

Three Rivers District Council

# The Bury Grounds – Biodiversity Project & River Restoration

Date: 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2024

**Climate Change, Leisure & Housing Committee**  
**24 July 2024**

**The Bury Grounds: Biodiversity Project & River Restoration**  
**(Associate Director for Customer and Community)**

**1 Summary**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an overview and context for the Bury Grounds project which is proposed to include: river restoration, access improvements, habitat enhancements and protecting heritage present on site.
- 1.2 Particular focus is drawn to the element of River Restoration at Taylors Cut.
- 1.3 The main aspects of the projects, including habitat improvements and river restoration work is fully funded through funding from Affinity Water and the Landfills Community Fund. Additional funding opportunities are being explored through the National Lottery Heritage Fund and with Batchworth Community Council to see if there is an opportunity for Parish level Community Infrastructure Levy to assist. Minor tree works at the site will be funded by existing budgets.

**2 Background**

- 2.1 The Bury Grounds is a 4.2 hectare green space in Rickmansworth, which once formed the grounds of the Bury House, at one point the Manor House of Rickmansworth. Through the Bury Grounds flows Taylor's Cut, a small loop of the river which re-joins the River Colne and was created in the 1840's to allow barges to access the house. It is an artificial, unnatural channel.
- 2.2 At present the site requires attention: there is encroaching scrub making the footpaths narrow and reducing the area of grassland; the woodland canopy is dense and dark, and the river channel is excessively shaded; the river itself is very straight and wide. There are opportunities to naturalise and enhance the habitat; the site has little sense of identity. The capacity of the site to assist with local flood alleviation must also be acknowledged, bordering the Aquadrome; the wetland here has the ability to store flood water.
- 2.3 There are many opportunities to enhance, restore and protect this greenspace.
- 2.4 To develop and deliver this improvement project, Three Rivers District Council has and will continue to work in partnership with organisations including: Affinity Water, the Environment Agency, Batchworth Community Council, the Colne Valley Regional Park, Groundworks South, and the Three Rivers Museum.
- 2.5 The overall project aims are to:
- Respect the heritage of the site.
  - Benefit biodiversity within the woodland, grassland, and river channel.
  - Create a safe, welcoming green space for all to use.
- 2.6 As part of this project many opportunities for conservation volunteering will be created, giving the public the opportunity to get closer to nature; this contribution will be massively beneficial to the project and highlighted as a form of match funding, to external grant award bodies emphasising the importance of volunteers.
- 2.7 The proposed project has several delivery workstreams:

## **River Improvements to Taylors Cut.**

- 2.7.1 Taylors Cut is an artificial channel, dug in the 1840's to allow boats to reach the main house – The Bury. It is wide, straight and uniform in shape and has become over-shaded by trees, creating a dark lifeless environment.
- 2.7.2 Opportunities are being assessed to naturalise this channel with low-flow in-channel features made from natural materials sourced on-site. Examples of features likely to be included are: berms<sup>1</sup>, tree-hinges<sup>2</sup> and flow deflectors<sup>3</sup>.
- 2.7.3 Affinity Water will contribute both technical and financial assistance with this project due to the improvements that it aims to make to the watercourse as this in turn will contribute to the Water Framework Directive (WFD) status,<sup>4</sup> assisting the channel to achieve “good ecological potential.”
- 2.7.4 A Collaboration Agreement has been signed between Three Rivers District Council and Affinity Water allowing the water company to support the project with funding and technical support. A full tender process took place with the assistance of the Councils Procurement Manager awarding the contract to Miles Water Engineering. The contract is to design, permit and then deliver the river restoration; through this process thorough informing of the public and stakeholder engagement will take place seeking the assistance of the communications team.
- 2.7.5 The funding incorporates the submission of a Flood Risk Activity Permit to the Environment Agency (EA) and if required, flood modelling. The permit will only be granted if the EA are assured by the data that it is likely that flood risk will not be increased. The river improvements will be data driven aiming to not increase flood risk, improve biodiversity and flow.
- 2.7.6 A condition on the Affinity Water funding is that the project must be delivered by the end of March 2025.

## **Habitat Enhancements throughout the site.**

- 2.7.7 Historical mapping has shown that the habitat composition present on site greatly differs to what was previously there. Previously the area was much more open and likely used for grazing; however, since this intense management ceased woodland has naturally developed with the assistance of some planting. Unfortunately, the woodland has developed a dense canopy of low diversity with abundant sycamore. Therefore, selectively thinning some of this woodland to preserve feature trees, and complete other habitat management including scrub clearance would greatly benefit the habitats and public accessibility.
- 2.7.8 Funding has been acquired through the Landfill Communities Fund to undertake habitat enhancements including tree works for the benefit of biodiversity. A condition on the funding is that the project must be delivered by the end of March 2025. This funding will not cover all of the works required, volunteer assistance will be sought, and existing Three Rivers District Council budgets will be utilised. In addition,

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<sup>1</sup> Berm: low level shelves constructed in a river channel to reinstate the natural sinuosity

<sup>2</sup> Tree Hinges: where a tree is partially cut, laid into the channel while remaining alive, they are firmly secured and able to grow.

<sup>3</sup> Flow Deflectors: a series of low structures in the river bed that irregularly narrow the bed causing variation in flow velocity

<sup>4</sup> The Water Framework Directive (WFD) Regulations are an important mechanism for assessing and managing the water environment in the UK. It originates from the EU Water Framework Directive, but still forms part of UK Law post – Brexit.

Officers will continue to investigate external funding opportunities to support this aspect of the project.

- 2.7.9 The Trees & Woodlands Officers are currently designing a specification for the works to programme in for Autumn-Winter 2024-25.

### **Access Improvements.**

- 2.7.10 In good weather conditions the Bury Grounds is used as a commuting route to get in and out of Rickmansworth town away from the main roads. In the winter or in bad weather, access is, however, limited due to unsurfaced paths particularly south of the river channel becoming very muddy and slippery. A surfaced path is therefore proposed from the footbridge within the site to the pedestrian crossing on Riverside Drive; not only will this allow permanent access (except during flood events) through the site but will also formalise the entrance by the pedestrian crossing over the entrance further west along Riverside Drive where there is no pavement nor safe crossing point.
- 2.7.11 Pathway improvements will be sustainable and will align with new site-wide directional signage and interpretation both welcoming and directing the visitor as well as educating visitors about the biodiversity and heritage of the site. The path surfacing will be in keeping with the natural style of the site and importantly will have been approved by the Environment Agency.
- 2.7.12 External funding is currently being sought for the access improvements; an expression of interest is being developed for the National Lottery Heritage Fund and opportunities are being explored with Batchworth Community Council to see if there is an opportunity for Parish level CIL to assist. Development will continue with this workstream to gain a better understanding of costs, restraints and funding opportunities.

### **Protecting the Heritage associated to the site.**

- 2.7.13 The Bury Grounds are what remains of the grounds of the Bury House, once the manor house of Rickmansworth. As such the site holds a lot of history, which the Three Rivers Museum have assisted with identifying. This project seeks not only to balance the requirements of the public visiting the site and the biodiversity calling the site home but also to protect and preserve its heritage features, for example the magnolia avenue.
- 2.7.14 This workstream will require external funding and is likely to be built into the National Lottery Heritage Fund bid detailed at 2.7.12. Development will continue with this workstream.

## **3 Options and Reasons for Recommendations**

- 3.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an overview and context for the Bury Grounds Biodiversity Project including river restoration. The report aims to give clarity on the process that will be undertaken.
- 3.2 The report recommends agreeing to progress the implementation of the fully funded parts of the project (River Improvements & Habitat Enhancements) and to progress those identified (Access improvements & protecting the heritage) subject to securing external funding.

## **4 Policy/Budget Reference and Implications**

- 4.1 The recommendations in this report are not within the Council's agreed budgets. The majority of the works are proposed to be externally funded.
- 4.2 The recommendations in this report are within the Council's agreed policies.
- 4.3 The recommendations in this report relate to the achievement of the following objective within the Corporate Framework 2023 – 2026:  
A district that takes action to mitigate and adapt to the climate emergency.
- 4.4 The impact of the recommendations on this performance indicator is:
- Create opportunities for biodiversity to thrive by increasing habitat quality and quantity.
  - Diversify the woodland and other plant communities present improving the habitat's resilience.
  - Improve the status of the river channel, aiming for "Good ecological potential" as per the WFD for heavily modified river channels.

## **5 Financial Implications**

- 5.1 As various sections of the project are still in development the associated costs are still indicative with detail to be added as the project develops. There will be no budget implications to Three Rivers District Council outside of minor tree works detailed at point 2.7.8 as part of the existing work programme.
- 5.2 At the time of this report the following funding has been awarded and is sufficient to cover the elements listed:
- 5.2.1 £14,300.00 from the Grundon Landfill Communities Tax fund, via Groundworks South, for tree works and habitat enhancements to be used by 31st March 2025.
- 5.2.2 £108,720.00 from Affinity Water for river restoration and naturalisation works, to be used by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.
- 5.3 Additional external funding currently being sought. The following elements of the project, subject to external funding will not take place until funding has been secured.
- 5.3.1 An expression of interest is soon to be developed for the National Lottery Heritage Fund for the accessibility and heritage sections of the project. It is expected the value of this application would be approximately £60,000.
- 5.3.2 TRDC has applied to Batchworth Community Council (BCC) for CIL funding to contribute to the footpath creation and interpretation boards. BCC are supportive of this project with ongoing conversations.
- 5.3.3 Works within existing council budgets for this project will include:
- Tree works of a health and safety nature
  - Grassland Management as part of the alternative grassland management regime
  - On-going routine grounds maintenance
  - Staff time to facilitate conservation volunteering and project management.

5.4 Additional Council funds are not expected to be required for this project.

## 6 Legal Implications

6.1 The following legal agreements are expected to be required for this project subject to the requirements of external grant awarding bodies:

<b>Climate and Sustainability Impact Assessment Summary</b>	
Homes, buildings, infrastructure, equipment and energy	N/A
Travel	3.00
Goods and Consumption	3.75
Ecology	3.75
Adaptation	3.20
Engagement and Influence	4
<b>Total Overall Average Score</b>	<b>3.6</b>

- LCF Grant Agreement letter
- Collaborative Agreement with Affinity Water
- If successful grant agreements with Batchworth Community Council & National Lottery Heritage Fund

6.2 At the 10 June 2024 Policy and Resources Committee and the 9 July 2024 Full Council, it was agreed to award contracts and enter into funding agreements associated with The Bury Grounds River Restoration Project.

## 7 Equal Opportunities Implications

7.1 There are no negative impacts from an equalities and diversity perspective.

7.2 The aim of the project is to improve the habitats present and accessibility for the public through a surfaced path, vegetation clearance and interpretation.

## 8 Staffing Implications

8.1 Requirements will fall within existing staffing; the Natural Infrastructure Programme Manager will lead on the project with assistance from the Natural Infrastructure Projects Officer, Principal Trees & Woodlands Officer, Grounds Maintenance team and assistance from Affinity Water.

## 9 Environmental Implications

9.1 The Sustainability Impact Assessment gave a score of 3.6 indicating that there is potential positive impact resulting from this project relating to increased flood capacity, improved pedestrian routes through the town, enhanced woodland/tree community with diverse structure and species mix and more.

## 10 Public Health implications

- 10.1 A body of evidence is growing which explains the benefit people can experience from contact with the natural world; for example, increased prominence of social prescribing by clinicians for walking or gardening to alleviate symptoms.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/state-of-the-environment/state-of-the-environment-health-people-and-the-environment>

- 10.2 Trees and greenery may boost lifespan, this has been studied for 8 years by Harvard researchers and published in April Environmental Health Perspectives.

<https://health.usnews.com/wellness/articles/2016-12-09/the-many-health-benefits-of-trees>

## 11 Communications and Website Implications

- 11.1 Officers are working with the Communications Team to create a communications plan for the project. To include information within the Council's website, social media, and in-person events.

- 11.2 Officers are aware of the concern that the works could worsen the flood risk for the area and intend to use proactive communications to reassure. Similarly, to make the public aware of planned tree works within the site, the reasoning for them, the benefits to biodiversity and any tree planting plans.

## 12 Community Safety/Customer Services Centre Implications

- 12.1 None-specific.

## 13 Risk and Health & Safety Implications

- 13.1 The Council has agreed its risk management strategy which can be found on the website at <http://www.threerivers.gov.uk>. In addition, the risks of the proposals in the report have also been assessed against the Council's duties under Health and Safety legislation relating to employees, visitors and persons affected by our operations. The risk management implications of this report are detailed below.

- 13.2 The subject of this report is covered by the Leisure and Natural Infrastructure Service Plan, Regulatory Services Service Plan, the Planning Policy and Conservation Service Plan and the Legal Elections and Democratic Services Service Plan. Any risks resulting from this report will be included in the risk register and, if necessary, managed within this/these plans.

Nature of Risk	Consequence	Suggested Control Measures	Response (tolerate, treat, terminate, transfer)	Risk Rating (combination of likelihood and impact)
Works to river and wetland cause flooding	Flooding of the site, road, and nearby property.	EA permitting will be required for works relating to main river channel.	Works will only proceed once EA permit in place.	6
Operational uncertainties – weather impacts	Project over runs timeframe.	Works schedules to leave a time contingency.	Programme planning	2

Funding not successful from BCC, Affinity & NLHF	Lack of funding.	Thorough applications submitted and multiple funding opportunities investigated.	Works compartmentalised per funding stream.	4
Complaints from the public regarding tree removal or river works	Lack of confidence from the public, harm to Council reputation.	Proactive communication plan	Active communications addressing risks, points of concern	4
Permit not approved by EA	Works involving river channel and adjacent 8m cannot take place.	Collaboration between organisations to ensure thorough permit submitted.	EA advice sought pre-app, Affinity assisting with permitting and specialist contractor seeking permit.	3
Funding deadlines of March 2025	Works incomplete by 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2025- funding conditions not met	Proactive project management	Informing funders of progress continually, works scheduled to allow time contingency.	4

13.3 The above risks are scored using the matrix below. The Council has determined its aversion to risk and is prepared to tolerate risks where the combination of impact and likelihood scores 6 or less.

Very Likely	Low	High	Very High	Very High	
	4	8	12	16	
	Likelihood	Low	Medium	High	Very High
		3	6	9	12
	Low	Low	Medium	High	
2	4	6	8		
Remote	Low	Low	Low	Low	
	1	2	3	4	
		Impact			
		Low	Unacceptable		

Impact Score

Likelihood Score

4 (Catastrophic)	4 (Very Likely (≥80%))
3 (Critical)	3 (Likely (21-79%))
2 (Significant)	2 (Unlikely (6-20%))
1 (Marginal)	1 (Remote (≤5%))

13.4 In the officers' opinion none of the new risks above, were they to come about, would seriously prejudice the achievement of the Strategic Plan and are therefore operational risks. The effectiveness of the management of operational risks is reviewed by the Audit Committee annually.

#### 14 Recommendation

That the Climate Change, Leisure & Housing Committee:

14.1 Agree to progress the implementation of the fully funded parts of the project as outlined at point 2.7.1 - 2.7.6 (River Improvements) and 2.7.7 - 2.7.9 (Habitat Enhancements) and to progress those identified at points 2.7.10 - 2.7.12 (Access improvements) and 2.7.13 - 2.7.14 (protecting the heritage) subject to securing external funding.

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