

Beechy Bottom Parkland Reserve

Vision Document

June 2024

Fairfax

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ARCHITECTS

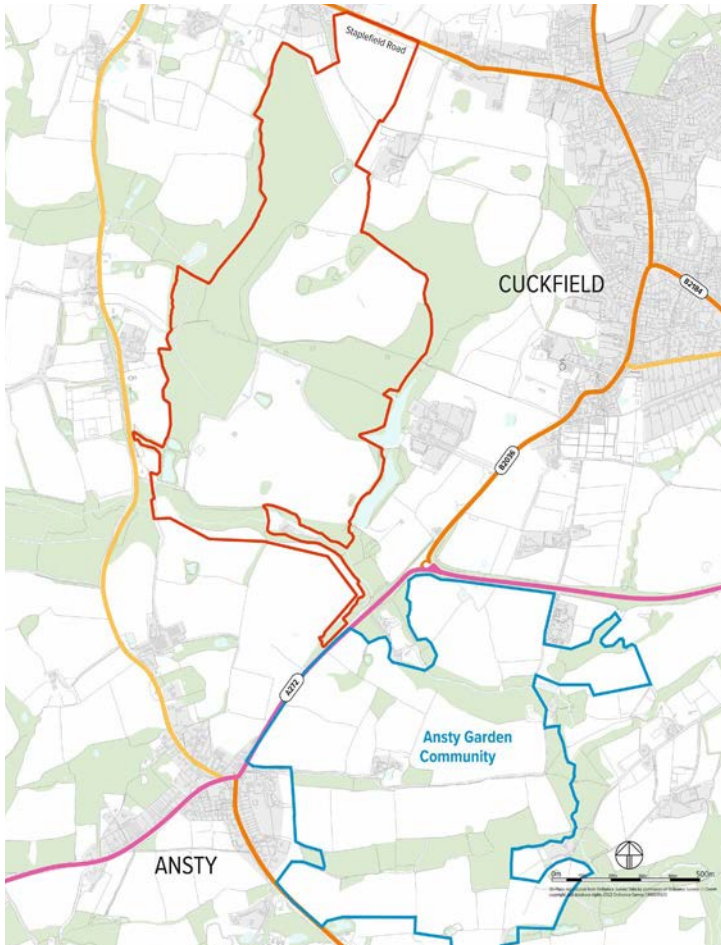


Figure 01 - Location Plan © Crown copyright and database rights [2024] Ordnance Survey 0100031673



1.2 Location

The site lies to the west of Cuckfield and north of Ansty. The site is located circa 560m west of Cuckfield and 790m north of Ansty, located within the former historic deer park

1.1 Executive Summary

The Parkland Reserve will come forward as part of the Green Infrastructure associated with the Ansty Garden Community to provide additional recreational resources and opportunities for biodiversity gain. The park will form a substantial area of naturalised open space and additional recreational fields for both the new Garden Community and the existing surrounding communities.

Beechy Bottom Parkland Reserve affords a very significant opportunity to create a naturalised parkland facility for the whole of the local community. The project will focus on restoring over 200 acres of farmed parkland; Ancient Semi Natural Woodland & Ancient Replanted Woodland to the west of Cuckfield Park.

A key aim is to create an exemplar of biodiverse habitat guided by the principles and lessons learnt from the Knepp rewilding project just south of Horsham. This will be achieved through a series of key design principles and indicators that will be tied into a long term management plan and monitored by a site warden.

To be read in conjunction with (submitted under separate cover):

- Appendix A - Arboricultural Briefing Note - Arbortrack - Oct 2023.
- Appendix B - EciA Report Rev01 - Oct 2023.
- Technical Details Document - DLA - Oct 2023.

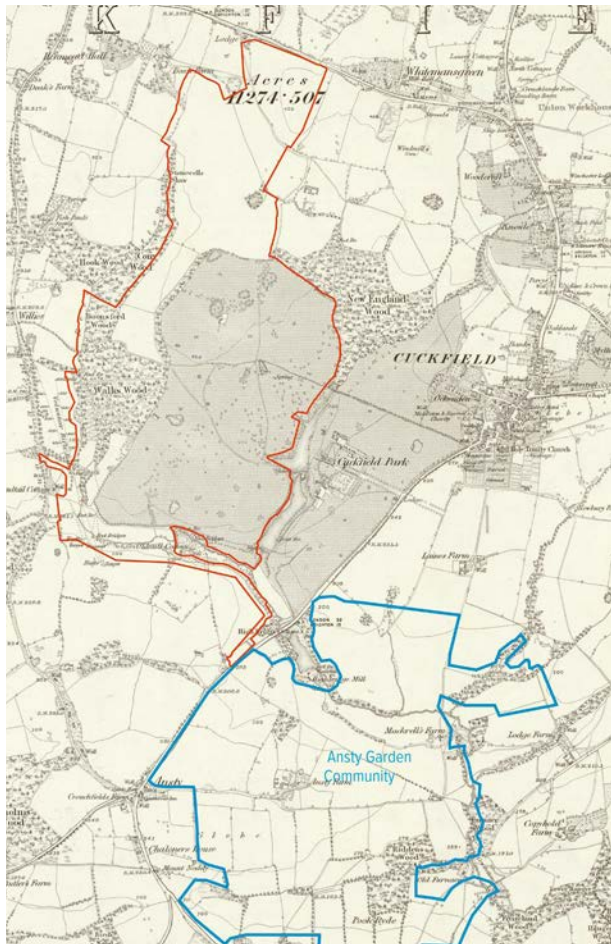


Figure 02 - 1879 Historic Mapping

of Cuckfield Park. The site covers approximately 200 acres (81ha) of farmland and an area of 15 acres (6ha) of private recreation grassland to the north.

The proposed reserve is bordered to the north by Staplefield Road which provides direct access to the existing recreation field at the northern end of the site. The northeast boundary is formed by the Whitemans Green recreation grounds which provide the base for Haywards Heath Rugby Football Club and other formal pitches. The eastern boundary is separated from the B2036 London Road by the eastern edge of the historic parkland. Whilst the southern boundary is defined by a private access road and woodland belt. The west is separated from Deaks Lane by a narrow strip of woodland, small pasture enclosures and scattered dwellings.

1.3 Proposals

1. Formal sports pitches & existing parking
2. Dedicated areas for local dog walkers
3. Parkland restoration
4. Woodland rides & glades including cycle trail
5. Viewing platform capturing panoramic views towards the South Downs National Park
6. Viewing platform capturing panoramic views towards pond
7. Pond restoration

The overall vision is of a park where nature and wildlife prevail. This will be achieved through the introduction of more naturalistic processes such as 'soft touch' extensive management systems, allowing the development of woody scrub areas, rich and structured grassland and natural regeneration within the woodlands. These, over time, will create species-rich and evocative wildlife rich habitats. So far as is possible, management of the park will deliver environmental and landscape enhancement through management of the degraded habitats and lost species.

Once this management has been set up, the reserve will then be left to 'go wild', with minimal management, but with close welfare and ecological monitoring to evaluate habitat and animal population change while providing a refuge for bats and birds that are currently lacking within the habitats on site at present. This will result in a positive benefit and significant increase in Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG).

As an aside, this will also result in carbon sequestration into the soils through the abandonment of more intensive agricultural techniques. Carbon sequestration is recognised as a key method for removing carbon from the earth's atmosphere.

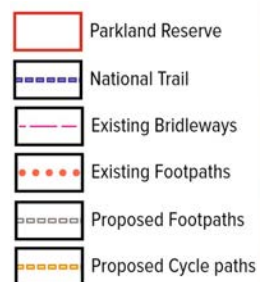


Figure 03 - Proposals

1.4 Consultant Team

A team of consultants, with a wide range of experiences and practice in such projects, have been involved in the preparation of this initial Vision Document and will continue to work towards the preparation of detailed designs and management plans that will take the park forward.

Client

Fairfax

Fairfax is an experienced land promoter with a successful history of obtaining consents for strategic development throughout the South-East. With headquarters in Mid Sussex, the team have extensive knowledge of the area and a strong personal connection to it.

The dedicated in-house team bring with them many years' experience of managing the planning process all the way from inception through to delivery. In addition, they bring together a highly trusted, skilled collective of industry - leading consultants and specialists to plan, develop and design attractive developments that not only provide much needed housing in the areas where people want to live and work, but also create truly sustainable communities with positive, lasting legacies.

The team appointed by Fairfax Properties comprises:

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DLA have successfully masterplanned and delivered a number of Country Parks and Suitable Alternative Green Space (SANG), with recent projects including; Canford SANG and a 50ha SANG/Country Park associated with the former Wisley Airfield Strategic Site.

DLA works closely with ecologists and stakeholders to provide attractive multifunctional green spaces and habitat resources that can adapt and evolve in perpetuity. This can only be achieved by a thorough understanding of the baseline and its potential to enhance and positively contribute to the future wider landscape and is fundamental to DLA's design process.



Arbortrack is a long established practice of arboricultural consultants providing a range of tree related services to clients in southern England and Australia from offices in Kenilworth, London & Brisbane. Their core business is in the delivery of a bespoke tree management software used throughout the UK and internationally by individuals and institutions to manage their tree stock(s). The consultancy practice is focused on guiding clients through any tree related issues in the development and planning process, given that trees are a material planning consideration.

Arbortrack have recently surveyed the woodland on site and are currently providing invaluable expertise on management and future strategies.



Tadorna have a wealth of experience in writing management plans in particular 'rewilding' management plans, aimed towards habitat and species restoration many of which include the complex management of large estates.

In addition to the management plans Tadorna specialise in the full range of ecological surveys as well as expert knowledge in botanical surveying and licences for surveying and mitigation licences for dormice, bats and badgers.

The EcIA report has been prepared by Ecologic in close association with Tadorna and is appended under separate cover.



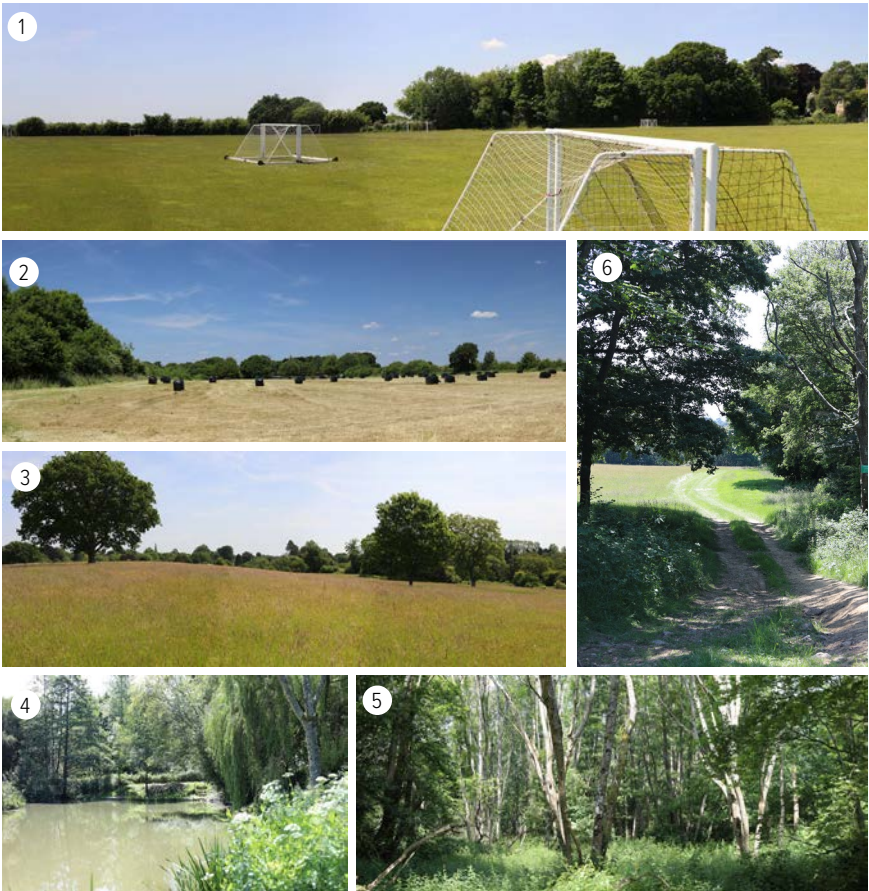


Figure 04 - Site Context

2.1 Landscape Setting

The history of the site and its mature woodland setting has meant that the proposed park has retained a sense of verdant countryside, removed from the day to day bustle of Cuckfield, Ansty and the B2036/ A272.

The site affords a variety of landscapes from enclosed pasture, woodlands, wet woodland and open pasture ground. Views within the site are directed towards a wooded backdrop, with opportunities for attractive longer distance view towards the South Downs.



2.2 Designations & Assets

The site lies within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

There are several areas of Ancient Woodland which tie in with areas of woodland identified on the 1878 OS plan (Fig 02).

Cuckfield Park lies to the east of the site, separated by the historic ponds and more recent tree planting. The house and features are Grade II Listed. Whilst forming part of the historic parkland associated with the house the site is not afforded any landscape or cultural protection through designations.



Image from <https://commons.wikimedia.org/>

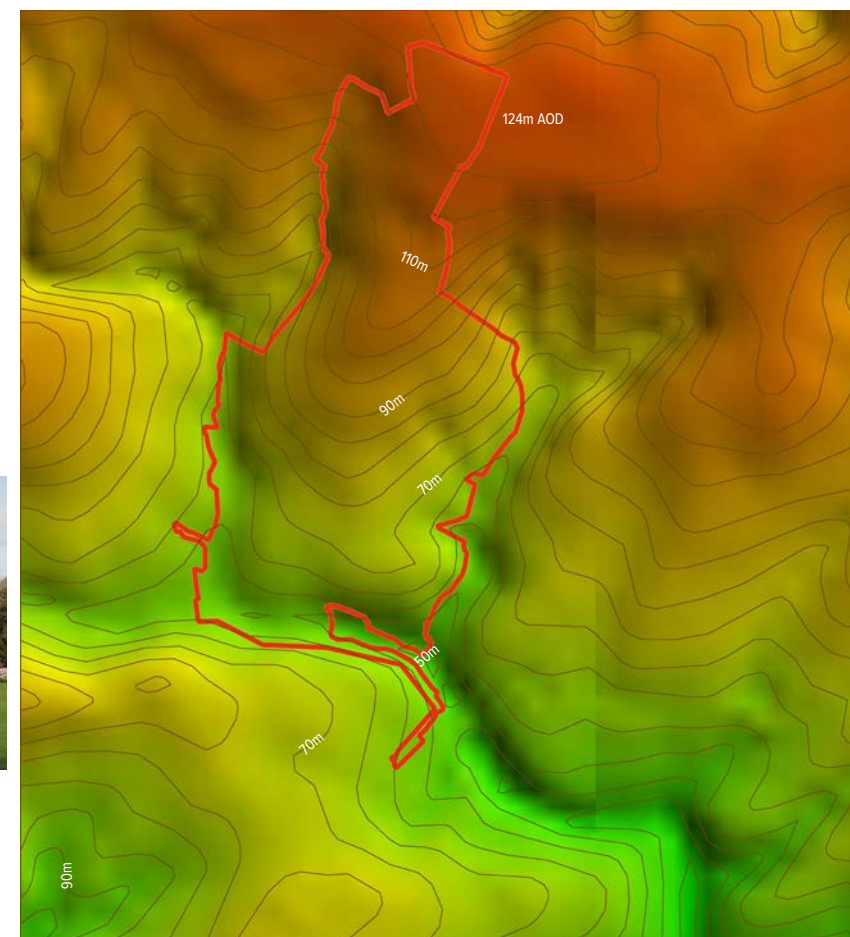


Figure 06 - Topography

2.3 Topography

The topography in the site gently falls from Staplefield Road to the north at circa 124m AOD to the valley base along the southern boundary at 50m AOD. A ridgeline runs in a north x south axis screening views between the east and west and also affords opportunities to create enclosure and vistas.

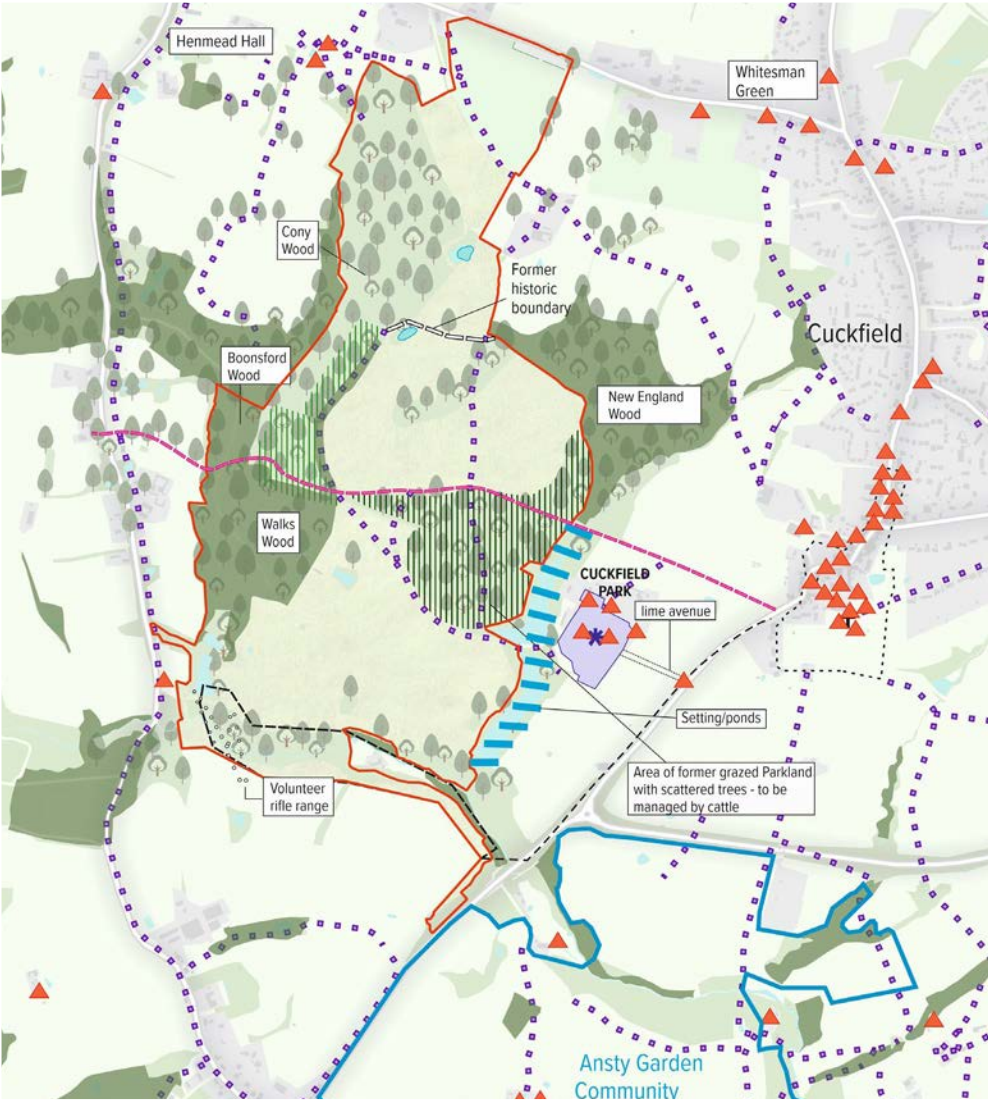


Figure 07 - Historic Landscape



3.1 Historic and Landscape Character

The site formed the western setting for Cuckfield Park, an Elizabethan house and seat of the Bower/Sergison families (now in private ownership). The parkland extended from the lime treed formal approach off South Street (The B2036) to the western boundary of the proposed park. The site formed part of the historic Deer Park associated with the house.

Today the landscape has not notably changed from the 1878 OS mapping with the most notable changes being the introduction of plantation woodland as shown on Fig 07.

Today the site forms part of the West Sussex High Weald Fringes (HW4) Landscape Character Area, with the parkland and associated ancient woodland considered a key characteristic of the landscape.

The High Weald Trail aligns with an historic track that provides access across the parkland.

Design Principles taken forward:

- Identifying, protecting and enhancing key features.
- Replanting parkland trees as part of an holistic masterplan.
- Creating points of interest, views and vistas across the parkland.
- Utilise historic management practices to enhance character and biodiversity.
- Restoring ponds through clearance of scrub and ongoing management.
- Provide opportunities to enhance landscape character and create a distinctive place.
- Create appropriate 'new landscape' to compliment and be able to adapt to future demands and climate change.

3.2 Access

There are Public Rights of Way (PRoW) that cross the site, predominantly following historic routes.

The site is bisected by a bridleway running west/east, which is part of the High Weald Landscape Trail, a 145km long distance path which meanders through the AONB from east to west.

There is no public access to the site (currently used for grazing farmland & a recreational pheasant shoot), but it has been used informally by the public - particularly dog walkers - since the COVID pandemic.

Design Principles taken forward:

- Provide opportunity for circular routes to north.
- Creating a new off road cycle route to link Staplefield Road to the north with the A272 to the south.
- Providing additional access to areas of the Park previously not public.
- Provide a range of experiences along the routes.
- Protecting ecologically sensitive areas.

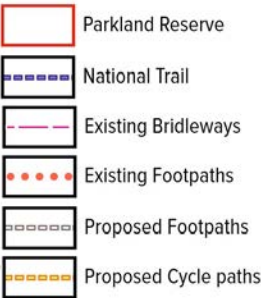


Figure 08 - Access

3.3 Biodiversity Enhancements & Management

The existing landscape will be sensitively managed to respect the historic parkland and promote biodiversity enhancement.

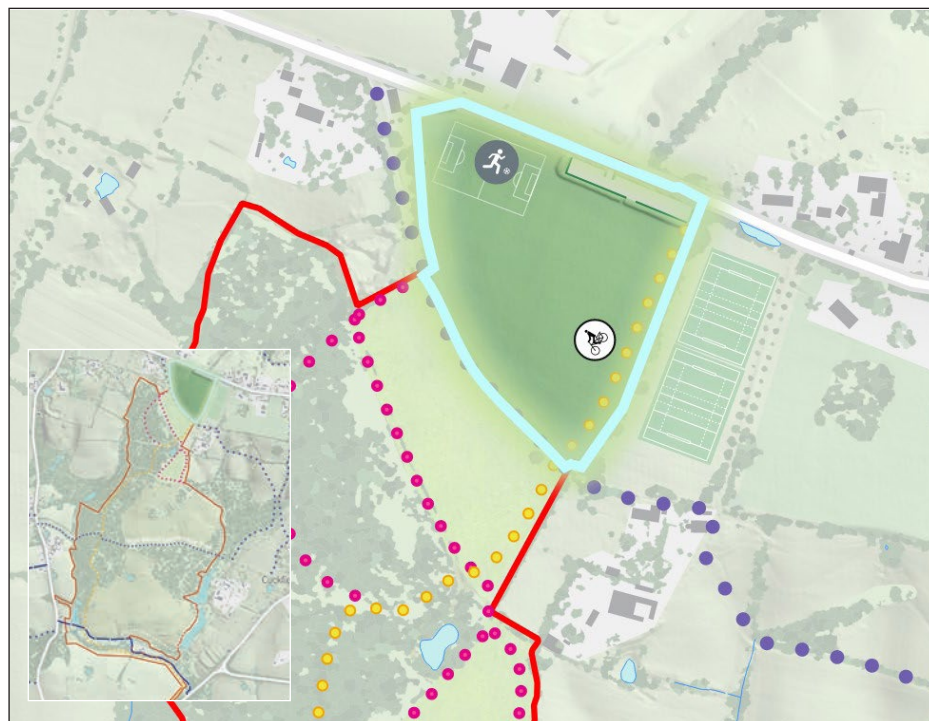
This will be achieved through the introduction of conservation management methods including grazing regimes and re-wilding. These are described in further detail in the Appendices.

Design Principles taken forward:

- Woodland to be managed for species diversity.
- Creating rides and glades to encourage a range of closed and open habitats grazed by controlled herds of animals such as cattle and red deer.
- Use of Conservation cattle/pigs to manage species rich grasslands and woodland.
- Veteranising newly planted trees such as poplar and ash for birds and mammals.
- Restoring ponds through clearance of scrub and ongoing management.
- Exploring the opportunities learnt from projects such as Knepp to create a rich and diverse wildlife resource.
- Focus on reintroducing farmland bird species such as grey partridge, corn bunting, and tree sparrow and well as reptile, amphibian, mammal and invertebrate species.
- Refurbishing the existing building on the fringe of woodland to provide a base for a full-time warden and educational hub to involve the local schools and community groups.
- Creating a long term management plan monitored by an ecologically trained site warden.
- Creating a long term legacy.



Figure 09 - Ecology Zones/Character Areas



Formal Recreation



Cycle Route



4.1 Beech Farm Field

Beech Farm Field lies to the north of the site, adjacent to the facilities at Whitemans Green, and is currently leased to the local clubs as additional recreational fields.

Access is via a dedicated gated access which leads straight in to an existing car parking area. The northern boundary with the road is defined by a native hedgerow, with views into the sports field further screened by a grassed earth bund. There is currently no public access to the field.

Upon the granting of permission for the Ansty Garden Community the freehold will be gifted to Cuckfield Cosmos Football Club. In addition the following benefits to the wider County Park and Community will be incorporated:

- A dedicated cycle route starting at the car park heading south through the park to the Ansty Garden Community - restricted cycle access at Staplefield Road.
- Boundaries will be managed for species diversity and connectivity, including additional enhancement of the northern/Staplefield Road boundary.
- Specialist works undertaken to enhance the resilience of the playing turf and enable it to be used more during the winter months. Key to this will be enhance drainage.



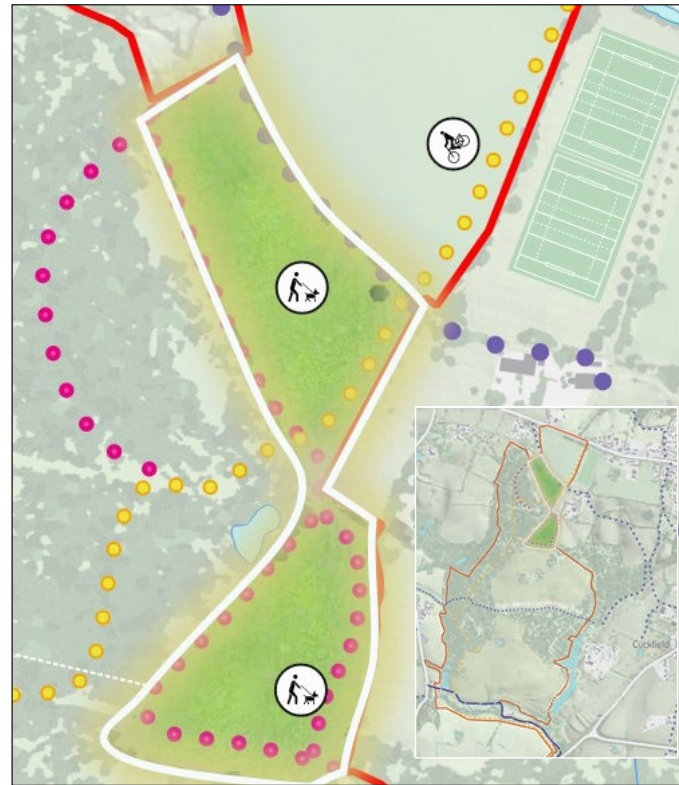
4.2 The Meadows

The Meadows consist of two enclosed fields that are currently used for hay. The proposals will see the management of these fields aligned to increase species diversity and biodiversity. It also affords an opportunity for a safe enclosed area to be created that will allow dogs to be let off the lead.

An additional circular route will be provided linking to the existing PRoW that crosses the northern boundary of this enclosure and the proposed cycle route.

Key Design Characteristics/features:

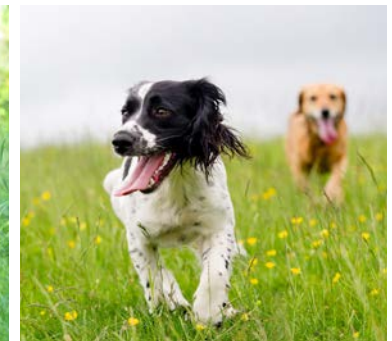
- Creating dedicated fenced areas for local dog walkers located away from sensitive habitat areas.
- Providing easy and safe access for local communities.
- Creating new year round circular routes with dog bins.
- Providing areas to meet and sit and enjoy views over the landscape.
- Creating access to woodland and new wetland areas.
- Providing information boards about the re-wilding project.

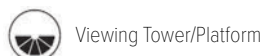


Dog Walking Area & Routes



Cycle Route





4.3 Open Parkland

This area is most characteristic of the perception of a 'parkland' landscape. Topography and woodland play a key role in creating views and vistas through the area as well as affording opportunities for open elevated views towards the South Down in the distance.

The High Weald Landscape Trail dissects the parkland and is afforded attractive views into the parkland area. This area will be managed through grazing to create a species rich grasslands with opportunities to re-introduce many species associated with this traditional management practice.

Key Design Characteristics/features:

- Identifying, protecting and enhancing key features.
- Replanting parkland trees as part of an holistic masterplan.
- Creating points of interest, views and vistas across the parkland.
- Enhancing the large areas of grassland through rare breed cattle grazing.
- Restoring ponds through clearance of scrub and ongoing management.
- Using the area as an educational resource.
- Providing an observation tower/platform next to the High Weald Landscape Trail to look over the parkland towards the South Downs National Park.



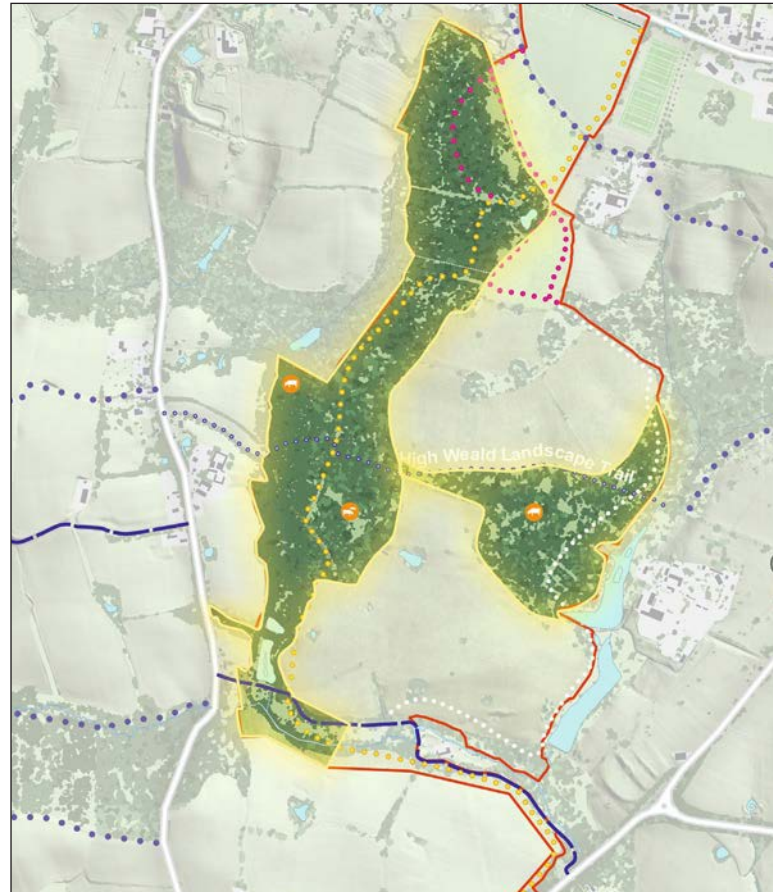
4.4 Ancient Woodland & Plantation

Woodland within the site on the western flank, known as Walks Wood and Beechy Bottom (partially within the site), is designated Ancient Replanted Woodland (ARW). Large sections of these woods are constituted of a relatively young plantation, i.e. estimated 20-25 year old sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*), sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) & birch (*Betula pendula*) amongst other broadleaved species in smaller concentrations.

Undesignated young plantation makes up the remainder of this wooded area. Two smaller parcels of Ancient Semi Natural Woodland stand on the southern flank of the site near Old Mill Cottage. The tree stock is dominated by native broadleaved trees with many fine individual English oak, beech & sweet chestnut present outside wooded blocks. Other species present include copper beech, hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*), Turkey oak (*Quercus cerris*) & Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*) in smaller quantities.

Key Design Characteristics/features:

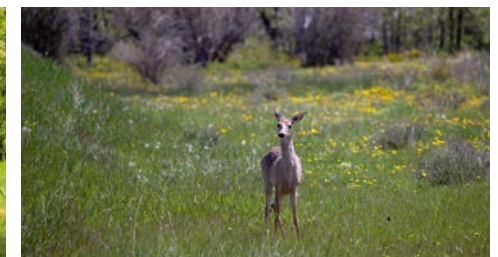
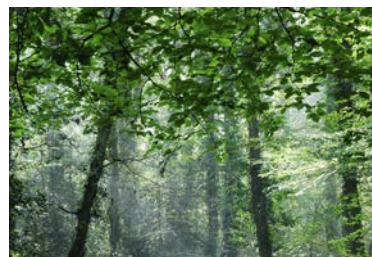
- Woodland to be managed for species diversity - refer to the Arboricultural Note at the rear of this document for more information.
- Creating rides and glades to encourage a range of closed and open habitats grazed by controlled herds of animals such as cattle and pigs.
- Fencing the perimeters of the 'conservation areas' to contain grazing animals, keep out human disturbance and deer.
- Use of Conservation cattle/pigs to manage species rich grasslands and woodland.
- Veteranising newly planted trees such as poplar and ash for birds and mammals.
- Creating a new north x south off road cycle and pedestrian route through to connect Ansty to the south with Cuckfield to the north.
- Restoring woodland edge ponds.



Cattle Grazing



Cycle Route



ECOLOGICAL TECHNICAL NOTE

The proposal is to enclose the park with a secure deer-proof fencing and then to remove the limited internal barriers to allow free access throughout the site for stock and wild animals. This is envisaged to include herds of cattle and pigs and wild animal species such as hare, red and roe deer would graze across the whole of the park. The vegetation will then be subject to a more naturalistic management process which can be built up over time allowing habitats to develop, through succession, into more semi-natural states.

This naturalistic grazing project has been inspired in part by the work undertaken at the nearby Knepp Estate and therefore by the theories of the Dutch ecologist Frans Vera. Frans Vera theorised that a true wilderness in this part of Europe would have been driven by disturbance from wild herbivores and would have looked more like wood pasture than dense, closed canopy forest. This may have been the case of the continent where large-scale seasonal migration by large numbers of herbivores was both feasible and possible, but this was unlikely to have taken place on mainland Britain since the end of the last ice age approximately 11,700 years ago due to the lack of a winter migratory refuge and low numbers of large herbivores when compared with a continental wide natural system.

To look at what can be created at Cuckfield, we have to look to a more recent past when a combination of fallow and 'waste' areas and areas

of traditional farming practices created habitat that supported large numbers of individual animals and a wide range of wildlife species. Prior to the Second World War, the UK supported very large areas of semi-natural habitat which in turn supported large wildlife populations (albeit in the absence of predators such as sparrow hawk and pine martens), in particular of farmland bird species. This was in part due to the large-scale imports of food products from the Empire, which from the 1880's led to a 60-year farming depression and a general lack of progression of farming methods and techniques.

During the war, an area measuring approximately 4 million acres was ploughed up and put into agricultural production. To give a comparison, this is similar in scale to the combined area of the whole of Cornwall, Devon, Somerset and Dorset. Post-war, this trend continued and large areas of scrub, woodland, wetland and permanent grassland went into intensive agricultural production.

Post-war government subsidies were heavily targeted towards increasing agricultural production. This led to changes in farming practices, which included the loss of mixed farming systems (creating arable and intensive pasture monocultures), the move from spring to autumn sowing of cereal crops (which actively kills farmland bird young), and increased use of a new diverse range of pesticides, all of which have been demonstrated to have had adverse impacts on farmland birds such as skylark (*Alauda arvensis*) and grey partridge (*Perdix perdix*).

Five farmland specialists (corn bunting *Emberiza calandra*, grey partridge, starling *Sturnus vulgaris*, turtle dove *Streptopelia turtur* and tree sparrow

Passer montanus) have experienced severe declines in excess of 80% since 1970. The grey partridge in particular has seen severe declines of 93% between 1967 to 2018.

However, the work at the Knepp Estate has seen a large-scale restoration of bird, reptile, botanical, mammal, amphibian populations. This includes large rises in all of the above species as well as rare migrants such as nightingale (*rufous nightingale*). With the UK summer population estimates to be just 5500-6000 birds, Knepp Estate can now boast of 40 territories (approx. 80 birds can be inferred) being defended, when in 2001, Knepp estate supported none.

It should be the aim of the proposed park to try and restore these lost animal species and restore degraded habitats. A particular focus will be on farmland bird species, but also reptile, amphibian, mammal and invertebrate populations as well as botanical diversity. By introducing more naturalistic processes such as 'soft touch' extensive management systems and allowing the development of woody scrub areas, forb rich and structured grassland as well as allowing natural regeneration within the woodlands should, over time, create species-rich and evocative wildlife rich habitats. As an aside, this will also result in carbon sequestration into the soils through the abandonment of more intensive agricultural techniques.

Once this management has been set up, Beechy Bottom Parkland Reserve will then be left to 'go wild', with minimal management, but with close welfare and ecological monitoring to evaluate habitat and animal population change



while providing a refuges for bats and birds that are currently lacking within the habitats on site at present.

The overall vision is of a park where natural processes predominate, and long-term financial stability is achieved outside a conventional agricultural framework. So far as is possible, management of the park will deliver environmental and landscape enhancement through these management techniques.

Further information can be found in Appendix B - EciA Report Rev01 - Oct 2023 submitted under separate cover.

SUMMARY ARBORICULTURAL TECHNICAL NOTE

Beechy Bottom Parkland Reserve is a parcel of land (circa 230 acres) to the west of the village of Cuckfield bounded to the east by the present Cuckfield Park Estate and New England Wood (Ancient Semi Natural Woodland (ASNW), i.e. continuously present as woodland since 1600 A.D.)

The site is bounded to the south & south west by the catchment of the upper Ouse river, where fishing ponds are also present. Other ponds (formerly quarry workings) are scattered through the site.

Woodland within the site on the western flank, known as Walks Wood and Beechy Bottom (partially within the site), is designated Ancient Replanted Woodland (ARW). Large sections of these woods are constituted of a relatively young plantation, i.e. estimated 20-25 year old sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*), sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) & birch (*Betula pendula*) amongst other broadleaved species in smaller concentrations. Undesignated young plantation makes up the remainder of this wooded area. Two smaller parcels of ASNW stand on the southern flank of the site near Old Mill Cottage.

The species mix of the ASNW is typical with oak (*Quercus robur*), ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), birch, beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), field maple (*Acer campestre*), hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) and goat willow (*Salix caprea*) present. Several non-native horse chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*) are present, e.g. trees. Many of the ash on site are showing symptoms of ash dieback disease (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*) and the prognosis for these trees is very poor. Plantations are made up of same-age birch, sycamore, sweet chestnut, oak and willow predominantly.

The two large southern fields of the site were formerly known as Cuckfield Park Deer Park: old maps suggest that at least 80 parkland trees stood within Cuckfield Park Deer Park - only remnants of these remain, with the stand-out features being fine free-standing English oaks, and two magnificent groves of sweet chestnut in the south eastern corner of the site.

The tree stock is dominated by native broadleaved trees with many fine individual English oak, beech & sweet chestnut present outside wooded blocks. Other species present include copper beech, hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*), Turkey oak (*Quercus cerris*) & Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*) in smaller quantities. Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*), and a Corsican pine (*Pinus nigra*), are also present as landscape planting.

The trees & woodlands identified on the tree location plan are a key element of the biodiversity & amenity value of the site. The proposed change of use for the site, i.e. a re-naturing project for the benefit of the general public with an educational and research remit, envisages the retention of all surveyed trees. Exceptions will include any tree in imminent danger of collapse (within influencing distance of new paths and potential areas of greater footfall should the risk of failure be unacceptable) and small plantation trees, which will be removed to create groves & paths within Walks Wood & Beechy Bottom.

Overtime there is great scope for new planting of native broadleaved trees to augment the amenity value, character and biodiversity value of the former deer park & the two small fields to the north of the site, which are designated for recreational use by walkers with or without dogs.

Further information can be found in Appendix A - Arboricultural Briefing Note - Arbotrack - Oct 2023 submitted under separate cover.



