

# **MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ROTHAMSTED PARK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

Held in the Council Chamber, Harpenden Town Council, Leyton Road, Harpenden on Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2011 at 7.00pm.

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## **Members In Attendance:**

Councillor Daniel Chichester-Miles (Chair) (Harpenden Town Council)  
Councillor Julie Bell (St Albans District Council)  
Councillor Chris Oxley (St Albans District Council)  
Councillor Steve Green (Harpenden Town Council)  
Councillor John Chambers (St Albans District Council)

## **Present:**

Andrew Smithard (Leisure Connection Ltd)  
Callum Goodall (John O'Conner (Grounds Maintenance) Ltd)  
Dorothy Mills (Local Resident)  
John Bagshaw (Harpenden Town Council)  
Les Crabtree (Harpenden Town Football Club)  
Ian Hunt (Harpenden Colts)  
Georgina Calle (Youth Town Council)  
Ellie Tyler (Youth Town Council)

## **Officers In Attendance:**

Jon Green (Parks and Green Spaces Manager)  
Ann Austin (Sports and Leisure Services Officer)  
Nick Sherriff (Parks and Green Spaces Officer)

## **Apologies:**

John Currie (Hertfordshire Orienteering Club)  
Pat Kent (Harpenden Town Council)  
Emma Payne (Youth Town Council)  
Councillor Mike Wakely (St Albans District Council)  
John Holley (Harpenden Town Council)

### 1. **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

In the temporary absence of a Chairman, Councillor Daniel Chichester-Miles was elected Chair for this meeting only.

### 2. **REPLACEMENT MEMBERS**

There were no replacement members.

3. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Management Committee held on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2010 were confirmed as read.

4. **NOTES AND ACTIONS FROM THIS MEETING**

a) **Harpenden Leisure Centre Oral Report:**

Andy Smithard, Business Manager, read out the report which is attached to the minutes (see Appendix 1).

b) **Parks Report (Appendix 2):**

The Committee considered the various items raised in the Parks report, and noted the following:

**(i) Environmental Study in the Park:**

The report by the Herts Biological Records Centre has highlighted some actions to be carried out to improve the park's various habitats, which are:

- to increase the size of existing summer meadow;
- to replant the hedge on the former field hedge boundary line;
- to relocate the trees planted in the meadow area over the last 5 years throughout less sensitive areas of the park; and
- possible improvements to the dell area through planting.

It was noted that these actions had been incorporated into the management plan actions.

**(ii) Skate Park:**

Harpenden Youth Town Council raised a number of items regarding the skate park for the Committee to note:

- HYTC are applying for funding to allow for improvements; and
- Officers gave an update regarding the issues that had been raised previously by HYTC.

**(iii) Green Flag:**

The judging of this year's Green Flag will take place in May 2011.

5. **Any Other Business:**

a) **Harpenden Town Football Club**

Les Crabtree informed the Committee that, due to funding issues, the plans for a new football clubhouse had now been put on hold. A new Chairman had

been appointed and has indicated that some funding is available to improve the current facilities. He also said that works on facilities needed to be carried out before the ground is graded by the FA. If it fails the inspection, HTFC may be relegated. Cllr Chichester-Miles suggested that a small working party be set up for discussions between SADC, HTC and HTFC to look at possible ways forward.

**Action:** Working party to be set up involving with key stakeholders.

**b) New Planters**

Cllr John Chambers questioned whether the planters at the Leyton Road entrance had been completed, as the standard of workmanship was poor. Nick Sherriff commented that they were not finished and unfortunately someone had driven into them as well. Nick Sherriff said he would get the Project Officer (Nik Khan) to ensure they were completed to a better standard. Cllr Chambers also said that he knew of a number of local businesses that would sponsor the beds.

**Action:** Jon Green to speak to Nik Khan regarding completing the works to a better standard and sponsorship and liaise with Cllr Chambers.

**c) Committee Papers by E-Mail**

Wherever possible, St Albans District Council would like to send out agendas, reports and minutes by e-mail. Hard copies would still be sent out to those who do not or cannot receive them electronically.

**d) Community Orchard**

The St Albans District Council would like to explore the possibility of planting a community orchard in the Park and look at possible funding avenues. The Committee supported the idea.

**e) Companies Using the Park**

The Committee agreed with the principle of charging companies who were profiting from using the park, but felt that care should be taken over this issue and groups who did not receive financial gain from the activities should be allowed to continue at no cost.

**6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> September 2011 in the Council Chamber, Harpenden Town Council, Leyton Road, Harpenden at 7.00pm.

The meeting ended at 7.50pm.

**(SIGNED)**

**CHAIRMAN**

***Harpenden Forum report March 2011***

***QUALITY***

The site has maintained and improved its high standards after being awarded Highly Commended status and an improved score of 81% in its recent Sport England Quest Audit, and being placed within the top 60 facilities in the country out of over 3000 centres on the scheme.

***STAFFING***

In terms of staffing we have had relatively little movement but we are pleased that Tom Shadbolt has been moved up from Fitness Instructor to Duty Manager following the departure of Gopalan in November. Alana Bates has been transferred from Westminster Lodge to take on the role of Part time Duty Manager and Children's Activities coordinator. Alana brings a great deal of operational knowledge which is fully expected to enhance the facility

Most other departments remain unchanged however as a site and industry we are continually recruiting part time lifeguards and receptionists.

***CAPITAL INVESTMENT AND MAINTENANCE***

16 new top of the range spinning cycles have been purchased costing in excess of £20k.

A new coffee bar operation has been installed at the pool site with hot and cold drinks and a range of healthy snacks being available throughout our opening times.

Additional tables and seating has been ordered and delivered for the wet site.

Working in partnership with SADC we have gained over £90k external funding from the Lawn tennis association to complete an upgrade to the external courts within the park which we expect to be completed over the coming months.

***CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES***

The crèche continues to be extremely successful and is often at capacity supporting our adult programme both at the pool and the main centre.

Children's courses are still running well with particularly the Gymnastics on a Saturday which has increased numbers attending each term.

## ***FITNESS***

The Gym and classes continue to be well utilized with over 3600 members paying a monthly subscription to the site. Utilization on most classes has been good and we hope to re-launch a new programme of classes toward the summer months.

Recent efforts to improve utilisation for target groups have been successful with over 50 students from Roundwood Park and St Georges School receiving discounted membership at the sites using funding from the Extended Opportunities fund. In addition to this we have also run dance sessions which target people aged over the 45 that have been equally successful this has been supported by the SAASH Development team a London Colney.

## ***SWIMMING***

Swim School has continued to thrive despite the economic downturn, with 92% utilisation, and many parents opting to take up private lessons in addition to their normal courses.

Some operational procedures have been adjusted following a review of health and safety, ensuring that all points of the pool can be seen by the lifeguards throughout the day, and particularly on summer days where we may have glare from the sunlight.

Casual swimming usage is continuing to grow with many users utilizing the Family fun sessions on the weekend and taking up the membership option.

## ***TENNIS***

The tennis programme has continued run over the winter months but we have suffered due to the weather because of the non-porous surface which is now in need of urgent replacement. The site has been awarded Beacon site status by the Lawn Tennis Association and we are in the process of devising an improved programme of sessions for the local community.

## ***MISCELLANEOUS***

The Sports Centre has continued to act as a point of call for First Aid incidents at the Skate Park and provided assistance where necessary.

## **Report to the Rothamsted Park Management Committee Meeting to be held on Tuesday 22nd March 2011**

### **Green Flag**

We have submitted the application for the Green Flag Award 2011. Last year's judges feedback is appended to the minutes of the previous meeting (attached), and this has been incorporated into the management plan/application where appropriate.

### **Sports areas**

Committee members are asked to report any concerns.

### **Play area**

A wall from a neighbouring property that was identified as potentially hazardous due to its instability, has been rebuilt by the house owner.

### **Environmental Study in the Park**

The Herts Biological Records Centre has undertaken a species and environmental survey of the Park in September, to look at existing habitats and report on possible improvements through management and maintenance of the site. The report is attached as *Appendix 1*.

In autumn a 50 metre swathe of meadow was scarified and planted with Yellow Rattle. Yellow Rattle is a parasitic plant that predated on coarse grasses and reduces its vigour allowing less competitive finer grasses and wildflowers to grow.

### **Landscaping**

#### The Rose Garden

The two central borders are to be sown this spring with a mixed annual flower seed as a trial. If successful this technique may be adopted in other beds across the district. This will be a more environmentally friendly way to provide annual bedding at this location as well saving money.

#### Leyton Road Entrance

To form part of a visual improvement and prevent car parking, a small patch of grass has been turned into a raised bed using oak sleepers and planted with shrubs.

#### Amenbury Lane entrance from the car park

The grass area has been reinstated and two raised shrub beds have been built using oak sleepers and planted with shrubs. A trellis has been installed on the wall and planted with climbers.

## **Skate Park**

As discussed at the last meeting, there were a number of issues regarding the skate park.

- Code of Practice sign to be moved
- John O'Conner to paint ramp with correct black paint, making sure not to paint coping and grind rail
- Nick Sherriff to organise site visit with SADC Technical Services Officer to look at tarmac lips.
- Other items would have to be discussed outside of the meeting due to budgetary implications.

The code of practice sign was moved to the new location, but has subsequently been stolen. John O'Conner will be painting the skate ramps with the correct paint in May (possibly before if weather permits). GBH Engineering has been appointed as the contractor to resurface the areas where the lips meet the tarmac. The other items raised at the last meeting have been discussed and possible solutions are being explored.

## **Use of Park by independent companies**

There has been an increase in private companies using the Park for exercise classes and personal training etc. Although SADC encourage the use of the Park by a wide range of people, it is felt that these companies are profiting from a free to use service. Officers are contacting these companies when they become known to us to allow us to regulate them, check insurance details and obtain a fee from them to use the Park. Money obtained will be reinvested into the Park.

HABITAT SURVEY  
 ROTHAMSTED PARK  
 27 SEPT 2010  
 M HICKS MBRC

SPECIES CODES

- Fe... Ash
- Or... Pedunculate oak
- Ap... Sycamore
- Ac... Field maple
- Ca... Hazel
- Sh... Elder
- Ilex... Holly
- Tilia... Lime
- Ah... Horse chestnut
- Up... English elm
- Ps... Blackthorn
- Cm... Hawthorn
- Cb... Hornbeam
- Sorbus... Rowan
- Psy... Scots pine
- Salix... Willow sp.



SCATTERED TREES



RUDERAL VEGETATION



SCRUB



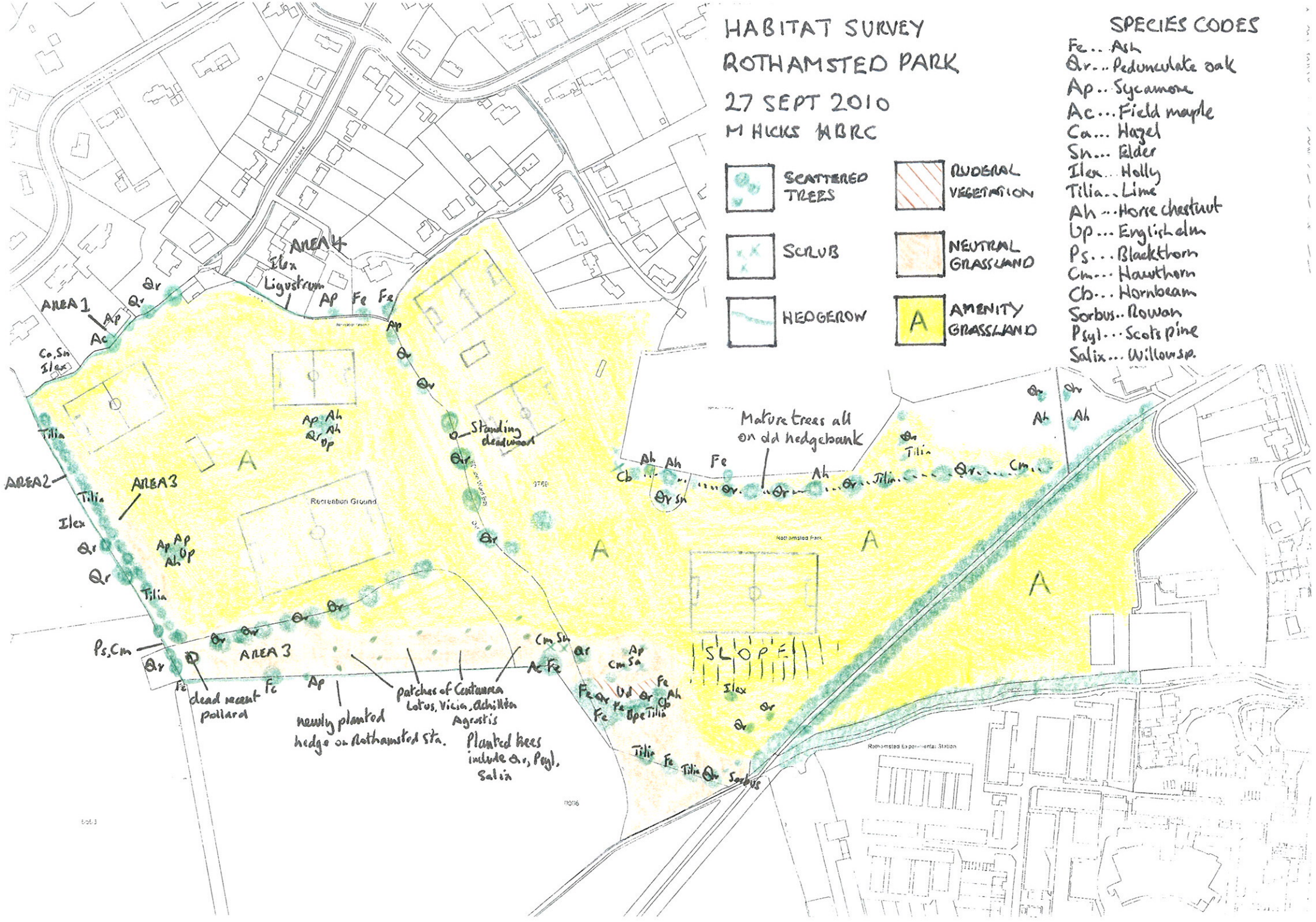
NEUTRAL GRASSLAND



HEDGEROW



AMENITY GRASSLAND



## Appendix 1

**Habitat Survey**  
**Rothamsted Park,**  
**Rothamsted**  
**Date: 27 Sept 2010**  
**M J Hicks, HBRC**

### **Target notes to accompany Habitat Map**

#### **Area 1 - hedgerow west of Orchard Avenue pavilion**

Mature *Quercus robur* over trimmed hedgerow, dominated by *Ilex aquifolium* with *Rubus fruticosus*. Mature *Acer campestre* and *Acer pseudoplatanus* then hedge coniferised. Towards the end it becomes semi-natural again, with *Corylus avellana*, *Prunus avium*, *Quercus robur*, *Ilex aquifolium*, *Sambucus nigra* over *Urtica dioica*.

#### **Area 2 - western boundary**

Hedgerow dominated for the most part by *Ilex aquifolium*, also with *Corylus avellana*, *Sambucus nigra*, *Prunus spinosa* and *Crataegus monogyna* with *Rubus fruticosus*, some mature *Quercus robur* – including dead ?self-pollard, small *Fraxinus excelsior* R, *Rosa canina*. Adjacent ground flora includes *Hedera helix*, *Urtica dioica*, *Lamium album*, *Borago officinalis*, *Anthriscus sylvestris*, *Stachys sylvatica*.

Adjacent avenue of mature *Tilia x europea*.

#### **Area 3 - neutral grassland**

This rough grassland is found in a thin strip along the western edge of the park and a wider strip along the southern edge. Species include *Dactylis glomerata* F-A, *Lolium perenne* A, *Agrostis* sp O-LA, *Phleum pratense* O, *Achillea millefolium* O, *Cerastium fontanum* R, *Taraxacum officinale* R-O, *Crepis capilaris* R, *Odontites verna* R-O, *Vicia hirsuta* R, *Centaurea nigra* R – O/F, *Plantago major* LF, *Rumex obtusifolius* O, *Heracleum sphondylium* O, *Plantago lanceolata* R, *Anthriscus sylvestris* O, *Trifolium repens* LF, *Ranunculus repens* LF, *Galium mollugo* R, *Lotus corniculatus* O, *Stellaria graminea* O, ?*Malva sylvestris* O, *Veronica chamaedrys* R, *Ranunculus acris* R.

The bulk of the remainder of the open ground within the site consists of species-poor amenity grassland. It is difficult to determine its full potential given the current management regime, however it is possible that some areas could develop as outlined above if left to grow.

Standing deadwood in SW corner with abundant wood-boring insect damage. Fallen deadwood beneath live *Quercus*. Hedge bordering Rothamsted includes *Crataegus monogyna*, *Cornus sanguinea*, *Corylus avellana*, *Malus sylvestris*.

Planted trees (saplings) over rough grassland include *Quercus robur*, *Pinus sylvestris* and *Salix sp.*

Dell area consists largely of rank grassland dominated by *Dactylis glomerata* with scattered *Betula pendula*, *Acer platanoides*, *Sorbus aria*, *Crataegus monogyna*. It has a ruderal vegetation edge, generally dominated by *Urtica dioica* and also including *Heracleum sphondylium*, *Rubus fruticosus*, *Ranunculus repens*. The scrub and trees around the southern edge of the dell include *Fraxinus excelsior*, *Aesculus hippocastanum*, *Quercus robur*, *Carpinus betulus*, *Tilia europea*, *Betula pendula*,

The woodland edge of the adjacent Park itself is largely dominated by *Quercus robur*, with *Fraxinus excelsior* over *Urtica dioica* and *Rubus fruticosus*.

The conifer screen within the public park includes *Sambucus nigra* and *Ilex aquifolium*.

#### **Area 4 - Northern boundary hedgerow**

Adjacent hedgerow at top end includes is dominated by *Ligustrum sp* and includes *Ilex aquifolium*, *Ulmus procera*, *Acer pseudoplatanus*, *Crataegus monogyna*, *Fraxinus excelsior*, *Quercus robur*, *Prunus spinosa*.

Tree lines across park. These are remnants of former hedgerows and include old features in places such as hedgebanks. Generally dominated by mature *Quercus robur*, with *Aesculus hippocastanum*, *Tilia x europea*, *Fraxinus excelsior*, *Carpinus betulus* (R), *Sambucus nigra*. One old tree in the middle of the park with standing deadwood contains frequent woodpecker holes. Associated scrub includes *Crataegus monogyna*.

#### **Summary**

Rothamsted Park includes areas of both formal and informal character. The main formal landscaping is reflected in the avenues of planted trees – largely lime – that border the western edge and the former avenue towards the historic Rothamsted Park. Most of the semi-natural tree lines – mainly oak – are on old field boundaries. These tree lines also support mature trees which valuable features of the site. Their ecology could be enhanced if the grassland between the trees and in strips along both their edges was allowed to grow to reinforce these features and create more of a wildlife corridor within the site instead of a row of scattered trees.

Surviving boundary hedges are a mixture of old field hedges, garden boundaries or recent planting. The historic NW – SE boundary feature leading to the Dell could be planted with oaks, completing a wildlife corridor across the site. This is a more ecologically appropriate location for new tree planting than the unimproved grassland outlined below.

The majority of the open grasslands are amenity grasslands which are regularly mown, within which are scattered football pitches of various sizes as well as cricket squares and other facilities. Although not surveyed in detail these appear relatively species poor, although if left to grow could improve. Although the park is not within an urban area, it is located on the urban fringe of Harpenden and provides many formal sporting and leisure facilities. Consequently there is limited scope for ecological enhancement of most of the grassland.

However, along the western and half of the southern boundary, wide strips of grassland have been allowed to develop. These are reasonably interesting in places and continued appropriate management may help to improve their botanical interest. They support characteristic neutral grassland communities including bent grasses, black knapweed, bird's-foot trefoil, yarrow, lesser stitchwort and meadow buttercup. It was not clear from the survey as to whether such areas are cut or whether the cuttings were removed. However the newly planted scattered saplings planted within this grassland along the southern edge are found in perhaps the best grassland area and are not conducive to the long term maintenance of this open grassland. Most if not all should be removed if the grassland interest here is to be maintained in the longer term.

Despite the amenity use there remains considerable scope for increasing the extent of this wildflower grassland without affecting any of the formal sports pitches. It could be widened to incorporate the clump of Sycamore and Horse chestnut along the western edge and broadened to reach the former hedgeline towards the southern boundary. Longer grassland could also be continued to border the Dell area and be allowed to develop to the east on the slope between the Avenue and the football pitch to the north (see map).

The grassland on the south-eastern side of the Avenue is currently amenity mown, closer to the urban area and somewhat separated from the main body of the park to the west. As such it is probably best being retained as amenity grassland.

It would be important to cut and remove all such areas of long grass, if not every year, at least every other year on rotation. This should secure the ecological gains of the structural diversity of grassland without losing any such area to scrub encroachment or requiring all of the cuttings to be disposed of in one operation. It is unlikely anyone would want the hay due to the impacts of dogs, so cutting half for removal may reduce this burden in any one summer.

Although mature most of the trees are not in senescence and with appropriate management should continue to mature into older or possibly veteran trees in due course. They should be managed with this – and public safety – in mind.

M Hicks  
HBRC 17/1/11