

## Dogs on Lead – Website Statement

### **Our request**

Chorleywood Common is a designated Local Nature Reserve and to promote and protect breeding birds and other wildlife, Chorleywood Parish Council is requesting that in specific areas on the Common (see map below) all dogs are kept on a short, 2m long lead during the period 1 March to 31 July inclusive. This is a sensible, effective and common policy to protect wildlife adopted on most nature reserves.

### **Reason for our request**

In recent years, members of our Ranger team have observed skylarks, a UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) red-list species, trying to nest on Larks Meadow and in the heathland/grassland adjacent to the War Memorial Hall permissive parking area.

According to the most recent Hertfordshire Bird Report (2021), skylarks are a “common resident which has recently declined”. Unfortunately, skylarks rarely make it to breed on the Common, due to the disturbance caused by dogs flushing them out and the general scent of dogs making it an unattractive breeding area. To wild creatures, a dog is a predator regardless of temperament or breed and wildlife recognises that and makes no discrimination. It is not about dogs catching birds or actively chasing them, the fact of them being off lead sniffing out nests and inadvertently flushing out birds in the long grass and scrub areas is what causes the birds to abandon their breeding behaviours. This request to keep dogs on lead will also benefit many other ground and low nesting birds; meadow pipits have also been recently witnessed on Larks Meadow, an amber-list species.

### **Duty to further the general biodiversity objective**

Since 1 January 2023, and as a result of changes brought about by the Environment Act 2021, section 40 of the Natural Environment and the Rural Communities Act 2006 places a duty on all local authorities, including Parish, Town and Community Councils, to consider what action the authority can properly take to further the general biodiversity objective – namely, the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity in England. The Council’s decision to make this request is therefore in accordance with the requirement to take biodiversity into account in all decisions and actions.

### **Adoption of a Sustainability Action Plan**

Further, the Parish Council has recently adopted a Sustainability Action Plan (see <https://www.chorleywood-pc.gov.uk/sustainability/> for more information). One of the objectives of this, under the heading “Using our powers and influence to improve the environment we live in: Biodiversity”, is to continue to improve habitats for wildlife on Parish Council land e.g. by managing the Common in accordance with the Greenspace Action Plan. This request is also in accordance with this provision of the Council’s Sustainability Action Plan.

### **No amendment to existing access rights on the Common**

There is no material amendment to existing access rights on the Common; the byelaws and the scheme of regulation both prohibit disturbance to wildlife. However, the Council understands that not all dog walkers are aware of their responsibilities and the impact they may be having on wildlife at sensitive times of year.

Dogs will always be welcome on Chorleywood Common; the Council is now requesting that they are kept under control on a short, 2m long lead during the bird nesting season from 1 March to 31 July, in the key areas identified. This action is about education and awareness so that dog walkers can be encouraged to make the right decisions and support the Council to protect wildlife and enhance our natural habitats.

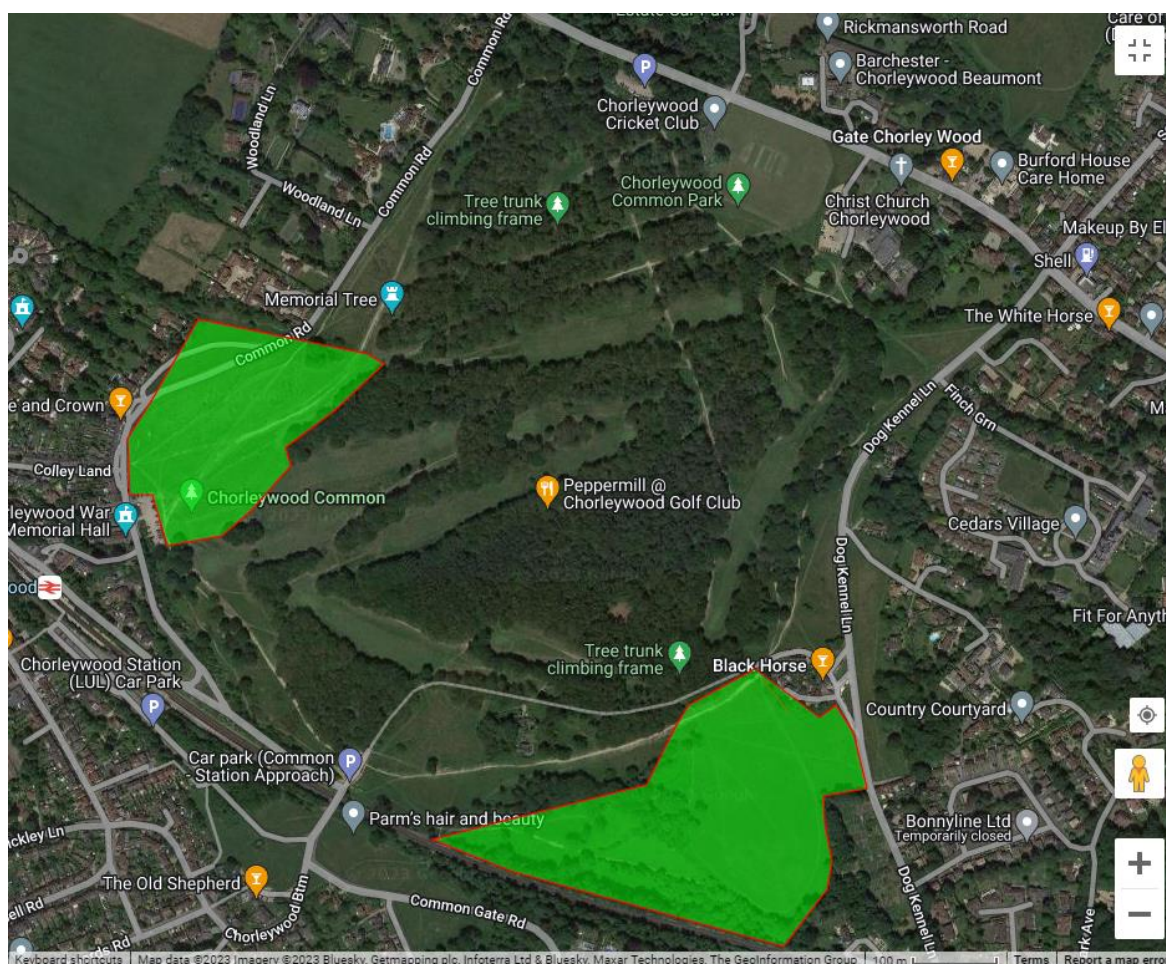
### **Display of information about our request**

Temporary posters will be displayed on the Common about our request in key areas for the duration of the nesting season. Our Rangers are also on hand on the Common and around the Parish to answer any questions people may have and, as some of them are also experienced dog owners, they are well suited to talk about this issue.

### Wildlife refuge

Chorleywood is very fortunate to have such a natural jewel in the centre of its Parish. The Common provides an important wildlife refuge in this increasingly urbanised part of our county with HS2 on our doorstep and the pressure to find space for new housing development. With nature elsewhere being squeezed into smaller and smaller wild areas, we all have a responsibility to do what we can and the Council is stepping up to remind people of their responsibilities to protect our wild spaces and the wildlife within it.

**Map showing designated skylark breeding zones in green where the Council is requesting that dogs are kept on a short lead:**



Resources for further information:

- The Hertfordshire Wildlife Trust website has a webpage about the importance of keeping dogs on lead at the appropriate times:  
<https://www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/news/keep-dogs-leads-protect-wildlife>
- The Kennel Club website summarises the England & Wales Countryside Code for dog walkers:

<https://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/about-us/campaigns/the-countryside-code/#:~:text=The%20England%20and%20Wales%20Countryside,year%20round%20near%20farm%20animals.>

- Chris Packham talks about dogs off lead in the New Forest, also an area of designated Open Access Land like the Common. Chris Packham is an advocate for responsible dog ownership and of course for wildlife for which he is better known: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KB4CFLdE4-4>
- For more specific information about skylarks:
  - o Skylarks are protected nationally under section 41 of the NERC Act 2006, which highlights the species as one of principle importance for conserving biodiversity. They are Red listed according to the UK Birds of Conservation Concern
  - o In terms of the national picture for skylarks, resources online include, e.g. the BTO website: <https://www.bto.org/understanding-birds/birdfacts/skylark> and RSPB website; <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/bird-a-z/skylark/threats/>