



# HASLEMERE TOWN COUNCIL

## BIODIVERSITY WORKING GROUP ACTIONS

### Background

In May 2024 Full Council approved the use of Neighbourhood CIL funds to obtain a parish wide biodiversity audit, to look at all open space areas owned by the Council.

A working group was set up and at a meeting in October 2024 it discussed how it would go about rating each site and implementing some of the suggestions contained in the report. At that meeting each site was given a priority rating from A-C.

A = look to implement first/cost up/easy change of management regime

B = look at as a second tranche

C = look at as a third tranche

The clerk was asked to contact the grounds care contractors to obtain management information and quotes.

At a second meeting on 26 June 2025 the group was updated with the findings and asked to put forward a proposal to this committee for approval. This proposal relates to sites with priority ratings A only.

Where there is a proposed change in the grass cutting regime, the group considered leaving grass long and having mown paths around the perimeter. However, the contractor has confirmed that it would take between 30-45 mins to change equipment to enable the shorter cuts.

### Clement Corner

1. increase grass cutting height to 75mm overall rather than having mown in paths at a different cutting height (see reasoning above).
2. retain non-native shrubs but replace with natives as and when required.

### St Christopher's Green

1. Cllr Matthes is going to contact church and Rotary, regarding small wildflower area between the bench and the garage that they have mentioned they would like to do.
2. increase grass cutting height to 75mm overall rather than having mown in paths at a different cutting height (see reasoning above).

### Pocket Park

1. increase grass cutting height to 75mm overall rather than having mown in paths at a different cutting height (see reasoning above).
2. cut back all the brambles on the top right-hand side, and remove the sycamore tree, with this area then forming part of the mowing regime as grass is allowed to grow.
3. green wall – allow the ivy, which is partly hidden by the brambles and sycamore tree, to continue spreading across the wall
4. create a bed at the base of the wall by laying a wool weed suppressor and wood chip and plant native species of ferns and other shade tolerant plants. The working group members to reach out to local groups and ask them to donate plants.

### **Grover's Garden**

1. look at cutting back rhododendrons & laurels. The Council's contractor to do a hard cut back of the inner area marked 4 and named "Laurel Island" (for the purposes of this paper), with a Cllr/Biodiversity group/volunteer led activity to cut back the two areas marked clump A & B and monitor going forward (map at the end of this paper, together with the management proposals for Grovers Garden).
2. increase grass cutting height to 75mm overall rather than having mown in paths at a different cutting height (see reasoning above).

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 1) To increase the grass cutting height to 75mm at St Christopher's Green, Clement Corner, Grover's Garden and Pocket Park to enable forbs to grow.
- 2) Council retains non-native shrubs at Clement Corner but replace with natives as and when required.
- 3) Creation of a bed at Pocket Park at the base of the wall to create a fernery, and area for shade tolerant plants. The creation of the bed will be approximately £275 for the wool weed suppressor and wood chip. This is to be paid from the budget line for the biodiversity audit actions.
- 4) To instruct contractors to do a hard cut back of area marked as "Laurel Island" on the map to £2,000. £1,000 from Biodiversity audit action budget and £1,000 from ad hoc maintenance. If underspend to be used for topping out tall laurel/rhododendron specimens.
- 5) Biodiversity Working group to set up a Cllr/Biodiversity group/volunteer led activity to cut back areas marked Clump A & B with the aim of holding the first volunteer task in late September.

## Management Brief, for Grovers Garden for Biodiversity Project, by Baseline Biodiversity Working Group (Haslemere Biodiversity Group and Haslemere Town Council) July 2025

### Aims and objectives:

1. Enhancement of Biodiversity Metric Score (Baseline Biodiversity Audit, Alyne Ecology 2024);
2. Engage with the local Community to inform and invite participation with the project;
3. Haslemere Biodiversity Group to use Grovers Garden as a pilot monitoring site for their Wildlife Gardening Project.

### Background

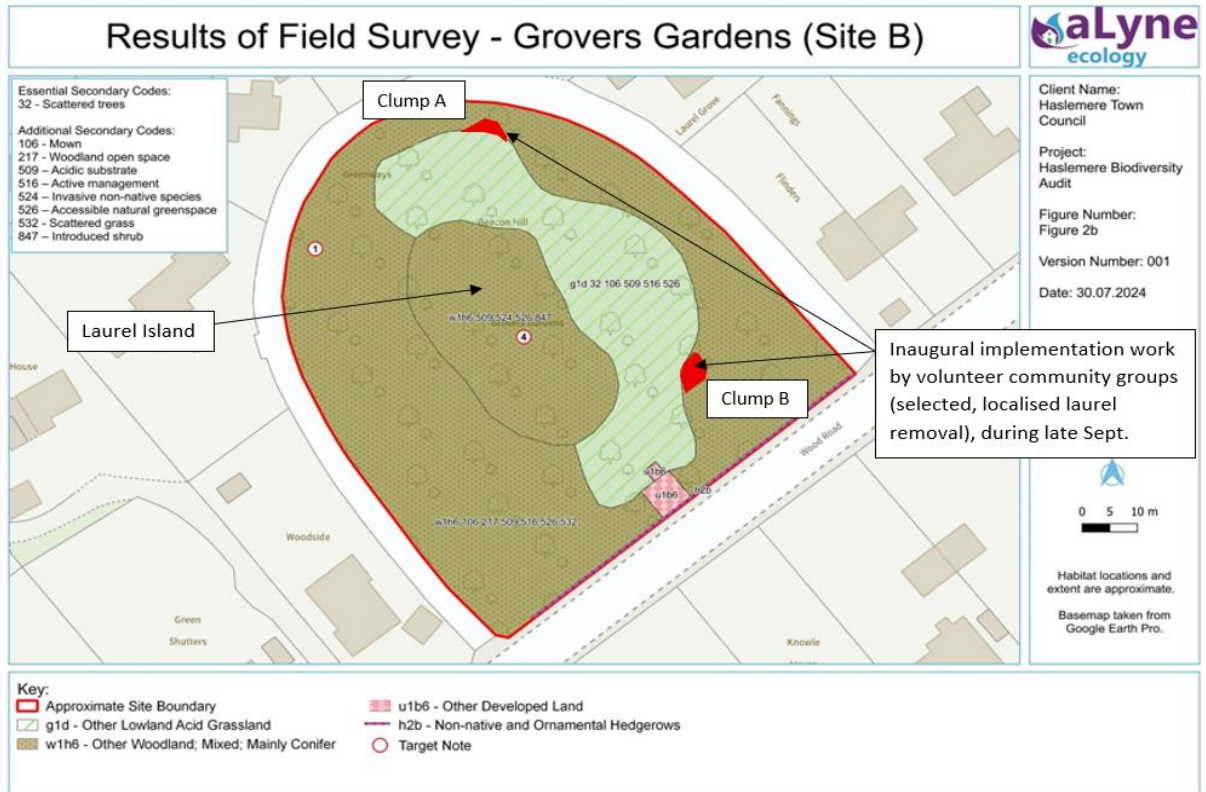
The Biodiversity Audit states, *'The grassland on site at Grovers Gardens has significant potential for enhancement from its current poor condition to moderate condition, providing the current management of the site is altered. The existing selection of acid grassland indicators (see attached Alyne Ecology map 'Results of Field Survey – Grovers Gardens') combined with the underlying geology and existing seed bank could provide good opportunities for biodiversity net gain. Management of acid grassland via grazing is not feasible on this site. Therefore, mowing is the only alternative which currently includes weekly grass cuts (maintained between 50 mm and 75 mm height) throughout the growing period (March-October)',* and it suggests *'the frequency of mowing could be reduced, or the cutting height increased slightly in order to allow any forbs within the grassland to flower and set seed.* Other recommendations within the Audit considered by the group, include removal of cherry laurel and rhododendron.

The space is a planted garden with mature ornamental shrubs and trees therefore HTC is limited in terms of budgets on what can be achieved, and any ongoing work must take account of the historic Community Garden background to the site. Community groups to engage with locally, include Beacon Hill Scout Group; Eco-Church (St. Albans); Local Resident Groups; Local Schools; immediate residents adjacent Grovers Gardens: and Wilder Communities (Surrey Wildlife Trust).

### Agreed Brief, following meeting of 31<sup>st</sup> July 2025 (see Figure 1. below):

1. **Remove two selected (A and B on plan) small clumps of laurel, with voluntary groups:** Clump A is proposed for priority removal, with a south-facing bank behind. A second clump (B) is suggested for removal if time permits. The clumps will be cut to ground level (or below) and stump-treated. Cuttings will be dragged to a pile within the Laurel Island and chipped by HTC. Grass lawns will be encouraged to grow in place of these laurel clumps.
2. **Engagement of local Community groups:** The works will include engagement with local groups (described above) to inform on the project brief and invite groups to participate in a volunteer task in late September, using hand tools only. Haslemere Biodiversity Group will engage with the wider Community during the Beacon Hill Fair on 13<sup>th</sup> September. The groups will be invited to give feed-back on future tasks, for example:
  - a) Seeding the bank to the rear of laurel clump A, with a wildflower seed mix.
  - b) Installing bird and bat boxes.
  - c) Inter-planting with native, or wildlife friendly ornamental species, as part of a more formal garden planting plan.
3. **Laurel Island:** In order to discourage ornamental shrubs from encroaching and reducing the area of grass lawns further on site, Haslemere Town Council will do a hard cut back on the north and east sides of Laurel Island (see **Figure 1**) and if budgets permit, top-out any tall laurel/rhododendron shading the lawn. This potential ongoing maintenance would benefit the general management of this garden for the local Community, in addition to the biodiversity enhancement work, as it will prevent the loss of the lawns and retain the open-space.

4. **Biodiversity Monitoring:** Haslemere Biodiversity Group to monitor these enhancements over time, and feedback to the Baseline Biodiversity Working Group.
5. **Grassland Management:** As the area of grassland expands through management of rhododendron and cherry laurel, the council could review cutting heights and mowing regime when the maintenance contracts are next up for review.



6.

