

CHIGWELL PARISH COUNCIL
OFFICER REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL
COURTLAND DRIVE AND BIODIVERSITY MANAGEMENT REVIEW

Date: 24 September 2026

Purpose of Report

To provide Members with an overview of the Council's current biodiversity management arrangements, review the effectiveness of the existing approach across Council-owned open spaces, and seek Member direction on the future management of these areas.

Background

Members will recall that concerns were raised regarding the appearance and maintenance of Courtland Drive. Whilst the original enquiry related specifically to this location, officers considered it appropriate to undertake a wider review of all Council-owned open spaces where biodiversity management practices have been introduced.

Courtland Drive Meadow comprises approximately 2.112 acres, of which approximately 0.8 acres is grassland, and 1.312 acres comprises trees, scrub and rough land. The site has been managed in accordance with the Council's Biodiversity Policy. A Biodiversity Management Plan prepared in August 2023 identified the site as suitable for rough grassland management to support wildlife habitats and ecological diversity.

The review has identified that many of the challenges experienced at Courtland Drive are also evident elsewhere throughout the Parish. These include resident concerns regarding appearance and accessibility, fly-tipping, litter accumulation, dog fouling, increased maintenance demands and difficulties in measuring whether biodiversity objectives are being successfully achieved.

Findings

The Council's current biodiversity approach has sought to balance environmental enhancement with the amenity value of public open space. Whilst there is anecdotal evidence that biodiversity may have improved at some locations, there is currently no formal ecological monitoring data available to demonstrate the extent of these benefits.

The review identified several operational challenges:

- Long grass can conceal litter, fly-tipping and evidence of antisocial behaviour.
- The Council's current equipment is not designed to collect and remove large volumes of arisings generated by meadow-style management.
- Maintaining multiple biodiversity areas across the Parish creates additional resource and maintenance pressures.
- Extended periods of hot weather have increased grass fire risks and impacted operational maintenance schedules.

- Resident expectations often differ between biodiversity areas and traditional amenity open spaces.

In addition, many sites within residential areas are primarily used as amenity space and residents generally expect these locations to be maintained to a higher visual and operational standard.

It should also be recognised that biodiversity is not solely dependent upon long grass management. Mature trees, hedgerows, scrub margins and established planting provide significant ecological benefits by offering food sources, shelter and nesting opportunities for birds, pollinators and other wildlife.

Officer Review

Having reviewed all Council-owned sites, officers consider that the current approach of distributing biodiversity management across numerous locations may not represent the most effective use of Council resources.

A more focused approach would enable biodiversity enhancements to be concentrated within a principal site, providing clearer management objectives, improved monitoring opportunities, better public understanding and more efficient use of staff and equipment.

Under such an approach, the following sites would primarily be maintained as amenity grassland:

- Woodland Road
- Tomswood Hill
- St Mary's
- Lee Grove
- Brook Rise
- Brook Parade and Barnaby Way
- Parish Office Grounds

Station Green would continue to receive a balanced approach combining amenity use with selective biodiversity measures where appropriate, reflecting its role as a prominent community space.

Members should also note that remedial works are planned at the Limes Farm Biodiversity Plot during October in conjunction with repairs to the adjacent damaged wall. Associated tree works are also scheduled, as overgrown trees and root systems are considered likely contributors to the deterioration of the structure.

Upon completion of these works, the Open Spaces Supervisor and Clerk will inspect the site and assess future options. These may include retaining the area in its current form, undertaking clearance works and re-letting the plot, or enhancing and retaining it as a dedicated biodiversity area. Given existing operational priorities, any substantial changes are unlikely to be progressed until the next financial year.

Officer Conclusion

Although this review originated from concerns relating to Courtland Drive, it has highlighted wider issues affecting biodiversity management across several Council-owned sites. The current approach creates competing demands between biodiversity objectives, operational practicality and resident expectations.

Officers consider that concentrating biodiversity initiatives within a single principal location like the field to the rear of the library and parish offices, would provide greater opportunities for habitat enhancement, environmental education and effective ecological monitoring. At the same time, it would allow other open spaces to be maintained to a standard more consistent with their primary amenity function and the expectations of local residents.

Recommendation

Members are requested to consider whether future biodiversity enhancement and monitoring activities should be focused primarily within a dedicated biodiversity area, whilst returning other residential open spaces to a more traditional amenity grass-cutting regime.

Members should note that such an approach would not remove biodiversity value from other locations, as mature trees, hedgerows, scrub margins and existing habitat features would remain in place and continue to support wildlife throughout the Parish.

Focusing biodiversity management within a principal location could provide:

- Clearer management objectives.
- Improved public accessibility and appearance.
- Reduced complaints relating to long grass management.
- Greater deterrence against littering and fly-tipping.
- More effective monitoring and measurement of biodiversity outcomes.
- More efficient use of Council resources and equipment.

Should Members support a revised approach, officers could prepare an updated Biodiversity Management Strategy together with site-specific maintenance schedules, resource requirements and associated cost implications for future consideration.

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