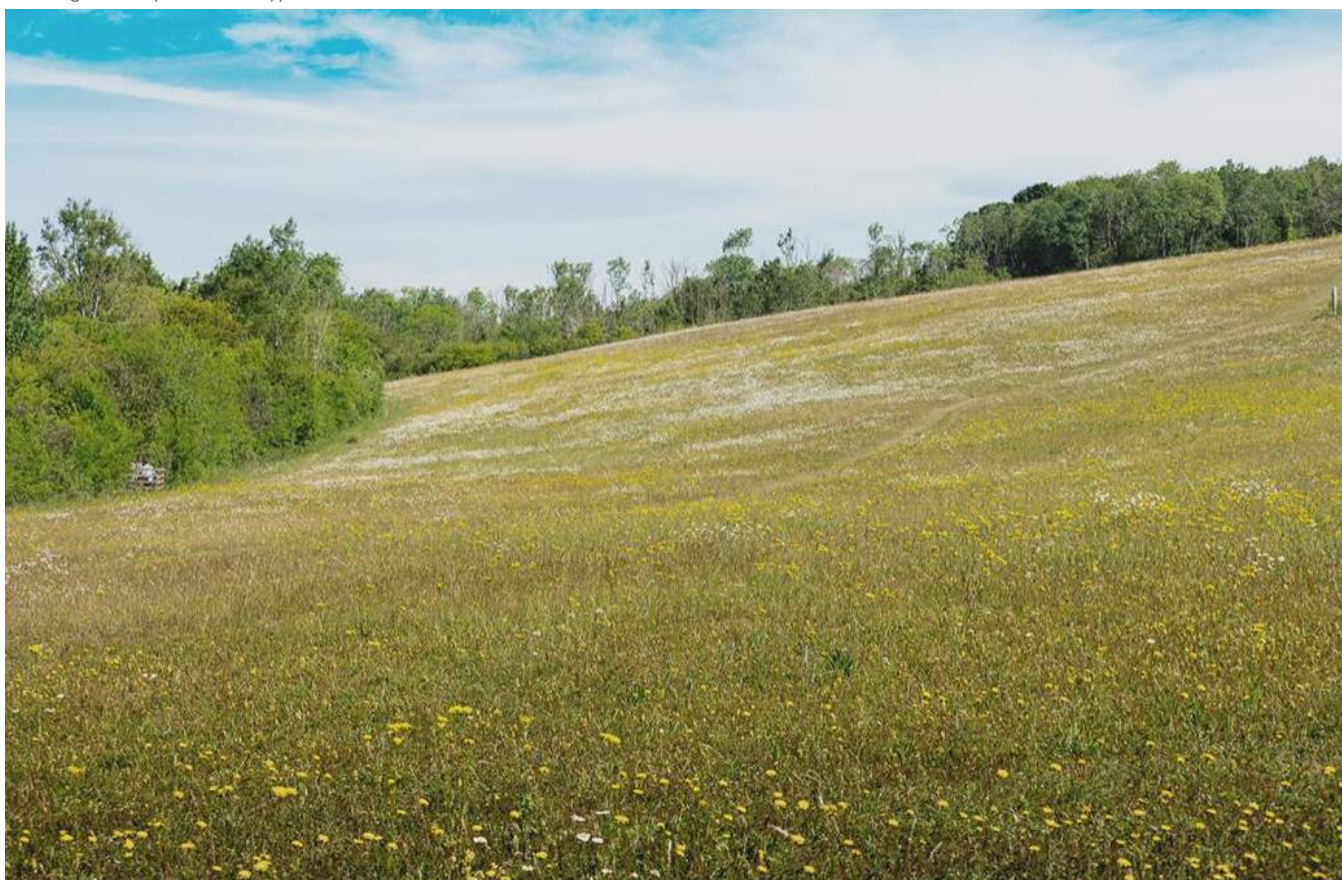
In terms of chalk grassland habitats, without management they will become colonised by tussocky grasses over time, which shade and dominate the rare wildflowers, scrub then populates the downland and trees begin to grow eventually becoming woodland.

Farthing Downs is intermixed with chalk and flint. Stoney White Piece and 8-Acre Common are the most species rich chalk downland areas which are currently managed through hay making and grazing respectively. The steep slopes and open aspect provide the ideal conditions for chalk grassland specialists.

Much of New Hill 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 and annual hay cutting so that returning rare and specialist plants and invertebrates can become established and thrive.

Below: Stoney White Piece, Farthing Downs (Mike Bromley)



“

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 Farthing Downs to the landscape we have today and is still an integral part of grassland management to maximise biodiversity.

The use of grazing cattle and sheep 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 Farthing Downs in greater numbers.

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, Farthing Downs
(Gary Watson)



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 area.

Below: Jacob sheep, Farthing Downs
(Gary Watson)



3.4 Climate change

Climate change is causing higher temperatures and more extreme and unpredictable weather events. Managing Farthing Downs 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 site 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 and more severe storm events. 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: Skylark, Farthing Downs (Daniel Greenwood)

3.6 Fragmentation, pests and diseases

Farthing Downs 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 Farthing Downs' 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 Farthing Downs, 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 Farthing Downs, 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 Farthing Downs.

Below: Proactive management to remove unsafe and infected ash trees along urban boundaries, Farthing Downs (Gary Watson)



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 quality 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 Farthing Downs. We endeavour to make Farthing Downs 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 New Hill, more families are venturing further onto the site, not just sticking to their regular dog walking or bike riding routes; More people have been able to explore the chalk grassland which were previously populated with dense growing scrub. We will continue to encourage more people to explore the whole of the site, diversifying the way they visit and changing their perception of Farthing Downs, 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 the downs so that all 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 Farthing Downs. We have a large, very active and incredibly valuable volunteering group who over the past 10 years have achieved an average of over 820 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 the grassland area, Farthing Downs (Daniel Greenwood)

4

Vision

Vision statement:

Farthing Downs 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, ancient heritage and landscape. The biodiverse chalk downlands, flower-rich grasslands, woodland and open wood pasture will be treasured by local people and all those who come to visit:

- Farthing Downs' 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 Farthing Downs' special wildlife and heritage and are actively engaged in its conservation.
- The scheduled monument and heritage assets will remain properly protected whilst events and interpretation will uncover Farthing Downs' 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 for overwintering mammals and invertebrates.
- Ensure the woodlands across the Common are **sustainably managed**, creating places rich in biodiversity and resilient to stresses such as disease whilst recycling by-products locally where possible such as producing charcoal.
- **Plant and maintain hedges and rotate cutting for 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 Downs and celebrate these through the Green Heritage Award.
- **Improve access on the common**, upgrading key tracks, maintaining rights of way and replacing trail posts with a focus on extending paths on New Hill.
- Support a **community-based volunteer group** to work on a large variety of tasks.
- Develop interpretation materials and continue with **events** such as walks, talks and

workshops to spread knowledge on the ecological and cultural value of the Downs.

- Promote and maintain the Farthing Downs and Happy Valley Nature Trail.
- **Protect and conserve the features associated with the Scheduled Monument**, preventing damage from encroaching scrub and human activities.

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: Main grazing area, Farthing Downs (Daniel Greenwood)







Above: New Hill from 8-Acre, Farthing Downs (©Gill Peachey)

5 Aims & targets

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 Farthing Downs 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 Farthing Downs 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

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

The biological elements of Farthing Downs 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.

5.1.1 Chalk grassland restoration and management

The vast and magnificent chalk grasslands are what Farthing Downs is best known for. We have got to the stage where we have completed the majority of the restoration works across the downs by removing large over-mature scrub blocks. There is still a small amount of work to be done to restore the chalk grasslands; once this is complete the focus will change to maintaining the open downland. Chalk grassland specialist species already present will gradually spread across the slopes to the newly cleared areas, with new species hopefully emerging due to the increase in light and reduction of nutrients. This also requires the seasonal removal of certain

Target: Maintain the grasslands in a favourable condition, whether through grazing or hay making

Achieved by:

- Continuing with the current grazing regime across all our grazed meadows.
- Continuing with the current hay making regime.

Target: Manage scrub across all chalk grassland meadows using different techniques depending on the scrub species, scrub age and topography

Achieved by:

- Continuing the scrub management across the main grazing area by felling larger scrub blocks, treating stumps with herbicides, seppi mowing and stump reduction to stop regrowth.
- Treating some blocks with herbicide using a handheld sprayer or tractor-mounted weed wiper.
- Tree popping younger hawthorn growth in specific meadows to remove the plant from the root.
- Mow or brushcut brambles depending on access and slopes.

Target: Connecting areas of grassland

Achieved by:

- Create a new grassland pathway in the woodlands north of New Field to connect a small glade of chalk and create a corridor to the wider downland.



Above: Removing hawthorn using tree poppers, 8-Acre, Farthing Downs (Gary Watson)

Target: Protect the breeding skylarks

Achieved by:

- Producing interpretation near the nesting areas to inform dog walkers and encourage them to keep dogs away from the nests.
- Liaising with other landowners to share knowledge of successful skylark conservation techniques.

Overmature scrub clearance

Between 2014 and 2016 large blocks of overmature scrub were removed by contractors in Stoney White Piece, 13 Acre Bury and New Field to restore the habitats to chalk grassland.

The focus now is on removing nutrients from the soil to encourage the return of the rare chalk grassland specialists.

Below: Hay cut and left to dry, Stoney White Piece, Farthing Downs (Gary Watson)



Target: Continue the intensive restoration work in Stoney White Piece, 13 Acre Bury and New Field to restore back to a species rich chalk downland habitat

Achieved by:

- Continuing hay cutting New Field and 13 Acre Bury.
- Continuing to graze sheep on Stoney White Piece.
- Continue grazing with sheep where possible.
- Continuing to graze cattle to 13 Acre Bury to control the ranker grasses using the No Fence system, with good PR and signage for visitors.
- Cutting and treating scrub regrowth on the steeper slopes which the tractor cannot reach.
- Brushcutting or mowing bramble.
- Investigating the idea of seeding some areas with green hay from other areas of Farthing Downs.
- Monitoring establishment of sward using wildflower surveys.

“

Visitor comment

5.1.2 Lowland Grassland management

The lowland grasslands across the site are managed by grazing or hay making, or a combination of both. Woodplace Farm Fields are grazed in the spring and autumn by cattle and sheep. This includes two areas, Tollers and Stables fields, that are not actually part of the Open Space, although Permissive Paths are opened through Tollers field when livestock are not present.

Hay is cut from Tollers and Stables Field annually, and these fields are grazed at times of the year when livestock are excluded from delicate downland habitats to allow wildflowers to grow.

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: Manage the grasslands to the encourage the highest biodiversity

Achieved by:

- Selectively grazing certain areas of the Main Grazing area on Farthing Downs using the No Fence system.
- Adjusting the cutting regime in some of the meadows to encourage an increase in biodiversity and a decrease in undesirable species.

Target: Reduce the spread of ragwort across the site

Achieved by:

- Annually remove ragwort by hand.
- Treating extensive ragwort growth with a tractor mounted weed-wiper.

Target: Protect delicate grassland habitats from compaction and trampling

Achieved by:

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



Above: Cinnabar moth caterpillar on Ragwort, Farthing Downs (Mike Bromley)



Above: Farthing Downs, (©Tim Nightingale)

Enhancing low biodiverse grasslands

To encourage a more biodiverse grassland sward throughout the site we will be reducing the amount of areas mown for amenity use. These areas will be cut around the same time as the annual hay cut to remove excess nutrients and prevent grasses and scrub taking hold. This will allow a greater dispersal of grassland plants and reduce the dominance of more common grasses and herbs.

This will benefit wildflowers 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.



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

Target: Enhancing low biodiverse grasslands across the site

Achieved by:

- Reviewing the cutting regime of certain areas of grassland across Farthing Downs, such as areas which have previously been regularly mown for aesthetic purposes.
- Considering seeding, plugging or spreading green hay in other areas of Farthing Downs.



5.1.3 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.

Above: Sussex cattle grazing using a NoFence collar, 13-Acre Bury, Farthing Downs



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 Farthing Downs without the need for temporary electric fencing, such as New Field and 13-Acre Bury.
- All rangers being alerted immediately through the No Fence app if a cow leaves the designated compartment and can respond promptly.

Left: Sussex cattle grazing, 8-Acre, Farthing Downs (Gary Watson)



5.1.4 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: 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.

Left: Jacob sheep, New Hill, Farthing Downs (Gary Watson)

5.1.5 Woodland management

Woodlands make up almost 16ha of Farthing Downs, 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 buddleia (*Buddleja davidii*) 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: 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 understory and ground flora.
- Thinning the holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) understory and controlling the spread of buddleia (*Buddleja davidii*).
- Cut and take grass from established glades through the woodlands.

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 whilst encouraging increasing populations of dormice on site

Achieved by:

- Continuing to coppice the hazel (*Corylus avellana*) on the edges of the Main Grazing Area to improve the habitat for dormice (*Muscardinus avellanarius*) and other species.
- Hazel-layering to increase the amount of hazel coppice stools throughout certain areas of the woodlands.
- Thinning woodland edges to graded grass-scrub-wood interface up to 10m into woodland.
- Reintroducing a 10-year coppice rotation in woodlands.
- Using the byproducts e.g. stakes/binders for hedgelaying elsewhere on site.



Left: New Hill woodland, Farthing Downs, (Daniel Greenwood)

5.1.6 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 Farthing Downs and elsewhere 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 site.
- 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, (©Tim Nightingale)

5.1.7 Decaying wood

The presence of dead and decaying wood is important to the health of woodlands and plays a big part in nutrient recycling (see pg. 21). 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 (see pg. 20).

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.



Left: Roman snail on deadwood, Farthing Downs (Gary Watson)



Right: Redwing

4.1.8 Hedge creation and management

Our aim is to manage the hedges on Farthing Downs 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).

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.

5.1.9 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 (see pg. 21), and these insects need ready access to nectar and pollens. This highlights the need for a well-maintained mosaic that includes standing and fallen deadwood and a well-structured interface between scrub, grassland and woodland.

Rotating the cutting of scrub across multiple years will give the best mix of habitat elements with small blocks consisting of a small proportion of retained old scrub, young thick scrub and areas where cut scrub will be allowed to regrow.

One species which benefits from regularly cut scrub is the brown hairstreak butterfly. A blackthorn thicket at the top of Stoney White Piece 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.



Above: Scrub mosaic, Farthing Downs (@Tim Nightingale)

Target: Management of the blackthorn thicket at the top of Stoney White Piece to sustain a thriving population of brown hairstreak butterfly

Achieved by:

- Cutting no more than a quarter 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).

Target: Management of scrub across Farthing Downs to ensure a variety of ages to maximise associated biodiversity

Achieved by:

- Rotating cutting of scrub blocks allowing for areas of older scrub.
- Cutting only outside of the breeding bird season (March to August).



Above: Surveying for night-flying moths

5.1.10 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 Farthing Downs, we are lacking up-to-date data on many other species.

This information can help guide the future management of the habitats on Farthing Downs 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 Farthing Downs for recreation, promoting community involvement in its management.

Farthing Downs is protected forever for people to enjoy by virtue of the Corporation of London (Open Spaces) Act 1878. The Act allows people access to Farthing Downs for recreation. Byelaws made under the Act regulate activity to protect the Open Space 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.

5.2.1 A welcoming place

There are numerous entrances onto Farthing Downs, 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 4.5km of mown footpaths throughout the grasslands and woodlands on Farthing Downs, as well as many kilometers of unmown footpaths grazed short by the cattle within the main grazing area. This encourages 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 6km of bridleways and permissive rides for horse riders, cyclists and walkers.

Below: Cyclists, Farthing Downs (Gary Watson)



Target: Maintain Farthing Downs 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 bridleways and 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.

Target: Provide appropriate signage

Achieved by:

- Maintaining and improving way marker signs to demarcate Public Footpaths, Public Bridleways and Permissive Rides.
- Replace all finger posts as and when necessary.
- Funding and refreshing the interpretation panels at the information point and car park.
- 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 is 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”.
- Maintaining and promoting the Farthing Downs and Happy Valley Nature Trail.

Target: Improve access across the Common

Achieved by:

- Explore possibilities for improving access for walkers and cyclists at Chaldon Way.



Above: Directional marker at the Folly pinpointing local areas, Farthing Downs (Gary Watson).

5.2.2 Healthy, safe and secure

The City of London has a strong safety culture and safety systems are embedded in all aspects of work covered by this plan. At the heart of the operation, a team of Rangers regularly patrol the Downs on weekdays and weekends 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 Farthing Downs 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 Farthing Downs is limited. However, such features as footpaths, benches, gates, waymarkers and fences are regularly inspected

Target: Ensure Farthing Downs is a healthy, safe and secure place

Achieved by:

- Maintaining a dedicated Ranger team working seven days a week with 24hr coverage for incidents and emergencies.
- Regular patrols to assist visitors and advise on behaviour in relation to byelaws.
- A system of incident recording, and incident reports shared with Police as required.
- A programme of tree safety assessments using a zoned risk-based approach.
- Risk-based approach to managing emerging risks, such as Ash dieback and potential risks such as Oak Processionary Moth infestation.
- Audits of countryside furniture conducted every six months.
- Measures to control dog fouling and reduce the spread of Neospora in the breeding herd of cattle.

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 Farthing Downs 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 Downs. 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.

Target: Ensure Farthing Downs is well maintained and clean

Achieved by:

- Removing offensive graffiti within 24 hours.
- Damage caused by vandalism made safe within 24 hours.
- Residential boundaries regularly inspected and fly-tipping challenged (see pg.60).
- Regular litter picks across all areas.
- Reporting damage and fly-tipping on Ditches Lane to the local authority Highways department.
- Supporting community and volunteer litter picks on the Downs (see pg.53)



Above: Horse rider Farthing Downs

5.2.3 Well-maintained and clean

Work across several areas of activity contributes towards the achievement of the Green Flag Award and Green Heritage Award scheme. This work is explained throughout the plan. The relevant targets in relation to 'well maintained

5.2.4 Community involvement

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

Target: Widening participation of our local community

Achieved by:

- Putting a call out to wildlife enthusiasts to undertake surveying and monitoring on Farthing Downs.
- 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 Downs.
- Continuing to make connections with local scout and brownie groups, facilitating group activities on site.
- Hosting light conservation sessions targeting specific neighbours to the Downs.

Target: Supporting volunteer groups on Farthing Downs

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 Downs.
- 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

We aim to actively encourage all members of our community to get involved in conservation work on Farthing Downs. Throughout 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.



Right: Volunteers treepopping, 8-Acre, Farthing Downs (Gary Watson)

5.2.5 Key messages and communication

Farthing Downs 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 Downs (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 therefore an effective way to target and deliver key messages to visitors and build contacts within the local community.



Above: Dog walker

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: Guided wildlife walk, Farthing Downs (Shanon Tucker)

5.2.6 Activities and events

On Farthing Downs 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 Farthing Downs.

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.

Under the 2018 change to the 1878 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 Farthing Downs.

Right: Meet the calves event,
Merlewood Estate Yard

Target: Provide and facilitate events

Achieved by:

- A Ranger-led 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 change to the 1878 Act.
- Gather feedback from activities and use to help plan and tailor future events.



5.2.7 Educational visits, work experience and student studies

Farthing Downs is a great place to learn about the wonders, complexity and fragility of nature. It naturally provides space for learning and play without the need for artificial enhancement. The Downs can thus 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 also like to encourage more undergraduate and postgraduate studies of Farthing Downs 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 Downs 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.

Downs. 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 the Environment 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.

Below: National Nature Reserve Discovery Day, 2019 Farthing Downs (©Clive Toteman)

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.

5.2.8 Liaison with other public open spaces

Farthing Downs shares its SSSI designation with neighbouring Happy Valley, and regular liaison with Croydon Council is maintained via links at officer level and the NNR operating group that also includes Natural England. This is also achieved in part through regular communications with the Friends of Farthing Downs and Happy Valley as well as the Coulsdon Commons Consultative Group.

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 Farthing



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.

5.3.1 Conserve and protect heritage features

The management of the features associated with the scheduled monument involves controlling the vegetation growing over them to limit root damage. This also involves the use of livestock through seasonal grazing.

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 Farthing Downs.
- Clearing trees and scrub where appropriate.
- Providing interpretation for key heritage features.



Left: Excavations near to the car park
Below left: Aerial view of Farthing Downs showing WWII defences
Right: Exposed view of ancient field banks and tumuli



5.3.2 Tree safety

The tree safety strategy for Farthing Downs 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 Farthing Downs is divided into one of three risk zones; high, medium and low risk. These are mapped and reviewed to ensure the information is relevant and includes changes made to boundaries and pathways on the Downs.



ZONE



High risk

Main public areas, properties, roads, easy access routes etc.

Annually in **autumn/ winter** (any trees retained noted 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: New Hill in the snow
Farthing Downs, (Gary Watson)

5.3.3 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 Farthing Downs. 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.

5.3.4 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 Farthing Downs to maintain their properties, although exceptions are sometimes granted if the work benefits the site 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 Farthing Downs.
- Only permitting under licence access across the Common to the rear of properties for Maintenance if the proposed work benefits the site or its visitors (tree safety for example).
- Challenging fly-tipping of garden waste along residential boundaries

5.3.5 Built assets

Many of the built structures on Farthing Downs are maintained by the City Surveyors Department and are listed in a 20-year plan for periodic maintenance and replacement. Assets managed this way include the toilet block, car park and cattle grids.

Left: Farthing Downs
(Daniel Greenwood)

Target: Maintain built assets

Achieved by:

- 20-year maintenance plan.
- Reporting and rectifying defects through City Surveyors department.
- Carrying out site audits every six months.

5.3.6 Utilities

The City of London (Open Spaces) Act 2018 allows the granting of easements and licenses under whatever terms the City of London considers necessary to protect open space.

A map of services is maintained as a guide only and does not replace the need for thorough checks prior to any activity that might impact on services.

Target: Protect utilities and infrastructure while safeguarding Farthing Downs

Achieved by:

- Granting access for the installation and maintenance of infrastructure assets under license only if the site is adequately protected.
- Ensuring companies proposing work that might damage the SSSI/Scheduled Monument gain consent from Natural England/Historic England
- Maintaining a map of utilities to act only as a general location guide.

5.3.7 Emergency planning

It is essential that plans are in place to deal with emergencies.

Target: Plan for emergencies

Achieved by:

- Maintaining emergency plans and keeping them available for instant use.
- Regular liaison with emergency services.
- 24 hours over 7 days rota for Ranger response.
- Maintaining a 24-hour call answering service for people to report incidents.
- Attending local policing panel meetings and feeding back information and incidents.

5.3.8 External accreditation

Achieving external quality standards validates management practices and gives assurance to our community, staff and elected Members that Farthing Downs is being well run.

Farthing Downs has successfully achieved a Green Flag award every year since 2007, and a Green Heritage award since 2013. 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: Millennium cairn and Folly, Farthing Downs



Above: Looking towards Woodplace Farm Fields, Farthing Downs

6 2021 –2031 Work Programme

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

The table on the following pages summarises when the major projects will be undertaken on Farthing Downs 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. Farthing Downs 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.

CODE	OBJECTIVE 3: ESTATE ASSETS & LEGAL ISSUES	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10
EST6	Target: Maintain built assets	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
EST6.3	Carry out site audit every 6 months	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
EST7	Target: Protect utilities whilst safeguarding site	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
EST7.1	Grant access for utility maintenance under licence and ensure site protection	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
EST7.2	Ensure SSSI/Scheduled Monument consent from Natural England/Historic England	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
EST7.3	Maintain map of utilities to act as general location guide	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
EST8	Target: Plan for emergencies	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
EST8.1	Maintain emergency plans and keep available for immediate use	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
EST8.2	Liaise with emergency services	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
EST8.3	Maintain 7 day, 24-hour Ranger response	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
EST8.4	Maintain 24-hour call answering service to report incidents	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
EST8.5	Attend local policing panel to feed back on incidents	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
EST9	Target: Seek external accreditation	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
EST9.1	Apply annually for Green Flag Award/Green Heritage accreditation	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
EST9.2	Seek professional input into wildlife and habitat assessments	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
EST9.3	Welcome specialist groups to survey for species	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
EST10	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
EST10.1	Liaise with Natural England	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
EST10.2	Liaise with Historic England	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
EST10.3	Produce new Management Plan										1
EST10.4	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.

Below: The Folly and cows at dusk, Farthing Downs (Daniel Greenwood)



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

Illustration by Dan Powell; photographs by Tim Nightingale, Gary Watson, Zuza Featherstone, Bill Bessant, Daniel Greenwood, Gill Peachey, Andy Carr, Mike Bromley and Sharon Tucker. 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: Farthing Downs at night, (©Andy Carr)

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 of London 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 of London'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 Corporation 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.



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