

Emm Brook: Greenways Bridge

Biodiversity Statement

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1.0 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.

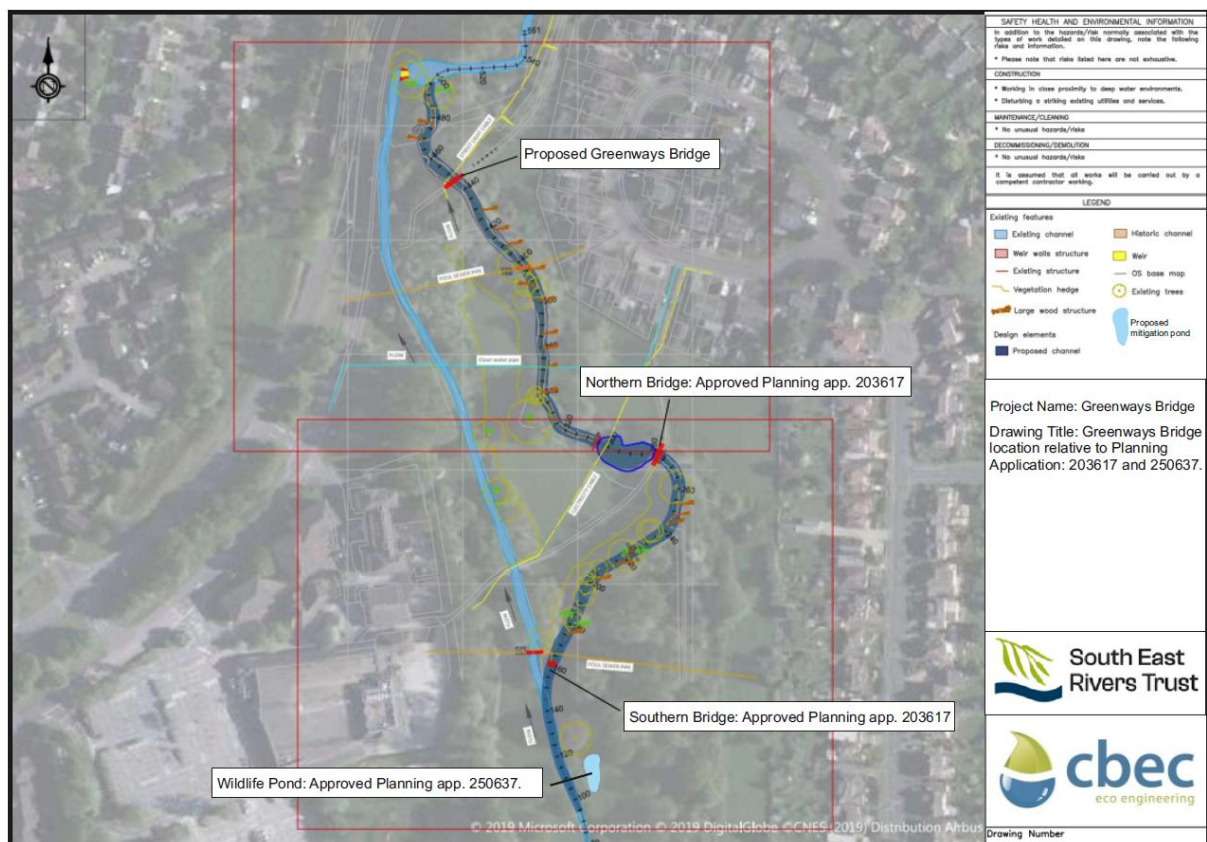


Figure 1: Shows the location of the Greenways Bridge planning application in relations to the wider bypass channel project.

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).

2.0 Greenways Bridge Proposal

2.1 Impact of Artificial Barriers

It is widely recognised that artificial barriers within waterbodies can either prevent or delay fish migration and significantly impact natural processes and the delivery of ecosystem services throughout a watercourse. For example, a weir may obstruct the upstream and downstream migration of fish, fragmenting habitats and isolating fish communities. This reduces overall biodiversity and the resilience of fish populations to pollution events and other stresses. Physical modifications can also prevent the downstream movement of sediment, with significant impacts on habitat and wildlife upstream and downstream. Upstream of the weirs, fine sediments tend to accumulate, while downstream reaches may experience increased scour and erosion because of sediment starvation. The consequence of which is reflected by the ecological diversity the degraded river system can support.

By bypassing the weir at NGR: SU 79840 69273 SERT can open 3.5 km of river habitat to fish migrating within the Emm Brook and Lodden catchments. SERT will also restore riparian habitat boost biodiversity.

2.2 Greenways Bridge Site

Due to the existing footpath network on site the reinstatement of the bypass channel requires the creation of 3 footbridges (Figure 1). Two of these were included in the original planning application approved in 2023 (planning app. 203617). A third bridge is needed, and forms this planning application.

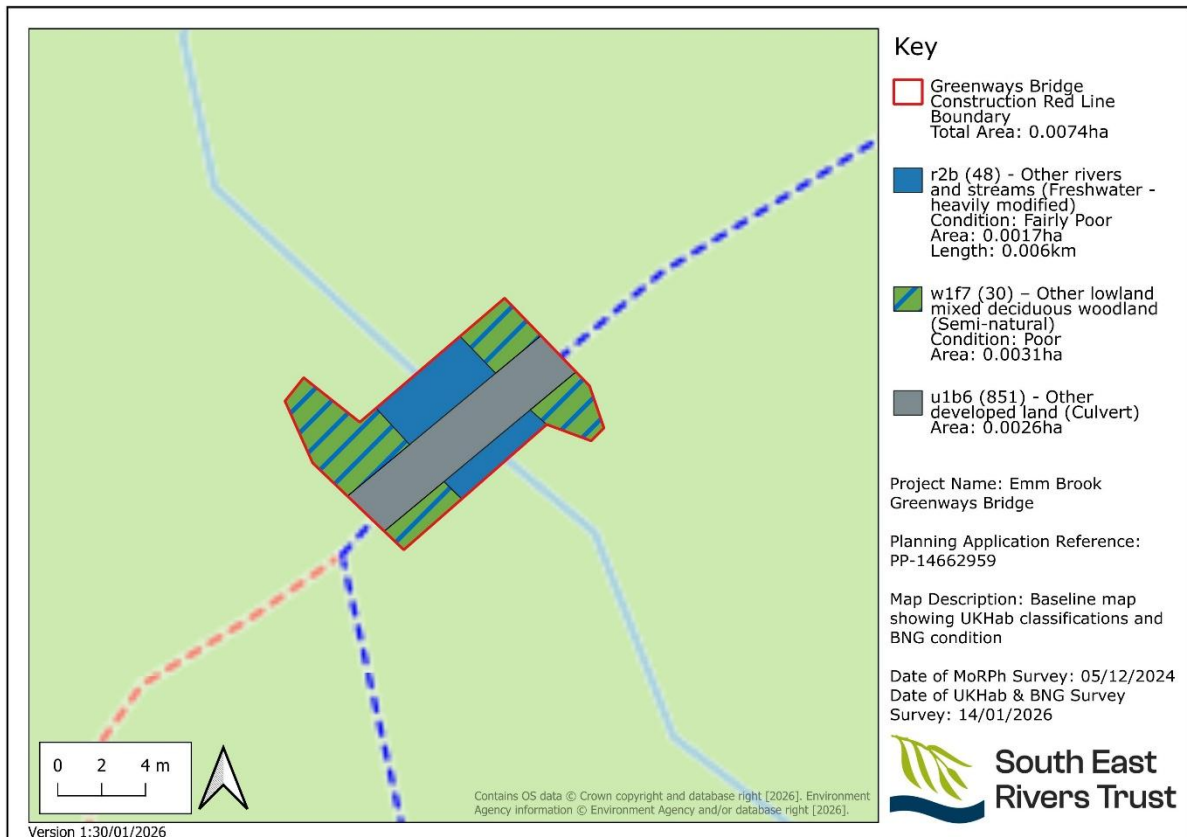


Figure 2: Existing habitat plan for the working area.

The proposed bridge location currently sits within an area of mixed deciduous woodland (Figure 2). The Greenways crosses the historic channel on a culverted walkway topped with tarmac (Figure 3). The historic channel does have limited seasonal flow, especially after periods of heavy rain during winter but it dries out quickly.



Figure 3: Existing culverted crossing on site.

The total area of the site is 0.0074 ha and is made up of 0.0031 ha of w1f7 mixed deciduous woodland, 0.0017 ha of r2b other rivers and streams and 0.0026 ha of u1b6 other developed land.

2.3 Greenways Bridge Design

Footbridge 3114 (Greenways Bridge) will be constructed at NGR: SU 79845 69227. It will be a hardwood (D70) timber footbridge with a 4.1 m total length (3.76m bearing c/c, 3.45m clear span) and clear width of 3.5m. The soffit shall be located at +44.76mOD to achieve 300mm freeboard to the 1 in 10Yr flood level. The foundations shall be a reinforced concrete L-wall with associated wing walls. The bridge shall be integrated with the existing footpaths through local regrading of the adjacent paths with access ramps constructed from imported or site won fill, as required.

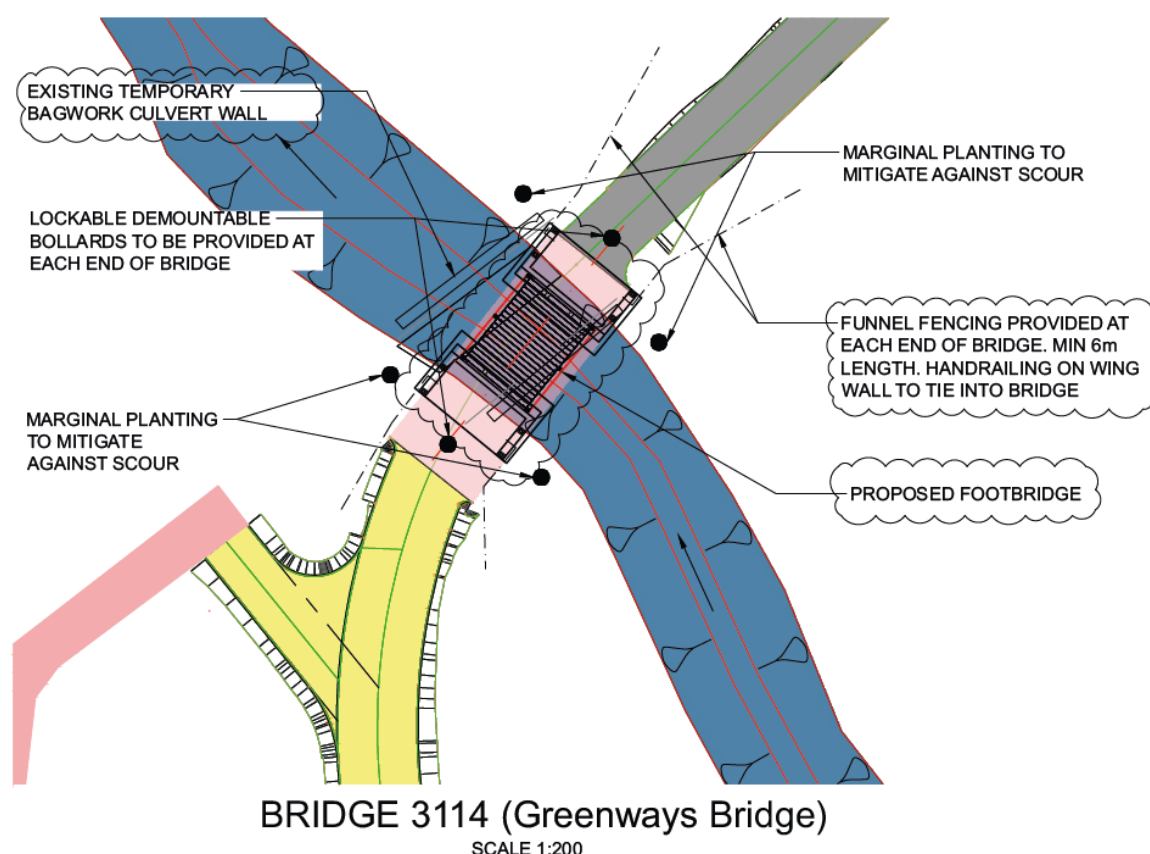


Figure 4: Extract from Emm Brook Greenways Bridge Plan.

2.4 Greenways Bridge Ecological Impact

2.4.1 Arboriculture

The new bridge will require the removal of 7 trees. These include two common ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), one white polar (*Populus alba*), one hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and 3 common alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) (Table 1 and Figure 5).

To be removed

Removed Trees / Groups

Ref	Species	Common Name	Height	Stem Diameter	Crown Clearance	Age Class	Observations	Est. Remaining Contribution	Date Surveyed	BS Cat	No.
29	Fraxinus excelsior	Common ash	19m	740mm	7m	Mature	Some visible dieback and deadwood	10 Years	19/3/2025	C1	1
46	Populus alba	White poplar	7m	150mm	2m	Semi-Mature	Group of five stems becoming established	10 Years	19/3/2025	C1	1
48	Alnus glutinosa	Common alder	10m	240mm	2m	Early-Mature	Seedling becoming established. Competing with adjacent hazel	10 Years	19/3/2025	C1	1
49	Corylus avellana	Hazel	5m	400#mm	2m	Early-Mature	Typical coppice form	10 Years	19/3/2025	C1	1
50	Alnus glutinosa	Common alder	10m	240mm	2m	Early-Mature	Seedling becoming established. Competing with adjacent hazel	20 Years	19/3/2025	C1	1
51	Fraxinus excelsior	Common ash	10m	200mm; 200mm; 200mm; 200mm	3m	Early-Mature	Group of self-seeded stems. Dense Ivy	10 Years	19/3/2025	C1	1
52	Alnus glutinosa	Common alder	25m	350#mm	2m	Mature	Fair condition but with dense ivy. Location estimated	10 Years	19/3/2025	C1	1
Total :7											

Table 1: Extract from Emm_Brook_Arboricultural_Assessment_&_Method_Statement Page 27.

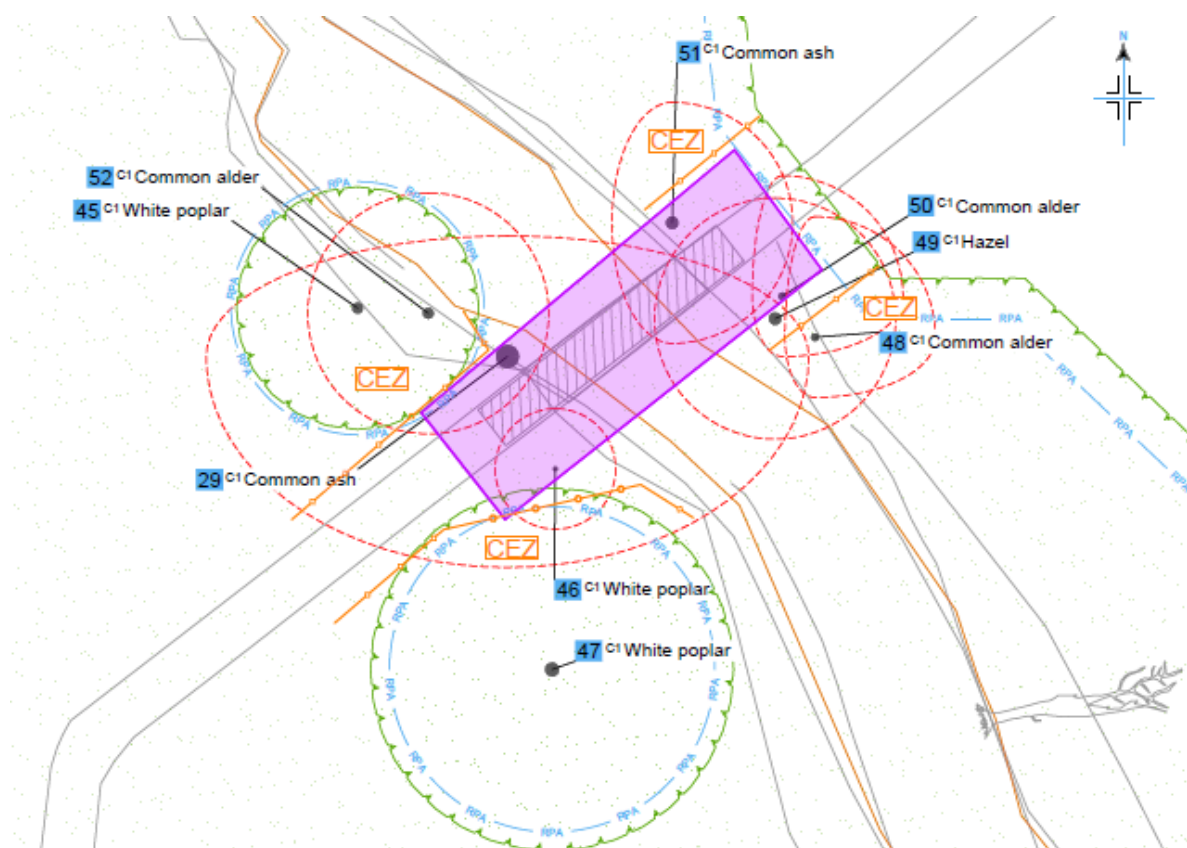


Figure 5: Extract from Emm_Brook_Arboricultural_Assessment_&_Method_Statement Page 27.

An arboricultural assessment and method statement has been produced for the whole Emm Brook scheme. The section relevant to the Greenways Bridge can be viewed from page 22 onwards

(Emm_Brook_Arboricultural_Assessment_&_Method_Statement). It details:

- The Construction Exclusion Zone (CEZ) a root sensitive area where construction activities are to be excluded.
- Temporary protective barriers.
- Ground protection methods within Root Protection Areas (RPAs).

All tree work will take place outside of bird breeding season. Despite this, a precautionary visual search for breeding birds will still be undertaken before any tree work commences.

2.4.3 Bats

A Ground Level Tree Assessment (GLTA) for bats was undertaken for the whole Emm Brook scheme in January 2026 (see. Emm_Brook_GLTA_(S1538_GLTA_a)). Three trees (T2, T4 & T29) supported a potential roost feature classified as PRF-I suitability; the other trees were of negligible bat roost potential. Of these, T29 is the only one within this planning application. T2 and T4 are covered by planning app. 203617.

The works (coppicing or soft felling) will follow a Precautionary Working Method Statement (PWMS) and a roost resource approach to mitigation. The precautionary measures to be adopted include:

- A toolbox talk delivered to the arborists before the tree works by a suitably licensed ecologist detailing how bats use trees, legal protections, working methods (i.e. section-felling), potential roost features, actions to be taken if a bat is found and personal safety procedures;
- A repeat inspection of the potential roost feature (PRF) by a suitably licensed ecologist or by arborist under ecological supervision, immediately before the works. If bats are found to be present during the inspection and/or there is evidence of roosting bats and they will be impacted by the works, a mitigation licence will be required for the works to proceed;
- A section-felling approach, taking care when exposing PRF (i.e. dense ivy cover), under the direct supervision of a suitably licensed ecologist. Each section should be carefully lowered to the ground and checked for bats by a licensed ecologist; and
- During the soft-felling process, if any roosting bats are found, work must stop immediately and advice sought from the licensed ecologist; a mitigation licence will likely be required for the felling of the tree (if it has not been felled to the ground at this point).

To prevent the reduction in the roosting resource following the tree works, at least three Schwegler 2FN Bat Boxes (or an approved functional equivalent) will be fixed onto suitable neighbouring mature trees. The boxes will be sited so that they are at least 4m high, free of obstruction from nearby branches and situated to face southwest or southeast. The Wokingham Borough Council Ecology team will be consulted on the positioning of these boxes.

2.4.4 Other Protected Species

All work will take place with a view to causing the least harm possible under an Environmental Risk Assessment with a detailed search taking place to ensure no species may be disturbed during the construction of the bridge.

Although great crested newts are not known to be present on site (negative eDNA results), work will take place under a precautionary method statement.

3.0 BNG Assessment

Figures 2 and 6 show the pre and post habitats within the project area. The full BNG assessment can be viewed in following document: EmmBrookGreenwaysBridge_BNG_PP-14662959_V1_30_01_2026.

A summary of the BNG assessment is as follows:

On-site Habitat (16.18% total net change)

- The on-site habitat ecological baseline is 0.02 units.
- 0.02 enhancement units are delivered through improvement of woodland (w1f7) condition from Poor to Moderate.

On-site Watercourse (26.59% total net change)

- The on-site watercourse ecological baseline is 0.03 units.
- 0.01 watercourse creation units are delivered through removal of the culvert (u1b6) and reinstatement of open channel.
- 0.04 watercourse enhancement units are delivered through improvement of river (r2b) condition from Fairly Poor to Moderate.

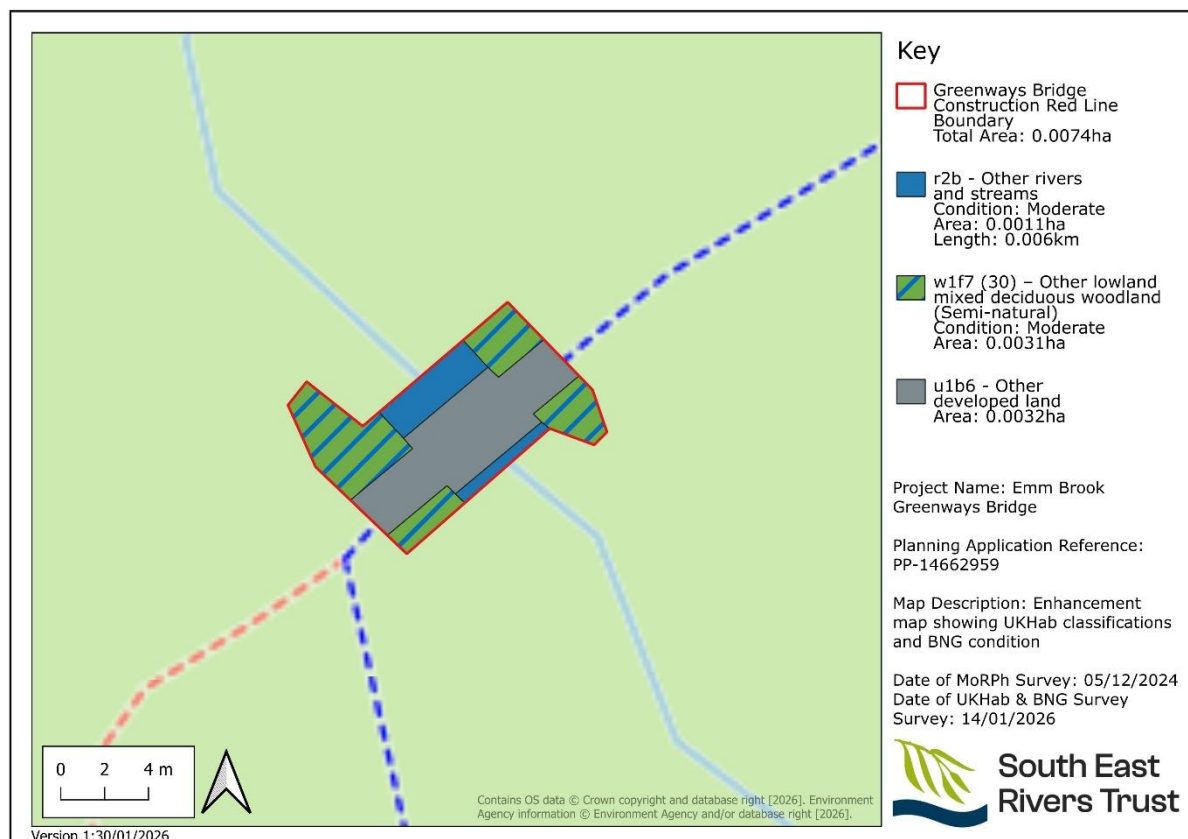


Figure 6: Post delivery habitat plan.

This results in a total increase of 0.02 area habitat units and 0.05 watercourse units, representing respective net gains of 16.18% and 26.59%. The scheme satisfies the statutory Biodiversity Net Gain requirement for both area habitats and watercourses and meets the applicable trading rules.

4.0 Summary

SERT plan to reconnect a 340-metre length of historic river channel of the Emm Brook to bypass the existing weir (planning app. 203617) at Riverside Park, Woosehill, Wokingham. As part of this programme of works a third bridge is needed, and forms this planning application. The third bridge at NGR: SU 79845 69227 referred to as the Greenways Bridge will replace the existing culvert on site.

The installation of the bridge requires the removal of 7 trees. These has been assessed, and an arboricultural method statement has been produced. A subsequent GLTA has been undertaken concluding the work can take place under a precautionary method statement. The scheme also satisfies the statutory Biodiversity Net Gain requirement for both area habitats and watercourses and meets the applicable trading rules.