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Dear Angela,

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the first phase of the consultation on the Oughtonhead Common Greenspace Action Plan. The approach taken by CMS and NHDC, with a consultation on broad aspirations followed by one on the final draft Plan, is one that Hitchin Forum believe should be more widely adopted. We support the overall aims of the GAP. Much progress has been made in recent years in the management of the wetland area for which credit is due to CMS, NHDC and the Friends of Oughtonhead Common.

What follows is a number of observations and suggestions which we hope will be constructive.

### **Recreational understanding and visitor experience**

- Signage and information boards are much improved recently – is there any chance of QR codes to link to further information on mobiles?
- Could there be an online and updated version of the Oughton Head Guided Walk booklet published years ago (in the 1980s?) by the North Herts Museum Service in addition to the online leaflet currently available?
- A photographic competition for best wildlife photo on the common (including by children and using mobiles) might promote engagement.
- Path surfaces have been much improved in recent years, especially RB1<sup>1</sup>. It is unclear whether RB3 is within the GAP area. The resurfacing completed last year which filled-in the potholes between its junction with BR5 and FP2, whilst effective across much of the width of the path, has not worked along its southern edge. Deep potholes developed very quickly, and the current situation is that these are just as deep as they were before.

## Site misuse

- Unauthorised vehicles. In the past, motorcycles have been seen along restricted byway (RB) 1 by the river. The barriers / gates at the entrances to the Common from the A600, Westmill on FP Pirton 5, the junction of RB 3 (Oughtonhead Lane) and bridleway 5, and near the Chalky on RB1 mean that this has not happened recently to my knowledge. However, irresponsible motorcycle use has been witnessed on RB 3 and near the springs. These may be outside the GAP area but if not, measures to prevent this would be helpful. Consideration should be given to ensuring easier wheelchair access.
- At least one 'weapon dog' has been witnessed being trained by being swung from a tyre hung on a tree in the vicinity of the seat on RB1 between the A600 and Westmill Lane.
- The vicinity of the chalky is often used for barbecues. Is this acceptable?
- Good that bank restoration work at the chalky, which was vandalised when first started some time ago, has now been completed.

## Reactive tree works

- How frequent are inspections?
- Major safety issues are on RB1 close to the springs. This may, of course be outside the GAP area.

## Maintenance

- Use of chippings recycled from nearby work, has helped improve the surface of the muddy reserve path from the weir to the gate at the junction of RB3. This can still be muddy after rain at its northern end. Continued use of recycled chippings could help to alleviate the problem further.
- Seats are a focus for litter. Are there enough bins, or is it time for removal of the bins on the basis that bins encourage more litter - an approach used by the National Trust at Sharpenhoe Clappers and elsewhere? Should the bins be emptied more frequently (the one near the entrance to the site on RB1 on the A600 is often overflowing).
- Dog fouling is a persistent problem throughout the site. Thought should be given to dog walkers who bag their dog's faeces and then hang the bag from a branch or throw it into a tree – which may be even worse than doing nothing. Is there any successful practice / signage elsewhere?

We understand that all actions are subject to financial constraints, but the approach of securing funding for such an important area has proved effective so far, and we look forward to continued progress and the publication of the draft GAP in the autumn.

Yours sincerely,

Bill Sellicks (Chairman)

## Notes

1. Right of way information is taken from the Web version of the Definitive Map for Hertfordshire at <http://webmaps.hertsdirect.org/row/row.htm>