

Management Plan: Old Tennis Courts at West Harrow Recreation Ground and The Ridgeway Embankments

Local Wildlife Site

April 2010 – March 2015

London Borough of Harrow



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1. Description

The site is located 1.1 km west of Harrow Town Centre aside The Ridgeway, and the Rayners Lane to West Harrow section of the Metropolitan Line (national grid coordinates TQ 138 877, Figure 1). Two composite compartments are recognised (Figure 2). These are described below:

The Ridgeway Embankments (0.84 ha)

- 1) This part of the site was identified as a Local Wildlife Site (LWS) during the 2003 habitat survey conducted by the Greater London Authority and is waiting formal adoption through the emerging Harrow LDF.

The five broad strips of scrub and trees which comprise the embankment are associated with the road bridge that crosses the railway. Ash and hawthorn are frequent to abundant. Other trees and shrubs include alder, butterfly-bush, elder, elm, field maple, hazel and Portugal laurel. Bramble and ivy are abundant in the understorey. A few other species occur, e.g. large bindweed, bittersweet and asparagus. Many common birds are present here including blackbird, robin, wren, song thrush and house sparrow. Other wildlife features include a fox earth, speckled wood butterflies and standing decaying timber.

The embankments, which are owned by LB Harrow, are fenced from the road and there is no official access.

Old Tennis Court in West Harrow Recreation Ground (0.46 ha)

- 2) This part of the site is already adopted in the Harrow UDP as a LWS of Local Importance for Nature Conservation (HwL06).

The area comprises an old lawn tennis court in the north-west corner of West Harrow Recreation Ground. In the past this was been sown with a wildflower seed mix by the Council to create a wildlife area. A few of sown species survive such as black knapweed and bird's-foot-trefoil. Generally, segregated patches and clumps of tall herb vegetation are present including great willowherb, stinging nettle and great bindweed. These are joined by patches of bramble scrub to the west of the area. A diverse range of grasses occur including false oat-grass, cock's-foot, tufted hair-grass, couch grass, red fescue, wall barley and Yorkshire fog. Timothy is abundant.

A number of trees occur on site particularly along the north-western edge aside the railway (which is dense enough to qualify as woodland). Ash and poplar are frequent. Other species include lime, alder, poplar and oak. An understorey is present below the tree canopies comprising a variety of shrubs: hawthorn is particularly common. Elder, hazel and elm are amongst the other species present. Additionally, a number of tree and shrub species are garden escapes or of obvious planted origin. These include field maple, red oak, coralberry, dogwood and Japanese spindle. There are the remains of a season ditch adjacent to the railway. Its wetter past is reflected in the continuing presence of a little osier and reed canary-grass.

For a small site there is a refreshing diversity of fauna present: common blue butterflies occur here, and the grassland is rich in grasshoppers. Woodland along the edge of the site beside the railway provides habitat for birds. This includes variety of woodland and garden species e.g. blackbird, blackcap, willow warbler, jay, long-tailed tit, robin, wren and song thrush. In the past their ranks have been swollen by bullfinch and linnet. The winter sees an influx of fieldfares and redwings which feed from the fruit of hawthorn and blackthorn shrubs. Goldfinch, chaffinch and goldcrest may also be seen at this time of year.

2. Important features on site

The site provides access to nature in an area deficient in accessible wildlife sites. A number of locally important features have been identified:

Semi-improved Neutral Grassland

- a) Most grassland in this part of Harrow is 'amenity grassland' associated with sports fields and town parks. It is frequently mown, usually dominated by rye-grass and contains relatively few wildflowers. In contrast the grassland of the Old Tennis Courts contains a variety of grasses and forbs within its sward and as a result supports a relatively diverse invertebrate fauna. However, a poor management regime and soil nitrification with dog faeces will lead to a loss of grassland biodiversity and eventual scrub invasion.

Secondary woodland

- b) The secondary woodland of the site with its ash, hawthorn and other trees and shrubs is of local significance in this part of Harrow and supports a variety of birds and invertebrates.

Birds

- c) A variety of birds are known from the site. Included are a number of London/UK BAP priority species and species of conservation concern e.g. bullfinch, house sparrow, linnets, song thrush and starling.

Dead wood

- d) Dead wood of all types, but particularly standing is a valuable habitat and asset for a variety of fauna. For example, woodpeckers, nuthatch and treecreeper are often dependent on this resource for foraging and nesting. Additionally, a variety of insects are associated with dead wood and many species of fungi are completely dependent upon it. Dead wood is a Harrow LBAP habitat. This habitat is often lost, particularly in urban areas, when sites are tidied up

Ivy-clad trees

- e) Ivy is a valuable resource during the autumn and winter months providing a late source of nectar for insects and foraging and shelter for birds at a time of year when deciduous trees are dormant. It is a common misconception that a covering of ivy somehow harms the trunks and branches of trees consequently it is sometimes cut-back or otherwise removed by well-meaning people.

3. Aims and Objectives

Management at the Old Tennis Court in West Harrow Recreation Ground and The Ridgeway Embankments should reflect targets set in the UK and local BAPs. Additionally, it should aim to maintain and enhance the general qualities of existing habitats whilst re-establishing others, appropriate to the site, and promote their appreciation by the public. This should be achieved via:-

- a) Maintenance of grassland areas to:
 - Arrest succession and prevent site becoming wooded
 - Provide suitable overwintering grassland habitat for invertebrates
 - Maintain/increase floral diversity of grassland
- b) Maintaining woodland/scrub habitat for birds
- c) Ensuring an adequate quantity of dead wood microhabitats, both standing and fallen
- d) Maintaining ivy-clad trees and banks
- e) Deterring littering and dumping on site and removal of offending items as and when required
- f) Dissuading dog owners from toileting their pets on site
- g) Improving safety standards and interpretation, to encourage educational use and the biological recording of the site

4. Management Prescription

Recommended Action

- a) [Compartment 2] A staggered 3-year rotational cutting regime shall be adopted for the site's grassland and tall herb vegetation (Figure 3) with one third of the area being mown in:
 - Late summer (August-September)
 - Late spring early summer (May-June)
 - Left uncut

Cuttings should be left on the ground for 3-5 days and then gathered up and taken off site.

This mowing regime will remove invading scrub and trees, ensure maintenance of suitable undisturbed overwintering grassland habitat for invertebrates and encourage floral diversity by lowering the organic matter returning to the soil and allowing for seed/invertebrate dispersal pre and post mowing.

- b) [Compartments 1 and 2] Woodland, trees and scrub will be maintained via non-intervention over the period of the management plan except in the case of health and safety concerns.
- c) [Compartment 1 and 2] dead wood should remain on site within wooded areas. Standing dead wood (e.g. monoliths) must be considered were safe to retain. Smaller logs should be stacked in habitat piles whilst larger trunks and branches can remain as individual items.

- d) [Compartments 1 and 2] Ivy should not be cut-back or cleared from bank or trees unless it can be demonstrated that it is likely to cause instability during windy conditions which may lead to tree fall.
- e) [Compartments 1 and 2] The Ridgeway Embankments are fenced and it is proposed to fence the Old Tennis Courts, which will deter fly-tipping. This should employ 3-rail post and rail fencing fitted with two pedestrian gates (1m wide) field gate for vehicular access. Litter should be cleared as and when required. New signage, fencing and management, of the Old Tennis Courts will make the area look cared for and less likely to be littered.
- f) [Compartment 2] The erection of new fencing around the Old Tennis Courts and the placing of interpretive signage and dog waste bins in selected locations will be used to dissuade people from toileting their dogs on site.
- g) [Compartment 2] A 1 m wide footpath will be mowed into the sward of the current meadow area – this will facilitate access and act as a fire break. Coupled with new interpretation, fencing and regular cleanups the site will be safer and more attractive to visitors. This could possibly include children from local primary schools which would find an environment that would accommodate ‘minibeast’ and similar activities. Local wildlife experts and groups should be encouraged to undertake regular biological survey and monitoring. This could be promoted at Greener Harrow and Harrow Heritage Trust meetings. Records should be passed on to Greenspace Information for Greater London (GiGL).
- h) [Compartment 2] A ‘Nip and Tuck’ patrol by Council staff should be conducted on a weekly basis to pick up repairs and potential public safety issues

Five-Year Management Plan: Schedule and Summary of Projects

Comp.	Project	Priority	Notes	Year	Timing	Para.
2	Grassland maintenance (see Figure 3)	1	Cut section A	1	Aug-Sep	4a
			Cut section B	1	May Jun	
			Leave section C	1	n/a	
			Cut section C	2	Aug-Sep	
			Cut section A	2	May Jun	
			Leave section B	2	n/a	
			Cut section B	3	Aug-Sep	
			Cut section C	3	May Jun	
			Leave section A	3	n/a	
			Cut section A	4	Aug-Sep	
			Cut section B	4	May Jun	
			Leave section C	4	n/a	
			Cut section C	5	Aug-Sep	
			Cut section A	5	May Jun	
Leave section B	5	n/a				
1 & 2	Woodland maintenance	2	Non-intervention except H&S	Ongoing	a/r	4b
	Retaining dead wood	2	Monolithing and habitat piles	Ongoing	a/r	4c
	Retaining ivy-clad trees	3	Important habitat for invertebrates, birds and bats	Ongoing	ongoing	4d
2	Fencing Old Tennis Courts	1	Erect outside bird-breeding season	1	Jan-Mar or Sep-Dec	4e
2	Removal of fly-tipping and litter	1		Ongoing	a/r	4e
2	Access, recreation and interpretation	2	Erect new signage and dog waste bins (after erecting fencing)	1 or 2	a/r	4f
			Mow a footpath across meadow - sward must be kept short <10 cm	1 to 5	a/r	4g
		3	Encourage biological recording	Ongoing	a/r	4g
			Investigate suitability for use by children	3	a/r	
		1	Regular patrols to identify potential problems and maintain a reassuring presence for the public	Ongoing	weekly	4h

Maps and plans

Figure 1: Location

Figure 2: Compartments

Figure 3: Old Tennis Courts (Compartment 2)

Figure 1: Location

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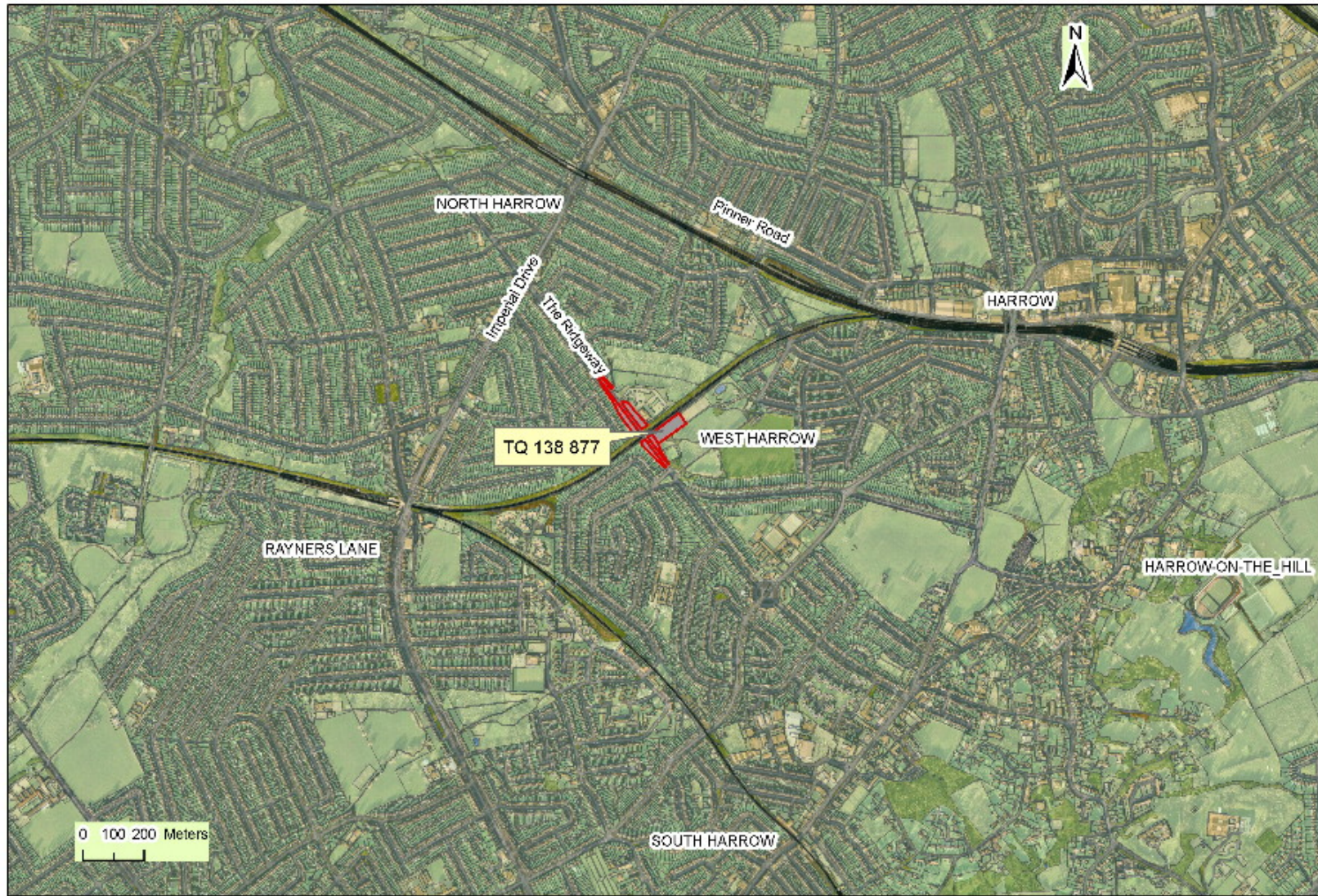


Figure 2: Compartments

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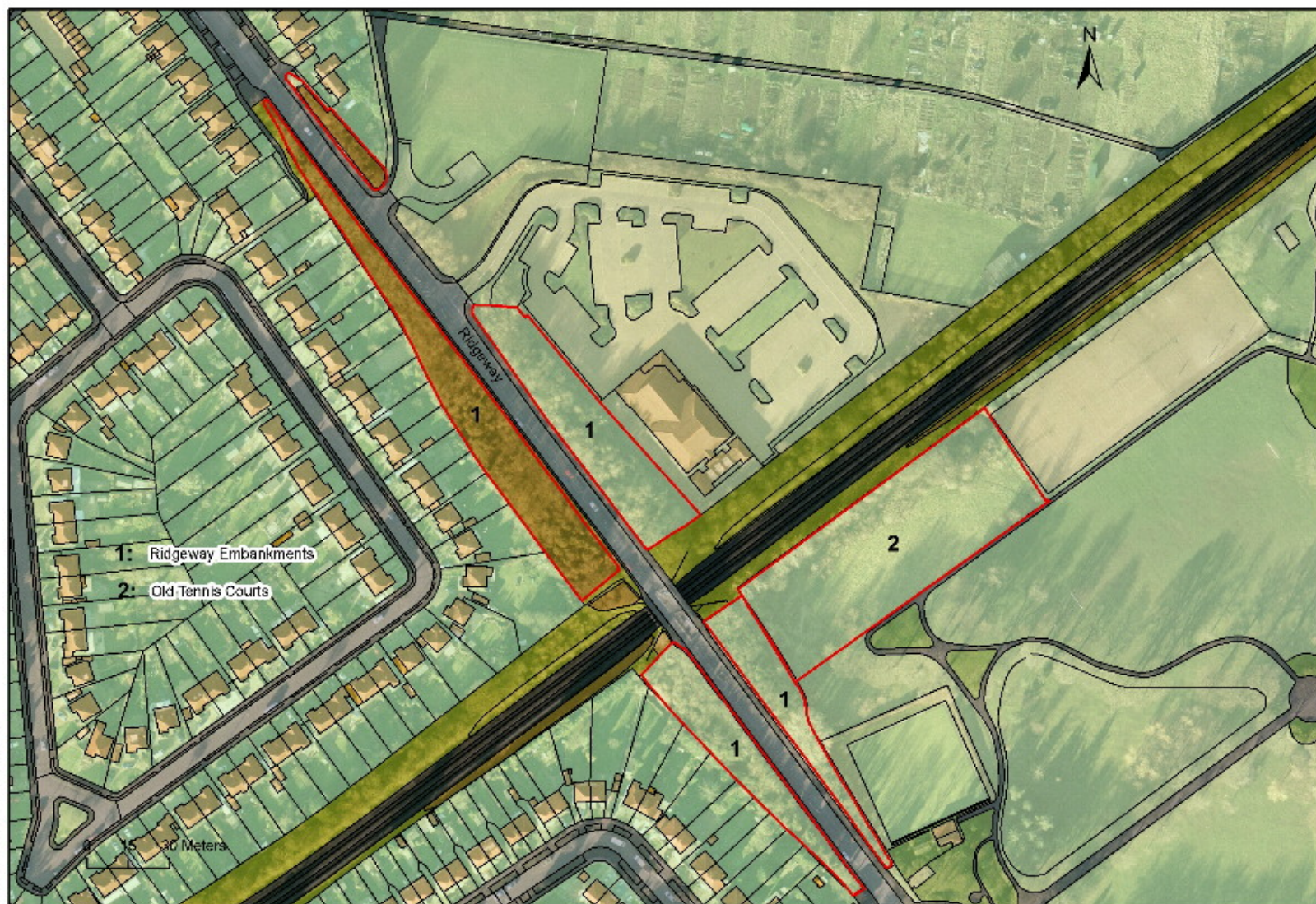


Figure 3: Old Tennis Courts (Compartment 2)

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Vascular Plant List (Surveyed 2009)

Appendix 2: Projected Capital Costs

Appendix 1: Vascular Plant List (Surveyed 2009)

Species		Compartment 1		Compartment 2	
English Name	Scientific name	Qualifiers	DAFOR	Qualifiers	DAFOR
Alder	<i>Alnus</i> sp				O
Ash	<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>	C	A	E	F
Asparagus	<i>Asparagus officinalis</i>		R		
Bent-grass	<i>Agrostis</i> sp.				F
Bird's-foot trefoil	<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>				O
Bittersweet	<i>Solanum dulcamara</i>		O		
Black knapweed	<i>Centaurea nigra</i>				F
Blackthorn	<i>Prunus spinosa</i>			C	O
Bramble	<i>Rubus fruticosus</i> agg.		A	E	F
Broad-leaved dock	<i>Rumex obtusifolius</i>				O
Butterfly-bush	<i>Buddleja davidii</i>		O		
Cherry	<i>Prunus</i> sp.			P	R
Chinese mugwort	<i>Artemisia veriotiorum</i>		R		
Cleavers	<i>Galium aparine</i>		O		O
Clustered dock	<i>Rumex conglomeratus</i>				O
Cock's-foot	<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>				O
Common speedwell	<i>Veronica persicaria</i>				O
Coralberry	<i>Symphoricarpos obiculatus</i>			C	O
Cotoneaster	<i>Cotoneaster</i> sp.	E	R	C	O
Couch grass	<i>Elytrigia repens</i>				F
Cow parsley	<i>Anthriscus sylvestris</i>				O
Creeping ciquefoil	<i>Potentilla reptans</i>				O
Creeping thistle	<i>Cirsium arvense</i>				O
Dogwood	<i>Cornus sanguinea</i>			S	R
Dogwood	<i>Cornus</i> sp.		R		
Elder	<i>Sambucus nigra</i>		O	CE	O
English elm	<i>Ulmus procera</i>		O	C	O
False oat-grass	<i>Arrhenatherum elatius</i>				O
Fat hen	<i>Chenopodium album</i>				R
Field maple	<i>Acer campestre</i>		O	PE	F
Goat's-rue	<i>Galega officinalis</i>				O
Great willowherb	<i>Epilobium hirsutum</i>				F
Grey alder	<i>Alnus incana</i>	P	O		
Hawthorn	<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>		F		O
Hazel	<i>Corylus avellana</i>		R		
Hedge bindweed	<i>Calystegia sepium</i>				R
Hedge woundwort	<i>Stachys sylvatica</i>			C	O
Herb robert	<i>Geranium robertianum</i>				O
Hoary ragwort	<i>Senecio erucifolius</i>				O
Holly	<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>			C	O
Horse-chestnut	<i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i>	S	R	S	R
Ivy	<i>Hedera helix</i>		F	C	O
Japanese spindle	<i>Euonymus japonicus</i>				R
Large bindweed	<i>Calystegia silvatica</i>		O		F
Lime	<i>Tilia</i> sp.			PE	O
Lombardy poplar	<i>Populus nigra italica</i>			CE	O
Meadow vetchling	<i>Lathyrus pratensis</i>				O
Mugwort	<i>Artemisia vulgaris</i>				R
Musk mallow	<i>Malva moschata</i>			E	F

Norway maple	<i>Acer platanoides</i>				R
Osier	<i>Salix viminalis</i>				O
Pedunculate oak	<i>Quercus robur</i>			M	O
Perennial rye-grass	<i>Lolium perenne</i>				F
Poplar	<i>Populus sp.</i>			E	F
Portugal laurel	<i>Prunus lusitanica</i>		O		
Red fescue	<i>Festuca rubra</i>				F
Red oak	<i>Quercus rubra</i>			P	R
Reed canary-grass	<i>Phalaris arundinacea</i>			C	O
Ribwort plantain	<i>Ribwort plantain</i>				O
Rose	<i>Rosa sp.</i>			E	O
Rowan	<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>			P	R
Russian comfrey	<i>Symphytum x uplandicum</i>				O
Spear thistle	<i>Cirsium vulgare</i>				R
Stinging nettle	<i>Urtica dioica</i>			C	F
Sycamore	<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>		R		
Timothy	<i>Phleum pratense</i>				A
Tufted hair-grass	<i>Deschampsia cespitosa</i>				F
Wall barley	<i>Hordeum murinum</i>				O
White clover	<i>Trifolium repens</i>				O
Yorkshire fog	<i>Holcus lanatus</i>				F

DAFOR Scale:

D=Dominant
A=Abundant
F=Frequent
O=Occasional
R=Rare

Qualifiers:

C=Clumped
E=Edge
P=Planted
M=Mature tree
S=Sapling

Appendix 2: Projected Capital Costs

Money agreed by The Harrow Chief Executive Group for managing Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation for biodiversity and improved visitor experience with regards to the requirements of the seven National Indicators (NI) within the Local Area Agreement

Chief Executive Group money:

Old Tennis Courts in West Harrow Recreation Ground and Ridgeway Embankment		HwL06
Fencing area including gates		2,500
Dog waste bins*		600
Interpretation*		1,000
Total		4,100

These NI have been chosen by the group as priorities including NI 197 (to be used to increase the number of local sites in Harrow that are actively managed to improve biodiversity).

The following table shows the cost of conducting fencing work. Just under £640 is estimated as being left from the £2,500 reserved from above for fencing. If BTCV were used to install fencing approximately 5 days work is estimated. Therefore at £300/day a further £860 would have to be found to complete the work.

Money required for fencing work:

Item	no.	cost/item	Total	Supplier
Posts 1.8m x 100mm x100mm	110	4.65	511.5	Grangewood Fencing Supplies
Rails 3.6m x 87mm x 38mm	112	3.06	336	Grangewood Fencing Supplies
Field gate (3.3m)	1	202	202	Jacksons
Oak posts (2.4m x150mmx150mm	2	60	120	Jacksons
Hanging system (Posts,Hinges,Catch,Fitting of Irons, etc.) - heavy	1	125	125	Jacksons
Hanging system (Posts,Hinges,Catch,Fitting of Irons, etc.) - light	2	114	228	Jacksons
Posts 2.4m x 150mm x 150mm	4	34	136	Jacksons
Nails (wire 125mm) 25kg	1	52	52	Jacksons
Delivery (estimate)	1	146	146	-----
Total			1860.5	

*£600 and £1,000 are reasonable estimates for purchasing dog waste bins and interpretation.