

Riverside Local Nature Reserve Rationale for Conservation Management

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1) History:

The Council holds limited historical files for the site. It is understood that prior to the construction of the River Wey Canal the site comprised wet meadows (Ordnance Survey maps). These are likely to have been managed as irrigated meadows for grazing pasture. This management would have become economically unviable, and the lower areas have developed into a wetland/ fen habitat comprising sedge and reed sweet-grass swamp and willow carr. As all wetlands worldwide, this wetland habitat provides a high nature conservation value in the context of the Wey Valley catchment area and international loss of wetlands. High ground water levels support the wetland at Riverside Nature Reserve.

The current site was created following the construction of the A3 during the late 1970s. It is now designated as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) by Natural England and includes areas of Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) and Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW). The area is divided into four principal habitats, grassland, fen, woodland and water.

2) Current Council Vision for Riverside Nature Reserve:

The Countryside Team has developed a Countryside Vision for all its 52 sites. The Countryside Vision Document (2017-27) contains the following Vision Statement for the management of our Countryside sites:

- Guildford Borough Council aims to manage its Countryside estate to maintain and enhance its landscape, natural capital and ecological value to continue providing benefits for future generations.
- We will work in Partnership with residents and organisations to improve sustainability and to protect our countryside, whilst balancing this with the needs of the rural and wider economy.

- Guildford's natural environment and landscapes will form part of the overall provision of Surrey's ecosystem services, creating a coherent network, for people, recreation and wildlife, through supporting the implementation of traditional management.

In line with the themes stated above Guildford Borough Council has the following Vision for Riverside Nature Reserve:

- Riverside Nature Reserve is an accessible, high quality and sustainable Local Nature Reserve that is a flagship site in the Wey Valley to provide public access to nature.
- The site links to a network of access routes, such as the Wey Navigation Towpath, and long distance cycle route SRN 223 connecting Woking with Guildford and areas further south.
- Riverside Nature Reserve provides a network of functioning wildlife habitats that are part of the River Wey ecological network that can be enjoyed by future generations.
- The River Wey and its catchment is a clean, valued and ecologically functioning river catchment area.
- The characteristic landscape features of the Wey Valley are maintained

Recreational activities need to be carefully balanced with nature conservation objectives to realise the above vision.

3) Surveys:

The wetland at Riverside was designated as a Local Nature Reserve in 2000 for its ecological significance of open fen swamp and old water meadows.

The site was entered into a Higher Level Stewardship Scheme in 2009 to support the management of Grassland, fen and reedbeds. The scheme was renewed twice and is currently running until 2027.

Hydrological Survey, The Environmental Project Consulting Group 2007:

A hydrological study was carried out in 2007. It mapped the existing wetland features. It shows a very similar picture to the present-day nature reserve, with standing water and slow flowing channels mapped as they are today.

ECOSA Ecological Survey 2009:

The Ecological survey report in 2009 followed up the invertebrate surveys in 2007 and included a Phase 2 Vegetation Survey. It identified and mapped an extensive area of ungrazed tall herb fen and sedge bed as well as wet woodland and standing water habitat. The main wet woodland locations were mapped in the area where the small boardwalk was removed and along the ditch in the middle field. Wet woodland is listed as a Priority Habitat in the UK. In 2007 surveys were previously carried out for Lepidoptera (butterflies and moths) and Odonata (dragonflies and damselflies). These surveys recommended conservation grazing, scrub management and increase in water levels for future habitat management.

1994 Surrey Wildlife Trust site survey:

This survey identified the importance of the fen swamp. It recommended for the site to be identified as a Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI).

The site was selected as SNCI in 1996 as part of the Slyfield Meadow and Riverside Park for its “mosaic of dry grassland, fen, swamp, wet meadows, open water, scrub and ancient semi-natural woodland. Of particular significance is one of the largest expanses of fen swamp in Surrey which supports a number of county scarce plants and has considerable bird and invertebrate interest.

It was also recommended by Surrey Bird Club as good for breeding Lapwings and wintering Water Pipits.”

Guildford SNCI Surveys 2016:

This survey was carried out as follow up to the 1994 survey and confirmed that the SNCI criteria for designation still apply. This survey assessed the SNCI condition as favourable.