

Emm Brook Pond: Planning and Community Involvement Statement

Version 1.0

Summary

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. SERT aims 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 – granted 27th October 2023). As part of this wider programme of works SERT propose creating a new wildlife pond at SU 79922 68966. This will act as mitigation for the loss of the existing pond at SU 79920 69100 that sits within the paleo channel that will be reconnected to the main flow of the Emm Brook.

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'. 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. The creation of the new pond alongside the Emm Brook will counter this decline.

The new pond will also contribute to improving the quality and quantity of the natural capital in the Emm Brook river catchment. 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. This increased health and wellbeing will contribute to more productive employees and a reduction in health (physical and mental) related absences from work.
- The 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 will raise awareness and enhance the profile of the Emm Brook river corridor, which will complement the established Greenway built by Wokingham Borough Council.

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'. Once the pond has been completed volunteer 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 the 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. 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 bid has been developed by the Loddon Catchment Partnership, and sits on their Loddon Catchment Plan of projects. The project development has involved community engagement. A community event was held during Loddon Rivers Week 2024, which allowed the local community to explore the nature present in the Emm Brook, including seeing fish and invertebrate surveys being undertaken.

Summary

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 (planning app. 203617).

The creation of this pond would meet a number of local and national objectives, aligning with several strategic plans. 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. The creation of the new pond alongside the Emm Brook will counter this decline and provide a number of ecosystem services.

The project also provides a number of opportunities to involve the local community in the development. Plug planting days will be organised, along with post-project guided tours. 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.