

## Greenspace 2- Elemore Park, Easington Lane

### 1.0 Introduction

1.1 Elemore Park Greenspace was a former golf course, which closed in 2019. Prior to that, the area was the location of Elemore Colliery and associated spoil heap. The working colliery closed in the mid-1970s. Plans are progressing to transform the 60ha golf course into a country park, SCC's vision is that Elemore Park will be

- Wildlife rich, attractive and inspiring
- Safe
- Accessible

Work is beginning to enhance the natural habitats to create a haven for wildlife and resource for local communities to enjoy nature and undertake informal recreation. The former clubhouse has been refurbished

and repurposed. It now has a café, garden centre and training room for community activities. The space immediately around the building will be a cycle hub and growing space with poly tunnels. Elemore Park connects to the wider countryside via rights of way and permissive walking and cycling routes.



1.2 Elemore Park has large areas of grasslands, hedgerows, scrub, woodland plantations, a stream, and a pond will be managed for wildlife. There are two large lakes in the northern area of the site, which are home to wildfowl and swans. Elemore Golf Course Local Wildlife Site sits within the greenspace. The LWS contains acid grassland, wetland areas and dense gorse scrub which attracts various species of birds. Elemore Park has fantastic potential for habitat restoration and creation and will create significant opportunities for the surrounding communities to enjoy and connect with nature.

### 2.0 Location and Accessibility

2.1 Elemore Park is west of Easington Lane village and south of Hetton-le-Hole. To the west and south lies agricultural land, extending into County Durham. The Café, Garden Centre and visitor facilities, with parking, opened in Spring 2023. Elemore Park is being promoted as a hub for walking and cycling. The Stephenson Trail, (an 11-mile promoted route which follows the route taken by coal wagons on their way from the Elemore and Hetton Collieries to the River Wear) starts by the Café in Elemore Park. The site also connects to the local cycleway network.

### 3.0 Methodology

3.1 Durham Wildlife Services (DWS) were commissioned to carry out an ecological appraisal of Elemore Park in May 2022. DWS used the following methodology:

- Desk Based Study;
- An Ecological Assessment;
- Protected Species and Other Species of Nature Conservation Importance;
- Controlled Invasive Species.

### 4.0 Greenspace Context

4.1 There are six Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and eleven records of non-statutory designated sites within a 2km radius of the site. The designated sites within 2km of Elemore Park are listed as follows:

- Eppleton Grassland SSSI
- Moorsley Banks SSSI
- High Moorsley SSSI
- Hetton Bogs SSSI
- Pig Hill SSSI
- Pittington Hill SSSI
- Elemore Golf Course LWS
- Elemore Vale LWS
- Elemore Woods LWS
- Elemore Horseshoe Pond LWS
- Pittington Hill LWS
- Robin House and Moorsley Marsh LWS
- Hetton Park LWS
- Hetton Lyons LWS
- Eppleton Railway LWS
- Eppleton Quarry LWS
- Hetton Bogs Wes LWS

## 5.0 Strategic Significance

5.1 Part of Elemore Park is designated as a LWS and overall, it is protected as open countryside, greenspace and as part of a strategic wildlife corridor in the Local Plan (2020). Overall, the greenspace has strong strategic significance and so has been input into the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Metric Calculator as "formally identified in local strategy". Areas of broadleaved woodland, acid grassland and ponds are also identified within the North-East England Nature Partnerships (NEENP) Durham Priority Habitats list.

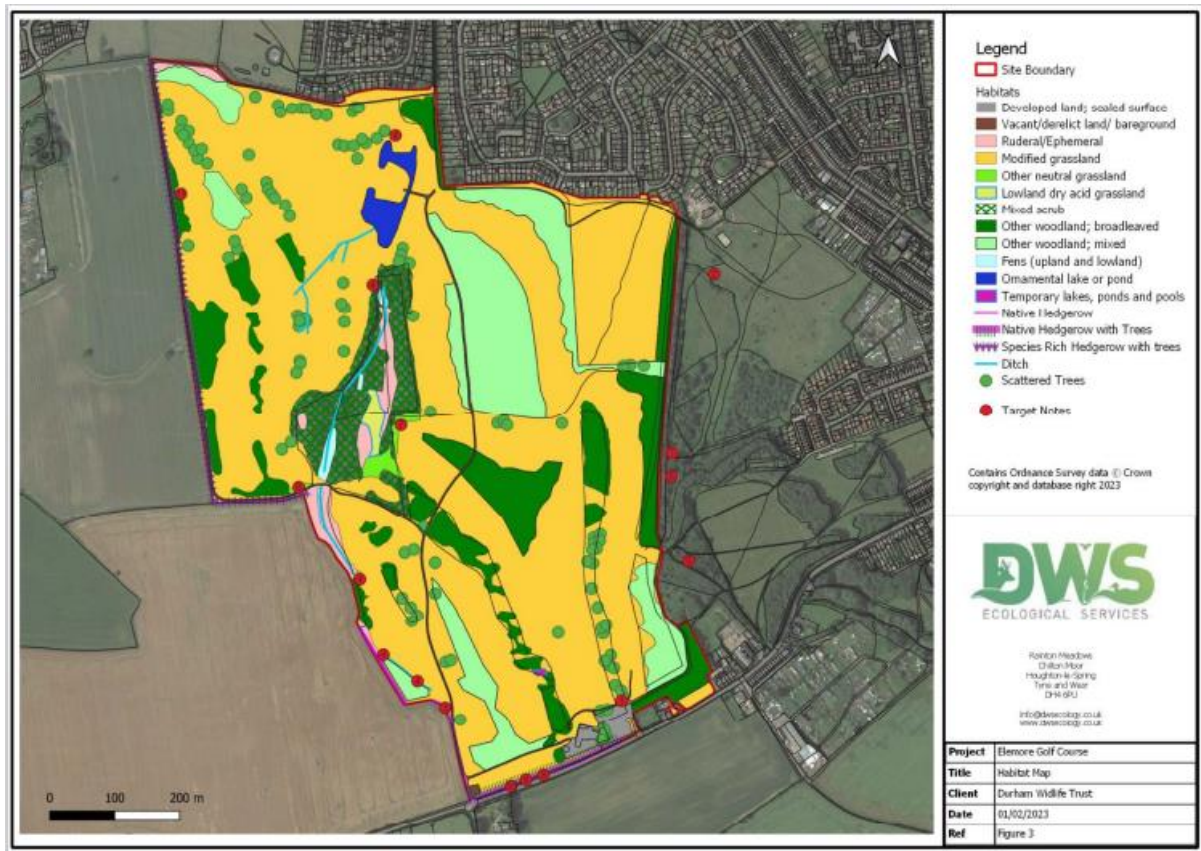
## 6.0 Habitat Assessment

6.1 The habitat types found in Elemore Park are set out below (and shown on the map following this table):

Habitats	Condition
<b>Urban Tree</b> There are a number of scattered trees across the grassland on site. Species include hawthorn, grey alder, ornamental hawthorn and sycamore.	Moderate
<b>Mixed scrub - LWS</b> There is an area of dense scrub within the LWS on site. Species include hawthorn, blackthorn, elder a, bramble, dogrose, and gorse. The scrub along the stream/ditch through this area is even more diverse, with several species of willow and more diverse ground flora.	Good
<b>Sparsely vegetated – Tall Ruderal/Ephemeral</b> Tall ruderal vegetation is present along the drier areas adjacent to the watercourses/ditches on site, as well as to the northwest and east edges of the site. There are also large areas of tall ruderal vegetation present within the LWS, particularly rosebay willowherb.	Poor
<b>Woodland –Broad leaved and mixed woodland</b>	Moderate

<p>The woodland on site is a mixture of semi-mature broadleaf plantation and mixed plantation woodland, depending on the amount of Scots pine present in the canopy. Species are a mixture of native and non-native. Native species include sessile oak, alder, field maple, hawthorn, silver birch, ash, Scots pine, and a variety of willows. Non-natives include Swedish whitebeam, grey alder, Italian alder, and sycamore. Ground flora is poor, and age structure is uniform. The woodland to the east of the greenspace, just outside of the site boundary is older, more establish and consequently more diverse, with a more varied ground flora with lots of ferns. However, Japanese Knotweed is present in this area. Mixed woodland contains the same species as is present above within the broadleaf, except a higher percentage of Scots pine is present.</p> <p>Over the winter 2021/22 an additional 5.3ha of mixed native woodland was planted with an understory of wildflowers. This was not condition assessed as part of the survey due to being new habitat.</p>	
<p><b>Native hedgerow</b> An intact hawthorn hedgerow is present along the boundary to the west of the site. A defunct hawthorn hedgerow is present along the boundary to the southwest of the site.</p> <p>An additional 1.36km of mixed native hedgerow was planted in 2021/22 as a continuous hedgerow from southwest to north east and north of the site.</p>	Intact – Moderate Defunct - Poor
<p><b>Native hedgerow with trees</b> The southwest boundary with the road consists of a defunct species poor hawthorn hedgerow with mature ash trees.</p>	Poor
<p><b>Species Rich Native Hedgerow with Tree</b> The overgrown and defunct hedgerow with trees along the western boundary to the northern end of the site is species rich, with alder, hazel, hawthorn, gorse, elder, bird cherry, rowan, ash, blackthorn, and guelder rose. Ground flora is less diverse but still contains greater stitchwort, with nettle, cow parsley and common hogweed.</p>	Good
<p><b>Modified grassland</b> The vast majority of the site consists of poor semi-improved grassland and is fairly uniform across the site with these areas previously all being part of a managed golf course. Grasses dominate including common bent, Yorkshire fog, red fescue and perennial rye-grass. Herbs present include dandelion, daisy, and white clover. There are occasional pockets, generally alongside paths or adjacent woodland/scrub to the west, which have additional more desirable species in the sward. Particularly orchids, with groups of bee and marsh orchids,</p> <p>Bunkers are scattered throughout these areas, which are becoming vegetated with small groups of regenerating trees particularly Scots pine, alder and a mix of herb species.</p> <p>The former greens are dominated with red fescue and provide opportunity to biodiversity uplift.</p>	Poor
<p><b>Other Neutral Grassland</b> There are two areas of more diverse grassland on site.</p>	Moderate

<p>One is a very small bank to the west of the site. Species here include glaucous sedge, common cat's-ear, ribwort plantain, red clover, and crested dog's-tail. The other area is adjacent to the LWS to the east. This area of neutral grassland along the edge of a mound borders on being of BAP quality and is certainly of special note due to the large number of bee orchids present.</p> <p>There is also a small area of marshy grassland within the LWS, which also falls under this habitat type within the metrics. Species include compact rush, angelica, tufted hair-grass and marsh thistle.</p>	
<p><b>Lowland Acid Grassland</b> The acid grassland present within the LWS is in decline, with large amounts of scrub and tall ruderal vegetation encroaching. Tormentil is managing to still survive amongst this, but more diverse areas are rare.</p>	Moderate
<p><b>Seasonal Pond and Ornamental Pond</b> There is a large ornamental pond to the north of the site, with man-made stone wall sides to the east and sloping banksides to the west. Bulrush, club-rush and yellow flag iris are all growing within it. Unusually, this pond was dry at the time of the September 2022 walkover but was not recorded as dry during any 2021 surveys or early 2022 surveys. There is also a small area of standing water, located towards the southern end of the site in a gap in the woodland. This is dominated by bulrush, it had very shallow water at the time of the walkover, and is likely to only be a seasonal pond, drying fully most summers. The seasonal pond is in moderate condition, with the ornamental in poor condition.</p>	<p>Seasonal Pond - Moderate</p> <p>Ornamental Pond - Poor</p>
<p><b>Lowland Fen</b> Pockets of fen habitat are present along the watercourse and ditch on site. They are rank and dominated by meadowsweet and great willowherb. A wet depression within the LWS includes cuckoo flower, soft rush and sharp-flowered rush.</p>	Poor
<p><b>Ditch</b> There is a ditch system to the west of the site towards the pond. It flows through a mixture of grassland and woodland. It is very shallow in places, and most of it is seasonally dry.</p>	Poor



## 7.0 Protected Species and Species of Nature Conservation Importance

### Breeding and wintering birds

7.1 In summary, a total of 56 bird species were recorded over the course of the breeding bird surveys. There were 28 confirmed breeding, 11 probable breeding, 7 possible breeding, and 9 non-breeding species within the survey area. Additionally, a pair of barn owl were using the site to forage and were suspected to be breeding within a farm building approximately 300-metres to the west of the site boundary (DWS 2022). Barn owls have been recorded on site.

7.2 Of the confirmed/potential/possible breeding species observed within the survey area (including immediate buffer area), 10 are considered to be of high conservation concern (red list) and 12 are considered to be of medium conservation concern (amber list).

7.3 A further 23 confirmed/potential/possible breeding species are of the lowest conservation concern and appear on the green list and 2 species which hold no status/introduced. According to the Birds of Durham (2012) the breeding species present would be typical for the area and no unusual observations were recorded given the location and habitats present.

7.4 Consequently, the evaluation of the site as a whole would suggest it is of at least District level importance.

### 7.5 Wintering Birds

In summary, a total of 61 species have been recorded over the course of the surveys carried out between September 2021 – March 2022. An average of 35 species per survey was recorded (DWS 2022). According to the Birds of Durham (2012) the wintering species present would be typical for the



area and habitats present. The presence of the little egret *Egretta garzetta* on site reflects the increasingly common nature of records for this species within the county.

7.6 A total of 15 Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC) Red listed species (24%), 17 BoCC Amber listed species (28%) species, which gives a combined total of 32 notably listed species (52%). In addition, 26 BoCC Green listed species (43%) have been identified across the site during the surveys. Further, 3 no status/introduced species were recorded (5%).

7.7 Based on the 2021 – 2022 survey findings and using the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) criteria, the site is considered to fall within at least **County level of importance** for its winter bird assemblage.

### **Bats**

7.8 No records from the site itself. Overall, the site has moderate quality habitat for foraging and commuting bats.

### **Badger**

7.9 No evidence of badger and unlikely due to roads and disturbance.

### **Western European Hedgehog**

7.10 The site provides good habitat for this species, and they are highly likely to be present.

### **Riparian Mammals – Otter and Water vole**

7.11 No signs of mink, otters or water voles were found during the survey of Elemore golf course by DWS.

### **Great Crested Newt (GCN)**

7.12 None of the waterbodies within the site tested positive for GCN environmental DNA (eDNA).

### **Invertebrates**

7.13 No invertebrate records are held for the site itself, but the site does provide a range of habitats which will accommodate a wide range of invertebrates, with wetland, more diverse grassland and woodland habitats on site. However, the woodland is lacking in mature trees and deadwood and the areas of species rich grassland are small, which makes the site less likely to have rarer species of invertebrate. Numerous common species of butterfly were seen during the walk over surveys including small skipper, ringlet, large skipper, small copper, large white, orange tip, meadow brown and small tortoiseshell. The site does have the potential to accommodate Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act butterflies such as wall, and small heath.

## **8.0 General description and observations**

8.1 The Golf Course at Elemore was built in the 1990s from reclaimed industrial land. At the time, the 60ha site was landscaped to create a suitable playing course with new woodland and areas of open grassland. Two interconnected ornamental ponds were built and fed from field drains and the greens watering systems. The pond helped to reduce any potential flood risk to adjacent housing. The Local Wildlife Site, within the golf course, provided a more natural feature with acid grassland, dense scrub, water course and ponds. This habitat quality has deteriorated through lack of management. The new golf course created habitat with associated wildlife benefits.

8.2 With the golf course's closure and the council's commitment to create a new park, which celebrates the Elemore's biodiversity and ecological interest, there is now a fantastic opportunity to maximise this resource by enhancing and restoring these valuable habitats and create better conditions for wildlife.

Elemore is recognised as a site that is important for birds and has the potential to increase the number and diversity of invertebrates.

There three priority areas for enhancement include:

### **Grasslands**

8.3 Elemore Park has large tracts low interest modified grassland, once the greens ceased to be cut or managed after the golf course closed in 2019. They are not particularly diverse or ecologically significant. However, there is huge potential to increase biodiversity and create an opportunity for Biodiversity Net Gain by proactive management. The preferred management option is to set up a conservation-grazing programme. Therefore, Link Together will build the necessary infrastructure to make that happen by creating grazing compartments so that cattle or ponies can be moved around the site to graze different areas across the seasons. Grazing infrastructure will include new fencing and a livestock water management system. This will be a significant programme of work to transform Elemore's layout which could influence how people use the site. The western part of the site will be grazed utilising existing fencing and new plantations, and the remainder of the park will be more open and used by visitors all year.

### **Local Wildlife Site**

8.4 The important acid grassland and fenlands within the LWS will be a priority for management with the delivery of further scrub control, management of ruderal vegetation and proactive cutting of grassland areas. The balance of grassland and scrub will be retained to ensure that there is suitable cover for birds. Work can be delivered through a mix of contractors and volunteers.

### **Wetland Management and Ponds**

8.5 The large ornamental ponds to the north of Elemore Park are important community assets and highly valued by the local community. Residents enjoying seeing the swans and other waterfowl that using the ponds throughout the year and breeding during Spring and Summer. There were concerns from residents about water levels during the dry summer of 2022, which affected the swans and other wildlife.

8.6 Since the golf course closure, the changes to how the land is managed has affected how water moved across Elemore Park. There is no longer regular watering of the greens, which has affected the amount of water draining across the site. Therefore, the grasslands, water course and ornamental ponds are dependent on rain and how surface water is managed as it flows across Elemore Park. Natural depressions across the site will enable water to be collected and stored, forming temporary ponds. Using the natural topography, existing watercourse and field drains, interventions to create a series of scrapes, ponds and wet areas, will create additional wetland habitat and areas for water storage. These areas will benefit the ponds by reducing the amount of silt entering the ponds and enabling slower and lengthier water release. By creating more water storage and slowing flows, this will reduce the risk of flash floods and reduce the risk of the large ponds drying up.

8.7 Work is proposed to create a series of leaky dams, through placing woody debris across the stream that flows through Local Wildlife Site, which sits within Elemore Park. By slowing flows temporary ponds will be created providing additional habitats for invertebrate's amphibians and birds.

### **Woodland Management**

8.8 As the DWT report identified there are several woodland plantations across Elemore Park. These offer cover for wildlife and are important landscape features, breaking up the large areas of grassland. The plantations are all a similar age with poor understory and include non-native species. There are stands of ash with signs of dieback. Some will need to be removed for safety reasons which will create open areas allowing other species to regenerate. There are signs of patches of new regenerating woodland alongside the existing plantations.

8.9 On the eastern side of Elemore, along the route of the Stephenson Trail and connecting to Easington Lane, there are more mature woodland blocks which need management to improve sightlines and ensure that official site entrances feel open and welcoming. Some of the woodland has fallen trees and storm damage.

8.10 Therefore, a programme of management will be delivered to remove fallen trees, to take out non-native species and diseased trees, create open areas and woodland edge habitat, improve the understory diversity and support natural regeneration. Fallen trees due to storm damage can be utilised to create habitat piles which will support invertebrates and other wildlife. Suitable large logs can be left as informal seating for visitors.

8.11 Woodland management can be followed-up by understory planting, which would increase the diversity of the woodland ground cover.

### **Access and Interpretation**

8.12 Over the four years since the golf course closed, the site has been unmanaged and used informally by the public. Many local residents use Elemore Park for walking the dog and enjoying the wildlife. However, there are incidences of anti-social behaviour, particularly by motorbikes and quadbikes, which causes damage to the site and deters other users from accessing Elemore Park. Therefore, a key priority is to stop this by identifying access points onto Elemore with barriers and planting. This will also be supported with greater informal community use and events and activities.

8.13 In conjunction with local residents and partners, Sunderland City Council is developing new entrance signs to ensure that Elemore Park feels more welcoming and that new users feel more comfortable and reassured that they are invited to use Elemore. Work is planned to install these signs in 2023/24 - Link Together plans will support and continue this development and dovetail with ongoing plans.

### **9.0 Existing Management and Maintenance**

9.1 Elemore Park has the potential to be a flagship park in the Coalfield and for all residents of Sunderland by offering local people the opportunity to enjoy its wildlife and wonderful landscapes. Elemore Park is connected, via footpaths, bridleways and cycleways, to the surrounding greenspace, countryside and local communities.

SCC has appointed a dedicated Park Manager with the responsibility to develop and manage the park. The park is in the development phase with new infrastructure such as a small play area, trim trail, footpaths and signage being installed. In addition, SCC is following the recommendations set out in DWS ecological appraisal to bring habitats within the park back into active management to enhance its biodiversity. Link Together is supporting that work by creating compartments for livestock as part of a Conservation Programme to enhance the grassland, building new footpaths and managing water across the sites in order to create wetlands.

The Local Wildlife Site (LWS) is in poor condition and sensitive management work will take place to improve habitat quality, particularly on the acid grassland. The Countryside team will add Elemore Park to the CMSi system in order to monitor the site and co-ordinate works with the Park Manager.

There is huge public interest in Elemore, the Park Manager is building on that by setting up a Friends' Group. SCC has secured additional funding from Natural England to create a Green Community Hub in Elemore Park which can enable conservation activity, walks and education use to develop prior to Link Together.



Elemore Park is an excellent location for regular green social prescribing activity due to on-site facilities and range of possible conservation tasks, which can engage regular volunteers, helping to support with skill development and improve health and well-being. Therefore, by the end of the project, it is expected that there will be a cohort of skilled, engaged and enthused individuals to play a part in a Friends Group and continue with practical management on site.

## 10.0 Summary of Constraints and Key Issues

Issue	Comment
Planning Policy	Proposals support local policy, enhancing the protected LWS, greenspace, wildlife corridor and open countryside.
Climate Change and Health	Proposals will support further opportunities for carbon sequestration. Within an area of deprivation nearby- site enhancement will support area.
Greenspace	Area has below average quality greenspace in adjacent urban areas – this site helps to mitigate for this lack of urban quality.
Biodiversity	Proposals will further support biodiversity on site and within the wildlife corridor.
Invasive Species	Japanese Knotweed identified in southeast of site and area close to visitor centre identified by WRT
Landscape Character	Area of higher landscape value. Opportunities to improve wildlife corridor with hedgerow and woodland, particularly around Hetton-le-Hole and Easington Lane.
Historic Environment	Limited historic importance on site. Local importance- former Elemore Colliery on site and site also forms start of the 1822 Hetton Colliery Railway, which was created by George and Robert Stephenson and was the first full mechanised railway in the world. Site interpretation to be enhanced.
Water Environment	Lies within a Source Protection Zone – proposals will not negatively impact on this. No flood zones affect the site, but groundwater flooding has been major issue, with significant works already undertaken to alleviate the problem at the northern end of the site (at the ponds).
Rights of Way / Access	Informal footpaths exist on site. Three main pathways (to form bridleway/cycleway) exist, running along the west and east boundaries, and centrally through the site (all north-south). These routes (and access points) will be improved. Signing and seating also to be improved.
Soil and Nitrates	No negative impact on soils. No nitrate fertilisers will be used as site lies within Nitrate Vulnerable Zone.
Utilities	No major utilities identified. Works undertaken will respect necessary easements.

## 11.0 Proposed Works

### 11.1 Habitat Management Aims

- To put in place a conservation grazing programme to secure long term management of Elemore Park through Biodiversity Net Gain
- To manage and enhance the local wildlife site by carrying out a programme of grassland management
- To improve the diversity and age structure of woodland plantations

### 11.2 Access and Interpretation Aims

The proposals for access and interpretation will be finalised once plans for this year's work have been agreed. However, the main focus will include:

- To formalise footpath routes from the building and carpark into Elemore Park at the southern part of the site.
- To continue development of information sign boards around Elemore Park.

### 12.0 Budget

Source of Funding	Amount (£)
Section 106	119,000
Area Committee	12,355
NECF	0
NLHF	118,645
<b>Total</b>	<b>250,000</b>

Habitat	Project	Months	Budget (£)
Modified Grasslands	Create infrastructure for Conservation Grazing: erect fencing with access points for livestock and visitors across western half of Elemore Park, to create grazing compartment including gates	Anytime	45,000
	Install watering systems for livestock	Anytime	28,975
Acid Grassland	Management of ruderal vegetation strimming and removal	Spring - Summer	
	Programme of scrub control	September to March	4,500
Water management	Creation of wetlands area and scrapes.	April – June	23,288
	Draining scheme to control water around entrance to Stephenson Trail	Anytime	
	WRT Management Fees		3,217
Non-native Invasive Species	Identify and treat Japanese Knotweed	April – September	1,800
Woodland Management	Thinning and creation of woodland glades and edge over two years. Removal of non-native species and dead, diseased and dying trees particularly ash. Programme to be delivered over two years.	October to February	45,000
	Planting ground cover with woodland species bulbs and wildflowers	Various	8,808
Footpaths	To build footpath 800m	Anytime	55,415
Signage and Interpretation boards.	Details to be agreed. Series of information boards and fingerposts planned across site	Anytime	9,000

Contingency – DWT			11,865
Contingency – SCC			13,135
<b>Total</b>			<b>250,000</b>

The specification for each area of work are outlined in the Specifications Link Together document and details of future maintenance and management are outlined in the Maintenance and Management Plan document.

