

Emm Brook: Greenways Bridge

Planning and Community Involvement Statement

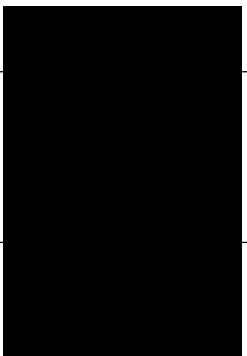
Version 1.0

March 2026

Document control:

Document title:	Emm Brook: Greenways Bridge Planning and Community Involvement Statement
Project title:	Emm Brook
Client / Funder:	SERT / RPA
Date:	31/03/26
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Publishing:	Public

Document review and sign off:

	Name(s):	Date:	Status:	Signed:
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Reviewed by:	SJ Squires	24/03/2026	Draft for Approval	
Approved by:	SJ Squires	31/03/2026	Final for Client Issue	

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Project Background

The South East Rivers Trust (SERT) is a registered charity (no. 1091000) whose objectives include the improvement of the physical and natural environment of the Southeast of England, aiming to make rivers thrive again for local communities and nature. SERT has been developing the Emm Brook Restoration Project at Woosehill Meadows, Wokingham for several years. Here, SERT plan to reconnect a 340-metre length of historic river channel of the Emm Brook to bypass the existing weir (planning app. 203617). This will open 3.5 km of river habitat and remove the lowest obstacle of fish migration on the Emm Brook. This planning application was awarded in 2023.

To reconnect the historic channel three footbridges are planned to maintain the existing footpath network. Two of those footbridges were included and approved in the original planning application (planning app. 203617). The third bridge at NGR: SU 79845 69227 referred to as the Greenways Bridge, was included in the designs, however it was not included in the planning application because it was planned to be delivered during the construction of the Greenways. Unfortunately, this did not happen, and a culvert was constructed in its place at NGR: SU 79845 69227. This crossing is not complimentary to reconnecting the historic channel. It needs to be replaced with a footbridge to allow the re-connected channel to flow freely. As it was not included in planning app. 203617, a new planning application is being sought to replace the culvert with a footbridge (aka Greenways Bridge).

Another planning application (planning app. 250637) was awarded in 2025. This application was for the creation of a new wildlife pond on site to mitigate for the loss of the existing pond habitat on site (a condition of planning app. 203617).

Meeting national and local objectives

This project meets the strategic domestic needs, both nationally and locally, aligning with several national and local strategic plans. The new green and blue infrastructure created during this project will create and connect habitat networks. This will contribute to climate change resilience for the future.

This project will also contribute to halting the decline of biodiversity in the Emm Brook river corridor, which helps contribute to the aims laid out in the government publication 'Biodiversity 2020'. The Greenways Bridge will enable the delivery of the wider Emm Brook project. This will deliver a multitude of ecosystem services for the local community including:

- Recreational benefits through better access to higher quality green spaces, which will provide a better aesthetic to the community park and contribute to increased health and wellbeing in the community.

- Open 3.5 km of river habitat and remove the lowest obstacle to fish migration on the Emm Brook which will increase biodiversity and increase the resilience of fish populations.
- A new pond will contribute to the conservation of wildlife in the local area. Providing habitat for an array of flora and fauna in the local area.
- Community engagement through volunteering opportunities (such as plug planting) will provide opportunities for environmental education of children and adults in the community.

Specifically, this project will raise awareness and enhance the profile of the Emm Brook river corridor. The installation of a new bridge will upgrade the established Greenway built by Wokingham Borough Council and enable the restoration of the Emm Brook to proceed.

Community Involvement

Local volunteers are a key element to this project, and one which opens up opportunities for community members to develop new skills in practical conservation delivery. This meets one of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan objectives, to 'increase public awareness and involvement'. Although there will be no volunteer involvement in the work covered in this planning application, there will be involvement in the wider project. This will involve:

- Plug planting days will be organised by SERT in collaboration with the Friends of the Emm Brook and Wokingham Borough Council.
- Local volunteers will also be able to create a proposed dead hedge under SERT instruction and supervision.
- We also plan to deliver post project completion guided walks, with community outreach sessions planned pre-works to keep the local community informed and engaged in the planned work. This delivers on the policy to 'connect people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing' outlined in the 25 Year Environment Plan.
- Education and engagement sessions are also underway with local schools. These are to be delivered throughout the development and delivery of this project. Since October 2025 there have been over 600 children already engaged with the project.

Delivering this project will increase business and community interest in delivering green infrastructure projects, which aligns with Wokingham Borough Councils Local Plan policy on green infrastructure (policy CC03). This project has been developed by the Loddon Catchment Partnership, and sits on their Loddon Catchment Plan of projects. The project development has involved community engagement.

Summary

SERT has been developing the Emm Brook Restoration Project at Woosehill Meadows, Wokingham for several years. Here, SERT plan to reconnect a 340-metre length of historic river channel of the Emm Brook to bypass the existing weir (planning app. 203617). This will open 3.5 km of river habitat and remove the lowest obstacle of fish migration on the Emm Brook. This planning application will enable this to happen.

The project provides many opportunities to involve the local community. Plug planting days will be organised, along with post-project guided tours. We are currently running education and engagement sessions with local schools and will continue until our funding ceases in March 2028. We also plan to run community outreach sessions before the work starts to keep the local community as informed as possible making sure the local community are involved throughout.