

Emm Brook Pond: Biodiversity Statement

Version 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 South East of England. Aiming to make rivers thrive again for local communities and nature.

At Riverside Park, Woosehill, Wokingham, SERT plan to reconnect a 340-metre length of historic river channel of the Emm Brook to bypass the existing weir (planning app. 203617). As part of this wider programme of works SERT propose creating a new wildlife pond at SU 79922 68966 (figure 1). The site forms part of the amenity parkland known as 'Woosehill Meadows' to the east of Morrisons supermarket in Woosehill, Wokingham (OS grid reference: SU 79824 69269). The site is used by the local community as a recreational area and as such consists of large areas of amenity grassland and woodland.



Figure 1: Location of the new proposed pond relative to the reconnection of the Emm Brook paleo channel.

Pond Proposal

A small offline pond currently exists on site at SU 79920 69100 which was created by excavating the paleo channel. It was widened and deepened in 2015. Since then, the pond has significantly silted up and become choked with vegetation. The reconnection of the paleo channel will result in the loss of

the pond. This type of wetland habitat offers niches for a range of different species compared with the running water habitat, and therefore it's loss without replacement would lead to loss of biodiversity interest.

Nationally over half a million ponds have been lost from the UK and, of those remaining, 1 in 5 are considered to be in a degraded state. To compensate for the loss of the pond SERT propose creating a new wildlife pond at SU 79922 68966 (figure 1). The location of the proposed pond lies 130m south of the current pond.



Figure 2: The area of the proposed new pond.

The suggested area for the pond excavation is an area of amenity grassland flanked by the Emm Brook and Greenway Sustrans to the west (left of figure 2), and broadleaf woodland to the north and east. The amenity grassland is comprised of a plant community with relatively low diversity of native grassland and herbaceous species. This is typical of regularly mown recreational areas and is abundant in Riverside Park, Woollahill. These managed open areas lack the structural and species diversity to support a rich assemblage of flora and fauna and thus are considered to be of negligible ecological value. The new pond will be plug planted with a wide range of native wetland marginal plants. These will provide refuge and forage for a wide array of species, not just aquatic. For instance, common comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*) provides a valuable nectar source for bumble bees and other insects. It also provides a key host plant for painted lady butterflies (*Vanessa cardui*) and many species of moth. Although the current pond is not known to hold Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS), Himalayan balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) is known to be present on site in low concentrations. To reduce the

risk of spread there will not be a translocation of plants from the existing pond. Instead, the proposed pond will be plug planted with locally sourced plants. Where possible any wetland marginal plants from the existing pond will be retained and reinstated in the paleo channel once groundwork is complete.

The proposed site for the new pond sits within a depression that becomes temporarily waterlogged during times of high rainfall. It will be offline and fed by groundwater and precipitation. Water levels are expected to fluctuate throughout the year. The new pond will measure 163m² and despite eDNA samples returning negative for great crested newts (*Triturus cristatus*) on site, the new pond will follow Natural England's Great Crested Newt criteria. Being naturally lined, during exceptional periods of drought there is a chance that the pond may dry out. It will have gently sloping banks to promote vegetation growth and provide easy access and egress for wildlife. The proposed pond will be ~1.5m deep (from the existing ground level) at its deepest point. This will provide an area that will not be quickly colonised by vegetation increasing habitat diversity within the pond. The proximity of the new pond to an area of broadleaf woodland will help further support local amphibian populations. This is because ponds are not the only habitat requirement needed to support healthy amphibian populations. Woodlands are also an important component and are used for shelter, foraging, dispersal and hibernation.

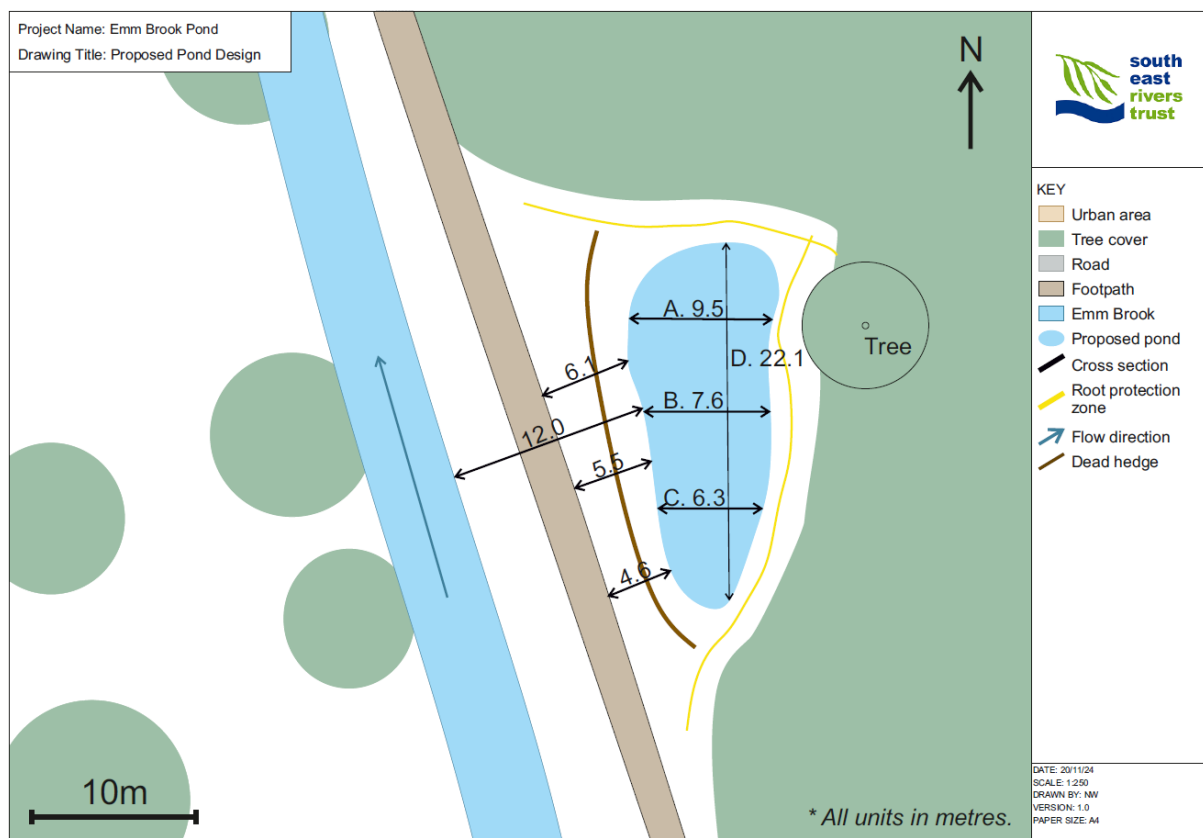


Figure 3: Emm Brook pond design.

The pond has been designed to fit within the existing Greenway and root protection zone of the neighbouring woodland. All won material will be removed from site and any waste generated recycled where possible or otherwise disposed of responsibly in line with current waste regulations. All work will

take place with a view to causing the least harm possible under an Environmental Risk Assessment with a detailed ground search taking place to ensure no species may be disturbed during the excavation process.

We also propose screening the pond with a low-level dead hedge (figure 4). This is primarily to discourage dog access into the pond and to give it time to establish, but it will also provide food and refuge for an array of invertebrates. Boosting habitat availability on site.



Figure 4: Previous dead hedge delivered by local volunteers under the supervision of SERT.

BNG Assessment

The baseline value of the modified grassland that currently occupies the location of the proposed pond is 0.04 units. This will be lost. The creation of the proposed pond (non-priority) will create 0.13 units. This results in a total increase of 0.09 units. This is a 243.82% unit increase and satisfies Biodiversity Net Gain trading rules.

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 SERT propose creating a new wildlife pond at SU 79922 68966 as mitigation for the loss of the current pond on site as this will be absorbed within the 'reconnected' historic channel of the Emm Brook.

The location of the proposed mitigation pond makes use of an existing low-lying area of Riverside Park to create high value habitat for local wildlife. It will replace an existing area of amenity grassland ased as negligible ecological value with relatively low diversity of native grassland and herbaceous species. The location of the proposed pond being adjacent to an area of broadleaf woodland further enhances the positive effect the pond will have for local wildlife populations.