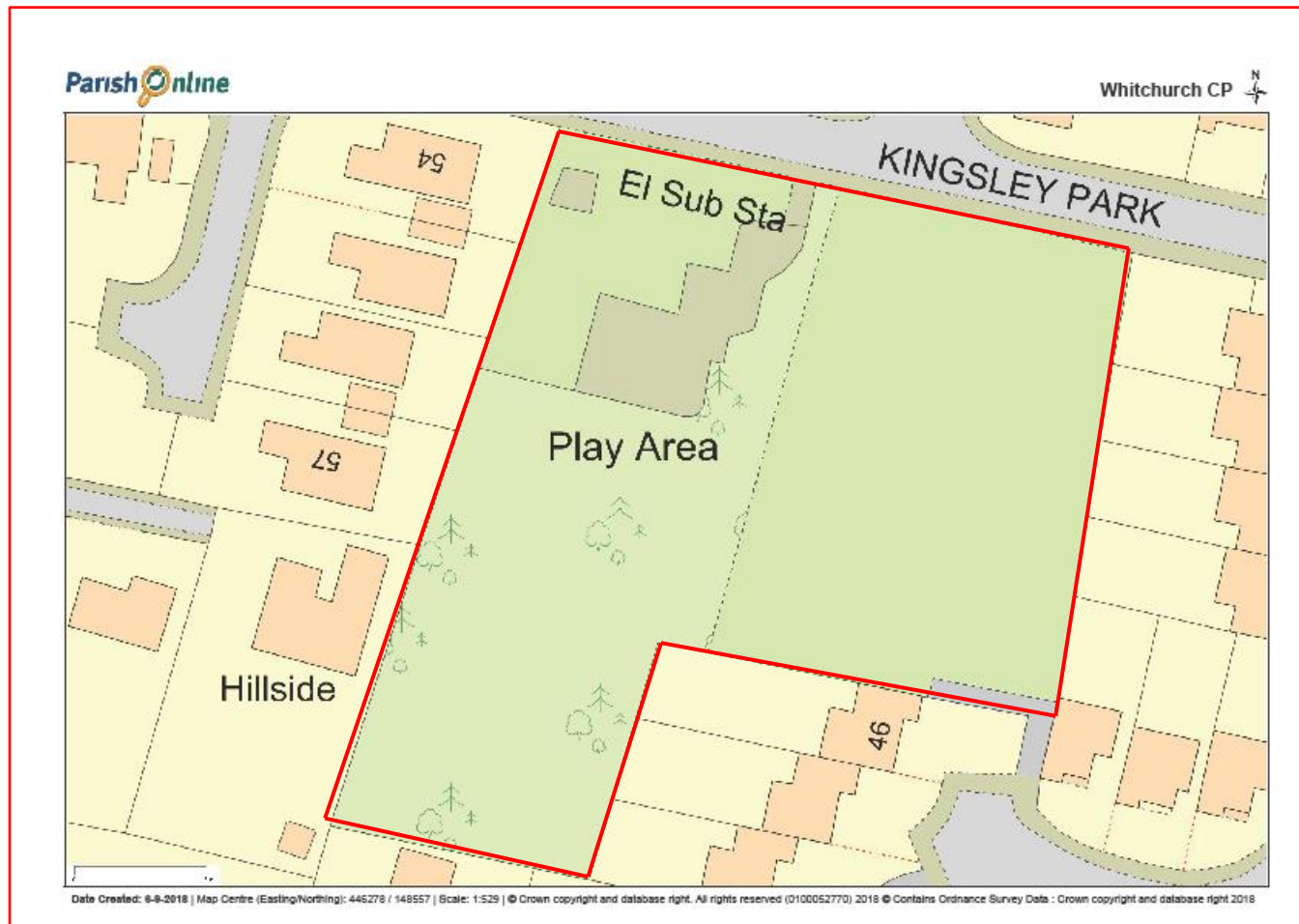


Soft Landscape Management Plan Framework
Kingsley Park Recreation Ground
for
Whitchurch Town Council

Final Document version 2

12 June 2020

Map of Kingsley Park Recreation Ground



Description of Site

- Whitchurch Town Council (WTC) owns and manages Kingsley Park Recreation Ground.
- Houses and bungalows overlook the recreation ground on all sides. Back gardens abut the W, S and E boundaries. Kingsley Park access road runs along the northern boundary. There is an enclosed childrens play area in the NW corner near the sub-station.
- Boundary vegetation exists on three sides providing containment and enclosure of the main grassed area. The western boundary until recently consisted of a mature native mixed hedgerow with specimen trees and diverse groundcover. It was a well established main feature of the recreation ground for many years.
- A small informal copse of trees with shrub understorey is located in the southern part, planted by residents and conservation volunteers over twenty years ago to provide a diverse range of native species as a valuable habitat for birds and other wildlife.
- Existing vegetation consists mainly of coppiced hazel on W and S boundaries; two large coppiced specimens in the main grassed area. Other species include hawthorn, holly, elder, blackthorn.
- A single species hawthorn hedge runs along the eastern edge of the site and is regularly clipped and maintained at approx 4.00-5.00m height. Three large, majestic oak trees and a number of smaller single stem trees are located sporadically around the site contributing to the semi-natural character.
- Mature trees and boundary vegetation together create an attractive green space with high visual amenity and biodiversity value, both at a local level and as part of the wider green infrastructure in and around Whitchurch. As the site is on high ground, mature tree canopies are visible on the skyline from the south and west.
- The recreation ground is well used and enjoyed by many local residents, including young families, as it is presently the only public recreation ground in the northern part of town. Activities include both passive and active recreation eg football, cricket, dog exercise on the grassed area; children/families using enclosed play area. The varied activities create many demands on the recreation ground, exacerbated by its relatively small size in a sensitive location adjacent to back gardens within a residential neighbourhood.

Good examples of existing management



Poor examples of existing management



Management of the Site: Background Summary

- **December 2016:** Work carried out to existing boundary vegetation for Whitchurch Town Council (WTC). This was considered by some residents and park users to be more extensive than set out in a letter previously sent to residents describing proposed works.
- Main cause for concern was the cutting down of a mature, mixed native hedgerow and trees along the western boundary, resulting in the loss of valuable wildlife habitats and loss of an attractive hedgerow that had taken many years to grow and establish as a main feature of the recreation ground.
- **January 2017:** WTC recognised that residents living around Kingsley Park recreation ground have differing views on management of boundary vegetation and the amount of clearance work that should be carried out. However, in response to above concerns, it was agreed that 'the stumps of the hazels will be allowed to regrow and no further clearance work is planned at this time'.
- **September 2018:** A draft Landscape Management Plan was considered by WTC to assist discussions on future management of the recreation ground. Councillors agreed some of the actions with further discussion required later on regarding detail and adoption of a final document.
- **18 December 2018:** Some sensitive phased coppicing of hazel and tidying up works were carried out to boundaries, as outlined in the draft plan, which helped to improve and restore visual amenity and biodiversity value.
- **16 March 2020:** Work carried out to existing vegetation along W boundary to clear a 1.60m width strip adjacent back garden fences for maintenance access.
- **27 April 2020:** At a meeting of the L&E Committee, an update of the draft plan was requested to include long term management objectives for review and adoption. The update to be used primarily as a framework document and also help to inform/consult residents and other interested parties in connection with soft landscape maintenance issues and long term management.

Existing Maintenance and Management of Soft Landscaped Areas

- **The main grassed area** is mown regularly from early summer to late autumn. Grass cuttings are taken offsite. Strimming carried out as needed to prevent brambles and nettles encroaching into mown grassed area.
- **Large oak trees:** works as needed eg to inspect general condition; remove dead wood and damaged branches; balance canopies.
- **Other specimen trees:** regular checks to assess condition; any vandalism or other damage; stakes and ties.
- **Established mixed native hedgerow along western boundary:** main species is coppiced hazel with occasional holly; elder; blackthorn; hawthorn. All species cut down to ground level in 2017 including hazel. Mature holly trees cut down. Significant gaps now evident in hedgerow. Majority of planted single stem specimen trees among vegetation retained. Material shredded on site and spread around the stumps smothering existing ground flora and discouraging re-establishment of hedgerow species. Logs left on site.
- **Small native copse along southern part of the site:** Main species include hazel; blackthorn; guelder rose; field maple; alder; rowan. Minimal maintenance carried out on existing vegetation at the request of residents whose gardens back onto the park for reasons of privacy and conservation. Portugal laurel reduced in height adjacent fence. Shredded bark spread around planted area has had detrimental effect creating gaps in existing planting for reasons outlined above.
- **Informal group of trees and understorey in SE corner:** minimal tidying and removal of dead, damaged vegetation to retain informal but tidy appearance and avoid obstruction of access into park. Thriving ground flora eg foxgloves.
- **Hawthorn hedgerow along eastern boundary:** maintained regularly as a clipped hedge of certain height.
- **Hedgerows, Copse and Trees:** all work carried out during the dormant season only and outside bird nesting season ie November – February.
- **Shredded Bark:** shredded and spread on site around base of vegetation creating issues with existing planting and maintenance.

Future Long Term Management

Main Aim

- An attractive recreational green space within a semi-natural setting for the enjoyment of park users and local residents; enhancement of visual amenity and improvement of biodiversity value for the benefit of the natural environment in the long term.

Main Objectives

- To provide a long term, consistent approach on future management of soft landscaped areas.
- To manage the green space for enjoyment of park users and local residents.
- To provide diverse local habitats within the green space eg for birds, pollinating insects and bees
- To ensure existing boundary vegetation and trees meet visual amenity and biodiversity objectives whilst not having unacceptable impacts on adjoining back gardens.
- To ensure the recreation ground is a safe and welcoming place for park users and local residents.
- To consult local residents regarding any significant changes or potential issues that may affect agreed aims and objectives for long term management of soft landscaped areas.

Current Issues and suggested actions

- Issue: Lack of clear long term strategy for managing existing trees and hedgerows within the recreation ground is having a detrimental impact in terms of appearance and wildlife habitats. Inconsistency of approach when responding to individual concerns also becomes an issue.
- Action: An agreed management plan for boundary vegetation and trees that ensures consistency of approach for the long term.
- Issue: Coppiced hazel is a valuable feature throughout the green space both as a main species within the boundary vegetation and as mature specimens within the grassed area. It is highly beneficial in terms of visual amenity and biodiversity value when properly managed ie cutting back established branches approx every 5 years . Left unmanaged, overmature hazel can become top heavy with large branches breaking away, permanently damaging the tree and creating potential safety issues for park users. Regular coppicing can prevent this although, if carried out too often, its value in terms of both appearance and benefits for wildlife is considerably reduced. Cutting down and coppicing all hazel at the same time would have similar results.
- Action: Coppice hazel as part of a long term, low maintenance plan ie work to be carried out only in selected areas at any one time as part of an ongoing phased rotation eg every 5 years. This would ensure boundary hedgerows are retained as a permanent feature and nesting habitats remain undisturbed.
- Issue: Small 'conservation' copse along south east boundary contains overmature hazel trees that have yet to be coppiced to prevent branches breaking away and creating potential safety issues with park users NB low maintenance (not no maintenance) is necessary for conservation purposes.
- Action: overmature hazel in the copse is the last area to be coppiced in the recreation ground. All coppiced hazel should be allowed to regrow and only cut back as part of an agreed long term management programme.

Current issues and suggested actions

- Issue: Spreading shredded waste around existing planted areas is unsightly; prevents re-establishment of native mix species and ground flora creating gaps which encourages dog fouling and dumping of garden rubbish. This has become a particular problem in the conservation copse.
- Action: shredded waste to be removed offsite instead of spreading among existing planted areas. Infill gaps with suitable species eg hawthorn. Temporary protective fencing eg stockproof fencing to be erected along outer edge of copse to avoid trampling and ensure successful establishment of infill planting.
- Issue: Cutting down mature hedgerow along W boundary has resulted in loss of some species eg hawthorn, elder, guelder rose and has created gaps for docks, brambles and nettles. This does not look attractive and is difficult to manage.
- Action: Infill gaps with new planting to re-establish diverse mature hedgerow boundary using suitable species eg hawthorn transplants which will be consistent with E boundary in terms of visual amenity and easier to maintain in the long term. NB It may prove more beneficial in the long term to eventually replace existing coppiced hazel as dominant species with hawthorn along W boundary.
- Issue: Width of existing hedgerow along W boundary and groundcover edge is gradually being eroded and reduced in width to the detriment of visual amenity, biodiversity and local semi-rural character.
- Action: Maintain a minimum width of 5.00m between back garden fences and grassed area (to include cleared maintenance strip next to fences). Maintain 'wavy informal' edge to grassed area to accommodate existing coppiced hazel and specimen trees.

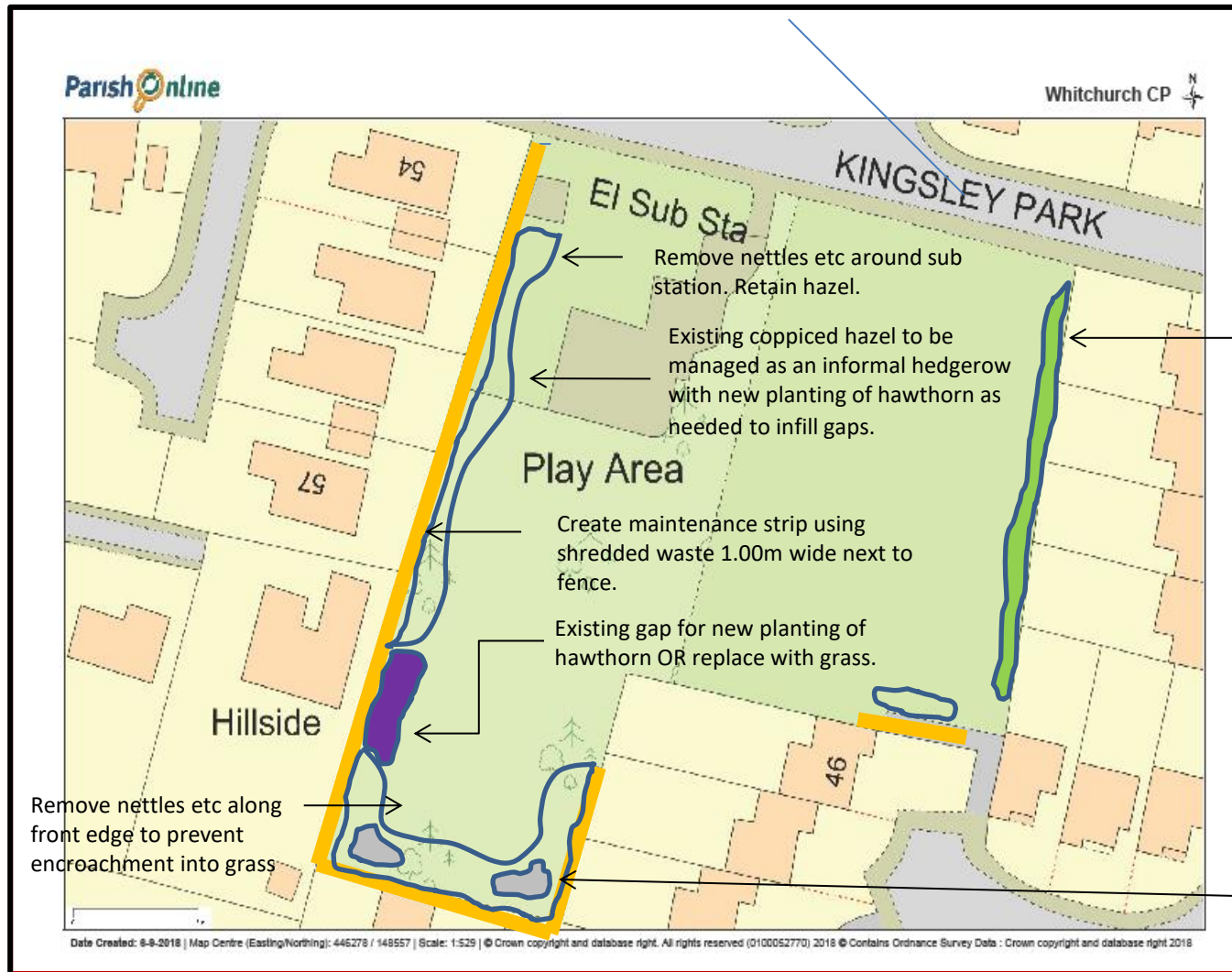
Current issues and suggested actions

- Issue: Vandalism and other damage to trees and hedgerows is detrimental to appearance and health of the planting and overall enjoyment of the area. Associated safety issues may also be a concern. Current problems include a single specimen tree in grassed area with bark removed completely around trunk, which is now dying and needs to be removed; a vandalised lower limb of oak tree by play area for removal.
- Action: regular site inspections to check existing trees and boundary vegetation with remedial work carried out as needed. Promote understanding and respect of the natural environment.
- Issue: Limited access for maintenance of back garden fences along the western boundary due to proximity of existing trees and hedgerow species in recreation ground.
- Action: Vegetation affected to be cut back to create and maintain an access path, maximum 1.00m width, next to garden fences.
- Issue: Excessive shading of back gardens and overhang from existing trees and hedgerow species along western boundary if allowed to grow unchecked. Properties abutting W boundary are E-W facing on a south facing slope, allowing back gardens to enjoy a sunny southerly aspect for most of the day; some partial shading early in the day from hedgerow and trees along the western boundary of the recreation ground is a possibility dependent on species, height and spread.
- Action: Carry out regular site inspections. Agree suitable average height of hedgerow eg 5.00m which would provide consistency of approach with average height of hawthorn hedgerow along eastern boundary. An agreed managed height combined with maintenance of an access path as outlined above would ensure existing planting is managed effectively for the benefit of all.

Summary of Main Actions

- Agree a management plan for boundary vegetation and trees that meets aims and objectives and ensures consistency of approach for the long term.
- Coppice hazel as part of a long term, low maintenance programme of work eg to be carried out only in selective areas at any one time as part of an ongoing rotation cycle eg every 5 years, ensuring boundary hedgerows are retained as a permanent feature and nesting habitats remain undisturbed.
- Programme of existing works for coppiced hazel to be completed Nov 2020 – Feb 2021 with coppicing of overmature hazel in the copse as final phase. All future works to be carried out as part of the agreed long term management plan.
- Strip next to garden fences, 1.00m maximum width, to be created behind existing planting using shredded waste and kept clear of vegetation for maintenance access.
- Maintain hedgerow along W boundary at an agreed maximum height eg 5.00m (excluding specimen single stem trees within planting which should be left to grow to maturity).
- Maintain hedgerow along W boundary at an agreed minimum width eg 5.00m, which includes access path; existing planting and an undulating groundcover edge adjacent grassed area to accommodate existing hazel and trees. An agreed managed height and width combined with maintenance of access path as outlined above would ensure existing boundary planting is managed effectively for the benefit of all.
- Shredded waste to be removed off site in future to meet objectives.
- Infill gaps in existing hedgerow and copse with suitable species eg hawthorn (bare root transplants 90 - 1.20m height) to provide quick establishment and ease of maintenance. Provide temporary protective stock proof fencing as needed for infill planting to avoid trampling and ensure successful establishment.
- Regular site inspections to check existing trees and boundary vegetation for vandalism and damage. Remedial work carried out as needed. Promote understanding and respect of the natural environment.

Outline first stage proposals for discussion (indicative only) ref site meeting on 10th June 2020



NB new planting to be protected by temporary protective fencing to assist establishment eg 1.5m height stockproof fencing.

Existing hawthorn hedge to remain as existing.

New planting of hawthorn whips in gaps between existing trees and hazel coppice.