Conningbrook Lakes Country Park Management plan 2016 – 2020

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1. Vision and long-term aims

It is anticipated that Conningbrook Lakes Country Park will develop into a hub within Ashford, used by local residents, community groups and nature enthusiasts. Kent Wildlife Trust will manage the site to enhance and restore riparian and open water habitats, and create a haven for wildlife and for people.

The reserve will provide Ashford with a beautiful reserve on its doorstep: a site with thriving reedbeds, wet woodlands, lakes, ponds and wildflower meadows, all in close proximity to the unique landscape of the Great Stour River. Local people will be able to enjoy walking through wildflower grasslands bursting with butterflies, dragonflies and the sound of singing skylarks. They will be able to relax and enjoy the sight of overwintering wildfowl whilst walking around the lakes and wet woodlands. The Country Park will also provide new links to established public rights of way and cycle routes.

To fulfil its roll within a Living Landcape, the vision is for the Country Park to extend beyond its current boundaries, providing greater space for wildlife and people, and linking to other conservation initiatives in Ashford and surrounding boroughs.

The implementation of the project will support the sustainable development of Ashford and contribute towards the re-creation, enhancement, connectivity and management of ecosystems.
In time, the Country Park will provide some of the best examples of priority habitats of their kind in the county and it will make an important contribution to the development of the Ashford Green and Blue Grid as a high quality, multi-functional network of urban green spaces, river corridors and linkages between Ashford and its surrounding countryside.

2. Acknowledgements

The successful conservation of Conningbrook Lakes Country Park and the drafting of this plan are dependent upon many contributions. In this capacity, the following are gratefully acknowledged:

Brett Group
Bioscan Ecology
Ashford Borough Council (ABC)
Ashford Borough Council's Conservation and Environment Forum
Environment Agency (EA)
Kent Wildlife Trust's (KWT) Conservation Committee
KWT's dedicated team of volunteers
Ashford Leisure Trust (ALT)
Mid Kent Fisheries (MKF) and fishermen

3. Introduction

The site upon which the Country Park is found was part of the floodplain grasslands and arable farming system found along most of the Great Stour river between Ashford and Canterbury (see Location and Historic maps in Appendix 10.1).

Conningbrook Lakes Country Park is located on the northern edge of Ashford in Kent. It supports a series of flooded gravel pits and its eastern boundary follows the Great Stour river.

The Country Park is owned by Brett Group, who will be developing part of the land as a residential area. The remainder will be leased for 500 years to Ashford Borough Council (ABC), who in turn will run the site with the help of KWT, ALT and MKF.

Below is a brief timeline showing how this land has developed in the last four decades:

1970s/ 80s – Gravel extracted by Brett Group to create what are now the three lakes (Eco Lake, Main Lake and North Lake)
1982 – Carp stocking into lakes
1986 – Designated a Local Wildlife Site as part of the River Great Stour (AS27) (see Appendix 10.2)
2001 – Last significant area of excavation from the southern edge of Main Lake
2011 June – ABC identify the creation of Conningbrook Lakes Country Park as a key objective
2013 March – Planning permission granted for housing development
2014 October – Early access works begun
2014 November – KWT / ABC management agreement signed
2015 January – KWT appointed Conningbrook Lakes warden
2015 May – Country Park open to the public

4. Recent Achievements

2014 October – ABC, early access works begun
2014 November – KWT / ABC management agreement signed
2015 January – KWT appointed Conningbrook Lakes warden
2015 February – KWT attracted additional funding from Linbury Trust, to increase warden position to full time
2015 March – KWT volunteer practical conservation tasks started
2015 April – ABC Early Works completed (including culverts, boundary and compartment fencing, removal of spit to create island, access for water sports and other access infrastructure)
2015 March – KWT species monitoring programme (breeding/ over wintering birds, dragonflies, butterflies, harvest mice)
2015 April – KWT / The Conservation Volunteers joint project planting 1,000 trees as part of headland creation
2015 September – Official open day
2015 November – Wildlife garden area developed

5. Essential information

5.1 General Information

Site Name: Conningbrook Lakes Country Park

Location: North-east Ashford, situated on the A2070 Willesborough Road. Enclosed by the River Great Stour to the east, the Ashford to Canterbury railway to the west and Willesborough Road to the south. (see Appendix 10.1)

Map Reference: TR 028436,

Postcode: TN24 9QX

Protection Status: Local Wildlife Site (LWS) River Great Stour (see Appendix 10.2)

Date of Establishment as Country Park: 2014

Area:

(Whole) Country Park	34.3 ha	84.75 acres
Nature Conservation Area (managed by KWT) (including Eco Lake and North Lake)	18.45 ha	45.61 acres
Main Lake (Two Tone Lake)	13.96 ha	34.49 acres
Eco Lake (Warbler lake)	1.87 ha	4.63 acres
North Lake (Kingfisher Lake)	0.93 ha	2.29 acres

Ownership: Brett Group

Tenure:

- ABC currently have a licence agreement
- ABC to retain a 500 year tenancy at start of housing development
- KWT 5 year management agreement started November 2014

Date of Expiry (KWT Agreement): November 2019

Local Planning Authority: Ashford Borough Council (ABC)

Consenting Authorities:

- Natural England (protected species)
- Environment Agency (water level manipulation)
- Internal Drainage Board (ditch and drainage work)
- Ashford Borough Council (planning issues)
- Forestry Commission (felling Licence)

Access (see Appendix 10.3):

- Open pedestrian access across site
- Main access from Julie Rose Stadium car park. Other access over Chapel Bridge from Blackwall Lane, and over the Railway line at far end of the site.
- Public footpath from east to west
- Proposed new bridal route to connect to cycle route 18
- Dogs on leads throughout the site, with further restrictions in sensitive areas (see Appendix 10.4 Dog Walking Policy)
- Restricted access across planned development site

Funding bodies: Brett Group, ABC, Linbury Trust, 106 payments from development.
Funding will be received from Brett Group on commencement of owners moving into the newly built houses. In the meantime, funding will be through ABC. Funding is also available until November 2016 as part of the Linbury Trust "Older and Out There" project.

5.2 Important contacts – managers

Kent Wildlife Trust (KWT)		
Reserves Officer (East)	John McAllister	01622 662012
Ashford Area Warden	Ian Rickards	07889 737839
Conningbrook Lakes Country Park Nature Conservation Community Warden	Vicky Aitkenhead	07747608826
Ashford Borough Council (ABC)		
Head of Culture and Environment	Christina Fuller	01233 637311
Tourism, Heritage and Nature Conservation Manager	Sarah Barber	01233 330345
Nature Conservation and Tourism Projects Officer	Terry Jones	01233 330621
Sports Development Officer	Simon Harris	01233 330232
Ashford Leisure Trust (ALT)		
Chief Executive	Emma Wood	01233 667123
Conningbrook Country Park & Stadium Manager	TBC	01233 613131
Mid Kent Fisheries (MKF)		
Managing Director	Chris Logsdon	07872 998076

5.3 Important habitats

(from *Land at Conningbrook Lakes, Ashford – Ecology and Nature Conservation* report by Bioscan, Oct 2012, pages 13-18)

	Status	Key species
Wet/damp ditches	The ditches within the CP are heavily shaded by surrounding alder and sallows with tall stands of stinging nettle and bramble on the banks and colonising dryer sections of channel.	Reedmace, water plantain, reed canary grass, soft rush, purple-loosestrife, great willowherb, jointed rush, fool's watercress, water starwort, brooklime, watercress, common duckweed, reed sweet-grass, water figwort, common duckweed, great willowherb, hemlock water-dropwort and amphibious bistort.
River	The River Great Stour passes just outside the site's eastern boundary. It has a fairly uniform morphology in this stretch, typified by a consistent channel width and depth and steady northward flow, enclosed between steep banks that support eutrophic vegetation and little in the way of tree or shrub cover except in very localised areas.	*Potomogeton pectinatus*, yellow water lily, spiked water milfoil, amphibious bistort, emergent branched bur-reed.
Emergent vegetation and swamp	Broad bands of emergent marginal vegetation are a feature of North and Eco Lake. The steeper margins of Main lake afford rather more limited opportunities for the establishment of emergent vegetation.	Greater reedmace, common reed, reed sweet-grass, reed canary-grass, water mint, common spike rush, gypsywort, great willowherb, bittersweet, soft rush, hard rush, sallow or osier saplings. Other species noted include water plantain, false fox-sedge, tufted hair grass, water figwort, fool's watercress, sea club-rush, goat's rue, hemlock water-dropwort, hemp-agrimony, common fleabane and ribbed melilot.
Succession grassland	Much of the site is covered by grasslands displaying similar characteristics and most of these have received active management in the form of grazing and/or mowing.	Yorkshire fog, red fescue, perennial ryegrass, timothy, common couch, common and creeping bent, cock's-foot, crested dog's-tail and soft brome.
Rank grassland and tall ruderal	This habitat occurs on disturbed and/or enriched ground at the edges of existing working areas and more extensively in association with the River Great Stour where it dominates the banks and the adjacent raised bunds.	Creeping thistle, Himalayan balsam, stinging nettle, broad-leaved dock, hogweed, hemlock, false oat-grass and mugwort.
Open ground vegetation	The principal and most interesting example of this habitat type occurs on tipped and levelled sandy ground immediately to the west of the Eco Lake.	*Vulpia* fescues, annual meadow-grass, Yorkshire-fog and common bent, thyme-leaved sandwort, wall speedwell and heath pearlwort.
Open water	All of the larger lakes on the site have	*Elodea* waterweeds, duckweed *Lemna* and

	extensive areas of open water. All are flooded pits with an engineered morphology, although the bank profiles on North and Eco Lake appear fairly shallow.	rigid hornwort in North and Eco Lake, with blanket weed and invasive *Elodea* pondweeds at times abundant in Main Lake.
Scrub	Scrub habitats on the site fall into two main categories; mixed species stands mainly comprised of self-sown species typical of dryer habitats.	*Salix*-dominated stands, often derived from plantation.
Broad-leaved woodland	The bulk of woodland cover on the site is of recent origin, the most extensive being closed canopy plantation around the Eco Lake.	*Salix*-dominated stands which are comprised of crack willow, goat willow, grey willow, white willow, osiers and others.
Mature, non-woodland trees	Mature trees are uncommon features of the wider site and limited to plantation specimens of fast growing species.	Balsam poplar (along the Stour) and hybrid black poplar (west of the development area).
Hedgerow	True hedgerow vegetation, as opposed to railside scrub, is generally restricted to the site's boundary with Willesborough Road and the periphery of the KCC depot.	Hazel, blackthorn, hawthorn, elder, English elm, ash, field maple and oak.

5.4 Geology/soils

Alluvial soils on gravel beds.

Isolated areas of sand left over from quarrying storage works.

5.5 Important species (highlighting notable species at the Country Park)

(with information based on *Land at Conningbrook Lakes, Ashford – Ecology and Nature Conservation* report by Bioscan, Oct 2012).

Biodiversity Importance	Species
International (K)	European Protected Species
National (N)	Red Data Book (RDB) species UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Priority Species Species of Principal Importance in England listed under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (updated in November 2008) Species listed under Schedules 1, 5 (Section 9(1)) or 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).
County (C)	Species listed within the Kent Red Data Book 2000 (and later amendments).
Local (L)	Species listed within Local Biodiversity Action Plans. Species whose presence or population, in the opinion of local experts, is of local importance. Vascular plant species that occur in between 11 & 52 of the tetrads in Kent based on current information available in Philp (1982).

5.5.1 Birds

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status at CCP	National Status & Distribution
Shoveler	*Anas clypeata*	Winter, all lakes.	Amber.
Tufted duck	*Aythya fuligula*	Winter, all lakes.	Amber status.
Gadwall	*Anas strepera*	Winter, all lakes.	Amber. S and SE concentrated.
Wigeon	*Anas penelope*	Winter, all lakes.	Amber. Winter Migrant.
Pochard	*Aythya ferina*	Winter, all lakes.	Amber. Resident and winter migrant.
Teal	*Anas crecca*	Winter, Eco lake.	Amber. Resident and winter migrant.
Great white egret	*Ardea alba*	Infrequently, Eco lake.	Scarce visitor.
Little egret	*Egretta garzetta*	Winter roost, Eco lake.	Amber. Present on coastal regions of south year round.
Kingfisher	*Alcedo atthis*	Frequently, Eco lake mainly.	Amber. Resident in UK but of conservation concern in Europe.
Barn owl	*Tyto alba*	Very infrequent.	Amber. Resident in UK but of conservation concern in Europe.
Cuckoo	*Cuculus canorus*	Heard calling, Eco lake.	Red. Summer migrant breeder/visitor throughout UK.
Skylark	*Alauda arvensis*	Frequent, over farmer's fields.	Red. Resident breeder. Passage/winter visitor in UK. Of conservation concern in Europe.
Green sandpiper	*Tringa ochropus*	Infrequent, farmer's fields.	Amber. Scarce breeder, passage/winter migrant.
Grey partridge	*Perdix perdix*	Infrequent, ALT land by barn.	Red. Resident/introduced breeder in UK. Of conservation concern in Europe.
Yellow wagtail	*Motacilla flava*	Frequent, end of Main lake.	Red. Migrant breeder, Passage visitor.
Yellowhammer	*Emberiza citrinella*	Infrequent, farmer's fields.	Red. Resident breeder, passage/winter visitor
Whitethroat	*Sylvia communis*	Summer, Eco lake.	Amber. Migrant breeder, passage visitor.
Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*	Summer, whole site.	Amber. Migrant breeder, passage visitor. Of conservation concern in Europe.
House martin	*Delichon urbicum*	Summer, around Main lake.	Amber. Migrant breeder, passage visitor. Of conservation concern in Europe.
Swift	*Apus apus*	Summer, around Main lake.	Amber. Migrant breeder, passage visitor.
Starling	*Sturnus vulgaris*	Small murmurations over Main lake at dusk.	Red. Resident breeder, passage/winter visitor. Of conservation concern in Europe.
Green woodpecker	*Picus viridis*	Abundant, whole site.	Amber. Resident breeder. Of conservation concern in Europe.
Turtle dove	*Streptopelia turtur*	Very infrequent, Eco lake.	Red. Summer migrant/visitor in England.
Fieldfare	*Turdus pilaris*	Winter, Main lake; Eco lake; river; farmer's fields.	Red. Winter migrant, widespread in UK.
Dunnock	*Prunella modularis*	Throughout site.	Amber, resident throughout UK.

Greylag goose	*Anser anser*	Around Main lake.	Amber. Resident in east. England, and winter visitor in the north and Ireland.
Lapwing	*Vanellus vanellus*	Flying in flocks over Main lake and farmer's fields.	Red. Resident un the UK.
Meadow pipit	*Anthus pretensis*	Skylark Meadow.	Amber. Mostly resident in the UK.
Song thrush	*Turdus philomelos*	Bretts contained land on end of Main lake.	Red. Resident in UK.
Kestrel	*Falco tinnunculus*	Hunting over ALT compartment, around Main lake verges and over farmer's fields.	Amber. Resident in UK.

In 2011, Bioscan carried out 10 bird surveys over the year. A total of 79 bird species were recorded on the site, with 67 species recorded over the course of the six winter surveys and 55 species during the four breeding bird surveys. Of those recorded during the breeding season, 34 are considered likely to have bred on the Country Park with five confirmed breeding, 17 probable breeders and 12 possible breeders. A further five out of the 21 non-breeding species (house martin, house sparrow, starling, collared dove and kingfisher) encountered are likely to have nested just outside the site mainly in association with the factory and offices immediately to the west of the site or, for kingfisher, along the River Great Stour.

5.5.2 Reptiles

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status at CCP	Distribution	K	N	C	L
Common lizard	*Zootoca vivipara*	Throughout the site. Large numbers in field opposite barn.	Widespread through most of UK, including Kent.		*		
Slow-worm	*Anguis fragilis*	Throughout the site except land adjacent to barn.	Widespread through UK, but absent in Ireland.		*		
Grass snake	*Natrix natrix*	ALT compartment and North Lake.	Widespread in England and Wales.		*		

5.5.3 Amphibians

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status at CCP	Distribution	K	N	C	L
Great-crested newt	*Triturus cristatus*	Small numbers of male and female individuals, and eggs recorded in the ballast hole.	Widespread through lowland UK, absent from Ireland.	*	*		
Smooth newt	*Lissotriton vulgaris*		Widespread through UK.		*		

Common toad	*Bufo bufo*		Widespread through UK but absent from Ireland.		*		
Marsh frog	*Pelophylax ridibundus*	Heard calling around the main lake.	Introduced species.				

5.5.4 Insects

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status at CCP	Distribution	K	N	C	L
Tumbling flower beetle	*Mordellistena neuwaldeggiana*	Ruderal habitats.	Recent colonist, post-industrial sites on the east Thames Corridor. Red Data Book sp.	*			
Cinnabar moth	*Tyria jacobaeae*	Ragwort.	Common and well distributed throughout most of UK.		*		
A ground nesting sand wasp	*Crossocerus distinguendus*	Sandy ground	Local in south-east. Nationally Scarce		*		
Yellow-faced bee	*Hylaeus cornutus*	White umbellifer plants.	Confined to south-central and south-east England. Nationally Scarce.		*		
Banded tree ant	*Lasius brunneus*	Deadwood and manmade wooden structures.	South-east of country. Nationally Scarce.		*		
Cuckoo bee	*Nomada fucata*	Parasite of the mining bee, ground tunnels.	Nationally Scarce.		*		
A pyralid moth	*Phlyctaenia perlucidalis*	Feeds on thistle plants.	Confined to East Anglia until 30 years ago. Nationally Scarce.		*		
Variegated ladybird	*Adonia variegata*	Sandy habitat.	Nationally Scarce.		*		
Willow tree tortrix moth	*Apotomis lineana*	Salix carr.	South-east England. Nationally Scarce.		*		
Six-belted clearwing	*Bembecia ichneumoniformis*		Nationally Scarce.		*		
Hairy dragonfly	*Brachytron pratense*	Well vegetated still water ponds and small lakes.	Nationally Scarce.		*		
A Pyralid moth	*Calamotropha paludella*	Typha reedmace.	South-east England. Nationally Scarce.		*		
Yellow-faced bee	*Hylaeus signatus*	Foodplant: Weld pollen.	Originally Kent and essex, but now spread north.		*		

			Nationally Scarce.				
A solitary bee	*Lasioglossum malachurum*	Clay substrates.	Originally Kent and Essex but now more south-east. Nationally Scarce.		*		
Flea beetle	*Longitarsus dorsalis*	Calcareous or sandy soils.	Southern England. Nationally Scarce.		*		
Roesel's bush-cricket	*Metrioptera roeselii*	Grassland habitats, field margins.	Nationally Scarce.		*		
Blue and red leaf beetle	*Podagrica fusciornis*	Foodplant: mallow.	Nationally Scarce.		*		
Cuckoo bee	*Sphecodes crassus*	Nest parasite on mining bees.	Widespread in London. Nationally Scarce.		*		

Nationally Scarce = species estimated to occur within the range of 16 and 100 10km squares of the National grid system.

A total of 639 terrestrial invertebrate species were recorded on the site in 2011 including one provisional (KRDB) Red Data Book species, the tumbling flower-beetle *Mordellistena neuwaldeggiana*, which, although a recent colonist to Britain, is now quite widespread. Five Nationally Scarce species species were recorded. In addition, 43 Nationally Local species were also recorded during the surveys.

5.5.5 Mammals

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status at CCP	Distribution	K	N	C	L
Nathusius' pipistrelle	*Pipistrellus nathusii*	Mostly using the river, and occasionally the main lake.	Sparse records throughout UK.	*			
Common pipistrelle	*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*	Mostly using the river, and occasionally the main lake.	Widespread throughout UK.	*			
Soprano pipistrelle	*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*	Mostly using the river, and occasionally the main lake.	Widespread across UK.	*			
Long-eared bat	*Plecotus auritus*	Mostly using the river, and occasionally the main lake.	Present throughout UK.	*			
Noctule bat	*Nyctalus noctula*	Around flood lights of working area in particular.	Relatively widespread in England and Wales.	*			
Daubenton's bat	*Myotis daubentonii*	99% confidence of presence.	Fairly widespread throughout UK.	*			
Natterer's bat	*Mytois nattereri*	60% confidence of presence.	Scarce, but recorded throughout UK.	*			
Otter	*Lutra lutra*	Two spraints in 2011. 2 spraints and footprints in 2015, along river banks.	Becoming more widespread in the UK.	*	*		
Badger	*Meles meles*	2 active setts between Ballast Hole and railway line.	Present in UK, concentrated to south-west.		*		
Harvest mouse	*Micromys minutus*	Widespread through suitable habitat in compartment 3.	Found in central Yorkshire and southwards.		*		

5.5.6 Flora

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status at CP	Distribution	K	N	C	L
Common spotted-orchid	*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*	Patch of 200 plants to the West of Eco Lake.					
Himalayan balsam	*Impatiens glandulifera*	Widespread invasive species along the river edges.	Widespread invasive species on water courses throughout UK.				
Black poplar	*Populus nigra*	New tree planted for Magna Carta memorial, and small patch of hybrid trees around barn and manor, and ballast hole.	Black Poplar UK's most endangered tree. (Forestry Commission).		*		

5.6 Surrounding landowners/tenants

Landowner/tenant	**Contact details**	**Details of land ownership**
The Mitchell Brothers	Address: Great Bromley Farm, Blackwall Road, Ashford, Kent TN25 5PA Phone: 01233 624113	The land to the east of the Stour and the CP and to the west of Compartment 1 and west of the railway (ELS ended December 2015).
Givaudan UK Ltd	Address: Kennington Road, Ashford, Kent TN24 0LT Phone: 01233 644444	The land to the south-west of the CP, on the southern side of the A28. Givaudan own and manage an area of wildflower meadow adjacent to the Stour, this has been managed with support from KSCP.
Premier Foods	Batchelors Factory, Kennington Rd, Willesborough, Ashford, Kent TN24 0LU.	The factory to the west of Country Park on other side of Willesborough Road.
Brett Group	Ashford Road, Canterbury, Kent CT4 7PP 01227 829000	Owner of Country Park land, also ballast hole to west of site, adjacent to railway line.
Kent County Council Landscape Services	1 Abbey Wood road, Kingshill, West Malling, ME19 4YT. 01622 236655	Depot situated between CP and Willesborough Road.
Ashford Borough Council	Property Services, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford, TN23 1PL.	Land between the CP and Willesborough Road. Includes Manor House and Conningbrook Barn.
Julie Rose stadium, Ashford Leisure Trust (Owner ABC)	The Julie Rose Stadium, Willesborough Road, Ashford, TN24 9QX. 01233 613131	

6. Management Objectives

The management proposals have been developed following guidance from the following documents:

Ashford Borough Council. *Conningbrook Lakes Country Park Ecological Management Plan: February 2014.*
Bioscan. *LAND AT CONNINGBROOK LAKES, ASHFORD Ecology and Nature Conservation October 2012. Bioscan Report Ref: E1353R3fv.*
Ashford Borough Council*. Conningbrook Decision Notice 121245AS: October 2014.*

6.1 Statement of Purpose

To maintain Conningbrook Lakes CP as an important area for wildlife and as a public amenity for present and future generations to enjoy. Where possible to extend the size of the reserve and link to other conservation initiatives.

6.2 Management Objectives

- Improve and conserve riparian habitat along river and lake edges
- Improve the quality of biodiversity within the lakes throughout the CP
- Manage and improve the grassland habitats for wildlife throughout the CP
- Manage areas of wet woodland, through coppicing and creation of areas of open habitat
- To support where possible national and local 'Species Recovery Programmes' and 'Biodiversity Species Action Plans'
- Monitor the impact of management, human activity and other environmental influences upon the CP
- Develop public access and appreciation of Conningbrook Lakes CP and its wildlife
- Maintain and enhance funding for management
- Continue to consult with interested parties over the management and development of the CP
- Provide opportunities for environmental study and research, whilst not undermining primary conservation objectives
- Extend and link the CP to other conservation initiatives

6.3 Site description by compartment

In order to aid and guide the future management of the Country Park, the site has been divided into 5 compartments (see Appendix 10.5) to which management tasks can then be applied. These are as follows:

- Compartment 1 - North field, lake and adjacent section of river
- Compartment 2 - Residential area
- Compartment 3 - Lake, river and wet woodland within LWS
- Compartment 4 - Southern grasslands and adjacent river
- Compartment 5 - Recreational lakes and activities centre

6.3.1 Compartment 1: managed by KWT – primary function is for nature conservation and protected species mitigation.

The greater part of this compartment is species-poor, semi-improved grassland that has been used for sheep grazing pre-development and has maintained a short sward with limited diversity. The lake within this compartment is understood to have been created as part of the original quarrying works but is now used to breed coarse fish to restock Main Lake. Although narrow in extent the margins of the lake have the most diverse mix of emergent species of any of the waterbodies within the site.

The bulk of this grassland area had previously been used as landfill. Presumably a previous gravel pit was filled in and capped. It is thought that the material used is inert.

The river is heavily channelized, although the banks are lower compared to the upstream section and some marginal vegetation is present, mostly likely the result of poaching of the banks by sheep. This compartment also includes a collection of ponds required as part of mitigation and enhancement works associated with loss of newt habitat due to development.

Key positive features

- The river is a key foraging habitat and commuting route for bats and other wildlife
- Water quality understood to have improved following upgrading of upstream sewage treatment works (2015 Ecological quality status 'Moderate'; Chemical quality status 'good' (Environment Agency))
- Will provide an improved breeding resource for newts on the site, which appears limited pre-development
- With correct management the northern meadow can be enhanced floristically benefitting butterfly and bee species
- The collection of ponds will provide extra habitat for Odonata and other water-dependent species
- Restrictions on the area open to the public could provide suitable habitat for ground nesting birds such as skylark

Constraints

- Intensive grazing has limited the overall floral diversity of the grasslands
- Lake is heavily stocked with fish e.g. carp species
- Poor channel profile of the river limits the extent and diversity of marginal vegetation

- Uniform in-channel bed profile of the river
- New ponds have been lined, so can be susceptible to damage by grazing livestock
- Banks of river are heavily infested with Himalayan balsam (vigorous invasive species)

Management prescriptions – see sections 6.4 and 6.5

6.3.2 Compartment 2: currently managed by Brett Group, this area will come under the control of the housing developer once building works start.

This compartment encompasses the formal development parcel within the site, together with associated multi-functional green infrastructure and landscaping.

Key positive features

- Availability and accessibility of surrounding residents provides opportunities for public education and engagement
- Potential new members for KWT
- Involvement in management of green infrastructure or involvement of residents with KWT task days
- Provides opportunities for integrated ecological enhancement within a formal setting

Constraints

- Recreational pressure will be high in any open space areas
- Any conservation objectives need to be compatible with its primary function
- Dogs and cats impacting upon wildlife

Management prescriptions

- Community engagement with the CP through walks and events
- Door drop of leaflets
- 'Friends of' group
- Management of green infrastructure by Landscaping company to be carried out in accordance with housing development plan and discharge of conditions 63 and 65.

6.3.3 Compartment 3: managed by KWT – primary function is for nature conservation.

The Local Wildlife Site falls within this compartment - the main area being the eco-lake, and River Great Stour which forms the boundary. The Eco Lake has hosted several over wintering water fowl species, as well as being a roost site for a flock of little egrets. Reedbed is present within this compartment, although not in large expanses and is relatively sparsely growing.

An area of wet woodland surrounds the eco-lake, which has interesting ground flora, including a patch of common spotted orchid. This area has potential to be a good area of fen once suitable management practices have been implemented in the young woodland.

There is a large area of sand flat, presumably left over from previous aggregate works, to the west of the Eco Lake. This area has become populated with an interesting array of lichens, mosses and burrowing insects as well as a diverse range of flowering plants.

Key positive features

- Presence and juxtaposition of key habitat types for invertebrates
- Area of tipped and levelled sandy ground has notable floral and invertebrate communities
- Remnant areas of reedbed
- Woodland ground flora has some floristic interest
- Large area of open water for waterfowl
- The river is a key foraging habitat and commuting route for bats and other riparian wildlife
- Water quality understood to have improved following upgrading of upstream sewage treatment works (2015 Ecological quality status 'Moderate'; Chemical quality status 'good' (Environment Agency))

Constraints

- Relatively uniform age structure within woodland
- Minimal diversity to marginal vegetation other than reed
- Woodland ground flora is being limited by closed canopy above
- Poor channel profile of the river limits the extent and diversity of marginal vegetation
- Uniform in-channel bed profile to river

Management prescriptions – see sections 6.4 and 6.5

6.3.4 Compartment 4: managed by KWT – primary function is for nature conservation.

A belt of grazed grassland adjacent to a heavily channelised stretch of the river. As with all the grasslands on the site, intensive grazing and mowing limits the floristic diversity of the grasslands, with the river profile offering few opportunities for marginal vegetation establishment. The previous spit of land that stretches into the Main Lake, has now been separated from the mainland becoming an island. Access can be gained to the island via a floating pontoon which can be detached during the bird breeding season, providing a breeding area protected from foxes and other predators.

Key positive features

- Key foraging habitat and commuting route for bats and other riparian wildlife
- Water quality understood to have improved following upgrading of upstream sewage treatment works (2015 Ecological quality status 'Moderate'; Chemical quality status 'good' (Environment Agency))
- Island provides protected breeding habitat for birds

Constraints

- Poor channel profile limits the extent and diversity of marginal vegetation
- Uniform in-channel bed profile

Management prescriptions – see sections 6.4 and 6.5

6.3.5 Compartment 5: managed by ALT and MKF – primary function is for recreation, fishing and non-motorized water sports.

The Main Lake forms the principal lake for formal recreation and activity at the site. Adjacent to the west of the lake is the activity centre, which provides parking, and storage for boats and equipment. Eastern side of the lake is to maintain opportunities for formal angling. A new shelter belt, consisting of 1000 trees, has been planted along the road line within compartment 5.

Key positive features

- The lake is the largest area of open water within the site
- Provide opportunities for integrated ecological enhancement within a formal setting

Constraints

- The lake remains relatively 'raw' following the cessation of quarrying activities
- There is a limited amount of marginal vegetation
- Recreational pressure will be high in any open space areas
- Any conservation objectives need to be compatible with the primary function of recreational activities
- Population of specimen carp within lake creating issues with eutrophication and predation of native aquatic wildlife

Management prescriptions – see sections 6.4 and 6.5

6.4 Management Prescriptions: Summary Five-Year Work Programme 2016 – 2020 (see Appendix 10.6 Desired State of Management by 2020)

Objective	Action by	Location	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Timing
1. Management of improved / semi improved grassland								
a. Implement regular grazing regime	CW, AW	Cpt 1,3 and 4	*	*	*	*	*	Jan-Mar, Jun - Oct
b. Ruderal control (thistle/dock/ragwort)	CW, AW, ABC	Cpt 1,3 and 4	*	*	*	*	*	Apr-Aug
c. Monitor condition of site fencing	CW, ABC,	Boundary & internal	*	*	*	*	*	All year
d. Monitor the effects of conservation works	CW, AW	Cpt 1,3 and 4	*	*	*	*	*	All Year
e. Removal of soil bunds along river bank, replace with species-rich wetland vegetation	BTG, HD	Cpt 3 and 4	*	*				TBA
f. Managing sand flat area	HD, KWT	Cpt 3	*	*	*	*	*	Sep-Jan
2. Management of rivers and ponds								
a. Himalayan balsam control	CW, KWT, EA	All	*	*	*	*	*	May- Aug
b. Management of ponds and scrapes	KWT, HD	Cpt 1	*	*	*	*	*	Ongoing
c. River management (river restoration)	HD, EA, KWT, ABC	Cpt 1, 3, 4	*	*	*			
d. Development of riparian woodland	KWT, EA	Cpt 1, 3, 4	*	*	*	*	*	Oct-Mar
3. Management of the three lakes (Main Lake, Eco Lake and North Lake)								
a. Reed bed management	KWT, MKF	Cpt 1,3,4,5	*	*	*	*	*	Oct-Feb
b. Establish areas of riparian vegetation	KWT, MKF	Cpt 1,3,4,5	*	*	*	*	*	TBA
c. Fisheries management	MKF	Cpt 1,3,4,5	*	*				TBA
d. Management of visitor pressure	KWT, HD, ABC, ALT, MKF	Cpt 1-5	*	*	*	*	*	All year
4. Management of woodland areas								
a. Coppice blocks of wet woodland	KWT	Cpt 3	*	*	*	*	*	Sep - Mar
b. Coppice scallops along lakeside edges	KWT	Cpt 3 and 4	*	*	*	*	*	Sep - Mar
c. Selectively remove non-native tree species	KWT	Cpt 3 and 4	*	*	*	*	*	Sep - Mar

d. Creation of area of new wet woodland	BTG, HD	Cpt 1	*	*				TBA
e. Create permanent areas of open habitat within wooded areas.	KWT	Cpt 3	*	*	*	*	*	Sep - Mar
5. Maintain access and infrastructure								
a. Complete installation of boundary and internal fencing	ABC, HD, BTG	Cpt 1,2,3,4,5	*	-	-	-	-	All year
b. Repair fencing as required	ABC	Cpt 1,2,3,4,5	*	*	*	*	*	Apr-Aug
c. Maintain footpaths (keeping vegetation clear)	KWT, CW	Cpt 1,3,4	*	*	*	*	*	Apr-Aug
d. Maintain footpaths (managing surface)	ABC, HD, KCC	Cpt1,2,3,4,5	*	*	*	*	*	Apr-Aug
e. Maintain gates and stiles	ABC	Cpt1,2,3,4,5	*	*	*	*	*	Apr-Aug
e. Maintain signs	ABC	Cpt1,2,3,4,5	*	*	*	*	*	All year
f. Look for new opportunities to improve access opportunities for visitors								
g. Bridleway continued from new bridge, and through new development	ABC, KCC, HD	Cpt3,2	*	*	*			All year
h. Bridge at northern end of cpt1, to link park with existing PROW network	ABC, KCC	Cpt 1	*	*				All year
i. Create circular route around perimeter of lake	ABC, KCC	Cpt 2,3,4,5	*	*				All year
6. Monitor the effects of management (see Appendix 10.7 Ecological Indicator Species)								
a. Butterfly/dragonfly surveys (see Appendix 10.8)	CW	All compartments	*	*	*	*	*	Apr-Sep
b. Vegetation monitoring	CW, KWT	All compartments	*	*	*	*	*	Mar-Sep
c. Bird surveys	CW, KWT	All compartments	*	*	*	*	*	Mar-Jun
d. Mammal survey (otters, water vole, harvest mouse)	CW, HD, KWT	All compartments	*	*	*	*	*	Apr-Sep
e. Herpetological survey	HD, BTG	All compartments	*	*	*	*	*	Apr-Sep
f. Fixed point photographs (winter and summer)	CW	All compartments	*	*	*	*	*	Feb & Jul
g. Monitor public use of site	CW, ABC, ALT	All compartments	*	*	*	*	*	All year
7. Public engagement								
a. Public information evenings	CW, KWT	Local area	*	*	*	*	*	All year

b. Reserve information leaflet	ABC		*					All year
c. Maintain signs at access points	ABC	All compartments	*	*	*	*	*	Apr-Aug
d. Program of guided walks and events	CW, KWT	All compartments	*	*	*	*	*	May-Aug
8. Health and safety								
a. Update site risk assessments (see Appendices 10.9 and 10.10)	ABC, ALL	All compartments	*	*	*	*	*	All year
b. Carry out hazardous tree survey (see Appendix 10.11)	CW	Cpt 1,3,4	*	*	*	*	*	Sep-Nov

Key

ABC – Ashford Borough Council
KWT –Kent Wildlife Trust
CW – Conningbrook Warden (KWT)
AW – Ashford Area Warden (KWT)
BTG – Brett Group
HD – Housing Developer
ALT –Ashford Leisure Trust
MKF –Mid Kent Fisheries
KCC – Kent County Council
EA - Environment Agency

6.5 Detailed management prescriptions

(see Appendix 10.6 Desired State of Management by 2020)

6.5.1 Management of improved / semi-improved grassland

A. Implement regular grazing regime

Ideal Condition: Species-rich grassland with diverse structure of tall tussocky grassland with areas of short sward.

Management prescriptions: The grassland across the County Park has been badly damaged in the past and is mainly dominated by vigorous grass species such as cock's-foot and Yorkshire fog. There are also large areas of creeping thistle, ragwort and broadleaved dock. The primary management over this area will be grazing with cattle, sheep or ponies. No additional food supplements must be given to the livestock, and no fertilizer added to the grassland.

Cpt number	Stock type / number	Grazing period	Approx. length of grazing	Desired condition at end of grazing period
1 (central)	40-80 sheep or 6-10 cattle	Feb-March and July-Oct	2-3 weeks each period	50% short sward (2-5cm) 40% medium sward (5-20cm) 10% tall rank vegetation (20cm+)
1 (perimeter)	40-80 sheep	July- Oct	1 week	
1 (pond cpt)	NO GRAZING			50% tall rank vegetation. 50% tussocky grass with patches of open ground
3 (riverside)	20-40 sheep	July - Oct	1-2 weeks	40% short sward (2-5cm) 40% medium sward (5-20cm) 20% tall rank vegetation (20cm+)
3 (west of Lake)	4-6 cattle	July - Oct	1-2 weeks	
4	40-80 sheep and 6-10 cattle	Feb-March and July-Oct	2-3 weeks each period	

B. Ruderal control

Ideal Condition: max 5% cover of ruderals across site (thistle species, ragwort, broad-leaved dock).

Management prescriptions:

- Grazing controls: Reduce opportunities for poaching from livestock. Restrict use of cattle and ponies on water logged fields. Manage grazing so that animals do not need to use

pinch points during wet periods (gateways etc.). Sheep grazing during early spring to browse on ruderal rosettes.

- Physical controls: If cover is greater than 5%, consider physical control methods. Docks and thistle – topping before plants set seed. Ragwort, hand pulling and removing from grazed areas before plants set seed.

C. Monitor condition of site fencing

Ideal Condition: Fencing intact and stock proof across whole site.

Management prescriptions: Regular checking of condition of fencing (weekly when livestock on site, monthly with no livestock).

D. Monitor the effects of conservation works

Ideal Condition: Good control over grazing pressure across site.

Management prescriptions: Regular checking of state of sward whilst livestock on site (minimum weekly). Alert grazier to remove livestock with plenty of notice (minimum 1 week).

E. Removal of soil bunds along river bank, replace with species-rich wetland vegetation

Ideal Condition: Removal of bunds will create improved views for visitors. Naturalised flooding from river will create wetland features. Reseeded areas will develop to become species-rich grassland.

Management prescriptions: Large bunds of soil, surplus material from the original gravel extraction work, lie adjacent to the river. One of the key objectives will be to remove these bunds, and use the material to raise ground levels on the development site. Removal of this material will give the potential of reseeding with a suitable wetland wildflower mix. Follow on management will require cessation of grazing, with mechanical hay cutting for the first two years carried out in July/ August.

F. Managing sand flat area

Ideal Condition: Ideal condition: Protection and extension of sand flat, with its population of lichens, burrowing invertebrates and flowering plants.

Management prescriptions: Manage scrub around edges, particularly where there is a dense stand of sea buckthorn and evening primrose invading the site. Consider creating new areas of bare sand on an annual basis - scrape areas up to 10m2. Remove top 5-10cm of sand to reveal bare sand. Use removed material to create sand south-facing sand banks on edges of clearing. Scrape areas with dense stands of sea buckthorn and evening primrose.

6.5.2 Management of rivers and ponds

A. Himalayan balsam control

Ideal Condition: Eradication of Himalayan balsam

Management prescriptions: Himalayan balsam is an annual plant, and develops from seed each year. Pulling, grazing and hand pulling before the plant sets seed will reduce its vigour. However it is important to remove ALL flowering plants. Also during flooding events, seed will spread from downstream. Cut plants will regrow during the same season and will need cutting several times to prevent flowering.

Recommendation: Hand pulling from late spring in concentrated blocks, focus on areas away from the river bank, where inundating from flooded seed is less likely. Eradication will only occur with coordinated control from riparian owners up stream of the site (liaise with EA).

B. Management of ponds and scrapes

Ideal Condition: A range of ephemeral and permanent water bodies. Species-rich water bodies with low nutrient levels.

Management prescriptions: There are two new ponds to the north of the meadow, which provide receptor sites for great-crested newts that will be translocated from the development area (Bioscan, Mar 2015, pg 3). The ponds have been raised above ground level to create ponds deep enough to hold water all year, whilst preventing digging into the layer of landfilled material. They have been lined to ensure they hold water all year round and planted with native riparian and aquatic vegetation. Grazing pressure on these ponds is likely to damage the liners, so a fence has been erected to prevent livestock access.

In order to create suitable habitat for great-crested newts adjacent to the ponds, cessation of any management for 2-3 years would be desirable to create a mosaic of tussocky grasses and rank vegetation. Some intervention may be necessary to control ruderals (see above). In order to create additional habitat for newts and other water dependant species, it is recommended that a series of shallower scrapes are dug throughout the northern meadow (Bioscan report *CONNINGBROOK LAKES, WILLESBOROUGH ROAD, ASHFORD Material to Partially Discharge Condition No.62: April 2015*). These ponds will be within the grazing area, and will develop a character attractive to wading birds. These can be managed with grazing animals as part of the ongoing grassland management works.

C. River management

Ideal Condition: Development of a species rich river with diverse riparian vegetation.

Management prescriptions: The EA have designed an entire river management plan for this stretch of the River Great Stour (see Alconbury Environmental Consultants, Feb 2012). We would fully support the implementation of this plan, either as part of the housing development or as an EA funded scheme.

The following is a summary of the Alconbury Environmental Consultants' report commissioned by the EA in 2012: *"The driving force from the EA's perspective is to improve the ecological status of the Stour in line with responsibilities under the WFD (Water Framework Directive). The recommendations here intend to meet a wide range of interests, but focus on tried and tested treatments that have worked well elsewhere in improving river habitat, landscape, aesthetics, and obviously had a beneficial*

ecological response. ***None are recommended if they could in any way increase flood risk both locally or within the catchment (more later).***

The recommendations are limited to ***channel and modifications to the left bank*** *and are based on the need to create greater dynamism within the channel with associated hugely enhanced range of habitats and vastly improved aesthetics. There is a requirement to alter the bed profile along and across the channel to create much more variation in water depth, velocity and substrate types and juxtaposition of these to form local complexes of diversity. The river has shown that with the low gradient it cannot recover this from previous dredging and maintenance activities on its own. It does, however, have all the ingredients to make a much more natural, dynamic and diverse river system but needs help to do so. Absolutely no materials need to be brought to site; improved channel morphology, biodiversity and landscape qualities can all be achieved through re-distribution of existing natural materials."*

D. Development of riparian woodland

Ideal Condition: Between 5 and 10% of the river bank to develop into blocks of scrub and woodland, with diverse mix of native species and ages.

Management prescriptions: Allow growth of scrub and woody species to develop along the river bank through natural succession, or through planting of appropriate species. Some control of grazing animals may be required through additional fencing or timing of grazing. As woody vegetation develops, encourage build-up of dead wood, fallen timber and other woodland features.

6.5.3. Management of the three lakes (Main Lake, Eco Lake and North Lake).

A. Reed bed management

Ideal Condition: Restoration a total of 0.5ha of reed bed that supports populations of reed bunting, reed warbler and other specialized species.

Management prescriptions: Fell surrounding trees to improve light levels and reduce transpiration effects of trees. Cut up to 20% of the reedbed areas each year between October and January to encourage fresh reed growth.

B. Establish areas of riparian vegetation

Ideal Condition: Between 50% and 80% of the lake banks covered with stands of native marginal vegetation, growing between 1m and 5m into the lakes. Keep areas clear for fishing, clear views of lake and recreation activities.

Management prescriptions: Material from the bund extraction (Bioscan, March 2015, pg 14) to be placed in lake edge to create shallow margins. Coppice of trees along lake edge to increase light levels.

C. Fisheries management

Ideal Condition: Healthy fish stock in Main Lake, with large fish removed from Eco Lake to encourage invertebrate and amphibian populations.

Management prescriptions: Electro-fishing of stock from Eco Lake, to relocate to Main Lake. Take lead from MKF.

D. Management of visitor pressure

Ideal Condition: Maintenance of visually attractive lakes, fringed with areas of reedbed, carr woodland and riparian vegetation.

Management prescription: Where lakes are in close proximity to the housing development, it has to be anticipated that there will be considerable pressure from residents and visitors. This additional pressure is likely to result in issues such bank erosion, wildlife disturbance and littering. Consider creating specific swimming areas for dogs, and manage vegetation to create natural barriers and sanctuaries for wildlife.

6.5.4 Management of wet woodland

A. Coppice blocks of wet woodland

Ideal Condition: An area of wet woodland with diverse age structure and native tree species on west and south of Eco Lake.

Management prescriptions: Seek felling licence to coppice small blocks of trees <400m^2 on an annual basis. Allow a portion of the woodland to regrow from the stools to produce carr woodland. Protect coppice stools from grazing pressure, build stool protectors with felled brash.

B. Coppice scallops along lakeside edges

Ideal Condition: Mixed aged range of tree species adjacent to lakes, providing range of habitats with dense scrub, and mature trees.

Management prescriptions: Seek felling licence to coppice 3-4 scallops per year, maximum of 20% of the total area. Repeat after 7-10 years, leaving native standards, standing dead wood (where safe to do so), and dead wood on the ground.

C. Selectively remove non-native tree species

Ideal Condition: Removal of all non-native species from KWT managed areas of Country Park.

Management prescriptions: When carrying out coppice and other felling works, target non-native species, consider stump treatment with suitable herbicide, or damage stumps by cutting vertically into the stool.

D. Creation of new area of wet woodland

Ideal Condition: Development of carr woodland with a diverse range of trees, ground flora and invertebrates (Bioscan, March 2015, pg16).

Management prescriptions: Creation of this habitat is part of the mitigation works carried out for the adjacent development. It is presumed that the area to the north of Kingfisher Lake will be reduced in height, with additional deeper pools and scrapes. Either natural regeneration or planting of suitable wet woodland species (willow species, alder, poplar). The area will need to be fenced to prevent ingress from livestock, and then follow with little or no management for following 4-8 years. Future management will involve coppicing small areas (150 - 300 m^2) on a 6-20 year rotation. Coppice margin between woodland and grassland on 2-5 year rotation to maintain a scrubby transitional edge.

E. Create permanent areas of open habitat within wet wooded areas

Ideal Condition: Creation of areas of open fenland habitat within the woodland.

Management prescriptions: Seek felling licence to clear trees to produce areas of permanent open habitat, up to 20% of marked area a year, with ongoing scrub management required to prevent scrub re-growing. Follow with cattle grazing to keep areas open.

6.5.5 Management of levels of recreational access

Ideal Condition: A beautiful nature reserve, accessible to all, with clearly marked paths. Visual access across the whole area, with good opportunities for viewing of some of Kent's best wildlife and landscapes. Restriction of physical access to some areas to encourage breeding and overwintering birds.

Methods for managing levels of access: Provision of a circular walk adjacent to the railway and river, with views across the interior of the compartment, and out towards Wye Downs across the River Great Stour. Dogs will be required to be on leads at all times, to reduce pressure on breeding birds and livestock. At times, further restrictions may be required in some areas (see Appendix 4 Dog Walking Policy).

7. People Engagement

Kent Wildlife Trust has long recognised the importance of people in trying to save Kent's wildlife. It is essential to win the hearts and minds of people if our natural heritage is to be saved for present and future generations.

We believe it is imperative that local communities understand the value and importance of wildlife and historic habitats and have a sense of pride and ownership in their local environment. The Trust endeavours to involve local communities and people generally when establishing and developing new nature reserves. The management of the Trust's current suite of 65 nature reserves distributed across Kent and Medway is heavily dependent upon some 1,100 volunteers who collectively contribute some 14,000 volunteer days per annum.

Absolutely fundamental to the successful establishment and management of Conningbrook Lakes Country Park as a nature reserve is the support and positive involvement of the local community. However, equally important is the Country Park's ability to contribute to the health and wellbeing of the local community and wider public. Management aims should contribute to objectives as set out in Kent County Council's *Kent Country Parks Service Strategy 2014-2017*, in particular Strategic Aim 2 to 'Increase knowledge of the environment and countryside and ensure the benefits of using country parks are available to all'.

The Trust will support ABC, ALT, MKF, Brett Group, the local community and wider public to:

- Manage compartments 1,3 and 4 as a nature reserve
- Support partners in managing other compartments with nature conservation in mind
- Provide open access to the Country Park with interpretation
- Raise levels of wildlife and environmental awareness through signage, leaflets and the internet
- Provide nature conservation volunteer opportunities
- Encourage access from all sectors of the community, including those with a health problem or physical disability
- Provide training opportunities for local people in conservation and wildlife management
- Develop wildlife and environmental education programmes - such as Forest School and other outdoor learning
- Restore species-rich grassland, wetland and woodland habitats

8. Constraints and obligations

8.1 Resources

Time, funding, staff and volunteer numbers are all limited. Any projects undertaken must reasonably meet these constraints. Major restoration work is likely to be dependent on securing external project funding.

8.2 Rights of way

Work carried out on footpaths must be done with due care and attention to visiting members of the public. Suitable alternative routes with signage must be arranged in the event of long term works. Unofficial desire lines do not have any legal status but blocking any routes may lead to vandalism. Due consideration is needed when planning fence lines.

8.3 Invasive and non-natives

Wetland systems like Conningbrook Country Park are susceptible to invasion from non-native species. Of particular note are Himalayan balsam along the river banks and Canadian pond weed in the main

lake. We will work with partners to come up with solutions for these issues, and be aware of new threats that may appear.

8.4 Climate change

Predicted changes to the climate may impact on species composition in decades to come. It is most likely to affect those at the southern edge of their range in Kent. This will need to be taken into account in future plans as it strengthens the need for connections to the wider landscape through the establishment and management of wildlife corridors. More pronounced spring and summer droughts are predicted for the south-east of England, which may force some species from extreme south-facing slopes as well as pushing them north.

8.5 Health and safety

There is a duty of care to all persons on the site. When carrying out work on the site, whether it is staff, volunteers or contractors, the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work regulation of 1992 must be followed. Risk assessments should be carried out for each project and for the site. It should be demonstrable that systems are in place to reduce risk to a minimum.

Hazardous trees are surveyed on a regular basis following Kent Wildlife Trust's policy (see Appendix 10.11).

8.6 Animal welfare

The Protection of Animals Act 1911 and the Agriculture Act 1968 prohibits the causing of unnecessary pain or suffering to animals. Owners and managers of livestock should follow animal welfare codes of practice. Accurate movement records must be kept for all livestock. Livestock owners and managers are responsible for public safety on public access land that any livestock are grazing.

8.7 Wildlife

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000 provide legal constraints on what can and cannot be done on wildlife sites. Certain habitats and species are protected through this legislation, in particular European Protected Species (see Appendix 10.12).

9. References

Alconbury Environmental Consultants. *RIVER STOUR, CONNINGSBROOK, ASHFORD: REHABILITATION RECOMMENDATIONS. February 2012 (Draft V1). Discussion Document to the Environment Agency.*

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