

Summary of

Admirals Park Management Plan

1.0 Site information

Site name: Admirals Park, Tower Gardens & West Park (**Admirals Park, CM1 2PL**)

Location: On the River Can in Chelmsford, Essex (Figure 1)

Proposed declaring authority: Chelmsford City Council

Area: 23 hectares (excluding West Park pitch and putt, 7 hectares)

Ownership: Site owned by Chelmsford City Council

The park is of vital importance as a wildlife corridor to connect rural areas with the city centre and a route for people to travel into Chelmsford. It was declared a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) in 2021.

1.1 History

The site is comprised of open parkland (Admirals Park and West park) and formal gardens (Tower Gardens) totalling 25 hectares (excluding the pitch and putt), figure 2.

- Admirals Park comprises the area of open space to the north of the river Can running from Beaches Drive through to Waterhouse Lane. The main block of Admirals Park was officially purchased on the 22nd January 1920. West Park is the area of open parkland to the south of the River Can with more woodland and long grassland.
- Tower Gardens is an area of formal parkland to the west of Admirals Park and was purchased by the Council on the 15th September 1914. The water tower site was originally purchased for water supply on the 29th August 1888 and then transferred to the water company. It was repurchased from the said company in 1987.
- West Park is the area of more open parkland to the south of the river. It is the location of more natural green space with woodland, wildflower meadows and ponds. The land was purchased by the council on 13th April 1931. It was described in the transfer as Little Waterhouse cottage and barn, river and pasture. Part of the area was used as a waste tip and later refilled some 3-4 m higher than existing ground levels.

1.2 Facilities:

- 1 Car park (Tower Gardens)
- 2 Toilets (Admirals)
- 3 Sports pavilion (Admirals) servicing the cricket square.
- 4 Chelmsford Bowls Club (Tower Gardens)
- 5 Play Area (Admirals)
- 6 Outdoor Gym (Admirals)
- 7 Football pitches (Admirals)
- 8 Tennis courts (Tower Gardens)
- 9 Woodland (Admirals)
- 10 Grasslands managed for biodiversity
- 11 Landscaped Gardens (Tower Gardens)
- 12 Riverside walks and pursuits including fishing

1.3 Financial Management

The Admirals Park management and maintenance is currently funded out of two revenue streams:

1. The Parks revenue budget.
2. Monies derived from the Community infrastructure Levy/S106.



Figure 1: Map showing the LNR area on the edge of Chelmsford (Google Maps, 2020)

Tower Gardens

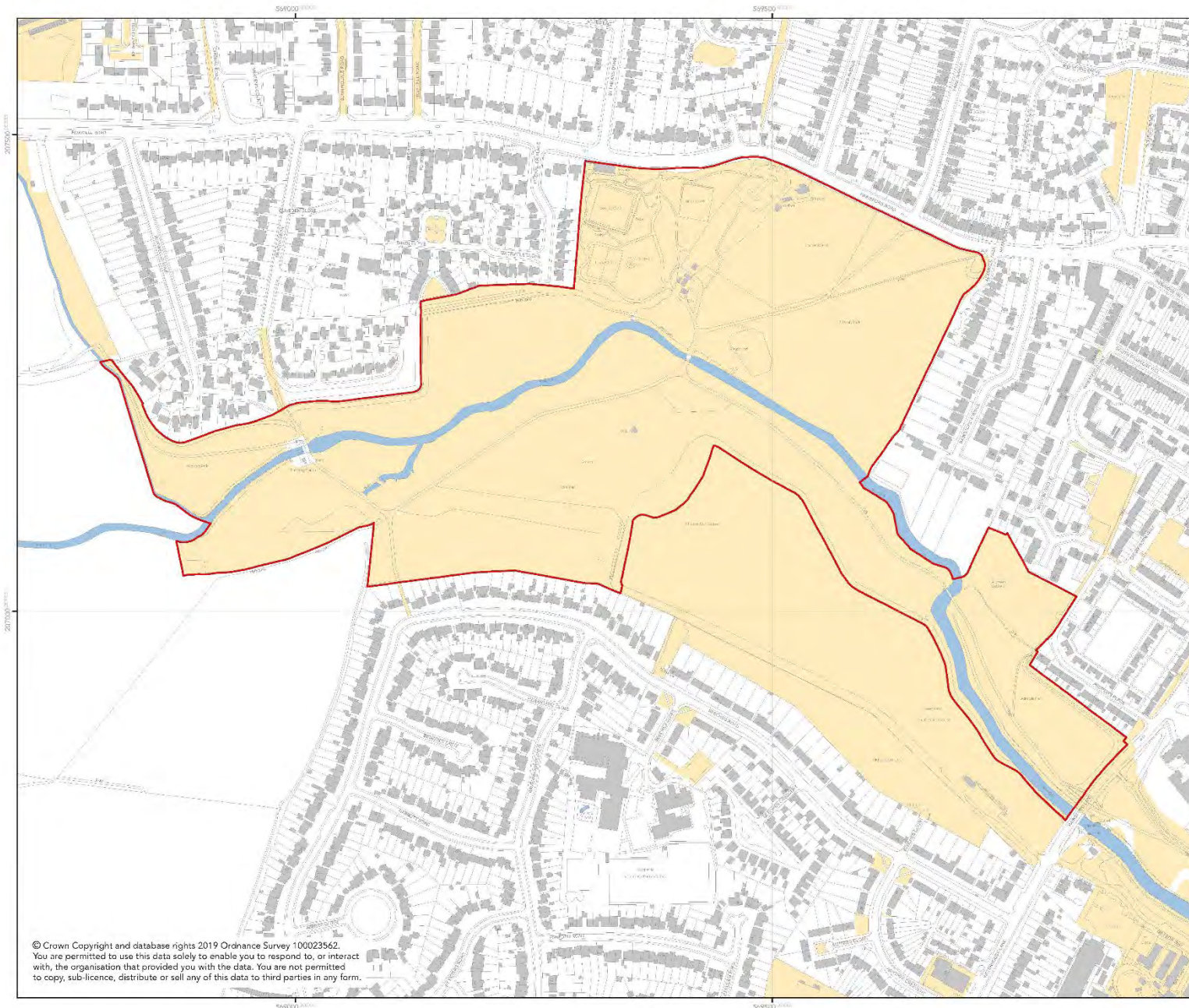
Admirals Park



West Park

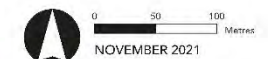
Pitch and Putt

Figure 2: Map outlining the different areas of Admirals Park, Tower Gardens and West Park, pitch and putt (Google Maps, 2020)



Admiral's Park Local Nature Reserve

- Area of Local Nature Reserve
- Land in CCC Registered Ownership



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Figure 3: Map showing the boundary of the LNR.

2 Site descriptions

2.1 Tower Gardens

Character description	This part of the park occupies the Victorian Pleasure Gardens whose layout and plantings in the main, have stayed true to the original design concept. In addition to the plantings the gardens contain four tennis courts and a bowling green. Along the southern edge of the gardens there is wildflower planting and trees which bring wildlife into the gardens. There are also some other areas of the gardens that are managed for wildlife, including an area with a bug hotel. All of these factors allow for movement of wildlife around the park as a whole.
Assessment	<p>The formal layout of the gardens gives a pleasing appearance to the area coupled by mature plantings of trees and shrubs and the formal areas of annual bedding but lacks the scale of planting, and degree of architectural ornamentation associated with this period.</p> <p>The focal point of the area is The Rotunda, tennis courts and bowls green.</p> <p>The Terrace at the bowling green is the feature requiring some priority. Most of the shrub borders within the gardens are now over mature and incapable of communicating their former grandeur.</p> <p>The lack of ornamentation at the entrance from the car park means that there is no sense of arrival to the gardens. The initial impression of the Park is undermined by the poor condition of the entrance from the car park.</p>
Management aims	<p>Maintain, restore and enhance the formal character in keeping with the heritage and style of the existing features.</p> <p>Introduce a catering facility coupled with an upgrade to the current toilet block to create an active and vibrant hub within the park centred on existing built fabric and facilities.</p> <p>Conserve and protect the historic rotunda.</p> <p>Restore and manage views between this character area and those beyond it to restore the relationship between the built core of the park and the wider parkland landscape.</p> <p>Introduce a greater range of plantings to provide horticultural delight consistent with the formal style. Planting to provide colour, texture, scent and movement and be attractive to insects.</p>

2.2 Open Parkland

Character description	This character area comprises the landscaped core that once formed the setting for the Mildmay family estate back in the 17th Century. The area is characterised by open grassland containing individual trees and tree lined footpaths. The Site falls downwards towards the river which flows through the park in a W E direction through the middle of the park.
Assessment	The landscape of the Admirals Park element of the parkland remains by and large as it was 250 years ago. In essence it is still managed as water meadow with a hay cut being taken in late summer. Much of the area being managed for biodiversity with tracts of land being mown to

	facilitate the playing of football and cricket. The river course remains the responsibility of the Environment Agency although the City Council has invested in bank stabilisation works along sections of river running through the park.
Management aims	Maintain as open grassland interspersed with trees character. Encourage differential mowing regimes for the grass to reduce maintenance intensity and to improve biodiversity. Prohibit incursion by scrub and further trees. Maintain the footpath network in an accessible, safe and attractive condition. Maintain park furniture in good condition.

2.3 Woodland

Character description	The area is characterised by stands of semi-mature poplar and willow.
Assessment	Overall, the area retains the distribution of planting that has characterised it for many years, but numerous gaps in the tree canopy remain, indicating that much remains to be done to restore the structural integrity of the woodland giving opportunity for understory planting. This area is being managed for the enjoyment of the public with paths being created through the plantations. To the south of the plantation the land is given to arable farmland and to the north the area is managed as water meadow grassland and is cut and cleared in the late summer.
Management aims	Identify gaps in the woodland that could be filled in with some underplanting.

2.4 River Corridor

Character description	This area runs through the middle of the park in a W-E direction. The margins of the riverbank are managed to benefit flora and fauna. Adjacent grassland is managed to encourage biodiversity and paths are mown through the area to allow people to wander and to enjoy the setting.
Assessment	Overall, the distribution of seating along the mown river path is sufficient and the relaxed mowing regimes plus the mown path network are well received by the public. There is a need to better specify the cutting of the riverbanks and for monitoring and control of Himalayan balsam along the banks. A meeting with the Environmental Agency would be of benefit to discuss the de silting of the water course in certain areas.
Management aims	Enhance the biodiversity of the area by maintaining the undisturbed character and by increasing habitat structural diversity. Maintain the heritage through the preservation of the ponds to the west of the site Ensure that pond 2 remains free from too many trees by regular coppicing of the willows to ensure they remain manageable Monitor silt and remove as necessary to control common reed and maintain areas of open water. Cut back bramble and nettle every two or three years.

2.5 Other wildlife areas

Character description	Large swaths of Admirals Park are managed for the benefit of wildlife and increase biodiversity.
Assessment	The wildflower meadow is a valued feature within the park providing colour and wildlife value and a contrast to the more enclosed, wooded spaces within the park. Its value is somewhat dependant on maintaining its extents and size and ensuring that it doesn't become fragmented or encroached upon by scrub or tree growth. Hedgerows provide habitat and linking features within the park and scrub provides habitat for bird and small mammal species.
Management aims	The long-term goal should be to recognise the value of keeping all the pieces together and therefore to ensure that public access is managed appropriately. Protect and enhance the biodiversity value of the area by maintaining its undisturbed character and by increasing habitat structural diversity. Maintain and interpret the landscape history by the protection of existing features. Maintain the landscape character by protecting the canopy cover that exists within the Park.

3 Green infrastructure and ecosystem services

Local importance:

- 1) For economic regeneration** – to produce more attractive business locations; cut environmental risks such as flood damage; generate new commercial activity.
- 2) For planning** – to help deliver on sustainable development and housing targets and maximise return on investment in public space.
- 3) For public health** – to create better environments and healthier communities with less mental and physical illness such as respiratory problems, heart disease and obesity (Heart & Sole is Chelmsford's FREE health walk programme set up by Chelmsford City Council and Chelmsford Primary Care Trust. Admirals Park/West Park is a venue for a specific walk with a way marked route and leaflet available to help promote the initiative).
- 4) For community cohesion** – to increase social interaction and reduce aggressive behavior.
- 5) For sustainable ecosystem services** – the site has value as part of the flood defences for the town, acting as a carbon sink to reduce the impacts of climate change and reducing the urban heat island effect locally.

3.1 Evaluation of nature conservation

The park has been managed historically as amenity grassland for decades and therefore it is important to realise that any positive improvements will take time to be achieved. Monitoring is showing that this is now occurring with an increase in species such as cuckoo-flower, an increasingly uncommon plant of damp conditions, south of the river and pignut, an indicator species of old grassland. It is hoped that over time species will re colonise from the LNR grassland upstream from the park. Active management has begun also within the willow wood and around the backwater pond.

Defined habitats and management



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Figure 4: Map outlining the habitats present within West park, Admirals Park and Tower Gardens (Compiled by the author).

4.0 Summary of habitats

4.1 West Park

West Park is the area south of the River Can from Beaches Road to Waterhouse Lane. It does not now include the pitch and putt highlighted in figure 2 and figure 4 by the red diagonal lines because this is managed externally. This site has a number of habitats which currently are not linked to each other but could form an attractive wildlife area adjacent to the adjoining countryside.

There is approximately 2 hectares of grassland being managed as lowland meadow habitat in the Park. In contrast, there is approximately 3.2 hectares of grassland being managed as short mown amenity. Meadows and pasture have been an integral part of the landscape of Admirals Park (Mildmay Estate) for centuries, grazed by cattle and sheep, whereas today they are cut by machines. The meadows are a link to the past and help tell the story of Admirals Park through the ages. Area 1 has been flail cut since October 2003. Once in spring and once in late summer. Areas 2 and 3 comprise close mown amenity grass, woodland, trees and scrub. There is a newly planted area of woodland as part of the greening Chelmsford project in area 3. The small woodland (Area 4) is predominantly willow, with some oak, field maple, wild cherry and hawthorn. The willows in particular are very close together and most have multiple stems.

The ground flora is dominated by nettle and cow parsley. This was the original line of the river and so is often quite wet. The hedge on the boundary with the farmland, compartment 5 contains mainly dead elm and contains many gaps. A double hedge marks a track way running through compartment 3. It is reported that it marks the route of an old railway serving the former brickworks. Much of this area is raised up above the level of the surrounding land. Along the riverbank there are a number of large mature trees, including elm, particularly in area 1.

A pond has formed in the old river course in area 2. There is a link to the river at the downstream end, forming a small backwater. Frog spawn has been found in it. It is the only pond in this group of parks. The current course of the river has a large sluice arrangement immediately upstream of the Pump House Bridge. There are steep banks that could be used by kingfisher. Dense vegetation on the banks upstream of the bridge provides cover for animals in this section. An otter spraint was found under the Pump House bridge during the Essex Otter Survey. Kingfishers have also been seen in the area.

4.2 Admirals Park and Tower Gardens

Admiral's Park and Tower Gardens Admiral's Park comprises the area of open space north of the River Can running from near Beaches Drive through to Waterhouse Lane. Tower Gardens is an area of formally managed gardens that lays in the middle of this park. The original core of the Admiral's Park, including the gardens, is quite traditional, reflecting its long history (it is shown on the 1874 First Series Ordnance Survey Map). It is the home to Chelmsford Bowls Club, has tennis courts, a bowling green, cricket and football pitches and changing rooms and toilets.

At the northern end, closest to the road, there are a number of mature trees forming recreational woodland. Closest to the river is a large dead tree that has been left for biodiversity. The vegetation on the riverbank is mown to the top of the bank.

Most of the rest of the park is dominated by close mown grass with standard trees. An avenue was planted either side of the main pathway through area 9. There is also a line of hawthorn trees approximately 3m from the northern boundary with the allotment site. There are a number of trees growing along the riverbank.

The piece of land between the river and houses Compartment 6 comprises a mix of scrub, bramble and tall herbs with some open areas of grassland. A relatively new cycleway linking through to Writtle was constructed by Essex County Council by agreement with Chelmsford City Council and Writtle College.

A large area of open grassland that forms part of the floodplain currently dominates the north-eastern part of the site area 7. This also includes a new area of woodland in area 8 on figure 4 above. There is also a strip of scrubby woodland that runs north to Roxwell Road that forms a buffer between the adjacent housing and the stream that flows from the north to join the River Can at the western end of the park. This area is not included in this management plan as there is no access.

The Chelmsford Biodiversity Action plan highlights the importance for biodiversity in the town of the riverside park network. A target within the previous plan was to survey all of the sites to assess their value for biodiversity and to propose any management changes that were felt to be appropriate. It was agreed that it would be necessary to prioritise the work, focusing on the sites where benefits could be achieved most easily. The western parts of West Park and Admiral's Park were felt to contain significant potential due to the number of existing habitat areas. The last six years has recorded a great improvement in the biodiversity value of all three sites.

5.0 Summary of management

Habitat type	Location	Management
Amenity grassland	Admirals Park, Tower Gardens and West Park.	Mown regularly to keep the height to a minimum, there are football pitches and cricket pitches located within this grassland which require further maintenance including application of chemicals and spiking. The edges of these areas are managed for biodiversity with grass left long and scrub allowed to grow to soften wooded edges.
Cut and collect grassland	Admirals Park and West Park	These areas are either cut for hay in the summer or left long grass and cut and cleared in September. There is a wider variety of flora in these areas compared to the amenity grassland. They also provide habitat for insects, small mammals and reptiles.
Woodland and trees	Admirals Park and West Park	The trees are monitored and assessed for safety by the Tree Officer using a system called 'Treewise' to keep a track on potentially dangerous trees. Contractors arboriculture firms can be contacted to carry out the removal of trees or individual limbs. The woodland in area 5 is dominated by tall standard trees with little diversity in species or structure. Thinning of this section should be carried out and then underplanting with a mix of species (Hazel, Hawthorn, Alder, Field Maple etc.). Some planting of trees has been carried out in area 3 and 8 as part of the greening Chelmsford project which will need some maintenance to keep them alive.
Scrub	Admirals Park and West Park	The areas of scrub are dominated by Hawthorn, Blackthorn and bramble. Maintenance is carried on these areas by removing and thinning of Hawthorn, Blackthorn and Bramble. This is an important habitat for birds, small mammals and insects. They provide a buffer between areas of high footfall and wildlife.
Hedgerow	Admirals Park and West Park	There are hedgerows which are managed by cutting regularly to a height of 1.5m. These still provide habitat to small mammals

		<p>and bird species and act as wildlife corridors within the site. In area 3 the hedgerow has been allowed to grow so is of greater value to wildlife as there is more cover and nesting potential. The hedgerow along area 5 needs to be thickened with planting up the gaps.</p>
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6.0 Value to the local community

6.1 Sport in the Parks

Use of sporting facilities within all three parks is actively encouraged. Each park offers its own mix of opportunities. Sporting facilities in parks are provided to a high standard and regular meetings are held with sports users who are represented by specific sports user groups. Local schools, local College and Cubs groups regularly use all the sporting facilities on offer. The summer events programme also makes use of these facilities during the school holidays.

Tower Gardens: There are two sets of tennis courts at Tower Gardens providing up to 4 nets at any one time. One set of courts is dedicated to Beechenlea Tennis Club on Wednesdays and Thursdays from 6.30 pm. The club actively encourages new members. The tennis courts are also actively used by the tennis leagues (free tennis tournaments for all). The bowling green is a well-used feature within the park and is home to Chelmsford Bowling Club, founded in 1906. The club has a large membership and many league matches are played through the summer months. One rink is left available for members of the public wishing to have a game, other than for official matches. Bookings are dealt with through the City Council’s sports booking line, though casual games are arranged directly with the club under terms of a concession agreement.

Admirals Park: The park has a Mini Pitch for the football enthusiasts. Also close by we have a cricket table and sports pavilion. Aside from these formally marked out areas there are other close mown areas in the park that facilitate informal ball games – rounders, football and cricket.

West Park: West Park has facilities for walking, running and a football pitch. There is also other open space suitable for playing ball games.

6.2 Play in the Parks

Admirals Park: The Park boasts a large self-contained formal play area with a mix of facilities for younger children. In addition to this there is an outdoor gym for adults.

6.3 Volunteering

There is a regular group of volunteers that meet every Tuesday in Tower Gardens to carry out horticultural work on the formal gardens. Local volunteers also have the opportunity to carry out practical work in this local park to improve it for wildlife through conservation volunteering sessions every other month. Thriftwood college Task include: Balsam bashing, scrub clearance, meadow cutting and raking and wildflower surveying. Local businesses also can be involved in the park through volunteer sessions doing similar tasks to improve the park. Volunteers can involve themselves in the River Care scheme locally. Also, twice a year ‘Love your Chelmsford’ organise a river litter pick and invite local people to come and get involved.

6.3.1 Greening Chelmsford

Recently the ‘Greening Chelmsford’ project has involved a huge amount of local people in planting over 3000 trees within West Park and Admirals Park to get better connectivity of the woodland through the park and part of a larger project of planting 14,000 trees across Chelmsford. This project

took place within Admirals and West Park between November 2019 and February 2020. The greening project will continue with planting in many other areas in Chelmsford and some future planting in the park. There were several different volunteer groups involved with this project who will continue to be involved through the aftercare of these trees:

- Gallagher Insurance.
- Anglia Ruskin University.
- Thriftwood College.
- Chelmsford College.
- Mencap Chelmsford.
- Local volunteer group.

6.4 Other activities taking place across the parks

River pursuits

The River Can runs through West Park and Admirals Park to the town centre and provides a setting for riverside walks and fishing. Fishing is permitted at the following two locations:

- South Bank from just above the weir down to the iron bridge
- North Bank from the weir to the end of Admirals Park

Chelmsford has an active Canoe Club who fully use the rivers through the parks.

Healthy living / Healthy walks

Heart & Sole is Chelmsford's FREE health walk programme set up by Chelmsford City Council and Chelmsford Primary Care Trust. It is especially ideal for those who do little exercise and are

interested in walking, or for those who are recovering from illness or surgery. The scheme currently provides eleven safe walking routes based around local parks led by trained volunteers. Each walk lasts approximately 30 minutes. Admirals Park/West Park is a venue for a specific walk with a way marked route and leaflet available to help promote the initiative.

7.0 Value of the park in the wider context (Admirals Park used to describe all three parks)

Admirals Park has huge importance locally and in a wider context for wildlife and people. Firstly, statutory and non-statutory designated sites have been identified in Chelmsford and surrounding area, shown in figure 5. Marconi Ponds LNR is the nearest site along with Chelmer Valley LNR which provide local refuges for wildlife. Other sites like Hylands Park, Galleywood Common and Newney Green Pit SSSI are also important nearby places for a variety of wildlife. Also, to the east there are several statutory designated sites (including woodland and lowland heath). There are no locally designated sites on the River Can so this would be a good opportunity to ensure the legal protection of Admirals Park by designating it an LNR. Figure 6 shows an aerial of Chelmsford and the surrounding area, highlighting the amount of greenspace surrounding Chelmsford. Much of this is arable farmland but there are also many pockets of woodland. The route of the rivers (Chelmer, Can and Wid) shows how the river corridors connect many valuable sites for wildlife. Admirals Park forms a key link from the town centre and the River Chelmer to the River Wid and the wildlife habitat to the west of Chelmsford. Many bird, mammal and reptile species rely on this connecting habitat to move around an urban dominated landscape. Also, Essex Wildlife Trusts Living Landscapes project is important in providing connectivity between nature reserves and other sites. Admirals Park is a key part of the living landscape linking together other important habitats.

7.1 Important habitats

Admirals Park also has great value to wildlife in its own right as it provides a large area of meadow in a local area (figure 4) which has little of this habitat feature and is important on a national scale. Furthermore, the trees and woodland as shown in figure 4 are of vital importance as nesting habitat for birds, provide food for mammals and birds and act as a local CO2 sink.

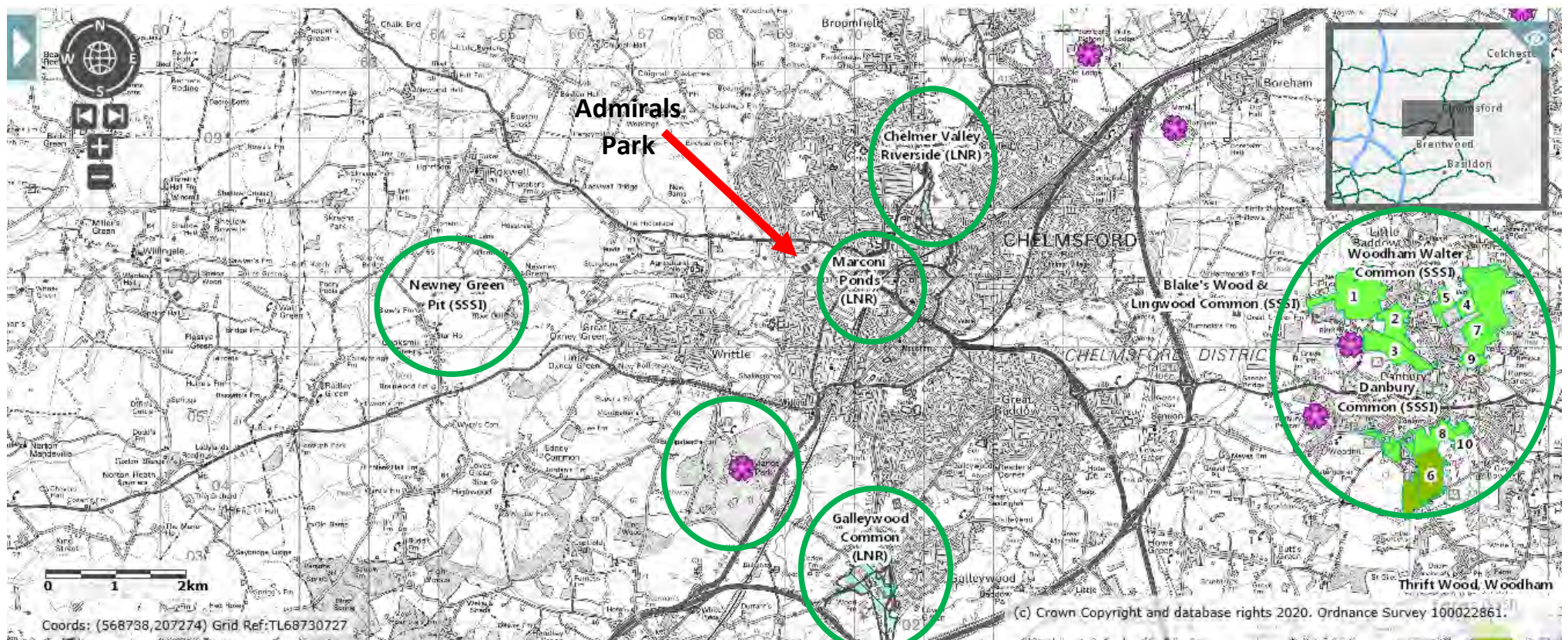


Figure 5: Map showing statutory and non-statutory designated in Chelmsford and surrounding area (Magic Map, 2020).

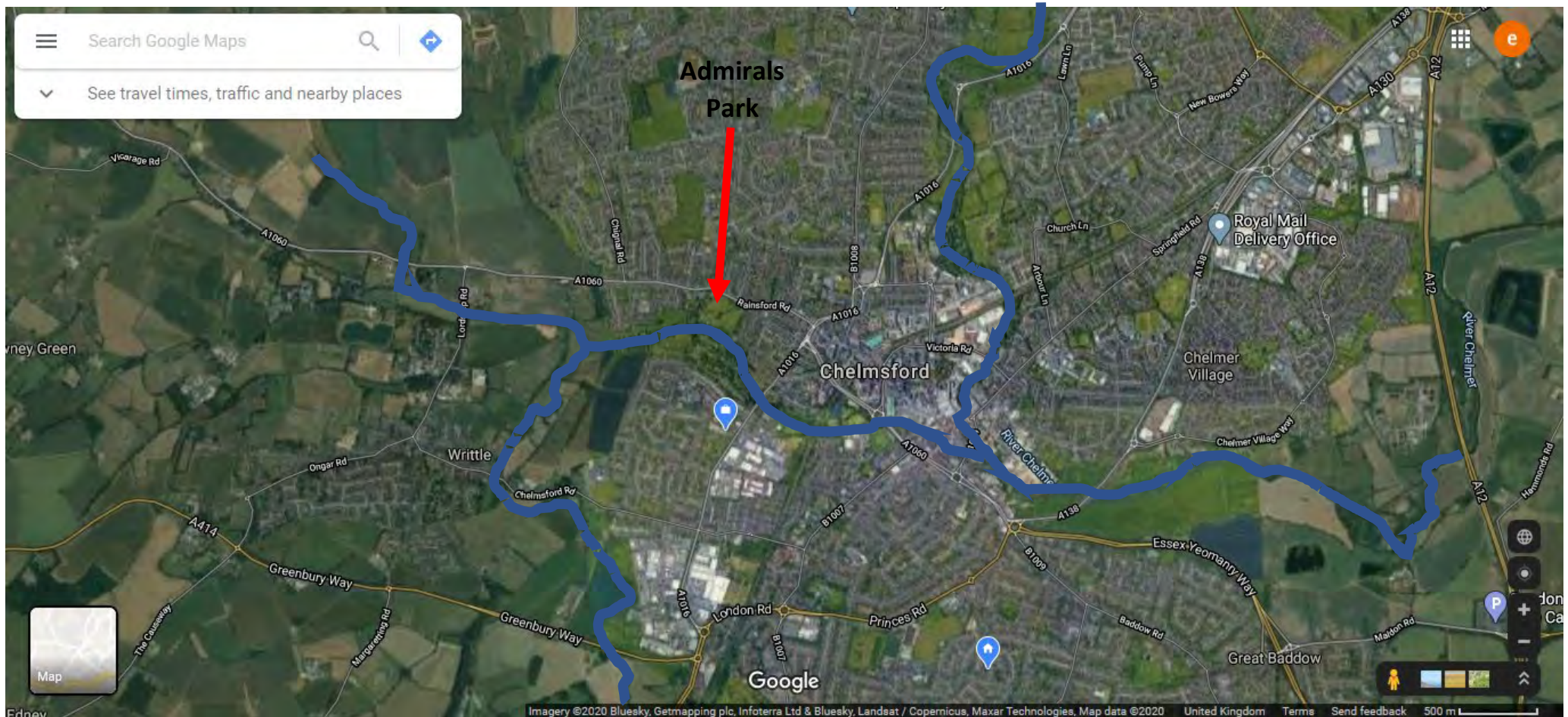


Figure 6: Aerial showing the green spaces around Chelmsford and the river corridors (Google Maps, 2020)

7.2 Access to the park

Admirals Park has good links to the town centre, Writtle and Melbourne area of Chelmsford with a major cycle route and pedestrian route. It is a vital route for people travelling into the city centre from the urban periphery, particularly as we need to encourage people not to use cars to reduce pollution and effects on climate change. Entrances to the park are located on Waterhouse Lane, Andrews Place, Rainsford road, Beaches Drive, Roxwell avenue, Lawford Lane and Beaches Road. There is also a car park located at one of the entrances of Rainsford Road Local people and schools can access the park on foot or bicycle with several schools being located within walking distance (Westlands primary school, King Edward VI Grammar school, Thriftwood College, Maltese Road Primary School and Kings Road Primary school). The cycle/walking route connects with the cycle/walking route along the River Chelmer where people can exercise and interact with nature. This is a vital link for many people to access different parts of the city and it provides a commuting route for many into the centre of Chelmsford. The park is directly connected to Central park with an underpass from central park providing connection to the centre of Chelmsford, with signage to Admirals Park from Central Park. There is some interpretation about the history of the park present but with designation as an LNR this is something that will be improved with interpretation and signage at the main entrances.

8.0 Staffing and constraints

Park maintenance team are based in situ and supported by: tractor staff (annual cut and collect of long grass and regular maintenance of sports pitches), qualified tree work staff (reductions, safety and thinning), the Volunteer leader (working with volunteer groups and schools in the park to carry out practical work) and land managers (helping to put in place the management plan).

Chelmsford City Council have worked with and continue to work with Essex Wildlife Trust to gain understanding and expertise on how to best manage a range of different habitats. In Admirals Park the council has previously worked with Essex Wildlife Trust on a river search survey and a water vole and otter identification survey. It is highlighted within the Chelmsford BAP that sites are becoming increasingly fragmented, so this site is of vital importance as it is a linear site and it has the capacity to connect fragmented sites for wildlife to move to feed and breed. Also, members of the management team from Chelmsford City Council attended the Chelmsford Biodiversity Forum. This provides contacts and information on local projects in green spaces and funding information.

Constraints of the site include that River Can itself is managed by the Environment Agency. Also, there are multiple services running through the site which need to be considered if any alterations are required.

References

Google Maps. (2020) Google maps showing aerial Admirals Park. *Blue Sky*. Available at: <https://www.google.co.uk/maps> (Accessed 31st March 2020).

MAGIC MAP. (2020) Map showing Statutory designated and non-statutory designated around Chelmsford. *Ordnance Survey*. Available at: <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx> (Accessed 31st March 2020).