Okehampton Town Council

Simmons Park & Kempley Meadows Management Plan

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This plan has been prepared in fulfilment of a condition of grant award by the Heritage Lottery Fund to the site owner, Okehampton Town Council, for the restoration of Simmons Park. It should be read in conjunction with the Historic Landscape Survey and Restoration Plan which sets out the basis for the capital restoration works and the character and values of the park which this plan aims to conserve.

1.1 Timescale and Review

The plan is to be current over a ten-year period, from 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2031. It is to be reviewed by three dates:

i) by 31 December 2025;
ii) by 31 December 2028;
iii) by 31 December 2031, at which time another ten-year management plan is to be produced.

1.2 Area

This plan is to apply to Simmons Park and Kempley Meadows (pleasure grounds), the boundary of which is set out in the restoration plan. In future the plan may be extended to cover other amenities venues throughout the parish of Okehampton.

1.3 Objectives

The following objectives of management are derived from the restoration plan:

i) to improve the maintenance of historic features, details, surfaces and surviving structures across the park;
ii) to manage the park's surviving historic structures, planting and features based on the evidence of the Ordnance Survey second edition, 1932 revision, and historic photographs;
iii) to conserve and improve the wildlife value of the site and public appreciation of wildlife, by managing ~~and~~ the diverse range of habitat types, consistent with the objective of conserving the designed historic landscape;
iv) to maintain access across and to the park for people with disabilities;
v) to seek public co-operation and consensus over the management of the park as and when such opportunities arise;
vi) to encourage public use and activity within the park by maintaining the sense of security and by using the park for public events where this can be achieved without physical damage to the heritage asset or disruption of the quiet public enjoyment of the park.

The management proposals which follow respond to the description of the park set out in the restoration plan and the above objectives.

1.4 Byelaws

Byelaws under section 164 of the Public Health Act, 1875 and sections 12 and 15 of the Open Spaces Act, 1906, were made by the Mayor, Aldermen and Burgesses of the Borough of Okehampton with respect to Simmons Park in 1911. Subsequently these were confirmed by the Secretary of State on 23rd May 1972 and are still valid today.

2.0 SOFT LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

2.1 Lawns

Existing lawns are to be maintained by regular mowing 14-20 times per annum with cuttings mulched except for the lawns at the front of the park. . Cuttings are removed to the dedicated compost bays and mixed where necessary. Land drains are to be cleaned annually from inspection points or outfalls and repaired or replaced where drainage fails. Areas of disturbed ground or compaction are to be cultivated and reseeded to a fine ryegrass-free seed mixture and temporarily fenced off using bent canes or coppice sticks. Where excessive moss or weeds occur, lawns should be improved firstly by surface raking. Steep areas and edges, including around rockwork, are to be strimmed at the same time as mowing. In Simmons Park, designated No Mow May areas are being implemented to promote biodiversity and support local wildlife. By refraining from mowing these sections of the park during May, we aim to provide a natural habitat for pollinators such as bees, butterflies, small mammals and other essential insects, which play a crucial role in the ecosystem. These areas will also allow wildflowers and grasses to flourish, creating a more diverse and healthier environment. The initiative aligns with environmental efforts to reduce lawn care chemicals, promote sustainability, and protect native species, ultimately contributing to a richer, more vibrant landscape in the park.

2.2 Shrub and Flower Beds

Shrub and flower beds are to be kept weed free by regular hoeing; spot use of glyphosate herbicide on perennial weeds; cultivation by hand and compost mulching or woodchip covering each spring and autumn; and periodic lifting, dividing and deep cultivation of herbaceous beds at three to five year intervals. The following shrubs should be pruned to best horticultural standards every spring:

Hydrangea
Forsythia
Roses

The following shrubs should be pruned to best horticultural standards after flowering or every autumn:

Buddleia
Rhododendron
Laurel

The following shrubs and plants should be vigorously deadheaded at least twice each flowering season:

Roses
Weigela
Camellia

Gaps at the front of beds should be infilled with bedding plants and spring bulbs as indicated on the landscape contract planting plans. Beds should be inspected monthly.

Okehampton Town Council has recognised the climate crisis and has adapted its planting in the park as this dictates, incorporating plants that are able to withstand more extremes of weather, plants that don't require large amounts of water as Devon has been under water restrictions in the past few years.

Climate change planting strategies are focused on selecting and cultivating plants that are more resilient to changing environmental conditions, particularly reduced water availability. These strategies aim to reduce water usage while promoting plant health and maintaining biodiversity.

1. **Drought-Tolerant Plants**: Choosing native and drought-resistant plants is one of the most effective ways to reduce water usage. Native species are naturally adapted to the local climate and are more likely to thrive with minimal watering once established.
2. **Mulching**: Applying a thick layer of organic mulch (such as wood chips, straw, or leaves) around plants helps retain moisture in the soil, reduces evaporation, and prevents weeds. It's especially effective in the summer months when water tends to evaporate quickly.
3. **Planting Deep-Rooted Species**: Plants with deep root systems, such as trees and certain shrubs, are better equipped to access water deep in the soil. These plants are more drought-resistant because they can survive longer periods without irrigation.
4. **Climate-Adaptive Planting**: As climate change alters weather patterns, selecting plants that are adaptable to both drought and fluctuating temperatures is key. This includes choosing species that are resilient to extreme heat, long dry spells, and intense rainfall events.
5. **Soil Health**: Healthy soil is more efficient at retaining water. Practices like composting and incorporating organic matter into the soil can improve soil structure, increase its ability to retain moisture, and reduce the need for frequent watering.

Adopting these climate change planting strategies, can help mitigate the impact of water scarcity, reduce the strain on water resources, and create more sustainable landscapes that are resilient to climate shifts. This is particularly important as climate change brings more unpredictable weather patterns, including periods of both drought and heavy rainfall.

2.3 Specimen Trees

Individual trees and woodland areas should be inspected every 18 months, alternating Summer and Winter inspections, or as recommended, by an Arboricultural Association approved contractor to ensure that:

- Unsafe, dead or dying trees posing safety risks are made safe or removed, removed trees are replaced like for like where possible;
- Important historic specimen trees are maintained in a good health and aesthetic condition and with adequate space for visual appreciation by visitors to the park;
- Specimen trees are retained to their maximum safe biological life.

Woodland is checked weekly and after high winds. Tree works should only be undertaken by a similarly approved and experienced arboricultural contractor, working to a minimum of BS 3998. The standard of safety will differ between trees overhanging footpaths and trees in the centre of denser parts of Solon's Copse. Tree works will be subject to Conservation Area consents. If advised or requested, trees are checked with a tomogram before felling.

Oak tree bowling green - to maintain a watching brief on the condition of this specimen. This tree is subject to a Tree Preservation Order.It is subjected to a tomograph every 3 years to check on the rate of decay from the honey fungus. Oak trees contain more wildlife than any other tree especially in the last 200 years of their life, hence the preservation of this tree.

2.4 Woodland Trees

Solon's Copse is to be managed on a coppice-with-standards basis, a third coppiced and thinned every five years, so that a fifteen-year rotation is established favouring oak standards, hazel and other native coppice trees. Some overstorey trees will need to be felled at intervals. This work is subject to Conservation Area and Felling Licence consents and conditions. Work should only be carried out by experienced staff or

contractors with chainsaw certificates, primarily by handworks. Felled material is to be left in situ as habitat piles, or removed by hand as firewood or poles, due to the limitations of access. Where, exceptionally, a timber tree has to be removed, extraction by an experienced horse logging contractor should be considered. In the light of Ash Die back it - may not be not prudent to replant trees like for like. Other native species of trees - may be planted to expand the range of trees - future proofing resilience if another species is targeted by disease. Where possible felled trees are utilised in the park e.g. signposts for nature signs. In managing ash trees within our parks, we will only undertake replanting where there is evidence of natural resilience to ash dieback, ensuring the long-term health and sustainability of the trees in Simmons Park.

2.5 Tree Report

Following the receipt of a preliminary tree report, to adhere to the recommendations contained therein and to plant new specimens when required following the removal of diseased, unsafe or dying trees. The inspections are to be carried out every 18 months to 3 years depending on the use of the area.

2.6 Woodland Ground Flora

Within Solon's Copse, the natural ground flora is to be allowed to regrow between coppicing. Elsewhere within the park, ground flora is to be managed as follows:

- Bramble, bracken, sycamore and maple regeneration and other weed species are to be cut and removed annually;
- Natural regeneration of oak, beech, yew and ornamental species is to be thinned progressively where required for replacement, subject to the character of individual areas (such as beech preferred within the beech wood area);
- Ornamental semi-natural species such as butcher's broom, bluebell, daffodils and Garlic are to be protected and retained;
- Replanted larch behind Chalet Treloar are to be periodically thinned to favour open grown, deep-crowned picturesque form 'alpine' larch;
- Dense prickly vegetation is to be retained behind Mayor's Seat and other locations where erosion caused by pedestrians or cyclists can or does occur;
- Laurel and *Rhododendron ponticum* are to be trimmed annually or coppiced individually on a ten year rotation;
- Viewpoints identified on the restoration plan are to be pruned annually where necessary to retain views.

2.7 Riverbank

The riverbank vegetation is to be managed by selective annual trimming in September to maintain views, periodic coppicing of alder and sycamore and retention of riverside oaks. Control invasive weeds such as Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam using herbicides agreed by the Environment Agency. Leaving the grass long and brambles along the edge of the river helps protect the banks from erosion by stabilizing the soil with deep-rooted vegetation. This natural barrier also reduces runoff, filters pollutants, and provides a vital habitat for wildlife, supporting biodiversity. Allowing the grass to grow undisturbed enhances the river's natural defences while maintaining a more sustainable and environmentally friendly landscape. This also acts as a natural rivers edge barrier.

2.8 Platts Meadow

Mowing is typically done at the end of the growing season to allow plants to set seeds. Grass cuttings should be removed after mowing to prevent soil enrichment, which can lead to the decline of wildflowers. To further enhance the meadow's role in biodiversity, encourage pollinators by planting a variety of nectar-rich flowers and providing sheltered areas for bees nd other insects. This can help increase pollinator populations, which are crucial for plant reproduction.
Rolling of bracken is carried out twice yearly to prevent the area being overrun.

Wildflower Meadow Management: Encouraging the growth of native wildflowers to provide essential food sources for pollinators, such as bees and butterflies. This will be achieved through a rotational mowing schedule and seed dispersal initiatives.

Hedgerow Conservation: Preserving and enhancing hedgerows as vital wildlife corridors. Regular maintenance will be carried out to ensure they remain healthy, providing shelter and food for birds, small mammals, and insects.

Platts Meadow is home to various species of birds, amphibians, and small mammals. Conservation efforts will focus on:

Creating Wildlife-Friendly Zones: Designating areas with minimal human disturbance to provide safe habitats for nesting birds, hedgehogs, and other species.

Bat & Bird Box Installations: Introducing nesting sites to encourage greater avian diversity and support bat populations.

Sustainable Land Management

To balance public access with environmental responsibility, Platts Meadow will be maintained using sustainable practices, including:

Low-Impact Grass Cutting: Adopting a mowing regime that leaves certain areas untouched during peak growing seasons to allow wildlife to thrive. It is cut once a year in 3 stages of height.

Pesticide-Free Maintenance: No use of harmful chemicals to protect soil health and prevent contamination of nearby watercourses.

Erosion Prevention Measures: Implementing strategies such as replanting native vegetation and installing soft landscaping solutions to reduce soil erosion and flooding risks.

Public Engagement & Education

Community involvement is essential in preserving Platts Meadow's ecological integrity. The council will:

Organize wildlife walks, educational talks, and conservation workshops to encourage public participation.

Provide clear signage with information about local species and how visitors can help protect them.

Work with local schools and environmental groups to promote awareness of meadowland conservation.

By implementing these measures, Platts Meadow will continue to serve as a valuable natural asset for Okehampton, benefiting both the environment and the local community

2.8 Leaf Collection

Autumnal leaf collection should be carried out for all paths and minimum 300mm wide verges, all lawns, beds and water features. Leaf collection is not required in woodland areas. Leaves are collected and removed to the compost site.

2.9 Hedgerows

Boundary hedgerows to be trimmed annually and, where thin, subject to trespass or over tall, cut and lay at 10 to 20 year intervals, using existing planting, infilling where necessary with hawthorn and hazel. If the hedge is not on a path it is trimmed at the end of the nesting season.

2.10 Planted Specimen Trees

Maintain newly planted specimen trees by maintaining a weed-free area, 2m diameter and maintain much 75mm deep; checking ties are firm, but loosen in season to allow stem growth; remove all ties and stakes after two years growth; avoid use of strimmer close to tree; carry out formative pruning annually to Arboricultural standards.

2.11 Plant and Equipment

To maintain landscape, shrubs, trees and flower beds it is essential to replace equipment over time with due budget provision acknowledged as part of this management plan. Renewal of equipment will be battery based rather than fuel based as part of the Councils efforts to reduce their carbon footprint . This is also beneficial in terms of health risks to employees by minimizing use of vibrating equipment.

3.0 HARD LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

3.1 Tarmacadam Paths

The existing smooth-surfaced main tarmacadam path is popular with people of all abilities and should therefore be maintained as a smooth, clean surface. It may require resurfacing at twenty year intervals and is currently in good condition. To avoid raising the path level unduly, previous layers may need to be planed off prior to resurfacing. Where specific areas are disturbed or in poor condition, the surface should be repaired to match as closely as possible the existing surface. Surface drains and gullies should be cleaned out once each year to a minimum functioning standard.

3.2 Stone-surfaced Paths

Stone surfaced paths should be leaf blown at least four times each autumn; inspected at least weekly to be free from obstruction or hazard; handraked and cleared of soil twice each year; scarified, regraded to cambers, made up where necessary using Meldon 20 mm down scalpings to match and rolled each year using small machinery suitable to the access. On zig-zag and steep-edged paths, damaged rustic stone edging should be reinstated or repaired at the same time and planting of butcher's broom and use of bent poles and layered coppice to restrict corner-cutting and erosion should be maintained on an annual basis each winter.

3.3 Grounds Maintenance

Due budget provision to be maintained each year for necessary works to maintain these routes.

3.4 Benches

Oak benches should be cleaned and rubbed down each year, splinters planed off and any splits infilled with exterior, self-coloured wood filler. After twenty years some may need to be replaced to the original design.

Ornamental benches should be inspected weekly and cleaned as necessary. Paintwork to iron should be rubbed down and recoated as necessary in situ at three-year intervals and one bench removed for full refurbishment each alternate year. Woodwork to the benches should be rubbed down and treated with one coat of raw linseed oil each summer.

Due budget provision to be made on an annual or as when required basis for the replacement of quality benches.

3.5 Bins and Litter

Bins should be emptied, and litter collected on a daily basis (Monday to Friday).

3.6 Buildings

Graffiti should be removed using proprietary cleaners within two days of its occurring. More serious but superficial damage should be repaired within two weeks. Extensive loss to arson or similar requiring replacement should be achieved within six months of the damage occurring. All chemicals used will be stored and disposed of correctly and a risk assessment and COSSH for each chemical is available in the Tractor Shed.

Shelters should be inspected and swept clean on a regular basis; no regular maintenance should be required within the shelters. Paintwork to the park keeper's office/meeting room should be rubbed down and repainted at four year intervals and the interior of the building cleaned weekly.

The tractor shed should not require maintenance, but damage to steelwork should be made good in accordance with the sheet supplier's recommendations. The shed should be cleaned out annually and all non-essential stored materials disposed from the exterior compound on an annual basis.

Electrical installations should be checked by a qualified electrician at five yearly intervals. PAT testing is undertaken annually.

Water supplies will be checked regularly to prevent waterborne diseases and ensure compliance with current regulations.

3.7 Playground Equipment

Playground equipment to be replaced on a when required basis through purchase, lease or sponsorship. The equipment is checked weekly for any faults, with 6 month in-depth inspections carried out by a qualified staff member and yearly by ROSPAA

3.8 Stone Retaining Walls

Stone retaining walls to the riverbank and boundary hedgerows should be inspected annually and repaired where necessary annually to match the surviving parts, either vertical drystone hedge walling, using stone on site or Meldon selected 100-225 mm walled stone; or mortared walls using a 1:3 mix of hydraulic lime mortar and grey coarse sand/stone dust, with 'trowel-handle' pointing. Maintain and rake out to weep holes where necessary.

3.9 Iron Railings

Repaint railings and all painted ironwork to bridges at five yearly intervals including rubbing down, zinc primer where necessary, undercoat and two coats of gloss to match the restored colour.

3.10 Resin-bound Grit Surfacing to Bridges

A ten year interval, or as necessary to sustain grip, reapply resin and silver-grey granite grit, 2.5mm size.

3.11 The Pond

Each year in autumn, trim back herbaceous growth, clean out silt from the gulley pots for intake on the park boundary, waterfall and outfall; clean out silt from the pond; replace pump and fountain fillers; carry out maintenance to pump; make good any leaks to the pond render.

3.12 Plant and Equipment

Plant and equipment to be replaced following due budget provision to maintain the park.

3.13 Structural Inspectors

Carry out safety inspections to bridges each year, or as recommended.

3.14 Signage

As set out in the Heritage Lottery Fund application documentation, information and interpretation signage within the park will be maintained and enhanced; to include a noticeboard at the main entrance gates, and information boards regarding the parks trees and wildlife habitats will be provided as an educational facility.

3.15 Wildlife

To enhance the park's biodiversity and support local wildlife, management practices should prioritize habitat conservation and ecological balance. A variety of habitat types, including woodland, meadow, and riverbank areas, will be maintained to provide food, shelter, and breeding grounds for native species. The establishment of "No Mow May" zones and wildflower meadows will encourage pollinators such as bees and butterflies, while selective coppicing and tree planting will sustain woodland diversity and resilience. Riverbanks will be left largely undisturbed, with long grass acting as a natural stabilizer against erosion and a refuge for small mammals and amphibians. Deadwood from necessary tree works will be retained in habitat piles to support fungi, insects, and birds. Public engagement through wildlife interpretation boards and guided nature walks will foster awareness and appreciation of the park's ecological importance, ensuring that conservation efforts are supported and sustained for future generations. Hedgehog houses and feeding stations provided. Simmons Park is a rehoming area for hedgehogs in Okehampton.

In 1997 the park was host to:
32 species of bird
1 species of mammal
30 species of plant
33 species of woodland trees and scrub
39 species of ornamental trees and shrubs.

In 2025 the Park will be surveyed to monitor the species number and variety.

4.0 ADMINISTRATION

4.1 Organisation

The management structure is as shown on the organisation diagram (appendix 1).

4.2 Quality Control

Quality control for the park is the responsibility of the Park Keeper. Inspection and activity records (appendix 2) should be reviewed on a six monthly basis with the Town Clerk and reported to the Parks Committee. A weekly check of the park is carried out every Friday.

4.3 Promotion of Parks

Promotion Educational and interpretative signage will be maintained and expanded. Social media will be used for regular updates.

4.4 Commercial Aspect

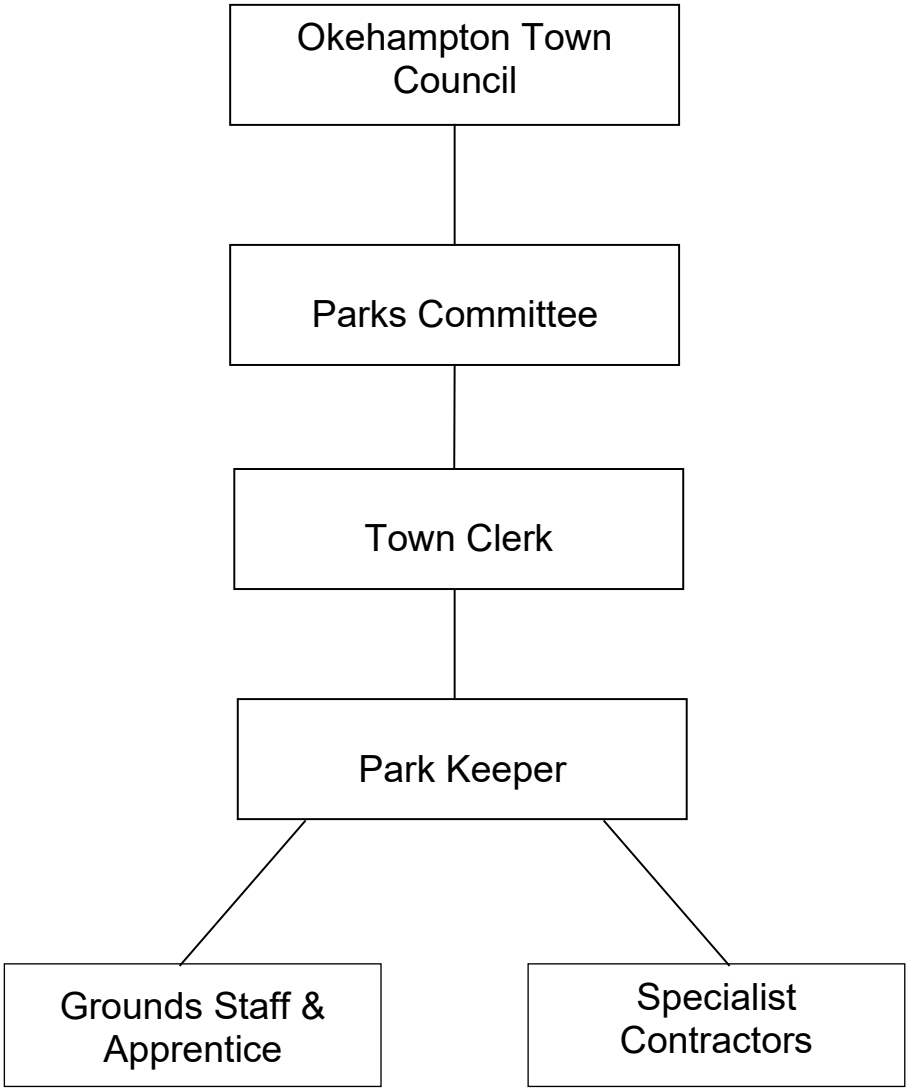
Commercial Aspect Opportunities to raise funds to offset operational costs will be explored.

4.5 Neighbours

To continue to foster and maintain good relations with neighbours.

Appendix 1

Simmons Park
Management Organisation



Appendix 2

Management Records. Each box to be dated and initialled

Annual Tasks

Review Plan	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
Inspect land drainage							
Coppicing							
Trim understorey flora							
Trim riverbank							
Leaf collection							
Trim hedgerows							
Inspect new planting							
Inspect tarmac/clean drains							
Maintain stone paths							
Clean and varnish benches							
Refurbish ornamental bench							
Repaint office							
Clean out tractor shed and depot							
Check electrics							
Inspect/repair walls							
Repaint railings							
Repaint bridges							
Reapply grit							
Pond maintenance							
Bridge inspections							
Spread Compost/Woodchip							
Wildflower Planting							
Sensory Garden Maintenance							
Weed Spraying							

Monthly Tasks for 2025

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Pruning/weeding beds												
Leaf blowing												
Record damage												
Record repair												

Weekly Tasks for 2025

	Week No												
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Mow lawns													
Strimming													
Inspect paths													
Litter collected													
Inspect shelters													
Clean office													

	Week No												
	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
Mow lawns													
Inspect paths													
Litter collected													
Inspect shelters													
Clean office													

	Week No												
	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39
Mow lawns													
Inspect paths													
Litter collected													
Inspect shelters													
Clean office													

	Week No												
	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52
Mow lawns													
Inspect paths													
Litter collected													
Inspect shelters													
Clean office													