

Greenspace 3- Elemore Vale, Easington Lane

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Elemore Vale Greenspace is designated as a Local Wildlife Site. It is a hidden wildlife haven with a mosaic of interesting habitats including grasslands, fen, scrub, woodland and watercourse. The grassland is largely unmanaged, and is a mixture of acid grassland, neutral grassland and fen with encroaching scrub. There is open access grassland and plantation woodland which is used by local people for dog walking. There are signs of anti-social behaviour, litter, flytipping and use of motorbikes. Elemore Vale is a gateway out to wider countryside with a network of formal and informal paths. The site is on the edge of the Sunderland boundary.



2.0 Location and Accessibility

2.1 Elemore Vale is accessed from Elemore Lane just off Elemore Road between Easington Lane and Elemore Vale, situated at the southernmost edge of the Sunderland City. There is housing to the east, greenspace to the north, allotments and farmland to the west, and plantation woodland to the south. The site has no formal identity with a lack of signage or information about the site.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Durham Wildlife Services (DWS) were commissioned to carry out an ecological appraisal of Flint Mill 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 Site Context

4.1 There are 5 statutory designated sites within 2km of the site and a further 3 non-statutory sites, which are listed below.

- Hetton Bogs SSSI/ LNR
- Eppleton Grassland and Railway SSSI/LNR
- Pig Hill SSSI
- Moorsley Banks SSSI
- Elemore Woods SSSI
- Elemore Golf Course LWS
- Hetton Lyons LWS
- South Hetton Ponds LWS

5.0 Strategic Significance

5.1 The greenspace is identified in the Sunderland Local Plan as a protected Local Wildlife Site, greenspace and open countryside, and acting as a strategic wildlife corridor. Due to the 'open countryside' status, the site 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 and acid grassland 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 Vale are set out below.

Habitats	Conditions
<p>Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland</p> <p>Woodland to the west of the site is more developed, with mature trees and a more natural feel than the dense plantation stands across the rest of the site. However, these areas do not show on a 1945 aerial, so were planted more recently than this. Species are mostly native, but ground flora is limited.</p>	Good
<p>Woodland Other Woodland Broadleaved</p> <p>Most of the shelter belt plantations across the site are dense, leggy, and uniform in age. They are mostly native, but lack in mature trees, with the exception of the woodland to the southwest, where a small number of mature trees remain from previous woodland. Ground flora is again poor across these areas of woodland.</p>	Moderate
<p>Pond (Non-Priority)</p> <p>A pond lies to the southeast of the site, amongst an extensive area of fen habitat. The pond itself was nearly dry at the time of the survey and its water surface was dominated with duckweed. The habitat in and immediately adjacent to the pond is diverse, with a wide range of wetland species present. However, this wider area of fen habitat is dominated by meadowsweet.</p>	Moderate
<p>Tall ruderal</p> <p>There are several large stands of tall ruderal vegetation across the site. Rosebay willowherb is particularly dominant across them all, with rank grasses such as cock's-foot. Meadowsweet is present in damper areas.</p>	Poor
<p>Lowland Acid Grassland</p> <p>A large area of lowland acid grassland is present in the centre of the site, with a smaller parcel to the south of the site. This is a rare habitat, and still had a good range of indicator species present within the sward. There was fire damage to part of the central grassland and at the time of the survey this area was dominated by bare ground and was recorded as such. However, acid grassland species were starting to colonise, and this area is likely to recover.</p>	Moderate
<p>Modified Grassland</p> <p>Large areas of grassland on site are species poor. Some areas are managed as amenity grassland and are typical of this kind of habitat type, with perennial ryegrass dominant and very few herbs present. Other areas on site are rank, with tall grasses such as false oat-grass abundant, and large areas of tall ruderal species such as rosebay willowherb and common hogweed.</p>	Poor

<p>Other Neutral Grassland Several more diverse areas of grassland are present on site. Previous surveys (DWS 2018) had recorded areas of Lowland Meadow on site, however these areas have evidently declined through an increase in rank grasses and scrub. Some indicator species still remain within the sward but are rare and confined to edges. These areas could recover though appropriate management.</p>	<p>Poor</p>
<p>Stream A very narrow and shallow stream flows through the site south to north. This stream was mostly dry at the time of the visit and its narrow (less than a metre) width was heavily overgrown with fen vegetation.</p>	<p>Stream not conditions assessed Adjacent Fen – moderate</p>
<p>Lowland Fen Extensive areas of this habitat are present on site. This is a rare and important habitat but varies wildly in quality across the site. The stream sides contain large amounts tall ruderal vegetation such as rosebay willowherb and broadleaved dock. The fen surrounding the pond is much more varied, with a wide range of species present, although meadowsweet does dominate large areas. To the south of the latter is an area of much poorer quality fen, dominated by rosebay willowherb and meadowsweet, and rank grasses. Additional species are mostly very rare in the sward.</p>	<p>Moderate</p>
<p>Heathland and shrub – Hawthorn Scrub Areas of dense scrub are present at the southern end of the site. Hawthorn and bramble dominate, with trees such as English oak and wych elm rare.</p>	<p>Moderate</p>
<p>Hedgerow – Native hedgerow An overgrown hedgerow is present along the northern site boundary, toward the east of site. The hedgerow is defunct, featuring gaps. The hedge is mostly comprised of hawthorn, with some elder, with some of the latter covered in ivy <i>Hedera helix</i>. Hedge parsley, cow parsley, and large bindweed are all also present.</p>	<p>Moderate</p>

7.0 Protected Species and Species of Nature Conservation Importance

Breeding and wintering birds

7.1 ERIC returned 9,183 records of birds within 2km of site. Of these, 1,006 were for Schedule 1 species and these are summarised in the DWS Survey Report. The vast majority of the records are from either Rainton Meadows, Hetton Bogs or Hetton Lyons Country Park. None of the Schedule 1 species fall within Elemore Vale itself. The site provides some good habitats for birds, with large areas of woodland and scrub habitat. The site also provides good foraging habitat for species such as barn owls.

Bats

7.2 Results of the consultation revealed a total of 23 bat records within 2km of site for at least 4 species, as well as records for unidentified species. Common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle, brown long eared bat, and noctule have all been identified. None of these records are from within the site itself, however, one soprano pipistrelle record is from Elemore golf course. Scrub, stream and woodland habitats will provide excellent foraging opportunities and the site is well connected to adjacent additional foraging habitats.

Badger

7.3 No evidence of badger.

Riparian Mammals – Otter and Water vole

7.4 No signs of otters or water voles were found during the survey of Elemore Vale.

Great Crested Newts (GCN)

7.5 The closest ponds which are known to hold great crested newts (GCN) *Triturus cristatus* are approximately 1.1km from Elemore Vale. Given the distance and the habitat between Elemore Vale and these ponds it is considered unlikely that GCN will be impacted.

Invertebrates

7.6 ERIC NE provided 64 records of invertebrates from within 2km. These are from a range of notable/red list/Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act butterflies, moths, dragonflies, bees, and true flies. Notable species include two species of true flies, *Colobaea bifasciella* and *Ditaeniella grisescens*. Species listed as either near-threatened, vulnerable or endangered on the red list include white-letter hairstreak, wall, dingy skipper, small heath and northern brown. Several NERC Act species were mentioned above in addition to buff ermine moth, shaded broad-bar moth, rosy rustic moth, dusky thorn moth, small square-spot moth, brown spot pinion moth and red shanked carder bee are all present. The site has potential for rarer species of invertebrates because of the wetland, diverse grassland and woodland on site.

8.0 Existing Management and Maintenance

8.1 The greenspace is managed by the City Council but, overall receives limited management.

9.0 General description and observations

9.1 Elemore Vale is a particularly special greenspace due to the combination of different grassland habitats, woodland, fen and a water course. There is the potential to support a diverse range of wildlife including invertebrates and birds. Elemore Vale has a very natural feel due to being in a valley, surrounded by woodland and disconnected from adjacent housing. There has been a lack of management on site, other than recent interventions as part of the Healing Nature project. Elemore Vale does suffer from some anti-social behaviour including regular dumping, motor bikes and occasional fires.

9.2 Parts of the Elemore Vale have become dominated by hawthorn scrub, which does provide good habitat for birds but has the potential to reduce the quality of surrounding grassland. Therefore, a two-year programme to remove scrub (particularly from sensitive areas) would be very beneficial. The surrounding plantation woodland is close to the housing and is subject to some anti-social behaviour. The trees are very even aged and ground flora is poor. Work to remove any damaged or non-native trees and thin out the plantation, to let more light onto the ground would be positive. Removal of flytipping and litter would take place at the same time. Opening-up dens and improving sight lines in to the woodland may help dissuade people from dumping waste and damaging trees.

9.3 The grasslands on Elemore Vale are important habitats and require regular management to enhance them and then ensure that management continues. Grasslands need to be cut in late summer and have the arisings removed. Purchasing specialist machinery would enable this to happen and support longer term management.

Access and Interpretation

9.4 There is no signage or site identity, and passers-by may not realise it is there or feel unsure if access is permitted. There is a network of unsurfaced paths or desire lines across the site which link up to the surrounding countryside, woodland plantations and the rights of way network. Orientation is confusing due to site layout and lack of designated routes. Routes are overgrown in places, are muddy and there is evidence of motor bike use. There is a barrier across the stream which it is assumed was installed to deter motorbikes. Therefore, carrying out works to reduce motorbike use would be beneficial.

9.5 The site is separated from Elemore Park and associated greenspace by Elemore Lane. However, with better signing there is the potential to create a network of promoted walking routes to link residents from Easington Lane to both Elemore Vale and Elemore Park.

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	None found on site.
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 brickfield on site. 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 surface water flooding occurs around 2 watercourses. Proposals (including watercourse clearing) may reduce flooding potential.
Rights of Way / Access	Informal footpaths exist on site. 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	Two sewers connect to the watercourse from adjacent properties. No other no major utilities identified. Works undertaken will respect necessary easements.

11.0 Proposed Works

11.1 Habitat Management aims at Elemore Vale:

- To plan and implement a programme of woodland management on areas of plantation woodland to the east of the site adjacent to the housing.
- To remove scrub and ruderal vegetation from fenland habitat and create areas of open water.
- To manage areas of scrub, creating a more diverse age structure, particularly where scrub is encroaching onto sensitive grassland habitats.
- To improve quality of other areas of grassland by planning a programme of scrub management to maintain open areas, putting in place suitable grazing or mowing regime
- To implement small-scale interventions on the water course.

11.2 Access and Interpretation

- To erect site signage and waymarks to give Elemore Vale greater identity
- To develop promote routes linking Elemore Vale, Elemore Park and associate greenspace.
- To reinstate motor-bike barriers to reduce access.
- To improve some sections of footpath, particularly sections subject to motorbike misuse.

12.0 Budget

Source of Funding	Amount (£)
Section 106	54,798
Area Committee	-
NECF	-
NLHF	50,019
Total	104,817

Habitat	Project	Season Delivered	Budget (£)
Woodland Management	Thinning out plantation woodland	October – March	8,818
	Removal of flytipping	Anytime	1,782
	Understory planting	March - June	1,800
Grassland	Implement programme of cutting	August – September	3,021
Scrub	Scrub management	October – March	22,500
Fenland management	Scrub management	October – March	9,000
	Ruderal vegetation management	Spring/Summer	
	Scrape creation	October – March	900
Water course interventions - WRT cost combined	Woody debris	Anytime	6,379
	Earth Bund	Anytime	
	WRT Man Fee	-	3,217
Footpath repairs	2 sections of footpath 300m & 170m	Anytime	27,184
Access Improvements	Upgrade Entrances	Anytime	4,102
	Entrance Signage	Anytime	3832
	Promoted routes & waymarkers	Anytime	
Contingency – DWT		-	5,002
Contingency – SCC		-	5,480
Total			104,317

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

