

**ITCHEN VALLEY COUNTRY PARK
MANAGEMENT PLAN, 2008 - 2013**

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VISION FOR ITCHEN VALLEY COUNTRY PARK

Itchen Valley Country Park will provide opportunities for Borough residents and other visitors to take part in informal recreation, have contact with nature, and learn about environmental issues in high quality surroundings.

To achieve this vision we will:

- Ensure the park is clean, safe and well maintained
- Provide high quality opportunities and facilities for recreation and access which respect the natural habitats and species found within the park
- Ensure the park is welcoming and provide high standards of Customer Care
- Minimise the park's impact on the environment by incorporating sustainable management practices
- Provide events and activities which enable visitors to learn about local and global environmental issues and encourage them to live more sustainably.
- Increase the value of the park for nature conservation by protecting and managing natural habitats and species.
- Develop and manage the Country Park to Green Flag standards.
- Encourage the widest possible range of visitors by identifying and where possible removing barriers to access.
- Enable visitors and the local community to take part in the management and development of the Country Park.
- Make the most efficient and effective use of the available resources.
- Seek continuous improvement in all these aspects of the park's management.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Itchen Valley Country Park provides a range of facilities and opportunities for the local community and visitors from farther afield to take part in informal recreation and have contact with nature in an area of significant nature conservation importance. Visitor facilities include an exhibition area, café, gift shop, classroom/ meeting room, public toilets, pay and display car parks, waymarked trails, two play areas, barbecues and many smaller facilities.

The park has been open for 20 years, and following major capital investment in a new building in 2007, a significant programme of renewals and improvements is under way to raise the quality of all the facilities to meet the expectations of visitors. To mark its commitment to the park and in order to achieve recognition for the quality of the site, the Council is entering the site for the Green Flag award in 2009.

This plan is a key part of the assessment process for the award, but is also be a working document, which sets out the aims and objectives for the park, and helps to translate them into actions planned for the amenity areas of the park in particular, in an accessible form.

The aims and objectives for the country park are as set out below:

<u>Aim</u>	<u>Related objectives</u>
To provide open space, facilities and activities to enable the residents of Eastleigh and visitors from further afield to have contact with nature and learn about environmental issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signage is necessary and useful, and consistent in design • The main visitor areas will be accessible to the widest possible range of users. • Obtain visitor feedback on the condition and quality of facilities and services • Consult visitors and the community on major developments and new facilities • Maintain or increase levels of volunteer support • Increase awareness of the Country Park among all potential user groups • Ensure signs and written materials present a consistent image
To ensure the country park is clean, safe and maintained to a high standard.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use safety and risk management processes to keep accidents to staff and visitors at the lowest possible levels. • Minimise the risk that park staff and visitors will be the victims of crime • The main entrance and approaches to car parks, High Wood Barn and High Hill Field are maintained to a high standard. • Maintain high standards of arboriculture, horticulture, site cleanliness, grounds and building maintenance • Develop a programme for maintenance, repairs and

	renewals within the context of the Council's asset management plan.
To achieve sustainability in the use of resources, land and the environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimise the amount of waste generated at the park which goes to landfill • Minimise the use of pesticides • Reduce carbon emissions by reducing energy consumption and making maximum use of renewable energy sources • Reduce consumption of water and other natural resources.
To protect conserve and enhance biodiversity and other features of interest in the country park	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain or enhance populations of priority species and the condition of priority habitats found within the park • Protect and conserve significant historical and archaeological features
To operate the park as efficiently as possible and make maximum use of the resources available.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To retain and develop a team of staff with the capacity, experience and skills needed to manage the country park • Record and make use of relevant performance management information • Improve customer service and make more efficient use of staff time by keeping business processes under review • Improve financial efficiency by reducing costs and increasing income, and when necessary seek additional funding for new initiatives • Increase the quantity of information and services which are available electronically • Standardise the designs of seating and other site furniture used within the Country Park.

Elsewhere in the plan these objectives are also linked to the Green Flag assessment criteria.

The plan then describes and assesses various aspects of the way the park is managed, and its physical features and facilities, and identifies actions required in order to achieve the objectives for the park in relation to each. The full list of actions, with related timescales and budgets, is then set out in tabular form at the end of plan to enable easy monitoring. Some of the key actions are listed below in relation to each aspect of the site and its management.

THE COUNTRYSIDE SERVICE

1) Staff resources and roles

- Recruit and retain suitably skilled and experienced staff.
- Review team structure and roles in light of changing demands on the service.

- Review routine site maintenance work with Direct Services Streetscene section.

2) Performance Management Systems

- Submit management plan as part of Green Flag assessment from 2009 onwards.
- Monitor progress against the action plan contained in this management plan.
- Work with local authorities to identify good practice and generate benchmarking information

3) Financial resources

- Implement actions to increase income as part of the Council's efficiency strategy.
- Contribute to the Council review of budgets for asset management.
- Seek sponsorship for ongoing services and activities.
- Maximise grant funding from partner organisations.

4) Health and safety

- Complete review of Safe systems of work and COSHH assessments.
- Secure funding for baseline condition survey of trees in high priority areas of country park.

5) Environmental management

- Provide new better designed litter bins for recyclable materials.
- Incorporate energy efficient systems and technologies when making repairs/ renewals to buildings.

6) Marketing

- Upgrade IT link to IVCP.
- Add live information from IVCP to Council website, e.g. nestcams, weather information.
- Replace events information and notice boards.

7) Community involvement and partnerships

- Carry out new in-depth visitor survey.
- Maintain support and improve the effectiveness of the volunteer group

8) Habitats

- Complete management plan for water-meadows
- Enter water-meadows into Higher Level Stewardship scheme.
- Complete woodland management plan
- Enter woodlands into Higher Level Stewardship scheme.
- Enter grasslands/ meadows into Higher Level Stewardship scheme.
- Investigate partnership projects with the Grasslands Trust.
- Control invasive/ non-native species in ponds.

9) Infrastructure

- Install cycle racks at High Wood Barn and High Hill play area

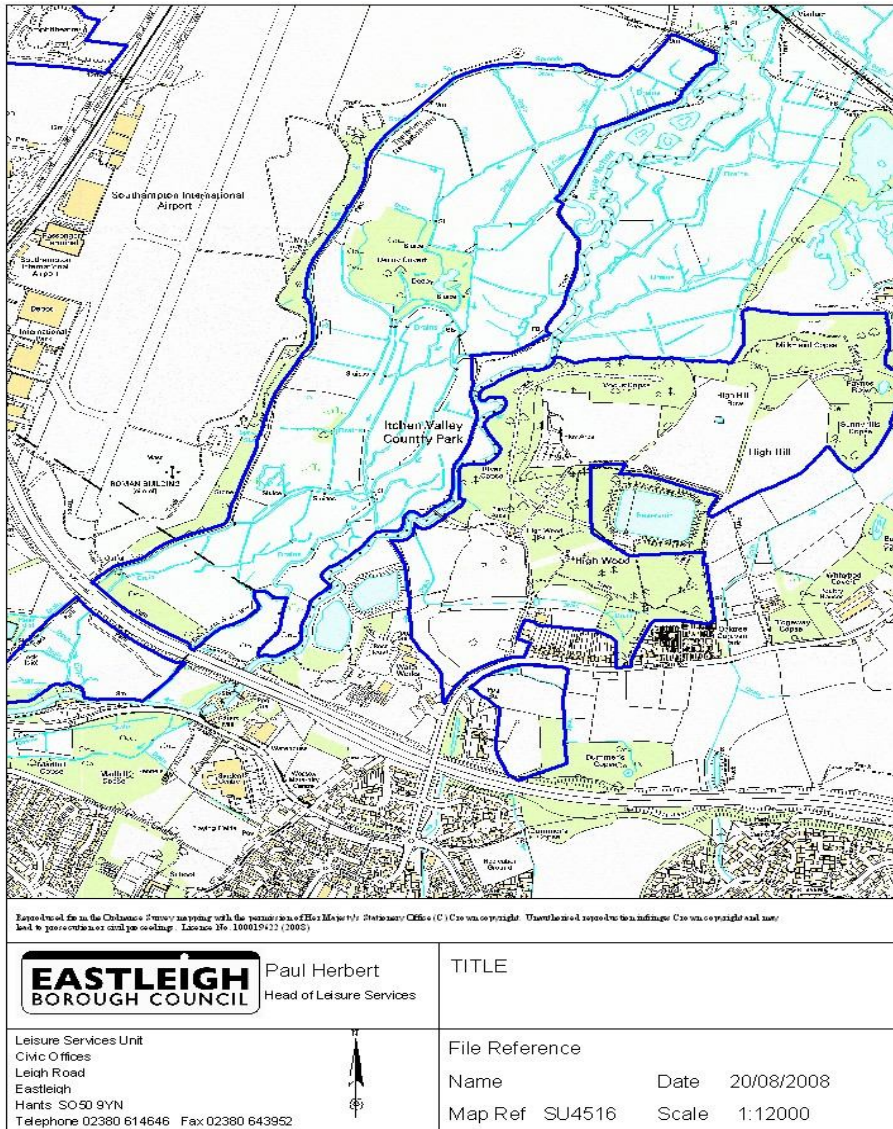
- Investigate opportunities to enhance play areas
- Review signage and implement rolling programme of renewals, including signs at main entrance
- Instigate rolling renewal programme for picnic benches.
- Investigate opportunities for funding improvements and extension of all-weather car parks.

10) Grounds maintenance

- Review and amend maintenance specifications.

INTRODUCTION

Itchen Valley Country Park is located off Allington Lane in West End in the Borough of Eastleigh, and comprises 182 hectares of land either side of the river Itchen; 100 ha of watermeadows west of the river, and 82 ha of woodland and meadows east of the river. The site is owned and managed by Eastleigh Borough Council and was opened to the public in 1987.



High Wood Barn was built in 1990 providing the country park with a visitor centre and display/education area. The building was extended in 1993 to add a café and offices for staff.

In 2007 the new Kingfisher Barn was opened, containing the Kingfisher Room and new public toilets. The room is used as a teaching facility for local schools and groups, for community use, and for hire by other organisations.

Itchen Valley Country Park provides space for informal outdoor recreation and a range of formal activities to enable visitors to experience nature and learn about environmental issues.

The Council aims to provide a high quality, accessible and responsive service benefiting the residents of Eastleigh and visitors from further afield.

Council Reporting and Management Structure

The Cabinet

Provides a clear sense of direction, sets the corporate strategy and priorities, and oversees the management of the organisation and political leadership and vision, within portfolio responsibilities allocated by the Council. The work at Itchen Valley Country Park falls within the Environment and Leisure portfolios.

The Council's purpose is to create a great quality of life for all local people through its strategic priorities, which are:

- A green Borough, safeguarding our environment for future generations.
- A prosperous place where business can flourish and everyone is able to share in prosperity.
- A healthy community, active and lively with a spirit of community togetherness, health and wellbeing.

The priorities of greatest relevance to the management of the country park are "A green Borough" and "A healthy community"

Scrutiny Panels

Review and scrutinise decisions or actions taken in respect of any functions which are the responsibility of the Cabinet in relation to the relevant portfolio areas. Management and operation of the country park would be scrutinised by the Environment, and Community Wellbeing scrutiny panels.

Local Area Committees

Have devolved responsibility for many services including countryside management, and ensure local decisions take consideration of the community strategy, corporate strategy, and council priorities, and are within budget. The Hedge End West End and Botley Local Area Committees has devolved responsibility for the areas of the park to which this plan chiefly relates, including woodland, car parks, play areas and public buildings.

The Local Area Co-ordinator works with members to ensure that they are aware of local perspectives that may need to be referred to Cabinet. The Hedge End West End and Botley (HEWEB) local area committee is very committed to supporting the Country Park and has a members' working group which meets at least twice a year as part of the Country Parks management structure.

Countryside and Trees Unit

The unit includes the Countryside Service, which manages the Borough's country parks and other countryside sites. The management structure of the Countryside and Trees unit is shown at Appendix A. The head of unit has a high degree of delegated responsibility for managing services, and works closely with portfolio and local area committee members.

ITCHEN VALLEY COUNTRY PARK - MANAGEMENT AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Management of the country park is governed by the overall long term aims for the site, which are in turn related to the council's strategic priorities. The aims for the country park are:

- To provide open space, facilities and activities to enable the residents of Eastleigh and visitors from further afield to have contact with nature and learn about environmental issues.
- To ensure the country park is clean, safe and maintained to a high standard.
- To achieve sustainability in the use of resources, land and the environment.
- To prepare and maintain a management plan for the country park.
- To protect conserve and enhance biodiversity and other features of interest in the country park
- To operate the park as efficiently as possible and make maximum use of the resources available.

To achieve these aims, a number of objectives have been set for each, which below are shown linked to the criteria for the Green flag Award - the national standard for quality in green space management, as set out below. In the description and analysis of the management and features of the country park which follows, specific management actions are identified to help achieve each objective.

Green Flag Criteria	Objectives
A Welcoming place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The main entrance and approaches to car parks, High Wood Barn and High Hill Field are maintained to a high standard. • Signage is necessary and useful, and consistent in design • The main visitor areas will be accessible to the widest possible range of users.
Healthy, Safe and Secure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use safety and risk management processes to keep accidents to staff and visitors at the lowest possible levels. • Minimise the risk that park staff and visitors will be the victims of crime
Clean and well maintained	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain high standards of arboriculture, horticulture, site cleanliness, grounds and building maintenance • Develop a programme for maintenance, repairs and renewals within the context

	<p>of the Council's asset management plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standardise the designs of seating and other site furniture used within the Country Park.
Environmental sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimise the amount of waste generated at the park which goes to landfill • Minimise the use of pesticides • Reduce carbon emissions by reducing energy consumption and making maximum use of renewable energy sources • Reduce consumption of water and other natural resources.
Conservation and heritage and nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain or enhance populations of priority species and the condition of priority habitats found within the park • Protect and conserve significant historical and archaeological features
Community Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain visitor feedback on the condition and quality of facilities and services • Consult visitors and the community on major developments and new facilities • Maintain or increase levels of volunteer support
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase awareness of the Country Park among all potential user groups • Ensure signs and written materials present a consistent image • Increase the quantity of information and services which are available electronically
Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To retain and develop a team of staff with the capacity, experience and skills needed to manage the country park • Record and make use of relevant performance management information • Improve customer service and make more efficient use of staff time by keeping business processes under review • Improve financial efficiency by reducing costs and increasing income, and when necessary seek additional funding for new initiatives

SITE/ SERVICE DESCRIPTION AND IDENTIFICATION OF FUTURE ACTIONS

1) Staff resources and roles

Itchen Valley Country Park is managed by the Countryside Manager and Visitor services Manager, who report to the Head of Countryside and Trees. The Countryside Manager delegates much site management to the two Countryside Officers, who are assisted by one permanent and one seasonal countryside ranger. The visitor centre, Kingfisher Barn, events and activities and interpretation are managed the Visitor Services Manager, two part-time Visitor Services Officers plus Information Assistants and casual staff.

General routine site maintenance is undertaken by the Streetscene section of the Council's Direct Services Unit in accordance with the grounds maintenance specification, and the countryside officers and rangers undertake more specialised duties.

Each member of staff has an annual work plan which acts as a framework within which work is undertaken, and they are able to supplement and vary this programme in the light of prevailing conditions in consultation with their manager. This gives staff pride in their work as they have more control over what needs to be undertaken and when they do it.

Also there is a dedicated group of volunteers who carryout a variety of maintenance tasks under the direction of a ranger. Working with the volunteers provides not only access to volunteer knowledge and practical support, but has also led to other opportunities for projects and initiatives.

Objective	Management action
To retain and develop a team of staff with the capacity, experience and skills needed to manage the country park.	1.1 Recruit and retain suitably skilled and experienced staff. 1.2 Review team structure and roles in light of changing demands on the service.
Maintain high standards of arboriculture, horticulture, site cleanliness, grounds and building maintenance.	1.3 Review routine site maintenance work with Direct Services Streetscene section.

2) Performance Management Systems

The Countryside and Trees Unit manages its business in a quality manner, and the performance of the countryside service and the country park is monitored in a number of ways to ensure that customer, and internal/ external statutory and regulatory requirements are met. These currently include:

- Monitoring progress against staff individual work plans.

- Internal and external audits of income/ expenditure and processes.
- Scheduled site inspection regimes.
- Customer feedback cards.
- Monitoring performance against local indicators through the Council's QPR performance management system.
- Reports to the Hedge End West End and Botley members working group on countryside issues.

It is important that methods and standards for performance management are kept under review, and new opportunities and requirements incorporated when appropriate.

The countryside service is also working with other local authority countryside services to identify good practice and produce benchmarking information.

Objective	Management action
Record and make use of relevant performance management information.	2.1 Review measures and targets on QPR system. 2.2 Introduce annual assessment of the country park against NI197 (management of local sites). 2.3 Monitor progress against the action plan contained in this management plan. 2.4 Submit management plan as part of Green Flag assessment from 2009 onwards.
Improve customer service and make more efficient use of staff time by keeping business processes under review.	2.5 Work with local authorities to identify good practice and generate benchmarking information.

3) Financial resources

Since 2005/06 revenue expenditure and income for Itchen Valley Country Park has been as follows:

YEAR	GROSS EXPENDITURE £	TOTAL INCOME £	NET EXPENDITURE £
2005/06 actual	338,754	111,096	227,658
2006/07 actual	365,634	123,928	241,706
2007/08 actual	390,192	149,598	240,594
2008/09 Budget	391,940	114,890	227,050

Day to day monitoring and control of the budgets is the responsibility of the Countryside Manager and Visitor Services Manager, who delegate responsibility for some budgets to other staff. The budgets for the country park are set and reviewed annually taking into account the needs of the service and the Council's overall financial position and budget strategy, which

at present requires costs to be minimised and income to be increased wherever possible.

In 2007/08 and 2008/09 HEWEB area committee invested £60,000 of capital expenditure in the Country Park to undertake improvements, showing the committee's commitment to ensuring that the Country Park has a high standard of visitor facilities. Further capital improvements may be funded in this way, and it is important that revenue budgets for maintenance are sufficient to maintain new and improved facilities in good condition on an ongoing basis.

Objective	Management action
Improve financial efficiency by reducing costs and increasing income, and when necessary seek additional funding for new initiatives.	3.1 Implement actions to increase income as part of the Council's efficiency strategy. 3.2. Seek sponsorship for ongoing services and activities. 3.3. Maximise grant funding from partner organisations.
Develop a programme for maintenance, repairs and renewals within the context of the Council's asset management plan	3.4 Contribute to the Council review of budgets for asset management.

4) Health and safety

The Council's Country Park is both a place of work and a public place. Health and safety issues apply to both the workforce and visitors. Two principal items of health and safety law which apply are the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, although many other specific pieces of legislation are also applicable.

Under the 1974 Act and various regulations, the Council has a statutory duty to ensure the health, safety and welfare of their employees and others. We must maintain a safe place of work, safe equipment and safe systems of work, and employ competent people who will not pose a safety risk to themselves or others.

To do this, the main systems currently in place include:

- Scheduled site inspections at various frequencies.
- Risk assessments for all tasks, facilities and events, which are reviewed annually or immediately after an accident to see if anything can be done to prevent further incidents.
- Ensuring staff are suitably trained and use appropriate personal protective equipment.

A number of other systems and processes are in need of review or updating.

Objective	Management action
Use safety and risk management processes to keep accidents to staff and visitors at the lowest possible levels.	4.1 Place details of completed site inspections on notice boards. 4.2 Complete review of Safe systems of work and COSHH assessments. 4.3 Introduce annual safety inspection by Countryside Services Manager and Council's Health and Safety Officer.
Maintain high standards of arboriculture, horticulture, site cleanliness, grounds and building maintenance.	4.4 Secure funding for baseline condition survey of trees in high priority areas of country park.

5) Environmental management

In line with the Council's strategic priority for the environment, in managing the country park, the countryside service wishes to minimise its environmental impact and that of its visitors, particularly in relation to resource use and waste minimisation.

Managing and operating the country park uses resources including:

- Fuel oil and electricity for heating, lighting and catering
- Water for drinking and flushing toilets.
- Materials and equipment for construction and maintenance of facilities and site furniture
- Fuel for vehicles and powered equipment
- Pesticides for maintenance and management operations.

High Wood Barn and the Kingfisher Barn have had sustainable technologies added or built into them to reduce energy and water consumption. Scope for major new initiatives is limited, but some systems could be improved.

Under normal circumstances formal planting areas are not watered, but raised beds may be subject to drought stress during periods of dry weather.

Materials and equipment use energy and raw materials in their manufacture and transport, and efforts are made to use recycled or renewable materials from local sources.

The Council's vehicles all run on diesel and use a 5% biodiesel mixture.

Pesticide use is already limited to use of glyphosate based herbicides for vegetation control, but alternative methods should be sought to reduce pesticide use further if possible.

Managing and operating the country park also generates waste in the following forms:

- Packaging from materials used or sold in the café and visitor centre.

- Litter left by visitors.
- Sewage from the visitor centre and Kingfisher Barn.
- Green waste arising from some grounds maintenance and habitat management operations, and clearing fly-tipping.

Recyclable waste generated by the countryside service is separated and collected by the Council's waste collection service. Visitors are encouraged to dispose of recyclable packaging bought at the visitor centre (cans and plastic bottles) in separate bins within the centre.

Visitors are encouraged to take their litter home, and litter bins are only provided in the immediate vicinity of the visitor centre. Removal of litter from the site is carried out by the Streetscene service and countryside staff, in line with the Environmental Protection Act (Duty of Care) Regulations 1991, and for the purpose of litter collection, Itchen Valley Country Park is designated Category 2 zone under the code of practice issued by the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). Recyclable materials are not currently separated out from litter collected from the site.

Sewage is disposed of to a tank, emptied regularly by a licensed contractor, the volume of waste being largely dictated by water consumption.

Arisings from woodland management are used or left on site. The countryside service currently has little demand for chipped/ shredded/ composted material, so although small amounts of green waste are chipped/ shredded and reused, the majority of green waste is stored and allowed to decay on site, or disposed of to landfill.

The countryside service also aims to encourage visitors and the local community to live more sustainably and reduce their impact on the environment. We do this in the following ways:

- Making issues such as climate change and energy conservation themes in on-site interpretation.
- Providing information about the sustainable technologies used on site.
- Promoting the Kingfisher Room and outdoor facilities for use by schools.
- Organising events and activities with environmental themes.

Objective	Management action
Minimise the amount of waste generated at the park which goes to landfill.	5.1. Provide new better designed litter bins for recyclable materials.
Minimise the use of pesticides.	5.2. Seek alternatives to herbicides to control weeds on paved areas.
Reduce carbon emissions by reducing energy consumption and making maximum use of	5.3. Incorporate energy efficient systems and technologies when making repairs/ renewals to buildings.

renewable energy sources.	
Reduce consumption of water and other natural resources.	5.4. Limit use of outdoor taps to school parties only. 5.5 Ensure new planting scheme for raised beds incorporates drought-resistant species and mulch to control weeds and retain moisture.

6) Marketing

Promoting and maintaining a high profile for the country park is crucial in achieving the aims and objectives of the site, particularly enabling visitors and the community to have contact with nature, raising their awareness of environmental issues, and improving its financial performance. Most of the the park’s visitors come from the southern parishes of Eastleigh and the east side of Southampton, but it also attracts visitors from further afield. Marketing and promotion is currently carried out in the following ways:

- Promotional leaflets about the parks and events/ activities distributed through external outlets including libraries etc
- Advertising in publications aimed at the park’s target audiences, particularly families with children;
- Specific advertising of larger events;
- Through the Council’s website;
- On-site promotion of facilities and forthcoming events.
- Press/ media releases about events, new attractions and facilities.

The existing IT link to the park means “live” information from the park cannot currently be placed on the Council’s website to raise interest in the park itself.

Although information about the park on the Council’s website is good, there is little information about its facilities which could be of use to council staff on the internal intranet.

Other Council units have good links to local businesses which could be used better to promote the park’s facilities.

On-site signs giving information about facilities and events are in some cases in poor condition and of variable design.

Objective	Management action
Increase awareness of the Country Park among all potential user groups	6.1 Use the Council’s viewpoint survey to monitor awareness of the park and its facilities. 6.2. Work with the Council’s economic development team to promote the park, particularly the Kingfisher Barn to local businesses. 6.3. Promote the Kingfisher room as a venue for meetings/ training to other Council units, particularly HR.

Ensure signs and written materials present a consistent image	6.4. Replace events information and notice boards.
Increase the quantity of information and services which are available electronically	6.5. Upgrade IT link to IVCP. 6.6. Add live information from IVCP to Council website, e.g. nestcams, weather information. 6.7 Add information about facilities of interest to staff to the Council's intranet.

7 Community involvement and partnerships

The countryside service currently involves the local community and its partners in the running and development of the park in a variety of ways, including:

- Users' views about the quality of service and facilities are sought through feedback cards on an ongoing basis.
- From time to time users are consulted through questionnaires and their views sought on areas for improvement.
- The volunteer ranger group takes part in regular maintenance and management tasks.
- Working with a local artist and the community together to provide the art work for High Wood Barn, Kingfisher Room and other areas around the site.
- Developing links with local businesses such as Solvay and BAA to provide opportunities for their staff to take part in practical tasks.
- Enabling partner organisations such as BTCV to use the site for practical tasks, meetings and training to encourage volunteering in the local community.
- Consulting and working with partner organisations including Natural England, Environment Agency, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust, Forestry Commission, Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre on the management and development of the park.

The last in-depth visitor survey was carried out in 1990, and it would be timely to carry out another survey after the current programme of improvements has been completed, to seek the views of visitors on the work and on plans for the future.

There is considerable scope to increase further the commercial sponsorship of activities and facilities at the site.

Objective	Management action
Obtain visitor feedback on the condition and quality of facilities and services.	7.1. Increase use of visitor feedback cards.
Consult visitors and the community on major developments and new	7.2. Carry out new in-depth visitor survey.

facilities	
Maintain or increase levels of volunteer support	7.3 Maintain support and improve the effectiveness of the volunteer group.
Increase the quantity of information and services which are available electronically	7.4. Provide the current Management Plan on the Internet.

THE COUNTRY PARK

The Country Park has been developed over the last 20 years with both public recreation and nature conservation in mind. It therefore offers opportunities for people to enjoy a wide range of activities including walking, dog walking, horse riding, cycling, bird watching, picnicking and children's play.

At the same time, the whole Park is managed to maximise biodiversity, with some key areas being specifically managed as nationally and internationally important areas for nature conservation.

8 HABITATS

a) Water Meadows

The River Itchen flows through the Country Park, but there is no public access to the banks, as this stretch of the river is privately owned by Lower Itchen Fisheries.

The water meadows to the west of the river are accessible by the public and are managed as a Nature Reserve. They are nationally and internationally designated in recognition of both habitat and species; otters and water voles are present, as well as significant numbers of over-wintering birds. The ditches support many invertebrates including the nationally rare Southern Damselfly. A specific Management Plan is being developed for the water meadows.

Objective	Management action
Maintain or enhance populations of priority species and the condition of priority habitats found within the park	8.1 Complete Water Meadows Management Plan by 2009 8.2 Enter Water Meadows into HLS scheme 8.3 Work with EA and other agencies to complete WLMP to ensure appropriate water levels are maintained 8.4 Ongoing monitoring of key species (e.g. butterfly transect, Southern damselfly transect, mink monitoring etc)
Protect and conserve significant historical and archaeological features	8.5 Commission survey of historical features of water meadows

b) Woodlands

Within the Country Park, there are a number of areas of broad-leaved woodland, including hazel and ash coppice with associated ground flora such as bluebells and wood anemone. These areas are managed under a traditional rotational coppice plan.

There are also areas of coniferous woodland; before the Council owned the land, some of the woodland was replanted with Scots Pine, Corsican Pine and Western Red Cedar to produce commercial timber. There is an ongoing programme to thin the conifers and this will be incorporated into the forthcoming Woodland Management Plan for the Park.

Objective	Management action
Maintain or enhance populations of priority species and the condition of priority habitats found within the park	8.6 Complete Woodland Management Plan by 2009 8.7 Enter woodland areas into HLS scheme 8.8 Ongoing monitoring of key species (e.g. butterfly transect, dormouse survey etc)
Protect and conserve significant historical and archaeological features	8.9 Maintain brick kilns feature and possibly carry out further excavation work in the future

c) Grassland/ Meadows

A large proportion of Itchen Valley Country Park is grassland/meadow.

Some of these areas are managed by grazing in the spring and summer, and others are managed as wildflower meadows with a late summer hay cut. Many of these areas are enclosed by hedgerows which are managed to maintain and enhance their biodiversity interest.

Objective	Management action
Maintain or enhance populations of priority species and the condition of priority habitats found within the park.	8.10 Continue to graze existing areas and explore possibility of further grazing where appropriate 8.11 Enter grassland areas into HLS scheme 8.12 Ongoing monitoring of key species (e.g. butterfly transect etc) 8.13 Explore partnership projects with The Grassland Trust 8.14 Investigate further educational potential of grassland areas 8.15 Manage hedgerows and field borders to benefit wildlife.

d) Ponds

There are a number of ponds within the Country Park ranging in size from small dipping ponds to a large woodland pond and in location from very public areas to 'closed reserve' areas. Interpretation is provided at the dipping ponds and families can hire nets and trays from the Visitor Centre during the spring and summer.

All ponds are managed appropriately to ensure that they contain the correct balance of vegetation and open water, and any non-native species are controlled as necessary.

Objective	Management action
Maintain or enhance populations of priority species and the condition of priority habitats found within the park	8.16 Control invasive plant species such as <i>Crassula</i> 8.17 Ensure open water by removing some vegetation during the autumn/winter (as and when required) 8.18 Monitor target species

e) Scrub

Scrub is a very important habitat throughout the Country Park, providing nesting, roosting and feeding sites for birds and small mammals, as well as providing a nectar source for invertebrates.

Where appropriate scrub is maintained, but where scrub encroachment threatens notable habitats or species it is managed in the most appropriate way (i.e. by grazing, mechanical or manual removal).

Objective	Management action
Maintain or enhance populations of priority species and the condition of priority habitats found within the park.	8.19 Monitor areas of scrub throughout the park and manage appropriately.

9) Infrastructure

a) Buildings

There are three buildings within the Country Park, all of which are maintained by the Countryside Service.

High Wood Barn

High Wood Barn was built in 1990 in the style of a 17th Century Hampshire Wide Aisle Barn. It is constructed using the traditional methods of that period, from timber brought down on the Beaulieu estate during the 1987 storms. The

barn contains a Visitor Centre and shop, café and the main office for the Countryside Service.

Kingfisher Barn

The Kingfisher Barn was opened in 2007, and comprises a classroom/ conference room, public toilets and staff shower room. The classroom is used by the Countryside Service for school groups, holiday clubs and specific events. It is equipped with AV facilities and can also be booked by community groups and members of the public. It is used for a wide variety of events/ activities such as the monthly Itchen Valley Art Club, corporate training days, children’s birthday parties etc.

The Kingfisher Barn incorporates a number of sustainable building technologies including a rain water harvesting system, waterless urinals, ground source heat pump and sheep’s wool insulation.

Storage Hangar

The Storage Hangar is an operational building where the Countryside Service store their vehicles, tools, equipment and materials.

Objective	Management action
Develop a programme for maintenance, repairs and renewals within the context of the Council’s asset management plan	9.1 Carry out planned maintenance and repairs to High Wood Barn, Kingfisher Barn and Storage Hangar as required
Reduce carbon emissions by reducing energy consumption and making maximum use of renewable energy sources	9.2 Continue to utilise existing sustainable technologies in all buildings, and explore new opportunities as they arise
Reduce consumption of water and other natural resources	9.3 Continue to utilise existing water reduction features in Kingfisher Building, and explore new opportunities as they arise
The main visitor areas will be accessible to the widest possible range of users	9.4 Install new cycle racks at the front and rear of High Wood Barn

b) Play Areas

There is a small play area for under nines directly behind High Wood Barn and a larger adventure style play area for under twelve’s situated on High Hill Field. Connecting the two is the Play Trail (suitable for pushchairs and wheelchairs), which is made up of a series of animal sculptures for children to climb on. The animals were designed by local school children and crafted by a

local sculptor.

Objective	Management action
Use safety and risk management processes to keep accidents to staff and visitors at the lowest possible levels	9.5 Weekly inspection of play areas 9.6 Commission independent annual inspection of play areas
Develop a programme for maintenance, repairs and renewals within the context of the Council's asset management plan	9.7 Maintain/repair play areas 9.8 Investigate opportunities to enhance existing play areas
The main visitor areas will be accessible to the widest possible range of users	9.9 Install new cycle racks adjacent to High Hill play area

c) Access Points

There is one main vehicle and pedestrian entrance into the Country Park from Allington Lane and pedestrian access onto the water meadows from the Itchen Navigation footpath.

The main entrance to the Country Park has threshold signs as well as details of forthcoming events, and information about the parking charges.

There is good directional signage to the country park (brown tourist signs) from Junctions 5 and 7 of the M27.

Objective	Management action
The main entrance and approaches to car parks, High Wood Barn and High Hill Field are maintained to a high standard.	9.10 Ensure grounds maintenance specifications are being maintained
Signage is necessary and useful, and consistent in design Ensure signs and written materials present a consistent image	9.11 Review entrance signage requirements and replace as necessary

d) Signage

At present there are a number of different styles of signage around the Country Park. A review is currently underway, looking at all signage and determining if it is appropriate or necessary. A rolling programme of replacements will lead to a standardised approach to signage throughout the Country Park.

Objective	Management action
Signage is necessary and useful, and consistent in design. Ensure signs and written materials present a consistent image	9.12 Review signage within the Park and implement rolling programme of renewal/replacement

e) Seating

There is a variety of seating within the Country Park, predominantly picnic tables and benches. Most of the picnic benches are located around High Wood Barn and High Hill Field, and the benches are located throughout the Park on various trails and paths.

Objective	Management action
Use safety and risk management processes to keep accidents to staff and visitors at the lowest possible levels	9.13 Regular inspection of all seats/benches/picnic tables
Develop a programme for maintenance, repairs and renewals within the context of the Council's asset management plan	9.14 Rolling programme of repairs/renewals

f) Trails/footpaths

The Country Park contains a number of way marked trails and activity trails, as well as a network of formal and informal footpaths.
There is also an off-road cycle route and a permissive riding route.
A new longer distance Totem Trail around the Park will be launched in 2009, encouraging families to walk further and increase levels of fitness.

Objective	Management action
Use safety and risk management processes to keep accidents to staff and visitors at the lowest possible levels	9.15 Regular inspection of all trails/footpaths/cycle route & riding route
Develop a programme for maintenance, repairs and renewals within the context of the Council's asset management plan	9.16 Rolling programme of repairs/renewals

g) Car Parks

There are 8 hard standing car parking areas within the park providing approximately 120 spaces, plus a staff car park and a grass overflow car park, providing a further 100 spaces (when ground conditions allow). All car

parking is Pay and Display and the prices are agreed annually by the Council's Fees & Charges Committee.

The existing surfaces are worn and degraded, and the overflow car park can only be used during the summer months when ground conditions allow; the Countryside Service will be working with HEWEB Local Area Committee to explore possible funding sources for resurfacing works to the main car parks, and drainage/surface improvements to the overflow car park to allow year round use.

Objective	Management action
Use safety and risk management processes to keep accidents to staff and visitors at the lowest possible levels	9.17 Regular inspection of all car parks and pay and ticket machines
Develop a programme for maintenance, repairs and renewals within the context of the Council's asset management plan.	9.18 Rolling programme of repairs/renewals 9.19 Investigate funding opportunities to resurface existing car park areas and overflow parking area

10) Grounds Maintenance

Regular grounds maintenance at Itchen Valley Country Park is carried out by the Council's StreetScene Service; this includes litter picking of main amenity areas, amenity grass cutting, some path clearance and hedgerow maintenance, dog bin emptying, and maintenance of the shrub beds adjacent to High Wood Barn.

All other grounds maintenance is carried out by Countryside Service staff or contractors as required.

Grounds maintenance requirements are constantly monitored and reviewed and amendments made according to conditions, seasons, nature conservation requirements etc.

Objective	Management action
The main entrance and approaches to car parks, High Wood Barn and High Hill Field are maintained to a high standard.	10.1 Monitor performance of grounds maintenance contract on a regular basis.
Maintain high standards of arboriculture, horticulture, site cleanliness, grounds and building maintenance.	10.2 Review and amend contract specification as required.

SUMMARY OF ACTIONS

Ref	<u>IMPROVEMENT</u>	<u>BUDGET</u>	<u>PROGRAMME /TIMESCALE</u>	<u>COMMENTS</u>	<u>BY WHO</u>	<u>STATUS</u>
1.1	Recruit and retain suitably skilled and experienced staff.	Existing staffing budgets.	Life of Management plan		HCT/CM/VSM	
1.2	Review team structure and roles in light of changing demands on the service.	Existing staffing budgets.	Life of Management plan		HCT/CM/VSM	
1.3	Review routine site maintenance work with Direct Services Streetscene section.	Existing staffing budgets.	2009		CM/COs	
2.1	Review measures and targets on QPR system.	Existing staffing budgets.	2009		HCT/CM/VSM	
2.2	Introduce annual assessment of the country park against NI197 (management of local sites).	Existing staffing budgets.	2009		BO	
2.3	Monitor progress against the action plan contained in this management plan.	Existing staffing budgets.	Annually		CM	
2.4	Submit management plan as part of Green Flag assessment from 2009 onwards.	Existing staffing and revenue budgets.	Annually		CM	
2.5	Work with local authorities to identify good practice and generate benchmarking information.	Existing staffing budgets.	2009		CM	

Ref	<u>IMPROVEMENT</u>	<u>BUDGET</u>	<u>PROGRAMME /TIMESCALE</u>	<u>COMMENTS</u>	<u>BY WHO</u>	<u>STATUS</u>
3.1	Implement actions to increase income as part of the Council's efficiency strategy.	Existing staffing budgets.	Life of Management plan		CO/ VSM	
3.2	Contribute to the Council review of budgets for asset management.	Existing staffing budgets.	2009		CM/VSM	
3.3	Seek sponsorship for ongoing services and activities.	Existing staffing budgets; aim to reduce other costs.	Life of Management plan			
3.4	Maximise grant funding from partner organisations.	Existing staffing budgets; aim to reduce other costs.	Life of Management plan			
4.1	Place details of completed site inspections on notice boards.	Existing staffing budgets	Monthly from 2009		CM	
4.2	Complete review of Safe systems of work and COSHH assessments.	Existing staffing budgets	2009		CM	
4.3	Introduce annual safety inspection by Countryside Services Manager and Council's Health and Safety Officer.	Existing staffing budgets	Annually from 2009		CM/ VSM	
4.4	Secure funding for baseline condition survey of trees in high priority areas of country park.	Existing staffing budgets	2009		HCT/ CM	
5.1	Provide new better designed litter bins for recyclable materials.	Existing HEWEB CIP	2009		CM	

Ref	<u>IMPROVEMENT</u>	<u>BUDGET</u>	<u>PROGRAMME /TIMESCALE</u>	<u>COMMENTS</u>	<u>BY WHO</u>	<u>STATUS</u>
5.2	Seek alternatives to herbicides to control weeds on paved areas.	Existing staffing budgets	Life of Management plan		CM/ COs	
5.3	Incorporate energy efficient systems and technologies when making repairs/ renewals to buildings.	Within allocated revenue or CIP budgets	As required		CM/ VSM	
5.4	Limit use of outdoor taps to school parties only.	Existing staffing and revenue budgets.	Life of Management plan		VSM	
5.5	Ensure new planting scheme for raised beds incorporates drought-resistant species and mulch to control weeds and retain moisture.	Existing staffing and HEWEB CIP budgets	2009		CM	
6.1	Use the Council's viewpoint survey to monitor awareness of the park and its facilities.	Existing staffing budgets	2009, 2011, 2013		VSM	
6.2	Work with the Council's economic development team to promote the park, particularly the Kingfisher Barn to local businesses.	Existing staffing budgets, aim to increase income.	2009, 2010		VSM	
6.3	Promote the Kingfisher room as a venue for meetings/ training to other Council units, particularly HR.	Existing staffing budgets, aim to increase income.	2009		VSM	
6.4	Replace events information and notice boards.	Existing HEWEB CIP	2009		VSM/ COs	
6.5	Upgrade IT link to IVCP.	Existing ICT CIP budget	2009		HCT/ VSM	

Ref	<u>IMPROVEMENT</u>	<u>BUDGET</u>	<u>PROGRAMME /TIMESCALE</u>	<u>COMMENTS</u>	<u>BY WHO</u>	<u>STATUS</u>
6.6	Add live information from IVCP to Council website, e.g. nestcams, weather information.	Existing staffing budgets	2010		VSM/ VSOs	
6.7	Add information about facilities of interest to staff to the Council's intranet.	Existing staffing budgets	2009		VSM/ VSOs	
7.1	Increase use of visitor feedback cards.	Existing staffing budgets	Life of Management plan		VSM/ VSOs	
7.2	Carry out new in-depth visitor survey.	Existing staffing and revenue budgets.	2010		VSM/ VSOs	
7.3	Maintain support and improve the effectiveness of the volunteer group.	Existing staffing budgets	Life of Management plan		CM/COs	
7.4	Provide the current Management Plan on the Internet.	Existing staffing budgets	2009		VSM/ VSOs	
8.1	Complete Water Meadows Management Plan	Existing staffing budgets	2009		CM/CO	
8.2	Enter Water Meadows into HLS scheme	Existing staffing budgets	2009		CO	
8.3	Work with EA and other agencies to complete WLMP to ensure appropriate water levels are maintained	Existing staffing budgets	2009		CM/ CO	

Ref	<u>IMPROVEMENT</u>	<u>BUDGET</u>	<u>PROGRAMME /TIMESCALE</u>	<u>COMMENTS</u>	<u>BY WHO</u>	<u>STATUS</u>
8.4	Ongoing monitoring of key species (e.g. butterfly transect, Southern damselfly transect, mink monitoring etc)	Existing staffing budgets	Life of Management plan		COs	
8.5	Commission survey of historical features of water meadows	Existing staffing budgets & external funding	2010		CO	
8.6	Complete Woodland Management Plan	Existing staffing budgets	2009		CM/ CO	
8.7	Enter woodland areas into HLS scheme	Existing staffing budgets	2009		CO	
8.8	Ongoing monitoring of key species (e.g. butterfly transect, dormouse survey etc)	Existing staffing budgets	Life of Management plan		COs, volunteers	
8.9	Maintain brick kilns feature and possibly carry out further excavation work in the future	Existing staffing budgets	Life of Management plan		COs	
8.10	Continue to graze existing areas and explore possibility of further grazing where appropriate.	Existing staffing budgets	Life of Management plan		COs	
8.11	Enter grassland areas into HLS scheme	Existing staffing budgets	2009		COs	
8.12	Ongoing monitoring of key species (e.g. butterfly transect etc)	Existing staffing budgets	Life of Management plan		COs/ volunteers	
8.13	Explore partnership projects with The Grassland Trust	Existing staffing budgets	2010		CM/ COs	
8.14	Investigate further educational potential of grassland areas	Existing staffing budgets	2010		VSM/ VSOs	

Ref	<u>IMPROVEMENT</u>	<u>BUDGET</u>	<u>PROGRAMME /TIMESCALE</u>	<u>COMMENTS</u>	<u>BY WHO</u>	<u>STATUS</u>
8.15	Manage hedgerows and field borders to benefit wildlife.	Existing staffing and maintenance budgets	Life of Management plan		COs	
9.1	Carry out planned maintenance and repairs to High Wood Barn, Kingfisher Barn and Storage Hangar as required	Existing maintenance budgets	Life of Management plan		VSM/ VSOs/ COs	
9.2	Continue to utilise existing sustainable technologies in all buildings, and explore new opportunities as they arise	Include costs within new project budgets	As opportunities arise		CM/ VSM	
9.3	Continue to utilise existing water reduction features in Kingfisher Building, and explore new opportunities as they arise	Existing staffing budgets	Life of Management plan		VSM	
9.4	Install new cycle racks at the front and rear of High Wood Barn	Existing HEWEB CIP	2009		T&E, VSM	
9.5	Weekly inspection of play areas	Existing staffing budgets	Life of Management plan		COs	
9.6	Commission independent annual inspection of play areas	Existing maintenance budgets	Annually for life of Management plan		CM	
9.7	Maintain/repair play areas	Existing maintenance budgets	Life of Management plan		COs	

Ref	<u>IMPROVEMENT</u>	<u>BUDGET</u>	<u>PROGRAMME /TIMESCALE</u>	<u>COMMENTS</u>	<u>BY WHO</u>	<u>STATUS</u>
9.8	Investigate opportunities to enhance existing play areas	Existing staffing budgets	2009		CM/ Area Co-ordinator/ Members	
9.9	Install new cycle racks adjacent to High Hill play area	Existing HEWEB CIP	2009		T&E, VSM	
9.10	Ensure grounds maintenance specifications are being maintained	Existing staffing budgets	Life of Management plan		COs	
9.11	Review entrance signage requirements and replace as necessary	Existing HEWEB CIP	2009		CM/ VSM	
9.12	Review signage within the Park and implement rolling programme of renewal/replacement	Existing HEWEB CIP	2009 and ongoing		CM/ VSM	
9.13	Regular inspection of all seats/ benches/ picnic tables	Existing staffing budgets	Life of Management plan		COs	
9.14	Rolling programme of repair/ renewal of seats and benches	Existing maintenance budgets	Life of Management plan		COs	
9.15	Regular inspection of all trails/ footpaths/ cycle route & riding route	Existing staffing budgets	Life of Management plan		COs	
9.16	Rolling programme of repair/ renewal to trails & footpaths	Existing maintenance budgets	Life of Management plan		COs	
9.17	Regular inspection of all car parks and pay and ticket machines	Existing staffing budgets	Life of Management plan		All staff	

Ref	<u>IMPROVEMENT</u>	<u>BUDGET</u>	<u>PROGRAMME /TIMESCALE</u>	<u>COMMENTS</u>	<u>BY WHO</u>	<u>STATUS</u>
9.18	Rolling programme of repairs/ renewals					
9.19	Investigate funding opportunities to resurface existing car park areas and overflow parking area	Existing staffing budgets	2009		CM/ Area Co- ordinator/ Members	
10.1	Monitor performance of grounds maintenance contract on a regular basis.	Existing staffing budgets	Life of Management plan		CM/ COs	
10.2	Review and amend contract specification as required	Existing staffing budgets	2009		CM/ COs/ Streetscene	

Countryside and Trees Unit structure – October 2008

